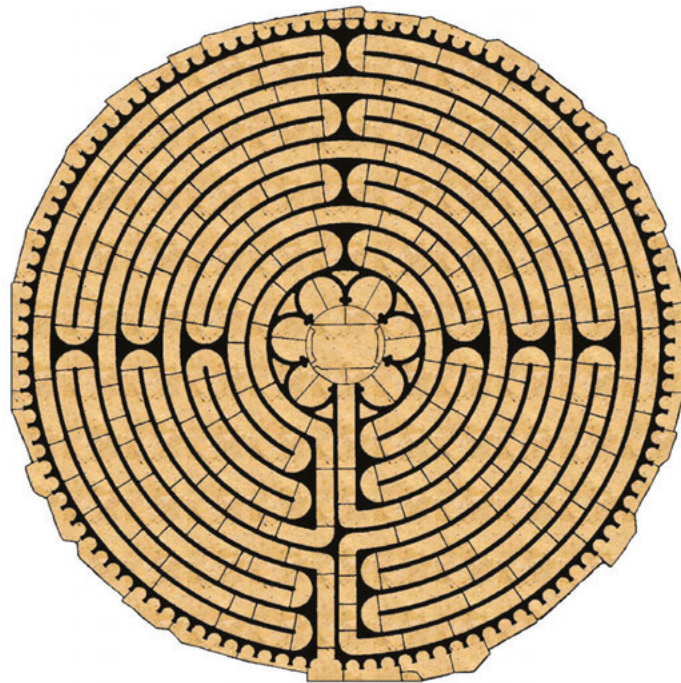


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An Ambivalent Female Voice: Translating Lope de Vega's  
*Los melindres de Belisa*

This essay explores selections from my unpublished English translation of Lope de Vega's *Los melindres de Belisa* as instances of an ambivalent female voice. I illustrate how Belisa evolves from a quirky non-conformist to a violent tyrant as she is disempowered by her gender and, at the same time, privileged by her wealth and religious-ethnic identity. This ambivalence results in a discourse that is at once subversive of gender norms, yet supportive of social hierarchies that deem violence towards Morisco slaves permissible. Engaging this tension through the medium of translation allows us to consider how contemporary English-speaking audiences might respond to Lope's text in general and to this larger-than-life female character, Belisa, in particular. Informed by the concept of intersectionality, translation theory, theories of comedy, and scholarly analyses of the how violence and humor intersect in early modern Spanish literature, I argue that an English version of *Los melindres de Belisa* that retains the duality of the central personage's characterization results in an undomesticated text capable of eliciting both critical reflection and comic amusement.

Written just before the 1609 expulsion of the Moriscos, *Los melindres de Belisa* satirizes the urban, aristocratic *milieu* of seventeenth-century Madrid. Belisa has earned a reputation for her eccentricities, among them her capricious rejection of any man who seeks her hand in marriage. Eliso, who will eventually marry Belisa, has borrowed money from her mother, the recently widowed Lisarda. Unable to return the money, Eliso pays his debt with two Morisco slaves, Pedro and Zara. Unbeknownst to the family, Pedro and Zara are Felisardo and Celia, noble lovers who have disguised themselves as slaves to escape arrest for a prior act of aggression committed by Felisardo. The complications mount when both Belisa and Lisarda fall in love with Pedro/Felisardo, and Belisa's brother, Juan, falls in love with Zara/Celia. It is only due to the repeated interventions of Tiberio, Belisa's uncle, that dramatic and social order are restored.

Belisa's assertion of her authority reveals the complexities of social stratification in Spain in the early seventeenth century. When she resists marriage, converting her suitors into distorted manifestations of her own linguistic prowess, she enters the carnivalesque realm, humorously inverting hierarchies, undermining masculine privilege, subverting the power of titles and wealth, and maintaining her independence in the face of her family's insistence that she wed; in sum, her recourse to the carnivalesque undermines the exigencies of the

dominant culture which demand a socially acceptable pairing with a Christian gentleman. However, her commands to brand, chain, and burn characters she believes to be Morisco slaves constitute an imposition of her power as a wealthy Christian aristocrat. When she makes these demands, her actions fall outside the boundaries of the comic genre. The resulting physical disfigurement of the “slaves,” in Act II, a literal realization of her discursive disfigurement of her suitors in Act I, marks the once-beautiful characters for exclusion from the social and affective sphere that Belisa inhabits through a process of differentiation, excision, and casting way that would serve to reinforce her position of dominance. It is also at this point that Tiberio, fully aware that Pedro and Zara are actually Felisardo and Celia, must intervene, and not to address the injustice of Belisa’s demands (since he allows her to believe that the two have been branded by applying fake scars). Rather, Tiberio’s actions ensure that the noble body, in both its individual and social sense, and of which he forms a part, remains intact. These observations become particularly poignant if we consider the play’s composition shortly before the expulsion of the Moriscos. Moreover, *Melindres*’s presentation of female desire at different life stages (through the characters of Lisarda and Belisa), its representation of an exoticized other (Pedro and Zara), and its grappling with shifting social hierarchies (the racialization of religious difference, the newly monied) make it an ideal catalyst for contemporary discussions of identity and representation with respect to class, race and gender and, thus, a *comedia* ripe for dissemination through translation.<sup>1</sup>

The text’s recent performance history attests to its continued ability to engage spectators. Productions from the second half of the twentieth century include an adaptation by the theater group La Columna de Aguascalientes, Mexico performed in 1987 at the Golden Age theater festival in El Paso, Texas; a 1963 recording from the program *El teatro del estudio* by Radio Nacional España; and adaptations directed by Dean Zayas from the University of Puerto Rico at Río Piedras from 1970, 1976, 1996, 2001, and 2009.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Zayas has taken the play on the road by the Teatro Rodante Universitario, with a performance at the Siglo de Oro festival in El Paso in 1975 for which his staging won Best Production, Best Actress, Best Actor, Best Director, and Best Secondary Actors. In 2003, Teatro Rodante performed *Los melindres de Belisa* in New York and New Jersey and received glowing reviews from Robert Daniels, a reviewer with *Variety*, who described the play as “delectable” and noted Belisa’s “felicitous capriciousness,” as well as the spectators’ “starry-eyed expressions.” It is through a convergence of the felicitous and the vicious that the translator finds herself at the limits of what can (and perhaps ought) to be translated, as Gabriela Carrión suggests when she notes the play’s “startling juxtaposition of comedy and violence” (15).

One specific example of Belisa’s use of humor to undermine patriarchy occurs in the third scene of Act One, when she is, once again, forced to respond to her uncle’s pressure to find a husband.

TIBERIO: ¿En qué te cansa Fabricio?

BELISA: En barba y Cabeza  
tiene ciertas moscas blancas,  
y cuando hay tantas moscas,  
es que el verano se acaba.

FLORA: El otro es médico.

BELISA: Lindo,  
con médico siempre en casa  
pensaré que estoy enferma.  
Frío me da de cuartanas,  
tiemblo; ti, ti, ti, ¡Jesús!  
¡Hola!, llevadme a la cama.

TIBERIO: Si no fuera mi sobrina,  
la diera dos bofetadas. (301-12)

(TIBERIO: And *what* is wrong with Fabricio?)

BELISA: He has these little white flecks in his hair and beard that remind me of fireflies. And when the fireflies swarm, summer is almost over. And then, before you know it, it's "Hello, Old Man Winter!"

FLORA: The other one is a doctor.

BELISA: Lovely! Why, with a doctor in the house, I'll always think I'm coming down with something. Such ch-ch-ch-chills from this f-f-f-fever! I'm t-t-t-trembling. Lord have mercy! Take me to my bed!

TIBERIO: If she weren't my niece I'd slap her twice.)

This exchange between Belisa, Tiberio, and Flora, Belisa's maid, illustrates Belisa's wit and resistance to social convention. Fabricio and the doctor are only two of the gallants who come courting, most of whom we only experience through Belisa's hyperbole. During Act One, she is forced to consider marriage to a nobleman from France, a nobleman from Spain, a nobleman from Portugal, a young gentleman in the Order of Santiago, and high-ranking military officer (among others). In each instance, Belisa undercuts the supremacy of these suitors as she takes these socially powerful men and reduces each one to a single, caricatured feature: enormous feet, dirty fingernails, a bald head, excessive facial hair, and a missing

eye, respectively. My translation of this selection reproduces the Spanish text's emphasis on wordplay, communicating Belisa's resistance to marriage to a (we can only assume) older man with a common expression in English that encompasses the implicit reference to age (Old Man), as well as the explicit mentions of insects (*moscas*/fireflies) and seasons (*verano*/winter). Tiberio's hilarious closing line—which I delighted in translating directly—echoes the violence that permeates the play and underscores the advantage that Belisa enjoys as a member of a wealthy family.

In the first scene of Act Two, Belisa's love for Pedro/Felisardo has brought about a change, as she claims to have become aware of her exaggeratedly exacting standards and to have rejected them.

BELISA: Que don Juan, en fin,  
como era estudiante,  
no gastaba en libros,  
lacayos y pajes  
lo que yo en espejos,  
pastillas y guantes.  
Con estas locuras  
fui tan arrogante  
que nunca pudieron  
casarme mis padres. (1126-35)

(BELISA: In sum, Don Juan, a student, did not spend as much on books, footmen, and pageboys as I on mirrors, make-up, and gloves. With these outrageous indulgences, I became so arrogant that my parents could never marry me off.)

Her acknowledgement of a defect and purported transformation due to the power of love is a convention of the *comedia de enredo*, one that Lope mines for comic potential as he undercuts neo-platonic ideals in plays like *La dama boba*. Unlike *La dama boba*, however, this transformation brings Belisa closer to her violent assertion of power and, ironically, also underscores her powerlessness.<sup>3</sup>

She continues, identifying the source and scope of her eccentricities:

BELISA: Yo, con la locura  
de hacienda tan grande  
y quizá engañada  
de mi ingenio y talle,  
he dado en melindres,  
en melindres tales  
que fui de la corte

fábula notable.  
 Di en decir un tiempo  
 que tenía de carne  
 las manos y rostro,  
 lo demás de imagen,  
 que, cual ves, las visten  
 solo por el talle,  
 sin piernas y cuerpo,  
 con bultos iguales. (1145-60)

(BELISA: With the presumptuousness that often accompanies such great wealth, and perhaps overestimating my own beauty and wit, I have indulged my whims to such an extent that I have become infamous at court. For a time, I told people that only my hands and face were made of flesh, that the rest of me was fake, a fashion plate, without legs or a body, and with perfect proportions.)

Here, Belisa explains her *melindres*, contextualizing them within a critique of her overindulgent upbringing, the evils of excess riches (her father's status as an *indiano* who made his fortune in the Philippines), and the gendered expectations placed upon her and her brother. And although audiences might see right through Belisa's poor little rich girl schtick, her revelation in lines 1153-60 is telling. The example of her former unruly behavior that she offers, the habit of telling people she was only real from the waist up, bears a symbolic resemblance to the social role assigned to her: the compliant Belisa is little more than a perfectly proportioned tailor's dummy. To convey this notion in the English version, I chose the term "fashion plate," an idiomatic expression used to describe someone who places immense importance on stylish dress. Belisa is certainly fond of fashion and demands that this fondness be indulged to an unreasonable degree, as we see in Act One when she insists that her maid replace a spotless dress with a new one due to an imagined stain.

BELISA: Como los ojos llegué  
 a sus palos, ellos fueron  
 tales, que al fin me los dieron;  
 pero luego me vengué.

FLORA: ¿De qué suerte?

BELISA: Del estuche  
 saqué un cuchillo y los dí  
 de puñaladas allí.



FLORA: ¡Quién hay que tal gracia escuche!  
¿Mataste la celosía?

BELISA: Hice, a lo menos, lugar  
por donde pude mirar  
quien por la calle venía.  
Mas presto vino el castigo,  
pues en vez del caballero  
pasó . . .

FLORA: ¿Quién?

BELISA: Un aceitero.

FLORA: ¿Y mirástele?

BELISA: Eso digo:  
que le miré, y me manchó  
el vestido.

FLORA: Pues ¿podía,  
tú detrás de celosía  
y él en la calle?

BELISA: ¿Pues no?  
Mírame bien.

FLORA: ¿De mirar  
el que va aceite vendiendo  
te has manchado?

BELISA: Así lo entiendo.  
Vestido me puedes dar,  
y éste harás luego vender.

FLORA: Mira que muy limpio está.

BELISA: Necia, ¿no te he dicho ya  
que daño me suele hacer  
quererme contradecir?  
¡Jesús, qué fiero accidente!

FLORA: ¿Cómo?

BELISA: Este pulso, esta frente.  
mira: estoy para morir  
¡Qué terrible calentura! (109-41)

(BELISA: When I pressed my face to the shutters to peek through the cracks, the slats wouldn't budge, and they cut off my sight. But I took care of them!

FLORA: Do tell . . .

BELISA: I took a knife from the cupboard and slashed them to bits.

FLORA: Never in my life! You killed the *shutters*?

BELISA: Not exactly. But I did carve out a peephole so I could see who was coming down the street. And that man was no gentleman!

FLORA: No?

BELISA: He was . . .

FLORA: Yeah?

BELISA: A common oil seller!

FLORA: So you got a *real* good look at him?

BELISA: That is what I am trying to tell you. And when I looked at him . . .

FLORA: Yes?

BELISA: He tainted . . .

FLORA: Go on . . .

BELISA: My dress!

FLORA: Oh *really*? With you behind the shutters and him in the street?

BELISA: You doubt me? Look. Here!

FLORA: So, you got a stain just from *looking* at the man who sells oil?

BELISA: That is my story. Now, run along and get me a clean dress. And see if you can sell this one.

FLORA: But it is spotless!

BELISA: Pay attention, Flora. We have been over this. You know how much I suffer when you contradict me. Sweet Jesus, such a pain!

FLORA: What?

BELISA: Take my pulse! Feel my forehead!  
I'm dying. Oh, it burns! It burns!

The stain discussed in this scene implicitly references the honor code, a set of standards that, in the context of the *Comedia*, place women under rigorous control to avoid a contamination that is no more real than Belisa's imaginary oil spot. With this association, the term "fashion plate," in addition to referencing her fanatical attention to sartorial finery, functions symbolically to denote Belisa's place in society. Despite her manipulation, Belisa has little meaningful power; her body, like the images used to illustrate and craft clothing, exists to shape the contours of the ideal *dama*, a construct that demands having a spotless reputation. When Belisa admits to likening herself to a tailor's dummy in Act Two, a detail presented as nothing more than an illustration of her former outlandish behavior, she shows a lack of conscious awareness of just how closely the image resembles the role that society really does expect her to fulfill. Therefore, while audiences may not pardon her quirks for the reason that she explicitly says that we should (because her parents spoiled her rotten), her behavior does become easier to understand if we consider the extent to which her ability to control her own life is constrained by prescribed gender roles.

The social hierarchy that Belisa deliberately undermines in Act I, and of which she appears as an unwitting victim in Act II, becomes a weapon that she wields to punish Zara/Celia, her rival for Pedro's/Felisardo's affection, in Act III. In the following exchange, Belisa commands that Carrillo, a servant, punish Zara/Celia brutally after she (Belisa) falsely accuses her of stealing.

CARRILLO: Calla, perrona.

FLORA: Ladrona. ¿Quién tal pensara?

LISARDA: ¿Qué disculpa puedes dar?

BELISA: Si a Carrillo no la entregas,  
si por su perdón me ruegas,  
si no la mandas pringar,  
cuéntame por muerta luego. (2555-61)

CARRILLO: Déjame a mí.

CELIA: Señora...

BELISA: Ponla en un fuego.  
.....

CARRILLO: Desnúdese.  
.....  
y concluya, que ha de haber  
azote y tocino ardiendo. (2563-74)

(CARRILLO: Hush, you cur.

FLORA: A thief. Who would have thought?

LISARDA: (To Celia) What have you to say for yourself?

BELISA: (To Lisarda) If you refuse to hand her over to Carrillo, if you beg me to spare her, if you do not *command* that she be basted with hot oil, then consider me dead.

CARRILLO: Leave her to me.

CELIA: My lady . . .

BELISA: Burn her alive.  
.....

CARRILLO: Take your clothes off. And rest assured that you will be whipped and fried like bacon.)

In these lines, Belisa's inventiveness reaches a violent peak. She takes advantage of her power over Carrillo to oblige him to punish Zara/Celia, an order that he eagerly follows, and then compels her mother into compliance. The command

that Belisa utters to Carrillo (“Ponla en un fuego”) could have been rendered in English in several ways, some of which could be read metaphorically as a demand that be put through some sort of unspecified ordeal (“Put her to the fire” or “Hold her feet to the fire”), though not necessarily that she actually be burned. However, it was important to me to capture the savagery of Belisa’s command and thus, I chose to render the line as “Burn her alive” to reference a form of torture understood as particularly cruel. Of course, the audience can rest assured that none of the aggressions she orders happen (because this is a comedy, and the “slaves” are nobles). Nevertheless, the fact that Belisa takes advantage of the privileges afforded to her by the very hierarchies she resisted in Act One, hierarchies of which she is seen as a victim in Act Two, results in a contradictory voice, the complexities of which I have chosen to maintain in my translation.

Belisa’s characterization reveals a complicated relationship with privilege and oppression which can be illuminated by the concept of intersectionality, a central theme in contemporary sociopolitical discourse. Intersectionality refers to the way race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, or disability status (among other facets of identity) interact to constitute our lived experiences. Most critical discourse focuses on intersectionality as disadvantageous, as layered forms of oppression. This is likely due to a broad application of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s specific (and pioneering) use of the term in a 1989 essay in which she analyzes the ways that sexism and racism converge to marginalize Black women within the legal system (“Demarginalizing”). More recently, however, Crenshaw has argued for a broader understanding of the concept: “Intersectionality is about capturing dynamics and converging patterns of advantage and disadvantage. Those are going to change from context to context” (qtd. in Moffitt). Lope’s play offers various instances in which characters experience privilege and oppression in intersectional ways, allowing contemporary audiences to engage with their extreme behavior and the text’s outlandish plot, at least for today’s theatergoers, on culturally relevant terms.

For example, Lisarda’s social advantages (being Christian and wealthy) are mediated by her age, a point that Belisa, ever ageist, makes clear when she describes the future that awaits her mother if she, Lisarda, marries:

LISARDA: si es viejo y sois vieja,  
juntaréis allí  
dos sierras heladas:  
¡qué triste vivir!  
Si es mozo y sois vieja,  
madre, presumid,  
que seréis maroma,  
como el volatín,  
que a pies, por momentos,  
os ha de medir,

para dar mil vueltas  
 al aire sutil.  
 Con la hacienda vuestra  
 comerá perdiz,  
 vestirá de tela  
 algún serafín.  
 Haranle su Adonis  
 diosas de Madrid,  
 que vuelven peón  
 el mejor arfil. (3098-105)

(LISARDA: If you and he are both old, your union will join two barren, snow-capped crags. Such a sad life! If he is a young man married to an old woman, rest assured that you'll be the tightrope and he, the tightrope walker. He will tread carefully and learn all the tricks so that he can use you to climb higher in station. With your fortune he will dine on partridge and buy fine dresses for some fresh-faced angel. The gold-digging goddesses of Madrid will make him their Adonis, and they can transform any bishop into a pawn.)

This selection exemplifies the association with love and money made throughout the text, as well as the implication that marriage is inextricably bound to the perpetuation of family honor and, by extension, to the bearing of children. Belisa's words echo a sentiment expressed in myriad examples of misogynistic discourse in early modern Spain that cast a ridiculing light on women who refuse to "act their age."<sup>4</sup> Since her rival in this instance is of the same social class and gender as she, Belisa attacks Lisarda from the one angle that offers an advantage: age. My translation follows the original closely, including the images of a tightrope walker and chess pieces. The first pair ("maroma" and "volatín") references the physical differences between a young husband (agile and strong) and his old wife (an inert object on which he walks), as well as the idea that he would only marry her to ascend socially. The second pair ("arfil" and "peon") conveys the notion of love as a calculated power play. I read "sierras heladas" as both a reference to white hair ("snow-capped") and as a suggestion of a lack of progeny, the notion that Lisarda is past child-bearing age, and I added the adjective "barren" to express the latter

Belisa's brother Juan illustrates male privilege, as well as that of social class. With respect to the former, Tiberio summarizes succinctly the difference between the expectations placed on Juan and those placed on Belisa in the first act when, bemoaning Belisa's reluctance to marry, he asks Lisarda:

TIBERIO: ¿Cómo vas tan descuidada  
en que se case Belisa,  
pues que ya su edad te avisa  
y el ser de mil conquistada?  
Que don Juan al fin es hombre. (49-53)

(TIBERIO: How is that you are so unconcerned with finding Belisa a husband? She is at a dangerous age, and the suitors swarm by the thousands. Don Juan does not worry me as much, being a man.)

We also note Juan's advantages through the nonchalance with which his daily routine is accepted: he stays out all night, carouses with women, gambles, and sleeps until noon most days, as Flora, Belisa's maidservant indicates: "no madruga don Juan / Las doce le dan en ella/los más días [don Juan never gets up early. Most days, when the clock strikes noon, you will find him in bed]" (669-71). The privileges of gender, ethnoreligious identity, and class converge when Juan forces advances on Zara/Celia, demanding that she dress him and, after dismissing Flora so that he and Zara/Celia can be alone, that she place his collar around his neck so that he can be close to her: "Llegad, ataréis el cuello [Come, fasten the collar]" (v. 854). In response, Zara's/Celia's words make clear that social norms view her harassment as his right: "Porque el serviros obligue / lo hare [Because I am obligated to serve you, I will do as you ask]" (855-56).

In contrast, Tiberio and Lisarda's insistence that Belisa marry constitutes an imposition of patriarchy (and an attempt to make the young woman someone else's problem). While Belisa's social and class and ethnicity afford her horrifying entitlements, the sheer number of suitors presented in the Act One, the fact that they are all described as "perfect" for her by her mother and uncle, and the casual admission of their interest in marrying for money lets audiences in on just how little Belisa's opinion matters. The resolution of the play, which includes Belisa's marriage to that weasel Eliso, a con artist who openly and aggressively woos and marries for financial gain, puts Belisa back in her place, reminding audiences that her rung on the social ladder will always be beneath that of her male relatives. Indeed, one gets the sense that her obligatory nuptials with Eliso punish her for eschewing marriage, rather than for her mistreatment of characters that she believes are Morisco slaves, a detail that emphasizes the injustice and violence of the social systems in which she operates and of which she is a product. While contemporary spectators would assuredly reject her treatment of Pedro/Felisardo and Zara/Celia (right along with their seventeenth-century counterparts, I suspect, but with a different tone to their condemnation), I submit that, because of its relevance to our contemporary socio-political discourse, they would also find what the character reveals about early modern intersectionality worth watching.

Of course, one could argue that there are behaviors so repellent that they would constitute an obstacle for contemporary spectators' engagement with the translated text and should simply be removed, and the performance history of *Melindres* offers one example of just such a cut. Though not a translation, Dean Zayas's 2012 production of the play excludes lines from Act One in which Belisa makes a joke about a one-eyed suitor and, in the process, mimics Black speech. In the director's opinion, such mimicry would prevent contemporary audiences from sympathizing with the character.

BELISA: ¿No es casi nada  
faltar un ojo?

LISARDA: ¿Qué importa,  
pues se le pone de plata?

BELISA: Yo te diré la ocasión.

.....  
Si este hombre jurara:  
«Como a mis ojos te quiero,»  
y le costaba el de plata  
dos reales, en otros tantos  
mi amor y vida estimaba.  
Fuera de eso, no podía  
llamarle mis ojos.  
Pues llamarle yo mi ojo,  
era ser negra. (216-29)

(BELISA: Did I mention that he only has one eye?)

LISARDA: Why does that matter? You can get him a silver one.

BELISA: I shall tell you

.....  
Ahem . . .  
If love at first sight is not  
always the case,  
but a second sight's hard  
with one eye in your face,  
then how can the flowers in  
Love's garden bloom  
or a discerning bride and a  
*cyclopic* groom?



And supposing one day  
 Cupid's arow, by chance,  
 did prick our desire and prod  
 our romance?  
 If this gentleman did catch  
 my eye, then, I fret, he  
 would keep it and try to  
 complete his own set.  
 And if he wore glasses, what  
 fun could there be?  
 I could not call him "four-  
 eyes." He'd have only three!  
 Thus, refusing the Father  
 and Spirit and Son,  
 my faith, by his ocular  
 Trinity won, no longer  
 ablaze from our love on the  
 make, but inflamed by the  
 fire of a heretic's stake, with  
 a prayer for my soul,  
 and a wave of the torch,  
 my lily-white skin would be blackened and scorched.)

These lines pose significant challenges for any translator since the aspirated word-final "s" in "mis ojos" does not have the same associations in English as in Spanish. Moreover, while today's audiences may initially applaud Belisa's mocking rejection of the *maestre de campo* because, as a woman subject to the social demands of marriage, she is punching up, the dynamic changes when she casts a marginalized group the butt of her joke. I took quite a few liberties in the English rendering, choosing to expand on the source text rather than eliminate parts of it. I have written the last lines of this exchange in verse and have incorporated jokes that reference the eyes (as the original text does) both to emphasize Belisa's theatricality and to underscore the artificiality of her perceived superiority; the goal is for audiences to laugh both at and with her. That Tiberio is taken in by her wit ("gracia" in the original), even to the point of participating in the rhyming in the English translation, parallels the way audiences accept (and even applaud) her clever use of language in Act One, and then, like Tiberio, reassess their responses to her utterances as they grow more vicious. Finally, Belisa's reference to the Trinity and the Inquisition in the English rendering reminds audiences that her characterization occurs within a wider framework of racialized notions of religious difference, a key element of the play that I emphasize in translation. Thus, while I do not intend to pass judgement on Zayas's decision, and he surely

has a successful history of bringing this play to the contemporary stage, I will note that none of the references to the torture and violation of religious minorities were removed from his 2012 staging. Furthermore, and with respect to the specific case of a translation, I will also suggest that a sanitized version of a work that is linguistically, temporally, and culturally “foreign” can result in a disservice to both the source text and its imagined spectators.

Zayas’s staging choice leads back to the specific question of how to represent a character like Belisa in a way that neither eliminates nor empathizes with her problematic wielding of power. Translation theory grapples with a related question, prompting us to consider what is gained and what is lost when a translator attempts to appeal to the perceived sensibilities of an intended audience. Lawrence Venuti describes the process by which a translated text is forced to reflect the target culture’s “values, beliefs and representations” as its “domestication” (*The Translator’s Invisibility* 18-19). “Foreignization,” in contrast, occurs when a translator “intentionally disrupts linguistic and genre expectations of the target language in order to mark the otherness of the translated text” (Myskja 3). This underscoring of alterity, according to Venuti, will “allow the translation to be read as a translation [...] showing where it departs from target language cultural values” (“Translations as Cultural Politics” 75). Although Venuti has been criticized for his dichotomous thinking (Myskja 11-13) and for the possible overlap of “foreignizing” and “exoticizing” source cultures (Myskja 13-17), I would argue that the English translation of a Spanish-language literary text like *Melindres* can, in Venuti’s words, “enlist the source text in the . . . revision of dominant cultural paradigms . . . in the receiving culture” (*The Translator’s Invisibility* 15). As we see in the example of intersectionality, Lope’s text illuminates power relationships that are recognizable as belonging to early modern Spain and, at the same time, illustrative of relevant socio-political discussions in the contemporary U.S.

Further, the fact that such serious matters are communicated via a comedic text should come as no surprise, given that for many theorists, comedy has always been connected to power, as Jennifer Marra writes, “Humor’s principal function . . . in the human struggle for liberation is to reveal and disrupt epistemic vice” (22). Belisa’s *melindres* disrupt the vice of patriarchy, challenging the legitimacy of Tiberio’s authority and inhibiting the perpetuation of the social values he represents by deferring marriage. Her resistance to marriage rewrites the script that would dictate the outcome of both the play and her life, and she uses language to rend and then recreate her so-called perfect suitors in ways that, through humor and hyperbole, emphasize the ridiculousness of the presumed naturalness of her mandated nuptials. Nevertheless, in light of Steven A. Benko and Eleanor Jones’s argument that comedy “does political work when the ingroup/outgroup dynamic is re-inscribed or upended” (101), Belisa presents us with a conundrum; she reverts to the original script—or at least aspects of it by which social hierarchies are assumed and upheld—when she imposes her will in an act

of hegemonic violence that is no less jarring for its performative nature. Which begs the question in the context of a comic play: is she (or ought she be) funny for today's audiences?<sup>5</sup>

Although the response to this question will always be idiosyncratic, we can look to the work of scholars of early modern Spanish literature, and that of translation theorists, to hypothesize about both the continued appeal of a text like *Melindres*, as well as (and in relation to) the effects of its mixing of comedy and brutality. Adrienne L. Martín's "Humor and Violence in Cervantes" argues that, because of *Don Quixote's* intermingling of violence and humor, the novel can neither be reduced to a "funny book" (in the words of P. E. Russell), nor to its serious engagement with early modern sociopolitical realities through its violent content. Martín's concluding sentence reads: "Since Cervantes' work is a symbiosis of life and literature, a relation one cannot emphasize enough, his work also exceeds humorous and violent motives yet abounds in their grave implications" (182). What I find particularly relevant about this quote for matters of translation is the critic's contrasting of "motives" and "implications," the idea that the consequences of the violence and humor in the novel, both respectively and in combination, will exceed whatever Cervantes intended their effects to be. That *Melindres* engages relevant social themes more than four hundred years after its composition would suggest a similar trajectory for this *comedia*. Indeed, Martín links the overlap of humor and violence to *Don Quixote's* modernity (182), as well as to the novel's continued ability to problematize interpretative certainty in engaging ways. And while the differences between *Don Quixote* and *Los melindres de Belisa* are myriad, Carrión makes a similar argument about Lope's play, noting that the text's "refusal . . . to reconcile the forces of play and politics is arguably one of its most remarkable achievements, for it is the tension between these forces, rather than a simplistic resolution of them, that commands the spectator's attention" (18). Finally, Myskja observes a similar rejection of binaries implicit to Venuti's concept of foreignization, which seeks to prioritize neither the source text/culture nor the receiving one but, rather, strives to "establish a cultural situation in which a number of voices are allowed to exist simultaneously" (6). I would submit that such observations also connect to the concept of intersectionality, which underscores the intricacies of power relationships and highlights points of convergence and divergence among varied subjectivities. Binding such theoretical engagements to practice, my translation of *Melindres* domesticates neither the source text nor its eponymous character; indeed, my goal is to communicate the comedic complexities of both.

### Notes

1. The background information in this paragraph and the previous one also appears in my essay “Too Near the Bone: Translation, *Los melindres de Belisa* and the Problem of Proximity,” *Cosmic Wit: Essays in Honor of Edward H. Friedman*, edited by Vicente Pérez de León, Cory Duclos and Martha García, Juan de la Cuesta, 2021, pp. 45-59.
2. This list may not be exhaustive, but these are the productions directed by Zayas that I was able to document from the University of Puerto Rico’s website: <http://smjegupr.net/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/TABLA-TEATRO-RODANTE-UNIVERSITARIO-octubre-2018.pdf>.
3. Frédérick Serralta classifies Belisa as a “pre-figurón,” noting that the main distinction between her and later examples of this stock character is her so-called transformation in the second and third acts: “por muy ‘figuonesca’ que pueda parecer en el primer acto, muy pronto se borran sus características iniciales, y ello debido a su radical enmienda en las dos últimas jornadas” (829). While a detailed discussion of the genre of this *comedia* is beyond the scope of this paper, I will note that the changes Belisa evinces in Act II and Act III do not suggest, in my mind, an improvement in her condition.
4. A fitting example is Quevedo’s “Vieja vuelta a la edad de las niñas,” in which the poetic voice mocks an old woman for trying to act and appear youthful.
5. Carrión poses a similar question, one that relates to my resistance to softening the text’s violent content in translation: “What are the implications of staging slavery and other forms of human torture within a comic framework? This is one of the questions at the heart of Lope de Vega’s *Los melindres de Belisa*, and it poses considerable challenges to critics and directors who, for the most part, have neglected this work or downplayed its physical and verbal violence” (15).

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