

***Diversifying the Classics:* The First Ten Years**

Barbara Fuchs

University of California, Los Angeles, USA

Abstract Launched in 2014, the *Diversifying the Classics* project at the University of California is dedicated to promoting Golden Age theatre primarily by producing translations of plays not yet available in English. This contribution illustrates the group's working method: collaborative versions, refined through workshops and constant interaction with theatre professionals, designed for performance and subsequently published both in open access and in paperback. The main focus is on an alternative idea of theatrical canon that highlights tensions of gender, caste and geopolitical origin.

Keywords Diversifying the Classics. Theatre translation. Spanish Golden Age drama. Reception. Literary canon.

Since 2014, the *Diversifying the Classics* project (DTC) at the University of California, Los Angeles, has been promoting Hispanic *comedia* in translation, in adaptation, and in the original Spanish. The project includes a wide range of activities, from theater festivals and commissioned adaptations to k-12 outreach and translation. For the purposes of this volume, I will focus on our translation activities.

Our “Working Group on the *Comedia* in Translation and Performance” has several unique features:

- We produce collaborative translations, jointly achieved by a team of faculty and graduate students, with occasional collaboration from undergraduates and theater professionals.
- We translate specifically for performance, aiming for texts that serve actors and directors on stage.

We work closely with theater artists as we refine the translations.

- We select plays that productively complicate ideas of Spain and that we hope will resonate with audiences today.
- While we do not preserve the source-text's verse, we produce a heightened vernacular that is both resonant and easy for modern audiences to understand.
- Translations are complemented by supporting materials such as introductions, dramaturgy packets, and pronunciation guides, all aimed at theatermakers.
- We are committed to open access, and post every translation on our website in addition to publishing it in book form.

Let me address each of these in turn. First and foremost, collaboration: we begin by dividing the source text into sections and assign it to groups of two or three. After translating and workshopping in their small groups, the translators bring the result to the larger workshop of 12-15 people. There, we take the translation apart and put it back together again, with special attention to misprision, lines that would be too hard to say on stage, and other possible pitfalls. Suggestions are offered seriatim until there is general agreement on a solution. We also make a special effort to preserve humor (even if the pun or specific joke must change) and any reference to the body or other spatial or emotional cues for actors. The occasional presence of theater professionals in the workshop is particularly helpful, and we supplement this resource with visiting speakers, such as directors and voice coaches. Our three-hour sessions in essence provide multiple rounds of real-time editing, as the translation is increasingly refined. Once we have completed a translation (our usual timeline is October-June), we hold table reads to ensure that the language flows well, characters speak with a consistent voice, and so forth.

The next step before publication online or in print is to (re)engage theater artists in further refining our translations. For our first few forays, we collaborated with Professor Michael Hackett of UCLA's Department of Theater, who directed a staged reading of our most recent translation with the incoming class of MFA (Master of Fine Arts) acting and directing students each fall. Members of DTC attended rehearsals and served as dramaturgs, paying special attention to any lines that seemed to give actors trouble (pronunciation, syntax) or that remained opaque despite our best efforts; we then fine-tuned the translations both during the rehearsal process and after the staged reading. Since 2020, we have collaborated with Red Bull Theater in New York in a similar model. In this case, Red Bull hires a director and a seasoned professional cast of classically trained actors, who rehearse for a few hours before offering a staged reading both live for the New York audience and streamed for a few days for viewers everywhere. We endeavor to have at least one member of DTC on site

to attend the day of rehearsal, and we all watch the streamed staged reading, so as to make the same kinds of edits and corrections to our translation before it is posted and published.

How do we select the plays we translate? We explicitly set out to challenge prevailing stereotypes about Spain's conservatism and the supposedly reactionary values of Hispanic classical theater (Fuchs 2016). We thus choose plays that foreground female agency, challenges to the gender system, and reflections on the constructedness of social roles, among other possibilities. Guillén de Castro's *The Force of Habit* (*La fuerza de la costumbre*), for example, raised key questions about gender identity and its fluidity, while Lope de Vega's *The Widow of Valencia* (*La viuda valenciana*) or *The Beast of Hungary* (*El animal de Hungría*) offer frank and largely positive visions of female sexuality. We are especially interested in plays by women and those from the Americas – Sor Juana thus checks all our boxes.

Because we focus on plays for which no published translation into English is available, we feel a responsibility to translate every line, and preserve most allusions. At the same time, we encourage directors, in consultation with us, to cut freely, put Spanish back into the text, and otherwise adapt our translations to the circumstances of their production. We translate into a heightened contemporary vernacular that we lay out to roughly match the original lines, although most of our translation is in fact prose. We translate into verse only for moments when the source text emphasizes the poetic, such as a sonnet. In those cases, the workshop produces a first-pass prose translation, and one of the published poets among our members then crafts a final version in verse. Our overall goal is language that has a classical flavor but that is nonetheless easy for contemporary audiences to grasp, in an era when any performance without subtitles, even for contemporary material, is increasingly at a disadvantage. For actors, we include a pronunciation guide (in print and also a recorded version online) that includes names of characters and places, as well as unfamiliar mythological figures. We try to preserve names in the original Spanish, unless there is a reason to translate them. For example, Sor Juana's *Amor es más laberinto* includes Atún and Racimo ("bunch of grapes", servant to Bacchus), which we translated as "Tuna" and "Vinny" to ensure that the humor remained legible.

The translations are complemented by a general introduction to *comedia*, which appears in all of them, and a more specific introduction to the play, geared towards theater professionals and generally co-written by two of the translators. We have also produced dramaturgy packets for a number of the plays. Designed to assist in performance, these include character maps, historical context, themes, and more. All of our translations are posted as PDFs to our open-access website (<http://diversifyingtheclassics.humanities.ucla.edu/>) for anyone to download freely. They are

subsequently published in a dedicated series of paperbacks from Juan de la Cuesta Press (Newark, Delaware). The series also includes other translations that align with our goals, whether by members of the collective working individually or in smaller groups, or by talented translators unaffiliated with us, as in the case of Dakin Matthews. DTC edits all those other translations line by line to ensure that they meet the same standards as our collectively produced ones.

Our translations (available open-access online or in print from Juan de la Cuesta Press):

Lope de Vega, *The Widow of Valencia* (2018)
Lope de Vega, *A Wild Night in Toledo* (2018)
Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, *What We Owe Our Lies* (2018)
Guillén de Castro, *The Force of Habit* (2019)
Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *To Love Beyond Death* (2021)
Ana Caro, *The Courage to Right a Woman's Wrongs* (2021)
Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Love is the Greater Labyrinth* (2023)
Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, *The Pretender, or A Man Beside Himself* (2023)
Guillén de Castro, *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (2025)
Lope de Vega, *The Beast of Hungary* (forthcoming 2025)

Other translations published in our series (some available in print only):

Translated by Barbara Fuchs:

Lope de Vega, *Women and Servants* (2016)

Translated by Laura Muñoz and Veronica Wilson:

Guillén de Castro, *Unhappily Married in Valencia* (2018)

Translated by Dakin Matthews:

Agustín Moreto, *It Can't Be Done* (2021)
Lope de Vega, *The Capulets and the Montagues* (2021)
Lope de Vega, *The Actor and the Emperor* (2021)
Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *One House, Many Complications* (2021)
Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *The English Schism* (2021)
Tirso de Molina, *Don Juan, The Trickster of Seville* (2022)
Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Coriolanus, or The Weapons of Loveliness* (forthcoming)
Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, *The Proof of the Promise* (forthcoming)

Bibliography

Fuchs, B. (2016). "Rethinking the Black Legend and the Golden Age Dramatic Canon".
Rodríguez Pérez, Y.; Sánchez Jiménez, A. (eds), *La Leyenda Negra en el crisol de la comedia. El teatro del Siglo de Oro frente a los estereotipos antihispánicos*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 219-36.