

ABSTRACT
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"What Can I Say?: Perspectives on *Comedia* Staging Reconstruction"

"When I get out of here, if I'm ever able to set this down, in any form, even in the form of one voice to another, it will be a reconstruction then too, at yet another remove. It's impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out, there are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances; too many gestures, which could mean this or that, too many shapes which can never be fully described, too many flavors, in the air or on the tongue, half-colors, too many."

--Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

Frustratingly, the rebirth of a contemporary Spanish *comedia* performance tradition has sprung up with an intensity inversely proportional to the scholarly study of its 17th-century staging practices. The past several decades has brought us the Teatro Clásico Español in Madrid, the Festival de Teatro Clásico in Almagro, the "Siglo" Festival in El Paso, TX among others, and yet post-Modernist criticism, especially the positions of Derrida and Foucault, has insisted upon the slippery significance of any staging "codes" or "conventions," and the impossibility of any fixing of associations.

What can we say, then, about actual staging practices in seventeenth-century Spain? This paper analyzes and problematizes the various approaches taken over the past few decades to staging reconstruction, including historical, semiotic, anthropological, cultural, structural, and phenomenological. Shevtsova, Schechner, Grubbs, Ferrer-Vals, Bass, Fischer and Friedman have all contributed to where Varey and Shergold, Allen, and Ruano de la Haza left off. While it seems that literary theory may also be used to dismiss these approaches out of hand, I argue each of these critics has worked to develop elements of a sustainable methodology that can effect some valid conclusions.