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The Tangible/Intangible Dialectic in *La dama duende*: A Critical Appreciation of the CNTC's 2017 Production

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ABSTRACT: The CNTC's 2017 production of *La dama duende* presented the transition between the two main characters' rooms in the third *jornada* using two illuminated windows at the rear wall of the stage. The comparison between this rendition and other modern productions reveals two problems in adaptation: the fidelity with the original and the understanding of contemporary audiences. In contrast, textual analysis sets the main aspects in which original performance was based. The work highlights the centrality of the tangible/intangible dialectic in connecting the many elements of play: the set, the theme, and the audience's spatial cognition. Synecdoche (in the *vestuario*) was a featured tool in the audience's conception of space of the *corral*. By changing the usage of this trope for the windows solution, the CNTC's version failed to address the tangible/intangible dialectic of Calderón's original. Consequently, the adaptation disregarded both the tradition and the public's participation in the performance.

KEYWORDS: CNTC, Calderón, space, tangible/intangible, synecdoche

The Two "Falsos Espejos"

To celebrate the 40th edition of the Festival de Teatro Clásico in Almagro, Spain, the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico (CNTC) presented a version of Calderón de la Barca's *La dama duende*. The premiere took place on July 6, 2017, at the Hospital de San Juan stage. From the beginning of the performance, Helena Pimenta, the director, and Esmeralda Díaz, the set designer, chose a sober and functional scenography: "la escenografía, sobria y funcional, ayud[ó] a que la obra se desarroll[ara] con la agilidad que requiere esta comedia" (Doménech). The characters moved swiftly between the rooms of doña Ángela and don Manuel

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Figure 1 | The two-sided revolving door in the CNTC's 2017 *La dama duende*. Photographer José Alberto Puertas. Photo courtesy of the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico.

through a dramatically useful scenographic element: a two-sided revolving door (fig. 1). One side of this device depicted the *dama's* own door; the other, placed in the center of the *caballero's* room, a cupboard—"la joya dramática de la alacena," as Aurelio González calls it ("Calderón" 178). Additionally, when the action happened in the first space, a sofa was brought in the stage; when it took place in the second, don Manuel's bed and writing table were presented.

However, soon after the interval, Pimenta and Díaz decided to redefine their spatial orientation from a simple and malleable set to the complex and ostentatious one. With that, they contributed with the polemic, in both criticism and performance, regarding the spatial transition between the first and second *cuadros* of the third *jornada* (cf. Ruano and Allen 403). Before this transformation, doña Ángela (Marta Poveda) and don Manuel (Rafa Castejón), who were flirting in the lady's room, were suddenly surprised by the unexpected arrival at the door of don Juan (Joaquín Notario), doña Ángela's jealous brother. To hide the lover, Isabel (Cecilia Solaguren), doña Ángela's maid, took don Manuel through the revolving door and into his own room: "Isabel, aprisa, vete/ con él y llévale tú/ hasta que oculto le dejes/ en aquel cuarto que sabes/ apartado . . ." (Tato 3. 2212–2216).¹ Throughout the performance, don Manuel and his *criado* Cosme (Álvaro de Juan) were ignorant of the existence of this

linking gadget, making them interpret all of doña Ángela's sneaky actions as coming from fantastic forces—from a *dama duende*.

The scene continues briefly with don Juan reprimanding his sister (a widow) about the lack of sobriety of her outfit. For the part that follows (where “salen por la alacena don Manuel e Isabel” and enter the *galán's* room), the spatial mutation became evident to the audience as

Esmeralda Díaz, la escenógrafa, va un oportuno paso más allá de lo que Calderón plantea, cuando, en el clímax del montaje de Pimenta, muestra a los personajes que están del otro lado, en la habitación simétrica de la de Doña Ángela, a través de dos falsos espejos, como los que se utilizan en psicología clínica para observar a los pacientes sin que ellos lo sepan. Eso propicia que Don Manuel y Cosme, el criado gracioso, actúen como títeres del fantástico retablo que maneja su ingeniosa y para ellos desconocida anfitriona. (Vallejo)

Two windows were hinted in the two rectangular spaces at each side of the door in the Compañía's stage—one of them can be clearly appreciated (turned off) above doña Ángela in the following image (fig. 2). These “falsos espejos,” which required functionless and unlit throughout the play, were illuminated to reveal the figures of don Manuel and Isabel. The *galán*, abandoned shortly after by the maid, did not know that he was actually in his own room: “Aquí me hallo, en una casa/ [. . .] tan lejos de la mía” (3. 2271–2275). Afterward, and in order to achieve the comic effect of the scene, Cosme, knowing that he was in his master's chamber, appeared in the opposite window. In the front stage, doña Ángela's room—and what, in other scenes, with a simple change of objects, also represented her lover's *apostento*—remained in the dark. Using the lights and shadows to create a signifying contrast, Manuel and Cosme then performed, as “títeres del [. . .] retablo,” the well-known comic scene:

COSME

¿Quién va?, ¿quién es?

DON MANUEL

Calle, digo,

quienquiera que es, si no quiere

que le mate a puñaladas.

COSME

No hablaré más que un pariente
pobre en la casa del rico.

[. . .]

DON MANUEL

Dime, ¿qué casa
es ésta y qué dueño tiene?

COSME

Señor, el dueño y la casa
son el diablo que me lleve,
porque aquí vive una dama
que llaman la *dama duende*,
que es un demonio en figura
de mujer. (3. 2295–2300)

Soon after, Isabel entered again and, confusing Cosme for don Manuel, took him to doña Ángela's room. The light from the double windows was turned off and the next *cuadro* happened in the well-lit main stage. Thus, Pimenta's inventive space treatment ended its brief life onstage, lasting the equivalent of only 160 lines. The “falsos espejos” were never revealed again.



Figure 2 | One of the two windows (“falsos espejos”) of the CNTC’s 2017 *La dama duende*. Photographer José Alberto Puertas. Photo courtesy of the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico.

The objective of this work is to contrast Pimenta and Diaz's original take on the scenography of *La dama duende* with, first, some of the most recent productions of the play. This exposes the main problem present in modern adaptations of Calderón's dramas: the productions' negotiation between tradition/originality and the audience's expectations. Second, the work returns to the text to highlight the ways in which the playwright stretches the limits of the dramatic conventions. The two opposite forces of the tangible and the intangible are shown to be working in the different methods and techniques of spatial construction and characterization. The article then describes the way in which both of them, in a dialectical form, serve the supernatural theme of *La dama duende*. Calderón takes advantage of this issue to highlight that "the structures of spatial use, and the articulation of fictional place and dramatic event are fundamental to the thematic concerns of the playwright and the production" (McAuley 33).

However, because the most recent CNTC's *La dama duende* was supposedly meant to "acercar al espectador contemporáneo [a] Calderón" (Zubieta 54), this article also deals with the side of the reception. In a more general note, verbal scenography and object-space synecdochic relations are presented as the principal dramatic techniques through which the audiences conceived the space of the *tablados*. In the final pages, the focus centers on the role of synecdoche in theatrical ontology and on the ways in which it actively involves the audience in the performance. The *vestuario*, an inner space at the rear-center of the Spanish Golden Age stage, is highlighted as one of the principal locations where the synecdochic relations happened. This trope also participates in the tangible/intangible dialectic as it generalizes a material reality (makes it intangible), creating an abstract, immaterial image in the audience's mind's eye. By presenting a straightforward, realistic device, such as the "falsos espejos," the CNTC's production neglected the link established between synecdoche and the audience in the establishment of meaning onstage. As a conclusion, using the ideas of the Polish theater director Jerzy Grotowsky, I present a critical appreciation of Pimenta and Diaz's spatial interpretation and suggest that, through synecdoche, audiences might still actively engage with a play that is almost four hundred years old.

Contemporary staging of *La dama duende*: between tradition, originality and reception

The exploitation of the two illuminated windows, using sophisticated technology and lighting design for one isolated scene, can tell a lot about contemporary theatrical practices, in general, and Calderón's adaptation, in particular. Pimenta's take illustrates how the writer's use of space, when decontextualized, represents a problem in different productions: "cuando hablamos del espacio en el caso concreto de las comedias de Calderón, tenemos que detenernos a pensar que con el paso del tiempo la concepción calderoniana del espacio creó problemas de representación" (González, "Calderón" 166).

In more recent stage versions, the change of scenes between the two lovers' rooms is achieved through methods that relate and differ from Pimenta's interpretation. For instance, the 1990 version by the CNTC (directed by José Luis Alonso and stage designed by Pedro Moreno) used a similar two-sided trap door (fig. 3). Contrarily, the 2003 one presented by *La Bicicleta de Sanpol* at the Teatro Sanpol of Madrid (directed by Ana María Boudeguer and stage designed by Pablo Almeida), worked with a single cupboard, entirely separated from the wall, to produce the same effect (fig. 4). Both of the following images capture a moment that anticipates the two "falsos espejos" in Pimenta's version: Isabel and don Manuel escaping from doña Ángela's room through the revolving door/cupboard.



Figure 3 | Still of the video recording of the 1990 CNTC's version of *La dama duende*. Courtesy of the Centro de Documentación Teatral, Spain.



Figure 4 | Still of the video recording of the 2003 *La Bicicleta* de Sanpol's version of *La dama duende*. Courtesy of the Centro de Documentación Teatral, Spain.

In the scene that follows, where don Juan reprimands his sister for her outfit, both productions remained faithful to Calderón's text. However, after this, the spatial mutation of the third *jornada*—the equivalent of Pimenta's "falsos espejos"—was settled through a somehow "anticalderonian" solution. Both versions presented an anticlimactic pitch-black stage, accompanied by five to ten seconds of musical interlude. This segmentation recalls the so-called French scene ("escena francesa"): a nineteenth-century technique that depends on the exits and entrances of characters onstage and on the consequent presence of an empty/dark *tablado*. The solution represents not only a clear anachronistic partitioning tool for a seventeenth-century drama, but also an unnecessary ornamentation. Indeed, "contando con la noción de espacio del personaje (o área de influencia del personaje) [. . .] el ámbito o esfera [el espacio] presentados en primer plano pueden cambiar sin que por ello se interrumpa la acción [con oscuros totales]" (Hermenegildo and Serrano 14). The presence of this or that character onstage already entitled a change of location in the original performances. Thus, the "cinematic structure," through which Peter Brook alludes to the visual continuity and lack of breaks of both the Elizabethan theater and the modern film structure (86), and which is also applicable to Golden Age's performance, was omitted in these performances.²

It was interrupted by constant blackouts. On the other hand, for audiences used to nineteenth-century realistic conventions, the French scene allows the perpetuation of the suspension of disbelief, hiding prop movement, scenic and temporal change, and other para-dramatic technicities.

The two productions reinstate this tradition-reception dilemma in the scene that follows: don Manuel and Cosme's comic moment. There, Alonso and Boudeguer decided to dim the stage lights to the minimum to produce the *enredo* between *dueño* and *criado*. Although with this they maintained certain semantic consistency with the original text, which alludes to a somber room—they obeyed tradition—they sacrificed the audience's attention. Action represented in an almost completely dark stage is somehow unconventional to "traditional" theatergoers (the same ones that accept it for scene transitions). Furthermore, in plays that were performed in an open space and begun at two o'clock in summer and at eleven in winter, the absence of light onstage is an obvious break with the material reality of the original productions (cf. Dessen 3).

Consequently, there seems to exist two major issues in the performance of *La dama duende* in the contemporary stage (and, probably, of the rest of Golden Age's theater productions). The first one is directly related with the audience's reception; the second one, with the (lack of) fidelity with the text and the original performance.³ In response to both issues and particularly relating to the transition between the first and second *cuadros* of the third *jornada*, it might be that the adaptation of the 2017 CNTC consciously steps beyond Calderón: "va un [. . .] paso más allá de lo que Calderón plantea" (Vallejo). First, the "falsos espejos" interpretation was praised by the audience (in the words of the reviewers) for its boldness and originality. Second, by avoiding a time-consuming change of scenery from doña Ángela to don Manuel's room, it maintained the pace and continuity—the "cinematic structure"—of the performance, sacrificing, however, the applauded functional sobriety of the previous scenes.⁴ Thus, two unlit windows functioned as an answer to the pressure from both reception and tradition.

However, paradoxically, with this "step beyond Calderón" maybe the production overlooked one of the playwright's chief contributions to theatrical practices as "no es, pues, en la introducción de nuevas técnicas o elementos decorativos donde hallaremos el genio escenificador calderoniano, sino más bien en el perfeccionamiento de estas técnicas y en el originalísimo uso de

algunas de ellas” (Ruano, “Escenografía” 304). For it is precisely in the spatial configuration—one that does not contribute in an absolute original way but rather stretches the limits of the imposed canon—where great part of Calderón’s artistic “trademark” lies: “el manejo del espacio dramático [. . .] hasta cierto punto marcado por el virtuosismo, es el que da individualidad y personalidad propia a la pieza calderoniana” (González, “Calderón” 179). Thus, in the overelaboration of novel scenographic techniques Pimenta is in contradiction, in principle, with Calderón’s ability to recycle and revitalize old spatial canons.

Space, Theme and Genre in *La Dama Duende*

Now that the main issues relating to modern adaptations of *La dama duende* have been addressed in opposition to the values of Calderón’s writing, it is time to (re)turn to the text. The playwright’s words will illustrate his particular ability to recycle, adapt, and stretch canonic dramatic techniques. They will also show the playwright’s awareness of his audience’s role in theatrical communication. The transition between the two *cuadros*, interpreted through the “falsos espejos” by Pimenta, must be contrasted with its immediate textual context. At the start of the third *jornada*, don Manuel enters a dark and undetermined space. He then explains to the public the reason for his presence there:

DON MANUEL

No está mala
la tramoya. ¿Cerró? Sí.
¿Qué pena a mi pena iguala?
Yo volví del Escurial,
y este encanto peregrino,
este pasmo celestial
que a traerme la luz vino
y me deja en duda igual,
me tiene escrito un papel
diciendo muy tierna en él:
“Si os atrevéis a venir
a verme, habéis de salir
esta noche, sin aquel

criado que os acompaña.
 Dos hombres esperarán
 en el cementerio –¡extraña
 parte!– de San Sebastián,
 y una silla”. Y no me engaña.
 En ella entré y discurrí
 hasta que el tino perdí,
 y al fin a un portal de horror,
 lleno, de sombras y temor,
 solo y a oscuras salí.
 Aquí llegó una mujer
 –al oír y al parecer–
 y a oscuras y por el tiento
 de aposento en aposento
 sin oír, hablar, ni ver
 me guió. (Calderón, 3. 2245–2273)

Up until now, in the audience’s mind “the central fact of theatrical semiosis, the complex interplay between the physical and the fictional, and the meaning that emerge from that interplay” (McAuley 20), must have been taking place. The spectator has established a particular mediation between fact and fiction, between what has been called scenic space (“el espacio escénico [. . .] designará el espacio concretamente perceptible por el público en el escenario”) and dramatic space (“por espacio dramático se entenderá el espacio de la ficción, el espacio representado o significado en el texto escrito” [Vitse 338]). Thus, don Manuel stands in a *tangible* scenic space—the *tablado*—but the cause for his presence there, the reason of his narration, belongs to the *intangible* dramatic space. From the setting of the third *jornada* on, the present and absent spatial elements play a complimentary role in the characterization of location. Calderón innovatively explores these scenic conventionalities to fit the dramatic requirements of his play, actively using the audience’s reception of the two (scenic, dramatic) spaces.

Additionally, two clear semantic fields are implicit in don Manuel’s words. “La tramoya” from the second line opens with a reference to fictional creation: doña Angela’s actions are interpreted through the rhetoric of drama. Soon, to this reference, don Manuel adds “encanto” and “pasma,” words that belong to the fictional field of the *comedia* but also possess the semantics

of the immaterial. Contrastingly, at the same time, very material references are included by the character: the light that reveals the physicality of objects and the paper that shows the plots of the *dama duende*. The lexical nature of the last lines, where don Manuel tells the audience about his presence in the ambiguous lady's dwelling place, seem to join both polar aspects. A very tangible "portal" is described intangibly: as full of "sombras y temor." This threshold was crossed only after a mysterious meeting at the "cementerio [...] de San Sebastián"—a concrete place with ambiguous ethereal qualities. The ghostly guide-woman is only human "al oír y al parecer." Don Manuel moves "de aposento en aposento," touching around ("por el tiento") because of the aerial darkness that surrounds him: "a oscuras." Overall, in don Manuel's speech, the tangible references are opposed to the intangible ones to characterize the gloomy and mysterious space.

However, the scene soon changes when richly dressed women appear in the previously empty and somber stage. The contrast shocks don Manuel, who exclaims (these lines are absent in Tato's version):

DON MANUEL

¡Qué casa tan alhajada!

¡Qué mujeres tan lucidas!

¡Qué sala tan adornada!

¡Qué damas tan bien prendidas!

¡Qué beldad tan estremada! (3. 2278–2282)

The disparity between the bare and somber stage present in don Manuel's narration and the rich and colorful one from doña Ángela's appearance is conceived mainly through the use of verbal imagery. Don Manuel's words anticipate Calderón's *didascalía*, which, lines later, points out: "salen todas las mujeres con toallas y conservas y agua y, haciendo reverencias todas, sale Doña Ángela ricamente vestida." To don Manuel's words, a visual mutation must be assumed to occur onstage at the same time. Indeed, both CNTC's productions (Pimenta's and Alonso's) managed, through lighting design but especially through the rich costumes of doña Ángela's retinue, to establish a very physical opposite to the previous bare stage (fig. 5).

Thus, it can be said that the construction of the *tablado's* mutation is double. For the contrasts between the scenes to be produced, there must exist an intangible part, corresponding to don Manuel's narration and created through



Figure 5 | Doña Ángela's richly dressed retinue in the 1990 CNTC's version of *La dama duende*. Courtesy of the Centro de Documentación Teatral, Spain.

verbal references, and a tangible manifestation of the characters and objects in doña Ángela's room and explicitly performed onstage. The lexical allusions aid the duality of the spatial variation. On the one hand, the elements described as phantasmagorical in don Manuel's narration—the graveyard; the shadows of the portal—develop in the unconcreted dramatic space (i.e., the space of fiction). On the other hand, the aspects praised by the character for their visual richness—the luxury of the house; the beauty of the women—happen in the concrete scenic space (i.e., the *tablado*). In Calderón's time, the audience would have had to mediate imaginatively between the impalpable references alluded in the dialogue and the concrete elements acted out by the characters (this is fundamental later on, when we turn to the topic of the synecdoche).

Such dual depiction of space has a thematic correspondence in the different descriptions of doña Ángela—apart from the most recurrent one, *dama-duende*. The clearest example happens at the end of the second *jornada*, just before don Manuel narrates his experience at the cemetery:

DON MANUEL
 Como sombra se mostró,
 fantástica su luz fue,

pero como cosa humana
se dejó tocar y ver,
como mortal se temió,
receló como mujer,
como ilusión se deshizo,
como fantasma se fue;
si doy la rienda al discurso,
no sé, ¡vive Dios!, no sé
ni qué tengo de dudar
ni qué tengo de creer.

COSME

Yo sí.

DON MANUEL

¿Qué?

COSME

Que es mujer-diablo
pues que novedad no es
—pues la mujer es demonio
todo el año— que una vez
por desquitarse de tantas
sea el demonio mujer. (2. 2225–2242)

Don Manuel and Cosme's characterization of doña Ángela's interpreted supernatural being happens in a dual way: she is both a human (corporeal being) and a devil (incorporeal being). As the space through which later on don Manuel will be directed, the woman belongs to both the tangible ("receló como mujer") and the intangible realm ("como ilusión se deshizo"). Cosme's hybrid resolution—"mujer-diablo"—answers to the impossibility of a clear separation between a rational and an irrational explanation and, in general, to *La dama duende's* characters' constant fight between what is perceived and what is seen. The extent of this epistemological complication is verbalized by don Manuel in the duality of two actions: "dudar" and "creer." Doubt comes when the individual is confronted with the ontological unreliability of the immaterial. Belief normally entitles the presence

of physical evidence. Between both extremes, the audience was asked to characterize the stage.

As with spatial conventions, Calderón stretches the limits of the linguistic realm from the purely lexical to the discursive. In Covarrubias' 1611 *Tesoro*, for example, the word *duende* is defined through a dialectic of materiality vs immateriality: “es algún *espíritu* de los que cayeron con Lucifer [. . .] estos suelen dentro de las casas, y en las montañas, y en las cuevas espantar con algunas *apariencias*, tomando *cuerpos fantásticos*” (s.v. *duende*). The playwright uses the paradoxical instability of the term, epitomized in the tangible/intangible “cuerpos fantásticos,” to explore comical variations in the mouth of his *gracioso*: “mujer-diablo,” “dama duende,” and so on. In a higher, discursive level, Calderón explores this uncertainty through the conventions of the fantastic genre as “the fantastic occupies the duration of th[e] *uncertainty* [between the material and the immaterial] [. . .] The fantastic is that *hesitation* experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (Todorov 25). Through Cosme's parody, *La dama duende* amplifies the uncertainty/hesitancy principle proper to the genre.

The thematic unfolding of the tangible/intangible dialectic through Cosme's language and the genre in general has a clear correspondence to the construction of space as uncertain and mysterious, seen previously, highlighting how “the way the space is conceived and organized, the kinds of space that are shown and/or evoked, the events associated with them, and the relationship between them are always of fundamental importance in the meaning conveyed” (McAuley 32). This theme–space interaction, which possesses a purely descriptive extension in McAuley's words, can be expanded to form part of the critical vocabulary of theatrical analysis. Thus, the success of a play, textually and in performance, can be measured by the different ways in which it respects the coherence between meaning and spatial construction. Pimenta's version, as shown later, momentarily neglects this conjunction in the “falsos espejos” decision.

To conclude this section and to show the extent of Calderón's “trademark”—the original adaptation of set canonic practices—it should be said that the correlations between the dual (tangible/intangible) spatial construction and the uncertainty principle of the fantastic are, however, not particular of *La dama duende*. Indeed, they can be read in the *comedia de capa y espada* in general. For both the “mysterious” space and the superstitions

are fundamental to the form: “[en los] equívocos y malentendidos [. . .] desempeña un papel importante [. . .] el espacio domestico con sus trampas, escondrijos, sótanos, salidas dobles, puertas ocultas” (Antonucci 14) and “la actitud hacia las supersticiones es un elemento fundamental [del género]” (Pérez 49). Space and theme are so intertwined, specifically in plays like *La dama duende* and *El galán fantasma*, that Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo encloses them in the same category when criticizing these works’ codes:

otro defecto que a las comedias de capa y espada se ha señalado, es la monotonía de recursos escénicos y también en esto es muy difícil disculpar a Calderón, porque tales recursos, además de repetidos y convencionales, pecan de inverosímiles y hasta absurdos [. . .]. Algo de esto puede decirse de las casas con dos puertas, de las damas duendes, de las escondidas, de las tapadas, de los galanes fantasma, de las alacenas giratorias. . . (353).

By grouping both aspects in the same class, the critic is unconsciously displaying the symbolic interrelation between space and the supernatural element of these plays. Without breaking the conventions, Calderón broadens the genre to its furthest, most Baroque limits. This, however, represents only one side of the issue that directors and adaptors confront when dealing with Calderón’s texts in adaptation: the relation with tradition. What happens with the other side of the problem: the audience? Next, we shall see how, through the tangible/intangible dialectic, Calderón manages to link four layers of dramatic signs implicit in *La dama duende*: the set construction, the theme, the genre, and the general cognition behind the audience’s understanding of space.

Synecdoche In The Changing Room (and The Words Onstage)

Although *La dama duende*’s spatial structuring may seem intimately tied to the specific generic conventions of the *comedia de capa y espada*, it is actually based on general practices of Golden Age drama. Apart from the actor’s gestures and movements, the different costumes, the sounds, and the music, for Calderón and his contemporaries, two fundamental ways existed to conceive space in the *tablado*: an intangible one, based on the verbal decor, and another conceived through a tangible-intangible relationship and

dependent upon the synecdochic ties between the objects onstage and the public's imagination. From the variety of forms that synecdoche takes—“*pars pro toto, totem pro parte, genus pro specie, species pro genere*,” as traditionally defined (Eco 281)—it is the part for the whole that will be determinative for the conception of space in Calderón's stage.

Regarding the first form, great part of the dramatic space was achieved “por medio de los parlamentos de los propios personajes.” Thus, “el teatro de los Siglos de Oro generalmente emplea esta última técnica que podríamos llamar escenografía de palabras” (González, “La creación” 65). Don Manuel makes use of this verbal resource in one of the scenes analyzed before. After being led through the “portal de horror,” the character is suddenly surprised by the richness of the scene, which he describes as “¡Qué casa tan alhajada! [. . .] ¡Qué sala tan adornada!” In the original performance, the mutation of the *tablado* must have happened through diverse elements such as the rich costumes worn by doña Ángela and her retinue. However, with the limited resources in the scenography of the *comedia*, the words take a fundamental preeminence in achieving this spatial change. Don Manuel's astonished words work to characterize the poor stage as a rich scene. Due to the voice's lack of any material tie to the scene, the verbal resource answers to the intangible part of Calderón exploitation of the tangible/intangible dialectic in *La dama duende*.

To the purely insubstantial nature of the word, another constructive process is added. The public's characterization of a determinate space—the king's chamber, for example—usually happened through a mental process, which employs the presence of a simple object onstage or a determinate location (a throne/an inner stage) to build the whole setting. These objects' and places' “main function was more often than not synecdochic, the part seen in the inner stage [or the object] standing for the whole stage” (Ruano, “The Staging” 54). In the dialectic of *La dama duende*, the material grip on the object stands for the tangible, the mental image created from this interaction for the intangible.

Regarding the external aspect of the Spanish playhouse and its preference for synecdoche, the *apariencia* or *vestuario* is of utmost importance. This space represents an internal door in the rear-center of the stage, usually covered with curtains, which possessed a similar function to the Shakespearean “inner stage” or “discovery space.” As the name tells it, “the space behind the rear curtain is called the ‘vestuario’ because it is here that in the early days of the theatre the actors put on their costume” (Shergold 548). The *vestuario*



Figure 6 | The *vestuario* at the center of the stage in the *corral de comedias* of Almagro, Spain. Photo by the author.

can be appreciated at the rear-center of the stage in the *corral de comedias* de Almagro (the only surviving *corral*) in the previous image (fig. 6).

With the passage of time, however, this location was appointed with a spatial function in the development of the dramas. Playwrights, actors, and *autores* soon discovered the symbolic possibilities of “un espacio que se podía revelar [u ocultar] por medio de correrse [o descorrerse] las cortinas” (Vitse 350). The space revealed behind the *vestuario* acquired synechdochic faculties: it could both signify a secondary, inner space or change the whole setting of the main one. This conception of space directly involved the audience in the play’s production, from the textual to the staging levels, as the producers behind the performance were aware of the significance of imagination in building up what their words, actions, and props only suggested.

In *La dama duende*’s case, the presence of an object that designates a location at large is exemplified by the *alacena*: “en *La dama duende* la alacena fue erigida detrás de las cortinas de esta escena interior [i.e. the *vestuario*], y que se revelaba sólo en aquellos cuadros donde la acción pasaba en el cuarto de don Manuel” (Vitse 350). The cupboard disappeared, by the closing of the curtain of the *vestuario*, when the action happened in doña Ángela’s room or in other locations of the play. The transition between the lovers’ rooms in the

third *jornada* (the “falsos espejos” scene in Pimenta’s version) is particularly revealing regarding the simplicity behind the act of opening and closing a curtain: in the Spanish Golden Age’s bare stage, a resource with minimum attachment to material elements, such as synecdoche, guaranteed an economic and rapid spatial progression. Seen through this light, the French scene solution—used by both the CNTC’s 1990 production and *La Bicicleta de Sanpol*’s 2003 version—attempts against the agility that the text and the original setting implies.

Finally, the tangible/intangible dialectic appears once again when the cognitive reception of this synecdochic tool is considered. As a whole, the mental process behind a synecdoche entails a transformation from “a tangible or concrete reality” to “the abstract,” a change from “the most particular idea to the most general” (White 5 and 207). When confronted with the revelation or concealment of the *alacena*, by the opening or closing of the curtains, the first audiences of *La dama duende* produced a generalization—an “intangibilization”—of the tangible stage elements. An image of don Manuel’s entire room became available to the mind’s eye through the singularity of the cupboard. Thus, synecdoche at the *corrales* required an active engagement from the audience’s part in the development of theatrical communication. With this, Calderón stretches the possibilities of this dialectic to fit not only the theme (the fantastic) and the set configuration (the “mysterious” space) but also the cognition behind the reception of the action and space on the *tablado*: the synecdochic and verbal relations.

Keeping the Curtains Closed: Back to the CNTC’s 2017 Production

How did the CNTC’s 2017 production deal with the implicit tangible/intangible dialectic of *La dama duende*’s text? How were the dramatic elements, tied through this dialectic, treated in the performance? First of all, read in contrast to the function of the synecdoche in the *vestuario*, the problematic stage decision made by Helena Pimenta for the transition between the first and second *cuadros* of the third *jornada*—the two hidden windows—could have been easily solved by the simple action of closing and opening a curtain. This would have made the *alacena* (meant to be seen only when signifying don Manuel’s room) and the interior room visible or invisible, activating, through the implied synecdoche, the process of “intangibilization” in the audience’s cognition. The sober and functional space of the beginning would have suddenly acquired the generalities of the imagined *aposeno* through a

cognitive blending between the revealed object and the personal experience of the public. Rather than engagement, the production implied a passivity: the crowd was detached from assuming a role in the construction of the dramatic communication (particularly regarding spatial transitions).

Additionally, the words that don Manuel produces afterward (“Pero, ¿qué es esto? Parece/ que a esta parte alguna puerta/ abren; sí, y ha entrado gente” [3. 2494–2496]) might have guided the spectator through the general spatial distribution. However, his utterance was lost with this heterogeneous stage decision as “when dramatic poetry is spoken in a heavily decorated scenic space, its descriptive function [. . .] is usurped, and the tension between seeing and hearing that is a distinguishing feature of the original staging of both Shakespeare and the *comedia* is all too often lost” (Fischer 63). The contrast in the mutation from the functional and simple stage of the first scenes to the technological ornamentation of the “falsos espejos” overshadowed the verbal structuring of space—the intangible “escenografía de palabras” was lost.

Consequently, in this reconstruction of Golden Age stage practice, the tangible-intangible (visual/synecdochic) and the intangible (verbal) parts of the spatial construction might have acted together to ensure both general intelligibility and audience engagement, as in early modern staging. With them, the production might have arrived to a compromise between the two polar forces that guide contemporary performances of Calderón: the tradition/originality drive—by maintaining an early modern spatial technique—and the reception drive—by involving the audience cognitively in the production of spatial meaning.

Furthermore, the fidelity with Calderón’s conception of space might have also added effectiveness to the thematic and generic level of *La dama duende*. Instead, the production decided to bet for a realistic innovation, disregarding Calderón’s ability to bend the conventionalities and test the limits of (self) imposed dramatic rules. This is clear in the two ways in which the “falsos espejos” were regarded by the reviewers: first, as an “original” take on traditional staging (“va un oportuno paso más allá de lo que Calderón plantea”); second, in comparison to a scientific tool (“[dos falsos espejos] como los que se utilizan en psicología clínica para observar a los pacientes sin que ellos lo sepan” [Vallejo]). Thus, the innovativeness behind the scenic device is semantically attached to the straightforwardness of scientific observation—objective and detailed, in principle. Hesitation and uncertainty—the ontological principles of the fantastic, which Calderón stretches to the limits in the lexical, thematic, generic, spatial, and cognitive spheres—became

overshadowed in the performance by the “lab-like” explicitness of the “falsos espejos.” It could be said that the tangibility of the dialectic was enhanced in the absence of synecdoche, making the whole spectrum of correlations tied to it disappear.

Finally, maybe this production purposely stands away from these issues because as the director accepted in the *cuaderno pedagógico* of the performance, in her *La dama duende* “hay una vinculación con lo cinematográfico que casi sale sola, porque es un recuerdo, que estamos acostumbrados a ver ya desde el cinematógrafo” (Zubieta 49). The economic and functional elements of theater (e.g., synecdoche) are redundant in a medium (e.g., cinema) that is not constrained by the dimensions of a stage. Thus, Pimenta’s version (and maybe the CNTC’s productions in general) searches for a more “synthetic” or “rich theater,” to use Jerzy Grotowski’s notion; that is, theater seen “as a synthesis of diverse creative disciplines [such as] literature, sculpture, painting, architecture, lighting, acting” or cinema in this case. However, to Grotowski, this “rich theatre [is only] rich in defects” for

theatre can exist without make-up, without special costumes, without scenery, without a separate space for representation (scene), without lights, without sound effects, etc. It cannot exist [however] without the actor-spectator relation in which a direct and ‘alive’ perceptual communion is established (13, my translation).

Synecdoche represents one of the clearest links between both agents of theatrical communication, and Grotowski might have understood this when staging in 1965 Calderón’s *El príncipe constante* (*Książę Niezłomny*) with as few scenic elements as possible. Through this cognitive trope, the spectator is forced and, at the same time, invited to furnish—with her own particular experiences and memories—the space that the actor inhabits. In a way, thanks to the “intangibilization” of tangible elements, she makes the performance *hers*. The absence of synecdoche, as in Pimenta’s work, demolishes the bridge of this communion. It keeps the curtains closed.

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NOTES

1. In the following pages, I specify when I am referring to Álvaro de Tato's version or Calderón's original.

2. “. . . we have at last become aware that the absence of scenery in Elizabethan theatre was one of its greatest freedoms. In England at least, all productions [of Shakespeare] for quite some time have been written to be performed continuously, that their cinematic structure of alternating short scenes, plot intercut with subplot, were all part of a total shape. This shape is only revealed dynamically, that is, in the uninterrupted sequence of these scenes, and without this their effect and power are lessened as much as would be a film that was projected with breaks and musical interludes between each reel” (86).

3. This might be because “unlike many other European countries, Spain did not have an uninterrupted tradition of performing its classics; it was this cultural belatedness that gave the CNTC its *raison d'être* while also denying it a stable performance tradition from which to emerge. [. . .] This lack of tradition meant that it would have been virtually impossible to try to perform the comedia in a seventeenth-century performance style. Even if it had been possible, Marsillach [first artistic director of the company]—clearly inspired by Peter Brook's notion of ‘the Deadly Theatre’—shunned this kind of production” (Wheeler 54).

4. Those seem to be the ideas implicit in Esmeralda Díaz's words in the interview presented in the *Cuadernos Pedagógicos* of the performance: “el recurso plástico ha sido claro, atendiendo a una convención a la que el público está acostumbrado y que le resulta fácil de seguir, pudiendo concentrar así su atención en el seguimiento de la trama dramática y en las ideas que subyacen” (Zubieta 58): teatroclasico.mcu.es/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CP-60-dd-web.pdf.

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