

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, Red Bull Theater, the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, and the UCLA Department of Theater. Productions for each play, including by the Guthrie, Miami New Drama, and various schools and universities, are listed below.

Full text PDFs of all our plays are [online](#), or available in print from [Juan de la Cuesta](#). Each translation includes a dramaturgical introduction and helpful annotations. We also offer [videos](#) of scenes, [dramaturgy packets](#), and more resources on our website.

We are available to supply additional support for productions, including creating a bilingual script, and to translate or adapt any play not on the list below. Please contact Barbara Fuchs at fuchsbar@humnet.ucla.edu for further information, or follow our work at: <http://diversifyingtheclassics.humanities.ucla.edu/>

Our plays

• **Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Love is the Greater Labyrinth*:** A madcap take on Greek mythology by famous Mexican author Sor Juana. Swashbuckling adventure, romantic farce, and sly political fable all rolled into one, the play follows Teseo (Theseus) as he goes to meet his fate in the jaws of the monstrous Minotaur. Little does he know that his greatest test will come when he escapes one labyrinth and heads straight into the even more disorienting complications of love. Princesses Fedra and Ariadna pull him in two different directions—which path will he choose?

Substantial roles: 8 male, 4 female.

Staged reading by Red Bull Theater (dir. Melia Bensussen, 2021).

• **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), Red Bull Theater (dir. Melia Bensussen, 2020), Stratford Theater Festival (dir. Miriam Fernandes, 2021), Bay Area Women's Theater Festival (dir. Dawn Monique Williams, 2022). Productions by Winthrop University (dir. Matt Ferrell, 2021), the Guthrie Theater (dir. Maija García, 2022), Miami New Drama (dir. Peter Romano, 2022), Polaris Theater Company (dir. Dawn Monique Williams, 2022), Skidmore College (2023), Bowdoin College (2024).

• **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, but they soon find this "natural" arrangement an uneasy fit.

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).

• **Guillén de Castro, *Don Quixote*:** Based on the same episode of Cervantes's novel as the lost Fletcher/Shakespeare work *Cardenio*, Guillén's version is an over-the-top tale of love and deception, ranging from absurdist comedy to *telenovela* machinations. Cardenio loves Lucinda, who is also pursued by Cardenio's master, the Marqués Fernando, whom Lucinda wants nothing to do with. Dorotea, previously seduced and abandoned by Fernando, teams up with Cardenio so they can both regain their former lovers. The drama is punctuated with the mad fits of Don Quixote, who imitates the knights of ages past and declaims in faux medieval tones, both amusing and alarming the barber, the priest, and the squire.

Substantial roles: 4 male, 2 female.

Staged reading by UCI's Brown Bag Players, Fall 2023.

• **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).

• **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). Production: UC Riverside (dir. Melanie Queponds, 2023).

• **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 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).

• **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).

• **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 Andalusí 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).

• **Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, *What We Owe Our Lies***: Mexican playwright Alarcón imagines a Madrid in which a foreign suitor can wreak havoc with preexisting relationships. Urbanity and urban space are at the heart of this play: how do you sort out your affections when the women you woo live literally on top of each other, in a house with multiple stories? Parents remain offstage as young lovers 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 global and multicultural 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, valiant sword,
how much more honor is there
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,
and to my great sorrow,
but not for cowardice, no.

2) Leonor and her servant Ribete discuss her plot for revenge on Don Juan.

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) **Luciana and her servant Inés discuss what women really want.**

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.

4) 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?

5) 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 Samson to 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!

6) **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!

7) **The widowed Leonarda prefers independence over a new husband.**

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-Slappedinthe face.
I have said quite enough.

8) 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,
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.