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**Journal of the Association**  
**For Hispanic Classical Theater**

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# **Comedia Performance**

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*Comedia Performance* publishes interviews with directors and actors, theater reviews and book reviews in special sections.

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1. Reviews should be between 3 and five pages long, including pictures.
2. Reviews should not include endnotes and bibliography.
3. Reviews should not include a detailed description of plot. For canonical plays, no plot summary is necessary. For lesser known plays, a two- to three-line synopsis should suffice.
4. Avoid minute descriptions of action, costume, lighting or sets. Avoid constructions such as, "And then Don Lope comes out and says..." Instead, comment on the efficacy of the blocking of particular scenes or the effect caused by costume and decor. Do not describe details of the performance unless you are going to comment on them.
5. Avoid structures such as "This reviewer thinks..."  
Reviews are by definition subjective.
6. One reviewer may not publish more than two reviews in a single issue.

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## *Performance Studies*

### **CELEBRATING THE PERFORMANT IN PERFORMANCE**

DONALD R. LARSON  
The Ohio State University

Most of us who teach Spanish Golden Age theatre, I should imagine, focus primarily on the level of semiosis when discussing a particular play with students. That is to say, we likely approach the work by, first of all, considering how the words of the playtext—or, if a film of the play is brought into the conversation, how words in combination with a variety of other signs—serve to communicate a story, a story that takes place not on the stage, as the theorists remind us, but in the imagination, where it is peopled with fictitious beings who participate in fictitious actions that occur in fictitious spaces. Having constructed this mental narrative, we probably next go on to examine what that narrative “means” in terms of its ideas, its values, its themes, and so on. In other words, our typical practice would seem to involve an initial basic decoding of the text and then analysis and dissection of that text.

All of this is appropriate and, indeed, necessary. Nevertheless, what actually happens during

our experience of a play in the theatre may be quite different from what we talk about in the classroom. We attend to the production on the level of semiosis, of course, reading all the elements of the staging in order to put together and interpret the story being conveyed, but we also operate from time to time on another level. That other level becomes operative when semiotic thinking is momentarily put aside and pure enjoyment takes over. This second level focuses not on *what* is being communicated but on *how* it is communicated, that is, on the expertise, the talent, and the skill of the participants who have entered into the act of communication. It has to do, in other words, with performance *as* performance.

The two levels of our engagement in the production correspond to what Jean Alter in his *A Sociosemiotic Theory of Theatre* posits as the two functions of theatre. The first of these is what Alter calls the referential function. Its purpose is to convey, through a variety of signs—words, movements, gestures, costumes, sets—the data out of which the audience will construct its interpretation of the performance. The other function of theatre is what Alter terms the performant function. The performant function works in tandem with the referential function, of course, and the two are mutually reinforcing. Nevertheless, they work toward different ends. The essential purpose of the referential function is to transmit information. The essential purpose of the performant function is to provide pleasure.

According to Alter, much of the pleasure provided by performances derives from the actual physical presence of things and people on stage (something that distinguishes theatre from film and television), and thus it is natural that a significant part of his discussion centers on the concept of corporeal presence. In this emphasis, Alter reveals a certain kinship with a group of professionals and critics of the final years of the twentieth century who in their practices and writings also focused on the materiality of performance, some to the extent of denying altogether the need for performance to communicate meaning.<sup>1</sup> Among these are the actor, dramatist, and historian of “happenings” Michael Kirby, the post-structural theorists Josette Féral and André Helbo, and the phenomenologist Bert States, each of whom differed from the others in important ways, but all of whom insisted on the importance of “presence” to the theatrical event. With the partial exception of Helbo, who is mentioned briefly, none of these is cited by Alter, but as their ideas serve to illuminate the approach set forth in his *Sociosemiotic Theory*, it may be helpful, before proceeding further, to cast a brief look at their positions.

Michael Kirby, who was associated particularly with the avant-garde movement in New York, was one of a number of contributors to a special issue on the topic of theatricality published by *Modern Drama* in 1982. His piece, entitled “Nonsemiotic Performance,” is a discussion of what he calls “structuralist theatre,” and it focuses in particular on

the staging of his play *Double Gothic*. The set of this work, he writes, “was a machine for acting,” and “[t]he physical presentation was a more or less independent variable not intended to express a central theme or convey part of a unified message” (106-07). He acknowledges that spectators could have drawn meanings from the play, but insists that no meanings were intended. What, then, was the point of the experience? Its purpose, he asserts, was to “[create] a new kind of formalism,” one that like all formalist art is “primarily sensory,” but that specifically in this instance involves “the relationships between ideas,” thus, “creating new emotions, emotions that cannot be derived from nature or from messages” (110-11).<sup>2</sup>

A second contribution to the special number of *Modern Drama* was that of Josette Féral. In her article, entitled “Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified,” Féral, like so many other theorists of the 1970s and 1980s, writes in celebration of “performance” by distinguishing it from “theatre.” The latter for Féral is a restricting and closed artistic endeavor, based on traditional structures, repetition, narrativity, the communication of “meaning,” and representation (of an absent “reality”).<sup>3</sup> Performance, or performance art as it is sometimes known, is, on the other hand, liberating, open, inchoate, spontaneous, non-discursive, and non-mimetic: it stands for actuality, immediacy, and presence. Based on what Féral terms the “manipula-

tion of the body” and the “manipulation of space” (171-72), it rejects both representation and the communication of meaning—“[p]erformance is the absence of meaning” (173)—in order to focus instead on the mediation of desire and on “energy flows—gestural, vocal, libidinal, etc.” (174).

The opposition between a concern with referentiality and the construction of meaning, a concern that Féral associates with theatre, and a concern with materiality and presence, which she associates with performance, led to fierce theoretical controversies in the 1980s, particularly in the francophone world. As early as 1983, however, as Marvin Carlson has noted, André Helbo of the University of Brussels advanced a model that “suggested that semiotic and poststructuralist concerns should not be considered as an either/or choice, but as a dialectic whose interplay is in fact essential to the theatre experience” (Rev. 176). In his *Les mots et les gestes*, Helbo writes that the theatre is the place where the voice, the site of communication, and the body, the site of pleasure, come into “confrontation” (50). Like many poststructuralist critics, he emphasizes the role of the actor in the theatrical event, but for him the actor is not simply the site of desire and the source of energy, but also a signifier in the narrative enacted by the drama. He is thus perceived by the spectator with a double consciousness, as both a real physical presence and a sign to be read.

The idea of double consciousness is central also to the thinking of the American phenomenologist

Bert States. In his *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, States, like Helbo and like Alter, undertakes to reconcile two competing conceptualizations of theatre: theatre as vehicle of communication and theatre as locus of pleasure and energy. He contends that during the theatrical event we are normally attentive both to what things *represent* and to what they *are in themselves*, that is, as real-world phenomena open to our sensory perception.<sup>4</sup> As the latter, they are capable of engaging us intensely, and when that happens we often become totally wrapped in them. In the case of such things as sets, costumes, and props, what we absorb are their colors, lines, and shapes, their structure and design, their craftsmanship and finish. With actors, what we focus on, of course, are such things as their looks, their manner of moving and gesturing, their voices, and so on—all those qualities that identify them not just as signs, or characters, but as real human beings. Thus, States argues, spectators typically regard the performance with a kind of “binocular vision,” seeing with one eye “significatively” and with the other “phenomenally”(8). As States recognizes, this view of art is far from new, and is indeed quite similar to Horace’s notion that poetry blends in one entity that which is *utile*, that is, useful and significative, and that which is *dulce*, which is to say, delightful.

Interestingly, in his discussion of the two functions of theatre, the referential and the performant,

Alter, to whom we now return, develops a related “binocular” view. Whereas States seems to feel, however, that the two objects of this gaze—that which is signified and the vehicle of the signification<sup>5</sup>—can be registered by the brain simultaneously, Alter believes this to be a cognitive impossibility. In his opinion, what happens during a performance, rather, is that we shift our attention between the two. Thus, he writes: “[D]uring the process of reception, interest in the referential story and appreciation of stage *performances* are always mutually exclusive. A spectator cannot, at the same time, watch an actor playing a role and visualize the corresponding imaginary character” (62). To illustrate this notion, Alter pictures a performance of *Hamlet*. As we follow the action of the play, sometimes our mind is focused on *what* is being referenced, the fictive events that take place in the dramatic space of Elsinore, and at other times it is focused on *how* that referencing is taking place in the actual space of the stage. “We stay with Hamlet’s story as long as it retains our interest; and good referentiality prolongs this interest while poor referentiality undermines it. Sooner or later, however, repeatedly and many times, we always return to the performers on the stage” (63).<sup>6</sup> It is important to acknowledge, of course, that this mental oscillation between the referential function of the performance and the performant function is, for the most part, completely unconscious and that different specta-

tors will experience it in different ways and to different degrees.

We have previously noted that the performant function works in conjunction with the referential function and that the two are mutually supportive. At this juncture, a number of additional points need to be made. First, it is obvious that certain parts of certain performances lend themselves more to a focus on the performant function, others more to a focus on the referential function. A speech like Mercutio's evocation of Queen Mab in Act One of *Romeo and Juliet* is clearly an interlude, designed more to showcase the actor who performs it than to advance the action of the play, whereas the scene that immediately follows it, the ball at the house of Capulet, is highly referential and crucial to the development of the plot. But it is not just individual parts of works that favor one function over another; sometimes a work in its entirety demonstrates a similar privileging, as do, indeed, whole genres. Most ballets, for example, clearly emphasize the performant at the expense of the referential; mime shows are comparable in this regard, and so for many years were the vast majority of opera productions. In recent times, of course, there has been a notable shift in the way operas are staged, but during the genre's so-called Golden Age, most productions evinced little interest in drawing the attention of the public into the story being enacted, focusing instead on the vocal skills of the principal singers.



Interestingly, the opposite phenomenon has become evident during the last few years in a great many stagings of classical European plays that have placed far greater weight on the performant aspect of the production than would have been the case previously, a development that in many instances reveals the clear influence of non-Western performance practices.<sup>7</sup> We shall return to this point later.

In his discussion of the performant function, Alter puts particular emphasis on the matter of the demonstration of skills, and the prominence he accords it is one of the features that distinguish his approach to theatre from that of many post-structuralists and phenomenologists (States is a partial exception). For Alter, in other words, mere corporeal presence is not sufficient to elicit delight in the spectator: there must be an exhibition of expertise, talent and excellence as well. That exhibition is not necessarily limited to the human performers on stage. Sometimes it is located in inanimate objects that may also be said to “perform” in the sense of drawing attention to themselves through a demonstration of brilliance (in the costumes, for example, or in the props, or in the décor), although notable display in this area is sometimes condemned, rather than applauded, as we shall see. Most typically, however, the manifestation of distinction to which its audiences respond with pleasure is found in the living performers, that is to say, in the actors themselves.

During a theatrical event, how do we judge the skills of the actors or the others who have contributed to that event? It would seem that to a large extent we assess them, either consciously or unconsciously, against norms that we hold for each individual's participation in the performance. Very often, those norms will be derived from previous theatrical experiences—for instance, from our having seen the same production before, or from our having previously seen the same play in a different production, or from having seen other plays similar to the one we are witnessing. Thus, we will remember how other actors performed in analogous circumstances (or how the same actors performed in different circumstances), or how other set and costume designers met comparable demands, or how other directors dealt with equivalent challenges. This process of remembering, and its consequences, is studied by Marvin Carlson in a recent work entitled *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine*. One of the major themes of this fascinating book is that all theatre-going is haunted by memories of the past, with the result, to take one example, that someone who has seen *Hamlet* a number of times cannot help, when encountering Ralph Fiennes in the title role, being influenced, or “haunted,” by his or her recall of Nicol Williamson in the part, or Richard Burton, or Laurence Olivier.

Of course, it is also entirely possible that the norms against which we evaluate the elements of a

production derive from an imaginary performance that we have constructed for ourselves, which is to say, from our thoughts regarding how something might be, or should be, done. Even then, however, it is likely that our “horizon of expectations,” to appropriate the phrase made famous by Hans Robert Jauss in his *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, will have been formed at least partially by prior experiences, such as reading that we have done or comments that we have heard from those who have already attended the show. Whatever the case, we react to each element in the performance according to the expectations that we have for that element, hoping always to encounter competence, or, better yet, excellence. Sometimes those prospects are not met, and we feel disappointed and deflated; sometimes they are met, but not exceeded, which leaves us feeling satisfied, but nothing more; and sometimes they are not merely exceeded, but extravagantly so, and what we experience then is pure exhilaration.

That rush of exhilaration shares a number of properties with the mental state that the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls “flow.” Flow occurs, according to Csikszentmihalyi, when we are so deeply absorbed in something that nothing outside of the immediate milieu seems to matter. We lose track of time, being focused only on the moment, and our sense of our surroundings becomes attenuated. Preoccupations and extraneous thoughts disappear, and we undergo feelings of immense

pleasure. We are, for the duration of the flow, in a condition that might be called enchantment.

The state of flow comes and goes, of course, and it may be found in many different contexts: not only in the theatre, but also at work, while we are playing sports, during deeply engrossing conversations with friends, and so on. The variety of these examples suggests an important point, which is that flow can occur either when we are alone or when we are members of a group. As everyone can attest, in the latter situation the exhilarated feelings of one person serve to arouse and magnify similar feelings in others, and the result is that experience that many years ago Émile Durkheim, in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, called “collective effervescence” (171 and *passim*). Durkheim, of course, was speaking about a religious phenomenon, but the state that he describes, one of excitement and joy and bonding with one’s fellow human beings, has been found by others to be applicable to a variety of situations. Whatever the circumstance, a feeling of *communitas* is created, and that feeling lasts for as long as the “effervescence” endures.<sup>8</sup>

In his discussion of the manner in which we subconsciously evaluate theatrical performances, both human and non-human, Alter makes the point that if we judge those performances incompetent or merely competent it is on the basis of how well they have fulfilled the referential function that they have

been given. It is when performances exceed that basic purpose, when they exhibit notable skill, that they become truly "performant." Thus, he writes, "[an exceptional performance] always breaks loose both from the competence norm and its ties to referentiality. [. . .] In other terms, whereas competence always depends on the success of referentiality, [an exceptional performance] constitutes the only pure manifestation of the performant function operating for its own sake" (66).

As Alter points out, our response to exceptional human performances in the theatre is very much akin to the way we respond to demonstrations of great skill in other areas of performative activity such as sports contests, circuses, and musical concerts, different as those activities may be, each from the others. In these, also, we react to superior performances with enthusiasm, delight, and awe, judging what we see and hear against certain expectations that we have brought to the event because of previous experiences. But there is another factor that enters into our appreciation of the skills that we are witnessing and that is our tacit recognition that we ourselves could not accomplish the exceptional feats on display, whether they consist of throwing a sixty-yard touchdown pass, or juggling six rings in the air while standing on the back of a cantering horse, or performing Franz Liszt's Transcendental Étude No. 5 without dropping a single note. When encountering such exploits, we naturally feel moved to rejoice in them, and thus we stand up, we shout

and cheer, and we envelop the performer in warm applause.

Oftentimes the pleasure that we take in performances on the playing field, or in the concert hall, or at the circus, is the result of our being aware that a particular trial is about to take place and then seeing that trial met successfully. Are there similar trials in the theatre? The answer is, of course, yes. In an opera, perhaps, a long, sustained high note, or a whole group of them, like the famous nine high C's in a row for the tenor in *La fille du regiment*; in a ballet, a prolonged series of *fouettés en tournant* (one thinks of the celebrated moment in Act II of *Swan Lake*); in a play, a particularly lengthy or taxing speech, or perhaps one that is dangerously over-familiar, such as Macbeth's "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" or Segismundo's "¿Qué es la vida?" peroration in *La vida es sueño*. In such instances what is wanted for maximum audience response is a demonstration that the test has been not just conquered, but that it has been conquered easily, fearlessly, triumphantly. That the demonstration has been done *live*—without the benefit of editing, overdubbing, retakes or any of the other kinds of electronic sleight-of-hand available in the film or recording studio—makes it all the more thrilling. A particular danger has been faced, without benefit of a metaphorical safety net, and it has been gloriously overcome.

What we see, then, is that exceptional performances, whether by human or by non-human performers, typically inspire exceptional delight on the part of those who observe them.<sup>9</sup> But it needs to be acknowledged that under certain circumstances other responses are also possible. It sometimes happens, for example, that a highly skilled actor will appear to be concerned only with his or her own portrayal, evincing little interest in participating in an ensemble effort, and that kind of self-centeredness runs the risk of engendering audience disapproval, not to mention active hostility on the part of colleagues. By the same token, there is a long tradition of criticizing what is viewed as inordinate attention given to sets, costumes, and stage effects, although, to be sure, in this case the criticism typically comes more from playwrights and professional reviewers than from audience members.

One of the dramatists who was outspoken in his objection to what we would call special effects was Lope de Vega who, in the *Prólogo dialogístico* to his Parte XVI (1621), has the allegorical figure of Teatro lament his present sad condition, complaining that more and more “los autores se valen de las máquinas; los poetas, de los carpinteros, y los oyentes de los ojos.”<sup>10</sup> Lope’s irritation that *máquinas* were drawing attention away from the verse of his plays was echoed by his English contemporary, Ben Jonson, who protested on frequent occasion that playgoers seemed more attentive to the elabo-

rate scenery and costumes that Inigo Jones had provided for his court masques than to the words that inspired them.<sup>11</sup> And, as we might suppose, late Baroque theatre, with its greater opportunities for even more astonishing effects generated still more vehement denunciations from both authors and critics of a literary bias. Thus in 1674 John Dryden, associated with the rather modest Drury Lane theatre in London, railed against that theatre's rival, the technologically advanced Dorset Garden, where "Scenes, Machines, and empty Opera's reign," and in 1701 Richard Steele wrote in his prologue to *The Funeral* that:

Nature's Deserted and Dramatick Art,  
To Dazle now the eye, has left the Heart;  
Gay Lights, and Dresses, long extended Scenes,  
Daemons and Angels moving in Machines,  
All that can now or please or fright the Fair  
May be perform'd without a Writer's Care.<sup>12</sup>

Censures of this nature were less common during the heyday of realist drama in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when directors and designers were obliged to create productions that accorded with the quotidian concerns of the plays being staged, but in more recent times they have been mounted again, particularly against the glittering stagings often accorded to Broadway and West End musicals. These attacks seem to presume that semiosis, or the referential function, is the principal



purpose of theatre and that, when prominent attention is given to the performant function, referentiality is undermined. From this point of view, anything that smacks of undue theatricality is to be looked at askance.

Nevertheless, it is evident that virtuosic display has been a part of theatre from the very beginning. Indeed, in some traditions it is the principal element. One thinks of the performances that took place in the streets and squares of medieval Europe that featured prestidigitators, clowns, acrobats, mimes, minstrels, tight-rope walkers, puppeteers and the like, theatre that in the Spanish context has been studied by Bruce R. Burningham in his recent *Radical Theatricality*. And still today, a similar emphasis on overt theatricality is characteristic of classical theatre in many parts of the non-Western world, particularly in Asia. Examples of this performant-centered theatre abound, extending from the Kathakali dramas of southern India, to the Kabuki plays of Japan, to the elaborate productions of Peking Opera. All of these combine spoken text with dance and song, and feature highly stylized movement, sumptuous costumes, stunning make-up, and exceptionally-skilled performers. Some of the sub-genres also incorporate puppet shows, and in Peking Opera “complex and thrilling acrobatics” are highlighted, with “somersaults, tumbling, and throwing, catching, and returning of spears being performed to split-second timing” (Mackerras 469).

As mentioned earlier, the performant-minded approach of Eastern theatre has in the last few decades been reflected in a number of important productions in the West as well. Two directors who have been particularly associated with that approach have been Peter Brook and Ariane Mnouckine. Brook, connected early on with the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon and more recently with the International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris, has throughout his career been notably open to influences from a variety of theatrical traditions. Examples of his absorption of other traditions are many, but perhaps the production which most obviously reveals his affinity with Eastern theatre is his dramatic adaptation, first into French and then into English, of the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*. Among those who thrilled to the performant aspect of this staging was Irving Wardle of the Times of London who wrote about it in 1985 as follows:

Brook the magician surpasses himself in this production. For his ceremonies, trails of fire race across the sand and ignite the waters. For his battles, you can trace the flights of the mimed arrows, and visualize the horses from the sight of chariot drivers whipping a single heavy wheel over the desert. As before in his work, the immediate impact produces amazement and pleasure: the long-term effect is the imprint of images of tenderness, tri-

umph and death that lodge in the memory for ever.  
(Qtd. in Brown 510)

Ariane Mnouchkine, co-founder of the Théâtre du Soleil in Paris, is, like Brook, known particularly for productions that combine various cultural traditions. She has traveled extensively in the Orient, and that travel is clearly reflected in her work, which has been described as “moving away from the constrained acting style of the naturalistic theatre towards a more overtly theatrical performance style which [celebrates] the visual, sensory, and musical power of a medium which seemed to have become a slave to the dramatic text” (Delgado and Heritage 176). Among her notable stagings have been the Kabuki-inflected mounting of Shakespeare’s *Richard II* of 1982 and her production of *Les Atrides* (1990-1992), a conflation of Euripides’s *Ephigenia in Aulis* and Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, which displayed a variety of Eastern influences. In connection with that production, Mnouchkine remarked that “we in Europe have authors, but [in Asia] they have acting. They know what an actor should be. And they have known that for two or three thousand years now” (qtd. in Brown 513).

As Brook and Mnouchkine are perfectly aware, and many other contemporary directors as well, demonstrations of great performant skill in the theatre, quite apart from the semiotic or referential function to which it may be put, and despite whatever objections may be raised against it, appeal to the

desire of all of us to be present at the revelation of something truly extraordinary. Attendees of theatres in Spain in the early modern period were surely no different from modern audiences in this regard, a fact that would seem to be confirmed by Lope's annoyance with the popular appeal exercised by the *tramoyistas*. Fortunately, as it turns out, the hunger of those playgoers for experiences that would astound and delight was unusually well served in the public theatres of the day, particularly insofar as those experiences centered on the talents of the performers themselves. To some extent this accommodation was the result of the physical configuration of the *corrales*, which is to say their employment of a thrust stage that placed the performers in close contact with spectators. Because of this proximity, playgoers could not only hear clearly the words of the actors and see plainly their movements, gestures, and facial expressions, but *feel* the energy and vitality that they brought to their playing, a quality that, as the phenomenologists emphasize, is one of the most important attributes of live theatre.

But it was not just the design of the stages of the *corrales* that lent itself to the prompting of feelings of awe and enchantment; it was as well the fare that was presented upon those stages. The archetypal *comedia*, as Burningham points out, affords frequent chances for performative display. Many of these are embedded in the roles given to the *graciosos*, parts typically filled with jokes, witticisms, and

the possibility to step outside of character and communicate directly with the audience, thereby relinquishing the referential function altogether in favor of the performant function. Other occasions are found in the songs and dances that normally enlivened the afternoon's proceedings. Still others are contained in the numerous lyrical speeches, often in the form of sonnets, which beg a virtuosic rendition as much as do arias in an opera. Finally, they were excellent opportunities to be exploited—and perhaps we are not accustomed to thinking of them in this context—in the long expository monologues that, as Burningham shows, are the descendants of the epic songs and ballads of the *jongleurs*. Eminently characteristic of Spanish seventeenth-century theatre, they can easily run to several hundred verses, far longer than anything to be encountered in Shakespeare. The challenge here, of course, is to make the speech come alive, to *animate* it, to make it continuously interesting, not just to recite it but to *perform* it.

All who attend the theatre with some frequency can enumerate many demonstrations of astonishing performant display that they have encountered and that linger in the memory. I would like to conclude by mentioning three that in recent years have impressed me greatly and that at least some of the readers of this journal are also likely to remember. They come from three different stages in three different countries.

The first performance was that of JD Cullum in the role of Don García in the Antaeus Company's production of Dakin Matthews's adaptation of Alarcón's *The Liar* that was presented at the Chamizal Golden Age Theater Festival in El Paso in 2000. Matthews's adaptation is a tour-de-force, and Cullum's performance was equally so. The principal difficulty of the role lies, of course, in its extended speeches, each of them filled with the most extravagant lies. Their dramatic purpose, unlike that of the expository speeches just mentioned, is not to provide the public with necessary background information, but rather to impress or persuade in some way the person to whom they are addressed. Thus, they walk a fine line: they must on the one hand seem at least minimally convincing to the onstage receptor of their words, and on the other hand they must amuse the eavesdropping members of the audience with their creativity and their flair. The trick for the actor in these extremely lengthy speeches is not merely to get through them without faltering, but to make them vivid, to keep them moving forward, to build to a peak of tension and glee, with the spectators not simply paying attention, but hanging on every word. This Cullum was able to do in magical fashion, with a dazzling variety of unexpected inflections, constantly changing rhythms, and judiciously placed pauses, all the while gesturing manically and capering like an acrobat around the multi-level set.

My second example also comes from a comedy, in this instance, the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of Catherine Boyle's adaptation of Sor Juana's *House of Desires*, seen at Stratford-upon-Avon in 2004. The actor playing Castaño, the *gracioso*, in this production was Simon Trinder, and his performance made him—and rightly so—a star in the eyes of the London critics. If Cullum in *The Liar* displayed an amazing talent for hilarious line-readings, Trinder proved to be a genius at physical comedy. Nowhere was that more evident than in his solo turn, the cross-dressing scene in Act Three, which had him donning article after article of feminine apparel, mincing here, sashaying there, batting his eyelashes and admiring his curves, while he gradually convinced himself that not only was he attractive, but truly “gorgeous.” The climax of the scene occurred when Trinder advanced coyly across the stage and planted a loud kiss on the bald head of a gentleman in the front row at the Swan Theatre, a moment that, as they say, brought the house down.

My third and final example is quite different. It relates to the performance of Sara Topham as Laurencia in Laurence Boswell's adaptation of Lope's *Fuente Ovejuna* which played during the summer of 2008 at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Canada. Her acting was outstanding throughout, but particularly memorable in Laurencia's famous harangue of the village council at the beginning of Act Three. From her first appearance at the beginning of this scene, bruised, scratched, and dirty, with her

clothes ripped and her hair disheveled, she was absolutely mesmerizing. She began her monologue with contained fury, and then, with ever more vehement emotion, she proceeded to heap insult upon insult on the assembled men who listened in embarrassed and uncertain silence. At one point the actor playing Esteban made a hesitant step toward her, but she waved him back and continued her tirade, sometimes speaking faster, sometimes speaking more slowly, alternating phrases that were all but shouted with others that were virtually whispered. The speech became truly operatic, and such was her intensity, and such was the silence and concentration of the audience that every word struck to the heart. At the end, so convincing had Topham been that one half expected members of the audience to join with the men of the village council, now moved to rebellion against the evil Comendador, in shouting "Death to the traitors, death to the tyrants."

Each of these examples, particularly the last one, illustrates Alter's point that the performant function of theatre can never be separated entirely from the referential function. We admire performances, not only those of the actors but also those of all others whose work is displayed onstage, for the way in which they serve the needs of the story being enacted. But we also respond to them—looking with the other of the two binocular eyes—as impressive and moving demonstrations of the skills, the talent, the flair, the creativity, and, yes, often-



times, the pure brilliance of the artists involved. As such these supremely performant performances are to be cherished and celebrated.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the wide diffusion of the concept of “presence” in postmodern theorizing about the arts, and the different uses to which it has been put, see Sayre 1-34, and Carlson, *Performance* 123-43.

<sup>2</sup> As Marvin Carlson has observed, Kirby’s work in the theatre, with its emphasis on visual and aural perception, has a great deal in common with the stagings of Richard Foreman, Robert Wilson, and the Wooster Group in this country and, in Germany, with those of Heiner Müller (*Theories* 512).

<sup>3</sup> The accusation that theatre involves mere empty representation of realities that lie elsewhere is, of course, a very ancient one, having been leveled many times from Plato onward. It was heard repeatedly in attacks against the stage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and figured importantly in the efforts of churchmen and others, particularly in England, to have the theatres closed permanently. Barish’s *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice*, provides an important overview of the topic.

<sup>4</sup> Reflecting on the concept of iconicity, pervasive in semiotic studies of the theatre, States writes: “[T]heatre—unlike fiction, painting, sculpture, and film—is really a language whose words consist to an unusual degree of things that *are* what they seem to be. In theater, image and object, pretense and pretender, sign-vehicle and content, draw unusually close. Or, as Peter Handke more interestingly puts it, in the theater light is brightness pretending to be other brightness, a chair is a chair pretending to be another chair, and so on” (20).

<sup>5</sup> The peculiar relation between signifiers and signified within the theatrical context has been the object of much theoretical discussion. On the one hand, as Handke observes in the previ-

ous note, objects on stage are perceived by spectators as “real”: real chairs, real tables, real bodies, and so on. On the other hand, they are perceived as not “real,” because they are understood to be signs of things that belong not to the actual world of the stage but to the imaginary world of the story being enacted. Thus, their existence is both affirmed and denied, a phenomenon that Anne Ubersfeld calls “dénégation” (*Lire* 46-50, “Notes” 11-26). Patrice Pavis uses the same term, although in a somewhat different way (11-15). It is important to note that “dénégation” has nothing to do with what is sometimes called “suspension of disbelief,” a condition that supposedly occurs when spectators accept the events that they are witnessing on stage as real or true. Virtually all writers on theatre agree that such “suspension,” if understood literally, rarely, if ever happens.

<sup>6</sup> This kind of shifting attention should not be confused with what Richard Schechner calls “selective inattention.” As described by Schechner, the latter occurs when spectators “drop in and out of a performance” (18), paying attention as long as their interest is maintained and leaving temporarily when they are bored or in need of refreshment. Such a practice is allowed, or even encouraged, in the case of very long performances such as are typical of Eastern theatre or certain kinds of avant-garde theatre in the West.

<sup>7</sup> A recent case in point was the splendid production of Calderón’s *No hay burlas con el amor*, presented at the Chamizal Siglo de Oro Drama Festival in 2007 by the Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático de Murcia, under the direction of Francisco García Vicente. Here the influence, however, came not from Asian theatre but rather from Hollywood musicals of the 1930s. For the specific nature of this inspiration, see García Vicente’s interview with Susan Paun de García.

<sup>8</sup> On the concept of *communitas*, and its relation both to flow and the concept of liminality, see Turner 45-60.

<sup>9</sup> It should be pointed out that oftentimes our delight in the performances of performers does not stem directly from their skill as performers but has to do rather with other factors: their physical beauty, their perceived charisma, their fame or notoriety, their enormous popularity, the fees that they are known to command, and so on. We react to them, in other words, on the basis of qualities that lie outside both the dramatic space and the performance space. What we are responding to, then, is what Alter terms *cultural* performance (71-78) and what Joseph Roach calls the "It" factor and not the performant function *per se*.

<sup>10</sup> I cite here from the abbreviated version of the Prólogo given in Castro and Rennert (260-61). For Lope's views on *máquinas*, *tramoyas* and the *tramoyistas*, see also Rennert 96-98, and Asensio.

<sup>11</sup> On the background of the famous quarrel between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones, see Gordon.

<sup>12</sup> The quotations from Dryden and Steele are cited from Carlson, "Resistance" 247.

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## ENTRE EL TEATRO Y LA ACADEMIA: DECODIFICAR LA ESCRITURA TEATRAL

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“Cuando he de escribir una comedia”, dice Lope en su *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias...*, “encierro los preceptos... [lo que hoy tal vez llamaríamos planteamientos teóricos] ...con seis llaves / y escribo por el arte que inventaron / los que el vulgar aplauso pretendieron, / porque, como las paga el vulgo, es justo / hablarle en necio para darle gusto.”

Por todo lo que pueda haber de irónico en ese “necio” con que se refiere al vulgo, Lope, demostrando su respeto por el público, se declara mucho más “izquierdista” que muchos directores posmodernos de nuestros días. Reconoce que el espectador, al pagar su entrada, tiene el derecho, como todo consumidor, de solicitar, de exigir que el actor satisfaga el deseo de diversión (o suspensión) con el que ha venido al teatro. Esta actitud de “solicitar” por parte del espectador constituye una mitad, al menos, de lo que se denomina *el acto teatral*. La segunda la suple el actor quien, al salir a las tablas y estimulado por lo que el espectador le pide, cumple con su

deseo de representar. Cuando sólo se considera al espectador por su poder adquisitivo, es decir por el mero hecho de haber comprado su entrada, convirtiéndole así en blanco de una estrategia de “marketing”, resulta que la fórmula de Lope, y de muchos otros dramaturgos, pierde vigencia. (Tampoco significa todo esto que el dramaturgo ignore que su tarea artística sea fuente de sus ingresos.) Disimulado por su acostumbrado humor, Lope no hace más que repetir los “preceptos” esenciales para que se cumpla lo que ya hemos denominado el *acto teatral*.

Dejando ya el espacio teatral y dirigiéndose al académico, al que el *Arte nuevo* va dirigido, Lope no desperdicia la oportunidad de poner a los teóricos en el sitio que les corresponde:

Fácil parece este sujeto [el de escribir *comedias*] y fácil  
fuera para cualquiera de vosotros [los académicos]  
que ha escrito menos de ellas y más sabe  
del arte de escribirlas y del todo;  
que lo que a mí me daña en esta parte  
es haberlas escritas sin el arte.

En estos versos Lope demuestra el desprecio que siente hacia la pedantería académica, encubierto bajo una capa de fina ironía. No obstante el hecho que el mismo Lope fuera un hombre de letras, lo que aquí se percibe es el desprecio que siente un dramaturgo cuando el teatro y la academia asumen posiciones opuestas. Como Lope sabe demasiado

bien, el arte teatral se aprende *in situ*, es decir en el espacio teatral mismo, por medio de la experimentación y la observación, y, claro está, por la experiencia creadora. Por decirlo de otra manera, lo que choca a Lope parece ser que gente sin experiencia de la práctica teatral le dicten cómo escribir teatro, cuando él ha adquirido sus conocimientos científicos de cómo funciona el teatro en ese laboratorio que es el mismo teatro.

En general, la academia ha planteado aproximaciones de orientación literaria al texto teatral, aproximaciones válidas para textos literarios. Sin embargo el texto teatral en su esencia no es compuesto para ser leído en forma impresa. Desde los primeros tiempos del teatro público en Europa, el texto escrito se dirige al actor/director quien, mediante una lectura teatral y no literaria, crea el texto mediante su representación instintiva o intelectualmente; mejor dicho, con la experiencia que tiene del teatro. (Al parecer, la poca importancia concedida al texto teatral como texto de lectura podría explicar la falta de manuscritos teatrales en tiempos de Lope: ni siquiera uno de Shakespeare si no contamos su intervención en *Sir Thomas More*, y poquísimos de sus prolíferos contemporáneos españoles).

Lo que planteamos muy esquemáticamente en estas páginas es que la escritura teatral cuenta con una dimensión espacial que la escritura literaria no necesita, una dimensión que permite al dramaturgo visualizar lo representable en su texto, y por medio



del cual elaborar un uso de la lengua, un registro muy particular a este tipo de escritura. En manos del actor el texto se convierte en fuente para sonsacar las acotaciones del dramaturgo, tanto las explícitas como las implícitas: dicho de otra manera, además de las acotaciones señaladas en el texto impreso, habría que fijarse en las que van encubiertas en las palabras del texto así como en la relación que hay entre las mismas palabras. Hay, pues, una especie de “shorthand” que obra entre el dramaturgo y el actor, por el cual la “voz” del dramaturgo se le comunica al actor. O por decirlo de otra manera, el texto teatral comunica su sentido por medio de una palabra escrita, que parecidamente a la nota musical en una partitura, contiene instrucciones tanto verbales como gestuales, en cuanto a cómo ha de decirse el verso y lo que debe hacerse al decirlo.

Lo espacial en la escritura teatral necesita más elaboración, pero basta apuntar aquí que este tipo de escritura contiene en sí un espacio para la interpretación del actor, y hoy día del director también, espacios previstos por el dramaturgo, sobre todo cuando éste está fuertemente ligado al teatro como era el caso en el teatro público en la Europa del renacimiento. No se necesita, pues, deshacerse del autor ni del dramaturgo, como se ha pretendido hacer, o suponer que sólo las luces de un director posmoderno son capaces de dar sentido teatral al texto de una obra. En la época de Lope y sus contemporáneos, el dramaturgo estaba íntimamente li-

gado con la producción teatral de su obra: hoy día (no siempre, por supuesto), se le retiene en los portales del teatro por miedo de que pudiera interferir en la interpretación del director.

Me he metido en lo teórico, pero conscientemente, y no quisiera convertirme en uno de aquellos académicos a quienes Lope apuntaba con ironía. Me atrevo a sugerir que un laboratorio en que colaboren activamente actores, directores y académicos, no sólo alrededor de una mesa de discusiones sino sobre las tablas mismas, abrirá el campo de la investigación teatral a un examen científico de todo lo que queda por descubrir, sin posiciones previas que defender. Los prejuicios, por sabios que parezcan, deberán dejarse en los portales del laboratorio. Creo que algo parecido puede haber ocurrido cuando se estableció la Royal Shakespeare Company, en tiempos de Peter Hall y John Barton, y que dio resultados impresionantes (véase el libro de Barton). Tal vez un encuentro de este tipo entre la academia y el teatro sea precisamente donde se planteen soluciones para los problemas suscitados para la representación de la comedia española del XVII. (Recordemos aquí el artículo de Adolfo Marsillach que apareció en *El país* en 1981. En él se plantean los problemas de cómo hacer accesible a un público de su día la comedia española del XVII, y lo hace particularizando con afán de investigador, y planteando problemas de escenificación con gran claridad. Pre-

cisamente en este contexto cita los éxitos de La Royal Shakespeare Co. y La Comédie Française.)

Hasta aquí lo teórico, y ahora a la práctica. Dos ejemplos: uno de cómo he descifrado un texto teatral del XVII al momento de dirigirlo, y otro que está en vía de realización en el teatro de la imaginación. Pero antes de considerar los ejemplos, quisiera tener en cuenta ciertas consideraciones al momento de descifrar la escritura teatral:

1. Los dramaturgos que componían obras para el teatro público del XVII con frecuencia conocían a los actores que desempeñaban los papeles que ellos creaban. Es más, en ciertos casos los mismos dramaturgos llegaron a crear papeles con actores particulares en mente, cosa que oculta todo un rasgo del personaje, ya que resultaba obvio al actor que representaba ese papel, y no habría por qué especificarlo en el texto. Sin duda alguna, denominaciones tales como “galán” o “barbas” hacen ver que los atributos físicos del actor están plenamente presentes en la mente del dramaturgo al momento de crear un papel.

2. Los mismos dramaturgos conocían también a su público. Hay que imaginar al dramaturgo cuando no actuaba en su propia comedia, como lo hacía Lope, al menos observando el progreso de su obra por las tablas. A lo largo del tiempo,

las reacciones de ese público les ayudaban a perfeccionar su arte.

Y ahora a la práctica.

El final de *El médico de su honra* de Calderón, ha resultado problemático, por decirlo con cierta liviandad, tanto en la academia como en el teatro. Al dirigir la comedia en versión inglesa hace unos años en EE.UU., tuve que enfrentarme a las envergaduras del problemático final de la obra. Es un caso en que Calderón parece haber prescindido de toda acotación textual, lo cual no quiere decir que no las haya, si seguimos la argumentación de la escritura teatral avanzada más arriba.

Recordemos ese fin problemático que ha llegado a dar lugar a acusaciones de inmoralidad contra Calderón por dejar impune a un marido que mata a su mujer. El rey silencia las protestas de Gutierre cuando éste le ordena que dé su mano a Leonor, y luego no vuelve a hablar más. Como director, me parecía improbable que el Rey escuchara las réplicas que prosiguen entre Gutierre y Leonor, y también que una figura como la de Pedro, que desempeña un papel tan definitivo, permaneciera en silencio hasta finalizar la obra. Por lo tanto le saqué de la escena.

Seguimos: al dirigir la palabra a Leonor, Gutierre se acerca a ella y la amenaza, recordándole que la práctica de sangrar no queda olvidada. Esto lo hace porque, una vez que se retira el Rey, Gutierre

piensa liberarse de un nuevo enlace aterrando a Leonor. Lo extraño en las palabras de Gutierre en esta secuencia es que contienen una confesión de que ha matado a su mujer y que, hasta este punto, había hecho un gran esfuerzo por mantener todo oculto dada la importancia de lo de “a secreto agravio, secreta venganza”. Se comprende que esta amenaza, con la que espera inspirar terror en Leonor, es la última esperanza que abriga para no cumplir con la orden del Rey. A su turno, Leonor le contesta que el casarse con Gutierre es la única salvación posible, por amenazadora que sea, de poder lavar su honor; palabras con las que Calderón agudiza la ironía trágica del cierre de la obra. Con estas palabras finaliza la conversación entre los dos personajes.

Al dirigir la escena, resultaba claro que era imprescindible hacer entrar a Leonor después de su breve respuesta a Gutierre, pues con ella afirmaba que el honor era tan importante para ella como para él: dejarla sobre las tablas disminuiría la fuerza tanto de sus palabras como de la ironía que Calderón les había dado. Al aceptar sin miedo la mano sangrienta que Gutierre le ofrece, se cierra para éste toda posibilidad de evadir la orden del Rey. En los momentos en que finaliza la obra me pareció entrever en la organización teatral del texto impreso un fin trágico en el que Gutierre queda aislado; un Gutierre que sólo anhela un rayo que le mate. Gutierre está deshecho por haber tenido que matar a una mu-

jer a quien había amado, y queda obligado tanto por su rey como por las leyes del honor que le obligan a callar, a dar su mano a una mujer a quien no ama. Forzado a matar a Mencía por testimonios que él creía convincentes, por tener una visión incompleta de la situación como su antecesor Edipo, se le cierran a Gutierre todas las puertas. Dejarle sólo sobre la escena en el momento en que finaliza la obra, me pareció subrayar el aislamiento dramático del personaje y el ambiente trágico que Calderón comunica en *El médico* mediante su escritura teatral (Benabu 36-52).

Puesto que lo que me propongo aquí es descifrar un problema que toca a la interpretación de una obra teatral en general, interpretación, digo, tanto por parte de los intérpretes (actor/director) como por parte de los espectadores, me permito señalar seguidamente una obra bien conocida que no es una comedia áurea, aunque sí es una obra que coincide con la época del desarrollo de la comedia española del siglo XVII. Me refiero al *El mercader de Venecia* de Shakespeare, obra muy conocida que, por serlo, me facilitará distinguir lo contenido en el texto del dramaturgo inglés frente a las capas interpretativas que hayan ido acumulándose a lo largo de la rica tradición escénica de la obra. Este ejemplo esclarecerá como las características de la escritura teatral sirven a dirigir a actores y a directores a la vez, y también a investigadores, a resolver problemas que tal vez no se vislumbren en el texto impreso.

Para esto voy a centrarme en la construcción de dos personajes de la obra; el mercader Antonio, protagonista del título, y el que, no siéndolo, Shylock, frecuentemente se ha opinado que lo es.

Shylock ha ejercido una fuerte atracción sobre generaciones de espectadores, pero también sobre grandes actores en la historia del teatro, que siempre han anhelado desempeñar el papel: ese mismo Shylock, cuya construcción ha animado discusiones marginales, tanto en la academia como en el teatro, en cuanto al supuesto antisemitismo de su creador. Digámoslo de una vez para mejor enfocar el problema: Shakespeare fue hijo de su época, y la figura del judío seguía teniendo entre cristianos una connotación negativa, que ha ido disolviéndose (aunque no enteramente) hasta hoy día. Si hiciera falta entender la diferencia entre un estereotipo y un personaje, no tenemos más que comparar a Shylock con su correligionario Barabas en *El Judío de Malta* de Christopher Marlowe (como ya se ha hecho con frecuencia); personaje estereotipado el de Marlowe, inspirado en una visión antisemita.

En total Shylock aparece en cinco escenas de la obra, aunque su última salida a las tablas está contenida dentro de una jornada entera, la cuarta, la del juicio. Sin referencias claras que yo haya encontrado en cuanto al vestuario del personaje, la tendencia ha sido de vestirle en ropajes miserables, de apariencia sucia, y con cabellos grasientos bajo su gorrito. Entre las producciones de la posguerra, la de

Jonathan Miller con Lawrence Olivier en el papel es una excepción, ya que se le caracteriza de banquero sefardí en el Londres del siglo 19. Y producciones más recientes han seguido esta iniciativa, tal vez como gesto apologético a la política de minorías. Pero existen cuadros de actores en la historia, como el de Kean, donde Shylock no se distingue de los demás personajes por su vestuario. Puede que vista la “Jewish gabardine “, pero este género de por sí no indica miseria pues es tela que puede costar bastante. A lo que todo esto apunta es que la apariencia de pordiosero de Shylock no está implícita ni en el texto de Shakespeare ni en la tradición interpretativa temprana del papel.

Más nos rinde examinar a Shylock como un personaje más en la galería de personajes shakespearianos que se pierden por dejarse llevar por a una pasión. Porque al fin y al cabo, el Shylock de Shakespeare no es una caricatura del judío más que en la mente de quienes hayan querido convertirle en estereotipo de sus propios prejuicios, como se hizo en la Alemania nazista. No es sino un personaje ficticio incrustado en un discurso dramático. También cabe observar que, más bien que reflejar la forma de pensar del propio Shakespeare, la opinión negativa que los venecianos tienen de Shylock, personajes éstos que están bien lejos de ser ejemplares, retrata a la vez las características de los personajes mismos e informa sobre una sociedad mercantil, al parecer



en decadencia, si nos dejamos llevar por los personajes que habitan la Venecia de Shakespeare.

Pasemos ahora a la supuesta pasión por el lucro frecuentemente atribuida a Shylock. Es prestamista por fuerza de su medioambiente más que por elección propia, y darle demasiada importancia a su pasión por el lucro es caer de nuevo en otro prejuicio anti-semita. Recordemos que cuando se escapa su hija con un cristiano, robándole sus alhajas, Shylock, confuso, parece atribuirle igual valor a su extraviada hija como a sus perdidos ducados. Sin embargo, en la corte, cuando se le ofrece el doble de la deuda con tal de que libere a Antonio de su obligación, Shylock se niega a aceptar la suma ofrecida. El lucro no representa para él una fuerza irresistible: la posibilidad de vengarse de quien le ha humillado le satisface mucho más. Lo dicho hasta ahora hace resaltar que las capas adquiridas en una tradición interpretativa no siempre se encuentran en el texto del dramaturgo.

Dejemos a Shylock aquí y volvamos nuestra atención sobre cierta lectura que se ha hecho recientemente de Antonio, la cual se ha ido popularizando tanto en la academia como en el teatro. No es de extrañar que en un siglo obsesionado por el sexo como lo es el nuestro, tarde o temprano se postulara que la melancolía de Antonio radique en una homosexualidad reprimida (¡lectura posmoderna *par excellence*!). Ya que la obra empieza *in medias res* con Antonio reflejando sobre su melancolía, hay

lectores que al no lograr explicar la causa de su estado de ánimo, han optado por una lectura muy a la moda, escogiendo la homosexualidad como explicación del afecto que Antonio siente por Bassanio. Si el afecto (“love”) que un personaje masculino siente por otro en la totalidad de la obra *Shakespeareana* apuntara tan sólo a la homosexualidad, tendríamos que revisar muchísimas interpretaciones.

Cuando se pretende hacer una lectura teatral, es decir responder a lo esencial de la escritura teatral, no hay por qué seguir un orden linear al momento de trazar lo necesario para construir un personaje; y esto nos lleva a ciertas observaciones, a la vez discretas e irónicas, que Shylock hace sobre Antonio, y que tal vez nos proporcionen una explicación menos sensacional de la melancolía de Antonio, pero una que cuadra bien con el mundo de la obra.

Cuando sale por primera vez, en compañía de Bassanio, quien le pide el préstamo para seguir sus aventuras en Belmonte, Shylock repite la suma requerida, los “three thousand ducats” una y otra vez, dando énfasis una vez al “three”, otra al “thousand” y otra al “ducats”. ¿Obsesionado por la suma, o ironía por parte de Shylock? Lo que se ha señalado menos es la sorpresa de Shylock al oír las razones por las cuales Bassanio no se ha dirigido a su amigo para el préstamo. Éste le informa que Antonio tiene todos sus barcos en altamar. Shylock queda sorprendido: ¿todos...? En una ciudad comercial como lo es la Venecia de fines del siglo XVI como tam-

bién lo es en la obra de Shakespeare, a Shylock, comerciante, le extraña que Antonio haya arriesgado todos sus barcos a la vez esparciéndolos por los mares, símbolo en aquella época de la inconstancia de la Fortuna.

Pero es que muchos de los venecianos en la obra se han acostumbrado a derrochar más bien que a ganar dinero, y esto parece sugerir que la sociedad mercantil de la obra está en decadencia. Lo que Shylock parece implicar, y que convence mucho más que la nueva tendencia de hacer “gay” a Antonio, es que su melancolía radica precisamente en lo que ha sorprendido a Shylock: en el hecho de que un mercader haya arriesgado todos sus barcos, es decir todo su capital, confiándolo a un mar inconstante. Para Shylock, la acción de Antonio demuestra poca astucia comercial. Y volviendo al texto del inicio de la obra, hallamos que Salerio intenta consolar al melancólico Antonio pintando esos “orgullosos” buques que dominan la mar, consuelo de un “payaso” que hace poco para aliviar la tristeza de Antonio.

Las lecturas esbozadas más arriba se avanzan no como secuelas a las muchas avanzadas en la academia hasta hoy día, sino como ejemplos de cómo funciona la lectura teatral, nacida para enfrentarse con la teatralidad del texto. Aunque se haya compuesto para las tablas, el texto de una obra no siempre se ha interpretado con las exigencias del teatro en mente, como parecen haberlo hecho los

académicos a quien Lope se dirige en su *Arte nuevo*. Este tipo de trabajo pudiera también ejemplificar lo que la colaboración entre el teatro y la academia (es decir, la de hoy, no la de Lope), puede contribuir a un estudio científico del arte teatral. Rechaza como artificial la supuesta “apertura” del texto teatral, posición asumida por el postmodernismo en la academia, donde se retira al “autor” para poner en su lugar al crítico, o, como en el caso del teatro, donde el director asume lo que propiamente pertenece al dramaturgo. Como es el caso con una moda académica pasadera, tal posición quiere, en el mejor de los casos, ensordecir la voz que el dramaturgo ha codificado en su texto por medio de la calidad *espacial* de su escritura teatral, y en el peor, plagiar la obra de quien la compuso.

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## INTERTEXT AND CONTEXT IN JOSÉ BLANCO GIL'S *FARSA DA INDIA*

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Director José Blanco Gil and Teatro Ibérico do Lisboa presented an elaborate, contemplative interpretation of Gil Vicente's *Auto da India* (1509) at the Chamizal National Memorial in El Paso, Texas, in March of 2002. This production expands greatly on Vicente's 570 lines by adding songs, dances, and a lengthy prelude in which the actors dramatize verses taken from the fourth canto of Luis Vaz de Camões's epic account of Vasco da Gama's first voyage to India, *Os Lusíadas* (1572). Teatro Ibérico thus combines two moments in classical Portuguese literature that even today remain controversial because of the dissenting perspectives they appear to present with respect to sixteenth-century Portuguese expansionist incursions into India. Before such an innovative revision of the work, the viewer would be remiss not to consider: Why this treatment of the work, at this time, in this place? At the time of the performance, the U.S. military had been bombing Afghanistan for five months in retaliation for the

terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, and the Bush administration continued to develop its plans for regime change in Iraq.<sup>1</sup> To present a work combining critical views of Western conquests of the East in George W. Bush's home state at such a politically charged moment is implicitly to question the administration's practices and challenge the need for military enterprises in the Middle East. An understanding of the historical contexts of Vicente's farce and Camões's epic and how these relate to the performance context of the March 2002 show at the Chamizal are keys to interpreting the play.

Vicente's *Auto da India* is a one-act play similar in tone, length, and subject to many Spanish *entremeses*. While a soldier-sailor is away on Tristão da Cunha's expedition to India from 1506-1509, his wife, the ironically named Constança, aided by her maid, engages in adulterous affairs with other men. The husband returns and questions her fidelity, but she paints herself as having faithfully pined for him all this time and puts him on the defensive by suggesting that perhaps he was unfaithful to her during his voyages and conquests. The two nevertheless reconcile and go to the harbor to see the newly arrived fleet.

With respect to the tone and style of this piece, Vicente may well have been influenced by court mummeries of the fifteenth century and Portuguese *arremedilhos*, which date from the twelfth century

and are essentially “farces in embryo” (Parker 26). He also apparently drew inspiration from his contemporary Anrique da Mota, who wrote a number of farces, many of which were published in 1516 (Rocha 113-50). Vicente may have drawn the character types and central action of *Auto da Índia* from motifs and situations common in folk literature, as well as from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, day 8, story 7 (c. 1352), and Masuccio Salernitano's later comic imitation of this episode in his *novella* 29 (1476). Donald McGrady notes parallels between Vicente's work and that of the two Italian authors in the use of the deceived lover theme, the placement of one of the heroine's lovers inside her house and the other outside, the comic presentation of the love triangle, and even coincidences in the hour and date of some actions (324-27).

Vicente makes these common elements of farce meaningful to his private Lisbon audience of 1509 (the court of Queen Leonor, widow of João II and sister of his successor Manuel I) by framing the action with contemporary events. The occasion of the performance was to celebrate the return of Tristão da Cunha's expedition from India in 1509. The play thus begins with the husband's departure in 1506 on precisely this voyage and ends with his return, which coincides exactly with the moment of the performance in 1509. The husband and wife's decision to go down to the harbor to see the fleet not only signals the conclusion of the play, but also in-

vites the audience to do the same. As McGrady explains:

By placing the action in the time and space of the spectators, Vicente brings home to them very graphically the hazards of their period. Any Portuguese husband eager to spend a few years overseas to make a fortune stands warned that he may well lose more at home than he could possibly gain abroad (328).

Such a message would have been especially appropriate for Dona Leonor's court. At the time of the play, nobles of the court tended to favor Portuguese evangelism in North Africa while condemning Atlantic voyages as profit-seeking ventures promoted by the self-interested merchant class and the bourgeoisie (Castelo-Branco 134-35). While Dona Leonor's late husband King João II had championed the economic interests of the merchant class by embracing commercial expansion, she stayed loyal to her aristocratic roots by favoring crusading missions in North Africa and condemning trade-driven endeavors. As a royal functionary, Vicente may thus be expressing what he perceives to be the view of the court he was commissioned to entertain in belittling da Cunha's mission, which, as Maria dos Remédios Castelo-Branco relates, brought to Lisbon in 1509 "as tão cobiçadas especiarias do Oriente, durante séculos sonho e miragem dos europeus e caudalosa fonte de riquezas e lucros para os comer-



ciantes muçulmanos e venezianos” (“the greatly coveted spices of the Orient, which for centuries had been the elusive dream of Europeans and a vast source of riches and profits for Muslim and Venetian traders”; 129). While the playwright’s audience was entertained by his central focus on a situation and character type common in the Western farce tradition -- the love triangles of an adulterous wife -- his framing device made the work speak with immediacy to his contemporaries.

Just as Vicente takes an old plot and frames it with material that points to contemporary matters, so too does Teatro Ibérico’s director Blanco Gil precede Vicente’s work with lines that speak to issues of importance to twenty-first-century Western audiences. Though scholars have been quick to discern an anti-imperialist critique in Vicente’s play, one can understand how the average audience member, today or in the past, might miss or fail to comprehend its references to da Cunha’s expedition. Moreover, there has been disagreement among scholars as to whether the play should be considered a trivialization of Portuguese military endeavors for the cause of material gain or a silly romp that follows the long tradition of farce in taking jabs at the ruling administration, which could be expected to tolerate such criticism as harmless carnivalesque play.<sup>2</sup> While it is possible that Vicente’s bawdy take on Portuguese expansionism was taken as light, harmless entertainment by members of Manuel I’s court

of 1509, some scholars maintain that it nonetheless files a significant protest against Portuguese imperialist ventures during the age of exploration. Jack Tomlins sees Vicente's play as the "farcical dawn" of a movement against Portuguese expansionism that would reach its zenith in the fourth canto of Camões's *Os Lusíadas* (1572), with the tirade of the *velho do Restelo*, the old man of Restelo beach in Belém, against Portuguese aggression and exploitation in the East (172). In Camões's epic, the old man's speech comes at a point in the action when Vasco da Gama continues to recount the history of Portugal and his own adventures to the Sultan of Melinde, who welcomed da Gama and his fleet at the end of the second canto. The captain describes the tearful scene at the beach in Belem, where the sailors bid farewell to their families and embark on their adventure. An old man addresses the solemn gathering, condemning the mission as violent, vain, and driven by greed and a thirst for power and glory.

José Blanco Gil, like Tomlins, brings Camões and Vicente together to explore attitudes toward Portuguese sixteenth-century maritime expeditions. Blanco Gil includes several stanzas from the Restelo beach scene of *Os Lusíadas* as part of his prelude to the main action of *Auto da Índia*. By integrating the scene of the tearful farewells and the old man's bitter condemnation of da Gama's mis-

sion, Blanco Gil sets a serious tone and implies that the play's critique of the expedition is sincere.

*Farsa da India* begins in near-darkness with the sound of the wind blowing and an image of water: two actors stretch a silky blue linen across the stage floor and create undulating waves by gently shaking it between them. A haunting theme-and-variation piece in a minor key adds to the hypnotic effect of the luminescent waves. An actress dances upstage, waving and twirling a sheet over the water. The lights briefly dim and the water and dancer disappear while other members of the cast set the stage: a square mattress emblazoned with a cross is placed in the middle of the stage, flanked by a large, throne-like chair on one side and a spinning wheel on the other. The actors dress the "bed" with silky linens. The playing area is thus delineated into the realms of man and woman, separated by the sexual space they share, which, interestingly, is marked by the insignia of the knights templar, the military force behind Portugal's evangelist missions.

Three male and two female actors enter, dressed in white. They perform a stately, solemn dance to tense guitar music, then sing *a cappella* in a minor key while waving a sheet over the bed and dressing it with pillows. All exit except for the husband, with a cross on his tunic, and his wife. The two contemplate his imminent departure, concerned and forlorn. They embrace and look about fearfully as the wind begins to howl and thunder crashes.

They freeze, facing each other and holding hands, standing on the “bed.” The dancer reappears, spinning and weaving seductively to plaintive music in a minor key. She recites the opening stanza of *Os Lusíadas*, in which Camões as narrator announces that his theme is that of arms and of great heroes, who left western Lusitanian shores and crossed beyond the eastern limit of the known world to win eternal fame and initiate a new age. Here, of course, the statement cannot be taken too literally since relatively little of what follows focuses directly on da Gama’s sailors and their adventures. Perhaps the audience is meant to interpret these lines as indicating that what follows is meant primarily as a commentary, however indirect, on the Portuguese enterprise.

After a pause, the dancer goes on to speak stanzas 88-89 of the fourth canto, in which the poet, as Vasco da Gama, describes the tearful crowd of friends, relatives, mothers, and wives gathered at Restelo beach in Belém to bid farewell to the crew, none of whom they expect to see again. The wife then poignantly begs the husband not to leave in lines taken from stanza 91:

Ó doce e amado esposo,  
Sem quem não quis Amor que viver possa,  
Porque es aventurar ao mar iroso  
Essa vida que é minha e não é vossa?  
Como por um caminho duvidoso,  
Vos esquece a afeição tão doce nossa?

Nosso amor, nosso vão contentamento,  
Quereis que com as velas leve o vento? (4.91)

O dearest husband,  
But for whose love I could not exist,  
Why do you risk on the angry seas  
That which belongs to me, not you?  
Why, for so dubious a voyage, do you  
Forget our so sweet affection?  
Is our passion, our happiness so frail  
As to scatter in the wind swelling the sail? (White  
95)

The husband, unable to look his loved one in the eye, speaks lines from 4.93, in which the narrator, as da Gama, explains how the men restrain their emotions in order to maintain their determination and ease their departure.

Nós outros, sem a vista alevantarmos  
Nem a mãe, nem a esposa, neste estado,  
Por nos não magoarmos, ou mudarmos  
Do propósito firme começado,  
Determinei de assi nos embarcarmos  
Sem o despedimento costumado,  
Que, posto que é de amor usança boa,  
A quem se aparta ou fica, mais magoa (4.93).

As for us, we dared not lift our faces  
To our mothers and our wives, fearing  
To be harrowed, or discouraged  
From the enterprise so firmly begun,  
And I decided we should all embark

Without the customary farewells,  
For, though they may be love's proper course,  
They make the pain of separation worse (White 95).

In selecting these lines from *Os Lusíadas*, Blanco Gil clearly does not promote the heroism of the soldiers or the glory of their cause, as the opening lines might have suggested; rather, he emphasizes the devastating effect that war can have on families and the difficulty of bidding farewell to one's spouse, perhaps forever. These lines are performed with great sincerity here. Once the central action of the play begins, however, we see the great contrast between the love and tenderness the couple demonstrate in the prelude and the cynical betrayal of that love in Vicente's *auto*.

The dancer then introduces the old man, reciting *Os Lusíadas* 4.94 to describe him as an elder of venerable aspect but with an attitude of discontent and a heavy voice. A lone spotlight isolates him upstage as he shakes his head three times, fixes his eyes on the "crew" and denounces their endeavor:

O glória de mandar! ó vã cobiça  
Desta vaidade a quem chamamos fama!  
O fraudulentto gosto que se atiça  
Cua aura popular que honra se chama!  
Que castigo tamanho e que justiça  
Fazes no peito vão que muito te ama!  
Que mortes, que perigos, que tormentas,  
Que crueldades neles exprimentas!

Dura inquietação de alma e da vida,  
Fonte de desemparos e adultérios,  
Sagaz consumidora conhecida  
De fazendas, de reinos e de impérios!  
Chamam-te ilustre, chamam-te subida,  
Sendo dina de infames vitupérios;  
Chamam-te Fama e Glória soberana,  
Nomes com quem se o povo néscio engana!  
A que novos desastres determinas  
De levar estes Reinos e esta gente?  
Que perigos, que mortes lhe destinas  
Debaxo dalgum nome preminente?  
Que promessas de reinos e de minas  
De ouro, que lhe farás tão facilmente?  
Que famas lhe prometerás? que histórias?  
Que triunfos? que palmas? que vitórias? (4.95-97)

O pride of power! O futile lust  
For that vanity known as fame!  
That hollow conceit which puffs itself up  
And which popular cant calls honour!  
What punishment, what poetic justice,  
You exact on souls that pursue you!  
To what deaths, what miseries you condemn  
Your heroes! What pains you inflict on them!  
You wreck all peace of soul and body,  
You promote separation and adultery;  
Subtly, manifestly, you consume  
The wealth of kingdoms and empires!  
They call distinction, they call honour  
What deserves ridicule and contempt;  
They talk of glory and eternal fame,  
And men are driven frantic by a name!

To what new catastrophes do you plan  
To drag this kingdom and these people?  
What perils, what deaths have you in store  
Under what magniloquent title?  
What visions of kingdoms and gold mines  
Will you guide them to infallibly?  
What fame do you promise them? What stories?  
What conquests and processions? What glories?"  
(White 96)

The spotlight fades on the old man and the dancer concludes the prelude with *Os Lusíadas* 5.3 and 5.16, in which da Gama, now on the ship, describes how heavy-hearted the men feel as they watch the coast of Lisbon receding on the horizon, and remarks that it would be impossible to tell of all the harrowing storms and dangers the men endured on the high seas. The dancer exits. The plaintive guitar theme swells once again as the husband and wife step down from their bed and share tender embraces, first down center, then, in front of the husband's great chair, left of the bed. They grasp each other's hands; then the husband lets go, mounts a raised platform upstage center, and waves farewell, as a sail bearing an enormous red cross slowly rises in front of him. When he is completely obscured by the unfurled canvas, the lights dim, leaving only the ghostly white sail and its crimson emblem illuminated for a moment before the music swells again and all goes to black.



The most significant lines in this prelude are spoken by the *velho do Restelo*. Critical commentary on the old man's speech may generally be divided between those who take it as the point of departure of a revisionist reading of *Os Lusíadas*, in which emphasis is placed on Camões's critiquing of Portugal's expedition to India, and those who maintain that though the episode may represent the dissenting voices of the era, the author's purpose remains that of glorifying da Gama's accomplishments.<sup>3</sup> María Helena Nery Gárcez maintains that the episode demonstrates the historical national division between two opposing parties, "o dos favoráveis à aventura marítima e à política expansionista e o dos defensores da política da terra, do desenvolvimento agrário e pastoril" ("that of those who favor maritime adventures and expansionist politics and that of the defenders of domestic politics, of agrarian and pastoral non-intervention"; 5).<sup>4</sup> This division would shape Portuguese politics throughout the colonial era.

By using the old man's anti-imperialist tirade as a prelude to Vicente's *auto*, Blanco Gil asserts without ambiguity that he does not mean for his farce to be taken as an escapist romp, but as a serious critique of Portuguese aggression and intervention in the East. The old man's qualification of overreaching ambition as a source of "adultérios" certainly makes it an appropriate introduction to this adultery farce. Above all, however, he condemns

the desire for power, honor, and fame, warning that it will consume and destroy not only the vain fool under its spell but also homes, kingdoms, and empires. How is the El Paso audience, so far removed from Portugal and its history, meant to interpret these remarks? The actor playing the old man in this scene makes direct eye contact with members of the audience throughout his speech, as if they were the soldiers upon whom, the narrator da Gama says, he fixes his stare (“postos em nós os olhos” 4.94). Like Camões’s old man to the crew, he appears to accuse and indict the viewers directly. It seems reasonable to assume that members of the audience at the Chamizal might interpret the scene according to current issues and conflicts, none of which would have been more pressing at the time of the performance than the U.S.’s campaign against alleged terrorist groups in Afghanistan, and the general uneasiness over U.S. tensions with Iraq. Although many Americans considered the attacks on Afghanistan a justified attempt to destroy Al-Qaeda where intelligence had pinpointed its base of operations, many others criticized the scale and inaccuracy of the bombings and the thousands of civilian casualties they inflicted.<sup>5</sup> As Saddam Hussein and the Bush administration exchanged war-like rhetoric and rumors circulated in the press of Iraq’s attempts to build weapons of mass destruction, politicians and public alike remained divided over the wisdom of military intervention in Iraq.

All of these events may have been of particular interest to the El Paso community and to Texans in general, since military recruiting of Hispanics has enjoyed great success in the area and statewide. El Paso County, for example, ranked seventh among the top 100 U.S. counties in recruitment of Hispanics in 2004. Twenty Texas counties made the list of the top 100, including Bexar County at #2 and Harris County at #4 ("Top 100 Counties"). Latinos have furthermore made up a disproportionate percentage of frontline troops exposed to the greatest dangers. In 2001, for example, while Hispanics constituted about 10% of military personnel, 17.7% were on the front lines, including nearly 20% of marines and 25% of army troops (Mariscal 2). In light of such risks, the old man of Restelo's warnings of violence and death might be especially meaningful for young Hispanics entering the service in the hope of learning valuable job skills or to obtain funding for college. Even residents of Ciudad Juárez, across the border from El Paso, would have had reason to be concerned about these circumstances: Jorge Mariscal reports that in May of 2008, a U.S. military recruiter was thrown out of a high school in Tijuana for trying to persuade youths there to fight for America. The U.S. military currently includes 40,000 immigrants with green cards, a third of whom are from Latin America (Mariscal 1).

Within this performance context, one might easily interpret Blanco Gil as using two centuries-

old warnings against Western campaigns into the East to protest the U.S.-led West's aggressive postures and actions since 9/11, which have been supported and facilitated by allies such as Portugal and Spain.<sup>6</sup> He makes this appeal to a demographic that is deeply affected by the U.S.'s decision to wage war in the Middle East.

To return to aesthetic issues, however, one might well ask at this point how two texts so different in nature and written more than 60 years apart may be harmoniously combined on stage. While there are clearly differences in tone, pace, and lighting that separate the prelude and Camões's lines from Vicente's *auto*, Blanco Gil uses certain elements to connect the contrasting texts. Clearly, the fact that the husband and wife who bid a tearful farewell to one another at Restelo beach in *Os Lusíadas* and Vicente's married couple are presented as one and the same creates a narrative link between the two texts. Blanco Gil conceives of the two works as treating the same people and events, only at different stages of their separation and with contrasting tones, one sincere and romantic, the other cynical and satirical.

The director also makes use of spatial elements to bring the two texts together. The "external" domain of the sea is interwoven with the "internal" domestic space of the bedroom in the opening scene of the prelude. The platform emblazoned with the cross of the Knights of Templar, upon which, ini-

tially, the ghostly white-shrouded dancer sways, is transformed into the couples' bed. As mentioned, two actors create the image of the sea by waving a long blue sheet between them. When the cast makes the bed, they wave the bed sheets in the same way before putting them on the bed. Thus, the cross of the crusade becomes the mattress; the waves of the sea become the sheets. This metamorphosis connects external and internal realms, public and private spheres, epic and farcical worlds, in a clear symbolic expression. The Indian expedition has both national and domestic repercussions: Just as the fortune and honor of the Portuguese Empire is challenged by a raging sea, so too is the honor and sanctity of the marriage bed cast into a tumultuous sea of doubt as husband and wife undergo temptation during their prolonged separation. The epic dangers Camões describes are presented as parallel to the domestic upheaval that threatens the couples' unity.

After the stage is set, the lines from Camões are performed in the same domestic space that will become the setting for the farce, as if Restelo beach were superimposed upon the couple's bedroom. Lighting creates the transition between the two spaces: before the dramatization of the lines from *Os Lusíadas*, the lights are dimmed, allowing the bedroom setting (bed, husband's chair, wife's spinning wheel) to fade into the shadows. Spots illuminate, in turn, the dancer, the husband and wife

standing face-to-face on the bed, and the old man, as each speaks. Although the idea of the beach may fade when the lights come up, the connection between beach and bedroom, public and private dis-sension, remains.

Blanco Gil also makes use of song to connect the prelude and the farce. During the prelude, the cast gathers around the bed and picks up the sheet. They wave the sheet and move in a circle around the bed, singing these lines taken from the first part of Vicente's *auto*, slowly, in a low vocal register and a minor key:

O certo é dar a prazer  
pera que é envelhecer  
esperando polo vento?  
Quant' eu por muy necia sento  
a que o contrayro fizer.  
Partem em Mayo d'aqui  
quando o sangue novo atiča,  
parece-te que é justiça?  
Milhor vivas tu, amem,  
& eu contigo também! (86-95)<sup>7</sup>

What's certain is the taking of pleasure:  
why should you grow old  
waiting for the wind?  
As for me, I think she's stupid  
who'd do the opposite!  
They leave here in May,  
when the new blood begins to rise.  
Do you think that's fair?

May you live better – amen –  
and I with you again (Lappin 131-33).

Although the lines here celebrate hedonism and sexual freedom, the solemnity with which the piece is sung keeps the tone and mood consistent with that of Camões's fourth and fifth cantos and Blanco Gil's prelude as a whole. Later, toward the beginning of Vicente's *auto*, the wife sings these lines to the same melody and rhythm used by the cast in the opening while reclining on her bed. The brief song thus connects the opening prelude, with its solemn images, stately pace, and forlorn tone, to the *auto*, with its farcical tone, bawdy references, and humorous touches.

After the wife sings these lines, the Spaniard enters. Here, it seems, the director continues to critique Western aggression, this time in parodic fashion, when the actor playing the belligerent Spaniard stomps around ridiculously, swinging his sword and boasting of his battle prowess. After the husband has departed on the expedition to India, the brazen wife is at first concerned that the ships may not actually leave; then she rejoices upon learning that they have indeed set sail. A Spaniard with whom the wife is acquainted comes to seduce her. He pours out his heart in melodramatic courtly love verses in an attempt to impress her. She embraces him, flirts, and encourages his affections. The wife tries to dismiss her servant. The Spaniard, annoyed by the maid's interruption, threatens her, and then

speaks these lines to try to convince both women of his ferocity:

¿Vos pensais que soy devino?  
Soy hombre, y siento el pesar.  
Trayo de dentro un leon  
metido en el coraçon:  
tieneme el anima dañada  
d'ensangrentar esta espada  
en hombres, que es perdicion.  
Ya Dios es importunado  
de las animas que le embio;  
y no es en poder mio  
dexar uno acuchillado.  
Dexe bivo allá en el puerto  
un hombrazo alto y tuerto,  
y despues fuylo a encontrar:  
pensó que lo yva a matar  
y de miedo cayó muerto (163-78).

After the lines 'Trayo de dentro un leon / metido en el coraçon,' the Spaniard roars (165-66). He draws his sword on "esta espada" (168), thrusts, roars again, chases the women around the stage, and jumps up and down. After he finishes his lines standing on the bed in the middle of the stage, the wife approaches, caresses the Spaniard's raised sword, and the two perform a bawdy, simulated fornication. His machismo and virility have clearly succeeded in winning her over.

Vicente may have intended his caricature of the Spaniard as a critique of Spanish *machismo*, pride,



and belligerence during his time. In our contemporary context, however, despite having provided air bases from which the U.S. could launch its attacks on Afghanistan, Spain is considered a relatively peaceful nation, far removed from the sixteenth-century empire that carried out military campaigns in Europe, England, North Africa, the Americas, and the Pacific. It is doubtful that the El Paso audience would take Blanco Gil's rendering of the Spaniard as a comment on present day Spanish character or politics. They might, however, see parallels between the combative Spaniard's attempts to impress the women by flexing his muscles, roaring, and inciting fear, and the bellicose Bush administration's attempts to win approval on the domestic front by inciting fear of terrorism among the populous and showing off its military might in Afghanistan.

Blanco Gil's production not only condemns the West's aggressive actions; in addition, the style of the play, exemplified here in the Spaniard's absurd behavior, imitates the farcical way in which the West creates and sustains through reiterative performance an image of might, fearlessness, and righteous indignation in the face of an imagined multiplicity of imminent threats to its security, without which it would be impossible to sustain public support for its aggressive policies. Ana Paula Ferreira maintains that the reason Vicente's *Auto da Índia* was one of the most frequently performed

plays in Portugal from the mid-1980's to the mid-90's was not only because it celebrated Portugal's anti-expansionist tradition upon the 500 year anniversary of the encounter (101). She asserts that, furthermore, it reminded a country that had been disillusioned by the revolutions of 1974 and 1975 but that once again became hopeful of political stability and an economic boom in 1986, that history and national identity are products of reiterative performances not terribly different from those contained within Vicente's *auto* (102-103). *Auto da India* speaks the same message in 2002 to Americans who daily witness rhetorical performances by members of the administration designed to garner public support by spreading fear of further terrorist attacks and weapons of mass destruction and arguing that freedom and the American way of life may be lost unless the military continues to bomb Afghanistan and take aggressive action against Iraq.

At the end of the play, Constance's husband returns from the expedition, and she describes how she has piously prayed for him and suffered much deprivation during his absence, to the amusement of the audience that has witnessed her affairs. She furthermore insinuates that perhaps he has been unfaithful to her with some beautiful Indian women (486). To this, the tired husband replies apologetically, in a sincere tone, casting his eyes downward as if in shame:

Lá vos digo que há fadigas,  
tantas mortes, tantas brigas,  
e perigos descompassados  
que assi vimos destroçados,  
pelados como formigas. (493-97)

There, I tell you, there are many labours,  
so many deaths, so many battles,  
and outlandish dangers  
that we were ground down thus,  
sheared like sheep. (Lappin 157)

She then asks if he nevertheless has returned rich. Here, Blanco Gil has the husband repeat the above lines, in the same weary tone, using the same defeated gestures as the first time. The wife asks again about his riches, and a third time he replies with the same lines, sitting in his chair. Other directors of this play may have the husband deliver these lines in an exaggerated, farcical tone, suggesting that the character did not actually suffer such hardship on his voyages; for example, directors Maria Salete Busnardo and Marilú Silveira indicate in their production notes that the husband should speak these lines using “largos gestos, grandes passadas” and an “entonação grandiloquente” (“broad gestures, great strides, grandiloquent intonation”; Busnardo 55).<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Blanco Gil here breaks with the farcical tone, returning to the solemnity of the prelude and emphasizing with sincerity that despite the soldiers’ dreams of great riches, they encountered only toil,

battles, suffering, and disaster. The soldier mechanically recites the fleet's hardships again and again, as if he is unable to escape from the trauma. The viewer cannot help noticing, with so many repetitions, how these lines echo the prophecy of the old man at the beginning of the play, who beseeched Glory and Fame to tell him of the danger and death to which they had lured the sailors: "Que perigos, que mortes lhe destinas?" (Camões 4.97). At the end of the play, Blanco Gil recalls his introduction, once again connecting Camões and Vicente, and affirms that the prophecy has been fulfilled.

To close the action, the husband and wife step forward, and she announces, "Ao fim, fenece esta farsa" ("finally, this farce ends").<sup>9</sup> The husband, surprised, looks at her and asks, "Farsa?" She affirms that she has said "farsa." Accusingly, he repeats his question, as if recognizing that her display of loyalty has all been an act and that she has been unfaithful. She shakes his shoulders as if to wake him up and exclaims again, "Farsa!" The lights dim as the two continue echoing "farsa." In adding this emphasis onto the final word of the play, Blanco Gil completes his framing of the action. As husband and wife recognize that their relationship has been a farce and remind us that the play has been a farce, we may also consider the farcical aspects of history and politics, which often establish ideologies through the performative production of images and

ideas convenient to past and current national agendas and aspirations. The play cautions Western audiences to question government, media, and even artistic performances of national values and ideologies. The rationale for the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the “success” of the bombing missions, the logic of the pre-emptive strike, and the perception that we are ever in imminent danger are all constructs. Notions of fear, freedom, and patriotism have been redundantly performed into the American psyche, just as Camões, for some, invents Portuguese heroism, or Vicente’s adulterous wife performs her unfailing loyalty to her husband.

Blanco Gil thus imitates Gil Vicente by framing an old plot with material that makes the action speak directly to contemporary Western audiences. Vicente framed an Italian bedroom farce with allusions that questioned contemporary Portuguese incursions into eastern lands; Blanco Gil, in turn, frames Vicente’s work with voices that question the wisdom of accepting farcically performed rationales of violence and cultural imperialism. The director pays homage to his playwright by borrowing one of his techniques, while imbuing his work with vital contemporary significance through his innovative inclusion of Camões’s verses.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Although the U.S. invasion of Iraq would not take place until March 20, 2003, Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz had long advocated invading Iraq. While the Iraq Liberation Act had been passed during the Clinton administration in 1998, the Republican Party platform of 2000 seemed to call for a more active commitment to Iraqi regime change. Ron Suskind writes that ousting Saddam Hussein had been discussed since the first National Security Council meeting under the Bush administration, and former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill said "From the start, we were building the case against Hussein and looking at how we could take him out and change Iraq into a new country" (Suskind 75, 86).

<sup>2</sup> Castelo-Branco, for example, maintains the former position, noting "um sarcasmo duro e desapiedado" 'a sharp and unmerciful sarcasm' in Vicente's tone (136, my translation). Paul Teyssier exemplifies the latter viewpoint, noting in his Bakhtinian reading of the play that "la farce était justement une des formules admises pour ces explosions d'irrespect" ("farce was rightly one of the acceptable forms for these outbursts of disrespect"; 679, my translation).

<sup>3</sup> For examples of revisionist interpretations, see the Tomlins article cited above, and that of Salvatore Onofrio, who maintains that Camões expresses his own condemnation of war and longing for peace through the old man (89). Jacinto do Prado Coelho (53), Victor Mendes (112-14), and Rajan Balachandra (181) all express at some point in their discussions that through the old man, Camões recognizes common protests to the mission, but ultimately dismisses them and celebrates the accomplishments of the Portuguese sailors.

<sup>4</sup> My translation.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Marc W. Herold writes on September 11, 2002, that with respect to civilian deaths, "as the body count of the World Trade Center was revised downward from the

initial high of 6,700 to the current 2,819, that in Afghanistan rose from 20-37 on October 8<sup>th</sup> to 3,215 today. The twin lines of ignominy cross around January 15<sup>th</sup>” (2).

<sup>6</sup> The Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Antonio Martins da Cruz, included as a foreign policy priority in a speech on June 18, 2002, “the strengthening of our presence in the Atlantic Alliance” (3) and reported that under Portuguese chairmanship, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe had set as priority “the prevention and fight against terrorism” (4). The U.S. Department of State has explained its “excellent” defense relationship with Portugal in recent years thus: “Lajes Air Base in the Azores has played an important role in supporting U.S. military aircraft engaged in counter-terrorism and humanitarian missions, including operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Portugal also provides the United States and other allies access to Montijo Air Base and a number of ports. Portugal defines itself as ‘Atlanticist,’ emphasizing its support for strong European ties with the United States, particularly on defense and security issues. The Portuguese Government has been a key ally in U.S.-led efforts in Iraq, and hosted the Azores Summit that preceded military action” (“Background Note: Portugal” 3).

<sup>7</sup> All quotes and translations from Vicente’s *Auto da Índia* are from Anthony Lappin’s bilingual edition, included in his *Three Discovery Plays*. Parenthetical references after the original Portuguese are to line numbers in the play, while those after each translation are to the page numbers of Lappin’s translation.

<sup>8</sup> My translation.

<sup>9</sup> My translation. The line has apparently been added by Blanco Gil.

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## **TOWARDS A DIACHRONIC VIEW OF THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE *COMEDIA***

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The ongoing critical conversation documented in this and other academic journals regarding contemporary performances of Hispanic classical theater invites considering broader questions regarding the meaning and significance of the Spanish “Golden Age” in the twenty-first century. We may presume that the discipline of *Comedia* studies has for some time implicitly addressed questions regarding what the “classics” of the literary canon signify to the modern spectator or reader, our motivations for teaching them, what our students gain from reading them and seeing them performed, and the extent to which their critical interpretation at any given moment is tied to the academic and governmental institutions that support their performances and promote their readership. The present study assumes that these questions remain relevant, but also that our current answers to them may well differ from those offered by earlier generations of scholars. The kind of contemporary cultural func-

tion currently assigned to the Golden Age and its “classical” theater is, in other words, a diachronic problem whose answers evolve according to the continually shifting academic landscape of literary and cultural studies, a landscape that is itself part and parcel of the dynamic nature of the broader culture(s) in which it participates. Rather than disregard the answers implicitly offered by the considerable body of scholarship realized over the course of the twentieth century, I propose reformulating those answers in light of more current disciplinary circumstances, which include two divergent paths currently emerging in *Comedia* studies, one privileging current theatrical practices of *Comedia* performances and the other primarily oriented toward the study of seventeenth-century texts, contexts, and performances of the same material. Taking the continually evolving modes of production and reception of Lope de Vega’s *Fuenteovejuna* as exemplary, I will argue that placing these apparently disparate approaches (and their implicit theoretical models) in dialogue can engage them collaboratively to as to show how our evolving understanding of the *Comedia*’s “meaning” in its original context and its “significance” when staged for a twenty-first century audience are indeed two sides of the same coin.<sup>1</sup>

My choice of the terms “meaning” and “significance” above is not casual, as I find E.D. Hirsch’s distinction between the two concepts useful: while “meaning” refers to the message commu-

nicated by the literary text itself, often associated (some would say problematically) with authorial intent, “significance” refers to the connection of the text (and its implicit “meaning”) to its audience, regardless of the historical or cultural distance between author and audience.<sup>2</sup> Despite how compelling they may be, any absolute distinctions we make between a dramatic script’s or literary text’s “original” and “subsequent” messages is illusory for a number of reasons, not the least of which would be their implicit assumption of a purely objective and a-historical critical vantage point from which they would be perceived. Indeed more current and theoretically sophisticated models have appeared since Hirsch wrote his seminal article, such as the recent examples of Judith Butler’s notion of “excitable speech” and Linda Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation*. The virtue of returning to Hirsch’s paradigm, which I will treat as analogous to the two divergent paths in *Comedia* Studies to which I allude above, is that the same reasons for which the Hirschian meaning/significance dichotomy now needs updating can help explain why the current historicized vs. contemporary *Comedia* performance studies duality need not be as mutually exclusive as it often appears to be in current practice.

A cursory view of the table of contents of this and previous volumes of *Comedia Performance* will demonstrate the diversity of approaches and points of view that contribute to current *Comedia* scholar-

ship, and that even among contributors to this journal there are differing working assumptions as to just what constitutes “Comedia Performance.” Thus far the journal has balanced an interest in circumstances surrounding the original seventeenth-century performances of the *Comedia* with a growing interest in the constant flow of re-interpretations and new productions occurring around the world today. While I see value in both areas of research, I would posit the need for a more concerted effort by scholars to integrate the two, so that each area of research may benefit from the findings of the other. The first area, which I associate with the goals and methods of the various modes of progressive historicization often called the New Historicism, Cultural Materialism or Cultural Poetics, promises a more nuanced situating of the cultural and ideological circumstances that gave rise to the composition and original staging of the *Comedia*. The second, which I associate with contemporary Cultural Studies, examines how the “classics” of the Spanish Golden Age are adapted and reinterpreted so as to engage a twenty-first century audience. In my view we can—and moreover we should—seek to have our cake and eat it too. A more intimate knowledge of what has been done with the *Comedia* since the seventeenth century, and what continues to be done with it onstage today, can speak in a unique way to the inescapable, highly situated vantage point from which the historically-oriented scholar investigates

its seventeenth-century point of origin. If we recognize that as scholars analyzing the public theater of seventeenth-century Spain we operate from a fixed perspective that is determined by our own cultural, ideological and historical circumstances, we should also recognize that any production of a *comedia* contemporary to us shares the same historical moment and cultural situation, and that the way in which we receive any given performance is inevitably inflected by how its perceived ideological orientation engages with our own.<sup>3</sup> How we historicize the *Comedia* and how it is interpreted onstage today are surely two very different questions, but each can be instructive to the other about their common point of origin.

Apart from an interest in incorporating literary textual analysis into a broader inquiry into the material conditions in which the text is produced, what the New Historicism and Cultural Studies as theoretical paradigms share in common is a resistance to doctrinal disciplinary parameters. The interdisciplinary and eclectic methods of Cultural Studies defy absolute boundaries and exhaustive definitions<sup>4</sup>; along similar lines the New Historicism, despite the claims of its earliest critics, invites interdisciplinary and aims to unseat the monolithic master narratives of earlier historical models, preferring instead to emphasize the ideological tensions and conflicts that the literary text or theatrical performance negotiates. This characterization might seem to ignore a

frequent critique of Stephen Greenblatt and his fellow neo-historians, namely the so-called “subversion/containment” narrative, according to which the literary text or theatrical performance is read as a transitory act of subversion permitted by the dominant powers-that-be, only so that it may be co-opted or “contained” in reaffirmation of those powers.<sup>5</sup> But Louis Montrose has argued effectively that this accusation, which implies that such a mode of interpretation merely replaces traditional master narratives with a new one, has missed the point of neohistorical scholarship. Rather than program an *a priori* outcome, the best neohistorical scholarship focuses on the ideological struggle itself and reads the text or performance script as a site of negotiation for broader cultural conflicts accessible through both literary and nonliterary discourses. Both the New Historicism and Cultural Studies, then, can function as modes of analysis and critical perspectives whose execution may be approached from a number of disciplinary vantage points (including history, literary and performance studies, and anthropology). Their common flexibility, in short, invites their collaboration.

*Fuenteovejuna* and the Shifting Contexts of  
Signification

Juan Goytisolo’s editorial column published in the May 5, 2000 edition of the Spanish newspaper



*El País* (and later reprinted in the journal *Spanish Cultural Studies*), titled “Fuenteovejuna, señor,” is one of countless examples of how Lope’s play retains a vivid symbolic significance in Spain’s twenty-first century collective cultural memory. Goytisolo’s use of the play’s title is seasoned with a healthy dose of postmodern irony and cynicism, as he applies it to the case of a local uproar in 1999 over the arrest of two young Castilians for shooting and permanently disabling a young man of gypsy descent. He admonishes Spain’s complacency about the racism of this and other acts of discriminatory violence by associating it with Lope’s seventeenth-century staging of a fifteenth-century popular uprising. In effect he associates the cultural vestiges of Francoism with *Fuenteovejuna* in order to align his own politics with progress and with Spain’s claims to membership in a modernized European Union, regardless of how radically different his implied reading of the play may be from more mainstream interpretations of it. What many twentieth-century studies of the play characterize as a dramatic representation of social and moral justice, or more recently as an ideological manipulation of history supportive of the absolutist monarchy, is for Goytisolo a symbol of a culturally primitive ethnocentrism of the masses, a stand-in for *lo castizo* meant to remind his readers of Spain’s barbaric and intolerant past. *Fuenteovejuna* thus serves as a cultural signifier used to frame and interpret the cultural and

ideological tensions of contemporary Spain—the same tensions that will inform each re-framing and re-interpretation of the play (whether implicitly or explicitly) in its staging for a modern Spanish audience.

A radically different symbolic function was assigned to Lope's play in what is likely its most celebrated twentieth-century production, directed by Federico García Lorca with his traveling theater troupe La Barraca. Lorca's production is based upon a more populist interpretation of the play, no doubt influenced by pre-Civil War cultural and political circumstances that in turn influenced his directorial decisions regarding how to stage it. These decisions, particularly the elimination of all scenes involving the Reyes Católicos and the Maestre de Calatrava, which constitute one third of Lope's original script, and with them the political (and according to Lorca, the secondary) plot interwoven with the village drama, need to be contextualized in terms of Lorca's agenda for using Golden Age theater to forge national identity in the during the short-lived Second Republic (1931-1936). La Barraca was founded by Lorca in order to rectify a widely held assessment of modern Spanish theater as suffering a deplorable state. By recruiting promising young university actors and touring rural Spain, Lorca hoped to breathe new life into a stale Spanish theater industry. The plays selected for La Barraca to adapt were by and large the classics of the

Golden Age—including a calderonian auto sacramental, some cervantine entremeses and of course Lope's *Fuenteovejuna*—because, as Lorca and many of his Barraca colleagues would explain in a number of interviews and essays, these classics spoke to an atemporal and transcendental national character in a unique way.<sup>6</sup>

Lorca's choice of Lope's play to communicate a message of national solidarity, rather than compose a new play of his own to that effect, is indicative of how the legacy of the Golden Age carries the weight of cultural authority that may be engaged to legitimize (or de-legitimize) contemporary political causes and ideologies. Of course *Fuenteovejuna* dramatizes events that occurred before one could properly speak of a politically or culturally unified Spanish nation; indeed recent neo-historically informed scholarship on the play such as that of Anthony Cascardi would consider the play a dramatization of the process of Spain becoming Spain, unified for the first time under a monarchy still attempting to purge its territories of competing interests from Portugal and the Islamic world. Lorca's agenda to make Lope's play be about an anachronistic notion of nationhood would therefore require some deft audiovisual supplementation to the abridged original playscript, which Lorca provides by dressing his actors in "rural" or "rustic" costumes that resembled conventional rural garb of the early twentieth century, and by seamlessly weaving

a number of newly composed and choreographed “folkloric” Spanish songs and dances into the play. This song and dance took its inspiration from a number of different “local” folkloric traditions, including those of Aragón and especially Andalucía (no doubt due to Lorca’s life-long obsession with Andalusian folk culture), which Suzanne Byrd explains as follows: “El propósito de llevar al pueblo más humilde, a las aldeas más aisladas, un vivo retrato del baile y la música folklóricos de España, en conjunción con la obra clásica de teatro, comunicó a la escena de esa época un nuevo sentido de valores artísticos y a la vez populares” (15).

Lorca’s political engagement implies an interpretation of the text that is less concerned with its original historical specificity and more concerned with connecting the play’s action to current events. Of particular concern, according to studies by Byrd and Teresa Huerta of the La Barraca production, was simplifying Lope’s multilayered plot so as to not distract the largely rural audience from the play’s applicability to the here-and-now. The play thus opens with the third scene of Lope’s original, as Laurencia and Pascuala discuss the sexually predatory *Comendador*, with the ensuing action to remain exclusively in the village throughout the performance (there are no Catholic Monarchs, no Maestre de Calatrava, no reference to the battles at Ciudad Real). Both Byrd and Huerta see the production as an “actualization” of Lope’s original

message, and liberating the plot from its secondary and historically specific level is taken by both scholars as essential to that aim. According to Byrd, “no se tomó Lorca ninguna libertad con el texto de Lope de Vega, sino que lo sintetizó para lograr una unidad más clara del desarrollo” (16). Streamlining the action for a modern audience is a production strategy that one finds frequently in performance studies of the *Comedia*, but in this case the editorial work assumes that eliminating the political context of the play’s action can somehow liberate its universality: again Byrd explains that “De ningún modo la supresión del argumento secundario perturba el objetivo primordial de la pieza lopesca” (16). The suggestion, it would seem, is that Lorca knew what Lope meant to say better than Lope himself, that three hundred years later he could resuscitate the primordial *duende* of Lope’s work and somehow improve upon its exposition.

Lorca’s reading of the “primordial spirit” of Lope’s drama as an allegory of a Spanish national character willing to sacrifice individual fortune for the collective good, all the while guided by a clear moral compass intolerant of vice and tyranny, was by no means unique in the early twentieth century. It even anticipated the assessments of literary scholars like Menéndez Pelayo, who in 1949 proclaimed that “no hay obra más democrática en el Teatro castellano” (cf. Lauer, p. 175), an observation that is more easily made when one deletes all references to

the villagers' eventual and willful submission to the absolutist monarchy. In a broader sense we may link this de-historicized rendering of *Fuenteovejuna* with the dominant mode of postwar literary criticism, the so-called New Criticism, which would promote the "correct reading" of a text's meaning so as to privilege its atemporal insights into a universal human condition. Within our particular field this tendency to de-historicize the *Comedia* would be exemplified by Alexander Parker's famous article "*The Approach to Golden Age Theater*" (my emphasis), an influential methodology that focused on a decontextualized rendering of a play's thematic center of "poetic justice." One can see the ripple effect of Parker's approach both in critical studies of *Fuenteovejuna* through the 1970s, as in William McCrary's identification of its thematic center as Platonic love, as well as onstage in productions across the globe, as Jack Weiner and Teresa Kirschner have documented. My sense is that Lorca would have found in Parker's approach a scholarly corollary to what he was attempting to achieve with *La Barraca* thirty years earlier by eliminating all references to the geopolitical struggle in which Lope had chosen to embed his drama.

More to the point, Lorca's pro-Republic production ushers in a tradition of staging *Fuenteovejuna* so as to eliminate or de-emphasize the decisive intervention of the Catholic Monarchs at the end of the play, especially in foreign productions, that re-

flect a populist (if not leftist) ideological perspective on Lope's "classic." This performance tradition is contemporary to a New Critical/Structuralist critical tradition that would isolate the literary text from its geopolitical and ideological context in an effort to celebrate its aesthetic rendering of the artist's insight into an ahistorical and universal human condition. This synchronicity is no coincidence, as both the performance and critical traditions aim to "bracket" historical specificity and all its messy complications. Lorca's attitude toward Lope's "secondary" military/political plot is telling in this regard: its elimination is justified (as Huerta maintains) in its potential to distract the modern audience (and its implied limits of attention span and intellect) from the true message of the play—true, of course, as he understands that truth to be from his own ideological vantage point. The Golden Age classic is a classic, it would seem, insofar as it can be read in accordance with the worldview of subsequent generations. Similarly, the "Parkerian" mode of interpreting *Fuenteovejuna*, exemplified by McCrary's neoplatonic reading, cannot escape its own determining socio-historical and ideological position as it defines the universal truths to which they see Lope speaking in the play.

*Fuenteovejuna* and the Shifting Contexts of  
Interpretation

The point here is not to discredit the substantial body of New Critical or Structuralist criticism applied to the *Comedia*, but rather to recognize it for what it is (and for what any subsequent criticism—including the present study—must necessarily be): a snapshot of one moment in “modern” cultural history and the interpretation of the “Golden Age” (or, if you prefer, “early modern Spain”) that such a moment affords. Indeed I would suggest that a judicious and qualified revisiting of early and mid-twentieth century *Comedia* scholarship could offer a unique insight into the interplay between contemporary performance and cultural context. Just as the New Historicism privileges “thick description” as the analytical practice through which various nonliterary discourses are engaged with the literary text, a mining of “old historicist” or a-historical scholarship could function as a metacritical “thick description” of twentieth-century performances of Golden Age “classics.”

If we accept my suggestion that a symbiotic relationship existed between early twentieth century productions and critical studies of *Fuenteovejuna*, the challenge that I see for those of us who choose to study the play’s current meaning and significance is to situate contemporary stagings of the play within the same cultural context that fosters the



most recent critical studies of the play. Recognizing this symbiosis in previous decades may lead us to suspect a similar phenomenon today, but a “real time” identification of the political and ideological issues informing current *Comedia* performances must necessarily be more tentative without the benefit and confidence that such hindsight affords. With this disclaimer in mind, I would posit that contemporary debates and issues surrounding gender in Spain (and in the American academy) do infiltrate current productions of Classical Hispanic theater, both in terms of the plays selected for performance and in terms of how they are staged. The *Comedia* canon (as an academic construct reflected in college and university syllabi and reading lists) has evolved to accommodate the vicissitudes of our various disciplines (reflected in nomenclature, from the mid-twentieth century “literary studies” and “theater studies” dedicated to “the Spanish Golden Age” to the more current “literary, performance and cultural studies” dedicated to “early modern Spain”), which in turn has made possible such twenty-first century milestones as the performance of María de Zayas’s *La traición en la amistad*, a play that was generally unavailable and virtually unknown to the field only twenty years ago.

Even the most time-honored classics like *Fuenteovejuna* have undergone extensive innovation in terms of the thematic and dramatic elements in the original script that are privileged and highlighted

onstage. This is no truer than in the case of a series of performances within the last decade in the public square of a Spanish town in the province of Córdoba named Fuente Obejuna. The 2006 production, mounted before the Ayuntamiento by residents of the village, was the fifth such production since the early 1990s. As one might expect, the twentieth and twenty-first century residents of the town have not staged the play to reconcile themselves with their share of responsibility for the *leyenda negra* of Imperial Spain (as Goytisolo's implied reading casts the play), but rather to commemorate the historical significance of their town, due to the events of 1476, and especially to celebrate their own special place in the cultural legacy of the Golden Age. In a telling instance of Community Theater, codes of production are literally determined by the paying public's codes of reception. The proverbial "fourth wall" of theater in this case is as porous as it has ever been.<sup>7</sup>

To use Lope's play in this way, of course, implies a very different interpretation than the one implied by Goytisolo. Local and national identity is intimately tied to such an enterprise, negotiated and performed *vía* a four-hundred year-old script. The implied reading of this script is much more traditional than is Goytisolo's against-the-ideological-grain invocation, as it takes the public uprising against an abusive local tyrant as emblematic of democratic values and popular solidarity. This is the

popular reading of the play that spread globally during the twentieth century, yielding the proverb “*todos a una, Fuenteovejuna*” and inspiring local and professional stagings from the Soviet Union to the United States.

The municipal productions in the actual village of Fuente Ovejuna are uniquely useful to our understanding of how a *comedia*'s significance is a diachronically evolving process, to the extent that each new community production both reauthenticates local identity and responds to community productions mounted in previous years. Javier Osorio, director of the 2004 production, for example, emphasized to Manuel J. Albert of *El País* that this year they wanted to emphasize the pivotal role of women in the drama, especially Laurencia's call-to-arms at the beginning of the third act, in an effort to raise public awareness of the persistent national problem of violence against women and domestic abuse: “Uno de los temas centrales de la obra de Lope es el de la violencia contra la mujer. En lo que llevamos de año han sido 72 las mujeres asesinadas en España. Quizás al ver la obra, la gente se sensibilice algo más al respecto.” A current issue in Spanish social and political discourse thus dictates the director's interpretation of Lope's play so as to render it more culturally relevant than ever, and it demonstrates how the broader cultural circumstances surrounding a twenty-first century production of a *comedia* will condition both its performance and its interpreta-

tion. These circumstances include the ways in which information is now circulated globally—a point illustrated in this case by the marketing and commemoration of previous community productions in the village of Fuente Obejuna that can be conveniently accessed at [www.fuenteovejuna.org](http://www.fuenteovejuna.org).

The political and civic discourse through which domestic abuse and violence against women are confronted in contemporary Spain are similarly produced in a globalized context and influenced by the discourse of contemporary feminism, a political movement repressed in Spain by the Franco regime as it spread widely throughout the western world in the 1960s and 1970s. While it lies beyond the parameters of the present study to trace the late arrival of feminist discourse to Spanish culture and even the recent pendulum-swinging progressivism of the current Zapatero government (including legislative initiatives meant to guarantee gender equality among elected officials and even in the division of domestic responsibilities among private citizens), it should be noted that these cultural conditions have also affected the way that we read the classics in the academy.<sup>8</sup> As twenty-first century audiences consume productions that treat the gender dynamics in an “actualized” way as does Ossorio’s 2004 staging in Fuente Obejuna, twenty-first century scholars will read and analyze those same dynamics in ways that are not necessarily identical, but that do resonate with broader patterns of cultural consumption.

My own gender-focused reading of *Fuenteovejuna*, such as I have recently presented to a graduate seminar at the University of Kansas, privileges the same monologue by Laurencia that is cited by Ossorio in his interview for *El País*. As the third act begins, she takes the men of her town to task for their failure to protect her from the tyrannical and sexually predatory *comendador* Fernán Gómez. Her speech, the catalyst for the climactic village uprising that would culminate with the parading of the tyrant's head on a stake, is an unequivocal attack on their masculinity:

Liebres cobardes nacistes;  
bárbaros sois, no españoles.  
Gallinas, ¡vuestras mujeres  
sufrís que otros hombres gocen!  
Poneos rucas en la cinta.  
¿Para qué os ceñís estoques?  
¡Vive Dios, que he de trazar  
que solas mujeres cobren  
la honra de estos tiranos,  
la sangre de estos traidores,  
y que os han de tirar piedras,  
hilanderas, maricones,  
amujerados, cobardes...  
(1776-82)

[You were all born cowards; you are barbarians, not Spaniards. Cowards, you allow your women to be taken by other men! Tie a knot in your belts. Why carry swords? I swear that I will plot for us women

alone to recover our honor from these tyrants, to spill the blood of these traitors, and to throw stones at you—spinsters, sissies, girly-men, cowards...]<sup>9</sup>

The entire text of Laurencia's tirade is full of such references to the male villagers' emasculation, as she calls them among other things "medio-hombres" [*half-men*] and "ovejas" [*sheep*] and poses to them similarly pointed rhetorical questions: "¿Vosotros sois hombres nobles?/ ¿Vosotros padres y deudos?" (1755-56) [*Are you noblemen? Are you fathers and kinsmen?*]. Furthermore, Laurencia treats the villagers' failure to live up to the standards of masculinity as an affront to Spanish national character ("bárbaros sois, no españoles" [*You are barbarians, not Spaniards*]). Donald Gilbert-Santamaría reads Laurencia's invocation of gender as a "rhetorical goad" (78) meant to catalyze the male citizenry of the village Fuenteovejuna, and its effectiveness stems from tapping into the profound cultural anxiety about gender in seventeenth-century Spain that is the subject of a number of recent publications in the fields of history and literary studies, including Sidney Donnell's *Feminizing the Enemy*. If we accept Teresa Kirschner's conception of the Fuenteovejuna villagers as a "protagonista colectivo" [*collective protagonist*] reflective of the collective identity of the play's seventeenth-century audience, we can assume that Laurencia's linkage of "effeminacy" with Spanish national identity would have resonated loudly in the early seven-

teenth-century *corral*. The fact that it continues to resonate onstage today, despite obvious contextual differences, suggests new ways in which we may explore how the “classics” of the Spanish Golden Age speak to us today.

Contemporary stagings of *Fuenteovejuna* and other *comedias* will of course reflect current cultural circumstances (both within academia and beyond it) in a variety of ways, including in ways that do not necessarily privilege questions of gender as I have done above. Scholars since the 1980s have taught us so much more about the interplay of text and context in Lope’s masterpiece, be it William R. Blue’s revelation that the relationship between the Maestre de Calatrava and the Comendador works allegorically to decry the political problems of Lope’s day (and to deftly avoid any implicit criticism of his patrons, who just so happen to be descendants of the Maestre), or be it A. Robert Lauer’s analysis of how Lope manipulates the chronology of historical events and other details surrounding the Fuenteovejuna uprising so as to rewrite history in a way that makes the play’s action more pivotal to Spain’s unification and the dawn of its national identity. As we continue to benefit from neohistorical scholarship and the insights it offers regarding the absolutist monarchy’s containment of subversive cultural elements and the struggle of those elements to resist containment, we should not expect a contemporary performance tradition to

mirror such scholarship, but we should be aware of its synchronic presence in the broader cultural context of those performances. One example of this synchronicity that is germane to the present study would be the decision in any given production of *Fuenteovejuna* to whether or how to represent the intervention of the Catholic Monarchs that punctuates Lope's text. We have already seen a roughly contemporary critical and Lorquian performative de-historicization of *Fuenteovejuna*; further evidence might include the postcolonial context in which the Chilean playwright Isabel Aguirre mounted her own adaptation of the play, studied in depth by Christopher Weimer. In this case the monarchs are included, but they are the only characters to speak in verse—a subversive strategy, Weimer argues, for rendering distance between the villagers of Fuenteovejuna and the imperial authorities that govern them, which in turn would allow the Pinochet-governed Chilean audience to more comfortably identify with the play's *protagonista colectivo*.

Precisely how the shift towards historicity in *Comedia* scholarship translates to current stagings of the play is the kind of problem that in my view we need to address more directly. The degree to which any particular production is impacted by neohistorical scholarship will undoubtedly vary, perhaps in correlation with the director's awareness of it or taste for it, but I see merit in exploring the extent to which new productions of a play like



*Fuenteovejuna* engage the newly available details of its original political context—or, conversely, the extent to which historicized context is put aside in an effort to “actualize” those still valid and even seductive transcendental values of populism and justice. We may well find that as our historical awareness broadens, new stagings of this and other Golden Age plays will seek new ways to strike a balance between making them accessible to twenty-first century audiences and tapping into the historical and ideological dynamics that had inspired their composition in the first place. In this way we may reconsider how our scholarly understanding of the “meaning” of a canonical play like *Fuenteovejuna* is tied to our reception of the play as spectators and consumers, through a careful study of its widely diverse performance contexts. Such diversity in performance should furthermore remind us, as they inform our critical readings of the play, that decades from now future scholars may examine our current work as we might examine that of previous generations of scholars, again as a snapshot of one set of determining cultural and historical circumstances that yields scholarship bound to that historical specificity. So continues the diachronic process of signification that has evolved in accordance with our continually developing critical understanding and historicization of *Fuenteovejuna*’s ostensible “meaning.” In this way, our understanding of what is going on *inside* the text will invariably resonate

the circumstances surrounding its contemporary performance, or to the performance-text realized through each new interpretation.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>I highlight “our evolving understanding” of the original meaning of plays like *Fuenteovejuna* not to deny the existence of any ostensible original meaning, but rather to recognize our lack of access to it and the inseparability of how we interpret it from our own historical, ideological and institutional circumstances. Along similar lines, any current production of a *comedia* will invariably reflect such circumstances: both when a director deliberately manipulates the original script in order to invest its performance in a particular ideological agenda, and when conversely s/he attempts a more “faithful” or “authentic” rendering of the original, contemporary performances of early modern *comedias* cannot escape the broader cultural context in which they are produced.

<sup>2</sup>E.D. Hirsch’s seminal article, “Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted,” is my source for this terminology. Of course a substantial amount of time has passed since Hirsch first proposed this theoretical paradigm, and our discipline has evolved in such a way as to render it problematic. For an insightful critique of Hirsch’s construct, see Scott A. Blue.

<sup>3</sup>The point here is not to posit the superiority of any single approach or ideology, but rather to call for greater critical reflection and awareness of how each scholar’s work is, implicitly or explicitly, the consequence of his or her particular historical specificity.

<sup>4</sup>See Simon During’s introduction to *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction*.

<sup>5</sup>Seminal studies in *Comedia* scholarship embracing this neohistorical narrative of theater at the service of the hegemon-

only include José Antonio Maravall's *Teatro y literatura en la sociedad barroca* and Walter Cohen's *Drama of a Nation*. Among the most cogent critiques of the theoretical paradigm of the New Historicism are Cantor, Myers and Young.

<sup>6</sup> See especially Byrd.

<sup>7</sup> My use of the term "paying public" may differ from the standard reference to a ticket-buying audience, but it is still appropriate because the "free admission" public performance was subsidized by the local municipal government, which budgeted 180,000 euros for the production. See Elena García-Martín for a detailed analysis of "*Fuenteovejuna* en Fuente Ovejuna."

<sup>8</sup> See Molly Moore's article in *The Washington Post*, 7 Oct. 2006.

<sup>9</sup> All translations from Lope de Vega are mine.

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## STAGING *FUENTE OVEJUNA* IN THE BORDERLANDS

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In 1998, Borderlands Theater, in conjunction with Tucson's Pima Community College, premiered their production of *Fuenteovejuna* at the Siglo de Oro festival at the Chamizal National Memorial in El Paso, Texas. On the first night, the production was in Spanish, and the following night, with the same cast and set, they performed the play again in English translation. After their debut at El Chamizal, the company then returned to Tucson, Arizona and opened the two versions of their production there. In Tucson, however, the Spanish language version was so sparsely attended that one of the performances had to be changed from Spanish to English. This is surprising given the many successes of productions, both in English and in Spanish, at the Siglo de Oro festival in El Paso, another border town. The resistance to the Spanish language performance becomes more curious when taken into account that Borderlands Theater is a professional company whose stated mission is, in the words of

the company's director Barclay Goldsmith "to reflect the diversity of the voices of the Southwest Border region." As part of this mission, they have a tradition of bilingual programming and their production of *Fuenteovejuna* was an example of this. It also is important to note that the "border" both as physical and social landscape is a metaphor for Borderlands' work and the theme of a village rising up in solidarity against its oppressor is one that should resonate in the border regions of the American Southwest, thus making *Fuenteovejuna* a seemingly ideal choice for this company.

Perhaps the negative reception of this production can be explained partially by El Paso's long-running Siglo de Oro festival and the fact that its sophisticated theater-going audience is very accustomed to Classical Spanish Theater. As *Fuenteovejuna* was Tucson's introduction to the Golden Age, it could simply be that seventeenth century theatrical conventions were too foreign for this audience. This explanation is rather simplistic, however, and does not account for the greater success of the English version. The purpose of my essay, therefore, will be to explore the staging and adaptation of these dual language productions as well as their localization, both geographically and temporally, for their border audiences. I will look first at the political message of the productions, then compare the English and the Spanish versions to attempt to ascertain the reason for the English language ver-

sion's greater success. I will base this assessment both on the video record of their Chamizal premieres as well as a theatrical review of the Tucson productions.

Now many studies of *Fuenteovejuna* have focused on Lope's historical fidelity—or lack thereof—, discussed its democratic tendencies, observed that the play lacks resolution and merely raises more questions (Blue), and still others have attempted to answer these questions by applying Aristotelian and Thomistic natural law (Fiore). Yet few of these studies focus on the question of how to stage this play in such a way that it succeeds in appealing to a modern audience. For example, Robert Lauer's neo-historical exploration of *Fuenteovejuna* — highlighting the historical inaccuracies of the play and contending that its principal themes are the usurpation of power and Fernando's Machiavellianism — is very revealing. I would agree with his claim that “the villagers’ *tumulto* was viewed historically as infamous” (214); I reject, however, the notion that our “[m]odern democratic sentiments... at times obfuscate our critical, rational, and objective judgment” (214) when we root for the villagers. While it is true that Covarrubias’ *emblema moral* No. 97 refers to the villagers’ actions as “un caso atroz”<sup>1</sup> it is also important to remember that—as Peter Brooks asseverates—“meaning never belongs to the past” (14-5) and modern audiences will view a classical play from their own perspective. I concur



rather with Duncan Moir when he states, “we still *feel* that the villagers killing [of] Fernán Gómez de Guzmán is justified and we are pleased by it” (214). Studies that inform a scholarly reading of the play are largely inconsequential to a viewing audience, particularly a late twentieth century American audience (the productions in question were staged in 1998) almost 400 years and a continent removed from seventeenth century Spain. No matter how detailed and accurately researched, the historical details are a footnote and a modern audience will continue to view this play through the lens of their own experiences and cheer the death of the Comendador. Issues of the consolidation of power into the hands of the monarchy remain mainly irrelevant in this situation.

In the twentieth century *Fuenteovejuna* has been staged by a range of diverse groups that run the gamut from 1930s Republican Spain, to the Franco era of the 1940s; from a Nazi propaganda piece in 1930s Germany (Seliger 831), to Soviet versions in Stalinist Russia, to Adrian Mitchell’s 1989 translation criticizing political repression in South Africa (Smith 83-4). Ironically, all of these various adaptations have been staged in support of specific—albeit opposing—political ideals. This leads me to concur with Lauer when he indicates, “*Fuenteovejuna* is commonly recognized as one of the most misconstrued political dramas of the Spanish Golden Age” (211). These “misconstructions”

of the play have lead some critics to claim—like Marcelino Menéndez-Pelayo—that “no hay obra mas democrática en el teatro castellano” (175) but others (Herrero) to view it as “a glorification of the triumph of absolute monarchy” (176). Apparently, neither the play’s scholars not its producers agree regarding the play’s resolution. Interestingly, the role of the Monarchs has often led to these diverging interpretations. As Juan Manuel Rozas has indicated “in moments of fundamental political crisis” in places where Fuenteovejuna is being staged the role of the Monarchs has been modified, or, at times, eliminated—as in the Soviet production. Conversely, as Dawn Smith has pointed out, in Declan Donnallan’s London production the King and Queen—in a Big Brother-like fashion—were seated on the stage throughout the play overseeing the events as they unfolded around them, thus highlighting the ironic importance of the Monarchs to his staging.

Given both the political aspects of the play and the often-political nature of Borderlands Theater, I was curious to see on which end of the political scale the productions in question would fall; particularly when Mari Wadsworth of the Tucson Weekly wrote in her review that:

Past productions such as *Deporting the Divas* and last year’s ambitious *13 días/13 days* have bolstered the Borderlands’ reputation for timely satire, strong politics and the courage to bring the minority

voice—be it a crossing-dressing Border Patrol agent or a disenfranchised Mexican campesino—center stage.

Now, in spite of the fact that their role has been eliminated in some productions, Isabel and Fernando's importance to the development of the action is much greater than their relatively limited physical presence onstage would suggest. In fact, in Victor Dixon's introduction to his English translation of Lope's play he mentions that, although they are only present in six of the play's scenes, the King and Queen are mentioned in the majority of them. In an interview with the Borderlands Theater cast and director, they indicated that they were quite conscious of the importance of the Monarchs to the development of the action: their decision to pardon the villagers or not is central to the resolution of *Fuenteovejuna*. Yet, to a modern audience accustomed to political self-determination, the Monarchs' role becomes less relevant. The dilemma for the cast was, then, to find a balance between fulfilling the modern audience's expectations while retaining a sense of how the Monarchs would have been performed in the seventeenth century; a balance between displaying their "grandeza real" and yet breaking down the façade and showing that the Monarchs are, after all, human (*A Discussion*). So, for example, in the First Act when the Regidor appears before the King and Queen with the news that Ciudad Real has been taken and its men killed, in

the Borderlands' staging of the play Isabel descends from the throne gently placing her hand on the messenger's shoulder to console him. Furthermore, this production consciously portrays the Monarchs as a couple in love and Fernando is consistently solicitous of Isabel, taking her hand to help her ascend to or descend from the throne; in this way their love story parallels that of Laurencia and Frondoso.

In a further effort to highlight the importance of the Monarchs, the Borderlands' production frames their conflict with the Order of Calatrava and establishes them as natural allies to the villagers before even a word is spoken. Their production opens with the villagers of Fuenteovejuna crossing the stage as they go about their daily life. A standard-bearer then enters carrying the flag of the Order of Calatrava. He places the flag on a platform to the right of the stage and then exits. The Catholic Monarchs now enter, also from the right, followed by their own standard-bearer. The villagers immediately stop what they are doing; remove their hats, and bow, kneeling respectfully as the Monarchs cross the stage. The King and Queen, while inclining their heads to both left and right to acknowledge the villagers, ceremoniously proceed across the stage past the flag of Calatrava, and then exit to the left. After the King and Queen have departed, the villagers continue on their way, leaving the stage empty as the scene concludes. Although not a word is spoken, this scene introduces the Monarchs to the public

immediately—rather than waiting until much later in the action as in Lope's text—thereby underlying their importance to the development of the action from the very beginning.

The Comendador, Flores and Ortuño now enter and *Fuenteovejuna* as we know it begins. The scene differs with the previous one in several ways. First, the Monarchs' serene bearing contrasts with that displayed by the Comendador who appears as a petulant child in comparison as he complains angrily of the perceived lack of respect shown to him by the Maestre. Furthermore, the deference the villagers showed the Monarchs is lacking entirely. Instead, Flores is seated on a low stool center stage picking the dirt from his boots with a knife while the Comendador paces angrily around him. Rather than ingratiating, as Dixon described them (16), neither Flores nor Ortuño seem to show much concern for their master's anger and almost indifferently, especially Flores, attempt to placate him. Throughout the scene, the Comendador borders on the bombastic as he shouts, gesticulates and paces. His nervous energy dominates the stage and continues to do so even after the Maestre arrives to explain his absence. The young Maestre takes Flores' stool, and remains seated through most of the scene while the Comendador continues his pacing. The impression then, given the lowness of the stool on which the Maestre sits, is of a pupil lectured by his teacher. The Comendador continues to dominate the space

physically—just as he verbally dominates the conversation—underscoring visually the way in which he controls and manipulates the Maestre.

After making their plans, the men exit and the villagers again take the stage in another departure from Lope's text. With baskets of laundry and rakes and hoes, the men and women of the village pantomime working while they sing repeatedly:

Nosotros somos el pueblo  
de Fuenteovejuna.  
Trabajamos en los campos  
solamente con las manos.

Interestingly, using a sort of freeze frame technique, on several occasions the villagers, as a group, will remain momentarily frozen in place thus offering the spectator a sort of snapshot of an idealized pastoral life. In this brief *alabanza del campo*, the villagers are portrayed as simple hardworking country folk living in peace with each other and with the land. This brief interlude, of course, builds upon the pastoral theme already present in the ensuing scene in which Laurencia waxes poetic about the simple pleasures of country life. This theme of the campesino is a common one in the border regions and we have examples of this in movies such as *The Milagro Beanfield War*, *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, *El Norte*, and even in the Borderlands Theater's earlier production of *13 days*. By accentuating the pastoral theme, however subtly, the director at-

tempts to situate *Fuenteovejuna* within a modern framework in an attempt to appeal to his border public.

Now, as a whole these first three scenes, Lope's original with the Comendador and the two Borderlands' additions with the Monarchs and the villagers, fulfill several important functions. Most importantly, presenting the Comendador ranting about the deference that he feels he is due contrasts nicely with the scene of mutual respect between the villagers and the Monarchs. Neither the villagers nor the royal couple need to insist upon respect, as it is freely accorded to them. In contrast, the Comendador must demand respect, because he does not deserve it. This juxtaposition of the harmony found in the first and third scene with the tension and discord of the scene with the Comendador serves, of course, to foreshadow the events that will follow, while at the same time establishes the Monarchs and the villagers as allies, thereby attempting to make relevant the King and Queen to a twentieth century audience.

Goldsmith has clearly chosen to build upon the opposition between the Monarchy and the Comendador already inherent in Lope's text, and throughout the play, the production will continue to insist upon the natural relationship between the people and the Monarchs. This reflects Goldsmith's decision to avoid an ironic portrayal of the Monarchs—similar to Donallan's—that would call into question

their importance to the play's resolution. He opted simply to portray the Monarchs as Lope presented them; they are the heads of state in this production, and, as such, arbiters of justice. As he states:

There are times in society where there is a non-retributive sense of justice; there are times when societies do come together, even temporarily, in a structural sense of order that pleases everybody, and I sort of took that take on the play (*A Discussion*).

Therefore, in the third Jornada, as the villagers begin their rebellion, there are twelve additional references to the King and Queen over and above the many references already present in the original text. Also highlighted is the incompatibility of the villagers and the Comendador as the villagers repeatedly shout, "Long live the King and Queen, death to tyrants." By repeatedly equating the Comendador with tyranny and contrasting the Monarchs to this tyrant, by implication the King and Queen are portrayed as just and fair. In addition, this production abbreviates the celebratory scenes following the Comendador's demise; similar to the original text, in the Borderlands' production the townspeople enter carrying the Comendador's head and singing: "Muchos años vivan / Isabel y Fernando, / y mueren los tiranos". Thirty-nine celebratory verses, however, are eliminated from the Spanish version (verses 2030-69)—as are the corresponding verses in the English production—so that



immediately after completing the song, Esteban orders the townspeople to remove the head, and Juan Rojo replaces it with the banner of Castile and Aragon.

These directorial decisions seem designed to 1) insert the theme of the *campesino* into the play, thus locating it geographically; 2) undercut the element of revenge present in Lope's *Fuenteovejuna*; 3) underscore the natural relationship between the village and the Monarchy; and 4) emphasize the right of a people to political self-determination. In Goldsmith's production, the villagers are simple country folk whose rebellion is motivated more by a desire to dissolve the political bands linking them to tyranny, than by an act of vengeance against the tyrant himself. When the new political order is established, more than in Lope's original, it is presented as simply logical, as if this is how things should have been all along, and the time under the Comendador was simply an aberration. The Monarchs have justly pardoned the villagers, and the new social order pleases all. It also appears that these directorial decisions effectively appealed to his audience—at least in the English production—and after the English language premiere, one of the audience members stated that this was the best production of *Fuenteovejuna* she had ever seen (*A Discussion*).<sup>2</sup>

Now, as I change tacks here, in attempting to ascertain the reason for the success of the English over the Spanish production, I focus primarily on

linguistic issues and it becomes readily apparent that the English version is superior for a variety of reasons. First, the majority of the cast is more comfortable in English than in Spanish and deliver their English lines with more confidence. Second, and more importantly, in the Spanish language production, due, perhaps to the actors' discomfort, there are lapses of memory on the part of the actors, and they do not seem to respect the versification. Although I was unable to obtain the director's cut of either script to determine if these apparent errors were intentional, in *A Discussion with Barclay Goldsmith*, however, Goldsmith stated that for the English production, Vern Williamsen adapted Dixon's 1989 English translation but that they made only minor changes to Lope's text for the Spanish version. I will take this as my starting point, then, when making assumptions about the texts in production. Ironically, for the predominantly English-speaking cast, they chose to simplify and modernize Dixon's nine year-old text because they found the iambic pentameter problematic, yet—for their non-Spanish speaking cast—made very few modifications to Lope's almost 400 year-old polymetric original. These difficulties with verse are far more problematic in Spanish than in English because: 1) in Williamsen's adaption there remains very little rhyme or meter to distort; 2) in the Spanish version the most frequent verse form used by Lope in this play is the *redondilla* and the distortion of that con-

sonant rhyme form is jarring to the ears. To illustrate this point, let's first compare Dixon's original translation with a transcription of Frondoso's explanation of urban political correctness as delivered in the English language production at the Chamizal:

Just following the fashion.

Your bachelor is always called a Master;  
the blind, 'one-eyed'; and those who're cross-eyed,  
'squinting';  
the lame, 'afflicted'; feckless folk, 'good-natured';  
those who know nothing, 'sound'; the boorish,  
'bluff'.

Big mouths are called 'full-lipped'; small-eyes,  
'sharp-sighted';

contentious folk are 'active'; clowns, 'amusing';  
chatterers, 'clever'; pushful people, 'bold';  
cowards, 'not up to much' and hotheads, 'dashing'.

Your dolt's 'good company'; your madman, 'care-free';

sourness, 'solemnity', and baldness, 'presence'.

folly's called 'wit'; big feet, 'a solid footing';

the pox is 'cold-sores'; haughtiness, 'reserve';

fanatics are 'persistent', hunchbacks, 'stooping'.

You see then what I meant when I said 'ladies';

I'll say no more; I could go on forever.

(74-5)

It's just the modern manner of speech.

All students today are called intellectuals;

misers are economical, and the deaf, eh, are hard of  
hearing.

If you're loud-mouthed, they call you powerful;

the busybody cares about people; a bully is strong-willed;

and a raving lunatic [maniacal laughter] is so original.

So if you catch a pox, call it a cold sore;

if you're a hunchback, say you're round-shouldered.

That's the fashion, and I'm in the fashion up to my neck

when I call you three, ladies.

It is readily apparent when comparing the two texts is that they have little to do with each other beyond ridiculing political correctness. The passage has been abbreviated, modernized and completely altered; it however, is extremely effective, beautifully polished, and based on the audience's laughter at El Chamizal, quite comical. Furthermore, even if the actor had inverted the word order, or forgotten a line, the audience probably would not have noticed, because the dialogue reads like prose.

To illustrate the distortion of the more overtly poetic Spanish rhyme scheme, let's look now at the same scene in the Spanish version. On the left is Lope's original text, in the column on the right, is the transcription from the Chamizal:

Andar al uso queremos:  
al bachiller, licenciado;  
al ciego, tuerto; al bisojo,

bizco; resentido, al cojo,

Andar al uso queremos:  
al bachiller, licenciado;  
**al gracioso,**  
**entretenido; (302)**  
**al ingenioso, constante;**

	(315)
y buen hombre, al descuidado;	<b>al corcovado, cargado.</b>
	(316)
al ignorante, sesudo;	al ignorante, sesudo;
al mal galán, soldadesca;	al mal galán, soldadesca;
a la boca grande, fresca,	a la boca grande, fresca,
y al ojo pequeño, agudo.	y al ojo pequeño, agudo.
al pleitista, diligente;	al pleitista, diligente;
<b>al gracioso, entretenido;</b>	<b>al gracioso,</b>
	<b>entretenido;</b>
al hablador, entendido;	al hablador, entendido;
y al insufrible, valiente;	y al insufrible, valiente.
al cobarde, para poco;	
al atrevido, bizarro;	
compañero, al que es un jarro,	
y desenfadado, al loco;	
gravedad, al descontento;	
a la calva, autoridad;	
donaire, a la necedad,	
y al pie grande, buen cimientto;	
al buboso, resfriado;	
comedido al arrogante;	
<b>al ingenioso, constante;</b>	
<b>al corcovado, cargado.</b>	
(292-316)	

In the verses following “Andar al uso queremos” in Lope’s text on the left-hand side, a series of *redondillas* begin with, of course, a typical rhyme scheme of abba in which “licenciado” rhymes with “cargado” and “entretenido” is supposed to rhyme with “entendido”. However, as we can see in the transcription of that passage, the actor begins with verses 292-3, he skips then to verse 302, then to

verses 315-6, and—after a long pause as if he were thinking of further “zingers”—he remembers his lines and delivers verses 297-304, repeating verse 302 and eliminating verses 305-316. Now, as we have seen in the English version of this speech, the director took many liberties with the text, simplifying the language, ignoring the blank verse, and shortening the passage. However, I do not think that, in this case, there was a conscious directorial decision to ignore the verse form in the Spanish version. It does not seem logical to distort the rhyme scheme of the first stanza, and then to revert to the verse form in the next two stanzas, nor would it be logical to repeat verse 302; these are errors more likely attributable to the actor’s faulty memory. More difficult to quantify than textual errors is the fact that the actor, a non-Spanish speaker, delivered the English lines with more confidence and greater feeling; he seemed more hesitant in Spanish and his comic timing, as judged by the audience’s reaction, did not appear to be as finely tuned.

Another example of the superiority of the English play over the Spanish is the fact that some of the actors—especially the non-Spanish speaking cast members—could not remember their lines. The most egregious example of this occurs in the opening scene of the Spanish language play in which the Comendador exhorts the young Maestre to support Juana of Portugal’s right to the Castilian throne. On the left are selections from Lope’s version and the

right is the corresponding transcription of the Borderlands' version from the Chamizal.

para que don Juan Pacheco,  
gran maestre de Santiago,  
fuese vuestro coadjutor;  
ya que es muerto, y que os han dado

el gobierno sólo a vos,

aunque de tan pocos años,  
advertid que es honra vuestra  
seguir en aqueste caso  
la parte de vuestros deudos;  
porque, muerto Enrique cuarto,  
quieren que al rey don Alonso  
de Portugal, que ha heredado,  
por su mujer, a Castilla,  
obedezcan sus vasallos;  
(81-94)

no con derecho tan claro  
a vuestros deudos, que en fin,  
no presumen que hay engaño  
en la sucesión de Juana,  
a quien vuestro primo hermano  
tiene agora en su poder.  
Y así vengo a aconsejaros  
que juntéis los caballeros  
de Calatrava en Almagro  
y a Ciudad Real toméis,  
que divide como paso  
a Andalucía y Castilla,

para mirarlos a entrambos.  
Poca gente es menester,  
porque tienen por soldados  
solamente sus vecinos  
y algunos pocos hidalgos,  
que defienden a Isabel  
y llaman rey a Fernando.

(98-116)

y nombró a Juan Lutor...

Ya ha muerto...sabes...

que ya ha muerto...

El padre mismo quieren que  
siguen a

don Alonso rey de Portugal y que  
obedezcan sus vasallos.

no con derecho tan claro  
según todos vuestros vasallos.

(verses eliminated)

Y así vengo a aconsejaros  
que juntéis los caballeros  
de Calatrava en Almagro,  
XXXX

que divide como paso  
a Andalucía y Casti-  
lla...eh...Castilla,

para vernos entrambos.

Es poco menester  
porque tienen por soldados  
solamente sus vecinos  
y algunos pocos hidalgos,  
que defienden a Isabel  
y dicen rey a él... a este...  
Fernando.

Now again, I have not been able to consult the acting script, however, I doubt that the director or the dramaturg would have eliminated Juan Pacheco, and replaced him with an invented historical figure named Juan Lutor. Most probably, this is an accidental conflation of the figure “Juan Pacheco” and his role of “coadjutor” to form the composite term “Juan Lutor”. This seems a likely explanation, when we consider that Juan Lutor does not appear in the English production. Notice also the grammatical impossibility of the assertion “el padre quieren”, the fact that Almagro, rather than Ciudad Real, will be invaded, and that this invasion, rather than requiring few people (“poca gente es menester”) will itself be unnecessary (“es poco menester”). This should then lead the audience to question why it should be invaded at all. While it is an understandably common practice to offer abbreviated versions of long, historically dense scenes, such as this, in the English production these sorts of errors do not occur.

This important speech lays the groundwork for the secondary action in Ciudad Real and at the Chamizal it was rendered nonsensical by the actor. Without at least a basic understanding of the historical details of this civil war, and in spite of the introductory notes prepared by consultant dramaturg Williamsen, the entire subplot could become incomprehensible. A lack of background undermines not only the conflict between the Comendador and the Monarchs, but also the role of the Mon-



archs in this historical moment and thus in the play. As we have seen, the director had carefully attempted to frame the conflict in the first few scenes while also introducing the Monarchs to the public, the Spanish language version of this speech undermines those efforts and weakens that production as a whole in a way that does not occur in the English language version.

The final scene that this article will address occurs in the Second Act in which the Comendador, accompanied by Flores and Ortuño, interrupts the town elders' meeting. The director chose to stage this scene in a tavern, and perhaps in keeping with the barroom theme, in both the English and the Spanish language productions, the Comendador appears to be drunk. Interestingly though, in the Spanish language production this drunkenness is exaggerated to the point that the Comendador becomes a buffoonish character reminiscent of a *gracioso* or a villain in a low-budget Mexican action movie of the *Mariachi* type. For example, while admonishing Esteban for Laurencia's rebuff, the Comendador attempts to sit on a bar stool but his sword catches on his neighbor and he has to struggle with it to accommodate himself and makes a joke: "¡Ah, esta espada!" Shortly thereafter, he staggers across the stage, gesturing widely, stumbles, overbalances, and would have fallen had the actor playing the part of Flores not caught him. Goldsmith revealed that during the earlier rehearsals the non-Spanish speaking

actor was apprehensive about the language barrier and felt most comfortable playing the Comendador as a drunk; in an effort to encourage his actor, Goldsmith had let that portrayal go, without realizing the extent to which the drunkenness would expand and permeate the entire role on opening night (*A Discussion*). This, then, was not a conscious directorial decision, although, perhaps through the decision to portray the Comendador as a drunkard, the actor was attempting to tap into a Spanish speaking audience's presumed familiarity with Mexican action films, and while the effect is comical, its effectiveness in the development of the action is questionable. The Comendador is far less sinister because the audience can laugh at him, and though he remains a bully, as a laughable figure, the need to overthrow and behead him become much less urgent. Again, this interpretation of the Comendador undermines the director's earlier efforts to establish the conflict between the villagers and the Monarchy on the one hand, and the Comendador on the other. In the English version, this character, although drunken is not played as comically; he neither stumbles nor slurs his words and, is, overall, a more threatening villain. The English version, as a result, seems more coherent.

The last major point that would explain Tucson's rejection of the Spanish language version of the play relates to Castilian versus Mexican Spanish. There appeared to be resistance from some of

the Spanish-speaking cast members to Castilian second person plural pronouns and verb conjugations. For example, in the right-hand column is a transcription of the Chamizal performance; compare Pascuala's advice to Lope's original text on the left:

Con la quisti6n  
**Pod6is** ir al sacrist6n

porque 6l o el cura **os** dar6n  
bastante satisfacci6n  
(437-40)

Con la quisti6n

**puedes** ir al sacrist6n.

6l, o el cura, puede darte  
bastante satisfacci6n.

In addition to disregarding the verse forms, the actor has also eliminated the second person plural forms "vosotros" and "os" with the second person singular "tú" and "te". Further examples of language resistance are demonstrated by the replacement of "vuestra edad" (verse 58) with "nuestra edad", "vuestro padre" (verse 72) with "aqueste padre", "vos" (verse 137) with "tú", "veis" (verse 449) with "ves", "con vos hablo" (verse 601) with "contigo hablo" and "vosotros honor ten6is" (verse 987) with "vuestros honor ten6is", etc... Some of these errors are not grammatically correct and others change the social relationship of the interlocutors, but all of these errors demonstrate both a lack of familiarity with the Castilian grammatical structures, and a resistance to them. The actors who most frequently committed these types of errors were native speakers of Spanish who were not from Spain; not surprisingly, the actor from Spain never con-

fused the Castilian grammatical structures. This leads me to believe that these were unconscious lapses rather than an attempt to make the language more accessible to the audience, particularly as these lapses were not consistent. The same actor, for example, confused “veis” with “ves” in verse 449, but then properly uttered “entrad que os quiere enseñar” in verse 615.

It is not only the actors, however, who demonstrated this resistance to the Castilian Spanish, for the public did as well. Interestingly, before returning with the play to Arizona, Goldsmith mentioned his apprehension about the Spanish language version’s acceptance in Tucson, fearing that the language might “alienate” some bilingual audience members (*A Discussion*). This appears to be what occurred, for in her review of the play, Wadsworth commented first on the difficulty posed by the “archaic” vocabulary and then noted, “for some, the *castellano* accent in which these lines are delivered may cause further confusion”. The only actor in the play with both a Castilian accent and a significant role was Nuria Morgado who played the part of Laurencia, so it is probable that Wadsworth refers to her when she references a confusing accent. Ironically, however, Morgado shines in her role as Laurencia and she is certainly easier to comprehend than were some of her non-Spanish speaking cast members. Theirs was certainly an ambitious undertaking, and they should be applauded for their ef-

forts, for, because they did not speak the language, they had to learn their lines as an opera singer would, and then perform these lines through the filter of a language barrier. Their Spanish remained heavily accented, however, and when they performed in Texas their enunciation hindered comprehension, yet this elicited no comment from the reviewer in Tucson except to congratulate their language coaches. In summary, both the actors and the Tucson audience generally appeared unfamiliar with and resistant to the accent and the grammatical variances of Castilian Spanish and, as a result, this probably influenced the reception of the Spanish language production.

Overall, the staging of *Fuenteovejuna* by Borderlands' Theater in dual language productions was an ambitious and a potentially intriguing project, there was, however, a lack of rigor in—most notably in the Spanish language version—that influenced its quality. While the early directorial decisions that stressed the relationship between the Monarchy and the villagers, and the freeze-frame technique that emphasized the idyllic country life were effective in locating the productions in a modern border setting, the actor's decision to play the Comendador comically undermined these efforts. As a result, the final product loses cohesion, again, principally the Spanish language production. This lack of cohesion was then exacerbated in the Spanish production by a cast of uneven abilities and lim-

ited Spanish language skills who had to perform through the filter of a language barrier. When the linguistic resistance was added to the mix, Tucson public's rejection of the Spanish language production becomes more understandable. I applaud Barclay Goldsmith and Borderlands' Theater intention, hard work, and daring, however, it seems that, given the linguistic challenges that Golden Age theater can pose, particularly to a cast with limited Spanish skills, perhaps they would have been better served to modernize not only Dixon's translation, but Lope's original as well. Ironically, it would seem, perhaps, that too much respect for the integrity of the original text undermined the production.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Under Emblem 97 in book three of Covarrubias' *Emblemas morales* there appears a woodcutting of a judge with the caption "Quidquid multis peccatur inultum est" or "El pecado que cometen muchos queda impune". The accompanying epigram states: "Grande es la confusión de un juez cristiano \ cuando en un caso atroz Fuenteovejuna, \ con atrevida y vengativa mano, \ sin Dios, sin rey, sin ley, toda se aúna \ de hecho, a un hecho bárbaro inhumano, \ sin que se halle claridad ninguna, \ cuál sea el culpado, cuál el inocente, \ en la comunidad de tanta gente."

<sup>2</sup> Amy Williamsen's mother—a woman who has seen many productions of *Fuenteovejuna*—thinks the play in general is "disgusting" but claims that this was the best production she had ever seen and the first that she had enjoyed (*A Discussion*).

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## *Interviews*

### **ENTREVISTA CON RAFAEL RODRÍGUEZ CABRERA, 2RC**

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Rafael Rodríguez nace en Arucas, Gran Canaria, en 1964. Comienza su formación teatral en su Canarias natal sobre el año 1984, participando junto a un grupo de jóvenes actores y actrices en los talleres impartidos por Ángel Ruggiero, Fermín Cabal y Ramón Sánchez Prat en la sede del Centro Insular de Cultura del Cabildo de Gran Canaria. Fundador del grupo de teatro Dizzy en Arucas, Rodríguez decide trasladarse a Madrid para profundizar su formación. En el año 1987 se muda definitivamente a Madrid e ingresa en la Sala Cuarta Pared, por entonces desconocida, que el año anterior el director argentino Ángel Ruggiero había fundado, junto con un grupo de estudiantes, en la calle Olivares del barrio de Lavapiés, afincado en España. Pronto entra a formar parte del equipo de trabajo de la Sala Cuarta Pared, pasando a dirigir talleres y cursos de iniciación teatral. De esta época son las primeras referencias en prensa, con títulos como *Antígona* de Jean Anouilh, o *Sueños de mala fortuna* sobre textos de

Edgar Alan Poe; la Sala Cuarta Pared le sirve de lugar de encuentro y trabajo junto a otros directores como Javier García Yagüe, Raúl Serrano y Antonio Malonda.

En el año 1992 ingresa en la Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático de Madrid para realizar los Estudios de Dirección de Escena y Dramaturgia, formando parte de la primera promoción de directores Titulados Superiores de España. Durante este periodo intenso de formación reglada, Rodríguez tiene la oportunidad de trabajar con directores del prestigio de Jorge Eines, Emilio Hernández y Juan Antonio Hormigón, a la vez que no deja de realizar trabajos de dirección de escena para diferentes compañías: *Talem* de Sargi Belbel para Atavara Teatro; *Ñaque de piojos y actores* para Ambulantes Teatro y *Cuatro por cuatro* de varios autores jóvenes como son Nieves Gámez, García May, Yolanda Pallín y Emeterio Díaz, y en codirección con diferentes compañeros de promoción como Natalia Menéndez o Ana Ramírez. A la vez participa en diferentes actividades y congresos organizados por la Asociación de Directores de Escena (ADE), lo que le permite acercarse de manera efectiva a la realidad y problemática de la profesión del director de escena. Una vez acabada la carrera, entra a ser socio de pleno derecho de dicha asociación profesional, llegando a ser así uno de los primeros directores de escena de Canarias que lo hace.

Ya en 1996 es director titulado, y surgen los primeros encargos profesionales. Entre los más destacados, el propuesto por Jorge Eines para el estreno nacional con la compañía titular de la Sala Ensayo 100 del texto de Lourdes Ortiz *El cascabel al gato*, publicado con un estudio del montaje realizado por la entonces novísima y desconocida editorial Ñaque, que dirigía un entusiasta Fernando Bercebal. Se afianza su relación con la ADE, colaborando en la realización de diversas actividades, entre las que destacan la coordinación para los cursos impartidos por Miguel Ángel Camacho y Jorge Saura; y dirige por segunda vez para la Compañía Ambulantes de Castilla la Mancha, esta vez con el espectáculo con que la Asociación de Directores de Escena premiará su joven proyección. En el año 1997 se le concede el premio José Luis Alonso para jóvenes directores por la dirección del espectáculo *Cuando los paisajes de Cartier Bresson*, del autor catalán Josep Pere Peyró, convirtiéndose de esta manera en el primer director de escena canario que consigue un premio de ámbito nacional en la corta historia profesional de las Islas.

Es precisamente en el año 1997, año de proyección y despegue, cuando decide su vuelta a Canarias después de cubrir su periodo de formación. Es aquí, en su tierra natal, donde pretende realizar el mayor esfuerzo profesional, trabajando con la idea de apostar por aquellos aspectos que en las Islas son deficitarios, por ausencia o poco interés, en aquellos

años. La idea de poner en marcha un centro dramático o un centro de producción estable, ya le ronda por la cabeza en esta época. Sus primeros aportes vienen con la puesta en marcha en Arucas, Gran Canaria, del Centro de Iniciativas Teatrales, que con los años pasará a integrarse en el organigrama de Las Escuelas Artísticas Municipales de Arucas. Es en este ámbito donde coordina encuentros con jóvenes autores y dirige espectáculos como son: *Morir* de Sergi Belbel, *Malditas sean Coronada y sus hijas* de Francisco Nieva, y *Mal dormir* de Sanchís Sinisterra; y es donde pone en marcha las Primeras Jornadas Sobre Educación y Teatro.

En Canarias desarrolla una prolífera e intensa carrera como director de escena, montando para diversas compañías y productoras: *Pareja abierta*, de Dario Fo, como primera producción de Producciones del Mar; *Dedos*, de Borja Ortiz de Gondra; y *El hacha*, de Antonio Morcillo, con la compañía La República. Es una época de abordar textos contemporáneos y de insistir en el rigor de la puesta en escena; el discurso es alejarse lo más posible de la comedia facilona y de vodevil que abunda en las Islas. Esta reflexión le lleva a plantear la posibilidad de crear una compañía que aborde textos del repertorio universal que no se hayan montado en época reciente en Canarias, y de ahí su interés en los textos clásicos. Llega a la cuenta de que en Canarias se habían dejado de montar textos de nuestro teatro áureo hacía aproximadamente veinte años

atrás. La apuesta fue la creación de una de las compañías que en los últimos años más proyección y prestigio ha logrado dentro del territorio autonómico, saltando las barreras, siempre difíciles, del panorama nacional: 2Rc Teatro Compañía de Repertorio.

Ha montado en cinco años tres textos clásicos y otros dos contemporáneos, amén de haber propiciado la producción de otros tres textos más: *La verdad sospechosa*, de Ruiz de Alarcón, *El perro del hortelano*, de Lope de Vega, *El alcalde de Zalamea*, de Calderón; *Ñaque de piojos y actores* y *El cerco de Leningrado* de Sanchís Sinisterra, además de una adaptación del cuento infantil *Arajelbem*, de Dolores Campos Herrero, para la Cueva Pintada de Gáldar. Logra así los siguientes hitos, no sólo para su compañía, sino para todo el teatro hecho en Canarias: es seleccionado para la final del Certamen Nacional de Teatro “Garnacha de Rioja” (2005 y 2008); presenta por primera vez para una compañía canaria dos espectáculos, *La verdad sospechosa* y *El perro del hortelano*, en el Festival Internacional de Teatro Clásico de Almagro (2006); presenta en el Festival de Las Autonomías (2006), en el Festival Internacional de Teatro y Danza de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (2006), en el Festival Clásico en Alcalá (2007), y por tres años consecutivos, en el Festival Internacional Tres Continentes de Agüimes (2006-2008). Rodríguez consigue una nominación en los premios Max 2008 como espectáculo revelación por parte de la Comunidad Autónoma de Cana-

rias para el espectáculo *El alcalde de Zalamea*. Completa su labor profesional con diferentes publicaciones de prólogos de textos teatrales, artículos para revistas especializadas y una ingente labor docente en diferentes cursos y seminarios, la mayoría en torno al concepto de la dramaturgia de la puesta en escena y el espacio escénico contemporáneo.

La presente entrevista se lleva a cabo con motivo de la primera gira de 2Rc Teatro Compañía de Repertorio por Estados Unidos y la zona fronteriza de México, emprendida en marzo de 2008. Su versión inolvidable de la obra calderoniana *El alcalde de Zalamea* viajó de oeste a este, haciendo paradas en San Marcos (California), Tijuana (México), El Paso (Texas), Ciudad Juárez (México), y para cerrar con broche de oro, Nueva York.



Rafael Rodríguez, en Almagro

**DS:** En 2008 fuisteis finalistas para el Premio Max, con vuestro *Alcalde de Zalamea*. ¿Qué supone eso para ti como director, y para tu compañía?

**RR:** Tengo que aclarar que fuimos finalistas para el premio Max Revelación que se otorga a un representante de cada autonomía, y nosotros fuimos los representantes de la de Canarias. En concreto, tanto para mí como para la compañía es un paso más, un paso realmente importante, en el desarrollo de un currículum profesional que trata de afianzar una trayectoria más centrada en el prestigio artístico que en los resultados económicos. Financieramente esta nominación no ha supuesto realmente ningún cambio significativo en el proyecto de la compañía; ahora bien, desde el punto de vista del prestigio sí supone un paso adelante en el conocimiento general de una profesión desde un ámbito nacional y no sólo autonómico.

Desde Canarias resulta realmente difícil darse a conocer a nivel nacional, y este tipo de premios o nominaciones sirven fundamentalmente para eso, para que nos conozcan un poquito más y confíen en nuestro trabajo. Hay que tener en cuenta que Canarias está a 2000 km. de la Península Ibérica, y que aunque estemos en un mundo globalizado, a una compañía de las islas, y más con el tipo de espectáculo que nosotros hacemos, no resulta ni fácil ni económico entrar en circuitos de distribución peninsulares. Estos premios, y la proyección profesional que ellos implican, nos presentan ese primer esco-

llo, que es el desconocimiento del teatro que se hace en las Islas Canarias.

Y como director, simplemente supone un toque para no bajar la guardia, para seguir apostando por el proyecto artístico que puse en marcha hace cinco años y que se llama “2Rc Teatro Compañía de Repertorio”, para no desfallecer; estos premios suben la moral y animan cuando las cosas se ponen difíciles. En ningún caso pueden servir para alimentar ningún tipo de vanidad porque eso iría en contra del sentido propio del teatro y de mi apuesta personal por el equipo; es decir, por creer, y esto es absolutamente cierto, que el resultado de un espectáculo es el esfuerzo del conjunto, desde quién ha diseñado el vestuario, pasando por los intérpretes, para terminar en el director, a quien represento humildemente en este caso.



Compañía 2Rc Teatro en los Premios Max de Artes Escénicas, 2008



**DS:** En los ensayos de *El alcalde de Zalamea* antes de la gira por EE.UU. y México, ¿os preparasteis de alguna manera diferente a como lo hacéis cuando os preparáis para un público español?

**RR:** No, en absoluto. Las únicas cuestiones partían del desconocimiento de los espacios donde íbamos a trabajar y del tiempo de montaje que tendríamos para implantar una escenografía que en cada lugar teníamos que construir. Era más una preocupación por la logística de la gira y por los problemas de producción, que por cuestiones artísticas respecto al trabajo interpretativo o de puesta en escena. En los momentos previos a la gira no teníamos consciencia del público que nos encontraríamos, y de cuáles podrían ser sus características. Esas cuestiones las fuimos descubriendo a medida que fuimos desarrollando nuestras representaciones y pudimos entablar contacto con esos públicos diversos, y a la vez fascinantes, de San Marcos o Tijuana, de El Paso o Ciudad Juárez, de Nueva York.





Ensayos de *El alcalde de Zalamea*

**DS:** En ese sentido, ¿cómo os afectaron los diversos espacios físicos durante la gira? ¿Qué tipos de cambios/modificaciones hubo que hacer durante esta gira para adaptaros y adaptar la obra a los diferentes locales?

**RR:** Como te explicaba, ese ha sido el factor más importante y que generó mayores dificultades. Cuando una compañía de teatro comienza una gira, cualquier gira, sabe que una de las cuestiones a resolver es la adaptación del espectáculo a los diferentes espacios con que se irá encontrando. Si tienes la suerte de contar con espacios de características similares en cuanto a dimensiones del escenario, caja escénica, equipamiento técnico, etc., pues no debería haber excesivos problemas; en cambio, si como nos pasó a nosotros, tienes pensado el espectáculo para un espacio de nueve por siete metros, y tienes que actuar en un teatro de cuatro por cuatro, sin

hombros en el escenario, pues resulta que prácticamente tienes que reinventar el espectáculo, acortar los movimientos de escena, las disposiciones espaciales de los personajes y objetos escénicos, y reelaborar las transiciones de entrada y salida de personajes. Esto es lo que tuvimos que hacer en Repertorio Español en Nueva York, que aunque es uno de los espacios con mejor energía, y con más historia y amor por el teatro de los que he podido pisar a lo largo de mi carrera, resulta que es un espacio minúsculo, con un equipamiento técnico que no podíamos tocar, y donde tuvimos que resolver muchas entradas y salidas por el patio de butacas. A pesar de todo, fue una función espectacular llena de fuerza y verdad escénica que no olvidaremos nunca. Pero a pesar de todo, lo que siempre buscamos es que tanto interpretativamente como estéticamente el espectáculo se vea lo menos afectado posible.



Preparando el espacio escénico en California State University, San Marcos

**DS:** ¿Puedes describir un poco cómo respondieron los diversos públicos (Calif., Tijuana, El Paso, NYC), y cómo os afectó?

**RR:** Sin ánimo de vanidad, sinceramente, la respuesta de los diferentes públicos durante las cinco representaciones que realizamos entre Estados Unidos y México fue realmente espectacular. Lógicamente algunas representaciones fueron especialmente emotivas como la que aconteció en el Teatro Rubén Vizcaíno Casas, de Tijuana, que coincidió con el fallecimiento ese mismo día de nuestra figurinista Pilar Quiñones. La energía que tenía la compañía se transmitió al público y resultó una función realmente espectacular, diríamos que casi perfecta; además, el público participaba de cada una de las distintas partes de la obra con su silencio o con su risa; es como si hubiera existido un vínculo especial. (Siento haberme puesto un tanto trascendente). Lo que quisiera explicarte es que el éxito fue mayor del que hubiéramos podido esperar. No existían prejuicios ni sobre la compañía ni sobre la obra. El público asistió a nuestras representaciones con ganas de disfrutar del Teatro, con mayúscula, y de descubrir lo que una joven compañía de un lugar, las Islas Canarias, que muchos de ellos no saben ni dónde se encuentran, era capaz de transportarlos a la tragedia de Pedro Crespo. Eso es lo maravilloso. En cualquier caso, en cada uno de los lugares el espectáculo se comprendió y se vivió con intensidad emocional la obra.

**DS:** ¿Cuál fue una de las cosas para ti más sorprendentes sobre los públicos estadounidenses y/o mexicanos?

**RR:** Siguiendo con la reflexión de la pregunta anterior, es verdad que los públicos no son iguales y que las características de cada uno, sin querer sentar cátedra sociológica, son bastante diferentes. Por ejemplo, sorprende que existiera público de habla exclusivamente inglesa siguiendo la acción de la obra en San Marcos. Luego descubrimos que muchos eran alumnos de teatro que estaban asombrados con la interpretación que se les mostraba. En Tijuana y Ciudad Juárez había un público joven ávido de ver teatro. En El Paso se nota que es público de festival, más adulto, más serio, amén de que he de agradecer los comentarios de los profesores y miembros de la AHCT que hicieron que valoráramos más el trabajo que estamos realizando. Nueva York supuso un público más frío, más intelectual, pero a la vez con más tradición, lo que al final se tradujo en una satisfacción mayor al comprobar que nuestro espectáculo había resultado un completo éxito, o lo que es lo mismo, del agrado de ese público que no sabíamos cómo recibiría nuestra función.

Otro de los aspectos que considero diferenciador con respecto a los públicos españoles, y concretamente los canarios, es la implicación del espectador latinoamericano. Su implicación no se limita al aplauso en las transiciones, o las risas adecuadas en

los momentos cómicos del espectáculo, sino que sentimos en cada una de las funciones que el público reaccionaba, y no era tímido a la hora de expresar sus emociones en el patio de butacas; si tenía que soltar una expresión de sorpresa o hacer algún comentario a aquello que estaban viendo, lo hacían sin pudor, y esto sí que era nuevo para nosotros, acostumbrados a un espectador más cohibido, menos expresivo o menos espontáneo.

**DS:** ¿Crees que *El alcalde de Zalamea* como texto tiene algo especial que hace que se trascienda las barreras que podrían suponer tanto el tiempo como la geografía? ¿Qué ofrece a un público del siglo XXI, al otro lado del Atlántico?

**RR:** Creo que sí. Que *El alcalde de Zalamea* tiene un potencial artístico y temático capaz de trascender las barreras del tiempo y del espacio geográfico. Da igual que la historia del rapto y posterior violación de Isabel a manos de un déspota capitán del ejército de Flandes hubiera ocurrido en la Zalamea del siglo XVII o en la Ciudad Juárez del siglo XXI; es suficientemente movilizadora de conciencias, es actual. A todas las personas con un mínimo de dignidad nos tiene que conmover; esto, unido al genio de Calderón que consigue plasmar todo el desarrollo dramático sin perder un ápice de la tensión accional y emocional, además de una escritura versal realmente hermosa, con versos que nos quedan en la memoria por su belleza, hacen que esta obra de Calderón sea de una modernidad irremediable a

la par que de una actualidad brutal. Si no, pensemos en las cientos o miles de mujeres que en el mundo son víctimas, hoy día y cada día, de la violencia de género; en España hasta hemos tenido que hacer leyes para luchar contra esta plaga, y aún no se ha conseguido eliminar porque en muchos casos tiene que ver con el concepto de la moral, del honor, de decisiones que, como Pedro Crespo, hay que tomar y que muchas veces van más allá de una conciencia racional. *El alcalde de Zalamea*, además de darnos una visión del mundo militar, del cuál era gran conocedor Calderón, o de la vida villanesca, nos presenta la lucha del hombre con su conciencia, con el orden establecido, con la moral. En definitiva, una lucha intemporal y por supuesto ageográfica.

**DS:** Habla un poco del papel de Pedro Crespo. Al final de la obra parece quedarse solo y rechazado por sus hijos. ¿Qué aspectos/habilidades tiene que aportar el actor que interpreta ese papel—en este caso Javier Collado—para transmitir con éxito todos los matices de este complicado personaje?

**RR:** Es verdad, en la versión que ha realizado Nicolás Fernández, ese final es algo que realmente considero un gran acierto, y que ayuda a comprender la idea que queríamos aportar a la obra. Pretendíamos mostrar cómo al final quien actúa bajo los criterios del buen proceder que unas veces tiene que ver con la moral propia y otras con el orden legal, muchas veces tiene que actuar a pesar de lo que

los demás demanden, pidan o exijan. En muchas ocasiones de la vida, tenemos que tomar decisiones que nos llevan a ese punto crítico que puede ponerte en contra de todos y de todo, pero que a pesar de ello tienes que optar por esa opción; en esos casos te arriesgas a la incomprensión de los demás, y cómo no, a la soledad, si no física, sí moral. Esto es lo que creemos que le pasa a Pedro Crespo, y para ello tuvimos que añadir unos cuatro versos, también de Calderón, que daban esta idea, además de plantear un final donde cada uno de los que están cerca de Crespo le dan en cierta medida la espalda.

Por supuesto, el trabajo de Javier Collado ha sido fundamental para el éxito de la obra, principalmente por lo que apuntas a la hora de poder transmitir todos los matices de los personajes, y no sólo eso, sino que es quien tiene que ser capaz de transmitirnos un Pedro Crespo creíble, emocional y síquicamente verdadero. Este es el gran milagro de nuestra propuesta, es lo que han destacado en los diferentes lugares donde hemos presentado: la humanidad, la verdad de este Pedro Crespo encarnado por Javier Collado, y que es capaz de llegar a las entrañas del espectador. Ha sido un trabajo duro, difícil a veces, pero muy satisfactorio.





El alcalde (Javier Collado, centro) con Isabel (María de Vigo, izq), Juan (Humberto García, der.) e Inés (Cata Blánquez, der.)

**DS:** La escena de la violación de Isabel se tuvo que cortar en la representación de El Paso, por petición del propio festival. ¿Cómo lo superasteis, para seguir proyectando el tono y el valor emotivo que buscabais transmitir con esa escena?

**RR:** Creo que no hubiera pasado nada, ni que el público se hubiera molestado por presentar la violación, el momento del coito, en escena; es tan evidente la dureza del momento; no es para nada gratuito, por lo que seguramente nadie del público se hubiera llevado las manos a la cabeza por este hecho, pero parece que estamos en un mundo donde se pretende poner la tirita antes que la herida, y eso va en contra del propio teatro.

Dicho esto, nosotros actuamos de la manera lo más profesional posible, se trabajó para que, como bien indicas, no decayera el sentido, la fuerza, la

intensidad del momento, y, por otro lado, se pudiera ver claro lo que pretendíamos; movilizar conciencias, poner frente al acto violento las miradas que normalmente tratan de desviarse de esos hechos. Muchos de los actores y actrices no querían cambiar nada de la escena por cuestiones ideológicas, pero como bien reflexionó uno de los miembros de la AHCT, el haber podido modificar, aunque fuera en una pequeña línea, la escena para que el acto del coito no fuera tan evidente (tan aparentemente evidente), permitió que las conciencias conservadoras que pudieran estar en el patio de butacas no se levantaran, y recibieran el discurso global de la obra, el sentido final que es lo que más nos importaba. No nos gustó, pero lo asumimos como parte del juego; además, ten en cuenta que estamos, querámoslo o no, frente a otra mentalidad cultural, cercana a la nuestra, pero en ningún caso igual, y eso también debemos aceptarlo y respetarlo.

Por otro lado, Calderón resuelve este momento entre cajas, no directamente en escena; esto es una licencia artística más de dirección, como ya digo, buscando un determinado efecto, sentido, impacto; y esto no lo modificamos, todo lo contrario, creo que la representación ese día en concreto estuvo matizada por el intento de censura, y eso permitió a los actores y actrices trabajar con más intensidad dramática, demostrando y mostrando más que en otras representaciones. Hasta tal punto resultó impactante la representación, que muchos de los co-

mentarios posteriores giraron en torno a la fuerza dramática y la energía verdadera mostrada por el elenco. Las flores que nos lanzaron al escenario al acabar la función no fueron fruto de la nada, muy al contrario, fue el resultado de un trabajo consciente y movilizador para con el espectador.



El alcalde (J. Collado) escucha las tristes noticias de su hija (M. Vigo)

**DS:** En tu compañía de repertorio habéis tratado obras clásicas (*El alcalde de Zalamea*, *El perro del hortelano*, *La verdad sospechosa*), al igual que obras más contemporáneas. A la hora de elegir un texto, ¿qué consideras? ¿Qué hace que una obra te atraiga como director?

**RR:** En mis estudios de dirección se nos plantean muchas consideraciones previas a la hora de seleccionar un texto para su realización escénica: que si el elenco con el que se cuenta, que si el pre-

supuesto para llevarla a cabo, que si los medios materiales y artísticos previos, y un largo etcétera que debe condicionar esa elección, y aunque eso es cierto, no lo es todo; yo diría más, son consideraciones a posteriori que pueden condicionar el nivel del espectáculo, o mejor dicho, el nivel de producción al cual se quiera llegar. Pero para ser sincero, lo principal a la hora de elegir un texto, para llevarlo a cabo, es que me entusiasme en una primera lectura, que me motive artísticamente, que me haga reír o llorar, que me despierte imágenes; es decir, que ese texto, de una manera u otra, esté ligado a mí desde un primer momento. Es verdad que, como compañía, antes de buscar ese material textual, te planteas cuestiones de por dónde llevar las líneas de producción planteadas, la línea de repertorio que llevas desarrollada y la trayectoria marcada artística y profesionalmente; todo es un uno y han de cuajar: el interés artístico, la trayectoria o sea, el repertorio, las cuestiones presupuestarias, los tiempos, etc. Pero lo fundamental es que ese texto que finalmente se elija sea una propuesta literario-dramática de primer nivel, y desde ahí dejar libre el corazón y la imaginación para que el espectáculo final merezca la pena.

**DS:** ¿Tiene algún impacto en vuestro trabajo el ser una compañía canaria, a la hora de montar obras de teatro clásico español en la península? ¿Vuestra distancia geográfica afecta para algo vuestra posibi-

lidad de incorporaros plenamente en el mundo del teatro de la España de hoy?

**RR:** Ya te lo contaba en las primeras preguntas de esta agradable charla. No es que tenga “algún impacto”, es que constantemente estamos impactados y matizados por esa cuestión. La distancia con la península, unida al hecho de la rareza de que una compañía canaria monte textos del Siglo de Oro, hace que nos cueste sobremanera entrar en los circuitos peninsulares; y aquí además entra de lleno la cuestión económica. A nosotros nos resulta excesivamente caro llevar no sólo el elenco artístico a la península—esto, al fin y al cabo, son unos cuantos billetes de avión—; lo que sale realmente caro y complicado es trasladar los elementos escenográficos, sobre todo porque yo no me resigno, cuando me planteo un espectáculo, a renunciar a una escenografía corpórea plásticamente efectiva. Muchas veces me animan a hacer teatro sin escenografía, atendiendo a las dificultades de movilidad que plantea el tipo de espacios escénicos y escenográficos que solemos realizar, pero eso me parece reducir las posibilidades de nuestros trabajos. Yo no niego que pueden haber espectáculos que demanden un mínimo o una nula realización escenográfica, pero eso depende de la propuesta, y no tanto de una consideración logística previa.



Rafael Rodríguez en Gran Canaria

**DS:** ¿Qué proyectos has tenido que dejar en el tintero, que te gustaría poder desarrollar algún día?

**RR:** Seguramente algún texto de Galdós, en concreto *Realidad*; es una obra que me atrae y que en algún momento de mi vida profesional tendré que abordar, llevo detrás de ella desde mi último año en la Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático de Madrid. Fue mi proyecto de dramaturgia de final de carrera, y desde entonces cada equis tiempo surge en mi mente. También sueño con dirigir un Shakespeare, o con seguir trabajando los textos del Siglo del Oro. Ya más para casa está una de las obras más significativas de Alonso Quesada. Se trata de *La Umbría*, un texto que aún no ha tenido una adecuada puesta en escena en Canarias, y que tarde o temprano terminaré montando.

**DS:** Aparte de tu trabajo como director, enseñas clases universitarias, y trabajas con niños y

adultos discapacitados. ¿Qué crees que aporta el teatro al ser humano, sea quien sea, tenga la edad que tenga?

**RR:** Capacidad de comunicación, trabajo en equipo y sensibilidad con el otro y con el entorno. El teatro, más allá de su componente artístico y cultural es un medio para lograr fines personales, de desarrollo personal y que le viene bien tanto a niños como a adultos. Haces referencia a una de las experiencias más significativas que estoy desarrollando, el trabajo con discapacitados psíquicos; es impresionante ver cómo este grupo consigue afianzar su autoestima, su capacidad de colaboración y su nivel de concentración y coordinación. En todo momento trato de trabajar su independencia a la hora de desarrollar los ejercicios, y sobre todo las representaciones; de esta manera son capaces de asumir en gran medida una responsabilidad que en otras circunstancias igual les es más difícil. Yo animo a todos, si me lo permites, a que se acerquen a la práctica del teatro, no tanto con la intención de ser actores o actrices, sino para desarrollar capacidades propias, personales, necesarias en nuestra vida cotidiana: comunicación verbal y corporal, desinhibiciones, aprender a colaborar y trabajar en grupo, y un largo etcétera.

**DS:** ¿Qué otros proyectos tienes ahora en el horizonte?

**RR:** A nivel de Compañía tenemos intención de estrenar en el otoño de 2009 *La dama boba* de

Lope de Vega. Nos apetece muchísimo volver con los clásicos del teatro áureo, y en este año especial de Lope no está mal esta divertidísima comedia llena de reflexiones sobre el amor, la intelectualidad o el machismo. Por otro lado, tengo el encargo de la Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico para estrenar el próximo verano, *¿De cuándo acá nos vino?*, también de Lope, y que sin duda es mi gran salto profesional. Este último es un texto de los menos conocidos de un Lope de cierta madurez, pero con un gran atractivo desde el punto de vista de los personajes femeninos ya que plantea el hecho de las madres solteras, eso sí desposeyéndolas de toda mancha de honor, justificando sus acciones, y consolidándolas como una posibilidad social más. En ambos proyectos espero que pueda seguir demostrando el rigor de la puesta en escena.

**DS:** ¿Habéis aprendido lecciones en vuestra primera gira por EE.UU./México que os servirán para hacer diferentes de alguna manera las preparaciones para vuestra siguiente gira?

**RR:** Sin duda, esperamos volver pronto tanto a El Paso como a San Diego. La lección más importante radica en la ilusión y el deseo de hacer las cosas bien.



## **STAGING SPANISH GOLDEN AGE PLAYS FOR ENGLISH-SPEAKING AUDIENCES: AN INTERVIEW WITH LAURENCE BOSWELL**

DAWN SMITH  
Trent University, Canada

Laurence Boswell has an impressive record as a director of plays ranging from the classics to modern works, such as Peter Nichols' *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*. He has worked extensively with the Royal Shakespeare Company and directed Jake Gyllenhaal and Matt Damon (in *This is our Youth*), as well as Madonna (in *Up for Grabs*), in London's West End. He fell in love with Lope de Vega's plays while still at university and has been a tireless champion of Spanish Golden Age theater ever since as a director and, frequently, as a translator/adaptor as well. In the early 1990s he introduced British audiences to an ambitious program of Golden Age plays, which was recognized in 1991 with an Olivier Award (one of Britain's most prestigious theater honors), at London's Gate Theatre. The program included four plays by Lope (*El castigo sin venganza*, *Lo fingido verdadero*, *Los locos de Valencia* and

*El caballero de Olmedo*); two by Tirso (*El conde-nado por desconfiado* and *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*), and Calderón's *Las tres justicias en una*. In 1995 Boswell directed a version of Calderón's *El pintor de su deshonra* for the Royal Shakespeare Company, and in 2004 he was the Director for the RSC's Golden Age Season, featuring plays by Cervantes, Tirso and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Boswell's own production of *El perro del hortelano* was an outstanding success with audiences in the UK and in Madrid at the 2004 Festival de Otoño. This season Laurence Boswell made his first visit to the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario, where he not only directed *Fuente Ovejuna* for the first time, but he also wrote the English text of the play.<sup>1</sup>

**DS:** How did you first become interested in Spanish Golden Age plays?

**LB:** In my first term at university I was researching Joan Littlewood, a brilliant left-wing director from the 1950s in England, and discovered that she had directed a production of *Fuente Ovejuna*. She was a Marxist who saw revolutionary fervor in the play. I was interested by the sound of the story and followed this up by reading a book of translations in the library. It was an American translation from about 1934, as I remember, and the first play I read was *El perro del hortelano*. I immediately wanted to direct it, and I did, not long after. It was the third play I ever directed, the first classic.

[He won the Royal Shakespeare Company Buzz Goodbody Award at the National Student Drama Festival for this production.] I kind of learned about directing from Lope.

**DS:** Can you be more specific about what you learned from Lope?

**LB:** Lope moves actors on and off the stage so brilliantly, so often and so quickly in *El perro*. You start to feel his choreography—to feel that for him meaning and movement are the same thing. So, Lope's choreographic skills and his embodiment of theme in movement helped me understand the importance and possibilities of stage action for actors.

That was the first play where I became aware of the power and possibility of metaphor. *El perro* has beautiful patterns of imagery, especially in relation to the cycle of nature—blossom, flowers, fruit and decay. I had always had a love and passion for words, but it was in *El perro* that I understood how these images can be made concrete for actors; how they need to be embedded in the body and emotions of the characters; how they should be born out of the situation.

For me it was like falling in love for the first time. *El perro* was the first complex play I ever tried to bring to life on the stage; it was where I made lots of simple and profound discoveries about the power and craft of the theater. Lope had drama running in his veins. He lived for the theater. *El perro*, one of his finest plays, is a great place to

learn. I always feel that if you really enter into the playwright's work deeply, emotionally, physically and intellectually, you start to get a sense of the man—at least of his talent. You learn by just living with his craft, retreading his path.

**DS:** What was it that attracted you when you read Lope's plays?

**LB:** With *El perro* it was the many shades of the authentic passion of love on the page in front of me, the direct and dynamic story telling, the audacious mixture of pain and laughter, and the complex living characters. I thought, "This is a good writer. I must direct this play."

**DS:** You've directed a number of Spanish Golden Age plays, including plays by Tirso and Calderón, but mostly by Lope. Do you have a preference for Lope?

**LB:** Yes, I have a preference for Lope. I admire Calderón's sophistication and intelligence. I enjoy Tirso's crunchy realism, but so far, anyway, Lope has always won my heart. There are some Calderón plays and some of Tirso's that I would like to direct—and more Lope.

**DS:** Any plays in particular?

**LB:** For me, *El castigo sin venganza* is a masterpiece. Lope takes on Calderón's style and does it better: the younger man inspiring and yet being surpassed by the old master. In *El castigo* there seems to be more interest in character, and the drive of the plot is slowed a little to allow a greater weight of

contemplation—characters and relationships are given more time to breathe. There is a darkness and seriousness of intent, which must be partly to do with Lope's life situation and everything he was dealing with, but I smell the influence of the younger writer here. This is intuition more than a provable fact.

**DS:** You directed Tirso's *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* in London in 1990. Are you interested in doing it again?

**LB:** I desperately want to direct this one again. The woman is so driven and passionate about getting her man. It's rough and tough, and I think one of the greatest parts ever written for an actress. I bubble with laughter when I read it, and I'd love to share with an audience just how funny I think this play is.

**DS:** Are there any plays by Calderón you'd like to do?

**LB:** I think *La estatua de Prometeo* is really interesting. I love the combination of music and drama.

**DS:** Are the Spanish Golden Age comedies (e.g. *El perro del hortelano*, *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*) easier to adapt for English-speaking audiences than tragicomedies like *Fuente Ovejuna*?

**LB:** Each play has its own challenges. For me, I don't think the translation/adaptation issue is genre-specific but play-specific. Comedy is always challenging because it has to be funny. It's often rooted

in the real contemporary world, and this makes demands on the version. Literal translation is often the opposite of funny.

**DS:** How do you work on creating your own English versions of the plays, specifically *Fuente Ovejuna*?

**LB:** Using a literal translation, I study the text to find out what is suggested and what is behind the text: the movement of the story. Then the characters emerge, the relationships, the journeys of the characters, and then the themes and the ideas become clear. I study the play until I can feel its mechanics. I'm looking for what makes it move through time and space; what its central conflict is—from which it gains its energy; what its internal combustion is; what's the petrol; what's the air, and how does the suck, squeeze, bang, and blow work in this story.

So, I don't start from the language as dialogue or as poetry. Mine is the opposite of the literary approach. The dialogue of a play is like the paint work on a car. You don't get to move something forward in time and space with paint. Most plays are born out of deep inner struggles and unresolved conflicts within the creator. I try to get in touch with these underlying energies in the play, and then I can start into dialogue. Throughout this process I consult Spanish Golden Age experts if there is anything troubling me in the text. [Credits are given to Professor Jack Sage and Kathleen Mountjoy in the theater program for *Fuente Ovejuna*.] Then I begin

working through the scenes to create a version. Over the years, working on these texts, I have come to feel that following Lope's changes in line length is very useful and that much can be gained from this. The use of rhyme is still something I am not convinced by, but this is an ongoing experiment, and I don't rule it out.

The paradox is, of course, that the essential experience of the play can only be accessed through the words on the page. They are the residue of a living experience. Great energies moved through Lope as he wrote these plays, and the squiggles on the page are the record of this living event. My job is to get back to this living energy, try to help the actors discover their part of this, and to find English words which will make this story live.

**DS:** In an interview with Kathleen Mountjoy in 2004 [*Comedia Performance* 2 (2005): 171-192], you referred to aiming over time at "echoing the poetic qualities of the original." Are you any closer to achieving this?

**LB:** The English version of *Fuente Ovejuna* follows the line length of Lope's play more or less accurately. Rhyme is for me the next big step, but an orange is not an apple and Spanish is not English, so I can't see direct imitations of Spanish rhyme patterns. Next time I plan to respond to the "wroughtness" of rhyme—the joy of changing elaborate ornate patterning of language. However, with a short line and so many rhyming words (in the

*redondilla*, particularly), it's difficult to stop the buzz of rhyme getting between the actor and the audience. In the translations I've read in rhyme, the danger is that the effort to find the rhyme can force the adapter into so many convolutions that the syntax of the sentence can begin to seem perverse. It draws attention to itself, rather than allowing for the natural flow and development of the story. This is the most dangerous outcome of the strictly literary approach, but when the adapter can find a natural flow to the line and integrate the wit of the rhyme into it, this is thrilling. I have nothing against rhyme. It is one of the smartest tricks of the poet's trade, but it can get in the way of the living human exchange if not used well.

**DS:** Is it more difficult to work on a version in collaboration with another translator (e.g. David Johnston, who wrote the text of *The Dog in the Manger* for the Royal Shakespeare Company's Spanish Golden Age season in 2004)?

**LB:** It depends on the translator. David and I have been through this process a number of times. He trusts me now, and David is a proper theater man. He pays close attention to the original and yet wants to bring the plays to life in English. He also understands that what happens in the rehearsal room can really push a translation forward. The discoveries that happen in a serious process of skilled folk working together can only support and develop the insights of one person alone with a computer in a



study. Playmaking is a communal event: the translator, actor and director are all part of this community. The wise translator trusts that his contribution can only be improved by the close attention of those people struggling to bring a play to life. David always delivers a fresh, stimulating and speakable draft for rehearsals, and we offer him any number of questions and clarifications from the rehearsal room. He then offers us new words to make sense of these questions and Lope's play.

**DS:** What were the particular challenges of staging *Fuente Ovejuna* at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival? Were there any surprises that you hadn't anticipated with the actors and the audience?

**LB:** The author and the play were new to the actors, most of whom have spent a lot of time with Shakespeare. Shakespeare gives an actor so much—the Shakespearean actor's plate is full. Lope, especially in this play, in which there are so many characters and where everyone is caught up inside great historical political events, gives his actors less clues. He has little time for such detail, so it took a while for the actors to appreciate how they had to contribute. It took everyone a while to get a sense of Lope and to realize how much the play required them to give. Lope is pushing through a big story in *Fuente*, and his concern is strictly narrative. He is light on his feet, etching out his choreography with pace and a lightness of touch. When the actors began to get a sense of the whole, they could cross-reference and

read their character's part in the story. Lope's plays are a dance—they swing across the stage with pace and a powerful force. In his world there is little time to stop and look inside these people. We can infer their characters and their contradictions from their actions and their omissions. The initial question is less “Who am I?” than “What do I do?” So with this play, anyway, there is a lot of searching for the actors to understand what part they play from sensing the whole and considering their actions.



Sara Topham (Larencia) with Jonathan Goad (Fronoso)

Audiences responded in exactly the same way as I have seen them do in Manchester, Coventry,

Hull, London or Madrid. They gasp, they laugh, and they are transported by Lope's storytelling. They can't understand why they are laughing one second and crying the next, but they are gripped by the speed and audacity of the storytelling.

**DS:** Do you think there are any real obstacles for North American or British audiences to appreciate Golden Age plays?

**LB:** Some of the plays seem a bit alien, especially when they start murdering wives and saying it's OK because it's a matter of honor. But the best of these plays exist on a level which reflects the values of their time but reaches beyond anything that is limiting. In fact, I think these plays are much easier for most folk in England and North America to understand than Shakespeare, Jonson or Middleton. Now those guys are difficult.

**DS:** You make very effective use in *Fuente Ovejuna* of music and song. Could you enlarge on this feature of Lope's plays? Is there a difference between Lope's plays and those of Calderón and Tirso in this respect?

**LB:** Music is important in Lope's plays, especially *Fuente* where he uses song so specifically as part of village life. I always use lots of music in my productions, and I also did so with Calderón and Tirso. If we look at some of Calderón's plays, they are half play, half opera (e.g. *La estatua de Prometeo*). I don't think Lope has any unique position as a user of music. In Tirso's *Don Gil* there is a wonder-

ful song at the end of Act I about love being like a mill that grinds us all into flour. They all wanted music and song in their plays. They probably all took inspiration from Lope as he was first up, but in art no one owns a good idea: someone proposes and then the offer is developed.

**DS:** You've praised the training and ensemble work of the actors (in a Festival webcast interview).<sup>2</sup> How difficult was it for them to adapt to the play and its demands? How did you prepare them for their roles?

**LB:** It was hard to go from Shakespeare, who piles on the words and the metaphors and the philosophy, and get down to the lean and honed world of *Fuente Ovejuna*. The actors learned quickly and worked hard. I prepared them first by trying to help them understand the world of the play. I shared the thoughts I had dug up during my examination of the play, as described above. I made them aware that Lope is a great choreographer and that they would need to find a physical movement for each change of thought or action. I invited them to open themselves to the very emotional world of Lope: his plays move forward on wheels of passion, the themes are all there but are carried forward by fast-moving narrative in a world that moves forward with feeling. Many British plays, especially since [Bernard] Shaw, happen in worlds of emotional aridity. The ideas, themes and characters are usually fascinating, but the currency across the stage to the

audience is dry and brain-driven. Lope's interaction with the audience is emotionally based. This is an important distinction. It was one of the main reasons I was drawn to Lope in reaction to the context of new plays I was brought up seeing and reading. Many of the Canadian actors at Stratford come out of a very British-based tradition, and I think they enjoyed this difference.

**DS:** The audience seemed to have no difficulty identifying with the villagers in *Fuente Ovejuna* (especially as your actors portrayed them). Was it difficult to deal with the other characters, which are more remote from an audience's experience?

**LB:** The Commander and the Royals are not written with quite the same empathy or detail by Lope. This makes them harder work for the director, actor and writer [adapter]. They are also involved in political actions and events that Lope could probably take for granted with his audience. Four hundred years later, and without this knowledge on the part of the audience, these characters are a little harder to make work.

**DS:** Is there a temptation to use a broad brush in portraying the Master and the Commander?

**LB:** I think there is a danger of feeling that there is no depth or weight to them. The hints are all there. The Master, for instance, has lost two fathers—his biological father and Juan Pacheco, his loyal regent, who brought him up. Then the Commander arrives—another father. This is a clue to start building

an interior world. Although he never talks of it, it is a big issue for the Master and underpins many of his decisions. He finally finds another father in Ferdinand. There are many such hints that one can pick up.

All his life, Lope was really writing one play hundreds of times over. His actors were constantly playing the same part, so they were interested and sensitive to the most minute adjustments and variations on the standard character. In *Fuente* Lope has no time to dwell on too much character. He is painting on a big canvas with many characters. The actor's job is to be a detective and go hunting and cross-referencing. Shakespeare puts it in your lap. People come on stage and open their hearts and tell you how they are feeling, and what is tearing them apart. Lope does this in *El perro*. In *Fuente* some of the characters require the actors to work independently. They are emotional plays. The actor must bring his passion, his 'duende' to the situation. Shakespeare gives actors step ladders into such revelations; Lope says, "There's the stage, there's the situation: you feel it, you give it a soul."

**DS:** What advice did you give Scott Wentworth as the Comendador? (I heard him say on the Festival webcast that he found it difficult to deal with the lack of "interiority" in the character). By mid-August he seemed to have toned down the more strident aspects that were evident in the final preview in June.



Scott Wentworth as the Comendador

**LB:** Scott is a very intelligent actor with a great deal of Shakespearean experience, and I think he was initially frustrated by the limited assistance Lope gives to the actor playing the commander. There's no soliloquy revealing his hidden depths or internal conflicts. You have to bring a great deal to the part from tiny hints. You have to blow on a few small embers to create something rich and complex. In previews Scott was playing with the sardonic, comic potential Lope gives the Commander—finding this and how it blends with other elements of the character is something an actor needs time and previews to explore.

**DS:** Why did you decide to stress the Catholic aspect (in scenes involving the Kings and the Master) in the music and the costumes?

**LB:** It seems to me to be a spiritual play, finally, set in a world of *realpolitik*. The spirituality of Lope's time expressed itself in Catholic terms. I think that this iconography is so woven into the fabric of the play, that to ignore it would be perverse and to use it might release some of the power of the play.

It would be hard not to reflect the Catholicism of the Master, who is the master of a holy order devoted to defending the values of the Catholic faith, and the king and queen, who are "the Catholic" King and Queen.

I think Lope wants to stress the religious significance of the Master in Scene One, for instance (with his constant references to the holy red cross on his breast and the Commander's), as part of his ongoing satiric intent. These religious guardians, these holy knights, are not discussing how to fulfill their true calling, but are plotting a civil war. They will march, not to the holy land, but down the road to kill some fellow Spaniards for their own personal political advancement and gain. These religious emblems seem to me to be used ironically in this way with the Master and the Commander throughout.

**DS:** Is the staging of the torture scene problematic? Why did you opt for amplification and musical effects?

**LB:** No, not problematic, but exciting. I think it's a really original bit of writing. Given more time, I'd have liked to try it with a little less amplification.



In my excitement about the “radio play,” as we called it, I think we may have overdone the effects. Sometimes you need to get out of the way of the play and let it speak for itself. I think this scene is the most important in the play. I think the villagers’ resistance under torture is what is truly unique about *Fuente Ovejuna*. There were other villages that killed tyrannical overlords in this period—none responded like this.

**DS:** I understand that you liked working on the Tom Patterson stage? [The Tom Patterson Theatre is the third of four indoor performance spaces at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. It seats 482 people on three sides of a long runway-thrust stage.] Can you tell us why?

**LB:** Because it is big and fluid. This is a large, fast-moving play. On the Tom Patterson stage I could bring on a lot of people quickly and get them off quickly. It’s a classical stage, neutral, open, and dynamic, with a close intimate relationship with the audience. Just what you need for Lope.

**DS:** Why do you think there aren’t more Spanish Golden Age plays produced in English?

**LB:** There is the long history of Spain’s isolation from Europe, but times are changing. Spain is back in the mainstream of the European community, and the English-speaking theater world is beginning to open the lid of Spain’s great dramatic treasure chest of stories.

**DS:** Have you directed any plays in Madrid with the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico?

**LB:** Not yet. They have invited me over on a couple of occasions, and it hasn't quite worked out yet for logistical reasons. We have plans for me to go over and direct one of Lope's Roman plays—*Lo fingido verdadero*, maybe in 2010. I did direct *El perro del hortelano* with an independent company last year, which was great fun [Rakatá, in Madrid. This production of *El perro* was also performed at the Festival de Almagro in July, 2008]. They have invited me back over to do another one, which is great.

**DS:** What are the main differences (apart from the obvious ones) between directing a Golden Age play in Spain and Britain or North America?

**LB:** Actors and directors in England are privileged to inherit a long classical tradition and a theater culture which has been radicalized and reinvented constantly, especially since the creation of the Royal Shakespeare Company in the 1960s. This gives the actors skills, confidence and a gang of good classical directors. In Canada and America I think there is still a residue of the old rhetorical tradition that was exported by nineteenth-century actors leaving England. It feels like those countries are still shedding that inheritance and finding their own way, and establishing their own traditions and institutions that can nurture this development. In Spain there is a certain amount of doubt and confu-

sion about the plays and how to handle the language. There are young companies springing up with a passion for language and for these plays. They are discovering a new attitude to Lope and his contemporaries. It is very exciting to feel a small part of all those movements.

**DS:** In the 2004 interview with Kathleen Mountjoy, you said you'd like to direct a Golden Age play in Spanish, with Spanish actors, and that you'd use the complete original text. Was this possible in practical terms?

**LB:** Yes, we did all that and used a full text. No problem.

**DS:** What plans do you have for directing more Golden Age plays in the future?

**LB:** There are many plans. I will keep you posted.

**DS:** Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts about directing Golden Age plays in English with me and the readers of *Comedia Performance*. We certainly look forward to seeing more of your productions, especially here in North America.

**LB:** Yes, well, thank you. And thank you to all the members of the North American academic community who have been so kind and helpful in sending me scripts and journals and opening up for me a new world of Spanish Golden Age insight and enthusiasm.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Laurence Boswell's English version of *Fuente Ovejuna* will be published by Nick Hern Books (London, UK).

<sup>2</sup> See the Stratford Shakespeare Festival web page at <http://www.stratford-festival.on.ca>, under Webcasts: #16—"Introduction to *Fuente Ovejuna*." Also of interest is #17—"Love, Lust and Revenge in *Fuente Ovejuna*."

## *Theater Reviews*

*Fuente Ovejuna*, by Lope de Vega. Dir. Laurence Boswell. New English version by Laurence Boswell. Stratford Shakespeare Festival, Stratford, Ontario, Canada (June 19 to October 4, 2008).

DAWN L. SMITH  
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Since its inception in 1953 the Canadian Stratford Festival had never staged a Spanish Golden Age play, so this season's English version of *Fuente Ovejuna* was welcomed with interest and curiosity. It was part of a move to put Shakespeare back at the center of the Festival's mandate and to include plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries in Europe. *Fuente Ovejuna* was staged in the Tom Patterson Theatre: its long thrust stage and proximity to the audience (seating is limited to under 500 patrons) suggest the ambience of the Spanish *corral*.

Director Laurence Boswell is well-known in Britain for his work both in London's West End and at the Royal Shakespeare Company, where he directed a highly successful season of Golden Age plays in 2004-05. He has championed the performance of the *Comedia* in English for over twenty-five years and in 1990-91 was responsible for presenting

seven Golden Age plays at London's tiny Gate Theatre. This achievement was honored with a prestigious Olivier Award in 1992.

Those fortunate enough to see his staging of Lope's *El perro del hortelano* (*The Dog in the Manger*) in Stratford-upon-Avon four years ago recall his brilliant stage direction, as well as the fine acting and clever English text (written by David Johnston). These qualities were also present in the Canadian production of *Fuente Ovejuna*, which gave us a straightforward, fast-paced and unflinching version that packed a powerful punch with its timeless relevance.

Boswell's nimble adaptation of the text set the standard for future productions in English, effortlessly blending modern colloquial phrases with references to Plato and Xerxes, and handling the challenge of Lope's language with flair and accuracy. Although Boswell shortened some long, discursive speeches, he retained the essential historical facts, deftly presenting them so that the audience could understand the background without losing its way. The famous love debate was admirably rendered; the passages ridiculing the effects of printing found ingenious equivalents in English (Barrildo complained of "information overload") and the satirical allusions to bad poets which enliven the wedding festivities were hilarious (Fronoso condemned Barrildo's verses for: "put[ting] the dog in doggerel"). Mengo's comparison of the poet and the

“buñolero” was turned into a catchy song: “It’s like the poet in his study/ As he sits and has a go/ Tugging at his sticky verses/ Like the baker and his dough”. The language throughout the play flowed rhythmically, sometimes with eight beats (octosyllables), sometimes following a loose pattern of iambic pentameter: the actors handled it all with ease. The audience clearly had no difficulty in following the sometimes complex allusions and responded warmly.

Lope’s play was a new experience for the Canadian actors, classically trained and used to performing many different types of theater. Boswell noted (in an interview available on the Festival webpage) that they were “initially surprised by how much is required of them in the play” (i.e. the effort needed to adjust to Lope’s lean plotline) “whereas Shakespeare gives you shovel loads of material to sift through”. [For further comments on this and other points, see the interview with Boswell in this issue.] Boswell also praised the actors’ skill in ensemble work. This was evident whenever the villagers gathered - notably in the wedding festivities, the meeting of the village council after the Comendador brutally abducted Laurencia and Frondoso and the rapid succession of ensuing scenes. The actors deserve high praise for the energy and sensitivity of their performances. Several were exceptionally good: veteran actor James Blendick played the part of the mayor Esteban with a *gravitas* that was

often moving. Robert Persichini, as the *gracioso* Mengo, big and bumbling in his rough shepherd's clothes, was funny and touching as the hero-in-spite-of-himself. Sarah Topham as Laurencia was outstanding. In her first scene with Pascuala (Severn Thompson) she engaged us with her playful high spirits and her determination not only to rebuff the lascivious Comendador but men in general. She showed Laurencia growing stronger in response to the Comendador's ruthless pursuit, even as she gradually softened towards Frondoso (played by Jonathan Goad in a nicely judged performance). In the scene with the village council she was superb. The audience fell silent when Topham entered in her torn, bloodied wedding dress; the tension was palpable as she delivered Laurencia's withering harangue in words that brilliantly conveyed the rhythm and meaning of the original. It was a moment that brought together the past and our own present – perhaps with the shocking realization that certain themes are timeless. Boswell's orchestration of the scene was masterful. The men sat on the benches lining the long thrust stage, with heads hanging low, or turned aside, ashamed to look at Laurencia while she spoke: their silence was eloquent. Finally, Esteban's gentle reproof to his daughter and his challenge to his companions to rise against the tyrant broke the tension.

In contrast to the care Lope takes in creating the characters of the villagers, he pays less attention



to developing the Catholic Kings and the Maestre. For audiences in Lope's time, as now, they represent the larger events behind the drama played out in Fuente Ovejuna. In their cameo roles, the Catholic Kings were sympathetically played by Geraint Wyn Davies and Seana McKenna, both veteran actors at Stratford. The touch of mutual affection (implied in Lope's text), when the king turns aside from his march to Portugal to greet the queen in Córdoba, was gracefully expanded in a fine detail of stage business: as the villagers waited to learn their fate, the royal couple consulted each other in whispers. Fernando hesitated, but the queen insisted and her merciful counsel prevailed. On the other hand, the part of Rodrigo, Maestre of Calatrava (Steven Kent) seemed stiff and undeveloped. It would have been interesting to see Rodrigo's youth and inexperience emphasized through his body language as well as in the text (historically, he was just a teenager). If more had been made of the difference in age between Maestre and Comendador, the antagonism between them might have been sharper.

As the bridge between the two spheres, the Comendador is a key figure in the play. Scott Wentworth, an American actor long established at Stratford and known for his Shakespearean roles (including Claudius in *Hamlet* this season), seemed to be still searching for a way to portray the Comendador. In an interview on the Festival website, Wentworth alludes to the problem of the char-

acter's lack of "interiority" (implying that Lope provides few clues in the text to the character's thoughts and motives). When I first saw the play, Wentworth was playing him rather like a villain out of Victorian melodrama (a Toronto critic called it "his De Niro-meets-Pacino performance"). Six weeks later he had toned this down. Whereas in the preview he maintained a sardonic, sneering tone throughout, underscoring his sense of privilege and entitlement, by mid-August he had introduced a hint of ambivalence into the confrontation with the villagers that ends with his death: was he a coward? Or sincere in trying to bargain with them? Or trusting in his usual wiles to get his way? Perhaps Lope himself contributes to this uncertainty, as the Comendador's last words are to beg God for mercy. Incidentally, these words were delivered offstage over an amplifier. This rather startling effect may have caused more confusion to an English-speaking audience than it would to those familiar with the *Comedia* (aware that even Don Juan, the heedless sinner, calls on God's mercy as he dies).

The staging of the torture scene was not entirely successful. Boswell followed Lope's direction that the whole scene be heard from offstage, with only Laurencia and Frondoso onstage. The use of amplifiers seemed gimmicky, when normal offstage voices might have served as well. The effect was not improved by the addition of a chorus chanting "Fuente Ovejooona" in swelling crescendo. De-

spite these minor objections the scene still gripped us with its intensity and momentum.

Boswell and composer Edward Henderson used music, song and dance throughout the play in keeping with Lope's own fondness for blending narrative and musical counterpoint. The effect was generally excellent (especially in the wedding scene, where the dancing suggested the influence of flamenco without falling into cliché). The use of sacred music in scenes involving the Maestre and the Kings emphasized the Catholic background to the play (and eight hooded attendants specifically designated "knight monks" were added to the cast list). It could be argued that the religious theme went too far and risked evoking a stereotypical view of Spain. Boswell himself contends that these effects were essential to an interpretation of the play today [see my interview with him in this issue]. In general terms, this raises a question about the staging and reception of Golden Age plays outside Spain that deserves further discussion.

English-speaking audiences, generally unfamiliar with Spanish Golden Age plays, are often disconcerted by the abrupt switches between comedy and high drama which occur in many of them. At the preview of *Fuente Ovejuna* people laughed at the comic moments, but at inappropriate moments as well. Later in the run, when both actors and audience were more relaxed, the laughs came easily and at the right time. After the intermission (be-

tween Acts 2 and 3) the mood palpably changed in both performances. As the plot swiftly unfolded with all its terrible consequences the audience reacted with a total, rapt silence, as if in shock. This was only broken at the very end when Mengo likened his bruised buttocks to “slices of salmon” (“ruedas de salmón”) and, in bit of added stageplay, offered to show them to the Catholic Kings. Things had returned to “normal” and the audience was free to laugh again. Whatever their surprise or discomfiture, audiences applauded enthusiastically at the end of both performances of *Fuente Ovejuna* that I saw, and attendance was consistently high throughout the season (averaging 75% or more in a year when audiences for the Festival were generally down for economic reasons). *Fuente Ovejuna*’s popularity can partly be explained by its novelty for the audience. It was also due to favorable word-of-mouth (although the press critics were somewhat puzzled and grudging in their praise). Above all, its success stemmed from Laurence Boswell’s remarkable gifts as director and adapter/translator. He approached the play and the language with passion and respect that were clearly communicated to the actors and, through them, to the audience. As he commented (in a recent e-mail), “the plays were written to please audiences and ... they connect very directly and ... emotionally in performance”. He is deeply committed to bringing Spanish Golden Age plays to English-speaking audiences, insisting (in the produc-

tion's program notes) that "The Spanish Golden Age is the missing link in the history of European drama" and that the time has come "to examine this last great unopened treasure chest of Western drama". This is very good news for those who love the *Comedia* and strive to make it better known in performance in English. Other directors and festival administrators should be inspired by Laurence Boswell's commitment and the success of this fine production of *Fuente Ovejuna*; Boswell himself deserves many more opportunities to direct Spanish Golden Age plays in North America.

*Life's a Dream (La vida es sueño)*. By Pedro Calderón de la Barca. Dir. Alexander Strain. Journeyman Theater. Trans. John Barton and Adrian Mitchell. Washington, D.C. January, February 2008.

BARBARA MUJICA  
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Journeyman Theater's 2008 production of *Life's a Dream* strove to capture Calderón's Christian humanism in a way that would be accessible and pleasing to modern viewers. The simple set consisted of stylized arches, vaguely reminiscent of the architecture of Toledo, constructed at a slant. The tilting structure created a sense of imbalance, conveying visually the disorientation of the characters. It converted easily into the columns of a palace, and, like the Repertorio Español set, conveyed both the distinctiveness and sameness of the play's two main locales.

Rather than grapple with the timing of Rosaura's entrance, director Alexander Strain eliminates the "hippogriff monologue" entirely. As the play begins, a man's hat sits on an empty stage, while the wind whispers eerily, "Rosaura! Ro-

saura!" This ploy not only peaks the curiosity of the spectators, but also makes them a party to the character's first transformation. Moments later, Rosaura enters and dons the hat, then practices some masculine bows. Now the audience not only knows the character's name but that she is a woman disguised as a man.

While some productions (GALA, Olney) have featured masculine-looking actresses in an attempt to make the credulity of Segismundo and Clotaldo in the early scenes of the play more convincing, Strain's choice of Maggie Glauber, an attractive, slight, and graceful actress, is more in keeping with early modern practices. Seventeenth-century spectators were accustomed to seeing women masquerading as men onstage. They understood that this was a convention; they did expect the women to actually look like men. Due to prohibitions against women in breeches, actresses often used only nominal masculine accoutrements to suggest a disguise. By showing Rosaura's transformation, Strain creates a sense of collusion between Rosaura and the audience. The viewer knows what Clotaldo and Segismundo do not. Rather than in animal skins, Segismundo appears onstage dressed in rags and blindfolded. His first epiphany is marked by Rosaura's gentle removal of the blindfold.

What distinguishes this production is the director's effort to humanize the characters and mitigate the play's harshness. In Strain's production

Basilio, played by Jim Jorgensen, is an anguished father who is caught between the demands of governance and his love for his son. He alternately sits under the trees feeding birds and watches in horror as Segismundo misbehaves. Astolfo and Estrella are similarly humanized. They are political manipulators—he is a sleazy villain and she is a sexy temptress—but underneath it all, she actually seems to care for him.

Even Segismundo's cruelty at Court is minimized. After he throws the servant out the window and into the lake—the audience hears a loud splash—the man returns dripping wet. In this production Segismundo, played by Eric Messner, is an out-of-control adolescent, not a murderer. At the beginning of the play he walks with an apelike gait like a slouching teenager, and when he is brought to the palace, he retains that gait, for in spite of his finery, he is still a beast. Yet, as he matures he stands more and more upright, communicating visually his transformation from brute to man. Messner conveys beautifully the anguish of the confused teenager seeking his own identity and direction. In the final scenes of the play Messner's resoluteness and calm demeanor convince the spectator that Segismundo has indeed become an adult capable of making decisions and accepting responsibility.

Perhaps influenced by British comedy, Adrian Mitchell's original translation transformed



Clarín into a loveable drunk rather than a sly opportunist. Nevertheless, only a master comedian could turn this carousing clown into a profound, multifaceted character. As played by Rex Daugherty, Clarín steals the show. He sings, jests, and ingratiates himself not only to Segismundo but also to the audience. However, behind his antics one perceives a sensitive man who cares deeply for the vulnerable young girl he serves. This makes his death at the end all the more poignant.

*Life's a Dream* is a monumental undertaking for a young theater group with limited means. Yet Alexander Strain and this highly talented troupe of actors proved that with creativity and flair, much can be accomplished with very little. Some in the audience who were familiar with the play found Strain's "kinder, gentler" version rather insipid. Yet, many playgoers who were seeing a *comedia* for the first time were enthralled and commented enthusiastically in the theater lobby after the performance.

*El cuerdo loco*, by Lope de Vega (1602). Dir. Carlos Aladro, Teatro en Tránsito. Almagro Festival 2008, Iglesia de las Bernardas. 30 June 2008 (run June 29- July 1).

ROBERT S. STONE  
US Naval Academy

The Iglesia de las Bernardas is a new addition to the dozen or so theatrical venues established in Almagro over the years. A broad mosaic of oriental rugs covered the floor and backdrop to the stage, with a rectangular form on wheels in the center, which was draped with the red and black Albanian flag. For this is one of several plays that Lope set in Albania, which the current director has rendered as a Balkanized quagmire swimming in water, rain and alcohol. This conceit is not always a comfortable fit, largely because there is little in the poetry to conjure up such liquid imagery. Otherwise, it works quite well since it is easy for the contemporary audience to envision a modern state run by power-mad drunkards. As characters fling about the flasks menacingly, the stage soon becomes littered with empty blue bottles whose contents variously represent water, vodka, or blood. Once during this performance,

Dinardo (Juan Ribó) accidentally spilled water on himself, and later the romantic lead Lucinda (Beatriz Segura) tripped over an empty. Both remained in character, but the miscues underscored a certain overkill.

Having said this, the quality of acting was high, with all cast members taking on at least two roles. Lope's verse was delivered with naturalistic verve, making longer poetic passages stand out. It is a pity that some of these speeches were cut in order to keep the entertainment -- and it *was* entertaining -- moving along. I, for one, have always appreciated the ways in which golden-age drama recaps the action at the beginning of each act, and Lope is a master of plot compression. Still, in the absence of *entremeses*, the decision to excise these is understandable.

Frequent attempts at humor hit the mark more often than not. Israel Elejalde, in the role of Prince Antonio, is adept at crazy facial expressions, and one of the funniest (and more disturbing) moments comes when he exploits his putative madness to humiliate, insult and assault his stepmother Rosania (Manuela Paso). But the play's climactic battle scene is unfortunately reduced to a *Star Wars* parody complete with Skywalker and Vader brandishing light sabers. This is both clumsy and frustrating because it denies us the possibility of watching the actors' faces during their final struggle. The only other glaring weakness in the production is the

sound, consisting largely of samples of schmaltzy songs ranging from “Strangers in the Night” to “Purple Rain.” Intended to enhance the scenes behind which they play, they merely distract anyone literate in American pop culture. Camp has its place in productions such as this one, but it should not be allowed to run roughshod over the play’s tragic potential. This is very much a *Hamlet*-like play, with a newly dead king leaving behind an ambitious widow who hopes to consolidate her power by marrying an equally ambitious, if not very smart, duke. The king’s son, “El cuerdo loco,” would have it otherwise.

The title lets us know that there is no real madman in the mix, only a feigned one who double-crosses his would-be usurpers. However, the entire cast of characters shows signs of insanity, mostly of the megalomaniacal sort, but also evincing the *amour fou* that first sets the drama in motion and casts doubt upon the ethics of the eventual hero. Indeed, more than any moral superiority over his rivals, it is Antonio’s undying love for Lucinda that wins over the audience’s sympathy.

Director Carlos Aladro sees a serious purpose behind Lope’s comedy, but his irreverent treatment fails to back it up. Nonetheless, his program notes make several interesting observations: “En esta ficticia corte de Albania se habla de un Rey Filipo muerto, un príncipe melancólico, una reina joven y francesa, un duque ambicioso. ¿Felipe II, el Infante

Carlos, Isabel de Valois, el Duque de Alba...? Nosotros creemos que para el público de Lope esa lectura era más que posible.” This provocative reading, however, does not come through in this production. More detectable and universal is the theme noted by the director: “El indebido ejercicio de la responsabilidad en el poder de todos los personajes de *El cuerdo loco* les conduce a un callejón sin salida, a la invasión *consentida* por parte del sultán otomano. Encrucijada de la que sólo se sale cuando un grupo de soldados decide liberar al príncipe supuestamente loco, y a punto de ser ajusticiado por una venganza personal, para recobrar el poder. ¿Es una forma de revolución?” The question reveals a desire to elevate Lope’s play to the echelons of *Fuenteovejuna* and other works in which *el pueblo*, represented here by common soldiers and one loyal Spanish servant, hands the reins of power to (more or less) deserving leaders. While I would be hesitant to grant the play such exalted status, it certainly warrants further scholarly scrutiny, and is a welcome addition to the performance stage.

*Fuenteovejuna*, by Lope de Vega. Dir. José Carlos Plaza. Samarkanda Teatro. Teatro Municipal, Almagro. July 8, 2008. (run 7-8 July 2008).

DARCI L. STROTHER  
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This innovative and intelligent version of *Fuenteovejuna* weaves together the past and present, the literary and the historical, fiction and reality, in a way that both does justice to Lope's canonical play, and to the four hundred years audiences have had since then to debate and analyze it.

The performance opened with the closing scene from *Fuenteovejuna*, and with the actors dressed in minimal costumes that would hint at their roles and time period. The delivery of lines was less than brilliant, and it seemed that the characters were going through the motions but not really feeling the impact of their lines, nor projecting them well to the audience. Mengo did not seem particularly "gracioso", nor was there any sense of the great emotional depth that the final scene is meant to convey. It was going to be a very long night indeed, I began to fear!

Suddenly, the scene was cut, as the actors stepped out of their *Fuenteovejuna* character roles and into their personae as “actors”, arguing about the meaning of the text. A lively discussion ensued regarding political content and authorial intention, the pros and cons of “arte comprometida”, etc., and this friction seemed to put in question whether or not they would be able to work together as actors bringing to life this particular text. One helped explain to the others (and of course, in turn, to the audience) the highlights of the historical background. This was done with the aid of a bulletin board downstage that included a map of Spain, along with other general papers, announcements, etc. that gave a sense of what a rehearsal space might look like. The passion and conviction with which each of the “actors” defended his/her point of view, or expressed doubt about the text, stood in stark contrast to their blatantly amateurish depiction of the play itself in the opening scene.

Having reached a general agreement about some of the aforementioned issues, the actors stepped back into their character roles and began again, this time roughly from the beginning of Lope’s *Fuenteovejuna*. Their evolution in skill was clear, and just as a beginning student of theatre often approaches the performance of a classical text without truly understanding the “who, what, why”, etc., but then improves with study, the dialogue and “education” of the “actors” led to a superior ability

to “perform” when they re-approached the text from the beginning. The audience, it seemed, paralleled their growing understanding of and skill at interpreting the text, by demonstrating a growing enjoyment of and engagement with the performance as it unfolded.



Courtesy of Samarkanda Teatro

The in-and-out of character vs. actor roles could have been a source of confusion, but the lighting, stage direction, sparing-but-effective use of props and costumes, and the writing made it easy for the audience to keep up. From this point on, the alternating performance of *Fuenteovejuna* maintained the chronology of Lope’s text, although for obvious reasons it was not represented in its entirety. One of the most humorous moments of the



evening came during the scene in which Mengo and the others are to debate the existence of love. Although proclaiming “Yo no sé filosofar,” Mengo, in faithfulness to Lope’s text, launches into an eloquent versified defense of his viewpoint about the selfishness inherent in human nature. This serves as the catalyst for the group to again return to their “actor” selves, to question why someone like Mengo, a humble peasant, would utter such eloquent verses about such a profound topic, when Lope’s own *Arte Nuevo de Hacer Comedias* specified that it was acceptable for peasants to speak as peasants. This, and others of Lope’s inconsistencies were debated by the actors, and one proposed to experiment with simply transmitting the meaning of the text without using verse and fancy language, by speaking as one might hear on television. The actors were game to give it a try, and re-started that scene as if they were doing it for TV. One actor mumbled his lines unintelligibly, and then proclaimed that he never understood anything on television, so he wanted to represent it that way. Mengo adopted an amusing sing-songish cadence and said “Pues yo no sé leer super-bien” instead of “leer, ¡ojalá supiera!” They all concluded that the television version did not seem to be working, at which point one of the actors brought out a laptop from which she read a defense of the teaching and performance of classical theatre, including how it can expand an audience’s vocabulary and linguistic understanding. It should

be noted that the “rehearsal table” around which they sat at various points throughout the performance, was chock full of “research resources” including the laptop, photocopies, and various editions of the text, strewn about the table for easy access during rehearsals. This gave a strong visual representation of the idea of the dialogic process that exists between text, author, director, and actor, the idea that there can be many interpretations and many versions of one text, and that there is undoubtedly no one “right way” to approach *Fuenteovejuna*.

Another significant performance/rehearsal switch happened during Frondoso and Laurencia’s wedding scene, which caused one of the characters to step into the actor persona and ask why in the world the wedding still would have been held in light of the crisis of the Comendador having just raped a villager. The point was made that in times of crisis and tragedy, in deference to the victims, important social and civic events are normally cancelled or postponed, so as not to engage in merriment during a time of intense suffering. Examples of recent acts of terrorism and of natural disasters were put forth to demonstrate that this principle remains in effect today. Another actor had a dissenting viewpoint, stating that the cancellation of celebrations of joy bestows even more power and control on the aggressor. Yet another actor stated that it was always important for people to come together, whether in sorrow or in joy, since the shar-

ing of those intense life moments epitomized human solidarity. Therefore, after another lively debate, and convinced that it was permissible for their *Fuenteovejuna* characters to hold the wedding, the actors got back to work and set about completing the wedding scene. Each time a “switch” happened, it provided the audience with an opportunity to stop and think critically about the play along with the actors. Although the fourth wall was not breached during the performance in any physical way, I would argue that the intellectual involvement expected of the audience, and which clearly occurred as evidenced by audience response during such scenes, broke down that wall (or at least put some significant dents in it), in quite a different manner.

Other instances of “switch” were interspersed for more comedic purposes. At one point, for example, a character needs to use a weapon which he does not have, so for a moment he becomes the actor complaining that his prop is not there. His fellow actors urge him not to stop the scene’s momentum and to improvise, which he readily does as the quick “switch-back” occurs.



Courtesy of Samarkanda Teatro

Although the *Fuenteovejuna* scenes were generally faithful to the chronology and the spirit of the text, there were some important innovations that warrant mention. One may be a nod to the Almagro Festival's naming 2008 as the year of the woman (or that may be just a coincidence). It is well known that with few exceptions, children and mothers are not normally seen on the Spanish classical stage. However, a life-size child doll was used in one of the village scenes, embraced by its mother, and thereby adding a symbolic reference to the presence of young and old in the discussions of important village matters such as those at hand. This also provided a visual representation of the role of woman as mother, yet another reason for the female characters of *Fuenteovejuna* to be strong and valiant pro-

tectors of their town from the Comendador's aggressions. The doll was used a second time during the torture scene, since Lope's text included a child among the line-up of villagers from whom the inquisitors tried to extract the identity of the Comendador's murderer. Yet another instance of a mother figure appears during the consent-to-marry scene. During Act II of Lope's text, Esteban benefits from the counsel and advice of the Regidor when Frondoso asks for his daughter's hand and Esteban agrees to ask his daughter's opinion of Frondoso. However, in Samarkanda's representation, a female figure stands with Esteban, and appears to discuss ideas and consult with him during this process, suggesting the presence of a mother for Laurencia and wife for Esteban. Whether or not it was the director's intention to give Laurencia a mother in this version, the fact remains that there was an additional female figure and voice added to this scene, and one in whom Esteban sought insight / confirmation that he was doing the right thing for Laurencia's future.

One innovation that came as a great surprise was the switching not only between the performance of *Fuenteovejuna* and the actors' rehearsal, but also the rotating of character roles among the actors throughout their performance. For example, each of the three female actors took a turn as Laurencia, the Comendador role was cycled among the male actors, as were many other roles. Therefore, from

scene to scene, a different actor could be playing the main parts. This was distracting at first, but became more comfortable as the play progressed, and the interconnectedness that is such a part of the essence of *Fuenteovejuna* was represented in this way. At certain points of the play, various actors performed and said the same lines simultaneously, and during Laurencia's pivotal Act III monologue, the entire cast (male and female) became "Laurencia" and performed the monologue together. Certainly, within an acting company it is helpful for the actors to know the lines of each others' roles, both for the purpose of being on cue, and in case the need for an understudy should arise. However, apart from representing that real-world reality facing a group of actors who work together, the director's use of simultaneous line delivery seems to honor the "we are all one" concept that lies at the heart of *Fuenteovejuna*. An injustice to one is an injustice to all. We all celebrate together, we all suffer together, and we all have to learn the daunting Laurencia monologue, one of the most challenging of female Siglo de Oro monologues, as one! Likewise, throughout the play's rehearsal scenes, the group of actors seemed to work together through a process of negotiation and dialogue, but as equals, without the presence of a director figure. Although there were clearly some actor-characters more opinionated or better prepared to share information than others, in the end there was no source of power or authority other than

their collective judgment and will. Since in the real world there clearly *was* a brave and skilled director (José Carlos Plaza) able to bring these talented actors to such a high level of performance of this challenging and multi-faceted piece, it is to his credit to have killed the image of the onstage director and given power to the collective group of actors, just as the characters they played in *Fuenteovejuna* relied on empowerment through collective action, and killed the Comendador.



Courtesy of Samarkanda Teatro

Samarkanda Teatro's version of *Fuenteovejuna*, as mentioned earlier, requires an actively engaged and alert audience. It also requires an audience already well-familiar with the plot-line of *Fuenteovejuna* and its general significance in Span-

ish cultural and literary history. The audience in Almagro was clearly up to the task. They bestowed upon the company a lengthy and rousing round of applause and several curtain calls, and spilled out into the streets afterwards generally abuzz with praise for the innovative performance. However, it is difficult to imagine that this type of approach to a classical Spanish play, even one as canonical as *Fuenteovejuna*, could work well with other types of audiences. It is a play that richly rewards the well-prepared audience member with the chance to be challenged as a creative partner, to reevaluate the play and the historical events it is loosely based on, to consider what lessons classical theatre can still teach us, and to marvel at the sight of a group of performers so adept at transporting us back and forth between Lope's world and ours.



*Crónica de Fuenteovejuna*. By Félix Lope de Vega Carpio. Dir. José Carlos Plaza and Carlos Martínez Abarca. Samarkanda Teatro, “Las Noches de Fonseca.” Colegio de Fonseca. Salamanca, Castilla y León, Spain. July 22, 2008 (one performance only at this venue).

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University of Chicago

The summer series of cultural activities annually offered by the Universidad de Salamanca and the Junta de Castilla y León has become the most popular attraction for tourists visiting the ancient Castilian city. One of these events takes place on the patio of the sixteenth-century plateresque Colegio de Fonseca, which has hosted a diverse variety of concerts, poetry recitals and theatrical performances over the last twenty years. Commonly known as “Las Noches de Fonseca,” this festival presented a 2008 program that included six outstanding flamenco performances and five modern adaptations of literary classics from the English Renaissance and the Spanish Golden Age, such as William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Tirso de Molina’s *El bur-*

*lador de Sevilla* and Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna*. The objectives of these innovative theatrical stagings were to appropriate the leitmotifs cunningly interwoven in the original texts, and to modernize the well-known plot by putting aside the author's point of view.

In the case of Plaza and Martínez Abarca's free version of Lope de Vega's masterpiece, the directors decided to eliminate the political turmoil around which the drama revolves. In this sense, there was no reference either to the fight for the throne of Castile between Queen Isabella I and the Portuguese faction supporting Joanna la Beltraneja after the death of King Edward IV, or to the historical unification of the Iberian kingdoms finalized by the Catholic Kings with the conquest of Granada. These modifications seriously affected the binary structure of the play and Lope de Vega's original intentions for his artistic creation. On the one hand, the drama is left just with one storyline: the sexual and physical abuses committed by Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, the Commander of the Order of Calatrava, and his soldiers in Fuenteovejuna and the subsequent rebellion of the peasants against their feudal lord. On the other hand, the comedy does not contain the means to excuse the playwright's patron's ancestor from his alleged participation in the treacherous attack of Ciudad Real and the support of his lieutenant. As we know, Lope de Vega designed this theatrical invention to please the third

Duke of Osuna, Pedro Téllez Girón, by blaming the old Commander of the Order of Calatrava for misleading the inexperienced Master of the Order. Without this second line of historical events, not only does the young Rodrigo Téllez Girón still appear as an accomplice to his lascivious adviser's misdeeds, but also more importantly, he cannot exploit the imminent crusade against the Moors in Andalusia to make it up to the Castilian monarchs.

This negative portrait of the Master of the Order of Calatrava was in keeping with Plaza and Martínez Abarca's new perspective of the role of the ruling classes in Spanish society nowadays. The elimination of the political propaganda included in Lope de Vega's play sets the tone for the development of a metatheatrical performance where the directors reflected on the need to believe in the power of a monarch or governor who claims to have been appointed directly by God. Clearly influenced by an unprecedented wave of criticism against right-wing politicians after Franco's dictatorship and especially against the current Spanish royal family, they adapted the comedy and shaped it into a series of provocative debates that discuss, first, the outrageous abuses committed by the nobility and people in office throughout history, and, secondly, the impending obligation to deprive the Bourbons in Spain of their undeserved privileges and immunity. The Samarkanda Teatro Company rejects the conservative message in this Golden Age classic and, in do-

ing so, raises the following questions: Do people have the legitimate right to overthrow their leaders when they exceed their authorities? Where are the limits of violence? How do those in power make illegal use of it? And, above all, why should we still respect one of the most emblematic plays of seventeenth-century Spain?

The directors' thought-provoking approach to *Fuenteovejuna* revolutionized their understanding of role assignments. Each actor and actress assumed the identity of a theatrical company member who analyzes and studies the political implications of the play. Not a single person was assigned in principle a particular character from Lope de Vega's original comedy. Nevertheless, when several actors expressed their disagreement with the widely-spread interpretation of a scene, they made space on the stage and organized an improvised rehearsal in which four or five of them interpreted the monarchs, the Commander of the Order of Calatrava, and a few neighbors of Fuenteovejuna. The transformation was very visual given that actors removed the existing tables, chairs and blackboards with maps to disguise themselves. Their personification took place in front of the audience, to whom they wanted to demonstrate that the scene did not work as it was.

One of the distinguishing features of this performance was that throughout the performance more than one person played the same role. For ex-

ample, all the actresses of the Samarkanda Teatro Company ended up interpreting the roles of Pascuala and Laurencia. Gender was generally a factor in the distribution of the roles among the actors. However, in the case of the soldier Cimbranos, his lines were recited both by men and women. In the following table, we can see the role assignation corresponding to the performance of July 22, 2008:

<b>Actor/ Actress</b>	<b>Role</b>
Memé Tabares	Reina Doña Isabel/ <b>Pascuala/Laurencia/Labradora/Cimbranos</b>
Pepa Gracia	<b>Laurencia/Pascuala/Jacinta/Labradora</b>
Ana García	<b>Pascuala/Laurencia/Labradora/Cimbranos</b>
Simón Ferrero	Frondoso/Labrador/ <b>Cimbranos/Soldado/Rey Don Fernando</b>
José Recio	Barrildo/Esteban/ <b>Cimbranos</b>
Fermín Núñez	<b>Rey Don Fernando/Comendador/ Flores/Soldado/Labrador</b>
Fernando Ramos	Juez/ <b>Flores/Comendador/Labrador/Rey Don Fernando</b>
Juan Carlos Castillejo	Mendo/ <b>Cimbranos/Soldado/Labrador/Manrique</b>

This coincidence did not cause a problem. In fact, the idea was to show that any of us could become a victim of our ruling classes in an absolutist regime. By sharing the same identity, the pain and torture affected the whole community of actors. This was brilliantly shown at one moment: two actresses and two actors playing simultaneously the rape of Laurencia by the Commander. Each couple

stood on one of the front corners of the stage and took turns rehearsing the scene twice while a light cannon illuminated their surroundings. This performing symmetry emphasized the brutality and violence of the sexual assault. This reflecting mirror was very effective as it also helped the actors to connect with the audience. Dozens of people attending the performance understood that the consequences of the commander's abuses of power could be extended to anybody.

What seemed a bit contradictory to the rest of the play was the fact that the kings' final trial of the Commander of the Order of Calatrava was kept as in the original. In a performance where the directors expressed their opposition to absolutism, it is problematic to end the show with the royal authority reestablishing the order in society. Was this just the directors' concession to a Castilian population where monarchist right-wing parties tend to be in office? Furthermore, history tells us that this Southern area of Castile played a crucial role in the fight for the throne in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. Salamanca is just thirty-four miles away from the Castle of Alaejos, in Valladolid. This fortress became doña Juana of Portugal's prison after an impotent King Henry IV got wind of his spouse's affair with his private, Beltrán de la Cueva. The child that Juana fathered was Joanna la Beltraneja, Queen Isabella I's opponent. Moreover, we also need to point out that doña Juana of Portugal was

imprisoned in Alaejos by Bishop Fonseca, most likely a member of the family who owned the Colegio de Fonseca, where the performance took place, until the nineteenth century. This religious monastery was initially built to provide an education to any student who could not afford to attend university. With time, however, it became an institution devoted to dealing with the state's bureaucracy. The performance that the *salmantinos* enjoyed on July 22, 2008 on the patio of this magnificent monument manifested this double Janus-faced nature: on one side, it reflects on the validity of the political apparatus in the Spanish society; on the other side, it does not break completely with a theatrical tradition of interpretation. Let's applaud, nevertheless, the directors' courage for making those dangerous innuendos in a time when Spaniards dare to criticize the king's representatives, that is the politicians, but when they are still hesitant to consistently question the role of the highest authority in the kingdom of Spain, the *familia real*.

*Love Is No Laughing Matter* (*No hay burlas con el amor*). By Pedro Calderón de la Barca. Dir. Bárbara Mujica. Devine Theater, Davis Center for the Performing Arts, Georgetown University. (run November 13-16, 2008).

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This production of *Love Is No Laughing Matter*, performed by the theatrical group El Retablo, was sponsored by the Georgetown University Departments of Performing Arts and Spanish and Portuguese, as well as the Program for Cultural Cooperation between Spain's Ministry of Culture & United States' Universities, the Embassy of Spain, and Washington Women in the Theater. Directed by Bárbara Mujica, the performance was based loosely on the English translation of *No hay burlas con el amor* by Donald Cruickshank and Seán Page.

I attended this staging with my students of The Latin American Short Story at Georgetown University. As we had recently explored the question of contemporary renditions into English of centuries-old works in Spanish, I encouraged the students to look for material in the play that might be relevant to this topic. The production did not disappoint, as it



convincingly interwove aspects of modern day society into Calderón's original work. In the opening scene Don Alonso, casually smoking a cigarette, and his personal assistant Moscatela (in the original, a manservant named Moscatel), banter over cell phones. The scene suggests a sophisticated urban atmosphere that parallels that of Calderón's original play.



**Moscatela explains to Don Alonso that she is in love.**

The costumes and set enhanced the contemporary tone. Dressed in sharp suits and curvaceous dresses, the performers conveyed visually the urbane air of Calderón's text. The only dowdy character was the old-fashioned matron Doña Patricia, who in this production replaced Don Pedro in the source play. The set itself suggested a Golden Age *corral*, yet functioned handily as both Don Alonso's bachelor apartment and Doña Patricia's house.

Painted white with black moldings, the set highlighted the colorful clothing and accessories of the actors, especially those of the outlandish Doña Beatriz. While waiting for her mistress to give her orders, the servant Inés perused Vogue magazines. In the scenes in Don Alonso's apartment, the singing maid María (a character not in the original play) constantly poured brandy for her employer and his friend Don Juan. All of these touches contributed to the modern, sophisticated feel.

Although the set, lighting, and sound were all professionally designed, the performers were newcomers. The acting was outstanding. I particularly enjoyed the smart and sassy Inés (played by Tanisha Humphrey) who humorously navigated amongst the scheming lovers.



**Inés tries on Beatriz's hat.**

My students overwhelmingly commented on the performance of Doña Patricia (played by Mercedes López), who, infuriated with her daughters, bellows strongly worded phrases in Spanish. These “lapses” into the work’s original language provided a great deal of humor and seemed perfectly natural. The temporal juxtaposition worked so well that several of my students inquired after the performance as to the original date of publication.



**Doña Patricia discovers a love note for one of her daughters. But which one?**

At the end all loose ends were tied up, and the entire cast joined hands and broke into festive song. The jubilant atmosphere of the final scene was fittingly saccharine, as, of course, love ultimately conquers all while remaining no laughing matter.

## ***Book Reviews***

Armona, José Antonio de. *Memorias cronológicas sobre el origen de la representación de Comedias en España (Año de 1785)*. Ed. Charles Davis with the collaboration of J.E. Varey. *Fuentes para la historia del teatro en España*, XIV. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2007. xiii+351 pp.

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It is nearly forty years since John Varey and N.D. Shergold launched the collection *Fuentes para la historia del teatro en España*. Their object was to publish original documents relating to the theater, many of which were lying unrecorded in libraries and archives at that time. Today the number of volumes in the series is also close to forty. So, why is the present volume only No. 14? It appears that the original editors assigned this number to the work at the outset of the project; however, for various reasons – including the appearance of another edition – its publication was delayed until 2007. Dr. Davis, the present director of the *Fuentes* series, eventually completed the edition and published it with its original number.

The *Memorias cronológicas* are important for several reasons: as the earliest comprehensive study of the history of Spanish theater – from the Middle Ages to the last quarter of the eighteenth century–, and as a fascinating record of a period in which the author played a crucial role as an administrator under Carlos III.

José Antonio de Armona y Murga was born in 1726 in the Basque country. Like his father and elder brother, he found work as a civil servant at a time when Spain was going through many bureaucratic reforms under the enlightened guidance of the king and his ministers. Armona showed himself to be an able administrator, as well as a man with intellectual interests. He made contacts with influential ministers and also with leading Spanish and French scholars of the day. He served for a time as assistant to the governor of Cuba and later as Secretario del Virreinato de México. After he returned to Spain in 1776, he quickly found favor with the king, who personally approved his appointment as Corregidor de Madrid. This important post carried great responsibility in all aspects of local government and Armona proved himself a worthy incumbent, particularly in implementing the reforms planned by the king and his minister Floridablanca. Carlos III later called Armona “el mejor alcalde de Madrid” (5).

As Corregidor, Armona was also Juez Protector de los teatros, with responsibility for theaters

throughout Spain. His mandate included approving plays to be performed, regulating the acting companies and their behavior, and enforcing public order in the theaters. As a typical *ilustrado*, Armona believed in the social value of the theater as a means of educating the public. Charles Davis notes that this belief inspired his work as administrator and as author of the *Memorias*, and that he consistently showed himself to be liberal and tolerant, both with the actors and the public (7). Armona found himself in a unique position to explore the history and function of the theater: the *Memorias* reflect his personal interests, both literary and philosophical; at the same time, they show his administrative concerns about the role of the theater as a moral influence and as a source of funds for the public benefit (both issues that date back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century).

The *Memorias* consist of two parts: the first is devoted to Armona's own comments on the history and evolution of the theater, sub-titled "Desde el origen de la representación de las comedias en España, y particularmente en Madrid, desde que, por averse hecho pública esta diversión, empezó a merecer las atenciones del gobierno" (23). Armona's own experience as an administrator clearly influenced his choice of subjects and the structure of the work. It also largely explains his focus on performance, rather than on dramatic content. His opening observations about early recorded examples of theater in Spain center on Juan del En-

cina and *La Celestina* (although he laments that mixing comedy and tragedy in the latter makes it "monstuosa y desarreglada" [25]). A discussion of Lope de Rueda is based on Cervantes' *Prólogo* to the *Ocho entremeses*, which he quotes almost *in toto*. While acknowledging Lope de Vega's contributions to the theater (attributing 1,900 plays to him), he also calls him "vn célebre creador y corruptor de los theatros de España" (41). Davis notes that in this instance, as elsewhere, Armona relied on the opinions of others, notably his near contemporary Blas Nasarre, and two earlier writers - Bances Candamo and Juan Caramuel. He often repeats their errors, as well: for example where he claims that Felipe III took no interest in the plays of Lope de Vega (43).

Of greater interest, perhaps, to the modern reader and theater historian is the material he provides on the administration of the *Corrales* and their relationship with the charitable hospitals in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Madrid (sections 37-63). Armona also discusses the rebuilding of the former *Corrales* in the first half of the eighteenth century, as well as the building of a third theater known as Los Caños del Peral. The illustrations of the facade of the new Coliseo de la Cruz, together with the ground plan, stage scenery and a cross section showing the *aposentos*, are valuable historical documents. Another interesting document, dated 1682 (a year after Calderón's death), orders that his

*autos sacramentales* (of which forty-seven titles are listed) be turned over to the Villa de Madrid. It also prohibits any further printing of them (section 96).

At times the *Memorias* seem like a ragbag of miscellaneous information. The later sections of the first part deal with matters pertaining to the theaters in Armona's own lifetime, such as a dispute between the hospitals and the Ayuntamiento of Madrid over ownership of the theaters (sections 107-114). He also includes material concerning his jurisdictional dispute with a colleague (who attempted to impose censorship on the use of '*tonadillas*' in the theater [9]). The second, shorter, part of the *Memorias* consists of a series of documents that serve as addenda or appendices to matters discussed in the first part. These include the text of a *Discurso* by the Duque de Híjar, proposing various reforms to the theater, and Armona's ensuing correspondence with the writer; lengthy passages quoted from Bances Candamo's *Theatro de los theatros*, as well as from writings by Ignacio Luzán (the influential advocate of neo-classicism), and others by Luis José Velázquez, author of *Orígenes de la poesía castellana*.

The *Memorias* is a personal work reflecting the preferences and concerns of its author, despite his tendency to wrap himself in a cloak of deference to the opinions of others. They display the qualities of the conscientious, discreet administrator and also of the tolerant liberal reformer. Armona's sincere in-



terest in the theater and the actors is perhaps best revealed in an order relating to the behavior of audiences. After banning the wearing of hats and smoking in the theater, he adds that no one should shout insults at the actors: "pues además de faltar a la buena política, y decencia del público, no es lícito agraviar a quien hace lo que puede y sabe por agradar a todos" (9).

José Antonio de Armona's *Memorias* breathe life into the colorful past of the Spanish theater. They also bring us an intriguing view of the seventeenth-century theater from the perspective of an eighteenth-century *ilustrado*. Charles Davis has written a fine introduction to this new edition, as well as editing and annotating it with the impeccable care we have come to expect from the admirable *Fuentes* series.

Burningham, Bruce R. *Tilting Cervantes: Baroque Reflections on Postmodern Culture*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2008. Paper. 227 pp.

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Professors teaching the *siglo de oro* these days are faced with a choice: presenting Cervantes and his ilk as precursors to our era, or placing them in the context of their history. Clearly most take a combined approach, and this hybrid is evident in Bruce Burningham's book, which, as implied by the title, tilts with the meta-fictions of the seventeenth century and the fragmentations of the twenty-first, and vice versa.

Books such as this will become increasingly common as a new generation of scholars establishes itself. Burningham's achievement is to bring Spanish early modern studies out of the halls of learnedness and into the arena of pop culture, which is not to suggest that his claims are not grounded in theory or well researched. On the contrary, a discussion of the affinities between early picaresque novels and rock-and-roll autobiographies is contingent upon Girardian triangulation, with nods to Bakhtin and

Spivak. It is to suggest, though, that the best parts of the book are those in which the author, freed of the need to acknowledge lit-crit demigods, voices provocative readings of American films ranging from *Stagecoach* to *The Matrix*.

The book's seven chapters juxtapose canonical Golden-Age texts with artifacts of American pop culture in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Their aim is not only to shed light on the continuing impact of "Cervantine" themes, characters and motifs, but also to see if postmodern narrative offers insight into early modern works, "to tease out how these baroque and postmodern mirrors inter-reflect and to examine the function of specularly itself...within these texts" (4). On the American side, this is an admittedly personal exploration of pop culture, and the author largely eschews historiography in favor of aesthetics: "I read my primary texts...first and foremost as literary texts that may or may not provide documentary evidence of some larger social or political phenomenon" (4). This stance is undermined, however, by the occasional need for substantiation in precisely those terms. When Burningham writes, for example, that Lope's "*Last Visigoth* shows the Muslim commander Tarife ordering the execution of Abembúcar and Zara simply because the two have converted to Christianity" (11), he neglects to note that such a conversion is apostasy, a crime punishable by death in Islam. A similar vagueness is evident in the chap-

ter on Salman Rushdie, whom Ayatollah Khomeini condemns “for his stories” (113), not because the author miscalculated the outrage of religious leaders who would see blasphemy in the very title *The Satanic Verses*. If in one chapter Don Quixote, when being compared to a Hindu fundamentalist, is characterized as “at base a single-minded, quasi-religious fanatic” (111), what are we to make of the messianic martial artists of *The Matrix*? In any event, religious extremism lingers in the wings of many of these essays. Burningham’s discursive style serves him well when he is certain of his arguments, notably in the chapters on film. But some of the literary analysis has a spliced-together and overly allusive feel that can get in the way of cogency, understandable given the pastiche of post-modernity that we carry into the twenty-first century.

Chapter one sets up an equivalency between Moors and Native Americans in *comedia* and in cinema, respectively, and intriguingly explores how unlikely heroes are constructed when they must protect women from “savages,” thus justifying acts of conquest ex post facto. Chapter two gives Marilyn Manson and Johnny Rotten the kind of legitimacy once enjoyed only by Madonna, but not for their music so much as their writing—they are latter-day Lazarillos whose autobiographies “exist as nothing less than picaresque novels in and of themselves that uncannily mirror the best-known mock autobi-

ographies of baroque Spain” (32). Later it is asserted, “Lazarillo’s Erasmian critique of the avarice and penury of Spain’s early modern clerics has become [Manson’s] ‘Satanist’ attack on Christianity itself” (50). For Burningham, a crucial aspect of *picardía* is performance, i.e., theatricality and self-representation, and this connects the early-modern romances of upward mobility with the meteoric stars of rock-and-roll. (Since Johnny Rotten’s pure punk rebellion was a reaction to the overblown, over-produced music that preceded it, and was eventually followed by Marilyn Manson’s re-glamorization and re-sexualization of the genre, it might be interesting to set these texts next to the decadent picaresque novel *Estebanillo González*, which purports to tell the true life story of a chameleonic, alcoholic performer willing to go to shocking lengths to get attention.)

Yet the fact remains, as a long but necessarily partial list in chapter two shows, that since its inception, picaresque narrative has reappeared regularly as an expression of a variety of personal, social and economic crises, and the genre will likely endure for as long as we have disgruntled youths and authors. Indeed, citing the stylistic impact (on language, dress and attitude) of *A Clockwork Orange*, Burningham describes cyberpunk literature as “a postmodern permutation of picaresque narrative under the influence of the punk movement of the 1970s and the ‘hacker’ culture that emerged in the

wake of the Internet revolution of the 1990s" (36). If the picaresque orphan is the first anti-hero in the Western canon, he gets to know his world in the manner of a knight errant, i.e., through encounters with his society and its geography. Thus it is a short hop from the picaresque novel to the western outlaw or counter-culture rocker, and an even shorter one to the road film. Cervantes, it could be said, does this one better by inventing the buddy movie.

The third chapter is the first to deal directly with Cervantes, specifically with "Rinconete and Cortadillo" and "The Dogs' Colloquy." Burningham keenly notes how Cervantes transformed the picaresque from a monologue to dialogue, and furthermore, how "the anticlericalism of baroque Spain has given way to the anti-consumerism of the contemporary United States" (60). This leads to an interesting analysis of the split personality at the center of *Fight Club*, the critical point being that narratives can provide us with essential clues to their own nature, forcing us to reconsider their overall meaning from the beginning. This moment arrives famously in the *Quijote* when the plot is suspended with swords literally hanging in mid-air. In *Fight Club*, it is when Brad Pitt's character confesses that when he works as a film projectionist he habitually inserts lurid single-frame images into otherwise pedestrian scenes.

While it may be hard for some to take a chapter called "*Toy Story* as Postmodern *Don Quixote*" seriously, Burningham's effort to do just that is bolstered by the fact that the *Quijote* itself was primarily a pop-culture phenomenon and only secondarily a crucial critical success. It is quite possible that future academics will look back on Pixar's first blockbuster film as a seminal text. Still, some skepticism and a bit of confusion will arise from the near one-to-one correspondences set up, for example, between Quixote's horse Rocinante and Buzz Lightyear's "wounded spaceship that, like Cervantes's dual-natured 'basinelmets'...also doubles as the torn carton in which he was packaged" (80). This chapter problematizes "Yo sé quien soy" – "the most important way in which *Toy Story* engages *Don Quixote* in an intertextual dialogue is through the development of a particularly postmodern reading of the central figure's identity crisis" (86). Such an arresting reading, however, is to some degree based in claims requiring the support of socio-historical context, for example, "Don Quixote's dementia stems, in part, from his inability to bear the weight of his own ordinariness in an all too unjust world" (87). The more sustained argument here (laying the groundwork for *The Matrix*) involves the realization on the part of protagonists that they are the artificial (and reproducible) products of authors, studios or factories, as the case may be.

Chapter five returns to the realm of letters and life, identifying imprisonment as a motif in both Cervantes and Salman Rushdie, and setting out to explore “the interplay between captivity and narrativity, and more importantly between madness and reading” (108). The provocative thesis seems to spread thin as a parade of characters in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* and other works is shown to bear an “uncanny” resemblance to Cervantes or his creations, leaving the issue of madness and reading largely untouched. The author also wishes to indicate “where the larger histories (political and literary) of Spain and India intersect with the personal histories (again, political and literary) of Cervantes and Rushdie” (104). This topic probably deserves an entire book, but is treated here only fleetingly. Ultimately, the chapter pronounces that “the voice of an author – any author – matters in the world” (120), a formulation of literariness that, while increasingly acceptable, Cervantes or Rushdie would probably not condone.

Burningham’s treatment of the Terry Gilliam film *Brazil* is brilliant. The parallels with the *Quijote* resonate convincingly, which should come as no surprise considering that Gilliam tried and failed to make a film based on the Spanish novel. This essay takes up the matter of Don Quixote’s putative deathbed retraction of his visions in the Cave of Montesinos as a means of reframing the film as a hallucination that could plausibly begin at several



points in the narrative. The reflections here are fruitful and multiple, ranging from a discussion of Plato's cave to implications for modern terrorism. This chapter and the earlier one on *Fight Club* are the best in the book. A final chapter on *The Matrix* trilogy is an admirable exercise in juxtaposing fundamentally dissimilar works and teasing out what they reflect of each other, namely reading the shifting reality of Matrix/Zion as the equivalent of Don Quixote's enchantment/disenchantment. Similarly, the conclusion considers *vanitas* and specularity in Sor Juana, Velázquez and latter-day Beverly Hills.

Don Quixote lives, and not just thanks to the oft-referenced musical *Man of La Mancha*. He has also become a cinematic type in films such as *The Truman Show*, *The Mighty*, even Disney's latest endeavor, *Bolt*. The picaresque, too, lives on in these and other films, most recently and wonderfully *Slumdog Millionaire* (also based on a novel). Over the centuries, Lazarillo and Alonso Quijano have been adopted, adapted or co-opted by those in the employ of what we call the entertainment industry.

Twice in this book it is pointed out that Gramsci equated hegemonic force with consent, which is why the Italian prisoner also insisted that we turn a critical eye upon all aspects of our lives. *Tilting Cervantes* is most convincing when contemporary texts are explained as complex and contradictory (i.e., baroque) products of our commercialist culture, but this treatment is only sporadically given to

the Spanish source texts. Granted, this may be because the author feels that such work has been done elsewhere already. Nevertheless, while scholars will take issue with a few of the book's broader claims for the *comedia*, the picaresque or the *Quijote*, the greater value of this project is to invite fresh perspectives on texts that are four centuries old.

Paun de García, Susan, and Donald R. Larson eds.  
*The Comedia in English: Translation & Performance*. Colección Támesis, Serie A: Monografías,  
261. Woodbridge, UK: Támesis, 2008. xx + 295  
pp.

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This excellent volume appears at an appropriate juncture in the historical interaction between classical Spanish theater and the English-speaking world. As the editors show abundantly in their introduction, recent years have seen an upsurge in the number of translations and English-language performance of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish pieces, with an especially gratifying number of productions by top professional companies. The volume is predicated on the notion that translation, performance, performance studies, and comparative studies of Renaissance theater across nationalities all feed off one another. Thus, the editors have wisely collected essays from scholars, translators, directors, and reviewers, and have divided the volume into sections devoted to these important as-

pects of the page-to-stage process. Yet the majority of the individual essays also exemplify the inevitable collaborations and conflicts between the participants in the process and within the thought and practice of each creative artistic and scholarly worker. The contributors have done an admirable job of wedding theoretical insights to practical considerations, but as the general principles governing activities like translation and directing are finite in number, there is an inevitable repetition of certain notions (e. g., *traduttore / traditore*), which can be slightly trying for a reader of the whole volume.

Paun de García and Larson have set up three major themes: 1) translating and adapting the *comedia*; 2) directing and contextualizing the *comedia*; and 3) viewing and reviewing the *comedia*. In the first main section, the reader is treated to a wide variety of issues and perspectives. There is a good deal of discussion (with illuminating examples) of the problems of translating polymetric verse, while the solutions range from almost exact reproduction of the original strophic patterns to much freer, yet still poetic versions. Furthermore, in some of the essays the term “translation” is applied not just to stage utterances, but also to seventeenth-century allusions, stage action, and acting style. While the currently popular term “cultural translation” is sometimes used in an all-too-vague sense, the essays in this section provide ample “hands-on” illustration of what is involved in the complicated *trans-*

*latio*, across time and cultures, of all the facets of the *comedia* and the *entremés*.

The second section contains informative and thought-provoking perspectives from a series of directors and from a translator who was closely involved in the production of her own English-language playtext. Their backgrounds vary from professional full-time directors (with varying degrees of previous exposure to Spanish classical theater) to scholar/directors. Again, the wealth of concrete detail about the specific productions shows how directorial decisions can depend on a whole gamut of factors, some having to do with local exigencies or limitations and others stemming from a broad vision of the play's meaning and mood. One also gets a valuable glimpse of how modifications needed to be made in scripts or how acting styles (especially those of seasoned professional actors) had to be adapted to fit the sort of language and stage conventions prevalent in the *comedia*.

The last section offers a group of critiques (in the senses of both *reseña* and *crítica*) about performances viewed by the authors or about English-language playtexts they have attempted to evaluate. The essays all come from well-established *comedia* scholars who combine (very felicitously) their broad knowledge of the genre and their in-depth experience of certain texts with a sensitivity to performance values such as audience reaction, theatrical venues where the performances took place, play-

ability of certain translations in certain contexts, and even the identities and ethnicities of the actors.

If there is any cause for slight dissatisfaction with the volume, it would only reside in the repeated emphasis placed on the *distance* between seventeenth-century culture and “our” culture in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Anglophone countries. The “target” culture posited in most of the essays ends up being either the authors’ own view of what post-modern life is or should be, or that of a typical highly-educated theater audience. In this procedure, we may lose sight of the fact that, *por fas o por nefas*, some of the “antiquated” elements of Golden Age Spain, especially in the areas of religion, gender roles, personal honor, and social hierarchy are not as thoroughly *letra muerta* in our countries as one might suppose.

There is one other issue not dealt with in the volume (and, given its contributors’ objectives, there is little reason to expect that it would arise): the relationship between accessibility to audiences and English-language performance in the US. The assumption made by most of the contributors, probably correct for large portions of the English-speaking world, is that performance in English is one of the keys to reaching larger and more numerous audiences. Yet, given the current (and probably future) linguistic situation of the US, there are significant portions of the nation where performance in the original Spanish might increase accessibility.

This factor should increasingly affect decisions by theater companies in the future as they seek to make the *comedia* better known.

It bears repeating that not only is the volume's appearance perfectly timed to match the exciting work being done with Spanish classical theater in the English-speaking world, but its consistent high quality and the breadth of the contributed essays promise to make it an invaluable tool for theater professionals and scholars for years to come.

Vélez de Guevara, Luis. *La Luna de la sierra*. Eds. William R. Manson y C. George Peale. Delaware: Juan de la Cuesta—Hispanic Monographs, 2007. Paper. 263 pp.

RUTH SÁNCHEZ IMIZCOZ  
Sewanee: The University of the South

El estudio de esta comedia, a cargo del profesor Arturo Pérez Pisonero, empieza con un análisis de la obra en general de Vélez de Guevara y de como este autor sigue y mejora con su arte los principios del *Arte nuevo*, introducidos por Lope de Vega. Señala la insistencia de la crítica en ver a Lope de Vega en las obras del autor andaluz, pero es rápido al señalar que los personajes de Vélez tienen sus propias voces, su propio tono y que sus acciones tiene distintas motivaciones, en particular en esta obra, que teatralmente hablando tiene también personalidad propia presentando una serie de variantes en el sistema fijo de la comedia áurea (14). El primer acto de la obra es una unidad completa en sí misma, tiene las mismas características que un entremés y además termina en boda. Sin embargo, Vélez lo enlaza hábilmente con los dos otros actos creando un



drama de honor que termina de forma atípica sin un baño de sangre o una tragedia evitable.

Se presentan cuatro niveles de lectura para esta obra. El primero que se estudia es el histórico: el viaje del ejercito de los Reyes Católicos hacia Granada, con la presencia de la Reina Isabel como uno de los personajes principales. Esta campaña proporciona un marco épico para enmarcar los personajes históricos. La aldea de la trama es sólo un punto de descanso en el viaje de la Reina antes de volver a la marcha, pero va a ser durante esta espera que tendrán lugar las dos peripecias teatrales: la primera protagonizada por los villanos, la segunda por los villanos y los nobles (17).

El segundo nivel es el rústico y está formado por ese primer acto de tipo entremesil. La serrana que huye porque no quiere casarse con el alcalde, el novio elegido por su hermano, se encuentra con la Reina por causalidad y le cuenta de sus amores con Antón y como no quiere casarse con el alcalde. La Reina solucionará el problema casando a la pareja de enamorados: Pascuala y Antón, y también al hermano de la serrana, Mengo con Bartola, y finalmente nombrando al alcalde repudiado, Gil del Rábano, alcalde vitalicio. Este final de bodas concluye el primer acto, pero va a servir como punto de partida para los siguientes actos que forman la comedia de honor. La belleza de Pascuala es tal que tanto el Príncipe don Juan como el Maestre de Calatrava se enamoran de ella y han de conseguir su favor. Bar-

tola actuará de tercera, y Antón al final decidirá que es incapaz de “guardar propia mujer / hermosa” (vv. 3575-76) y le pedirá a la Reina que le descase.

El tercer nivel estudiado es el mitológico por las analogías entre seres humanos y dioses que aparecen a lo largo de la trama. Las comparaciones que Pérez Pisonero presenta, y que explica hábilmente, no son de individualidades sino combinaciones que se dan en un personaje. La primera analogía que se da es la de la Reina que se la compara con las diosas Diana, Artemis, Palas y Afrodita, de cada una de ellas toma ciertos atributos que le van a ser necesarios a lo largo de la obra. En el otro extremo de la comparación está la del Maestre con el dios Ares, y está en el otro extremo, porque como se explica, es el mismo Maestre el que se compara con el dios de la guerra griego Ares y mas tarde con Marte, en lugar de ser los otros personajes los que hagan las comparaciones, como es en el caso de la Reina.

El último nivel presentado es el astrológico y viene sugerido por la continua presencia de la luna en la obra. Esta perspectiva no sólo establece “relaciones analógicas entre las funciones de los de los personajes y los astros [sino que] da a la pieza una proyección onírica.” (22) El análisis está basado en las que se consideran características típicas de la luna y que son las que dan origen a su simbolismo: su dependencia del sol para brillar y su carácter mutable. Así pues desde la perspectiva social, si la Reina Isabel es el sol, Pascuala es la luna que refleja su

luz, ya que después de todo, su apodo es la Luna de la sierra. Como se puede ver en cualquier nivel que escojamos para leer esta comedia, podremos ver la relación existente entre los personajes y las figuras mitológicas que representan y que les dan su personalidad o “conducta dramática” (23).

El siguiente paso es el análisis de los espacios presentados en la comedia: la sierra (Sierra Morena), la aldea y la corte (Adamuz). Todos ellos espacios convencionales dentro de la literatura y del teatro. En el caso de la sierra se van a mezclar lo poético y mítico con lo real a través de los personajes. La aldea también va a tener una doble vertiente, por un lado la caricatura rural y por otro el ideal bucólico y dentro de éste se encontrará la casa de Antón y Pascuala que representa el espacio del honor. El tercer espacio es la corte que simboliza el poder en el personaje de la Reina.

El análisis del tiempo hasta cierto punto se ve ligado a la representación mitológica de los personajes. Las dos temporalidades que predominan en la obra son la mañana y la noche, que están relacionadas con los dos focos de luz anteriormente mencionados: el sol y la luna y por relación analógica la presencia en escena de la Reina o Pascuala. Pero el tiempo cronológico no es único presente en la obra: el tiempo del amor, el tiempo de la espera, el tiempo de la aldea y el tiempo de la corte todos juegan un papel en la obra y a la vez marcan el ritmo a seguir. Este ritmo lo vemos en las peripecias teatrales que

Pérez Pisonero señala para cada uno de los tres actos y junto al tiempo marca el espacio donde las acciones tienen lugar.

En el análisis de los personajes se da una unificación de las ideas presentadas a lo largo del estudio de los diferentes niveles y como en estos personajes junta Vélez de Guevara mitología, historia y hasta cierto punto la presencia del actor, pues como se sabe estas obras muchas veces se escribían pensado en una compañía de actores en particular. Cabe indicar también que el dramaturgo tiene en cuenta al público, a quien va dirigida la obra, y con quien va a buscar una complicidad, pero ante todo lo que quiere es no ser ignorado, aplaudido sí, abucheado también. Lo importante es que haya una relación o una comunicación.

La segunda parte de esta introducción es el análisis textual y la transcripción de la obra. Para los criterios de transcripción el profesor Peale sigue los ya establecidos para esta colección, para la edición de esta obra en particular usa cinco documentos: tres de ellos del siglo XVII y dos más modernos un del XIX y otro del XX. Para la fecha de composición de la obra señala que está relacionada con la aparición de *Peribáñez* de Lope de Vega. Peale no niega que *Peribáñez* sea la fuente inspiradora de *La luna de la sierra*, pero también indica la “la innegable originalidad de la parodia de Vélez” (52). También señala la influencia de Góngora en Vélez y si a esta influencia se le añaden los patrones que este

dramaturgo usaba al escribir, la fecha de composición de *La luna* se pone en el año 1614.

*La luna de la sierra* no es *Peribáñez*, pero no por eso deja de ser una obra entretenida, divertida en sus momentos y, a la vez, un buen ejemplo de como siguiendo las instrucciones de Lope en *El arte nuevo*, se puede crear de verdad algo nuevo y original.

Vélez de Guevara, Luis. *Los sucesos en Orán por el marqués de Ardales*. Eds. William R. Manson y C. George Peale. Newark, Delaware: Juan de la Cuesta—Hispanic Monographs, 2007. Paper. 237 pp.

RUTH SÁNCHEZ IMIZCOZ  
Sewanee: The University of the South

Con esta edición el profesor C. George Peale saca a luz una de las comedias menos conocidas de Vélez de Guevara y que parece haber estado relegada a los fondos de la Biblioteca Nacional. Su tema y composición indican que fue escrita para ser representada sólo en palacio y para un público específico. Simplemente el número de actores necesarios para su representación hubiera sobrepasado el número normal de una compañía de corrales, y también parece estar dirigida, aunque sea indirectamente, a elogiar al Conde-duque de Olivares.

El estudio crítico de la obra está dividida en tres partes: la primera a cargo de Melveena McKendrick, la segunda de Javier J. González, y la tercera de C. George Peale. La profesora McKendrick se encarga del estudio poético de la obra, de la obra

como comedia de moros y cristianos, y como comedia de hombres y mujeres. En su análisis, indica claramente como esta comedia estaba dirigida a un público específico que tenían unos intereses y expectativas muy concretos, y como esto se puede convertir en un problema para el lector actual, pues éste no va a poder decidirse si el dramaturgo escribe en plan serio o en plan irónico (13). El protagonista de la obra, como el título indica, es el marqués de Ardales, pero esta información, según indica McKendrick, no sirve de ayuda para datar la comedia, ya que los sucesos que relata parecen ser totalmente ficticios, aunque el marqués no lo sea. La obra tiene un ligero sabor propagandístico, no sólo a nivel personal (el retrato de Ardales como héroe nacional), sino a nivel nacional (las constantes luchas en el Mediterráneo con los moros). La comedia va a presentar el consabido tema de las relaciones entre moros y cristianos y el de la superioridad cristiana, que en esta obra llega a rayar en lo absurdo (15). Con todo, Vélez también se va a asegurar de que haya un enemigo lo bastante digno para que su derrota se vea de verdad como triunfo cristiano. El tono triunfalista no se mantiene a lo largo de toda la obra; en ciertos momentos llega a adquirir una perspectiva totalmente irónica, y según McKendrick, esto se puede ver claramente en el tono exagerado de los elogios de los españoles (16).

Otra forma de marcar las diferencias entre las culturas es la presencia o ausencia de ciertos valo-

res. En este caso, Vélez presenta la cortesía como una de las características más sobresalientes de los cristianos y la que les va a distinguir de los moros, pero en realidad es todo un estereotipo. El otro rasgo que Vélez presenta es el racismo en los cristianos. Esta comedia va a presentar de forma consciente e inconsciente la preocupación existente con las diferencias de raza, cristiana, mora y hebrea, que aparecen en la obra y que coexisten en la vida real. Así pues surge la pregunta de que por qué presenta Vélez estos temas, si es cuestión de parodia (asumiendo una complicidad del público), o de presentar sus propios prejuicios. La figura del gracioso viene de la mano de Mahagún, un sirviente moro que “al mismo tiempo es una caracterización que se construye sobre toda una serie de prejuicios raciales” (19). La raza hebrea está representada en la figura de Ayén, que representa “la figura tradicional en su capacidad de mediador entre cristianos y moros” (20). Sólo que este personaje va a servir también de comentador sobre la figura del marqués y de los cristianos en general. Y los cristianos van a tener comentarios sobre los moros y judíos. Como se puede ver, es un encadenamiento de opiniones y estereotipos que va de una raza a otra y ninguna sale ganando. McKendrick señala que hay un punto más importante en la obra, lo que ella llama “invisibilidad cultural” que es la falta de reconocimiento de una cultura de los signos empleados por otra, y en el caso de esta obra, hay que tener en cuenta no sólo



los prejuicios propios del dramaturgo, sino los del público, como entes singulares y como ente colectiva, que presencian la representación.

La comedia tiene también una trama secundaria que relata las relaciones amorosas de varias parejas, una mora y dos cristianas. Así que a lo largo de la obra se van a hacer comparaciones entre el Amor y la Guerra. La pareja mora la forman Filayla y Ambrán que están recién casados, y las parejas cristianas las forman Lope y Clara, quienes están claramente enamorados, y Leonardo y Elvira. Tanto Filayla y Ambrán como Lope y Clara se ven afectados por la guerra que los va a separar. La guerra también va a afectar a Elvira, una mujer engañada que va en busca de su honor perdido y que “en la mejor tradición de la mujer varonil, abandona temporalmente su papel sociosexual para recuperar su honor y su felicidad y reintegrarse luego en la sociedad patriarcal como la esposa que desea ser” (23). Elvira tardará un poco más en conseguir su meta, pero al final de la obra, las tres parejas estarán reunidas siguiendo los códigos sociales del momento.

Javier J. González centra su estudio en la relación que hay entre los sucesos históricos reales y los presentados en la obra, las personas que realmente existieron y los personajes, y la influencia que los romances moriscos hayan podido tener en el desarrollo del tema o de los personajes. También analiza la importancia que una obra como ésta tendría como propaganda en la corte. Leyendo la obra con

cuidado se puede ver la cantidad de detalles que describen las reglas de gobierno en Orán, las expediciones y la vida en esa ciudad. González indica que, debido a esta minuciosidad en los detalles, Vélez tuvo que tener más de una fuente de información. Debió de consultar con personas que vivieron allí. También debió de haber leído los informes, relaciones y cartas que llegaban de África, en particular la relación que envió el propio marqués de Ardales al rey, y que se encuentra en el Archivo General de Simancas. El estudio es interesante a nivel histórico por la cantidad de información reunida que presenta y el análisis que hace la figura del marqués de Ardales.

En el tercer estudio, C. George Peale explica el procedimiento que ha seguido para la transcripción, que es el mismo que usa en todas sus ediciones de Vélez de Guevara, y que facilita en gran manera la lectura de las obras, tanto para los neófitos como para los ya enterados. Si entra en detalle al hablar de la jerga morisca representada en la figura del gracioso, es por las excepciones que contiene en relación a otros textos auriseculares.

Esta comedia, como se ha dicho al principio, es una comedia de palacio, histórica en su contenido hasta cierto punto, pero un poco lenta y no siempre fácil de interpretar para el lector de hoy en día.

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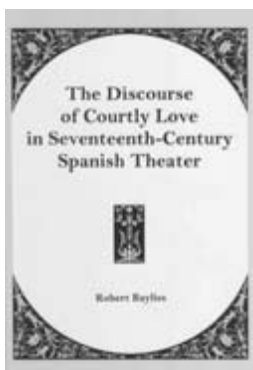
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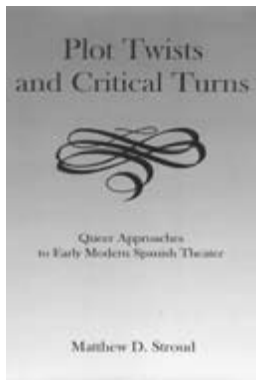
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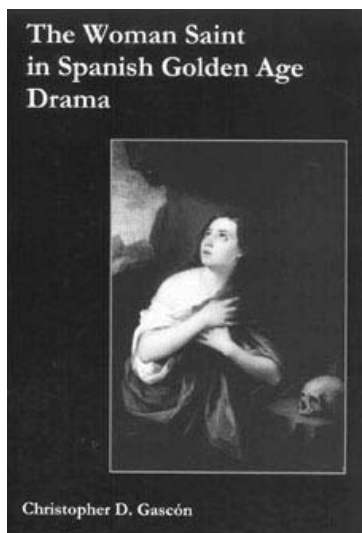
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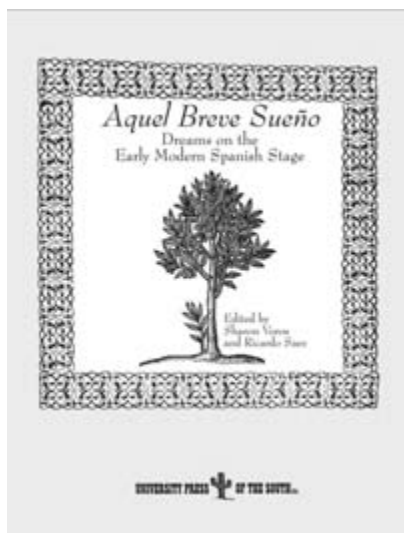
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Contributing to Part II, dedicated exclusively to Calderón's *La vida es sueño*, are Nelson López, Christian Andrès, Ricardo Sáez, and Christine Aguilar-Adan. Topics include staging and directing *La vida es sueño*, a comparative study on Pierre Boasituau's *Theatrum Mundi* and Calderón's *La vida es sueño* and *El gran teatro del mundo*, poetic structure and style in the *redondillas* of *La vida es sueño*, and *La vida es sueño* and the political institution of the prince.

