

Spanish farce translated for modern audiences

By Chuck Lieurance

In many circles Don Pedro Calderon de la Barca is considered the Shakespeare of Spain's Golden Age. This renaissance period in the arts produced such figures as El Greco, Cervantes and Lope De Vega also. Calderon is probably the best of Spain's dramatists and the least accessible to modern audiences.

theater review

Modern audiences were given a surprising entrance into his work by the UNL theater company when, for the first time in the United States, they produced a David M. Gitlitz translation of the farce, *Beware of Still Waters*.

Castro on Love Boat for peaceful episode

(The scene: The Love Boat. As the saccharin steamship cruises the Pacific coast, the stage seems to be set for another 60 minutes of tropical schmaltz. But all is not well aboard the ship. Captain Merrill Steubing calls a meeting in his quarters.)

"Ladies and gentlemen," he says, with the stiffness and dignity that have made him seem so out of place all these years on the pleasure boat. "As you know, we have been waltzing on the waves out here in the Pacific for quite some time, and we've had a lot of fun."

The members of the crew had heard the captain start lectures this way before, but there was a certain amount of apprehensive whispering among them.

"As you know, we opened the fall season with a special cruise that took us through the Panama Canal into the

pat clark

Caribbean."

"Yeah, it was great," interjects Isaac, the bartender. "Carol Channing, Betty White, Lola Falana... a big name cast like that probably drew in some great ratings. I can hardly wait to get back to shore to see how we did with the critics."

"It's not the critics I'm worried about," says the captain.

"See, things aren't the same in the Carribbean as they are in the Pacific. The Carribbean has Cuba in it; a nation that is not on the friendliest of terms with our own. On our cruise through the Carribbean, the Love Boat veered somewhat off course, accidentally entering the territorial waters of Cuba. Cuban patrol boats relayed the information to shore, and it soon came to the attention of Fidel Castro. Well, to be as brief as possible, let me just say that due to our actions Cuba has declared war on the United States."

"Gosh, that's too bad," says Julie, our cruise director, in monumental understatement.

"What we do, see, is give Fidel Castro an all-expense-paid cruise on the Love Boat," says the captain. "He will be hesitant at first, but we will tell him that Reggid Jackson is going to be on the cruise. Fidel loves the New York Yankees."

"Then we kill him and win the war!" says Gopher excitedly.

"This is not *The War Boat*," says the captain.

"Anyway, find some catchy character actress; say, Valerie Bertinelli — somebody young and perky and just a little naughty maybe. After all, we do have trashy image to protect. On the ship she comes to Fidel Castro and explains that she is trying desperately to defect to Cuba to escape the decadence of American life."

"Then we invite Ronald and Nancy reagan on a cruise; the same cruise. The Reagans love to take vacations. When they get here, we will assign them 'accidentally' (nyuk, nyuk) to the same room with Valerie Bertinelli. When Castro comes to her room to explain to her the defection plan I have written into the script, he and the Reagans recognize each other immediately. At this point, Adam Bricker, the ship's doctor barges in to say that the room is quarantined because Valerie Bertinelli was not vaccinated properly when she left the States. We lock them in the room, they work out a truce, and everyone lives happily ever after."

"It's so crazy, it just might work!" squeals Julie. "Let's try it, and save civilization as we know it!"

Beware of Still Waters adapted well to the small surroundings of Studio 12, becoming a much less formal play in this setting. The translation was also refreshingly void of formal high Spanish dialogue.

There was some awkwardness, however, when Gitlitz, chairman and associate professor of the Modern Languages and Literatures Department, tried to inject very modern puns into the banter, including a joke about busing that received an uncomfortable moment of silence from the audience. Because of this "modern" translation, there was the danger of reducing a complicated comedy to a rather banal melodrama, but the cast, at least most of the cast, rose above that and met the challenge.

Complementary member

Christopher Darga as the dashing Don Felix, who refused to fall in love, fit into his part with ease and complemented other members of the cast quite well. J. Christopher Wineman, as the foiled suitor Don Pedro, showed he was quite talented and very able to play the straight man to the more assertive members of the cast, but one feels that perhaps Calderon did not mean for him to be quite so endearing to the audience. When his love is thwarted in the end it is hard to feel good cheer for the others.

Julie Uribe and Joi Hoffsummer as the two most sought-after daughters of Madrid, Dona Eugenia and Dona Clara respectively, work well off of one another and are very capable actresses.

Most of the rest of the cast seemed to come off as simple caricatures. Thomas Loughlin, as the overly-

concerned father, has moments of stage mastery, and Brian Dunbar as the paranoid, temperamental Don Juan rises above the superficiality of his character at some points.

Royalty celebrations

As with Shakespeare, many of Calderon's plays were produced for royalty or to celebrate a royal event. *Beware of Still Waters* was probably written as a memorial to the marriage of King Philip IV of Spain to the Princess Maria Ana of Austria.

The play contains several rather clumsily interjected descriptions of the wedding festivities. These portions were probably a little more subtle in the original translations, and such things certainly come off better in Shakespearean drama. But in this translation the long tales become tiresome.

There is some relief from this in that many of the players clown about during the speeches, taking most of the tedium away. The main actor responsible for this is Scott Dienstbier as Hernando, Don Felix's servant, who takes none of the pomp seriously and releases the boredom of the audience with his hilarious facial expressions and slapstick routines.

Beware of Still Waters is a worthy comedy performed well by an entertaining and lively cast. As a translation it is still a bit flawed and the flaws deserve attention in order to retain some of Calderon's classicism and the feel of Spain's Golden Age. As an entertaining evening at the theater however, the play is top-notch, with a quick energetic pace.

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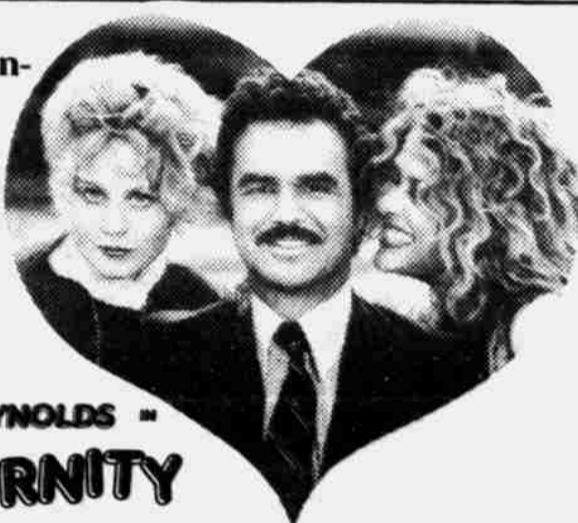
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