

PREFACE

Juan Pablo Gil-Osle
Frederick A. de Armas

Over the years, evolving schools of scholarly production have paradoxically followed the path of the Spanish Empire. By this we mean that since the nineteenth century, criticism of Iberia has slowly widened to reflect its global expansion. While early critics centered mainly on the Peninsula, over time, colonial studies came to be seen as an essential element in the understanding of early modern cultural productions. For example, Diana de Armas Wilson understood Cervantes through the lens of the New World, thus breaking disciplinary boundaries between Peninsular and Latin American studies.¹ Today we study figures like Juan Ruiz de Alarcón as part of a transatlantic space.² Moving beyond these two spaces critics have come to visualize a series of American interactions, thus furthering notions of imperial reach through hemispheric studies. For example, Lisa Voigt has shown how writings of captivity in Europe, North Africa, and the Americas share commonalities. Through narratives of captivity, borders are crossed, and discourses are mediated.³ In this long and productive journey, critics, as the Spanish explorers before them, found themselves confronted with the almost insurmountable space of the Pacific Ocean, or the then-called *Mar del Sur*. The Spanish dream of reaching the riches of Cathay and the Spice Island was constrained by Magellan's understanding of the vastness that had to be traversed. This impossible journey has also been undertaken by recent critics. Serge Gruzinsky compared the conquest of Tenochtitlán to the attempts to penetrate

¹ See Wilson (2000).

² See, for example, García Pinar (2015); Estrada (2019).

³ See Voigt (2012).

the Ming empire, while Christina Lee collected a series of essays that analyze western visions of what Miguel Martínez has called a third New World, the innumerable cultures and islands that exist within the Pacific Rim.⁴ After the conquest of the Philippines, the Spanish imperial conglomerate reached the point of considering how to deal with highly complex societies that amazed the Europeans. While some even thought to conquer China, others sensed the martial and cultural strength of the land and its peoples.⁵ Indeed, the West was faced with cultures that could capture the minds and hearts of travelers as they visited the almost marvelous lands of Cathay and Cipango. This encounter led to a notable production of books, reports, and maps concerning the great powers of Asia, and the wonders of China.⁶

Among the great wonders of China, one was the production of books: “tienen impresión y grande multitud de libros porque hay muchas tiendas en cada ciudad do hay muchos para vender y los que nosotros habemos comprados impresos y visto allende de muchos cantares y farsas y otras historias que no quisimos comprar...” (Luarca, 127). This is proof that by 1575 the “cantares y farsas,” which were part of Chinese theater in Fujian, were already known to Spaniards. Although the Habsburg empire in Iberia produced thousands of plays during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Ming dynasty in China (1368-1644), which started much earlier, was equally inclined to the theater: “More than four hundred playwrights produced over fifteen hundred plays, ranging from one-act skits to works of more than fifty scenes” (Hu 60).⁷ Furthermore, during the latter part of the Ming dynasty (1572-1644) theater in China experienced a second Golden Age thanks to a new form of theater, the southern *chuanqi*.⁸ A Spanish audience would have been surprised to see that most of these plays were suffused with music and singing, although in Spain, Calderón would begin experimenting with an operatic format two decades later. Spanish opera began to be performed in America by 1700.⁹

⁴ See Gruzinski (2014), Lee (2016), Martínez (2016).

⁵ See Ellis (2012, 67), Ollé (2000, 121).

⁶ See Lach (1963).

⁷ See Hu (1983).

⁸ For information about the southern *chuanqi*, see Idema (2001).

⁹ See Gasta (2013).

While in Spain the public performances predominated, they seemed to be secondary in China's Ming dynasty. The performance spaces in China tended to be in private residences and the troupes themselves would belong to these elite families. However, after Tang's *Peony Pavilion* there was a "popular turn" where more general audiences were kept in mind. "Stage appeal" seemed more important than "literary value." The language was simpler, the vulgar jokes increased, and the figure of the courtesan possessed by love became increasingly popular.¹⁰

Equally astounding for a Spaniard would have been the length of some of the Chinese plays, with as many as fifty-five scenes and taking several days to perform.¹¹ A Spaniard attending one such play would be particularly astonished by the constant use of the supernatural, since many of the works derived from existing legends. They would encounter, among others, the Eight Immortals and they would be taken to realms beyond the human. On the other hand, they would fully understand the feeling of disillusionment with this world, which would easily translate into *desengaño*.

Chinese plays of the period never surfaced in Spain, nor are there references to Spain in Chinese plays of the Ming dynasty. While China thought of the Iberian empire as a place too far away to be concerned with its literary works, Spain was fascinated by reports on Chinese culture and Chinese theater. Lope de Vega, when seeking to describe a far-off place, often describes China. Cathay thus becomes almost commonplace in Spanish early modern theater. This book then focuses on two theaters that were not apparently in dialogue with each other, in order to scrutinize them in spite of the distance that must be traversed to understand / translate each of them. One of the results of this attempt is the many commonalities they share. It is as if there was a circulation of ideas and tropes, although it did not seem to happen. What may be the case is that both Spain and China shared a more popular and performative kind of play, where the fourth wall was partially breached. These commonalities were lost within the neoclassic bent of the eighteenth century. The modern era has been slowly recovering the interaction between

¹⁰ See Hua (2016, 38).

¹¹ See Tan (2016, 1-3). The number of scenes in a chuanqi varies generally from 30 to 50; most chuanqi generally have around 40 scenes, with some extreme cases.

actors and stage and has thus turned to China to once again breach the fourth wall.

A comparative study of Ming and Iberian theaters has never been attempted. Thus, this book aims to provide the reader with a series of different approaches. First, through a comparison of specific works by Spanish and Chinese playwrights during the Ming and Habsburg periods, we aim to show that at times certain commonalities are in reality spaces fraught with misunderstanding. A melancholic character in Spain would not be the same as a melancholic figure in Chinese theater. A particular plant or flower had completely different symbolic meanings. However, it is curious to note how certain character types in both theaters resemble each other; and how the interaction between actors and audience would show clear parallels. At the same time, this is a book that also finds the thrill of commonalities as they are recovered through modern staging.

In order to reinforce the notion that Spanish and Chinese theaters complement one another, this volume includes a series of essays showing how Golden Age plays are appreciated in modern China, and how plays written in a Chinese mode have been successful in America. In other words, these two theaters are not a far-off place. Written at approximately the same time, they show surprisingly similar ways of thinking. Emotions, dreams, honor, and farce; and the bringing together of different styles and modes from the comic to the tragic, are all items that are part of these plays' makeup. Both theaters were nurtured by ancient tales. Whereas Spain tended to use classical myths and medieval Christian legends, Chinese theater was nurtured by its many living myths. Thus, protean characters such as Pedro de Urdemalas could well fit into a Chinese work, where the Monkey King is also born from a rock. Examples from Japanese theater also show the closeness of dramatic productions in the east and the west. In order to move an audience to conversion, Jesuits would turn to Nô theater to appeal to people's emotions. In other words, this book allows us to think in a global manner as we confront the theaters of Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Calderón de la Barca as they have become interlocutors in a transcultural dialogue that shows China's closeness then and now.

THE ESSAYS

This collection is divided into four sections. The first consists of two articles. In the first, Bruce Burningham proposes a new way of looking at the rise of Spanish theater, and also relates it to Chinese drama. Both of them, he argues, have roots in the *jongleuresque* traditions. While early modern Spanish theater slowly did away with *jongleuresque* insertions and the presence of acrobats and other forms of entertainment in their theater, in China, the opposite occurred. Indeed, Spanish Golden Age Theater was later considered by neo-classicists as a failed type of theater. It was not serious enough and did not impose a fourth wall separating the stage from the audience. On the other hand, Chinese theater did not have to deal with neoclassical rules. Highly stylized acrobatic performances became standard in the theaters of Cathay. It was through Bertold Brecht that *jongleuresque* practices were again inserted in the western theatrical tradition through the revalorization of Chinese theater. Characters could communicate directly with the audience, making their actions transparent. Thus, Spanish Golden Age theater is most compatible with Chinese theater since both partook of the *jongleuresque* where audience and actors collaborate in the *mise-en-scene*, as can be seen in a number of essays in this volume dealing with staging. The second essay deals with the first major Spanish work on China, and the first one to make reference to Chinese theater: Miguel de Luarca's *Verdadera relación de la grandeza del Reino de China* [*True Account of the Greatness of the Kingdom of China*] (1575). Luarca, a member of the first diplomatic mission to China, includes commentaries on a number of Chinese theatrical performances staged for the occasion of their visit. Jorge Abril Sánchez stresses the point that even though Luarca provides a first-hand description of these works, members of the diplomatic delegation did not acquire any books or manuscripts containing any of these productions, their music or theatrics, including the uses of acrobats and puppets. At the same time, this essay allows us to better understand the plot of these performances and who the characters might be. Indeed, one of the plays dealt with one of China's foundational myths.

The second section consists of three essays that take up oneiric phenomena and emotional distress as points of departure for comparative approaches to Spanish and Chinese theaters. The first essay, by Frederick A. de Armas,

begins with the opposite assumption, that the intertextuality of the two theaters has enough substance to sustain comparisons. He compares Tang Xianzu's *Peony Pavilion* with Lope de Vega's *La quinta de Florencia* [*The Florentine Villa*], written the same year as Tang's work (1598). The study also alludes to a later play by Lope, *El caballero de Olmedo* [*The Knight from Olmedo*]. After proposing some general similarities and differences between the two theaters, De Armas argues that Tang Xianzu shows what seems to be a more complex and fluid use of theatrical devices than Lope de Vega. In the Chinese work, Du Linian encounters Liu Mengmei in a dream and falls in love with him. The affair continues in the dream until she wakes up, becomes melancholy and dies of lovesickness, not without first having a portrait of herself painted. Lope de Vega, *La quinta de Florencia* features a figure that falls asleep and falls in love. César does not paint, but instead looks at a work of art as he finds himself in a state between dreaming and waking. His beloved, a new Venus, emerges from art and dream. Neither Liu Mengmei's beloved nor César's goddess exist in this plane of reality. Both César and Liu Mengmei attempt a necromantic resurrection, but of different kinds, in very different ways, and with different results. Discussing art, dreams, gardens, melancholy, necromancy and theatricality, this essay shows how the many similarities between Tang and Lope de Vega often become divergences or points of inflection when cosmology, myth, and the oscillating meaning of terms and symbols are taken into account. Each playwright serves as a mirror to the other, further enriching textures and meanings. The second essay, by Juan Pablo Gil-Osle, begins with the premise that Ming and Iberian Habsburg theater traditions were not in contact at the time. Therefore, it would seem that the differences from these far-away places would be so daunting as to make comparisons fruitless. Nevertheless, representations of emotions and global climatic events serve to link these lands and their theaters in the seventeenth century. Gil-Osle focuses here on the connection between global climate change in the seventeenth century and the overwhelming passions surrounding human relationships, particularly friendships. The third and final essay in this section again takes up Tang Xianzu's *Peony Pavilion*. Carmela Mattza utilizes the dream, the flower (the peony), and emotions to analyze these plays. She defines emotions as a disposition to act according to the Way (dao). Indeed, Mattza finds glimmers of this use of emotions in the Span-

ish Golden Age play *La vida es sueño* [*Life is a Dream*]. Both plays endow the female protagonist with agency as they enter forbidden spaces. Mattza compares Xianzu's garden with Calderon's tower, showing them as forbidden spaces, but also as places of love, pain and melancholy. In the garden, the blooming azaleas may point to sadness while the peonies that only bloom in summer can refer to future fulfillment. Indeed, it is a flower that in both east and west is connected with occult practices. In the Chinese play, it connects to the three realities of the Shen. While the dream in the Chinese work takes Du Liniang to other realms, in Calderón it is also part of an experiment to prove the truth of oneiric cognitions. The article concludes with the uses of the portrait in both works. It "becomes a metaphor for the freedom that makes the artistic imagination possible."

Section three deals with global stagings and is made up of five essays. In the first piece, Alejandro González Puche discusses how he staged Cervantes' *Pedro de Urdemalas* [*Peter of Urdemalas*] at Beijing's Central Academy of Drama in 2008. The essay centers on the challenges faced by the production of a *comedia* in a culture where the basic concepts of Golden Age Theater are unknown. For instance, professional actors in China consider themselves civil servants. As a consequence, the Spanish picaresque genre with its critical view of society had to be clearly explained to the actors so they understood how to enact criticism. Ironically, despite the challenges, the staging was a great success and the Chinese actors and audience showed a better understanding of the protean transformations of Pedro de Urdemalas than today's Spanish-speaking troupes and audiences. Thus, the essay speaks to the convergence between the two theaters in spite of initial moments of uncertainties. In the second piece, Ma Zhenghog discusses two different methods of staging Calderón's *El astrólogo fingido* [*The Feigned Astrologer*], the Stanislavski system and that of Chinese traditional theater. Whereas the first one is based on interpretation, the Chinese opera uses a kind of theater of representation which relies on external illustration and on stereotypes and artificial forms. According to her experience, the application of the Stanislavski method was a failure, which led her to research other theatrical traditions that did not rely on psychological truths but on performance mechanisms. After considering works by Meyerhold and Brecht on Chinese opera, as well as the speeches of Jiao Juying, she reassessed her mise-en-scene of Calderón's

play. The new production was successful as detailed by the following article. Ma's explorations led to the discovery that the conventions of Chinese opera and Spanish Golden Age Theater have many similarities, including the fact that neither theater was naturalistic or realistic. The third essay continues this discussion. María José Domínguez analyzes a *mise-en-scene* of the same play, Calderón de la Barca's *El astrólogo fingido* at the International Siglo de Oro Festival at the Chamizal National Memorial in El Paso, Texas. The play was directed by Ma Zhenghong. She gauges the public's reception of the use of Chinese music, Chinese clothing, and Chinese recitation techniques in this baroque play, and concludes that the audience becomes the protagonist of the work, revitalizing a Spanish classic through the use of elements from the Peking Opera. In the fourth essay of this section, Matthew Ancell examines a direct encounter between China and Calderón in a 2015 production of the second act from *La vida es sueño*, directed by Chen Kaixian, Emeritus Professor of Spanish Literature at the University of Nanjing. The English department at Nanjing organized a festival in 2014 to commemorate a Shakespearean theater festival from 1964 put on by Chen's father, who was the head of English at the time. Following this precedent, Chen organized a student theater troupe, called *El Grupo Teatral Estudiantil Quijote* [The Quixote Student Theater Group] in 2015. The group adapted the second act of *La vida es sueño* and Chen wrote a short first and third act to complement the second by Calderón, in which appear Cervantes, Don Quijote, Sancho Panza, and in the third, Zhaungzhou (ca. 369-286 BCE). *El Grupo Teatral Estudiantil Quijote* is the first Spanish theater troupe in China—and the only student group in Asia—to only perform Spanish plays. The production draws the characters Don Quijote and Sancho Panza, as well as Cervantes himself, into the *comedia* in order to commemorate the four-hundredth anniversary of the second part of *Don Quijote*. Moreover, they are joined by the Chinese philosopher as the play revisits the Cueva de Montesinos episode in the context of Calderón's play as another dream within a dream. Central to the relationship between these works are the issues of adaptation and transformation. Chen exploits a quintessentially Chinese story in Zhaungzhou's text, the Zhuangzi, about the oscillation between life and dream.

In order to round out this panorama of Spanish and Chinese theaters in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is important to discuss Spanish

missionary theater in the Sinosphere. Since China did not have this kind of theater, we turn to Japan in order to understand this phenomenon. The first of two essays in this fourth section is by Javier Rubiera. He analyzes the connection between Jesuit missionary theater and the Nô style of Japanese theater. Since missionary theater was targeting local populations, Jesuits turned to this style to better align their theater to the customs and manners of the Japanese. Thus, the Jesuits are able to present stories of the Christian faith in a manner that attracts audiences and achieves success. As it is well-known, the Christian missionaries experienced persecution in Japan during the times of the civil war at the beginning of the seventeenth century. One of the consequences, as Claudia Mesa Higuera states, was the public martyrdom of Christians. When news of the tragic events reached Spain, the writing and production of the only play dealing with Japan was commissioned: *Los primeros mártires del Japón*, a play attributed to Lope de Vega. She argues that this work “is structured around a hyperbolic metaphor of visual and verbal display.” Here, the supernatural has great importance since it was intended to provoke an emotional response. This response was also facilitated by the introduction of sympathetic and suffering characters.

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