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Comedy, Foppery, Camp: Moreto's *El Lindo don Diego*

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In 1990, Francisco Portes brought his Teatro Pequeño to the Chamizal in El Paso and gave the audience his usual high quality performance of Moreto's *El lindo don Diego*. Those who attended the performance or have seen it on videotape know that Portes's portrayal of Diego was nothing less than magisterial. He minces, he scolds, he blusters, he fusses, completely obsessed with his appearance and his affect on others. Don Diego's entry scene established his character and the comic tone for the entire play. In it, Diego converses with a very straight-laced foil, Don Mendo, a much more typical *galán*. The more Diego says how his incredible physical beauty, enhanced by personal hygiene, clothing and other accoutrements, sends women into swoons, overcome by his masculine presence, the more Mendo, in both direct dialogue and asides, lets us know that he not only disbelieves Diego's claim to be a lady-killer, but he thinks that Diego is a mad, ridiculous, fool. Interestingly, Mendo, while trying to show Diego what a fool he thinks he is, buys into Diego's vocabulary, speaking of him in terms more typically uttered in the *comedia* by a man to or about a woman:

> Don Diego, tanto primor
> es ya estilo impertinente.
> Si todo el día se asea
> vuestra prolija porfía,
> ¿cómo os puede quedar día
> para que la gente os vea? (475-80)

'Primor,' 'asearse,' and 'prolija' are simply not words one associates with typical *galanes* in the *comedia*. Through the use of such words, Mendo attempts to control Diego with irony. Nevertheless, Mendo accepts that Diego's goal is to be seen and appreciated, but for his

beauty (like a woman) rather than for his strength or prowess, usually associated with men.

Diego could not be less influenced by Mendo's indirect criticism. Diego's response is to say (as he does repeatedly) that he is so attractive that he draws the attention of more women in one hour than Mendo does all day (483-84). There is even a note of idolatry in the way he describes himself in the same manner in which *galanes* idolize *damas*: "Pues es virtud más que aseo,/porque siempre que me veo me admiro y alabo a Dios" (494-96). He makes no bones about his all-consuming desire to appear "bien labrado y pulido" (498). Moreover, like familiar women characters, Diego prizes his '*desdén*' of those who fall for him; in a sense, he is an '*hombre esquivo*:'

> Yo a las necias no miro;
> y en las que yo logro el tiro
> sufren, como son discretas.
> Y aunque las mueva su fuego
> a hablar, callarán también,
> porque ven que mi desdén
> ha de despreciar su ruego. (518-24).

Naturally, this makes no sense to Mendo, who, like most '*comedia galanes*' would never turn down the offer of a woman who sought him out: "Mirad que eso es bobería/de vuestra imaginación" (529-30). When he finally dons his hat, he believes he is approaching perfection:

> El talle está de retablo;
> el sombrero va sereno:
> de medio arriba está bueno
> de medio abajo es el diablo. (585-88)

His praise of his appearance is interrupted only by his exaggerated reaction to the fact that one lace tie is a coin's width longer than the

other. When Mendo protests that the lace is meaningless, Diego responds, "Sólo con aquesta liga/cazo yo las hermosuras" (603-4).

Although Diego speaks frequently of his effect on women (482-84, 538-540, 551-52, 671-72), his success with women smacks more of self-satisfaction and his need to be the center of attention than it does with any real interest in the women he tries to seduce. Even Tirso's Don Juan, whose inability to maintain a stable relationship with one woman has been used as a marker for latent homosexuality, apparently really wanted to have sexual relations with his victims. Don Diego views women merely as reflections of his ability to attract them; his interest in women lies only in their capacity to serve as yet another mirror of his beauty. The very last thing he wants is to be enslaved ("¿queréis que me avasalle?" 526), which in Diego's mind is another way to describe having an actual relationship with a woman. Despite everything, Diego's egocentrism seems to be surpassed only by his cravenness. While he laments that all his beauty should be wasted on a cousin, he is willing to go through with this marriage because she is wealthy and therefore worthy of his attention (643-44, 650).[1]

The Chamizal audience laughed at Portes's magisterial portrayal of Don Diego, but it was not until the next morning that the extent to which Portes had presented a truly disturbing characterization was revealed. During a discussion session with the actors, more than one (straight, male, Spanish) spectator took issue with the characterization of the title character. Although it was clearly a successful portrayal, judging from audience response, those opposed to Portes's Diego claimed that he was violating historical accuracy with his mincing, effeminate actions. Moreover, they said that it also violated the logic of the text, for what woman would be attracted to such a *maricón*? The argument seemed to turn on whether or not Portes had remained

1. Heiple (311) astutely notes that the reference to '*prima*,' as well as Mosquito's subsequent reference to '*bordón*,' also refer to the highest and lowest-pitched guitar strings. Thus, Mosquito "suggests that Don Diego would better be served by something more substantial, the bass string."

faithful to the character of Diego as Moreto wrote him. While reasonable people can certainly disagree about Moreto's intention (especially since there is no way to verify it), there is no doubt that Portes used the words Moreto wrote.

Moreover, this scene is far from the only one that might hint at alternate sexuality in the play. Later in the same act, Diego responds to the courtesy shown him by Don Tello by remarking to Mosquito: "¡Hola! Por Dios, que también/se me ha enamorado el viejo" (865-66). Toward the end of Act II, Diego tells Juan that if he wants to marry Inés, he will gladly yield to love. He is taken with Juan: "vuestra bizarría/me ha enamorado" (1856-57), a sentence that demonstrates the manner in which Diego has or wishes to have a real, homosocial relationship with Juan.[2] Perhaps what those who protested the performance were missing was the camp aspect of Portes's portrayal that is common to numerous *comedias*. Or, perhaps, they did not miss a bit of it, and were profoundly disturbed, if not offended, by the queer portrayal of Diego.

The disapproval of Portes's performance followed to the letter the criticism of fops in English Restoration comedy, and there is little doubt that much of the humor in *El lindo don Diego* comes from the protagonist's foppery. Diego shares many characteristics with his English counterpart. This standard seventeenth-century figure, to be reincarnated in the nineteenth century as the dandy,[3] exhibits a

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2. The term 'homosocial' to describe the tight, powerful relationships between men that usually but not always involve the exchange of women was popularized by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in *Between Men*. See especially pp. 1-10.

3. Among the ways in which the nineteenth-century dandy is quite different from the seventeenth and eighteenth-century fop is the dandy's anarchism; "he rejects all rules and all norms." (Botz-Bornstein 285). At the same time, continues Botz-Bornstein (286-87), the dandy lacks enthusiasm; he is a hypocrite, respecting and subverting the rules of society at the same time. Both the fop and the dandy play games with social norms, but the dandy's game is more serious, and the stakes are higher, since he, unlike the fop, has been informed by Sade and Hegel. On the dandy and game-playing, see Botz-Bornstein 286-89. Godfrey also notes the dandy's social alienation and its relationship to the Romantic artist, a stance not at all developed in the earlier fops.

relatively uniform set of traits: he is vain; his emphasis is on external style rather than internal substance; he is, as Norman Holland put it, "all outside, no inside" (102); he produces nothing. He is overly concerned, if not obsessed, with his appearance, notably his clothing and accessories and especially his appearance in a mirror. In this regard, he is an exhibitionist, constantly calling attention to himself and his appearance. He sets himself up as the arbiter of good taste, but he has affected speech and manners, is condescending, and, even worse, Frenchified, which came through clearly not only in Portes's portrayal of Diego but in the costumes he chose for his production as well. He loathes ugliness, bad smells, bad manners, and anything that offends his sensibilities. Because of his scrupulous attention to appearance, he considers himself more attractive than other men. Indeed, more than in just appearance, he considers himself generally superior to others; he is a snob. He loves gossip.

In general, the fop is good natured and an addition to social groups, especially groups of women. Despite his occasional rumbles of bravura, however, he has a delicate constitution. He is not considered dangerous or evil, nor does he carry out the actions familiar to male protagonists: murder, rape, abduction, or theft. Rarely does a fop insist on a fight; rather he is generally complaisant, even passive, preferring the company of women, spending his time dancing, singing, and gossiping, all of which are traditionally considered to be feminine interests. While he may have been a fool, he was also a faithful representative of the excesses of the society, particularly court society, of his day, and part of the reason he was entertaining was because the audience could recognize in him the foibles and foolishness they could see in the artificial, hypocritical world around them.[4]

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4. This list of foppish characteristics is derived from the following sources: Staves 413-17, 421, 425; Botz-Bornstein 285-86; Godfrey 23, and Heilman 364, 366, 388, 394n. Regarding the relationship between theater and real life, Staves (419) notes that there were indeed real fops who have been described in history, especially in France and England.

There is little doubt that Diego qualifies as a fop. The very use of the word '*lindo*' to describe the title character could very well be translated as 'fop.' Lest there be any confusion about the contemporary meaning of '*lindo*,' the *Diccionario de autoridades* notes not only that it is the typical clothes-horse fop ("que cuida demasiado de su compostura y aseo") but that in addition, or as a result, he is "el hombre afeminado."[5] The fact that Diego is not a *gracioso* but a nobleman allows for considerable complexity in interpretation. His foolishness is not so easily dismissed. Through this character, Moreto demonstrates, as Heilman put it in discussing the English counterparts (392), "that his attitude toward his society is ambiguous, and that this frees his imagination to construe the butt of the age as more than an object of derision."

Those who protested Diego's effeminacy aligned themselves with critics of Restoration comedy in their rejection of even the slightest hint of homosexuality in the character of Diego. Several critics, especially Staves and Heilman, seem to go out of their way to argue that, "though fops are in various ways effeminate, they are rarely presented as homosexual. On the contrary, they are asexuals who like to spend their time with the ladies" (Staves 414). Staves continues, "there is no necessary connection between foppery and male homosexuality" (415). In a footnote, Staves brings sociology to bear by scrupulously insisting upon the difference between homosexual behavior and homosexual roles (reminding one, as conservative politicians do today, that homosexual activity is different from one's identity). She continues, "the emphasis in most plays seems to me to be on the fop's lack of strong sexual appetite rather than on any

5. Heilman (363-64) notes the English synonyms for fop: coxcomb, beau, butterfly, dandy, fashion-plate, lightweight, sad sack, drip, jerk, idiot, nut, flake, sissy, pop-off, show-off, phony, smart-ass and affected man of taste. In all the fop is a social-vanguard exhibitionist and the embodiment of *vanitas vanitatum*. For Heilman (364), all the terms used to describe a fop "have in common an intention to point out an inferior mode of being, inferior to the user's own mode or to some established norm." Heiple (305-9) gives additional references from Golden Age sources that shed light on the meaning and uses of '*lindo*.'

suggestion of homosexuality or bisexuality" (415). At the same time, Staves also underscores the contrast the fop provides to the rake or, in terms of the *comedia*, the '*galán*:' his passivity causes the virility of the 'normal' man to shine (422). Likewise, Heilman notes that in only the rarest instances is the word 'fop' assigned to a "clearly identified homosexual" (364).

Oddly, the same criticism of the fop that highlights his lack of homosexuality, also points out that he is essentially marginalized, if not anathematized, by society. As a fool in the person of a courtly snob, the fop's lot is to abused, ridiculed, scorned, laughed at, rejected, and dismissed (see Heilman 389). As an object of social criticism, one can believe Staves when she asserts (419-20) that attacks on foppery were manifestations of the conservative, even reactionary, protest against the feminization of the masculine roles that occurred in seventeenth-century court society. Fops also provided for additional moral criticism of vanity and of foreignness (especially all things French; Staves 428). In addition, one might also note the implicit criticism of nobility and court society. Since clothes were symbols of one's social rank, and since only the nobility had the resources and the desire to indulge an exaggerated sense of fashion, the appearance of a foolish fop provided for a good laugh at the expense of the nobility in general. As Staves says, "Foppery was an unusual vice in that in its purer forms it was the monopoly of the rich" (427). Finally, Staves (420) notes that fops represent the "avant-garde of sex role change." They may have been ridiculed in their own time, but we, especially those of us attuned to issues of gender identity and sexual orientation, can look to the fop as a literary precursor. Why could this not also be a reaction to a possible homosexuality bubbling up to the surface and thus visible to other members of the society?

Clearly, foppery, like dandyism later, is an exercise in irony; the fop is at once grand and foolish, impeccable and sinful, attractive and repulsive (see Godfrey 24, 26). He is both outsider and consummate insider (Heilman 393), which is an apt description of many modern

gay people, especially in the service trades: decorators and hair stylists who have the absolute confidence of the power brokers of society but who are considered abject outsiders in the social hierarchy. Consider the universal condemnation of Diego by other characters. Diego is most definitely noble, reasonably intelligent, and witty, traits frequently praised in other characters. As an example of Diego's wit, one can note that when Juan speaks of hitting the target (*blanco*), Diego says he rarely hits the target because he abhors white (893-84). Nevertheless, all the other characters are quick to state their disdain for him, even their contempt. Diego's entrance is postponed not only so that he can make the greatest impact possible, but also to allow for our perception of him to be colored by the (negative) opinions of others.

From the beginning Tello comments, "Su gala y su bizarría/es cosa de admiración;/de Burgos es el blasón" (45-47). '*Gala*' and '*bizarría*' could merely refer to his outstanding masculine traits. Still, although they are not uniquely feminine, these particular terms are frequently applied to women characters. '*Blasón*' can mean 'honor' or 'glory' but it might also have a different meaning: Diego is the talk of Burgos. What does that mean? Just what is Tello saying? Mosquito, who as '*gracioso*' has greater freedom to speak the truth, is more to the point, as he demonstrates in his lengthy speech, 313-86:

> Es lindo el don Diego, y tiene
> más que de Diego de lindo.
> El es tan rara persona,
> que, como se anda vestido,
> puede en una mojiganga
> ser figura de capricho. (315-20)

Remembering the definitions of '*lindo*' as 'effeminate,' Mosquito is in effect saying that Diego is more woman than man. Although Mosquito occasionally flatters his master by mentioning his beauty (*beldad*, 2157), he can also produce at will a long and comical laundry

list of Diego's obsessions (321-86). Diego overwhelms the senses with his fastidiousness in both dress and hygiene; his principal obsession is his appearance: his clothes, his hair, his style. Mosquito mentions that Diego suffers greatly to look perfect: "anda descoyuntado/del tormento del vestido" (327-28). He wears a headdress for his hair while he gets dressed, he spends three hours adjusting his laces, and three more in combing his hair while looking at himself in the mirror like Narcissus.

There is no doubt Mosquito has little respect for this gentleman, as he condescendingly compares him to a Jew, a horse (and later, 1047, '*rocín*'), and a mule. He is a fool, but '*entendido*' (340). This last important word of description brings us up a bit short. Since it becomes ever clearer that Diego is not intelligent or well educated, or even understands his effect on others, it is hard to imagine that Mosquito thinks Diego to be '*entendido*' in the sense of 'astute' or 'wise.' Perhaps rather, even for audiences in Moreto's day, '*entendido*' had the same occult meaning it does today: gay.[6]

Throughout the play, others echo Mosquito's original assessment. When Diego finally meets Inés and Leonor, there is another opportunity for people to describe their first reactions to this eccentric man. (The way the play is structured, one gets the idea that at least half the comedy of the play is based on these initial reactions.) "Qué hombre, ¡cielos!, es aqueste/tan torpe, exquisito y necio?" remarks Inés (833-34), to which Diego responds to Mosquito that Inés has fallen madly in love with him. When Isabel, a maid, sees Diego for the first time, she exclaims, "¡Jesús, qué extraña figura!" (1647-48). For Leonor, Diego is too much a '*galán*' ("lo sois con tanto extremo," 854); as a result, the foolish Diego also believes that Leonor has fallen for him as well. As noted earlier, even Tello cannot escape his

6. Heiple does not believe that one can necessarily assume that '*entendido*' had a meaning akin to the modern 'gay' in Golden Age Spain. However, he does assert, "It is difficult to find a meaning for '*entendido*' in this passage other than that of male homosexual that would make a good joke" (312).

better bullfighter in Burgos; bulls tremble at his name (1728). Mosquito, too, tries hard not to laugh out loud (1744). Diego is sure that the countess is falling for him (1755). Later (1851), he says that four hundred local ladies hope to marry him.

After all has been said and done by and regarding Diego, it is surprising that the end of the play marginalizes Diego to such a remarkable degree. Since, as a *comedia,* it must end with promising heterosexual marriages, Diego really has no role. Diego exits on line 2418, and does not return again until 2985, and then only to make remarks to the audience '*al paño*' until 3038, when he finally enters just in time for the final climax of the intrigue and the dénouement. He continues to amuse with his insistence on the power of his 'talle' (3052). When Juan speaks to Beatriz as a servant, Diego muses, "Más señora es ella que ellas,/lo que va de mí a un cochero" (3092).

Actually, there is some indication that he is less respected than a hard-working coachman. As punishment for his folly, his foppery, he is excluded from the happy ending as the final marriages are arranged: Juan and Inés, Mendo and Leonor, even Mosquito and Beatriz. Diego is to be denied the hands of both Inés and, of course, the 'countess.' He is not permitted entrance into the stable, heterosexually married society: "el castigo más severo/deste necio es que la pierda" (3160-61). He not only loses Inés, but he also loses social position, fortune, and hope for success at court. Mosquito's final pronouncement assures us that we, as members of the audience, are pleased with the result: "Y castigado este necio/a gusto de los oyentes" (3196-97).

The previously mentioned assertion of the heterosexuality, or, at worst, asexuality, of foppish characters, at least in the *comedia,* is misleading. It would simply not have been possible to present openly gay characters without having them roundly condemned, and more likely killed, even burned at the stake, by the final curtain. One of the lessons of the recent rethinking of older literature in light of queer theory is the idea that one must necessarily look at secondary or tertiary meanings of words and actions to tease out what gay content

there might have been. After all, anything that might appeal to a gay sensibility would have to lie hidden enough to evade the scrutiny of the censors. Of course, 'gay' should not necessarily be taken in a literal, late twentieth-century meaning; Diego is not a 'gay' character in the sense that he is an avowed homosexual or in any sense even approximating one. Rather, the purpose of this reading of *El lindo don Diego*, as informed by Portes's production, is to relate the irony, disdain, marginalization, and humor of Don Diego specifically to his foppery as a marker for a possible homosexuality. The creation of a character that can be at once threatening and comic is at the heart of yet another theatrical type that prizes style over content: camp (Sontag 115). Hall explicitly links camp to dandyism, the Victorian version of foppery (77); in all three cases gay culture (defined loosely in earlier periods) has been able to extract aesthetic value and humor even at its own expense through camp (foppish) characters that play both as characters of scorn in the larger society and characters of great wit and humor to those on the inside, the '*entendidos*.'

Camp has been defined in many ways, but almost all of them include the following characteristics: irony, incongruity, masquerade, aestheticism, theatricality, humor, exaggeration, and an inversion of the important and the trivial (it is more important what one looks like than what one is, and how something is done is more important that what is done).[8] According to Jack Babuscio (23), "camp emphasizes style as a means of self-projection, a conveyor of meaning, and an expression of emotional tone." For Babuscio, style is never natural, but always acquired. Moreover, it is an urban rejection of the anonymity, boredom, and socializing tendencies, which I would call enforced conformity, of the larger society. "Camp aims to transform the ordinary into something more spectacular" (Babuscio 23). The Other is clearly marked for containment. In contrast, camp involves not just accepting but embracing the Other.

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8. For definitions of camp, see Babuscio 20-29; Newton 46-49; Long 79, 88-90; Bergman 94, 99; Ross 63.

Straight society inevitably associates camp with one of the showier manifestations of gay culture, namely drag. Although in some circles it is undifferentiated from drag, camp, despite some common misperceptions by outsiders, is by no means synonymous with it. Of course, drag can be camp, but not all drag responds to the same demands of gay culture. As Judith Butler has noted, there are many kinds of drag, including "forms of drag that heterosexual culture produces for itself" (126). As examples, she notes Julie Andrews in *Victor, Victoria*, Dustin Hoffmann in *Tootsie*, and Jack Lemmon in *Some Like It Hot.* In these instances, Butler asserts that:

> The anxiety over a possible homosexual consequence is both produced and deflected within the narrative trajectory of the films. These are films which produce and contain the homosexual excess of any given drag performance, the fear that an apparently heterosexual contact might be made before the discovery of a nonapparent homosexuality (126).

At that same time that the heterosexual audience is reveling in the absurdity of a possible homosexuality, however, it is quite true that the homosexual audience seeing the same theatrical event sees itself, and that self-identification registers as validation. Even such egregiously grotesque visions of homosexuality as *Staircase*, with Richard Burton and Rex Harrison, and *Boys in the Band*, were seen by throngs of gay men when the movie played in theaters. So strong is the notion of "seeing oneself" on stage that even a negative portrayal can be viewed as a kind of success in a conservative culture when there are no other representations of one's identity for one to latch onto. The same has largely been true for the drag queen. Certainly not every gay person who has cheered on a drag performance either is a transvestite or has transvestites as the objects of his desire. But, especially several decades ago, when the only representations of gayness one could find were drags, then drags received the ovation, even the gratitude, of the gay audience. Again, of course, drag is not

the same as camp. Esther Newton notes, "the drag queen simply expresses the incongruity while the camp actually uses it to achieve a higher synthesis" (45). To return to Butler's film references, there is a considerable difference between the cases of *Victor, Victoria* and *Tootsie*, on the one hand, and *Some Like it Hot*, on the other, and the difference lies in the nature of the performance. While Jack Lemmon and his male character completely embrace his role as Daphne,[9] Julie Andrews and Dustin Hoffman and their characters clearly use cross-dressing for comedic effect without ever relinquishing the basic heterosexuality of the underlying (biological) character. The latter performances are thus not particularly campy.

Consider another play performed at the Chamizal, Sor Juana's *Los empeños de una casa*, presented in 1986 by the Grupo de Teatro de Seguros Sociales de México. In Act III of Sor Juana's magisterial comedy, Castaño disguises himself as a woman in order to take a letter to Don Rodrigo without being identified. Much of the humor comes from Castaño's enthusiastic description of the feminine clothes he adorns and his perception of the way men will react to him. In his long soliloquy, Castaño first looks at the clothes lent to him by Doña Leonor and supposes that he will be the prettiest woman in Toledo ("¿habrá en Toledo tapada/que a mi garbo se parezca?" 2417-18). He frets over the possible danger of allowing even a single tress of hair visible to passing men, using a diminutive form more typical of the speech of feminine characters:

> Lo primero, aprisionar
> me conviene la melena,
> porque quitará mil vidas
> si le doy tantica suelta. (2421-24)

He waxes enthusiastic about the quality of the fabric of his clothes (2430), declaring that blue goes well with his dark complexion,

9. For a convincing study of Jack Lemmon's Daphne as successful camp, see Sikov, 99-103.

describing himself with a feminine adjective in the process ("como soy morena/me está del cielo lo azul" 2432-33). At one point, he cannot contain his enthusiasm for his new appearance, addressing the women of the audience directly:

> ¿Qué les parece, señoras,
> este encaje de ballena?
> Ni puesta con sacristanes
> pudiera estar más bien puesta.
> Es cierto que estoy hermosa.
> ¡Dios me guarde, que estoy bella! (2451-56).

At the end of his lengthy description of his transformation into a '*dama*,' Castaño puts the final camp touch on his drag by noting the very theatricality of it:

> Dama habrá en el auditorio
> que diga a su compañera:
> "Mariquita, aqueste bobo
> al Tapado representa."
> Pues atención, mis señoras,
> que es paso de la comedia;
> no piensen que son embustes
> fraguados acá en mi idea. (2479-86)

(Is it just a coincidence that he invokes a certain "*Mariquita*," a common term used by gay men in Spain today to talk about each other?) It is not just that he has been transformed into a beautiful lady that is important to him. He also believes that his mere presence will cause men's hearts to flutter:

> ¿quién duda
> que en el punto que me vean
> me sigan cuatro mil lindos
> de aquestos que galantean
> a salga lo que saliere,

y que a bulto se amartelan,
no de la belleza que es,
sino de la que ellos piensan? (2489-96).

Here, too, there is plenty here that can be marked as camp: the overt theatricality; the character's reveling in the change of signifier from masculine to feminine; the reference to fops ('*lindos*') as his pursuers, thus underscoring the obvious homosexuality of his assertion; and the additional irony of the servant playing a lady.

Castaño marks the Other in a number of ways: his status as a servant and therefore relatively incidental to the major characters and the normalized heterosexuality of the plot, and, at least in this 1986 production, the actor's refusal to "act like a woman" just because he is dressed like a woman, preferring instead to present a caricature of a woman on the one hand and a masculinized parody of a woman on the other. Ironically, his drag performance is remarkably not campy. On the one hand, it is hilarious to see this masculine servant clomping around in a dress, just as it is funny to see Robin Williams suffer endless travails as Mrs. Doubtfire. Indeed, most of the humorous drag in the *comedia* can indeed be presented in a similar fashion: funny, but not threatening in the sense that boundaries between male and female, or masculine and feminine, have been seriously crossed. Let us note, however, that much of this approach to a character is under the control of the director and the actor. Despite the campy elements found in the text itself, it is clear that this actor playing Castaño is trying very hard to maintain his masculinity even while dressed in a lady's clothing.[10]

By contrast, the portrayal of Don Diego, who does not appear in women's clothing, is great camp. Why? Drag implies and even highlights the distance between the actor and the role (Newton 45). In *El lindo don Diego*, however, while Mendo thinks that Diego is a fop

10 For those who are not familiar with the production, a videotape of the production is available in the archive of the Association for Hispanic Classical Theater.

or a fool, Diego rejects or at least dismisses such accusations. He has completely appropriated unto himself the fastidious, and stereotypically feminine, aspects noted earlier. The essence of Portes's portrayal is the fusion, or at least the confusion, of the socially defined sex roles, of the signified and the signifier, of the otherness that must, in Butler's words, be relegated to the abject if one is to be accepted in normative society. Unlike Castaño, this Diego has not aligned himself, even for comic purposes, with the social expectations for males exemplified by Mendo. He is manifestly proud of his actions and demeanor, and, in fact, considers himself greatly superior to the normal brutish '*galanes*' around him. That inner dignity, even though it is humbled at the end of the play, is essential to the camp portrayal of Diego. Without it, Diego is merely overbearing and intensely annoying.

At the same time, there is also a very different quality to the humor of these portrayals of Castaño and Diego. The 1986 Castaño derives his humor by essentially making himself the butt of the joke, the typical situation of a straight man in a dress. In this case, even the man portraying the woman allies himself with other men in their derision of the loss of stature and social power that accompanies the shift from masculine to feminine. It's all a joke, and we are not expected to take his cross-dressing seriously. While some forms of gay camp are also carried out just for the joke, for the most part there is a seriousness to most camp performance. The character Diego, as opposed to Portes the actor, by no means intends that his careful attention to his appearance should be construed as funny. Rather than placing himself on the side of Mendo, and thus looking at his own performance as other, he fully believes in the character he creates (and here I refer not just to the character created by Portes but that created by Diego as well).

Portes's extravagance goes beyond the simple us-versus-them of the man in a dress to broach larger questions familiar to *comedia* audiences: reality versus appearance, being versus role-playing, and

life as a theater, the very same themes cited by Babuscio as central to camp. "Camp," Babuscio continues, "by focusing on the outward appearances of role, implies that roles, and, in particular, sex roles, are superficial –a matter of style. Indeed, life itself is role and theater, appearance and impersonation" (24). These are serious issues. Like much of the comedy in the *comedia*, camp does not dismiss the serious. Indeed, the serious is absolutely essential to camp comedy (Babuscio 28). As one of Christopher Isherwood's characters asserted in *The World in the Evening*, "You can't camp about something you don't take seriously; you're not making fun of it; you're making fun out of it" (quoted in Babuscio 29).

Finally, Babuscio underscores artificiality as a most important strategy for forcing an audience to question its assumptions about society and its inhabitants" (29), and we who study the *comedia* are used to finding serious issues lurking just beneath the surface. The humor in Portes's portrayal of Diego does partake in the us-versus-them role, but it does not stop there. It leads us on to consider the situation of a truly foppish or effeminate man rather than an obviously heterosexual man in a dress. As a result, it is a much dicier proposition. While straight men can laugh at the absurd appearance of Castaño in a dress, Don Diego's fastidiousness and foppishness strikes home at a much more serious, perhaps even threatening, level.

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