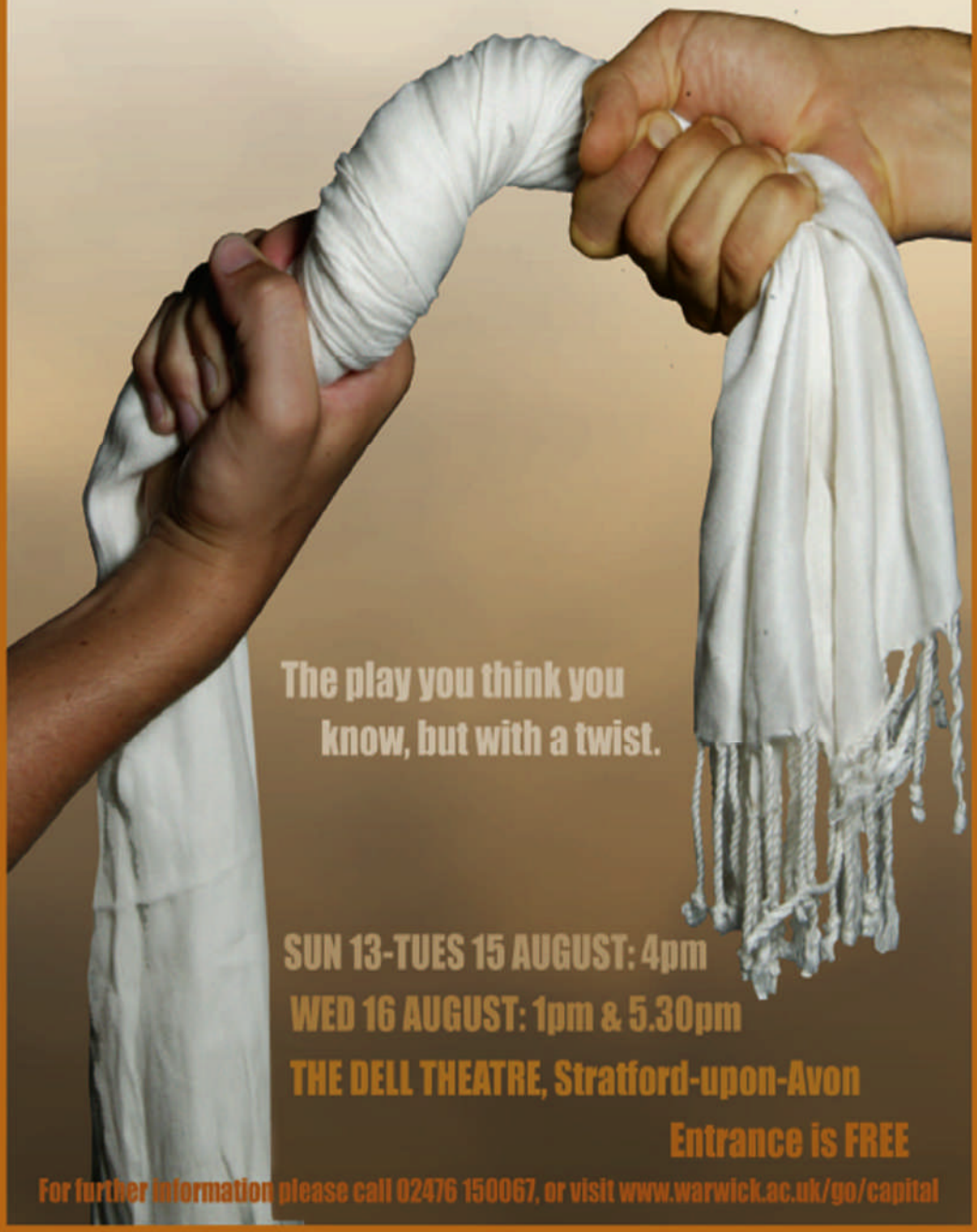
A CAPITAL Centre production

CAPULETS & MONTAGUES

COMPLETE WORKS FRINGE
THE DELL THEATRE

a tragicomedy by Lope de Vega, from a translation by Gwynne Edwards



The play you think you know, but with a twist.

SUN 13-TUES 15 AUGUST: 4pm
WED 16 AUGUST: 1pm & 5.30pm
THE DELL THEATRE, Stratford-upon-Avon
Entrance is FREE

For further information please call 02476 150067, or visit www.warwick.ac.uk/go/capital

Capulets and Montagues

A learning pack prepared by Harriet Mann
For the CAPITAL Centre production August 2006

Contents

Lope de Vega: Background

Back to top

Who was Lope de Vega?

Lope Felix de Vega Carpio was one of the most successful playwrights of the Spanish Golden Age. Born in Madrid in 1562, two years before Shakespeare, Lope is believed to have produced around 1800 secular plays, in addition to 400 religious works. This extraordinary productivity led his contemporaries to refer to him as a "monster of nature", and earned him considerable commercial success.

Lope led a colourful life, marrying twice and embarking upon numerous love affairs. On more than one occasion, his illicit encounters landed him in trouble with the law, and in 1587 he was banished from Madrid for eight years after making libellous claims against a former mistress. Other notable events in Lope's life include joining the Spanish Armada in 1588, and taking Holy Orders at the age of 52 – a fact which did not seem to have much effect on his womanising, however. He died in 1635, aged 73.

The Spanish Golden Age

Spain's "Golden Age" was a period of intense cultural and intellectual activity that is usually seen to have lasted from the mid-sixteenth century to the end of the seventeenth century. During this time, the arts flourished, and theatre was no exception. The sixteenth century saw the development of Spanish secular drama, with the new public theatres coming into prominence towards the end of the century.

Lope's Drama

Lope de Vega's writing responded to the new popular demand for plays, and he was responsible for developing a new style (the *comedia nuente)* which incorporated elements from both comedy and tragedy. *Capulets and Montagues* is an excellent example of this, blending the potentially tragic dimensions of the story of star-crossed lovers with a rollicking humour, which manifests itself most obviously in the rumbustious ending. Lope's innovations as a writer included perfecting the form of the three-act play (as opposed to the five acts favoured by the classical dramatists), and the skilful employment of the eight-syllable line, which allowed the action of the play to unfold at a vigorous pace. By crafting his plays in this manner, Lope maximised their appeal to a notoriously restless Spanish audience.

The Almagro Theatre, near Madrid, was built during the Spanish Golden Age.

The *Corrales*

Lope de Vega wrote primarily for the public theatres, or *corrales*, which became popular in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. The *corrales* were courtyards enclosed between blocks of houses, which were specifically designed for theatrical performances.

The stage was rectangular, and its apron projected into the audience. There would have been a curtain at the back of the stage which could be drawn back at specific moments to reveal the "discovery space" – a small inlet which could be used to represent an inner space, or to display a grisly sight such as a corpse. The trapdoor on the stage could have been used to represent hell, and the gallery above it to indicate an elevated space such as a balcony. (Some of the larger theatres even had two galleries, one above the other.) On occasion, ramps were used to connect the stage to the space immediately in front of it in order to create an additional playing area, which could be used for fights or jousts – often with real horses.

To the front and sides of the stage was the *patio*, or pit, where many of the spectators stood to watch the play. Other, wealthier patrons could sit on tiered benches arranged along the sides of the courtyard. Both groups would have been exclusively male, since the audiences were segregated by gender, with women being confined to a gallery at the back of the *corral*, called the *cazuela* (stewpot). Nobility could hire the balconied rooms of private houses which overlooked the *corral*; these were the only parts of the theatre where men and women were allowed to mix.

Lope and Shakespeare

Although Lope is considered to have been as successful as Shakespeare in his time, the sheer volume of his work has meant that much of it has subsequently been neglected. Many scholars feel, therefore, that undue emphasis has fallen upon a mere handful of his plays, including *Fuente Ovejuna*, *Peribanez*, *The Knight from Olmedo*, *Punishment Without Revenge*, and *The Dog in the Manger.*

The Capulets and Montagues (*Castalvines y Monteses)* draws on some of the same sources as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, but Lope's play has never reached an equivalent level of popularity in Spain. It is also more or less unheard of in the UK, with Gywnne Edwards' translation (published in 2005) representing the first English language version of the text to be published in this country. The CAPITAL Centre's production of the play was therefore a pioneering effort, with the first performance, on 13 August 2006, at the Dell theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon marking its official UK premiere.

The Role of Women

One of the crucial differences between Spanish Golden Age drama and its Elizabethan counterpart was the role of women in the theatre. In England, it was not the custom for women to become actresses, and so all of the female roles in Shakespeare's plays would have been played by teenage boys. However, in Spain it was permitted for women to act, provided that they were married.

This factor must have some bearing on our interpretation of Lope's writing in comparison to Shakespeare's. *Capulets and Montagues* does, in actual fact, have more female characters than *Romeo and Juliet* (five, as opposed to four), although it is interesting that Lope chooses not to portray either Lady Capulet or Lady Montague on stage. (Shakespeare dramatises both characters, and Juliet's mother is clearly present in the Italian sources.) We might wonder what this tells us about Lope's concerns as a writer: clearly he did not see older women as forming an important part of this story.

Star-Crossed Lovers: The Sources

Although it seems very likely that Lope and Shakespeare were composing their respective plays at similar times, there is no evidence that either playwright was aware of the other's work. We must conclude, therefore, that the similarities between the stories result from the writers' use of the same, or similar, source material.

The story of star-crossed lovers was popular in Renaissance Italy, and an Italian version of it can be found as early as 1476, in Masuccio's *Il Novellino*. Closer to Shakespeare's (and Lope)'s version is Luigi da Porto's tale of Montecchi and Cappelletti (c.1530), which was later adapted by Matteo Bandello in his *Romeo e Giulietta*. It is quite likely that Lope had access to

Bandello's version, and this may have been his direct source for *The Capulets and Montagues.* Alternatively, or in addition, he may have read the French adaptation of Bandello produced by Pierre Boaistuau in 1559.

With regard to Shakespeare, Gywnne Edwards believes that he

> used as his direct source Arthur Brooke's long poem, *The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Juliet*, published in 1562, and, to a lesser extent, William Painter's version of the story in the second volume of *Palace of Pleasure.* Painter's story was, in effect, a translation of Boaistuau, Brooke's an expanded version of it in which he made certain additions, expanded existing specches, and transformed passages of narrative into direct speech. (Intro, xxxiv)

It seems very likely, therefore, that Lope and Shakespeare did have access to similiar sources. Yet there are considerable differences between the two plays – most noticeably, their radically different endings. Both da Porto and Bandello describe a tragic ending for the two lovers, in which Giulietta takes her own life after discovering Romeo dead; it is very interesting, therefore, that Lope chose to change this. Lope's play is significantly different from Shakespeare's in this respect, and clearly indicates the differing concerns of the two playwrights when dramatising this story.

Capulets and Montagues: Synopsis

Back to top

Like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* Lope de Vega's *The Capulets and Montagues* tells the tale of a love affair which is threatened by the conflict between two families. Roselo, a young Montague on the lookout for excitement, persuades his friends to enter a Capulet party in disguise. There, he meets the beautiful Julia Capulet, and the pair instantly fall in love – each being ignorant of the other's identity. Julia invites him to meet her secretly in the garden; at the same time, hatching a crafty plan to deal with the unwelcome advances of her cousin, Ottavio.

When, in due course, the lovers learn of each other's true identities, they decide to marry in secret. Disaster strikes, however, when Roselo finds himself embroiled in a dispute between the families, and is forced to kill Ottavio. Roselo is banished to Ferrara; meanwhile, Julia's father makes plans for her to marry the wealthy Count of Paris. Roselo hears of this and is devastated, resolving to forget all about Julia and find a new bride in Ferrara.

When Julia discovers her father's plans for her to marry, she becomes desperate and attempts suicide by drinking what she believes to be poison sent by the priest Aurelio. Unknown to Julia and her family, however, Aurelio's potion is merely a sleeping draught, the effects of which will subside in two days' time. Julia is laid in the family tomb, whilst word is sent to Roselo that he must hurry back to Verona in order to rescue her when she awakens.

Roselo arrives in the nick of time, and the pair flee to the country estate of Antonio Capulet (Julia's father), disguising themselves as peasants. Here, the locals inform them of an approaching wedding: Antonio, in a desperate bid to secure a male heir, is preparing to marry his brother's daughter, Dorotea. In a final twist, Julia then appears to her father, pretending to be a ghost, and coerces him into promising that he will not harm Roselo. Julia then reveals herself to be alive, and her union with Roselo is duly recognised. Since Antonio now has his daughter back, there is no need for him to marry his niece. Instead, Dorotea marries Roselo's friend, Anselmo, whilst Julia's maid marries Roselo's servant, and the conflict between the families is finally resolved.

The Rehearsal Process

Back to top

Early Stages: Building the Ensemble

Heather Davies (the director) wanted the production to convey a strong sense of ensemble, so the beginning of the rehearsal process was concerned with bringing the company together as a team. Heather used a variety of games and activities to encourage the company to work together, including a special version of a game often known as “grandmother’s footsteps”. One person (“grandmother”) stood at one end of the room with their back turned, and a set of keys was placed between their feet. The rest of the group then lined up against the opposite wall: their mission was to snatch the keys and return them safely to the other side of the room, without grandmother seeing them move. Grandmother could turn around at any time, and anyone whom she saw moving would be sent back to the wall. This game was effective because it established a clear **objective** for the group, whilst requiring them to work as a team in order to achieve this.

The same principle could then be applied when tackling the play. Heather explained:

“It was important to establish clear objectives for the production, and to create a company vocabulary that could be referred to throughout the process. For this reason, I continued to do some full company work every day, so that we were constantly confirming the sense of ensemble.

“The ensemble experience is part and parcel of my philosophy of respecting what everyone brings to the table. I aim to be as egalitarian and inclusive as possible, because I find that this increases a company’s sense of ownership of the work. Delegating responsibility empowers people creatively, which is particularly important in a learning situation.”

Approaching the Text

(i) Intention

Heather encouraged the actors to think about their lines in terms of **intention.** This meant thinking about what their character was trying to do to whoever they were addressing, and constantly asking themselves, “how am I trying to change the other person?”

The clearest way to demonstrate this method is through an example. Below is an extract from the very beginning of the play. I shall then attempt to explain,

stage by stage, how Heather would have gone about approaching this section of text with the actors, in order to establish their intention.

Enter **Anselmo, Roselo,** and **Marin.**

Anselmo The place is alive with laughter and
Rejoicing.

Roselo It looks as if a son
Or daughter's getting married.

Anselmo I'd say
For sure a concert or a wedding.

Roselo Marin, find out what's going on.

Marin And have them give me the last rites?
These people are your worst enemies.

Roselo But no one knows you. It'll be all right.

Marin There's always someone looking for trouble.
The Capulets are dangerous.

Roselo Don't tell me you are scared, Marin.

Marin Of course I'm not. If they were here
Outside, armed to the teeth, I'd take
Them on single-handed. But there
Inside, what could be more stupid?

Anselmo If you want to know what's happening,
Disguise yourself. Put on a mask.
They'll think you are a relative.

Roselo You think it'll work?

Anselmo Of course, unless
There's someone wants to know who
You really are.

Roselo All right, Anselmo, The two
Of us.

When approaching a section of text for the first time, Heather would begin by getting the actors to simply read through the scene. Then, they would discuss what they thought the scene was about, and come up with a broad situation, or **argument**, which they felt was being presented in the text. Here, the

argument could be presented in the form of a simple question: “Go to the party – yes or no?”

The next stage would be to analyse each character’s position in relation to this argument. For example, we could summarise the individual characters’ responses as follows:

- Roselo – YES! Let’s go!
- Marin – NO! It’s far too dangerous!
- Anselmo – PERHAPS, if we’re clever and disguise ourselves...

Having been through this simple process, the actors would then be in a position to make choices about the manner in which their character interacts with the others in this scene, and thus to determine a basic **intention**. For example:

- Roselo – persuade his friends to go to the party
- Marin – persuade his master (and Anselmo) that going to the party would be very foolish
- Anselmo – encourage Roselo to go to the party, provided that he diguises himself first

Each actor could then feel sure that there was a definite purpose behind everything that their character said, since they were always actively trying to have a specific effect on their target. By going through this process with every section of text, Heather ensured that the actors not only understood what was going on in each scene, but were also engaging with each other in an active manner.

(ii) Actioning

Once the characters’ intentions had been established, Heather introduced the actors to a special technique known as **actioning**. This involves going through the text line by line, and choosing a **transitive verb** which expresses what the character is trying to do to the person they are speaking to.

For example:

Anselmo *(GRABS)* The place is alive with laughter and Rejoicing.

Roselo *(EXCITES)* It looks as if a son Or daughter’s getting married.

Anselmo *(SUPPORTS)* I’d say For sure a concert or a wedding.

Roselo *(COMMANDS)* Marin, find out what’s going on.

Marin *(ALARMS)* And have them give me the last rites?
These people are your worst enemies.

Actions are by no means final or unchangeable – rather, they are a tool which helps the actor to make specific choices which they can then play out and experiment with in rehearsals. If the action they have chosen does not seem to work, they may simply choose another (with the guidance of the director). Similarly, although a certain action may seem like the perfect choice at the beginning of the rehearsal process, that is not to say that it will continue to work forever: a director may ask an actor to change their action on a line several times during the course of rehearsals, as their performance continues to grow and evolve.

Actioning is an established practice in the theatre, and originates in the work of the Russian director/actor/theorist, Stanislavski (1863-1938). In Britain, the modern practice of actioning owes a lot to the director Max Stafford-Clark, who famously insists on spending the first few weeks of rehearsal sitting around a table with his actors and actioning every single line of text.

Today, actioning is taught at many drama schools and conservatoires across Europe and the US. The attitude of individual directors to the practice varies, however. Some, like Stafford-Clark, insist upon an agreed set of actions for the entire text of a play, whereas others allow actors to use actioning as a private process, only bringing it to the forefront of rehearsals when they encounter problems.

The Set

Back to top

The stage at The Dell

Lanterns for use during the party scene

Three horses!

Interview with Heather Davies (director)

Back to top

1. What attracted you to this play, and why did you think it would be a suitable project for the CAPITAL Centre?

I was asked to programme for the RSC's Complete Works Fringe Festival, so the play needed to have a relationship with the Complete Works in some way, and *Capulets and Montagues* just seemed fitting. The possibility of performing in an outdoor venue was discussed, and I was very keen to choose a play which would have been written specifically to be performed outdoors. Lope wrote for the *corrales*, which were open-air courtyard theatres, so again, it seemed appropriate. In addition to this, I wanted to do a play which would require a reasonable-sized cast, since this would clearly be in line with the CAPITAL Centre's ethos of inclusivity.

2. How did you want the production to look and feel?

I was keen that a part of the learning experience for those involved should be to acquire an understanding of Lope in the context of Spanish Golden Age drama, so it was my intention to do it in the spirit of the original performance circumstances: a troupe of actors, on tour, who would simply turn up and perform in a very basic outdoor venue. In collaboration with Alison (the designer), I then decided on the idea of a cart, from which all the set could be unloaded at the beginning of the play. The props could be placed inside boxes, which would also be carried on the cart, so that it would create the impression that the actors had literally just turned up at the venue with all their stuff, and everything they would need for the performance was contained inside those boxes.

Alison and I wanted the appearance of the set, and the boxes themselves, to resonate with the idea of the "Spanish Golden Age", so we chose a terracotta colour scheme, with lots of gold – golden crooks to hang the lanterns on, gold bands on the boxes, a golden sun, and so on. We felt that there was no point in trying to compete with the natural environment at The Dell, so we deliberately went for a look that wouldn't jar with it. At the same time, however, we knew that this colour scheme would complement the red brick interior of the George Bernard Shaw Theatre. In terms of costume, we decided on a basic period costume, which would be kept as pared-down as possible.

I wanted the production to feel light on its feet, immediate, engaging, dynamic, and entertaining. I felt that it should be quick-paced, since it is quite a plot-driven play, and I didn't want it to be weighed down by the set. I really wanted the focus to be on the actors, so that it felt like an ensemble piece – the spirit of the ensemble was essential to me.

3. Why was it so important for the company to work as an ensemble?

Partly because I felt that an important aspect of the learning experience was to maximise everyone's contribution. I tend to find that the busier people are, the more fun it is for them. Given that I am working within what is essentially a hierarchical art-form, I strive to be as egalitarian as possible, because I think that this is essential for respecting the individual talents of a group of people. So that was the reasoning, combined with what I think is exciting about theatre. One of the things which I find most exciting is the transformative power of acting. It is exciting for audiences to see actors playing different characters within the same production, and seeing how multi-talented people are. That transformative experience is part of what makes theatre special for me – the unique combination of the individual skills of a team, which makes the collective so exciting.

4. What did you see as the major themes of the play, and how did your attitude to them shape the rehearsal process?

The three major themes for me were "love", "family" and "honour". I would also include "friendship" and "enemies" as a sort of sub-heading, since these could be seen to spring from "love" and "honour". These themes were discussed at the beginning of the rehearsal process, with the cast all contributing ideas about what the words meant to them. What tends to happen during rehearsals is that in the middle of the process we become concerned primarily with moment to moment work, and the themes become useful again as we near the end of that. At a certain point in the process, therefore, the themes become beacons which focus the story.

5. Could you explain a bit about the role of music in the production?

Music was very important, because it helped to establish changes of location and mood. Creating the music was a multi-pronged creative process. We learned bits of Spanish classical music, and I asked Karl (Marin) and Alex (the Duke of Verona) to devise some music and then teach it to the company. I also contributed some melodies myself. We then developed the music as a group, using voices, and instruments provided by the company. I was particularly interested in rhythm – particularly Spanish rhythms – so we explored a lot through clapping and stamping. In this way, I was able to build up a musical vocabulary which could be referred to throughout the rehearsal process.

6. Why was it important to incorporate the work of specialists in movement, fights, and voice work? How did their input contribute to the production?

It's important to have them because I can't do everything, and I wouldn't pretend that I could! Their work is absolutely integral to the process, and I felt that it was an important part of the learning experience for the actors to have contact with other professional practitioners. With regard to the fight work,

health and safety was absolutely paramount – and indeed, that goes for voice and movement as well. It was important that we took a considered and healthy approach to each specialist area. Theatre is a collaborative art-form, and by having a strong team of specialists, it increased the possibility of having a dynamic project.

7. Were there any specific moments in the script, or aspects of the story, which were particularly challenging from a directorial point of view?

The party scene [at the beginning of the play] was a bit tricky! What you have there is a situation in which three people – call them A, B, and C – are having two conversations at the same time: A is talking to B, but not hearing what C is saying to B. It was very difficult to make that believable, and the physical patterns which went with it were quite challenging. So, that was tricky – but fun, ultimately!

Another of my challenges was making sure that people were clear about the story of the private chair in the church. Although it might like a small thing to us, in Lope's world it was a point of honour, so in fact it's a very big thing indeed. Communicating the ramifications of honour was therefore important – getting people to ask themselves, what does honour mean? How does it affect people in this world? In line with this was the idea of family, and the importance of a family's honour, which was effectively determined by the behaviour of the daughter. These were all ideas which I wanted to get across.

The horses were a challenge, but good fun, too! I wanted to find a different way of representing a horse which was playful, and not a cliché. So having people on boxes, with horse-heads, felt like it was a slightly different version, rather than simply repeating someone else's idea.

8. How did you respond to the contrasting challenges presented by two very different spaces?

Quite simply, I tried to facilitate the skills needed by the acting company to tell the story. This brings us back to the work of the specialists: for the story to work in the outdoor space, the actors needed to be able to work to scale – to have freedom, physically, whilst maintaining the specificity required in the moment to moment work. They also needed to understand that it was necessary for them to grab the attention of the audience, because there was so much else to compete with in the outside environment – noises, distractions, and so on.

In the indoor venue, the actors needed to reconnect with a lot of the more subtle work done in rehearsal. They needed to key back into the specificity which we had developed in the rehearsal room, because we found that this had grown a lot outdoors. I tried to show them that they could be more subtle vocally: in this space, they had the audience's attention already, so they didn't need to grab people in quite the same way.

9. Did you discover anything about the play which surprised you?

Working with the translation was interesting. I think the original Spanish was more poetic – there was quite a prosaic quality to the text in translation. However, given that, the simplicity of the language worked fantastically well as a style of writing for an outdoor performance. The intent of the writer to entertain people outdoors, and his skilful employment of structure and rhythm, was extremely evident. And the audiences really enjoyed it! Although the characters are not as intricate as Romeo and Juliet, people enjoyed the humour and the rollercoaster-style storytelling, and seemed delighted by the happy ending. So, in performance, it worked really well – if not a surprise, as such, that was a delightful confirmation!

10. Were there any aspects of the text or performance which you would like to have pursued further?

I would like to have done more with the pre-performance elements of the production – engaging with the audience before we started telling the story. I would also have been very happy to perform it for longer, so that I could have had more of an opportunity to observe it in performance. I felt that the company were beginning to understand more about the play, the longer they performed it. Doing it for longer would increase the confidence and virtuosity of their performances, allowing them to develop more of a love of the language, and of word play. I would also have liked to incorporate more music into the production.

Company Interviews: Vaughan Jacob (Roselo)

Back to top

1. What was your initial reaction to Roselo, on reading the script?

I found him very easy to identify with. He is characterised by his youthful idealism; it appears he has never been hurt or betrayed before and so has nothing to fear. The first scene, for example, reminded me of many a teenage night on the town, looking for trouble and romance! This daredevil attitude is what is most attractive about Roselo. People are drawn to his innocence and his zest for life, which makes it all the more painful when his ideals are shattered and he can no longer live a carefree life.

2. Did your view of him change at all during the rehearsal process? If so, why?

It did change significantly. Initially I was keen to emphasise how vulnerable Roselo becomes when he falls in love with Julia, as if he is completely under her sway and is subject to her every need, and so Roselo became a very dreary, miserable and clichéd romantic lover. Of course this is not the Roselo in the script, as the director was keen to point out. Far from being scared by the problems posed by love, he is instead positively excited by them. He has no time to feel trapped, because, in true cavalier fashion, he is making his mind up as he goes along. The best example I can give is when Roselo discovers that Julia is to marry the Count of Paris. Initially I perceived Roselo's action to be that of a spoilt child, cursing Fate through floods of tears for being so cruel. However, Roselo's pride is arguably more hurt than his heart, such is his confidence in himself. How could Julia leave a man as attractive as him? What has Paris got that Roselo hasn't? This boisterous attitude made the character more likable, and, crucially, more believable. As a footnote, the director's insistence that I base Roselo on the carefree Ted from *Bill and Ted* was remarkably helpful, even if the air guitars never made it past the dress rehearsal!

3. How did it feel to be playing a character who is often seen by people as an alternative to Shakespeare's Romeo? Did your awareness of the existence of Romeo influence your approach to Roselo?

It certainly did, and I believe that is why initially I misguidedly regarded Roselo as a tortured lover-poet. He is in fact very different. Roselo's promiscuity knows no bounds; his technique as a flirt is there for all to admire, and the speed with which he seeks another woman after having been betrayed by Julia reveals a consummate lover who more often than not gets what he wants. In short, he is at times testosterone personified! Far from burying his

head in love poetry, as Romeo does, Roselo is more likely to be living the love poetry himself, only stopping to contemplate when he is too old to carry on. As such it was not difficult to decide what part of the body Roselo led from in the rehearsal process; he is ballsy in many more ways than one! Yet this is not to discredit Roselo. He remains likable because of the enthusiasm and confidence which he brings to every sphere of his life, not just his sexual encounters. By emphasising Roselo's (and Julia's) libidinousness more than Shakespeare and his star crossed lovers, I think Lope is very clearly demonstrating that this is a tale of young love: passionate and well-meaning, but perhaps not destined to last for ever. There was certainly no need to consciously play against the Romeo stereotype after having discovered the differences; Roselo's lines speak for themselves.

4. What did you find to be the most demanding aspect of playing the role?

The party scene that opens the play is a nightmare! Roselo declares his love to Julia whilst she is holding a two-way conversation with him and Ottavio. The logistics of the situation proved difficult to perform; Roselo has to convince Julia of his sincere love but not be seen by the person she is talking to. Cue many hours of rehearsal spent with masks, movement, gesture etc... It transpired that it was possible for Roselo to talk to guests in the party whilst intending the words for Julia, just as she speaks to Ottavio but intends her words for Roselo. I found this incredibly funny (it was great to declare my undying love to a collection of bemused house servants!), and the scene was improving with every performance, but I don't think I did the writing justice; it is a hilarious scene.

5. What was your favourite moment to perform, and why?

The crypt scene, in which a determined Roselo and a reluctant Marin seek out a confused Julia, is really funny! In rehearsal it was a bore; for some reason we could not get the right balance between tension and comedy, and I think we were trying too hard; as soon as the comedy is artificial it ceases to be funny. When we came to perform it in the open air, however, it was one of the most consistently satisfying scenes to act, and the audience seemed to enjoy it. The sword fight comes in at a close second. It is scientifically proven that the noise a sword makes as it is drawn from a scabbard is the most fun anyone can have without having a heart attack, and when you clash two together....! I'm getting excited just thinking about it!

Company Interviews: Karl Niklas (Marin)

Back to top

1. What was your initial response to Marin, on reading the script?

My first response was extremely positive. I enjoyed the comedy of the character a great deal, but I saw him as more of a swaggering rogue-type figure for most of play, until the end when he finally cracks under pressure. Of course, I now see that this is not the case.

I was pleased that the character was given enough background by other people in the play, especially the scene between Arnaldo and Lidio, which I believed would allow me to enjoy the scenes more, as opposed to using them to establish myself and be noticed. In other words, I could relish the text more.

2. Did you learn anything, through playing him, which was not obvious from simply reading the play on the page?

I never truly realised how funny the character could be until we started to put him into practice. However, I found that trying to play the comedy did not work. My mind is tuned into comedy a lot of the time and so I was looking for it. For example, the garden scene between Roselo/Julia and Marin/Celia is a hilarious scene when put into practice. The lines about using the dagger on Celia were funny in my head, but when played straight it was even funnier. I also learnt just how much of a coward Marin was, which was something I tried to ignore when I first read the script. Only when I realised that bravery and cowardice were such important themes did I start to focus on this aspect more.

3. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, there is no real equivalent to the character of Marin. Did your knowledge of Shakespeare's play affect your interpretation of Marin, or did you see *Capulets and Montagues* as a completely separate world?

When everyone was cast, we went looking for our parts and who they were in the script. Between Anselmo and Marin, you had the roles taken by Mercutio and Benvolio in *Romeo and Juliet.* Of course, the characters do not match up. But I had the idea of trying to play my character Mercutio-esque. This fell flat on its face the moment I walked through the rehearsal room door: I realised I had to build a whole new character. I found this quite hard, as Marin is one of the characters, like Anselmo or Celia, whose character does not appear in *Romeo and Juliet*, but whose role does. It is hard to not play that role and thus become the Shakespearian characters.

4. How did you respond to the language of the play? Did it help or hinder you, as an actor?

The language of the play was fine - it was the meter that was the problem! With verse, I immediately drop into iambic pentameter, but here I found myself tripping over my own words to try and fit the extra two beats on the line. But with practice, I was able to overcome this barrier.

5. Did the audience's reaction teach you anything about your character, or the play in general?

The audiences confirmed two things for me. The first is that the play is actually funnier than I first thought. Second, that my character is funnier than I first thought. I don't know whether that was through my interpretation of him, or other actors on stage, but something in performance completely brought the character to life. To tell the truth, I feed off the audience a great deal. If they like something, I will do it more: give the audience what they want.

Bibliography/ Further Reading

Back to top

Lope de Vega / Spanish Golden Age

Edwards, Gwynne. Introduction. *Three Spanish Golden Age Plays.* By Lope de Vega/ Rojas Zorrilla, trans. Gywnne Edwards. London: Methuen, 2005.

Interview:

The Spanish Golden Age: Laurence Boswell, Director of the RSC's Spanish Golden Age Season, talks about the productions. http://www.rsc.org.uk/press/1445.aspx

Lewis-Smith. *The Theatre of the Spanish Golden Age*, University of Bristol http://www.bristol.ac.uk/hispanic/current/undergrad/courses/golden.html

Whicker, Jules, University of Birmingham. Module Outline 2005-2006: European Drama Outline: Spanish Golden-Age Theatre. http://www.celc.bham.ac.uk/eurodrama/outline_2006.htm

Pasto, David. *Comedia in Translation: What is the Golden Age?* http://www.denison.edu/collaborations/comedia/golden.html

Theatre reviews:

The Gentleman from Olmedo (Watermill, Newbury), 14 April – 22 May 2004. Reviews from the *Guardian, Daily Telegraph, Sunday Times, Kick FM,* and *Newbury Weekly News.* http://www.newburytheatre.co.uk/archive/200404e.htm

The Dog in the Manger (RSC, Swan)
The Stage: http://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/review.php/1831
LondonTown: http://www.londontown.com/LondonEvents/TheDogintheManger/b0350?utm_source=LondonMonthly&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=LondonMonthly8
Telegraph: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2004/04/27/btdog27.xml

Article:

Fenton, James. *A Movable Feast: Spanish classics would suit any one of our small theatres.* Guardian Unlimited, 5 April 2003. http://arts.guardian.co.uk/features/story/0,,929910,00.html

Shakespeare/ sources

RSC Learning: *Shakespeare's Women*
http://www.rsc.org.uk/picturesandexhibitions/action/viewExhibition?typeid=themes&exhibitionid=12&sectionid=11

RSC website: *Romeo and Juliet: Shakespeare's Sources*
http://www.rsc.org.uk/romeo/about/sources.html

Greenblatt, Stephen. General Introduction. *The Norton Shakespeare.* By William Shakespeare, Stephen Greenblatt, ed.
London: Norton, 1997.

Salernitano, Masuccio, [et. al] *Romeo and Juliet Before Shakespeare: Four Early Stories of Star-Crossed Love.* Trans, and Intro, Nicole Prunster.
Toronto: CRRS, 2000.

Richmond, Hugh Macrae. *Shakespeare's Staging*
http://shakespearestaging.berkeley.edu/index.php?set_albumName=album01&option=com_gallery&Itemid=200&include=view_album.php