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ECHOES OF COMEDY: INFLUENCES OF SPANISH THEATRE IN THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE AND THE NETHERLANDS IN THE HAPSBURG ERA¹

*Iluminando a Helicón
Noble trasunto de Apolo
Das luz al béglico polo
Y al Hispano, admiración*

[*Illuminating Helicon
Noble representation of Apollo
You give light to the Belgian pole
And to the Spaniard, admiration*]

These are the four first lines of a laudatory decima by Don Juan de Amezquita — a gentleman from Granada’s municipal oligarchy, belonging to a family engaged in leasing royal incomes²— in praise of poet and playwright Miguel de Barrios. It was written in the foreword of a book entitled *Flor de Apolo*, apparently published in Brussels, although it actually appeared in Amsterdam³ in 1665. According to his devoted admirer, Don Miguel’s writings, including his comedies, gave solace and pleasure to readers in the Netherlands and Iberia alike. They were in circulation across both territories in their printed versions, as testified by the existence of a copy of the book preserved in the National Library in Madrid and once owned by Don Juan Sanz Dorador⁴, a member of the group of Portuguese Jewish *converso* financiers from Portugal who were operating in the Peninsula during the second half of the 17th century; he may have acquired it as a gift or he may have ordered it from one of his correspondents in Amsterdam.

¹“Ecos de Comedia: Influencias del Teatro español en el Sacro Imperio y los Países Bajos en tiempos de los Austrias” in *Teatro y Fiestas del siglo de Oro en tierras europeas de los Austrias*. Madrid, SEACEX, 2003, p. 94-106.

² More specifically, Luis de Acosta Amezquita was lessor between 1671 and 1674 of sales tax and a small percentage of Granada sugar. A.G.S. C.M.C. 3^a ép. Leg. 3479

³ Since 1995 a number of scholars have insisted that this book was published in Amsterdam, although the printing location was faked so it would appear to have been published in the city of Brussels. There were commercial reasons for this, as customers in the southern Netherlands would not have misgivings in acquiring the work.

⁴ BNE 3/63064

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Bernardo Eliesneher, another financier and agent for the Fugger family in Madrid during the early 17th century, owned a large library with more than one hundred and sixty books, including "... *veinte libros pequeños en alemán uno con otro.. y otros trece de cuartilla (..)* " ["... *twenty small books in German, all with each other.. and another thirteen in quarto (..)*"] of which no other details are given except for the price and that they were sold in Madrid at public auction sometime during 1612⁵ .

Also in the National Library of Vienna is a manuscript with comedies and interludes by Castillo Solórzano⁶, originally owned by Don Fernando Afán de Rivera, Duke of Alcalá. The manuscript was produced as a personal gift for the Duke on the occasion of "... *su embarcación en el Grao de Valencia para el Reino de Nápoles*" ["... *his departure from the Port of Valencia for the Kingdom of Naples*"]. Finding this volume in Vienna comes as no surprise, as the Duke died in Villach in 1637.

The young student Fabricio, the main character of a work entitled *Jalourse studentin*, a direct adaptation of Lope de Vega's *La escolástica celosa*, describes an educational journey taking him to Leuven, Douai, Orleans, Salamanca, Alcalá, Barcelona, Padua, Heidelberg, Cambridge, Oxford and finally Coimbra, before returning to his home city The Hague. Although he was a fictional character, his experience was not so different from that of another young man - this time in real life - who ended up in Salamanca in the early 17th century and was such a regular spectator of comedies that he recorded the titles and names of the companies of players in his diary⁷.

People, ideas, books and leaflets were in circulation all over Europe in the 16th and 17th century and for obvious political reasons, they were more prolific in the regions governed by the two branches of the Hapsburg family tree. The theatre performed in the

⁵ A.H.P.N.M. prot. 2845, fol. 1428v.

⁶ Specifically Manuscript 13.181 talks about him. PAOLESSI, R.: "Casa de Regozixo. Un manuscrito del siglo XVII". CICHON, P (Ed.): *Actas de las Primeras jornadas de Hispanistas en Austria*. Viena, 1996, pages 145-148. The manuscript contains a collection of short novels told under the pretext of amusing a lady recovering from a grave illness at carnival time. It has an introduction and four parts called *Holguras* that include stories and the interlude *El prevenido* together with two one-day comedies entitled *El Barbador* and *La prueba de médicos*.

⁷ SOMMAIA, G. da: *Diario de un estudiante de Salamanca*. Edition and introduction by HALEY, G. Universidad de Salamanca 1977.

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Netherlands and in the Holy Roman Empire during the 16th and 17th centuries⁸ was also influenced by Spanish Golden Age theatre, either as topical inspiration from afar or by means of translations and adaptations.

Theatre tradition in lands of the Holy Roman Empire prior to contact with Spanish comedy: school theatre and carnivalesque comedy

School theatre, both the Protestant and the Catholic form produced in the 16th century in German-speaking territories, came from humanist drama and in many ways it was the outward sign of the reaction against the persistence of religious theatre traditions from the Middle Ages⁹. Protestant theatre arose in regions where confessional controversy was particularly lively, such as Saxony, the Upper Rhine and Alsace. Its primary source was Greek and Latin classic drama taken from the original and translations into the vernacular. Reformists like Melanchthon and Luther expressly recommended that students study writers of classic Roman comedy and that their dramas should be performed in schools.

The connection between Protestantism, school and theatre gave rise to a large number of playwrights who used school drama as a medium for propaganda¹⁰. Aimed at reaching the masses, Neo-Latin drama was translated or rewritten in German, but the formal model continued to be based on classic drama. More than a hundred playwrights developed *Schuldrama* for the 16th century. Perhaps the three most significant were Joachim Greff (1510-1552), Paul Rebhun (1505-1546) and Sixt Birk (1501-1554). However, it was always cultivated in the small circle of humanist Latin experts as well as in higher education establishments and universities, which is why it never became anything other than an educational and elitist form of theatre. In the 1720s and 30s, German Baroque poet Martín Opitz (1597-1639), urged German writers to model themselves on classic French and Italian classic authors when writing their Baroque dramas (*Trauerspiel*) aimed at a wider audience. Tragedies by Baroque playwrights

⁸ I am deliberately excluding court theatre and Baroque festival as far as possible, since both are dealt with elsewhere.

⁹ On all these issues, see CURTIUS, E.R.: *Literatura europea y Edad Media latina*. Mexico. F.C.E. 1948.

¹⁰ EHRSTINE, Glenn: *Theater, Culture and Community in Reformation Bern, 1523-1556*. Brill, Netherland, 2002.

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Silesia Andreas Gryphius (1616-1664), Daniel Casper von Lohenstein (1635-1683) and Hallman were performed in Breslau on school theatre stages cultivated in the city's Protestant colleges, as they were to some extent written for this kind of theatre.

School drama, albeit a peculiar kind, was developed by Jesuits in German-speaking territories from the mid-16th century to well into the 18th century. It arose at the same time as the Catholic Counter Reformation with the appearance and spread of the Company of Jesus, founded in 1540, becoming a permanent and fixed part of the teaching of rhetoric delivered in the Order's schools.

Jesuit schools were serious competition as far as Protestant school theatre was concerned. Works performed in educational and public venues, exhibited on solemn occasions and at end of term celebrations were at the service of the Counter Reformation. The southern regions of Germany and Austria were where Jesuit drama was at its strongest. The Company of Jesus contributed no theories or forms of its own to produce its drama and theatre pieces, resorting to existing traditional dramatic forms and theatrical practices that were already widespread in their areas of influence, such as religious drama, morality plays, bourgeois comedy and school drama. They also incorporated humanist drama, with strict observance of its use of Latin.

To make their performances easier to understand, they published a kind of illustrated programme called *Perioche* with a detailed description in German of the content of each act and scene. We could interpret this as evidence of an apparent contradiction between the purpose of effective evangelising and that of preserving Latin in their performances. The apparent paradox can be explained, firstly because the Jesuits' Counter Reformist missionary purpose was aimed at a cultured social group. Secondly, in performances of these dramas, Latin flowed in a similar way to how it was heard in liturgical events and religious services, instilling respect and veneration in the majority of spectators who did know the language.

From a theatrical point of view, Jesuit drama distanced itself clearly from the humanist drama model and from Protestant school theatre, relying more on sensationalism. At first, large-scale outdoor sets were used that provided enough space for displaying

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impressive mass scenes, but in the 17th century tastes changed to favour salon-style venues that not only had the effect of concentrating the dramatic action but also enabled the latest modern stage techniques to be used. The similarity between the theatrical practice preferred by the Company of Jesus and the way court theatre was staged, particularly the staging of Italian opera, became visibly apparent in the 17th century.

This type of drama that had been developing strongly since 1580 shows certain preferences in terms of theme and content. For example, in the early 17th century, drama about martyrdom was popular and from the mid-17th century it had also spread to Vienna, where the preference was for historical themes, with the special genre of *Ludi Caesari*. Its creator was Nicolaus von Avancini (1611-1686), Jesuit and Tridentine professor of rhetoric and theology. In his *Pietas Victrix* (1659) he took the example of Constantine the Great and his victory over the enemies of the church, lionising the Austrian monarchs as Constantine's successors. The conscious orientation of these dramas towards exaltation of the Hapsburg dynasty, plus the active participation of the Imperial court in their performance, turned them into a quasi-official form of Baroque state theatre. However, in addition to this peculiar form of Jesuit theatre, the genre's finest moment came with the work by the Munich professor of rhetoric Jacob Bidermann (1578-1639) who, with his *Cenodoxus* (1602), produced the most important Jesuit drama of all those written on German soil. The work, traditionally considered to be one of the sources for Goethe's *Faust*, narrates the story of the famous, elegant and hypocritical Doctor of Paris who eventually falls victim to eternal condemnation. But whether they were plays about saints or martyrs, on biblical or historical themes, it was basically about glorifying the triumphant church.

To find the echoes of certain popular roots on German-speaking stages one has to look at the *Meistersingers* and at *carnavalesque performance* in particular. Although there were no public theatres in the 16th century in the German-speaking area, one kind of drama had deeply urban roots and maintained secular forms of performance dating back to the late Middle Ages, combined to a certain extent with the genre of medieval religious performance.

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In its different variations this theatre reflected the political and religious issues of the day, although it also frequently revealed a freer literary ambition with regard to the themes and motives of the time, especially in music drama. The development of this genre was mainly located in the south of today's Germany and in Austria.

Meistersingers were usually residents in an organised association governed by the guilds and set up to practise the arts of poetry and music in a characteristic expression of the artistic efforts of simple townsfolk, mainly artisans. It had its heyday in the second half of the 15th century and in the 16th century. The leading schools of *Meistergesang* were founded in Mainz, Augsburg (1449), Sterzing in the Tyrol, Strasburg (1492) and especially in the imperial city of Nuremberg (1450). The artistic profile of these associations was controlled by strict public regulations and compliance was generally overseen by four inspectors. The *Meistersingers* did not just learn technical aspects such as rhyme or musical appreciation. They also learnt how to perfect the content, themes and moral message in the songs. For the *Meistersingers*, their art was a work of God and a useful way of occupying one's time, in short, a combination of ethical, instructive and pleasant activities. The culmination of the *Meistersingers'* activity were contests and competitions¹¹.

Like *Meistergesang* and often written by the same authors, the middle class *carnival comedies* originally performed between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday served as entertainment for this layer of society. Carnavalesque comedy arose in the middle classes and represented middle-class interests. Satirical pieces making reference to other social groups started to appear, expressing opposition to anything that was not urban-related; it was against villains, gentlemen and, above all, against peasants. They were performed in taverns or private meeting places and the actors were nearly always colleagues from the same guild. Some one hundred and fifty theatre pieces date from the period between 1430 and 1500, generally consisting of no more than about three hundred verses and lasting anywhere between five minutes and half an hour.

¹¹ The central theme of Wagner's opera, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868) is based on the activity of the Meistersingers and his main character, Hans Sachs, is an idealised version of the real-life figure.

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The early serial structure, with the prologue and epilogue spoken by separate orators and in which a series of unconnected figures narrated a story, gave rise to action comedy. This form was a step forward for theatre as characters stopped interacting directly with the audience and began to act out their roles within a closed fictional framework.

In the 16th century this tradition produced the exceptional character of Nuremberg poet and playwright Hans Sachs (1494-1576), a Meistersinger belonging to the middle class guild of master shoemakers. On his return from a journey on which he learned his trade, taking him to the Tyrol, the Netherlands and central Germany, he settled in Nuremberg in 1520 and became a famous Meistersinger. His extraordinarily extensive poetry work includes nearly two hundred dramas. He wrote around eighty pieces of carnivalesque farce in its strictest traditional form, depicting simple scenes from domestic life, customs and language from the period¹². In these dramas, Sachs was able to connect with the old Nuremberg tradition, creating a novel form of drama that was much more developed overall and became regarded as the classic form of the genre. Hans Sachs worked with a huge variety of themes and content: burlesque motifs, the Italian Renaissance novel, popular books and topics of his own invention.

What is really interesting about these classic carnivalesque comedy sketches by Sachs, the same as with secular comic drama in the late Middle Ages, is the satirical trivialisation of human faults and weaknesses in general. However, they do not contain drastic and obscene carnivalesque buffoonery, plus they lack the satirical biting tone that mocks human vices and failings. These features were replaced by warm and sympathetic humour blended with an instructive, moralising and benevolent approach.

The same cast of characters, with special preference for the figure of the peasant, on which the obsession with ridicule is offloaded, is also shared by the comic interlude. Based on the burlesque sketches of the Middle Ages, its main sources were the exemplary stories and tales by minor monks, humanist pamphlets, such as those by

¹² SCHWEITZER, Ch.: *Étude sur la vie et les oeuvres de Hans Sachs*. París, Berger-Levrault, 1887. p. 340 and foll.

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Heinrich Bebel (1508-1514), plus oral tradition. The drama of the Meistersingers of Nuremberg and carnivalesque farces had few or no successors beyond the 16th century.

Theatre tradition in the Netherlands prior to contact with Spanish comedy

Literary life and theatre practice in the Netherlands during the 16th century was widely dominated by the famous chambers of rhetoric, the *Rederijker*, which had already started appearing in the 15th century and were in some ways comparable with the German Meistersingers and their love of dramatic theatre¹³. However, the theatrical activity of the *Rederijker* began before that of the Meistersingers in Germany and was developed with greater precision until it found its own form of dramatic literature and theatre practice.

The breeding ground for the *Rederijker* and for their theatre was the flourishing culture of the Netherlands in the late Middle Ages. This was the result of a series of circumstances, in particular the high middle class living standards reached in many urban communities and the secular humanist spirit that drew people towards an artistic, figurative and realist sentiment that was reflected, for example, in the sculpture and painting developed in the Netherlands during that period.

The main genres cultivated by these middle-class urban associations that sprang up alongside the guilds were drama and lyrical poetry, almost always performed against the backdrop of civil or religious festivities. By the end of the 16th century there were around two hundred spread across nearly all the cities in the Seventeen Provinces.

¹³As predecessor of the drama cultivated by the *Rederijker* we should consider the genre of *Abele Spelen*, which dates back to at least the mid-14th century and consisted of serious secular drama always combined with a comic sketch in the form of a idealising farce known as *Kluchten*. Very few of these *Abele Spelen* have been preserved although some have survived and date back to the early 15th century. Both these dramatic forms were performed at gatherings of young people (*Ghesellen van den spele*), which were already being organised by guilds and were the precursors of the chambers of rhetoric in the early 15th century.

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The dramatic production of current events was a common feature of their activity. The Renaissance and Humanism were also addressed by the *Rederijker*; Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly* sparked numerous theatre plays and poems and other works by him were translated and produced as comedies.

The leading academies of rhetoric in Amsterdam were *De Eglantier* (the wild rose) of which Gerbrand Bredero (1585-1618) was a member, and *Het Wit Lavendel* (the white lavender flower) consisting predominantly of Flemish refugees from the southern Netherlands and to which Joos van den Vondel (1587-1679), widely regarded as the "father" of Dutch theatre, belonged. In Antwerp the most important chamber was *De Olijftak* (the olive branch).

Chambers of rhetoric members were not just citizens who belonged to the guilds, unlike the vast majority of German Meistersingers, almost all of whom were members of the artisan class. In fact, they were joined by a higher patrician middle class and even by aristocrats and royalty, at least in the specifically honorary and management roles. For example, Emperor Charles V belonged to the *Het Boek* (the book) chamber of rhetoric in Brussels under the title of *Prins* (honorary president), although it was actually run by a member known as the *Faktor*. Other important roles in the internal hierarchy of the chambers of rhetoric were those of treasurer, buffoon and standard-bearer. As high-ranking figures began to join these association, their prestige grew and they started to make more public appearances.

The primary dramatic genre developed and cultivated by the *Rederijker* were the "*Spelen van zinne*" (literally, "plays of the mind"), a kind of secular allegorical drama akin in many of its features to the late medieval morality genre. The dramatic structure of their theatre performances was very simple but also very distinctive. They were around seven hundred verses in length on a general topic of human interest that was tackled as a key issue and addressed allegorically in the performance.

The characters nearly always discussed the topic using a controversial and argumentative dialogue and were never more than simple allegories with no trace of realism whatsoever. The biblical or ancient themes often incorporated into these plays

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served merely as examples for reference and were never depicted as real or meaningful historical events¹⁴.

The allegorical characters used most frequently included a special group, the *Sinnekens* (spirits or imps) who created confusion and were similar to the sarcastic devilish characters featured in religious plays in the Middle Ages. Their mission was to produce comic effects in what otherwise might have been a monotonous drama. This development of the action was also emphasised by the so-called *Vertooningen* or *tableaux vivants*, scenes showing motionless, silent figures at critical moments in the action. The *Kluchten* or *Esbattermenten* were also part of the dramatic heritage of the *Rederijker* and slightly broadened their classical repertoire. The minor drama forms, almost always performed as satirical monologues by fools (*Factien*) or as couplets (*Tafelspeelkens*), described funny scenes to make the audience laugh, although they sometimes included a satirical moral twist.

The stages on which they performed their plays were also very distinctive. The *Rederijker*, at least in the 16th century, used special stages called *toonels* (neutral platforms with no sets), closed at the back by a façade several storeys high normally built with fake wooden architectural features, in a similar way to an altarpiece. This façade had a number of openings blocked off by curtains at first, which were then drawn back when the play reached its climax, revealing the living tableau of the *Vertooningen*.

The impact of these living tableaux on the audience caught the attention of Calvete de Estrella when he accompanied the future King Philip II of Spain on his visit to the Netherlands. His account of the Prince's solemn entrance into Leuven in his Third Book includes a description of the impact of watching these *Vertooningen* performed in the street by members of the city's academies of rhetoric¹⁵:

¹⁴ GIBSON, Walter S.: "Artists and Rederijkers in the Age of Brugel" in *The Art Bulletin* September (1981) vol. LXIII, n° 3, p. 426-435

¹⁵ DEPLUVREZ, J.M.: "Fêtes, cortèges et jouissances aux Pays-Bas Meridionaux. Ceremonial de cour et traditions urbaines". *Splendeurs d'Espagne et les villes belges 1500-1700*. Vol. I, Brussels, 1985, p. 184

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“(..).Llegando a la plaça de Groufstrate, delante del monasterio de monjas de la Anunciación, el qual fundó la marquesa muger de Guillermo de Croy, Marqués de Arscot, avia allí un espectáculo en una quadra muy bien entapiçada, y abriendo unas cortinas de tafetón verde, con que se cerravan, al un cabo de la quadra se vía representar de personas bivas el rey Príamo de Troya con corona y vestiduras reales, acompañado de la Reyna Hécuba su mujer y sus hijos y de muchos cavalleros vestidos de colores. Los quales todos assí en este espectáculo como en todos los otros, que eran representados los autos de personas vivas, era maravillosa cosa de ver en abriendo las cortinas, con quanta magestad, postura y arte estaban hechos personajes, representando tan al pronto la hystoria que allí se hazía que sólo de ver la postura de cada persona se podía fácilmente entender quién era cada uno y lo que representaba, assí en el gesto y semblante como en la postura del cuerpo y de las manos, piernas y pies, quedando en paños pintados, sin mover los ojos, ni pestañas, ni hazer cosa fuera de lo que representava, assí hombres como mujeres, que quien quisiere ver un tapiz de figuras bivas podiera verlo en aquellos espectáculos (..)”

*[“(...) On our arrival at the square of Groufstrate, in front of the nuns’ convent of the Annunciation, founded by the Marchioness, wife of Guillermo de Croy, Marquess of Arscot, a performance took place on a well-draped stage, and when the green taffeta curtains were drawn back to reveal the stage, the figures of Priam of Troy wearing his crown and royal robes could be seen, accompanied by his wife Queen Hecuba and their children and many knights dressed in colourful garments. All of whom in this show as in all the others, representing the deeds of living people, it was marvellous to see how when the curtains opened, with what majesty, poise and art these characters were shown, with the story so well represented that one only had to see the pose of each person to know who each one was and what they were representing, both in gesture and expression, and in the posture of their bodies, hands, legs and feet, as if they were figures in a painting, without moving their eyes, not even an eyelash, or doing anything other than what they were representing, both men and women, whoever wants to see a tapestry of living figures can see it in these performances (..)”]*¹⁶

Along with the use of these *Toonels*, the use of portable stages is also well documented, for example to perform satirical morality plays.

¹⁶ CALVETE DE ESTRELLA, Juan Christóval: *El felicísimo viaje del muy alto y muy poderoso Príncipe don Phelippe*. Edition by Paloma Cuenca. Madrid. Sociedad Estatal para la Conmemoración de los centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V. 2001, p. 157-158

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The dramatic and theatrical action of the *Rederijker* was clearly oriented towards marking a specific moment and was consummated (albeit flying in the face of normal literary requirements) in the fleeting event of the festive community performance of theatre pieces. It was not understood as something that should be preserved or as an artwork with lasting value. This meant that the majority of dramatic texts were not printed, with many being preserved in handwritten form and others lost forever.

The best known performers of the *Rederijker* include Cornelis Everaert, *Faktor* of the chamber of Bruges, whose manuscript legacy comprises no fewer than thirty-five works written between 1509 and 1538, including several examples of the comic genre of the *Esbattements*. The *Faktor* of the Oudenaarde chamber of rhetoric, Matthijs de Castelein¹⁷, also wrote numerous theatrical pieces, unfortunately now lost, plus a theoretical dissertation on *Rederijker* drama and literary art entitled *De const van Rhethoriken* written in 1548 and published in 1555. In the Netherlands, the *Rederijker* laid the foundations for the development of 17th century modern artistic drama.

Considering the huge number and widespread membership of the *Rederijker* associations, they quickly became fiercely competitive with one another. Already in the first half of the 15th century, formal drama competitions called *Landjuweelen* were being held, which were organised by one of the chambers issuing a challenge to the rest. The chambers from other towns and cities came to compete not only to win the honorary prize for their dramatic performances, but also to make their own public appearances with magnificent and colourful displays featuring lavish costumes.

Examples of urban theatre in the Netherlands in the 17th century

In the Netherlands during the 1600s, a shift in focus can be seen towards highly literary forms of artistic drama influenced by the classics, together with the disappearance of a type of amateur actor who was replaced by professionally organised theatre.

¹⁷ SPIES, Marijke: *Rhetoric, Rhetoricians, and Poets: Studies in Renaissance Poetry and Poetics*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 1999, p. 40-44.

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But, unlike what was happening in other parts of Europe, where absolutist forms of government gave a predominantly courtly nature to the development of art and national culture, in the northern Netherlands this particular aspect is missing. Baroque culture and art, as well as its drama and theatre, acquired a basically middle-class character.

In the first decades of the 17th century the *Rederijker* generally remained active with their own brand of staging, although their numbers gradually dwindled. This was particularly true in the United Provinces in the north, which, having gained their independence from the Spanish monarchy and with Amsterdam as their capital, became the real breeding ground for commercial, regulated modern dramatic practice. Meanwhile, in the southern Netherlands, the drama of the *Rederijker* and its old ways of staging and performing still retained a strong following¹⁸.

The foundation of the first Low German Academy, the *Eerste Nederduytsche Academie* (1617) in Amsterdam, by doctor and playwright Samuel Coster (1579-1665) in partnership with Bredero, was a decisive moment in the development of the professional theatre that was taking root in the northern Netherlands. This institution, set up along the lines of Italian literary academies in a conscious attempt to distance itself from the city's two chambers of rhetoric, in practice very soon became a kind of Dutch national theatre. It soon absorbed the depleted Amsterdam chambers of rhetoric and when the city authorities took over the institution, the academy finally became a public company.

With the growth of the Republic in the 17th century, demand for social entertainment grew and the benefits of a regular theatre were soon discovered. In only a few years, performances once held in rented warehouses were so successful that the municipal authorities and the church, both patrons benefitting from the extra income, were convinced that a stable theatre that could hold around a thousand people could be profitable. In the 17th century, the theatre built for the academy by Coster in the city's Keizersgracht underwent two major renovations to its structure. That formal

¹⁸ The commercial and professional theatre that became more widespread in these areas was performed by French companies. In the 1690s the "Polidore" and "Adriem Talmy" companies performed in Amiens, Liège, Arras and Brussels. On this topic, see LEBÈGUE, R.: "L'Influence de la Pléiade". *Le Théâtre*" in CHARLIER, G. and HANSE, J.: *Histoire illustrée des lettres françaises de Belgique*. Brussels, 1958, p. 171-174

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modification enables us to obtain a view of the developmental path followed by theatrical art in the United Provinces during the Baroque era.

Whereas during the first two decades of Coster's Academy the simultaneous set was still in operation, the structural change brought about in 1637, the moment from which theatre would be known as *Schouwburg*, showed us a very different picture¹⁹. At that time, the stage was a series of forms of transition in which traditional and modern elements were combined in the theatre space. A podium lit by daylight as the main feature, drew the eye towards a fixed raked structure composed of columns and galleries where backdrops painted in perspective converged into various openings. The front stage curtain was still absent, although there was an intermediate curtain for covering the centre and back of the stage, for changing scenery or for revealing the *Vertooningen*. However, in the Amsterdam *Schouwburg* created in 1637, the local tradition of the *Rederijker* still played an important role.

The second structural change to occur between 1664 and 1665, and which was almost equivalent to rebuilding the theatre, did away with this distinctive stage arrangement and with it, the still limited dramatic principle underlying it. Theatre then became equipped with a modern and illusionist stage, along the lines of the Italian model, with perspective sets and with a scene-changing system based on the wings technique and with a wide range of stage machinery. From this profound transformation onwards, European Baroque dramatic forms gained a definitive foothold in Amsterdam.

This whole process developed in close connection with the appearance and consolidation of the acting profession across the entire country. In this respect, the model was provided by the English companies of players who stopped many times en route to Germany, spending lengthy periods in Dutch towns and cities. Gradually, and without a fuss, professional actors began to emerge in the United Provinces, apparently from the *Rederijker* associations with the strongest links with theatre.

¹⁹ MULLIN, Donald C.: *The Development of the Playhouse: A Survey of Theatre Architecture from the Renaissance to the present*. Berkeley, University of California, 1970, p. 167-171

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The best known professional players included Van Zjermes (or Germes) and the famous Jan Tamboer, a comic actor and drummer with the civic guard. Although at the turn of the century female roles were played by men, in compliance with the purest English Protestant tradition, women gradually started appearing on the stage. The first and best known was Ariana Van den Berg-Noozeman²⁰.

In the southern Netherlands, permanent theatres were set up in major cities from the mid-17th century. Brussels, where the Court was based, regularly received professional companies who performed their shows in a venue built by a rich brewer in a street referred to as *of the players*. A second venue was later added in a street known as *Fossé aux Loups*²¹.

The demand for stage material intended for professional theatre at the time meant that foreign, English, French and particularly Spanish plays became popular in both the northern and southern Netherlands.

Spanish comedy and its influence on theatre in the Netherlands

According to Van Praag²² from the early 17th century and up to the late 18th century, a relatively large number of plays translated from Spanish were regularly performed on stages in Amsterdam, Antwerp and Brussels, and were hugely successful. The many publications are proof of their popularity and even in the 18th century, when classic French theatre ruled, several Spanish comedies held their own in commercial theatre repertoires.

Various factors explain this presence of Spanish comedy in the Netherlands. In the southern provinces, upper and middle class social groups continued to be strongly influenced by Spain, fuelled by the establishment of Isabel Clara Eugenia and the Archduke Albert of Austria in Brussels as sovereigns of the territories from 1598 to

²⁰ VAN PRAAG, J.A.: *La Comedia espagnole aux Pays Bas* (au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle). Amsterdam, 1922, p. 8

²¹ LIEBRECHT, H.: "Le théâtre au XVIIe siècle" in CHARLIER, G. and HANSE, J.: *Histoire illustrée des lettres françaises de Belgique*. Brussels, 1958, p. 199-210 and also RENIEU, L.: *Histoire des théâtres de Bruxelles*. Bruxelles, 2 vols. 1928.

²² Op. Cit. Pag. 80

Para citar este trabajo: SANZ AYÁN, C. "Echoes of Comedy: Influences of Spanish Theatre in the Holy Roman Empire and the Netherland in the Hapsburg Era". *Doc. De Trabajo. 1. Proyecto NOBINCIS*. 2013. (añadir enlace WEB). Versión completa en: SANZ AYÁN, C.: *Hacer escena. Capítulos de Historia de la empresa teatral en el Siglo de Oro*. Madrid, R. A. H. 2013. pp. 75-112

1621. The presence of Isabel Clara as governor until 1633 prolonged this appearance of an independent court that was nevertheless closely linked with Spanish culture and interests²³. The Brussels court regularly received visits from Spanish companies, whose full range of activities and travels have yet to be studied. Only fragments of information have survived, such as the presence in Ghent in July 1620 of a Spanish company of players²⁴ led by Baltasar de Varlios.

It is possible that many performances were organised on the initiative of Spanish nationals resident in Brussels. The long list of Spanish comedies imported from Spain²⁵ held in the city's University Library seems to confirm this²⁶. Theatre plays were also published in Spanish, especially those of Lope de Vega, from the early part of the century²⁷. As well as the Spanish editions, new works were written that imitated Spanish theatre. Various educated men from these countries were dramatists who wrote works influenced by the style of Spanish comedy. They included Frederico Cornelio de Connincq (1606-1649) and Antonio Francisco Wouters. The former spent long periods in Seville and spoke Spanish perfectly. He put on a number of pieces in Antwerp between 1635 and 1638 that reflected the spirit of Lope de Vega's comedies²⁸. Wouters worked in the 1760s and 70s and adapted *El castigo sin venganza* under the title of *De ver liefde Stiefmoedr oft de gestrafte bloetschand* for the *De Olijftack* chamber of rhetoric, plus *La devoción de la Cruz* by Calderón under the title of *De devotie van*

²³ THOMAS, Werner: "La Corte de Bruselas y la restauración de la Casa de Habsburgo en Flandes 1598-1633" in *El Arte en la Corte de los Archiduques Alberto de Austria e Isabel Clara Eugenia (1598-1633). Un reino imaginado*. Madrid, 2000, p. 46-63

²⁴ This was reported by VAN PRAGG, Op. Cit. Page 42 note 5 taken from HAUWAERT, O. Van: *Overzicht van het Vlaamsch Tooneel in de XVII eeuw*. Ghent, 1983, p. 20

²⁵ On this topic, see PEETERS-FONTAINAS, J.: *Bibliographie des impressions espagnoles des Pays Bas*. Lovaina-Amberes: Musée Plantin-Moretus, 1933.

²⁶ VAN PRAGG, Op. Cit. Page 38

²⁷ VEGA CARPIO, Lope Félix de: *Segunda parte de las comedias de Lope de Vega Carpio, que contiene otras doce*. In Brussels, by Roger Velpio and Huberto Antonio, printers. 1611. (Contains: *La fuerza lastimosa, la ocasión perdida, el fallado capitán, el mayorazgo dudoso, La resistencia honrada y condesa Matilde, Los Benavides, Los comendadores de Cordoba, La bella malmaridada, Los tres diamantes, La quinta de Florencia, El padrino desposado* and *Las ferias de Madrid*.) Another three separate comedies in Spanish were also published in Brussels in 1649: *Comedia de Cosario a Cosario; Querer la propia desdicha* and *Del mal el menos*, all three were edited by Huberto Antonio Velpio.

²⁸ VOSTERS, Simón Anselmus: "Litteratures espagnole et néerlandaise: les influences mutuelles" in *Spelndeurs d'Espagne et les villes belges 1500-1700*. Vol. I, Brussels, 1985, p. 205-224

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*Eusebius lot het Heilige Kruys*²⁹. Others, including Van den Brande and Roeland van Engelen also worked in the chamber of rhetoric known as *Des Violiers* (the wallflowers) from the second half of the 17th century. The former rewrote a comedy by Pérez de Montalban under the title of *La gitanilla oft Spaens Heydinetje* (1649) and the latter wrote for *Des Violiers* on a continuous basis between 1650 and 1665 adapting Spanish works³⁰.

A number of Dutch literary scholars think that, in the northern provinces, the influence of Spanish literature on Dutch literature was three times higher than that of Italian literature, and was far higher than that of English literature³¹. They contributed particularly to the spread of Iberian literature, especially theatre of the so-called “Portuguese” Sephardic Jews, although they were mostly Spanish crypto-Jewish emigrants from the peninsula who had openly embraced the faith of their ancestors once they were settled in Amsterdam. To understand the culture of these Sephardic Jews living in the Dutch capital, first, as remarked by scholars such as Kaplan³² and Miriam Bodian³³, we need to understand the difference between this group and the Sephardic Jews expelled in 1492. Whereas these, in their isolation, preserved their culture and customs intact practically up to the present day, the Jewish converts (the *conversos*) who emigrated to Amsterdam in the 17th century knew little or no Hebrew and apart from a few customs, had ceased to live as Jews. On the other hand, they retained strong links with their homeland, where they had grown up and lived, and despite keeping their Jewish faith alive in Amsterdam, they missed their former home, they kept in constant

²⁹ All the information about the publication of this book and how to find it in the Paris National Library can be found in: SULLIVAN, H.W.: “Una traducción flamenca de la *Devoción de la Cruz* que no está perdida” in SULLIVAN, H.W; GALOPPE, R.A. and STOUTZ, M.L.: *La comedia española en el teatro europeo del siglo XVII*. Suffolk.Támesis Books, 1999, p. 143-151. The work, found in 1998, is in the B.N.P. with the reference Y,Th. 67685.

³⁰ VOSTERS, S. M. Op. Cit. p. 215

³¹ This is stated by WALTHAUS, R.: “La comedia lopesca y el teatro holandés de principios del siglo XVII: Un temprano triunfo para Theodore Rhodemburg” in SULLIVAN, H.W; GALOPPE, R.A. and STOUTZ, M.L. (Eds.): Op. Cit. P. 152-174, which quotes for this argument from WINKEL, J. te: “De invloed der Spaansche letterkunde op de Nederlandsche in de zeventiende eeuw” en *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Taal-en Letterkunde* 1 (1881) p. 59-114, specifically p. 61.

³² KAPLAN, Y.: “a Comunidade portuguesa de Amsterdao no século XVII entre tradição e mudança” in KISTEMAKER, R. and LEVIE, T. (Eds.): *Portugueses em Amsterdao 1600-1800*. Amsterdam, 1988, p. 42-55

³³ BODIAN, Miriam: *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1997

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contact with their Iberian counterparts for financial and commercial reasons, and they knew about and enjoyed literature from the peninsula.

So it is not surprising then, that during the second half of the 17th century, literary "academies" began to emerge in the Sephardic community living in the city and that they were inspired by the Spanish rather than the Dutch academies³⁴. Their distinctive features can be seen not only in the fact that their sessions were held in Spanish, but also in that, unlike the *Rederijker*, the Sephardic academies had an aristocratic element³⁵ that always set them apart. Although it is not known exactly when these literary meetings started taking place (probably towards the end of the first quarter of the 17th century) the first printed evidence of a group of Sephardic writers devoted to this activity dates from 1655. In 1676, Isaac Nuñez, also known as Manuel de Belmonte, Count Palatino and the King of Spain's Resident in the Netherlands³⁶, formed a poetry academy with a Sephardic membership called *El temor Divino*. Another similar academy, that of *los Floridos*, operated in the city from 1685. Poet and dramatist Miguel de Barrios (1635-1701) was an active member, as evidenced by one of his publications entitled *Estrella de Jacob y flores de lis*³⁷, dated 1686, when the writer had renounced Christianity. It contained a section entitled *Academia de los Floridos* that contains a record of those who took part in the meetings. As well as theatre plays written in Hebrew with religious content, these Sephardic academics also wrote secular comedies³⁸. Of these, Miguel de Barrios was the most prolific. In addition to three swashbuckling comedies published in 1665 plus other works under the title of *Flor de*

³⁴ The Spanish academies had their heyday in the last quarter of the 16th century and during the 17th century.

³⁵ DEN BOER, Harm: *La literatura sefardí de Amsterdam*. Instituto Internacional de Estudios Sefardíes y Andalusíes. Universidad de Alcalá, 1996. P. 135 and foll.

³⁶ He belonged to a social and financial elite that a number of researchers have dubbed "Court Jews", see ISRAEL, J.: *La judería europea en la era del mercantilismo (1550-1750)*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1992, p. 151-174.

³⁷ BNM R/ 2186, p. 65-68

³⁸ DEN BOER, H.: "El teatro entre los sefardíes de Ámsterdam a fines del siglo XVII" en *Diálogos Hispánicos*, 8/III (1989), p. 679-690. Specifically p. 680

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*Apolo*³⁹, he wrote minor comedies published in *Triunfo del gobierno popular* (1683-1684) and *Alegrías de Himeneo* (1688).

Some documentary traces revealed by Harm de Boer reflect the popularity of Spanish theatre amongst Amsterdam Sephardic Jews in the late 17th and early 18th centuries⁴⁰. On 2 January 1696, Francisco Rodríguez Henriquez rented a warehouse for “holding comedies” as quoted in a notary deed; soon afterwards, in 1708, Spanish comedy enthusiasts requested permission from Amsterdam City Council to hold performances in Spanish on Wednesdays, the day when the municipal theatre was closed. The authorities refused to give permission although this was something that Sephardic Jews had been doing for nine years, by their own admission. The City Council was afraid that the municipal monopoly over the city’s theatre performances would be adversely affected if the practice was allowed, but in fact, back in 1677, a group of actors that included poet Miguel de Barrios had performed a comedy in a rented warehouse in front of an audience of around thirty people.

The habit of putting on shows in private houses to mark family events was an Iberian practice that was also widespread among the Sephardic community in Amsterdam. For example, Calderón’s *La vida es sueño* was performed thirteen years after its publication (1635) in the home of “the Pinto family” as part of wedding celebrations⁴¹. Another actor involved in the 1677 performance, Lorenzo Escudero⁴², was a Spaniard of Moorish birth who had converted to Judaism and settled in the Amsterdam Sephardic community under the name of Abraham Israel. His Jewish connections did not prevent him from being invited to take part in the theatre festivities for the wedding of Leopold I and Margaret Theresa of Austria in the Brussels court, and the fact of the matter is

³⁹ From the copy in the BNM R/4854. The titles of the three comedies were: *Pedir favor al contrario; El canto junto al encanto; El español de Orán*.

⁴⁰ DEN BOER, H.: *La literatura...* Op. Cit. P. 149

⁴¹ SALOMÓN, H.P.: “The De Pinto Manuscript”: a 17th Century Marrano Family History” in *Studia Rosenthalia*, 9, 1 (1975), p. 1-62, specifically p. 60

⁴² The *Genealogía* says the following about him: “*fue un mozo rubio mui galán y aseado. Hiçose representante y casó con juana de Zisneros. Después pasó a italia y de allí a Amsterdam dónde judaizó y murió rebentado*” [“he was a blond youth, very handsome and neat. He became a representative an married Juana de Zisneros. Then he went to Italy and from there to Amsterdam where he converted to Judaism and died a ruined man”] in VAREY, J. and SHERGOLD, N.D. (Eds.): *Genealogía, origen y noticias de los comediantes de España*. Tàmesis, Books, Valencia, 1985, p. 149

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that, despite political and religious differences, cultural permeability did exist between the north and south, at least in respect of Spanish-based theatre, as shown by the publication of collections of comedies of this kind promoted by Sephardic Jews. The volumes printed in 1697 and 1704 are an example. In both of them, the printing location has been faked. The first says it was printed in Cologne and the second in Brussels. However, the printer's name, Manuel Texera, and those of patrons Gil López Pinto and Manuel de Belmonte, make their connections very clear. Faking both printing locations served to sell the editions to a Catholic readership, especially in the southern Netherlands.

Outside purely Sephardic circles⁴³ Theodoor Rodenburg (1574-1644), a lawyer born in Utrecht, was responsible for introducing Spanish comedy into the Netherlands. Representative in Madrid of the Trading Company of Guinea and diplomat at the court of King Philip III, his writings were highly scholarly and he was author of one of the first Dutch language poetics. He was president of the *Eglantier* academy of rhetoric following the departure of Bredero, Hooft and Coster. His translations of Lope de Vega during the first half of the 17th century show him to be ahead of his time, as Spanish theatre only began to gain in popularity in Holland towards the second half. Although he did not stray much from the original versions, all the plays he adapted bore his personal stamp, reflecting Lope's metric diversity and the ultimate aim of his theatre, which was to amuse the audience, especially his versions of the swashbuckling comedies, a genre⁴⁴ that was hugely successful in Holland⁴⁴.

The success of Spanish comedy in the United Provinces, in particular Amsterdam, was closely linked to the development of commercial theatre and therefore to the official

⁴³ DEN BOER, Harm: "La representación de la comedia española en Holanda" en SANZ AYÁN, C. (Ed.): *Ingenio Fecundo y juicio profundo. Estudios de historia del Teatro en la Edad Moderna*. Monographic Vc nº 23- 1999 in *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna*. P. 113-127

⁴⁴ WALTHAUS, Rina: "La comedia lopesca y el teatro holandés de principios del siglo XVII: un temprano triunfo para Theodore Rodenburgh" in SULLIVAN, Henry W., Galoppe, Raul A. and Stoutz, Mahlon L.: *La comedia española y el teatro europeo del siglo XVII*, London, Tamesis Books, 1999. p. 152-174

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opening of the *Schouwburg* theatre⁴⁵ under local authority ownership. Certainly, the possibilities offered by a permanent venue with capacity for a considerable number of spectators was a contributing factor in the success of the Spanish formula. The city authorities recognised the economic and social importance of theatre performances, as the income they generated was used for the upkeep of orphans and the elderly with no means of support, as was the case with public theatres practically throughout the Spanish monarchy⁴⁶. It is therefore understandable that theatre in Amsterdam was a mix of interests, those of dramatists, civil authorities, religious authorities (although to a lesser extent) plus those of the public.

From 1638 onwards, Spanish comedies were performed every year; more than forty in direct translation, nearly thirty via French translation⁴⁷ and almost forty more of uncertain origin but inspired by Spanish works⁴⁸. The most widely performed author was Lope de Vega. His most popular plays in the Netherlands included *La fuerza lastimosa*; *Los locos de Valencia*; *Si no vieran las mujeres*; *El castigo sin Venganza*; *El gran Duque de Moscovia* and *El molino*⁴⁹. From the titles chosen to be performed in the commercial theatre, it seems that their success was really down to their energy, people's interest in intrigue and the chance for the actors to show off their skills. In the late 19th century, the scholar Te Winkel attempted to make an inventory of Dutch drama works based on Spanish comedies, listing around seventy titles, nearly all from the period 1640-1730.

From halfway through the century, the connection with professional theatre can also be seen in the identity of the translators. Most of them were not academics like

⁴⁵ HELLINGA, W. Gs.: "la representation de "Gijsbreght van Amstel" de Vondel. Inauguration du Schouwburg d'Amsterdam (1639)" in JACQUOT, Jean (ed.): *Le lieu théâtral à la Renaissance*. Paris, 1964, 323-348.

⁴⁶ SANZ AYÁN, C.: "Felipe II y los orígenes del teatro Barroco" en SANZ AYÁN, C. (Ed.): *Ingenio Fecundo y juicio profundo*. Op. Cit. Pags. 47-77, specifically pages 70-72

⁴⁷ A considerable number of Spanish comedies were translated or imitated in French in the 17th century. On the spread of Spanish comedy in France see LABARRE, Françoise: *Jouer la Comedia. Le théâtre du siècle D'Or sur la Scène Française du XVIIe siècle à nous jours*. Toulouse. Université de Toulouse le Mirail. 1993. Corneille's major work, *Le Cid* and the majority of Rotrou comedies that were successful in their day were clearly based on Spanish models.

⁴⁸ Boer cites Van Praag as the first to produce a bibliography of translations and rewritten versions of Spanish comedy.

⁴⁹ VAN PRAGG, op. Cit. P. 82

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Rodenburg, but professional actors or theatre company directors. One of them, León de Fuyter, was a Spanish comedy specialist. But Dutch translators were not working alone, they collaborated with Sephardic Jews living in Amsterdam who provided a first version of the translation in prose, from which the Dutch would produce a final version in verse. From an analysis of information from the Amsterdam municipal theatre administration, we can infer that the Spanish comedy formula was a guaranteed box office success. In the period 1638-1665 only three works were able to compete: the Dutch tragedy *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel* by Vondel, with 110 performances⁵⁰; the translation of *Le Cid* by Corneille with 79, and a Dutch rewrite of *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kid with 62. During this period five of Lope de Vega's comedies accumulated more than 40 performances each: *El cuerdo loco*, *La fuerza lastimosa*, *El perseguido*, *Laura perseguida* and *El palacio confuso*. The average number of performances of a Spanish comedy during those years was an impressive fifteen⁵¹. As for the other great genius of Spanish theatre, Calderón de la Barca, five of his plays were translated into Dutch directly from Spanish in the 17th century: *La devoción de la Cruz*; *La Gran Cenobia*; *Lances de Amor y fortuna*; *El mayor encanto Amor* and *La vida es Sueño*⁵². They were all translated by southern Dutch writers, two by Antonio Wouters, two by Claude Griek and one by Shouwenbergh. This predilection of southern translators for Calderón's works has been explained by a very superficial analysis justifying that Catholic "fanatics" in the south preferred to translate their Catholic counterpart as he was a famous author of religious plays. What is paradoxical and vacuous about this theory is precisely that, of the five works cited, only one has any kind of religious content.

German artistic drama and its development in the 17th century

⁵⁰ On the symbolic meaning of this work see PARENTE, James A.: "The theatricality of History in the Dutch Golden Age. Joost van den Vondel's *Gysbrecht van Aemstel*" in HERMANS Th. and SALVERDA, R. (eds.): *From revolt to riches. Culture and history of the Low Countries 1500-1700*. London. 1993, p. 248-267

⁵¹ Boer extracts the data from: OEY de VITA, E and GEESINK, M: *Academie En Schouwburg Amsterdams toneelrepertoire 1617-1665*. Amsterdam, 1983

⁵² VAN PRAGG, op. Cit. P. 132-133

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In German-speaking countries, activity in the field of dramatic art was extremely diversified. There were no public theatres, which meant that performances were held at the Emperor's court or at that of the Prince, in schools and in large and medium-sized trading towns, especially at fairs. In these areas, the wealth and variety of Spanish comedy was evident in three cultural centres: The Viennese Court, The Hamburg Opera and the travelling theatre company of Johannes Velten (1640-1693)⁵³.

In the political and social environment of Princely absolutism, Germany saw a surge in Baroque culture based in the court, which in essence, left its artistic and intellectual mark on an entire era. Highly developed theatre was a major component of this Baroque and Absolutist court culture, with a particularly strong emphasis on the dramatic musical genre, that is to say, on Italian opera, with its theatre practices and its architectural achievements.

But alongside this development of a Baroque and courtly theatre culture, the 17th century saw the rise of an aesthetically independent type of German artistic drama. It could be seen on stage in the Protestant school theatre, at the Hamburg Opera, the cultural manifestation of the Hanseatic middle-class, in the Latin Catholic drama of religious orders (especially the Jesuits) and in the consolidation of a professional class of actors who wrote their own costumbrist dramatic literature. All these theatre forms were not created in a vacuum. There were links between them in such a way that travelling companies performed under the patronage of the Prince, while Jesuit theatre in Munich and Vienna served as court theatre. The historical dramas of Andreas Gryphius⁵⁴ and theatre plays by Daniel Casper von Lohenstein written for Protestant schools were also performed in the various Princely courts and were adapted by travelling players, in particular by foreign professional companies who had been putting on performances in Germany since the mid-16th century. In the Hamburg Baroque Opera, the constant influx of Dutch and German travelling companies brought in a multitude of topics to operas performed there that aimed to satisfy a broader range of

⁵³ FRANZBACH, M.: "La recepción de la comedia española en Alemania y Austria" in SULLIVAN, H.W; GALOPPE, R.A. and STOUTZ, M.L. (Eds.): *Op. Cit.* P. 175-185

⁵⁴ MENHENNET, Alan: *The Historical Experience in German Drama. From Gryphius to Brecht*. USA, Camden House, 2003. P. 13-32

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middle-class audiences rather than the limited circle at court. Calderón's texts were adapted or served as inspiration for Hamburg libretto writers, especially from the last quarter of the 17th century onwards⁵⁵.

The appearance of professional theatre in lands of the Holy Roman Empire and Spanish comedy

Italian professional players started appearing on the scene in the southern Holy Roman Empire in the 1670s. But these *Commedia dell'Arte* companies remained loyal to the vernacular and to the distinctive features of Italian costumbrist comedy and its theatre practice, making them a closed theatre system. In this sense, the most direct promoters of professional theatre across the entire German-speaking area were English travelling players. The *Englische Komödianten*, the first of which were documented in Dresden between 1585 and 1587, imported a new way of doing things that was very different to the declamatory style of humanist school theatre or of 16th century Meistersingers and carnivalesque comedy, as its main features were expressivity and naturalism. From 1592 up to the mid-17th century, they spread across the whole German-speaking area and from the outset they made their mark with their flexible approach to all aspects of their productions.

In the first place, they were remarkable for their ability to transport their shows to many different places with ease. These companies travelled from the Netherlands to Bohemia and Styria, and from Alsace and Switzerland to the Baltic and Poland. But an even more decisive factor than this ability to move around was their versatility in performing their productions to different social groups. They were equally able to commit to the Princely courts either provisionally or for a prolonged period, at the same time as giving regular performances in all the big cities in the German-speaking area, especially at fair time. They also managed to remain in these areas for long periods of time thanks to their

⁵⁵ FRANZBACH, M.: *La recepción...* Op. Cit. P. 180-183

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willingness to perform in German in the very early 17th century. This was the most important condition for making themselves understood to less well-educated audiences.

In the beginning, the repertoire of English players was limited to an overview of English Elizabethan theatre (including Marlowe and Shakespeare), reducing the original text down to a series of sensationalist scenes. Mixed in with a few political plays, comic works were the norm, with the clown as an essential figure. Very soon they began to offer comedies with biblical content and others by German authors. Halfway through the century they widened their repertoire to include Italian, Spanish and French productions. Texts by Lope de Vega and Calderón found their way onto the stages of English travelling players.

The smooth operation and success of these theatre enterprises, which usually consisted of more than ten members, depended firstly on the expertise and directing abilities of the *principal*, equivalent to the *autor* in Spanish companies. The *principal* was the one who played the most important role within the company. He would normally take on the comic character role, the most popular with audiences, the same as in Spanish companies, where the authors were frequently the ones who played the part of the fool – the *bobo* or *gracioso*. For this central speciality, some directors created certain distinctive, peculiar and established styles or characters. The most important of these was perhaps Reynold's harlequin, a widespread and popular character in travelling theatre.

The last and perhaps most famous director of an English company in German territory was Joris Jolliphus (or Georg Jolly) († 1673) who, after leaving England because of the theatre ban imposed by the Puritans during the Civil War, appeared on the Continent in 1648 and remained in German territory until 1660 with a company of fourteen actors including a woman⁵⁶.

Throughout the first half of the century, English players accepted German actors into their groups. From the mid-17th century, we find the first successful German travelling

⁵⁶ DONOHUE, Joseph (ed.): *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*. Vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 173.

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companies beginning to appear. Many of them continued to work under the professional name of "English players" and retained geographical mobility as a hallmark of their profession. Leading companies included those of Karl Michael Treu, Karl Andreas Paulsen, active between 1650 and 1687, and especially that of Johannes Velten, who worked between 1640 and 1692. Paulsen was originally from Hamburg and was likely to have been a university graduate. He worked in northern and eastern European cities and his repertoire featured plays by Marlowe, Kid and Shakespeare, plus works by Lope de Vega and Calderón. In fact, Johannes Velten's credentials as teacher and graduate of the universities of Wittemberg and Leipzig are proof of the considerable cultural level of German Baroque professional companies. He was also one of the leading adaptors of Spanish theatre, specifically of Calderón de la Barca, on professional stages across the German-speaking regions. The outline of his professional career is comparable to that taken by other actors and directors of companies as far away as the kingdom of Castile. Born in Halle⁵⁷, he embarked on his acting career on completing his studies. In 1665 he joined the company headed by Karl Andreas Paulsen and married his daughter Catherina Elizabeth. He is mentioned in Nuremberg in 1668 leading a group called *High German Actors* and in early 1669 Velten's company included *Lances de amor y fortuna* under the title of *Der Künstliche Lügner* in their repertoire of works to be performed in the city of Danzing. He proved himself to be as versatile as the English companies of players who preceded him, and he was equally to be found applying to the Frankfurt or Leipzig city authorities for licences to perform at fairs, as performing at the faraway court of the Czar with a thirty-strong company of players in the early years of the 1670s. In the service of the Prince-Elector of Saxony since 1685, he would often include French and Spanish comedies in his theatre. In fact, Calderón's work made up roughly ten per cent of his entire repertoire. His staunch defence of the presence of women on the stage, his own wife was cast in the company's leading female roles, brought him harsh criticism, in particular from the Protestant clergy who were against professionalised commercial theatre.

⁵⁷ See information about Velten and his company in SULLIVAN, H.W.: *Calderon in the German lands and the Low Countries: His reception and influence, 1654-1980*. Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 72-77

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After Velten's death in 1692, his wife continued to direct the company and when Frederick Augustus I was elected King of Poland in 1697, she obtained permission to perform there. A short while later, the company put on the major piece *Königliche polnische und kursächsisch-hochdeutsche Hofkomödianten*, resulting in the group of actors became a Royal Company at the courts of the Elector of Saxony and the King of Poland.

1690 was the year in which Spanish plays occupied the lion's share of Velten's repertoire. As adaptor and performer of Calderón as well as of *Lances de Amor y Fortuna*, a highly successful play in German lands at least until the mid-18th century, he gave several performances of *El alcaide de sí mismo* under the title of *Sien selbst Gefangener*; *La hija del aire (Die grose Königin Semiramis)*; *La vida es sueño (Prinz Sigismund van Pohlen)* and *Darlo todo y no dar nada (Alles geben und doch Nichtsgeben*⁵⁸). Fortunately, the manuscript for this performance has survived⁵⁹ and we know for a fact that it was the basis for Velten's production and probably also for the production staged in 1695 by the company known as *Merserburger Komödianten*. In order to produce this adapted manuscript, it seems he used the court performance given in Vienna during 1668 of the original published in Spanish by Matheo Cosmerovio⁶⁰.

In summary, the drama performed by typically Baroque professional travelling theatre in the lands of the Holy Roman Empire was generally practical in nature. It had no ambitions to go down in history as highly regarded artistic literature. Its decisive contribution to 17th century general cultural history lies in having created a professional (and therefore commercial) theatre, consolidated as a cultural institution with universal social aspirations, something that was never achieved either before or after by court

⁵⁸ On the reception of Calderón's theatre see FRANZBACH, M.: *El teatro de Calderón en Europa*. Madrid, 1982.

⁵⁹ Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna (Cod. Vindob. 13.124) Cited by SULLIVAN, H.W.: Op. Cit. P. 74

⁶⁰ On 22 December 1668, to mark the birthday of Queen Mariana of Austria, the comedy *Darlo todo y no dar nada* was performed at the Viennese court. The volume in Spanish containing the play was printed in the city that same year under the title *Triunfos del Diciembre en la Felicidad del numerarse entre los suyos el día de años de la Serenísima Reyna de España Doña Mariana de Austria*. The existence of this volume is recorded by SEIFERT, H.: *Die Oper am WienerKaiserhof im 17. Jahrhundert*. Tutzing, Verlegt Bei Hans Schneider, 1985, p. 465

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theatre, or Protestant theatre, or Catholic religious theatre with its highly restricted public profile.