

The Influence of British Directors on the Fundación Siglo de Oro and its Productions of Early Modern Drama, 2007-2021

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Abstract:

The Fundación Siglo de Oro –formerly Compañía Rakatá– has been staging Spanish Golden Age and Elizabethan theatre since it was founded in 2006. Over this time, the company has developed an identity associated not only with its staging of early modern drama, but also with the influence of a series of contemporary British theatre practitioners on its rehearsal process. Perhaps one of the most noteworthy constants in its work is a fruitful series of collaborations with British stage directors, beginning in 2007 with Laurence Boswell directing *El perro del hortelano* (revived in 2014), in 2009 *Fuenteovejuna*, and in 2015 co-directing *Mujeres y criados* with company founder and producer Rodrigo Arribas. While, at first, we can ascribe this collaboration to the impact of the Royal Shakespeare Company Golden Age season, curated by Boswell, which visited Madrid's emblematic Teatro Español in 2004, the company have continued to seek out British directors including Tim Hoare on *Don Juan en Alcalá* (2016) and *Trabajos de amor perdidos* (2016), and most recently Dominic Dromgoole on a new production of *El perro del hortelano* (2021). This latter partnership is also the culmination of a collaboration with Shakespeare's Globe Theatre which saw the company take part in the Cultural Olympiad with *Enrique VIII* (2012) and become the first company to perform Lope de Vega in Spanish at the London theatre, with *El castigo sin venganza* (2014). There has therefore been a clear exchange of ideas between Spanish classical theatre and contemporary British theatre practice. This article proposes to explore the methodological contributions of British directors to better understand how this has altered the in-rehearsal perspectives on the Spanish Golden Age to explain the

benefits of this Anglo-Hispanic collaborative approach to the company's work. This will be supported by an interview with Rodrigo Arribas, whose constant presence as founder, producer, actor and most recently as director can help us to understand the contributions made by Boswell, Hoare and Dromgoole to the company's rehearsal methodology.

Keywords: Fundación Siglo de Oro; Rodrigo Arribas; Golden Age Performance; British stage directors; rehearsal methodology.

The Fundación Siglo de Oro –formerly Compañía Rakatá– has a storied history of working with British stage directors. The most extensive collaboration has been with Laurence Boswell,¹ who directed *El perro del hortelano* (2007, revived in 2014), *Fuenteovejuna* (2009), and co-directed *Mujeres y criados* (2015) with company founder, producer and actor Rodrigo Arribas. While, at first, we can ascribe this collaboration to the impact of the Royal Shakespeare Company (henceforth RSC) Golden Age season, curated by Boswell, which visited Madrid's emblematic Teatro Español in 2004,² the company has continued to seek out collaborations with British directors, including Tim Hoare³ on *Don Juan en Alcalá* (2016) and *Trabajos de amor perdidos* (2016), and most recently Dominic Dromgoole⁴ on *El perro del hortelano* (2021). I must also include myself in this list, as I directed the company's production of *Doctor Faustus* (2011).⁵ All of this not

1 Laurence Boswell is a theatre director who was associate director of the RSC, helming the company's Spanish Golden Age season which transferred to the Teatro Español in 2004. He went on to become the artistic director of the Ustinov Studio, Bath.

2 Fischer examines Boswell's 2004 production of *Dog in the Manger* for the RSC in some detail (2009, 220-244).

3 Tim Hoare is a theatre director who has directed for the Royal National Theatre, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, and Broadway and West End venues.

4 Dominic Dromgoole is a theatre director who was artistic director of Shakespeare's Globe from 2005 to 2015.

5 I collaborated with Fundación Siglo de Oro as assistant director on *Fuenteovejuna* (dir. Laurence Boswell) and *El castigo sin venganza* (dir. Ernesto Arias), and directed *Doctor Faustus* at the Teatros del Canal. I discussed the project, focusing on issues of translation but also mentioning the staging, in Breden (2017), and do not propose to discuss my work with the company in this paper. This paper should, therefore, be understood in terms of Richard Schechner's "participant observation" as a mode of fieldwork (2). My research often stems from such fieldwork, and I have considered the theoretical framing of this approach elsewhere (Breden 2014, 5-6).

including long-standing collaborations with figures of the stature of John Wright⁶ and Will Keen⁷ delivering workshops and assisting in the training and coaching of actors within the company. Clearly there is an affinity between the company's work and goals and the working methodologies of British directors, which has led to very fruitful collaborations. Perhaps most notably, it was Dromgoole himself who invited the company to stage *Enrique VIII* (2012) for the Cultural Olympiad at Shakespeare's Globe in London, going on to become the first company to perform Lope de Vega in Spanish at the same venue, with *El castigo sin venganza* (2014).⁸ It is therefore worth considering how these collaborations have evolved and shaped the way in which the company works in rehearsal and stages both Spanish Golden Age and Elizabethan and Jacobean plays.

Before proceeding, it is worth pausing for a moment on the figure of Rodrigo Arribas, currently president of the Fundación Siglo de Oro (henceforth FUSO). Arribas studied law, but soon moved towards acting, training at the Madrid RESAD drama school. He was one of the founding members of Rakatá (now FUSO) and Producer for the company, also regularly appearing as a lead actor in its productions. Given the absence of a regular director, with Boswell as perhaps the most frequent returning director, the consistent artistic identity of the company must necessarily reside elsewhere. Much of this article is based on an interview that I held with Arribas in July 2021, in which I suggested that he occupied a role of artistic directorship of the company. His humble response was to point towards a way of working and to a team that has been present since the company's inception: "Sí, hay un sentido de transversalidad en el proyecto, eso sí estoy seguro, y eso tiene que ver con el hecho de estar presente. Pero no estar presente solo yo, sino estar presente elementos que han formado parte del proyecto desde el principio." ["Yes, there is a sense of a through-line in the company, I am sure of it, and it has a lot to do with my presence. But not just my presence, but that of a number of elements who have been part of the company from the start"] (cited in Breden 2021, 378). Although he is of course right that he is not the only member of the company who has been present from the start, he has always occupied a key role of responsibility in terms of selecting projects and directors and facilitating a way of working for the entire team. His role has often been one of oversight of

6 John Wright is a theatre director and pedagogue, co-founder of Trestle and Told by an Idiot theatre companies.

7 Will Keen is an actor and actor-trainer, and a regular collaborator with Declan Donnellan's Check by Jowl.

8 Both productions were directed by Ernesto Arias, a highly respected and established actor who trained at the Teatro de la Abadía in Madrid and played Teodoro in Boswell's *El perro del hortelano*.

projects, occasionally co-directing by taking on responsibility for detailed text work while the fellow co-director looked after how the text occupied the stage and considered what it could say to a modern audience. Although he seems to reject the label of artistic director –“realmente no sé qué es lo que es” [“I don’t really know what it is”] (378)–⁹ he does nevertheless clearly occupy a key role in defining the company’s identity and working methodologies. As a result, when we consider the contributions of British directors to the company, we must recognise that these are instigated and channelled into the company’s work and identity by Arribas.

The company itself is ostensibly devoted to the Spanish Golden Age, particularly with its rebranding as a foundation in 2011. Although they have staged pieces by a variety of authors from the period, including Tirso de Molina’s *Desde Toledo a Madrid* (2006), Cervantes’ *El rufián dichoso* (2017), two plays by Ana Caro, *El conde Partinuplés* (2018) and *Valor, agravio y mujer* (2019), and a version of Fernando de Rojas’ *La celestina* (2020), their main focus has been Félix Lope de Vega from the very start, as Arribas states: “nosotros somos muy de Lope” [“we are great fans of Lope”] (372): *El perro del hortelano* (2007 & 2021), *Fuenteovejuna* (2009), *El castigo sin venganza* (2010) & *Mujeres y criados* (2015). Their interest also spills into modern biographical examinations of Lope, with Santiago Miralles and Gerardo Malla’s text *Entre Marta y Lope* (2013) which looked at the playwright’s relationship with Marta de Nevaes. Meanwhile, Elizabethan theatre is represented by Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (2011) and Shakespeare’s *Enrique VIII* (2012) and *Trabajos de amor perdidos* (2016). Indeed, the 2021 production of *El perro del hortelano*, directed by Dromgoole, consciously attempts to, in the company’s own words, “aunar el Siglo de Oro con el Teatro Isabelino” [“combine the Golden Age with Elizabethan drama”] (Fundación Siglo de Oro 2012, 3), referring to them as “dos tradiciones hermanadas” [“two twinned traditions”] (2012: 8). In this case, the connection is virtually architectural: Dromgoole, who has spent years directing for the Shakespeare’s Globe space, a modern recreation of an Elizabethan theatre, finds points of connection with the traditional Spanish *corral* space, recreated at the Fiesta Corral Cervantes, a summer festival curated by FUSO held in a temporary structure that is itself based on the Almagro *corral*

9 By way of explanation, he points to the Spanish trends for the role to either be exclusively dedicated to programming or entirely dominating of an artistic venture –“se enfocan exclusivamente en dirigir todo” [“they focus exclusively on directing everything”] (378)– neither of which apply to his attitude towards FUSO. We could instead define the role in terms of British theatre practice, as a curator of the artistic identity of a company or venue, with a direct responsibility for facilitating the conditions within which work can be created but not necessarily exclusively responsible for directing all productions by that company.

de comedias, the only remaining fully-preserved seventeenth century theatre in Spain. According to Dromgoole, both spaces allow for “libertad de movimiento, la colaboración con el público, el protagonismo del lenguaje y la confianza en los actores, sobre todo” [“freedom of movement, complicity with the audience, the prominence of language and trust in the actors, above all”] (Fundación Siglo de Oro 2012, 8). Dromgoole’s proposal is fundamentally actor-centred, where the text, as performed with their voices and bodies, becomes their main tool for communication with an audience.

It is not the purpose of this article to discuss the appropriateness of how to approach early modern theatre on the modern stage,¹⁰ a dichotomy best illustrated by the differing focuses we see, for instance, in José María Díez Borque and José María Ruano de la Haza: “hay que pensar que el público iba a oír y a ver, con unas posibilidades recreativas de lo oral quizás hoy perdidas” [“we must remember that the audience went to hear and watch, with abilities to enjoy orality that have perhaps been lost today”] (Díez Borque 2002, 73); “Difícil será explicarlos, interpretarlos, adaptarlos o deconstruirlos, sin poseer una idea precisa de la manera en que fueron presentados al público para el que fueron escritos. Los estudiosos del teatro del Siglo de Oro nos olvidamos a menudo de que la gran mayoría de las comedias del Siglo XVII fueron compuestas para ser representadas y solo muy secundariamente para ser leídas” [“It is hard to explain, interpret, adapt or deconstruct them without having a clear idea of how they were presented to the audience for which they were written. Golden Age academics often forget that the vast majority of 16th century texts were written to be performed and only very secondarily to be read”] (Ruano de la Haza 2000, 10). The emphasis shifts from a textual and literary relationship with the audience where performance is akin to a poetry recitation, towards a fuller conception of stage performance beyond the primacy of the actor, including all the technical and design elements we now associate with the theatrical event. There is a fundamental difference here in perceiving the function of the Golden Age on the modern stage: for Díez Borque, the plays are no longer eloquent to a modern audience, a view inherited from José Antonio Maravall and Francoist efforts to define the Golden Age as representative of lost traditional-Catholic values, as Duncan Wheeler (2012) and Julio Vélez-Sainz (at press) have demonstrated. Meanwhile, Ruano de la Haza’s desire to understand Golden Age performance and its audiences is aimed at helping to reinterpret the texts for a modern audience,

10 Duncan Wheeler, for instance, does not mince words on Boswell’s *Fuenteovejuna* with Rakatá: “despite being imaginatively staged and reasonably well acted, the onstage action was unengaging and the audience was visibly bored for the duration” (2012, 103).

giving autonomy of interpretation to the new productions, as Vélez-Sainz has also noted: “la autonomía de los directores se reafirma pues en un arte que interpreta y determina sentidos, a partir, pero también más allá, del texto literario dramático fuente” [“the autonomy of the director is reaffirmed as it is an art that interprets and determines meaning based on, but also going beyond, the literary dramatic source text”] (at press). The fact is that for the most part, FUSO have aligned themselves with a textual and oral emphasis on the perceived original meanings of the plays over possible contemporary reinterpretations, and has often relegated other productions elements such as set, costume, light, sound or other technologies to a purely functional level.

We have only to consider FUSO’s motto of “Fuerza, amor, ritmo y dicción” [“Strength, love, rhythm, diction”], established with the company’s rebranding in 2011, where we find that the last two terms refer explicitly to the actor’s work on text. However, this is a motto established after five years and four productions, including two with Laurence Boswell at the helm. Boswell’s importance to the company’s work on Golden Age verse cannot be understated,¹¹ and Arribas has reflected on how introducing methodologies developed at the RSC,¹² adapted for Golden Age verse, shaped the future working methodology and identity of FUSO:

[estas técnicas] permiten formas técnicas de mecanización que permiten ser absolutamente fiel al planteamiento del autor y que son los principios sobre los que ahondó la RSC en sus formas investigativas para revitalizar, a través de la emisión de la palabra, una nueva conexión con el teatro Shakespeareano. Esto tiene que ver con un primer grandísimo objetivo nuestro, que es la identificación de la acción verbal. El ‘para qué’ de la unidad menor de emisión y cómo este ‘para qué’ trasciende de la unidad menor a las unidades consecutivamente mayores y que terminan en la grandísima unidad que es la obra en sí. (371-2)

11 I witnessed the application of the following process as assistant director during rehearsals for *Fuenteovejuna* (2009).

12 Tirzah Lowen, assistant director to Peter Hall on a production of *Antony & Cleopatra* (1987), runs through a similar process in chapter 3 of her documentation of the rehearsal process: “Hall described how he, John Barton and Trevor Nunn could pass on this rediscovered way of handling Shakespearean verse, having been trained in it by George Rylands at Cambridge” (Lowen 1990, 27). Further to this, *Staging the Spanish Golden Age: Translation and Performance*, by Kathleen Jeffs, details her first-hand experience of the rehearsals for Boswell’s RSC Golden Age season, documenting the entire process from play selection to the impact of the season. The book also discusses Boswell’s later work with Rakatá (Jeffs 2018, 177-183).

[these techniques permit technical means of mechanisation that make it possible to be completely faithful to the author's work and which are the principles on which the RSC developed its research that aimed to revitalise a new connection with Shakespeare's theatre, by means of emitting the word. This has much to do with one of our first and greatest objectives, which is the identification of verbal action. The 'purpose' of the smallest emitted unit and how this 'purpose' travels from the smallest units to consecutively larger units, ending up in the enormous unity represented by the play itself.]

The methodology alluded to implies a detailed and close examination of how the verse is assembled in order to identify psychological action to assist in constructing the character, the theory being that the playwright has deliberately left all of these clues embedded in the verse, allowing us to reconstruct their interpretation of the character. Whilst this process has been compiled by Peter Hall himself in *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players* (2003), crucially here it has been adapted to the much more varied verse-form uses of the Spanish Golden Age. The methodology proposes a systematic series of steps:

1. Identify the verse structure and the end of each stanza. Normally, given the relatively rigid rhyme forms of Golden Age theatre, each stanza will contain a single 'thought'. Identifying this thought will help the actor to formulate the verse as action rather than poetry. Different stanza forms are also used for different purposes, giving the actor a clue as to the function of the speech: i.e. romance verse form is usually used for narrating a story or relating information, while *redondillas* usually denote conversation, action and movement.
2. Establish the length of each thought by identifying the length of each sentence. For example, a four-line stanza may contain one, two, three or more sentences. Each sentence is a single thought, or modulation on an overarching thought within the stanza. A longer sentence usually indicates that the character is reasoning, while shorter sentences reveal states of anxiety. If sentences coincide with stanza structure, this again indicates a steady and reasoned thought, but where sentences are longer or shorter and overlap different stanzas, this again indicates that something is destabilising the thought, inviting the actor to consider what this might be and how to transmit it to the audience.
3. Having established the length of each thought, we must establish the arrangement of syllables in each line. This involves writing the corresponding number of syllables above each word, and seeing the emerging patterns. We may detect a steady beat in the line, an irregular rhythm, or the line may suddenly draw our attention to the significance of a particular polysyllabic

- word. The importance of these words again highlights the emotional and psychological state of the character.
4. Next, we must identify if each verse and thought is sustained by vowels or consonants. The greater presence of vowels and repeated vowel sounds often indicates an expression of emotion or agitation, while a stronger emphasis on consonants again suggests a more reasoning state of mind.
 5. Identifying verbs and nouns. If we are to identify 'verbal action' in verse, then evidently verbs will be our primary clue. Considering the suggested action helps the actor to mobilise the verse. If, however, a section of verse is privileging nouns over verbs, then the character is reflecting on the significance of those nouns to their situation, be they proper nouns or otherwise. When we speak a name of a person, place or even an object, we usually have an attitude towards it, so the actor may consider what the character's attitude is towards a given noun and colour their delivery of the noun accordingly.
 6. Shared verses. Very often in Golden Age plays, characters may share a given verse which has been split between them, requiring the actor to quickly pick up the cue to maintain the internal rhythm of the verse. Again, this indicates a rhythmical intervention by the playwright, which requires us to understand the psychological purpose of the interruption.
 7. In order to physicalise this often more textual analysis, and internalise the rhythms of the verse in the body, actors can recite their text, clicking their fingers at every comma and clapping once at the end of each line of verse. A full stop would be accompanied by two claps. This exercise makes the rhythms of the verse more evident, as well as helping the actor to use punctuation to transition through modulations in a single thought or across multiple ones.¹³

Combining all of the above observations begins to give us a clear picture of a Golden Age character's emotional state at any given moment in the play. We will know if they are calm and reasoning (perhaps reflecting or manipulating another character) or are in a particular emotional state that necessarily colours their actions. Most importantly, we will be using the verse as a means of communicating this information as active speech, rather than reciting the play as poetry, rendering it devoid of 'verbal action'. These steps were created to deal with Shakespeare, but the company have demonstrated that it can be applied to the Golden Age consistently and very fruitfully, as this system has been used in every production since Boswell introduced it.

¹³ The approach was summarised in an internal report which the company circulated to all members of the team for private study and future use (Compañía Rakatá 2009a).

The actors who had to learn this approach would largely agree with the contribution that a systematic approach to activating verse had on their individual practice. We must remember that the approach contradicts more widespread directing styles which could be categorised as either a broad Stanislavskian approach with little close work on verse, or a more declamatory approach to verse, or directorially-imposed interpretations of the plays that often run counter-text.¹⁴ For instance, in an article discussing setting up an acting school based in the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico (henceforth CNTC), its founder and first artistic director, Adolfo Marsillach, made the following observation: “La mayor dificultad del verso está en su interpretación, no en su recitación [...] Todas las interpretaciones sinceras son más o menos orgánicas [...] los acentos, las pausas, los ritmos- se dan casi por añadidura” [“The greatest difficulty of verse is interpreting it, not reciting it [...] All sincere interpretations are more or less organic [...] accents, pauses, rhythms- arrive almost as a consequence”] (2003: 185). Whilst on first glance there is nothing controversial here, Marsillach’s influential work on the plays for the CNTC started from a directorial interpretation, which the verse had to effectively adapt itself to, rather than discoveries being made from close work on the verse first and foremost.¹⁵ This in part may explain why some of his critics at the time felt that his work tended to prosify the verse: “[los actores] han sido dirigidos de manera adversa, o a despecho de las riquezas del texto” [“The actors have been directed adversely, or out of spite for the richness of the text”] (Haro, 1986).¹⁶ Returning to FUSO and its early work emerging from this context, the team noted the impact and novelty of Boswell’s approach on their individual craft. It

14 I have discussed the historical absence of significant contributions to the craft of directing within Spain elsewhere (Breden 2014, 12-15).

15 Even when work did stem from the verse, as appears to be the case with José Luis Alonso, another highly influential director contemporary to Marsillach, the work did not appear to be systematised: “desmenuzábamos el texto palabra por palabra, pieza por pieza, como si de una maquinaria de reloj se tratara” [“we took the text apart, word by word, piece by piece, as if it were the mechanisms of clockwork”] (1991, 343). Although the RSC methodology is discussed in similar metaphors, Alonso recognises that his was entirely “ensayos de mesa” [“table rehearsals”], whereas Boswell always had the actors physicalise the rhythmic discoveries. Furthermore, this description of rehearsal does not reveal a systematic approach to verse, and it should be noted that Alonso did not specialise in Golden Age theatre, as a glance at a list of his productions reveals. He tended to describe the verse in terms of an obstacle, describing “palabras enconcertadas en los versos” [“words corseted in verse”] (367), whilst with Boswell the verse work is entirely positive and liberating, not an enemy that has to be reduced as Alonso implies: “Ha sido una lucha titánica hasta dominar el verso” (363).

16 Vélez-Sainz explores the personal and political rivalries that also sat behind the conflict between director Marsillach and critic Haro Tecglen (at press).

should be noted that Arribas himself, whilst now apparently more focused on production and directing, was primarily an actor at the time of inviting Boswell to Spain, and himself benefitted from the work:

Todos aquellos actores con los que puedo seguir hablando, entre ellos un grandísimo profesional que es ahora representativo del Teatro Nacional y del teatro del Siglo de Oro en España, como es Ernesto Arias, siempre se acordará de lo absolutamente descubridor y de configuración de basamenta que resultó para él este trabajo. También lo ha sido para la Fundación y para muchos de nosotros [...] el caso de Ernesto, el caso de Bruno Ciordia, o el caso de nuestro querido y malogrado amigo Óscar Zafra¹⁷ (374).

[All the actors I am still in touch with, amongst them a great professional who is now representing the National Theatre and Golden Age drama in Spain, Ernesto Arias, will always remember how revelatory in establishing foundations the work was. This was also the case for the Foundation and for many of us [...] Ernesto, Bruno Ciordia or our dear and late friend Óscar Zafra].

Arribas specifically mentions Ernesto Arias, director of two productions for FUSO, and an established theatre actor in his own right, who played Teodoro in the 2007 *El perro del hortelano* under Boswell's direction, and participated as advisor on verse for his *Fuenteovejuna*. Arias himself clearly states how Boswell's approach was distinct to broad industry approaches to the Golden Age leading up to 2007, as he provided exercises which "tenían como fundamento conseguir una fonética precisa que permitiera una diáfana elocuencia" ["had as a purpose achieving precise phonetics to allow for crystal-clean elocution"]:

Laurence consideraba el texto de Lope no solo como una propuesta dramática sino también como una propuesta de musicalidad escénica. Encontrar esa musicalidad solo podía conseguirse mediante un minucioso estudio del texto a través de su composición, es decir del verso y sus estrofas. Mi experiencia me enseñaba que esto no era algo muy habitual entre los directores con los que había trabajado que tomaban el verso como un simple modo de hablar propio de las obras del Siglo de Oro, dejando toda la responsabilidad de cómo debe ser dicho al intérprete. Las propuestas escénicas podían ser más acertadas o menos, pero para crearlas se solía tener en cuenta únicamente el aspecto dramático

17 Óscar Zafra (1969-2021), was an established theatre, TV and film actor, who worked with the company on *Fuenteovejuna* as the *gracioso* Mengo, and played the title role in *Doctor Faustus*. He will be missed.

del texto, es decir sus situaciones y conflictos. Pero se ponía poca, o ninguna, atención en el aspecto formal del texto.

[Laurence considered Lope’s text not only as a dramatic proposal, but also a proposal of stage musicality. Finding that musicality could only be achieved by means of a meticulous study of the text through its composition, in other words the verse and its verse forms. My experience taught me that this was not very common amongst directors with whom I had worked, who would use verse simply as the means of speech unique to Golden Age plays, leaving all the responsibility of how it should be spoken to the actor. The stage proposals could be more or less appropriate, but to create them usually only the dramatic aspect of the text was kept in mind, in other words its situations and conflicts. But very little or no attention was given to the formal aspects of the text.]¹⁸

As we can see, Arias was accustomed to working from a broad directorial interpretation and having to figure out the verse as an actor for himself. Working with Boswell became about imprinting the musicality of the verse on the production itself, to the extent of dictating stage movement rather than the other way around: Arias relates an anecdote from *El perro del Hortelano*, whereby a *redondilla* was interrupted by a character’s exit: to prevent her exit from breaking the rhythm of the verse, Boswell, altered the blocking to allow for the performer to very quickly exit, allowing the actor who had to complete the *redondilla* to be able to do so without interrupting the flow of the text.¹⁹

18 Personal e-mail, 13 March 2022.

19 “Fue en los versos 839-842 de *El perro del hortelano*; una *redondilla* que dice:

Diana:	que no importa que se pierda si se puede perder más.	<i>Váyase</i>
Teodoro:	Fuese. ¿Quién pensó jamás de mujer tan noble y cuerda....	

Esta *redondilla* (rima: abba) compartida está interrumpida después de los dos primeros versos por la marcha de la Condesa; y según él entendía la fluidez de la *redondilla* no se podía paralizar para que Diana hiciese su salida de escena. Por tanto redibujó el movimiento escénico para que Diana estuviera al lado de una de las puertas de salida y pudiera hacerla ágil permitiendo que yo (que hacía Teodoro) pudiera decir mi texto de la manera más seguida al suyo manteniendo la cadencia de la *redondilla*.

Sirva este ejemplo para demostrar su enorme atención al verso y estrofas para la elaboración del movimiento escénico, algo sorprendente teniendo en cuenta que no hablaba castellano. [It was in the verses 839-84 of *The dog in the manger*; a *redondilla* that says:

Diana:	Why fear this loss when there may be A greater loss we still may face?	[DIANA exits]
Teodoro:	She’s gone. Whoever thought the grace And pride of her nobility [...]	

(Racz, 2018: 134)

Elsewhere, actors interviewed in the press have noted the musicality of Boswell's approach, implicitly suggesting that there were aspects they had not been accustomed to in other rehearsal processes.²⁰ Blanca Oteyza, who played Diana in *El perro del hortelano*, noted that Boswell did not speak Spanish, "pero conoce tan bien la obra... Incluso la métrica. Nos ha explicado a qué sentimiento correspondía cada verso, por qué Lope elegía una redondilla para expresar determinadas emociones... Dirigía con el cuerpo, como un director de orquesta" ["but he knows the play so well... Even the meter. He has explained to us what feeling corresponds to each verse, why Lope would choose a *redondilla* to express particular emotions... He directed with his body, like an orchestra conductor"] (J.B. 2007). On this note of Boswell's physicalisation of the verse, Alberto Jiménez, the Commander in *Fuenteovejuna*, observed that Boswell "es el único director con el que he trabajado que dirige y da las indicaciones con los ojos cerrados" ["he is the only director I have worked with who directs and gives notes with his eyes closed"] (Díaz Sande 2010). Indeed, as assistant director on the production, I can confirm that the focus on rhythm of his conducting of the verse in rehearsal did lead him to spend long stretches with his eyes apparently closed, and physically rocking to the rhythm of the verse. Both Jiménez and Lidia Otón, who appeared in both *El perro del hortelano* and *Fuenteovejuna* as Laurencia, note that this way of working on verse helped them connect to the emotions of the play. In Jiménez's words, "es un modo que hace que esté más cerca de la historia que quiere contar [...] Trabaja para que el actor pueda vivir esa emoción" ["it is a way for him to be closer to the story he wants to tell [...] He works so that the actor can experience that emotion"], while Otón notes that Boswell helped her to "ver las emociones y pasiones de Lope que traspasan la letra" ["see the emotions and passions of Lope that go beyond the words"] (Díaz Sande 2010). Reading between the lines of these three interviews, we detect actors who, even working on plays in their native language and from their own heritage, were discovering functions of rhythm and verse that they had been previously unaware of, and how this work assisted

This shared *redondilla* (rhyming abba) is interrupted after the first two verses by the departure of the Countess; and as he believed the fluidity of the *redondilla* couldn't be paralysed so that Diana could exit. So he changed the blocking so that Diana would end up beside one of the doors and could exit swiftly, allowing me (playing Teodoro) to say my lines as fluidly as I could after hers, thus maintaining the cadence of the *redondilla*. This example demonstrates his great attention to verse and stanzas in the creation of stage movement, all the more surprising bearing in mind he didn't speak Spanish.] (Arias 2022).

20 We must, of course, assume that the purpose of these interviews is to present the show in a positive light for promotional purposes, and any criticisms or misgivings are muted.

them in understanding the emotional journeys of their characters and how to express them with the verse. These are precisely the objectives of the process outlined earlier.

The aforementioned process has also, of course, undergone certain changes and adaptations in dialogue with other compatible systems of rehearsal. For instance, in preparation for *El castigo sin venganza*, the company invited Will Keen to deliver a workshop entitled ‘La palabra sin castigo’²¹. Much of the workshop’s approach would be familiar to readers of Declan Donnellan’s *The Actor and the Target* (2002), as Keen led the cast through a series of exercises designed to help them focus on the purpose of their speech. As he suggested, all speech arises from a need to communicate, or change something around us: each sentence is born from the failure of the previous sentence to effect this change. Armed with the psychological and emotional information of the verse, Keen contributed the sense of purpose and urgency in dialogue. Thus, the actor must consider what they want to change around them before speaking, and then use every word as a decision in order to achieve that goal: the classic Donnellan exercise in this sense was translated as “Tú, yo, el espacio,” [“There’s you, there’s me, and there’s the space”] where Keen judged if the actor was communicating a clear purpose and connection in delivering the words, or simply speaking empty. The end goal of the workshop coincides with that of the detailed verse work in terms of avoiding empty speech as an actor, and ensuring that the text is always being used actively, with clear intentions and purposes.

The company’s systems of rehearsal saw new contributions from practitioners who had experience with improvisation and devising, starting with workshops with John Wright, and the productions of *Doctor Faustus* and *Trabajos de amor perdidos*. As Arribas puts it, “en tu caso en *Doctor Faustus*, [contribuye] la conciencia de una forma de trabajo [...] que venía de una forma de construcción de los espectáculos puramente basada en el devised y en el trabajo en la colectividad, aportando esa responsabilidad al actor” [“in your case in *Doctor Faustus*, the contribution was the awareness of a way of working [...] that came from a way of building shows based purely on devising and collective efforts, passing that responsibility on to the actor”] (380). He refers to a more playful way of working where actors are more directly involved in recreating the text for a modern audience. In some cases, this rewriting can be quite extreme, as Arribas relates writing an end for *Trabajos de amor perdidos* through improvisations guided by director Tim Hoare: “[...] escribir un final,

21 Again, the workshop was summarised in an internal document and circulated internally (Compañía Rakatá 2009b).

que hizo José Padilla de manera absolutamente brillante, sobre un trabajo devised entre los tres: entre él, Tim y yo y de la mano del trabajo anterior de los actores que terminó francamente bien” [writing an ending, which José Padilla did absolutely brilliantly, based on devised work between three of us: him, Tim and I and developing prior work by the cast, and the results were frankly good] (377). The idea of the actor not only creating their own characters, but playing a significant role in the development of the narrative, represented a major shift for the company. Perhaps what was most surprising to Arribas was to position the actor in a playful state of mind for this work: “Todo lo que planteaba, lo planteaba desde un ámbito de lo lúdico que yo nunca había visto. Su relación con las improvisaciones era tan absolutamente acertada para hacer que el actor entendiese y se pusiese en el punto de lo creativo” [“everything he proposed came from a playful place and I had never seen this before. His work with improvisations was so absolutely effective to get the actor to understand put themselves in a creative mindset”] (376). I have explored the fruitful connection between play and creativity in devising processes elsewhere (Breden 2014, 121-126), which evidently both I and Hoare applied to make the actors co-creators of the overall performance, tying into the notion of an understanding of the ‘para qué’ of the entire play that Arribas stated as the goal of the verse work. Arribas does, however, note the risks of such processes: “en este proceso de trabajo [los actores] ... han desvinculado [sus propuestas] de la narrativa y están exclusivamente al servicio del deleite del propio actor. Entonces estaban haciendo cosas que van total y absolutamente a contra texto: esto puede ser un elemento pernicioso” [“in this process the actors have disconnected their proposals from the narrative and they are exclusively there for their own enjoyment. So they were doing things that run completely and utterly counter-text: this can be a harmful element”] (375). In other words, given creative freedom, an actor may propose ideas which run counter-text, creating a more disjointed, or even self-contradictory, interpretation of the play. Clearly it is the responsibility of the director to channel these ideas into a cohesive form, but here we enter into the realities of group work, quite aside from any theories or ideal rehearsal processes that we may want to apply: “He visto directores con mayor conocimiento de la narrativa perder a equipos por cuestiones de gestión de capital humano, de manera justa e injusta o de manera poco profesional por parte de los actores, pero al final son de los que dependes para sacar adelante una historia” [“I have seen directors with great knowledge of the narrative lose creative teams over issues of managing people, both fairly and unfairly or even unprofessionally on the part of the actors, but in the end you depend on them to tell a story”] (375). Being able to manage a

large team of artists is perhaps the greatest challenge a director actually faces when stepping into a rehearsal room.

This brings us to the most recent collaboration with Dominic Dromgoole, and, for Arribas, his greatest achievement in rehearsing *El perro del hortelano* during the trying times of Covid-19 restrictions, lockdowns and the difficulties raised by Brexit in terms of collaborations between Europe and the UK: “para mí ... lo más brillante [fue] ... gestionar el capital humano y le permitió convencer a diez actores y actrices inseguros por naturaleza de que iban a ser capaces de sacar adelante un proyecto como este *El perro del hortelano* en veinte días” [“for me, the most brilliant thing was his ability to manage the team, allowing him to convince ten actors who are by nature insecure, that they were going to be able to put on *El perro del hortelano* in twenty days”] (374-5). We encounter one major cultural difference here, in that a one-month rehearsal period would not be unheard of in the UK scene, although perhaps the difficulties inherent in an early modern text and a larger cast would require a slightly longer rehearsal period. Meanwhile, FUSO is accustomed to longer rehearsal periods of two to three months at least, so it is not surprising that regular actors within the company would balk at rehearsing such a play in only twenty days. In any case, we should consider the production at the time of writing²² as very much a work-in-progress, given that “el tiempo de ensayo se redujo al 55 y 60% de lo previsto” [“rehearsal time was reduced by 55-60% of what was planned”] (374), with Arribas taking great pains in pointing out that the company had not been able to undertake their usual detailed verse work: “No se ha podido centrar ni mucho menos tiempo en el verso, ahora lo estamos haciendo” [“He was not able to focus on the verse, we’re doing that now”] (375). In any case, if we return to Dromgoole’s conception of the production, according to Arribas we will find an effective knowledge of techniques that work to hook the audience: “la aplicación de unos resortes elementales en el conocimiento de cómo funcionan estas historias y de cómo determinado tipo de elementos funcionan siempre con el público” [“the use of a series of basic devices based on a knowledge of how these stories work and how certain devices are always going to work with the audience”] (375). The sorts of elemental techniques that Arribas refers to here are the performance of live music onstage, and the construction of a complicit relationship between the actor and the audience that is such a hallmark of the Globe space and the

22 The production ran at the Teatros del Canal from 23-30 April, and then transferred to the Fiesta Corral Cervantes for two runs from 29 July to 7 August and 21-23 October.

identity its first artistic director Mark Rylance²³ imprinted on it: for instance, Arribas mentions an exercise to help mobilise soliloquys, whereby the actor addresses their speech to two audiences: one in favour of their actions and reasoning, and one against. The result is to force the actor to try to convince the reluctant audience with their words, while always counting on a favourable audience for complicit support. Nevertheless, the results of this truncated rehearsal period appear to be mixed, with critic Javier Vallejo noting all of Dromgoole's tricks, "deja encendida la luz de sala para que los actores puedan observar al público que les observa, pone por toda escenografía tres marcos que evocan los de las puertas de los corrales de comedias, salpimenta la acción con canciones de la época," ["he leaves the house lights on so that the actors can observe the audience watching them, his set is only three door frames that suggest those of the corrales de comedias, he peppers the action with period song"] but concluding that the play text itself has not been duly served: "no acierta a dar cuerpo dramático al conflicto poderoso que mueve la acción" ["he does not succeed in giving a dramatic body to the powerful conflict that moves the action"] (Vallejo 2021). Critic Raúl Losáñez also notes the scaffolds of the techniques, but the lack of detailed work behind it: "no ha logrado Dromgoole amoldar plenamente el texto de Lope a esas formas escénicas en las que está tan acostumbrado a ver a Shakespeare. En primer lugar, porque la interpelación directa al público –evidente, divertida e incluso gamberra en una especie de introducción a la representación- se abandona sin que llegue nunca a recuperarse en cuanto empieza la función como tal" ["Dromgoole has not succeeded in completely adapting Lope's text to the stage forms he is so used to seeing in Shakespeare. In the first place, because direct address to the audience -obvious, fun and even mischievous as a kind of introduction to the performance- is abandoned without ever being picked up again once the play has truly began"] (Losáñez, 2021). Perhaps further work on the text, which Arribas implies is necessary, will add some substance to Dromgoole's stage trickery.

In any case, what is perhaps most interesting about the press reactions to the production is their noting of all the techniques of the Globe productions and how it affects their perception of Lope's play: Julio Bravo's account was entitled "Lope de Vega a la inglesa" ["Lope de Vega in English style"] (Bravo 2021) while Losáñez opted for "Lope se viste de Shakespeare" ["Lope dresses

23 Actor and director, and artistic director of the Globe 1995-2005. Bridget Escolme has examined how he exploited the audience's role in the production of meaning for his work at the Globe (cited in Russell Brown 2005, 407-424).

as Shakespeare”]. It seemed the press were unable or unwilling to read the performance as anything other than a Globe-influenced product. Once again, FUSO and Arribas have found a way of integrating the working methodology of a British company, as they did with RSC verse work and devising methodologies, to approach the Spanish Golden Age in new ways. Irrespective of the artistic or commercial success of these various projects over a fifteen year-period, there is clearly an effort to curate a programme of the Spanish classics with a methodology built over years of collaborations that extend beyond Spanish borders. Although the British contribution may be as valid as any other – Arribas cites the French tradition, for instance– it has clearly helped in generating visibility for the productions –Boswell and Dromgoole in particular brought a certain prestige that the press has responded to enthusiastically– and in constructing an identity distinct from its competitors, foremost amongst them the CNTC. Furthermore, the productions and actors who have engaged with Boswell, Keen and Hoare’s contributions in rehearsal have influenced other companies and projects, as Arribas notes: “esa impronta luego se haya extendido a través de numerosos profesionales que he podido ver con posterioridad, que en trabajos con otras compañías u otros proyectos volvían a repetir y utilizaban las mismas formas, las mismas técnicas” [“that model has then spread across several actors I have seen later, who when working with other companies or on other projects, were repeating and using the same forms, the same techniques”] (374). FUSO has successfully established itself as a private alternative to the CNTC in staging the Spanish classics, with a track-record that has earned it the recognition of the Medalla de Oro de las Artes Escénicas awarded by the Academia de las Artes Escénicas in 2018 [Gold Medal in the Performing Arts, Academy of Performing Arts].

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