Comparing the Commercial Theaters of Early Modern London and Madrid

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Comparative studies have revealed uncanny similarities between the theatrical cultures of Shakespearean England and Golden Age Spain, and in particular between the Elizabethan amphitheaters and the Spanish corrales de comedia (courtyard playhouses). Contrary to conventional wisdom, however, Spain’s (and, in particular, Madrid’s) courtyard theaters may have resembled the English indoor public playhouses, especially London’s Blackfriars, more than the Globe-like amphitheaters with which they are so often matched. That the corrales could simultaneously play the part of both Globe and Blackfriars also helps account for the absence of indoor public playhouses in Habsburg Spain.

INTRODUCTION

AMONG THE MANY advances taking place in recent Shakespearean scholarship, one of the most revitalizing approaches has been to contrast the theatrical culture of early modern England with that of other nations. One theatrical culture that has proven to be particularly fertile soil for comparative study with Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, due to the almost uncanny similarities between the two, is that of Golden Age Spain. In the collection of essays aptly named Parallel Lives, editors Louise and Peter Fothergill-Payne explain how scholars of both English and Spanish early modern drama have increasingly remarked on the numerous features these theatrical cultures shared. Among the

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1 See the introduction to Parallel Lives, 9. The milestones within a growing bibliography, in chronological order, are Cohen; Loftis; Fischer; Parallel Lives; Greer, 2000; Cañadas. In 2016, I defended my doctoral thesis, titled “Playgrounds: The Theatrical Landscape of Shake-
many points of comparison, the most recurrent and revisited topic is the supposed similarity between the o-shaped theaters of London and the corrales de comedia (courtyard playhouses) of Spain in general, and Madrid in particular.

In a time-traveling exercise, theater historian John J. Allen illustrates forthrightly how closely the experiences of theatergoing in early modern London’s and Madrid’s public playhouses resembled each other, despite the apparent lack of communication between the two theatrical cultures at the time in which the first permanent playhouses were built:2

We are in the central box in the third story of an open-air playhouse, facing the stage that rises some five or six feet off a yard or pit. The paved yard slopes gently downward toward the stage from ground level beneath our box. Some sixty or seventy feet from us at the back of the stage is the tiring-house wall, and a curtain or arras hung from the forward edge of the floor of an upper gallery masks double doors in the center, flanked by another door at each side. Spectators are seated on benches or stools on either side of the central stage, and standees fill the yard below, between us and the stage, which is roofed by a shadow or cover supported by two posts or pillars. It is three o’clock in the afternoon, the play has just begun, and we see a character rising from beneath the stage through a trapdoor; he parts the central pair of curtains, revealing that the double doors are open to a sort of tableau. Are we in London or in Madrid? I think it is impossible to say.3

Clearly, from a distance of slightly over 400 years, the arrangement of the early modern English amphitheaters and Spanish corrales de comedias appears to have been very similar, if not virtually the same. However, what is rarely mentioned when comparing the theatrical venues of both countries, and Allen’s narrative

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2 For a summary of the political relations between England and Spain before the peace treaty of 1604 (also known as the Treaty of London), after which the exchange of culture and ideas between the two nations increased significantly, see García García; Samson. An extraordinarily prolific subject of study in the field of Anglo-Spanish cultural relations is the Cardenio, a lost play believed to have been written in collaboration by Shakespeare and John Fletcher based on a novella interwoven into Miguel de Cervantes’s Don Quijote. Among the numerous studies on the missing Cardenio play, see, in particular, Carnegie and Taylor; Chartier; Fuchs; Hammond; Stern.

3 Allen, 1991b, 55.
comparison faithfully reflects this tradition, is that there was also a different type of archetypical public playhouse other than the open-air theater in London: the indoor playhouse, the best-known example of which was the Blackfriars theater frequented by Shakespeare’s acting company from the first decade of the seventeenth century onward.

The characteristics of the Globe-like theaters in Elizabethan and Jacobean London are well known. They were for the most part round (or, more accurately, polygonal) buildings, with three levels of galleries surrounding a thrust stage in the middle of an unroofed yard peopled by a group of standing audience members commonly referred to as groundlings. This description, as Allen’s comparison above suggests, broadly fits the corrales de comedia in Madrid as well. The first such playhouse in London, the Theatre in Shoreditch, was built in 1576 by James Burbage, father of the future lead actor in Shakespeare’s company Richard Burbage; the last is the popular reconstructed Shakespeare’s Globe on the South Bank of the Thames, only two decades old and one of London’s main cultural attractions today. The City’s indoor theaters, sometimes misleadingly known as the private playhouses, have received much less attention, something that will undoubtedly change with the recent construction in the Shakespeare’s Globe building complex of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse—a new acting space modeled after what is known regarding the most important indoor playhouses from Shakespeare’s time, mainly the Blackfriars theater, St. Paul’s playhouse, and the Cockpit-Phoenix theater in Drury Lane.

These venues were smaller, roofed, and candlelit, and offered actors and audiences alike a quite different experience from that of the large and naturally lit Globe. The first two indoor playhouses were built around the same time as the Theatre in Shoreditch, and choirboys used them in the 1570s and 1580s to rehearse their court performances in front of paying aristocratic audiences. After about a decade of inactivity, they were brought back into the commercial theater

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4 While round-like venues were predominant, there were also some amphitheatres known or at least believed to have been square-shaped; for instance, a recent archaeological excavation claims to have uncovered the remains of a square-shaped (and not circular, as it was traditionally thought) Curtain playhouse. For more on the Curtain archaeological excavations carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA), see Kennedy.

5 “The widely used term ‘private’ to describe indoor playhouses is misleading, since they were, in fact, no less public than those open air. They did, however, charge substantially higher ticket prices: sixpence for a seat in the top gallery, one shilling and sixpence for a seat in the pit facing the stage, and two shillings and sixpence for a side-staged box,” as opposed to the one penny charged in the amphitheatres: White, 1998, 145; see also I. Smith, 299–301.
circuit toward the turn of the century. During their first lifetime, these playhouses cannot be said to have competed in the same market as the amphitheaters: both the stage poetry and the use of child actors in these playhouses catered to a different audience than that of the open-air playhouses. However, the reactivation of theatrical activity in these elite City theaters in 1600 changed London’s theatrical landscape forever, since the style of drama performed by the children companies this time around—with plays written by the likes of Ben Jonson and John Marston—directly competed in the commercial circuit with that of the popular suburban amphitheaters.

Such a venue model did not exist in Golden Age Spain’s public theater circuit. It also never made its way, at least in a significant and consistent manner, into the comparative history of the two theatrical cultures. With this in mind, this article explores some possible explanations for the lack of a public indoor playhouse in Golden Age Spain, and more specifically in the capital city of Madrid, in comparison with Shakespeare’s London. Challenging the inherited assumption that the English amphitheater and Spanish corral de comedias were virtually identical venues, and arguing instead that in crucial aspects the social and performance conditions in the Spanish corral more closely resembled those found at a London indoor playhouse, helps update current understanding of these two remarkably alike theatrical cultures. I will, moreover, argue that the absence of a Blackfriars-like venue in Madrid is not coincidental, since the city’s corrales could perform both the artistic and social functions of London’s indoor as well as open-air commercial playhouses at the same time.

CONDITIONS OF PERFORMANCE

“The most well-trodden subject of all the background aspects of the drama,” Andrew Gurr writes in the opening lines of The Shakespearean Stage, “is the structure of the playhouses.” This observation translates seamlessly into the comparative study of early modern England’s and Spain’s theatrical cultures, since the most obvious similarity between the two is the physical aspect of their open-air playhouses. John Corbin and Hugo Albert Rennert, in 1906 and 1909,

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7 I. Smith, 175.
8 Gurr, 1992, 115.
respectively, were among the first scholars to draw this comparison. John Orrell and Glynne Wickham, separately, later specified that the *corrales* in Madrid shared similar features with London’s Boar’s Head and Red Bull, two inns converted into playhouses. In recent years, John Allen has frequently discussed the two venue types in juxtaposition.9 The passage of Allen’s cited above eloquently states the often-mentioned parallelism between the building structures, even though Allen also is always the first to highlight the main difference between them: English amphitheaters, in their majority, were stand-alone buildings purposefully erected for the theater, whereas the Spanish *corrales* were spaces left in between buildings that were later recycled for theatrical use.10 Nevertheless, the arrangement of audiences along hierarchical scaffolding and the superficial physical attributes of the roofless venues of both countries indeed point toward an immediate pairing between the two. One consequence of this focus is that London’s indoor playhouses have played at best a bit part in the historical comparison.11 This section reintroduces the indoor playhouse into the comparative equation by contrasting the physical attributes and performance conditions of the two types of London commercial theater venues with those of the Madrid *corrales*. Particular attention is paid to their acoustic quality and to the comfort level of their patrons during shows, in order to gauge more precisely the experience of proximity and distance across these three different acting spaces.

The absence of a tangible connection between the almost-simultaneous emergence of the first and very similar permanent playhouses in London and Madrid—the Theatre in Shoreditch in 1576, Madrid’s Corral de la Cruz in 1578—renders the comparison even more intriguing. The two countries’ ongoing political and ideological wars ensured that there would be little or, more probably, no direct dialogue between the two theatrical cultures at the time.

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10 Allen, 2012, 147–51. This is why, for instance, the shape of the *corrales* varies so much even when the design intention is the same. The Corral de la Cruz has a much more elongated and irregular plan than its neighboring Corral del Príncipe, while the layout of the vivienda (façade building) and vestuario (tiring-house) remained similar. As Allen points out in a different publication, “the term *corral de comedias* describes a certain relationship between the playing space and the auditorium, between actors and audience, and not any particular kind of structure at all”: Allen, 1990, 211. More in Allen, 1983, 11–16; Allen, 1989, 21.

11 The exception here is, in fact, Allen himself, who fleetingly mentions the Fortune and, more surprisingly, the Blackfriars indoor playhouse as the two venues that looked most like the Corral del Príncipe he reconstructed. Allen, 1983, 114–16.
These cultures did, however, share a theatrical ancestry from before the Reformation, in particular the performance of (mostly religious) theater on top of carts in the streets. In addition to their own vernacular traditions and influences, such as the animal-baiting arenas in London’s South Bank or the corridas de toros (bullfights) in town squares across Spain, this common heritage explains the shared inclination toward playing in the open in order to benefit from the natural light. Additionally, the contact both cultures had with itinerant players from their Continental neighbors—in particular, the commedia dell’arte troupes from Italy and France—would have also taught the first theater entrepreneurs of England and Spain the need for holding performances in an enclosed space they could control and where admission could be charged.12 To that end, theater impresarios either built scaffolds around these improvised stages, as they did in England, or recycled a preexisting space by placing a stage within a courtyard and opening viewing galleries in the surrounding buildings, as they did in Spain. In this sense, the earliest commercial playhouses of London and Madrid, far from being sophisticated and studied architectural designs, were products of improvisation within a popular building tradition.

And yet, despite this initial common vernacularism of the English amphitheater and the Spanish corral, one crucial aspect led to different trajectories: whereas the structure and design of the corrales were submitted to continuous reexamination and development, English amphitheaters varied very little from beginning to end. This fact caught Glynne Wickham’s attention as he set the two playhouse types side by side: “development of these ‘corral’ playhouses between 1574 and 1635 took the form of constant minor improvements to particular features—tiled roofs, better seating, paved yards and better drainage, marble columns and so on.”13 In England, conversely, there are very few traces of the reconstruction or redesign of open-air theaters, the most notable excep-

12 Campa Gutiérrez et al.; Shergold, 1–176; McKendrick, 41–50; Wickham, 1959, 112–76; Wickham, 2002, 1–94; Wickham et al., 63.
13 Wickham, 1972, 97–98. The continuous renovations that Spanish playhouses underwent help explain the exorbitant difference in documentary evidence between the Spanish and English theaters. As Herbert Berry points out, “nearly everything we know about Elizabethan and Jacobean playhouses as buildings comes at random from documents about something else”: Berry, 1979, 29. On the other hand, an almost-unmanageable amount of documents related to the Spanish playhouses has survived. Since 1971, these documents have been studied and compiled in the ongoing series Fuentes para la historia del teatro en España (Sources for the history of theater in Spain), initiated by John E. Varey and Norman D. Shergold. For an English-language description of the different Fuentes volumes, see Allen, 1998.
tion being the Rose playhouse in Southwark. All the evidence uncovered during the 1989 archaeological excavations indicates that theater impresario Philip Henslowe financed the costly renovation in order to deal with some significant flaws in the initial design. The yard floor’s aggressive slant was leveled, and the galleries nearest to the stage were widened in order to create better visual lines with the stage after the addition of the roof, or heavens, a requirement for the staging of many Elizabethan plays that the first design lacked. The widening of the galleries, moreover, increased the audience capacity, and the stage itself was also modified to give it more prominence and thrust, as well as to place it in better geometric relation with the rest of the building (fig. 1). Other than the Rose, the only known account of an amphitheater’s design being meaningfully revisited in early modern England was that of the King’s Men’s Globe; after it burned down in 1613 due to a pyrotechnical malfunction during a performance of Shakespeare and Fletcher’s Henry VIII, the acting company took advantage of this unfortunate event to improve its open-air playhouse. In other words, all significant alterations to Elizabethan playhouses seem to have been motivated by inescapable necessity.

Per contra, Madrid’s early rudimentary corrales underwent frequent modifications in order to upgrade both the performance logistics as well as the comfort of players and audience alike. The players were progressively supplied with as many technical changes as their profession demanded, and repeated efforts were

14 Throughout this effort of synthesis, the main discussion regarding the English amphitheater focuses on the round-shaped one, since this was the most common and emblematic playhouse design of Elizabethan and Jacobean London. However, one should keep in mind that the Red Bull and Boar’s Head playhouses were also converted innyards, very similar to the Spanish corrales, and thus their design “was approached in an ad hoc, pragmatic way”; the Boar’s Head’s progressive conversion from a victualing trade site into a “primitive box-ring sort of playhouse” spanned from 1557 to approximately 1599: Orrell, 1991, 26–28. For the Red Bull playhouse, Eva Griffith provides a detailed account of the progressive transformation of the inn, which started off as “a ‘howse’ with ‘stables and other roomes’ set around a ‘square Court,’” into a theater venue: see Griffith, 93–107. Herbert Berry’s canonical The Boar’s Head Playhouse does the same for its namesake: see Berry, 1986. The original description of the leased property that would be converted into the Red Bull playhouse is cited in Griffith, 66.

15 Jon Greenfield suggests that the 1587 Rose, due to its structure and separation between galleries and yard, may have been initially conceived as a multipurpose arena, only later to be converted into a full-time playhouse.

16 Bowsher, 2007; Bowsher and Blatherwick; Bowsher and Miller, 22–62. For a transcript of Henslowe’s expenses in rebuilding the playhouse, see Wickham et al., 426–31.

17 The building costs of the second Globe doubled those of the first, which suggests a level of opulence and comfort never seen before in the suburban playhouses. Bowsher and Miller, 91.
made to render more satisfactory the audience’s time at the *comedia*. Madrid’s *corrales* were overseen by both royal and civic governments, whose doubts about the moral legitimacy of popular theater were assuaged by its serving as the main source of funding for the Cofradía de la Soledad (Confraternity of Solitude) and the Cofradía de la Pasión (Confraternity of the Holy Passion), two religious brotherhoods whose charitable duties included financing the capital’s general hospital.\(^{18}\) It was, moreover, common for the *corrales’* leasing contracts to include provisions to guarantee their proper maintenance in order to lure the best acting companies into performing in Madrid. In Spain there were over twenty *corrales* in operation in the larger cities and towns such as Valencia and, above all, the wealthy commercial emporium Seville, which, like Madrid, had more than one playhouse in operation at the same time.\(^{19}\) Both the direct combination of public and private interest and the plurality of dramatic venues differed markedly from the situation in England, wherein London stood virtually alone as the country’s single important theatrical hub.

The progressive renovations of Madrid’s theaters included ever more dignified facades, improved facilities inside, and the slow substitution of the empty yard space peopled by standing *mosqueteros* (groundlings) for benches with footrests. If in 1583, a year after its public opening, the Corral del Príncipe was still a quite rudimentary yard with not much more than a make-do stage, it would end up becoming a very sophisticated acting venue, with “a stage for performing, a changing room, bleachers in the yard for the men, portable benches, eventually 95 of them, a viewing gallery for the women, private boxes or galleries with iron balconies, windows with bars or lattices, master drainage channels, roofs covering all the viewing galleries and bleachers, and, finally, . . . a cobblestone patio.”\(^{20}\) No doubt the English amphitheaters also underwent repair work de-

\(^{18}\) More on the financial management of Madrid’s *corrales* by the religious brotherhoods in Díez Borque, 1988, 20–21; Oehrlein, 210; Sanz Ayán and García García, 5–11; Shergold, 177. Additionally, Rachael Ball’s recent monograph provides an insightful comparison between the heavy involvement of the Catholic Church in the theatrical culture of Spain and the Spanish Atlantic territories and the more secular patronage model of the English-speaking theatrical world of the Renaissance.

\(^{19}\) The *contratos de arrendamiento* (leasing contracts) for Madrid’s *corrales* between 1587 and 1717 can be found in Varey, Shergold, and Davis, 67–190. For a concise chronology of the *corrales* built in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, see Greer, 2011, 304–06; Sentaurens, 83–111. In England, other than London, only Bristol (1604), York (1609), and a market town in Lancashire—and the latter only for a brief spell—had permanent, purpose-built acting spaces in which commercial companies could play before the 1660s. For more on these non-London playhouses, see Keenan, 144–64.

\(^{20}\) This is how Casiano Pellicer described the Corral del Príncipe’s improvements in his 1804 *Tratado histórico sobre el origen y progreso de la comedia y el histrionismo en España* (Hist-
spite the lack of surviving evidence, but it is also likely that if the changes had been significant—as they ended up being in the Madrid playhouses—some news of the matter would have traveled through time. One can assume that the product offered at the London amphitheaters, at least in terms of architecture, remained unaltered barring the necessary minimum. On the opposite end, the corrales’ contractually motivated organic nature—to paraphrase John Orrell—permitted them to evolve and survive well into the eighteenth century.21

Not only was the organic corral working steadily toward a higher quality of playing and playgoing, but also the de facto features of the Madrid playing venues suggest that the initial performance conditions in them were substantially better than those of the London open-air theaters, especially regarding acoustics. The builders of English and Spanish amphitheaters would have had to factor in different considerations, for their immediate environment directly affected intelligibility in their venues, much like what happens today in Shakespeare’s Globe (that is, the reconstruction in Southwark): “Acoustically, in the Globe, sound is specific, not general. Individual instruments retain their own character and personality while contributing to the ensemble of which they are part. Add to that the effects of greatly differing air temperatures, ambient noise of 1,500 people in the auditorium (700 standing) and overhead aeroplanes, and the composer quickly finds that the instrumental combination heard in the comfortable and resonant ambience of the rehearsal room—a familiar acoustic that lends itself to the artificially enhanced modern theater auditorium—seems to have aurally disintegrated.”22 Madrid was probably back then, as it is now, slightly less noisy and considerably less rainy than London. There are numerous references to how loud London was, with the incessant rolling of carts and coaches, criers advertising their wares almost as loudly as the dogs barked and the pigs squealed, and a constant ringing of church bells in the background. Madrid was no well of silence, but it was nothing compared to London with its larger and more dense population as well as its greater industrial activity, especially in

torical treatise on the origin and development of the comedia and acting in Spain), said to have been written using a (now lost) diary documenting all the Príncipe’s changes, as cited in Ruano de la Haza and Allen, 32. More in Sanz Ayán and García García, 8.

21 Orrell, 1991, 28. In his detailed study of the still-standing corral de comedias of the university city of Alcalá de Henares (around 30 km east of Madrid), Allen, 2015, 13, compares the development of corrales with the growth of trees: slow yet seamlessly steady. Today, the Teatro Corral de Comedias de Alcalá is an archaeological testament to its four centuries of performance activity. The renovation efforts have successfully managed to display simultaneously all the layers of reconstruction and reinvention throughout the venue’s history. More in Allen, 2015; Higuera Sánchez-Pardo et al.

22 Van Kampen, 82.
the suburbs. Moreover, England’s rainy climate played its part by not only adding extra layers of noise, but also impoverishing the quality of preexisting sounds, since damp air dissipates sound by lowering its acoustic reflexivity whereas dry air contains and preserves it.23 It thus seems likely that Madrid was a more aurally intelligible space than London, and that the corrales in the Habsburg capital started off with certain acoustic advantages over their English counterparts.

Regarding building materials and other physical considerations, in many respects the English and Spanish venues were very similar. Both were made of wood and plaster, which are ideal transmitters of sound: the reverberation levels are not too high, and they provide a reasonably ample frequency reception (i.e., a wide pitch range). In both cases, the main sound absorbents were the soil of the yard floor, the members of the audience, and the heavy woven fabrics of their clothing, as of the arras covering the tiring-house wall. In terms of these particular features, both acting spaces were once again remarkably alike. One minor difference is the shape of some of London’s playhouses: the higher number of surfaces in the multisided polygon that was the archetypical English amphitheater gave it a certain aural advantage over the rectangular-shaped corral, since more round-like buildings prove better at propagating and sustaining sound.24 However, other significant factors end up giving the corrales an edge over the English amphitheaters. Madrid’s Cruz and Príncipe could seat 1,500 and 1,100 playgoers, respectively, while their London contemporaries the Swan and Globe could fit approximately 3,000.25 This difference is due both to the average Madrid corral being smaller than the London theater as well as to the lower density of playgoers per square foot inside. Not only were the theategoers of Elizabethan London’s amphitheaters double the size of the corrales’ audience capacity in Madrid, but also—as mentioned above—with time a larger percentage of the London groundlings than the Madrid mosqueteros had to stand uncomfortably for the duration of the show. Conversely, the Blackfriars theater—which was by far the largest of the London indoor playhouses—could house about 600 people, all of whom would have been comfortably seated.26

Additionally, the corral supplemented its continuously improved and lengthened roofs, which progressively covered an increasingly larger portion of the yard (much more so than the English ones), by having the stage hands climb up on them and unfurl a rectangular canvas awning over what remained of the opening.

26 Gurr, 1992, 117; I. Smith, 296–97. In the same pages cited, Irwin Smith also suggests that the Blackfriars playhouse would have been “quiet” in comparison with the Globe due to the lack of “restless” standees.
This canvas, or toldo, seems to have been used in most of Spain’s open-air theaters of the time.²⁷ Its purpose was not to protect the audience from the occasional shower, as the Florentine ruler Cosimo III de’ Medici made abundantly clear in one of his visits to a Madrid corral: “when it rains it is rather uncomfortable to stand in the middle of the yard, since it is left uncovered so that light can shine through.”²⁸ According to a later description, the awning was used “to protect from the sun, but not from the rain.”²⁹ And not only would the toldo serve to disperse the natural light on sunny days, thus getting rid of possible chiaroscuro on the stage, but it would also result in providing the venue a semi-enclosed environment for better listening (fig. 2). Consequently, the sound in the corrales would no longer propagate sideways, as Bruce R. Smith demonstrates it did in the amphitheaters of London, since the surface of the canvas would produce a round sound instead of a broad one, much more like that of the indoor playhouses (fig. 3). Moreover, the toldo’s dampening quality—just like that of the

²⁷ Ruano de la Haza and Allen, 142–43, 217; Shergold, 184. A full summary of the roofing in the Madrid corrales, including the original documents and English translations for them, can be found in Allen, 1983, 88–94.
²⁸ As translated into Spanish and cited in Díez Borque, 1990, 225 (my translation into English).
²⁹ Casiano Pellicer as cited in Ruano de la Haza and Allen, 32.
audience’s clothing and the stage arras previously mentioned—did not reflect enough to produce unwanted echo, and thus created a very favorable acoustic setting for the performance of plays (fig. 4).

The habit of covering the open space in the corrales may have its origin in a different but closely related culture. In her study of sixteenth-century Florentine theater, Sara Mamone notes that for the performances in the cortile (courtyard) of the Medici Palace they covered the yard with a canvas awning, both in order to protect the guests from the afternoon’s cool or humidity and to enhance the illusory effect by giving the open space the aspect of an indoor hall. Mamone traces this practice to two sources: the habit of covering streets during fairs in order to protect merchandise, and to the Roman velarium that was used in
the Coliseum to shelter the audience. Renaissance Florentines, indeed, seem not to have been the first to notice the benefits of the isolating qualities of cloth for theatrical performances: Thomas Heywood describes in his idealized history of the theater how Romans in the days of the consul Quintus Catulus covered the bare outside and inside of their theaters with “linen cloth” and “Curtens of silke,” respectively, to protect their performance spaces from the disruptive environment. Eventually, he goes on to explain, they built fixed surrounding structures with sturdier materials. But this convention, it seems, never made it to England and its open-air playhouses. Despite the fact that “curtains could be found all over the stage in early modern [English] theaters,” and served a myriad of different semiotic purposes, there is no record of one being used as a sunshade—perhaps because it would more often than not become a sodden umbrella instead.

On the other hand, the ceiling of the London indoor theaters, in combination with more ample room per audience member (Bruce Smith calculates it would have been double in the Blackfriars than in the Globe when both were at full capacity), endowed them with significantly better acoustic conditions. Additionally, one has to consider whether the smaller amount and percentage of standing theaergoers in the corral could come closer to the level of comfort of the indoor playhouses in London. “A seated audience at an indoor venue,” Gurr remarks when discussing the Blackfriars playhouse, “is always likely to behave more politely and to be more docile and passive in its responses than an audience that is on its feet surrounding the stage that the actors are walking on.”

One last and frequently invoked barometer of acoustic quality in English playhouses is the different types of musical instruments used in open-air as opposed to enclosed theaters. It is argued that a smaller, indoor space would allow for softer instruments to be played than those used in a larger building without a
roof. Consequently, the musical staples at the open-air Globe were tambourines and trumpets, whereas at the Blackfriars one could expect to hear lutes, mandolins, bandores, violins, and flutes.35 Evidence in the printed texts of some of Shakespeare’s plays associates each of the King’s Men’s playhouses with a specific range of instruments: “Where the Globe might have used a trumpet fanfare to herald the visit of foreign dignitaries such as Aragon and Morocco in The Merchant of Venice, the Folio text, prepared for the Blackfriars, specifies a cor- net. The dumb-show in Hamlet is heralded in the 1604 quarto by trumpet-calls, but in the Folio text of 1623 by hautboys, the indoor equivalent.”36 Once again, in this crux the corral finds itself somewhere in between the amphitheater and the indoor playhouse: it was large enough to allow loud instruments (tambourines, trumpets) to be played to signal scene changes, indicate martial encounters, or cover up the noise the stage machinery made, but the environment was tranquil enough that the main instrument accompanying the frequent singing in Golden Age comedia was the Baroque guitar.37 The guitarra barroca, much like the contemporary classical guitar, was an extremely polyvalent instrument:

35 The association between quieter instruments and the private playhouses, especially Blackfriars, has also been attributed to a 1595 petition filed by the neighbors of the Blackfriars priory against the construction of a public playhouse in their precinct, which would have triggered the adoption of new instruments. That said, David Lindley challenges quite convincingly the presupposed idea that there was a significant difference in instrument usage between popular and courtly music. One example he provides is when musicians performed with tabor and pipe, traditionally associated with lower-class music, in front of none other than Queen Elizabeth herself, one of the many instances that—in Lindley’s opinion—demonstrate that “the gap between the ‘courtly’ and the ‘popular’ musics was neither as wide, nor as readily perceived, as a modern readership might anticipate”: see Lindley, 60. María Antonia Flórez’s research suggests a similar narrative for Spain, where both popular and court music relied heavily on the guitarra (also indistinctly referred to as vihuela). More in Flórez, 84–100; Gurr, 1992, 155–56; B. R. Smith, 1999, 229–30; J. S. Smith, 480–83.

36 Gurr, 1992, 156.

37 In her influential monograph on seventeenth-century Spanish theater music, Louise Stein studies the music in the plays of Lope de Vega, Cervantes, Calderón, and other Golden Age dramatists. Even though most of the music associated with Golden Age theater takes place in the entr’acte performances, there is a considerable amount of music within the comedia as well. She identifies a large number of instruments featured in the plays of Lope (“trumpets, shawms, flutes, shepherd’s pipes, bagpipes, guitars, harps, drums, tambourines, bells”), as well as their significantly different functions. Loud instruments, Stein explains, are almost always associated with a specific set of stage directions. On the other hand, actors singing and playing the guitar intertwine seamlessly with the plot. More in Stein, 15–23, 336–45. My personal thanks to Louise Stein for her suggestions and guidance regarding this topic.
at the corrales it could be played very loudly with the riff-like rasgueado (strumming) technique, or much more delicately using the punteo (plucking) style. While the easier chord playing was perhaps more present in the theater, both the rasgueado and punteo were commonly employed, which in turn suggests that the acoustic space of the corral was richer than what is presumed for the Globe and such amphitheaters in London.38

Essentially, a seventeenth-century corral de comedias during showtime was a venue with performance conditions in between those of the open-air theaters and the roofed indoor playhouses of London, and conceivably even closer to the latter than the former. In other words, from a standpoint of performance quality, there may have been little room for improvement in Madrid’s theatrical landscape, whereas in London a completely new venue format would have been required to cover such needs. The following section extends this line of inquiry by introducing the location of the commercial playhouses within the cities as well as the audience arrangement within the venues as two additional explanations of why the corrales survived the entire early modern period as the sole commercial theater option in Madrid.

THE PLACES OF THE STAGES

Culture and/or entertainment could be found everywhent and everywhere in sixteenth-century London and Madrid, but there were certain areas in these cities in which theater had a stronger presence. Where the playhouses were located was, needless to say, not an arbitrary matter, and understanding the relationship between the acting venues and their more immediate geographical, demographic, and social environments can reveal much about the role theater played in these specific contexts. The following pages look at the districts in early modern London and Madrid in which the playhouses were located, and how these neighborhoods’ identities played a part in shaping the theatrical scene in these two cities. In particular, this section focuses on the parish of San Sebastián, home to Madrid’s two corrales. Its central location helps explains the lack of an elite indoor alternative in the Habsburg capital, whose success in attracting a more privileged audience provides a social counterpoint to the more popular crowds attending the suburban amphitheaters of London.

38 Sebastián de Covarrubias, in 1611, wrote that the rasgueado technique transforms the guitar into “a cowbell, it becomes so easy to play . . . that even stable boys consider themselves musicians with a guitar in hand.” More in Flórez, 84–86, 93–106; Covarrubias as cited in Flórez, 95.
London did not develop its bifocal theater system overnight. The first short-lived attempt to erect a purpose-built playhouse in London took place in the northeastern district of Mile End, where in 1567 John Brayne and James Burbage converted a patch of farmland into a rudimentary scaffolded yard for putting on plays and other forms of entertainment. A short decade later, in 1576, the same James Burbage built the Theatre playhouse in the neighboring suburb of Shoreditch, and a year later another playhouse, the Curtain, opened its doors right next door. The Theatre and the Curtain were the first structures purposefully built for the performances of plays in England. Before that, players temporarily converted inns, innyards, town-hall common rooms, and other similar venues into improvised acting spaces. By the end of the sixteenth century new amphitheatres began to emerge in other suburban districts of the capital, mainly the red-light district of Southwark (fig. 5). This borough, across the Thames River from the City of London, was best known for being the home of the Globe theater, the principal open-air playhouse of Shakespeare’s playing company from 1599 onward. It also housed two of the other amphitheatres of the time, the Rose and the Swan, in addition to the animal-baiting arena—or bear garden, as it was also known.40

A crucial reason for building the Elizabethan amphitheatres in these popular extramural suburbs is because they housed many of the capital’s “liberties,” that is, areas within London’s wards that were jurisdictionally independent from the City. Although plays were also performed in certain inns inside the City walls and within its jurisdiction during the sixteenth century, the City’s government’s animosity toward and persecution of the theatrical community is well documented. For this reason, all the earliest London amphitheatres were built within liberties that were under the jurisdiction of neighboring counties (Surrey for Southwark, Middlesex for Shoreditch) instead of the City. These zones were, as Janette Dillon reminds us, “free of city controls, but crucially determined by the city.”41 It was precisely their administratively confusing and confused nature that made the building of purpose-built playhouses in Elizabethan London possible: the first theater entrepreneurs took advantage of the relatively loose ties of the liberties with the City to elude the local authorities’ desire to have no commercial theater in London.42

39 Wickham et al., 290–94.
40 For an up-to-date and concise-yet-thorough summary of all of London’s open-air playhouses, see Ichikawa, 1–8.
41 Dillon, 33.
42 For a clear exploration of early modern London’s liberties, a topic much debated ever since Steven Mullaney foregrounded it in his seminal The Place of the Stage (which the title of this section echoes), see Kozusko.
It is important to note that the suburbs in which these amphitheatres were built had distinctly popular reputations, which became symbiotically associated with the playhouses themselves. As the intramural City reached an almost unmanageable population density, the better-off migrants preferred to move to the West End near the Inns of Court and Westminster, whereas the middling sort—the period term for what was emerging as the middle class—and the poorer migrants settled in the remaining suburbs, especially those to the east and south of the City.43 In the case of Southwark, to its poorer status relative to the City one has to add its reputation for being the “pleasure-ground for the more closely regulated community to the north.”44 Because of the Kent thoroughfare road and the City’s policy of shutting the London Bridge gates at nightfall, the borough

43 In addition to the previously given population statistics, it is worth noting that the City of London was relatively small in geographical size: approximately 3 km from east to west, and considerably less from north to south. See Browner; Clark, 251; Keene, 2001, 11. More on the term middling sort and social ranks in London and England in Earle; Leinwand; Wrightson.

44 Browner (unpaginated).
had been full of inns for travelers since the Middle Ages. Hand in hand with the innkeeping world came another set of closely related trades, prominently the provision of food and drink as well as prostitution. These two leisure businesses had close ties with the theatrical world (in that these services were offered also in and around the playhouses), and played an important part in creating the ecosystem within which commercial playhouses could flourish.

If the markedly popular identity of the London open-air playhouse districts is easy to detect, the same cannot be said of the parish of San Sebastián, home to the two permanent public playhouses of Madrid’s theatrical Golden Age. The Corral del Príncipe and Corral de la Cruz, named after the streets in which they were found, were located in the upper side of the capital’s second largest parroquia (parish), an area nowadays known as el barrio de las letras (the poets’ quarter) due to the many famous writers who lived and commuted in this parish (fig. 6). However, reconstructing the identity of a neighborhood in an early modern city such as Madrid is extremely difficult, especially if one is referring to informal communities and not to formal administrative boundaries, either eccle-
siastical (parishes) or secular/municipal (wards and quarters). Very little evidence regarding Habsburg Madrid’s topographic and social stratification has been uncovered, and the few historians who have broached the topic have focused almost exclusively on the parish as a territorial base. As if this were not obstacle enough, by the seventeenth century the capital of Spain was divided into only thirteen parishes, an exceptionally small number for a city of its size—and much more so when compared to the 113 parishes of London.48

Early modern Madrid’s parishes have been subcategorized either as “blocked”—unable to grow due to their location in the city center—or as “expanding,” that is,

48 Harding, 111-15. The only other topographical division known for early modern Madrid is that of the cuarteles (quarters or macro-wards). In 1604 a royal order divided the city into six cuarteles, each headed by an alcalde de corte (court mayor) with a staff of alguaciles (sheriffs), escribanos (scribes), and other employees to aid him in maintaining public order. The theater district was located in the cuartel known as El barranco, which was renamed San Sebastián by 1665 to match the better-known parish name. By 1681 San Sebastián was divided into two cuarteles (I and II). More on cuarteles in Cubo Machado, 25–26.
on the periphery and thus able to absorb terrain with which to resettle newcomers. The macroparish of San Sebastián, the second largest in the villa, was essentially a mixture of the two types, with the northern border situated in the heart of the city and its southern limit reaching the natural boundary that was the Manzanares River. It is safe to affirm that the San Sebastián parish in its entirety was not an indivisible quarter inhabited by a homogeneous community, but beyond this little else can be said about the parish with absolute confidence.

To be sure, the parish of San Sebastián had a traditionally popular and artisan identity that can be traced back to medieval times; this humble reputation only increased when Madrid was made capital in 1561, since logistical constraints forced most of the flood of new immigrants to settle in the “expanding” parishes. All the same, it is highly likely that popular opinion distinguished two very different districts within the parish. As Miguel Ángel García Sánchez shows time and again in his research on poverty in the Habsburg capital, San Sebastián stood out as a district of social, occupational, and financial contrasts. Topographically, this was best reflected in Calle de Atocha, the street running from the city’s Plaza Mayor to the outskirts of the capital and which separated the parish into two distinct halves. Most of the area south of the Calle de Atocha was located outside the medieval city limits: anything that was not part of the old ciudad was considered an arrabal (shantytown, or suburb in the Southwark or Shoreditch sense), the once-empty stretch of land new-coming families and minority communities made their own. Many immigrants settled in the southern sectors of San Sebastián, such as the north-south axis known as the Calle de Lavapiés that gives its name today to the popular area of the city. This in turn explains why most of the commercial activity in the neighborhood (around 77 percent, according to historian Alfredo Alvar Ezquerra) took place in the southern side of the parish, marked in dark gray (fig. 7), as well as why all the known nobles and better-off residents of San Sebastián inhabited the northern half of

49 Larquié, 59–61. Alfredo Alvar Ezquerra adds a third category and divides the parish types into parroquias cortesanas (court parishes), muertas/bloqueadas (dead/blocked parishes), and vivas/expansivas (living/expanding parishes), as cited in García Sánchez, 2003, 49.
51 In his breakdown of late sixteenth-century Madrid into six economic barrios (neighborhoods) for tax purposes, Alvar Ezquerra considers the Calle de Atocha, one of the city’s main arteries, as the border between two somewhat different districts. More in Alvar Ezquerra, 246–54.
52 Pinto Crespo and Madrazo Madrazo, 115. Another popular name used to refer to the northern edge of the parroquia in question is Huertas (Orchards), a toponym alluding to the area’s agricultural activity before the great migration influx beginning in the 1560s. More in Simón Díaz, 86.
the district (shown in the map in a lighter shade of gray), many of them on the streets of the corrales themselves.\(^{53}\)

Regarding prostitution (a factor often brought up when defining a district’s reputation), San Sebastián was once again a mixed landscape. Baroque writer Alonso de Castillo Solórzano refers to the parish’s sexual and theatrical activities as prominent and interconnected attractions for the capital’s mozos (gallants) in his satirical novel *Las harpías en Madrid* (1631). “The neighborhoods near [the parish church of] San Sebastián,” he writes, “were the most frequented in all of Madrid by the gallant youth, due to both its proximity to the two corrales de comedias as well as to the many professional ladies who live there.”\(^{54}\) The parish’s southern end—known as the Barranco de Lavapiés—was reputed to be the city’s focal point of prostitution by the second half of the sixteenth century, if not before. The mujeres enamoradas (women in love), as they were euphemistically referred to, also worked in the northern half of the parish. In fact, a public com-

\(^{53}\) Greer, 2000, 395–97; Thomas, 29. Regarding commerce, most parishes in Madrid had similarly specialized reputations, although none of them were socially homogeneous. More in Corral, 26–27; Larquié, 60–62. Reference to Alvar Ezquerra’s research in García Sánchez, 2003, 74–75.

\(^{54}\) Castillo Solórzano, 53.
plaint was filed in 1616 with the local authorities about three *damas de corte* (court ladies), yet another typical euphemism, who lived on the same Calle de la Cruz that housed the *corral* of that name. However, prostitution in the upper side of San Sebastián, especially the main brothel in the street that used to be called Francos and today is known as Cervantes, catered to aristocrats, a far cry from the clientele of the *casas públicas* (public houses) at the opposite end of the district. And the aforementioned Barranco de Lavapiés was not only the nucleus of Madrid’s red-light activity, it was also one of the four official waste dumps for the capital.55

These residential and occupational features underlay the significant disparity between the urban landscape of the northern half of the parish, in which the *corrales* were located, and the southern half. Although there is no hard evidence to corroborate any explicit marking of internal subdivisions within the macroparishes of early modern Madrid, it seems reasonable to assume that the commercial playhouses were widely seen to be in a more middle-to-upper-class neighborhood.56 Its elite status was, if anything, made more visible by the contrast with the poorer southern district literally downhill from its heights. Thus, the environments in which the London amphitheaters and the Madrid *corrales* were built, although at first sight similar, appear very different after one focuses more closely on the details of each district’s fabric and functions.

**PLAYGOING SEGREGATION**

The popular and, to a certain extent, insalubrious identity of the extramural districts of the first London theaters played a significant role in the emergence of alternative and more aristocratic venues within City walls. Indeed, the reinsertion of the indoor intramural playhouses into London’s commercial theater network had important social connotations and consequences. To begin with, the upper-class playgoers who could not attend court performances did not need to go to the suburbs to see plays any longer. Unlike the amphitheaters, London’s indoor playhouses were located within the limits of the City, and not in the poorer suburbs outside the city walls. But perhaps even more importantly, the wealthier theatergoers would no more need to rub shoulders with their poorer


56 The most complete census following the creation of the *cuarteles*, known as the *Censo de Floridablanca* (1787), shows that the lawyers, merchants, court employees, and *hidalgos* (gentlemen) of the parish tended to reside in the northeastern wards in which the *corrales* were located. The census also documents a higher concentration of working-class population, both in urban trades and agriculture in the fields adjacent to the city, in the *cuarteles* southeast of Atocha street. More in Galán Cabilla, 26.
neighbors during performances. This final section extends the same socioeco-
nomic line of inquiry from the previous section inside the playhouse itself, in
order to illustrate how the way audience members were arranged in the three dif-
ferent venues once more helps explain why Madrid ended up not needing a com-
pletely different space in order to satisfy its theatergoers’ needs.

As is well known, the English amphitheaters adopted the layered fee collect-
ing system of the baiting arenas, in which the further up in comfort and style the
theatergoer climbed the higher fees he or she would have to pay. William Lam-
barde’s 1576 *Perambulation of Kent* explains it best when he writes that, “no
more than such as to go to Paris Garden, the Bel Savage, or Theater, to behold
bear baiting, Interludes or fence play, can account of any pleasant spectacle un-
less they first pay one penny at the gate, another at the entry of the scaffold, and
the third for a quiet standing.” While this was the standard formula, all Lon-
don entertainment arenas had their own idiosyncratic procedures, some more
refined than others, and this system of payment faithfully represented the social
gradation and ranking that dominated within early modern English society.

That said, such a model could at the same time paradoxically undermine the
hierarchical nature of the playhouse, as Paul Yachnin points out, since a mem-
ber of the lower classes could seem to be richer than he or she really was by pur-
chasing access to a higher position. One of the passages in Ben Jonson’s
satirical contract for his audience members in the prologue of *Bartholomew Fair*
(ca. 1614) may be alluding precisely to this practice:

It is further agreed that every person here, have his or their free-will of cen-
sure, to like or dislike at their own charge, the Author having now departed
with his right: It shall be lawful for any man to judge his six pen’orth his
twelve pen’orth, his place so to his eighteen pence, 2 shillings, half a crowne,
to the value of his place: Provided always get not above his wit.

The indoor playhouses were officially as public as the amphitheaters across
the Thames in that anyone who could afford them could enter. However, as
noted above, the high prices these theaters charged—more than five times those
of the amphitheaters—made frequent visits to these venues quite forbidding for
playgoers with lesser means. The most common patrons of the indoor play-
houses were thus members of the aristocracy, Inns of Court students, and the
wealthy middling sort. In other words, the emergence of the indoor public the-

57 As cited in White, 1999, 154.
59 Yachnin, 269.
60 Jonson, A5r. Passage selected by and cited in Yachnin, 269.
aters in London, as intermediate performance venues located between the aristocratic court and the demotic open-air playhouses, seems to have addressed the particular needs of a city with a growing nonaristocratic stratum: a middle class with means. This was less true of Madrid, a city whose middle class was large by Spanish standards but which paled in comparison with that of London.

Madrid may have had a smaller and less assertive middle class, but this was compensated at least in part by a robust tradition of elite theatricality, as well as a solid infrastructure for its performance. Although Philip II is generally seen as having been notoriously uninterested in the theater, his successors Philip III and Philip IV markedly enjoyed it to the point that both monarchs ordered venues for court performances to be built in the capital during their reigns. Thus under Philip III a theater was raised in 1607 in the patio of la Casa del Tesoro (Treasurer’s House) next to the Royal Palace, while the Retiro Palace theater built by his son Philip IV in the 1630s provided a space for court theater that was unprecedented in both size and splendor. \(^{61}\) In addition to performances at the palaces, aristocrats in Madrid often hired companies to perform *particulares* (private performances) in their own homes in front of a select audience of guests. In England, private performances in nobles’ houses also took place, but not as frequently as in Spain, where they became a cultural staple: the playwright Antonio Salas Barbadillo wrote in 1621 that in Madrid there were “two *comedia* performances each day, and if you count the *particulares* it could go up to six.”\(^{62}\) Moreover, that the *corrales* were located in a relatively well-reputed area must have been one less concern to address in comparison with London’s elite having to travel to the poorer and frankly notorious suburbs. Since Madrid was a smaller city than London and most of its wealthy theatergoers were in one way or another linked to the court, an alternative venue to fit the elite members of society who could not attend performances in an aristocratic environment was, it seems, less of a necessity. That the monarchs themselves might have also frequented the popular playhouses would have legitimized the locales in unequivocal fashion: although it is unknown whether Philip III ever attended a public show, it is common lore that Philip IV himself often frequented the capital’s *corrales* in disguise and that he had numerous affairs with prominent actresses of the time, one of whom—María Calderón, popularly known as “la Calderona”—mothered his bastard son Juan José de Austria.\(^{63}\) From the point of view of the powerful, then, there was little need for a more reputable public alternative than the one that the king himself found suitable.

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\(^{61}\) For a more nuanced discussion of Philip II’s relationship with the theater, see Sanz Ayán.

\(^{62}\) As cited in Barbadillo de la Fuente, 244.

\(^{63}\) More in Deleito y Piñuela, 23–27.
Furthermore, although Spain did not have a Blackfriars with which to segregate playgoers of different social strata, there is one way in which the Madrid elite could have been kept sufficiently isolated from the mass audience down below without needing to resort to a completely different venue. Madrid’s corrales operated with a fee-layered scheme similar to that of the English amphitheaters, with a progressive admission cost for the popular seats: the mosqueteros (groundlings) paid twelve maravedis at the gate, and a second fee of four maravedis at the second door; those who wanted to sit on a bench in the lower floor paid an extra sixteen maravedis.64 However, an important distinction between the inside of a London and a Madrid playhouse was the segregation of nonaristocratic women and men; women in Spanish theaters, unlike in English ones, were not allowed to view the play from the yard and had a separate gallery reserved for them on the first floor. The entrance to the cazuela (stewpot)—as the women’s gallery was called—was through a separate door on the street. Members of the female public were charged the same fixed fee, and special watchmen were hired to protect them from sexual harassment by male playgoers or men simply passing by.65 The remaining galleries in the corral were reserved for the privileged playgoers: the desván (attic)—also referred to as tertulia (gathering)—for the clergy and academics; the aposentos (rooms) and the rejas (gratings), the terms used to refer to private rooms, for aristocratic men who rented them out for full seasons and who would often bring along guests (of both sexes); and the aposento de la villa permanently reserved for local government officials who wished to attend the event. And what is most interesting is that access to most of these private rooms took place through the neighboring houses. After all, the majority of the private

64 In early modern Spanish currency, the maravedi was the smallest and most frequently used monetary value. The relation goes as follows: 34 maravedis to a real (crown), 375 maravedis to a ducado (ducat), and 440 maravedis to an escudo. In the first half of the seventeenth century, four ducats were approximately one English pound sterling (and thus fifteen maravedis being roughly the equivalent to a penny); thus, the cost of admission in London and Madrid public playhouses would have been roughly the same, about one-fifth of the period’s average daily wage. More in Albrecht, 54–55; Allen, 1983, 6; Brown and Elliott, 257; Varey and Shergold, 33–35.

65 While it is possible that in an early phase women and men shared the same spaces of the corrales, criticism from anti-thespian moralists soon led the playhouses to segregate the paying audience according to sex. More in Allen, 1983, 28; Sanz Ayán and García García, 7; Varey and Shergold, 31–33. Also, it is believed that in certain exceptionally large corrales, such as the Príncipe, there may have been a second women’s gallery as well (more in Ruano de la Haza). Regarding the presence of women in the English amphitheaters, there is much debate as to how many middle-to-lower-class women attended theatrical events (apparently not too many, proportionally), and if so, how this would have taken place. A good summary of the discussion is Mann.
boxes, the so called *aposentos laterales* (side rooms), structurally belonged to houses overlooking the converted patio that was a *corral de comedias*.

On a final note, the upper galleries of the *corrales* were much more opaque than those of the London amphitheaters in which the nobility sat in an open gallery for all to see. In fact, at least at the beginning, they were simply rooms with small grated windows in the apartments surrounding the theater yard (these boxes were both commonly and administratively referred to as *aposentos* and *rejas* in the surviving documents). Only later on were the walls torn down to make galleries out of said chambers, which made the playhouses look more like


67 There are references to private boxes, or lord’s rooms, in some English amphitheaters as well, which could apparently be “reserved in advance.” I. Smith, 294–95. The Hope had two boxes “fitt and decent for gentlemen to sitt in,” and there is debate as to whether the “orchestra” that appears in De Witt’s sketch of the Swan playhouse was also a room reserved for the wealthy theatergoers; De Witt mentions a “lord’s room,” although “orchestra” would have meant precisely that in many Renaissance theaters around Europe as well. Bowsher and Miller, 115–16; Gurr, 1992, 147; Leacroft and Leacroft, 54. Additionally, during the 1628 performance of *Henry VIII* at the new Globe, the Duke of Buckingham—who commissioned and paid for the show—sat in the lord’s room above the stage. Yachnin, 275–76. For the full De Witt text, see Holmes.
the corral reconstruction in Almagro, the Spanish equivalent of Shakespeare’s Globe (fig. 8). But despite their progressive uncovering, many of these boxes would have been screened by celosías (lattices) or rejas (gratings). This would effectively allow for the corral to have substantially different types of playgoing spaces within the same venue. Not surprisingly, the aposentos for the nobility and the government officials were adorned and equipped with all sorts of luxury items that suggest that viewing a performance from these boxes was much more comfortable in contrast to the same experience in the rest of the space reserved for less deserving playgoers.

CONCLUSION

Shakespearean scholarship has always taken slightly for granted the coexistence of the popular open-air and elite indoor playhouses in early modern London. There are various reasons for this parti pris, and among the more important are the contemporary need for class and wealth segregation and the market retailing of lifestyle improvements— notions that, needless to say, translate perfectly from the Elizabethan and Jacobean days to our own. This is exactly what venues like the Blackfriars, St. Paul’s, and the other so-called private playhouses offered to the wealthy Londoner: a ticket to social exclusivity in the shape of one of the capital’s main forms of attraction, in the best conditions available, and surrounded by only those as wealthy as oneself. As to why it took over a decade to reestablish these spaces of exclusivity, between when the Blackfriars and St. Paul’s closed their doors in the late 1580s and the reemergence of the children’s companies at the turn of the century, perhaps it was simply a matter of time, or of timing. Perhaps the novelty of the o-shaped theaters in Shoreditch and Southwark wore out and lost their appeal after almost two decades of commercial playgoing. Perhaps the acoustic and visibility deficiencies of the open-

68 More on the corral in Almagro in Allen, 1991a; García de León Álvarez, 2000; García de León Álvarez, 2002.

69 In fact, the surviving documents for the Corral de la Cruz metonymically refer to its lateral boxes as celosías. Davis; Ruano de la Haza and Allen, 119, 135.

70 Indeed, the value of the items in the aposentos must have been such that many different forms of locks, bolts, and other security devices were required in order to keep people from intruding or burglarizing. Ruano de la Haza and Allen, 134–36.

71 It is worth noting that most descriptions of the amphitheaters that survive were made by foreigners visiting London, and that the descriptions focus on the novelty of the playhouse shape, unheard of in their home countries. The open-air amphitheaters did attract distinguished audiences even after the private playhouses opened, but the most detailed descriptions of such visits come from tourists; perhaps the locals felt this sense of wonder in the first years—or even decades—as well. More in Bowsher and Miller, 16; Gurr, 1987, 70–71.
air theaters finally caught up with them. This would explain why all the London playhouses built after the Hope in 1614 were indoors. Moreover, that the most expensive seats in the private playhouses were those in the pit, where the groundlings would have been standing in the amphitheater, instead of the galleries, indicates an interest in procuring a better location from which to see and hear the play. A new, more elitist, and better-provided playhouse within City jurisdiction would surely have satisfied these needs.

This dynamic does not seem to apply to the theatrical landscape of Golden Age Madrid: a Blackfriars equivalent in the Spanish capital was never in the books. Not because the wealthier Madrileños were any less driven by a pursuit (and display) of a higher standard of living over those considered one’s inferiors, but because the corrales de comedias had found a way of making the conditions of performance, as well as the segregation of theatergoers, satisfactory and efficient enough that a completely different venue was not required. The best answer to the question of the lack of an equivalent to London’s Blackfriars in Madrid, thus, would be another question: why build a Spanish Blackfriars if the Spanish Globe was more than enough?

72 Gurr, 1987, 36–39; I. Smith, 296. Gurr also discusses acoustic and visibility problems in the indoor playhouses (Gurr, 1987, 40–43), but these were not comparable to those of the amphitheaters.
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