

UCLA Diversifying the Classics: Movement and Dance in the Comedia



In comedia, stage directions are sparse and rarely indicate anything beyond which characters have entered the scene, although they occasionally describe clothing, sounds, and even blocking. In place of elaborate stage directions, playwrights often embed the actions and movements directly in the text. Verbs of movement indicate the actions characters are taking as they speak. In the following example from Guillén de Castro's *Unhappily Married in Valencia*, Hipólita's reaction is not the only clue for Valerián's action: "Look upon me, / and let your heart melt / at the size of my love / and the barriers it has overcome" (Act 1, Sc 1). While there is no stage direction to indicate that Valerián is moving closer and/or touching Ipólita, a phrase like "barriers...overcome" indicates his intrusion into Ipólita's personal space. Modern translations either maintain this language of action in the text itself or add stage directions to aid staging and movement; in those cases, the translator's interpretation of a scene or character action will be made explicit.

At times, movement becomes central to the action of the play in the form of diegetic dance within the narrative, often in moments of celebration, like weddings, or simply as entertainment for the characters to partake in. These moments can serve to either contrast with or highlight themes within the play. In Lope de Vega's *Fuente Ovejuna*, for example, dance is used to highlight the tension between the villagers and their cruel overlord as they reluctantly celebrate his return (Act I), or when he interrupts a wedding to abduct the bride (Act II). Modern productions of this play have opted to use folkloric dance traditions from the communities being addressed by the production; a show drawing parallels between Lope's plot of a despot overthrown and the ousting of the Puerto Rican governor in 2019, for example, might make use of Plena, a Puerto Rican style of music created on plantations and used by the oppressed to communicate with one another through song.

Resources:

Los empeños de una casa, 2013 Almagro Festival of Classical Theater
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYTA3Vmoiw>

Harley Erdman and Susan Paun de García, eds. *Remaking the Comedia: Spanish Classical Theater in Adaptation*. London: Tamesis, 2015.