# Astucias Por HEREDAR

## UN SOBRINO A UN TÍO

**Study Guide**

MILAGRO

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The cast.

The last time Astucias por heredar was seen on the stage was in the early 19th century. Over two hundred years later, the show receives its first contemporary staging at Milagro in a commedia dell'arte style.

This play was the first play ever performed by Hispanic settlers in California in the area of Santa Cruz and Monterey where it was preserved in manuscript form until today. The original is in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.

This study guide looks at the history of the play, some of the language, and provides a little insight into commedia dell'arte.

We hope this information informs your enjoyment of the production.

# Astucias Por HEREDAR

## UN SOBRINO A UN TÍO

Written by **Fermín de Reygadas**
Directed by **Robi Arce**

Study guide research and writing
by **Kenyon Acton**

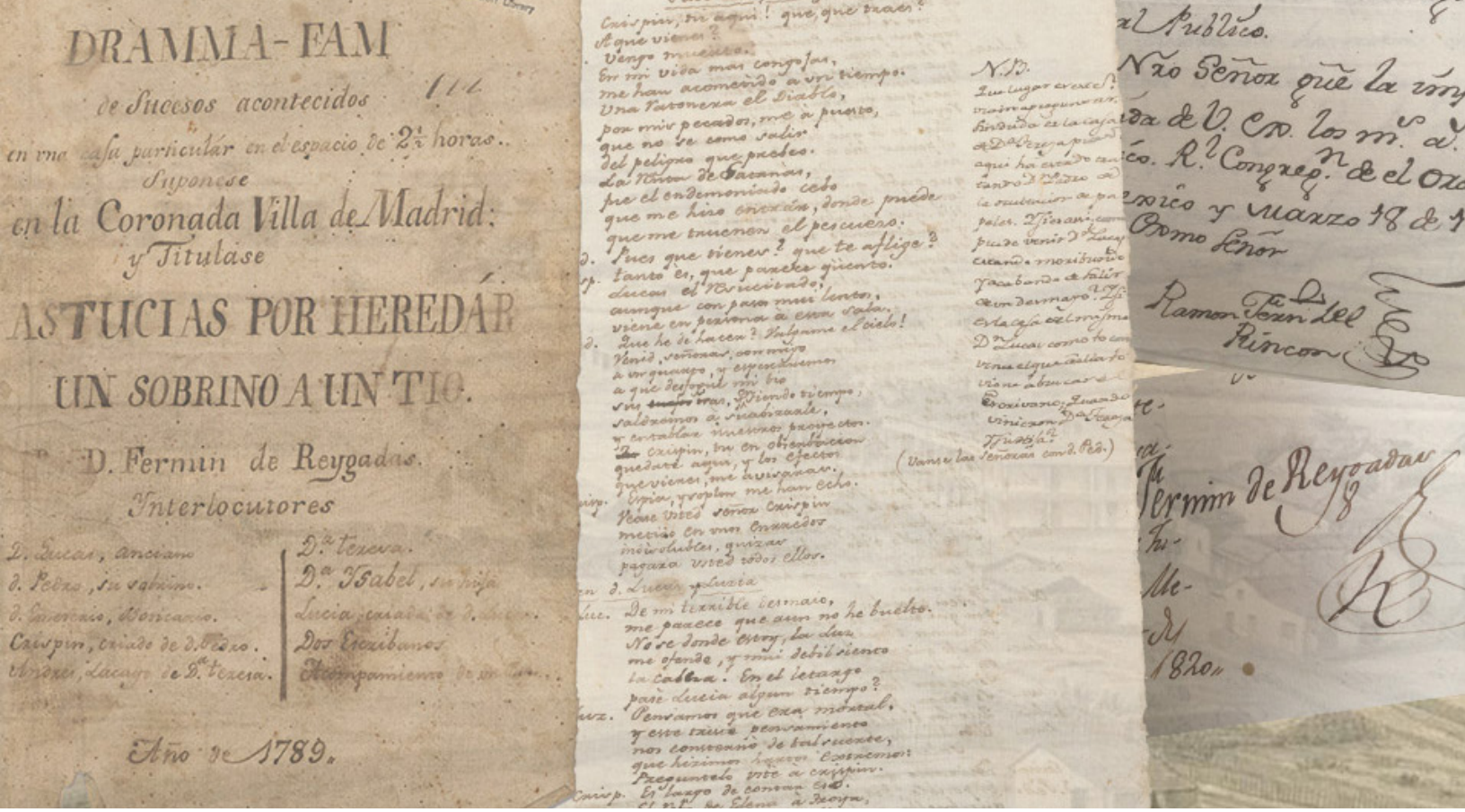



Photo includes cover and one page of the original manuscript, the signature of the censure order, and Fermín de Reygadas's signature.

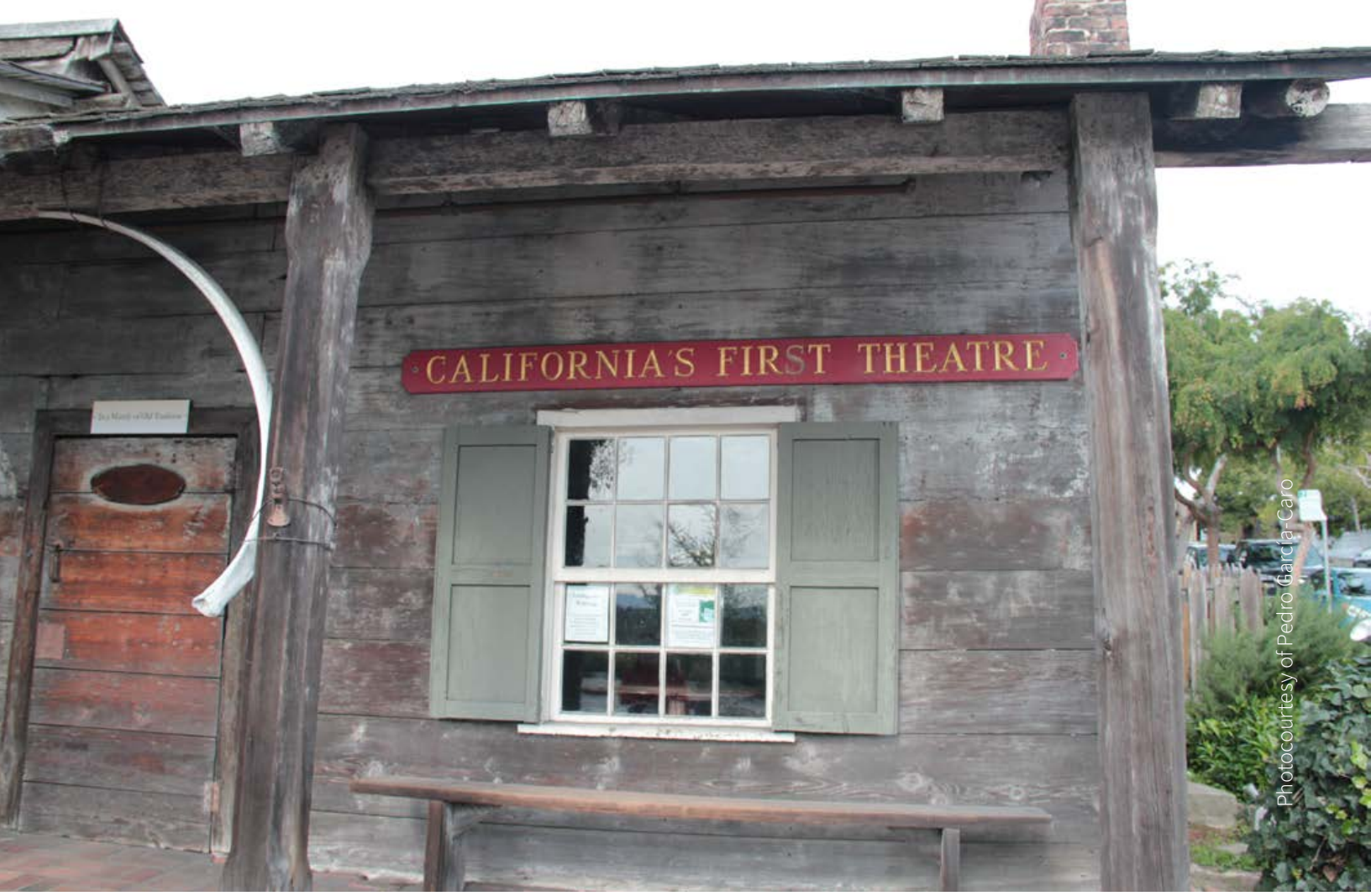
# Context: Reygadas, Vestige of the Age of Revolution

*Astucias por heredar un sobrino a un tío* (*Tricks to Inherit: A Nephew from his Uncle*) will be performed for the first time in over two-hundred years as a result of the unique preservation of the original, banned, manuscript. Written in 1789, the scenarios and questions raised in the play regarding class, gender, politics, and religion led the Office of Censorship to refuse its license for performance in the Coliseum of Mexico City in New Spain. The play was performed, but in another territory: Alta California. In Branciforte, which today is part of Santa Cruz, the manuscript of A*stucias por heredar un sobrino a un tío* was in the hands of the Volunteers of Catalonia, a crew who moved from Mexico City to Branciforte. The Volunteers of Catalonia performed the play near the turn of the 19th Century in Alta California, perhaps in various emerging communities with secular populations such as Branciforte.[1]

The author of *Astucias*, Fermín de Reygadas, was born in Santander, Spain in 1754. An immigrant to Nueva España (New Spain), Reygadas was a political thinker, writer, and mining engineer. In political spheres his forward thinking was opposed to the extent that "anti-Reygadas" was a political position. He is quoted with the thought that more important than whether a mayor is of indigenous or Spanish descent is the degree to which ethics are embodied in the post.

*Astucias* holds a significance of revolution. Being in fact an adaptation of a 1708 French play *Le Légataire universel* (*The Heir Apparent*) by Jean-François Regnard, Reygadas' play was produced and

1. Garcia-Caro, Pedro. "Astucias Por Heredar Un Sobrino a Un Tío." Houston, Texas: Arte Público Press, forthcoming.




Photocourtesy of Pedro García-Caro

performed in a time when the monarchies in Europe were experiencing internal upheaval echoed by efforts in the colonial territories to form independent constitutions.[2] In his adaptation, Reygadas includes class and gender revolution, augmenting the role of Lucía: in Astucias the female servant is opinionated and advocates for her right to inherit. Both her outspoken lines and presumption of gaining monetary wealth contributed to the radical nature of the play and to its censorship.

The play may be viewed as a metaphor for the larger scale, with factions in the colonies seeking independence much as the servants in the play seek empowerment and emancipation. In the Age of Revolution (approximately 1774 – 1849), the uprisings in France and around the globe redefined the path of power. Through the transition from monarchies to republics, ideas about the inheritance of ruling power were changing. ***Astucias*** asks what is right, morally, in the distribution of wealth and inheritance of power — a relevant question to this day.

The censorship of ***Astucias*** also came in a time and place where the act of theatre was only permitted in the context of charity — the Coliseum in the Christian settlement of Mexico City was a charity organization in which the theatre supported the attached NGO hospital, justifying Christian attendance of theatrical arts. Most plays from the time and region have been lost, some plays only noted briefly in censors' files. The fact that the full manuscript remains is testament both to an intricate history in which preservation and access to patrimony are gated by cultural prejudice, and to the faculty of the playwright, todays researchers and adapters ,and the play to reach beyond borders and history to examine that which makes us human.

2. "Performing Spain from Colonial California: Astucias por Heredar (1789-1805)," Garcia-Caro, Pedro.

# Plot Overview

Photo by Russell J. Young

Carlos Adrián Manzano (Criispín) and Verónika Nuñez (Lucía)

**Characters:**

- Don Lucas, elderly
- Don Pedro, his nephew
- Lucía, Don Lucas's servant
- Crispín, Don Pedro's servant
- Doña Teresa
- Doña Isabel, her daughter
- Andrés, Doña Teresa's footman
- Don Emeterio, the pharmacist
- Don Justo, scribe

Don Lucas, living in Madrid and nearing the end of his life, is surrounded by servants and a possible heir. Lucía, Don Lucas's faithful servant of ten years, in conversation with Crispín, the servant of Don Lucas's nephew Don Pedro, divulges that Don Lucas is stingy, constantly inventing ways to save money, but that she hopes to be rewarded for her service in his will. Don Lucas's nephew, Don Pedro, and the servants discuss the situation and hatch a plan to convince Don Lucas to name Don Pedro as his heir to fortune, titles, and estates. Don Pedro, with much to gain, including the hand in marriage of Doña Isabel, as Doña Teresa requires the fortune before offering her hand, agrees to reward the servants and they set the plan in motion. Don Lucas, stubborn to leave this world, proposes his own marriage to Isabel and awaits visits from two other possible heirs so he may examine their worthiness. Through the servant's tricks, Don Lucas deems that Don Pedro is the only worthy heir. The scribe arrives to take the testament, but is it too late? The servants, convinced Don Lucas has passed on and this is the only way to update the will, fake Don Lucas's testament, benefited by the fact that it's been years since Don Lucas signed anything himself. Crispín, pretending to be Don Lucas, wills himself 4,000 reales annually, an enormous sum, to which no one can protest given the situation. The celebration is halted by Don Lucas's recovery. When Don Lucas learns of the updated will, the servants scramble to explain how, in his drowsiness, his memory of giving the testament must have vanished. In discussing the terms of the will, the characters muse on aspects of morality, saintly action, and status. Lucía argues that in passing to the next life it is impossible to take fortune "so why not, with an open and pious hand, rescue two servants from the tyranny of poverty,"[3] given that Don Pedro is willing to share the inheritance. Don Lucas, seeing that everyone wishes to proceed with the forged will, agrees to uphold it and upon confirming the interest of Doña Isabel and Don Pedro to wed, asks them to take hands and invites everyone to celebrate the wedding.

3. Fermín de Reygadas. "Astucias por Heredar un Sobrino a un Tío." Trans. Olga Sanchez Saltveit unpublished manuscript, University of Oregon.

# Terms of Note

**Amo**: Spanish term for master, owner; specifically referring to class, slavery, ownership of another being. Etymology: from the masculine form of *ama* from the Hispanicized Latin "amma," which in the 13th century was used for wet nurse and lady of the house (nodriza, dueña de la casa).

**Caquético**: To be in a state of malnutrition due to consumptive illnesses such as tuberculosis or cancer.

**Commedia dell'arte**: A form of improvised theater developed during the Italian Renaissance in the 16th century, with roots in Ancient Greek and Roman theater. Remaining popular through the 18th century, commedia dell'arte style continues today and is said to be the bread upon which you can you can put anything. Troupes performing in this style would travel between towns using masks, exaggerated features, mime techniques, and recognizable archetypes to connect with audiences regardless of language and class. Given the improvised nature, the performers were able to tailor performances to each audience, drawing on general plot outlines. Performed in the streets with no tickets for admission, the style lends itself to satire as the performance can be swiftly staged, denounced, and brought to the next town.

**Criada bachillera**: Lucía is referred to as the criada bachillera, a satire of contradiction. At the time the play was written, neither Lucía's class nor gender corresponded with completing bachelor's studies. Thus, adapting the word bachillero to the feminine bachillera expands upon the out-of-placeness of an educated servant, highlighting the disparity of gender and furthering the comical satire of the wise maid.

**Croesus (Creso)**: The last king of Lydia in the 6th Century B.C. gained fame and became reference for wealth, power, and human vanity. In the play, Doña Isabel says to Don Pedro: "This whole naughty ploy that you do to be an heir of Don Lucas's goods is useless, for I have a heart so gallant so full of heroic breath, that if you yourself weren't worthy of my affections, I wouldn't love you, even if you had more gold and silver than Croesus."[4]

**Enredo**: A key term explicitly referencing confusion of identity and dialogue characteristic of the theatrical genre of Astucias: "comedy of errors," known in Spanish as "la comedia de enredo."

**Fandango**: Popular couples dance from 18th century Spain that came to Mexico and California.

**Pelona/Pelada**: Death. Possible mexicanism.

**Pesos and reales**: While the play is set in Madrid, the Spanish peso "piece of eight" (real de a ocho) was also a standard coin in the Spanish colonies in North America. Also called the Spanish dollar, the peso was introduced in Spain in 1497 and was worth 8 reales.[5] Scheming to benefit from Don Lucas's fortune, the servants hope to inherit the following sums: Lucía, 500 pesos; Crispín, 4,000 reales annually. The inheritance by a servant of any wealth from a master was noted as "unbelievable" by the censor.

**Postrero**: The last one. The youngest child.

**Sinon (Sinón)**: Warrior in Greek mythology often alluded to in Spanish Golden Age theatre (1590-1681); a symbol of treachery and fraud.

**Sopílfora**: Possible from the German: Smart, educated woman. Smart.

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4 Fermín de Reygadas. "Astucias por Heredar un Sobrino a un Tío." Trans. Olga Sanchez Saltveit unpublished manuscript, University of Oregon.

5 "Spanish real." Academic Dictionaries and Encyclopedias, www.enacademic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/1448293

# Bibliography

Fermín de Reygadas. “Astucias por heredar un Sobrino a un Tío.” Trans. Olga Sanchez Saltveit unpublished manuscript, University of Oregon.

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Garcia-Caro, Pedro. “Performing Spain from Colonial California: Astucias por Heredar (1789-1805).” 3 February 2018, El Zócalo, Teatro Milagro, Portland, OR. Talk.

Meagher, Author: Jennifer. “Commedia Dell'arte.” The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1 July 2007, www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/comm/hd_comm.htm.

“Spanish real.” Academic Dictionaries and Encyclopedias, www.enacademic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/1448293.

By Antoine Watteau - The Yorck Project: 10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei. DVD-ROM, 2002. ISBN 3936122202. Distributed by DIRECTMEDIA Publishing GmbH., Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=160120

# Commedia dell'arte

Commedia dell'arte, (Italian: comedy of the profession or comedy of professional artists) is an Italian theatrical form that emerged in northern Italy in the fifteenth century and rapidly flourished throughout Europe from the 16th through the 18th century, usually performed outdoors by traveling companies with dialogue improvised by the actors. Performances were based on a basic, often familiar sotry. Outside Italy, the form had its greatest success in France, where it became the Comédie-Italienne. In England, elements from it were naturalized in the harlequinade in pantomime and in the Punch-and-Judy show, a puppet play involving the commedia dell'arte character Punch. The comical Hanswurst, of German folklore, was also a commedia dell'arte character.

The earliest known company formed in Padua in 1545, and by the turn of the seventeenth century some companies were known internationally. In France, the commedia became a favorite theme of artists such as Jean-Baptiste Joseph Pater (1695–1736) and Antoine Watteau (1684–1721) (49.7.54).

## Source and further reading:


Meagher, Jennifer. *Commedia dell'arte*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

TheatreHistory.com. *The Commedia dell'arte*.


## On your own

Stock characters, such as the Pantalone and the Innamorati, and masks are distinctive features of commedia dell'arte.

- Identify which stock characters are represented in *Astucias*...
- Why do some characters wear masks and others don't?

Bibiana Lorenzo Johnston (D. Teresa) and Yan Collazo (D. Lucas)

# Astucias Por HEREDAR

## UN SOBRINO A UN TÍO

By **Fermín de Reygadas**
Directed by **Robi Arce**

**February 8 – March 3, 2018**
Thursday–Saturday, 7:30 PM | Sunday, 2:00 PM

**Milagro Theatre** | 525 SE Stark Street, Portland

Tickets start at $27
Student, senior, and veteran discounts available
For group sales, contact us
at 503-236-7253 x 117

Preview: Thurday February 8 at 7:30 PM
Opening night: Friday February 9 at 7:30 PM
followed by a reception in the café

## Special Events

**Sunday, February 11**
Talk-back with the cast and creative team
following the performance

**Saturday February 17**
**Roundtable: Astucias por heredar:**
**banned, forgotten, revived**
in **El Zócalo at El Centro Milagro**
Moderated by Dr. Pedro García-Caro,
University of Oregon
3:00 – 5:00 PM; FREE

### Cast

Yan Collazo . . . . . .Don Lucas
Enrique Andrade . . . . . Don Pedro
Veronika Nuñez . . . . . Lucía
Carlos Adrián Manzano . . . . . .Crispín
Bibiana Lorenzo Johnston . . . . . .Doña Teresa
Marian Mendez . . . . . Doña Isabel
Sara Fay Goldman . . . . . Andrés,
Don Emeterio, Don Justo

*For full cast and crew list and biographies, please refer to the program or the website.*

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The Miracle Theatre Group (Milagro) has been dedicated to bringing the vibrancy of Latino theatre to the Northwest community and beyond since 1985. In addition to its national tours, Milagro provides a home for Latino arts and culture at El Centro Milagro, where it enriches the local community with a variety of community outreach projects and educational programs designed to share the diversity of Latino culture. For more information about Milagro, visit milagro.org or call 503-236-7253.