

CONTEMPORARY PRODUCTIONS OF SPANISH GOLDEN  
AGE DRAMA IN GREAT BRITAIN AND SPAIN

by

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Contemporary Productions of Spanish Golden Age Drama in Great Britain and Spain

Thesis directed by Professor Oliver Gerland

### Abstract

Spanish Golden Age Drama is mostly studied in language departments where it is treated as literature to be read. Few scholars have studied Spanish Golden Age drama in contemporary performance. The purpose of this study is to examine and compare contemporary productions of works by Spanish Golden Age dramatists in Spain and England. In 1986 the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico (CNTC) was formed in Madrid with the express purpose of staging plays of the Spanish Golden Age. In the first half of the dissertation, I examine three recent productions directed by the CNTC's current head, Eduardo Vasco: *La estrella de Sevilla* (*The Star of Seville*, Lope de Vega?), *El pintor de su deshonra* (*The Painter of His Own Dishonor*, Calderon de la Barca), and *El Alcalde de Zalamea* (*The Mayor of Zalamea*, Calderon). In 2004, led by renowned director Laurence Boswell, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) staged a Spanish Golden Age season in English; in the second half of the dissertation, I examine the RSC productions of *El perro del hortelano* (*The Dog in the Manger*, Lope), *Las casa de empeños* (*The House of Desires*, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz) and *Pedro de Urdemales* (*Pedro the Great Pretender*, Miguel de Cervantes). My objective is to analyze the dramatic texts in terms of contemporary production challenges, and to compare the production styles of the CNTC and the RSC. Two distinct production approaches emerge. The work of Vasco tends to emphasize a directorial concept that aims to make the plays relevant to contemporary audiences while the work by Boswell and his

colleagues, building on the RSC's tradition of training actors to speak verse, focuses more closely on the text and the creation of emotionally compelling characters.

## Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: In the Land of the Misfits: <i>Estrella de Sevilla</i> .....	20
Lope de Vega.....	22
Play synopsis.....	27
Textual analysis.....	31
Production analysis.....	45
Conclusion.....	60
CHAPTER THREE: Calderon's Juan Roca and His Internal Fight with Honor.....	62
Calderón de la Barca.....	64
Play synopsis.....	65
Textual analysis.....	68
Production analysis.....	81
Conclusion.....	91
CHAPTER FOUR: The Emergence of a New Honor Code in <i>El Alcalde de Zalamea</i> ...	94
Play synopsis.....	96
Textual analysis.....	103
Production analysis.....	112
Conclusion.....	123
CHAPTER FIVE: A Monumental Task at Hand: The RSC's Revival of the Spanish Golden Age.....	127
Leading up to the RSC Season.....	129
A pioneer for the Spanish Golden Age in English: Laurence Boswell.....	131
Translation and Adaptation.....	146
CHAPTER SIX: The Power of Language and Love in Lope's <i>The Dog in the Manger</i>	155
Play synopsis.....	157
Textual analysis.....	163
Production analysis.....	171
Conclusion.....	188
CHAPTER SEVEN: Meta-theatrical Conventions: Creating Space for Sor Juana's Voice Then and Now.....	190
Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.....	192
Play synopsis.....	195

Textual analysis.....	201
Production analysis.....	214
Conclusion.....	232
CHAPTER EIGHT: Exploring the Marvels of Theatre in Cervantes' <i>Pedro the Great Pretender</i> .....	
	234
Miguel de Cervantes.....	236
Play synopsis.....	237
Pedro and acting.....	242
Production analysis.....	247
Conclusion.....	262
CHAPTER NINE: Conclusion.....	265
WORKS CITED.....	280

## Contemporary Productions of Spanish Golden Age Drama in Great Britain and Spain

### Introduction

I remember quite vividly my first experience in Spain in 1992. The constant bustle on the streets and sidewalks, my first taste of *sangría*, the smell of chorizo and Spanish tortilla in the busy cafés, the old stone buildings and palaces and the animated and energetic demeanor of the people reeled me in; I had never experienced a place so vibrant and theatrical. Madrid is akin to a live theatre event in motion. As I began to study literature, painting and Spanish music, my fascination only grew. The Museo Prado exhibits some of the most talented and vital Spanish painters of all time, including Diego Velázquez. Velázquez was a well-known painter of the 17th century and worked at the same time that Spain was developing its Golden Age of drama led by Lope de Vega and supported by Cervantes, Tirso de Molina, and Calderón de la Barca. Velázquez's paintings provide a very "theatrical" view of Spanish people. The canvases convey heightened emotions, and feature expressive faces and a wide-ranging view of life. It was my respect for Velázquez's work, along with the works of El Greco and later Goya, Picasso and Dalí, that spurred my interest in Spanish theatre, especially that of the Golden Age. A culture that produced such excellence in the visual arts must have produced comparably talented theatre artists and yet many theatre scholars dismiss Spanish Golden Age theatre and literature. Consider the following statement in the *History of The Theatre* by Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy about Golden Age

drama: "Its preoccupation with a narrow code of honor and failure to probe deeply into human destiny are limitations which make it less universal than the best English work. Nevertheless, many of the plays were widely known and imitated outside of Spain, and at home they established a lasting standard" (139). I asked myself, "How could such a vivacious and dramatic culture produce theatre deserving of such an unenthusiastic rating?" A dichotomy exists as to the challenges that exist in staging these plays, based on the first statement, but a desire and evidence that these plays have been staged and are worth performing.

Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* (*The Sheep's Well*) is the standard Spanish Golden Age dramatic text read in theatre departments in universities in the United States. Additionally, this play is one of the most frequently produced in the Golden Age repertoire. However, there is a dearth of information about actual performances of this play and others from the period, especially outside of Spain. As an actor and director, I found this lack of information to be disappointing but exciting and provocative at the same time. I knew that someone was producing these plays, and began to wonder who it was and how they were being done. These two questions engendered my research. There are many textual analyses of Spanish Golden Age plays, but far fewer production analyses. Many Anglo-American critics share the attitude voiced by Brockett in the statement above; they focus on the Spanish code of honor and discuss how this prevalent theme is outdated and has no relevance for a modern audience. In his book *A Companion to Golden Age Theatre*, renowned scholar Jonathan Thacker notes how beyond the world of Spanish-speaking academics, not much is known about Spanish Golden Age drama. Even in Spain these theatre texts have been received somewhat dubiously. As Thacker



writes, "in Spain, the drama, which became known as the *comedia nueva* (or simply the *comedia*), has been successively, although never universally, mistrusted, rejected as formally inept, re-written, abused for political purposes, and misunderstood" (vii, Forward). Furthermore, in a book that is specifically dedicated to the Spanish Golden Age on the British stage, *The Spanish Golden Age in English*, Thacker illuminates more reasons as to why this drama has been perceived as so difficult to stage. He asserts that, from the perspective of the British, the Spanish drama seems foreign, "particularly the obsessive honour code." Moreover, translating Spanish polymetric verse into English is very problematic and, compounding these difficulties, there is a "lack of continuous performance tradition in Spain itself" (15).

It is true that there are definite challenges in staging a Spanish Golden Age piece, even the gem that is *Fuenteovejuna*. The difficulties that I choose to focus on are those that are in the text, including the language, structure, form, themes and characters that impede taking these plays and adapting them for contemporary directors, actors and audiences. Some of the impediments that will be explored in this study include: the antiquated theme of the honor code and how it is used in these plays; the characters and their seemingly lack of complexity; the constant change in action and the varying storylines within the texts; and the plays' overall lackluster reputation. I hope to shed light on the remarkableness of these plays as revealed by their multifaceted characters, their innate theatricality, and their thematic variety. In the following chapters, I will offer textual and production analyses for six Spanish Golden Age plays. I will discuss three plays directed by Eduardo Vasco through the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico (CNTC) based in Madrid; and I will examine three plays as they were presented during

the 2004 Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) Spanish Golden Age season which was spearheaded by Spanish Golden Age theatre pioneer and renowned director, Laurence Boswell. I hope to identify and explain why scholars are wrong to dismiss Spanish Golden Age plays and, compare Spanish and English productions in order to articulate different approaches to staging them.

As I shall demonstrate, there were significant differences between the Spanish and English productions. Vasco took a more conceptual approach, apparently in order to freshen the plays for Spanish audiences who already knew them. The RSC productions were, by and large, more faithful to the originals. This approach makes sense since English audiences were unacquainted with Spanish Golden Age drama. Boswell and his colleagues sought to make the Spanish plays familiar to his English audiences, not to defamiliarize them by means of a production concept.

### **Literature Review**

The work of Melveena McKendrick forms the cornerstone for many academics and practitioners in the field of Spanish Golden Age studies. Especially pertinent are two of her books: *Theatre in Spain 1490-1700* and *Women and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age: A study of the "mujer varonil."* Whereas the first text overviews the most recognized playwrights from Spain of the 16th and 17th centuries, the second examines the plays' female characters, as they really stand out in their strength, assertiveness, dominance, and sensuality. Another important and relevant text is Jonathan Thacker's *A Companion to Golden Age Theatre*. This book was published in 2007 and gives a more updated account of the celebrated playwrights of the Spanish

Golden Age. Thacker begins the book by talking about Lope de Vega, Cervantes, Tirso de Molina and Calderón de la Barca. In the remaining chapters he addresses how Golden Age pieces might be staged and performed, and the different forms of *Comedia* and the other types of theatre that were being presented at the time. He also has a chapter entitled "A Brief History of Reception." The two appendices in Thacker's book are quite informative, especially the one dealing with the polymetric verse found in Spanish Golden Age texts. The other appendix lists translations of Spanish Golden Age plays into English. Of course, there are a huge number of these plays in Spanish. Thacker's list is helpful but it really points to the scarcity of translations, leading one to believe that there is still a great deal of good work yet to be discovered.

Another book that covers many of the playwrights of the time period is *Spanish Dramatists of the Golden Age: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, edited by Mary Parker. This text gives a brief biography of each playwright, followed by sections entitled "Dramaturgy: Major Works and Themes," "Critical Response" and a "Selected Bibliography" that includes lists of translations, if any exist, and critical studies of the playwright's work. Finally, a massive, two volume study of the entire history of Spanish theatre is *Historia del teatro español* edited by Javier Huerta Calvo. Researchers into Spanish Golden Age theatre will rely on the first volume. The article, "El actor y las técnicas de interpretación" by Evagelina Rodríguez Cuadros was most helpful in discussing the status of actors and the practices of acting companies during the 17th century. This research proved vital in the chapter that deals with the itinerant performer in *Pedro the Great Pretender*.

Especially important from a production point of view is a recently published book that deals with some of the 2004 RSC productions of Spanish Golden Age plays: *The Spanish Golden Age in English: Perspectives on Performance*, edited by Catherine Boyle and David Johnston. The book mostly contains articles by scholars and artists who participated in the RSC's Spanish Golden Age season. Jonathan Thacker writes about the history of performances on the English stage. One of the dramaturgs for the RSC season, Kathleen Mountjoy (who also appears as Kathleen Jeffs in this dissertation), discusses the translation and adaptation of certain verse forms used in the RSC productions in her chapter "Literal and Performance Text." Philip Osment contributed a chapter that deals with his experience translating *Pedro the Great Pretender* for a production directed by Mike Alfreds. Catherine Boyle translated Sor Juana's *House of Desires* for the season and wrote the chapter "Perspectives on Loss and Discovery: Reading and Reception." Finally, the other article that proved very instructive was by David Johnston. Johnston is a scholar and translator who has played a key role in making Spanish Golden Age dramas available in English. He wrote the chapter, "Historicizing the Spanish Golden Age: Lope's *El perro del hortelano* and *El caballero de Olmeda* in English."

This dissertation differs from *The Spanish Golden Age in English* in two ways. First, I will provide detailed production analyses whereas there is very little production analysis in the Boyle and Johnston volume. Second, as its title implies, *The Spanish Golden Age in English* focuses exclusively on the English stage: there is no comparison of the RSC productions to contemporary Spanish productions of Spanish Golden Age plays.

### **Methodology**

During my Ph.D. course work, I audited a Spanish Golden Age seminar taught in Spanish by Dr. John D. Slater, through the Spanish and Portuguese Department at the University of Colorado in Boulder. I gained from this course a general grasp of the ideological principles used to approach some of the dramatic works published in 17th century Spain. The class spent a great deal of time reading and discussing the works of Lope, Cervantes, Tirso de Molina and Calderón de la Barca.

In 2009, while staying in Madrid, I saw my first Spanish Golden Age production presented by the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico: *La estrella de Sevilla* (*The Star of Seville*). This production is the basis for Chapter Two. I attended the 2009 Festival de Teatro Clásico in Almagro, Spain where I saw two different productions of *Fuenteovejuna*. The first was directed by Laurence Boswell for the Spanish based company, Rakatá. He came over to Spain to work with Spanish actors on this classic; I will briefly address this production in the conclusion. The second production of *Fuenteovejuna* was by the Japanese theatre company, KSEC. They offered a very different version of this play and it received a very positive reception the evening that I attended.

The combination of Dr. Slater's course and these two productions prompted me to write a paper for the Association of Hispanic Classical Theatre conference in El Paso, Texas in March of 2010. At this conference I met and interviewed British stage director Laurence Boswell for the first time. Mr. Boswell has been instrumental bringing the Spanish Golden Age classics to the British stage.

In the summer of 2010, funded by an Ogilvy Grant from the Center for British and Irish Studies at CU Boulder, I was able to travel to Great Britain to continue my

research. I spent several days in Stratford-upon-Avon at the Shakespeare Library. It was here that I viewed video recordings of the 2004 RSC productions of Spanish Golden Age plays. I took notes during the viewings and also closely studied the programs for the shows. The programs were essential for giving me a well-rounded view of the productions: they were created through the joint efforts of scholars, dramaturgs, translators and directors. While in London, I spent two weeks researching Spanish Golden Age theatre at the British Library. It was exciting to look at original texts and translations of Spanish texts done by the English in the 17th and 18th centuries. I also met with Kathleen Jeffs, one of the dramaturgs for the RSC season, at Oxford University. She talked about her work for the RSC but also about an online project called *Out of the Wings*, which I will discuss in Chapter 5. I also met with Mr. Boswell two more times to discuss his views on the RSC's 2004 season, Lope, and hopes for future productions.

After a month in Great Britain, I flew to Spain to continue my investigation. I attended the Festival in Amalgro again. This time I saw three productions, *El Alcalde de Zalama* (*The Mayor of Zalamea*) by Calderón, *La moza de cántaro* by Lope de Vega, and *El condenado por desconfiado* (*Damned for despair*) by Tirso de Molina. Chapter 4 is about the production of *Alcalde*. Even though I did not write on *La moza* or *El condenado*, I discovered that the more Spanish Golden Age productions I saw the better it was for my research. Motivated by these productions, I sought out more examples. Madrid houses a wonderful resource for my research at La Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, an institution supported by the Ministry of Culture that holds videotapes of all of the productions by the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico since 1986. Chapter 3 is about a production that I saw on videotape there, *El pintor de su deshonra* (*The Painter*

*of His Own Dishonor*), a wife murder tragedy by Calderón. I chose this piece because it was directed by Eduardo Vasco who directed the other Spanish productions that I had seen. Mr. Vasco has served as the Artistic Director of the CNTC since 2004. Mr. Vasco has been discussing with me over email his work, especially his production of *El pintor*. I also chose to examine this piece because it received great critical acclaim in Spain during the 2009-2010 CNTC season. I saw recorded versions of several other productions. One was *¿De cuando acá nos vino?* (*From when did this come?*) by Lope de Vega as directed by Rafael Rodríguez for the 2009-2010 CNTC season. Mr. Rodríguez has been extremely helpful; we have been in contact through email and met one afternoon in Madrid to discuss his process, work and view of the Spanish Golden Age. I have consulted reviews of the productions to help gain better insight into the work of the CNTC and the RSC. A final source I should mention is webcast interviews with actors who played in Mr. Boswell's production of *Fuenteovejuna* at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Ontario, Canada. Easily accessible via "Youtube," these interviews were vital in helping me to understand how actors received Mr. Boswell's direction. There is also one featuring the composer who created the original music for this production.

In sum, my research began with coursework and with reading and familiarizing myself with Spanish Golden Age theatre and drama scholarship. I viewed numerous productions of Spanish Golden Age plays in person and on video, and took copious notes. I interviewed Mr. Boswell and Mr. Rodríguez in person, and exchanged emails with Mr. Vasco. I gathered additional information from programs and production reviews. I also conducted my own deep readings of the plays, including some scholarly commentary. Finally, I directed *Fuenteovejuna* for the Spanish and Portuguese Department at the

University of Colorado in Boulder in the spring of 2010. This was a wonderful opportunity for me to put into practice what I was studying; I took the Spanish text and translated my vision of it through the performers for an audience that was unaccustomed to Spanish Golden Age theatre and drama. This experience greatly enhanced my conversations with the directors and my viewings and investigations into the productions.

In this study I plan to look at these plays and the difficulties they present today for a modern audience. We are a public that grew up with the psychological realism of television and the movies, and this includes the audiences of Spain and England. Because of our exposure to the Stanislavsky influenced type of acting, there is an expectation for characters employing natural-seeming behaviors and language filled with a purpose so that we can create a deep emotional connection with these performers on stage; this is in opposition to listening to a language for the sake of language. Psychological realism is the dominant acting mode today and these plays are difficult because it can be hard to make them "fit" into this dominant style.

### **A Brief Background**

In the late 16th century, one of the most popular plays to be performed on the Elizabethan stage was *The Spanish Tragedy* attributed to Thomas Kyd. This is a bloody and highly entertaining revenge tragedy with a ghost character, a complicated love story and a play within a play that ends with the deaths of five people. One can suppose that this is how the English saw the Spaniards and their dramatic texts though, as scholar Melveena McKendrick says, some academics claim that Spanish Golden Age tragedy does not exist. This last statement is debatable and McKendrick believes that tragedy was only *one* of the genres addressed in the Spanish Golden Age. But, it is true that the



great contribution to theatre was the Spanish *comedia*, and one of the most valuable assets to the *comedia* was the fact that women could perform on the Spanish stage. This phenomenon must have heavily shaped the writing of many of the texts and one of the main reasons behind the versatile and exciting female characters of the Spanish Golden Age, especially Lope's women.

In *A Companion to Golden Age Theatre*, Jonathan Thacker suggests that it is difficult to connect the very beginnings of modern Spanish drama to its most well known representative, Lope de Vega. Popular theatre, including religious drama, developed and was performed in the 16th century in Spain. Additionally, it would be erroneous, claims Thacker, to give all credit to Lope for creating the *comedia nueva* because he was influenced by previous theatre practitioners; still, there is no doubt that he was by far its biggest proponent and wrote the 1609 *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo*. Lope would have been influenced by performances of the time period. In the late 1500's Italian *commedia dell'arte* troupes traveled through Spain and greatly influenced developing trends. Thacker proposes that the *commedia* could have perpetuated the development of the *gracioso* in Spanish *comedia*, the three act structure, the comical aspects and the light use of props and stage decoration (4-5). Lope also would have been exposed to Spanish texts being performed such as those by Lope de Rueda, a 16th century practitioner who impacted the development of theatre by means of his traveling company and popular success. Lope was very well read. Besides the Italian *novella*, he would have known the classics including Aristotle's *Poetics* to which he made reference. Lope was a prolific playwright who wrote political, peasant, religious, comic, and tragic

pieces; through his treatise of *Arte Nuevo*—a work written somewhat tongue-in-cheek--, he illustrates some qualities that make for good drama.

It is useful to look briefly at the overriding components of the *comedia* and some of the theatre practices of 17th century Spain. There is no essence of *comedia* but the plays do have some recurring characteristics. *Comedias* break neo-Aristotelian rules. For example, they generally do not enforce the unities of time, space and action, and mix tragedy and comedy, the high with the low. The plays are divided into three acts, utilize polymetric verse, frequently feature themes of love, and present particular character types such as the *gracioso* (Thacker 3). The plays are driven by plot rather than character (though characters are complex), and imagery holds structure and theme together (McKendrick, *Theatre* 75). Even though *comedias* are known for a "happy" finale, often there is "a sting in its tail which compromises the satisfactory nature of the ending" (McKendrick 74). In *Theatre in Spain, 1490-1700*, McKendrick indicates that love and honor play important roles in the plots, but also magnify and dramatize the variety that exists in "human behavior and experience." "Above all," she goes on to say, *comedias* are committed "to an exploration of the relationship between the individual and the society in which he lives" (76). McKendrick maintains that it is vital to remember that these plays were written for the *corrales* and that their audience was trained to listen for irony and plays on words. Finally, she notes the *comedia*'s structure was loosely defined, allowing for great flexibility among playwrights. After its birth in the *corrales*, the *comedia* "matured effortlessly later on into an elaborate court drama" (75).

The *corrales* began to take shape in the 1560's in Spain and reached the height of their popularity in the 1630's. They were supported by the *cofradías* which were

religious brotherhoods that offered up their patios for performance; eventually the church, aligned with the hospitals, made a lot of money from the troupes that came through to perform, which caused ethical complications since many of the clergy were opposed to this type of theatre. The two principal and permanent *corrales* in Madrid were the Cruz (1579) and the Príncipe (1582). Other major cities in Spain created *corrales* and theatre companies traveled from city to city. The space of the *corral* was rectangular with a thrust stage surrounded by the audience on three of four sides. There might have been railings on the sides of the stage for more important people to sit behind so that they could be seen by everyone. In front of the stage on the ground was the patio for the *mosqueteros* or groundlings. On the sides of the stage were places for people to sit partitioned off by *rejas* or Spanish iron bars; these eventually became boxes for wealthier people to rent. On the second level directly in front of the stage was the *cazuela*, a seating place for women who also had their own entrance and later a type of body guard to protect them from the men. The only other place where women could sit was the let boxes (*aposeentos*). Over the years a third level was added for more *aposeentos*, another *cazuela* and a special place for clergy and literati. The first *corrales* were believed to hold about 680 people but by the 1630s that number rose to about 1900. The male spectators paid the so-called actor's fee to enter the building, another fee to access the *patio* and then one more fee for a seat in a box. Below the stage was a dressing room for the men, including several trap doors. At stage level there was a facade with entrances covered by curtains on both sides, which was used as a discovery space and as a place for actors to "hide" while being seen by the audience. Behind this area was the *vestuario*, or the dressing area for the women. There were balconies for battle and love scenes.

Spanish spectators loved their spectacles, and *tramoyas* were used which could lower and lift characters for *aparencias* or sudden appearances or removals. There was little stage decoration because these were such fast moving plays but props such as "light household furniture, writing materials, cushions, candles, weapons, musical instruments, and clothing" (Thacker 126) were used. Theatre took place in the streets and plazas, especially the religiously based *auto sacramentales* that occurred during festivals and holidays, Corpus Christi being the most predominant. Although the King did come to the *corral* for performances, court theatre became very popular during the reigns of Felipe III and Felipe IV in the 17th century.

The companies were headed by the *autor* so-called because when Lope de Rueda led his company he was also the main playwright. This person was in charge of running the company and was sometimes an actor. A company that was licensed normally had 14 to 19 members; more details about the actors are given in Chapter Eight since Cervantes' play *Pedro the Great Pretender* deals with this very subject. Censorship was alive and well in the 17th century as plays first went through the hands of a censor or *fiscal* who had to answer to the *protector* of the hospitals and who was a member of the Council of Castile. The Council would decide whether or not a play could be performed. As Thacker suggests, influenced by the Inquisition, the censors looked more for heresy than immorality (132). This may explain why so many of the plays of the time period were fraught with cross dressing, sex, love triangles and strong female characters.

McKendrick explains that these plays provided portholes of escapism for the theatre going audience (74), and allowed for a variety of themes that focused on love and honor. Honor based plays form the majority of the texts investigated in this study, but

this term takes on different meanings and Spaniards of the 17th century, as economic times were getting tougher, turned to "less painful prizes." McKendrick writes that these "prizes" included, "religion, honour, purity of blood and nobility." Additionally, this was a society "obsessed with appearances and display, with reputation, self-image and rank" (4). Honor in this sense is both private and public, but something that needs to be approved by society. Honor is a tricky term in contemporary society and has converted to something that often implies a type of personal integrity. This was not necessarily the case in 17<sup>th</sup> century Spain, when "honor" was understood to mean "preservation of the prestige owed a person of high social rank." Although the idea of honor has morphed, it remains relevant to contemporary audiences: no one wants to be looked down upon by neighbors. In the plays of Lope and Calderon, honor is not a concept with a single concrete definition. Instead, it is questioned and twisted in ways to create intriguing and complex characters who struggle to make sense of the world in which they live.

Unlike the plays of Shakespeare in England or the plays of Racine in France, Golden Age texts have not enjoyed a continuous tradition of production in Spain. In the 18th century Calderón remained popular on Spanish stages but, in general, *comedias* did not interest many theatre goers. The theatre-going public was dominated by the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie who turned up their noses at Lope and re-wrote his work in accordance with neoclassical rules. Re-workings of the Golden Age classics continued into the 19th century when Calderón became well respected by the German Romantics, and Lope, whose work was seen as sillier and more light-hearted, gained popularity on the Spanish stage. Lope's reputation re-surged in the 1800s when, in accordance with the nationalism then sweeping Europe, he "became the voice of his

people, able to remain faithful to the spirit of their history. As such he was a species of genius" (Thacker 173). Calderón was seen as a more philosophical and spiritual writer, and his works were used for political purposes. These plays continued to be done in the 20th century on the Spanish stage, but there was no performance tradition to ground them. There is no Spanish equivalent to William Poel, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century English producer whose attempts to recreate the original conditions of the Elizabethan stage ignited what J.L. Styan termed the "Shakespeare Revolution," an artistic/scholarly movement centered on the production of Shakespeare's plays that underlies the formation of the RSC. Instead, Spanish Golden Age dramas were subject to changing theatrical fads, resulting in a discontinuous performance history. Thacker attributes the lack of a 20<sup>th</sup> century tradition of producing Spanish Golden Age dramas to the volatile political strife that scarred Spain during much of that century. In addition, there was no national theatre company "which might have given a sense of continuity, explored the canon and educated actors in how to speak the poets' verse and in other technical matters" (174). One famous group, La Barraca, led at one time by García Lorca, staged some of the classics and brought theatre to rural areas. Right-wing dictator Generalísimo Francisco Franco came to power in 1945 and restricted the plays from the Golden Age that could be performed; only plays that seemed to support a Catholic Spain were allowed. Franco died in 1975, which allowed for a great period of experimentation in the theatre as well as a reconnection with the Spanish classics. The Almagro festival began in 1978 and the CNTC was founded in 1986.

The CNTC was founded in 1986 by director Adolfo Marsillach. The first play the group presented was *El médico de su honra* by Calderón de la Barca. The company

forms part of INAEM (Instituto Nacional de las Artes Escénicas y la Música), which is an organ of the Spanish Ministry of Culture. Marsillach stated that the purpose of the CNTC was to present Spanish Golden Age drama in a an organized and systematical fashion. He wanted Spain to rediscover its rich theatrical heritage and to open up the public's eyes to the production possibilities of these plays. Marsillach was very aware of the challenges that come with staging work that does not have strong and established production history. In 2004, Eduardo Vasco became artistic director of the CNTC. The government periodically hires a new person in this position and it was announced in April 2011 that Helena Pimenta would head the CNTC for the upcoming 2011-2012 season.

As mentioned Adolfo Marsillach was the founder of the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico in Spain in 1986. Currently it is a company that runs about three to four shows a year, and there is usually one show that is on tour. The CNTC's website discusses its mission and objectives. One major goal is to make certain that the structure and storyline are relevant for a modern audience, and even though they choose to amplify the number of works being performed by the well-known playwrights, they also choose to work with lesser known Spanish Golden Age playwrights and international authors. They strive to create a connection between the contemporary audience and the work of these playwrights, "Pero también debe haber un apuesta, un riesgo estético, una búsqueda y un compromiso con el mundo que nos rodea" ("But, there should also be a risky proposal, a search and some kind of compromise within the world we live") (Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico). They absolutely do not want to produce any kind of museum piece but performances that are vital and full of life. Their aim is to focus on the language and this is why it is essential to create a company that has worked and trained

together. For this reason, within a season and year after year, many of the same actors will perform in their shows. As stated on their website, they cannot begin from "zero" every time they prepare for a new representation. A theatrical tradition is important to establish and a purposeful nexus between the past and present should be established so that the past does not burden the work they are trying to do but rather functions as a guide.

### **Chapter Breakdown**

The first three chapters of this dissertation address three productions directed by Eduardo Vasco for the CNTC: *La Estrella de Sevilla* by Lope de Vega (Chapter 2), *El pintor de su deshonra* by Calderón de la Barca (Chapter 3) and *El alcalde de Zalamea* also by Calderón de la Barca (Chapter 4). Vasco is deliberate in his choice of plays and how he stages them. After reading his comments in the program notes and watching the productions, it seems that he aims to create a Spanish national theatre that emphasizes Spanish distinctness (hence his emphasis upon the stereotypically "Spanish" theme of honor) and reminds the Spanish public of the greatness of their literary past.

The Royal Shakespeare Company officially began (as a chartered cooperation) in 1961, but it was in 1959 that Peter Hall named it as a permanent company. Its base is located in Stratford-upon-Avon, but also there are designated spaces in London for performances. The company is subsidized substantially by the British government, which is very fortunate and allows for a continuing history of innovative and entertaining performances. Plays in the 2004 RSC Spanish Golden Age season were performed in repertory with all four productions running throughout the season.



Chapter 4 will focus mainly on the work of Mr. Boswell, and include a brief exploration of the translation and adaptation process that took place for the 2004 RSC Spanish Golden Age season. The following three chapters will examine individual productions: *The Dog in the Manger* (*El perro del hortelano*) by Lope de Vega, *The House of Desires* (*Las casa de empeños*) by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and *Pedro the Great Pretender* (*Pedro de Urdemales*) by Miguel de Cervantes. Within each chapter, each time a new playwright's work is discussed, background information will be provided on the author so as to better understand their work and contribution to Spanish Golden Age drama. These plays are a challenge because they are not performed under the conventional framework for which they were written, and this creates a disconnection between the audience and these classics. Vasco seems to use this disconnect as a way to forge a new Spanish national theatre; meanwhile Boswell aims to overcome this disconnect in order to reconnect with the past, the playwrights and the power of these texts.

### **In the Land of the Misfits: *Estrella de Sevilla***

"Es una tragedia que está a medio camino entre sus raíces grecolatinas y la comedia nueva, un híbrido maravilloso lleno de contradicciones, con un mecanismo efectivo, una peripecia sólida y pinceladas absurdas de naturaleza barroca: un reto para cualquier director." (Vasco)

It is tragedy that is on the road between its Greco-Latin roots and the new *comedia*, a marvelous hybrid full of contradictions with an effective mechanism, a solid adventure and abstract brushstrokes from baroque naturalism; a challenge for any director. (Vasco)

In *Speak the Speech: Shakespeare's Monologues Illuminated*, one of the writers comments:

Here's the recipe for Jacobean tragicomedy: throw one measure of tragedy into the pot, simmer until Act V, remove from fire, add a measure of comedic resolution. To make it a dish fit for a king, set the tragicomedy in Vienna, garnish liberally with zest of sex and death, serve on a bed of moral ambiguity - and *bon appetit!* You've got *Measure for Measure*.

(966)

This play by William Shakespeare is listed under the section of "Problem Plays" in the book, and has been deemed so by other theatre practitioners and scholars. There are several parallels between this play and *La Estrella de Sevilla* by Lope de Vega. *Measure for Measure* is considered a tragicomedy, while plays in Spain during this time are listed as *comedias*. *Estrella*, however, possesses many traits akin to a tragicomedy. For

example it contains a hero with whom it is hard to empathize, forced unhappy marriages in the end, and female characters who suffer needlessly at the hands of their male counterparts. Although there are some similarities between these two "problem plays," I am concerned with the aspects of the Spanish Golden Age texts that hinder their reception by contemporary audiences accustomed to psychological realism; such "difficulties" or "challenges" make it hard to produce these plays successfully today. I will discuss the challenges of *La Estrella de Sevilla*, and then look at how one director from Spain attempted to deal with them in a recent 2009 production.

Both plays, despite their status as problematic works, contain very rich stories. *La Estrella de Sevilla* is about a new King who is learning how to wield his power, which he believes to be absolute and unquestionable at the beginning of the play. Because of his amorous desires towards Estrella Tabera, he ends up having her brother killed by her lover, thus destroying her family and hopes of love. At the end of the play, the King is forced to admit what he did but receives no reprimand while Estrella grants her brother's killer, also her ex-fiance, his life. The King announces that he will marry her off well, even though this is not what she necessarily wants. Estrella's ruse is a bit gentler than Isabella's in that she simply fools the King into thinking that if he grants her the right to avenge her brother's death, she will kill Sancho, thus protecting the King from being discovered for his wrong doing. She surprises everyone by setting Sancho free, however, and admits that she loves him but could never be with the man that murdered her brother. Both plays contain intrigue, deception, lust, power, and fascinating characters. Both plays deal with the abuse of power. In order to better understand the complicatedness of *Estrella*, I will describe the major obstacles in the following order: the question behind its

authorship, the "problems" in being a *comedia*, the themes of power, abuse and honor and how they relate to the characters, and the unsatisfactory ending. This may seem a large list but, again, the story is very lively and intriguing, and there is a great deal of value to this play as evidenced by the fact that it is done on the contemporary stage to much acclaim.

### **Lope de Vega**

A way to better understand Lope de Vega, or "*El fenix*" or "*El monstruo de la naturaleza*" as Cervantes called him, is to visit his house, which, ironically, is located on Calle Cervantes (Cervantes Street) in Madrid. It was not always called this, and Calle Lope de Vega is just one street over. This is the house that he lived in beginning when he was 48 years old, 1610 being the year that he permanently established himself in Madrid. He lived there until he died in 1635 at the age of 73. The house was changed in the interior and exterior due to restoration, but when the Real Academia took it over in the 1930's, the goal was to reconstruct it to look like a house of the 17th century. The location of the house is important as it is located in the bohemian, artistic area of Madrid known as the "*barrio de las Musas*" or "*de las Letras*." Just down the street of León was one of the famous corners known as "*mentidero de representantes*," which were popular at the time. They were places where only certain people were allowed to gather together to talk. In this particular area these people were playwrights, actors, writers and poets who would chitchat about the latest *comedia*. It only makes sense that Lope would want to be in the middle of it all.

On his door frame Lope inscribed "*D.O.M. PARVA PROPIA MAGNA/MAGNA ALIENA PARVA*," which was translated by Calderón as "*que propio albergue es mucho*,"

*aún siendo poco / y mucho albergue es poco, siendo ajeno*" ("one's own home is a great deal even if it is small / and a large home is little, being foreign/strange"). It actually became a very popular saying at the time. The tour of the house actually begins in the patio, which has been restored with much of the fauna and flora that inspired Lope in his verses. We are taken up to the first floor where the stairs end at a *capilla*, which is a little chapel. In 1613, suffering from a type of spiritual strife, Lope decided to join the priesthood. This does not mean, however, that his spirited love life slowed. He celebrated mass daily in the chapel.

The next stop is his study where he composed so much of his work. The bookcases are filled with authentic books of the time period and we know that Lope was an incredibly well-read man. He truly was a genius when it came to creating verse. In this study stands the original painting of him that is used so often in textbooks. The painter is anonymous, but as one looks at it you can see that he was very well kept and attractive man, which helps explain his many romantic trysts. Nonetheless, I think it was primarily his poetry that made many a female swoon. Above the door of the study hangs a painting that was actually completed by his nephew, and one of the figures therein is the Duke of Sessa. He was Lope's financial supporter for many years, which proved difficult for Lope after receiving his religious orders. The room is quite large and opposite the writing desk on the other side reside several chairs and a brass fire pit; one can just imagine the *tertulias* (lively conversations) that happened between Lope and other artists of the time. The tour guide took the time to remind us here that many people of the time were illiterate and that Lope really understood his audience. It is partly because of this that he wrote what he did; he was writing for people who could not

read his poems and the other literature of the time. There were many illiterate people at the time, and he was the man to entertain them.

Exiting this room you walk into the *estrado*, which is a small room with cushions that after the sixteenth century was a place just for women. If a man wanted to enter he had to be invited in. As the custom was brought from what is today our Middle East, it was customary to sit on the cushions with your legs crossed. Sewing, reading, conversation took place in this room. What I could not help notice was that it led directly into a bedroom, that had no other exit. This bedroom is the room where Lope de Vega died, and it seemed appropriate that it was located directly adjacent the women's room. Another interesting aspect about this room is the little window with wood shutters that closed that looked directly into the little chapel. As the tour guide noted, he could bring his women in and pray before and after from this vantage point for the sin he was committing. Also in this room was a basin for taking care of one's own excretory needs. The only reason I bring this up is that it has to do with the fashion of the time. When one was done with the basin, its contents were thrown out into the street. Strangely, this uncleanly habit influenced the fashion of the time. Men wore wide brimmed hats and capes in order to protect their clothing, the look which we so associate with the Spanish ruffian. The women wore high heels and everyone would smear a nice smelling ointment on their wrists for something to help the awful smell that permeated the streets.

In another room we see where two of his girls slept. There were actually three children in this house, but one of the daughters joined the nunnery and was the only child to survive him, which must have been great cause for heartache. There is a legend surrounding one of the daughters, Antonio Clara, which our tour guide cleared up for us.

The popular story is that she was kidnapped by her boyfriend, who had the last name of Tenorio, which is ironic because of legendary stories of Don Juan Tenorio. The truth is, however, that this man's wife, who lived only a few doors down, was Lope's lover that would come to visit every morning. When the husband found out he became furious and ended up kidnapping Lope's daughter and stealing many of Lope's jewels at the same time. Lope was of course devastated. He lost his other child a year before his death in 1634 when the boy drowned while pearl fishing. Perhaps some may see the plays of Lope as farfetched, but, often, real life is even more bizarre.

There is another floor above the first floor and this is significant because of a law during the time of Philip II. If a house had more than one floor, excluding the ground floor, the owners were required by law to put up at least one lodger. If the owners did not comply, they would be fined. Some people actually tried to get around this by creating fake roofs outside of their house to make it look like they just had the one floor, as it must have been quite inconvenient to have complete stranger in your home. One of the more famous lodgers at the Vega y Carpio house, was Captian Contreras, whose life was filled with infamous adventures. Just to name a couple, he fought against Sir Walter Raleigh in the waters near Puerto Rico, and one time while in Italy saved a convent of nuns after an eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Like Lope, he was quite a lady's man, and one cannot help but wonder if any of his adventures helped in the plotlines of Lope's *comedias*.

The last room I will mention is the one for the children, specifically the boys. In it was a cradle with a belt laid across it. On the belt dangled many amulets, such as goat's horn, that were worn on the children at the time as a way to keep away the evil spirits. Unfortunately it did not work as Carlos Félix died at a very young age of fever, and I

already mention the unfortunate death of Lope Félix. Lope de Vega was a very amorous man, and often jokes are made a part of his person. Sadly, one of his lovers, Marta de Nevares, who was referred to in his poetry as "Amarilis" or "Marcía Leonarda" went blind in 1626, went insane, and died in 1628, most likely of syphilis, probably given to her by Lope de Vega. We cannot, however, presume that these losses were of slight concern to such a revered man. Contrarily, Lope more than likely suffered a great deal because he would have had to have felt a great deal in order to write characters who were so tragically human. Lope de Vega lived an adventurous and full life and was obviously a prolific writer though he likely exaggerated the number of his textual productions; nonetheless his contribution to the literature and drama of the time period is unsurpassed. As noted scholar David Johnston wrote in the program notes for the 2004 Spanish Golden Age season:

His wide-ranging focus, examining national myth and history, the relationship between entertainment and power, and Spanish public morality, led to the establishment of theatre as a space in which a society thought about itself in front of itself. It was a genuinely national theatre, and as such it freed his great successor, Calderón, to explore through his prodigious imagination the relationship between the public space and the metaphysical, the nation and the world beyond. (program notes)

As Calderón's work became more popular and the King less powerful, Johnston reports that eleven years after Lope's death a group of religious clerics made a recommendation to the King that Lope's plays, "that have proved so detrimental to the customs and habits



of the people, be banned" (Johnston, program notes). Controversial in their own time, Lope's plays remain challenging today.

### **Play Synopsis**

The text is based somewhat on historical events. The Seville in history and the Seville in the play are two different cities. The historical Seville is a 13th century city that Christians and Muslims fought to control. The play's Seville is a thriving city of the 17th century. This is one aspect that still has not changed too much for a modern audience, as Seville is considered the jewel of Andalucía and Spain. The real King Sancho of history had to seize the contested throne, and he lived through a very troubled reign. The King in the play, Sancho the Bravo, is a self assured, exuberant and tyrannical ruler. He believes that he can do whatever he wants in this land. Seventeenth century Spain was well into its decline as a mega super power due to its overspending, gigantic debt, numerous wars, and the great expanses of land it was expected to rule. These crises were exacerbated by the weak governance of Felipe III and Felipe IV. After the death of Felipe II in 1598, the country was plagued by inefficient rulers who, as it happened, graciously supported the arts. The question of a good ruler would have been at the forefront of the minds of many Spaniards, but people lived in a time when criticizing the monarchy was risky. Lope de Vega, or whoever wrote *Estrella de Sevilla* (there is dispute about its authorship), would have faced obstacles openly disapproving of the government. Unflattering observations or criticisms had to be well hidden. Perhaps this is why the play's author placed the action 300 years earlier.

In the play, after his arrival in Seville, the King immediately falls for the beautiful Estrella Tabera. She has a brother, Busto, who watches over her very closely. In order to gain access to her, Arias, the King's confidant, suggests that he bribe Busto into taking a very honorable position within the court. Busto does not want the position, as he believes that he has not earned it. (Busto has an exaggerated sense of honor, which can cause a problem for both actor and audience. He seems to take it too far at times and it can become tiring and very unrealistic). He commits a dishonorable deed in this scene, however, when he does not reveal to the King the engagement between Estrella and her betrothed, ironically, also named Sancho (Ortiz is his last name). Because Busto hides this information, Sancho the King believes he has easy access to Estrella.

As the story continues, the King's arrogance grows to the point of cruelty. In a devious attempt to gain access to Estrella, again as suggested by Arias, King Sancho finds himself in a standoff with Busto in the dark. This scene is very strategically planned. Arias has persuaded Natilde, one of the servants of the house, to let the King in one night while Busto is away. Busto returns early to discover the intruder, and in a great meta-theatrical scene, he admonishes this man who claims to be King (and really is the King) because the true and honorable King of Seville would not act in such a disgraceful way. Busto knows it is the King, but the audience is unaware if the King knows that Busto is aware of his true identity. After he draws his sword, the King warns Busto that he is who he says he is; but Busto can use the dark to play "dumb":

'Tis false! What, the King

Thus compass my disgrace! The King, alone

And muffled up! It cannot be; and thou,

Villain, hast done his Highness grievous wrong,  
 Imputing a defect in him, which is  
 The very depth baseness. What, the King  
 Strive to dishonour his own vassals! 'Sdeath! (27)

The King becomes irate with indignity as Busto continues in this vein and the come to blows. They stop fighting when others enter and, because the King does not want to be discovered, he runs off. When it is ascertained that Natilde is to blame, Busto has her hung and placed in front of the King's quarters. It is this affront that spurs the King's revenge to hire Sancho Ortiz, Busto's best friend, to slay him.

Later, Busto accuses his own sister of treachery but when he finds that she is innocent, he tells her that she will marry Sancho Ortiz immediately. Estrella, who truly loves Sancho Ortiz, becomes elated. In the meantime the King contracts Sancho Ortiz to kill Busto, but Sancho does not know who he is required to kill as it is written on a piece of paper that he does not read in the moment. The King has also written an "excuse," so that if Sancho is caught, the King will take responsibility. Sancho rips up the piece of paper that would exculpate him. It is only after the King has left, that Sancho learns whom he is to kill, even though the King never gave a reason for Busto's death sentence. Busto immediately arrives after Sancho Ortiz's long and painful debate with honor (as a invisible character) with the great news that he and Estrella can marry; but Sancho, even after hearing of the good tidings, stabs his best friend. Sancho is caught and taken to jail because he struggles between duty to a code of honor among men and the duty to do what is morally or ethically right.

In Act III, Sancho, wanting and believing that he will die, awaits his sentence while in prison. He begins to hear howling and roaring as his body starts to burn; it is clear that he is losing his mind and believes himself to be in Hell on judgment day. Clarindo, playing into his master's insanity, indicates, "There stands the tyrant Honour, / Beset by all the countless doting fools / That suffer for his sake" (60). In this very theatrical moment, Sancho takes on two characters, one his own and the other the voice of "honor." This provocative scene continues as Clarindo saves his Master from going completely insane. Clarindo also takes on two roles: himself and the "Three-headed Cerberus" (61). He convinces Sancho to return mentally to the jail cell in Seville, which he does as he is restored back to his lucid and depressed self.

Finally, we arrive at the baffling ending of the play. When Estrella learns of her brother's death, she goes straight to the King to ask that justice be put into her hands regarding Sancho. The King, thinking that she is going to kill Sancho, agrees so that his secret will not get out. Sancho Ortiz has refused to confess who hired him to kill Busto because of his faith that the King will do the right thing in the end. During Act III, the King witnesses the upright actions and honor of this town and is petrified by it. In front of everyone, even though she is given the right to kill Sancho, Estrella pardons the man she loves and sets him free, as true mercy is most honorable; however, the two will never be together. In a last ditch effort to clear his conscience without revealing his deeds, the King asks the town counsel to exile Sancho Ortiz instead of killing him. They agree, but then come back later with the decision to have him killed; at this moment, the town counsel overrides the decision of the King, thus threatening his power. Only then does the King, struck with a slight pang of conscience, decide to confess what he did. He is

merely met with "With this Seville is satisfied: since you / Decreed his death, he surely gave you cause" (75) by one of the town councilmen.

### **Textual Analysis**

It is very illuminating to consider what a name like Lope's-- he is a national trademark in Spain-- can lend to a text. It is possible that a play by Shakespeare might lose some of its reputational weight if one discovered that it was actually written by someone else. Lope de Vega is a national treasure for Spain and attributing a piece of work to him naturally elevates that piece. In the last century, *Estrella de Sevilla*, originally believed to have been written by Lope, has come under scrutiny from those who believe Lope is not its author. There are certain aspects that are *lopean* in nature, such as the plot, but the versification does not seem to fit with his style. About the most scholars can agree on is that the text has undergone major revisions and that it is impossible to say with certainty who wrote it. In the program notes for the 2009-2010 production by Madrid's Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico, artistic director and director of the production, Eduardo Vasco, spent a great deal of time talking about the dubious ownership of the text. In his notes, he evaluates the text and reassures the public as to its dramatic worth, despite not knowing if it was penned or not by the Fénix. His opening words affirm, "*La estrella de Sevilla* es uno de los más importantes textos de nuestro Siglo de Oro, una joya de los postulados del Arte nuevo . . ." ("*The Star of Seville* is one of the most important texts of our Golden Age, a jewel from the postulates of the 'new Art'") (program notes). It is certain that this script is very provocative, but because questions have arisen as to its authorship, there is a need to reassure the audience that it is still worth doing. Vasco is guaranteeing his Spanish audiences, who take pride

in the fact that Lope is one of theirs, that their time and money will not be wasted. As Vasco suggests, "Era, seguro, más rentable desde el punto de vista comercial, editar a nombre de Lope que a cualquier otro" ("It certainly was more profitable from a commercial standpoint to put Lope's name on the play"; 3). Vasco also admits in the program notes that the discrepancy as to the author has hurt the play in such a way that fewer companies are producing it. Despite this challenge to its validity, Vasco affirms, "Nos parece una manera justa de sumar y no restar, a base de conjeturas, valor a un texto tan bello." (It seems just to us to add to and not take away, based on conjectures, the value of such a beautiful text) (3). This leaves the text to stand on its own, which places it and the production in a more precarious position. *Measure for Measure* may not be produced as often as *Hamlet*, but because we accept Shakespeare as its playwright, it will always be recognized as a great piece.

*Estrella* is an interesting play but problematic in terms of structure and character and, for this reason, difficult for a modern audience to grasp. Additionally, though the context and theme are familiar, the spectator will tune out if the actors play their roles in too generalized a manner. The production must be both relevant and personal at the same time. One way to pull in an audience is to help them identify the genre in which the play falls. Most scholars consider *Estrella* a *comedia* because in a strange way there is a "happy" ending with the sort of sting to which McKendrick alludes. Vasco, director of the 2009 CNTC version, calls it "una tragedia a la española" ("a Spanish tragedy") (program notes, *Estrella*) whose main focus is the abuse of power. Labeling it as a tragedy, we can begin to make associations and interpretations that create meaning for the

play. I believe that while there are tragic aspects to the play, it better suits the description of a *comedia* because of the "happy ending" or marriage at the end.

Regardless of the debate about its author and genre, the play should be judged on its merits, as Vasco suggests. Certainly, there are anachronistic challenges that a Spanish audience can more easily negotiate than a non-native audience. However, the extreme behaviors of the characters and their almost blind adherence to honor in the face of blatant political abuse, is difficult for any contemporary audience, Spanish or not. We are accustomed to hearing about political abuse in the media but the "goodness" or blindness and rash behavior of these characters can appear ridiculous. Even though Vasco places the action in a modern setting in this production, the themes are able to stretch from the 17th century to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The play's main idea concerns the abuse of power by one who is in a position of high authority. Vasco elucidates, "Nuestra tradición, ya desde el Renacimiento, concede un alto valor a este tipo de temas: el tirano y sus excesos, la legitimidad o la arbitrariedad de las decisiones, la mentira que se va complicando, que va creciendo hasta engullir al propio monarca" ("Our tradition, since the Renaissance, grants a great deal of value to this type of theme: the tyrant and his excesses, the legitimacy or arbitrariness of decisions, the lie that keeps complicating itself and that grows until it has swallowed up its own monarchy") (program notes). Lope's famous play *Fuenteovejuna*, for example, overtly deals with these very themes. McKendrick, wrote an entire book dedicated to the idea of kingship in these plays entitled *Playing the King: Lope de Vega and the Limits of Conformity*. She suggests that these plays comment covertly or overtly upon the instability and bad ruler ship of the time.

Similarly, it is believed, for example, that some of Shakespeare's plays of the late 16th century referred to the fear surrounding the decision of who would rule England after Queen Elizabeth's demise. Rhona Silverbush suggests that, "*Measure for Measure* seems to have been written with the King in mind. The play explores issues in which he was particularly interested, such as the divine right of rulers and the nature of the monarch's role in government" (969). This is a strong and ultimately improvable assertion but the fact that two major playwrights deal with the use and/or abuse of a King's power, implies that this notion occupied many people's minds. This is to be expected when one nation, England, is beginning to gain power in the world, while the other is fighting to keep its sinking ship afloat. However, one of the major differences in the plays is that the Duke in *Measure* is punished while King Sancho in *Estrella* is completely let off the hook which is interesting and, in a way, more realistic. We live in a fairly democratic world in the United States and Europe, and kingship is no longer relevant as a political category. However, because leadership and politics remain pressing concerns, the play is still relevant

For the most part, despite the difficulty with language, modern spectators can relate to Shakespeare and his "psychologically" driven characters. Plays of the Spanish Golden Age are more plot driven which might lessen contemporary audience's interest. This might be the biggest difference between English and Spanish Renaissance dramas. We live in a psychological age: a play by Lope might seem too artificial to work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, its characters two-dimensional and its story grounded in 17th century values and conventions. One of the dominant traits of these characters is their adherence to honor. Spanish Golden Age drama's apparent obsession with honor ("apparent" because



the Spanish Golden Age corpus consists of thousands of plays many of which have little to do with honor) leads some critics to disparage the work. Examining closely how honor is treated and dissected in this plays, however, it is easy to see how complicated the issue is and how it imbues these characters with a deep psychological struggle.

One of the intriguing but also beguiling twists in *Estrella* is its refusal to clearly articulate the code of honor under which the characters operate. Indeed, each character seems to represent a different type of honor. The characters in *Estrella* must adhere to their own personal sense of honor, some are more concerned with honor as outward while others are concerned about honor as an individual sense of right and wrong. The tension between these views makes for extremely interesting dilemmas appreciated by both 17<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century audiences. Even though *Estrella* can be seen as a play more concerned with a societal journey--the transformation of long held social constructs--the themes of abuse, power and honor are woven into the lives of the characters and so are the focal point of the action; the characters are the windows through which societal and human complexities are seen.

I will begin by looking at the male characters and their ideas about honor since they determine the major action in the play. If we follow the figure who creates all of the commotion in *Estrella*, we are led to the King; the end of the play suggests that it is about him. Vasco shares his view that the typical baroque man was " . . . atrapado por una concepción del poder que raya en lo divino, que cumple con su misión honorable por encima de todo, que permite que su vida se arruine ante la obediencia debida; que no va a permitir que la majestad se dañe o disminuya" (" . . . trapped by a conception of power that radiates from the divine, that completes his honorable mission above all else, that

allows that his life become ruined in the face of obedience to duty; that will not allow the majesty to harm itself or diminish itself") (program notes). This quotation paints a complex picture of the male characters in *Estrella* and the type of quandaries in which they find themselves. The three principal male characters are caught in a web of outward appearances. Busto's need to keep an honorable house is so great that he overreacts and kills Natilde. The King is either consumed with his lust for Estrella or driven by his need to revenge his "honor" after Busto's offence. Sancho proves the most interesting character in that he struggles the most; it is interesting how honor becomes an externalized character with whom he fights.

The King in *Estrella* is a womanizer from the beginning so his trajectory may seem less compelling to a contemporary actor and spectator. However, as the actor that played the King, Daniel Albadalejo, explains, this is a story about an "absolute King" who wants Estrella to help complete his rule and fill his heart with love. Although themes such as honor and tyranny are predominant in the text, love is also a very vital theme. Love is a great motivator and spurs passions with which everyone can relate. Finally, Albadalejo asserts that, "Estamos ante un crimen de estado en un mundo en que todo se tambalea" ("We are confronted with a crime of the state in a world in which everything is tottering".) (José Ramón Díaz Sande, *Madridteatro*, 2/10/2010). Despite the actor's claim, it is difficult to find in the text evidence that the King is truly motivated by love and seeks in Estrella a love which would help him rule the Kingdom. Instead, the King appears to be greedy, power hungry, manipulative, lustful and driven by his need to have something that he cannot have. Busto is killed by order of the King; and the King will not admit to his venal actions until the very end of the play when, strangely, he is

neither punished nor reprimanded. Mr. Albadalejo's view of his character may have added to his stage portrayal but his claim that the King is motivated mostly by love is debatable. The King is clearly driven by lust and the need for power. At the opening of the play he reviews a list of women, naming all of their faults. He even remarks to Arias, his confidant, "Arias you hunt with me, / Yet cannot see the quarry for the game" (3). Thus he compares women to animals; they are prey to be captured by the King. His language to describe Estrella is very poetic and full of imagery but it makes reference to the sun, fire, blazes and heat that "burns my very soul" (5). This is lust and indicates a type of madness that is driven by physical needs. He knows nothing of the heroine but her physical beauty; thus begins his very shady pursuit of her. There is nothing that suggests love in his pursuit of Estrella; instead, the King demonstrates manipulation, force, deceit and cowardice throughout the play.

The next character to be examined is Busto. He reveals a type of "tragic flaw" when he hides from the King the fact that Estrella wants to marry Sancho Ortiz. By not honoring the bonds of friendship and brotherhood because of his trumped up duty to the King, he decides his own fate and demise. His death, however, is not the tragic event of the play; Busto cannot be the "tragic hero" as he dies half way through the action. His death is very sad and unfortunate, but it seems that he got what he deserved because he was so self-righteous about his honor. This is one side of honor in the text: honor taken to an extreme as a badge of pride. Another strike against Busto and his outrageous honor is the fact that he has Natilde hung after he learns that she helped the King into their home: it is one thing to lose one's honor and another thing to cause someone else to lose his life. It is difficult to surmise how a 17th century audience would have reacted to

Natilde's barbarous treatment or Busto's affront to the King. In the here and now, Busto's hanging of Natilde helps to justify his murder while, at the same time, complicating the story so as to make him a more empathetic character. One can easily relate to a man (Busto) who does not want to be pushed around by a deviant ruler after he has worked so hard to live a good and purposeful life. Additionally, Busto is trying to protect his sister, even if he goes too far. He may be easy to dislike but he is also emotionally intelligible.

Sancho Ortiz represents a different view of honor, one that focuses more on moral integrity and trust than outward appearances. He tells the King that no pardon is needed, the word of the King is sufficient to commission a murder. Sancho's action might have provoked a twinge in the audience as to why he would do such a thing as tear up an alibi; to today's audience, the tearing up of this paper seems quite foolish and irresponsible. Perhaps this is Ortiz's "tragic flaw": he places too much faith in honor and in the title of King. For him, it is as disrespectful to question the King as, today, it is for a soldier to challenge his commanding officer. The pull between duty and honor in the text begins when Busto avoids telling the King about Estrella and Sancho; it extends to Sancho when he has to decide between his best friend and his duty to the King.

Honor winds its way in and out of the scenes as if it were its own character. In fact in many Spanish Golden Age plays, honor is so embedded within some characters that they talk to it as does Juan in *El pintor de su deshonra*. Sancho does the same in his long deliberation about what to do in regards to Busto. In the program notes, Vasco writes, "El honor, tan español y tan barroco, hará el resto; nada se escapa a la mirada certera y abstracta que juzga y castiga" ("Honor, so Spanish and baroque, will do the rest:

nothing can escape from its well aimed and abstract gaze that judges and punishes," 7).

Vasco does two things here: first, he names honor as something very Spanish, which helps define it so that it is better understood and accepted; second, he uses of the word "abstract," suggesting that honor has a way of distorting events and even the minds of its characters. The author gives Sancho a very emotional monologue as he deliberates over the decision he must make. He wavers back and forth, and clearly does not know the correct action to take:

I am a man of honour and must do  
My duty, not my pleasure. Ay, but then,  
Which law must I obey? the prior law.  
But there's no law compels me to do this.  
And yet there is. However wrong the King,  
I must obey his law, and leave to heaven  
His punishment. (42-43)

Sancho decides to act against the moral or unwritten law of God in order to fulfill his duty to the King. This is truly the most interesting point in the play and determines the actions that the other characters take until the end. Sancho challenges honor as a moral concept but does not negate his ethical obligations. The problem lies in how to not make this play too didactic. Lope does this by examining honor even closer under the societal microscope.

In the following speech, by Sancho the character of "honour" speaks as indicated by the quotes:

Honour, a fool, an honourable fool,

Would be your Honour's servant, one that yet  
 Has ne'er transgressed your laws. - 'Friend, 'twas ill done.  
 True honour is to know not honour now.  
 What, look for me in yonder world, when I  
 Have now been dead these hundred thousand years!  
 Henceforth, my friend, let money be your quest.  
 Money is honour now. What did you do?'-  
 Fulfilled my promised word. - 'A pretty jest!  
 Fulfil a promise? What simplicity!  
 To break a promise is manliness.'- (60)

This scene, in an almost comedic way, comments on how the concept of honor has been twisted in the world of the play; Lope, showing honor taken to an extreme, holds it up for scrutiny. Although Spanish Golden Age plays have been dismissed because of their over-emphasis on honor, this mini satire is very modern. Honor and its distortions have sickened the society in the play just as any extreme moral stricture can do to any society in any time period. We live in a time when honor is an ambiguous idea, and doing what may be deemed as "honorable" holds less weight; still, it is easy to relate to Sancho's commitment to something he holds so dear.

Female roles in Spanish Golden Age plays are truly remarkable and are coveted by many actresses. McKendrick dedicated an entire book to Lope's female characters called *Women and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age: A Study of the "Mujer Varonil."* Many of the strong and rich female characters are found in the *comedias*; there seems to be something about the *comedia* structure that allows them to

behave in a more aggressive and masculine way. Although Estrella provides a wonderful example of how human beings should behave, she could seem too unrealistic, appearing in a negative light as a female who is weak and submissive, the virginal woman who sacrifices for the sake of man. It is necessary to combat this image says Muriel Sánchez, who played the role of Estrella, in an interview with José Ramón Díaz Sande of

*Madridteatro:*

Estrella es un carácter femenino excepcional – Es de los pocos personajes que se libera de la podredumbre y de las ansias de poder. Emprende un viaje hacia su propia libertad: decide por sí misma, hasta ahora era su hermano quien tomaba las decisiones, toma las riendas de su propio destino. Ella revela, al mismo tiempo, una tremenda inteligencia y estrategia. Se enfrenta al Rey haciendo creer que va a vengar la muerte de su hermano. Ama profundamente a quien lo mató y es ahí donde se da el conflicto. Decide no matarlo pues su amor está por encima de la venganza, pero no puede vivir con él y por eso viaja hacia la libertad. Finalmente son sus propias decisiones las que mandan.

Estrella is an exceptional female character - She is one of the few that liberates herself from the corruption and from the anxieties of power. She undertakes a journey towards her own liberty: she decides for herself, up until now it was her brother who made all of the decisions, she takes hold of the reins of her own destiny. This reveals, at the same time, a tremendous intelligence and strategy. She confronts the King making him think that she will avenge the death of her brother. She profoundly loves

the person who killed him and it is in this where the conflict is found. She decides not to kill him because her love overrides revenge, but she cannot live with him either and it is because of this that she takes her journey toward freedom. Finally, it is her decisions that hold sway. (Citation?)

Certainly, Estrella is left in a lurch when her brother is killed and she must take over and make the tough decisions. She slyly manipulates the King but it is questionable whether she is free at the end. As a way to explain Estrella, and to justify her to a modern audience, Vasco presents his view of her role in play. Estrella, he explains, is a destiny in and of herself. She is " . . . esa mujer del Barroco español que deslumbra, impacta y transforma al hombre que se la encuentra, parece ser el destino en sí misma, un puerto de llegada, una luz al final del túnel del que nadie consigue salir" (" . . . that type of Spanish Baroque woman that dazzles, impacts and transforms the man that finds her, she seems a destiny within herself, a port of arrival, the light at the end of the tunnel from which no one can leave") ( program notes). Her goodness, for certain, seems unattainable by the rest of the characters as she is somewhat idealized, and perhaps this is why she is given her name. A star is high in the sky, and something that cannot be reached, but only illuminates and gives guidance. Her behavior, even for a modern day audience, is remarkable as she forgoes her vengeance, lets go of her lover and agrees to marry whomever the King decides. When she reveals herself to Sancho, he exclaims, "Estrella of my soul" (63). She replies in kind:

Estrella, true. I am thy guiding Star,  
That brings thee promise of new life. Go, then;  
For thus love triumphs over vain revenge,



And for love's sake I prove a kindly Star. (63)

Estrella is an angelic figure that is unobtainable and too good to be true which could prove a major concern for a modern actress playing her and a modern woman watching her. However, it would be wrong to think that she acts and behaves as she does without inner turmoil.

One of the most problematic issues in the play is the ending because there are no consequences for the selfish and manipulative King, no punishment for his atrocious crimes. As scholar Frank P. Casa notes:

That the king should make amends for his egregious abuse of authority with so little censure seems disturbingly unbalanced. Indeed, if viewed from a modern or democratic perspective, it is undeniably so. However, once again, we must revert to the deliberately symbolic nature of many endings in *comedias* if we are to find the solution acceptable. A look back at some well-known plays will reveal that endings characterized by ambiguity are not infrequent. ("The Centrality." 73)

Casa labels the play as a *comedia* and not as a tragedy or tragicomedy. He then lists the King's pardoning of the people for the heinous death of the *Comendador* in *Fuenteovejuna* as another example of these troubling endings. In fact many of the *comedias* contain ambiguous, unbalanced and disturbing "happy endings." These endings can dissatisfy a modern audience but also intrigue them because in life loose ends are almost never tied up. There is an innate sense of the modern in these *comedia* finales.

Although the King is determined to marry Estrella to another noble, he is driven by his passion for her during much of the play. One interpretation of the ending is that Lope was following through with the tradition of *comedia* by making audience and characters happy with a wedding. Estrella's words of love belie this claim, however, because it is difficult to believe that she can be happy after losing her brother and the man she loves. Estrella is a very admirable and remarkable character, but her level of personal freedom is highly debatable in this play. Estrella is not a nun but rather a full-blooded woman about to get married; she seeks no revenge and is less manipulative than anyone else in the play. She is actually a very enigmatic figure. Unfortunately for her, the ruling powers ultimately decide her fate. The King's final words are "She shall be wed, and wed as she deserves" (76).

Although authorship of this play remains an open question, there is something very *lopean* about this troubling ending which is similar to the troubling endings of texts by Lope and other Spanish Golden Age playwrights. When we arrive at the end of the play, we are left with many unanswered questions. The ending is not conventionally "happy" because the lovers are separated, Estrella has lost her brother and the King is not punished. At the end, the King comments admiringly on the decision by Sancho and Estrella not to marry one another, "What steadfast faith"; his confidant, Don Arias, also in awe, adds, "What noble constancy!" Suddenly, however, Clarindo debunks their admiration by quipping, "I rather call it madness" (76). The *gracioso* offers the most plausible critique of the actions and events in the play. One could submit that this is also the playwright's final word. Unfortunately, one cannot surmise his intentions and we are only left with the text. Regarding genre, one might say, first, that it is a stretch to call

this play a tragedy as Vasco does in his notes, and secondly, that the ending is troublesome because the King does not get his due and the victims go their separate ways. Nowhere does the author imply that the King will change his ways, except, perhaps, at the end of the play when, feeling forced, he confesses his crimes. He is unjustly relieved of responsibility no matter how one looks at it. Although we can never be sure of the author's intentions, contemporary directors have to make sense of it. As Vasco clarifies in his program notes, "Asistiremos . . . a la historia de un gobernante sobrado que comete un error y para subsanarlo manipula, asesina y no respeta ni su propia ley" (We will attend . . . to the history of an excessive ruler that commits a mistake and in order to correct it he manipulates, murders without respect to his own laws") (program notes ).

### **Production analysis**

I shall argue that Vasco's production concept for this play is pseudo-Brechtian. Claiming this, I do not mean to imply that the director deliberately referred to the precepts of Brecht's epic theatre. *La Estrella de Sevilla* is not an epic story in structure but Vasco's production did align with some of Brecht's ideas. In "A Short Organum for Theatre" as translated by John Willett, Brecht states, "The exposition of story and its communication by suitable means of alienation constitute the main business of theatre" (202). In describing the "alienation effect," Brecht explains, "A representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (192). Through the use of set and setting, movement and character development, a consciously theatrical proposal regarding the abuse of power is placed before the audience. At the end of his program notes, Vasco states, "Sigue siendo

necesario encontrar maneras diferentes de llevar a escena nuestros grandes textos, desde el conocimiento, desde la pasión por este tipo de dramaturgia, desde una óptica que no nos lleve a renunciar al riesgo y a la belleza que estos textos pueden proyectar en nuestra sensibilidad contemporánea" (It is still necessary to find different ways to bring to the stage these great texts, stemming from a knowledge of them, from the passion for this type of playwriting, from a view that allows us to renounce the risk and beauty that these texts can reach our modern sensibility") (program notes). Because these plays are well known, Spanish producers need to keep renewing and re-inventing them. Doing this, they also attached to the text a new interpretation under the guise of making it relevant for a modern Spanish audience.

In writing about the purpose of set design, Brecht opines:

Just as the composer wins back his freedom by no longer having to create atmosphere so that the audience may be helped to lose itself unreservedly in the events on the stage, so also the stage designer gets considerable freedom as soon as he no longer has to give the illusion of a room or a locality when he is building sets. It is enough for him to give hints, though these make statements of greater historical or social interest than does the real setting. (203).

The focus of the production is the actual space and its use and the relationship between actor and audience. Vasco directed the play on a proscenium stage which hindered the audience's connection with the action, especially as the theatre was also quite large. As with Shakespeare in the English tradition, it is common to take Spanish Golden Age plays out of their original historical context and to place them in other, more recent

settings so as to make the action more relevant to a modern audience. Removing a play from its cultural and historical context, no matter the explanation by a director, sends a strong message, adding a new layer of reference. It is a re-reading of the play with the intent to convey a particular message. Vasco uses a shiny wood platform to cover the stage floor upon which a smaller platform is placed for added height in certain scenes. Walls of the same wood enclose the side and back of the stage. The overall effect is reminiscent of a modern boardroom. The only other set pieces are several lighter colored shiny rectangular boxes that are about the length of two benches put together. Some of the only other pieces are the few props such as the letter, Sancho's knife, and the very memorable sunglasses worn by the King, shading his eyes from the brightness of Seville. The simple bare setting gives no indication of where specifically the action is taking place. The director focuses attention on the text itself, inviting the audience to evaluate the piece on its own merits. In this way, the production raises the question as to whether or not the text can stand on its own. The costumes, by contrast, give a great deal of information about the place and time of the play, adding a strong political undertone.

It is made clear that the production is set in a modern time period when the actors enter. The modern costumes work in tandem with the set to create more specificity, but not too much; the action appears to take place in a modern business environment. The actors are dressed in grey or black. In commenting on the costume choice, Vasco notes:

El vestuario es actual . . . en el siglo XXI - Se puede leer a muchos niveles. . . .hay crítica a los banqueros y al juez en estos tiempos nuestros de crisis financiera, en el que nuestro mundo también se tambalea. Tiene algo del siglo de oro en lo que respecta a las mujeres oprimidas. Con

respecto a la rigurosidad histórica, pertenece más a la fantasía que a la verdad y lo que pretende retratar es una situación de su época en la que el honor salpica todo. Es un coctel de amor, honor y poder. Es una tragedia espléndida que se presenta en el siglo de oro como una tragedia clásica, con las tres unidades grecolatinas, pero con las maneras del siglo XVII, lo cual no es fácil en el siglo de Oro más proclive a la comedia.' (interview, José Ramón Díaz Sande, *Madridteatro*)

The costumes are modern and 21st century - One can read this on many levels. . . .in our times, times of financial crisis that have the whole world reeling, bankers and judges are criticized. It has something from the Golden Age and with respect to oppressed women. With respect to the rigorousness of historicism, it pertains more to a fantasy than to reality as it attempts to portray a situation of its time in which honor affects everything. It is a potent cocktail of love, honor and power. It is a splendid tragedy that presents itself in the Golden Age as a classical tragedy, with the three Greek/Roman unities, but in the way of the 17th century, which is not easy in a time when the Golden Age was more inclined to comedy, rather than tragedy.

The King is in the nicest suit with shiny black lapels that cover his black turtleneck, which are paired with black pants and shoes. He is one step above the rest in attire, but there is something *mafioso* in the way he looks. The rest of the men have jackets and their long sleeved shirts are scoop neck. Estrella is also dressed in a nice grey pantsuit with a scoop neck tank, while her slave, Natilde, dons no jacket. She is dressed just in

grey pants and top. Except for one man who is in brown, all the men are in black and the two women are in grey. There is division in color between the sexes and the women wear the lighter shades. The only character that wears color is Clarindo, the *gracioso* for this play, with red satin on the inside of his jacket. In this play there exists a metaphysical and social hierarchy. Individuals are supposed to reflect through their actions the beliefs of the person that stands above them. For example, the King should be a reflection of God and Busto should be a reflection of the King; Estrella should be a reflection of Busto and so on down the line to the person deemed lowest in the socio/political structure. This ideological structure is believed by some to represent the ideal 17th century Spanish society. There is a hierarchy that reaches up to God, and if people mirror the figures above them (assuming that they are honorable leaders), then harmony can be obtained. The costumes in this production echo this idea without hitting the audience over the head but, at the same time, raise the question as to whether it is wise to emulate those above oneself. Lastly, because set and costume hint at the world of modern business, the importance of money and power becomes obvious. Money is highly valued in our society, a material form of power. The women are dressed like the men, in modern pantsuit attire, which allows for a gender power struggle. Modern women face a similar dilemma: women still struggle for power in the workplace. Those labeled power hungry are often denigrated by the press and society. The actress playing Estrella tried to render her character so as not to offend modern women; but character interpretations must always be balanced by the text itself.

I purposely chose the term "Pseudo-Brechtian" because I feel that the director was trying to present the story of the play while at the same time making a socio-political and

socio-economic statement about the world in which we live. Setting the play in the contemporary world, Vasco displaces and alienates the action; the conflict between setting and text (in verse) leads the audience to think critically about what they are seeing. On the other hand, by placing the action in a modern world, Vasco implies that these characters are similar to the audience. In his writings, it is interesting to note what Brecht says in regards to the setting of a play:

If we ensure that our characters on the stage are moved by social impulses and that these differ according to the period, then we make it harder for our spectator to identify himself with them. . . . And if the play works dealing with our own time as though they were historical, then perhaps the circumstances under which he himself acts will strike him as equally odd; and this where the critical attitude begins. (190)

There is a double layer in this production; the audience is asked to identify with the social wrongs occurring in the 21st century world through a production whose text was written in another time. The question is whether the director wants to provoke thought and action in the audience, which would be more "Brechtian," or if it is simply a way to make a commentary and make the production more interesting.

On another level the set incorporates the imagery of light and dark that is in the text. The relatively bare set and toned down costumes create an oppressive environment because of their starkness but, at the same time, the shiny wood evokes sunshine and light. There is something very theatrical about the minimalism of this set: the material details and objects characteristic of realism have been removed. Finally, in contrast to the minimal set, the language and verse are rich with symbolism and copious imagery. In



the opening scene, King Sancho beseeches Arias to tell him the name of the beauty he just saw (Estrella):

Say, who is that dark beauty I espied  
 Upon a balcony, and greeted her  
 In breathless wonder? Who is she whose eyes  
 Flash burning rays, more keen than Phoebus' self,  
 And, heedless of my pain, consume my heart?  
 One who, withal so dark, outshines the sun,  
 When out of ebon shadows her bright glance  
 Dawns on our dim horizon. Dark as night,  
 She puts to flight the day, that borrows light  
 From the same darkness that eclipses him;  
 Beauteous disfigurement of the bright sun,  
 With brighter darkness blinding his pure light. (4)

Note the contrast between dark and light; this is seen in the set in the contrast between the light, yellowish wood and the dark suits. Also, there is a violence to the language as the light of Estrella's eyes consumes the King's heart, and darkness is often linked to death. Finally there is the word "disfigurement" which suggests marring and deformity, terms that are negative and can suggest danger. When the King arrives, the lives of these characters will be transformed as strongly held beliefs such as honor and truth will be distorted by his machinations. In an enlightening statement about the transformation that takes place in the play, one scholar notes:

*La estrella de Sevilla* depicts the political implications of the dissolution of cosmic order predicated on resemblance. When the King violates the sanctity of Busto's home, he fractures the system of resemblance that links God, King, and subject. Words then cease to convey truth: they instead fracture society; it forces Sancho Ortiz to choose between his king and his beloved. Once resemblance breaks down, its various parts become independent entities that become the foundation of a new order. (Burton, 62)

This quote is useful, because it goes back to the play-text and looks at language and imagery. In this production, the set, lighting and costumes serve three different purposes: social commentary, establishing contemporary relevance, and evoking textual imagery. Vasco refers to the text as inhabiting a type of middle ground between traditional Greek tragedy and Spanish *comedia* but he still considers the play a tragedy. Ambiguity is a dominant theme of the text but representing ambiguity on the stage is tricky: it can become an amorphous mess that confuses the audience but it seems that Vasco only perpetuates the ambiguity in an attempt to relieve it.

The next element that I will focus on is the music which further enhanced my theatrical experience. As the play began, there was live accompaniment in the form of a violin player at center stage. In contemporary productions of Spanish and English plays of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, music is important; frequently it is played live. Besides adding depth to a production, the live music connects historically to the Spanish *comedia* and English Renaissance drama. These plays are about entertaining the common folk as well as the nobility and music plays an important role in reaching this wide audience.

The emphasis on music links back directly to traveling performers who used music, dance and frivolity to please their audiences. There are two types of music employed in this production: live violin and recorded rock and roll. Brecht, in writing about the purpose of music, says "Music does not 'accompany' except in the form of comment" (203). However, there seems to be a contradiction in what Brecht says a little bit later: "music can make its point in a number of ways" but "at the same time it can also quite simply help lend variety to the entertainment" (203). In this production, the music appeared more for the second reason.

Vasco and company did not shy from the theatrical in this production. As the actors began to enter from both sides and take seats around the stage, the music changed suddenly: contemporary recorded music with a strong beat overtook the violin. Then someone came on and basically pulled the violin player off as the rest of lights come up. This vaudeville beginning "act" definitely alienated but its purpose was not evident to me. The music that was played during some of the scene changes and overcame the violin is by the group "Can," a psychedelic, experimental band from Cologne, Germany in the 1970's. The beat is very strong with a jazz feel. This music and that of the violin seem completely disjointed, and perhaps this is the point; but it is hard to find a relationship between the intense, classical and haunting sound of the live violin and the recorded modern music. The violin player was used periodically throughout as a way to heighten an emotional or poignant moment during certain scenes. For example, when the King mentions Estrella for the first time, the violinist was heard as the lights also changed. As the King's passion grew, so did the violin music. Another extremely compelling moment happened when Sancho opened the letter to discover whom he is to murder and there was

an intense use of silence and the strum of the violin strings. The actor took a very long time to perform his speech, while remaining quite static in movement as the strings were being plucked. In order to further enlarge this moment there was a very dramatic light change. This all helped the audience enter into the character's very intimate turmoil. At other moments, when there was a different kind of emotional climax, the recorded music blared throughout the auditorium. This happened, for instance, when Estrella was standing on one of the blocks and ripped off her jacket, dancing and gyrating to the recorded music of "Can" before her brother comes in to accuse her of dishonorable behavior with the King. The music, both violin and recorded, was pleasurable to the ear, but I was perplexed by its inconsistent use.

The next two components that will be addressed are the ensemble approach of the staging and the movement of the blocks. In the opening moments the actors came to the edge of the stage to face the audience and knelt down as King Sancho was behind them on the elevated platform. Immediately the audience was implicated in the play, although it was unclear whether we were just observers or part of the problem. This never became totally clear during the show but Brecht's alienation effect seems to have been employed from the beginning. Vasco highlighted theatrical elements and reminded the audience that this is a play and not real life. After the King's initial speech, the actors went to the back wall and sides to take a seat to watch the play as it took place. They entered and exited the "scenes" when necessary for taking on the role they were playing. They were like the spectators in the audience, which allowed a certain kind of connection but also alienated by reminding us that we were watching a piece of theatre. At times the actors' presence was almost menacing as they looked on, but it was uncertain if they were

the characters they played, actors watching a play, or actors judging the conflict in a chorus-like fashion. Additionally, this is a text that supports a strong hierarchy in society. The God-King-Vassal hierarchy is archaic to a modern audience, but hierarchies are still found in our society. On one hand there was the idea that all of the actors were the same, members of the working class who came together to present this play. Also, it implied that any one of them or us could be Estrella, Natilde, the King, etc.. On the other hand, the ensemble undermined the social hierarchy in the world of the play and underscored the King's abuse of power.

After the King made his public speech and the actors went back to their "places," which did not remain the same during the show, a rectangular block was brought out to indicate change in location. The movement of characters and scenery was smooth and harmonious. The actors shifted the blocks during the entire show as no stagehands were used, and their movement in and out of the scenes created one long fluid piece of choreography. When the play began and the King was "alone" in his chambers with his confidant, Arias, there was a block laid out for his use. He laid on it, rolled on it, stood on it and sat on it. This was his mini-stage to use in front of Arias, who was for the most part always on a lower level than the King. As the scene drew near the end, some of the actors entered to indicate the change. At times they provided background such as a group of men talking, but it also let us know that the place and time were different and that other players were more than likely coming into the scene. There were times when the actors stood on the fringes of the scene being played; sometimes they sat and sometimes they stood. There was no uniformity in their presence or placement, but each major change was marked by movements of the actors and the blocks. The use of the blocks

could have led to stylized acting and gesture in the production, but this was not the case. At most, some of the actors used heightened movement but it was not abstract or disjointed.

There seemed to be little symbolic use of the blocks and their placement. It was rare when they were used in a realistic fashion; rather, they were moved to assist in denoting place and scene changes in the world of the play. There were some very interesting set ups. For example, on the night of the fight between Busto and the King, three platforms were stacked on top of each other to indicate the wall of Busto's house. During another scene the blocks were set length-wise upstage as the actors sat facing the back wall. Natilde came down and leaned on the men as if they were a wall as Arias wooed her to do the King's bidding later on that evening. These two examples serve as more practical uses. However, when the scene changed to Estrella, Sancho Ortiz and Clarindo, after the King's opening, the two blocks faced out at an angle forming two sides of an isosceles triangle. After Busto brutally accused Estrella of unseemly behavior, the blocks were stood on end, like columns through which she wove in and out before leaving the scene. In the most memorable image, shown on the cover of the program, and referred to by at least one critic, two blocks were laid out length wise from front to back. Estrella was in a white long dress, which was the only costume change in the play, except for Clarindo. This is moment that she discovers that Sancho has killed her brother. When the news arrived, the actress was at the back of the two blocks and when the terrible moment hit, she thrust herself forward, sliding on her stomach towards the audience on the two blocks in her beautiful white dress. The violent thrusting movement made it seem that Estrella was having her heart ripped out as she exposed her pain to the

rest of us. The way the actors touched, caressed, and slid on the blocks connected them integrally to the world of theatre, to each other, and, in a way, to the audience. They became an enmeshed incarnation of the stage. The blocks did not hinder the flow and movement of the play, and they served their purpose in helping move events forward. There was a beauty in the fluid movement; sometimes it was luxurious and sensuous and at other times harsh, fast and staccato, reflecting the language and action. Again, however, there was a lack of clarity in the approach. Once in a while the blocks were used for practical purposes, at other times the movement seemed to mark a change in scene or was made just to make the scene more interesting. The movement of actors and blocks was elegant, almost soothing, but it did not help to move the story due to its inconsistency.

Finally, I will address the performance style of some of the actors. In regards to performance, Brecht notes, "A representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (192). There were discrepancies in the director's choices with respect to acting styles. The director might have intended this variety to underscore the uncertainties of the text but it also meant uneven presentations and confusing interpretations. The gestures and the movements of most of the characters were toned down as compared to Clarindo, the *gracioso*. Two characters in particular appeared to go for psychological exploration of their characters while still maintaining a heightened energy and intensity on stage: the King, played by Daniel Albaladejo and Sancho Ortiz, played by Jaimer Soler. The actor playing the King embodied a contrast between word and action. The words in the play suggest an indulgent, greedy, powerful, selfish, arrogant and at times careless leader. He does not

think of the consequences of his actions. The actor as King in this production went for a more even or controlled method of presentation; it was difficult to say if it worked for or against him. The actors playing Busto (Arturo Querejeta), Sancho and even Estrella (Muriel Sánchez) appeared to be led by their emotions, while the actor playing the King remained much cooler. It was difficult to pinpoint who was the protagonist in this production. The actor playing Sancho gave his two big speeches with an inner emotional turmoil which lent credence to his psychological and internal approach. Estrella was loud and brusque in her speech. All in all the actors playing these five roles, including the man who plays Clarindo, had five different approaches to character which made for an uneven overall performance. Brecht writes, "In order to produce A-effects the actor has to discard whatever means he has learnt of getting the audience to indentify itself with the characters which he plays" (193).

Paco Vila, the actor who played Clarindo, approached the *gracioso* in a baffling and disquieting manner. There was an attempt to turn Clarindo into a real clown figure that jarred uncomfortably with the tone of the play. The actor was dressed like the rest of the characters, except that the inside of his jacket was lined with red satin. He was definitely the "audience" for Sancho, his master. In some of his speeches he used a false voice, very large intricate gestures, and obscure and exaggerated facial expressions; sometimes he talked directly to the audience. He walked very strangely at times, including hip gyrations and large steps. Sometimes, *graciosos* can serve as type of a Greek chorus for the audience, or the intermediary between the world of the play and the audience in the theatre. They are often given comedic lines that also shed light on events and offer a type of realistic and grounded perspective. The problem with this Clarindo



was that the clownishness was not funny and so the audience was not quite certain how to react to his antics. One reviewer was quite critical of the choices for Clarindo in this production:

La tragedia, tal como nos ha llegado, resulta excesiva y desigual, posiblemente debido a que ha sufrido intervenciones de distintas plumas, lo que hace difícil, todavía hoy, la segura atribución de *La Estrella de Sevilla*. Sorprenden, o desentonan, algunas escenas, sobre todo la burla del infierno urdida por el criado **Clorindo** a partir de la percepción delirante experimentada por **Sancho** en la cárcel de Sevilla. En esta escena la sordidez que impregna la trama se torna disparatada y burlesca, extraño contrapunto cómico de una escalofriante historia gobernada por el exacerbado sentido del honor en individuos y colectividades, en hombres y en mujeres, que no se detiene ni siquiera ante la posibilidad de dar muerte al otro.

The tragedy, as it has arrived to us, seems excessive and unequal, possibly due to the fact that it has suffered from so many interventions by distinct pens, which makes it difficult, even today, to attribute *La Estrella de Sevilla* to someone. Some scenes surprise and are brought down a peg, above all the joke of hell burning by the servant Clorindo from the delirious perception as experienced by Sancho in the jail in Seville. In this scene the sordidness that fills the plot is disparate and burlesque, a strange comedic counterpoint to a spine tingling story governed by an exacerbated sense of honor in the individual and the collective, in men and women,

that does not stop itself even before the possibility of one giving death to another. (Pérez Rasilla)

Because Clarindo made some astute comments and desires to help his master, his clown like behavior was disjointed and out of place. Even if this were the point, the motivation behind the choice remained unclear.

### **Conclusion**

In the beginning I presented the challenges to presenting this play, i.e. dealing with a troublesome genre, themes that are socially rather than individually based, and seemingly extreme but psychologically plausible character types. Honor plays an important role but can be difficult to interpret and present. Additionally, this is a play that rests in a type of middle ground or liminal space because we cannot be entirely sure that it is by Lope de Vega. The status of the play might diminish because of the recent scholarship suggesting he is not the author; and it is difficult to define its genre as tragedy, tragicomedy or *comedia*. The play itself is difficult to categorize, the female characters are curious, the male characters are over zealous, yet the story is very exciting and thought provoking. This last point must not be forgotten because the story is quite unique. Nonetheless, the aforementioned problems may explain some of the unevenness and incongruities in Vasco's production. The production definitely grasped the theatricality of the piece and the societal implications through the set and costume design. It is easy to make the leap between abuse of power in the business world and abuse of power by the King. There was a lack of consistency and final focus, however. Honor did not appear to be an important theme in the production even though it is so curiously examined in the text. The music was also interesting and placed emphasis on certain

emotional moments but, because of its incongruities, it left the spectator wondering. Finally, the acting was intense but inconsistent, further confusing the already troubling aspects of *comedia* and tragicomedy. In the end the piece was entertaining which is what Lope would have wanted. However, because viewpoints were mixed and confused, this pseudo-Brechtian production did not successfully address the play's most challenging aspects.

### Calderon's Juan Roca and His Internal Fight with Honor

*Juan Roca:* A picture . . .

Done by the Painter of his own Dishonour

In blood.

I am Don Juan Roca. Such revenge

As each would have of me, now let him take,

As far as one life holds. (Act I, 57))

*Othello:* Who can control his fate? - 'Tis not so now.

Be not afraid, though you do see me weaponed:

Here is my journey's end, here is my butt

And very sea-mark of my utmost sail.

(Shakespeare, Vii, 263-266)

Definitions of tragedy abound but both scholars and audience members would likely agree with the following general statement: a tragedy features a clear protagonist with whose motives one can sympathize and whose actions, violent though they may be, restore a sense of moral order. Consider Shakespeare's *Othello*. There is a clear protagonist (the eponymous Othello) who acts out of motives with which an audience can sympathize (jealousy inflamed by Iago) and whose final deed—preceded by the statement quoted above--punishes the murderer (himself) of his sweet wife, Desdemona. Calderon de la Barca's *El pintor de su deshonra* (*The Painter of His Own Dishonor*) is

very different and, with respect to genre, more problematic. The statement above is made by the putative protagonist (the painter, Juan Roca) immediately after he shoots his wife Serafina who, like Desdemona, is mistakenly thought to be an adulteress. Tragic convention leads one to expect both that there is a good reason for Roca's action, and that he will be punished or, at least, learn from his error, but Calderon does not provide such satisfaction. Roca admits that he is motivated by a sense of honor that lies outside of himself, in the society at large: unlike Othello who takes revenge on Desdemona out of his personal feelings of hurt and rage, Roca kills Serafina because he thinks that he is supposed to do so; it is what society expects of him. Given that he operates according to social dictates, it is perhaps not surprising that he endures no punishment for his heinous deed, but it is certainly emotionally unsatisfying for contemporary audience members: the play leaves the sour taste of unresolved moral difficulty lingering in the spectator's mouth.

*El Pintor* does not fit comfortably within the genre of tragedy. Contemporary audiences accustomed to conventional tragedies struggle to engage it, pressuring directors to develop production concepts that will make their task easier. The play presents at least three areas of difficulty. First is the lack of a clear protagonist—Calderon introduces sub-plots that complicate the main plot without, apparently, shedding light on it. Second, given that Juan Roca is the protagonist, his commitment to an outmoded principle of honor makes him a difficult character for contemporary audiences to understand, let alone to sympathize with. Third, the destruction of the innocent Serafina, Roca's wife, whom he murders without just cause, goes unpunished; a sense of moral order is not restored at play's end. As a result, contemporary audiences do

not experience the same satisfaction at the end of *Pintor* as at the end of *Othello*. By custom, we expect loose ends to be tied up in a conclusion; in *Pintor* these expectations are subverted which can be frustrating but also intriguing. In this chapter, I will detail the plot and characters of Calderon's play, pointing out the problems they pose for contemporary audiences. I then will discuss a successful 2009-2010 production of the play directed by Eduardo Vasco for *La compañía nacional de teatro clásico* in Madrid. Vasco addresses the challenges above with an innovative and visually striking approach through the use of certain aspects associated with the grotesque and *carnavalesque*.

### **Calderón de la Barca**

"Handsome, clever, a brilliant conversationalist as well as an accomplished swordsman with a reputation for dueling and romantic escapades, he proved the ideal courtier." These words were used to describe Calderón de la Barca in the program notes for *The Painter of Dishonour* by David Johnston, who also wrote the translation for this play that Laurence Boswell directed in 1995. It seems that of the four male playwrights examined in this dissertation, Calderón was born into the most favorable of conditions. He was born in 1600 and sadly his parents both perished when he was quite young, but he inherited a comely estate and his wealthy grandmother paid for an excellent Jesuit education from the University of Salamanca. Nonetheless, the excitement of the military pulled at him and he did some traveling and service before coming back to Madrid. Philip IV of Spain admired the plays of Calderon who was not only a playwright but also a director. He was awarded the title Knight of Santiago. He stopped writing in 1650 and, perhaps due to the death of his mistress and two brothers, left for Toledo. But Philip IV called him back to be his private chaplain. It was during this time that wrote a large

number of *autosacramentales*. Madrid at the time was the city that was responsible for putting together the grandest of Corpus Christi celebrations, for which the *autos* were written. He died in 1681 highly respected and honored.

### **Play synopsis**

The play begins in Don Luis' house in Naples, as he and his daughter, Porcia, welcome the visit of his long time friend, Juan Roca and his new wife, Serafina. Juan Roca and Don Luis represent the old school traditional values of honor tinged with inflexibility and uprightness. Porcia and Serafina are friends and discuss the fate of Alvaro, Porcia's brother and Don Luis' son, who is thought to have drowned while on an ocean voyage. These are the younger people in the play who are finding their way in the world. Their values are less traditional, even though they are heavily influenced by their fathers. Just as happiness begins to fill this house that was deeply saddened by Alvaro's presumed death, news comes that the Prince is arriving and that Alvaro actually survived the accident at sea. Serafina becomes almost hysterical as she confesses to Porcia her old feelings for Alvaro and why she married Juan Roca. She was desperately in love with the young man but, believing that he was dead, married Juan Roca, the painter. Eventually, Alvaro arrives to the house as he finds Serafina on the floor after she has fainted at the news of his arrival. When she awakes, he and Serafina share a very intense emotional moment together. Nonetheless, Serafina acts as an honorable woman as she explains to Alvaro what has happened and that she must remain faithful to Juan, her husband. Alvaro is of course confused and devastated by her actions, even though she married thinking he was dead. Meanwhile, the Prince arrives and is immediately intrigued by

Serafina and her beauty, even though he and Porcia have been courting each other for some time.

In Act II, Serafina and Juan Roca are back in Barcelona, Spain. As the scene opens, Juan is very disturbed by the fact that he cannot capture his wife's beauty accurately on the canvas. This act is important because we see a Serafina who has accepted her circumstances and begun to care deeply for her husband. It is also an exciting time as there is to be a huge costume festival the next day. Juan must step out and who but Alvaro should show up at the house much to Serafina's chagrin. She tries to get him to leave when Juan Roca arrives home. In a somewhat traditional Spanish escape scene, Alvaro is able to flee under cover of darkness but Roca's suspicions are ignited and he begins to doubt his wife. The couple goes on to prepare for and attend the big celebration in town. Meanwhile, in Naples, Porcia is desperately trying to win over the Prince in an overly romantic wooing scene as she sings different songs to him from her balcony. He does seem to like her, but he is still very attracted to Serafina. Back in Barcelona, during the party, Serafina is asked to dance by a masked gentleman. This masked figure is obviously Alvaro, and in a bizarre coincidence, Roca forces Serafina to dance with him. She absolutely does not want to do so, but must obey her husband. News suddenly arrives that a huge fire has started nearby. Juan Roca saves his wife and leaves her outside at a safe distance from the fire, but she has fainted from the commotion and smoke. Alvaro sees his chance, kidnaps the unconscious Serafina, and steals her away on his boat. At the end of this act a devastated and heartbroken Juan Roca looks out at the sea because he believes his beautiful wife has run away with her young lover.



Act III, the remainder of the play, takes place in Italy. Alvaro and his kidnapped and miserable mistress, Serafina, are in the hills. She is completely broken and sad, but Alvaro pays no mind to her suffering. He has also angered his father, who knows nothing of Serafina's abduction. Don Luis became very upset when Alvaro left immediately after his arrival in Act I because he did not spend time with his father who had mourned so deeply following his supposed death. Porcia, being the good sister, convinces her father to forgive Alvaro for his rash behavior. She plans to join the Prince in the hills near where Alvaro and Serafina are confined, as her father owns another house there. When she encounters Alvaro, they both try to hide the reason why they are in this part of the country. Meanwhile, Juan Roca has arrived and meets up with the Prince who has recently seen Serafina. Because of his attraction to her, the Prince asks Juan to paint the portrait of this beautiful woman. He indicates that this woman lives in the hills, but neither the Prince nor Roca knows it is Serafina, Juan's wife. Juan, unknowingly, goes to where Serafina is being held captive. Juan arrives as he sees a lady exit onto the outside premises, and a few moments pass before he realizes who she is. He shoots her dead, and then chases after Alvaro and kills him too. This is when we arrive at the monologue quoted at the beginning of this chapter:

*Juan de la Roca:* A picture . . .

Done by the Painter of his own Dishonour

In blood.

I am Don Juan Roca. Such revenge

As each would have of me, now let him take,

As far as one life holds. Don Pedro, who

Gave me that lovely creature for a bride,  
 And I return to him a bloody corpse;  
 Don Luis, who beholds his bosom's son  
 Slain by his bosom friends; and you, my lord,  
 Who, for your favours, might expect a place  
 In some far other style of art than this:  
 Deal with me as you list: 'twill be a mercy  
 To swell this complement of death with mine;  
 For all I had to do is done, and life  
 Is worse than nothing now. (Act I, 57)

Juan appears remorseful for his actions but also believes that he had no alternative. He is effectively pardoned for his actions by the Prince and by his friend, Luis, whose son he has just slain in cold blood. Juan is let to go on his way and, on this emotionally discordant note, the play ends.

### **Textual analysis**

This play has not been produced on the Spanish stage for over 100 years. Possible reasons for this neglect quickly spring to mind. The play's merit comes into question and we begin to look for flaws. There are inherent problems with this script, but some of these are found in many Spanish Golden Age dramatic texts; therefore, it is inspiring when contemporary directors decide to take on these difficulties. The problems that need to be addressed in *Pintor* are: the various plots that are woven in and out of the text; the obtuse honor code that creates the rationale and motivation behind Juan Roca's

insane behavior; and the upturning of our expectations at the end, leaving a sense of dissatisfaction, confusion and emptiness.

As I investigate the above listed challenges, I will also connect the text to the ideas behind the grotesque and *carnavalesque* since they play into the production concept developed by Eduardo Vasco. In the introduction to his *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin writes, "The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (19-20). This applies to the play in three ways: 1) its representation of art; 2) the honor code; and 3) the supposed protagonist, Juan Roca. Art is often represented idealistically, as a celebration of lofty beauty. In Calderon's play, however, art is given a less positive coloring. Juan struggles to paint his wife at the opening of Act II. Things become more perverse when in Act III, he is requested by the prince to paint a beautiful woman, whom Roca does not know is his wife. Ultimately, the only work of art he completes is the cold-blooded murder of his wife. The honor code, which should serve as a paradigm as to how a dignified human behaves, instead turns into an unreasonable and coercive social construct devoid of human compassion. Finally, the protagonist does not follow a predictable role. The title of the play *The Painter of Dishonor* leads us to think that the protagonist is Juan Roca, and anticipation rises that it is his story that will be followed. Although this is partly true, there are other characters that compete for the spotlight. The other two main characters are Serafina and Alvaro, thus creating a very bizarre love triangle. The secondary characters, Don Luis, Porcia and the Prince, take up a great deal of stage time and their stories border on the farcical. The many characters and their different connections and

stories create a complicated web that challenges a director and actors. To help clarify my use of the grotesque in this analysis, I refer again to Bakhtin as he contemplates the relation of the Renaissance and the grotesque:

...the grotesque images preserve their peculiar nature, entirely different from ready-made, completed being. They remain ambivalent and contradictory; they are ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of "classic" aesthetics., that is, the aesthetics of the ready-made and the completed. The new historic sense that penetrates them gives these images a new meaning but keeps intact their traditional contents: copulation, pregnancy, birth, growth, old age, disintegration, dismemberment. All these in their direct material aspect are the main element in the system of grotesque images. They are contrary to the classic images of the finished, completed man, cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development. (25)

Calderón was aware of the political, economic and societal changes that had greatly impacted Spain, and he would have also been aware of his country's literary and theatrical history. Keeping this in mind might open an approach to this play. There is a baseness and cold sense of humanity, for example, at the end when Roca walks away. *Pintor* breaks with ideas behind traditional tragedy and asks its readers and audience to shift their point of view. The honor code is used as a theatrical mechanism in order to create a distorted world where characters struggle to make their way.

At the very beginning of the play we meet a Juan Roca who confesses to his long time friend Don Luis that for many years he was harassed for not getting married, but that

he had no longings for passion or a wife. He finally acquiesced to peer pressure and agreed to get married. When he met his wife, Serafina, he was completely taken with her beauty and fell in love: "At the first glance / I knew myself no more myself, but hers, / Another (and how much a happier!) man" (9). Calderón creates a very real character for us from the beginning, thus making his demise harder to accept. He was an aging bachelor who was content in his ways but, in order to carry on the family name and keep up tradition, he decided to fulfill his familial and societal duty which naturally ties into the idea of Spanish honor. Even though it may seem old fashioned, many people feel pressured to get married and have a family. This idea is timeless and ubiquitous. Juan, luckily, also happened to fall in love. He comes across as rational and human in this first scene. In the first act there are no other indications of mental instability or emotional imbalance; he appears to be a happy and fulfilled man. The rest of the act is more about Serafina and Alvaro, Don Luis, Porcia and the Prince. That being said, however, Calderón insidiously sets us a bit against Juan because of his advanced years. He is much older than his beautiful young wife who, without his knowing, had fallen madly in love with a brave and masculine man closer to her age. Immediately there is a stigma attached to Juan setting him apart, almost disqualifying him as a "hero" from the beginning.

In the opening of Act II, we see a slightly changed Juan Roca. It is up to the actor and director to find this in performance but Calderón makes it easier than it may seem at first. Juan is frustrated, doubting and insecure even though at this moment it seems that there is no reason for him to be this way. He is trying to paint his wife, and he is completely disconcerted by the fact that he cannot capture her true beauty on the canvas:

The object of this act, (pray, look at me,  
 And do not laugh, Serafina,) is to seize  
 Those subtlest symmetries that, as I said,  
 Are subtlest in the loveliest; and though  
 It has been half the study of my life  
 To recognize and represent true beauty,  
 I had not dreamt of such excess of it  
 As yours; nor can I, when before my eyes,  
 Take the clear image in my trembling soul;  
 And therefore if that face of yours exceed  
 Imagination, and imagination  
 (As it must do) the pencil; then my picture  
 Can be but the poor shadow of a shade  
 Besides, - . . .  
 'Tis said that fire and light, and air and snow,  
 Cannot be painted; how much less a face  
 Where they are so distinct, yet so compounded,  
 As needs must drive the artist to despair! (43-44)

This passage is interesting because of the painful torture of Roca's soul against the almost  
 ethereal beauty of Serafina. It is uncertain where his angst is coming from, especially  
 since Serafina chides him for being ridiculous. He becomes so frustrated that he throws  
 his brushes down and asks her that if he ever tries to paint her again, she should tell him  
 not to. Perhaps this scene is to show Juan's fault: he is trying to capture an image that

cannot be captured, and he must accept that. His conceit gets in the way, and perhaps fear: there are references to pencils and paint brushes which could allude to Juan's sexual impotence. Another possibility is that he senses doom; after all, immediately after he leaves Alvaro arrives to try and woo Serafina. Perhaps, on the other hand, it is understood that because he is quite a bit older, he is naturally experiencing the doubt that accompanies marrying a much younger and beautiful wife. There is no concrete answer to explain his sudden change and anxiety, but Calderón provides realistic possibilities that also augment the tension because the reader/public is not quite certain about the reasons for this change. Calderón also draws an obvious parallel to art and its creation. For the painter and the playwright, perfection is the aim but it can never be realized. When idealized beauty cannot be achieved, the implication is the opposite, or the destruction of that beauty. This is what happens in the play, and connects Juan's painting to the ideas behind the grotesque. Making the connection between nature, art and humankind is not only philosophical but also a genius move on the part of the playwright.

When he returns home that same evening, Juan is unaware that Alvaro has been in his house. He has news for Serafina that a party will be held in her name. There is one caveat, however: she must wear an ugly mask in order to hide her beautiful face. Juan Roca is becoming irrationally covetous of her beauty. It is not until the middle of this scene when Juan has a solid reason to behave irrationally. In the "dark" scene when Alvaro is trying to escape, one of the servants, Leonelo stumbles upon him. Humorously, the maid says it was her but Leonelo informs Roca that there was a man in the house because he was hairy. The maid calls Leonelo a liar, and Roca reproaches his

tomfoolery. Nonetheless, true doubt begins as Roca questions Serafina's actions, which the rest of the audience knows have been honest and pure.

It is the night of the party and Alvaro, masked, asks the masked Serafina to dance. She declines, but Juan Roca encourages her and basically forces her to dance. His reasoning is as follows: he is suspicious of the man following his wife and thinks her strong refusal indicates a "secret inclination" (67). There is something compelling about the way that Calderón has his characters engineer their own downfall. Lope de Vega also does this with his tragic characters. These are people that in the end cannot be happy and therefore must ensure their own ruin; unfortunately, it also means the ruin of innocents. Serafina ends the dance and claims exhaustion. She and Roca leave. This is when the fire begins and Alvaro kidnaps the unconscious Serafina to take her back to Naples on his ship. As Roca sadly watches the ship sail away, he is told by Leonelo that the "sailor" who danced with Serafina is the one who took her away. It is unclear as to whether Roca believes his wife went off willingly with Alvaro. His doubts are evident in the last lines of the act: "What I dare not name till it be avenged; Pirate!-Ruffian! Oh fool, I might have guessed--but I will find them through water and fire too. To the shore!" (73).

The final act is again mostly about the two young ex-lovers, Porcia and the Prince, and Don Luis forgiving his son. Juan Roca is not present very much, but he performs the most important and gruesome deed. His jealousy ends in blind rage as he takes a gun and kills his innocent and beautiful young wife. The challenge of the play is not only that the supposed protagonist murders the woman he loves because he believes her to be a cheating whore. Most modern audiences have read these types of stories in the newspaper or seen them on a television program. Obviously, what he does is



unforgiveable and he should be punished. The more disconcerting issue seems to be his reasoning: yes, he loves Serafina and believes her to be an adulterous wife but his reasoning for the crime circulates around his honor. Again, honor is a reason easy for us to sympathize with if we align personal honor with ego and pride. When we have been shamed on a deep level, revenge is a common response. Most people will not act out their revenge, however, but rather daydream about obliterating their enemy. However, in his conversation with himself (and the audience) Juan Roca harangues honor as the culprit for his state. Returning to Naples in a distraught state not knowing where his beloved lies, he moans:

Who could have thought that I, being what I was

A few days back, am what I am; to this

Reduc'd by that name *Honour*; whose nice laws,

Accurst be he who framed!

Little he know the essence of the thing

He legislated for, who put my honour

Into another's hand; made my free right

Another's slave, for others to abuse,

And then myself before the world arraign'd,

To answer for a crime against myself!

And one being vain enough to make the law,

How came the silly world to follow it,

Like sheep to their own slaughter! And in all

This silly world is there a greater victim

To its accursed custom than myself! (Act III, 48))

It seems strange to us to see honor as an object that imposed and taken away by others. In the 21st century western world, a person's ego may be crushed because his or her spouse commits adultery, but to use honor as an excuse for revenge seems ludicrous. To Juan Roca, honor is less internal than external, less about deep personal emotion and more about a “silly world” that has imposed this duty upon him. Honor is not about personal integrity in Juan's world and in much Spanish Golden Age literature but rather about appearance and social reputation. Nonetheless, there are still cultures in the world today where this type of honor exists, e.g. in powerful patriarchal societies. I call this kind of honor “external” because it has to do with others’ perception of the self rather than one’s own perception of the self. As *El Pintor* makes clear, women function as objects in this external honor scheme. Men suffer societal rebuke if they fail adequately to control their wives and daughters. To put it another way, strong and independent women pose a problem for the Spanish system of honor. Women come to be seen as the real culprits in the keeping or staining of the family honor. Of course, this antiquated, even misogynistic system, poses a great deal of difficulty for a modern audience. The play would be easier to engage if Juan’s angst stemmed from personal emotional turmoil instead of from a societal structure that depends upon male control of women who, of course, carried less political weight and enjoyed fewer rights in this time period. Finally, in the end, it is the exuberance in Juan’s speech that jostles and unsettles. But, perhaps this is how Calderón intends to shock his audience. What Juan Roca does is wrong and not appropriate in any society, especially since his wife is innocent. In speaking about the difficulty of understanding the endings of these plays, scholar Bobes Naves suggests

that in plays like *El médico de su honra*, *El pintor de su deshonra*, *El mayor monstruo los celos* the men who suspect their wives of some type of infidelity actually feel and believe that they are obliged to kill them. They commit the crime without any type of logical thought that tells them that their blind adherence to honor is completely irrational (440). This "social sense of honor" perverts these men and produces their monstrous behavior. The irony lies in the fact that they also recognize the absurdity of their actions. Contrast Juan's action with that of Othello. The Moor's murder of Desdemona is caused by his jealousy not for reasons of social obligation. Jealousy is a motive easy for contemporary audiences to sympathize with because it is a raw human emotion that triggers a visceral reaction in most people. A 17<sup>th</sup> century social construct simply cannot produce the same response. In the end, however, there is something familiarly psychological about the way that Roca examines the forces driving him; and these are what actor and director focus on. He questions his role in the sub-strata of the society in which he lives. As he walks off at the end of the play, we see a tension between the moral strictures of the time and the burgeoning of a "new" individual who is willing to interrogate them.

The next challenge lies in the relationship between Alvaro and Serafina. Right before he arrives, Serafina still thinks that Alvaro is dead. As she explains to Porcia, she desperately loved Alvaro and they had planned to marry, but upon learning of his death at sea her father persuaded her to marry Juan. As she recounts these events to Porcia, she becomes very agitated and distraught. She thinks she actually sees Alvaro and she does. Alvaro enters for the first time and she faints. Despite her love for Alvaro, she holds steadfast in her commitment to Juan even when Alvaro pushes her. The problem for the director is that this love triangle is less interesting than one might think. By Act II,

Serafina has reconciled herself to her situation and actually comes to respect and love her husband. After he leaves to go see about the party, she reflects about how Cupid's arrow has gone astray yet she is healing quickly. In a more telling speech just a few minutes later she rebukes Alvaro for having come to Spain to try and win her over:

I must leave metaphor,  
 And take to sober sense: nor is it right,  
 Alvaro, that you strive  
 Tis choke the virtuous present with the past,  
 Which, when it was the past, was virtuous too,  
 But would be guilty if reiterate.  
 Now is it right, more courteous, certainly,  
 Doubting what I declare of my own heart;  
 Nay, you who do yourself affirm, Alvaro,  
 How well I loved you when such love was lawful  
 Are bound to credit me when I declare  
 That love is now another's (51)

In Act III she is totally despondent and weary after Alvaro has kidnapped her and taken her back to Naples. She did not ask for any of this making her the play's greatest victim. Calderón, like for Roca, creates a journey for Serafina. Certainly her reason for staying with Roca has to do with honor, but he also weaves in the possibility of affection and the possibility of a type of love based on respect for oneself and one's mate despite age differences. This makes her death harder to take and more grotesque in the end; her idealized beauty grows inwardly as she comes to love her husband with complete honor

and loyalty; he destroys all of her beauty, both inner and outer, with his rash and violent behavior. He ceases to become a creator of beauty, but rather its slayer.

Alvaro is a selfish lover as he stalks poor Serafina. Calderón writes carefully and craftily: it is sad that these two young people cannot be together because of a false report on Alvaro's death but his unending pursuit of his ex-lover becomes obsessive and cruel. Alvaro comes across as rather sinister and, by the end of Act II when he takes Serafina against her will, it is difficult to find empathy for his character. In Act III, having berated him and told him that he will never have her soul, she wholeheartedly pleads with him to let her join a convent because she has lost everything: her husband, home and honor. Her stirring speech does not move Alvaro, who responds with: "No more, / Rather than give you up again, Serafina (81). The love triangle is difficult for contemporary audiences to engage because Serafina is treated brutally and unfairly by both men. Both Alvaro and Juan Roca are contemptuous of her and cruel in their final actions. It is almost a relief when Roca kills Alvaro in the end, even though it is the son of his good friend Don Luis. Again we arrive at the senselessness of the acts committed by the characters, which a director must make compelling to a contemporary audience.

Finally, there is the conundrum regarding the outlying characters, especially the Prince and Porcia. They play a bizarre role in the play because they do not offer a foil to Serafina's twisted relationships, the parallel of a healthy couple to the perverted love triangle outlined above. Indeed, Porcia, the Prince, and Serafina form their own twisted love triangle. Porcia is in love with the Prince, but the first time that he sees Serafina he is quite taken by her. He maintains his infatuation until the end of the play when he asks Juan to paint Serafina so that he may at least have her portrait. Nonetheless, he also

encourages Porcia to keep pursuing him throughout the play. After the painting scene between Juan and Serafina and Alvaro's forced entry into the house in Spain, there is a night balcony scene back in Naples in which Porcia sings to the Prince. He listens but complains to his servant of his heart's discontent because he longs for Serafina. The scene is quite long as Porcia goes in and out to appease her father and sings different songs of love, its glory and ills. Suddenly we are back in Spain for the festival with nothing resolved between Porcia and the Prince. There is also another storyline in place, and that is Don Luis' anger and disdain for his son. These sub-plots seem misplaced and disconnected from the main plot of the three lovers. The challenge to the director is how to make these three different plots cohere given that neither Porcia's and the Prince's connection nor the angst suffered by Don Luis bear any kind of weight upon the action of the main plot. They dangle around the main plot, as it were. One wonders whether there is more to these secondary lines of action than meets the eye. One also wonders whether the convoluted plots explain why contemporary theatre companies have stayed away from *El Pintor* for so long.

Finally, the ending to this play is almost incomprehensible in its coldness: Juan receives no punishment for his deeds. His need to punish Serafina is a product of his own demented mind, even though Calderon provides a more substantial reason for his ire and jealousy later on in the story when his wife is actually abducted by her ex-lover. Roman plots influenced Renaissance drama, but so too did Greek drama in such plays as *Medea* and *The Oresteia*. As Bushnell states, "Crafted in outsized rhetoric, these tragedies revel in extreme acts that violate all laws and social norms" (77). In the "Senecan" plot, "There is no conclusion of moral satisfaction; what remains is only the sense that all the worst in

human nature has prevailed" (77). At the end of *El pintor de su deshonra*, a contemporary audience is left hanging in the depths of despair. Juan kills his wife simply because he believes that the laws of honor require it, even though he questions these laws. Although she was kidnapped against her will and is completely innocent, Serafina is brutally murdered along with the man who abducted her, and the murderer is a free man in the end. There is absolutely no satisfaction here because nothing is restored. At the end of *Othello* Cassio is put in power, which gives a sense of stability being reestablished. There is no restoration of order or goodness in the final moments of *El Pintor*.

### **Production analysis**

During the 2009-2010 season, *La compañía nacional de teatro clásico* in Madrid presented a version of this play directed by Eduardo Vasco. The show was seen as a success by both critics and audiences. In the Spanish newspaper *ABC* a critic from Barcelona wrote that Vasco's version painted a "luxurious palette" for *El pintor* and was able to make it relevant for a modern audience so that we could understand all its intricate nuances (Doria). Vasco tackled head on the challenges described in the previous section and brought this play to life. In order to show how he did this, I will focus on the set design and the costumes, and the separation of the three actors and their style as contrasted with the rest of the players. Juan Ignacio García Garzón, another critic for *ABC* in Madrid said of the production:

El montaje de Eduardo Vasco es primoroso, de los que justifican la pasión por el teatro. Muy bien dirigido, con una bella escenografía sintética y

nada ostentosa, soberbiamente iluminado y con un vestuario de los que hay que aplaudir puestos en pie: la escena del Carnaval es deslumbrante. En el plano interpretativo, la CNTC ha alcanzado un tono general excelente;

The staging by Eduardo Vasco is exquisite, of those that justify the passion for the theatre. Very well directed, with a beautiful and synthetic mise en scene that is not ostentatious, soberly illuminated and with costumes that allowed for a standing ovation, the scene of the Carnival is dazzling. On the interpretive level, the CNTC has reached a generally excellent tone.

As this critic suggests, Vasco combined the *grotesque* with shades of the *carnavalesque*, and allowed this production to stand on its own as a theatre spectacle. Vasco surmises that the play is, "...una pieza en la que conviven principios de la tragedia clásica con las normas básicas del arte nuevo" (a piece which incorporates the principles of the classic tragedy and the basic norms of the "*arte nuevo*") (José Ramón Díaz Sande). He is of course referring to the basic tenets of Lope de Vega's treatise on playwriting, *On the New Art of Writing Plays* (*El arte nuevo*). He further comments in this same quote that Calderón was influenced and enchanted by the *carnavalesque* that could apparently be found in Barcelona during this time period. On that note, it is helpful to remember when Calderón was writing. Spain was in the midst of losing its international prestige; although it would maintain control of its colonies in the Americas, the people occupying those places were already beginning their long drawn out revolt against the mother country. In the meantime, Spain had in the last 80 years enjoyed an artistic revolution in



the fields of literature, fine art and drama. Commenting on this time of deep contrast within Spain, the play's adapter, Rafael Pérez Sierra, adds:

Eran tiempos de profundas creencias religiosas que contrastaban con una moral al uso que tenía dos caras como el **dios Jano**, la que se aparentaba y la que andaba por los adentros de cada individuo, porque en nuestro Siglo de Oro no era oro todo lo que relucía en materia de costumbres, ni tampoco en los envíos americanos, que ya empezaban a ser de plata.

These were times of profound religious beliefs that contrasted with a morality, whose use had the two faces of the God Janus, that which made itself apparent and that which lived internally in each individual, because in our Golden Age it was not always gold that shined through in the customs of the Spaniards nor in the shipments from the Americas, that were beginning to be of silver. (José Ramón Díaz Sande)

For Pérez Sierra, the play is set in a time of dichotomies as men struggle to realize their own individual being based on more modern notions in opposition to a staunchly religious society. There is also criticism of Spain and its colonization of the "New World." It was common knowledge by then that indigenous peoples had been treated badly by many Spaniards, creating a malignant stain on this once powerful empire. Gold supposedly lined streets in the Americas, but silver was found instead. Silver is valuable but not as valuable as gold and it was gained through much bloodshed. Spain was in a social crisis, and Calderón witnessed this phenomena. Spain was struggling and the dichotomy lay in the need to maintain the appearance of a powerful nation while within

the country everything was crumbling. There seems to be a type of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde implication made both by Vasco and Pérez Sierra: they see this struggle where Spain is creating great beauty through its art and literature, but simultaneously destroying itself. These contrasts play nicely into the idea of spectacle, the grotesque, the mask and the carnival.

While looking at this play in its time and context in order to better understand it, the works of 17th century Spanish painter Diego Velázquez come to mind. I believe there is a correlation between his paintings, this time period, the play and this production that is worth exploring. His paintings broke the mold of the time in their use of color, perspective, themes and boldness. There is no real hint of the grotesque, but there is a boldness, a latent disturbing energy, that if pushed further could have turned into the grotesque. In talking about the play, the director describes it as one might look at certain paintings by Velázquez and that time period:

La deshonra, la vergüenza insuperable, autóctona en su magnitud, como obstáculo para la vida social. Un marco muy barroco, donde subyacen todas las premisas del momento, con el determinismo apuntalando la historia, el orden moral como garante frente a la heterodoxia que el hombre y la misma naturaleza imponen, y el mundo, contemplado así, como un lugar lleno de peligros, de contrastes, que se nos escapa de las manos.

Dishonor, the insurmountable shame and national in its magnitude, is like an obstacle for the social life. This is a very Baroque mark, where underlying are all of the premises of the moment, with a determinism

underpinning history, the moral order as a guarantor facing the unorthodox that man and nature itself impose, and the world, contemplated as such, as a place filled with dangers, contrasts, that escape from our hands.

In Velázquez's painting "El triunfo de Baco" ("The Triumph of Bacchus") or "Los borrachos" ("The drunkards"), there is the smiling and playing Bacchus of Greek mythology sitting in a somewhat idyllic scene as a group of very common working men drink up their wine in a state of blissful drunkenness. There is contrast in the pastoral references to Greek mythology and the dirtied men. Colors highlight the contrast: earthy colors such as brown and yellow are used for the clothing of the men while greens, pinks, and reds convey the joviality of the Greek part of the painting. This rich use of color can really be seen in the scenic compositions in Vasco's production of *El Pintor de su deshonra*. Additionally, the underlying incongruity of some of Velázquez's paintings can be compared with that of *El pintor de su deshonra*. On one level the paintings contain a great deal of beauty; it is to this kind of beauty that Juan Roca aspires, especially when trying to capture the image of his wife. Her beauty belies her name, making for an interesting twist. Serafina is the feminine version in Spanish of Serafin or Seraphim in the Judeo-Christian tradition. This term can mean the "burning ones" referring to angels, and it has also been used in the Bible to mean serpents. In this and other places of incongruity in the text, one can see a correlation with the grotesque. Vasco's production of the play picked up on the theme of the grotesque. There are two aspects that merit special attention: the *mise en scene* and the performance style.

The *mise en scene* includes both set design and costumes in this production; they very much worked in tandem and were absolutely gorgeous and powerful. The costumes

appeared so grand against the backgrounds that it were as if the characters were moving around inside their own paintings. As the play opened there was an ocean painted on a cloth upstage. This painting in conjunction with the music was used to suggest the loss of Alvaro at sea. This is obviously a directorial choice, as it is not indicated in the text. It helped establish a history and create the feeling of something ominous hanging in the background ready to make an appearance when least expected. In fact the idea of a predetermined destiny is something that is inherent in Spanish Golden Age drama according to Eduardo Vasco:

Personajes predestinados, capaces de leer señales, de intuir presagios fatales, con un pie en el simbolismo y otro en la tradición popular. Ecos de naufragios, amores imposibles, asesinatos, fascinaciones repentinas, etc., que recuerdan la novela bizantina o a la posterior **novelle** italiana.

Personajes al borde de la comedia, que cumplen su función, dejando pasar el aire a la enrarecida cámara trágica. Música, canciones como juegos inocentes, hasta frívolos, en escenas amorosas que embellecen la pieza. El color y la fascinación del carnaval en Barcelona, la ciudad cosmopolita que conoció **Calderón** y fascinó a todo el Barroco, y la máscara que recuerda que todo es posible, aunque todo parezca perdido.

Predetermined characters, capable of reading signs, of intuiting fatal "messages", with one foot rooted in symbolism and the other in the popular tradition. Echoes of ships sinking, impossible loves, assassinations, "repentant" fascinations, etc., that remind us of the

Byzantine novel and the later Italian *novella*. Characters that verge on the line of *comedia*, that fulfill this function, letting pass through that rare air of tragedy. Music, songs like innocent games, almost to the point of frivolity, in amorous scenes that embellish the piece. The color and fascination with the carnival of Barcelona, the cosmopolitan city that Calderón knew and fascinated everyone of the time, and the mask that reminds that everything is possible, even if it may seem lost.

The scene changed and we saw a port city, Naples, painted on a backdrop. The painting was beautiful with many rich and deep blues. However, the painting was slanted, almost expressionistic, as it did not fill the width of the stage. The painting obeyed the rules of linear perspective but, because it was slanted, it hinted at things that did not quite fit. The same can be said of most of the set design elements in the first act. They helped to create the background, literally framing the characters and their place and time while indicating things are off course. The costumes only enriched the scene through the rich use of color. Because the painting backdrop did not take up the entire upstage space and because there were so few other scenic elements used on stage, darkness surrounded the action on all sides. This scenic practice was reminiscent of paintings, especially portraits, where ones see the person in color framed against a black or very dark background. The idea of portrait was vital to this production and text as everyone tried to mold Serafina in a way to fit their hopes and expectations of her. It was mostly the women's costumes that caught the eye. Porcia (Eva Trancón) was dressed in a very rich green dress with a few ruffles that contrasted nicely when the stunning Serafina (Nuria Mencía) entered the picture for the first time. First of all we noticed her extremely tall hat, and that she was

wearing a green and pink dress that was lighter than Porcia's. The mariners returning from sea were vibrantly dressed with big blue capes, bright red suits and French like hats, reminiscent of French sailors of the 18th century. If no words were used, the scenic images could still tell the story of the play: each moment was like a still photograph capturing an instant of the action. It was an ingenious directorial solution. As I have discussed, *El Pintor* suffers from a lack of tonal coherence and emotional flow. Vasco accepted and highlighted this challenge. His painting/portraiture approach underscored the different scenes and different characters and their unique storylines. At the same time, his consistently painter-like approach helped fuse together the story. Additionally, by distorting certain pieces of the set, Vasco was telling us that something was off balance, keeping us on edge, which was so vital for the inconstant action of this play.

Each act was distinguishable on the basis of the different set pieces; however, one aspect that was always dominant was size. The objects all seemed very large and overpowering. The sense of large scale was also created by the openness of the stage and the sizeable distance between the actors on stage, which appeared completely deliberate in the blocking. For example, in the opening of Act II, Roca (Arturo Querejeta) was standing in front of his easel, attempting to paint his wife. She was standing quite ceremoniously up center as he was down right. This blocking of the painting of a picture itself made a picture, and it was enhanced by the choice of costume for Serafina: her dress was rich fuchsia, baring her arms, neck and upper chest. She looked like a goddess, further frustrating Roca as he was unable to capture her essence on his canvas. Each scene in the play was like its own piece of fine art. Consider, for example, how another "painting" was set up in the balcony scene. Two balconies were brought out, stage right

and left. The prince was on one balcony and Porcia was on the other. The image was almost Disney-like, especially considering the way that Porcia was dressed and how she "wooed" the Prince. The scene was borderline comical; the actor playing the Prince had made his character goofy and indifferent to the longings of Porcia. She came across as ridiculous. It seems that the director made the decision to parallel the rather absurd Roca/Serafina and Alvaro/Serafina relationships with that between Porcia and the Prince. The parallel was identifiable but strange at the same time. One has to ask the question as to which was more ridiculous; and the answer is "the relationship between Porcia and the Prince." Additionally, by stretching out the comedy in the Porcia and Prince (Angel R. Jimenez) scenes, the audience was given relief from the tension and horrors of the serious part of the drama.

The *mise en scene* and costumes also tied into the different acting styles which helped to differentiate the characters and created an atmosphere that somewhat reflected the disintegration of Juan Roca's mind and the lives of Alvaro (Daniel Albajalejo) and Serafina. One of the actors commented on the language lending itself to a deeper psychological understanding of the characters: "El uso del romance le sirve para describir y prundizar en la psicología de los personajes" ("The use of the Romance works in order to describe and make ore profound the psychology of the characters")(Arturo Querejeta). It was certain that the three principals portrayed a different acting style than the rest of the characters. This separated the scenes into two types: those where the tragedy was more apparent and the more comical scenes as represented by Porcia and the Prince, for example. Here, again, we see Vasco making lemonade when Calderon provides lemons; rather than fight the play's lack of tonal

consistency, he accentuated it and, in that way, made it part of the overall audience experience. I believe that this was a definite attempt on the part of the director to recreate the psychological kaleidoscope of Juan's mind, the twists and turns in his attitude toward Serafina. This is evident not only in the *mise en scene* but also in the acting. The most poignant moment was at the end of Act II as Juan watched Alvaro's boat disappear into the distance. In the production, the audience watched as the character completely unraveled on stage. Having focused attention on the actor from the beginning of the piece, I could see that he slowly built up to this moment. There was a logical psychological progression in his devastation. However, watching the actor was not enough as the director added one more layer. As Juan physically and emotionally expressed his rage and vengeful desires, the music intensified and performers from the local carnival, wearing huge and colorful yet somewhat demonic masks, surrounded him on two sides. The masks and costumes were of various shapes, sizes, textures and colors, and they came from different centuries. They came straight out of the Italian *commedia*, and Disney's *Alice in Wonderland*, albeit grotesquely distorted in nature. They were beautiful and disturbing all in one moment, providing a visual image for the break that occurs in Juan's mind and leads ultimately to his murders.

Serafina, or the actress playing her, also changed her comportment over the duration of the piece. In the first act, she was borderline overly emotional, but not comical or farcical like Porcia. She was weaker in the first act, which is key to her progression. In Act II, Serafina appeared stronger and more graceful though she was also clearly a victim of her beauty. Sadly, in Act III, it was a beaten and hopeless Serafina whose life had been completely ruined by Alvaro and also by her own husband. The



actors playing Roca and Serafina really pushed their emotional limits, almost going overboard in their style; this contrasted diabolically with the calm and self-assured actor playing Alvaro. It was completely unnerving how he kept his calm during the entire production, furthering the distinction between the different performance styles. This actor came right out of psychological realism but, rather than disconcert, this choice seemed deliberate and worked well in contrast with the more emotionally stylized characters of Roca and Serafina. Alvaro's costume matched his behavior: a slick leather light brown cape and earthy tones pronounced his smoothed out arrogance. His performance indicated that he believed that he had been robbed of what truly belonged to him: Serafina. One did not know how to take Alvaro's conduct; should he be loved or hated or both? Again this unsettledness only created more dramatic tension in the scene and really explained nothing, but in a positive way: at the end of the production, the audience was left with the thought that we are complex individuals that suffer and create a great amount of suffering. We are tied to one another through nature and art. Calderón clearly understood the human experience as was underscored in this visually beautiful and frightening production. The horror of the events contrasted with the beauty of the costumes and set design.

### **Conclusion**

Vasco offers his take on the apparent remoteness of the theme of honor from a contemporary audience. He does not see it as so far away from our modern world. He believes, rather, that this play shows us how little progress we have made as human beings. Furthermore, he posits, "Ni siquiera el gusto español, generador de horrendos y maravillosos monstruos, ha variado sustancialmente." (Not even the fondness of the

Spaniard [for this theme], generator of horrendous and marvelous monsters, has varied substantially.)

Vasco ends with the quote: " . . .casi la raíz de España. Todo lo que pasa en la obra nos habla de cómo somos ahora" ("...like the root of Spain. Everything that happens in the play talks to us of how we are now"). This invites the question as to whether or not honor is the main focus of Calderon; after all it seems that even for Calderon it is an arcane idea that can be used as a theatrical base to explore the psychological demise of a fascinating character whose life reflects that of humankind and whose nature is allied with art. The production is held together through the series of "paintings" created by means of the design for each scene. At times these works of art are unbalanced and distorted, like the grotesque. At other times they are almost picture perfect as during an idyllic scene that is, however, bordering on farce. By connecting the production through a series of artistic visual images, Vasco joins together the disjointed text. We see snapshots, bordering on the grotesque, of the people of the play. Although they are not relegated to that time period, their ugliness, humor, love, violence, selfishness, pain and severity come alive in a disturbing and volatile manner. We watch as all three principal characters unwind, motivated by selfish, societal and supposedly moral reasons. Balance may not be traditionally restored at the end of the play, but Vasco creates a theatrical space that, perhaps one day, will allow these characters or others like them to crawl out of their hell to a better more harmonious place. Life is messy in this play and in this time period in Spain; and this transfers to contemporary times. When things are in transition, it is impossible to believe in nicely tied up ends. After watching the video several times, I felt bad for all of the characters trapped in this world; they seemed like characters

trapped in a beautiful but grotesquely inflected painting. Change and transformation are difficult as Calderón and Vasco seem to have recognized. As an appropriate way to end this chapter, I use a quote by Bakhtin who connects the carnival with the Renaissance. This relates directly to this play and production: "But the basic carnival nucleus of this culture is by no means a purely artistic form nor a spectacle and does not, generally speaking, belong to the sphere of art. It belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play" (7).

### **The emergence of a new honor code in *El Alcalde de Zalamea***

*Pedro Crespo*: And so when I was meditating  
revenge, God himself puts the rod of justice into my hands! How shall I  
dare myself outrage the law when I am made its keeper?

Some critics denigrate the plays of the Spanish Golden Age because they rely so heavily on the idea of honor. On this view, honor is part of an outdated social code that holds no meaning for a contemporary audience. In the two plays discussed in the previous chapters, for example, honor hovers above the lives of the characters like a heavy weight. The problem is that modern audiences cannot appreciate that weight: they more than likely see the point of view of a 17th century Spaniard as archaic and irrelevant. In particular, contemporary audiences have difficulty appreciating the importance of honor when its value is not established by means of an arduous personal journey. Consider the treatment of honor in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The protagonist struggles the entire play over what to do about his uncle Claudius who murdered his father and married his mother. The struggle for Hamlet is his personal battle to do the honorable thing, that is, to do his duty according to the laws of his father and society: avenge his father's death. His own conscience forms the major roadblock to his revenge and the achievement of honor, and it is precisely this struggle that keeps audience members engaged in the play. We actually see the development of our modern sense of honor in this play through Hamlet's psychologically thrilling struggle to do the right thing. In Calderón de la Barca's *The Mayor of Zalamea*, the protagonist, Pedro Crespo, must also struggle to act appropriately and honorably. The difference between Pedro and Hamlet, however, is that Pedro never goes through the struggle that Hamlet endures. His

moral code is set from the beginning and there is a seeming lack of growth in him. As audience members, we are left wondering at the absence of turmoil inside the character, his lack of personal journey. As a result, the play can appear stagnant with little danger and excitement.

As stated in the program notes for the production that I saw, director Eduardo Vasco writes that *Zalamea* is, "la obra más universalmente reconocida de nuestro teatro clásico" (the play that is the most universally recognized in our classical theatre). Although this is one of the most produced plays on the Spanish classical stage, it gives rise to a number of production challenges. The play is about honor, compelling production teams to deal with a prominent, albeit outdated and overused, theme. Frequently worrisome to actors and directors of classical plays is the problem of how to make well-known and much loved characters "interesting." This is true for modern productions of Shakespeare's plays, for example. Although unknown to most English-speaking audiences, Pedro Crespo is very well known to most Spanish audiences who have encountered the text through reading. Delivering a fresh, new and nuanced performance of this character is another challenge that *Zalamea* poses for the actor and director. A third challenge lies in the fact that it is less an individual than the town of Zalamea that develops over the course of the action. The individual characters appear monochromatic, inhabiting a particular "role" over the course of the play. It is a struggle to find in them an arc of development like that found in characters in most modern dramas. *Zalamea* is not so much about the protagonist's grappling with himself as it is about a society wrestling to grow into a more modern world. Contemporary audiences fascinated by the travails of an individual's psyche can find this aspect of the play hard to

engage. A final difficulty is the focus on class distinctions in the play. Vasco calls *Zalamea* a "drama de labradores" ("drama of laborers"), and compares it to several pieces of its time, including the well-known *Fuenteovejuna* by Lope de Vega. Audiences for whom class is a matter of relative wealth rather than in-born status can have difficulty appreciating the significance of the division between nobles and members of the working class. In order to deal with these problematic aspects of the play, Vasco chose to style his production along the lines of psychological realism: in this way, he gave audiences a chance to connect with the motivational factors driving characters. In this chapter, I will explore the challenges of Calderon's play and the different meanings of honor it suggests. Finally, I will compare these issues with Vasco's production to see how he addressed these challenges.

### **Play synopsis**

The play begins with the downtrodden Spanish army marching into the town of Zalamea. Which war they are marching back from is uncertain but Phillip II is the King of Spain. During his reign, Spain found itself in many entanglements with other countries that severely damaged the country's finances and international esteem. It is also pertinent to understand the class system of the time. In the world of the play, which mirrored society, the King is at the top of the hierarchically arranged social order. Don Lope, who is in charge of the entire army, is next in line, followed by Captain Alvaro, who is in charge of a large group of men, like a modern day army division. All of the soldiers in this unit are of higher social status than the people in the town of Zalamea. In the actual town, Pedro Crespo is a lowly laborer but of higher standing than most because

he has acquired a substantial sum of money. The soldiers in this play are weary, hungry and tired of fighting, but they are coming upon a town that might provide a few days of respite, revelry, food and drink. It was expected in Spain during this time that when troops came to these towns, lodging and food would be given to the soldiers without charge. The head of this band of disgruntled men is the hooligan Rebolledo, who performs a newer, more sophisticated type of *gracioso* in the play. He has a female companion, the spicy and daring *la Chispa*. She performs the songs in the play and her role in the army is somewhat dubious as she trails along with them. Finally, good news reaches them as they are told that they will get to stay in the town of Zalamea for a few days.

Captain Alvaro is the man directly in charge of the soldiers, and he at first appears as a man bound by honor and strict social norms. This illusion is quickly dispelled. He is revealed to be a man who thinks that the mixing of social classes is completely foul and wrong. Alvaro is told that he will stay at the house of the taciturn Pedro Crespo, the most prosperous man in Zalamea. Nevertheless, Crespo is below Alvaro's social class as he is basically a farmer who has done very well for himself. He does not aspire to go above his current social station as he believes that honor, dignity and respect are truly what define a good man. He believes that if a man tries to raise his social rank, it is only for base appearances. (Curiously, then, both Alvaro and Crespo see the mixing of classes as base). The first complication occurs when Alvaro's sergeant tells him of Crespo's beautiful daughter. The Captain, however, reproaches this young man:

Sergeant, I think you ought to know

Your attitude is incorrect,

Firm when a man is passion-swayed  
 And sees his loved one walking by  
 He says 'My lady' with a sigh.  
 He does not say 'My dairy-maid'.  
 Ladies are, for the man of taste,  
 Artistic objects to acquire.  
 One peasant piece - and his entire  
 Collection is at once debased. (Calderón 7)

His words will of course come back to haunt him.

Crespo has two children, Isabel and Juan. Juan is an uncultured young man who has a terrible habit of gambling away his money. Isabel is a virtuous and beautiful virgin. Crespo is a very strict but loving, supportive and understanding father. When his son chides him for not striving to rise in society by buying a title, Crespo explains that social standing has more to do with one's moral compass and personal sense of honor than a title.

Name me one who doesn't know  
 I'm from a peasant family.  
 Nobody. Right. So if I buy  
 Such a certificate, who's gained?  
 The King - he gets the patent fee.  
 You can't buy blue blood by the pint.  
 Would folk say: Pedro Crespo's changed -  
 The peasant has become a prince?



They'd say: he tried to buy respect -

It cost six thousand silver coins.

I've lot of money, and that proves

I'm rich, not that I'm dishonourable.

---

I want no honour that's unreal.

My parents and their parents were

Ordin'ry people. So are we. (18-19)

He is tested throughout the play to stand by his beliefs.

There are two characters that must be briefly mentioned as they represent another class in this society. Mendo and his servant Nuño represent the aristocracy outside of the military. Mendo is desperately trying to woo Crespo's daughter, Isabela, but she cannot stand him. Additionally, he sees her on a level much below his own, and talks about her as if she were an object to possess sexually and nothing more. Complicating the figure of Mendo is the fact that he is a poor aristocrat who has lost most of his money. The equivalent would be the declining aristocracy represented in Chekhov's plays at the turn of the 20th century. Calderón is apparently looking at a similar process of deterioration as Spain hurled itself into economic and political ruin in the 17th century.

Eventually, Captain Alvaro, intrigued by the fact that Crespo has chosen to hide his daughter from the soldiers, schemes and creates a diversion so that he may enter into her chambers. Alvaro sees Isabel hiding to preserve her honor but his virile and violent passion takes over as he falls desperately and, later, obsessively, in love with her.

Additionally, Rebolledo gets roped into Alvaro's schemes. To add another layer to the

clearly delineated class structure, while we are discovering Alvaro's schemes with respect to Isabel, his supervising authority arrives, the venerable Don Lope. Lope makes a good friend and foe for Pedro Crespo because he also lives by an extremely strict code of honor; however, he is also from a class far above that of Crespo. Lope takes control of the situation and tells Alvaro to stay away from the house and from this family. Lope and Crespo's bantering back and forth about the meaning of honor is half of the play's entertainment. Lope firmly believes that one is born into his own honor, or that honor goes hand in hand with a title that is bestowed according to one's bloodline and nobility. Meanwhile, Crespo holds that honor has to do with one's personal integrity and that it is something that has to be earned by living a good life. Their argument will carry through to the tumultuous ending. These two men also provide good role models for the wily Juan, Crespo's son. Juan eventually decides to join the army, and Don Lope allows him to do so.

Throughout the play Alvaro is driven by his obsessive need to be with Isabela. He gets into real trouble when he again disobeys Lope who decides to remove the troops from town. Following their exodus, with the help of his minions, Alvaro returns and kidnaps Isabela while creating a wild and raucous diversion in Crespo's house. At the beginning of Act III, we see Isabela who has escaped but only after she has been raped and ravaged by Alvaro. She knows that she has lost her honor and dishonored her family. In an extremely moving monologue she begs to die. She is caught in quite a predicament:

If I go home, my father's wide  
Wound will gape wider, horribly.  
How he loved to see his honour.

Reflected in the moon of mine.  
 Moon . . . a bad sun has eclipsed her,  
 My honour's blotted out. No light.  
 And if I don't go home, from fear  
 And from respect for him - they'll say  
 I encouraged my attacker  
 And call me hypocritical. (72)

Her father listens in the background without her knowing; he also begs to die as he is torn by his daughter's pain and his own predicament concerning the family honor. When he does appear to her, she begs him to kill her. He refuses even though that would have been accepted in this world. This is an important event in the play. In *Pintor*, Roca kills his wife as the only way to save his honor but, in this play, Crespo chooses to transcend such barbaric and outdated practice. Later, he stops his son, Juan, from killing his sister. We never hear from Isabela again, but we learn that she has been taken to a nunnery; this move restores some sense of honor to the family, which probably eased the minds of the 17th century audience. Unfortunately, it is harder for a modern audience to accept.

It is at this time that Crespo receives the news that he is to be Mayor of the town. He is dumbfounded because he now believes that it is his job to distribute justice to Alvaro. He does want to do it justly, however. The only problem is that Don Lope and the law mandate that the nasty Captain's fate is to be decided by soldiers, at a social level higher than Crespo's rank. The third act features their argument and Crespo's pleading with Alvaro to marry his daughter, which he resolutely refuses to do. Crespo has Alvaro condemned to death, and Lope seeks to punish Crespo for punishing Alvaro. King

Phillip II then arrives and, in classic *deus ex machina* fashion, pardons Crespo for what he has done. Juan leaves to serve in the army under the protection of Don Lope and it seems a somewhat happy ending, barring what happened to Isabela, of course. In one of his final speeches Crespo explains how the modern laws should be:

In such a case, if anyone  
 Came to me with the same complaint  
 Wouldn't I do him justice? Yes.  
 Aren't I allowed to do the same  
 For my own daughter as I would  
 For anybody else's child? Of course.  
 Apart from that, just now I jailed  
 My own son- so it's obvious.  
 I'm an impartial magistrate,  
 Uninfluenced by claims of blood.  
 Here are the legal documents:  
 If anyone finds a falsehood  
 Or an irregularity  
 Or that I've bribed my witnesses  
 Or altered their testimony,  
 Then I'm content that you should take  
 And execute me. (99-100)

His argument is very simple: in our society a man's honor is based on his ability to make fair and just decisions. Every man is able to achieve honor in this sense; honor is not a

title that one carries like a badge. Captain Alvaro is one of the least honorable men in the play despite his rank. Finally, the common man is capable of distributing justice in a fair and rational way, and should be allowed to do so. Thus *Zalamea* offers a very modern view of honor, especially considering the time and place in which it was conceived.

### **Textual analysis**

Honor is a major theme in most Spanish Golden Age plays. As noted scholar Susan Paun García writes, it causes problems for contemporary audiences and playwrights:

Another difficulty for translators - and their audiences - is the pervasive presence in Spanish seventeenth-century drama of the theme of honor, defined not as conscience, or a sense of right or wrong, but as the esteem of others or public reputation. As we will see, adaptors of Spanish plays, for whom such an understanding is irrelevant or even repugnant, frequently either downplayed considerations of honor when producing their own works or eliminated them altogether. The result is a text with a considerably altered moral structure. (3)

Obviously, it is necessary for any potential producer of a Spanish Golden Age drama to address the problem of honor.

In *Honor and Violence in Golden Age Spain*, scholar Scott K. Taylor investigates honor, drawing most of the information from criminal law books of the time. Echoing other critics, Taylor calls the “wife murder plays” like *Pintor* “especially telling products of Castilian culture whose themes helped to mark Spain as a uniquely violent, honor-

obsessed country quite different from the rest of early modern Europe" (2). In this scholar's view, the theme of honor in Spanish Golden Age plays has three major characteristics: 1) a man's honor is dependent upon the females of the family; 2) one's reputation was tied directly to one's sexual behavior; and 3) the only way to react to behavior deemed dishonorable was through violence (2-3). Taylor suggests that some scholars believe that Spaniards were honor-obsessed, but not necessarily for the reasons above; rather the obsession had to do with maintaining the purity of the family bloodline. People would go to great lengths to demonstrate purity of blood. Taylor goes on to question whether a true "honor code" existed; but he does acknowledge that honor was a "tool, used equally by men and women to manage relations with their neighbors and maintain their place in the community" (7). Taylor maintains that it is better to call honor "rhetoric" instead of a code as Spaniards had a choice when it came time to settling a dispute; they could invoke the language of honor or choose reconciliation. Roca sees his situation differently in *Pintor*; he suggests that he has no choice but to follow the code of honor thrust upon him by society. Additionally, honor was not based purely on sexual propriety but encompassed a wide range of topics: "competence in one's trade or office, the management of one's credit and debt relationships, and one's performance in the aggressive, competitive play that composed much of male sociability" (9). It appears that honor was about protecting one's reputation, and it applied to both men and women. Women did have to protect their reputation regarding sexuality, but, "Like men, women took steps to protect other family members, even their husbands - sometimes resorting to slander and violence in their defense" (9). Finally, honor was an aspect that applied to everyone in society and was not just held to by the social elite.

In the end, Taylor connects honor to an individual's social reputation, meaning that it is driven by public opinion. One can never be certain what honor truly meant to a Spaniard in the 17th century, but Taylor's analysis can provide a starting point to help ground the world of *El Alcalde de Zalamea*. In this play, honor is used as a dramatic device to help structure the story and provide for more dramatically provocative action. If handled correctly, honor—especially, the tension between the different views of honor voiced by Pedro Crespo and Don Lope--can become part of the play's modernity, rather than evidence of its irrelevant antiquity.

Crespo embodies a type of honor that feels very contemporary. He is a man whose actions match his words. He sees honor as a matter of personal integrity, a quality to which all men should aspire, not just those born of noble blood. This internalized sense of honor makes Crespo seem modern, especially when Calderon opposes Crespo's sense of honor against the system of aristocratic ranks and privileges. As Taylor explain, the judicial system in 17th century Spain was seen as a system of vengeance whereby victims (or their families) could achieve retribution for crimes committed against them. He writes:

Even the men who were most invested in the primacy of law used the term *vengeance*, implying personal enmity and an active search for retribution, rather than describing criminal law in terms of judges imposing justice, an impersonal process of restoring peace and order. Royal justice was meant to replace private vengeance, but it was a way to achieve vengeance all the same. The problem, according to the aggrieved Pedro Crespo and our standard understanding of the honor code, was that vengeance at the hands

of the justice system was no vengeance at all--taking revenge oneself was the only real revenge.

The idea that vengeance was the goal of criminal law lends support to the stage kings of Lope and Calderón who granted legitimacy to private vengeance through their equivocal responses to the murder of captains, nobles, and wives. (68)

In many circumstances, a victim can preserve his honor by using the judicial system to take revenge on an enemy. The problem in the case of *El Alcade* is that, because the judicial system respects aristocratic rank, it protects the criminal; it denies Crespo the right to prosecute Captain Alvaro for kidnapping and raping his daughter. Due to his rank, Alvaro is to be tried by his class, the military headed by Lope and, above him, by the King. Crespo decides that this system is unjust. However, he does not kill Alvaro outright. Instead, he makes the case a civil matter and chooses the sentencing for Alvaro, which was completely against the law at the time. Crespo is fighting the set-up of the entire governmental/judicial system and to further his just cause, even throws his own son into jail so he will not avenge his sister's death by murdering Alvaro or kill his sister for "destroying" the family honor. Crespo goes beyond the traditional meaning of honor in this play and fights the system; contemporary producers should clarify his actions so as to make the theme of honor are more interesting and modern.

The next hurdle faced by a potential producer is the character of Pedro Crespo and, in general, the seeming one-dimensionality of the major characters. As mentioned, Crespo is a very well known figure to many Spanish audiences, which pressures the actor and director to make him vital and fresh. Nonetheless, the larger obstacle is the apparent



lack of development in him and the other major characters. The key to success here is to recognize that Calderón has shaped the play so that certain characters play off each other, even if they have a strict set of traits that define them. In other words, even if the characters themselves appear one-dimensional, their relations to one another create a multi-dimensional system through which the viewer circulates. There is never a point in the play where Crespo falters in his pursuit of what is right and just. Lope de Figuera, in charge of the wily group of soldiers and, obviously, from a much higher class than Crespo, is equally insistent. Taken together, Don Lope and Crespo present the viewer with complementary points of view, opposed yet parallel. For example, Crespo is in charge of the well being of his children and Don Lope is in charge of his soldiers and of enforcing the laws of Spain. Their relationship begins tenuously when Don Lope arrives to the commotion in Crespo's house as Captain Alvaro has discovered the hidden Isabel. Don Lope, upon throwing Alvaro out, decides himself to stay in this house. At first, Calderon presents Don Lope and Crespo as bitter rivals, each denigrating the other in asides to the audience. When their conversation turns to honor, however, it becomes clear that they have much in common: they are headstrong, assured but loyal, caring, good men even though they are separated by the status assigned to them by society. These similarities and differences between the characters create a rich site of engagement for contemporary audiences. There is something that Don Lope has not quite come to understand; Crespo must prove to his friend/foe that honor is something that rises from within and not something that is attached with a title or birth into a particular class. Crespo could buy a higher social status, after all, which was something frequently done

during that time period. Crespo derides his son, Juan, for suggesting that he purchase a title because as he explains:

You can't buy blue blood by the pint.

Would folk say: Pedro Crespo's changed -

The peasant has become a prince?

They'd say: he tried to buy respect -

It cost six thousand silver coins.

I've lots of money, and that proves

I'm rich, not that I'm honorable. (18)

In the standoff between Crespo and Lope, it comes down to who has the right to punish the Captain, first for his trick in entering Isabel's quarters and abusing Crespo's hospitality and secondly for the rape of his daughter. Don Lope ardently and angrily argues that he has the right because Crespo is lower in social status than the Captain. In their first argument, Crespo almost convinces Don Lope. He points out that men bestow titles, and that what truly counts is in one's soul; the great judge of one's honor is God alone. Don Lope implies that Crespo accepts all types of "impositions," to which Crespo replies:

Upon my house and money -yes -

Upon my reputation - no.

I'll give up life and property

At the King's word. But honor is

The offspring of the soul of man.

And the soul, God tells us, is his. (33)

The reference to God may disconcert some modern spectators, but the sentiment is universal and timeless. It actually takes the intervention of the King to excuse Crespo's actions in his second argument with Don Lope. Don Lope never fully comes to understand the protagonist's grandness of spirit and view of honor. Perhaps the one character that does change over the course of the action, Juan, will learn from his father when Crespo swears that even if the King had not intervened, he would have done everything possible to do what was just and morally correct. Pedro has lost his daughter, so to speak, but his son is set free; he remains Mayor and wins the admiration of the King (and audience) through his moral uprightness. Crespo and Lope do not change; in this respect, they are characters that maintain their perspectives throughout the entire play. By provoking, challenging and testing each other, however, they create an intense multivalent argument in which audience members can emotionally and intellectually invest themselves.

Calderon uses other character pairings to create a web demonstrating the complexity of human nature. In an introduction to an edited version of the play, scholar Ruana de Haza notes, "*El alcalde de Zalamea* es una obra compleja y polisémica. Ninguna interpretación podrá abarcar todos sus matices ni explicar cada uno de los enigmas que presenta sobre la naturaleza humana, sobre las motivaciones de los hombres, sobre la naturaleza de la felicidad, la justicia, la razón y la prudencia. (*The Mayor of Zalamea* is a complex and polysemic work as it offers ideas and words that contain more than one meaning. There is no interpretation that could fully cover all of its nuances or explore each one of the existing enigmas that are presented about human nature, about the motivations of human beings, about the nature of happiness, justice, reason and

prudence) (56). This polysemic complexity is related to the characters and how they work with and in opposition to each other. In an introduction to the play, scholar Ruano de la Haza proposes that Captain Alvaro is a one dimensional character, "La reacción despectiva del Capitán no sorprende al espectador. El es un personaje unidimensional, monocorde, el auténtico <<malo>> de la pieza, sin una sola característica redimidora, pues incluso se muestra como un cobarde, al huir en varias ocasiones de don Lope de Figuerola." (The Captain's contemptuous reaction does not surprise the spectator. He is the one dimensional, monochord, the authentic "bad" man in the piece, without one redeeming quality, and he shows himself to be a coward by fleeing on several occasions from Lope de Figuerola) (46). It is natural for modern actors and audiences to crave more depth in characters. For this reason, it makes sense that a director would try to expand the characters' psychological complexity to make them more appealing. We can never know if the desire to create a psychological understanding of these characters is out of line with author intent, but the theatre of our times almost demands this type of interpretation. However, it may be that much of the extra work is unnecessary if one stays with the structure of the character relations.

The final production problem that I will address briefly has to do with the focus on and separation of the various classes of society represented in this play. In his book on honor, Taylor offers a brief breakdown of the ranks in 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish society. On the top rung of the social ladder in a typical town would be wealthy landowners, the "petty nobility" or *hidalgos*. Below this group might be the educated male clergy followed by "prosperous peasant families; a few professionals such as physicians, surgeons, pharmacists, and schoolteachers; and some merchants" (11). There would have

also been artisans and the people who ran inns and taverns. Pedro Crespo would have been part of the "prosperous peasant family" and not the *labradores*, who "owned some land but usually not enough to support a family" (11). Finally there were many people who owned absolutely no land at all. This societal organization is foreign to contemporary audiences not because there does not exist a multitude of classes in our society, but because the people of 17<sup>th</sup> century Spain believed that one is born into a social status and that rising to another station is either inappropriate or impossible. It is this system that is at the crux of Crespo's and Lope's argument. Added to the complex social make-up in *El Alcalde* is the soldier class, led by a noble, Lope de Figuera. Within the soldier class is also a sub-system: Captain Alvaro is in charge of his men and on the low end are the somewhat comic characters of Rebolledo and Chispa. Another class element that Calderón throws in is Mendo and Nuño who are penniless aristocracy.

Calderón has crafted a well-structured text that does present character types, but there is still complexity in their interactions and conflicts. Additionally, the ending asks us to pause and reflect on how the ends may be tied up. Geraint Evans observes,

[A]lthough there is peace at the end it is marked with loss. Reputation, often expressed in terms of honour, is defined and cherished by many of the protagonists, but at the end of the play all have lost honour. No longer a virgin, Isabel enters a convent without ever having expressed a religious vocation. The army commander, who defended the right of soldiers to try their own, has seen his authority compromised by peasants and the king, while Crespo has seen his family split up, and the captain is dead. Order, associated with comic resolution, is restored but at a cost. (70)

### **Production analysis**

When the *Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico* of Madrid presented this famous piece at the Almagro Festival in the summer of 2010, director Eduardo Vasco had two major barriers: presenting an outdated feudal class system to a very democratic audience and re-creating one of Calderon's most beloved characters, Pedro Crespo. Vasco's answer to these dilemmas was to present a stripped down, realistic drama that fights to explore and demonstrate the psychological machinations behind Crespo and Captain Alvaro; in other words, Vasco chose to produce the play as a modern realistic tragedy. In the program notes for the production, Vasco says about the play and Calderón's language, "Sus diálogos considerados paradigmáticos, al contener la belleza del verso calderoniano y parte de una filosofía popular que continúa profundamente enraizada en nuestros días, y que tiene que ver con el individuo mismo, con la honradez, la dignidad, el trabajo, la tierra, la confianza y la justicia" (The dialogues are considered paradigmatic as they contain the beauty of the Calderonian verse and offer a popular philosophy that is continuously enmeshed profoundly in our days, and has to do with the individual himself and his relationship with honor, dignity, work, land, trust and justice" (*El Alcalde* 3).

There are two major features in Vasco's production: contrasting acting styles, and a minimalist set design. The director takes a psychologically realistic approach to some characters and a more stylized approach to others; he subverts our expectations regarding highly familiar roles and caricaturizes others to an extreme. The set stands against the acting styles in its minimalistic design. Purposefully detailed costumes are also

juxtaposed, helping to shed light on class distinctions. These directorial choices will be addressed along with how they addressed the textual difficulties previously listed.

On July 6, 2010 in Almagro, Spain I saw the most recent rendition of this play by the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico, directed by Eduardo Vasco. It was a proscenium stage but we sat outside, underneath the night sky. The preshow lights were dim and one could barely perceive a few set pieces: four benches and some chairs. When the lights went down, the sound of a live beating drum could be heard. Eventually the drummer came onstage, dressed as a soldier, tapping away on that typical snare drum associated with armies from times past. By means of this musical figure, Vasco was telling the audience that troops are arriving and that this is time past; at the same time, the image was familiar enough to create the sense of the timelessness of war. The drum was heard periodically throughout the production. In addition to the drumming there was singing in the background. In other CNTC productions that I have seen by this director and others, there persists the desire to keep with the tradition of live music, at least part of the time, and songs performed by the actors. Songs are incorporated into many of the Spanish Golden Age texts, most likely as way to increase the entertainment value of the production. The drum beats a march tempo and actors begin to enter from the wings, sitting on the benches and chairs as if watching the production, while soldiers come out in line formation to the center of the stage, singing and marching.

The first part of the show was performed without any scenery. In fact the entire production used only three set pieces to indicate place, accompanied by changes in light for time and mood, and movement of benches and chairs when necessary. The scenes changed quickly in the play, so a realistic set would have been cumbersome and broken

the flow of action (in this respect, Spanish Golden Age plays are very much like those of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras). The first "created" set piece used in this staging was a painted flat that seemed to be the interior or exterior of a simple house. It was painted to look like a wall with wooden slats. This represented the Crespo residence. The second piece was used towards the end of the play. The piece was another painted flat in a brown color scheme that looked worn with cracked with fissures and was very suggestive of the jail where the men were being kept. The third scenic piece appeared at the beginning of Act III, when Crespo and Isabel find each other on the hillside. Instead of a painted flat, the entire stage was opened up with rectangular long columns stretching from floor to ceiling placed up stage. The lighting hinted at dawn, but there was no apparent intention to portray the countryside in a realistic way. An audience member commented that the rectangular columns reminded her of bars in a jail; this makes sense for the scene represented the place where Crespo, hands tied, listens to Isabel tell of her awful experience with the Captain. The scene created a sense of expanse; Crespo looked like he was being swallowed up by the space. Isabel was down stage, much closer to the audience, as if on a different level than her father. There was an abstract quality to the set that contrasted with the different choices in acting style. The purpose of the set was to make the audience focus on the individual characters while providing simple indications of place and atmosphere.

The highly detailed costumes also contrasted the minimal set. Based on 17<sup>th</sup> century attire, they helped to differentiate the play's various social classes. Returning to the opening moments of the production, the marching action was broken as the soldiers



gathered around Rebolledo for his complaints of the sad state that they lived in. His first lines are as follows:

Left! Right! And to hell with the rat  
 Marches us here and there and back,  
 Nowhere to no-place with a pack  
 And with no booze - (1)

Rebolledo's dress caused him to stand out from the other soldiers. Whereas they wore black his colors were brown with hints of red. The textures differed as well; Rebolledo's costume looked as if it were made of leather. He is the rebellious one in the play, and this difference in his costume made that quality apparent. The Sergeant and Alvaro were clothed a step above the typical soldier's black garb, the Sergeant appearing more clean and crisp while Alvaro wore a bit more decoration. The costumes' relation to social class became even more apparent when Don Lope, who is completely in charge of the troops, came on stage. He wore a big white accordion collared blouse, black pantaloons and a cape with very ornate embroidery. What was most striking, however, was the tall hat and the golden chained neck piece that hung down his chest. He looked like he had stepped out of a 17th century painting. However, there was still the king who was even more sublime in his apparel and seemed almost surreal. This might have been purposeful, an acknowledgement of his extraordinary—nearly surreal—appearance late in the action when he suddenly appeared out of nowhere to make final judgment like the *deus ex machina*. Philip II's hat was a bit higher than Don Lope's, his black cape was shiny and his gold necklace was larger with small plates of gold instead of linked chains. To counterpoint these aristocratic figures, there was the dress of Don Crespo and his son.

They were garbed like villagers, in lighter colors and rougher fabrics. Crespo's wear was a bit untidy and matched the vacillating way that the actor portrayed him, Joaquín Notario. His pants were of a light brown color and his top a blousy white; the materials of both were rough, indicative of rural life. The women were attractively adorned, but wore similar types of cloth and light, unassuming colors. The big change for Isabel came after her rape; during her big monologue, she wore a completely white top and skirt, suggestive of a slip or undergarment from the period. Juan's garb also changed when he became a soldier. He no longer dressed in the rural style but did not don the soldier's black either; rather, he wore a grayish leather suggesting that he was nobler in action than some of his brothers-in-arms. Juan is the new kind of soldier who earns social status by means of his actions; he is not given his status by being born into a particular rank nor does he purchase it by buying a step up in society. Clearly, the costumes helped to establish the cultural space that these characters occupied. Rebollado and Chispa were very marginal as they were not completely soldier or civilian, good or bad. The soldiers wear black, and Captain Alvaro really represented the badness of his kind. Alvaro, wearing a black decorated uniform, appeared to be someone striving to be honorable but, of course, this is an ironic choice since he is completely incapable of noble action due to his own moral vapidness. Don Lope and the King represent the old guard but understand how to correlate noble actions with noble status. Pedro and the villagers are people of the earth and land. They are humble and live a more carefree life. The costumes enabled audience members to understand the characters' social relations and, combined with the limited number of props and set pieces, allowed them to understand the essence of the play without breaking its flow or changing its rhythm.

The acting styles also reflected the class and place of these characters; this was especially true of the acting style used by Notario who played Pedro. He seemed to lay huge emphasis on the “psychological gesture” associated with Michael Chekhov. When Crespo first came onto the scene he was nothing like the man that was previously described by the Sergeant to Alvaro. He appeared lethargic, slow-paced, heavy in his movements as if weighed down by deep thought and mature perspective. He was an anachronism, a man ahead of his time because of his modern views of humanity. This contrasted very obviously with his counterpoint in the play, Don Lope, played by José Luís Santos, who was of similar age. The actor playing Crespo used strong gestures to highlight his inner personality. He entered shuffling his feet, immediately creating the impression of insecurity and instability. Crespo does not waiver in his integrity and beliefs but, in this production, it did seem that the actor made him very aware that his views did not match that of his society. The way the actor moved, sat, and gestured were reminiscent of a fish out of water; Crespo appeared to be a man not quite comfortable in his own surroundings. This choice was also registered by the Crespo's inability to look people in the eyes during much of his time on stage. The final touch was the actor's speech. Unfortunately, he mumbled to the extent that, many times, his speech was impossible to understand. This acting choice may have been calculated to create a sense of novelty and freshness—remember that Crespo is a figure very familiar to Spanish audiences—but there must have been another way to inflect the actor's speech so as to communicate his deep inner psychology without sacrificing the audibility of his words. Don Lope, by contrast, was sure-footed, grounded and seemed very tall next to the slightly stooped Crespo. His gestures were larger and he was much louder, but easier to

understand. Vasco seemed to want to focus on the internal growth of some characters. We saw this when Crespo learned that he had become the Mayor of Zalamea through a slight change in his costume. He began to don a robe like piece and carried a staff to indicate a rise in stature. He still looked displaced but almost religious in his official vestments.

Another important aspect in the play is Crespo's relationship with his children. In the text and in this production, he was loving and very attentive toward his children. When Juan appeared in their first scene together, remorseful about his losses while gambling with his father's money, Crespo did not become angry. He simply offered his advice on how Juan should behave, saying that he should not put at risk money that he is unable to pay back. Crespo was not worried and did not punish or chide his son. He was very warm and loving with his daughter, Isabel, who was equally demonstrative in loving and honoring her father. In this way, Vasco led the audience to see Crespo as an everyday sort of person, a father who heads and cares for his family in the most respectful manner as possible. This Crespo was not taciturn, angry, loud, or unbearable. When the time came to say goodbye to Juan, it was quite moving; he imparted advice to his son in a way similar to Polonius instructing Laertes in *Hamlet*. He was truly upset by the departure of his son as Isabel moved to comfort him. This directorial/acting choice became important when, regardless of his fatherly feelings, he did the right thing and put his son in jail to prevent further violence.

When Alvaro, played by Ernesto Arias, first entered in this production, he was accompanied by the Sergeant, portrayed by Pedro Almagro, who actually appeared to be the more evil of the two. He was a true henchman of the Captain, who anticipated his

desires and moves. The Sergeant was dressed in black, like the other soldiers, and was cool and calculating in his manner. Of all of the actors on stage, Almagro who played the Sergeant was the most subtle and naturalistic, which had the effect of displacing the figure of the Sergeant (as Crespo was displaced) but also of making him more menacing. Alvaro, on the other hand, displayed a very laid back attitude; when he entered, he carried a rose, something that the actor had off and on during the play. I do not know what the rose signified, but it was red and singular. Watching the transformation of Alvaro in this production, I would surmise that Vasco felt it important for the audience to understand the stress and suffering of Alvaro. He, too, seemed a character caught in a time warp.

Alvaro gets into trouble when he sees Isabela for the first time and his lust and sexual drive take over: they are in complete conflict with the treasured honor system that has guided him through life to this point. At first Alvaro was nonchalant in his walk, with a slight air of authority and humor. The actor was attractive and had a masculine air about him; he did not appear vile or repulsive. He could easily be liked by women and did not seem the type that needed to force women to love him. I would guess that casting an actor with these qualities was a deliberate choice by the director because it helped create a more complex relationship between audience and character. On the one hand, the I think that Alvaro deserves to die or, at least, receive severe punishment following his rape of Isabela but this animosity is opposed by the actor's charm which helped to pull the audience into his struggle on a more intimate level.

The antagonist, Captain Alvaro never comes to understand true honor and, in this production, actually moves farther from it over the course of the action. In the first scene, Alvaro was almost docile. Then he discovered Isabel, acted by Eva Rufo, a

moment that the director marked with a very strong choice. Their first encounter on stage was almost a wooing scene. Time slowed down; Alvaro was completely taken by Isabel and she was very aware of his intentions and seemed pleased and equally attracted. He slowly moved closer and she did not move away. All eyes were focused on these two and, on his last line before Crespo's voice broke the scene, Alvaro's hand came up to Isabel's face as if the two were going to kiss. By making Alvaro attractive to Isabel, his psychological crisis became more complex and interesting for a modern audience. It did however, create a shade of grey around the character of Isabel that may or may not have been appropriate; it was there for the audience to contemplate that evening. The actor playing Alvaro used a psychologically realistic acting technique; this choice further complicated his character and the audience's relationship with him as he was one dimensional. I found myself actually feeling pity for Alvaro as he lamented his disturbed mind; one could see him fighting against it. At the end of the play, after being apprehended by the new Mayor, Crespo, he laughed his way through the scene because he has completely lost any sense of goodness that he might have had before.

Strong choices were made by the director in regards to other characters as well. For example, Rebolledo, played by David Lorente, could be portrayed in many ways, e.g. as a slimy war profiteer or even as a clown like a traditional *gracioso*, but the actor and director chose a different approach. There was nothing overly aggressive or disagreeable about Rebolledo in this production. He saw the waste of war and progressed through the play focusing on one thing: his survival. In this aspect he appeared to be a very realistic character. He did not take particular delight in helping the Captain obtain Isabel, but seemed very straight forward about it. His understanding of the situation seemed almost

modern. He must do what he has to do to pay his debts, survive and have a little fun. If this actor played to a 17th century audience, he might be the one to whom most spectators could most closely relate. His speech was voluminous but never exaggerated. In fact, there was an underscoring of tiredness in his breath and demeanor. This Rebolledo had been roughed up by the war which gave the actor the opportunity to create a bit of a sardonic edge. He filled space with his body and his energy, and he made great use of his arms but his gestures suited the play and his role as not being overly realistic or overly exaggerated. He spoke directly and naturally to the other characters on stage as one finds in more modern acting, as opposed to declamatory acting that was carried out by the performers playing Mendo and Nuño. Rebolledo is such an interesting character on account of his greed, trickery, jokes and selfishness that it almost seemed unfair to play him in such a low-key; many an actor would have chosen to make more of the role.

Rebolledo's partner in crime, however, La Chispa, portrayed by Pepa Pedroche, was almost the opposite. The word "chispa" means spark in English. When I first read this character, I pictured her as very lively and lacking in morality. In this production she definitely was a ball of energy, but of a highly masculine kind. She was dressed in pants of a color similar to those worn by Rebolledo, and even though it was intimated that they were lovers of a sort, their relationship came off much more as friends or compatriots. The actress very much played to the audience and used large gestures with a forced energy in her voice. As one of the guys, her gait was masculine and even her singing took on a rather jolly, pirate like tone. She seemed the true intermediary between the audience and the life on stage, but that connection was made for the sake of humor

and not necessarily to interpret the action in the manner of a chorus. It would be interesting to see her character played in a more sinister and serious tone.

The two characters that really seemed out of place in this production were Mendo and his servant Nuño. Mendo is another example of a person with a title who lacks personal integrity. He is the stereotypical male swine figure in this play; he just wants to have his way with Isabel and then do away with her. The Mendo in this production, Miguel Cubero, was the fool or *gracioso*, accompanied by his own jester, his servant, Nuño, played by Alejandro Saa. Mendo was dressed in a manner reminiscent of a clown, all in red. Besides, his entire costume hailed from a different time period except for the big white accordion collar around his neck. He even wore a bowler hat with a feather sticking out of it. In contrast to the gold chains worn by Don Lope and the King, he wore a big chain around his neck from which hung oversized keys. He was made-up to look like a clown, too, with worn off white, exaggerated features, rouged cheeks and red nose. Nuño was dressed as his master's opposite, all in rags, the image of an abused and ill respected servant. The actor playing Mendo used gestures that were exaggerated, even grotesque, and he was way over the top. He walked funny, mimicked, incorporated many facial expressions and changed his voice radically for his different lines. Interestingly enough this actor had played the "gracioso" figure in *Estrella de Sevilla* the year before with the same company. Mendo and Nuño filled the break in the first act between the scene set in the camp of the troops and the scene set in the house of Pedro Crespo.

In *El Alcalde de Zalamea*, Pedro Crespo fights against the traditional understanding of honor that would compel him to commit violence in response to the rape of his daughter. The scene that really pushes him to the brink comes at the beginning



of Act III following Alvaro's abduction of Isabel. It was also by far the most fascinating scene in the play, even though it seemed to come from a completely different production. When Isabel came out having escaped from her captor, she looked remarkably angelic. Her hair was down, but mussed up. Her undergarments were white but not stained or torn; part of the upper slip was slightly un-tucked. Her speech was crystal clear and there was a certain tranquility and otherworldliness to her voice that matched the images of the stars, auroras, planets that are in her monologue. The lighting carried hues of blues, purples and soft gold, and against the large rectangular columns, it was expressionistic in ambience. By matching her appearance with the words she spoke, we saw that although Isabel was the most victimized character in this play, her wrongs were not the most important part of the story. This Isabel understood that her role as a female require that she do away with her life if this society. By setting her against this background with her father very far up stage listening to her, we saw her as he did. Crespo could not kill her because he knew that in his heart, her honor was not measured by what had been done to her. She was beautiful and ethereal and this was how she will always be in Crespo's eyes, even if his society, and at this point, his son, were unable to see her this way. This scene really worked because there was so much focus on the language, which was full of visceral imagery, and the actress let it take a hold of her. This acting choice allowed us to be with Isabel and really feel how she was pushed aside in the rest of the play; in this moment, Vasco and the actress appealed to our modern sympathies since Isabel was treated poorly throughout the play.

### **Conclusion**

This production created a triangle of three men between Crespo, Don Lope, and Alvaro, each defending his own code of honor, with the king standing in the middle (in the middle of the triangle). But the king in this particular production was borderline ridiculous and it was Crespo who replaced him, at least in this spectator's eyes. Many definitions of honor were given voice in this play: honor based on the nobility of one's family, one's military rank, the purity of one's blood, or as a responsibility to one's family. "Todas estas variedades de honor, patrimonio del alma, que antepone la dignidad personal y la integridad moral a cualquier otro tipo de consideración social. *El Alcalde de Zalamea* presenta el conflicto que surge cuando la casta militar trata de negar el respeto y la dignidad personal a que tiene derecho todo individuo" ("All of the varieties of honor that have patrimony over the soul, put personal dignity and moral integrity in front of any other social consideration. *El Alcalde de Zalamea* presents a conflict that emerges when the military class tries to negate the respect and personal dignity that is the right of every individual") (Ruano de la Haza 53). This could be a fight that will continue as long as humankind divides itself into social ranks.

There were several scenes that truly worked in this production, but some elements did not mesh as well. First, the clash between the minimal and abstract set design and the two different acting styles discussed. There were the actors who played Alvaro, Crespo, Juan, Rebolledo and Isabel that leaned towards a very psychological and realistic type of performance. On the other side were La Chispa, Mendo and Niño who were aggressively loud, clown like, and very physical and representational in their style of acting. Secondly, the characterization of these last roles listed were neither humorous nor interesting. Placing heavy focus on the psychological motivations behind the shuffling Pedro Crespo

made him a one-note character. There was no tension in the character, no real fight to achieve his goals. By far the most interesting character was Captain Alvaro; he portrayed the modern figure of a man fighting off insanity due to a complete psychological and moral collapse. Finally, Vasco's apparent desire to differentiate each character undermined the web of character relationships that gives the play its emotional and intellectual depth. Each character was memorable but they did not work with or off each other. The result, in this observer's view, was a version that lacked dynamic and life.

Antonio Castro wrote in *Madridiario* that although there were some good performances, especially the banter scenes between Crespo and Lope, the play that it lacked, "nervio, ritmo creciente para llegar al desenlace del drama don desasosiego, con deseos de justicia". Additionally he suggests that Vasco tried to alleviate some of the tension with by bringing down the very heightened moments in the script perhaps because the audience, "no se va a tragar tanta desgracia" ( would not be able to accept/swallow the misfortunes") suffered by the people. Díaz Sande, José Ramón. Vasco did try to undermine the theme of honor through his production. Vasco strove to draw attention to social class and gave license to the actors to develop their characters, but the result was a set of performances that did not gel and hold this great story together. Perhaps by not trusting in its value just as it is presented in the script, he drained the story of one of its most interesting and thought provoking aspects. The same happened with the class structure as it was addressed through the costumes, but this was on a more superficial level as the tension was lost. It is true that the actual concepts of honor and class system are presented archaically in this text, but Calderón is known for his structure and his ability to create great human drama based on true human characteristics and

actions. Instead of trying to pare everything down, perhaps by highlighting these historically distant themes (if they really are historically distant) would have been a better approach.

As I am working on this analysis, complete chaos has broken out in Egypt, threatening to destabilize the region and relations with the United States. The major crux of this massive uprising is the fact that Egyptian President Mubarak has been in power for about 30 years while many people have suffered from poverty and lack of basic human rights. Last week, the people decided to rebel against their government and just today a counter-attack began in the streets of Cairo, creating more chaos, suffering, injuries and deaths. My point in mentioning this is to show that the struggle of the common folk against corrupt tyrants is an ongoing part of our world; the emphasis that *Zalamea* places on this idea indicates its critical and contemporary relevance. Just as there are certain challenges to this play, there are also many poignant aspects that resonate with and appeal to a contemporary public. As Vasco comments in his program notes, "la gente tiene el derecho a disfrutar cierta catarsis justiciera, aunque sea en la ficción" ("the people have the right to enjoy a certain justice oriented catharsis even if it is in the form of fiction"). This play has the potential to create such a catharsis.

### **A Monumental Task at Hand: The RSC's Revival of the Spanish Golden Age**

James Fenton, translator of *Tamar's Revenge* for the 2004 RSC season notes, "One of the great attractions of the Spanish Theatre of the Golden Age is that it is both very close in spirit and idiom to English theatre of the same period, and strikingly different from it" (program notes). In this chapter, I will address some of the challenges of presenting Spanish Golden Age plays on the contemporary English stage in a general sense because specific plays and productions will be addressed in the following chapters. The focus will be twofold: 1) a specific look at director Laurence Boswell, artistic director of the RSC season, and 2) the adaptation/translation process. These plays have had to leap through several large hoops in order to successfully reach a modern English speaking audience. By examining more closely the work accomplished during the RSC SGA season, one can see the challenges that were overcome and those that remained.

Characterization is one challenge that faces contemporary producers that want to stage a Spanish Golden Age drama. Unlike Shakespeare's highly individualized dramatic characters, many characters in Spanish Golden Age drama fall clearly into types, e.g. the submissive female that must join a nunnery because her honor has been stained, the jealous husband, the tyrannical ruler, the idiotic *gracioso*, and the completely lovelorn couple. Characters falling neatly into one of these categories conform to certain conventions and expectations, that is, they become predictable. Convincingly portraying such "typed" characters is one issue confronting actors and directors of today, and not all characters fall into types, but are actually full of contradiction, complexity and life. For example, the complex and strong, sexy and beautiful, intelligent and fearless female

characters often form the core of these plays. However, because the plays are dominated by action-oriented plots, it can be difficult for contemporary actors to find the necessary depth even in these wonderful female characters, especially in England where they are much more familiar with Shakespeare's works than with these texts. In referring to how Lope de Vega incorporates and weaves his characters into his plots, Jack Sage (Emeritus Professor of the University of London) writes:

So: he imitates not the hallowed laws of nature but the actual mixture of the high and the low, the serious and the comic, prompting the audience to identify with the lowly while looking up to the great, or indeed to look up to a humble character who wittily exposes an exalted character as ridiculous or ignoble by nature; verisimilitude portrays not just what has happened but what does or could plausibly happen; the stage mirrors the world which is itself but a stage, so the stage is an ironically realistic mirror of the unreality of the world; the text must be written in varying forms of verse to match the varying contexts. By the end of this exercise in persuasion, Lope has moved craftily not only to back the audience he at first dubbed as 'stupid' but also to 'stand by what I have written'. All these 'new' principles are demonstrably at work in varying measure in all the plays by the playwrights featured in this RSC Spanish season. (program notes)

Professor Sage implies that interaction between characters in Spanish Golden Age, typed though they may be, creates a kind of human web that speaks to the varied members of the audience. There is a great deal to these characters that can be discovered, and one

great proponent of Lope and these plays is Laurence Boswell who made the RSC Spanish Golden Age season such an historic success.

### **Leading up to the 2004 RSC Season**

The plays of 17th century Spain have not seen many presentations outside of Spain in the last 400 years. Most have occurred in the last fifty years and, fortunately, the number continues to increase. In the program for Calderón de la Barca's *The Painter of His Own Dishonour*, which Mr. Boswell directed for the Gate Theatre in London in 1995, Professor Sage wrote about the breakthrough that occurred in the 1950's with Joan Littlewood's production of *Fuenteovejuna*. He refers to her production as "mould-breaking," and goes on to mention several other notable productions. John Osborne created a very respectable translation of a Lope play at the Old Vic, *A Bond Honoured*, in 1966. Four of Adrian Mitchell's translations were staged: *The Mayor of Zalamea* at the National Theatre in 1981; Lope de Vega's *Justice without Revenge* (directed by Laurence Boswell) at The Other Place in Stratford; *Life's a Dream* (directed by John Barton) also at The Other Place; and one *auto* by Calderon, *The Great Theatre of the World*, performed by the Medieval Players from Oxford. In 1989, Cheek by Jowl staged *The Doctor of Dishonour* and the National Theatre presented Calderon's *Schism in England* for the Edinburgh Festival and the National Theatre (Cottesloe). Clearly, a relationship was developing between Spanish Golden Age Theatre and British Theatre.

Calderón, as mentioned in the program for *Painter*, has become more widely known than Lope or Tirso. As Dr. Sage recounts, it was the French who translated quite a few of Calderon's works in the 17th and 18th centuries, beginning in 1641. In England

the first documented production of a play by Calderon was in 1662. Additionally, Calderon's work influenced German drama and opera. Dr. Sage writes, "Lessing, Schiller, Goethe saw in his drama the ideal embodiment of fantasy, imagination, poetry wedded to culture, religion, chivalry, honour . . . After Shakespeare, Calderón was the 'the greatest playwright the world had ever known.'" The reasons for this interest in Calderón over other Spanish Golden Age playwrights are a mystery, but Dr. Sage offers some explanations. One is that the plays of Calderón are easier to read than those of Lope or Tirso because the latter two possess more "aptly dramatic qualities" (meaning that they assume the reader's knowledge of now unfamiliar stage conventions). Another possible reason for Calderon's English popularity has to do with language and structure:

Another plausible explanation for Calderon's success outside Spain might also relate to Menéndez Pelayo's telling criticism that his style is mannered and predictable. Indeed, he does marshal his words and linguistic codes with, so to speak, computerized regularity but they set up different configurations that frame and highlight selected options that sweep over national frontiers by interfacing readily with related systems in other languages. (Program notes, *The Painter of Dishonour*)

For me, there exists a taut quality to Calderon's work that heightens the tension. Even if I know what is going to happen, as I watch or read one of his plays, I keep thinking that maybe this time it will be different, e.g. maybe this time the painter Juan Roca will not irrationally suspect his wife of infidelity and brutally murder her. The plays are so tightly constructed that the characters have no room to maneuver, yet I remain surprised and shocked every time.



### **A Pioneer for the Spanish Golden Age in English: Laurence Boswell**

"In early 2003 the Royal Shakespeare Company announced its intention to produce a season of Spanish Golden Age plays under the artistic direction of Laurence Boswell, the period's most important pioneer on the British stage" (*The Spanish Golden Age in English* 11). Boswell has been monumentally important in re-introducing texts from Spain's great playwrights of the 17th century. He has directed over 12 Spanish *comedias* and served as Artistic Director of the Gate Theatre in London and as Associate Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). In 1991 and 1992 at the Gate Theatre in Notting Hill he was responsible for mounting an entire Golden Age season. He directed three of the five plays: *El castigo sin venganza*, *Lo fingido verdadero* and *El Caballero de Olmedo* all in English and all by Lope de Vega. The other two plays were Tirso de Molina's *Damned for Despair* and Calderon's *Three Judgements in One*. The company had very little financial support and so greatly relied on their own creativity and imagination. The pieces were performed in what was considered a fringe theatre in a room above a pub. The entire season received overwhelming accolades, garnering Boswell the prestigious Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement. In 1995, the RSC asked him to direct *The Painter of His Dishonour* by Calderón de la Barca. For the RSC's Spanish Golden Age season in 2004, Boswell brought together a myriad of people including academics, translators and well known and respected directors. Eventually, all four productions went to Spain and were very well received. Boswell has also recently directed two Spanish Golden Age plays in Spain with Spanish actors and one in English for the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Ontario, Canada. Mr. Boswell is accomplished in many areas and is currently writing a

commissioned musical version of *Pinocchio* for the RSC. Mr. Boswell was definitely the driving force behind the extremely innovative and celebrated 2004 season, and much of the focus of this chapter will be on his work and directing process. In addition, I will address briefly the translation and adaptation process, which were so important to making these productions successful in both English and Spanish eyes.

I had the opportunity to speak with Mr. Boswell in person on several occasions to talk to him about his work. Besides being an extremely talented and knowledgeable practitioner, he is also a very grounded, engaging and delightfully charming person. Most of my information on Mr. Boswell was gathered through personal interviews, his talks that I attended at the Association for Classical Hispanic Theatre in El Paso, Texas in March of 2010, and from printed interviews.

Laurence Boswell was born in 1959 in Coventry in the Midlands. Drama had hooked him in by the age he was 10 when he played a ventriloquist's dummy for a school review. He earned a B.A. with honors in Drama from Manchester University. At the age of 21, after winning several awards at a theatre festival, he was offered a job as an assistant director for the Royal Shakespeare Company. He has worked with many famous actors such as Clive Owen and Eddie Izzard on *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*. He directed Madonna in *Up for Grabs*. Mr. Boswell originally thought that he was going to be an actor, but Michael Boyd (who would go on to become artistic director of the RSC) suggested to Laurence at a young age that he had more of a director in him. Some of Mr. Boswell's favorite playwrights include Kenneth Lonergan, Shakespeare and Lope de Vega. Mr. Boswell was the director of the 2004 RSC Spanish Golden Age season and

also directed the first show, *The Dog in the Manger* by Lope de Vega that opened to the press on April 21, 2004 at the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. The next play to open was Tirso de Molina's *Tamar's Revenge*, directed by Simon Usher on June 15; followed by *House of Desires*, by Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, directed by Nancy Meckler, on July 8; the last production to open was Cervantes' *Pedro the Great Pretender*, directed by Mike Alfreds, on September 9, 2004. They all played at the Swan Theatre, and then moved to the Teatro Español in Madrid during the month of October, ending their run at The People's Theatre in Newcastle-upon-Tyne later that year.

There are many books written by directors about their approach to rehearsal and working with actors. It is beneficial to look at Mr. Boswell's own view regarding the directing process. He believes, first of all, that there is a need for humility on the part of the artist because talent is not a self-earned possession, but a gift that is given. Artistic genius is wonderful but the person is the conduit through which this talent flows for the good of others. There is a need to go beyond the ego of oneself and to share one's gifts with the world. This is true in acting: if one is too self-aware on stage, it is impossible to give one's fullest to the audience. If an individual remains focused on his or herself, then the world becomes smaller and more selfish; when an individual opens up and realizes his or her connection to the whole and works for the whole, then the world becomes a larger more humane place. Boswell's artistic humility is not only inspiring, but it also helps to explain his careful, respectful approach to Spanish Golden Age plays, and his successful collaborations with their translators and adaptors.

In one of my interviews Mr. Boswell explained how the RSC designed the season. First, he and two of his colleagues read over hundred plays of the period. Next they rated

the plays from "must do" to "not worth doing" at all. When they reached a consensus on their top 10 plays, Boswell asked for literal translations of the plays into English, so that directors who did not know Spanish could read them. After selecting the other three directors who would contribute to the season, Mr. Boswell gave them each several plays to choose from that he believed fit their style. For example, he explained that Director Mike Alfreds consistently employed the idea of ensemble. Because of its large number of characters and vignette-like structure, Cervantes' *Pedro the Great Pretender* (*Pedro de Urdemalas*) seemed to invite an ensemble-based production approach. Boswell therefore gave Alfreds that play to read and, in the end, Alfreds chose to direct it. Once the directors found the play that they wanted to direct, they chose their own translators. These translations have been published by the RSC and can be purchased.

As Boswell sees it, the job of the director is that of teacher and leader but in a way that is open to the group as a whole. A good director will "animate the group" and "liberate the actor." Actors are put into precarious and exposed positions, and rely on the director for guidance, which can come in many different forms. For example, the actors are bound to speak the text and, therefore, the director must really understand its subtleties and nuances, which can prove more difficult when working with verse. Of great importance to Mr. Boswell is the idea that the director is "servant" to the text: not only does this lead to his practice of scouring over the text to understand all of its intricacies but to also to the idea that it is the director's job to remain true to the playwright's voice and to enliven that voice so that it can emerge on the stage. Good direction means great preparation because without it insecurity can set in at a moment when a director might want complete control; lack of preparation can lead to anxieties

and disputes that are counter-productive for a production team with so many members. Alongside this profound preparation is needed one's own personal approach to the material and to the directorial process.

When I first met with Mr. Boswell, I had two very text-based questions. I asked him what made the female characters in Spanish Golden Age Drama seem so unique. Boswell stated that the playwrights were writing for female actors (unlike in England, where boys played women's roles) and, therefore, the characters appear more realistic, especially in their passion. Perhaps a Rosalind could be compared to a Diana in *Dog in the Manger*, but there is something in Diana that imbues her with an ambiguity that seems more deeply human than the witty, cross-dressing Shakespearean female. Diana can be cruel, selfish, whimsical, beguiling, and violent but, despite her mercurial nature, we still like her. The women of Spanish Golden Age drama could step right out of the fashion magazines of today. This is not to say that Shakespeare's women are any less true or interesting but they certainly are different; I would summarize this difference by saying that the women in Spanish Golden Age plays are less predictable and less ideal.

The second textual issue that I asked Mr. Boswell to address is the disturbing endings of the plays. I asked him about his view on the endings of some of Lope's plays with a distinct objective in mind. I had trouble accepting the claims made by some scholars that Lope wrote plays in order to stick to a party line, or to underscore the political ideology of the time. Some scholars have advanced the hypothesis that Lope used historical or foreign figures either to present a model government or a malignant one, in order to make comments about, the troubled and unstable monarchy of Philip IV. In *Fuenteovejuna*, the King and Queen are fair and just. The king does indicate that what

the townspeople did was incorrect but, recognizing the tyranny of the *Comendador*, he pardons the people. The people are thankful and pledge their allegiance to the King. If we stop here, it appears that these scholars are correct: Lope maintains a classist ideology. Nonetheless, two aspects must be addressed. First, Philip IV was not this kind of generous, even-tempered ruler and, second, the brutality of the actions of the townspeople, which matches that of the *Comendador*, remains unsettling to the audience. Therefore, I would propose that we are not left with such a well rounded, "happy days"-type ending.

Mr. Boswell used two of Lope's plays to confirm my suspicion that the playwright did not always write to please the nobles, leaving no room for contradiction or criticism. He spoke of *El castigo sin venganza* (*Punishment without Revenge*) and *El perro del hortelano* (*The Dog in the Manger*). The "clichés about Spain are so entrenched" and the irony is "so subtle" that these plays "confuse the critics." Briefly, *Castigo sin venganza* is about a Duke who marries a beautiful wife, treats her badly, and then goes off to fight. In the meantime his son and wife fall in love. When the Duke returns, he discovers what has happened and kills the couple. The Duke tried to find a path of goodness by consulting religious authorities but, in the end, he turns religion on its head by using it as an excuse for the brutal murder of his wife and son. "The dominant strategy of Lope is irony," explained Mr. Boswell. By digging into these texts, we find that there are "shades of meaning." Lope loved to write about the Spanish obsession with appearance. In *Castigo*, Mr. Boswell sees characters that are completely consumed by their need for self-destruction. Their mindset is, "My life is going to be awful, so what does it matter what I do?" However, they can never let their despair

show. The characters must put on the facade of living a grand and beautiful life. The characters in this play essentially create their own tragedy because what happens does not need to happen. Lope very delicately opens for us the hearts of all of the characters. They say that "life is awful" and, because they cannot change their viewpoint, that is how their lives turn out.

A common question asked in regards to producing these plays is how they should be performed in regards to language and verse. This is a topic of continuous debate and there may be no correct answer because it may depend upon the theatre traditions of one's country or experience. As Boswell acknowledges, Great Britain has the advantage of great support in the performance arts. The RSC is extremely well-funded which allows for superb actor training, especially with the classics and verse plays. Learning how to perform verse well is a life long project and, to prove his point, Mr. Boswell pointed to the work of noted director, playwright, and RSC co-founder John Barton. Verse is an important aspect of Britain's theatrical life: not only are actors trained to speak verse but also there is a diverse public that is trained to understand what it all means. This is also true for the delivery of rhetoric, that is, the especially "eloquent, elegant, or ornate language" of classical dramas. Mr. Boswell noted how rhetoric sometimes takes on a derogatory connotation as people sometimes view it as language completely separated from the heart and emotion. But one always needs the passion of one's soul; without it, the play loses all heart and is not worth doing. Therefore, there needs to be a marriage between rhetoric and emotion; divorced of emotion, rhetoric invites actors to indulge in aggravated yelling. This point was brought up when I asked him about the experience of working with the Spanish actors on the two Spanish productions. There is not the same

training and tradition with respect to the study of verse and rhetoric in Spain as there is in England. It seems that actors in Spain understand how the verse is organized, but they find it difficult to understand why the playwright organized it in this way. Mr. Boswell noticed this when he directed *Fuenteovejuna* for the Spain-based company, Rakatá, in 2009. He explained that when actors know why the lines are arranged as they are, the result is a greater understanding of character. The Spanish actors struggled on an individual level in working with the verse. He stated in an interview with David Johnston, "the actors tell me that they get no real guidance from directors, and in fact that the performance issues that verse poses aren't really considered at all in the rehearsal process" (148). Like Barton, Boswell maintains that play scripts are roadmaps to understanding the characters and the intentions of the playwright. This view of the script becomes very apparent in the discussion of how the Spanish Golden Age texts were translated from Spanish to English. The language in these plays is "key, because all the information you need for understanding of character, as well as rhythm and development of relationships, is encased within it" (148). He explains how the language is like "choreography" and helps designate where to move in the scenes, "how you are able to handle props, when the props transfer from one character to another" (148).

Regarding language, Mr. Boswell made comparisons to William Shakespeare on several occasions. As he sees it, Shakespeare and Lope had similar jobs in that they had to tell compelling stories that could reach out to the people in the back of the audience without the use of much scenery. He believes that the techniques that an actor uses to speak the verse in Shakespeare, can also be used with verse in Spanish Golden Age plays. There are laws to rhetoric and one must look for the "psychological clues" so that the



work does not turn into vacant explosions of words. He suggested the use of Cicely Berry's *The Actor and his Text* in approaching any type of verse work. A text comes alive through the actor's dealing with the rhetoric it contains. Therefore, actors have a very significant role in the resurrection of these plays and their characters every night. He explained that actors all possess a poet within and that they must tap into this being/character to allow the language to come alive. Many actors feel a lack of confidence in the humanizing of rhetoric. The playwright is also a poet and when actor, director and playwright work together, a love of language is developed. The lines are musical and possess a rhythm and beat that the actor must incorporate through his or her body. When the actor understands the text and its language, the punctuation and movement of the lines become natural and spark what is being done on stage between the actors. Through all of his work, Laurence hopes to reach an audience that will begin or continue a love affair with language, literature and poetry, and that this love affair will be shared with others.

While in El Paso in 2010 at the annual conference for the Association of Classical Hispanic Theatre, Mr. Boswell gave a talk entitled "Suck, squeeze, bang, blow." He developed this metaphor in reference to a combustion engine in order to demonstrate how these plays work. In an engine the air is sucked in and then squeezed, there is a spark, which sets the gas on fire, which is the bang, and then it is blown out so that the car can function. Despite the sexual connotations, this image is a perfect way to describe the mechanics of these plays. The texts are "paradoxical and dangerous"; they are not blueprints detailing how one should live one's life. They do provide answers; however, those answers lie in the process that the actor, director and eventually the audience go

through to make the plays go or spark, like the car engine. One of the key words in Boswell's understanding of a play is "compulsion" and what entices characters to act the way they do. The clues to a character's compulsions lie in the language of the play but the text is also a "source of un-resolvable conflicts and the actor must dig through these problems to bring the answers to life." Mr. Boswell referred to Spanish Golden Age play texts as hieroglyphs or the "residue of the experience" of the playwright. In another useful metaphor, Mr. Boswell referred to butterflies pinned up in a display case and used for static viewing purposes. When they are in this state, we just see their outer surface, so to speak; it is not until they are flying freely that we are able to see them for what they are. Similarly, to really know Spanish Golden Age dramas, we must see how these dynamic texts work in performance.

Mr. Boswell made it clear in conversations with me that the story of the playwright's life can help an actor find the living truth of a character. He singled out the biography of Lope de Vega. Lope was a man who knew much about love and passions and heartbreak. He was, after all, exiled from Madrid after spreading lies about one woman that he loved after she abandoned him for another man of higher status. Speaking of status, Lope was obsessed his entire life with finding a stable and prestigious place in the court. This never came to fruition for him as it did for other writers like Calderón de la Barca. Lope understood the rules that governed his society and he understood unmanageable, uncontrollable, irrational passion, like Diana exhibits in *The Dog in the Manger*. We all are led by human compulsions, like the characters in these plays, which in fact makes the characters very realistic and believable for both Golden Age and modern audiences. As Boswell put it, Lope was, "a man addicted to love" and he was

also "threatened by those rules" that formed the moral structure of his society. This conflict in Lope centers the conflicts that we see in his characters. Insights like those shared by Mr. Boswell give actors a great deal with which to work.

Some plays are theme driven, and some, like *The Dog in the Manger* are plot driven. In this play, things happen very quickly. As in life, the characters are driven to the border of insanity because of the overwhelming state of their emotions. When some people arrive at this state, a sense of frantic panic takes over; the frenetic and quick exchanges of dialogue in this play match the pace of the characters' panic. Such fast pace and shortened verse can prove difficult for English-speaking actors who are more accustomed to a 10 syllable line and iambic pentameter. Therefore, Mr. Boswell talks of thinking about the acting as if it were a dance. Every time there is a plot change there needs to be a new move. Lope, says Boswell, is "leaner than Shakespeare" in that these plays are more driven by the story. The characters certainly have an underlying psychology, but the responsibility of digging it up falls on the actor. More importantly, the actor has to think of his or her "dance" which takes modern performers some getting used to. In Spanish, there is a term "*duende*" which is often associated with Federico García Lorca. The word cannot be directly translated, but the concept can be discussed. *Duende* is deeper than soul and combines life with death. One must approach death in a sense to reach the creative force behind *duende*. Engaging the plays of Lope, the actors must find both their own *duende* and that of the characters in order to bring the characters to life. Boswell proposes that it is all there in the words of Shakespeare's plays, but with Lope's plays, one must bring up the *duende* or light it on fire, so to speak.

Boswell offered a Stanislavsky-inspired view of directing. He claimed that, when attacking one of these plays, the director must find its super objective, an overall goal or purpose that will then appear in every scene. Mr. Boswell told the participants at the El Paso conference to go back Stanislavsky's description in *An Actor Prepares*. He said that the super objective is like a well of information and once you have it the characters begin to emerge. The ease of locating a super objective in Lope's plays is why this director thinks that directing works by the Spanish playwright is easier than directing the works of Shakespeare: there is one major dilemma in a Lope play, whereas with a Shakespeare play there might be three or four. The single story line in a Lope play has some consequences for the pacing of the show: events unfold at high speed, keeping the audience on the edge of their seats and requiring a great deal of energy from the actors. Lope's plays fly from one scene to the next, which would have been important on a stage with little scenery or dressing. It is sort like a roller coaster that runs in only one direction with flips and surprises coming at a very fast pace. At the same time, each scene must stand alone and one has to ask, "What is going on here?", "What is at the root of the scene?", "What are the objectives of the characters?" Drama is conflict and in order to understand it and be able to work with it, the director must discover who is creating the conflict and what that character wants. Conflict, according to Mr. Boswell, is created in all of the scenes in a Lope play. However, these conflicts are dynamic and cannot be analyzed within a single analytical framework. The text is the surface; what goes on underneath it is what makes the text come alive. It is the job of the director to find the "suck, squeeze, bang, blow" process that works for each play.

For example, the characters in *Dog in the Manger* all want love and all find obstacles put in their way. For the main characters, Diana especially, the honor code is the major roadblock and so she must find a pragmatic way to work around it. Using Mr. Boswell's approach, one might articulate the crucial question in *Dog in the Manger* as, "How can I get the love I want while avoiding the rules of honor?" The characters confront this dilemma in every scene. Unfortunately for Diana, emotions and passions overtake her at times, just like any human being, and so she is conflicted by what she feels deeply and what she should do. This is a very real human experience, which creates a deep conflict as we all experience "insatiable desires." The characters are fueled by their own desires and those of other characters and try to find ways around the honor system so that their emotional and physical needs can be met. In the end, a solution is presented by the servant Tristan: he arranges for his master Teodoro to become honorable and, thereby, to qualify as Diana's husband by secretly inventing a filial relation between Teodoro and Don Ludvocio. Thus only the appearance of honor counts in this play. Honor is not a deeply felt personal trait; it is an artificial emblem that society uses to maintain the class status quo. We do not know if everyone in Lope's original audience saw honor in such a critical light but this view has the benefit of saving everyone: the characters who, keeping the secret, can safely marry and the audience whose romantic expectations are met. Lope very much is manipulating a moral code that is supported by clergy and court. He allows his characters to play with this code so that they can get what they want. *Dog in the Manger* will be discussed in great detail in the following chapter as it was the production directed by Mr. Boswell for the RSC 2004 season.

One of the more difficult aspects of some of these plays is their long speeches, especially when they come at the beginning. Long opening speeches can prove incredibly daunting for the actor and director alike. Boswell believes that it is the job of the director to assist the actor so that the audience does not get lost in all the discourse. Physical movement can be used to punctuate the speech and to give it more visual life. For example, as I discuss more fully in a later chapter, in the RSC production of Sor Juana's *House of Desires*, the actors took to pantomiming the actions and events being reported in a long speech. This choice did not appear hokey; rather, it assisted the audience in comprehending what was being said and, at the same time, maintained the upbeat tempo of the play. Since these plays were written with few decorations or scenery in mind, the actor must keep his/her audience constantly engaged. Boswell suggests that with verse in general and with long speeches in particular, every time that a character has a new thought, a new physical movement must be made. Precision and clarity are of most importance, and will come through if the actor continues to pursue his or her objectives.

Another difficulty experienced by the Shakespearean trained actor is that the lines in Spanish Golden Age texts are often eight syllables long (as opposed to the ten syllables in a line of iambic pentameter). One of the exercises that Boswell uses in rehearsal to shape the actor's speech rhythms involves throwing a tennis ball. The actor begins by throwing the ball on the most important word in the line. Since many sections of the plays are composed of four line stanzas, the actors can find the most poignant word in each line.

Another exercise that Boswell uses in rehearsal is to ask his actors to find a set of psychological gestures that helps to express the impulses of the characters that they are

playing. Using the term “psychological gesture,” Boswell is referring to the work of actor and acting teacher Michael Chekhov. Boswell’s idea is to "create a dance of impulses" for the characters that will be set free in the scenes, allowing for a vibrant, new, refreshing performance every night. It is not the job of the actors or director to label characters as good or bad; rather, they must figure out everything they can about the characters until there are no more surprises for the actor. The result of this process are characters that are deeply felt and understood by the actor while being contradictory, complex, and surprising to the audience. As Mr. Boswell pointed out, some of the characters in *Dog in the Manger* are so consumed with desire that they practically go insane. Diana, for instance, actually hits Teodoro and draws blood. It is the job of the actor playing this character to tap into this passion and to fully understand what makes her act that way. Most of us, for good or bad, do understand that kind of passion.

Actors are not allowed to judge their characters, according to Mr. Boswell, but must look at them in terms of their relationships with the other characters and their contradictions. In sage advice to the participants of the El Paso conference he suggested that directors and actors make themselves the following lists when rehearsing a play:

1. all that the character says about himself
2. all that the character says about other characters
3. all that other characters say about that character
4. the actual facts about the characters

This is a way to provide honest support and information for the actor.

Finally I asked Mr. Boswell, what he would like see in his future regarding the production of Spanish Golden Age plays, and his take on the use of directorial analogy--

the resetting of a play's action to a time and place different from the one called for by the playwright--especially when the analogy is used for political or social purposes. In regards to the second question, he responded that the plays are very new to English audiences and should not be messed with too much. However, he continued on to say that as long as the production is done with respect and great deal of knowledge about the play and all of its corollary relationships, then it is possible to take the action of the play out of its original context. With respect to my question about future productions, Mr. Boswell said that he would like to translate a play so that it follows more closely the polymetric fully rhymed verse written by Lope and Calderon. Of course this would be very challenging but it would draw more attention to the beauty of the poetry and would be well worth the effort, according to Mr. Boswell.

### **Translation and adaptation**

In this section of the chapter I will talk about the processes of translation and adaptation that were used to prepare the texts for theatrical production by the RSC. Theatre artists must find a way to present the dramatic text so as to engage a contemporary audience. Of course, much of this responsibility falls on the director and the performers, but my investigation suggests that the translation and adaptation processes are fundamental for modern interpretations. Extremely impressive was the collaboration and forethought that went into the translations for the RSC's 2004-2005 Spanish Golden Age season. Because these plays are perceived as "new" outside of Spain, the translations tended to emphasize fidelity to the original, the preservation of verse forms, and respect of the playwright's intentions. Because there is more familiarity



with these texts and their historical background within Spain, in some cases, Spanish adapters have felt freer to play around with interpretation, paying less attention to the verse. On that note one scholar pointed out that for the RSC season "the essential purpose was to highlight a range of realistic human moods through varying tonal utterance linked to the changing metric forms" (Sage, program notes). In other words the focus on character through close textual examination was essential for these performances.

Dr. David Johnston is a Professor at Queen's University of Belfast and a translator and academic well-known and respected by theatre and Spanish scholars. He and Mr. Boswell have worked together quite often to bring Spanish Golden Age pieces to the stage, including creating the translation for Boswell's *Painter of His Own Dishonour* for the Gate Theatre and *Dog in the Manger* for the RSC season. The following five statements made by him shed light on what Johnston sees as essential aspects of the Spanish Golden Age tradition in his translation in the introduction of *The Dog in the Manger*. First: "The force of the realisation that there may after all be a pattern to our living, that if destiny means anything it may well be the cumulative effect of all our negative actions, of our moral torpor and of the hypocrisy and sham courtesies under whose cover these things reign supreme." Here, I believe that Johnston is referring to Lope and how he viewed human frailties. Lope exploits these aspects through the characters and situations in his plays. Second: "The obsession with appearances, which paradoxically, is at once the most superficial and the most destructive functioning of the honour code, is very much a convention of the theatre of the Spanish Golden Age, just as it was to be much later of Lorca's." I believe that the connection Johnston makes here is

important for understanding the relationship between the classical and modern traditions of drama in Spain. Third: "The chasm between what we appear to be and what our passions make of us, of course, makes for good theatre." Clearly, Johnston shares with Boswell the belief that characters in Spanish Golden Age dramas are driven by strong emotions. Fourth: "His [Lope's] purpose is rather the indictment of a society which seeks to codify its deep humanity into unlivable ground rules; the portrayal of a nation sliding into the shadows of history and underpinning its own imminent collapse by an insistence on the rigid observance of good form, of social grace become social cement." Johnston here supports the idea that Lope is more of a social critic than some scholars suggest, a position with which I entirely agree as discussed earlier in this chapter. Fifth: "The result is a stage language which is characterised simultaneously by sobriety and exuberance, controlled and yet expressive of everything in us that lies beyond control. It seems to me that there is something very Spanish about that; it is also present in the work of Lope, Unamuno and Lorca . . . just as it is in the paintings of Velázquez and Goya" (all quotes from Introduction to translation, 5-7). Johnston's articulation of the contradictions in Spanish Golden Age drama—indeed, in Spanish art and drama in general—reminds one that the production team's goal is not to cancel textual complexity but to find a way to make it come alive on stage.

One of the positive results of the RSC's Spanish Golden Age season and the ongoing attempt to rediscover these plays is the development of an on-line project, *Out of the Wings* (available at <http://www.outofthewings.org/>). Funded by King's College London, the University of Oxford, and Queen's University Belfast, this website aims to bring translations and further knowledge of Spanish and Spanish American theatres to

non-Spanish speaking academics and fans. The project's directors are Professor David Johnston, Professor Catherine Boyle, Dr. Jonathan Thacker and Paul Spence. One of the researchers, responsible for creating a number of translations to be put on-line, is Dr. Kathleen Jeffs who is on Faculty in Medieval and Modern Languages at Oxford University. She also served as dramaturg for *Dog in the Manger* and *Pedro the Great Pretender* for the RSC season. She has written on the translation process for all of the plays presented that year. In an article that she wrote for *Romance Studies*, "*Acomode los versos con prudencia. . .*": Polymetric Verse on Stage in Translation," she describes how some of the verse was translated not only through the text, but also through blocking and movement choices, lighting design, scene changes and music so as to capture the varied rhythm and mood changes communicated by the different forms of verse in the Spanish original. Like other scholars, Dr. Jeffs also points to the success of the RSC's 2004 season due to the collaborations and shared expertise of the theatre practitioners and Spanish scholars. Such collaborations are implicit in her statement about the goals of her essay: "In the present study, my aim is to suggest ways that interpreting the *comedia* for performance augments the study of the verse on the page" (3).

The first part of Jeffs' title refers to Lope's *El arte nuevo* on how the verse should appropriately match the scene with character. She offers the methods she uses in working with the original texts in Spanish to bring them to life on stage. She suggests that the study of versification has been around since the beginnings of Spanish drama. Lope offers some advice on when to use which kind of verse in his *Arte nuevo* but, as most scholars concur, he was not a strict follower of these rules. On that note, it would erroneous to say that one type of verse always fits one kind of character or situation,

though patterns do exist. Given this uncertainty, it is often necessary to look at the original Spanish; subtle changes in verse may reflect subtle changes in character and mood that need to be addressed on a play-by-play basis. "Many critics have noticed how *comedia* versification conveys meaning through sound. Victor Dixon encouraged editors and students of the *comedia* to be sensitive to verse change and to its affinities with musical changes of tempo or key" (Jeffs 4). In the following chapter, I will consider more closely her analysis of the opening of *Dog in the Manger* and her explanation of how shifts in the Spanish text were reflected on the English stage.

As many scholars have pointed out, audiences in both Elizabethan and Jacobean and Spanish Golden Age Theatre, were better at listening than we are today. Verse can prove challenging not only for a modern audience but also for modern actors. Dr. Thacker in his book *A Companion to Golden Age Theatre* alludes to the many difficulties related to the verse, i.e. how to say it and how to hear it, even when performed in Spain in Spanish. He gives a brief explanation of the verse forms in his book. At the end of a scene, verse forms will often change to indicate some type of transition. Another function of shifts in verse is to signify the change of the "status" or "objective" of a character, or of the mood within the scene. Lope's verse and use of it changed throughout his life. Thacker takes us to Lope's *Arte Nuevo (The New Art of Writing Plays at This Time)* to give clues on how to perform verse. In a translation of this treatise, Dr. Thacker suggests that Lope was saying, "Tactfully suit your verse to the subjects being treated. *Décimas* are good for complainings; the sonnet is good for those who are waiting in expectation; recitals of events ask for *romances*, though they shine brilliantly in *octavas*. *Tercets* are for grave affairs and *redondillas* for affairs of love" (Thacker 180). The

*romance*, the *redondilla*, the *quintilla* and the *décima* are octosyllabic and are native to Spain. Again referencing Lope's *Arte nuevo* and his ideas on writing in verse, Thacker proposes:

The prudence of the dramatic poet, alluded to in the first line here, surely refers to the need for the verse form to match the situation or speaker, so that no offence is committed against decorum. The remaining six lines provide a fascinating exemplification of this prudence rather than a complete and binding guide to *comedia* versification. Thus the sonnet is not always spoken by a character awaiting some development, but it often summarizes a predicament while the scene of the action changes: similarly *redondillas* are not uniformly employed for love scenes, but were the staple form for Lope over a substantial period, whereas for Calderón the *romance* was the basic form. (180)

By understanding the verse in this way, an actor and director can develop a much clearer understanding of a character's psychology and intentions. Of course, translators and adapters have taken different approaches when converting the Spanish texts to English, as Dr. Kathleen Jeffs acknowledges in her article in regards to the four different translators used for the four plays.

David Johnston's comments on his translation of *Dog in the Manger* which was used by the RSC for the 2004-2005 season are illuminating. He claims that he tried to stay close to the original. He mentions that other approaches had been tried. For example, in Madrid, Emilio Hernández, created a version that is more modern, further expanding the play's eroticism. Johnston suggests that this eroticization of the text is

unnecessary because it has already been put there by Lope. The term Johnston uses to describe Hernández's version is *intralingual*. Johnston calls *Dog in the Manger* one of Lope's "most controlled" and "erotically liberated" plays (Johnston 15); it uses changing verse forms to track the contrasting moods and desires of the characters. Lope's original text is polymetrical whereas most of the verse in Johnston's version is written in eight beats, except for the sonnets which remain as sonnets. Johnston comments on the growing reception of Lope's plays in England, arguing that one must try and remain as close to Lope's essence as possible. "But we also have to let Lope speak for himself, and this translation is probably as faithful as the related demands of speakability and performance will allow" (17). In his notes about the play, Johnston refers to the rapid pace of the action which he claims Lope built into the text in order to prevent the audiences from becoming bored. Johnston's sensitivity to the pace of the action helps to explain Boswell's rare use of props. The director wanted to keep things moving to perpetuate the "the thrill of transgression" that the translator saw in the original (15).

By far the most radical of the RSC translations was Philip Osment's version of Cervantes', *Pedro the Great Pretender*. Osment found seven different types of verse forms in Cervantes' play, including a rhyme scheme, and he strove to mirror that in his translation. He found this difficult because in English there are fewer words that rhyme. As a result, the translation process was slow: he was able to complete only about sixty lines a day. It proved difficult to make line changes during rehearsal because that usually meant changing an entire speech or several lines in a dialogue. Another difficulty identified by Osment had to do with the rhythms of the two languages. He says that English has a more "pronounced" meter whereas, "Spanish is liquid and flows freely,

uses elision; English has a more 'chunky' concrete texture - the consonants provide less permeable barriers for the syllables" (92). He tried to use a more modern language but did not want to go for an "easy laugh"; at the same time, he did not want a type of "mock Elizabethan" (93). Osment admits to taking some liberties with Cervantes' text. For example, in Pedro's very long speech towards the beginning of the play when he talks about his adventures in life, Osment chose a "romance" form with lines of 8 syllables in an alternating assonant rhyme scheme. He tried to do it in the style of rap music with "internal rhyming" (94). Heavy rhyme schemes present a huge challenge to actors because if they really stress the rhyme it can become "deafening and monotonous" (95). The actor that played Pedro found a way to make it work, however. Osment observes, "In speaking these lines John Ramm, who played Pedro, found ways of using the internal rhymes to illustrate Pedro's ironic view of life, his wit and his intelligence" (94). I will address how the actors dealt with the verse forms in *Pedro* in a later chapter.

The translators for the RSC productions had their own way of approaching the text but what all of them shared—and what was essential to the season's success--was close collaborations with the directors. Another thing they shared was poetic ability. As Mr. Boswell stated in a conversation, besides knowing how to translate from one language to another, one must also be a poet. At the same time, the translations remained as faithful to the originals as speakability and the demands of the English stage would allow. The result, as translator for *Tamar's Revenge* James Fenton wrote in the program notes, "Tamar's Revenge," allowed audiences to discover a set of family resemblances:

To an English audience, Spanish drama comes like a long-lost cousin  
whom we may never have met before, but whom we immediately and

instinctively recognise as a close relation. What a welcome discovery it is, and how intriguing it is to think that there is so much more to discover, unperformed in English, and unfamiliar, for that matter, on the Spanish stage of today. (program notes)

The RSC Golden Age Season and the online *Out of the Wings* project have helped to jump start the dissemination of Spanish Golden Age dramatic texts and their eventual placement on the stage.



**The power of language and love in Lope's *Dog in the Manger***

Diana: Love is the common lot of all on earth;  
 but I more highly prize my honoured name,  
 I worship my nobility of birth,  
 and must regard the very thought with shame. (47)

There is an Aesop fable about a dog sleeping by a manger filled with hay. An ox comes along to eat it, but the dog keeps him at bay by barking ferociously at him. The dog cannot eat the hay, but does not want another animal to do so either. Therefore, the expression “dog in a manger” refers to someone who wields his or her power by coveting something that he or she cannot possess while fervently preventing others from obtaining it. In *Dog in the Manger* (*El perro del hortelano*) by Lope de Vega, our strong protagonist, Diana, is that same dog. Her sometimes suitor remarks:

Teodoro: I just don't know. I'm going mad. One moment  
 she dotes on me, the next she turns against me.  
 She won't have me, or let me have Marcela,  
 and if I keep away, she finds at once  
 some trumped -up reason why she has to see me.  
 She's neither in, nor out; won't eat, or *let* eat.  
 "Dog in the manger" sums her up exactly. (87)

Diana is a complex and engaging character that we love and hate. At the same time, because humans are deeply emotional creatures, we feel that we can understand her

ambivalent intensity and the frustrations of the characters that have to deal with her. If one were to compare her and a character in the Shakespearean canon, the logical choice would be Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing*. Beatrice is obviously in love with Benedict (and he with her) but their pride stands in the way of acknowledging their shared feelings. Beatrice and Benedict are the protagonists of a very contemporary love story. Audience members today can relate to two strongly independent and intelligent people frightened to make themselves vulnerable by opening up and risking love. Diana's and Teodoro's story is something like that of Beatrice and Benedict's, though it is actually much more complicated and disturbing.

*Dog in the Manger* is definitely a comedy with some intriguingly dark edges that can make an audience uncomfortable. This play has many positive qualities (for example, the writing is very clever) and, as a comedy, it is more likely to succeed on the English speaking stage than a serious drama. Audiences tend to favor comedies with their faster moving action and more approachable characters. Still, *Dog in The Manger* presents several significant production challenges. First, it is challenging to present a play about love that, at first glance, adheres to the stringent rules of a 17th century honor-bound Spanish society. Second, though contemporary audiences enjoy seeing a strong and independent woman, Diana can be cruel, unreasonable, selfish, arrogant, haughty and, basically, downright unlikeable at times. Indeed, her character may suggest that Lope was a misogynist, which he was not. In any case, it takes a certain amount of delicacy to present her in a likeable way while keeping her deliciously undesirable characteristics intact. There are other characters that are difficult to represent, mainly Teodoro and his sidekick servant, Tristan, the typical *gracioso*. This difficulty raises a

third production challenge: giving the audience a funny comedy while maintaining the danger so reminiscent of a Lope play. In the 2004 Royal Shakespeare Company season, director Laurence Boswell, by relying on the skill of his actors and the story and language given in the text, created an action packed, fast paced and hilarious version of this play to the delight of both the English and Spanish speaking audiences.

### **Play synopsis**

The play begins as Diana comes running into a room because it seems that she has just heard a man's voice in or very near her bedroom. Diana is the protagonist in the story and the proprietor of this great house. She is of noble birth and holds honor in very high esteem. Diana lives with her many servants, including her secretary, Teodoro. She is quite wealthy and has men pursuing her for her money, beauty and high social status. Diana is irate at the opening of the play because her honor is being put at risk, especially if the man in her quarters is unknown. She finally calls out to her women in waiting, and Diana comes to discover that the men in the area are her secretary, Teodoro, and his lackey, Tristán. Teodoro was in this private area of the house because he is in love with Diana's maid Marcela. Discovering the reason for Teodoro's being in her private chambers so late at night, Diana begins to feel a sensation of jealousy. She had been completely unaware that she loved Teodoro or, at least, was attracted to him. In a soliloquy, she laments:

Love is the common lot of all on earth;  
but I more highly prize my honoured name,  
I worship my nobility of birth,

and must regard the very thought with shame.

Envy, I know too well, must be my fate,  
 engendered by a joy I cannot share;  
 with reason I resent my rank and state,  
 and can but vainly wish, in fond despair,  
 that he were more, and I not far above him,  
 or I were less, and so could freely love him. (47)

Teodoro laments his love for Marcela and worries that he that he will not be able to be with her since Diana learned of their engagement. He is unaware of Diana's attraction to him but, rather, is worried that by being in Marcela's chambers, Diana will be angry about the possible blight his presence there could bring to her honored house. Tristan, apparently accustomed to advising his master, attempts to console him in a hilarious speech on how to forget the ones we love. Basically, in a reasonable way, he counsels him to imagine all of the disgusting aspects of Marcela and that should cure him immediately of his love.

In a ruse to spend time with Teodoro and test his affections, Diana comes in to ask his opinion about a "friend" of hers who is desperately in love with a man below her station. Eventually, Diana's strategy ignites Teodoro's curiosity and attraction to her. This friend is obviously Diana herself. Now, utterly confused, it is Teodoro's turn to share his private thoughts and feelings with the audience as Diana and Marcela have already done. Hopeful, Teodoro begins to play with the idea of being with Diana. Teodoro is very quick, too quick in fact, to change his love for Marcela to a possible attraction with Diana. To add to this surprise change of heart, we see that it is not just

love or lust that dangles a carrot before his eyes, but also his desire for increased status, power and money. He vacillates a while on whether or not he could drop Marcela so cruelly for her mistress. However, after denouncing Marcela unabashedly as "a fool" (62), he later rationalizes that women do the same cruel things as men, so it really is acceptable:

I'll wrong Marcela cruelly if I drop her;  
 too often women find men they thought true  
 have played them false, and that's not right or proper.  
 But they respond to whims and fancies too,  
 and when it suits them, they play fast and loose.  
 Sauce for the gander, then, sauce for the goose. (63)

Teodoro begins to lose his compassion as he aims higher. He disregards Marcela and even begins to take on "airs" as he sees the advantages of being with a woman from a higher social bracket. The scene slows down a bit during his deliberations, which mark a shift in the story since now he has his hat in the ring, competing with Diana's other suitors for her affections.

Poor Marcela is required to leave the room, and Teodoro and Diana are left alone again. It is the beginning of Act II in the text. (Lope and other *comedia* writers preferred the division of plays into three *jornadas*, which would be like acts to a modern reader). We are now introduced to two suitors who are vying to marry the honorable and lovely Diana. They are Don Ricardo and Don Federico, completely ridiculous figures in their pursuit of Diana. During their visit, however, Diana receives the news that Teodoro has

written the letter that she requested, so she subtly dismisses her guests. The letter to her friend is to give advice regarding her "friend" loving a man who is below her station. It is during this second meeting that Teodoro becomes more cognizant of Diana's feelings. After Diana leaves, Marcela enters and she and Teodoro begin to confess their feelings for one another. Unfortunately, they are discovered by Diana who becomes irate. She hides her jealousy by accusing them both of threatening her good honor. Poor Marcela is confined to internment within the house until they marry and is not allowed to see Teodoro, so that Diana's good name does not run the risk of being dirtied. Marcela leaves and Teodoro and Diana are left alone again. Just as Teodoro is about to leave, Diana "falls" to the ground; Teodoro must of course help her up which provides for an intimate moment between them. This leads Teodoro to believe that he might actually be able to rise in status by marrying Diana. He begins to plan his break from Marcela, despite Tristan who scolds and tries to stop him. Tristan understands that this society is very attached to its norms and that Diana is tightly regulated by them. It is difficult to decide in this play who is the more selfish and malicious, Teodoro or Diana: whereas Teodoro's "love" is driven by worldly ambition, Diana's "love" comes from envy and jealousy. At the same time, the audience roots for them to come together, mostly due to Diana's heartache. Her emotions are real and believable as she wants to do the right thing, but her heart and passions fight against her ideals. This is the kind of drama we still live today.

Marcela, truly, is a victim but carries on with a vindictive edge. She discovers the torn up letter that she had written expressing her love left by Teodoro. He callously pushes her away when she is trying to win back his affections; indeed, he pushes so

forcefully that she falls to the floor, echoing Diana's recent collapse. Teodoro does not stoop to raise her, however, and she goes to Fabio, another character who has cared about her for some time, to tell him that she has decided to be with him. Although Fabio knows that her desire for him is driven by Teodoro's rejection of her, he still accepts her proposal.

The break-up has occurred, and Diana could have Teodoro if she wanted, but her sense of duty wins and she continues to confuse the poor man by asking him whom she should marry, Marques Ricardo or Don Federico. This, of course, completely throws Teodoro, and we see Tristan try and comfort his master while humorously hugging him. Now it is time for them both to try and woo Marcela back for Teodoro. Surprisingly, Marcela rejects him and swears revenge at first. She holds steadfast for a while and makes Teodoro work at winning her back. There is no better way to do this than to have him say mean and ugly things about Diana. Upon seeing the two together again and hearing their barbs, Diana becomes jealous and proceeds to break them up again.

In a climactic bit of dialogue, Teodoro directly confronts Diana. He tells her that he is deeply confused and accuses her of being responsible. Diana goes berserk, striking him twice and, as he falls, beating him. It is important that Federico sees her in action because he comes to the conclusion that love is the only reason a woman would act this way. Diana's action prompts Federico and the Marques to plan Teodoro's murder. Diana is livid and, beating Teodoro, causes him to bleed. After she leaves, Teodoro does not read despair in her violence but hope. He rejoices, "We both felt pleasure" and he knows now that she really likes him.

Diana and Teodoro end up in a passionate exchange in the third act. He is planning to leave for Spain as both his honor and her honor have come into question. Marcela later barges in to let Diana know that she and Teodoro are going to Spain together. Of course, Diana will absolutely not allow this and forces Marcela to marry Fabio. The final problem in the play concerns the question of Diana's honor. How can she marry beneath her station while preserving her honor? We would expect to discover that Teodoro is actually a nobleman. Lope does not disappoint us, but Teodoro's nobility is not achieved in the usual way. Tristán happens to hear that an old Count, Ludovico, lost a son to pirates with the same name as Teodoro. Tristán swears to Teodoro to arrange it so that everyone believes that Teodoro is Count Ludovico's long lost son. In this way Diana and Teodoro can be together and Teodoro will have "noble" lineage. Upon seeing Teodoro, Ludovico comments on how similar he is to himself when he was younger. This statement by the Count brings the audience relief. In other words, there is enough proof so that even conservative spectators in the Spanish Golden Age can believe that Teodoro is noble and qualified to marry Diana. It is telling that it is the rascally servant that puts the whole scheme together. Tristán reassures his master, "So you must be the son, and he your father, / and I'll arrange it all." Teodoro warns him, "Tristán, be careful; / your ingenuity and your inventions / might cost us both our honour and our lives" (94). At first Teodoro goes along completely with the plan to the point of lying to Diana. But, in the end, he confesses to Diana that Tristán fabricated the entire story and that he, Teodoro, is actually nobody in her circle. Her heart conquered, Diana does not mind the lie as long as it remains secret. Fearing that Tristán will tell, she tells Teodoro to dismiss his servant but he refuses. Tristan, a little put off, promises not to tell. She



even plays along with the plot as she tells Ludovico that she and Teodoro are husband and wife, "for happiness depends, not on high rank, / but on the harmony of heart with heart. / I mean to marry you [to Teodoro]" (112, III.iii). The deal is, however, that Teodoro must never reveal the secret. One can only ask what kind of marriage they will have in the end. Marcela is forced to marry Fabio and in her speech renouncing Teodoro, she contemplates:

Honour and love can never be conjoined;  
 too many snow-capped mountains stand between.  
 I feel my passion still, but feel avenged,  
 and therefore shall forget, for that's love's way.  
 If you remember me, just call to mind  
 that I no longer care, and then you'll want me.  
 'Twas ever thus; thinking he's been forgotten  
 will always make a lover love again. (104)

In the end, all of the "happy couples" get married, which is signified through a dance. Having confessed their guilt for trying to have Teodoro killed, Ricardo and Federico supply the dowries for Marcela and Dorotea, Tristan's betrothed.

### **Textual analysis**

This is a play about love, or aspects of love: jealousy, passion, deceit, cruelty and humor. At the very beginning of the play in a whirlwind of action, our protagonist, Diana, seeks the two scoundrels that found their way into her chambers. We discover

that this is a huge problem for Diana, because their presence could tarnish her pristine honor, the maintenance of which is her major preoccupation during the play. Diana's fear of loss of honor guides her emotions and decisions during much of the play. The theme of honor is predominant in plays of the Golden Age but, interestingly, its meaning and significance tend to be interrogated rather than simply assumed. Diana's adherence to her honor code hurts many people in the play, including herself, and causes her to act selfishly, cruelly and unpredictably. Contemporary readers/audience member may not be able entirely to empathize with her commitment to honor—as I have discussed, honor is a concept that stems from the age of feudalism—but we do understand social mores and what it means to feel confined by a social code. In this case, the binding social mores concern class distinctions. Diana's basic problem is that she loves someone with lower social status. Focusing on this problem, Lope may have been influenced by a novella written by the Italian author Bandello (1490-1560) about a woman of means and title that falls in love with her secretary. Interestingly enough, Bandello also wrote a novella about a young pair of lovers named Romeo and Julieta of Verona, upon which Lope based his play *Castelvines y Monteneses*. Not only the novella, but events in Lope's own life may have shaped *Dog in a Manger*. As Dr. Kathleen Jeffs, dramaturg for the RSC production, informs us in her program notes, Lope was also a secretary and understood the workings of that position; "Lope developed the skills of a go-between required of a gentleman's secretary." Finally, I note that the play's rather disturbing depiction of romance—the way Lope infects Diana and Teodoro's love with ambition and envy—may have been a result of unhappy events in Lope's personal life. The play was written around 1613. His beloved son, Carlos Fénix, had died the year before and Carlos' mother, Juana Guardo,

died in 1613. Perhaps honor is less of a reason for us not to love in this day and age, but love stories made into books and Hollywood movies exist that present similarly bound and challenged characters. The challenge to the contemporary director is to bring alive the conflict in Diana between her honor and her jealousy-induced love so that the audience can warmly relate to her.

One might ask what is “love” in this play? Teodoro is attracted by Diana's status and her beauty; Marcela leaves Fabio and stupidly goes back to Teodoro after he dropped her; the two idiot suitors vie for Diana's hand, wealth and status; and Diana is motivated by jealousy and the need for power and control. In this way, Lope turns the notion of “true love” upside down and, at the end, we are not quite certain who really wins; the characters’ rather vicious and egotistical behavior destabilizes their relationships, despite the final wedding dance. It is these little surprises in Lope's plays that, when examined closely, allow for a richer interpretation.

I am not implying that love and desire do not exist in this play, but Lope's depiction of them are not pure and idealized. Well known Spanish Golden Age Scholar and translator of *Dog in the Manger* for this RSC season, David Johnston, writes in the program notes that:

Lope's life seeps into his work most profoundly through his understanding of the workings of the human heart. Here was a man who was married several times and had enjoyed a number of affairs, and he infused his erotic energy into many of his plays, *Dog in the Manger* perhaps principal among them. Lope loved women and, unlike Shakespeare, he had real women to write for. (program notes)

Johnston's comment might provide insight into Lope's fascinating female characters. For example, Diana and Teodoro end up in a passionate exchange in the third act. He is planning to leave for Spain as his honor and her honor have come into question and he wants to save both. It is difficult for the couple to part but, finally, Teodoro leaves with, "God bless your ladyship." Diana, in a telling moment, angered by the social norms that confine her, despairs, "My ladyship? / My ladyship be damned, if being a lady / prevents my being his whom I desire" (96). In a surprising last turn, Marcela returns to make one more attempt to be with Teodoro. She asks Diana if she can marry Teodoro and go to Spain with him as they have discussed. This time Diana is overcome by her jealousy and denies Marcela completely as "Love must lose all control. And yet it need not; no, this disease at least is easily cured" (97). What is the disease here? Is it Marcela, jealousy or love? She rids herself of Marcela and forces her to marry Fabio, whom Marcela actually "hates." In her next scene, Diana is again with Teodoro swearing her love, but still not quite ready to give up her honor and status. Lope gives us very strong women who are afflicted by the thorns and roses of love. It seems that Diana wins in the end but her victory is precarious. Honor can be used as a shield to protect one from heart-break but Diana gives up its protection. This is permissible as long as others do not discover that Teodoro's nobility is a lie. The challenge to the director is expose all of the disconcerting aspects of Diana's "love" while making her a likeable character.

Diana is not the only important or difficult character in this play, nor in Spanish Golden Age drama. I am moved to make this point because the conventional view of characters from these plays reduces their complexity. Noted Spanish Golden Age scholar Dr. Jonathan Thacker wrote, "Psychological motivation, an important element of what

the Golden Age called verisimilitude, had an enormous influence on how later dramatists constructed their plots" (*Companion* 15). Thacker wrote this in the section about Lope de Rueda, a popular playwright of the sixteenth century, in relation to the future playwrights that would dominate the Spanish stage in the seventeenth century. His quote contradicts the widely-held belief that Spanish dramatists of this time period did not create characters as round and in depth as their English counterparts; indeed these playwrights did create believable and relatable characters. However, because these plays emphasize plot, the performer must get into the character's skin to find the fullness and make the character come alive on stage. In *The Dog in the Manger*, character depth is not as apparent as in *Hamlet* or *Richard III* but the characters' actions and behaviors are certainly credible. Most important, the ending leaves those expecting a storybook, happy ending unfulfilled. We walk away aware of the contradictions between the characters' words and actions.

Sometimes, however, it is difficult to find the depth in these characters. Except for Tristán, the men are presented as buffoons, even Teodoro, as we see especially when he is with Tristan. Although slaves to their emotions and, at times, irrational, the women control the action in this play. For example, after Diana sees Teodoro and Marcela back together again, she dictates a letter to Teodoro to let him know that he is foolish to go to Marcela when someone of a much higher status is in love him. In a strange reversal, it is the man, Teodoro, who acts according to the whims of the women in power, rather than vice-versa as traditional gender relations would suggest. It is as if Teodoro is unable to act unless acted upon. After Teodoro has coldly dismissed Marcela by calling her "dense" and "stupid," a stupefied Marcela asks Tristán the reason for his rash behavior. Tristán compares Teodoro to a woman, "A little flightiness; he's joined the ladies" (69).

This comment is indeed derogatory towards women but in a play with strong, mindful women, we only see it as an insult to Teodoro. Nonetheless, Teodoro does change like the wind and is at times inert. Following in his wavering footsteps is the servant Fabio, to whom Marcela runs after being dumped by Teodoro. At this point, Marcela's relationship with Fabio is not about love, but necessity. Dorotea, a friend of Marcela, urges, "Fabio, seize your chance. Be bold; just now Marcela *needs* to love you. Teodoro's flying high, and dropping her" (71). Fabio's response is one of the wounded victim:

Marcela, I must go and look for him.

I'll do, it seems, when he plays hard to get.

You're like a letter that's addressed: "Teodoro.

Please forward, if he's not home, to Fabio."

Not very flattering, but I'll overlook it.

We'll talk about it. Your obedient servant. (71)

As we see here, the characters' complexity is heightened by their trying to find humor in their pain. Director Boswell really understands this aspect of Lope's work, and played to that in the production.

Like many of the other male characters in the play, Teodoro displays an inability to act. At the end of Act II, he complains to Diana about her unfair treatment of him. Angered, in retaliation, she actually strikes him. Teodoro cries out, "What's this, your ladyship?" She retorts, "The beating you deserve for such indecency, such boorishness" (85). Reference is made to the bloody handkerchief that he carrying with him to stop his

wounds, and Diana later gives him 2000 ducats to buy new ones. At the very end of the act, Teodoro and Tristán have the following exchange:

Teodoro: She's given me a cool two thousand ducats.

Tristán: You wouldn't mind a dozen blows at that price.

Teodoro: For handkerchiefs, she said, and took the bloody one.

Tristán: *Droit de seigneur*, it's called. 'Cause she's deflowered you, and made you bleed, she's paid you - through the nose.

Teodoro: Maybe she's too bad a dog; she bites,  
then she's all over you. (88)

Teodoro is willing to overlook a beating for money and status. Although this is a comedy, it is still something of a shock to see a man become the object of domestic abuse in a society where wife beating was if not legal, more common. It is problematic, then, to say that this play is about love since it emphasizes the messy, complicated, disturbing aspects of desire and attraction. In my view, the play presents a grotesque distortion of love, which, of course, poses raises interesting questions about what directors and actors will do with it on the contemporary stage.

The character of the *gracioso* appears in all of the plays that I have examined and researched. *Gracioso* characters are supposed to provide comic relief and be very funny. In my experience, however, they are not all that amusing; either they are too slapstick and silly or their humor relies on arcane historical references. Perhaps they are better thought of as Shakespearean-type fools, for many of the *graciosos* provide wisdom and knowledge, especially for the crazy masters who are suffering the woes of love. There is a great honesty and loyalty in Tristan's relationship to Teodoro, and his advice is wise;

indeed, he appears as the most sane character in the play. Tristan warns his master of aiming too high and admonishes him to read the letter that Marcela has written him: "For God's sake read it. / Don't act so high and mighty! Wine breeds flies; / that doesn't mean the wine's less well regarded; / and I remember when your 'butterfly' Marcela, / was a glorious golden eagle" (67). After Teodoro heartlessly rips up Marcela's letter calling it "stupid nonsense" (67), Tristán scolds, "But that's unjust and cruel" (67), to which Teo responds, "Don't be surprised; I'm not the man I was." Teodoro goes on to explain that something special is happening and he would be a fool not to take his turn at it: "Each man, Tristán, has his own chance of greatness; / not having it, is not knowing how to seize it. / Count of Belflor, or die in the attempt!" (68). Tristán very wisely replies:

A famous duke called Caesar Borgia, sir,  
chose the device "Be Caesar or be nothing."

It turned out badly, though, his schemes miscarried, and then some  
waspy wit wrote: "Caesar, you said

'Be Caesar or be nothing'; you were both. (68)

Besides the *gracioso* figure, there are often minor characters who, again, are there for comic relief. In this play, the comic minor characters are the two suitors, Marques Ricardo and Don Federico, who are vying to marry the honorable and lovely Diana. It is difficult to decide which of these two is more silly, just as it is difficult to decide which is more selfish and malicious, Teodoro or Diana.

Having considered some of the difficulties inherent in the text, I will now present a breakdown of it in performance as directed by Mr. Laurence Boswell. By attacking the comedy of the play and running it at top speed, Boswell and actors created a diverting



evening of fun, while still providing the necessary sting at the end of the play, leaving our feathers a little ruffled.

### **Production analysis**

One reviewer writes of the production of *Dog in the Manger*, "Laurence Boswell promotes the comedy over the drama. By doing so, he ensures that all of this is great fun, probably as much for the energetic actors as their audience. It is a good advert for the Spanish contemporaries of our own Bard" (Fisher). There were no special effects or elaborate sets in this production, and hardly any type of prop was used, and yet audience members were engaged the entire time, almost retraining themselves to listen, a task that the ensemble of director, translator, actors, academics made easy. Through the use of focused lighting, a minimal yet symbolic set design and costumes, detailed and purposeful staging, movement and gesture, Boswell and actors were able to highlight the intricacies of the language and the varying degrees of humor and pain that accompany being in love.

Successful collaboration was one of the key aspects of the RSC Spanish Golden Age season. The collaboration between *Dog in the Manger* translator David Johnston and director Lawrence Boswell is an excellent example. Based on Johnston's comments, it appears that the translation and direction went hand in hand; he and Boswell saw many aspects of the text in a similar light and their agreement came out in the actual staging of the piece. For example, in the program notes, Johnston proposes:

Of course, the erotic in Lope is invariably sublimated. After all, there was

the Inquisition to negotiate and delicate royal patronage to maintain. Both Lope and his character Teodoro know all about the tension between the expression of eroticism and the maintenance of favour. So Lope's eroticism is intuited, barely glimpsed, given half-words - and it is all the more powerful for that. There is a pervasive sense of such eroticism in *Dog in the Manger*, played out in a teasing - although, at times, also brutal - game of covert courtship. For a translator, the temptation is to write this forward, to make more explicit what is only suggested through veiled allusion in the original. I have tried to resist this temptation, in part because I think the balance of Lope's original is perfect, and in part because both Laurence Boswell and I wanted to let Lope speak to an audience of the early twenty-first century in as direct and unmediated a manner as possible.

Both Johnston and Boswell sought to adhere to the essence of Lope and his work in this production. Their respect for the playwright can be seen in the high value they placed on the language and on the various stage elements that helped to support the language and the objective of the play.

Spanish Golden Age texts are polymetric, meaning that the verse is composed in a variety of meters. In order to better understand the difficulty in translation, provided here is one small example of how it might work. Dr. Kathleen Jeffs, describes the Spanish verse changes carried over into Johnston's translation: for the *redondillas* (these are typical in Spanish poetry and consist of 4 trochaic lines usually of 8 syllables with a

rhyme scheme of *abba*) he uses an English octosyllabic line. The closing line of a *redondilla*, often signifies the end of a thought; Johnston opted to close it out with one of Diana's interior revealing sonnets, having her say "I am calm." This sudden break in her passionate and heartfelt discourse made the audience laugh because of its prose-like feel and because it was a complete lie. But the lie does indicate a shift in the scene, and we know that she is again donning a mask to hide her true feelings. "The dramaturgic function of the verse shift in the original, which is to show a subtle shift in Diana's tactics as well as the start of Marcela's narrative of her love affair, is thus retained in Johnston's textual indications of the physical transition happening on stage and the tonal shift in Diana's delivery" (Jeffs 8). When Johnston shifts to the sonnet, he is not as stringent with meter, but he does use rhymed lines, which catches the ears of the listener. Just as a side note, after one of Diana's monologue, Marcela shares her dilemma with the audience in a similar fashion. A smaller area of light is used and there is a nice parallel established between the plight of these rivals for Teodoro, structurally in the text and in the staging. The language of the text and the performances of the actors worked harmoniously with other staging and technical elements.

Pace and language went hand-in-hand in this production. As soon as the houselights went down, two men, Teodoro (Joseph Millson), Diana's secretary, and his servant, the hilarious Tristan (Simon Trinder), rushed from upstage to down stage in a diagonal. Even though the light was dim, the audience could see their silhouette, and it was obvious that they were being chased. The stage was a 3/4 thrust with two stage level exits that went off diagonally down left and right. Sometimes, actors posed there to listen. The two men exited but the rapidity of the scene continued as two brass doors

upstage swung open and Diana (Rebecca Johnson) entered in all of her fastidiousness. She was dressed perfectly. Her dress was Elizabethan in style with a white bouffant, ruffled collar around her neck. She was covered up to her neck. Her dress was dark red with great detailing on the material. Most of the characters stayed in the same costumes throughout the action. The most notable costume changes were made by Tristan and Diana, at the end of the play. The costumes in all of the RSC plays, except for perhaps in *Tamar*, reflected the status of the characters very clearly, which was true to Spanish Golden Age and Elizabethan practice (except that these actors did not have to buy their own apparel!). Moreover, except for *Pedro the Great Pretender*, costume changes in these plays remained scant because they were not necessary. The dress that Diana wore was very consistent with her character. It was stiff to reflect her own rigidity, and its detail and design reflected a woman of very high status. All of the women had fans attached to their wrists or dresses.

Returning to the action, I want to re-iterate the velocity at which the play opened. This high speed was maintained throughout, constantly keeping the audience on edge. I did not know what would happen next. Moving the action along at such great pace was a very deliberate choice on the part of the director and even the translator. Johnston wrote in the program for the production, "These are astonishingly fast-moving plays, all of them acute observations of what today we would call the psychological dimension, that obscure layer that lies between what people say and what they hide." The entire play rests on what Diana, mostly, and to some extent, Teodoro, want to do and say but must keep pushing down. This disconnect between inner desire and outward action creates great tension. As Johnston reveals, this play is about the "yearnings of the heart"; "*Dog in*

*the Manger* sits relentlessly astride this fault line between desire and the law, written and unwritten" (program notes).

Dr. Kathleen Jeffs investigates the verse of the first scene. After everyone leaves the stage, Diana shares her true feelings. What I noticed immediately was the Johnson's change in tone of voice. Her voice was less harsh and tight, and came at a lower volume. There appeared a softness to her that we did not see when she interacted with the other characters, who often acted nervous and afraid around her. Up until this time, the rapid pace of the staging had created an almost swirling motion; Diana's sonnet slows things down a bit. As Dr. Jeffs writes of Diana's line, "Mil veces" ("1000 times") there is a shift in mood:

Making the transition from a fast-paced, storytelling form to the hendecasyllabic lines of the sonnet, Diana's speech changes the mood and offers a snapshot of her inner state of mind. It sounds different from the *romances* in that the rhyme is now a full rhyme instead of the assonance of the native Spanish form; also, the increased length allows time to develop complex thoughts within the line. There are no dialogic interruptions. (7-8).

In this introspective sonnet, we saw the problem of the play laid out for us by Diana. As Jeffs points out, after this sonnet, Diana exited the stage. It was the first moment that everyone was off stage since curtain rise. This break in the action helped the audience to identify the action so far as the opening section of the play and to reflect on the dilemma that had just been posed.

Keeping with Spanish Golden Age and Elizabethan "set design," minimal pieces

were used and the stage was mostly bare. Necessary furniture pieces, such as two chairs, were brought on occasionally to aid in establishing a different scene, space and time. However, after a few scenes, a curtain was added upstage. This addition was made when Teodoro had hopes for Diana and began to see what might happen in his life if he and Diana came together. A curtain came together from the two sides and joined in the middle. On the huge curtain a face was painted that looked very like the young girl in the famous Dutch painting, *Het Meisje met de peral*, by Johannes Vermeer that inspired a recent book, *Girl with the Pearl Earring* by Tracy Chevalier, and a movie. Many audience members could connect the play's action to these popular works. In the novel and the movie, the girl is from a lower class and there is a strong indication of a sexual attraction between her and her master, the man who paints her. However, they can never come together because of class differences and the fact that he is married. The curtain was used for symbolic as well as practical purposes. At a couple of points in the play, characters worried about being overheard observed that "these tapestries have eyes and ears," e.g. in the scene when Tristan gained a whiff of Teodoro's airs and warned him against his aspirations. The curtain was also used to hide characters listening in on other back by saying mean and ugly things about Diana. The curtain was key because as he was talking about Diana's unseemliness, she was peeping through the curtain and listening. Here, the curtains both literally and figuratively had eyes and ears. As directed by Boswell, this was an especially delightful scene. Marcela (Claire Cox) pumped Teodoro to disparage Diana, leading him to call her a rabbit and the three of them, Tristan included, began jumping around on the stage like rabbits as Diana watched.

As stated the curtain was used throughout but, after the interval, the audience was

presented with a scene that appeared totally different though no huge changes were made. It was a night scene: the curtain had been pulled back and the doors were completely open exposing a brick wall in the background. The back light was bluish against the wall and down front a big circle of deep red light stained the stage as the suitors, the Marques and Don Ricardo, planned their murder of Teodoro. Tristan came on in completely different clothes bought with the money that Diana had given Teodoro for the new handkerchiefs. Donning leather pants and boots, a nice jacket and white fluffy top, Tristan did not look the raggedy servant that he had been. His status was raised along with his master's. It also helped to fool the two men as they did not recognize him. This visual set up really helped the audience to understand that the scene was occurring outdoors in the streets of Naples. For the Spanish audience, Naples carried connotations of the exotic, a place a bit wild. Dr. Jeffs writes in the program that, "Taking advantage of the dangerous, devilish associations his audience had of Naples as a port town, Lope invites the spectator to Belflor, a house steeped in envy, bound by the honour code, and manipulated by the trickery of both nobles and rogues" (program notes). The scene was made mostly by the lighting, which was an integral part of this production.

In the first series of scenes up to Diana's soliloquized sonnet, the lighting was used very subtly to mark shifts of mood. For example, when Diana dismissed her ladies in waiting so that she might speak to Marcela alone, the doors closed and the warmish aspect of the lights dimmed, so that it was harsher for this "interrogation." Diana really dug at Marcela to discover the truth of her relationship to Teodoro. Lighting was used like this throughout the play. At times there was a deep red circle of light that appeared when a character was searching internally and their passion burst forth in their language.

Many times when a character was left alone on stage to talk to the audience, the lights around the stage were lowered leaving only a circle of light for the character. This choice worked to make the space more intimate; it was as if the audience were entering a more personal, private space containing the characters' hidden thoughts and feelings. Light changes were also used to indicate time of day, and whether the location was interior or exterior. The changes were hardly noticeable but helped the audience to understand the characters and the place and time. The use of lighting was also exceptional because of the few stage pieces used. In the entire first scene not one piece of set decoration was used. The speed and movement of the staging, the actors' delivery of verse, and the lighting effects sufficed to create the different shifts in the story.

Sometimes as the scene changed back to an interior, the lights changed and the painted curtain was brought back on. At one point, the director opted to focus a spotlight tightly on the two female characters. In one of Diana's most poignant moment, as she felt Teodoro slipping away from her, the other stage lights were extinguished and the spot illuminated only her upper body, her chest and head. When Marcela entered, the same kind of spot was used on her. These lighting choices forged a strong parallel between the two characters—rivals for Teodoro's affection—and created the impression that they were floating around stage bodiless. When Diana left, the spot remained on Marcela during her speech. By cutting off the other lights and only showing their upper bodies, Boswell made these women seem more vulnerable: the moment became very serious and intimate; their desires and sufferings were paralleled; we saw them as equals, even though society did not regard them as such. We were made to focus on each of their plights but we could intuit that Marcela would ultimately lose the battle for Teodoro



because Diana was such a determined and cunning woman who had gained, and retained, the spectator's support.

Lighting also assisted in establishing and characterizing the relationships between characters. After one of Teodoro's early love-torn soliloquies, Marcela entered and the upstage lights warmed and intensified a little. Her love for him was apparent but, as she tried to touch him, we saw him start to push away. When Diana came in and caught them, the reds and oranges upstage disappeared; instead, light issued from the open doors and the fringes of the stage were dimmed. The light was harsher and we sensed that the characters' relationships were not quite so warm as Diana railed at the pair for their lack of propriety in her honorable house. During her diatribe, Teodoro and Marcela separated, one going down right and the other down left. Poor Marcela was told that she was confined to the house until she married Teodoro and was not allowed to see him until then, so as to preserve the purity of Diana's good name. Marcela exited and Teodoro and Diana were left alone again. The lights went up a little after the doors closed and yellow gels restored a bit of warmth to the scene. The couple stood close together, and the tone and volume of their conversation became very quiet. Overall the lighting was surprisingly dark for a romantic comedy, though perhaps this choice underscored the "darker," even insidious, nature of love in the play.

Boswell used the staging, blocking and actors' gestures to help the audience grasp textual complexities. In their first few scenes together, the actors playing Diana and Teodoro displayed a certain tautness of posture; there was little movement when they were together. One got the feeling that the couple was very aware of their proximity, of each other's physical presence. In other words, the intimate blocking created the

impression of sexual tautness and suppressed desire between the two characters. Boswell was careful to keep the sensuality under strict control, so strict that it seemed almost painful. Some contemporary directors might embellish the sexual relationship, thinking that desires more clearly expressed would register better with a modern audience.

Boswell, however, did not elect this route. Instead, as the relationship between Diana and Teodoro evolved, it was fascinating to watch the actors' subtle shifts in voice, mannerism and proximity. With each scene they came one step closer to actually touching.

When Teodoro came back with the letter that Diana asked him to write, the actors were blocked in the reverse image of their previous scene; whereas previously he had been upstage right, now he was downstage left; whereas she had been downstage left, now she was upstage right. Of course, this reversal hinted at the flip-flops of love enacted by the play, but it also suggested their equality and the superficiality of Diana's defense of her honor. She kept as much distance as she could when she took the letter from Teodoro and he created as much distance when he took the letter back by stretching out his arm to her. Their movements were the equivalent of a rubber band being pulled back and forth. This contrasted nicely to the scenes between Marcela and Teodoro, where we saw her great physical affection for her lover. Boswell created the impression that Teodoro had an innate need to keep a physical distance from Diana; he blocked the scene so that when she walked towards him, he retreated and leaned back a little.

Teodoro appeared to be afraid of what the increasingly unpredictable Diana would do next. Finally the actors released the physical tension a bit and we saw that Teodoro was coming around to Diana's subtle pursuit. On the lines when he talked of Icarus getting too close to the sun, he got very close to her. She stayed there, next to him and said, "I

am a woman;" it is the closest they had come. Of course, the sexually charged moment was too good to last and, fearing an imminent breach of decorum, Diana left the room. The lights dimmed as no light issued from the upstage door; this light change altered the mood of Teodoro's next monologue. The light in the center of the stage seemed more intense because its focus had tightened. Boswell's restrained and respectful staging, performed by the excellent RSC actors, allowed Lope's poetry and imagery to come through in this production.

The taut invisible string connecting Diana and Teodoro was still there in a later scene, when she asks his advice as to whom she should wed. At first the two appeared calm and civil, but then we saw the desires begin to stir in Diana: words and movements began to speed up, as the actress got up from her chair, sat down, and spun around. She asked, "What advice have you got for me?" in regards to man she should marry. Teodoro sat and they talked across the space to each other, creating a distance bridged by an invisible string connecting their hearts. The actress spoke the line, "As you say, times change," with great vehemence, stood up and flew down stage only to return and sit in order to dismiss Teodoro. However, as he left, Diana collapsed. It was clearly a ploy and the actress perfectly executed the move. Teodoro's back was turned, and Diana, who was center stage, coughed, purposefully plopped herself onto the ground, paused, and then said, "I've fallen." This playacting provoked uproarious laughter from the audience. She told her secretary that he must help her up. He wrapped something around his hand so as to not touch her because he is below her station. She reproached him, and he freed his hand so that they would have to touch physically. It was so tantalizing and exciting a

moment, just a touch of the hand, but the director had made us hold our breath for it. And of course, even as the audience was rooting for the two of them, somewhere in the back of our minds we also began to feel sorry for Marcela. Diana held Teodoro's hand firmly as he helped her to her feet. They held hands briefly and then he pulled away quickly because he should not be touching her; still, the heat between them lingered.

Interestingly enough, as represented in the production, Marcela was the character most naive about the societal laws of love. She was open and physical as she moved around the space, unbounded in her affection for Teodoro as she touched and kissed, or tried to hiss, him. Her body language and movements were the complete opposite of Diana's. Additionally, her dress was much less stiff with a v-line neck, allowing for more movement and exposing her throat and upper chest. Marcela is a person very much victimized in the play; she does not want to hide behind artifice but, unfortunately, she ends paying for her warmly expressive and affectionate nature when is forced to marry a man that she despises. Boswell was particularly skillful when staging the scenes of violence in the play. There were two very disturbing moments in the production that caused the audience to step back and pause. Love is not supposed to be violent but it often can be. Having discovered the torn up letter, Marcela was pushed away by Teodoro with such force that she fell to the floor. Such physical violence is not acceptable to a contemporary audience, and complicated our feelings towards Teodoro. Afterwards, Marcela went to Fabio to tell him that she has decided to be with him. Although he knows it is because she has been rejected by Teodoro, Fabio has cared about Marcela for some time and accepts her proposal. As she did with Teodoro, the actress playing Marcela touched and caressed Fabio, but there was a hastiness and manic quality to her

movements. These touches were obviously not heartfelt.

I mentioned an even more disturbingly violent scene in the plot synopsis. The final scene before the interval was between Teodoro and Diana. The light upstage showed part of curtain and there was no downstage light, creating a small space in which these two could have a quiet and intimate exchange. Teodoro challenged Diana's love for him, saying that he is unable to respond to her rapidly changing affections anymore, that he is confused. Unable to find words for her feelings, Diana lashed out, striking Teodoro and causing him to bleed. After she left, Teodoro reached a strange conclusion: he read hope rather than despair in Diana's abuse. He rejoiced, "We both felt pleasure" and knew now that she really liked him. Love can be awful, uncontrollable, and all consuming but people can become addicted to it, even its sadomasochistic qualities. Diana returned briefly to take the bloody handkerchief, confirming Tristan and Teodoro's suspicion that there was still hope. By placing the interval at this spot, Boswell provided spectators an opportunity to reflect on gender roles in this play and the values assigned to love.

Finally, I shall consider the comedic characters and how their movements and gestures really highlighted the comedy in an entertaining fashion. The actor playing Tristan was a true delight, taking full advantage of Lope's multifarious character. There was no need to make Tristan farcical or clownish, because it would contradict the sage advice he gave to his master. Nonetheless, his lightheartedness and willingness to do anything to help Teodoro made him funny. In their opening scene, the lights were a warmish yellow, helping to establish the friendship between master and servant. In the first act, Tristan often walked around with a stool tied to his back for Teodoro to sit on when necessary. The stool was used in this scene, placed upstage right. Tristan was

barefoot and his costume reflected his status very clearly. He was the "fool" in this play, like Harlequin in the Italian *commedia dell arte*, but more wise and down to earth than the fool/servant that this same actor played in *House of Desires*. He was an excellent physical comedian, miming with great gesture and movement even when compared to the other actors, who were all physically aware and energetic. There was a change in the beat and tone of Tristan's monologue, and the light grew brighter as he backed away downstage, creating distance between him and master. With Teodoro on the chair upstage and Tristan standing downstage on the diagonal, all eyes were naturally focused on Tristan because we were doing the same thing as Teodoro, listening. To mark another shift in the scene, Teodoro stood when he called Tristan a quack, which led to Tristan sitting on the stool. At one point, as Tristan tried to physically comfort his master, the two were on the stool together. The use of space, physical gesture and vocal quality in this light scene was nicely contrasted when Diana entered and Tristan flew off his stool. To attest to the true talent of this actor, it must be noted that he played the *gracioso* role in *House of Desires* and managed to create an equally hilarious, yet completely different character. This is proof that it is possible to find emotional depth in comic characters of the Golden Age and that they can be differentiated.

Movement played a major part in the production, in keeping with Boswell's allusion in the previous chapter to the "dance of the characters" as the way to bring them to life. As one reviewer noted, "RSC Associate Director Boswell has eschewed naturalism for a physical style that borders on slapstick and positively encourages overacting. This works well with a play that takes a wry look at love and fidelity" (Fisher 2005). However, the "overacting" referenced by this reviewer did not detract from the

language of the play or its entertainment value. The incongruities of love were presented in a moving, funny and disturbing way, perhaps even as Lope himself intended. The actors were all physically astute and paid great attention to their movements and gestures; however, the movements and gestures of the comedic characters were definitely amplified. Apart from Tristan, consider the actor that played the Marques Ricardo (he, John Ramm, played Pedro in *Pedro the Great Pretender*). His movement contrasts were in fantastic contrast to those of Diana, Teodoro and his known rival, Don Federico (Oscar Pearce). When Don Ricardo entered, he appeared big and exaggerated, inflated not only by his affection for Diana but also completely in love with himself. The Marques used big arm and hand gestures while stomping around the stage with large, long steps. He loved to hear himself speak and motioned everywhere. In almost every scene he gave Diana flowers by having his manservant whip them out like a magician. In the first scene the flowers were white and in subsequent scenes the bouquets became bigger and red. To help set the mood of the scene and to help Diana maintain her integrity and distance, as she is not attracted to this man at all, but must never appear displeased by his presence, two chairs were brought out and placed up right and up left for her and the Marques to sit in for a polite conversation. It is also worth mentioning here that Diana's other suitor, Don Federico, was the opposite of the Marques. He was literally smaller in stature and everything he did seemed to shrink in comparison with the Marques. At one point he, too, brought flowers to Diana, only to be outlandishly out done by the big red flowers of the Marques. At times Federico seemed like a simpering fool, and though the director's concept shaped their characterization, even in the script they are completely ridiculous. Don Federico practically made love to the doors of the chapel as he waited for Diana who

was inside. He did not possess the confidence or flare of his rival. This choice suggested that there is variety even within high social stations, and that coupling men and women of noble birth can lead to absurdities. Lope was a man who understood the longings of the heart, who believed that shared class rank does not a happy pairing make. People love and desire regardless of class standing; to deny this is to seem presumptuous and irrational, especially in the eyes of a 21st century audience.

At the end of the production, Tristan found a way to gain Teodoro his status, and we were brought to Ludovico's home. Again light changes created the appearance of a completely different setting. A relic was highlighted on the back brick wall, the lights were low with a bluish hue, and a chair for Ludovico (John Stahl) was brought upstage center for him. Tristan entered, disguised as a Turkish Arab. In a very funny but silly scene, he managed to convince Ludovico that his long lost son truly was in Naples; we have to think that Ludovico really wanted this to happen since he was so gullible. There was a touch of humanity in his willingness to accept what Tristan says. Lope had lost his much beloved son the year before the play was written, and the paternal affection of a father for a son is yet another kind of love represented in this play and production. Most memorable about the actor playing Ludovico was his exuberant joy at discovering his "son." Ridiculous as the scene was, it moved the audience to feel happy for this character but, at the same time, the scene was poignant and sad because we knew it is a lie. In the end, we were left to hope that Teodoro would prove a "good son" to his "father," even though their relationship was based on a lie.

As expected, the physical exchanges between Diana and Teodoro grew in



proximity and intensity over the course of the action until they actually kissed, which was directed as a "climatic" moment. Before this happened, the tension just kept growing. We were given a sort of release after Diana began to yell at Teodoro about the stupid farce that they were caught in. Feigning the hurt, lowly lover, he retorted acidly, "But who am I to insult you?" The two stood in profile, center stage, as she yelled in his face, "My wife." When finally they kissed, it was as if fireworks were going off!

In the closing scene, when these two were together again, Diana wore a white wedding dress. She was still covered to the neck and had donned a mantilla. There was something reminiscent of Queen Elizabeth in her appearance especially as Diana's hair had two rolls. Whether the allusion was intended or not, I could not help but think of the label of the "virgin queen" and the fact that Elizabeth I turned down Felipe II of Spain during trying times between their two countries. In this scene the two lovers could not keep their hands off each other. Too bad that their love had to begin on such perilous footing; as Tristan so aptly reminded us, "Walls have ears," as he came out from behind the curtain. The scene then changed and, with the music, the curtain and doors went away, and we were back at Ludovico's house for the marriage of all the "happy couples" as signified through a dance. Ricardo and Federico had confessed their guilt at having attempted to kill Teodoro, and supplied the dowries for Marcela and Dorotea, Tristan's betrothed. As suggested at the very beginning of this chapter, this production overthrew our sentimental expectations, leaving a bitter pill for us to swallow amidst the joy.

In one review of the play, Philip Fisher of the *British Theatre Guide* writes, "In some ways, *The Dog in the Manger* is a little like a Spanish *Twelfth Night*. It is set in

Italy (Naples) with mistaken identities and swapped loves. It also has a servant who gets above himself, a lost son and a pair of ageing comic suitors for the hand of the fickle Rebecca Johnson's nubile Diana, Countess of Belflor. The only thing missing is the cross-dressing" (2005). Although the production generated an amazing amount of laughter in the audience, it also kept its sting as this same reviewer observes, "It is refreshing and rather sad to see that while half of the members of Diana's circle end up betrothed, almost every one of them is unhappily so" (Philip Fisher). Just after the lights went down, there was a quick flash of lights, and audience members saw Diana and Teodoro pleading with the audience not to reveal their secret.

As a testament to the success of the RSC's Spanish Golden Age season, these productions were acclaimed when they journeyed to Spain. In her essay "Perspectives on Loss and Discovery," Catherine Boyle, whose translation of *House of Desires*, was used in the RSC season, writes about the reception of the plays in Madrid. Of *Dog in the Manger*, one reporter wrote that it contained the "spirit of the *corral*." Boyle continues by saying that this same reporter, for *ABC*, a major Spanish newspaper, "is vociferous in criticizing the 'widespread tendency amongst Spanish directors to make Lope solemn [ . . . ] as if they are ashamed of the indisputable fact that Lope wrote for the people.'" She sees the production of *The Dog in the Manger* as being "conceived of from the point of view of absolute fidelity to Lope's popular tragicomic theatre, freeing him from the 'prison' to which he has been condemned by Spanish directors" (71). As Boyle suggests, some artists and scholars believe that Lope and his playwriting brothers and sisters are receiving more faithful productions outside Spain than in Spain. Questions of intercultural comparison are always fraught but it is certainly the case that Boswell's

production of *Dog in the Manger* respected Lope's text. The director did not impose a production "concept" that self-consciously declared his "reading" of Lope's play.

Rather, Boswell and his production team made choices that captured the vitality of Lope's original, and honored its comic-erotic-disturbing depiction of love and desire.

### **Meta-theatrical Conventions: Creating Space for Sor Juana's Voice Then and Now**

Celia: Isn't it well known  
that when someone's in love  
they colour the truth  
with all sorts of deceptions? (Cervantes, I.i)

Many of the Spanish Golden Age plays and texts have meta-theatrical elements. When the Royal Shakespeare Company ran an entire SGA season in repertoire in 2003-04, awareness of this fact became acute. Much of the plays' dialogue points to the dynamism inherent in the performance process. In the program notes for *Dog in a Manger*, David Johnston writes of Lope, "His wide -ranging focus, examining national myth and history, the relationship between entertainment and power, and Spanish public morality, led to the establishment of theatre as a space in which a society thought about itself in front of itself" (program). Clearly, these playwrights were very aware of the power of theatre. Johnston goes further by stating, "It was a genuinely national theatre, and as such it freed his great successor, Calderón, to explore through his prodigious imagination the relationship between the public space and the metaphysical, the nation and the world beyond" (program). It is interesting to ponder why the RSC dedicated itself to another country's theatre tradition for an entire season, given that theatre is a part of the nation's culture identity in Great Britain. This could prove risky, as people are accustomed to their own national figure, William Shakespeare, the Bard of Stratford-Upon-Avon, and all of the prestige and expectation that his work brings to the stage. The 2003-2004 season invited the theatre going public to use pre-conceptions and expectations developed through watching Shakespeare to process a group of new plays

that are over 400 years old. This cross-cultural and cross-textual interaction is exciting and daring, with many meta-theatrical implications.

*House of Desires (Los empeños de una casa)* by Sor Juan Inés de la Cruz is a play most definitely about love in which honor takes on a different kind of role. The play could be seen as historic and didactic, which would play against its innate humor and frivolity. Sor Juana was an extraordinary woman with an amazing mind who was engaged in a cross-cultural experiment with this play, presenting a Spanish Golden Age text to a Mexican audience. There is a play by Calderón de la Barca, *Los empeños de un acaso (The Trials of Chance)*, the title of which differs from Sor Juana's title by only one syllable. Catherine Boyle, the director of the RSC piece, writes in the translation that Sor Juana:

. . .succeeds immediately in creating an ironic gesture towards her literary and dramatic masters. She will take this further in the second interlude, in which she has her characters discuss the superiority of Spanish imports, which, they say, are lighter on the digestion. And while they lament the poor quality of the present play (which Sor Juana shamelessly attributes to one of her contemporaries) they praise a recent play called *Celestina*, a reference to a play co-authored by Sor Juana. They label it as *mestiza* (of mixed race) - an uneven affair, lacking in design, but written with wit. Writing from her convent, invisible at the performance of the play, Sor Juana writes herself into it: she forces us to see her. (*House*, Boyle 13)

Sor Juana was well read and knew her Spanish Golden Age theatre. The first task, therefore with the play, is capturing the true spirit of the intra-textuality inherent in the

text and respecting the figure of Sor Juana and her views without making them seem didactic or too historical. Secondly, honor and especially love are at the heart of this play, which is told from the female point of view. It is challenging to make these women funny, relevant and intelligent without making them seem silly or overly capricious; the same could be said about the male characters. Finally, the structure of the play is difficult because of the numerous scenes, entrances and exits and the exorbitant number of monologues and asides spoken by the many characters. Director Nancy Meckler completely embraces the inter-textual elements of this play and pays homage to Sor Juana while presenting a wildly funny, yet touching story about the trivialities and truths about love and desire.

### **Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz**

She was born Juana Ramírez de Asbaje in 1651 near Mexico city and she died in 1695 at the age of 44 when an epidemic hit the nunnery where she resided. Her mother and father were not legally married and he actually deserted them, which would always cause for a dubious shadow to follow her around throughout her life. Her mother was a *criolla*, which meant that she was of Spanish descent and part of the rising class in New Spain trying to create a type of native aristocracy. Information that is gathered about Sor Juana in her youth actually comes from 'The Response' (*Respuesta a Sor Filotea*), which she wrote when she was defending the right of women to have an education. There are humorous anecdotes about her desire to learn. For example, she, for a while, stopped eating cheese because she had heard that it made people stupid. At the age of 3 she followed her sister to a type of school and lied to the teacher by saying that her mother wanted her to learn to read. She learned so quickly, that by the time her mother found

out, she was able to read. At the age of six or seven she had heard about schools and universities in Mexico City and begged her mother to let her go, offering the option to dress as a male so that she would not get into trouble. Women at the time were not allowed access to higher learning. Having to except a "no" she opted to read her Grandfather's books, with whom she lived beginning in 1660. She says that people in Mexico City, where her grandfather lived, were more impressed with her memory than her intelligence since she was so young. She was invited to the court under the protection of the Viceroy's wife, the Marquesa of Mancera. She quickly impressed the court where legend has it that she was put to the test by 40 philosophers and scholars and passed their "exam". It seems that she was an extremely quick learner, where besides her academic feats, she quickly came to understand the customs and lifestyle of the people in the city, who were copying the court life in Madrid. This is important for our study of her play as the idea of putting on roles and playing parts is so important. It seems she was watching a society do this right in front of her eyes. Her protection by the Marquesa was very fortunate because the court in Mexico City was one of the most prestigious of the time period. Sor Juana, as the one of the Marquesa's favorites, would have been surrounded by a myriad of theologians, philosophers, mathematicians and scientists that would have further enhanced her education.

Sor Juana, expressing a desire to not marry, caught the attention of Father Nuñez Miranda, who encouraged her to join a convent, which she did in 1667. Unfortunately, she left the Order of the Barefoot Carmelites after only 3 months as the lifestyle was too severe and austere for her liking. In 1669, she did find an Order of Saint Jerome, which she stayed at until she died. Sor Juana actually did admit in her 'Response' years later

that the life in a convent was not completely to her liking. There were aspects she found quite distasteful for her character, but it was where she could do what she wanted to most, read, study and learn. And, given the choice between the nunnery and marriage, the life of a nun seemed the lesser of two evils. Here she was allowed to learn and write, and was given a bigger place to live, including servants. Additionally, she was allowed to have visits and engage in '*tertulias*', specific gatherings for conversational purposes. Her friend, the Marquesa, died in 1674; Sor Juana dedicated several poems praising her. In 1680, with a different Viceroy, Sor Juana became great friends with his wife since they were of such close age. It was during this first part of the decade where she realized some of her most important work, including *La casa de los empeños* (*House of Desires*), which did receive public performance, and another *comedia*, *Amor es más laberinto* and several *autosacramentales*, including *El divino narciso*. Later on she found herself embroiled in a theological debate in which she criticized a sermon. The story is that the Bishop of Puebla published her written challenge, without her knowledge, while including in the preface a call out to her to leave her life of academic pursuit and pursue those activities befitting a nun. He disguised her name under the pseudonym of Sor Filotea. This is from where her famous response derived where she defended herself and the need for women to be educated.

In the 90's as her friends in the court had mostly disappeared, Sor Juana wrote less and less. There are suppositions as to the reason behind her literary pullback. Some believe that it was her own doing, in that she wanted to dedicate her life to more spiritual activities. Others believe that she was coerced by critics upset with an educated female who was so talented and renowned. It was during this time that she retaken her vows and



she basically repented for her life. She wrote out her death certificate, asking her sisters to fill in the date and where she included her famous phrase, "*Yo, la peor del mundo*" (*I, the worse of the world*). She completely quit writing and sold all of her books to give the money to charity. Again, we do not know if she was forced, or if it was something she chose to do. It is important to note her deep friendships with females in high places, as one, The Countess of Paredes supported the first publication of Sor Juana's work in Spain. These women saw in Sor Juana her genius and supported her thirst for knowledge. It is relevant to appreciate what it must have been like for a woman to have been denied the right to participate in the scholarly activities that were so easily granted to men. Her feats, passion and determination are so admirable and this small band of women, must have truly found comfort in a world that was so negative to female intelligence. I also wonder if her death came about at time befitting Sor Juana. If she was truly forced out of her learning, which seems very probable, then I would imagine that this would have caused a spiritual death in her also. We are fortunate to have access to her writings and that there are theatre companies in existence willing to put out her work. Sor Juana was a rarity and Octavio Paz called her the greatest figure of Latin America in that time period, and she was a woman.

### **Play synopsis**

The scene opens as Doña Ana and Celia, her servant, anxiously await late at night the arrival of Diana's brother, Pedro. We learn that a trap has been set involving play-acting and lying. Doña Ana and Don Pedro are brother and sister in a very well respected house in Toledo. She recently joined him here, leaving her love interest, Don Juan in Madrid. However, neither sibling has the person that he or she desires. Don Pedro lusts

after Doña Leonor of another noble house, and Doña Ana is very attracted to Don Carlos. This is problematic because Don Carlos and Doña Leonor love each other. Word has arrived to the sibling's house that Leonor and Carlos plan to run away that night because he would not be quite the acceptable suitor for Leonor's father, Don Rodrigo. Ana reveals all of this information at the beginning to her "trusted" servant, Celia. Pedro has hired some men to arrest Don Carlos and the plan is that, as the couple walks past the house, these men are to take Leonor and bring her inside under the guise of protecting her. The plan, of course, goes awry.

Suddenly there is a knock at the door and it is Doña Leonor, who is by herself, escaping from the night's troubles. She is seeking refuge because she was attempting to run away that night but her fiancé, Don Carlos, was forced to flee, so she too fled. She cannot return home since she has technically cast a shadow on her family's honor. Doña Ana, being the good hostess, allows her to stay. After a few tense moments, Doña Leonor goes into a very long monologue, briefing the ladies about her life and her meeting with Don Carlos. Although Doña Leonor is not conniving like Ana and is purer and honest in her love and pursuit of Don Carlos, she is still a very strong and intelligent character. Leonor tells us that she is of noble descent, which is so unfortunate as "for although nobility / is a precious jewel, / it is but a trinket, / a mere embarrassment, / in an unfortunate soul" (27). Her point is, however, that she was cursed because of her "plebian preoccupations"—namely, learning--which does not fit well for her status. Not only that, but Dona Leonor is beautiful, which has further complicated her life. The monologue is endearing and it is obvious that it speaks to Sor Juana's own life.

The second scene begins in a flurry as Don Carlos and his trusty servant, Castaño, fly into Doña Ana's house seeking to escape from the hoodlums pursuing them. Doña Ana very willingly takes them in, but Don Carlos has no idea of her feelings for him nor does he know that his precious Leonor is also hiding in this very house. In the meantime Leonor's father is avidly looking for his daughter and the rascalion who confiscated her. Then the action shoots back to the house where Dona Ana's love interest, Don Juan, has appeared. The scene is set in the dark. Don Juan pursues in a rough and tumble manner Doña Leonor because he thinks that she is Doña Ana. Don Carlos and Ana then enter the scene and everything becomes quite confusing until Celia shows up with a candle. Everyone is shocked, except for Ana, who pleads with them to not besot her honor and to go hide in the places she tells them as her brother is about to arrive. They all obey because it is the most honorable action to take, however Carlos, through the wiliness of Ana, does not know that who else is there. He thinks that he heard her voice, but is uncertain. Don Pedro does arrive home and is quite pleased that Leonor is also here. However, Pedro has no idea that the other two male guests will be spending the night. This is the end of day one.

Day two begins and Carlos is a wreck because he dreamt about Leonor all night thinking that he heard her. Castaño tells him not to get so worked up about it, and encourages him to pursue Ana since she is beautiful and rich. Carlos resolutely dismisses any such thought. Ana and Leonor meet up in the morning and Leonor is forced to hide her jealousy because she believes that Carlos is staying here because he likes Ana. Enter Don Pedro who woos Leonor after Ana leaves. She finds him repulsive, but acts like a lady; Don Pedro has no idea of her disdain. Nonetheless, while this is all going on, Ana

asks Celia to slyly bring Carlos and Castaño to a window so that they may hear Pedro pursuing Leonor. All the main actors are now in the scene, and some are hidden. The musicians are brought in and in a hilarious song, each principal character muses on the meaning of love. The scene is quite tongue and cheek, but the two truest and pure are Leonor and Carlos. What makes the scene particularly funny is that after each person philosophizes on what is love, another character says verbatim, "It is not so," to which the first person responds, "Ah, yes it is." (Sor Juana 59-62). It is said eleven times in this one short scene.

After this scene, Carlos begs Cecilia to tell him the reason that Don Pedro was with Doña Leonor. Being the ever obedient and salacious servant, Celia lies to Carlos and lets him know that Pedro is wooing Leonor, indicating that Leonor returns his feelings. Carlos is credulous for a minute, but informs Castaño that he cannot believe that his love would betray him so quickly. He ponders:

And I . . . but why am I not  
 burning up in this suffering  
 rather than naming my grievances  
 one by one? But, by heavens!  
 Couldn't Leonor be in this house by chance?  
 Perhaps she's not to blame,  
 and perhaps she couldn't prevent it? (65)

Don Carlos has this amazing ability to see the good (or believe in the good) of all his fellows.

In order to end the day in complete turmoil, there is one more twist to the plot. Don Rodrigo, Leonor's father, pays a visit to Don Pedro, believing that it was he that kidnapped his daughter. Confronted with this lie, Pedro sees the fortuitous opportunity to get what he wants. He plays into the lie because he knows that Don Rodrigo will beg him to marry Leonor in order to preserve the family honor. This is exactly what happens, but Carlos overhears all of this and becomes irate. After all he is the one who ran away with Leonor in the middle of the night! At this moment, however, he decides not confess to Don Rodrigo, but rather decides to enact "Sweet revenge indeed!" (76). His fire is only flamed higher by his trusty but obtrusive servant Castaño.

Day three begins with Doña Leonor begging to be let free as she learns that her father has promised her hand in marriage to the awful Don Pedro. Celia "agrees" to help her try and escape. What she really does is lock Leonor in the garden, thus preventing her from leaving. Don Juan also enters the garden, and he camps out to wait for Doña Ana to appear. Meanwhile, Carlos and Castaño have been combing the house for Leonor. Carlos is off his revenge kick and has instead decided to reveal to Don Rodrigo the truth of the whole situation. However, he must employ the help of Castaño. Castaño, it must be noted, has been carrying around Doña Leonor's dresses this entire time. Apparently, she ordered him to carry them when she fled the two nights before. Don Carlos has written a letter to Don Rodrigo explaining everything. His obstacle is that he cannot leave this house because this would leave Leonor unprotected. Therefore, Castaño must deliver the letter. Castaño is mortified because delivering such news could provoke such ire in Rodrigo that he would kill Castaño. Carlos, unmoved by his servant's plea, orders him to carry out this task. This leads to Castaño's three page monologue as

he devises a scheme to protect himself: he will dress up as a woman and give Rodrigo the letter. As he delivers the monologue he simultaneously attires himself in Leonor's clothes.

After he is decked out as a woman, Castaño finds himself in the garden where he runs into Don Pedro. Because it is dark, Pedro thinks that he has miraculously come across Leonor. A fantastically funny four page "wooing" scene ensues, where Castaño is completely won over, as a woman, by Pedro's evocative words. All of the sudden the action changes as Carlos and Juan enter the garden amidst a sword fight. Worried that a blood bath will occur, Castaño blows out the one candle, leaving everyone in complete darkness. Carlos, being the good guy and not knowing that Leonor is there, is concerned about Ana's safety. He must remove Ana from the house so that she does not get hurt. In the dark he grabs a female, which happens to be Leonor. Ana, meanwhile, grabs hold of Juan, believing that it is Carlos, in order to hide him from her angry brother. Finally, thinking that Castaño is Leonor, Pedro locks "her" away, vowing that they must get married that very night. Castaño is in complete agreement.

By the end of the play, there have been a couple more mishaps due to the mistaken identities, as the women, including Castaño, have been wearing veils over their heads to hide their faces. Ana has accidentally "married" Juan, thinking that it was Carlos. Carlos and Leonor are finally able to confess their love for each other and marry one another. Don Pedro believes himself to be the luckiest of all when he finds Castaño again in his house, until he finds out that he is a man. And there is a hint that Celia and Castaño, the man, have struck up a little romance. As hard as Doña Aña and her brother Don Pedro try to win the people they love, they fail. Leonor and Carlos, although filled

with doubts at times, remain constant in their love for one another. In the end they are together and Doña Ana is with Don Juan, the lover she tried to shake off during the running of events in the play. Alas, poor Don Pedro ends up alone.

### **Textual analysis**

The term meta-theatricality can be described quite simply as theatre within theatre. From an English standpoint, two great examples are "The Murder of Gonzago" in *Hamlet* and "The Tragedy of Pyramus" in *Midsummer's Night's Dream*. To both an English and Spanish 17th c. audience, this type of "play-within-the play" was very quite common. *House of Desires* is heavy with possibilities to make this a highly meta-theatrical presentation because of the long monologues and hiding and pretending that goes on. By taking a step back and looking at the play in a larger framework, one can see that the translation and adaptation of these plays leads to an even deeper level of inter-textuality. There is a sort of ethereal inter-cultural and textual halo surrounding the RSC season, proclaiming: "We are taking these plays that were written in the time of Shakespeare and his contemporaries and followers; these were times when our two countries were often at odds; we are translating them and presenting them on our English stage as a way to re-discover them and present them as new in a place where you are accustomed to mostly seeing your great dramatists from your great country." It is almost a challenge to the audience. To the Spanish, a similar statement is being made: "We are taking your great plays, sifting them through our translation and adaptation machines and bringing to you our interpretations. We hope not to offend." This phenomenon of translation and adaptation parallels what was happening when Sor Juna Inés de la Cruz wrote *Los empeños de una casa*.

Sor Juana's play was written after a piece called *Los empeños de un acaso* (*The Trials of Chance*) by Calderón de la Barca. It is believed that Sor Juana knew this play and used it as a base to create her farce. Thus *House of Desires* is an intertextual work. It is also obviously metatheatrical, e.g. as in Castano's costuming himself as a woman. Sor Juana's interest in metatheatricality is not surprising since the world that she inhabited was meta-theatrical itself. She wrote for the court, and they were accustomed to seeing the plays of the Spanish Golden age brought to them by traveling theatre companies. This court was curious in that it greatly imitated the tastes, styles and traditions of the old world, but was also trying to create its own identity, and Sor Juana, a very observant woman, was watching this first hand. So, just as people were trying to create a national identity, the same must have been going on in the arts; there would be imitation of the greats with infusions of one's own characteristics. Calderón's work was very popular, especially his plays of *capa y espada*, known as "cloak and dagger" in English. As Catherine Boyle points out in the introduction of her translation, "The forms are imitated, but what is written into them is the sensibility of those inhabiting the 'new world, with its wondrous natural realities, its complex social and racial structures, and its emergent identities, which had not yet been fully recognized or classified" (12). As Boyle suggests, "Sor Juana has changed one syllable of a cloak and dagger comedy by Pedro Calderón de la Barca . . . and succeeds immediately in creating an ironic gesture towards her literary and dramatic masters" (13). In the program notes, Boyle presents another reason that Calderón would have been so alluring to Sor Juana:

Calderon's cloak and dagger comedies offered a form that must have been irresistible to Sor Juana: she could display her verbal ingenuity, she could



wreak havoc with ridiculously complex codes by which these characters live. Above all, perhaps, it was a theatre that was perfectly suited to the court, which was her only audience. And Sor Juana rarely took her eyes off her audience: she ardently sought out the places for communication, where she could exercise her intellect, wit, and her mischievous humor.

Sor Juana was a real person, but she has also developed into a legend, and therefore part of her persona has been embellished if not fictionalized, which happens to so many heroes and heroines in history. Sor Juana was also probably aware that part of her fame was a creation in and of itself, especially after she entered the convent, where she was not seen publically. She was Sor Juana, the nun and woman, and Sor Juana the superstar. What a great way to play with this idea, by inserting aspects of her persona into a theatrical character. Nonetheless, there are also touches of complete truth. The character Leonor, who is loosely based on Sor Juana, explains to Doña Ana and Celia, "From a very young age / I was inclined to studying / with such burning fervour, / with such diligence / that long and difficult tasks / were conquered with consummate ease" (28). This parallels the legend that surrounds Sor Juana as a child. She was a complete prodigy and had a tremendous appetite for learning.

It seems that Sor Juana experienced a push and pull from the admiration that she received in the court and the pressure to change her ways from the church. The church wanted her to behave more like a woman, whatever that meant. In her writing, she confesses how she had been criticized for writing like a man, and she needed to write more like a woman. She was scorned and praised at the same time, which must have been cause for pain, frustration and perhaps even loneliness. Boyle sees Sor Juana in the

character of Leonor in *House of Desires*, and it does become very apparent that a parallel exists in her first long soliloquy that will be addressed later on this chapter. There is a difference, however, between Leonor and Sor Juana, as Boyle suggests, because Leonor discovers love and "she loves and is loved. She sees and is seen" (Boyle, program notes). Sor Juana is unable to have this kind of connection and she is a "proud performer, who seeks a correspondence to legitimate and validate her being, a community that will allow her to be herself" (Boyle, program notes). This never really happened for her, but it is through these charismatic and very dramatic characters that we witness her ability to see things with a keen eye, and with a great deal of humor. She was an enigma for her time and even for our time. Through the text, one can see the play between audience and character and the almost forced reflexive bouncing back and forth that creates a world within a world within a world. Sor Juana writes herself into this play, by another playwright, that is presented for a court that she cannot attend. Then the play is taken 300 hundred years later into translation, which is where we begin. The meta-theatricality and inter-textuality inherent in the text and the production, flip dramatic conventions and social codes inside out so that this overly dramatic *House of Desires* shows us what love, although idealized, could and perhaps should be for a nun or an educated woman, who is denied this human need.

Love is the central theme of this play and all of its fallacies and perhaps truths are played out by a group of passionate, fallible, selfish and selfless, humorous, jealous, lovelorn characters. As mentioned in the plot synopsis, they all present their interpretation of what love means. There is a very idealized, almost ridiculous, representation of love by the two characters of Leonor and Carlos. Pedro, Ana and Juan

represent the more selfish and animal-like characteristics of love. Everyone is struck by desire in this house, including the two servants Celia and Castaño, and each acts to the extreme of their beliefs or is portrayed as such. This could present a great dilemma to a modern director because love is not as simple, trite or as ridiculous as it seems to be in the text.

A great example of this romanticized image of love is heard in Leonor's great opening monologue as she talks about her love (and Ana's), Don Carlos. It is worth quoting a bit of her description, because although it is ridiculous, it paints a portrait of a man that probably would have appealed to Sor Juana if he had existed. Don Carlos is beautiful, but humble; he is intelligent, manly and charming:

He was so humble in his affection,  
 so tender in his attentions,  
 so refined in his convictions  
 so pleasing in his conduct,  
 so perfect in every way;  
 long-suffering in disdain,  
 silent in favours,  
 resolute in danger,  
 and prudent in adventure;  
 tell me, with these qualities,  
 and many more that I have not named,  
 how could any woman  
 safeguard her modesty?

(31)

Truth be told, this list could be used by many contemporary people as a description of their ideal mate. It is humbling to recognize that what we look for in another person has crossed centuries. Love is a uniting theme and can cross time and borders with ease. What Sor Juana is able to do is to flip love upside down and present a borderline outrageous version of it, but then infuse it with a great deal of humor and even hope as to what the possibility of love could be.

Love is represented by the characters, and another notable trait is the portrayal of males and females in this script. They are not quite easily matched in the sense that the women appear more calculating, but in a good way, sassier, feistier, if not a bit more intelligent than their male counterparts. The two servants are matched as they are both witty and cunning, but Celia is tougher. Doña Ana and Don Juan, who end up together in the end, as mentioned are more physical, but Ana is much more manipulative. Doña Leonor and Don Carlos are more intellectual, naive and hopelessly in love with one another, but Leonor is more grounded and jealous.

When the action of the play commences, we learn that a trap has been set where play acting and lying are required. In the text and production, Doña Ana is very riled up in this first scene, so much that she tells Celia that she cannot sleep. She is excited and nervous to which Celia responds that she is not surprised as "Isn't it well known / that when someone's in love / they colour the truth / with all sorts of deception?" (23). She presents us with a negative view of love that is manipulative and dishonest, the kind of love represented by this household. Doña Ana is not far behind with a similar sentiment when it comes to her own perception. When Celia reproaches Ana for forgetting her

lover, Don Juan, who is completely devoted to her, Ana explains her loss of interest:

"Whatever I wanted was mine for the asking. / Yet, that was his downfall: / for, if he is already mine, what is left for me to desire?" (24). It seems that Sor Juana really understood the fickleness of some people and Ana's reaction is very modern, and although these characters dance around issues of honor, this play is really more about love.

It is worth paying special attention to the men that Sor Juana has written, as it would be easy to represent them as two-dimensional nitwits in a production; the women are written with a bit more depth. Don Carlos, as mentioned, is the mirror of perfection. His virtuousness is carried through to the extreme in the text. When a debate is being carried out in the play about love and the greatest suffering it causes, Don Carlos says to Castaño, " . . . jealousy is the greatest ill. / If only I could allow myself to be jealous. / But since love's star has decreed that I die, / I shall die merely fearing jealousy" (61). He never once relents in his love or pursuit for Leonor, no matter how Ana tries to trick him, or how Castaño, his servant, tries to persuade him to give up. There is a certain naïveté to Don Carlos, thus demonstrating that even though his love is pure, that which he and Leonor share is almost impossible. When Castaño tells him to go for Doña Ana because she is beautiful and rich, Don Carlos reproaches him for speaking ill of her; after all she is just providing them refuge. After they end up at Doña Ana's house after fleeing from the sword fight, he admits that she did compliment him which if he were vain, which he is not, he might take for her liking him. This is absurd to him, however, as he explains to Castaño:

But these are the fancies

of young and arrogant men,  
 who seduce women  
 and then judge them slatterns;  
 who, in their misguided malice,  
 only judge women honourable  
 when they are aloof. And,  
 according to this way of thinking,  
 women never behave so well  
 as when they are treated ill. (49)

A 17th century audience and a 21st audience know that what Carlos takes as heresy against these generalities made about women, are actually true to a degree, and that is what makes it all the funnier. There is fun in the chase of the ones that are hard to get. It is one aspect of human nature that is quite alluring for some people. Doña Ana, does admit, after hearing Leonor's story, that she wants Carlos even more now that he belongs to someone else. She knows that he is desirable enough just on his own merit, but as she confesses to the audience, "now that I know he's in love, / won't victory be much more exciting / when he's parted from his sweet precious love dove?" (33).

Don Carlos' rival, Doña Ana's brother, Don Pedro, is totally different as he is a complete narcissist who admires every move that he makes and word he speaks. When he finally has Leonor alone, he admits his incredulity in her disdain towards him. How could she not love him? He does relent, however, in that if she cannot not love him now, he knows that she will in the future, "for one day you will step down / from your pious pedestal / and concede to my constant love" (57). He maneuvers throughout the play in a

similar fashion, always unaware of what people are feeling. Sor Juana finds justice in this character and his many faults, as he is the one left standing alone at the end of the play.

Juan has one pursuit in life and that is Doña Ana. In one scene where he thinks that he is talking to Ana, and is actually talking to Leonor, he passionately beseeches her:

Have you not so often seen  
that, when the waves of my passion  
were at their wildest,  
and love's desire  
was ready to break on the beach,  
respect for you  
was the shore of my hopes? (40)

Don Juan is the one ready to engage in a swordfight at any time to win his love. He is like a tornado, and if he weren't a gentleman, he would destroy everything in his path. At one point, he almost ruins Leonor, still thinking that she is Ana, by trying to take her by force. Luckily she gets away. It is appropriate that he does end up with Ana in the end, as they tend to be more on the reckless side of love. To that end each of these men represents a different kind of suitor, and are matched accordingly. This is different than in *Dog in the Manger*, where some of the lovers are ill-matched and ill fated. Sor Juana opts for a relatively happy ending with a type of poetic justice, no matter how ludicrous the story and the characters seem.

Don Rodrigo, Doña Leonor's father, also represents a different kind of male. He is the representation of the old vanguard of the Spanish noble. His concern during the entire play is his honor, and it seems to be the only thing he cares about.

As you know,  
 honour is such a precious gem  
 that all noble and worthy men  
 must protect it at all costs.  
 Honour is a crystal so finely polished  
 that though a blow to its perfection  
 might not break it,  
 breath alone will sully it. (101)

It makes no matter to him who his daughter loves, only that she marry correctly, thus protecting her honor and his house. His low esteem of women is made obvious when he bemoans, "Women! Poisonous monsters!" (37). He is so angry because he thought that due to her learning, intelligence and beauty, Leonor would overcome the need to deceive her father and bring shame upon his house. He finally believes he has found a remedy to his predicament, when Don Pedro steps forward to engage in another lie to further complicate the plot. He tells Don Rodrigo that he kidnapped Leonor that night from her house, when it was actually Don Carlos. Pedro knows that by "admitting" this, Don Rodrigo will have to "force" Don Pedro to marry Leonor. This is exactly what happens and Don Rodrigo agrees:

My honour will not be satisfied



until you are married.

Whether Leonor wishes it or not

is not an impediment,

for she can have no desire other

than to obey my command.

So call her and you will see

how quickly I put this in order. (74)

He is all noise and the reader and audience must know that. Leonor did after all attempt to defy her father once; why would she not do it again?

The last male character worth noting is Castaño, the *gracioso* of the play. He performs the most meta-theatrical act in the play. Castaño dresses up as a woman in order to fool Don Rodrigo, but ends up having to play Doña Leonor to Don Pedro, Don Carlos and even Don Rodrigo. The idea of cross dressing and taking on these pretend roles is not so innovative to be shocking to a contemporary or Golden Age audience, or even an Elizabethan audience. It is worth noting, that it does take place within all of these plays of the RSC season, and we are reminded of the inherent theatricality of all of these pieces. I suggest that these playwrights believed in the idea of theatre and the power it has to fool others, but also its self-reflexive power. The characters fool each other within the play, though we know what is going on, making us feel like we are in on something special. But, as we buy into this tomfoolery, we are also being fooled because we believe that the other characters do not know that Castaño is really not a Sultan but Carlos' servant; but in reality they do know because they are the actors and have rehearsed these scene many times. It is all just a great game that we play and playact.

The characters, especially the males, are highly theatrical in that they come off as exaggerated; but the women are also characterized to the extreme. Leonor is too pious and Ana is too manipulative and crazily attracted to Carlos. Celica, the servant, goes more out of her way to cause trouble and create chaos. By making the characters so extreme, Sor Juana seems to be poking fun at famous Spanish Golden Age plays that had made their way to Mexico; at the trials, trivialities and hope of love; and perhaps even at herself, a nun fascinated by the ways of love.

Finally there are the structural issues to consider, most notably the asides and the long monologues by certain characters, which add to the meta-theatricality of the play. When one looks at the text, the amount of asides is astonishing, not to mention how long some of them are. For example, one of Ana's many asides is 20 lines long. There are certain parts of scenes where the action between characters is dropped as the characters go back and forth from aside to aside. Sometimes these asides seem like the processing of their inner thoughts and at times, as if they were specifically written to be spoken to the audience. Asides also remind us that we are watching a play and we are compromised as we are brought in on the action; in a play that has so many asides, the audience really becomes its own character. This engagement appears to have been very deliberate by Sor Juana. Her structure is very daring and progressive. This play is constantly referring to itself as a play and in poking fun at itself, Sor Juana seems to do the same to herself, her situation and those who surround her on all sides.

One of the biggest challenges of this play and many of the plays of the Spanish Golden Age are the long speeches given by the characters. Sometimes these monologues help the character address or work through a big moral dilemma that confronts them; or

perhaps they might be a way for the character to converse directly with the audience, perhaps to gain their support. Often the monologues are used for expository purposes, as in Doña Leonor's opening speech in *House of Desires*. Catherine Boyle addresses this issue in her translation's introduction, and even admits to cutting some of these speeches, especially what she termed "Sor Juana's indulgences." Boyle also has a take on the different kinds of public interaction with the performance between that time and this time. This play would have been performed during the Baroque Festival when a myriad of activities would have been happening. This in turn led to the need to keep recapitulating the events of the play for an audience who might have been half listening. This is why there is repetition in certain parts of the story, according to Boyle. The Baroque audience would have been more dependent on gesture and visual aids, that "gives an author like Sor Juana scope for verbal pyrotechnics" (14). A contemporary audience depends more on "listening to and understanding the dialogue" so we do not need the gratuitous repetition (14). Study of the Elizabethan audience suggests that they actually had more honed listening skills than we do today and that language would have been very important. I would think that the same would be true for the Spanish Golden Age audience as few props and scenic elements (i.e. visually stimulating elements) were used. In fact, in our world where so much of our entertainment is visually based, it is more difficult for us to listen. I think that cutting the text benefitted the modern audience, but for different reasons. The irony and wit might have been lost on us, especially since these speeches are so long: the actors would have to put great energy into these monologues just to keep a contemporary audience engaged. A 17th century audience, by contrast, would have been very adept listeners and the linguistic 'indulgences' cut by

Boyle might have been better understood and appreciated by them, especially considering that they lived in the same time as the playwright and felt that they had some access to her. For a contemporary audience, the tactics almost need to become more meta-theatrical just so that the public does not drift off during a character's soliloquy.

### **Production analysis**

One of the great aspects of theatre is its multi-vocal capacity. It is the bringing together of so many thoughts and ideas that are accompanied by varied perspectives and experiences. We all have a history that we bring to any situation. Reflecting on this, in a chapter written by Catherine Boyle in *The Spanish Golden Age in English: Perspective and Performance*, whose translation of *House of Desires* was used for this RSC season, she comments on the goals of this venture:

The awareness of the cross-fertilization of traditions, languages, cultures and approaches was shared by all critics, and the performance in the Swan in Stratford, built as a modern courtyard theatre, was perfect in its evocation of a communal space for theatre that transcended the Elizabethan playhouse and the seventeenth-century Spanish *corral*. (62)

This space was also a sort of experimental playground and as Boyle further submits, "This became the embodiment of the testing of structures and feelings; of sets of methods; of ways of thinking dramatically; emotionally, socially, sexually; of making associations with our own memories and with our own experiences of theatre" (62). Reading about this season and how it was approached and how it was processed, seems to speak of a need to find new approaches to theatre. It is a conversation in the theatre about theatre practice and tradition. Boyle refers to Raymond Williams who, in his book

*Drama in Performance*, explains how pieces from the past, that served certain needs in their own time, can be re-evaluated and re-designed for a fresh approach which in turn can create a new set of meanings. The structures of theatre are being pulled back and re-fashioned, which causes a disruption and forces one to change his/her perspective. The meta-theatrical conversation thus begins before the lights go down. In the production of *House of Desires* and *Pedro the Great Pretender*, the directors focused in on this idea and highlighted a major concept for each production. In *House*, director Nancy Meckler and performers used it to point to the farcical aspect of the play, which she supposes is a great thematic issue for Sor Juana. Meckler's emphasis on farce is a directorial choice securely rooted in the text.

It is appropriate to address the pre-meta-theatrical dialogue that occurred before the house lights even dimmed. The RSC actors moved in and out of different characters and worlds throughout different nights of the season. More than likely, a Spanish Golden Age audience would have had a similar conversation, seeing the same actors play different roles in different plays. For example, the actor playing Tristan (Simon Trinder) in *Dog in the Manger* was also Clemente in *Pedro the Great Pretender* and Don Carlos's servant, Castaño, in *House of Desires*. I cannot help but make these connections when I watch these plays and reflect upon the comradeship, ensemble work, and sharing that goes on between these actors pre-performance. Understandably, not all of the audience members would have made these connections, especially if they only saw one or two of the plays. Nonetheless, this reflection and crossover of roles can simply be acknowledged by reading the actors' bios and seeing what roles they play in the other productions. What this does is join all of the worlds together in a way that only further

expands the dialogue in the play. This leads me to the actual production itself. In *House of Desires*, right from the very beginning, the director opted to highlight another aspect of the meta-theatrical world by bringing in the playwright, Sor Juana. Additionally, Meckler dealt with characters, challenging asides and monologues and other structurally challenging aspects of this piece by consciously pulling out all of the meta-theatrical stops through costumes, movement, gestures, carts and great acting.

In the production for the RSC, just before the lights went all the way down to let the audience know that the play had begun, there were three women on stage. In the background there was organ music and a guitar playing. Two women who looked to be dressed as nuns were cleaning the floor; the other nun, which I took to be Sor Juana based on her dress and the director's notes, was taking relics, that looked like dolls, from the back part of the stage and placing one on the floor down right and the other up onto the bench. As the lights went down, one just saw the geometrical design on the floor used in three of the productions and the two relics/dolls. The two actresses playing Celia (Katherine Kelly) and Doña Ana (Claire Cox) came into place next to the dolls in the darkness. Celia was up on the bench and Doña Ana was down front. While everything else remained dark, the two nuns came next to the women and as the dolls were lifted up off of the floor, right next to the bodies of the two women, the light also came up on them as a follow spot. There was some kind of connection between the dolls, these two characters and the woman, "Sor Juana," seated at the back of the stage at a writing table. It made the two women, Ana and Celia, seem completely fictional as if the nun in the back was creating them at that very moment. The audience was entering into "her" mind and world. The lights went out on the floor and a greenish bluish light bathed the stage,

suggesting that it was night as the bells tolled the time; then, in a flash, the action began. Meckler immediately established the idea of the play within the play with this opening while simultaneously paying homage to Sor Juana.

Meckler developed a meta-theatrical, storytelling approach that helped the delivery of the long monologues and stories. In the opening, when Doña Ana began her story about her brother and herself, she sat down next to Celia, indicating that she is going to engage in a story so that we tuned in and listened to this important background information. Even though she sat at first, the pace was very fast as she then stood and told her story with drama and, at times, in a flurry. Her movements were almost musical as she used her arms and made many dance-like turns, like so many of the other characters who swirled and swished as if they were about to engage in the most dramatic moment of their life. The direction of these whirlwind type movements was purposeful and established the farcical and melodramatic lives of these characters. In the introduction to translation of the play text, Catherine Boyle writes, "This translation has sought to keep the play alive by matching its pace and changes of rhythm, and by maintaining the intrinsic orality of the story-telling, especially in the early long monologues" (14). To assist in the story telling, the director, Nancy Meckler, had the actors periodically act out their stories themselves.

There was one final aspect of this first scene that was textual, but was carried out brilliantly by the actress playing Celia, who used a straight deadpan voice. It further pointed to Sor Juana's wit and genius. At the end of this first scene, there was a knock at the door. Ana says to Celia, "It's the Lady! / Open up, Celia." Celia went to open the door with, "Enter, whoever you are." One knew, as did Ana and Celia that it was

"Justice" to bring the sequestered Leonor. These little quips cropped up occasionally throughout and acted as a wink and nudge to the public, and reminded them of the play acting that was going on inside of that house. And to think that all of this has been set up within just the first scene!

The plot moved forward with the expected arrival of Doña Leonor (Rebecca Johnson). When this happened, the woman who was sitting at the writing desk in the back came forward and two people came out to help take off the nun's habit so that this beautiful woman was unveiled in a light colored, virginal, pure looking dress. She, of course, was Doña Leonor and her dress contrasted greatly with that of Doña Ana, whose attire had great detail, is darker, and very Spanish. Her dress looked like it was right out of *Las Meninas* by Velázquez, which connected nicely with the raising of the dolls at the beginning of the play. Diego Velázquez, was a 17th century court painter and one of the most admired artists in the world. He was known all over Spain and certain parts of Europe, and would have been recognized to a 'new world' audience. In one of his most famous works, *Las Meninas*, he paints himself into the painting while he paints the young *infanta* and her playmates and ladies in waiting. The painting is very daring as all the characters are looking straight out at the spectator as if they are expecting something from us or looking into a mirror. To add one more level of meta-theatricality, there is a mirror in the back of the painting reflecting a King and Queen, mother and father to the *infanta*. Whether Meckler meant to or not, it is easy to see this connection between this 17th c. painter and Sor Juana's play. This painting has also been addressed in other versions by both Goya and Picasso, famous Spanish artists, thus posing another possible inter-textual artistic and literary dialogue. Menina literally means "maid of honour."



Although Doña Leonor is not conniving like Ana and is purer and honest in her love and pursuit of Don Carlos, she is still a very strong and intelligent character in this play. We learn about her troubles in the next scene.

It is worth going into great detail to describe the way the actress playing Leonor carried out one of the extremely long speeches in her opening scene, as these pose great challenges for director and actor. After Leonor entered the house, she was required, for plot purposes, to relate her reason for finding herself in this predicament. Her story helped to cement her virtuousness and placed Leonor in high esteem in the eyes of Doña Ana and the audience. The challenge to the actress and the director was the length of her life story. This was approached creatively in the production with the aid of few props and special effects, but was mostly carried out by the actress. She used the space dynamically as if it were an animate force waiting to react and transform according to her needs to get her story across. Although techniques of Japanese Noh theatre were not used, there was so much energy engaged and ignited, that the air itself seemed to crackle with electricity as in Noh.

Upon entering into her story Leonor took center stage. Her "audience" consisted of Celia, who laid down on her stomach, down center, as Doña Ana sat down left. This set the stage, so to speak for Leonor to be front and center because geographically she was in that symbolic space. Now she was set to act out her story, which was exactly what she did. By using clever movements and subtle changes to the set, the director found a way to break up the moments and moods of the story so that it did not become monotonous or boring to the audience. She began her story and lamented her sad and tragic existence, and Sor Juana's own wit and reflexivity was made apparent almost

immediately through the text. Leonor related that she was of noble descent, which was unfortunate as "for although nobility / is a precious jewel, / it is but a trinket, / a mere embarrassment, / in an unfortunate soul" (27). This of course received a laugh from audience. Her point was, however, that she was cursed because of her "plebian preoccupations" (learning), which did not fit well for her status. Not only that, she was beautiful, which had further complicated her life. This was when there was a beat change, and she went back to her childhood. On her line, "From a very young age / I was inclined to studying" (28), a chair was brought out and placed center. There was no need to hide the use of stage scene assistants in this play or in the other plays. The audience was always made aware that these were plays because the stage hands were not hidden during performance. Their presence was apparent as they assisted with changes of props, scenery and costumes. At first, the chair was used for Leonor to motion towards as she reflected on her young self diligently studying. Also, by placing the chair at this time, it broke from the previous moment and set up a different time of her life. Strangely, due to the content of this speech and the use of the chair, one was reminded once again of the studious life of Sor Juana and the praises that she received. But, along with the adulation came frustration and confusion as it did for young Leonor. So the director chose to build one meta-theatrical device into another by also referencing the character of Sor Juana, as Leonor was acting out her young life.

The chair was used further. When she exclaimed, "My celebrity spread far and wide" (28), she stood on top of her chair to address the wide world as one saw her fame flow forth, symbolizing the crowds of enthusiasts, that came to listen by kneeling down on the stage across from Ana and Celia. This also paralleled Sor Juana's life. Leonor

stepped off the chair at "He who dissented," which clearly indicated a change in mood and trajectory of story. Amidst all her glory, was the sadness and loneliness that came with her intelligence and beauty, which again reflected on Sor Juana. Right before she went into blaming her parents in her speech, she sat, specifying another change. She broke from the chronological aspect of the story and allowed herself to converse with her "two" audience members.

A big change occurred when she mentioned the name of her love, Don Carlos, for the first time. Not only did it provoke Doña Ana to stand and enter the story, but the actor (Joseph Millson) playing this dashing man, entered into the "play" and sat on the chair. Strategically placed, he was there for the women and the audience to admire, as Leonor described him. Her list of characteristics was long and could have come off as burdensome, but by placing him there we were given an actual visual, and he even acknowledged the audience at one point following one of the compliments, thus breaking the fourth wall, causing laughter.

While narrating her impossible list of characteristics, the mood changed and there was a moment for a genuine bonding to occur between Leonor and Carlos so that we were also able to witness their true and pure love for one another in this ridiculous farce. And to mark this change, from playacting out her past, her voice also changed. She touched him gently on his thigh, and her voice became softer and sweeter, but rang of honesty. This kind of idealized love was also humorous, but the director chose to spotlight these moments with a certain sensitivity, and it made me feel that it was the kind of love to which we all should aspire. When, however, it was time for her to go back to her story, on "My lady, I loved him" (31), she turned in a flurry and returned to a

more rapid fire pace of speaking as both women were now standing on either side of Carlos. This helped the audience also visualize the conflict between the two, as they were both in love with the same man. Doña Leonor changed her physicality and vocal quality again when Don Carlos stood up to leave and she uttered, "We loved each other" (31). Her voice was different because before when she spoke about her life in her past, her speech was quicker, staccato, sharper, more dramatic and embellished. Leonor stripped that away when she talked about Don Carlos, which helped signify the purity of their love and broke the truth of their love from the dramatic and theatrical atmosphere of the night and her circumstances for being at this house. In a way it made reference to the public and theatricalized life of Sor Juana, and the suffering she must have endured privately as a beautiful and intelligent woman who was only allowed certain opportunities in the time in which she lived.

The pace and tension began to increase the closer to the moment for her arrival at the house came, which told the public that the story was coming close to the end, but also that the situation was growing more perilous. When she said, "we were determined to run away tonight" (32) she reached out both hands to Ana, to indicate to her that they were both going to act this out together. Doña Ana played the part of Don Carlos and then the two women ran to the back of the stage. This allowed for the stakes to turn higher, and two men rushed on stage to help play the foes, or the ones who tried to arrest Don Carlos. What we learned was that Don Carlos did not submit as he should have, and he bravely pulled his sword and wounded one of the men, who he thought he had killed. It was fascinating to watch Leonor as she directed Ana's body in the sword fight. She had one hand on her waist and one on her sword arm (the right one), and Ana seemed

really committed to playing this part out. This was theatre within theatre within theatre. When "he," the wounded man, said, 'I am done for!', the chair, being held by the two men, was laid down, indicating his fallen state. Ana watched intently, at "Carlos," staring at the body (chair) and at Leonor, until Leonor came back, grabbed her waist and arm again and "sheathed" the sword. When she said that he was arrested, Leonor pushed Ana away stage left. When she reached to the end of her story, on the line "As consequence of that disaster," she went back to her posture on her knees, with hands clasped, as she was at the beginning when she first came into the house looking for refuge. It is a way to end the story and let the audience, Ana and Celia know that everyone was now up to date with her situation.

The characters in this production were more self consciously outrageous in their acting than in any of the other RSC productions. It had to do with the acknowledgement that this whole story was borderline melodrama and aware of itself as theatre, mocking certain literary forms, societal values and love itself. The actors carried out their roles in a very affected manner during the entire play, which increased the energy output. The audience found humor in their grand gestures and exaggerated voices, and it was carried out with such skill and self-awareness that it never became tedious. I will focus on the men and the differences in their characters in the text and how they were able to carry this through in the staging.

Don Carlos, as mentioned, was the mirror of perfection. Don Carlos' voice was filled with pain when it needed to be, and with righteousness at all other times; his voice and body posture and movement matched. The actor playing Pedro, William Buckhurst, in the performance stretched his vowels and extended his gestures as if he were

constantly putting on a show for his numerous adorers. Don Juan (Oscar Pearce) was another young man in the play, and he was in love with Doña Ana. Obviously, then, his rival was also Don Carlos. This actor chose to make his Don Juan react with great bravado, which was also a bit rough around the edges. His speech was more forceful as if his manliness caused him to be on the edge of bursting at any moment. His speech was so flowery and poetic when he wooed his women, however, he seemed to have stepped right out of a 17<sup>th</sup> century Harlequin Romance novel. Since Rodrigo (Peter Sproule) was a version of the stereotyped father right out of an honor play, the director made him a somewhat one dimensional character. This was suitable since he was concerned with one thing, honor. Therefore, he shouted many of his lines at an unbelievably exaggerated volume. He felt so offended that it was like he was purging his suffering through his voice. His booming voice represented his inflated ego in thinking he could make his daughter yield to his commands. This aspect was probably not fictional in that women were still required to follow their father's wishes, but people did and still do marry for love. He seemed more like a character than a true father figure. This was interesting since Sor Juana's father was non-existent in her life, yet she was forced in the end to yield in a male dominated world.

Castaño was by far the most exaggerated character in the production; he also engaged in a rather long monologue. This was the moment when he was forced by Carlos to go to Don Rodrigo's to deliver the letter telling the truth about everything. Before Castaño thought of donning one of the dresses, he lamented to the audience, offering a little intra-textual humor. This first joke was an invention of the contemporary producer/director. He complained, "If only I were Pedro the Great Pretender," making

reference to another SGA play that season. The second joke was given to us by Sor Juana in the text, as he cried out:

Oh, someone, somewhere, anyone, anywhere,  
 some kind man - or even a woman -  
 whether you wield a fan,  
 or parade with a sword,  
 inspire me with a 'Calderonian' twist of the plot  
 to get me out of this mess. (85)

During his long speech as he changed clothes, the actor really played with the audience at one point asking one of the women in the front row to put the lipstick on him as he sat on her lap. It seems that the actor and director really tapped into the idea of the "lazzi" from the *commedia* as I would imagine every night this speech had more to do with audience/actor give and take than a very rehearsed monologue. In the English script the text is over three pages long, so it requires these "bits" to keep it alive. The script has some great lines that certainly were updated to generate audience laughter. When he put on the skirt, Castaño cried, "Sweet Jesus, what beautiful material. / It suits me perfectly - / I'm so dark that blue looks divine on me" (86). He sang and danced and made little jokes here and there, exploring all of the different capacities of his voice. When it was time for the breast piece to be put on, he tried and tried to suck in so hard to get it to fit. A wedding dress, can symbolize the oppression of women, especially during the 17th century and related to the idea of Sor Juana not wanting to get married so that she could pursue her own educational aspirations. Castaño was also his own audience as he looked at himself in the gold doors upstage, "I really am beautiful. / Good God, but I'm

gorgeous" (86). On and on he went with the veil and gloves and fan, until his best line yet, which was one more wink from Sor Juana:

But pay attention, ladies and gentlemen,  
this is all part of the play.  
Don't think I've concocted it all on my own.  
I have no wish to deceive you,  
least of all our eminent visitors from out of town. (87)

On this last line, he was out in the audience and grabbed a woman's purse because it went nicely with his "outfit." And then to take it one step further, Castaño gloated by telling us that the best part of all of this was those idiot men would fall down after him, "not with the beauty that I am, / but with the beauty they *think* I am" (87, my emphasis). He then practiced his walking and "wriggling," figuring out the gait of a female, all prompted by the script, when he observed, "My beauty's wasted in these cloisters" (87), which was the perfect line for Sor Juana again to refer back to herself. The dress, of course, was a very light color to suggest purity and grace, another nod by the director to Sor Juana. For an actor this kind of work takes a great deal of skill, confidence and dedication. But, after all, the actors who played the *harelquinos* in the traveling *commedia* companies were virtuosos with their talents and were so comfortable with what they were doing that they could easily play with the spectators.

As mentioned, there are many asides in this text, which could become overly repetitious and dull. The asides did not bore the audience in this production because they were mostly delivered directly to the audience, really establishing a connection with the



public and making them feel that they were very much a part of this play. To help with the asides and create further meta-theatrical spectacle, the production incorporated rolling carts in order to bring on certain characters for certain scenes. For example in the very first aside in the play, speaking directly to the audience, Celia let us know that she might be in great trouble because just that day, without Doña Ana knowing, she let Don Juan into the house and was hiding him. When she started into her aside to let the public know of her transgression, the actress walked upstage left and pulled out a rolling cart. The board was wide enough for an actor or two to occupy and it is set on four wheels. Additionally there was a proscenium like frame attached that encapsulated the actors inside of it. She yanked it out on "I've got Don Juan himself / hidden in her room" and there stands Don Juan in a very masculine pose; she pushed him back into the wings when her aside was completed. The moment was priceless, caught the audience off guard, and provided another laugh in the production; but it also clearly reminded us that though this was a theatre space with ridiculous characters, and that we are to some degree ridiculous when it comes to love.

Besides being used for pulling in and taking off the actors, the carts also were used to help differentiate between scenes. For example when Don Juan and Don Rodrigo were outside, two carts were rolled in behind them with painted scenery representing the buildings of Toledo. When they approached their destination, they turned around walk behind the two carts, which were then also turned with another scene painted on the other side to let us know they had arrived. This special effect, was not used, however, to create realism in the scene. Rather, it was done to further point to the meta-theatrical nature of the play and to help demarcate the location of these two men. The director must have

known that it would receive laughter from the audience, and intended that kind of response. Another use of the carts, was the grille that is used periodically for spying and eavesdropping. Spain is famous for the iron bars that cover windows and doors, and a set of these was mounted on a cart that moved around depending on the point of view of listener and speaker. The first time it was used was when Celia, directed by Ana, brought Carlos to the window to overhear the conversation between Leonor and Pedro. He could not hear them but he watched them and the mere sight of them together sufficed to make him think that something fishy was going on. In the important scene where all of the characters humorously offered their insights into the great woes of love, Castaño and Carlos, who were listening in again, started downstage on the cart, backs to us as if looking down on the other characters, towards the upstage. When the rest of the actors were brought in, the cart was swung around to go to the upstage and turned around, so that they were now facing us, heads peering through the bars at the other actors who were now downstage. It was an ingenious way to create a multi-perspective in the meta-theatrical structure. We knew that they were listening in and were in fact an audience, but the actors "below" them did not, except for Ana, who like a director of a play, and the manipulator of all of these happenings, created the effect that she wanted to in order to make Carlos suspicious.

This brings us to the final events of the play and a scene that captured the theatricality of the text and the production. Just as Castaño was about to leave the house, he was caught by Don Pedro, who thought that he was Leonor. To try and escape his clutches, Castaño/"Leonor" told Pedro off. This was a great way for Sor Juana to put into Leonor's mouth something that she would have liked to have said but would not:

Castaño: You're a miserable git,  
 your sister's a mare,  
 the maid servants are old hags,  
 the man servants are pigs,  
 and I've had it up to here!  
 I'm off to a cake shop for some cream buns. (89)

A little put off and yet undeterred, Don Pedro in yet another aside exclaimed, "Good heavens, she must abhor me! And yet, my passion is so blind / that nothing can diminish it" (90). Castaño, seeing no other way out, was forced to accept Pedro's hand in marriage. Suddenly fighting was heard between Carlos and Juan because Don Juan thought that Don Carlos loved Doña Ana. Fearful again of being found out, Castaño blew out the candle and put everyone in the dark. A very similar "dark" scene was carried out in the first half of the play when most of the characters had arrived and were trying to figure out who was there. In order to understand how this scene worked, I will describe it.

Doña Leonor entered trying to get away from Don Juan in the dark as he mistook her for Doña Ana. The lights were so low that they appeared to be almost out as Leonor came running in. For a little bit of light, a stagehand was standing up center back with a lit candle to make it look brighter. When she heard Don Juan approaching, she went up to blow out the candle, and then everything got very bright on stage, because everything was dark except for that one candle. Of course the audience laughed because just the opposite happened when the candle was blown out with everything going bright for a

second. Then the lights came on at about half to indicate that these creatures were walking around in the dark. Obviously, the most useful tool in this scene was the movement by the actors. How do we walk in the dark? Our arms are stretched out forward and we are unsure of our footing as we tap around with our feet and hands. The actors did this on a very exaggerated level, but each character had their own unique way of walking in the dark, which made it that much more humorous and believable. At one point when Don Juan thought he was talking to Doña Leonor, he was actually touching a woman in the audience. He knew that he was wrong when he heard Leonor's voice coming from a different direction. The actress playing Leonor used different levels of body height as a way to listen for his voice. Sometimes they got close, right next to each other, but then passed each other by. This was done effectively to create the tension and danger of the scene, where, ironically, the actors could see what was going on and we knew it was fake, but we "suspended our disbelief" because we wanted to and because of the commitment made by the performers. Don Juan finally tripped over Leonor and he grabbed her.

When Carlos and Ana came on, Carlos was flapping his arms and hands like a big fish as he walked in an outstretched warrior pose with bended front leg. The scene was completely physical and must have been carefully rehearsed. Leonor was careful and made smaller, quaint steps and movements; she even stopped and found a place to hide every now and then, while Juan was constantly moving. Don Juan was bigger and swung around a lot. He seemed very sure footed and unimpeded, like he was really going to get what he had come for, which matched the description laid out earlier. Don Carlos was big in body but slower and smaller in movement, especially with that hand slapping

motion. Doña Ana just hung onto the coat tails of Don Carlos and she spoke to the audience in her asides as the others continued to rummage around in the dark. But when Ana did get separated from Carlos, she was also very slow in her movement and took really long, prudent strides. When everyone was mixed up, on the line, "So, wretched woman, you insist in your cruel disdain?" (42), Carlos and Juan were up center as Juan grabbed him, believing it to be Ana. Finally, Celia entered and it went completely dark again on stage because she *had* a candle. After a quick pause, the lights came up a bit so that all could see. Asides were done in this scene by all of them, and when each had his/her moment the rest froze and the timing was impeccable. For example, the men engaged in a very loud, macho sword fight that included big movements and jumping. During this, Carlos suddenly had an aside, and then everyone froze in their exact, strongly physical pose, as Carlos spoke to the audience. When he was done, they went right back into where they had left off. When an aside called for a frozen cast, it was always done very dramatically. Some of the asides, however, did not require this and the actor just simply stepped out and made his/her comment to the audience while the action continued. This type of scene and the asides were ways to accentuate the melodramatic, *telenovela*, overacting, farcical aspect of this production. This scene was a great example of audience and actors working together as if a pact had been made stating that we all willingly played along. Because the scene does last several pages, I would maintain that a similar pact was carried out between Sor Juana, the actors and her audience. This suggests that we are all co-conspirators in the roles we play and are assigned in life.

In the second dark room scene, the same type of tactics were used. From the acting perspective, this might have been very similar to how it was done when the play was first performed. This scene allowed for an even greater mix up as Castaño, mistaken as Leonor, Leonor and Ana all had their heads covered so that they were escorted in and out the scene by the different men until they finally ended up with the appropriate one. It was Doña Ana who admitted defeat in the end. Thinking that she was being carried off by Don Carlos, she secretly married, only to find out that she went with Don Juan. Understanding that all was to no avail and that Don Carlos and Doña Leonor loved each other, she told the audience that it was time to let go and the actress kissed her hand then placed it on the forehead of Carlos, who was frozen. Don Pedro was alone, but Castaño, still dressed as a woman, said that he was willing to marry him. He really goaded Pedro, chiding him for backing out of his promise, "Do no forsake me, me darling - / I'll not go back on my promise" (111).

### **Conclusion**

My investigation compares contemporary stagings of Spanish Golden Age plays by English and Spanish theatre companies. I find that the Spanish productions stress modernizing their plays through a conceptually based approach which focuses on creating a social, political and/or artistic idea to ground the piece. English companies emphasize the language and use of verse in the text to help actors create their strong characters and through that a concept is born. Honor ceases to exist, and the desire of the heart, at its purest state, is what counts. Sor Juana must have understood this. The purity of love that we see is not necessarily of a religious kind, but it is loving someone for who they are; something that might have been very difficult for Sor Juana to receive. Perhaps

this is the reason that Leonor receives such love; she deserved it just as Sor Juana did. In the play there are about ninety asides, and some are quite lengthy. There is great play between light and darkness, playing different parts, lying, hiding and reappearing and many references to incarceration and freedom, as Carlos, Castaño and Leonor are literally locked up in Doña Ana's house, just as Doña Leonor was in her father's house. Sor Juana understood very well the circumstances of being "locked up", which can be taken literally as she was sequestered in a convent. But, beyond that, she was a captive of her time, unable to live a free life as she and other women deserved. She was aware of this and includes many allusions to the tragedy of female subordination in her comedy. As with the production of *Dog* there is a consistency in the acting style and much emphasis was placed on actor placement, movement and gesture. The acting could be labeled as presentational, but it all comes from the text and the force of the language. The props, lighting changes, blocking and voice inflections were tied together in an economic and taut manner in order to maintain a coherent and relevant piece.

### Exploring the Marvels of Theatre in Cervantes' *Pedro the Great Pretender*

Pedro: The skills that are prerequisite  
and that an actor must possess  
in order to have some success  
are as rare as they're infinite. (Cervantes 118)

In the previous chapter, I enumerated the challenges of presenting a Spanish Golden Age drama. Sometimes these problems arise for Spanish and non-Spanish speaking audiences alike. This is the case with the theme of honor, which can seem outdated and irrelevant, though Spaniards might enjoy this aspect more as it derives from their literary tradition. A Spanish audience likely has more appreciation for their great playwrights because they are more familiar with them. What happens, then, when one of their greatest writers of all time has a blighted reputation as a playwright? This is the case with Miguel de Cervantes, the famous writer of *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. There are several reasons as to why Cervantes did not see many of his plays presented on the stage during his lifetime. Even today, it is difficult to find a Cervantes' play being produced. His *entremeses* are the most popular as they are short comedic skits, often with outrageous characters. *Entremeses* were entertainment pieces placed between the acts of regular full-length plays in the 17th century as a type of comic relief. Cervantes' full-length plays occupy the shadows cast by his great novel and these farcical one-acts. The lines above come from Cervantes' full-length play *Pedro the Great Pretender*, a story about an itinerate actor who in his travels meets up with many different people and finds himself embroiled in various comedic situations. This play has many Italian *commedia*



*de'll arte* features and it is difficult to find a Shakespearean play to compare to it. *Pedro* is a risky play to present and that is what makes the Royal Shakespeare Company's successful production of it in their 2004 Golden Age season so remarkable.

The difficulties in presenting this play are numerous; however, one positive point is that the author is well-known worldwide which can create a certain amount of intrigue. First, the very long script lacks a clear dramatic structure, which makes for an unwieldy and disjointed play at times. There are several storylines that do not connect; and there is no single line of action that gives rise to an overriding dramatic conflict that would create a climax and arc for the show. There are many plays on the modern stage that do not follow the traditional Aristotelian plot structure but this play seems patched together out of random stories. Second, there are numerous characters; keeping their stories straight and making them entertaining is a monumental task for director and actor. Finally, there is a big task that must be carried out by the actor who plays Pedro. It is not that Pedro is as well-known as the character of Juan Crespo in the *The Mayor of Zalamea*, but that he plays many different roles and carries the central set of events which is made more difficult because of the rambling structure of the play. Nonetheless, there is a level of genius in Cervantes' piece, and digging deep enough, one can see the progressive and modern attitude that this writer had. Cervantes might seem a misfit playwright from his own time period, but he had some very perceptive views about the stage and about acting. The director, Mike Alfreds, embraced all of these difficulties by highlighting them and creating an ensemble piece that exposed the challenges and the novelties of this entertaining play.

### **Miguel de Cervantes**

Cervantes had a harder life than Lope. "Cervantes' life was dogged by misfortune yet the wealth of human insights it brought was rarely conveyed in his writings without a wry smile" (Sage, program notes). Cervantes was born in Alcalá de Henares in 1547, which is not too far from Madrid. His father was a barber-surgeon who was constantly searching for prosperity, though it never really came to the family. By the time he was 22, Cervantes was a poet but this was not a great way to financially support himself. Miguel had a stutter since his birth and his family was never very prosperous. He joined the military and fought at the battle of Lepanto against the Turks where he severely injured his left arm, and was proud of it. However, he left Naples in 1575 for Spain and a band of pirates captured the ship he was on and he remained in shackles for 5 years. During that time he tried to escape four times and was accused being the leader of these attempts. But, he was not tortured to death because he was held in a bit higher esteem by both the Christians and the Muslims for his "Christian faith, open-minded fellowship and humanity" (Sage, program notes).

His first major work was *La Galatea* and he claimed to have written quite a few plays, but the one we have is a Senecan tragedy called *The Siege of Numancia*. He did not receive the most positive reviews. He did have a brief affair, and a daughter was born, who would later turn her back on him. He finally did get married to a woman with Jewish heritage, thus spurring the allegations that he derived from a history of the Jewish *converso*. The reason this was a problem was because of the Spanish Inquisition. No

children came from the marriage, and after 3 years he took off for Seville, and did not see his wife for over ten years. There are similarities between Pedro and Cervantes' in Seville, as Cervantes was jailed several times and seemed to live a bit half-hazard. He claimed to have started *Don Quijote* in jail. It was published in 1605 and immediately became a bestseller. That same year, however, he had to return to his house in Madrid and live with his wife, sisters, niece and daughter. Under suspicion of running a brothel, he and the women were imprisoned. And 2 years before he died, Spanish writer Avellaneda wrote a sequel to *Don Quijote* which really stung Cervantes. Nonetheless, he did complete his own sequel and "was back to deflating Avellaneda with his inimitable weapon of laconic, smiling irony" (Sage, program notes). His last work was *The Travails of Persiles and Sigismunda* which Sage finds ironic as at the end she asks to be released of marriage so that she can go straight to heaven. He quotes Cervantes, "It seems that good and evil differ so little one from the other they are like two concurrent lines which, though starting from separate beginnings, end in a single point."

### **Play synopsis**

Because this is such a different kind of play, there are a myriad of stories going on that barely connect with one another. The one mainstay is Pedro himself who travels around interacting with different groups of people, often having to put on some type of disguise or costume either to help someone, to get money or to try to win a girl over. There are several episodes in this piece, making it the longest in the RSC 2004 Spanish Golden Age season. In the beginning, we meet Pedro, as a friend of his, Clemente, is desperate for some guidance from the famed Pedro in wooing a lovely little country girl. Pedro is dressed as a farmhand and Clemente is a shepherd. Of course the trusty and

very capable Pedro promises to help Clemente. All of sudden, the scene changes and the new mayor enters. Apparently, Pedro is employed by the mayor who is a complete nincompoop and relies on the Great Pretender to deliver sentences for the cases he hears. Pedro's plan is to place a series of random sentences in the Mayor's hat; as soon as the witnesses plead their cases, he pulls out a sentence and reads it for the decision. The sentences are nonsensical and Pedro is also left to decipher them. The Mayor has a disastrous vocabulary and mixes up words all of the time like, "I'll pass a sentence with my rectum," instead of "rectitude" (24-25). Clemente shows up in this scene with a veiled woman. The Mayor is tricked into acquiescing to the marriage of the two only later to discover that the veiled female was his daughter.

Next episode: enter Maldonado, leader of a group of gypsies. He is impatient to know whether or not Pedro is going to become a gypsy. This offers Pedro the opportunity to tell the story of his life in a multi-paged monologue. He has many professions, most of them quite shady. Several stories directly parallel events in the life of Cervantes himself. He explains how he got his name: while visiting a gypsy she told him to add "Pretender" to his name "Pedro the Great," and "you will be / a king, a pope, a friar as well, / the figure that leads the carnival" (37). The scene changes to St. John's Eve when a big celebration is happening. The lovely Benita is at her window as Roque is admiring or stalking her outside her window. After much revelry, song and trickery, Pascual ends up with Benita (not Roque) and Clemencia with Clemente. Pedro helped through it all. At the end of this first act we meet Belica and "sister" Ines, who form part of the gypsy families. Belica has a huge problem as she believes that she is of royal blood and is always putting on airs. The way that Maldonado convinces Pedro to finally

join the band is to promise the beautiful Belica to him. What neither of them know is that Belica will never agree.

Act II begins with the return of the Mayor who is excited because the King and Queen are visiting. He has prepared a little something extra special for their enjoyment. Instead of boring them with the dances by the young and enticing gypsy girls, he has employed a group of men to dress up as gypsy women to dance. It is learned that Pedro has quit his job with the mayor. As an addition to the English text that was not in the Spanish text, two goofy men come forward and perform. They dance their way off as the next scene begins. Two blind men enter, and obviously one of them is Pedro, feigning his vision impairment. They are both looking for money and come across the very wealthy but miserly Marina. Pedro manages to get rid of the blind man so that he can take control of the situation and eventually her money.

Dressed now as gypsy, Pedro comes across the lovely Belica and Ines. He tries to woo Belica, but she informs him that she will only date a man of her status, royalty.

Pedro responds:

What am I? I'm just a churl,  
but dream I'm pope, or prince, or earl,  
a monarch or an emperor;  
so I too fantasize like her  
and think I'm lord of all the world. (67)

Belica is still not convinced. The King comes along and he and Belica make eyes at each other. In both the script and the production this is where the interval occurs.

After the break, Pedro sees Belica chatting with the King, who is flirting with her using many hunting metaphors. This prompts Pedro to admit defeat and let go of the silly idea of winning over Belica. There is a problem because the Queen is approaching and rumor has it that she is the most jealous of all women. There is a switch back to Pedro dressed as the blind man and he is now at Marina's house. The deal is this: he will recite to her a list of all of her family members that are in hell. The only way for her to free them is to pay a great deal of money. He reads the list and she is mortified enough to hand over the majority of her most precious possession, money. Pedro will not, however, keep the money for himself as he has decided to give it all to Belica so that she can buy beautiful clothes worthy of what she believes to be her station.

It is now time for the King and Queen's entertainment. The Mayor comes in and is quite upset as all of his dancers (the men dressed up) have been beaten up and are unable to perform. Next up are the beautiful gypsy women who dance much to the King's delight and the Queen's dismay. The Queen becomes so overwhelmed with jealousy that she orders all of the women to be put in jail because they are so beautiful. She is clearly upset about the attraction that the King shows towards Belica, who is the most stunning. Ines steps forward to beg the Queen for her ear in private so she can explain everything. This scene ends Act II.

The Queen is in her chambers with a brand new character, Marcelo. He relates a very intriguing story from his past. One night while Marcelo was on sentry duty, a beautiful noble woman used her hair to lower a bundled up baby to him, pleading that he take the child away to a very kind gypsy woman in the hills. He later learns that the father was the Queen's brother. He was in love with the mother of the baby, but she died

immediately and he was never able to help her. Jewels also traveled with this baby, which of course are in Belica's possession. Upon careful scrutiny, the Queen recognizes the resemblance between Belica and her beloved brother and is completely overcome with excitement. In the last scene, which occurs a few episodes later, she comes to realize that her petty jealousies are only hurting her relationships and decides to change her ways. Depressed by his attraction to Belica, the King also knows that he will never have her. Meanwhile, Pedro has discovered a group of actors and asks to join them since he no longer wants to be a gypsy. The troupe is skeptical at first and in another monologue Pedro tells them that he will change his name to Miguel Cervantes (107). He recites all of the qualities that he could offer as an actor and director:

Now I can be student or pope,  
 a patriarch or a king,  
 wear a crown or wear a cope,  
 for every rank and every calling  
 come within an actor's scope;  
 and though the life can be a grind,  
 it's one for an enquiring mind  
 because it deals with new ideas.  
 Even a detractor who sneers,  
 won't say it's of an idle kind. (108-109)

The play ends with Belica firmly ensconced in her new home having completely turned her back on her gypsy family. The character now known as Miguel Cervantes joins the actors who are about to enter the palace for a performance for the King and Queen.

### **Pedro and acting**

In the opening line of Philip Osment's translation of *Pedro the Great Pretender* Clemente seeks Pedro's help. He addresses him as "Ingenious Pedro," which establishes Pedro as a remarkable character from the beginning. Cervantes was a remarkable character himself and lived a very interesting life. In the introduction of this chapter, I listed a number of challenges for presenting this piece to a contemporary audience, i.e. the play's rambling structure and multiple storylines, the numerous characters and the many changes in Pedro himself. I also suggested that Cervantes, a proven genius, created a very progressive but relevant play. There is an enigmatic quality to Cervantes that definitely shines out through the title character of *Pedro the Great Pretender*. As mentioned, towards the beginning of the play, Pedro has a four page long monologue about his adventurous life, his many different masters and all of the tricks he learned along the way. At one point he came across a blind man, with whom he stayed for 10 months. While he was with him Pedro explains:

I learnt to speak the patter,  
 how to be a blind man's eyes,  
 how with genteel graceful language  
 to make prayers that solemnise.  
 But then my good old blind man  
 died and left, like Saint Paul,  
 penniless but wiser,  
 clear-sighted and sharp withal. (36)



It seems that Pedro, like Cervantes, had quite a difficult life at times. Still, he and his creator shared a sense of humor aligned with grace and the capacity to understand human nature that adds poignancy to both their lives.

Even though Cervantes did not witness much success with the production of his plays, it seems that he did possess a keen insight into the life of the actor of the time. In talking about the adaptation process, Osment's one big change was to take the speech made by Pedro about the actor and his art from the earlier section of the play and place it towards the end. The reason he gave for this change was, "This gave the theme of acting more prominence" (98). In a chapter of *Historia del teatro español*, put together by Javier Huerta Calvo, Evangelina Rodríguez Cuadros writes about the life of the actor in early 17th century Spain. She takes a long passage from Agustín de Rojas' *El viaje entretenido* (*The Entertaining Journey*) as he talks about the different types of traveling entertainment that could be witnessed at this time in Spain. He was an actor, writer and playwright and wrote about his life and that of his *compañeros*. He writes the book in dialogue fashion as he is one of the speakers and the other one takes the form of different people of the theatre company to which he belonged. Upon reading this, Moliere's *Versailles Impromptu* immediately comes to mind. As in seventeenth century France, the actor was seen as a lower class type of creature. As theatre companies grew and playwrights blossomed, however, actors became very popular and their lifestyle improved. Over the course of the 17th century, theatre companies in Spain eventually became economically solvent and prosperous.

One example is a "company" of one actor, *bululú*, who might possess one *comedia* and one *loa*. A *loa*, which was a specialty of Agustín de Rojas, would be similar

to a prologue but it was a piece separate from the play. It was a pre-play presentation that was served up for entertainment purposes to prepare the audience for the play. The pieces were in verse and might be farcical or deal with some type of situation related to one of the themes of the play. A traveling company might come to town and have one of the locals write the *loa* for their play. If it were a one man show, the actor might have with him a chest, on which he could stand as a type of stage. Another type of company was the *garnacha* with five or six men, one woman and one boy. They would probably have 4 *comedias*, 3 *autos* and 3 *entremeses*. An *entremes* is a type of farce, very short, that would have been performed between the first and second acts of a play. It usually dealt with people from the popular classes and was for the sake of fun. As I stated earlier, Cervantes wrote a few *entremeses*. This company might have in its possession a bit more clothing for costume purposes, including 3 beards and 3 wigs. The last type of company I will mention is the largest which would have had over 300 bundles of clothes for costumes, 50 *comedias*, 16 actors and a *cobrador*, which I take to be a type of manager of accounts. Rojas's book came out in 1603. By the middle of the 17th century, there came to be two kinds of large acting troupes: *compañías de título* and *compañías de la legua*. The first most definitely would have been professional and therefore registered. Less is known about the second kind of troupe; maybe it would have been equivalent to our semi-professional and even community theatre type companies.

There was a definite hierarchy of company members such as first lady and gentleman, ranked perhaps all the way down to the fifth lady and gentleman; there would have been an actor specializing in the *gracioso* role, and others that played the elderly parts or were musicians. Lent, when the theatres were closed, was the time to set up new

individual or company contracts. In the registers next to a performer's name might be a listing of what they could do, like act and sing or sing and dance. There were fines for not completing the assigned duties, such as not attending the plays of the playwright who was writing for that company. Often familial relations made up parts of the company. These companies became self-sufficient and were structured so as to protect each other and guarantee their members a relatively good life, depending upon where one stood in the company. Like today, there were good actors and bad ones, and for that they had different names attached to them. It seems that there is quite a bit of good information written about the companies of the time. One reason could be that special attention was paid because there were women performing in some of these groups, and they were therefore more scrutinized. Another source is the *Arte Nuevo* by Lope de Vega in which he gives advice to actors, but there are testimonials and pieces written giving advice on how best to give a performance, not to mention the plays themselves which contain stage directions and editorials about the actor and acting of the time period. We witness this in *Pedro the Great Pretender* when Pedro makes several commentaries on what an actor's job is. Additionally, there exist accounts and books kept by the theatre companies. The principal theatre companies were supported by the church (*cofradías*). Because of clerical financial backing and because respectable women were allowed to act in the companies, very careful documentation was required.

It is certain that the theatre space would dictate to some degree the type of acting required to entertain a quite possibly riotous group of spectators. Presumably, with little scenery, few set pieces and noisy crowds, actors tended to engage in a more representational and/or stylized type of acting. This does not mean, however, that

realistic delivery was not attempted. We will never be certain how actors carried out their roles, but with psychologically in-depth novels like *Don Quijote* and plays like *Hamlet*, where sound advice is given to the actors, theatre practitioners must have concerned themselves with a somewhat realistic personification of their characters. It seems that verisimilitude was admirable. Perhaps there were sets of conventional gestures to indicate a certain emotional state, as well as established ways to project one's voice but, as now, each actor had an individual persona. Certain actors were very popular, more than likely because of their skill and ability to move an audience. Rehearsals were not like they are at present, with time to delve into a part and really explore it; this is probably why many actors specialized in a particular type of part. Such specialization would have helped them to understand that type of character. Like literature, acting techniques conform to the contours of the time period and often go hand in hand with the type of play being written. Spain and England were two nations in transition and their theatres featured plays that spoke to a wide range of people who were also in transition from a medieval to a more modern way of life. Granted, Spain's journey to modernity passed through the Spanish Inquisition but evidence of that journey is there in the literature and drama. If great drama was being written, it would make sense that competent acting accompanied it. Consider the range an actor—or acting troupe—had to possess, from the pathos of plays like *The Painter of His Own Dishonor* to the comic exaggerations of the *loas* and *entremeses*. I am not suggesting that the acting back then was the equivalent to the emotionally-absorbed acting of today but I do want to challenge the stereotype that performances have become increasingly “realistic” over time, that acting in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was necessarily more heightened or stylized than

acting in the 18th and 19th centuries. There is a true reverence for theatre and the craft of the actor in *Pedro the Great Pretender*. Cervantes understood, like so many, the ability of theatre to entertain while offering insight into human behavior. Director Alfreds understood this and exploited the meta-theatrical elements of the play while highlighting the forward-looking nature of Cervantes' script.

*Pedro the Great Pretender* portrays theatre as a vehicle for entertainment but it is also a great meta-theatrical piece that explores the idea of role-playing both in society and onstage. Commenting on the difficulties presented by the play's episodic structure, Osment states: "Certainly I came to see that its episodic structure lent it a vitality and a modernity that made it seem somehow closer to the life than the plays I knew of Lope de Vega where the plot is sometimes worked out in an almost formulaic fashion" (90). It is a fun text, not to be taken too seriously; its significance becomes more clear when looked at in conjunction with Cervantes' life and the social and dramatic contexts of the period. It has been said that Cervantes' pieces are difficult to stage; certainly the structure of this play is dramatically clumsy. The key to the RSC's staging of *Pedro* was that he was the most realistic character while the others appeared more as exaggerated types. As with the RSC productions of *Dog in the Manger* and *House of Desires*, the director and translator were close collaborators.

### **Production analysis**

In *The Spanish Golden Age in English*, noted scholar Catherine Boyle comments on Philip Osment's translation of *Pedro the Great Pretender*. The translation process for each of the RSC plays is relevant for it helped to shape the productions. The most

controversial translation was of this play. Osment restructured some of the episodes to create a more clearly defined through-line of action so that Pedro's adventures follow a loosely formed dramatic arc. Osment also took considerable time with the verse. Boyle observes, "In this sense the controversial translation was Philip Osment's version of *Pedro de Urdemales* (*Pedro the Great Pretender*) into rhyme schemes and metre that follow Cervantes' original, prompting in English the question of the role of verse in theatre" ("Perspectives" 63). She says that the actors appreciated the rhyme scheme as it eased their memorization process, but that "some critics found it anachronistic and difficult on the ear" (63). Boyle continues by highlighting the uniqueness of this process at this time period:

The question of translation calls on issues of cross-cultural tradition, textual practice and orality. In this sense, *Pedro*. . . should be read as a sustained experiment, in performance of the anti-Lope dramatic structure of Cervantes and in the rendering of the verse form in English throughout. Its success in these terms lies in the celebration of process and the incomplete (physicalized by the rehearsal-room presence of the actors on stage throughout), which lies at the heart of Cervantes' writing. (63)

Boyle's words provide insight into how the production team tackled the play; one can immediately see the importance of the ensemble approach. I have opted in this production analysis to take a different approach due to the uniqueness of the play's structure and style. I will take the reader through the production in chronological fashion, so that one can appreciate the amusing experiences achieved by Osment, Alfreds and the actors.

When the actors came out onto the stage, the house lights were still up and they talked and bantered with one another as the audience was doing the same thing. The actor playing Pedro (John Ramm) shuffled forward and greeted the audience and his fellow actors with "Morning" which led to laughs. The actors retired to the upstage portion of the stage where some were seated and others stood. There was a totally relaxed quality in their demeanors as if they were ready for a good time. One could sense the special connection that existed between all players, which immediately extended out to the audience as if they were also part of this game. The atmosphere was friendly, without losing any sense of professionalism or the promise of an evening of entertainment. In the production there were 13 episodes, each with a title that was announced beforehand. The first was "Pedro and the Shepherds." Osment states that "This quasi-Brechtian device had the effect of allowing John Ramm as story teller to have a complicity with the audience. This allowed them to share in the joke" (97). The lighting in this first scene was warm and natural, almost like the sun was out to indicate a pastoral setting. The Shepherd, Clem (Simon Trinder) wore what looked like chaps. There was absolutely no scenery on the thrust stage and only one prop piece, a shepherd's staff. The actors sat in the back and watched the play. The players were not on stage for the entire show, but when they were there they would enter from the back, watching what was happening. There was no need to disguise or mask what they were doing; they were watching the play just like the audience and were free to react in any way appropriate to an audience member. When Pedro and Clem began to address the two women about whom they were speaking, they pointed to the actresses playing Clemencia (Emma Pallant) and Benita (Katherine Kelly) who rose from their seats with jugs on their

shoulders and entered the scene by crossing down right. As mentioned, the verse rhymed but the actors used it so well that it did not sound monotonous. The ladies were barefoot as were Pedro and Clemente. The actors were physically and vocally expressive, using pantomime, large gestures, and different volume levels. They exited the stage when the scene was over.

Crespo (Julius D'Silva), the new mayor and Pedro's employer, entered with his two men. The lights changed to announce the new scene. These men were dressed in suits with bowler hats. I could not place the exact time period, but the costumes indicated a type of dreary Dickensian London of the mid-1800's. There was never an indication of a particular time period but there was a definite demarcation between town and country. This contrast echoed an important social/cultural difference that Cervantes would have observed in his own time period. Pedro changed his outfit between the first two scenes. In the first, he wore a whitish blousy shirt with a bag hung over his shoulder and pants that were quite loose fitting. In this scene he wore a bowler hat that was too small for his head and worn out pants and a jacket. Chairs were taken from the upstage area to set up the court for this scene. Crespo had a funny looking staff with small objects hanging from it. He was a broadly sketched social type: a nitwit man of the town who has some money and power that he has no idea how to use. Accompanying him were the court recorder and the two men with the complaint. The performance was taken to the extreme; the actors played the characters as caricatures. For example, the man who called Crespo an ass, breathed and made sounds like a burro. Pedro, meanwhile, was deadpan in this scene. Crespo had a little hood hanging from his jacket; from this place Pedro pulled out the pieces of paper containing inane phrases, which he told Crespo to



use as judgments for the cases tried. The two plaintiffs wore clothes that evoked lower urban class status, and when a decision was made, the two men almost had seizures on stage. The energetic performances brought to the scene a wonderful quality of liveliness. It was like a whirlwind as the characters moved around and varied their vocal tones and volumes before Clemente and Clemencia re-entered.

She entered with her head covered and Clemente had a half mask covering his eyes. Clemente's speech counteracted what had just happened in the previous moments. His speech was honest and heartfelt as everyone calmed down, giving him the stage. There was an earnestness to the performance, a lack of "over-acting," that clearly delineated this serious moment amidst all the comedic moments; Alfreds's careful modulation of the energy in the scene gave the audience a more profound experience. After Clemente's speech the mood changed again with a renewal of the flurried movement and high vocal energy. When Clemencia pleaded to her father to let her marry Clemente, everyone stopped moving on stage; all energies and bodies were directed towards Crespo, pushing him spiritually to give Clemencia leave to marry Clemente. In the love moments between Clem and Clem, everything stopped, froze or slowed down. At the end of this scene, the actors stopped and the lights went down for a moment; then lights came up again with only on one of the actors on stage and the rest of the stage was in black. This tableau was designed to give audience members a moment to applaud and to appreciate the actors' performance of these particular characters, many of which would not be seen again. There was a banging sound that cued the end of scene. The actors went back to their seats and Pedro announced the next scene:

Episode 2 -" Pedro tells his story"

Maldonado, the Gypsy, was dressed with the kerchief on his head, a white blouse and a vest, tight pants with bell bottoms, high-heeled flamenco-like shoes and a sash around his waist. Pedro was back in his original attire, except with a vest and no bag. When Pedro started his story, Maldonado sat down left on level with the audience, as if to announce that now we, too, were listening to Pedro story. Pedro used the entire stage with great movement. For different parts of his life, he used different parts of the stage. For example, when he referenced his trip to Algiers, he pointed back to the part of the stage where he started that part of the story. Sometimes when he went off story to explain or embellish, he got closer to Maldonado and bent down low, as if he was getting down low with the audience. One of his standard gestures was hands in his pockets with a bit of a relaxed swagger. Maldonado also changed positions to indicate changes in Pedro's story. For example, when Pedro began to talk about the blind man he spent time with (Cervantes), Maldonado leaned in and even scooted a little closer; this change in the story was also when Pedro described having had a truly intellectual and spiritual experience. When it was time for Pedro to become a gypsy, Maldonado offered him a knife, for the cutting and blood sharing (he was so masculine!) and Pedro swaggered over after a look at the audience that said, "Uh-oh, now I have to cut myself." Pedro's cutting was much funnier because he turned away to show that he was hurt. This move worked well in contrast to Maldonado's natural manliness.

### Episode 3: "The Night of Saint John"

This scene was different from the other scenes in the play; it conveyed a dreamy feeling, which is an accurate expression of the festival of Saint John. The effect was created mostly with the lights, like watching an impressionistic piece being painted right

before our eyes. One could see the ensemble direction by Alfreds as everyone helped with the scene changes. The actors all worked together and none seemed more important than another. Actors clapped for other actors as soon as an episode ended. A table and basin were brought on from offstage, but the stool was brought on from the upstage area. The lights changed drastically, but up left was a brighter light for the talk between Pascual and Pedro. The rest of the stage was pretty dark except for Benita, who sat on a stool on a table with a small light on her. When she began to sing, the lights changed to a blue hue and covered the stage in a circular pattern so that neither the other actors nor audience could be seen. To indicate the height of the balcony, she sat on a stool that had been placed on top of the table. She put her feet in the basin. Roque sat on the floor and leaned his head against the table as if he were listening against a wall of her house below her room or balcony. He delivered his speech while on the ground, moving his arm and hand. Benita cleverly "lowered" her ribbon down to him; it was as if she was dropping it from a balcony. After her song, the blue hued lights changed. The stage lightened, opening up the scene to the other actors upstage. The lights turned a pinkish hue at center stage, indicating heat, love, lightness and dreaminess. We were back in the country, so when Pascual entered he wore a big wooly sheep's vest and she, Benita, donned a simply-colored country girl's dress that was hemmed just above the ankle. When Pascual began his speech of love, Pedro sat. His stillness, and that of the other characters, gave focus to Pascual during his love plea to Benita. In his speech, when the reference to fruit was made, he actually grabbed a basket of fruit and handed it to Benita.

Finally, the music began to indicate the Saint John celebration. Another table was brought on for the other girl, up left of Benitas' table. They both went back to sitting on

the stools on top of the tables, while many actors entered with branches. The bluish and pinkish hues remained which perpetuated the dream-like feeling. The singing was light and beautiful; the men sang to the girl on the balcony as if they were singing to all the women in the audience. There is quite a tradition of this in Spain, and there was a slight Spanish sound to the music. When the song changed and became even more festive, it was back to the all blue hue, which was very strong. There were tambourines, flutes, and drums. As daylight approached, because the St. John festival lasts all evening, the blue began to disappear and faint orange and white light replaced it on the stage. The girls got down from their balconies and everyone danced. The audience was mesmerized as branches were used for characters to run under. At the very end of the song the lights were almost white and the scene reached a sort of climax. There were actual "ahhs" from the audience when the song and dance ended. It was so beautiful and captured the love and lightness of San Juan, which is a great tribute to Cervantes and Spain, but not so far removed as to completely distance the audience. They were engaged by the performance every step of the way. The joy expressed by the actors was probably the main reason for the audience's engagement but also important were the costumes which did not belong to a single, identifiable historical period thereby creating a "timeless" feel. At the end of the scene Pedro helped clean the floor of water for reasons of "health and safety" as he explained to the audience.

#### Episode 4 -"Gypsy life"

The lights indicated the countryside again and Ines (Joanna Van Kampen) and Belica (Claire Cox), the two gypsy girls, appeared. They were rougher and earthier than the other female characters seen so far. Their clothes were more rustic-looking, layered

with worn edges, but Belica's skirts had a lot more color than those of Ines. They were red in shade and she wore a matching vest. Ines' hair looked looser and messier with a flower in it, and she and Belica wore gypsy shawls around their waists. They were definitely wilder than the sweet Benita and Clemencia. The stingy widow (Melanie MacHugh) entered in a black dress of formal cut, which indicated her higher status. When she entered, Belica and Ines sat together up right and Pedro and Maldonado were down left. Ines and Belica's gypsy identities were indicated through their movements; it was as if they were dancing a flamenco the entire time, swaying their hips and spinning when they talked. It was very sensual. These characters seemed to be "of the earth;" one could hear the haunting gypsy music in their movements alone. These women occupied a larger energy space than Clemencia or Benita. There was an animal essence and lustiness to them. Ines was definitely more animal-like than Belica because Belica is of higher status. No scenery was used for this scene because it was all about bodies utilizing the space.

#### Episode 5: "The mayor's dance"

Two chairs were brought on stage which, because there was no scenery, helped to make clear that the scene was located in town rather than in the country. This was the scene where the Mayor looks at his "dancers" for the King. The men were dressed as women with bells around their ankles, and the look was completely ridiculous as they entered. Their dance was funny but they played as if they were really serious about it, waving their fans almost all of the time and playing off each other. There was absolutely no grace to this dance. They had a routine, but were clumsy and buffoonish. At one moment, one fell over the feet of one of the men seated upstage. The men had tank-like

shirts that showed off their muscles, a costume choice that contrasted nicely with their fluffy, huge tutus. The music was lively and fun.

#### Episode. 6 - "The widow and the blind man"

The lights changed again to whitish, bluish, and greenish hues that indicated night. No scenery was used in this scene, but Pedro was dressed different than before. He wore round bottle cap dark sunglasses, a hat that covered his head and a big black robe/skirt with a long vest that fell to the floor. As he sauntered on with a staff, his speech also changed to indicate that he was "playing" a character, the blind man. He rolled his "r's" and his voice sounded deeper and louder. His speech was exaggerated, elevated and seemed more formal. The real blind man that Pedro was following was also wearing glasses, with a different hat and a long skirt with a long jacket over it. There were some funny moments when the blind man walked to where he thought people were, but they are not. We are in on Pedro's joke. We know that Pedro can see, so we are on his side when he fools the blind man and the widow.

#### Episode 7 "Pedro joins the gypsies"

This was the last scene in the first act of the production where Pedro decided to join the band of gypsies. It was a nice place to end the act because of Pedro's change in status, whatever that may be, and because it was before the arrival of the King and Queen. Pedro was also wearing a different outfit with a kerchief on his head, vest, pants and a red sash around his waist. He played all of his different parts like the great actor (pretender). This first act lasted for about 1 hour and 23 minutes, but it was so entertaining and lively, that the audience did not seem to mind.

Interval

### Episode 8: "The wounded heart"

The second act of the production answered all of the unsettled questions raised in the first act, yet more evidence that Alfreds and Osment made a sound strategic decision placing the interval where they did. The King (Joseph Millson) is hunting as comes across some wild game, Belica. He was made a bit effeminate as he entered with a servant behind carrying a white umbrella over his head; it was very funny when the King asked his servant about the deer passing by. The king wore a very fancy vest and short pants with stockings, while his man had a long ponytail with a ribbon. It was very obvious that this was a royal party, given their shiny gold vests. Belica's movement in this scene became very sensuous, as she raised her arms and took in the sun and the circumstances. She lifted her chest and walked with head held high; though a gypsy girl, her movements communicated an authority by which she "owned" the others. She thought of herself as royal, and commanded everyone's attention. She was so beautiful and sexy that everyone watched her, though there was no loss to the dance feel of her movements.

### Episode 9: "Pedro comes from Purgatory"

Laughter erupted from the audience when they saw how Pedro was dressed in the next scene. The lights changed. In the center there was a dim white light while surrounding Pedro in a semi-circle downstage the light was a fiery, hellish red. The rest of the stage was entirely dark obscuring the actors and audience. Three levels of theatricality were present in this scene: there was the actor who played Pedro announcing the episode as contemporary actor; there was Pedro dressed as a character who made asides to the audience, such as "I hope this works"; and there was Pedro in the scene with

the widow pretending to be someone else. He was carrying a tall staff and wearing a monk's robe with a belt and heavy sacks hanging on him to weigh him down. He had no hat or glasses. Again, his speech was changed as his voice was even deeper, drawn out and louder, but in his asides, he used his "Pedro" speak. It was funny how Marina dragged around his chains as he talked; Pedro was center stage and the widow moved below him in a semicircle as in the previous scene. He was center stage, like the great actor, performing his act. The scene ended with a loud sound like a dong, and a white light shone on a posed Pedro with the rest of the performers in dark. The lights changed again to a lighter and brighter yellow, as in the opening of the play, and Pedro announced the scene change.

#### Episode 10: "The court in the country"

Something exciting and big was about to happen as a bright orange light illuminated center stage as Ines talked to Silerio, the King's servant. Following the entrance of Pedro and Maldonado came the King dressed with a big flowery, greenish cape of expensive, draped material. His servant brought on a big blanket for the picnic and pillows for the royals to lay on. The Queen's dress was very different than the dresses of the rest of the girls. It was light, beautiful and bouncy, accompanied by a big scarlet cape. She was all royalty with a big pendant, earrings and a large sash that matched her cape. Even more pillows were brought on stage so that the King and Queen were completely comfortable. The Mayor Crespo entered and uttered the classic malapropism, "I can't ejaculate how I feel." Their movement and placement on the down stage with the fluffy pillows helped to create the tranquil, pastoral atmosphere of this scene. When the gypsies (females) entered, their costumes had been changed and



featured even more colors and shawls; after all they were supposed to perform a dance, so they had to put on their "costumes." The lighting changed during this scene with reds, yellows, oranges, blues, pinks and purples. We even heard castanets and a live guitarist on stage. The dance of Belica and Ines contained a mixture of Spanish flamenco and modern elements, creating a wild and vibrant feel. The Queen became outrageously jealous as she watched the King follow every move that Belica made. When the King and Queen engaged in their fight, the actors gathered upstage to watch the "scene" deteriorate into a full out pillow fight. The King then had his own tantrum after everyone left. It was now time for Pedro to reveal himself and he took off his gypsy attire on stage, getting back into the baggy pants and white shirt. There was a feeling that the time had come for the main issues of the play to be resolved. This mood became quite serious as indicated by the more somber tone of the music as the actors clean up the stage.

#### Episode 11: "Marcelo's secret"

The lights, whitish with slight hints of blue and pink, indicated an interior, perhaps evening time. One chair was positioned upstage right, one center stage left and one downstage right. As Marcelo began his story for the Queen, she was center stage and listened as he moved around to tell his story. His dress was the most noble yet seen; he looked vaguely French neo-classical as he wore a white/grey wig with a black ribbon in the back. His tights were white, with black shoes, and he had a white blouse with a tie around the front of the neck. His suit was colored shiny blue and he walked with a staff. His coat had tails and he wore a vest and short pants. This costume helped to differentiate him in age and status from Crespo who wore long pants. These two different costumes, representing two distinct time periods separated the two men in

status. Looks and appearances created the impression of nobility. The nobles took center stage in this scene and the gypsies sat in the downright corner to listen and watch.

#### Episode 12: "Pedro's prophecy"

In the next scene, Pedro wore a big round hat with round rim, the same pants and blouse as before, but with one change: a cape that covered his arms up to his elbows and fell to his knees. In this scene, Pedro made his big speech about needing to change one's role in life. He was with a man who had hens, which were hand held puppets; an actor in the background would make the noises when they chirped. There was great stage action when the hens tried to fly away and the man fell down trying to catch them. Pedro killed the hens onstage, complete with hilarious death-squawks from the actor in the back, and covered the corpses with his hat. Even the actors watching this laughed out loud, creating a full arena stage effect, i.e. Pedro was completely surrounded by spectators laughing at his actions. It was a perfect moment to bring on the actors.

The actors entered. They were costumed distinctly and eccentrically with capes that hung off one shoulder and hats with sashes tied around the rims. Their colors were dark and rich. They wore big high shiny boots and looked like beautiful, sexy pirates from the 18th century, with kerchiefs on their heads. There was a self-assuredness and bravado about these men that distinguished them from the rest of the characters. Pedro shed his garb as he explained that he wanted to become an actor, going back to the pants and blouse, reflecting his unkempt state from the beginning. There were no female actors and, strangely enough, one of the actors was dressed as a feminine cupid-type angel in a faux ballet outfit. The actors had arrived to perform for the King and Queen but then the audience is hit with a meta-theatrical *coup d'état* as the "director" enters

carrying something in his hand. It turned out to be a skull; he began to talk to it and exclaimed, "What's annoying! Here's the rub." The crowd went absolutely crazy with laughter. Here we could see an intercultural dialogue in motion, joining together past and present, Shakespeare and Cervantes. It was a brilliant moment and a true celebration of theatre!

#### Episode 13: "Pedro finds his true vocation"

In the final scene the stage was bathed in bright blue, but the King and Silerio sat in a different kind of light, more natural with a reddish/pinkish tint. During the song and dance, Cupid and one actor entered to sit and sing down left. They summarized the events of the play in their song and as they sang the King and servant danced romantically. This bit was entertaining but, unfortunately, there was no unbelievably happy ending. When Belica discovered that she really is royal, she completely snubbed her gypsy roots and her family. This moment suggested that life goes on, which is quite realistic and very Cervantes. As Belica entered the lights changed to more pinks and oranges, but with a darker feel; Belica was differently dressed having donned a mantilla with a veil hanging off the back. The Queen was also wearing a headpiece with a dark veil hanging off her back; her dress looked very regal with a big red sash/belt around her waist, and she carried a matching fan. Pedro was now wearing a cape that tied around his neck and a sash around his waist and hat. As the nobles exited, the lighting returned to that at the beginning of the play. During his final speech about what actors should do, Pedro took off his cape and sash and laid them on the chair. He walked amongst the actors and motioned while talking to them. The lighting dimmed, however, and focused on the actors as Pedro came center stage amongst them and everyone turned and listened

to him talk about what theatre is and what actors do. Finally they got up to leave and Pedro followed them as he finished his speech with the line, "Pedro the great pretender." I found that I did not want the moment to end as something very special was captured in this production.

### **Conclusion**

In *Pedro*, Mike Alfreds emphasized the ensemble nature of theatre so as to give a shape to Cervantes' rather formless play; he pulled out all of the theatrical stops and produced an invigorating evening of play that pulled everyone into the creative playing field. First of all, the clothing represented different time periods so that the actors as characters were always wearing "costumes". That is to say it was if they were always play acting in some capacity by changing up what they were wearing, which really corresponded succinctly with the heightened theatrical aspects of the production. Secondly, Alfreds' "brechtian" approach, helped create enough distance to really understand that this play was a comment about theatre and about life, which is what Cervantes would have wanted. Finally, as this was the last production that I saw in the series and was the last one to premier during the 2004 RSC season, I was astounded by the variety of character portrayal that the actors were able to achieve even though they appeared in various productions. For example, Joseph Millson played Teodoro in *The Dog in the Manger*, Don Carlos in *House of Desires* and the insipid King in *Pedro the Great Pretender*. He was a completely different character in all three plays and it led me back to the comments that Mr. Boswell made about beginning with the language and verse in order to carve out your characters from this standpoint. It was obvious that he and Alfreds were on the same page in this respect. Unfortunately, many of the same

actors also performed different characters in the Spanish versions of the plays I saw and often I kept seeing the same character and the same bag of tricks. As translator and adapter Osment observed, "It was as if the RSC actors had taken off their masks and were presenting themselves to the audience as story tellers" (98). The reviews were not as enthusiastic for this show as they were for *Dog in the Manger* and *House of Desires*, but critics certainly did appreciate the effort and work put forth by everyone in this production. Philip Fisher wrote, "*Pedro the Great Pretender* shows another side to a great author, who is now known for a single work and while not as outrageously funny as its two companion pieces, succeeds thanks to a strong company and in particular, its leader John Ramm" (Fisher). As this quotation suggests, John Ramm, who played Pedro, was highly praised. Reviewer Peter Lathan comments that "It works," referring to the production. "The play proceeds from scene to scene at a good pace and what seem at first to be disconnected scenes gradually reveal themselves to be a well-rounded picture of the central character, Pedro himself, played with great glee and a marvelous *rapport* with the audience by John Ramm" (Lathan). Besides appreciating the work that Ramm did as Pedro, which as mentioned previously in this chapter is one of the major challenges of the play, Lathan recognized the great work done by all of the company, and the structural complexities and challenges of the text. Nonetheless, in concurring with what I suggested at the beginning of this chapter that Cervantes was actually ahead of his time, this reviewer suggests that, "in short, it is too innovative." He compliments the "great *ensemble* piece" and concludes that he believes that "the night really belonged to Cervantes. Just short of 390 years after it was written, *Pedro the Great Pretender*

confirmed what we already know from *Don Quijote*, that he is among the greats of the comic writer pantheon."

## Conclusion

*The Spanish Golden Age in England* contains an interview in which Dr. David Johnston talks to Mr. Laurence Boswell regarding the RSC season and how the productions were received when the company brought them to Spain. Mr. Boswell said that he was nervous about the trip because they were taking Spanish classics that had been adapted and translated to English, and were presenting them in the motherland. The productions were successful with both audiences and critics. Mr. Boswell explains that what happened in Madrid "was a genuinely intercultural moment" (152). He was hugged by one of the directors because the RSC had somehow managed to combine Lope with Shakespeare. Mr. Boswell clarified that Lope did not become Shakespeare but that their work with Shakespearean texts influenced how they approached the texts of Lope, Cervantes, Tirso, Calderón and Sor Juana. Mr. Boswell stated:

The English actors from the RSC had brought their style, their confidence, their buoyancy with language, their experience of humanizing language, making it accessible and dynamic, and fused all of this with a very Spanish play. I'm finding the same cultural interaction now. An English director using English methods in a completely Spanish context is liberating for me, and I think it's exciting and liberating for actors. So intercultural action can work, but it has to be from the grass roots up.

(152)

This entire investigation has been intercultural in the comparing and contrasting of theatre production styles from two different countries. Given the limited number of examples, I can make no sweeping generalizations about English versus Spanish approaches to producing Spanish Golden Age drama. However, I can draw some conclusions based on Mr. Eduardo Vasco's productions for the CNTC in contrast to the RSC productions directed by Mr. Boswell, Ms. Nancy Meckler and Mr. Mike Alfreds. The RSC productions focused on the plays' language. This was possible because the RSC actors were familiar with the conventions of speaking verse (though most had never worked before on Spanish verse). As the John Barton series "Playing Shakespeare" makes clear, the RSC has a long tradition of cultivating actors who know how to interpret poetic language in a natural-sounding way, "humanizing language" as Mr. Boswell says. The result is a theatre experience that is both linguistically and emotionally intelligible; audiences can understand what the characters are saying and can empathize with why they are saying it. Add to these compelling theatrical qualities lively staging and an ensemble spirit, and it is easy to understand why the RSC productions were so successful with English and Spanish audiences.

There was a play in the 2004 RSC season, *Tamar's Revenge*, that did not conform to the typical RSC style, which, again, focuses on text and language. Rather, director Simon Usher approached this play with a more pronounced concept in mind; I will address the RSC production of *Tamar's Revenge* briefly in this concluding chapter, along with other production approaches, in an effort to open up other possibilities. I will review the overriding challenges of the Spanish Golden Age texts discussed in the dissertation and the approaches taken by the RSC and CNTC to handling these problems.



I will end with a description of my own approach to directing *Fuenteovejuna* in the spring of 2010.

In my opinion *Estrella de Sevilla* was the most difficult of the dramatic texts studied in this dissertation to present on stage. First, the question as to the author's identity, if it is not Lope de Vega, arouses doubt about the play's value, especially since there are other problems related to the structure, verse, themes and characters. Second, the play features a mix of genres: it contains aspects of tragedy, tragicomedy and the Spanish *comedia*. The *comedia* itself, with its multiple plot lines, can raise many red flags since fast moving plot driven plays, especially ones with disturbing characters and that difficult endings, can be difficult for audiences to handle. Although *Estrella* presents a strong female figure, she is also the unprotected victim of her male counterparts. The third difficulty stems from the dominant Spanish Golden Age theme of honor, which takes many different forms in this piece. King Sancho believes that honor is something that one inherits in accordance with one's social station (or, in his case, his royal title). As a result, honor and power go hand and hand; honor can be used and abused by the aristocrats in the play regardless of the consequences. Busto, *Estrella*'s brother, is blind in his passion to defend his honor. For him honor is like a cloak, used for keeping up appearances. No matter what the individual believes, one must never get in the way of honor to one's class and place in society. His blind adherence justifies in his mind the brutal hanging of his maid, Natilde. His best friend, Sancho, also is affected by his ideas of honor. Sancho is a complex soul, trapped by an antiquated code of honor that steers him in the wrong direction. He knows deep down that he does not want to kill his best friend and lose the woman that he loves. Nonetheless, he is unable to break free from his

duty and word to the King. Finally, Estrella exemplifies a more modern idea of honor: honor with compassion and integrity. She does not have Sancho killed, as is her right, and she does not seek revenge against the King. Instead she chooses to forgive, which is the true reason why she is the star of Seville. I proposed that by showing so many different types of honor in this play, the playwright was holding up to scrutiny this outdated and stringent code, allowing it to be questioned.

Mr. Eduardo Vasco of the CNTC dealt with this fascinating text by using a "Brechtian" approach. The play was displaced in time and set in what looked to be a modern day boardroom with actors dressed in modern business, almost *mafioso*, attire. No real set pieces used, but elongated blocks were moved around for practical reasons and to create various looks. Much of the time the actors were on stage serving as spectators, reminding us that we were watching a play. By creating this type of stage world the director was able to unleash the contemporary reverberations of the text while at the same time distancing us so that we could examine its social implications. However, some of Vasco's choices were less successful, e.g. the unevenness in acting styles and the character of Clarindo who did not seem to belong in this stage world. His presence was actually disconcerting and, frankly, I think it would have been best to cut his part from the play. Because the acting styles differed so greatly, it was difficult to focus on the theme of honor and the beauty and symbolism of the poetry became lost.

The next play and production that I explored was *El pintor de su honra* by Calderón. Although Juan Roca, the painter, is named in the title, it is difficult to identify whose story this truly is. Obviously, he commits the atrocious act in the end but Serafina and Alvaro also play very prominent roles. At first glance, Juan Roca has an attachment

to and struggles with an outdated code of honor. Like Sancho in *Estrella*, he debates with honor, as if it were a character. He goes through a psychological struggle that leads him nearly to insanity. Finally, like *Estrella*, Serafina is mistreated and abused shamefully by both men and then is brutally murdered. Because both murders go unpunished at the end, the play is even more difficult to watch. Vasco handled the psychological twists and turns in this text beautifully; the set and costume designs were vivid and alive, tinged by the *carnavalesque*. The scenes were set up as individual paintings that came to life; Vasco's execution was so clear that, watching the video, I could understand the tone and story without any words. Finally, each set of actors was given a different acting style to incorporate into the production, which seems to be encouraged by Vasco. The actor playing Juan was the most psychologically driven; he dug deep to connect with his emotions and almost wore them on his sleeve. The actors playing Alvaro and Serafina were more refined and reserved. The latter's internal struggle complemented Alvaro's calm and cool demeanor, which was very unnerving. Finally, Vasco intelligently treated the story line that really seemed superfluous. The love story of Porcia and the Prince was presented with a tinge of humor since there was no real love between them and it seemed silly compared to the tragic love triangle between Serafina, Alvaro and Juan. Therefore, their acting was exaggerated and borderline comic, which made for a nice balance for the other characters.

Finally, Vasco took a completely different approach to *El Alcalde de Zalamea*: he emphasized a type of psychological realism. The challenges facing producers of this piece include: the theme of honor; a nationally well known character that must be made interesting with each new production; characters who do not really progress or grow

throughout the action; a story that focuses on class struggle within a feudal society.

There was minimal set design as Vasco clearly wanted to focus on the acting. He pushed a type of psychological journey for each character in order to make the individuals stand out more clearly. The most interesting performance was by the actor who played the Captain; he seemed tortured by his inability to stop his obsession with Isabella. By contrast, the actor who played the protagonist, Pedro Crespo, seemed to get lost searching out a modern interpretation for his character. His shuffling and mumbling really detracted from the feat that Crespo accomplishes in the text.

I then examined the productions on the English speaking stage. The first text addressed was *The Dog in a Manger* as directed by Laurence Boswell. Diana is a strong female character who is difficult to like at times because of her manipulative nature and ferociousness. Love is at the center of this play, and it is shown in all of its darkness. Teodoro, who marries Diana in the end, fakes his nobility, treats Marcella abominably, and really likes the status attached to being with someone like Diana. It is difficult to say that there is a true happy ending to this play because the couple has to live a lie in order to make their relationship work. The RSC actors used the language fully and maintained a rapid pace, keeping me on my toes as I watched the recording. The actress who played Diana dug deep to connect with her emotions and exposed all of the character's feistiness and vulnerability at the same time. The minimal set and prop pieces focused attention on the acting, and the lighting enhanced the dark and light moods of the play. The focus on the language and acting was all that was needed to bring this piece to life. It was extremely entertaining, funny and provocative at the same time. The ending was perfect as it captured the tension filled finale that is so characteristic of Lope.

The next play I discussed was Sor Juana's *House of Desires* directed by Nancy Meckler . The biggest production challenge in this play is delivery of the long monologues. The piece could come across as both didactic (given the monologues) and confusing (given the numerous scenes and entrances and exits advancing the crazy storyline). The way that Ms. Meckler dealt with these challenges was to make of Sor Juana's play a truly metatheatrical experience that simultaneously paid great homage and tribute to the author.

The last play in this series was *Pedro the Great Pretender* by Cervantes, directed by Mike Alfreds. This play is so difficult because of its structural challenge, finding a dramatic arc. A great deal of pressure is placed on the actor playing Pedro because of his dominant role in the story. Also, there are several storylines or, rather, dramatic experiences that are difficult to connect except that they are all events that involve Pedro. As I tried to show in the textual analysis, *Pedro* is actually a very forward thinking play and points to Cervantes' genius. Alfreds gave this play an ensemble-type production with actors moving in and out of the action; this choice highlighted the joy and beauty of theatre and how it relates to our daily lives. There was something so communal about this production; it created a truly shared experience between audience and performers.

My investigation is very limited in that I am focusing on the work of the CNTC, using performances only directed and conceived by Eduardo Vasco. But in my exploration, there are certain patterns of performance and scenic representations that were consistent. As Marsillach, founder of the CNTC stated, there is a definite effort to develop a classical theatrical tradition in Spain. The biggest difference I see between the work with Vasco and Boswell, is that the Spanish productions evolve around a concept

and the British productions focus on preserving the text and using the language in all of its expressive capacities. For example in *Estrella*, a type of "Brechtian" approach placed this play in a modern business environment where corruption is rampant; this is a very contemporary and frightening issue for people today because of the current economic crisis. The staging or blocking was designed to create a disparate group of visual compositions. In *Pintor* each scene was like its own painting, with very deliberate movement by the actors to never throw off the "arrangement" in these works of art. The music was also used distinctly. Instead of using the music just as it is incorporated in the script (such as for a party), it was used to engender mood and scene changes. Furthermore, even though many of the actors have worked together for years, each performer developed his or her own style within a production. For example, in the plays that I saw, Daniel Albadalejo (the King in *Estrella* and Alvaro in *El pintor*) always possessed a cool and somewhat restrained manner in his performances regardless of the different characters that he played. Porcia and the Prince in *El Pintor* were very comic in their demeanor (voice and movement in particular) as compared to a more psychological and realistic mode embodied by the actors playing Alvaro, Serafina and Juan Roca. Their antics also defined the scene and responded to the scenic design. As I mentioned, the "love" scene between Porcia and the Prince looked like a balcony scene from a Disneyland movie. On this same note, the *graciosos* were totally removed from the flow of the play to completely stand out as very clown-like and ridiculous figures.

In keeping with the mission of the CNTC, Vasco aimed to create fresh, contemporary interpretations. One goal of these staged pieces is to pull in new audiences who have very little exposure to the Spanish Golden Age classics. Additionally, most

audiences in Spain are unaccustomed to hearing plays with elaborate language in verse. By creating a production concept that attempts to make a political, artistic or social comment, Vasco helps ground the spectators so that they can better understand the story. CNTC claims that it does not wish to turn these plays into museum pieces. I take this to mean that the company wants to let the texts stand for themselves based on their language and story. They have no other choice, really, simply because there is a lack of tradition and training as one finds in British classical theatre; in other words, there is no “museum” tradition in which these productions could participate. By generating a conceptually based performance, CNTC aims to revive the classics, reinventing them to a degree in the hopes of creating their own tradition and keeping these plays alive. The biggest problem that I saw, however, was the lack of consistency in the acting and the driving through with the concept. By either encouraging or letting actors perform to an individual style, there remains a lack of interaction between them, which leads to a lack of vitality in the entire production; there is a type of dead weight that hangs heavy, especially in *Alcalde*. The most successful production that I saw of the group was *Pintor* because it connected more of the elements and purposeful highlighted the incongruities in order to pair the beautiful with the *carnavalesque* aspect of the production.

The plays that I viewed from the 2004 Royal Shakespeare Company, influenced heavily by Laurence Boswell and his experience and direction, differed, but mostly because of the training tradition of classical actors that has been long established in Great Britain. There is a strong focus on language in this tradition. Actors know what different verse forms mean and how to use them to express the character’s intentions and mood. The sparseness of the stage setting emphasized the actors’ performances and other

theatrical elements. Instead of music, it was lighting that helped the audience to identify changes in mood and tone within and between the scenes. Music was used as if it were an integral part of the story. Again, in the plays that I saw, directors used dynamic stage movement in order to better establish the relationships between characters and an evenness in performance style. By “evenness in performance style,” I mean that the actors followed a similar pattern in delivering their lines and making their gestures; actors playing the most ridiculous characters bumped their expressiveness up a notch so as to distinguish themselves from the principal characters whose story was the main focus. This increased expressiveness also held true for actors playing the *gracioso* figures, who relied on the language and their interaction with the other actors to create nuanced and extremely funny and entertaining performances. In the end, however, there is such a strong sense of consistency that ties everything together. The combination of these elements kept the production united so that there was a flow and consistency even when the structure of the text inclined toward disjointedness. Finally, besides the ensemble work between director and actors, there was also collaboration between the director and translator/adaptor, dramaturg, scenic and lighting designers, musicians and audience members. In short, everyone seemed to be involved in the process. The result was a fully integrated final product that really made this season an overwhelming success, and the confidence of the people involved really shines through. Obviously, the work paid off because the RSC’s English-language performances triumphed in Madrid for Spanish speaking audiences that look at Lope in the way that English audiences looks at Shakespeare. Theatre practitioners in Great Britain paid a great deal of respect to the Golden Age playwrights, presenting their plays as close to the original as possible. One



reason for this choice is that the English artists understood what it means to have renowned playwrights as part of their national historical narrative. Also, the RSC had developed an actor training tradition that worked well with these texts; they had established a heritage of humanized poetry and an institution that audiences could trust for excellence. Finally, most of these plays are unknown in Great Britain. Because few people have seen them performed, there is no need to try and refresh them: their unfamiliarity makes them "new."

Production concepts played a central role in the CNTC's presentations of the plays. Although the CNTC champions language and actor training, it does not appear to have founded a strong tradition along these lines as yet. This may be less surprising than it appears at first, since it is not just actors and directors that have to establish a system for dealing with verse, but the audience, too, needs to be trained. One of the advantages to staging a piece based around a strong directorial concept is that it aids the audience in understanding the text, whose knowledge of the plays are mostly based on reading them and not seeing them. This reason, coupled with Vasco's desire to refresh the plays' familiar meanings, may have led to his decision to emphasize his concept. By contrast, three of the four RSC productions relied heavily on the performance of actors trained in classical Shakespearean verse and were designed for an audience whose ears are attuned to listening to such language. The productions were fast paced and it was easy to see and understand the influence of Mr. Boswell's theories and techniques in practice. The actors used the language to dig into the interiors of their characters, bringing them to life. Their use of language translated nicely into their gestures which would have appeared

exaggerated for a modern realistic play but corresponded perfectly with the tensions, fast pace and excitement that these classical plays elicited.

When I directed *Fuenteovejuna* I was very nervous about presenting a play in 17th century Spanish language for an audience that had little or no exposure to Spanish Golden Age plays. Additionally, it was challenging but extremely fun to work with actors from the language department who had little performance experience and even less in dealing with this type of language and verse. Therefore, we found it necessary to introduce a production concept that, I hoped, would aid the audience's comprehension: I used a series of images that flashed on screens, along with music and costume. For example, when the Comendador comes to town and expects to have all the food and resources given to him we flashed paintings of grotesque pictures of food and animals. During the torture scene of the townspeople we used images of prisoners being tortured in the Abu Ghraib prison. Another issue was how to make a King and Queen, who are characters in the play, modern and meaningful. In a sense they are meaningless for us, but in the text they serve as figureheads that keep everyone united and in a way they are always watching, like a Big Brother. I used mannequins donned in royal attire that were brought out at the beginning of the show; we placed these figures in the very center of the audience where there were two seats being held for them. The audience appreciated the visual and audio aids because they did not have a tradition that could assist them in understanding the story. Unfortunately, making this strong visual choice, there was little time for focusing on the plays' beautiful verse and poetry.

The one production in the 2004 RSC season that emphasized a directorial concept was Tirso de Molina's tragedy, *Tamar's Revenge* directed by Simon Usher. This play is

based on the Bible story of the children of King David. It focuses on the fall of the house of David through the malevolent behavior of his sons. Tamar is David's daughter, and the play concerns her brother's, Amnon's, sexual obsession with her. He is so consumed with illicit passion for his sister that he becomes physically ill. He finally accedes to his needs and brutally rapes Tamar who swears revenge. She avenges herself through her other brother, Absalom, who murders the elder Amnon in the country though his primary motivation is not vengeance but ambition because he wants David's crown. The director, Usher, decided to take a very abstract approach. The acting was extremely stylized and was not based on actors communicating with each other; rather the staging was very presentational with much of the dialogue delivered directly to the audience. There were also interesting costume choices. For example, towards the beginning of the play, Tamar and her friend were sitting in the hot garden of the palace at night pining for love. It is never indicated in the text that Tamar leads her brother on, but in the production she was scantily dressed in a black leather strapless bra and an extremely short skirt. The girls were also blindfolded to indicate that it was night and that they could not see anything, especially when Amnon came to spy on them. In many of the scenes the actors were placed so as to create a formal stage composition, sometimes geometrical, in order to highlight the abstract nature of the production. The presentation was interesting to watch but the pace was much slower and I did not find it as engaging as the other three RSC productions.

Clearly, there are various ways to present Spanish Golden Age dramas. For example, when Mr. Boswell went to Madrid to direct *Fuenteovejuna* for the Spanish company Rakatá in 2009, he used a very telling and visually striking set piece. On stage

was placed an enormous wooden bucket, the type that would go down into a well. The bucket would open and close, suggesting how the townspeople closed ranks and established their unity. Mr. Boswell acknowledged that it was a very different experience working with the Spanish actors because of their lack of training in verse. That same summer I saw a Japanese production by KSEC of *Fuenteovejuna*. This was the most extreme version of the play that I have seen; most of the text was cut, primarily because the Spanish audiences do not understand Japanese. The stage setting consisted of different types of wooden slats put together so that they looked like large oversized doors from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. They were set up like dominos, creating two lateral sides of a triangle with the base at the front of the stage. At the end of the play, when the town decides to kill the Comendador, these scenic units were knocked down, exposing the naked stage. In the meantime, since they were moveable, the actors were able to shift the positions of these “doors,” hiding behind them, making noise, and blocking the movement of other characters. Also, some had little windows that opened, allowing the audience to see only the actors’ faces. Because this fusion of actors with scenic elements underscored the theatricality of the event, it suggested both the “Brechtian” idea of “alienation” and the communal nature of theatre because it underscored the theatricality of the event. These choices tied the audience closer to the action.

I will be directing *Fuenteovejuna* in the spring of 2012 in Denver, Colorado using an English translation and trained actors. Because these actors are not trained in verse, I will attempt to introduce them to the work of Cicely Berry, who was highly recommended by Mr. Boswell. My plan is to use the techniques and theories that proved so successful in the RSC’s 2004 season. The most exciting aspect of this experience will

be exposing a U.S. audience to a play and a dramatic style with which they are unfamiliar. I will continue to use the images and other scenic elements that I previously incorporated into my 2010 production. I believe that Spanish Golden Age dramas are important and still vital, and that we need to create more dialogues around them by more frequently producing them. To this end, in August 2011 at the ATHE conference in Chicago, I will participate in a panel discussion of Golden Age scholars and enthusiasts. Our aim is to share our experiences in working with these texts in theatrical contexts so that we can further propagate their presentation. Speaking to Dr. David Johnston, Mr. Boswell expressed the idea that Spanish Golden Age plays are not museum pieces and that producers must make them again as enjoyable and immediate as they once were. Mr. Boswell states, "you have to be moved, you have to cry, you have to laugh, you have to feel the need to clap. That happened everyday in the Golden Age, and the Spanish public has to a very large extent lost that. That's what we're trying to bring back" (154).

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