

Comedia
Performance

Journal of
The Association for
Hispanic Classical Theater
Volume 10, Number 1, Spring 2013
www.comediaperformance.org

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

**Barbara Mujica, Editor
Box 571039
Georgetown University
Washington, D. C. 20057**

**Volume 10, Number 1
Spring 2013
ISSN 1553-6505**

CONTENTS

<i>Editor's Note</i>	1
<i>Antonio Regalado García: In Memoriam</i>	4
<i>Performance Studies</i>	
Calderon's <i>La vida es sueño</i> Meets Callaghan's <i>Fever/Dream: Adaptation and Performance</i> <i>Catherine Larson</i>	19
Water, Wine, and <i>Aloja</i> : Consuming Interests in the <i>Corrales de Comedias</i> 1600-1646 <i>Rachel Ball</i>	59
The Dancing of an Attitude: Inconstancy as Masculine Virtue in Lope de Vega's <i>El perro del hortelano</i> <i>Shifra Armon</i>	93
La elusión del vacío en <i>El médico de su honra</i> <i>Gabriel Villarroel</i>	119
Del enredo barroco al minimalismo bizarro: <i>Las bizzarrías de Belisa</i> y la renovación escénica de los clásicos <i>Esther Fernández</i>	153

Interview

Tirso's *Damned by Despair* at London's
National Theatre: An Interview with
Bijan Sheibani

Maryrica Ortiz Lottman 195

Theater Reviews 227

Book Reviews 244

***EL DESDÉN CON EL DESDÉN.* BY
AUGUSTÍN MORETO. DIRECTED BY HUGO
MEDRANO. THE TIVOLI THEATER, WASH-
INGTON D.C. SEPTEMBER 13-OCTOBER 7,
2012.**

KRISTIN CONNOR
University of Virginia

While not a comedy in the sense of the word that we understand it today, the genre of the *comedia* is still meant to be entertaining and may contain much humor; an aspect of the play that can be overlooked or underappreciated during a private reading of a *comedia*. However, the performance of Moreto's *El desdén con el desdén* by Teatro Hispano GALA brings this element of the play to the foreground with electrifying results. Their masterful production also visually signals the issues of sex and sexuality that otherwise remain only implied in the text. The end result is a strikingly modern-feeling play that still respects the original text.

Humor is an extremely important part of this production and begins from the first scene and crescendos to the last. In the first scene, the audience

first meets the servant of Carlos; the servant's name is Polilla, who represents the *gracioso*, and his comedic performance can easily steal the show and threaten to overshadow the likewise comedic performances of Carlos and the protagonist Diana. Polilla's humor is based on an approach not entirely dissimilar to The Three Stooges. His performance is body-based. His highly emotive facial expressions that change smoothly and effortlessly first draw the eye to Polilla, as well as his large, often exaggerated gestures, constant movement about the stage and his total body performance that makes it seem even his toes are in on the show. He is also fond of mimicking other characters, particularly the female ones and even Diana herself; he curls in on himself and pushes his shoulders forward in a feminine gesture of modesty, brings his hands close to his face as if pretending to be a mouse and speaks in an equally squeaky-mousy voice that is not meant to imitate Diana, but to reveal her ridiculousness. Polilla also engages in self-mockery and abuse, hitting himself in the face and on the head in comedic stooge-like moments. He also has moments of self-congratulation in which he struts about the stage. In another example of body humor, he disguises himself in order to win the trust of Diana and while his costume on top of costume, at first glance, seems to confer on him an air of respectability, it ends up being a mockery of the supposed intellectual superiority of the educated classes. His glasses and the fact that he carries about either a book or a writing

plume over-exaggerate the point and his fumbling with his wig draws attention to the meta-theatrical aspect of his disguise. In all of these attempts at humor, he is rewarded by laughter from the audience.

Just as funny are the performances by Carlos and Diana, though their humor is based less on bodily humor and more on wit and verbal play. However, Diana, in particular, is skilled at expressing her sarcasm and disdain with her sardonic facial expressions and disparaging tone of voice. Her wit is often expressed through sarcasm and the audience rejoices in this *mujer esquivia*. Carlos, too, is capable of comedy. He feigns disinterest in order to win the heart of Diana, but his macho façade is sometimes transparent to comedic ends. The juxtaposition of his cool, suave demeanor when dealing with Diana compared to his babbling, love stricken demeanor when alone with Polilla is highly entertaining. He goes weak at the knees and looks to his servant for guidance, advice, both emotional, and quite literally, physical support.

Another element this production brings visually to the stage is sex. The play takes place during Carnival, which is traditionally associated with bending the rules of propriety and, one could go so far as to say, lust. In the opening scene, we are reminded on the site of Carlos' body that conquering Diana is about love, but also sex. During his monologue in which he describes his passion for Diana and her continual refusal of suitors, he, by the by,

begins to undress down to his underwear. This on-stage striptease would be enough to suggest sex, but he then continues to undress and enters the bathtub on stage in the nude while Polilla holds up his cape to partially shield his master from the immodest gaze of the audience. Upon exiting the bathtub, he remains a while covered only by a towel before getting dressed again. This on stage dressing and undressing reminds the audience that despite the courtly flattery, sex is never out of mind.

Both Carlos and Polilla use body language and gestures to express sexuality. Polilla, when describing the conquest of love, wiggles his hips and uses pelvic gestures to make it known this conquest will end in the bed. Carlos also uses a similar tactic, when describing his "*ansia de verla*," referring to Diana, he gestures to his pelvic area underlining the idea of "anxiety," which becomes a euphemism for his sexual desire. In yet another moment, the two men are face to face, so close their noses touch and Polilla says "*¿Quieres besarme, señor?*"; a fleeting moment of homosexual referencing and desire in the play. These are all examples of not only how sex and sexuality are made visible, but also made humorous through the actor's performances.

In an equally amusing scene in the second act, Diana and three of her friends sing in their undergarments in Diana's private garden, hoping to attract the attention of Carlos. Their exaggerated facial expressions, gestures and statuesque poses make the audience laugh and their clothing makes

the actors on stage pine for the women, eliciting more laughter from the audience. While these undergarments are not particularly revealing or shocking for a modern audience, it is still understood that this is a moment of sexual desire. The maid, Laura, highlights the point by pulling down one of her sleeves to reveal her shoulder and upper arm, the loose drape of the fabric hinting at the fact that it might just slip a bit further and reveal her breast.

Indeed, clothing becomes the women's most provocative ally, especially for Diana. We first meet Diana in Act I dressed in black, with an extremely high neckline and absolutely no skin showing—not even her shoes can be seen as she walks. Her costume seeks to desexualize Diana while we see her reading and writing in her study and also to convey to the audience the impossibility of her chilly exterior ever being penetrated by love's arrow. Yet, after the scene-change, Diana re-emerges on stage in a white and purple iridescent gown, the neckline square and low, and her necklace pointing down toward her breasts that, if the neckline were just a few millimeters lower, would begin to show her bosom. Diana becomes sexualized, though not objectified. She maintains her character of *mujer esquivia* and perhaps even *mujer varonil* until the very last scenes. In her last costume change, Diana changes into a pink gown that shows a little more skin than the white gown, the neckline perhaps a bit wider, her arms showing through the transparent sleeves, and for the first time her shoes (and her an-

kles!) can be seen as she walks. Her pink gown is meant to connect her to Carlos who, in a previous scene, chose the color pink as the color of love. The pink gown symbolizes that she has fallen in love with Carlos, though she herself does not become conscious of it until almost the very last scene. And for a modern audience, of course, pink has become associated with Valentine's Day and reminds us of love as well.

This play could have been approached from another direction, highlighting the more serious aspects of the text, portraying the conquest of Diana in a negative light, or even making Polilla more of a fool than a comedic relief. However, the approach taken that puts sex, sexuality and humor front and center makes the viewing more light-hearted and allows the audience to leave fully satisfied with the ending. The result is an immensely entertaining and delightful production that bridges the past with the present. It is a production that grants access to another time through the lenses of the twenty-first century while allowing the modern audience to revel in stories from early modern Spain with the same enthusiasm as they may view more modern ones.