

When my agent called and asked if I'd be interested in translating Corneille's The Liar for the Shakespeare Theatre Company of Washington, I had never heard of the play. Nor had he. As it turned out, I needn't have been ashamed of my ignorance in the case of The Liar. I doubt there were 500 people in this republic of 300 million who knew the piece or even the title. In any case: "Send the script along," I told my agent. "I'll take a look at it." He sent, I looked, and several hours later, with the help of a fat French dictionary, I found myself astonished. Exhilarated. Giddy. For, lying on the desk before me, was one of the world's great comedies. I felt as if some lost Shakespeare festival comedy on the order of Twelfth Night or Much Ado About Nothing had been found. This particular Shakespeare comedy was unfortunately locked away in French (the French have a way of doing things like that), but I could remedy that. ... Everything about it spoke to me. The rippling language. The rich simplicity of the premise. The gorgeousness of the set pieces. The seeming insouciance of the treatment alongside the classical rigor of the plotting. The way the play's wide understanding and humanity was nicely seasoned with several large pinches of social satire.

The Liar is one of those plays that seem to be made out of almost nothing, yet end up being about so much. ... It's one of those plays that are both a view on our world and their own separate world, one that we would happily inhabit. Corneille wrote Le menteur in the middle of his great career as a return to comedy, and it shows. The play has all the ease of a successful playwright completely in control of his powers. He seems to be improvising this divertissement before our eyes, riffing on the Spanish play he stole the basic plot from (and which he vastly improved). Though written in Corneille's middle age, The Liar sparkles with youth.

All that being said, I have to add that my Liar is not exactly Corneille's Liar. For, having been bowled over by the play, I had to consider how to render this luminous world in English. There was one thing that I knew right away: it had to be in verse, just as it is in Corneille. The Liar is a portrait of a brilliant performer and, language being the wire Dorante dances upon, the language had to match his agile mind at every turn. Prose would have turned this into a "Seinfeld" episode and made it banal. Only rhyme would do. Next question: translate the whole play, translate some of the play, or make another play "based on" Corneille? Frankly, there were elements of the plot that did not satisfy me, and which I doubted would satisfy anybody else either: Lucrece was a cipher, indeed virtually a non-speaking role for most of the action; the servant Cliton's relationship to Dorante and to the play's underlying themes wasn't clear; the two maids were thankless parts; and the wrap-up was cursory in the extreme. Not good enough.

My version of the play is what I call a translattation, i.e., a translation with a heavy dose of adaptation. For what I have realized in translating plays is that, in an odd way, the language of a play is of secondary concern. In translating a play, I contend, one must think as a playwright, not as a translator. One must ask: what is the play underneath the words, what is going on beneath speeches rather than on their surface, who are these characters and what drives them, and finally, what is this play actually all about? What was on Corneille's chest and how can I use what's on mine to create something with dramatic and comedic integrity? It seems to me that that's the only way a translated play can ever have what every good play has to have: a voice. In other words, you have to write the play Corneille would have written today, in English. In the end, I did to The Liar what Corneille had done to his Spanish source: I ran with it. The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, as refracted in a theatrical fun-house mirror. Welcome to The Liar.



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THE LIAR

by David Ives
from the comedy by Pierre Corneille

The Liar is presented by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc., New York

CAST: (in Alphabetical Order)

ALCIPPE	Ryan Sozzi
CLARICE	Caitlin Barry
CLITON	Christopher DeLuca
DORANTE	David Soop
GERONTE	Bryan Mittelstadt
ISABELLE	Erika Gallo
LUCRECE	Lisa Johnson
PHILISTE	Ryan Beene
SABINE	Ora Cevallos

ARTISTIC STAFF

DIRECTOR	Professor David Legore
PRODUCTION DESIGNER	Professor Terry Price
ACTING COACH & ARTS MANAGEMENT	Professor Shannon Ivey
COSTUME & MAKEUP DESIGNER	Omar Leos
COSTUME & MAKEUP COORDINATOR	Tabatha Steakley
STAGE MANAGER	Selina Ramirez
LIGHTING DESIGNER	Fletcher Wright
LIGHT BOARD OPERATOR	Hannah Schmidt
SOUND BOARD OPERATOR	Timothy Gapinski
RUNNING CREW	Taylor Gardner

CONSTRUCTION CREW

Caroline Jordan, Jordan Morales, Nolan Schmidt
Members of the company and DRAM 101/111

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