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Shakespeare in La Mancha: Performing Shakespeare at the Almagro Corral

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ABSTRACT

Shakespeare is one of the most often performed playwrights at the *Festival de Teatro Clásico de Almagro* [The Almagro Festival of Classical Theater], an event initially created to celebrate Golden Age drama in which, nowadays, Shakespearean productions often outnumber those by individual national authors. Throughout the history of the festival, several Shakespearean productions have been staged in the Corral de Comedias, an original seventeenth-century venue that reactivates the use of space encoded in the playtext due to its similarities with Renaissance playhouses. This article has a double purpose: first, to examine the abundance of Shakespeare in Almagro as a phenomenon that finds its explanation in factors ranging from Shakespeare's popularity to the role of modern translation and, second, to focus on how Shakespearean productions at the Corral de Comedias have negotiated new meanings of Shakespeare in performance, generating an interplay between Renaissance and Golden Age venues in contemporary performance.

KEYWORDS: William Shakespeare; contemporary performance; Golden Age; theater architecture; theater festivals.

Shakespeare en la Mancha: la representación de Shakespeare en el Corral de Almagro

RESUMEN

Shakespeare es uno de los autores representados con mayor frecuencia en el Festival de Teatro Clásico de Almagro. Este encuentro estuvo inicialmente dedicado a la preservación del teatro del Siglo de Oro español. No obstante, las producciones shakespearianas superan hoy día a las de muchos autores nacionales. A lo largo de su historia, el festival ha acogido diversas producciones de Shakespeare en el Corral de Comedias, un edificio teatral del siglo XVII en el

Shakespeare em La Mancha: A representação de Shakespeare no Corral de Almagro*

RESUMO

Shakespeare é um dos autores mais frequentemente representados no *Festival de Teatro Clásico de Almagro*, um encontro inicialmente criado para celebrar o drama do Século de Ouro espanhol, mas no qual as produções de Shakespeare superam em número as de muitos autores nacionais individuais. Ao longo da história do festival, várias produções de Shakespeare foram encenadas no Corral de Comedias, um edifício teatral do século XVII, o qual, devido à sua seme-

* Translation into Portuguese by Miguel Ramalhete.

que, debido a su similitud con los teatros de la Inglaterra renacentista, se reactivan los usos del espacio codificados en el texto. Este artículo tiene dos propósitos fundamentales, por un lado, examina las causas que han llevado a Shakespeare a convertirse en el autor más representado en Almagro, un hecho que encuentra su explicación en factores tan diversos como la popularidad del dramaturgo inglés o el papel de la traducción al español. Por otro lado, el artículo estudia cómo las producciones de Shakespeare en el Corral de Comedias generan nuevos significados en la puesta en escena de las obras, creando una interacción entre los teatros del Siglo de Oro y los renacentistas ingleses desde la representación contemporánea.

PALABRAS CLAVE: William Shakespeare; representación contemporánea; Siglo de Oro; arquitectura teatral; festivales de teatro.

lança com os teatros da Inglaterra renascentista, reativa os usos do espaço codificados no texto dramático. Este artigo cumpre dois propósitos fundamentais: em primeiro lugar, examinar a abundância de Shakespeare em Almagro, enquanto fenómeno que encontra a sua explicação em fatores que vão desde a popularidade de Shakespeare até ao papel da tradução contemporânea; em segundo lugar, focar-se no modo como as produções de Shakespeare no Corral de Comedias têm vindo a negociar novos sentidos para a representação de Shakespeare, gerando uma interação entre os teatros renascentista inglês e do Século de Ouro através da representação contemporânea.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: William Shakespeare; representação contemporânea; Século de Ouro; arquitetura teatral; festivais de teatro.

SHAKESPEARE.- In a village of England, the name of which I have no desire to call to mind, there lived not long since one of those writers that write for the theater, quick of wit, sharp of pen and rich in fame. The age of this writer of ours was bordering on fifty; he was of a hardy habit, spare, gaunt-featured, a very early riser and a great sportsman. They will have it his name was William, or Will, but this is of little importance to our tale; it will be enough not to stray a hair's breadth from the truth in the telling of it.

Miguel Will, José Carlos Somoza

William Shakespeare literally made his entrance on the stage of the Festival de Teatro Clásico de Almagro [The Almagro Festival of Classical Theater] on the evening of 17 July 1997. The playwright, transformed into the protagonist of the play *Miguel Will*, written by José Carlos Somoza, delivered the lines above at the beginning of the play. Nevertheless, his words were not recognized as Shakespeare's, as they paraphrased the popular opening of *Don Quixote*. *Miguel Will* tells the story of the staging of *Cardenio*, the lost play written by Shakespeare in collaboration with John Fletcher inspired by an episode in Cervantes' novel, as performed by the King's Men and

casting Shakespeare himself in the title role. The play was the winner of the First Cervantes Theater Prize, organized on the occasion of the four 450th anniversary of the birth of Cervantes. The award included the staging by the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico, Spain's national company, plus its premiere at the Almagro Festival. The plays eligible for the award had to capture Cervantes' essence. It is through Shakespeare's imaginary tribute to Cervantes with the staging of *Cardenio* that this essence is captured in *Miguel Will*.

It is paradoxical that the winner of the award or, what is the same, the play chosen to celebrate Cervantes' 450th birth anniversary, resorts to Shakespeare to remember the Spanish writer, who wanted to become a playwright but whose dramatic production—much more limited than that of his contemporaries Lope de Vega or Calderón—was never successful during his lifetime.¹ This paradox is further increased if the fact that the play premiered at the Almagro Festival performed by Spain's national company—two institutions devoted to the promotion and preservation of Golden Age theater—is taken into consideration.

Had the play been staged in the Corral de Comedias, the seventeenth-century venue of the Almagro Festival, it would have been too much for the Cervantine celebration: Shakespeare would have not only displaced the attention that was due to Cervantes in that year, but he would have even occupied a physical space similar to the venues in which Cervantes had desired to see his plays performed with more frequency.² However, *Miguel Will* did not go that far. The performance took place in the proscenium-arch Teatro Municipal, a much more contemporary venue than the Corral. Although Shakespeare did not occupy the original space of Spanish Golden Age drama, his works did receive more attention than those by Cervantes in that festival season. The only productions programmed to mark Cervantes' anniversary were *Miguel Will*, with Shakespeare as the main protagonist, and a performance of his *Entremeses*. In contrast, two other Shakespearean productions were

¹ Cervantes acknowledges his passion for the theater in the prologue to his *Comedias y Entremeses*, as well as in several references in *Don Quixote* and other prose works. The fact that he decided to publish eight of his plays is considered a sign of his failure to have them performed (Sánchez 1992).

² Due to the date of construction of the Corral (1628), it is unlikely that Cervantes' dramatic pieces had been staged in this venue.

staged (*The Tempest*, dir. Calixto Bieito; *Much Ado about Nothing*, dir. Juan Carlos Corazza).

The celebration of Golden Age Spanish theater and the Corral have been two of the pillars of the Almagro Festival since its inception in 1978. The festival, held in the Castilian town of Almagro, intended to revive Spanish Golden Age classics, which had been used to support the ideology of Franco's regime in the 1940s and had experienced a dramatic decrease on the Spanish stages from the 1960s to the 1980s (Peláez Martín 1997, 25; García Lorenzo and Muñoz Carabantes 1997, 64). It is only in the 1980s, once the festival widened its scope to include international artists and authors, when the first Shakespearean productions were staged in Almagro.³ The festival celebrates sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theater, with special attention to Spanish Golden Age classics. Nevertheless, Shakespearean productions often outnumber those by individual national authors, with Shakespeare stealing the scene from Golden Age authors. Shakespeare's intrusion in the celebration of Spanish classical theater is enhanced when his plays are performed in the Corral de Comedias. This article has a double purpose, first, to examine the abundance of Shakespeare in Almagro as a phenomenon that finds its explanation in factors ranging from Shakespeare's popularity to the role of modern translation and, second, to focus on how Shakespearean productions at the Corral de Comedias have negotiated new meanings of Shakespeare in performance, generating an interplay between Renaissance and Golden Age theater.

³ The first Shakespearean productions, staged in 1984, were *Pericles*, dir. Declan Donnellan; *La Tempestad*, dir. Edgar Saba; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, dir. Jaume Bordera. The inclusion of *Pericles*, by the international company Cheek by Jowl, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, performed in Catalan, illustrate the evolution of Spanish theater under the new democratic government, with the emergence of the "teatro de las nacionalidades" [theater of nationalities]—theater in the regional languages of Spain often used to support nationalist causes—and the increasing numbers of foreign companies on the Spanish stages (Ruiz Ramón 1988, 103–13; Berenguer and Pérez 1998, 36).

Shakespeare in the Company of Golden Age Authors

The steady rise of Shakespearean productions throughout the history of the Almagro Festival has led to a tension between the original purpose of the festival (preserving Golden Age drama), and the profusion of Shakespeare's works. The analysis of the festival programs, gathered in the Museo Nacional del Teatro in Almagro, shows that the festival seasons in the 1980s did not include more than one or two, if any, of Shakespeare's plays on average; however, the beginning of the twenty-first century has witnessed a dramatic increase.⁴ In 2015, the Almagro Festival reached a historical maximum of Shakespeare's plays, with nine productions in the program. In contrast, the three most popular Spanish playwrights of the period only amounted to eleven productions: five by Lope de Vega and Calderón respectively, and only one by Tirso de Molina. This domination of Shakespeare on the Almagro stages is not unique, but reproduces the general theatrical landscape in Spain. Keith Gregor has noted the Spanish addiction to Shakespeare at the beginning of the twenty-first century, pointing out that Shakespearean productions do not only outnumber the works by individual Golden Age playwrights, but even sometimes "the combined dramatic efforts of all of Spain's classical authors" (2010, 1). The production of more Shakespeare than national classical authors in the country as a whole can go somehow unnoticed, but the concentration of theatrical events at the Almagro Festival—taking place in a single city in the span of a month—brings such contrast to the fore. It is precisely due to the large number of Shakespeare's plays, often outnumbering the plays by individual Spanish playwrights, that the study of Shakespeare in Almagro is relevant.

Nevertheless, the presence of more plays by Shakespeare than by individual national authors has not been a real threat to the celebration of national theater in Almagro, as the total number of Golden Age productions has always been greater. In 2015, Shakespearean productions occupied 22.5% of the program, those by Lope de Vega, Calderón and Tirso put together reached 27.5%, and the remaining 50% were by other Spanish and foreign classical

⁴ The increasing number of Shakespearean productions in Almagro already caught the attention of José Manuel González (1999), whose chapter "Shakespeare in Almagro" offers an overview of the Shakespearean productions in the festival in the 1990s.

authors.⁵ However, in a national as well as international market in which Shakespeare is, by far, the playwright most often performed, the organizers of the Almagro Festival need to design each season carefully in order to prevent Shakespearean productions from completely taking over the program.

Apart from paralleling a national trend, the most obvious explanation for Shakespeare's omnipresence in Almagro is that he stands as the most popular playwright of the period to which the festival is devoted.⁶ As a thematic festival focused on a specific moment of theater history and featuring only works from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries or related somehow to this period, the festival foregrounds the link between the productions presented and this historical past, a connection that, most of the time, comes via the playwright. This means that Shakespearean works are eligible to be presented at the festival precisely because they have been written by Shakespeare. In this case, the historical time when they were created and Shakespeare's canonical status are the two main explanations for the abundance of Shakespeare's plays at the festival. The historical requirement shapes the meaning of the Almagro Festival as an event and affects the reading of the productions. The inclusion of Shakespearean productions in the festival marks them as representatives of a historical period, whose performance in the festival is intended to show that these works can still speak to contemporary audiences, no matter how long ago they were written. Shakespeare's canonicity and the commercial success of his works on the Spanish stage also explain why his works are performed in Almagro much more often than those by other English playwrights of the same period, as Marlowe or Fletcher.

Shakespeare's works have been performed in a wide range of styles at the festival, pointing out their relevance in twenty-first-century theater: from productions recontextualizing the action in our days (e.g. *Coriolanus*, dir. Àlex Rigola, 2012; *The Merry Wives*, dir. Andrés Lima, 2015), to playful parodies and pastiche adaptations (e.g. *Shakespeare para ignorantes*, 2013), or productions in a more

⁵ Data obtained using the information available in the 2015 festival program.

⁶ Jonathan Bate (1997) argues that part of Shakespeare's popularity is due to the political victory of England over Spain and that had Spain's power not declined after the seventeenth century, Lope's fate would have been certainly different and he would "have triumphed over Shakespeare" (338).

canonical style (e.g. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, dir. Gustavo Tambascio, 2001; *Hamlet*, dir. Alfonso Zorro, 2015). This variety of approaches to Shakespeare in performance does not find an equivalent in Golden Age productions. Even if they are sometimes adapted and updated to be contextualized in our days, Golden Age plays do not undergo such generalized processes of adaptation as has been the case with Shakespeare's plays.⁷ A quick overview of the productions in Almagro, as well as of those in the country in general, reveals that whereas the tendency in Shakespearean productions is to perform the plays in contemporary attire, a large number of Golden Age works are in period costume to evoke seventeenth-century theater. This apparently insignificant detail gives an idea of to what extent the plays of the Golden Age are still made to represent the national historical past.

The connotations that the plays from the Golden Age carry with them, as well as some of their characteristics such as the topics or language, or even their performance tradition, might also explain why they are not performed in such varied styles as in the case of Shakespeare. Golden Age works are still regarded as Spanish sacred classics, which deserve respect and require some degree of historical accuracy, as the frequent performance in period costume indicates. Whereas some of the topics that the plays address, such as love or vengeance, can have a universal and contemporary appeal, others have lost their currency in contemporary society, like those dealing with honor or religion (Gregor 2005, 240–41). The ideological appropriations of Spanish Classics in the early years of Franco's dictatorship, together with their almost complete absence from Spanish stages from the 1960s until the 1980s, explains why the experimentation with and adaptation of Golden Age plays have been much more limited than in the case of Shakespeare's works, which have been continuously reinvented all through the twentieth century. All this hinders the adaptability of certain plays of the Golden Age canon for contemporary theater.

⁷ Gregor (2010, 2) refers to the plurality of approaches to Shakespeare as one of the main characteristics of Shakespearean performance in Spain since the 1990s, and he explicitly mentions the Almagro Festival as a paramount example of this variety.

Shakespeare's works in modern translation are, in general, linguistically more accessible to Spanish audiences than the works of Golden Age theater. Well-trained companies like the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico recite classical Spanish verse in its sixteenth- and seventeenth-century language with the purpose to make it as accessible as possible. Nevertheless, audiences not familiar with Golden Age theater usually need to get used to the rhymed verse before being able to fully grasp the meaning of the dialogues. Such difficulty does not appear in Shakespeare's performances in modern translation; as Rafael Portillo and Manuel J. Gómez Lara point out, "since the vast majority of Spaniards cannot understand his original English, modern translations, particularly those written for the stage, make Shakespeare sound quite 'contemporary' to the ears of the audience" (1994, 219). Thus, Spanish festival-goers in Almagro might feel closer to Shakespeare's language in translation than to Lope's Golden Age Spanish.

Performing Shakespeare in the Almagro Corral

At the Almagro Festival, Shakespeare has not only occupied a symbolic space initially devoted to the preservation of Golden Age drama, but has also entered a physical space from that time, the Corral de Comedias.⁸ The Corral was built in 1628 and was used to stage plays during the Golden Age. In the eighteenth century, with the prohibition of the *corrales*, the building was transformed into a tavern and was not rediscovered until 1950 (García de León Álvarez 2000). As several critics have pointed out, theater architecture serves not only to contain meaning, but it is also an active element in the process of meaning making (Carlson 1989, McAuley 2000); in the words of Juliet Rufford, "theatre is a temporal art but it is also one that signifies spatially" (2015, 8). Part of the spatial meaning of Shakespearean productions at the Corral is determined by the adaptation of the performances to the spatial configuration of the venue, as well as by their use of the resources available in it (i.e.

⁸ The opposite, the performance of Golden Age works in an Elizabethan venue, at least in the closet example existing nowadays, the reconstruction of Shakespeare's Globe, took place with the performance of Lope de Vega's *El castigo sin venganza* [Punishment without Revenge] by Lope de Vega by the company Rakatá in September 2015.

balconies, working doors,...). The historical connotations of a theater space also intervene in the spatial meaning of performance. Because of its historical origin, the *Corral* can be described, to borrow Marvin Carlson's words, as a "haunted house" (2001, 131), a space that activates the connection between contemporary performance and the theatrical past of the Spanish Golden Age.

The Spanish *corrales* and the Elizabethan public playhouses, two types of sixteenth-century theater architecture, share several features (Hildy 2004; Allen 1990). Franklin J. Hildy acknowledges the importance of the Corral de Comedias in Almagro for the study of Elizabethan amphitheaters because it "remains the only existing theatrical space in Europe with any resemblance to the open-air playhouses of Shakespeare's day" (2004, 101). This resemblance starts in the spatial configuration of the *corrales* and the Elizabethan amphitheaters. In both types of venues, audiences were distributed in three sides around the stage on different levels, from the lower level—the yard in Elizabethan playhouses and the *patio*, its equivalent in the *corrales*—to the galleries.⁹ As in Elizabethan amphitheaters, the *corrales* tended to be open-air constructions. Their location in relation to the city was, nevertheless, different, with the *corrales* situated in the city center and the Elizabethan venues outside the city walls. The placement of the *corrales* inside the city explains their square or rectangular shape as they had their origin in the inner courtyards of buildings that were used for the performance of touring companies. This ad hoc space derived in purpose-built theaters, as is the case of the Corral de Comedias in Almagro. In contrast, Elizabethan public theaters usually had a circular or octagonal shape, but their origin can be also traced back to temporary arrangements in the yards of inns, as it is known to have been the case of the Boar's Head and the Red Bull (Gurr 2009, 147).¹⁰ In the *corrales*, the front part of the *patio* was filled with benches and the back was occupied by standing men (known as *mosqueteros*),

⁹ For a detailed description of the *corrales* and Golden Age theater practices see Ruano de la Haza (2000); Ruano de la Haza and Allen (1994). For an analysis of the *corrales* in English see Thacker (2007). A general analysis on Elizabethan venues and theater practices at the time is provided in Gurr (2009). Recent studies on performance at the Shakespeare's Globe have also shed some light on the practices of Renaissance theater (Karim-Cooper and Stern 2013; Carson and Karim-Cooper 2008).

¹⁰ Both the Boar's Head and the Red Bull were officially transformed into play houses after the ban on staging plays at inns.

reversing the pattern of Elizabethan theaters in which standing audiences were at the front and seating spectators in the lower gallery at the back.

Nowadays, the Corral in Almagro preserves the overall original disposition of audiences in the *patio* and the galleries, although there are no longer spectators on the sides of the stage or standing, the benches have been substituted by chairs and there is artificial lighting. After a recent restoration in 2004, Felipe Delgado Laguna and Isidro G. Hidalgo Herrero, the architect and archaeologist in charge of the project, stated that the Corral has been “able to meet the technical requirements and the architectural features to become a modern twenty-first-century building preserving intact its personality and its popular architecture” (2006, 155).¹¹ Technological innovations and seventeenth-century elements coexist in the restored Corral. The venue has three balconies in the upstage gallery (similar to the Lord’s room in Elizabethan amphitheaters), and two working doors at stage level plus two exits on the sides, elements that many productions integrate into the performance.

The similarities between Elizabethan and Golden Age theaters, together with the resources available in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, result in similar performing practices, such as the integration of the architecture into the action or the constructedness of theater practice. Andrew Gurr observes that in Elizabethan theater practices the “awareness of the illusion as illusion was [...] much closer to the surface all the time” (2009, 180), a statement that is also true for Golden Age theater. Scenes requiring an upper level were performed in the balconies in both traditions and the central door at stage level provided space for the *apariencias* in Spain and discovery scenes in England.¹² The two traditions also created meaning with similar resources. For instance, a chair and a desk on the English and Spanish sixteenth- and seventeenth-century stages would have functioned as referential stage properties (Ubbersfeld 1999, 123) to indicate that a scene was placed indoors;

¹¹ “Ha sido capaz de recoger por sí mismo las condiciones técnicas y arquitectónicas para ser un edificio moderno del siglo XXI manteniendo su personalidad, el lenguaje de su arquitectura popular.” My translation.

¹² The *apariencias* were scenes generally shown behind the central door at stage level that pursued to make a visual impact on their audiences (Ruano de la Haza 2000, 226).

likewise, branches and plants suggested outdoor locations and the use of torches and candles announced night scenes.

Shakespearean and Golden Age works might have been written with the venues where they were going to be performed in mind, integrating into the action specific characteristics of these spaces. There is no way of determining whether this was the case, but there is conclusive evidence for the performance of Shakespeare's works in a variety of locations (open-air playhouses, small indoor theaters such as Blackfriars, the Inns of Court or a palace at court). At the same time, there are indications in the plays that the specific characteristics of these spaces were put to good use in the dramatic action. This means that, given the similarities between Elizabethan amphitheatres and the Spanish *corrales*, Shakespearean productions performed at the Corral de Comedias in Almagro have the possibility to reactivate the use of space encoded in the playtext and to give rise to new spatial meanings in a venue that is, at the same time, historically accurate (built in the seventeenth century), but geographically displaced (in Spain instead of England), while the performance takes place in present-day Spain. The first production to materialize such interplay took place in 1984, when Cheek by Jowl was invited to perform *Pericles* at the festival.¹³ Since then, twenty-one different Shakespearean productions have been staged there as part of the Almagro Festival, and each has interacted with this historical building in diverse ways. The reasons for such a reduced number of Shakespearean productions in this space, twenty-one in contrast to the 132 productions staged in the festival until 2016, are simple: the reduced dimensions of the stage (the stage in Almagro is quite shallow, around 8 meters wide by 5 meters deep), and some of the technical restrictions of the venue make it difficult to accommodate big-scale productions with large casts, as those in most of the Shakespearean productions at the festival, which are more easily staged in other venues. The challenge faced by Shakespearean productions in the Corral is not how to recreate original theater practice from the Golden Age or the Renaissance, but

¹³ There are no indications of Shakespearean productions in the Corral before the one in 1984. From its restoration and reopening in 1954 until the inauguration of the festival, the Corral was mainly used to stage Golden Age plays, including those for the TV series *Teatro de Siempre*, and for local festivities.

how to accommodate present-day productions—devised to be staged in a more contemporary venue—in this historical space.

Cheek by Jowl's *Pericles* was not only the first example of Shakespeare in this space, but also the first visit of the company to both the festival and Spain. The company has periodically returned to the festival since then, presenting up to five Shakespearean productions and becoming the international company that has most often performed Shakespeare in Almagro.¹⁴ *Pericles* proved a good example of the theater practice of the company, a style whose core axioms have been summarized by Paul Prescott as follows:

[...] that the art of the theatre is above all the art of the actor; that the director's primary job is to nurture the health of the ensemble; that the story and the text are not the same thing and that in the case of a clash, the former must prevail; that every single line must be new-minted; that the emotionally unblocked actor needs less physical blocking; that the scenery and props should never obtrude between the actor and the audience; that rehearsals and the process of discovery continue until the final performance; that there must always be something at stake. (2008, 70)

All these were present in *Pericles*, performed by seven actors who doubled and tripled characters. Far from being an obstruction between actor and audience or, even more, between actor and performance space, the setting and props perfectly adapted to the Corral. What was at stake at this specific performance was the resonance of the play when staged in this particular venue. The set featured a wooden door in the center of the stage and two boxes that constantly varied their function to recreate different moments in the play. They were used, for instance, to represent the ship when *Pericles* leaves Pentapolis, and transformed later into the coffin in which Thaisa is thrown overboard being left for dead. Aside from its imaginative functionality, the set did not try to impose itself over the elements of the venue, but left the back wall of the stage perfectly

¹⁴ Apart from *Pericles* (1984), the productions by Cheek by Jowl at the Almagro Festival include: *Measure for Measure* (1994), *Othello* (2004), *Twelfth Night* (2008) and *Troilus and Cressida* (2008). *Measure for Measure*, *Othello* and *Twelfth Night* took place in the Teatro Municipal, while *Pericles* and *Troilus and Cressida* were staged in the Corral. The relationship between the company and the festival has been an intense one, with Declan Donnellan and Nick Ormerod (the stage designer) receiving the Corral de Comedias award in 2008.

visible—a white wall with some wood pillars, plus the doors and balconies.

The set, together with the costumes of the actors, who were in sailor-like attire, did not try to locate the action in a precise historical time, but rather indicated a timeless space appropriate to evoke the multiple voyages in *Pericles*. Instances of physical theater served to present on stage events that would be otherwise difficult to conjure up. This was the case of the storm during which Thaisa gives birth to Marina, created thanks to the movements of the actors. The importance of physical theater in this production can be interpreted as an expansion of the dumb shows in the play, as both show (in images) rather than tell (with words). Instead of restricting the narration with images only to transitional scenes, the physical actions of the actors remained essential all through the production. This led to an emphasis on the visual, enhancing the accessibility of the production, performed in English for a mainly Spanish audience. Gower's lines were shared by all the actors, who took turns to deliver them addressing the audience directly. The direct address was favored by the proximity of the audience to the stage in the Corral, in which the first row of spectators is barely two meters away from the scene. The simple set, the use of physical theater and the closeness of the auditorium and the stage in the Corral highlighted the constructedness of theater, recalling some of the mechanisms of Elizabethan and Spanish Golden Age theater. As in those times, Cheek by Jowl challenged their audiences with a production in which they had to engage with the imaginative solutions on stage.

Other Shakespearean productions in the Corral have integrated the architecture of the venue into their *mise en scène* more directly, as was the case of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (dir. Gustavo Tambascio, 2001). The production relied on the architectural features of the space (i.e. the working doors on stage, the balconies and the side entrances) to locate the action and create diverse stage configurations involving the stage and the balconies. The opening scene already foreshadowed the intention to occupy all the performing spaces available at the Corral. A musician, playing the harpsichord in one of the side galleries over the stage, presented the play while the actors appeared in different spaces of the theater (at the doors, balconies, etc.) as he announced:

The Merry Wives of Windsor by William Shakespeare. A very pleasant and excellent comedy of John Falstaff and the merry wives, mixed with different genres by Sir Hugh, the Danish gentleman, the judge Shallow, and his nephew Slender, with the boastful veteran Pistol and Nym, as it has been acted at various times by members of the honourable Lord Chamberlain on the occasion of the feast of The Most Noble Order of the Garter for Her Majesty Elizabeth I.¹⁵

The opening lines reveal the aura of authenticity that the production as a whole attempted to evoke, presenting the production as if it was the one performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men and premiered for Elizabeth I. The introduction of some features of original practice in the *mise en scène* contributed to this evocation of authenticity, such as the use of period costumes or on-stage music—there were two other musicians playing guitar on stage apart from the one on the harpsichord and the piece they played several times was “Greensleeves.”

The architecture of the Corral was all the scenography that the production needed. The doors at stage level were, in general, consistently used for the entrance or exit to a room when the action was located indoors, and as the entrance to a house when it took place outside.¹⁶ The entrance of a group of characters through one of the sides and their immediate exit through the other indicated that they were walking on their way to somewhere. During the first half of the performance, the changes of scene were announced by a character onstage, who proclaimed both the location and the scene number. Most of the announcements were made from the central balcony, and were on occasions accompanied by a board indicating

¹⁵ “*Las alegres comadres de Windsor* de William Shakespeare, una muy agradable y excelente comedia de Sir John Falstaff y las alegres comadres, entremezclada con géneros variados de Sir Hugh, el caballero danés, el juez Shallow y su sobrino Slender, con la jactanciosa vanidad del veterano pistola y el Cabo Nym, tal y como ha sido actuada en diversos momentos por los miembros del honorable Lord Chamberlain en ocasión de la festividad de la orden de la jarretera ante su majestad Isabel I.” *Las alegres comadres de Windsor*, dir. Gustavo Tambascio, 2001. Quoted from the recording by the Centro de Documentación Teatral at the Almagro Festival 2001. My translation.

¹⁶ Mariko Ichikawa (2002, 85) has discussed the use of stage doors in Elizabethan venues, suggesting that doors represented the entrance/exit to a particular place at specific moments during the performance.

the scene location.¹⁷ For the first scene at the inn, for instance, one of the secondary characters appeared on the balcony carrying a sign with the words “Garter Inn,” which resembled the actual board that could have been found on the facade of an inn.

In addition to the announcements, the boards and the references to locale also present in the text, the performance employed other elements to situate a scene indoors or outdoors. One of them was bringing furniture or other props into the stage. Thanks to this technique, also characteristic of Elizabethan and Golden Age theater, a chair, some stools and the buck-basket (where Falstaff hides the first time he needs to escape from the house without being seen by Mr. Ford) were enough to transform the stage from a street setting into an indoor room. The last scene was situated in Windsor Park just by adding some branches to the costumes of the actors. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theater, the performance of the plays during day-time enhanced the interaction between the stage and the auditorium, as public and actors shared the same light. Here, however, the introduction of artificial lighting clearly separated actors and spectators, with stage lighting to indicate changes in locale and the time of the action. Night scenes, for instance, used low intensity lights in blue shade for indoor scenes and in amber for indoor locations, perhaps in an attempt to recreate the color of candle light of past times, when such props were made to represent night scenes.

In Golden Age theater, the doors, usually covered by hangings, were often used to hide characters or help them to exit without being seen. A typical plot of the *comedia* involves a lover visiting his lady and having to escape from the house because of the unexpected arrival of her father or brothers, as is the case of *Casa con dos puertas mala es de guardar* [A House with Two Doors Is Difficult to Guard], by Calderón de la Barca. In this play, the two doors of the house allow the lover (known as *galán*) to visit his lady and exit without being caught. Likewise, hiding and escaping are central to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, where Mistress Page and Mistress Ford fool both Falstaff and Mr. Ford. In Falstaff’s two visits to Mistress Ford in this production, Mistress Page hides behind the central door to overhear

¹⁷ According to Gurr (2009, 180), some performances of Court plays in private playhouses used boards to indicate the location. Their introduction here could be interpreted as an echo of this practice.

the conversation between her friend and Falstaff, and Falstaff hides behind the other door when Mistress Page enters to bring news about Mr. Ford. In his second visit, Falstaff is taken upstairs by Mistress Page to be dressed as the maid's aunt of Brentford. The first glimpse that the audience catches of him in disguise takes place in one of the upper balconies, anticipating the subsequent comedy when he reaches the stage and exits without being recognized by Mr. Ford, although Mr. Ford hits him thinking that he is the witch from Brentford. The architecture of the theatrical building in Almagro provides an excellent setting to perform the actions in the play without having to resort to any other features of the set.

Pericles and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* did not introduce any significant alterations to the performing space of the Corral. On the contrary, they integrated their action into the characteristics of the venue. Other Shakespearean productions have made more drastic modifications to this space. In *The Taming of the Shrew* (dir. Carlos Marchena, 1999), a white backcloth covered the whole facade of the tiring house, which was concealed or visible depending on how it was illuminated. Four years later, *Troilus and Cressida* (dir. Francisco Vidal, 2003) also employed a white cloth for the opening scene, although this one had a maroon circle in the center and covered the front of the stage. The cloth was removed after the Chorus's opening speech.

The most radical modification of the Corral took place with Cheek by Jowl's *Troilus and Cressida* in 2008, when the spatial configuration of the venue was completely altered. Instead of using the actual stage, as previous Shakespearean productions had done, the stage space was expanded to form a T-shaped traverse stage, with a platform across the *patio* connecting with the real stage, while the facade of the tiring house was covered with some strips of canvas stained with faded blood. This particular use of the space emphasized the spectacular aspect of the production, shifting the attention from its linguistic component (it was performed in English with Spanish surtitles) to its visual dimension.

Troilus and Cressida was detached from the historical origin of the play in a way that the first production of the company at the festival, *Pericles*, was not. *Troilus and Cressida* addressed present day reality, with the characters in contemporary attire and with some of them updated to resemble recognizable character types. Apart from an

openly gay Thersites, Helena and Paris were transformed into Hollywood-like stars. However, in Cheek by Jowl's style, the production kept the simplicity of the setting, mostly restricted here to some stools. This was combined with more unusual stage conventions, such as the performance of soliloquies with characters not in isolation, but surrounded by others who were immobile while the speeches were delivered.

If the performance of Cheek by Jowl's *Pericles* in the Corral allows for a comparison between Golden Age and Elizabethan venues, a third space comes into view in *Troilus and Cressida*: a more contemporary kind of performing space, that of the traverse stage. Most of the action took place in the traverse stage, enabling the actors to exit the performance space just by moving to the stage of the Corral. The real stage was only restored to its original function in a metatheatrical moment, when a transvestite Thersites sang to the Trojan Warriors in a Marlene Dietrich style. As the performing space was rearranged, the distribution of the venue was reconfigured, with the audience seating in rows of chairs along the traverse stage in the *patio* and the balconies. This distribution enhanced the stage-auditorium relationship as the audience was even closer to the performers, who addressed them directly and went down the stage invading the audience's space at some moments. The constructedness of theater was highlighted by the distribution, as the spectators faced one another and those in the row next to the stage were illuminated by the stage lighting. This effect was suppressed for soliloquies, when the light intensity was lowered to isolate the characters from the audience and achieve a more emotional introspection.

Cheek by Jowl's intervention in the space transformed the concept of attending a play in this venue. As Ric Knowles notes, "all performances take place within specific architectural and geographic frames that serve to shape their meaning" (2004, 66). While the geographical frame of *Troilus and Cressida* is quite specific (the performance takes place in Almagro, in the Corral de Comedias, in the main square of the town), a multiplicity of architectural spaces are juxtaposed in the performance: two physical spaces (the Corral as a building plus the addition of the traverse stage), and a fictional space (an evocation of Elizabethan playhouses through the play and Cheek by Jowl's staging). This simultaneity of fictional and physical

spaces, common to all the Shakespearean productions in the Corral examined here, recalls Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias. According to Foucault, heterotopias juxtapose different incompatible spaces in a single real space. To exemplify this, Foucault precisely comments on what happens in theater, "the theatre brings onto the rectangle of the stage a whole series of places that are alien to one another" (2008, 19). Shakespearean productions in the Corral do not only conjure on the stage those fictional places that appear in the plays, they also juxtapose the fictional space of Elizabethan venues and real physical spaces—the Golden Age venue itself and, in the case of *Troilus and Cressida*, the addition of the traverse stage.

Experimentation with original practice techniques is not frequent at the Corral de Comedias, either with Golden Age works or with Shakespeare. However, the performance of Shakespeare's plays in an original seventeenth-century venue activates the resonances of space encoded in the playtext, foregrounding the relationship between the text and the venue for which they were written in a foreign theatrical space of similar characteristics. With its profusion of Shakespearean productions, the Almagro Festival does not only place the works of the English playwright in direct conversation—and competition—with those by Golden Age authors, but also gives rise to a unique theatrical event bringing together Golden Age, Elizabethan theater and contemporary Shakespearean performance.

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