

Academics in Practice: Moving Beyond Appreciation

Erin Alice Cowling, Ana Karen Rodas Garza

NOTICE: This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Cowling, Erin Alice, Ana Karen Rodas Garza; Academics in Practice: Moving Beyond Appreciation. *Comedia Performance* 1 June 2022; 19 (1): 70–84, which has been published in final form at <http://dx.doi.org/10.5325/comeperf.19.1.0070>.

Permanent link to this version <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14078/3046>

License All Rights Reserved

Academics in Practice: Moving Beyond Appreciation

Erin Alice Cowling, MacEwan University

Ana Karen Rodas Garza, MacEwan University

ABSTRACT

In this short article, a professor and her student reflect on an ongoing project that brings them into close contact with theatrical adaptations. They discuss the ups and downs of working closely with Sor Juana's *Los empeños de una casa* and Mexican actor Fernando Villa Proal of EFE TRES Teatro throughout the pandemic that started in early 2020 and has extended long into 2021. The piece also includes interview materials from theater practitioners who are interested in the overlap between theater and research. These are just some of the conclusions and suggestions that they have arrived at throughout this process, with an aim to bring academic and artistic practices into closer alignment.

KEYWORDS

reviews, theater, practice, appreciation, Sor Juana

The Association for Hispanic Classical Theater, the non-profit organization out of which *Comedia Performance* was founded, was “chartered ... in 1984 to promote and foster greater appreciation for Spain’s classical drama in production” (“What is the AHCT?”). Up until the 2020 pandemic, which necessitated the cancellation of the in-person symposium, the meetings of the AHCT have been held yearly in El Paso, Texas, alongside the annual Siglo de Oro Theater Festival of the Chamizal National Park. This, of course, has meant that we could have the best of both worlds: lively and deep academic discussions during the day, access to wonderful productions—

and their associated companies—of Siglo de Oro theater (something not always easy to find on this side of the *charco*) at night, and even the occasional encounter with the artists. In the last few years (and here we include two or three years leading up to the last in-person conference in El Paso in 2019 as well as the two virtual symposia run in July of 2020 and 2021) these lines between these two worlds have started to blur even more significantly, particularly in the discussions and sessions that have included artists from around the Hispanic-speaking world. Now, having participated in an adaptation from start to (semi)finish, we are of the opinion that this meshing of practices is one of the strongest ways forward for the discipline, *comediante* scholarship, and our students. Appreciation can mean a great many things, but often it takes on a passive role. It is no longer enough to passively *appreciate* the *comedia* in production, we must also take on a more active stance in order to support artists and keep the mission of the AHCT alive. Without performance, the Association's mission is drastically diminished.

We do not necessarily mean to put appreciation down—nor is it true that appreciation is never a discernible act—but it is action that is going to be needed, now more than ever, for artists, particularly smaller/less-well-known companies, to survive the seismic shifts that have happened and will continue to reverberate into the foreseeable future, due in large part to the theater shutdowns and rapid digitization of the performing arts. We can still appreciate performances; an important part of our work is and will continue to be the writing of reviews that capture the ephemeral essence of a live show and maintain a written record of the *comedia* in all its forms today. But here, again, we see that the work of appreciation we perform through reviews is purely academic and perhaps even works against the performers themselves. Often these reviews only appear in peer-reviewed journals, a process that can take months or even years to complete. For something that is by nature fleeting—with perhaps only a few shows, or a run of a couple of months

if the company is very lucky—we waste precious time holding our thoughts and critiques away from the rest of the world.

Although Susan Fischer has stated that “there is little difference between writing performance analysis, performance history, performance studies as *academic* criticism, and what the *theater critic* has to do” (8, emphasis in the original), the big difference is the timeline on which we do this work. For the artists, however, there is a great distinction between the work of the theater critic and that of the academic register, as we will see. If we were to adjust our thinking on the value of the review to align with the needs of the companies, what would that look like and what might we gain (or lose) by doing so? To find out, we discussed our ideas with two theater companies based in Mexico City, EFE TRES Teatro and Teatro de los Sótanos, with whom we collaborated on the adaptation of *Los empeños de una casa*, which premiered at the 2021 Virtual Association for Hispanic Classical Theater Conference. All quotes from the members of these two companies are from that interview, unless otherwise noted.

From Appreciation to Action

First, let us think about what the needs of the performers are in this case: a review that comes out immediately following a premiere or even during dress rehearsals (as they do in newspapers—for example, Broadway reviews tend to be about shows currently running or coming-up in the next few weeks) gives others who might be interested in seeing the show or who were on the fence about paying for a performance about which they know very little, an idea about whether it is right for them. This, in turn, could translate into more ticket sales and hype around the show. It gives the company timely information that they can then turn into materials to promote themselves or include in the show’s program. Now, we realize that it may appear that we are

advocating for the potential dissolution of a major feature of *Comedia Performance*, but this is not, in fact, our intention. Which leads us to our second thought experiment regarding reviews: what does this mean for us as academics or how might this change the way we work? While there are surely many excellent suggestions and possible solutions, here's just one that we might propose. First, establish an online repository for "quick reviews" of shows in the moment. Anyone who wishes to write a longer, more academic review, should also consider submitting a review to be posted to the site in as quick a turnaround time as possible—within 48 hours to a week of attending the theater. By establishing an official database or website where these are housed, we would avoid the issues raised by Fischer as to the "confusion [that] might arise regarding an *opinion* and a *critical review*" (8, emphasis in the original), particularly around the rise of internet commentators and blogs that might tout themselves as professional but that lack the training to be considered a professional or academic reviewer. These reviews can then be provided to the artists to use for self-promotion, program, and dossier materials, etc. Assuming they have a longer run or are going on tour, they could also be provided to the theaters themselves to help ticket sales.¹

These types of quick reviews would still be distinct from the journalistic review, as they would come from a place of academic critique. As the artists we spoke with indicated, the reviews that come out in the next day's newspaper or on blogs are generally not of the same caliber:

Fernando Villa: *Creo que son dos líneas bien distintas.... Pero sí, yo creo que una cosa es el registro académico en donde no solamente es una reseña de: "ay qué bonito actuaron," o "ay este este muchacho por más que le echa ganas, nomás no lo logra. O sea que esas son las reseñas periodísticas, que si bien sí conllevan un poquito de investigación, en realidad es un estudio más minucioso de la pieza que se va a ver y lo que está sucediendo para que el espectador pueda decidir a priori si va o no.*

Lizeth Rondero: La reseña periodística que funciona para las temporadas teatrales esta que de la que estamos hablando ahorita, rápidamente, de si la obra funciona, no funciona, es estupenda, no es estupenda, carece de esto, carece del otro. Mucho depende de la calidad del crítico que a veces son de muy dudosa procedencia, eso es la verdad, de muy dudosa procedencia académica.

There is, therefore, a gap between the theater critic's review the day after and those academic reviews that sometimes are not published until long after the show's run is over.

But what about peer review? At this point, we would not argue against the value of it. These are important and provide academics who are interested in contemporary performance with details that perhaps they were unable to see for themselves, by virtue of having either missed the performance or being engrossed in another aspect of the same play. Just like with reading and rereading a text, viewing and re-viewing (not to be confused with the act of writing a review) a play can reveal new details that escaped us the first time around. Of course, with performance, every show can be slightly different as well. A seasoned company may be able to deliver more or less the same experience every night, but even changes that might seem minor—the venue, the city, the audience members in attendance—can affect the mood and even performance of both actors and spectators. Peer-reviewed performance reviews should take all of these factors into consideration, while also adding a more meaningful, analytic interpretation of the motivations and decisions by the company and the production itself. In essence, what we are arguing for is a two-pronged approach: first, the more rapid, less “academic” reviews to be posted somewhere that is easily accessible to the artists and venues for promotional purposes; and second, a longer, more analytical review of the performance that can be used by academics both in the intermediate and long term as secondary sources for future projects that investigate how theater and performance

transpired at a given point in time. These second-tier reviews could even be longer than a traditional review, taking the form of more of a mini essay.

Interestingly, the artists with whom we spoke were adamant that these longer reviews (and the long wait for them) are worth it. Although they might not be able to use them in the moment for promotional purposes or ticket sales, they have a more enduring value for their analytical content:

Erin Cowling: *¿Qué podemos hacer los académicos para apoyarles en su trabajo?*

Allan Flores: *Yo creo que el registro es algo muy valioso, el registro a nivel texto. Justo las entrevistas o todo lo que han estado haciendo alrededor de lo que hemos hecho como EFE TRES, y ahora con Teatro de los Sótanos. Creo que eso es valioso, porque, el tener publicaciones en donde se mencione nuestro nombre o nuestras compañías o nuestro trabajo, sucede muy poco. Por lo menos en México. Que a nivel académico haya registro de las obras y aún más del proceso de ellas. Porque muchas veces hay registro de las obras, pero primeramente como memoria de que hubo esa obra, pero nada más: se hizo tal año, con tales actores y actrices, y tal dirección, y listo. Pero tener notas que avalan nuestro trabajo de alguna manera, creo que por una parte eso es bastante, importante y que nos apoya a nosotros, a encontrar nuevos lugares o nuevas cosas con tener esto. Entonces, el registro creo que es bastante importante.*

Lizeth Rondero: *En ese sentido creo que por ejemplo la academia y el periodismo son dos áreas que pueden nutrir ricamente el proceso de creación teatral, al igual que las letras... Entonces yo creo que la academia está en ese en esa relación íntima con el proceso artístico de los creadores, porque finalmente se genera investigación, se generan contenidos, y creo que el registro es algo súper importante. El teatro, por ser efímero, el teatro, ya sabemos, tenemos toda esta experiencia Zoom, toda esta experiencia a distancia, aquí con Empeños lo hicimos. Y sin embargo, el teatro*

se tiene que ver en vivo. Sin embargo, pasa siempre algo con el teatro que su vitalidad en “presencia”.... Pues es lo que es el teatro, y en ese sentido carecemos de un registro, de una perpetuación de nuestro trabajo. En ese sentido es efímero, es un momento que sucede. La academia, aunando a lo que dice Allan, viene a ser esta suerte de testimonio-testigo relación íntima, en la cual se puede registrar, hablar, se puede profundizar de un proceso de trabajo que tuvo una dialéctica tal que llegó a un resultado escénico.

Thus, our work in preserving the ephemeral is just as important—or more so—as that of the next day review, with its more immediate benefit. As costume designer Violeta García told us, this could go beyond the performance, as often the “sub arts” of the theater are ignored all together:

***Violeta García:** Bueno a mí me parece que es bien importante el registro. Por la parte que decías de lo efímero, pero también porque el teatro se compone de varias sub-artes o no sé cómo decirlo. Todo el diseño sonoro, el diseño de iluminación, el diseño de vestuario. Y yo, que trabajo con vestuario, todo el tiempo digo que los vestuarios que salen de las obras son como pequeñas colecciones de arte; y que no se registra eso. A lo mejor hay lista, y hay fotografías para su uso técnico posteriormente, pero no hay un análisis académico al menos aquí en México que yo conozca, formalizado de eso. Y creo que es bien importante el trabajo académico porque, empezar a estudiar teatro desde esa perspectiva, pues va a utilizar todas esas también pequeñas artes y hacer que se valoren y a lo mejor después se pueda un manejo distinto incluso a esas pequeñas colecciones que se van dando.*

From the Ephemeral to the Permanent: Next Steps

Often, as academics, we become excited by a new revelation, and what is a performance but revelatory? We may become overcome by the sensation that we have discovered something

new and shiny and want nothing more than to be the first to tell the world about it. But when it comes to live performances, we are no longer talking about a play that was written some 400 years ago and whose author is long gone; rather, we are dealing with real, live human beings, whose hard work and sweat equity have gone into bringing this experience to life. And what we may see in their work may not be what they intended. This is not necessarily a bad thing—any of it—but something to be conscious of when we decide to study and write about contemporary art and artists. Certainly, our analysis can be valid even when it does not line up with authorial intention. Artists of all kinds cannot control what their audience reads into their work (and as Cowling commented at the AHCT’s 2021 Virtual Symposium: “no puedes controlar la reacción de la audiencia, y menos a los académicos, que somos los peores” (Gaviño and Rodríguez-Claro)), but given our relative position of power, we could do them the favor of asking.

Aside from checking with the artists as to their vision and how well it lines up (or does not) with our own, what more might we offer artists as recompense for their hard work and creative inspiration? For one, the term starving artist is often more than just a cliché. Although there are some artists who do “make it,” for everyone who does there are many more who do not. Along the same lines, the creation of a new production can be cost prohibitive, either forcing companies to get innovative in their use of pre-owned materials, minimalist set/prop design, and other creative decisions, or find funding sources that are willing to take a risk on a little-known theater group. When Cowling and Fernando Villa Proal (EFE TRES Teatro) first discussed the possibility of adapting a play together in 2019, the idea was to search for bursaries that would allow Cowling and a couple of students to travel to Mexico and document the work of the company in the adaptation and scenification of the production. Then, just a few months later, as the COVID-19 pandemic became much more serious than many anticipated, we decided to pivot to an online

format for the adaptation process that was carried out by Cowling, Villa Proal, and two recently graduated MacEwan University students, Rodas Garza and Daniela Villa Orozco. This is still, however, a goal for both principal collaborators:

***Ana Rodas Garza:** Se está creando algo, y como ustedes dicen es el registro y la energía. Veo que de los dos lados [el académico y el artístico], se va al mismo enfoque, aunque se empiece de diferentes caminos. Eso es algo que me gusta mucho, porque pues si tiene que pasar va a pasar, o sea aunque se empiecen de diferentes lados.*

***Fernando Villa:** Agregaría también, que como proyecto a futuro sí me gustaría seguir sumando a los investigadores como parte del proceso. En tanto de registro como de proceso. Creo que somos, hemos sido muy malos, por lo menos EFE TRES en llevar un registro, y una bitácora. No lo hemos logrado porque no tenemos la disciplina, porque se nos olvida, por mil cosas, pero al final siempre lo hemos platicado. Incluso con amigos investigadores no solamente desde el lado de la académica, de la historia, o de la investigación histórica, sino de la investigación teatral hoy por hoy, hay muy poco registro de procesos. La investigación teatral, mucho de su bagaje de lo que registra es el resultado, casi no es el proceso. Son pocos los que tienen su proceso registrado. Y creo que sí estaría muy bien continuar con esta línea, para seguir manteniendo el registro de nuestros procesos, pues en papel o en digital.*

Documenting the artistic process is a potential next step. Not only will it allow for theater companies to have a record of their work, much like the reviews, but it could also set up the conditions for a new generation of practitioners to continue the work of adapting and staging Golden Age plays. As academics, we would widen our potential audience beyond the ivory tower, and hopefully inspire new productions by exposing artists to the genre.

Although it can often be difficult to provide the one thing that companies need to put on a show—money—eventually, almost a year after starting the project, Cowling was able to get funding from a last-minute opportunity for Summer 2021 research from the Faculty of Arts & Science at MacEwan that allowed EFE TRES and a new creative partner-company, Teatro de los Sótanos, to create what Villa Proal has called an “extended trailer”—a forty-minute long first act that outlines the frame story and introduces the characters (Villa Proal et al.). Here, Cowling and her students were able to provide support in two separate but vital ways: by partaking in the adaptation process itself, we were able to participate in the discussion of textual interpretation, audience perception, and fluidity of verse, on the other, with the “just-in-time” funds, we were able to support the artists and their vision of this piece. It was important to us that the funds were not only able to support the creation of the piece through costuming, props, rehearsal or performance spaces, and the digitization of the piece for the premiere at the conference, but also to pay the artists, directors, and other important members of the companies for the time and knowledge they imparted to the process. For all of us, the most necessary path forward includes artistic and academic collaboration:

***Fernando Villa:** También agregaría que, parte importantísima de la sinergia que ha resultado del encuentro de EFE TRES con ustedes, con la academia en general. Y creo que es muy importante que también se inmiscuyan los artistas en el proceso de los académicos. Y que además tengamos espacio nosotros también, exponer nuestros procesos. Espacios que muchos de ellos, gracias a ti Erin, se han abierto en estos congresos. Que es: EFE TRES va a platicar de por qué montó El Príncipe Ynocente, o Qué con Quique Quinto, o como lo montó, cual fue su acercamiento al texto, cómo hizo la adaptación... Que al final, son cosas que a ustedes les interesan como académicos, pero no solamente es en nosotros dar, sino, la oportunidad que en este caso he tenido*

de absorber cuanto conocimiento ha venido, por parte de ustedes, por sus procesos de investigación... Y es mucho, gracias a ustedes, y la sinergia que se hace, que el aprendizaje de los creadores se podría, pues que el follaje pueda crecer.

Lizeth Rondero: *Y que el resultado escénico está empapado de toda esa investigación. Y que toda esta investigación sin duda alguna entabla alianzas necesarias para que el teatro suceda. Es a través de los académicos que el teatro también se puede presentar, es a través de los académicos que el teatro se puede programar. Es a través de los académicos que se pueden abrir espacios para que el teatro suceda, espacios de investigación en donde el fenómeno escénico esté íntimamente relacionado con un proceso de investigación de conocimiento, de generación de nuevas rutas de entendimiento. Presupuestos, sin duda alguna, los presupuestos de académicos, los presupuestos de las universidades podrían ser también como ese buen mecenas, ese mecenas generoso que puede estar generando resultados escénicos de procesos de trabajo de investigación. Entonces creo que se pueden hacer muchas cosas entre los académicos y la investigación teatral, que resulte en un proceso práctico, o sea que tiene una base teórica, tiene una base de investigación, y tiene un proceso práctico. Creo que enriquece muchísimo.*

Allan Flores: *Sí, y pensarlo creo como como un “work-in-progress,” eso también creo que era muy, en México es muy extraño que se trabajen procesos de trabajo, y que se vaya descubriendo poco a poco por donde va la obra. Creo que eso fue muy rico en este proceso, porque digamos que ahorita que ya está montada una parte, pues ya hay escenografía, ya hay escenario. Y creo que también a nivel creativo, nos ayuda por ejemplo a que el trabajo de Violeta tenga diálogo con los actores. Y que teniendo tan anticipadamente, antes de que exista la obra, como “total,” el vestuario también les da oportunidad al equipo a que pueda experimentar, puedan trabajar con*

lo que propone Violeta, y que se pueda integrar de una mejor manera, que seguramente se le vayan encontrando más usos a la utilería, a todo el vestuario, toda la escenografía.

We might not always be able to access funds, but at the very least, we can find the time to discuss the texts and offer insights as experts on the period, its authors, and the vast field of interpretation and analysis that exists in our world. Best practices would almost always include financial support but being realistic about the state of universities in general and the arts and humanities more specifically, that may not always be possible. Still, our publications are a kind of currency for us, and although it is not always a one-to-one transaction, they can buy us into certain spaces and help us move our careers forward. If they're being built on the backs of living, breathing artists, we should be offering something in return, monetary or otherwise.

The Student Perspective

Appreciation takes form in various ways, varying from person to person; it was interesting to participate in this project as a student, an observer, as it allowed me to see the way that academics and artists can come together to create a multifaceted experience that can be shared with the public. As the project evolved, unexpected challenges and questions advanced us forward. From the unexpected inconsistencies, a deeper understanding of the project was enhanced, and new questions appeared, such as: Why are plays and other works of literature adapted in any particular way, so that people may feel a strong pull to find a deeper connection? To ask the necessary question: Why is there a need for people to see these plays?

My role as a student/collaborator in this project allowed me to see and participate in a rather unconventional manner. I was taught that we would create something more meaningful by sharing insight, by sharing and participating in the discussions, and being active. Whereas in a more

conventional setting, I, as the least experienced, would have been told to sit by and watch, purely observational. We learned that the play can reach anyone, when the learning roles are open to each individual. Discussing the various ways in which the play could be adapted for a broader audience impacted the overall direction of the final product. When discussing the academic and artistic impact of the investigation process, we discussed the importance of documenting as much as possible, the overall process where art and academia intertwine.

Connection and Disruption

Our finding a connection to this play was enhanced by the disrupting forces of 2020. The academic world is highly structured, and yet has flexibility that allows for other breakthroughs outside of these regulated practices. The reality of this project was that we moved ahead, regardless of any difficulties from such a tumultuous year. In “Artists and Academics: What They Might Have in Common,” Sara Schumacher reflects on the shift that might occur when focusing on similarities “rather than differences.” For this project, academics and artists came together to focus on the similarities shared in both the academic and artistic fields. There seems to be an oppositional approach of the arts and academia, thought to perform best when kept apart. While allowing some merging of the two, academics take one approach, and artists another. The attitude of disallowing these two worlds to collide and create more ideas, restricts access to those that would not have the option of understanding these works at a deeper level.

Paradoxically, the pandemic forced us into a passive situation (in that we could not really move about freely) through which we became much more active participants in the adaptation process. Whereas the original plan was to go to Mexico and observe, we instead worked collaboratively with Villa Proal to break down the text into a playable piece. Active participation

is almost always more effective as a teaching tool than passive observation, and thus we obtained a much better understanding of the creative process than we might have if we had only been observing rehearsals. The active participation allowed us to have a more authentic experience, which in turn allowed us to move from a state of appreciation of the company's work into an active, and yes, appreciative, role. It also demonstrated the power of theater to connect: during a period of widespread disconnection, we were able to connect with each other, albeit over a video call. We also experienced theater's ability to connect us to another time and space as we discussed Sor Juana's words and debated her intentions and what it could mean for an audience today. Although the COVID-19 pandemic was a major disruption in almost all areas of our lives, it also forced us into creative spaces, be it innovative online pedagogy or adapting to digital performance.

Although it was not our original intention in choosing this piece by Sor Juana, we found ourselves studying a play that spoke directly to our experience of confinement and isolation at the beginning of the pandemic. Like many plays of the period that employ what Frederick de Armas has labeled the "invisible woman," the female protagonists of Sor Juana's *Los empeños de una casa* find themselves trapped inside a house by the honor code that constricts their lives and movements and the men that uphold it. Unlike other playwrights of the period, Sor Juana allows Ana and Leonor to start off in highly public lives, having already chosen their suitors before the play begins, but constrains their movement more and more as the play progresses. For those of us who lived through the pandemic, we can relate to the feeling of one day being free to live our lives, only to find ourselves trapped inside without an end in sight. At the end of the play, the two women's paths diverge—Ana, the more conniving of the two, is forced into a marriage that does not fully interest her, but that must be made for the sake of appearances, while Leonor is rewarded for her virtue, allowed to go free and marry the man she truly loves. Even this contrast in their

denouements gives us insight into the various reactions and outcomes we have seen in society as the COVID-19 virus continues to disrupt our lives. Some have to settle for the paradoxically uncomfortably comforting confinement of “Stay Home, Save Lives” as early pandemic slogans urged. For women in the early modern era, this could just as easily have been “Stay Home, Save Honra.” Some have attempted to circumvent the majority of precautions and paid dearly—which would have been Ana’s path if she had strayed from the proposal before her at the end of the play. Ultimately, however, the pandemic’s version is not there solely to control a certain sector of the population, but rather to hopefully avoid some of the more drastic outcomes of a deadly disease. The code of honor only becomes deadly when someone chooses to enforce it on others.

Concluding Thoughts

In short, we do not see this as a one-off experience, but rather, if we consider ourselves students and scholars of *comedia* performance, we need to be more involved, more often in order to better understand the process and final product we see on stage. We can no longer sit back and expect something to come to us fully formed and then critique it and break it down without understanding the realities faced by these companies. If we want the *comedia* to continue to be performed, particularly for North American audiences, we must be realistic about the needs of both the spectator and the performer. EFE TRES and Teatro de los Sótanos created an adaptation that is not only entertaining but also pedagogical, teaching their audience about the early modern theater, its conventions, and the work behind the scenes that is undertaken by both academic and actor.² By unveiling this normally covert labor, the audience is engaged actively, both learning how to watch the performance in front of them, and walking away with a better appreciation of a genre that might very well have been unknown to them previously. The artists are also in favor of

continuing this collaborative relationship:

***Lizeth Rondero:** Hay que continuar ese proceso.... Está colaboración nos abre como la intención, la puerta de poder mantener la expectativa, y la idea en la cabeza de que es posible generar este tipo de proceso. Entonces, bueno creo que desde nuestra parte los procesos de trabajo que van a venir en un futuro en un futuro cercano serán procesos que empezarán cómo está ahorita a partir del teatro, y que empezaremos de acuerdo a lo que deseemos investigar o deseemos generar, enlazar otras áreas del conocimiento, y en ese sentido será la búsqueda de una colaboración académica.... En ese sentido creo que, por nuestra parte, o por la mía, hay un asunto de continuar ejerciendo los procesos de investigación a partir de que se hace la puesta. A partir de que se hace una puesta en escena es que buscas la colaboración, si es funcional o si no es funcional. De nuestra parte creo que sería así.*

Although some of our colleagues might feel that this type of *refundición* is a step too far, an act of rebellion against the words written by the author that renders the performance inauthentic, we feel that this is precisely the sort of adaptation that creates and connects through the act of disruption. We cannot know what the dramaturg of 400 years ago wanted to portray, nor how her words were interpreted by the companies over which she held no control. Plays, once written, are meant to be staged, and are often done so without consulting the writer. Lope knew that his audience had specific likes and dislikes, and often catered to them, knowing that the whim of the viewer was his ticket to fame and fortune. We should be doing everything in our power to support and uplift those companies who are following in his footsteps and creating *comedia* performances that speak to their audiences and provide us the opportunity to experience this theater today.

<BIO> **Erin Alice Cowling** is an associate professor of Spanish at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Canada. Her current research interests lie in how marginalized characters are portrayed,

as well as how modern performances can inform and expand our understanding of early modern plays. She is the author of *Chocolate: How a New World Commodity Conquered Spanish Literature* and co-editor of *Social Justice in Spanish Golden Age Theatre*, both from the University of Toronto Press. She has previously published in *eHumanista/Cervantes*, *Bulletin of the Comediantes*, *Hispania*, among others.

<BIO> **Ana Karen Rodas Garza** is a recently graduated student from MacEwan University, with a BA in English and Spanish. She is particularly interested in translation and how it shapes our understanding of the world.

NOTES

¹ As Laura Ramiro argued at the AHCT's 2021 Virtual Symposium, it works best for companies to be paid by *cachet* rather than ticket sales, but for smaller companies without a reputation to precede them, these deals may be harder to make. Again, another argument is to be made here for having more accessible reviews by reputable scholars, as the companies can point to these reviews as a demonstration and documentation of their on-going success.

² *Empeños* (2021) is the joint creation of these two companies from Mexico City, based on the adaptation of *Los empeños de una casa* that we worked on collectively over the summer of 2020. An "extended trailer" version running approximately 40 minutes was premiered at the 2021 Virtual Symposium of the AHCT and includes a "professor" character who explains some of the conventions and characters to the two actors who mime her words.

Works Cited

De Armas, Frederick A. *The Invisible Mistress: Aspects of Feminism and Fantasy in the Golden Age*.

Charlottesville, VA: Biblioteca Siglo de Oro, 1976. Print.

Fischer, Susan L. "Viewing and Re-Viewing the *Comedia*: Conversation with Bárbara Mujica." *Comedia Performance*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2021, pp. 7-15. Print.

Gaviño, Carlota, and Iñigo Rodríguez-Claro. *Creación de los clásicos para el siglo XXI*. Interview by Glenda Nieto-Cuebas and Erin Alice Cowling, 9 July 2021.

Ramiro Moreno, Laura. *Spanish Classical Theater in COVID-19 Times: How Andalusian Companies Dealt with the 2020 Pandemic*. AHCT Virtual Symposium. 6 July 2021.

Villa Proal, Fernando et al. *Confinement in the Comedia/Confinement and the Comedia*. AHCT Virtual Symposium. 6 July 2021.

"What Is the AHCT?" *The Association for Hispanic Classical Theater*, <http://www.wordpress.comedias.org/>. Web. Accessed 29 June 2021.