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GENDER DYNAMICS IN THEATRICAL RETRANSLATION: WOMEN'S ROLES IN ENGLISH VERSIONS OF *FUENTE OVEJUNA*

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Abstract

The concept of retranslation holds particular significance in the performing arts, where considerations of historical periods, linguistic aspects, literary discoveries, and personal views are key features. This paper aims to shed some light on the textual, paratextual and social agents that intervene in the (re)translation and reception of Lope de Vega's *Fuente Ovejuna* in the UK.[1] More specifically, it intends to show how women's roles and sexual exploitation in the Spanish text are portrayed in the target plays, examining the extent to which female characters are afforded increased empowerment and agency. For exemplification purposes, four British performance-oriented retranslations have been selected: Ruth Fainlight and Allan Sillitoe's *All Citizens Are Soldiers* (1969), Adrian Mitchell's *Fuente Ovejuna* (1989), Daniel Goldman's *Fuente Ovejuna* (2010), and April De Angelis's *The Village* (2018a). The findings reveal a gradual shift from collective judgement to alternative interpretations that situate women at the heart of the action.

Keywords: Theatre retranslation. *Fuente Ovejuna*. Women's roles. Empowerment. Agency.

1. This paper follows the original spelling convention of *Fuente Ovejuna* as two separate words, as used by Lope de Vega and found in Froldi's 2010 Spanish edition (Vega Carpio 2010b).

Resumen

El concepto de retraducción adquiere tintes únicos en el ámbito teatral, donde cobran especial interés el periodo histórico, los aspectos lingüísticos, los descubrimientos literarios y la impronta personal. Este artículo estudia los agentes textuales, paratextuales y sociales en la (re)traducción y recepción en el Reino Unido de *Fuente Ovejuna*, de Lope de Vega. En concreto, aborda cómo se reflejan en los textos meta el papel de la mujer y la explotación sexual, así como el modo en el que los personajes femeninos reciben mayor autoridad y protagonismo. Como ejemplos, se han seleccionado cuatro retraducciones pensadas para los escenarios británicos: *All Citizens Are Soldiers* de Fainlight y Sillitoe (1969); *Fuente Ovejuna* de Adrian Mitchell (1989); *Fuente Ovejuna* de Daniel Goldman (2010); y *The Village* por April De Angelis (2018a). Los resultados muestran un cambio gradual en la interpretación del clásico desde posiciones en las que prima la justicia colectiva a otras en las que la mujer ocupa el centro de atención.

Palabras clave: Retraducción Teatral. *Fuente Ovejuna*. Papel de la Mujer. Empoderamiento. Agencia.

1. Theatre Retranslation within (Re)translation Studies

The notion of retranslation, naturally "determined by the prior existence of an initial translation of a given work into a given language" (Deane-Cox 2014: 1), has recently garnered extensive scholarly attention (Zaro Vera & Ruiz Noguera 2007; Deane-Cox 2014; Cadera & Walsh 2017; Van Poucke 2017; Zhang & Huijuan 2018; Van Poucke & Sanz Gallego 2019; Berk Albachten & Tahir Gürçaglar 2019; 2020; Peeters & Van Poucke 2023; Amenta, Barrale & Sinatra 2025). These studies have attempted to refine this overarching notion and to single out the underlying motivations, mostly in relation to literature. The factors, spanning social, linguistic, literary, editorial and commercial domains, that stimulate retranslation have been of particular interest. Ageing (Van Poucke 2017), whether due to changes in cultural or translation norms (Aaltonen 2003) or because the original language is considered outdated (Aaltonen 2003; Venuti 2004: 25; Ortiz Gozalo 2007: 35) has been a focal point. Economic and literary aspects cannot be excluded either, since retranslation can be a strictly commercial affair. Besides, a novel critical interpretation addressing a different readership or a new artistic consideration of a given source text may be literary reasons (Venuti 2004: 25) that foster retranslation; for instance, basic

studies of seventeenth-century acting and performance spaces in Spain have influenced the way contemporary practitioners view Spanish early modern theatre in translation (Larson 2015: 3). Needless to say, this does not exclude the unearthing of mistakes or misinterpretations in a translation as the driver of new corrected versions; meanwhile changing social contexts, that is, ideological and political concerns as an excuse for reaffirming the authority of certain institutions (Aaltonen 2003) must also be taken into account, among them censorship and political correctness (Van Poucke 2017: 97).

Oddly, the theoretical discussion regarding literary retranslation has largely overlooked drama, with existing analyses being scarce (Zaro Vera & Ruiz Noguera 2007; Van Poucke 2017; Braga Riera 2024) and often limited to particular case studies that neglect the theatrical dimension of written plays. This apparent lack of interest sits uneasily with the fact that theatrical texts are especially age-sensitive, requiring rewritings and constant modernization (Van Poucke 2017: 97). Still, insights can be gleaned from the existing literature, such as the reluctance of theatre companies toward staging new or previously unstaged works (Fournari 2007: 233-242); the influence of theatrical trends; the need to strip the language "of old aesthetic conventions" that interfere with the illocutionary effect of the utterances on stage (Cetera 2009: 106); or the role of ideological manipulation through language (Bollaert 2019: 45-72).

Ideologies undoubtedly generate diverse readings of a single (re)translated play, with results that may feel remote from the source due to the intervention of intermedial human agents (Crossley 2019; Marinetti & De Francisci 2022), that is, people such as adaptors, directors, producers or even actors, who make interpretative choices and decide how to portray certain elements in a way that bridges linguistic and cultural gaps, aligning (or not) the performance with the sensibilities of the target audience. Gender readings, for instance, may bring female characters to the forefront, as observed in Tanya Ronder's *Peribanez* (2004), where Casilda embodies women's rights.

This essay understands retranslation in theatre as the process of creating new translations of a dramatic work that already has existing translations, usually to adapt it for thematic and stylistic reasons, in a particular

cultural, historical or literary context. These translations often result in various versions and adaptations, which might take great creative liberties and significantly alter the audience's understanding of the play.[2]

In what follows, I endeavour to shed light on the influences exerted by textual, paratextual and social intermedial agencies upon the retranslation and reception in the UK of one of the most internationally recognized Spanish plays, Lope de Vega's *Fuente Ovejuna* (1619). In particular, this study seeks to dissect how women's roles in the source text are portrayed in the target plays, and to what extent female characters are imbued with heightened empowerment and agency. This aspect is most noticeably observed in the case of Laurencia, the peasant woman who, following an alleged sexual assault by the village Commander, rallies the townsfolk to collectively kill him.

2. *Fuente Ovejuna* and its retranslation in the British Isles

Based on a historical event from 1476, the narrative of this play unfolds with the arrival of a despotic Commander, Don Guzmán, in the small town of Fuente Ovejuna. The young peasant Laurencia and her friend Pascuala express their aversion toward the Commander due to his notorious reputation for making unwelcome sexual advances towards village women. On one occasion he orders his soldiers to seize Laurencia and Pascuala, attempting to confine them in a nearby stable; however, the women resist vehemently and successfully evade being captured.

During a conversation in the woods between Laurencia and Frondoso, a young villager in love with her, the Commander appears, but Frondoso manages to hide in the trees and the Commander starts to force himself on her. Frondoso intervenes just in time to help Laurencia escape, but the Commander vows revenge on them. Subsequently, Laurencia and Frondoso decide to get married. They seek approval from her father, Esteban, who consents to their union. They do get married, but the Commander abruptly

2. Defining exactly what counts as an adaptation versus a version can be complex and subjective, leading to lengthy discussions that might detract from the main focus of this essay. See Braga Riera (2011) for terminological issues regarding the use of these terms.

interrupts the wedding, arrests Frondoso and takes Laurencia captive. Esteban gathers his councilmen, argues that the Commander's actions have brought dishonour upon all of them, and prompts the townspeople to unite against the tyrant.

Just then, Laurencia arrives at the meeting, after having allegedly been raped by the Commander, and urges the townspeople to collectively seek justice by confronting Don Guzmán. A royal judge is dispatched by the monarchs to uncover the culprits behind the crime, but the tortured villagers collectively reply with the defiant assertion, "Fuenteovejuna did it!." Ultimately the monarchs Isabel and Fernando pay a visit to Fuente Ovejuna and the courageous villagers receive a royal pardon.

The concept of honour, a pivotal element in the Spanish *comedias*, has traditionally posed a challenge for English translators who have either downplayed, eliminated or even mocked it, leading to substantially altered moral structures in some instances (Braga Riera 2013).[3] Surprisingly, however, a play such as *Fuente Ovejuna*, where honour holds profound significance, has caught the eye of many translators and adaptors in the British Isles. In fact, the narrative and thematic richness of *Fuente Ovejuna* have established it as one of the most frequently retranslated Spanish classics into English and several other languages (Kirschner 1977; Huerta 2019).

In terms of the reception of the play in the UK, a significant performance in 1936 by Theatre Union in Manchester (Johnston 1996: 92-93) possibly using the translation of American Garrett Underhill made a lasting impact (Breden 2019: 187). Directed by Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl, the production aimed to raise funds for the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War. Notably, the play found its way to the stage through various left-wing theatre groups during the same decade (Paun de Garcia & Larson 2008: 20), experiencing a resurgence in subsequent years with university and amateur theatre groups presenting it as Lope's most renowned play in the country (Thacker 2007: 16).

3. In Spanish Golden Age plays conflicts of honour often arise from rivalries between suitors or confrontations involving a suitor and the lady's father or brother. In such cases, the family's honour may be jeopardized by the woman's behaviour, which, even if unintentionally inappropriate, is perceived as a potential threat to the family's reputation (Braga Riera 2013: 37).

The first British translation, *Spanish Village* (Unity Theatre 1943?) was authored by Stanley Harrison. This text took a liberal approach to the source material, making substantial changes, such as the adoption of contemporary language (sometimes using a colloquial register) and a slight reduction in the prominence of the monarchs, alterations driven by political considerations.[4] As noted by Breden (2019: 194), this perspective led to Marxist interpretations of the play, with the apparent success of the workers' struggle. However, it was not until more than two decades later that the first British retranslation, Fainlight and Sillitoe's *All Citizens Are Soldiers* (1969), emerged.

Two additional retranslations followed, both in 1989: Victor Dixon's bilingual blank-verse text and Adrian Mitchell's monolingual free-verse interpretation. The latter was criticised for its free approach, leading Gwynne Edwards (Vega Carpio 1999) to propose his own rendition. Nevertheless, from a professional standpoint, the most noteworthy production materialized as part of the British National Theatre's 1988-9 season, featuring Adrian Mitchell's script. More recent performances include director Daniel Goldman's staging in Southwark Studios (London, 9-28 August 2010), and the latest to date, April De Angelis' *The Village* in 2018a.[5]

For illustrative purposes in the analysis, four British retranslations of this classic have been selected: Ruth Fainlight and Allan Sillitoe's *All Citizens Are Soldiers* (Vega Carpio 1969), Adrian Mitchell's *Fuente Ovejuna* (Vega Carpio 1989), Daniel Goldman's *Fuente Ovejuna* (2010, unpublished) and April De Angelis's *The Village* (2018a).[6] Considering the notable socio-geographical disparities between the US and the UK, only retranslations originating in the United Kingdom are considered here. Still, the US

4. Established in London in 1936, Unity Theatre was a British left-wing theatre company that emerged in response to the economic hardships and social injustices of the time. Unity Theatre's productions often tackled pressing social issues, from class inequality and labour rights to fascism and war. See Breden 2020.
5. Its reception and influence in the UK, as we will see, has been varied, and the same can be said about other cultures: German adaptations, for instance, tended, until recently, to tone down violence, while most 20th-century French stagings were produced by left-wing groups (Gagen 1993: 5, 7).
6. I express my gratitude to Daniel Goldman for generously providing me with a complimentary copy of the play text.

pioneered the introduction of Lope de Vega's play in the English language, commencing in 1936 with *The Sheep Well*, John Garrett Underhill's prose rendition in *Four Plays by Lope de Vega* (Vega Carpio 1936).[7]

This selection is justified by the fact that they are the sole retranslations that have been associated with professional productions in the country. In all cases translators seem to have worked directly from the Spanish play, since there is no evidence they may have used literal or indirect translations.

3. Women in *Fuente Ovejuna* and its British retranslations

In *Fuente Ovejuna*, historical, political, and moral issues can be distinguished. Lope de Vega favoured a strong, centralized monarchy, portraying the Catholic monarchs as just and wise. Additionally, there are political undertones, particularly concerning the farmers-landowners who were gaining prominence in Lope's society and who could assert a more significant social position. The moral dimension is evident through the depiction of the peasants as simple folk embodying the fundamental values of an honest rural life. But women's roles also undergo moral scrutiny, with their courageous confrontation to both Don Guzmán and the men in the village.

7. Other non-professionally staged translations include Dixon's bilingual edition (Vega Carpio 1989) and Gwynne Edwards' *Fuente Ovejuna* (Vega Carpio 1999). In America, Dorothy Peterson continued Underhill's pioneering work with *Fuenteovejuna* (Vega Carpio 1937). In 1957, Angel Flores and Muriel Kittel included *Fuente Ovejuna* in their *Masterpieces of the Spanish Golden Age* (Vega Carpio 1957). Two years later Eric Bentley's collection *The Classic Theatre. Volume 3* (Vega Carpio 1959) was released incorporating a verse translation by Roy Campbell. The first actor-oriented piece came out in 1961 through actress Jill Booty in *Lope de Vega: 5 Plays* (Vega Carpio 1961), followed seven years later by *Fuente Ovejuna: A Bilingual verse translation of one of the greatest plays by the outstanding dramatist of Spain's Golden Age*, a critical edition by Professor William E. Colford (Vega Carpio 1968) aimed at university students. In the twenty-first century additional versions have surfaced: Dover Editions edited *Fuenteovejuna: A Dual-Language Book* (edited and translated by Stanley Appelbaum, Vega Carpio 2002), and poet Richard Sanger included a translation in *The Broadview Anthology of Drama: Plays from the Western Theatre* (Vega Carpio 2005). Other translations include one by G. C. Racz (Vega Carpio 2010b), who preserved the original metre and rhyme entirely, and another by the renowned British director Laurence Boswell (Vega Carpio 2009), using blank verse and staged at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival (Ontario, Canada) in 2008.

Given this multifaceted interpretation, the play has been utilized throughout theatrical history for various purposes, mainly political (loyalty to the monarchy or the supremacy of the people) and the object of this essay, feminist causes.

As expected in Spanish Golden Age theatre, women are usually portrayed as an integral component of a patriarchal system that constrains their behaviour. Central to this portrayal are the themes of marriage and virginity, with the figure of a brother or father assuming the role of preserving their honour intact. According to Allatson (1996: 261) what sets *Fuente Ovejuna* apart from other *comedias* is the presence of a woman, Laurencia, engaging in something mostly the preserve of men: inspiring a peasants' revolt against a lord to recuperate her reputation.[8]

In the Spanish play, several pivotal moments underscore the substantial role of women. One such moment occurs in Act I (vv. 173-274): Laurencia and her friend Pascuala engage in a conversation and discuss the Commander's past advances towards other women as well as the transient nature of men's behaviour, since they tend to abandon their victims once their desires are satisfied. The second of these moments unfolds later in this same Act, when the Commander attempts to persuade both of them to enter his house, an invitation they steadfastly reject out of mistrust (vv. 595-626), underlining their position. A third significant moment occurs at the end of Act I when the Commander tries to seduce Laurencia. In this key scene, Frondoso, in hiding, courageously defies Don Guzmán, seeking to protect the honour of his future wife (vv. 779-860).

In Act II, the most striking event unfolds during Laurencia and Frondoso's wedding, when the Commander unexpectedly arrests both of them. Act II also marks a crucial moment when Laurencia, consumed by fury, passionately appeals to the men in the village (including Esteban, her father and also town's mayor), accusing them of failing in their roles as protectors and calling for revenge (vv. 1713-1905). So she resolves to

8. This is not an isolated case. As Fuchs (2024: 375) asserts, Spanish *comedias* are replete with strong women characters, and translators and directors have capitalised on this feature to reimagine the canon, thereby creating new versions appealing to contemporary audiences.

supplement their lack of masculinity and the women take the initial steps towards action, organizing an armed brigade and demonstrating their determination by eventually beheading the Commander and catching his body on their lances.

In the ensuing comparative analysis, three aspects will be scrutinized: (1) how English translators (or human intermedial agents such as directors) handle the theme of sexual exploitation, and the significance attributed to Laurencia as the victim of the Commander's sexual abuse; (2) how the adoption of a contemporary idiom empowers Laurencia, proving the importance of language ageing as a key factor in retranslation; and (3) the way paratexts influence the context and interpretation of women's actions in the resulting performances.

Gérard Genette divides paratexts into peritext (features of the text in the published form) and the epitext, or "any paratext not materially appended to the text" (1997: 344). Both peritext and epitext interweave a series of linguistic and visual elements that serve as components of guidance. Given the particular nature of theatre, special emphasis will be given to epitexts. These include "publicity (press releases, ads and commercials, promotional videos and trailers), press reviews, interviews, posters, playbills, flyers and programmes, together with the photographic apparatus that usually complements them" (Braga Riera 2018: 253).

Due to space constraints, aims 1 and 2 will focus mainly on three selected scenes in the play: Laurencia's attitude in the forest (Act I), her monologue to the men in the village after her abduction and rape (Act II), and the moment when the Commander is killed (Act III). The rape incident is particularly noteworthy because Lope de Vega does not explicitly clarify it. It takes place off-stage, and some scholars (Parker Aronoson 2015: 33) argue against her having been raped.[9] However, various textual and contextual elements such as her physical condition (*desmelenada*, 'dishevelled hair') and transformation when she shows up to the extent that her own father can hardly recognize her, strongly suggest she was indeed subjected to a sexual assault.

9. "Laurencia's abduction and rape occupies a privileged position in the drama even though numerous scholars argue against her having been raped at all."

The following sections (4-7) will focus on the extent to which the theme of sexual exploitation prevails in the translations selected, and how women's actions are rendered and interpreted (linguistically and paratextually) in the target plays.

4. "Long live the Republic!": *All Citizens Are Soldiers* (1969)

All Citizens Are Soldiers is a prose adaptation by Ruth Fainlight and Alan Sillitoe. Although neither of them had any experience in playwriting, they were drawn to a text that spoke to Sillitoe's literary commitment to the struggle of the working classes. Their connection to this theme might have been influenced by their first-hand experience with Franco's regime during their sojourn in Mallorca in the 1950s, which made them align with their cause. The play made its debut at the London's Theatre Royal Stratford East, under the direction of Bill Martin.

Set in the Teatro Lara in Madrid in 1936, *All Citizens Are Soldiers* portrays a group of Republican soldiers staging *Fuente Ovejuna* during the Spanish Civil War. The translators' political view is clearly articulated in the added Prologue before Act 1, when the troupe's assistant artistic director explains to the soldiers what the play is about: "There is a wind in Madrid, they say, that can kill a man […] Their motto is 'Down with Intelligence'. This play tells us how, even four hundred years ago, the people of Spain were crushed by oppressors" (p. 4). The play ends with new lines describing a modern Madrid filled with explosions and gunfire, and an announcement that the Nationalist troops are nearby.

Excepting this Prologue and the final bombing scene, *All Citizens Are Soldiers* is fairly faithful to the original plot, although at times it is interspersed with references to conditions in Spain at the time, such as food restrictions (p. 11). Women's daring attitude is clearly seen in the forest scene, not only physically (at one point a stage direction indicates that Pascuala touches Laurencia's breasts, p. 10) but verbally:

Fuente Ovejuna, p. 49	*All Citizens Are Soldiers*, p. 10
PAS: Pues tales los hombres son: Cuando nos han menester somos su vida, su ser, su alma, su corazón; pero pasadas las ascuas, las tías somos judías, y en vez de llamarnos tías, anda el nombre de las pascuas.	PAS: When we've given in, they treat us like Jews who've kissed the cross. Instead of calling us darling, it's whore and slut and get out of my way you foul baggage.

This straightforward language in the English text is in this case used to render the euphemism *nombre de las pascuas*, an outdated expression meaning 'whore' and 'pimp' as referenced in *La Celestina*. Women's determination is also visible at the moment when the Commander "invites" Pascuala and Laurencia to his own house, with the help of his servant Ortuño, although the English Laurencia misses the play on words between 'meat' and 'flesh':

Fuente Ovejuna, p. 63	*All Citizens Are Soldiers,* p. 10
LAURENCIA: ¿No basta a vuestro señor tanta carne presentada? ORTUÑO: La vuestra es la que le agrada. LAURENCIA: Reviente de mal dolor.	LAURENCIA: Hasn't your master had enough flesh? ORTUÑO: It's yours he wants. LAURENCIA: It would choke him.

The translators, however, will use the commander's reprehensible conduct not only to to criticize women's exploitation, but also the political situation in Spain. This is evident at the moment when Don Guzmán intends to apprehend Jacinta, an honest peasant who vehemently rejects her attacker. Infuriated by her resistance, Don Guzmán delivers her to the soldiers:

Fuente Ovejuna, pp. 89-90	*All Citizens Are Soldiers*, p. 30
COMENDADOR: ¿Tú, villana, ¿por qué huyes? ¿Es mejor un labrador que un hombre de mi valor? […] Tira por ahí. JACINTA: ¿Con quién? COMENDADOR: Conmigo. JACINTA: Míralo bien. COMENDADOR: Para tu mal lo he mirado ya no mía, del bagaje del ejército has de ser. JACINTA: No tiene el mundo poder para hacerme, viva, ultraje. COMENDADOR Ea, villana, camina. JACINTA: ¡Piedad, señor!	GUZMAN: So you were running away? Aren't I better than a peasant? […] Come here. JACINTA: Where? GUZMAN: (*roaring*): Come with me! You common slut. I'll settle you. I don't want you – I'll hand you over to the army to be their whore. JACINTA: I'll die first. GUZMAN: Move on, whore! JACINTA: Have pity! […] ***As Guzman's soldiers do so, the Civil War Republican soldiers at the side of the stage jump up, protesting*:** **1st SOLDIER: Leave her, you monsters.** **2nd SOLDIER: It's just like the Fascists and the Moors.** […] **BARRILDO: Comrades, keep calm, it's only a play.** **2nd SOLDIER: But it's real too. That's the sort of thing they do. Stop it!**

The translators turn Don Guzmán into an impersonation of the fascists, and by breaking the illusion of the play, add some lines (in bold in the example) to denounce the Nationalists' violent behaviour. This is reinforced in the scene after Laurencia's rape, as she is, unlike in Lope, very explicit about what happened to her: "They put knives to my breast until they overcame my chastity" (p. 44). This contrasts, however, with the rest of the monologue to the men in the village, in which the intensity of some of the terms used in her original harangue are deleted or toned down, as the following fragment shows:

Fuente Ovejuna, pp. 109-110	*All Citizens Are Soldiers,* p. 44
¡Qué dagas no vi en mi pecho! ¡Qué desatinos enormes, qué palabras, qué amenazas, y qué delitos atroces, por rendir mi castidad a sus apetitos torpes! Mis cabellos, ¿no lo dicen? ¿No se ven aquí los golpes, de la sangre y las señales? ¿Vosotros sois hombres nobles? ¿Vosotros padres y deudos? […] ¡Que solas mujeres cobren la honra de estos tiranos, la sangre de estos traidores, y que os han de tirar piedras, hilanderas, maricones, amujerados, cobardes, y que mañana os adornen nuestras tocas y basquiñas, solimanes y colores!	They put knives to my breast until they overcame my chastity. Can't you see what they've done? Look at my hair, look at these bruises. But you aren't men. My pain moves nobody. Are you my father? Are you my uncle? Give me weapons and I'll avenge myself, and all your wives, while you stand by and talk, talk, talk. It is you who should do the spinning and cooking. We women will kill these tyrants, even if we have to stone them. Then we'll dress you pansies and cowards up, paint your faces and set you all to sew.

We can see the omission of both the term *sangre* ('blood'), and of the rhetorical iteration of the acts committed on her: "Qué palabras, qué amenazas, y qué delitos atroces" (lit. 'what words, threats and horrendous crimes') is rendered as "Can't you see what they've done?". In the same manner, the homophobic insults perpetrated against the men, i.e. *hilanderas* ('spinners'), *maricones* ('faggots'), *amujerados* ('effeminates') and *cobardes* ('cowards') are limited to "pansies and cowards." The diminishment of force is also felt in the explanatory lines with which Laurencia overtly articulates her potential actions to the men villagers: "Then we'll dress you pansies and cowards up, paint your faces and set you all to sew": although the content is semantically rendered, word choice is overall less powerful. Finally, the information given in a stage note after they kill the Commander, "Salen los labradores y labradoras, con la cabeza de Fernán Gómez en una lanza" (p. 121) is faithfully translated as "Enter peasants, with Fernan Gomez de Guzman's head on a lance," even though Lope probably chose to stress

the fact that women were present there, too, by using the feminine form *labradoras*.

While the three central themes in the source text are interwoven in the retranslation, it is evident that the political dimension takes precedence over women's actions, which are at times used to prioritize other purposes. This is primarily due to the additional fragments that intensify the association between the oppressed people of Fuente Ovejuna and life under fascism. This inclination is also reflected in the paratextual elements: the cover of the 1969 edition features an image of two countrymen being speared against a blood-red backdrop, while the theatre poster depicts a soldier prepared for battle with a shotgun.[10] Still, even though the absence of an elaborate epitextual apparatus limits the extent to which richer conclusions can be drawn regarding female presence in the paratexts, in the playtext *All Citizens Are Soldiers* women are not passive characters; rather, they are active agents of change who question the injustices around them and challenge the violence perpetuated by male power. The use of modernised idiom, the unambiguous portrayal of the Commander's actions and the directness in which females are portrayed enhance the vigour of their struggle, although language at times falls short of intensity.

5. The power of love: Adrian Mitchell's *Fuente Ovejuna* (1989)

Adrian Mitchell's *Fuente Ovejuna* was part of the 1988-9 season at the British National Theatre under the direction of Declan Donnellan. The production enjoyed substantial commercial success, with 95 performances. Also a poet, a performer and a playwright, Mitchell wrote many classic adaptations and was a supporter of the political left.

Mitchell employed free verse in his rendition. This approach, however, came at the expense of certain elements in the play and the reordering of lines. He tried to compensate for omissions by modernising the language, updating references to food, clothing, or colloquial expressions. He also omitted the translation of some Spanish verses to enhance the play's

10. <https://www.unfinishedhistories.com/contemporary-theatre/>.

fluidity in English, or added others, such as the scene when Laurencia kisses Frondoso (p. 74).

Mitchell might have been drawn to the theme of popular resistance to oppression, which resonated with the context of British society under Margaret Thatcher's rule, a time of rioting and social unrest. He openly acknowledged that his choice was influenced by the play's universal and contemporary qualities, emphasizing human relations and humour based on character rather than mere wordplay (Farrán Graves 1989: 176). This humour is strategically interwoven in key moments in the play, contributing to a nuanced portrayal that tempers the gravity of certain situations in which Laurencia is involved:

Fuente Ovejuna, p. 56	*Fuente Ovejuna*, p. 51
MENGO: ¿Amas tú? LAURENCIA: Mi propio honor.	MENGO: Laurencia, do you love anybody? LAURENCIA: Oh I love my virtue. I'm just like Plato.

Laurencia's philosophical allusion is unexpected and unrealistic in the context of the conversation she shares with clown Mengo about love, a topic usually reserved to "wise men," and not to illiterate country women. Nonetheless, Laurencia's resistance to the Commander's advancements is notably accentuated, as evident in the forest scene when Frondoso was concealed in hiding:

Fuente Ovejuna, p. 71	*Fuente Ovejuna*, p. 61
LAURENCIA: ¡Cómo! ¿Eso hacéis? ¿Estáis en vos? *Sale FRONDOSO y toma la ballesta.* COMENDADOR: No te defiendas […] Acaba, ríndete. LAURENCIA: ¡Cielos, ayudadme agora! COMENDADOR: Solos estamos, no tengas miedo.	LAURENCIA: You'd rape me? You're crazy! *FRONDOSO creeps out of hiding and takes the crossbow.* COMMANDER: It's no use […] I've got you. Here. Come on. LAURENCIA: Get off me, you bastard! COMMANDER: Come on, you want it, don't you? Come on. There's nobody here.

Laurencia unequivocally qualifies the Commander's actions as 'rape' and labels him a 'bastard', in a stark contrast to the Spanish original in which she merely implores the Heavens ("¡Cielos!"). Her reaction in the English version is parallel to the despicable nature of the Commander, as he presumes she is feigning resistance. In the Spanish line, the Commander merely reassures her not to be scared (*no tengas miedo*, that is, "don't be afraid").

Laurencia is also very explicit when describing the Commander's acts during her apprehension, using words such as "violent" and "violate me," while retaining references to bruises and blood. But as in the preceding translation, the terms originally used to address the men (*hilanderas*, *maricones*, *amujerados* and *cobardes*) are somehow softened to "Stones! Rabbits! Sheep! Eunuchs!" Additionally, in the search for a rhyme scheme supplementary lines are introduced, as seen in the inclusion of "and lead your round the houses," probably in an effort to find a suitable rhyming word for "blouses." This prioritizing of verse over content also introduces a subtle comedic effect:

Fuente Ovejuna, pp. 86-87
Well, they held me down with violent abuse, with violent threats, with violent hands, With every kind of violence So he could violate me. Doesn't my hair tell its own story? Can you see the blood on my skirt? Can you see the bruises Where they clutched me? Where they hit me? Call yourselves respected councillors? Call yourselves my kinsmen? […] Take my sewing needles. My God, do we women have to show you How to smash those bastards And wash yourself clean in a through of their blood? Stones! Rabbits! Sheep! Eunuchs! Tomorrow we women will dress you up In our best skirts and blouses We'll paint and powder you prettily And lead you round the houses.

Later on, the townspeople enter with the Commander's head stuck on a pole. The only difference lies in the nature of the celebratory songs: while the Spanish peasants invoke the Catholic monarchs, the English counterparts mock Don Guzmán's tragic demise, completed with rhyming elements:

Fuente Ovejuna, pp. 121-122	*Fuente Ovejuna*, p. 95
¡Vivan la bella Isabel, Y Fernando de Aragón, Pues que para en uno son, Él con ella, ella con él!	The first time I saw the Commander He was strutting down the Street. The last time I saw the Commander He looked like a sausage-meat.

This production shifted political emphasis towards a different set of considerations, as noted by *The Guardian* critic Michael Billington, who commented that, regardless of the strength of the popular uprising, "real power resides elsewhere" (Billington 1989). This "place" is patent in the review by the *Evening Standard*, which praised Mitchell's version describing it as "robust," and affirming "the power of love over brutality." So while the central themes remain unaltered the role of women–at times equivocal due to versification and humour–is clear, as depicted in the poster with a woman holding what it seems to be a lance.[11] This is also supported by the modernised language (e.g., in Laurencia's statements such as "If a woman tells the truth she's called a bitch;" p, 49; "keep your monkey claws off me," p. 56; etc.). It is noteworthy that the primary focus of this production, rather than revolving around women's individual actions or any other aspects of the original play, is on the potency of love and camaraderie. This is discernible from the limited production pictures accessible, where one captures a romantic portrayal of Laurencia on her wedding day, although the majority accentuate the broader sense of community.[12] Still, despite the humour and occasional softer language in Laurencia's scorn for the men's inaction, the voices of women in resisting tyranny remain unmistakable.

11. <https://shop.nationaltheatre.org.uk/products/pod1033130>.
12. <https://www.cheekbyjowl.com/looking-back-at-fuenteovejuna/>.

6. Fun at the village: Daniel Goldman's *Fuente Ovejuna* (2010)

The thematic nuances of the two previous English texts are partially absent in this fresh rendition, which was translated and directed by Daniel Goldman and staged at the Southwark Studios in London in 2010 (and restaged in 2013) thanks to the Tangram Theatre Company. Goldman's dual intention was, on the one hand, to narrate the story of "a village that rises up to kill a tyrant and then holds strong in the face of a justice system that is looking for an individual to hang," but, on the other, "perform a show with a different live band every night [….], casting the audience as actors in the show, running a bar on stage that was open to all throughout."[13] The blend of pop music and flamenco, along with a contemporization of language and costumes resonated well with critics, who unanimously praised its entertainment value (Fisher 2010).

While Laurencia initially rejects Don Guzmán, the gravity of the narrative is frequently alleviated by the use of pop songs (for example Frondoso woos Laurencia to musical classics such as The Supreme's *Stop In The Name Of Love,* to which Laurencia fairly replies with some Bon Jovi: *You Give Love A Bad Name*) and laughs appear at crucial moments, such as when the villagers march to execute Don Guzmán using water-filled balloons involving the audience's participation, as specified in the stage directions (Act III).

Other humorous elements incorporate modern language. For instance, the character Johnny (a sort of master of ceremonies) introduces Laurencia as an independent woman, but also as "hopeless romantic," eliciting a candid retort from her: "Fuck off!" Laurencia puts it clearly when she articulates her perspective on what men want from women: "Be whores at night, virgins by day, daughters to their mothers and cleaners for their homes" (Act I). She also takes a critical stance on male misogyny: If we want to look good, we're sluts / If we want to live alone, we're spinsters" (Act I). Laurencia's determination in her actions is further accentuated by the translator's inclusion of extra lines (marked in bold in the next example) highlighting her assertiveness. This is evident when Flores, one of the Commander's attendants, tries to persuade Laurencia and Pascuala to enter Don Guzman's residence:

13. <https://danielgoldman.co.uk/directing/fuente-ovejuna/>.

Fuente Ovejuna, p. 63	*Fuente Ovejuna*, Act I
LAURENCIA: No nos agarre. FLORES: Entrad; que sois necias. PASCUALA: Harre, que echaréis luego el postigo.	LAURENCIA: Let me go! Hasn't he had enough meat already! PASCUALA: Stop it! I'll scream! LAURENCIA: (***She kicks Flores in the balls. He falls onto the floor***). **Pascuala. Come on!** FLORES: **FFFFFFFF. Stop laughing. It's not funny!**

Even in the gravest situations intentional black humour is not absent; for instance, in the forest scene when the Commander attempts to abuse Laurencia, asking her to relax by thinking of her own country:

Fuente Ovejuna, p. 63	*Fuente Ovejuna*, Act I
LAURENCIA: ¡Cómo! ***¿Eso hacéis? ¿Estáis en vos? […]*** COMENDADOR: No te defiendas […] LAURENCIA: Acaba, ríndete.	LAURENCIA: What are you doing? Remember who you are! COMMANDER: Lie back and think of Spain […] Stop struggling! You'll love it! Get on your knees. Open your legs! Open them. Let me in! You're gagging for it. No, just gagging!

Another situation not devoid of absurd humour is the scene where the Commander's decapitated head appears on stage, and two male characters, Esteban (the mayor) and Mengo, engage in a playful exchange: "ESTEBAN: Will you stop playing with his head! / MENGO: But it's so much fun!" (Act III), ignoring the presence of female characters. However, in other instances of violence seriousness prevails, such as when the Commander spits on Jacinta or in Laurencia's renowned discourse, which is more explicit and leaves no room for ambiguity concerning the sexual abuse – even specifying the precise number of offenders. With updated and daring language, she openly references the men's lack of "balls," though, again, the insults directed to them are tempered to "Cowards. Eunuchs." Intriguingly, in this particular instance Laurencia extends her plea beyond the confines of the male villagers, addressing the entire community. However, the final lines

of the English harangue ("Is there nothing we women don't have to do!") presents a simplified perspective view of her reaction:

Fuente Ovejuna, Act II
There were four of them, and fifty of you. But what else could you do? They were armed. Would you like to see what happens when the monsters come? Look at my clothes. May hair. My thighs. Would you like to see the blood between my legs? It's not dried yet. Would you like to smell my fear? Call yourselves good fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters? Call yourselves decent and good? […] And yet your warm souls lift not even a finger! […] Cowards. Eunuchs. Where are your balls? My God, is there nothing we women don't have to do!

Nevertheless, the promotional materials for the play provide minimal reference to its central themes. The poster features a man playing the guitar, and the photos showcased in the director's webpage primarily capture the celebratory moments, with a focus on the band, dances, the Commander and even more peripheral characters, such as the monarchs, who are dressed in casual attire and adorned with party hats.[14]

In short, the play revolves about love, honour, collective power and monarchy. While the most crucial issues are not neglected (Laurencia's maltreatment, the despair in the town, Laurencia's expression of grief and wrath in response to her ordeal, and the Commander's contribution of sombre tones), the dynamism of dialogues, the jokes, the bold language employed by women and the performative elements that underpin the production (which suggests Goldman's extensive experience as a director, playwright and producer), mainly contribute to creating a rich and vibrant theatrical picture.

14. <https://danielgoldman.co.uk/directing/fuente-ovejuna/>. The reviews consulted lack in photographic material.

7. Women rule: *The Village* (2018)

The Village departs from fifteenth-century Spain to immerse itself in the contemporary political turmoil of India. Directed by Nadia Fall at the Stratford East Theatre in London, *The Village* embraced a vibrant, music-infused, Bollywood-inspired show. The translator, April De Angelis, a feminist with an extensive career in play writing and an experience in rewriting "the traditional narratives that relegate women to a peripheral status" (Gardner 2015), recognised the potential of the text centred on women who embody a "female resilience that becomes increasingly dark, lurching into something akin to feminist revenge thriller territory" (Lukowski 2018). The empowerment of female characters is also pointed out in *Morning Star*: "This is a vivid production that remains true to Lope de Vega's original but, by putting women at the heart of the action, it's infused with contemporary relevance. Its deceptive simplicity, underpinned by a skilful blend of styles and techniques, holds the audience throughout" (Persson 2018).

The translator maintains the original storyline while introducing its own antagonist in the form of a corrupt police inspector Gangwar, who subjects the villagers of Sahaspur to terror, mistreats women and fuels animosity between the Muslim and Hindu communities. In a harrowing turn of events, after Gangwar sexually assaults 16-year-old Jyoti (the Spanish Laurencia), a Hindu planning to wed a Muslim, the villagers rise up and exact retribution by killing Gangwar. Indeed, Jyoti is portrayed as a strong woman with no overt desire for marriage (p. 25), not even after she is informed that her potential suitor is financially secure (p. 19). She articulates this perspective when she asserts that "once men have had us in the sack / They pass us by and don't look back" (p. 20). Socially, Jyoti's experience of rape is critically important: she also shows up "unrecognisable," but in stark contrast to Lope's work, she clearly announces that "my beaten face which was used as a / space to smash their fits / while they drove into me with their sex" (p. 71). This level of explicitness persists throughout the rest of the monologue directed towards the men in Sahaspur, although the impact is somewhat diluted in the translation since terms such as "stones, sheep, mice, worms" might seem as lacking the visceral intensity of Laurencia's original Spanish words.

The Village, p. 71
Doesn't my hair tell its own story? Or my bloody clothes, my wedding dress of rags Or my beaten face which was used as A space to smash their fists While they drove into me with their sex. Are you my father? I was your daughter, not yet Farooq's wife. […] Stones, sheep, mice, worms Yes, that's what you're like –worms- Blind and buried in the earth, too scared of the bird's sharp beak to take a peek.

A similar absence of force is observed in the murder scene. Jyoti acts less theatrical and does not raise the Commander's head but she wears Gangwar's blood-smeared jacket. However, the significance of this image is intensified later when it is revealed that Gangwar had his ears cut off, "a euphemism of his cock / which the women bit off" (as stated by Ishani, p. 90, see below). Finally, the translator emphasises the role of women by introducing two new female characters: Gina, who serves as the co-mayor of the village, and Ishani, a Hindu political candidate who describes the women's response as "an outpouring of suppressed rage – hashtag Me Too" (p. 89).

Linguistically, the play employs a modern idiom, replete with colloquialisms and references to both British and Indian contemporary culture. Gangwar's language is generally profane or obscene and does not hesitate to use derogative terms to refer to women ("sluts," "whores"), abruptly interrupting conversations with remarks as "Shut up." Jyoti exhibits more restraint in her expressions (particularly when compared to her predecessors in the works discussed above), accentuating Gangwar's repugnance even further.

The paratextual information also stresses the role of the heroine, evident not only in the illustrations accompanying printed reviews but also on the book cover, the theatre poster and the promotional video.[15] These elements

15. <https://stratfordeast.com/whats-on/all-shows/the-village/437>.

collectively leave no room for doubt about the protagonist's central position within a context of a racially and religiously diverse society.

8. Discussion and conclusions

Spanish classical theatre in retranslation may serve as a fertile ground for the examination of issues related to sex and gender. An excellent example of this is female characters in *Fuente Ovejuna* and, above all, Laurencia, who boldly states her views about men and the oppression they impose on women, culminating in a physical expression of resistance. The Spanish Laurencia manipulates a masculine discourse without having to adopt a men's attire, while the male characters succumb to the passive roles traditionally ascribed to ladies.

This essay has selected four stage-oriented derivative works (*The Village* labelled as "an adaptation," the other three inconsistently described as translations and adaptations) of this classic in the UK and examines how various agents portray a gendered voice, mainly that of sexual abuse and the extent to which Laurencia is characterised as a victim of the Commander. An analysis of textual data, supported by paratextual features, reveals substantial differences between the retranslations and between them and the original play. These differences shape the manner in which English audiences perceive women's roles and behaviour in the resulting texts once transplanted across spatial and temporal settings.

Textually, the four retranslations address issues related to women in the Spanish play differently, although also exhibiting notable similarities. Firstly, the original and all the target texts convey the determination of women not to be subjugated by men, in the case of the translations employing updated, clear language, audacious remarks, and, on occasion, unconventional actions for classical theatre such as physical contact (e.g., kisses or breast touching). Furthermore, all four target texts make it unequivocal that Laurencia was subjected to sexual assault by her master. This is apparent in the descriptions of her clothing and hair, as well as the explicitness in the language used, adopting a contemporary idiom that places women on an equal footing with men.

Additionally, the resources employed by Laurencia to motivate men into action (misogyny and homophobia according to Allatson 1996: 267) are also present in the retranslations, though less accentuated. Paratextually, the reviews, posters and images reflect the intentions of the translators (and eventually the directors), who do their task out of personal interest within distinct socio-political contexts: *All Citizens Are Soldiers* in the backdrop of Francoism, Mitchell's *Fuente Ovejuna* in the midst of Thatcher's social unrest, Goldman's *Fuente Ovejuna* emphasising collective responsibility by including the audience as part of the village community, and *The Village* resonating with the Me-Too movements of the 2010s.

In *All Citizens Are Soldiers* the add-ons expose specific political and social differences, and utilize the Commander's behaviour not merely to criticize his abuse of the female villagers but also to comment on the broader political landscape in Spain, aligning him with Franco's supporters. Laurencia's monologue, while still describing the violence she endures, downplays the visual references to clothing and hair, and portrays the men in the village with a softer depiction, making the political dimension take precedence.

Adrian Mitchell's *Fuente Ovejuna* might have drawn inspiration from the theme of popular resistance to oppression, possibly due to the socio-political situation in the UK during that period. He characterizes Laurencia's sexual abuse as rape, articulating it openly in the text. However, there is also room for humour, perhaps as a result of preserving versification and rhyme. Nonetheless, despite these variations and moments of levity, mainly induced by laughter and a colloquial register, the central themes of the Spanish play (women's issues included) are not absent. The primary focus still centres on the enduring power of love and the strength of the community, as further evidenced by the scarce paratextual elements associated with this translation.

Goldman delivers a highly modernized version of the play, characterized by *Go London* (Several Authors 2010) as "a blend of Quentin Tarantino, *As You Like It*, and *Glee*." This rendition presents sex and violence in a more explicit manner, often intertwined with humour and music, a combination that received favourable reviews from critics. Laurencia's bold idiom

and attitude resemble that of men, allowing her to convey her message clearly, albeit somewhat overshadowed by other performative elements. Consequently, rather than serving primarily as a platform for denunciation or political commentary, the play provides an engaging and captivating theatrical show. Additionally, posters and promotional photos emphasize the festive and entertaining nature of the production.

The Village carries the unmistakable influence of its translator, who infuses the play with an evident feminist perspective.[16] She masterfully preserves the essence of the original work while reimagining characters and situations in a completely different context, retaining political and social themes, and even introducing a religious dimension. Throughout, women take on a central and empowered role, their strength bolstered by the use of contemporary and colloquial language, though never reaching the Commander's levels of profanity. While in some instances, as seen in Laurencia's monologue, the lexical force may seem to wane, the visual impact remains potent. Particularly, the theme of sexual exploitation takes precedence over that of collective justice, positioning women at the heart of the play's action and emphasizing their pivotal role in the narrative. This production demonstrates the enduring licence attributed to the female characters in *Fuente Ovejuna*, underlining the resonance of the play's themes on a global scale in the present day.

The target texts reflect each translator's unique perspective of the role of women in the play. Fainlight and Sillitoe paid no notice to the only existing British translation of the classic at the time, offering a realistic perspective of resistance against oppression. Although they emphasize Laurencia's determination and bold confrontation, their approach frames Laurencia less as an individual heroine and more as a voice for a community. Mitchell's proposal brings a fresh perspective that reflects contemporary sensibilities about social justice, including gender equality (in fact this text is still popular in modern performances, most recently at

16. De Angelis is unequivocal about the imperative to give closer consideration to gender-related issues: "It is up to writers and theatre-makers – male and female – to make gender trouble, and to audiences to ask the questions critics don't" (2018b: 559).

New York's Theatre for a New Audience in 2023).[17] Goldman, for his part, diverges from his predecessors with an interactive style, bringing a festive atmosphere to the play's themes, but with humour shifting the focus slightly away from Laurencia as a catalytic figure. On the contrary, April De Angelis' reasons for writing a new translation seem to be the adoption of an explicit feminist lens, sharpening women's psychological situation under the Commander's rule, and casting Laurencia more as a victim than as a rebellious figure.

All in all, women's issues do not seem to have been the primary motivation behind the retranslations, with the clear exception of *The Village*, which was probably influenced by the push for gender equality in recent decades. Still, women's oppression has not been overlooked in any of the target texts, as proved by a language and actions that significantly diverge from the expected conventions of Golden Age drama, and which may inspire future efforts to further explore this trend in the form of new retranslations.

Conclusions could undoubtedly have benefited from the study of recordings of different performances (accessing the videos has proven to be unfeasible), as dialect, tone, and non-verbal elements such as gesture, attire or props might have yielded interesting results contributing to the final portrayal of Golden Age women in the translations.

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17. https://tfana.org/productions/fuente-ovejuna.

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