**Diversifying the Classics: Suggestions for Production**

In our experience working on translations and adaptations in Los Angeles, we have found that theater practitioners are both surprised and delighted by what the *comedia* has to offer. From Lope de Vega and Guillén de Castro to their distinguished peers from across the Atlantic, Mexicans Juan Ruiz de Alarcón and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the corpus has a great deal to offer those who want to venture beyond Shakespeare to imagine a more diverse repertoire.

*Comedias* were plays for the people: performances took place in open-air theaters, where audiences of all classes and both sexes commingled. At the same time, the works are sophisticated dramas, offering pointed reflections on the constructed nature of class and gender as well as the performativity of social roles, issues that resonate with audiences today. The *comedia* offers fantastic roles for women, many of them written for famous actresses in the period—unlike in Elizabethan England, in Spain there were women on stage, although audiences still relished cross-dressing plots.

Our translations aim above all for language that will work for actors and allow them to shine. We have tested our playtexts both in our workshop, which is regularly attended by practitioners, and in staged readings by Chalk Repertory Theatre, New York Classical Theatre, and the UCLA Department of Theater. Staged readings at New York Classical Theatre and Red Bull in New York, and workshops at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Ontario, have also featured our work.

Each translation includes a dramaturgical introduction and brief annotations. Dramaturgy packets are available for each play. We are also available to supply additional support for productions as necessary, and to translate or adapt any play not on the list below. Please contact Barbara Fuchs at [fuchsbar@humnet.ucla.edu](mailto:fuchsbar@humnet.ucla.edu) for further information, or follow our work at:

<http://diversifyingtheclassics.humanities.ucla.edu/>

**The plays (full text PDFs online at http://diversifyingtheclassics.humanities.ucla.edu/):**

**•Guillén de Castro, *The Force of Habit*:** Can gender be learned and unlearned? Félix and Hipólita, two siblings separated at birth, are brought up in the habits of the opposite gender. Kept close by his mother’s side, Félix is timid and sensitive. Hipólita, trained by her father on the battlefield, is fiercely attached to her sword. When the family is reunited, the father insists on making the siblings conform to traditional gender roles. Helped along the way by their respective love interests, the two gradually assume traditional positions, but their journeys expose the limitations of the gender system. **Substantial roles: 7 male, 4 female. Staged readings by Chalk Rep (2014), the Southern California Shakespeare Festival (2017) and New York Classical Theatre (dir. Stephen Burdman, 2019).**

**•Ana Caro, *The Courage to Right a Woman’s Wrongs*:** What if Don Juan had to face the woman he ghosted? And what if she were transformed into a sword-wielding, powerful opponent? When Leonor decides to become Leonardo and follow her fickle sometime lover to Brussels, she earns the love of ladies and the admiration of all, using her wits as deftly as her sword. As the servant Ribete notes, this world is stranger than any play, but Leonor’s courage will set things to rights. **Substantial roles: 5 male, 4 female. Staged readings by UCLA’s Theater MFA program (dir. Michael Hackett, 2019), at Red Bull’s Revelation Readings (dir. Melia Bensussen, 2020), and at Stratford Theater Festival “Uprising” series (dir. Miriam Fernandes, 2021).**

**•Lope de Vega, *The Widow of Valencia*** introduces audiences to Leonarda, a young woman intent on protecting the freedom afforded by her husband’s death. In a Valencia turned upside down by Carnival, she rejects her suitors by day but makes her own arrangements by night, selecting a masked lover who is not allowed to look at her. Hers is a balancing act of appearances and disappearances, aspirations and desires. How long can she keep everyone in the dark? **Substantial roles: 7 male, 3 female. Staged reading by UCLA’s Theater MFA program (dir. Michael Hackett, 2017). New York Classical Theatre (dir. Stephen Burdman, 2018), Actors Gang (2019).**

**•Lope de Vega, *Women and Servants:*** Recently rediscovered in Madrid’s National Library, this *comedia* emerges from its 400-year sleep with a remarkable freshness: it presents a world of suave dissimulation and accommodation, where creaky notions of honor and vengeance have virtually no place. Lope depicts a sophisticated urban culture of self-fashioning and social mobility, as the titular figures outsmart fathers and masters to marry those they love. The sisters Luciana and Violante prefer their choices to men of higher standing, and are more than capable of getting their way. **Substantial roles: 8 male, 3 female. Produced at McMaster University (dir. Peter Cockett, 2018). Staged readings by Chalk Rep (2015), New York Classical Theatre (dir. Stephen Burdman, 2018), and CSULB (dir. Jeff Janisheski, 2019), and at LA ESCENA (dir. Sylvia Blush and Jean Carlo Yunén Aróstegui, 2018).**

**•Calderón, *To Love Beyond Death*** dramatizes the moment when ethnic, religious, and cultural differences turned Spanish subjects against one another in the 1560’s Rebellion of the Alpujarra. When the Crown attempts to eradicate Andalusi culture from Spain, the Moriscos—Muslims forcibly converted to Christianity, as well as their descendants—are put into an impossible position, and turn to armed resistance. The tragic story of the Morisco Tuzaní’s search for revenge after the death of his beloved Clara is as much about love and devotion as it is about civil war, destruction, and the violent emergence of a modern nation. **Substantial roles: 10 male, 4 female. Staged reading by UCLA’s Theater MFA program (dir. Michael Hackett, 2018).**

**•Lope de Vega, *A Wild Night in Toledo:***In Spanish popular culture, the phrase “una noche toledana” refers to a long and sleepless night of wild, often amorous intrigues, or of unrelenting annoyances. Such is the case in this funny, fast-moving play, in which young men and women cross paths at a hostel in a single night. Under the covers of darkness and disguise, they use ingenuity and humor to navigate personal desires, negotiate collective frustrations, and test whether they can rewrite their destinies alongside their identities. **Substantial roles: 10 male, 3 female. Staged reading by UCLA’s Theater MFA program (dir. Michael Hackett, 2015).**

**•Guillén de Castro, *Unhappily Married in Valencia:***Amazingly modern, this biting comedy shows what happens *after* the traditional happy ending. Two married couples air their disillusion with marriage, while the cross-dressed mistress of one of the husbands merrily manipulates one and all. With everyone attracted to the wrong person, innuendo, accusations, and revenge steal the show. **Substantial roles: 5 male, 3 female. Staged reading by Independent Shakespeare Company (2019).**

**•Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, *What We Owe Our Lies***: Mexican writer Alarcón imagines a Madrid in which a foreign suitor can wreak havoc with preexisting alliances. Urbanity and urban space are at the heart of this play: how do you sort out your affections when the women you court live literally on top of each other, in a house with multiple stories? Parents remain offstage as sons and daughters must figure out their obligations to each other and to who they are, or at least who they say they are. **Substantial roles: 5 male, 4 female. Staged reading by UCLA’s Theater MFA program (dir. Michael Hackett, 2016) and Antaeus Theatre Company (2019).**

**•Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, *The Pretender***, ***or A Man Beside Himself***: The question posed by this play is as poignant today as it was 400 years ago: what actually makes us “us”, and what makes “them” something different? Can a man determined to test the fidelity of his beloved pass for another by simply changing his name? Set in the heyday of a world-wide and multi-cultural Spanish Empire, Alarcón’s play explores how love and jealousy operate in a radically expanded world, where identity seems newly set adrift. **Substantial roles: 4 male, 3 female.**

**Sample excerpts:**

1) **Hipólita says goodbye to her sword after living as a man for twenty years**

Guillén de Castro, *The Force of Habit*

I cannot take this quietly—

I must say a proper goodbye!

*She draws her sword*

Oh sword! I worship

the cross of your hilt

and your blade of steel.

I can have no hope

of buckling you on again,

for it would be cruel,

dishonorable, disloyal

to take you up once I’d placed

a knitting needle

where you used to be.

And yet,

how much more honor is there,

valiant sword,

in detecting an ambush

in your polished steel

than in gazing at braids

in the looking-glass.

Time is unjust—

being a man

suited me so well,

that just as my disposition changed,

my gender should have changed too.

Oh my sword!

Banished from my side,

perhaps you could bend a little,

although you are made of steel,

and return where you used to be,

so close and well girded.

Sword of my life,

heaven knows,

this hand never

drew you to your shame!

And if obedience

did not force my hand,

no one could take you from it.

I would guard you and defend you.

Let him whom I obey

bear witness that I leave you

out of obedience and honor,

to my great sorrow,

but not for cowardice, no.

2) **Leonor and her servant Ribete discuss her plot for revenge:**

Ana Caro, *The Courage to Right a Woman’s Wrongs*

Leonor Be quiet, fool.

Ribete Oh please.

Must I play the coward?

Couldn’t I be the brave servant?

Leonor Is that what’s bothering you?

Ribete Why must servants always be

hungry cowards, and play the fool?

Can’t a man be born daring

even if he is not born noble?

What? Couldn’t the servant

be twice as brave as his master?

Leonor Well said.

There’s a reason I chose you

as my friend and not my servant.

Ribete Ribete of Seville is at your side,

so fierce that he thought nothing

of taking on three at once,

as he planted his bloody flag

amid the green banners of war.

But on to the living:

what will you do now?

Leonor We must find my brother, Ribete,

or everything will be lost.

Ribete And if he recognizes you?

Leonor Impossible.

I was just six years old when he left.

He won’t remember my face.

As long as he takes me in,

my courage will avenge my wrongs.

Ribete So now you’re Don Leonardo,

some newfangled Lord Ponce de León?

Leonor Yes, that’s my name now.

Ribete Oh master, and how the women

will be pestering me now,

with their love letters to you!

Just like in a play,

where the fool is the go-between

and must take care of everything.

There’s no plot, there’s no scene,

where a servant with good taste

won’t come in handy.

Without him, there goes Troy!

Is there anything more delicious

than when a servant yokes together

the stables and the court,

or makes a fierce thundering king

laugh at his wild antics?

Leonor There are people coming.

You’d better hide.

3) **The widowed Leonarda chooses not to remarry and complains about men’s low intentions**

Lope de Vega, *The Widow of Valencia*

You can accuse me of nothing,

and unless you’ve something to add,

I’ve already heard you out.

Tell me, Lucencio,

should I risk sinfulness

for your sake?

Would you want that for me,

when all the authors agree

in condemning remarriage?

Is not prudent and chaste widowhood

universally praised?

Even jealous slander

cannot last for long.

The truth soon comes out,

and a good name rises,

like a phoenix from the flames,

to welcome a new day.

Who, I ask you, would want

one of those candy-coated dandies

in a rakish hat,

short feathers, new sashes,

shirt open just so,

and Italian linen—

nice and clean on the outside,

old and grimy on the inside.

Boots so tight they won’t come off,

not for months at a time,

baggy stockings down below,

and a mustache out to here,

with toupees and pomade,

fake necklaces to impress with,

scented gloves—

a great one for sonnets and love letters.

With those immaculate hands

he’ll snatch at three thousand a year,

ready to take his ease

between sheets of the finest silk.

Before a week’s out,

he’ll be off to find other women

or return to old loves,

and so forsake mine.

He will come home late,

I will be jealous.

He’ll throw my money around,

and then we will argue

about what he has and has not done.

I’ll hide it and he’ll give it away,

taking on debts in my name.

The police will come knocking,

there will be yelling and screaming.

Day and night, he’ll stir up the house.

And the more I give in,

the more he’ll grant me

such fine and noble titles

as Countess Kicked-and-Slappedintheface.

I have said quite enough.

4) **Luciana and her servant Inés discuss what women really mean when they make promises**

Lope de Vega, *Women and Servants*

Inés If Teodoro’s jealousy is all about your not receiving the Count’s letters, you must take them secretly.

Luciana And my oath?

Inés I’ll get to that. Just listen, and don’t lose any more sleep over it. Did you say which hand wouldn’t take any letters?

Luciana No.

Inés Well, then you have an easy way out! Even if you can’t remember exactly what you swore, if you said the right, then you’ll just take them with the left. It makes me laugh to hear lovers speak of truth when they’re apart—that’s just fine nonsense! When a woman says, “I cannot even dine, I am so miserable,” she will have lunch ten times over, because lunch is not dinner, see? When she says she has not slept, she means “in her clothes,” for of course she slept once she got undressed. And when she says, “When I don’t see you I find everything tiresome,” of course she’s not referring to parties, or men, or money. If she swears over and over again “to be your slave for life,” clearly it’s because life is but a day. Is there any religion—look at the examples I come up with!—that can make a meal last from one day to the next? And in love, which is a tyrannical faith, no woman should save a man for tomorrow when she can have him today.

Luciana You must be joking, Inés. Surely you are not serious.

Inés Yes, this is all just nonsense—I’m just joking with you. An honorable woman should profess only truth, constancy, and chastity until love leads to holy marriage.

5) **Don Álvaro Tuzaní finds his dying bride amid the ruins of Galera:**

Calderón, *To Love Beyond Death*

Oh, what a fool is he

who claims love makes

two lives into one!

If only that were true,

you would not die now,

or I would not live.

Either I would die too,

or you would live on,

sharing one fate.

Oh heavens, who witness my sorrows,

oh mountains, who look upon my misfortunes,

oh winds, who hear my sufferings,

oh flames, who see my burdens,

how could you allow

the best light to be put out,

the finest flower to die,

the sweetest breath to be lost to you?

Oh men who know of love,

tell me, in this sorry pass,

what should a lover do?

Seeking his lady

to consummate their long-sought love,

he finds her bathed in blood,

a lily gilded with deathly varnish,

gold refined by the hottest fire.

What should a wretch do

when he finds a tomb

instead of a bridal bed?

When, seeking a goddess,

he finds only a corpse?

But no, don’t answer me,

I do not need your counsel.

Pain will be my guide

over any advice.

Oh, impregnable Alpujarra,

theater of the crudest victory,

of the most cowardly deed,

of the basest glory!

If only your peaks and valleys

had never seen this most unlucky beauty!

But what is the use of complaints,

when they are lost in the wind?

6) **Having accidentally brought her love and her rival together, Lisena fears the worst**

Lope de Vega, *A Wild Night in Toledo*

Who has ever suffered like this?

On this night when I feared that

my jealousy would prove justified,

when I thought everything

was well under control,

with my enemy locked up

and rendered harmless,

that vile Innkeeper

puts them in the same room!

But no, he doesn’t know what’s going on,

or that they’re in there together.

I put them into that room,

so that I could be safe,

as long as I kept hold of the keys.

He must have given them that room

because they fear the Law,

and they can reach the monastery from there.

Unaware of my misfortune,

he’s put the four of them together!

Together! They are in there together,

with plenty of time and space

to enjoy each other at will.

Just kill me with love, jealousy!

And I was the key,

I gave Florencio and Gerarda

the chance to be together!

My God!

How can I live with the thought of it,

happening now, this very moment?

Florencio with another woman,

before my very eyes!

Together in the same room,

holding, embracing one another.

How can I know it, see it,

allow it, hold my tongue?

How can I not call on the heavens?

How can I not scream and rant?

How can I not go mad,

and break down those vile doors,

though they were made of diamond

to barge in and kill them?

Just kill me with love, jealousy!

And I was the key,

I gave Florencio and Gerarda

the chance to be together!

Florencio, you traitor,

I am Lisena. If you claim you left me

because I gave you reason to be jealous,

then why do you resort to deception?

I have always loved you, you cruel man.

Don’t give me reasons to forget you.

You were my first love—

I never loved before or after.

Oh Heavens, I am trembling.

Did they come here to meet?

Have they already recognized each other in there?

Does she want him to hold her in his arms?

Or are they hiding in silence,

because Gerarda doesn’t know

who has come in,

and Florencio doesn’t know it’s Gerarda?

What terrible confusion!

But they will talk.

One of them will certainly make noise,

and the other one will ask something.

Or simply because he hears breathing,

looking nervous, Florencio will ask,

suspiciously,“Who is there?”

How can Gerarda, after hearing his voice,

possibly stay away from him?

Lovers’ arms work more quickly than their voices.

How then, my sorrows,

am I to endure you,

when you allow them

to enjoy each other?

I will not allow it,

I will tear you to pieces, oh doors,

And may fire consume you,

though I die in the attempt

a Samsonto this dreadful temple.

Just fall on me, kill me already.

And I was the key,

I gave Florencio and Gerarda

the chance to be together!

7) **Eugenia bemoans her marriage and describes her ideal man**

Guillén de Castro, *Unhappily Married in Valencia*

How could I be jealous

of a husband I retain

yet have no love for, only disdain?

And what I’ve suffered here

all comes from this:

that the husband who’s bound to me

has never had my love.

Women want men

who are not so easily moved,

who are what they seem

in thought, word, and deed.

It’s inevitable, I fear,

that you’ll come to detest the one

you’re stuck with for life,

especially if he acts like a woman.

I trust you,

and hope you can find

a cure for my woes:

I’m dying to have a husband

who is the opposite of mine—

a tireless man about town,

a hungry wolf.

Loving all and keeping none,

his sword abides

by fury and reason,

punching one here

and slashing another there.

That kind of man consumes me—

he is just my type.

And don’t be surprised,

oh, Antonio!, that these men

drive a woman crazy.

Those are men to love,

those are men to adore,

they heat up the senses,

and set a woman on fire.

8) **Diego tries to sort the lies from the truth amid accusations of false love**

Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, *What We Owe our Lies*

How can my unlucky stars

so mislead a noble heart

to such malicious judgments?

Go on, oh ingrate, oh cruel one!

It’s so subtle of you

to deny your fickleness

by inventing faults for me!

Given that Leonor adores me,

and that don Sancho wants me

to take her hand in marriage

who is it up to? Who?

Is it not up to me?

If I loved her and just pretended

to disdain her for your sake,

what would stop me now,

when I know that you know

and that I pretend in vain?

Especially when you’ve so wronged me

in both word and deed,

that I’d be justified in changing my mind,

and even in taking my revenge.

Would I not be knocking down her door?

Would I not be fulfilling my designs?

Would I be here explaining myself to you?

Would I be hanging on your every whim?

So if I leave her and seek you out,

if I flee her and pursue you,

if I adore you and despise her,

if I beg you and resist her,

how can you not be satisfied?

What other possible crimes

am I accused of to justify

this notorious treatment?

Say that you’ve changed your mind, you traitor,

say that don Sancho is richer,

say that I am a poor wretch,

say that your love was feigned,

say that I do not deserve you;

but do not deny my devotions,

when their strength could have pierced

even a heart made of stone!