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“Para Tiempos De Veras / Se Ejercitan En Las Burlas”

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“PARA TIEMPOS DE VERAS / SE EJERCITAN EN LAS BURLAS”

Some uses of rehearsal on the Golden Age stage

Jonathan Thacker

Studying a part and rehearsing it within the *compañía* was an established element of the actor’s daily life from the late sixteenth century in Spain. The practices of rehearsal must have developed as the troupes became more professional in a period which saw the establishment and rapid growth in popularity of the permanent theatres in Madrid and other towns and cities. The nature of play rehearsals – what went on in the *autor de comedias*’s house every morning from nine o’clock – may be difficult to establish with confidence and would not have accorded at all closely with today’s rehearsal-room norms, but the importance of practice to enhance performance was recognised generally.¹ Thus, the *labrador* in Calderón’s *auto sacramental*, *El gran teatro del mundo* (mid-1630s), plaintively echoes his fellow characters in objecting to the *autor*’s denial of rehearsal time to them as they take to the stage of life:

Aun una comedia vieja
harta de representar
si no se vuelve a ensayar
se yerra cuando se prueba.
Si no se ensaya esta nueva,
¿cómo se podrá acertar?

(Calderón de la Barca 1985, lines 453–58)

If even an old play from the repertoire requires practice, a new one will certainly fall flat without study and rehearsal time.² However, the *autor* (or God) who “directs” the play of life within this Corpus Christi play, advises His creations that the prompt-book, or *apunto* (line 478), will be His law which is to provide guidance in the extempore role-playing of life. Though the central allegory is somewhat strained by the lack of a chance to practise before performance, the *autor*’s point is overtly didactic and within Catholic theological norms: one’s audience is God, the title of the play is unchanging and one’s role is simple and uniform.

Beyond the conservatism of the seasonal *auto sacramental*, in a period when social roles were changing more rapidly than they had done before and individuals could countenance re-fashioning – to borrow Stephen Greenblatt’s seductive term – and bettering themselves, the idea of rehearsing a role, a notion taken from the world of the popular theatre, was a serious one with far-reaching implications.³ In their secular works for the Golden Age stage,

dramatists are seen to concentrate metatheatrically on the *practising* of theatre, rather than making use of the fully-fledged play-within-the-play, the final rehearsed performance. This probably explains the hitherto unremarked fact that cases of on-stage rehearsal of plays and roles in the drama of the period are more common than examples of the play-within-the-play, a metatheatrical phenomenon which has more limited possibilities and functions.⁴ Indeed, these rehearsals frequently constitute pivotal moments in the plays in which they occur, jolting and challenging the audience members through the momentary breaking of the dramatic illusion, and demanding that they reflect on their use and the scene's implications. They provide or open up possibilities for the interpretation of the works in question and reflect, I shall argue, the broader concerns of the period as a whole.

The plays to be considered here display the variety of uses of rehearsal which emerged in the *comedia nueva* as it matured during the opening decades of the seventeenth century. In Antonio Mira de Amescua's *El ejemplo mayor de la desdicha* (c. 1625), the text of a play being rehearsed principally by the court ladies, allows for characters to express themselves freely – to escape social niceties – using the dramatist's words as a code. In Agustín Moreto and Jerónimo Cáncer's *Nuestra señora de la Aurora* (c. 1650), the lines of a play being rehearsed in a rural setting permit a peasant woman to escape an undeserved slur on her honour. In Tirso de Molina's *El vergonzoso en palacio* (c. 1621), in a much-admired scene, rehearsal allows for the freedom of self-expression normally denied to the noblewoman, and something similar occurs in the same playwright's *El Aquiles* (c. 1626). In Felipe Godínez's *La cautela en la amistad* (c. 1635), the rehearsal of a ceremony creates a space in which real feelings can be made known.⁵ In Lope de Vega's *El castigo sin venganza* (1631), the overhearing of a rehearsal introduces a central theme of the tragedy, the anxiety surrounding performance in elevated social roles. And the importance of rehearsal is fundamental, in complementary ways, to the whole conception of life in Lope's *Lo fingido verdadero* (c. 1608) and Cervantes's *Pedro de Urdemalas* (c. 1615). The definition of *ensayo* is stretched in two of these plays (Godínez's *La cautela en la amistad* and Tirso's *El Aquiles*, in which the rehearsals are of a wedding and a courtship respectively) but this elasticity is justified by the emphasis characters in them place on their status as rehearsals, not least in their repeated recourse to the term “ensayar” and its cognates.

Given what I intend to suggest in my analysis of rehearsal scenes in the *comedia*, it is important to bear in mind that this term “ensayar” possesses in Spanish a breadth of association that the English “rehearse” (whose origins relate it to repetition and whose meaning is now more restricted to its theatrical sense) does not.⁶ Covarrubias, in his 1611 dictionary, explains that “vale hacer prueba” (2006, 789) and the third volume of the *Diccionario de Autoridades*, published in 1732, defines the verb as “examinar, reconocer, hacer prueba y experiencia de alguna cosa” (2014). Testing and trying out is often implicit in its meaning and modern Spanish dictionaries do not prioritise the theatrical sense of “ensayar” either. The rehearsals in the plays mentioned provide testing-grounds of distinct sorts for characters: they are not in general simple, potentially dull exercises in learning lines (*estudiar*) or merely repeating what is written on the *papel de actor*, but are privileged scenes in which characters evolve, plot develops and discoveries are made in a heightened atmosphere.

The rehearsal scene in Mira de Amescua's *El ejemplo mayor de la desdicha* constitutes a good example of how a play practice can be integrated into the main plot allowing the playwright to create a chance for self-expression which would normally be denied the characters in the performance of their social roles. Teodora, the empress of Constantinople, has decided to entertain the emperor on his birthday with a “comedia” performed by the palace “damas” (Mira de Amescua 2001, line 1000). The performance is partly to take his mind off the absence of his favoured general, Belisario, for whom he feels an excessive affection. Teodora, as it happens,

has been trying to have Belisario killed, though the latter, who foils the attempts on his life, is unaware of who exactly his enemy is at court before the rehearsal scene starts. The play to be practised is “Píramo y Tisbe” (line 1035), and Belisario’s unexpected return from war means that he can be asked to help out by playing the part of Pyramus, a fortuitous turn of events as he is secretly in love with Antonia, who is playing Thisbe.

Belisario is delighted at the chance to hear Antonia speaking loving words to him even if perhaps “fingidos” (line 1338). The rehearsal allows their love affair to develop as they realise that their feelings are mutual and that they can, paradoxically, speak openly to each other through another’s words (line 1374). Belisario is able to establish that Antonia is not his enemy and, although he slips in and out of the part (calling Tisbe “Antonia” on one occasion), their role-play, part extempore in fact, but part scripted, is enough to cement their relationship. Antonia, using the code of the rehearsal lines and the well-known elements of the story, is even able to warn Belisario that Teodora is the “lion” trying to ruin their relationship but that she will die happy if she knows that they are in love. A lady-in-waiting, in on the act, warns Antonia that “tu madre está escuchando” (line 1478). The “madre” is of course the suspicious empress, who is reassured that this loving conversation is all part of the Pyramus and Thisbe play rehearsal. However, Teodora eventually senses that reality and fiction are becoming dangerously blurred and loses her temper, ripping up the play-text and promising that she will indeed be a lion to be feared. Floro, the *gracioso*, is moved to intone: “La comedia se acabó. / Perdón, ilustre senado” (lines 1493–94), comically breaking the tension that has built up during the rehearsal.⁷

The rehearsal scene, in this first case, provides some comic relief and vicarious pleasure at the evil empress being outwitted, and also develops the plot of the play. The lines written for another play by an anonymous playwright can be abused and added to cleverly to match the characters’ needs. Suspicion is in part averted because characters can deny that what they are saying is an expression of their own feelings. This *modus operandi* can be seen as an example of Lope de Vega’s “hablar equívoco” (Vega 2006, line 323), a recourse for the successful playwright and a way for a character to express him- or herself in a potentially hostile social environment.⁸ At the same time, Belisario’s naivety, which will cost him his life, is evident in the scene and the choice of play forewarns the audience of the tragic outcome. The rehearsal here is much better suited to the playwright’s intentions than a play-within-the-play would have been. It allows for more nuance and subtlety in plot and characterisation.

In Moreto and Cáncer’s co-written work, *Nuestra señora de la aurora*, rehearsal functions slightly differently, though its use might still be said to follow Lope’s recommendation. A group of villagers rehearse a work intended to celebrate the creation of a new image of the Virgin by the village’s *cofradía*. The play being prepared is a version of *El robo de Elena*, another classical story, whose title is chosen to shed ironic light on the plot of the frame play. A local nobleman, Don Diego, smitten by the peasant girl, Madalena, who has repeatedly rejected him, bribes another villager with a ring to allow him to see the rehearsal they are about to begin. Madalena’s beloved, Manuel, is the peasant director and lead actor who takes the part of Menelaus to Madalena’s Helen.

On this occasion it is not the lovers who use the play’s lines, as one might have expected, to communicate secretly or even enjoy an illicit intimacy (as the *autor* Ginés does with his *primera dama* in Lope’s *Lo fingido verdadero*). The “robo” in question is actually attempted by Don Diego during the rehearsal and a frightened Madalena, shouts out from off-stage as he tries to abduct her. Rather than reacting as a jealous lover, Manuel is frustrated that she is speaking her lines too early in the piece. However, when Madalena’s father, Juan, suspecting that something is afoot, goes after her, she is able to hide Don Diego away to save everyone’s blushes (and her own honour of course), claiming that she was just acting. Her quick-wittedness helps avoid a

real crisis in the lovers' relationship and the amateur nature of the production is even adduced by her father to explain the way events have unfolded:

Manuel: ¿Pues quién aquí dentro estaba?

Juan: ¿No veis que representaba?

Madalena: Este es un paso que tiene mi papel.

Juan: Pues ¿de qué indicio se asustan, quiero saber? Miren lo que hace el no ser representantes de oficio.

(Moreto and Cáncer 2014)

As is the case with Mira's tragedy, the lines of the rehearsed play can possess a double meaning: they are fictional yet real. The rehearsal has allowed breathing space in a situation that was approaching a crisis, averting the sort of destructive conflict that society's strict codes might necessitate. In this case it is the freedom to err which rehearsal permits that provides the possibility of escape. Again, this would be harder to carry off if the scene involved a polished performance of the play.

One of the better-known rehearsal scenes in Golden Age drama occurs in act 2 of Tirso de Molina's *El vergonzoso en palacio*, and here too the practice allows a temporary freedom which normal social role-play would not permit. In this play the scene is prepared for when noblewoman Juana explains to her cousin, Antonio, that her mistress, Serafina, is not interested in love but in:

estudiar con sus doncellas
una comedia, que por ser mañana
Carnestolendas, a su hermana intenta
representar, sin que lo sepa el duque
[. . .] y esta tarde
conmigo sola en el jardín pretende
ensayar el papel, vestida de hombre.

(Tirso de Molina 1989b, lines 473–76 and 478–80)

It is Carnival time then, when the world can be turned upside-down: the play is illicit, performed by an all-female cast and organised without parental permission, and Serafina will be dressed in male attire. In terms of its dramatic function the rehearsal gives Antonio the chance to have Serafina's portrait painted from a secluded position.

Serafina begins by convincing Juana of the merits of the theatre (lines 749–84). Her oft-anthologised speech, like that of the duke of Ferrara in *El castigo sin venganza*, encourages the audience to begin to consider the effect of theatre on real life in terms of its straight didactic function – being a mirror – but also in terms of the proximity of conscious play-acting and normally unconscious social acting. She defends her playing by saying that the audience will be only her sister, Magdalena, and her ladies. Nevertheless, Serafina wants to look right – she does not want her hair to fall down, like a lady's will, when she removes her hat – and she is dressed as a man even for the run-through: “Ensayemos el papel, / pues ya estoy vestida de hombre” (lines 843–44).

Serafina's play is a “farsa” called *La portuguesa cruel* and, rather than playing the lead, she chooses to play a “príncipe” who goes out into the country to fight a “conde” over the eponymous

woman. Never having been in love, she does not know what jealousy is, but performs her speech so vividly that Juana fears for her life (lines 896–97); then she plays a tender scene with her lover, and Juana asks her, “¿es posible que quien siente / y hace así un enamorado / no tenga amor?” (lines 947–49). Finally she plays the same man, “loco,” a complicated part in which she has to master several voices, strike herself, and attack a congregation.⁹ Again her performance is a bravura one in which, crucially, she loses or forgets herself.

In terms of its structural function, the scene needs to provide a chance for a portrait of Serafina to be sketched by a painter: later she will find the portrait and fall in love with the mystery man in it. Yet the artist admits to having finished his work before the real rehearsal has even begun (lines 835–36). This is not mere comic relief either and so the scene is, strictly speaking, excessive, and might thus be seen to constitute a metatheatrical riff by a self-indulgent playwright and a chance for an actress to display her talents. However, the concentration on the rehearsal is more than that: within Serafina’s praise of the theatre’s ability to entertain and instruct, she asks “el ignorante, ¿no sabe?” (line 763), implying that the theatre can open one’s eyes to things that one does not know, that one can learn from performance. In Serafina’s case this awakening is to another side of her character, a part of her that she has been unable to express in her closeted life as a duke’s daughter, as Jeremy Robbins has argued: “However categorized, it is clear that her [Serafina’s] sense of self is markedly at odds with all social and sexual expectations of what was deemed normal for a woman” (1998, 129). Instinctively she expresses passion, freed from the confines of her sex’s usual comportment, to the extent, as we have noted, that she loses herself and seems to *become* the passionate prince. This sudden alteration is permitted by the excuse of the *ensayo* but it will live on beyond the rehearsal, the (unseen) play-within-a-play and even the conventional end to the main play, as Galoppe suggests (2001, 202). Serafina’s manliness does not put off Antonio who, from the bushes, admires her “donaire y gracia” (line 1045) even more than he did before, and it is no doubt a mistake, as Robbins also argues (129), to over-read the scene as demonstrating that she has latent masculine or lesbian desires. Serafina’s wish to maintain her new dress, “quiero / vestirme sobre este traje / el mío, hasta que sea tiempo / de representar” (lines 1050–53), is a sign that she is keen to maintain something of this new sense of self, the freedom of expression she has discovered and that came with the role played, not that she actually wants to be a man. The scene contributes directly to the theme of a play that charts the “vergonzoso,” Mireno’s realisation of his proper place in the world and which contains Tirso’s fine sonnet, sparked by the hero’s change in clothes (lines 660–73).

For Robbins too, Serafina’s ‘performance’ (128) is one example of Tirso’s overall purpose in his work: “The exploration and adoption of other identities, and the possibilities this offers of allowing the expression of personal desires and aspirations otherwise forbidden by gender or class, is the driving force behind the entire play” (129). I would add, focusing on the scene’s status as a rehearsal-within-a-play, rather than a play-within-a-play, that Tirso demonstrates that *rehearsal* is important for life because it allows an individual to discover something about herself without immediate consequences in the “real world.” The audience members do not see the planned play performed but that is because the rehearsal, the trying out, is more important for their grasp of the character of Serafina, and perhaps all of us. Tirso’s understanding of the possibilities of the individual is a characteristically sensitive and modern one. He is often sympathetic to those who have not found their part in life and frequently allows his characters to thrive and express themselves in disguise or through pretence. Of course, the rehearsal is to the play – as Serafina’s paean to theatre indicates – , what the play, *El vergonzoso en palacio* or the *comedia nueva* in general, is to life beyond the theatre. The “sabios” (line 782) and the “discretos” (line 785), mentioned by Serafina and Juana, enjoy seeing plays for what they can learn

from them about themselves and others. It might be said then that rehearsals are important in the *comedia* because the *comedia* itself functions, in part at least – and as good theatre should – as a sort of vicarious rehearsal, a testing ground, for the spectator’s life, a safe space for practice.

This idea recurs but more overtly in another work by Tirso, *El Aquiles*. The rehearsal scene in act 2 of this play is not of a pre-existing dramatic work in fact, since Aquiles (dressed as a woman) asks Deidamia to practise an unscripted courtship scene with him: “Finge que mi dama eres / y yo tu galán” (Tirso de Molina 1989a, 983a), he urges her, metatheatrically. Even without a script individuals know the outlines of their roles in certain common situations, having heard, read or experienced them before. Aquiles sketches the reasons behind his desire:

De esta manera
se entretienen las mujeres
cuando apetece casarse,
engañando el gusto así
unas con otras; yo vi
muchas damas ensayarse
cuando niñas, que amor ciego
travesea a todas horas.
“Los señores y señoras”
llaman los niños a un juego
en que contentos imitan
lo que a sus padres oyeron
y en materia de amor vieron,
con que después facilitan
dificultades mayores
que trae consigo el recato.
(983a)

Interesting here is the protagonist’s emphasis on rehearsal as a natural (here, female) practice beneficial in that it prepares the individual to overcome a potential problem, to ensure that future difficulties are avoided. As the leader-in-waiting, Ciro, explains while training his makeshift peasant army, in Lope de Vega’s *Contra valor no hay desdicha* (c. 1625–35), “Para tiempos de veras / se ejercitan en las burlas” (Vega 1857, lines 759–60).

The Aquiles-Deidamia scene, presented as a rehearsal/practice for real courtship (she is betrothed to another man, Lisandro), lasts until the end of the act. Aquiles asks whether he is being a good “galán.” When Deidamia replies that “she” does in fact look like a *man* she recently fell in love with, he replies:

Pues siendo así,
saldrá la fiesta más propia.
Veamos cómo se ensaya
nuestro amor y mi ventura.
(Tirso de Molina 1989a, 983a)

Aquiles “hace que sale del vestuario” in the stage direction (983b) and has to repeat his extemporised lines as she asks him to give himself a name before the practice proper begins. When Aquiles gets over-excited, and kisses her hand, she calms him, “Paso, prima, que parece / que va esto de veras” (984b). He has become the role he is playing, rather like Amón in a similar

scene, though without the heavy stress on the idea of rehearsal, in Tirso's *La venganza de Tamar* (1621–24). Deidamia calls an end to the game and he asks her to watch him play the jealous lover: “hace que vuelve a salir” (985a). Aquiles, after delivering the jealous speech, this time in his female disguise of Nereida, goes off and appears in the *vestuario* as a man (987a). They declare their eternal love for one another. Thus Aquiles has used the “act” to jog Deidamia's memory and rekindle her love for him, first experienced when out hunting in act 1, and then surprise her with his real identity. This rehearsal is a means of expressing pent-up or repressed emotions and unblocking their flow, where a simple declaration by Aquiles/Nereida to Deidamia would certainly fail. It proves the value of an equivocal approach.

Godínez's *La cautela en la amistad* also contains an intriguing rehearsal of a ceremony, with a similar purpose. In act 2, the duquesa de Milán invites the relatively lowly Carlos Colonna to pretend to be her husband ostensibly so that she can play her role adequately on the day of her wedding to the royal Enrique. What seems to be a suggestive request becomes more highly-charged still when she encourages him to act so that it seems to be real, “no tan fingido, / que no parezca de veras” (Godínez 2014). The main interest of this play is the stress put on the likelihood of something practised, rehearsed, fictional in nature, becoming the truth. In act 3, as she tries to persuade Carlos to marry her for real, and faced with his hesitancy, the duchess makes clear to him what her earlier strategy was:

Ea, que ya no te ensayas
para ser el desposado,
y si esto acaso es venganza
de aquellas burlas, advierte
que eran veras ensayadas.

It is the scene prior to this in act 2, however, which allows a more leisurely reflection on the status of the rehearsal. In a speech reminiscent of Aquiles's in Tirso's play, the *duquesa* suggests the idea of rehearsing to Carlos to assuage his melancholy thus:

vos estáis triste y yo quiero
divertiros por si acaso,
como imagino, me caso.
¿Sabéis lo que considero,
que en aquel lance primero
de la esposa y del esposo,
suele el menos vergonzoso
turbarse, recién venido,
y faltarle lo entendido
o, por lo menos, lo airoso?
Pues yo quisiera excusar
aquel desaire en mis bodas
en que al fin todos y todas
suelen comúnmente errar,
y quizá debe de estar
en no pensarlo el error.
¡Qué invencionero es amor!
El cuerdo que se previene
en lo que hace y dice tiene
más destreza y más primor.

El ensayo facilita
toda acción: decirle espero,
si quiera así, que le quiero.
Vaya la primer visita:
vos sois quien el novio imita
y yo vuestra esposa bella.
Fingid, pues, que entráis a verla.

Typically, the *gracioso*, Gandalín, understands the duchess's subtext and, faced with an uncertain master, astutely advises him:

Calla, y déjate engañar
que, pues lo quiere ensayar
ahora con tal cuidado,
cuando lo tenga ensayado,
lo querrá representar.

The rehearsal itself is a characteristically ambivalent scene in which the duchess at times admits that she is not taking on her character – “pero vamos al ensayo, / que esto ha sido fuera dél” – , and advises Carlos to inhabit his own, “hablad sin miedo, ensayad / de modo que transforméis / en ese papel que hacéis.” He does so to the extent of kissing her hand. His excuse is at the ready: “Agravio en besarla os hice; / pues perdonad, que lo dice /de esa manera el papel.” (Unlike in Mira's *El ejemplo mayor de la desdicha* there is in fact no written role to be followed in this scene.) Towards the end of the encounter, and in forgiving him his indiscretion, the duchess is moved to introduce explicitly the *theatrum mundi* commonplace:

Corrido sin duda estáis,
aunque veis que todo ha sido
disimulado y fingido;
pero ya no os ensayáis
y aunque en la comedia hagáis,
como es lo más ordinario,
cada día un papel vario,
sabed que vuelve después
cada uno a ser quien es,
volviéndose al vestuario.

It is a metaphor that will simultaneously keep Carlos at arm's length *and* give him hope. He has demonstrated to her satisfaction that he can play the part of a “gran señor” – she has tested him through the rehearsal – and yet he must return to his usual social role (“quien es”) once the scene is over. The rehearsal creates a safe space in which to try out words one would like to employ and actions one would like to perform. It is no surprise really that characters compare rehearsals to children's games or to education and it has a sound pedigree in Aristotle's assertion that man is the most imitative of creatures and learns by imitation.

The rehearsal that the duke, Ricardo and Febo come across during an evening on the streets of Ferrara in Lope's *El castigo sin venganza* has some parallels with the scene we have analysed in Tirso's *El vergonzoso en palacio*, though it is much briefer in duration (at just nine lines of rehearsal text). Here the duke is out at night looking for amorous adventure and entertainment when he and his men hear singing and arrive at the house of an “autor / de comedias” (Vega

2009, lines 178–79). The duke establishes that they are rehearsing (line 194) and listens in to Andrelina (thought to be the Italian actress and poet, Isabel Andreini) whose acting he admires.

The point of this scene is to show that the duke is affected by the theatre: the actual words, heard off-stage in this case, refer to a glorious past turning into a tragic present, “mi pasada gloria / conviertes en tormento” (lines 199–200). They are indeed “discursos tristes para alegres horas” (line 205) as the actress complains from within her apparently tragic role (about which we learn nothing more). This snatch of monologue apparently reminds the duke of his own situation – the imminent life-changing marriage to Casandra and the end to his immoral life of pleasure that should entail. He is suddenly “sin gusto” (line 208). We know that the acting in the rehearsal affects him because, as we see also with the Roman emperor in the same playwright’s *Lo fingido verdadero*, it sparks a rumination on the relationship of acting to life and in particular the role of theatre as a teacher: the duke goes on to say that he has had one lesson from a “primera dama” that evening (Cintia, who has shut her window on him earlier in the act) and does not want to listen to more drama that will prick his conscience. The scene helps characterise the duke: he knows what he is doing wrong but does not have the strength of character to change, and becomes immediately melancholic. The fact that the intelligent duke sees parallels between life and theatre and finds a lesson to learn (line 173) in the rehearsal, but does not then profit from it, helps the audience to make up its mind about the moral lessons of the play. For Lope then, the rehearsal text, so convincingly performed, constitutes a clear warning for the future reality of not just a man but a man responsible for a realm. The fact that we overhear a *rehearsal* rather than a play in this case is verisimilar but probably not so important, although, with the next day’s ceremonies so close, there could be an implied negative comment on the duke’s own lack of preparation for his new role. Is this how he rehearses for the next day’s formal entry?

Acting and the *theatrum mundi* topos are central concerns of Lope’s *Lo fingido verdadero* as well. The histrionic themes of this saints play have been well documented, though in fact it does not contain such clear-cut rehearsal scenes as *El vergonzoso en palacio* or *El castigo sin venganza*. In act 1, the emperor Carino stalks the Roman streets looking for adventure, much like the duke of Ferrara. Unlike the duke, Carino is a simple character, a fool who rejects the comparison of life to a play until he is able to comfort himself that he is all but immortal, whilst an actor, such as Ginés, can only be a king for an hour and a half (Vega 1964, 63a). His sudden and dramatic death is a clear comment on his over-confidence and immoral ways.

In act 3, a rehearsal of sorts is set up by the new emperor, Diocleciano. The future patron-saint of actors, Ginés, alone, rehearses playing a Christian in a soliloquy as his troupe, off-stage, attempts to re-ignite the old play at the emperor’s command. In his practice he uses his knowledge of what Christians do when praying and sits down as if “en un gran tormento” (95b), and then he mimics abusing the emperor as if he were there (commenting, at the same time, on how he’s performing the role). He next turns his attention to the heavens, begging the saints to intercede and Christ to baptise him. The heavens do open and he hears a voice which he thinks, momentarily, must have come from one of the cast. Once the play starts and Ginés again goes off the page, the “soldado” (in character) complains: “El fin de este paso dudo; / que no se ensayaba así” (100a) and the other actors continue to be confused calling for prompts and eventually angering the emperor for not knowing their lines.

These scenes in Lope’s *Lo fingido verdadero* emphasise the notion that underpins the rehearsal-within-the-play occurring elsewhere in Golden Age drama, that the words spoken in practice – privileged as they seem to be – contain a not immediately evident truth which has implications for the lives of the characters that speak or hear them. There are at least two interesting features in this particular case. First, there is the specifically religious aspect to Ginés’s experience. By allowing himself to be subsumed into the role, Ginés is able to be heard in heaven and a divine voice replies to him. Like Serafina in *El vergonzoso en palacio*,

Ginés becomes in rehearsal the part that he is trying to play and to his own ultimate advantage. Whereas for the former, there is something to learn about her own self or identity from her instinctive desire to play, for Ginés the performance leads to conversion to Christianity, a higher truth still which takes the idea of rehearsing a performance into fresh territory. Rehearsal here unblocks a new route towards a sort of personal liberation which (in the only saints play discussed here) chimes with contemporary theology. The second aspect is that in this work, uniquely amongst the play-texts studied here, we see the rehearsal, its effect on the play-within-the-play (in which Ginés errs from the text but plays the Christian part correctly), and the subsequent effect on life itself (within the frame play of course), which is martyrdom, a great prize indeed in the eyes of the contemporary audience. The drama as a whole can be, if we follow the idea of the play itself as a vicarious rehearsal for the audience, a recognition of the power of practising in the search to discover a truth or to get something right. Genesis's uncertain rehearsal within the frame play is equivalent to the play in the *corral* seen by the audience in the seventeenth-century world.

Cervantes's *Pedro de Urdemalas*, while it is a secular play and while it undermines the Lopean model of the *comedia nueva*, is in fact quite similar to *Lo fingido verdadero* in an important sense, related to the theme of acting and rehearsing. The thematic unity of this picaresque play is also provided precisely by Cervantes's aperçus concerning the theatricality of life, in particular the importance of trying out roles. In act 3, as Pedro re-appears on stage in yet another garb – this time as a student – he produces a hymn of praise to mutability (Cervantes 1986, lines 2660–89). He is reaching a personal maturity, having spent years effectively rehearsing different parts, and celebrates his new understanding of life:

Bien logrado iré del mundo
cuando Dios me lleve dél
pues podré decir que en él
un Proteo fui segundo.
(lines 2672–75)

Right on cue (line 2711), two actors arrive on the scene to help him fleece the *labrador* carrying his chickens, and Pedro accepts that his role in life is to be an actor: Malgesi's seemingly outlandish predictions about him can thus all come true:

Ya podré ser patriarca,
pontífice y estudiante,
emperador y monarca;
que el oficio de farsante
todos estados abarca.
(lines 2862–66)

Pedro's famous speech on the ideal actor is delivered to the *autor* who arrives to begin rehearsing and his fate is sealed. Of course Pedro's literal transformation into an actor is the result of a life of rehearsing different roles. The implication – and in this Cervantes goes further than his contemporary playwrights – is that life makes most sense when seen and experienced as a succession of roles played, and success can be had by those who have an ability to play.¹⁰

Pedro de Urdemalas ends inconclusively with the suggestion that this particular play, with its resistance to dramatic norms – “que no acaba en casamiento” (line 3169) – and its chaotic, insecure role-playing, is somehow truer to life than other dramatic fare. A play about a

character seeking a role, about a man constantly rehearsing until discovering his vocation as an actor, about one play ending and another beginning (lines 3160–63), is further strong evidence of the contemporary concern with appearances and reality, with mutability and social mobility.

The rehearsal scenes in these *comedias*, all written most likely during the reigns of Philip III and Philip IV, are deftly employed by dramatists often in key moments in their works (usually major *salidas* of act 2), to allow them to develop plot and characters and address their principal themes. The rehearsal text can act as a code which enables characters to communicate secretly; it can hide or excuse an error, allowing an individual a second chance to correct behaviour; it can enable a journey of self-discovery; it can unblock a repressed or suppressed emotion; it can open up a “safe space” in which to explore a possibility; responses to a rehearsal can shed light on characters and their contribution to the theme or moral message of the play; and in our last two examples, one secular, one religious, we enter a more philosophical arena, hinted at in all of the earlier examples. In *Lo fingido verdadero* and *Pedro de Urdemalas* a staged rehearsal and the realisation that a life-time has been spent in rehearsal respectively, allow characters to discover a kind of freedom or self-confidence for which any audience-member might yearn.

What is more, the rehearsal seems to make a case both overtly and implicitly for the usefulness of drama not just by sparking the occasional paean to the theatre (which might of course alert the audience to the theme), but by demonstrating how theatre can work practically in life. If the play in the Golden Age, indeed in any period, can act for the audience as a vicarious rehearsal for life, a sort of preparation at one remove or exploration of modes of acting, then the rehearsal within the play is a particularly privileged scene. Rehearsals within plays are more frequent than plays-within-plays in the Golden Age because they actually enable a wider variety of possibilities than a play itself. *Pace* Calderón’s *autor* of *El gran teatro del mundo* it is the theatre itself that becomes the period’s prompt book.

Notes

- 1 I have summarised briefly the state of knowledge about play rehearsals in Golden Age Spain in my recent article (Thacker 2014). Oehrlein’s (1993) is the best brief consideration of the topic in print. There are a number of parallels with the situation in Shakespeare’s London, as can be seen by consulting Stern (2000).
- 2 Lope de Vega’s *Lo fingido verdadero* provides a good sense of what it took to prepare a play already in the troupe’s repertoire for a fresh performance. See Thacker (2014, 129–131).
- 3 See for example, though their approaches to this state of flux in the early modern period differ: Stephen Greenblatt, who (with English writers principally in mind) believes that “there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process” (1980, 2); José Antonio Maravall, who argues that the Spanish individual “en virtud del amplio desarrollo de su vida durante casi dos siglos anteriores, se salía de los cuadros tradicionales del orden social” which had held him in check (1990, 18); Jeremy Robbins, who notes the “omnipresence of the notion of performance” in the seventeenth century (1998, 39); George Mariscal, for whom “an interplay of subject positions” (1991, 33) is a feature of the period; and the historian J.H. Elliott, who argues that, “As an age captivated by the art of the theatre, the seventeenth century displayed an almost obsessive concern with appearance” (1989, 163). I do not wish to labour this point about the histrionic tendencies of early modern individuals, which is generally accepted as self-evident, if not a defining feature of the early-modern period. The necessity for theatre-style *rehearsal* in a society in which role-play is essential has not, however, yet been explored in any detail by scholars.
- 4 A good example of the use of the play-within-the-play, to “catch the conscience of the king,” as in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, occurs in the third act of Lope de Vega’s 1602 play, *El cuerdo loco*.
- 5 On the date and authorship of this play, sometimes attributed to Moreto, see Vega García-Luengos (1986, 91–98).
- 6 See Stern (2000, 22–25) on “rehearse” in English.
- 7 The play contains a fascinating “papel de actor” within the text of the rehearsal scene, which Floro, unaware of how he is meant to deliver his lines, reads out in full, cues and all. See Thacker (2014, 132–133).

- 8 Lope allows his characters to develop a coded speech in other plays too. See, for example, Thacker's (2000) exploration of the use characters in *Los locos de Valencia* make of well-known figures from Ariosto and the ballad.
- 9 This has been called "teatro dentro del teatro dentro del teatro" by Margrit Frenk (as quoted in Galoppe 2001, 199).
- 10 In act 3 of *La entretenida* (c. 1615), Cervantes becomes bolder still in pursuit of a similar idea, not allowing the audience to distinguish clearly between the rehearsed *entremés* and the "real world" of the play.

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