Spanish Golden Age theater is known for its rejection of the classics. And yet, before the advent of Lope de Vega, during the late 16th century many plays were written in imitation of classical tragedy. After a brief glance at these early plays and how they inadvertently paved the way for the future of the *comedia*, this essay will turn to Cervantes’s *Numancia*, the one canonical play from this period, so as to understand how it differs radically from the new comedy as established by Lope de Vega (1562–1635). This essay will then analyze Lope’s famous treatise *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias* [*New Art of Writing Plays*] to determine the reasons utilized for the rejection of the classics and to uncover within this very work a more subtle insertion of the ancients.

A similar frisson can be found in Lope’s plays. While these works revealed in innovation, denying the authority of the ancients, at times they followed theories of tragedy or techniques of comedy that derive from the antique. And the very language of these *comedias* was consistently “adorned” with allusions to classical mythology. While seemingly ornamental, some of these citations reveal a significant mythical substructure latent in these plays. The reader or audience is alerted to this pattern through foregrounding. Keir Elam explains: “Linguistic foregrounding in language occurs when an unexpected usage suddenly forces the listener or reader to take note of the utterance itself, rather than continue his automatic concern with its ‘content.’”

A similar pattern can be seen in those who followed Lope, such as Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, Tirso de Molina and many others. Perhaps a clearer yet more subtle pattern of mythical foregrounding can be gleaned in the second generation of playwrights led by Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600–81). Linguistic foregrounding can be expanded to include situational foregrounding. We can thus label some of the manners in which these myths call attention to themselves: contrastive repetitions, forbidden terms, macabre tales, mistaken myths, mysteries of naming, ominous icons, role

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reversals, planetary puzzles, and prophetic frenzies.\textsuperscript{2} In this essay, we will encounter forbidden terms such as the hippogryph, mysteries in naming such as Astraea, planetary puzzles such as that of Saturn, ominous icons such as the painting of Venus and Adonis, and role reversals as in the Cupid and Psyche myth. In addition, the later Calderón is also known for his court spectacle plays, where mythology and the gods of the ancients acquire new prominence. And in this last period, some playwrights like Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla (1607–48) even veered away from the \textit{comedia} pattern to write tragedies.\textsuperscript{3}

It would be impossible to study the full range of acceptance to rejection of the classics in this essay. In order to understand this constant conflict between the uses of the ancients and the desire for the new, I will discuss four distinct questions. I will begin with the early classicizing plays and use Cervantes’s \textit{La Numancia} as a salient example. I will then turn to the conflict between Cervantes and Lope de Vega. A third section will explore some of the ways in which classicizing elements of comedy survived in this period, comparing Terence and Lope de Vega. The fourth part of the essay will focus on tragedy and how Lope turned to Italian art for his models, an art that in turn reflected the classics. A final section will briefly show how Lope’s new art continues to develop in the next generation of playwrights led by Calderón de la Barca.

\section*{I. From the Early Tragedians to Cervantes’s \textit{La Numancia} (1582)}

During the last half of the 16th century, before the advent of Lope de Vega, a Renaissance classicizing theater flourished in Spain. While Fernán Pérez de Oliva wrote prose translations from the Latin of Greek tragedies such as Sophocles’ \textit{Electra} and \textit{Agamemnon}, as well as Euripides’ \textit{Hecuba}, other playwrights preferred to follow the Senecan tradition, although transformed in order to conform to a new audience. The most salient tragic authors of this period were Lupercio Leonardo de Argensola, Jerónimo Bermúdez, Juan de la Cueva, Andrés Rey de Artieda, and Cristóbal de Virués. Each in his own way transforms the classics and, unbeknownst

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\textsuperscript{3} Raymond R. MacCurdy, \textit{Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla and the Tragedy} (Albuquerque, 1958).
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