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Review of *La Tempestad* (directed by John Mowat for the Companhia do Chapitô) at the Corral de Comedias, Almagro, Spain, 23 July 2011

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Inside Almagro's corral de comedias stage, an audience gathered in the open-air theater to experience Companhia do Chapitô's adaptation of *La Tempestad*. Electrical lighting and a glow from the night sky illuminated the audience, engaged in waving their abanicos (Spanish hand-fans) to stay cool from the July heat. In continuous use since its construction in 1628, the Spanish patio style-theater houses an elevated stage surrounded by three walls, two levels of balcony seating, and a patio floor. Almagro is a small town outside of Ciudad Real, approximately two hours by train from Madrid. For 34 years it has hosted the annual Festival Internacional de Teatro Clásico, the largest and most renowned international theatre festival in Spain.

Chapitô is a Portuguese company in its fifteenth year of producing collective creations and gestural theatre, and this production was no exception. They performed this version of *The Tempest* in castellano, in Spanish, with just three actors, a long black cloth, and a book. The sparse props, modern casual attire of the actors, and absence of sets allowed the audience to engage with the action onstage outside of a delineated temporal or geographical setting. Each actor played multiple roles, signaled not through changes in costuming or makeup, but through shifts in body language and diction. Under John Mowat's direction, comedic scenes were added and much of Shakespeare's dialogue removed to create a fast-paced story that relied heavily on physicality and silence.

The show opened with dim blue lighting as the actors used the long black sheet to create the stormy tempest on stage. While they were all underneath the sheet, creating its waves, the book glided seamlessly on top of the waves, only to be picked up by Prospero, who emerged from the tides. With the help of the sheet, the actors posed in snapshot images, creating a tableau vivant of the many characters that would appear on the island. These silent images of the tempest advanced the narrative of the shipwreck without dialogue.

Indeed the sheet was such an integral part of the production that it ultimately became the fourth actor. Prospero, played by Tiago Viegas, used the sheet as his magician's cape. Marta Cerqueira, who played Miranda, was at one point wrapped in

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the cloth and dragged across the stage. It was also used to execute elements of pantomime and clowning. To illustrate Prospero's magical abilities, Prospero stuffed the entire black sheet into the palm of his hand, and then revealed his empty hand to the audience. Cerqueira, hiding behind him, had the sheet. Unseen by the audience, she fed it to him from behind, and Prospero magically pulled the cloth from his ear. He then pulled Miranda from his ear, somersaulting over his shoulder. The comedy intensified when Prospero pulled her neglected tennis shoe from his ear as both characters looked at each other, shocked.

Not only were moments of comedy added to the play, but characters were too. Sycorax, Caliban's mother, Prospero's wife and Miranda's mother, were briefly depicted in this production. Cerqueira's Sycorax gave birth to Jorge Cruz's Caliban, and Cruz as Prospero's wife gave birth to Cerqueira's Miranda. The comedic staging of the birthing scenes was amplified by the actors' multiple roles. Comedy was not only added to childbirth, but to the staging of Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda. Caliban grabbed Miranda from behind and began to thrust against her aggressively. Prospero tried to separate them, but unable to do so physically, he resorted to magic, which after further twisting and struggle, produced the effect of Miranda and Caliban stuck together at their bums. Each of the three characters looked confused at Prospero's failed magic, and at last Prospero conjured a spell that separated Caliban and Miranda.

Cruz's double role as Caliban and Ferdinand allowed Cerqueira as Miranda to express both desire and repulsion toward the same actor. As Ferdinand, Cruz moved his hair to the side for a sleeker, more refined look, and stood erect in his delicate and respectful courtship of Miranda. Ferdinand and Miranda kissed passionately, but unlike Caliban's aggressive act, these two characters separated themselves easily when Prospero discovered their lovemaking. As Caliban, Cruz's hair was tousled, his collared shirt in disarray, and he emitted groans as he moved gracelessly across the stage. Everything was foreign to Caliban, from the stock of wine he discovered to Prospero's book. Caliban attempted to eat the book, as if digesting the book's power and words would internalize them for him.

Much of the 75-minute production was done without any verbal language. The staging of Caliban's introduction to speaking included humorous moments when Prospero tried to teach Caliban to say Miranda's name. But it was his bad breath, expressed through the dismay of Prospero and Miranda's reaction to their proximity to Caliban, which turned this vignette into slapstick comedy. Likewise, Miranda first appeared, silently smiling girlishly to the audience. Her initial words came out as unintelligible groans. Prospero, as controller of language on the island, with his cape on and book in hand, cast a spell to silence her. When his magic failed again, he simply tore a page from the book and stuffed it in her mouth.

Without dialogue, the actors' bodies and the constant retooling of the sheet told a more comedic, but not light-hearted, version of Shakespeare's story of the characters on a deserted island. At one point, the sheet hid the actors so only their heads appeared. The confusion of being separated physically from each other, as well as their own limbs, was in sharp contrast to the moments when their bodies were intertwined. The hyper-physicality of the production left only portions of the plot to be expressed through Shakespeare's dialogue. Through non-verbal modes of expression emerged a minimalist manner of storytelling that

created well-developed characters enmeshed in a power struggle on a lost island. La Companhia do Chapitô articulated the characters and story through a rhythmic voice that was a mixture of textual translation, the exchange between sonic qualities and silence, and physical comedy. The voice of *La Tempestad* was revealed through each actor's physical embodiment of multiple roles and the tableau they created together.