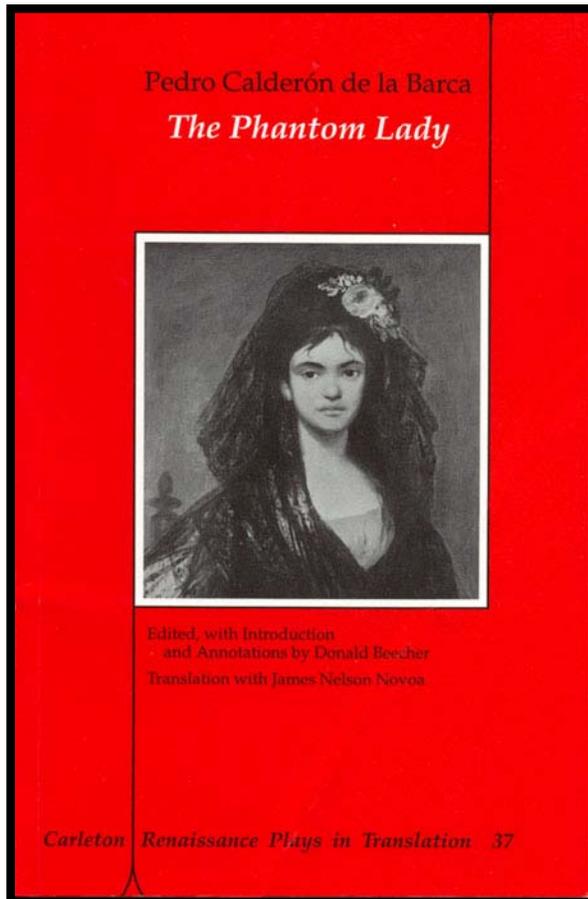


Beecher, Donald, Ed and Trans. Trans. James Nelson Novoa. *The Phantom Lady (La dama duende)*. Ottawa, Canada: Dovehouse Editions, 2002. 152 pp.
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In the past few decades, the number of Golden Age plays translated into English has grown considerably, certainly due to the increasing interest of the Anglo-Saxon academic world in Renaissance Spanish theater as well as the need for reliable translations for those who do not speak Spanish. However, there are still relatively few translations available, the majority of which tend to be of works that have already been translated a number of times and generally appear as part of a larger collection of works (in contrast, see our recent Spanish edition and first-time translation of Lope de Vega's *Porfiar hasta morir / Persistence until Death*, Pamplona, Eunsa, 2003).

The Phantom Lady,¹ a new edition and translation of Calderón de la Barca's *Dama Duende*, proves to be an important addition to Golden Age translation into English. Although this particular work has been translated before, the thoroughness of the present edition / translation sets it apart from the others. Donald Beecher (editor and translator) and James Nelson Novoa (translator), focus solely on this work and the final product is an extensive and

detailed edition and translation with a substantial introduction, meticulous notes and an appendix that allows readers to study a variation of a section of the third act.

The introduction includes a discussion of Calderón's life including details on his family, his education, his religious life, and his life at court as well as the many difficulties that he suffered and the scandals in which he found himself implicated. Each of these elements is considered in conjunction with the author's productive life as a playwright ("The life of Calderón" 11-15). The second section, entitled "Cloak and Dagger Plays: The Profile of a 'Problem' Genre" (15-20), discusses the particularities of the genre of comedy known in Spanish as the *capa y espada*. After an introduction to the genre and its "problem 'factors'" (17), Beecher explains:

So perceived, *The Phantom Lady* becomes a "problem" comedy. The blocking agents and the institutions they represent, the household incarceration of Spanish

¹ *The Phantom Lady* was published by Dovehouse Editions, an excellent publishing house that, under the direction of Donald Beecher, has also published several English translations of sixteenth century Italian theater.

women, the vestiges of chivalric thinking, the displays of honor and the logistics of “blood” manifested in the readiness to cross swords at the slightest pretext, congeal into an unsatisfactory, even shameful, cultural configuration. The problem element emerges when troubling memories of the blocking agents take precedence over the satisfaction felt for the successful lovers. For readers disposed toward the tragic sense, Calderón invokes again and again, as the status quo of the cloak and dagger society, undercurrents of tyranny, patriarchy, and blood lust. (18)

The third part of the introduction, “A ‘Madrilenian’ Comedy” looks at, as the subtitle suggests, the importance of the city of Madrid in this play (20-23). In “Literary Sources” which follows, Beecher examines the provenance of *La dama duende*. He explains that Calderón has added to his “core narrative all the accoutrements of the cloak-and-dagger world” (23). However, what remains is the “nucleus of the action” (23), which can be traced back, as he explains, to the twenty-sixth *novellino* written by Masuccio of Salerno. Beecher also points out that another scholar, Frederick de Armas, has demonstrated the play’s ties to *El soldado Píndero* published by Céspedes y Meneses in 1626. “Romance and the Trickster Heroine” (26-28), discusses the role of romance as well as the way in which the protagonist becomes the “maker of plot” (27). Beecher explains: “[Angela] manages her wooing by trickery, as a series of apparitions through which she advances and retreats at once” (27). Beecher also asserts that in this process,

[she] joins company with other sagacious and resourceful heroines who shape their futures through trickery from Rosalind in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* to Lope’s Countess Diana in *The Dog in the Manger*, or from Helena in *All’s Well That Ends Well* to Magdalena in *El vergonzoso en palacio*. (27)

In “Back to Honor,” the sixth section of the introduction, Beecher explains that “by far the most discussed topic in relation to these plays is the honor code of seventeenth-century Spain” (28) and that *La dama duende* cannot escape this discussion. He further states that each of the three “expressions of honor” are found in the play: “Manuel protects Angela from calumny and violence, [...] Luis avenges his supposed injuries man to man, and [...] Juan virtually incarcerates his sister out of considerations for family honor” (30). This section concludes with a discussion of Calderón’s intentions: Is he endorsing or undermining the honor code? Angela’s station as a widow as well as the “*topos* of the widow as erotic object, active seductress, and agent of destabilization” (40) is explored in the section entitled “On the Status of Widows” (35-40). Beecher points out:

Widows challenge close-knit communities by the ambiguity of their status; they are experienced, older, unhoused, unconstrained, destabilizing presences – potentially. Wives hate them as lures to their husbands. As a widow, Angela is to be mistrusted, as a sister protected; her brothers visit her, Juan provides for her, and in that regard Angela reasons with her brother Luis: ‘It’s best, after all, to bear with him, for he is our elder brother and we both live at his charge.’ (36)

Beecher concludes this section by pointing to other widows in Spanish literature (in the satire of Quevedo as well as Sloeberry (Endrina) in the *Libro de Buen Amor*, etc.) (40). “Allegorical and

Symbolic Readings” (40-46) and “*A House with Two Doors is Difficult to Guard*” (46-48) follow. In the first of these sections, Beecher looks at the various critical approaches to *The Phantom Lady* –most of which attempt to read the *comedia* allegorically. Beecher is not convinced by these arguments and concludes his section with the following remark: “As this account of opportunistic analogy-making has no doubt suggested, I am not easily persuaded by the allegorized readings of the play in which characters are made to embody ideological positions, or the action made to symbolize mystical transactions” (45). Finally, the section “*A House with Two Doors is Difficult to Guard*” is so named because, as Beecher points out, *The Phantom Lady* is closest in time, structure, and ethos to this other play by Calderón. This section, then, looks at the similarities and differences between these two works.

The remaining three sections of the introduction look at the performances, versions and translations of *La dama duende*. The first of these, “Calderón in England” (48-50), investigates the popularity of Spanish plays in England, specifically *The Phantom Lady*, which was first translated into English in 1717 by Christopher Bullock under the title *Woman is a Riddle*. It was performed that same year in Lincoln’s Inn Fields. “Verse, Scene Divisions, and Variants in the Early Editions,” (51-56) discuss the details of versification, scene divisions as well as variants in the early editions of the work in relation to the translation and edition of this present edition. Finally, “Textual and Editorial Matters” (57-59) concludes the introduction and advises the reader that this translation is based on A. J. Valbuena Briones edition published in Madrid in 1976. Valbuena Briones based his edition on the *Primera parte de comedias de don Pedro Calderón de la Barca*, which was an “official” edition that appeared in 1636 and incorporated revisions made by the author. The editor also adds explanation about the decisions made in regards to the translation and edition (prose vs. verse, scene divisions, etc.).

The translation itself is no less remarkable than the introduction. It is well translated from poetry to prose, using natural, unforced language. Beecher comments on this aspect in his introduction: “Our initial translation of the play was pitched at levels rather too rhetorical and lyrical –making too much of the formalities– that we have subsequently written down to more spontaneous and colloquial registers” (58). It is also important to note that the translators choose not to impose scene divisions where characters entered or locales changed. However, as Beecher points out, they “may seem implicit for some in the clearly designated changes of location taken over from the early stage directions” (58). In one instance in the second act, however, the translators have amended a street “scene” where there seemed to have been “inconsistency in the description of locales” (58-59). Twenty pages of impressive textual annotations follow the translation and finally, the book is concluded with an appendix giving an alternate reading from act three (from the Valencia and Zaragoza editions, based on the acting versions).

All that is left to do, then, is to congratulate Donald Beecher and James Nelson Novoa for an exceptional edition / translation of *The Phantom Lady*. The thorough introduction, superb translation, detailed textual annotation and the alternate reading from Act III make this edition a must-read for Golden Age students and scholars.