

Esther Fernández

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(Eds.)

LIVING
THE *COMEDIA*

Essays Celebrating Amy Williamsen

Volume II



THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
OF THE SOUTH

2021

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Published in the United States by The University Press of the South. Printed in France by Monbeaulivre.fr

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Living the *Comedia*. Essays Celebrating Amy Williamsen, Vol. II.

248 pages.

Front Cover Design by Ana María Calatayud. Cover Photo by Daniel Alonso (Courtesy: Centro de Documentación de las Artes Escénicas y la Música).

1. Early Modern Spain. 2. Golden Age. 3. Theater. 4. *Comedia* in the Classroom. 5. Staging the *Comedia*. 6. Golden Age Music and Musicians. 7. Esther Fernández. 8. Yuri Porras. 9. Bruce Burningham. 10. Amy Williamsen.

ISBN: 978-1-952799-17-4 (Second Edition: Europe)
2021

For Amy Williamsen.

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FOREWORD

Amy Williamsen (1959-2019)

BRUCE R. BURNINGHAM

Although scholars of what was once commonly called Spanish “Golden Age” literature have increasingly moved—with good reason—toward less hegemonic locutions such as “early modern Iberian and Latin American studies,” or “early modern Mediterranean studies,” or even early modern “imperium studies,” the notion of “Golden Age” remains evocative, if only among those of us working in the field. To be clear, I do not mean by this that those of us who may still occasionally self-identify as “Golden Age” scholars view the period of roughly 1500 to 1700 as some kind of glorious “center” of the Spanish-language literary and cultural canon. Rather, what I mean is that the easily recognizable phrase “Golden Age” often serves as shorthand for the sense of collegiality and comradery that we presume to share, even while now describing our field in much more nuanced terms on our CVs and in our author blurbs. Indeed, more than once I have found myself chatting with colleagues about how “Golden Age people” seem to be less contentious as a cohort than colleagues in other fields of specialization, or how we seem to pride ourselves on being much more warm-and-welcoming to junior colleagues whose mentorship we take very seriously, or even how we are perhaps inordinately over-represented in various university administrative positions precisely due to an assumed level-headedness among us. Of course, while the notion that these (and several other) positive traits adhere to the term “Golden Age” may be anecdotal at best (if not clearly self-serving), such a notion is most certainly applicable to our dear friend and colleague Amy Williamsen, who shockingly passed away in April 2019.

Like many of us working in early modern Iberian and Latin America cultures, Amy’s scholarship and professional service encompassed several overlapping areas. First (at least chronologically), Amy was a well-known and respected *cervantista* who earned her PhD at the University of Southern California under the direction of James A. Parr. Amy’s doctoral dissertation, “Comic Subversion: A Study of Humor and Irony in the *Persiles*” formed the basis for her first book, *Co(s)mic Chaos: Exploring Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*, while her other Cervantes-related publications include multiple articles and book

reviews that appeared in such journals as *Neophilologus*, *Hispania*, and *Cervantes*. Moreover, during her 30-year career Amy served three separate terms on the Cervantes Society of America Executive Council (1993-1997, 2002-2005, and 2009-2011) and was also a member of the *Cervantes* journal's editorial board (1996-1999).

Regarding *Cervantes*, for my very first issue as the journal's new Editor in Spring 2011, I had the honor of publishing one of Amy's essays. Titled "Quantum Quixote: Embodying Empathy in the Borderlands," this article epitomizes what Parr has called the "aura of warmth and caring" that permeated all of Amy's professional life (11). Beginning with the question of why Cervantes still inspires us today, Amy examines various episodes from *Don Quixote* in order to trace what she calls "the origins of Cervantes's deep understanding of the plight of the marginalized" ("Quantum" 176). From this point of departure, Amy pivots to a discussion of migrant populations in the US-Mexico borderlands in order to "consider how dehumanizing distance enables the atrocities that we as societies perpetuate" (179), before concluding that "now more than ever, it seems imperative that we heed Cervantes's call to empathy. We must actively resist discourse that objectifies human beings as 'other'; for, this is the first step in constructing the psychological and sociological conditions for abuse" (180). It is precisely this kind of socially engaged, empathetic scholarship that provided the rest of us with such a powerful model for what the Humanities ought to be doing in the early decades of the twenty-first century. And, as usual, Amy was out front leading the way.

Beyond the world of Cervantes studies, Amy was also a distinguished *comediante* dedicated to fostering an appreciation of early modern Spanish and Latin American theater. Indeed, as the daughter of Vern G. Williamsen, one of the Association for Hispanic Classical Theater's four founding "charter" members, Amy was really AHCT "royalty" and came of age in a world full of renowned *comediantes*. She maintained strong connections to AHCT throughout her career, serving on its Board of Directors for many, many years, and regularly attending the AHCT conference held in El Paso, Texas in connection with the annual Siglo de Oro Drama Festival at the Chamizal National Memorial. In this last regard, Amy's sparkling pre-performance introductions with Ben Gunter (what affectionately came to be called the "Ben and Amy Show") provided Chamizal audiences with the background information they would need to better appreciate the *comedia* they were about to see. Beyond AHCT and the Chamizal festival, Amy also served on the Modern Language Association's Division on Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Spanish Drama. And, most recently, she spearheaded the very successful organization of the 2019 annual Comediantes Banquet, which was held last January at Café Ibérico in Chicago.

Amy's scholarly contribution to the world of *comedia* scholarship is impressive by any measure. Among the five volumes of collected essays that she co-edited with such colleagues as Judith Whitenack, Ellen Anderson, Valerie Hegstrom, Barbara Simerka, and Gwyn Campbell, two are specifically dedicated to early modern theater: *Prismatic Reflections on Spanish Golden Age Theater: Essays in Honor of Matthew D. Stroud* (see Campbell and Williamsen) and *Engendering the Early Modern Stage: Women Playwrights in the Spanish Empire* (see Hegstrom and Williamsen). Moreover, Amy authored or co-authored some thirteen articles and book chapters on early modern Spanish and Latin America theater, with a particular emphasis either on questions of gender and sexuality in the traditional Golden Age canon or on the important—but woefully underappreciated—work of early modern *dramaturgas* like Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, Ana Caro, and María de Zayas. In fact, promoting a greater awareness and appreciation of the work of Golden Age women dramatists was one of Amy's great scholarly passions, as she and Valerie Hegstrom note in a co-authored 2015 essay titled “Early Modern *Dramaturgas*: A Contemporary Performance History”:

More than fifteen years ago we allowed ourselves to imagine what we would like to see happen for our beloved early modern women dramatists writing in Spanish across the globe, including Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, and the Americas. We made an apparently impossible wish list—and an even longer, more detailed list of action items. One of our dreams seemed beyond our control: we wanted to see at least one of the female-authored plays on stage. (83)

Of course, some two decades later, Amy and Valerie's “apparently impossible wish list” has been (at least partially) realized in ways that they perhaps may not have imagined at the time. The last twenty years have seen a veritable explosion of interest—both literary and theatrical—in the work of Golden Age *dramaturgas*. This work includes several new editions and translations of plays like Sor Juana's *Los empeños de una casa*, Zayas's *La traición en la Amistad*, and Caro's *El conde Partinuplés*, many of which found their way into production across the US and around the world. Amy's particular contribution to this impressive body of work includes her own translation of Caro's *Valor, agravio y mujer* (titled *Courage, Betrayal, and a Woman Scorned*), which—in addition to serving as the textual foundation for the supertitles of a 2006 Spanish-language production of Caro's play mounted by GALA Hispanic Theatre in Washington, DC—was first produced at Oklahoma City University in 2007 under the direction of David Pasto, and later adapted at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2012 under the direction of Ian Borden.

It has been said that “all that glitters is not gold.” In Amy's case, such an aphorism simply does not hold true (at least not in the way it is meant to be

understood as a caution against mistaking “*parecer*” for “*ser*”). During her all-too-brief time with us, Amy glittered oh-so-very-brightly, while at the same time being genuinely golden. She was a rigorous scholar and unselfish colleague: gifted, curious, and capable, but also gentle, kind, and compassionate. As I recently noted elsewhere, Amy was one of the most generous people that I have ever had the honor and pleasure to know, and her natural impulse to mentor younger colleagues certainly had an impact on my own life and career (Burningham 7). She will be deeply missed by all who knew and loved her. She touched our lives in so many ways. Hers was truly a “Golden Age.”

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INTRODUCTION

Living and Practicing the *Comedia*

ESTHER FERNÁNDEZ AND YURI PORRAS¹

The specter of globalization pervades every aspect of our lives, yet borders and retaining walls emerge around us, affecting even the academic realm. In the shadow of late capitalism, for example, the emphasis on professional specializations and the proliferation of fields of study splinter disciplines and the Humanities as a whole. It has become paramount, in a swirling miasma of competing intellectual and popular interest, to not only justify the significance of a genre or a field, but also to actively attract an audience whose members increasingly favor the instant, individualized gratification of digital petit narratives. While the articles presented in this volume point to the survival of Spanish early modern literature and theatre culture in the twenty-first century, they also recognize the ceaseless enthusiasm of educators, researchers, practitioners, and artists who endeavor to keep alive this vibrant cultural heritage, something in which Amy Williamsen played a key role throughout her career.

Amy was an impressive confluence of a loving, warm, funny, as well as open individual, with that of an insightful, original, and dedicated professional. She shared the belief of a growing number of scholars and practitioners that proactive collaboration across disciplines exponentially increases the successful maintenance and success of early modern literary studies in general—like other fields in the Humanities—under intensifying pressure to validate its existence. A significant part of Amy’s legacy, therefore, aligns with a generation of scholars whose primary objectives have been evolving not just to question, theorize, and understand so-called Spanish Golden Age works in context, but to shed light on these precious and oft-perceived “archaic” texts; in essence, to *live* and *practice* them in the classroom, in research, and in performance.

The volumes of this project contain sections that reflect various aspects of Amy’s legacy, which we hope students, colleagues, family, and friends will fondly

¹ We would like to acknowledge Robert Bayliss and Judith Caballero, co-editors of this volume’s companion (*Peculiar Lives in Early Modern Spain: Essays in Honor of Amy Williamsen*), for their collaboration in editing this part of our two-volume project. Our choice to assign the names of two editors to each volume reflects the exigencies of our profession and of our home institutions, but not the spirit in which we all contributed to the development of the essays published in both *Peculiar Lives* and *Living the Comedia*.

remember. This volume rightly begins with the section entitled “Early Modern Spanish Literature in the Classroom and Beyond,” a homage to her love of teaching and making texts more accessible to today's students and the general public. The following section, “Staging the *Comedia* and Contemporary Audiences,” reflects Amy's passion for bringing the text to performance on the twenty-first-century stage and fostering its appreciation among both English- and Spanish-speaking audiences. Finally, the closing section, “Music and Musicians in Early Modern Literature and Performance,” pays tribute to Amy's vision of the significance of collaborative and interdisciplinary research. We believe the sections in this volume, in the end, congruently and justly represent Amy's quest for motivating audiences and readers of a variety of levels, backgrounds, and ages to appreciate and *live* early modern works.

Early Modern Spanish Literature in the Classroom and Beyond

To attract new students to Spanish early modern literature, Glenda Y. Nieto-Cuebas provides an inspiring first-hand account of the ways in which experiential learning can be applied to the teaching of the *Comedia* to undergraduates—native and nonnative speakers—in Spanish literature courses, and of how *Comedia* performance can contribute to a holistic approach to student learning that fosters transferable skills like critical thinking, conflict resolution, and project management. Over the years, various books such as the MLA's *Approaches to Teaching Spanish Golden Age Drama* (1989) or *Approaches to Teaching Early Modern Spanish Drama* (2006) have offered alternative pedagogical strategies to teach Golden Age drama. Nieto-Cuebas contributes to this growing field by applying her classroom experiences teaching early modern Spanish culture through performance workshops. The author persuasively demonstrates how David A. Kolb's experiential learning theory can be applied to the study of Golden Age drama, innovating the theory and practice of teaching the *Comedia* by describing a methodology for educators that is optimal for small-class settings focused on individualized attention.

Similarly, Shannon M. Polshow's article provides a hopeful opening to further develop and expand upon scholarship about Cervantes in the undergraduate classroom, beyond the standard-bearing 1984 and 2015 iterations of the MLA's *Approaches to Teaching Cervantes's Don Quixote* (1984, 2015) has been the standard. Polshow supplements those canonical pedagogical strategies, detailing her experience in the classroom while also lamenting that her Spanish Golden Age courses irremediably compete with other professionally-oriented classes on translation and interpretation in her department. Polshow reveals a “postmodern playfulness” that she uses to renovate her courses on Cervantes studies. Instead of

designing a class concentrated entirely on reading *Don Quixote*, Polshow devises the study of early modern Spanish culture through the lens of Cervantes's oeuvre, paying close attention to his *Exemplary Novels* and his *Entremeses*, which are shorter and less daunting to the uninitiated than his masterpiece. For the final class project, students write a book review on novels inspired by Cervantes's life (biofiction): for example, students who have become acquainted with the writer's real-life may assess novels such as Jaime Manrique's *Cervantes Street* (2012) or Luis García Jambrina's *La sombra de otro* (2014). As Polshow demonstrates, there are creative ways to teach Cervantes that win over new readers by engaging popular culture and our postmodern sensibilities. However, Polshow insists that it is also crucial to continue tilting at windmills to preserve *Don Quixote* in our curricula.

While the aforementioned essays argue for the need to find alternatives in higher education to introduce early modern literature to new audiences so that the genre may survive in present-day curricula, the two articles that follow describe techniques that anchor Golden Age theatre in current society through a public and democratic cultural display that goes beyond the traditional stage. In this sense, the essay coauthored by Esther Fernández, Jonathan Wade, Jared White, and Jason Yancey (members of the Dragoncillo puppet troupe) spotlights outreach in K-12 bilingual schools with the use of shadow puppetry, which brings sixteenth and seventeenth-century Hispanic literature and culture to young audiences in new, engaging ways. Thanks to Jason Yancey's guidance and puppetry expertise, the troupe has developed a system of ready-made puppet shows that offers a veritable performance template for any would-be instructor. The innovative template is designed so that anyone can stage performances, as instructors can learn how to put on their own puppet shows in less than two hours. This itinerant "teach the teacher" approach to pedagogy can be exponentially impactful, as bringing culture plays to schools increases awareness of and excitement for the genre, stagecraft, and cultural heritage.

If Dragoncillo's efforts are specifically aimed to take the early modern Hispanic heritage to K-12 audiences across the United States, the International Almagro Festival in Spain has been laboring toward a comparable goal, one that is directed to a more general audience over the last forty years. As with any other theater festival, its mission involves democratizing performance arts and opening theater to local, national, and international audiences. In this section's final chapter, Ignacio García, the current director of the Almagro Festival, explains precisely how the festival has evolved and incorporated the trademark innovation, open-mindedness, and inclusivity that he has solidified at the festival under his leadership. In sum, this section's articles bring to light the imperative to achieve much greater visibility for the literature of early modernity, which is besieged in

academia and even in the entertainment industry. Each proposed intervention offers specific, pragmatic solutions that go beyond speculation and wishful thinking. Indeed, these authors have experimented firsthand with the novel formulas they propose and are positioned at the forefront of pedagogy, outreach, and cultural leadership.

Staging Early Modern *Comedia* for Contemporary Audiences

If the preceding section focused on how educators, scholars, and cultural ambassadors have undertaken efforts outside traditional stage settings so that sixteenth and seventeenth-century theater reaches all kinds of audiences, the essays are based on the development of the *Comedia* on stage and, specifically, on how gender has dialogued with different aspects involved in performance. In this sense, this essay cohort pays tribute to Amy Williamsen's work as an intellectual activist on gender issues and a visionary in the performance studies of Golden Age plays. Barbara Mujica opens this section by enlightening readers about the role that older actresses played on the Spanish stage. Unlike Elizabethan theater, the *Comedia* offers an abundance of roles for young actresses. Contrary to what one might think, the most seasoned early modern female performers also found a niche in embodying character types whose mature age could enrich and highlight certain characterizations. Mujica prompts us to re-evaluate the role of *Comedia* actresses in general by pointing out aspects of female acting that go beyond the physical attractiveness with which these professionals were often associated. In turn, Melissa Figueroa's article takes a historicist approach to tackle another understudied aspect of the Golden Age theater: plays staged by Moriscos. Figueroa pays attention to Francisco de Arellano's *Auto de la destrucción de Troya* (1574), which was executed to celebrate the capture of La Goleta but was interrupted and banned by the Inquisitors after its first performance. Figueroa argues that Moriscos adapted the theme of the destruction of Troy to their own social circumstances, even though they knew that these "dangerous performances," as the author characterizes them, would expose them politically.

While these articles analyze how early modern theater dialogues with marginal subjects, the remainder of this section explores how different characteristics associated with seventeenth-century gender normativity are negotiated on the twenty-century stage. Mindy Badía and Sonia Pérez Villanueva's contribution focuses on the mise-en-scene of *El alcalde de Zalamea* staged by 2RC Teatro at the Chamizal International Theater Festival in 2008, a production that generated controversy when the festival directors banned the on-stage rape of Isabel, the mayor's daughter. The authors argue that this censorship does nothing

more than replicate one of the main anxieties of the play, which is to keep women hidden in order to safeguard male honor.

The articles by Elizabeth Cruz Petersen and Christopher Gascón discuss Ana Caro Mallén de Soto's *Valor, agravio y mujer* (c. 1609-1620), a work that Amy Williamsen translated and studied in 2010. Cruz Petersen analyzes Williamsen's translation by contrasting it with Ian Borden's 2012 trans-adaptation and staging, with which Williamsen also collaborated. As we know, works by women writers in the theater of the Spanish Golden Age are scarce, and even fewer make it on today's stages, with the possible exception of Sor Juana's *Los empeños de una casa* (1683). *Valor*, deservedly so, is another of these plays which have attracted increasing national and international acclaim in staged productions throughout the twenty and twenty-first centuries. Gascón analyzes the most recent production directed by Leyma López, which premiered at the Repertorio Español in New York in 2018. Similar to Cruz Petersen, Gascón takes into account how the physicality of the protagonist, Leonor, influences the message of the play and reads such physical performance in light of nomadic theory. Finally, in this section's closing article, Margaret E. Boyle evaluates three recent performances, María Folguera's *Sangre forzada* based on Cervantes's *La fuerza de la sangre*, Nando López's version of María de Zayas's *Desengaños amorosos* in 2018, and Harley Erdman's and Gina Kauffman's 2019 adaptation of Luis Vélez de Guevara's *La serrana de la Vera*. Boyle's timely contribution pays close attention to how these plays' female characters are described in light of current social movements against sexual violence.

Music and Musicians in Early Modern Literatures and Performance

Holding true to Amy's vision of forging interdisciplinary approaches, the section on music explores current trends in research on seventeenth-century musicians and actors, as well as criticism on the unequivocal presence and impact—both structurally and *performatively*—songs, instruments, and dances, have on early modern works across genres. Through the example of late seventeenth-century actress, playwright, and musician María Ruano (d. 1702), esteemed Musicologist María Asunción Flórez's essay elucidates how women writers and performers took the lead in the creation of an evolving conception of women during the seventeenth century, a subject for which she advocates for greater critical attention. Though María Ruano's playwrighting and musical capabilities are unique, Flórez utilizes this lesser-known actress-musician to argue that the space within which women participated—in the dramatic arts in particular—formed important skillfully trained groups whose members enjoyed unequivocal economic, entrepreneurial, professional, and artistic freedoms (i.e., no male

tutelage) not afforded to other women outside of the “bubble” of the theater community, who were constrained by more stringent Baroque societal codes.

In the essays that follow, music in Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* takes center stage. Although the scholarship on music in Cervantes is extensive, especially in *Don Quixote*, Chad Gasta reminds us that there are so many references to music in the novel that the reader might think Cervantes himself was a musician. While there is no evidence to confirm that Cervantes played any instruments or even read music, the level of knowledge about musical subtleties displayed in his narrative provides material for interested scholars to keep exploring. Gasta’s argument regarding Cervantes’s knowledge of early modern music and performance informs his analysis of *Don Quixote*, in which entire episodes are dependent on music, several characters sing or play instruments regularly, and music is either performed in the background or utilized to set the ambiance of a given scene. The essay then focuses on the *Bodas de Camacho* in the novel’s second installment (1615), in which the series of spectacular songs and dances performed for the wedding guests echoes the Italian *intermedi* tradition, a distinct form of musical theater that before later developing into *opera en música*, which we know today as Opera. Gasta discerns a plausible connection between the musical spectacle in the *bodas* to the Medici wedding festivals from the late sixteenth century, where the world’s first operas also were performed and which had become fashionable in Florence around the time Cervantes was writing the second part of his masterpiece.

The next two essays, by Ivy Walters and Ben Gunter, study the role of songs in twenty-first-century adaptations of early modern *comedias*. Ivy Walters argues that musical performances written into *comedia* playscripts can afford us important information about early modern Spanish culture and society, given their association with quotidian customs. In her analysis of *La traición en la amistad*, Walters posits that María de Zayas’s incorporation of music in Gerardo’s attempt to woo Marcia underscores the real-world social convention of performing music to express love in courtship practices. Walters interprets Zayas’s use of music and its accompanying text as a means to heighten her parodic characterization of Gerardo, the “singer of laments,” before examining the adaptation and staging of Gerardo’s song in the 2003 Oklahoma City University production, directed by David Pasto, and the 2009 “Colectivo de Teatro Vistazul,” directed by Antonio Morillas Rodríguez. Walters affirms that emphasizing the musicality of the poetic text and setting it to music provides composers and directors with many dramatic tools and options for performance.

Along a similar line of inquiry, theater director and performer Ben Gunter offers a practitioner’s perspective on the essential role music plays in TWAM’s (Theater With a Mission) adaptations of Lope’s *Nuevo mundo* (Small New World), Cervantes’s *Retablo de las maravillas*, and Francisco Bernardo de Quirós’s *El*

muerto. Gunter poses a series of questions: How can performers today recapture the dramatic impact of such songs, onstage and in English? What strategies of research, translation, musical composition, orchestration, and staging can revive the vital performance vigor of songs in classical Spanish plays? Through these case studies, Gunter shares specific, replicable techniques for researching tunes, translating lyrics, and engaging audiences through the strategical staging of songs.

Finally, this section closes by addressing the obvious impact of musical performance on the work of Pedro Calderón de la Barca, and Calderón's perhaps even greater importance to the development of musical theater in Spain. Laura Ramiro analyzes the role of songs in two of Calderón's operas (*Celos aún del aire matan* and *La púrpura de la rosa*) and two of his *zarzuelas* (*El golfo de las sirenas* and *El laurel del Apolo*). Ramiro examines the world of the senses from a philosophical and historical context, first by situating Calderón's musical theater in the Baroque tradition of theatrical spectacles at court, which were influenced by the innovative use of machinery and visual effects brought to Spain by Italian engineers, and then by teasing out how Calderón deploys music to establish the preeminence of the sense of hearing over sight. As Ramiro explains, Calderón privileges music as a way to focus the audience's attention on the play's use of language and away from the courtly tradition's fashionable but often overwhelming visual elements.

These essays aim to illuminate Amy Williamsen's mark on a variety of the field's current trends in the study of pedagogy, gender, and performance in early modern drama and fiction. We the editors sincerely hope that, with the help of our contributing authors and many other friends and colleagues, Amy's intellectual strength and radiating spirit will continue to shape our fields of study. These two volumes of essays, which we are honored to present in her memory, give forth fitting cogitations on our continuing work to shape the field according to the values and standards that Amy modeled for all of us.

SECTION 1

Early Modern Spanish Literature in the Classroom and Beyond

Chapter 1

Experiential Learning and the Spanish *Comedia*: Process and Outcomes

GLENDAY. NIETO-CUEBAS

In this article,¹ I will discuss how experiential learning can help college-age learners better comprehend the Spanish *Comedia* and achieve a higher level of analytical understanding of this genre. Experiential learning is a methodology in which the educator becomes a facilitator and mentor, allowing students to have “direct experience with the subject matter,” and to experience “things first-hand by creating, designing, building, and testing ideas” in order to understand the subject matter in depth (Wurdinger and Carlson 9). David A. Kolb, one of the leading theorists of this methodology, describes it as a “dynamic view of learning based on a learning cycle ... or spiral where the learner ‘touches all the bases’—experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting—in a recursive process that is sensitive to the learning situation and what is being learned” (51). Taking into consideration Kolb’s concepts of experiential learning and the learning cycle, I will discuss how this learning approach can be implemented in undergraduate *Comedia* courses through the various projects I conducted with students. During these projects, learners participated in workshops and other hands-on activities with various professional theater companies, as well as attended live productions both at our university, a small liberal arts college in the Midwest, and at the *Festival de Teatro Clásico de Almagro* and the *Siglo de Oro Drama Festival* in El Paso, Texas. I also will share students’ reflections, as well as strategies to stimulate undergraduate understanding of and engagement with early modern Spanish plays. My goal is also to show how experiential

¹ An initial version of this essay was presented at the 2019 Conference of *The Association for Hispanic Classical Theater*. Two of my students, J. Adrian Burr and Sarah Gielink, participated in the panel, sharing their learning outcomes. Their interest, passion, and commitment have inspired me to share the efficacy of the experiential learning-based process. I also would like to mention that the projects discussed in this article would not have been possible without the financial help from my institution, Ohio Wesleyan University (OWU), which granted to me and my students several *Theory to Practice* grants in 2018 and 2019 to support these projects. I am grateful for OWU’s support and the help they have given me to keep promoting interest in the Spanish *comedia* among students and our local community.

learning helps students develop not only critical thinking and problem-solving strategies through the *Comedia*, but also project management skills that they will find valuable in any field of study they choose.

The difficulties entailed in teaching the Spanish *Comedia* both to native and non-native speakers prompted me to look for innovative pedagogical approaches. As pointed out by Catherine Larson, professors of Hispanic classical theater should always look for new “keys to open the texts that we teach, so that our students will see the *comedias* that they study as representable texts and not as poems or as prose” (44). The study of the *Comedia* can convey linguistic, literary, historical, sociological, political, and religious complexities that can be extremely difficult to grasp if not given the proper background, not to mention the preconceived idea many students have about classical theater in general as being old-fashioned and, perhaps, boring (Burningham 107). Bruce R. Burningham expresses that “[m]any students come to the classroom predisposed to view the *Comedia* as an ancient (and inherently inaccessible) literary form whose exacting canonical authority demands nothing less – though, curiously, nothing more – than reverential awe” (107). Our challenge as scholars and educators of the *Comedia* then becomes a complex one: How can we help students get an in- depth understanding of the *Comedia*, enjoy it, and genuinely engage in class discussions? How can we implement performance elements in literature courses? How can we render the *Comedia* as a genre that recognizes ethical questions and values that transcend the classroom to stimulate students’ intellectual growth and appreciation for the arts while helping them become mindful and worldly citizens?²

There is a vast array of ways to tackle the study of the *Comedia*, from theoretical to applied approaches, depending on desired goals and outcomes. In *Approaches to Teaching Early Modern Spanish Drama*, Bass and Greer make an excellent contribution to our field by compiling articles that delineate different methodologies and discuss different theories, processes, outcomes, and resources for teaching Spanish classical theater. Another collection of essays that led the way to new ideas and methodologies in our field is Hesse and Larson’s *Approaches to Teaching Spanish Golden Age Drama*. These two volumes contain articles that propose experiential learning approaches as effective methods to the study of the *Comedia*. Donald Dietz is among the first scholars to delineate the advantages of an integrative, creative, hands-on, and student-centered approach to teaching this

² In *Holistic Shakespeare: An Experimental Learning Approach*, Debra Charlton explains how to transform the classroom into a “scholarly and creative community” (xi). She advocates that knowledge should “bring not only individual growth and moral development but also the responsibility to use our heightened social sensibility for the common good. Shakespeare’s plays pose probing moral questions that transcend the walls of the classroom and compel individuals to become thoughtful and active citizens who are motivated to leave a positive imprint on the world” (xii). These goals and concepts are related directly to the study of the *comedia* and must be addressed to achieve better results in student learning and intellectual growth.

genre. In “An Alternative Approach to the Teaching of the *Comedia*,” Dietz expresses the limitations conveyed by teaching theater through a teacher-centered environment, where students lack opportunities to be active participants. He advocates for a humanistic methodology that “instruct[s] the total mind” by mixing humanistic (student-focused) and scientific (lecture-based) approaches (15). Matthew Stroud, on the other hand, focuses on the performative character of the *Comedia* and emphasizes that it is not necessary to “abandon the text in order to discuss performance” (28). He points out that there are performance techniques and activities that can be applied in class to help students better understand this theatrical genre and asserts that considering textual and extratextual elements of performances can “illuminate the text” by making students reflect on each play (37). Thirty years after Dietz’s and Stroud’s proposals, an integrative and experiential approach to the teaching of the *Comedia* is still considered one of the most effective pedagogical practices by scholars like Dale J. Pratt, Valerie Hegstrom, V. Martin, and Rosie Seagraves. Their performance-based projects with college students further demonstrate the success of teaching the *Comedia* through an experiential approach.³ I also advocate for employing performance in the study of the *Comedia*, and for an integrative and active learning methodology that combines traditional and experiential learning means.

The experiential learning approach, as the name suggests, refers to obtaining knowledge by doing, be it through in-class and hands-on activities, role play, internships, service and travel learning projects, or theory-to-practice tasks. Kolb⁴ has considered that “lifelong learning is often conceived as a process of learning from direct life experiences that is controlled by the individual” (xix). That is, students become active participants in the learning process when they are directly involved in what is being taught, contrary to the traditional approach where learners only read, hear, talk, and/or write about the material but seldom have the chance to be actively involved in the subject matter. Kolb explains:

Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience. Grasping experience refers to the process of taking in information, and transforming experience is how individuals interpret and act on that information. The experiential learning theory learning model portrays two dialectically related modes of grasping experience – *Concrete Experience* (CE) and *Abstract Conceptualization* (AC) – and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience – *Reflective Observation* (RO) and *Active*

³ Pratt and Hegstrom assert that the “best way to teach theater is through performance” (198).

⁴ John Dewey is the most notable proponent of experiential learning. His career as an educational researcher began in the 1920s, and the principles of this methodology evolved from his work. David Kolb, on the other hand, has become the leading theorist on experiential learning in the last forty years. His outline of the experiential learning cycle has been cited numerous times and is often used as a model to delineate and explain how experience-based teaching leads to enhanced student learning.