

## ***La creación del mundo on the Seventeenth-century Street and Stage***

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**ABSTRACT:** By 1629 there were two *comedias* entitled *La creación del mundo* in the repertoires of Golden Age acting troupes, one by Lope de Vega and the other by Luis Vélez de Guevara. From the texts of the plays, one a printed edition and the other a manuscript, and perhaps especially from the stage directions included in these play-texts, it is possible to make some tentative deductions about how and where these works—dramatizing the early chapters of the Old Testament Book of Genesis—were performed. Analysis of archival documentation from Badajoz together with these two play texts and an awareness of performance norms of the period may help solve the riddle of which *Creación* came first, Lope's or Vélez's.

**KEYWORDS:** Vélez de Guevara; Lope de Vega; *La creación del mundo*; Corpus Christi; Badajoz; staging

This study is primarily concerned with the dating of two Golden Age plays with a similar title, *La creación del mundo*, one by Lope de Vega and the other by Luis Vélez de Guevara. I shall argue that Vélez's charming dramatization of the opening chapters of the Old Testament Book of Genesis was written and performed by 1610—a relatively early date for this Andalusian dramatist—whilst Lope's version of the story is most likely a late play, written in the 1620s. The investigation into these two little-known works opens up some interesting and far-reaching questions, not all of which have ready answers, but deductions about their respective performances, made from the play-texts, from staging practices of the period and from contemporary documentation, are central to the case for the precedence of Vélez's *comedia*.<sup>1</sup>

We know from a contract held in the Archivo Histórico Provincial de Badajoz (Figure 1) that a play called *La creación del mundo* was commissioned to be performed in the city as a part of the celebrations of Corpus Christi in June of 1610. The document states that the *autor de comedias*, Pedro Rodríguez de Flores, who was from Valladolid:

se oblig[ó] de recitar con su compañía en la fiesta que haze [la cofradía d]el Santísimo Sacramento y sus regidores en esta ciudad, en Santa María del Castillo, el domingo próximo venidero 20 deste presente mes, que a de ser la comedia de *La Creación del Mundo* con dos entremeses y vn bayle de mascara a la postre, mui bien recitada y con sus apariencias y todo lo demas ques costumbre.

The *mayordomo de la cofradía*, Marcos de Trejo, agreed to pay the company 450 *reales* 'y toda la madera que fuere necesario para el tablado y apariencias'.<sup>2</sup>

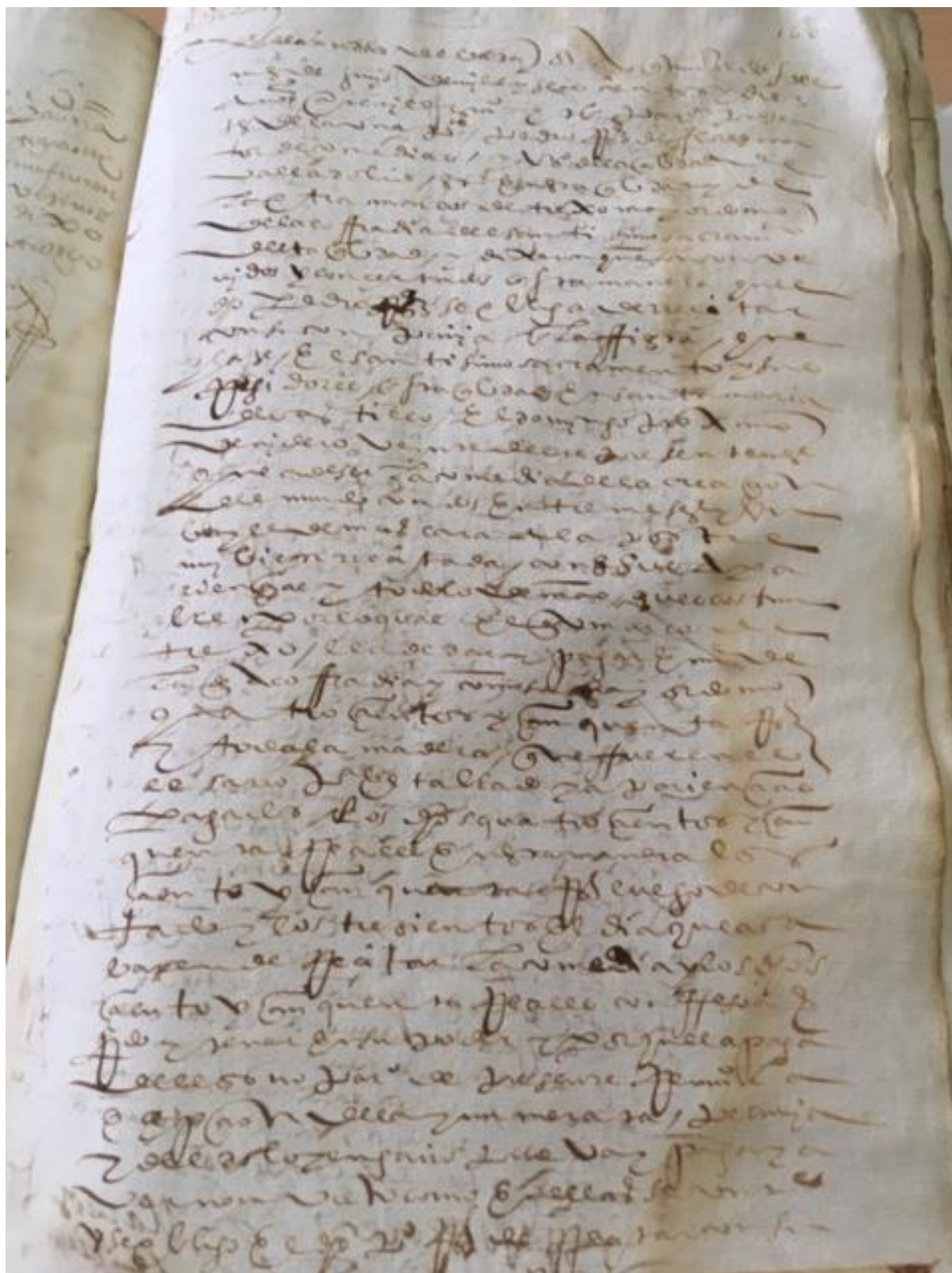


Figure 1: the title of the play appears on the seventeenth and eighteenth lines of the contract

As is most frequently the case with such documents, the contract makes no mention of the playwright's name. Thus, not unreasonably, in his 1997 study of theatre and theatrical life in seventeenth-century Badajoz, Marcos Álvarez assumes that the play in question was Lope de Vega's religious drama whose full title was *La creación del mundo y primera culpa del*

*hombre* (59). It was not uncommon, of course, for play titles (when mentioned) to be given in abbreviated or alternative form in contracts and Lope's play is today the best known from the period with that title. Without ever becoming canonical, it had survived well enough, through *ediciones sueltas* in particular, is included in the various catalogues of plays from the Golden Age, and was edited by Menéndez y Pelayo in the nineteenth century. The most recent edition, by Alessandro Martinengo, was published in 2012.<sup>3</sup> At first glance, then, Lope's is the most obvious play-text to connect with the Badajoz performance in the early years of the seventeenth century.

My contention, however, is that this documented performance was in fact of Luis Vélez de Guevara's work, entitled *La creación del mundo, tout court*, and which dealt with similar Old Testament material. This possibility has not been previously considered partly because Marcos Álvarez's transcriptions of archival material from Badajoz are relatively recent (published in 1997) and partly because Vélez's play has been so little studied. The only modern edition, before that of Manson and Peale in 2018, was by Ziomek and Linker dating from 1974, and the most substantial scholarly engagement with the play until 2018, to the best of my knowledge, has been Peale's review of that edition published in the *Bulletin of the Comediantes* in 1975.

The two plays are short, three-act *comedias* which dramatize the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis, specifically God's creation of the world and the first couple, Adam and Eve, their expulsion from the earthly paradise, the first murder (of Abel by Cain), and the subsequent killing of Cain by Lamech (though Vélez's version takes the story further, to the death of Adam, and ends with Eve's lament). The works are conceived independently, that is, whichever playwright wrote his play second made no obvious use of the other's work.<sup>4</sup> Either play would have been a good and popular choice as a didactic *comedia divina* for the Badajoz Corpus festivities.

Vélez's *Creación* survived only in an undated seventeenth-century manuscript copy now in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid (MSS / 15.047). It is not an autograph but is in two hands, one identifiable—as Geroge Peale has discovered (Vélez, *La creación* 47), with the help of *Manos teatrales*—as that of Pedro de Valdés, actor and *autor de comedias*, active between 1594 and 1636, according to *DICAT*. The manuscript does not give us a link to the Badajoz festivities and neither does it help with dating the *comedia* a) because of the longevity of Valdés's career, and b) because his and the other copyist's version is at least second hand, and probably served for a revival of the work.

Despite the absence of a clear link between Vélez's play and the documented 1610 performance, a case can be assembled against the work in question being Lope's and in favour of its being Vélez's. Beginning circumstantially, the shorter title is an exact match to the documentary record (whereas Lope's play was known by both halves of its title and contains, within its text, a heavier emphasis on the idea of man's 'primera culpa').<sup>5</sup> The play would be fairly early for Vélez but he was beyond 'up-and-coming' by 1610: he was well known in the theatre world, over 30 years old, and had enjoyed nearly a decade of dramatic success. Andrés de Claramonte praised him around that year as 'floridísimo ingenio de Ezija, de quien esperamos grandes escritos y trabajos y a hecho hasta oy muchas famosas comedias' (Profeti 2). There is not—yet, anyway—a versification case for or against Vélez's play having been written as early as 1610, but it is predominantly composed in octosyllables (*quintillas*, *romance*, *redondillas*), is quite simple in its language and imagery, and could easily be an early work. And, although he is best known today for his novelesque and historical works,

Vélez was a writer of religious dramas too, like most of his contemporaries who accepted commissions and might benefit financially through involvement with Corpus celebrations and other festivities.

These points make Vélez a likely candidate to be the author of the play referred to in the notarial document from Badajoz, but do not rule out Lope (or, indeed, some other recognized playwright who had written a work with this title which is now lost). However, the most robust argument in favour of identifying the Andalusian's play as the one put on in June 1610 is its suitability for street rather than *corral* performance. Vélez seems to have envisaged his play, as he went about composing it, not as one destined for the established playhouses with their fixed stages, but as a more flexible work, easily adaptable to a temporary stage erected for the Corpus Christi celebrations. As the reference to timber in the Badajoz contract suggests ('toda la madera que fuere necesario para el tablado y apariencias'), the stage and special effects were constructed expressly for the Corpus street performances in which visual spectacle—stunning the audience with the depiction of the supernatural or miraculous, for example—was arguably more important than it was in the *corral*.

It is plausible, then, that the *comedia* was commissioned for and premièred in Badajoz in 1610, where the religious celebrations were known for their especial splendour: 'la solemnidad del Corpus era en el siglo XVII "la fiesta más lucida y celebrada" de entre las que por diversos motivos hacían sus vecinos' (Marcos Álvarez 95). The Cabildo Catedralicio de Badajoz would not limit themselves to *autos sacramentales*, like most towns, but would pay for secular and religious plays as well, including a *comedia de santos*, a *comedia divina* and even a *comedia de capa y espada* (Marcos Álvarez 93-95). Vélez's *La creación del mundo*, a short play (at just 2217 lines of text), clear in structure and meaning, overtly didactic, emotionally engaging, spectacular in its stage effects, would certainly have been a hit with the *cofradía*, who put up the money, and the citizens who made up the audience.

Whilst one cannot deny that Vélez's play could have worked in a *corral*, its ambitions exceed the norms of that space and the playwright's *acotaciones* are obviously key in assessing his expectations in this regard. Unlike Lope in his version of the story, he hardly mentions the normal features of a *corral* stage, such as the *nichos* and the *cortinas* which could be used to cover them, or the *vestuario*.<sup>6</sup> This may well be because he knows the stage will be temporary, constructed (in the case of Badajoz) in the square in front of the façade of Santa María del Castillo (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Santa María del Castillo, Badajoz, in 2018.

A temporary stage does not imply a more primitive dramatic product, but it does mean that the dramatist cannot envisage as clearly or precisely as usual how his scenes will be staged. Indeed, though references to the physical stage itself are scarce in the play, the conception of Vélez's *Creación* is more ambitious than the *corral* would comfortably allow. In particular, it



is worth noting that Vélez's cast-list is 28 strong (compared to Lope's nine) and he floods the stage with bodies and movement at least once in each act. The stage traffic itself is designed to quicken the pulse of the audience. In act 1, a host of devils appears to plot the downfall of Adam and Eve:

*Cúbrese todo, y suenen cajas y trompetas, y van saliendo, marchando, Astarot, Bercebú, Barrabás y los más demonios que pudieren salir, todos con sus cabelleras, y culebras rodeadas en ellas, y pintados los rostros de estrellas negras, todos muy bien vestidos de demonios, y sus arcabuces, y saca Uno una bandera negra y pintada de llamas, y luego detrás, Lucifer, con un bastón y una corona de llamas, y el rostro pintado de estrellas de oro, y dice Luzbel, en una silla pintada [...] (stage direction at l. 148).*

While Lope's *Creación* features just a bitter Luzbel, newly defeated by San Miguel, Vélez's stage direction underlines the importance to his play of the visual and aural impression to be made on the audience through a host of malevolent demons. These are frightening figures with their snakes, black and gold stars, flames, painted faces and weapons (soon to be noisily discharged). As many as 'pudieren salir' will be accommodated on the purpose-built stage to form an overwhelming enemy to the hapless first couple. Such dramaturgy has a strong ring of a Corpus Christi street performance to it.

Later in the act various figures – *Tiempo, un judío, un negro, un indio caribe, un romano, un turco* and finally *la Muerte* – process, one by one, across the stage as part of the protagonists' joint dream. Vélez's instruction reads: '*Duérmense recostados sobre una peña, y tocan dentro música, y sale por una tramoya el Tiempo, con unas alas y el rostro dorado, y dice [...] (stage direction at l. 634). Vélez leaves the blocking and the physical staging, to the autor de comedias, but the arrival of winged Time will be impressive visually (through costume and make-up as well as the special effect) and aurally (with the musicians accompanying the dramatic entrance). And the playwright is similarly concerned about the appearance of the remaining figures, including Death, 'como la pintan' (stage direction at l. 703).*

In act 2, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel and their wives, Delbora and Alcana (these two absent from Lope's play), appear together to eat, and in act 3, there is another well-populated scene at Adam's death-bed: '*Entran Cainán, Enoc y Niacar, y Taret y Matusalén. Descúbrase Adán en una cama, y muy viejo*' (stage direction at l. 1912).

Vélez also creates memorable *tableaux vivants*, often overtly with paintings in mind. The play opens thus:

*Tocan música de chirimías dentro, y aparece el paraíso terrenal, lo mejor que pudiere, y hecho un cielo con sol y luna, y un jardín con el árbol de las manzanas, y Adán, hincado de rodillas, desnudo, con calzón y camisa de lienzo, y Dios Padre arriba, criándole de la manera que le pintan [...] (stage direction before l. 1).*

This is an attempt to attract and maintain the attention of the faithful through the recreation of images that are a recognisable part of their visual culture, as that of Death would be. Later there are similar *tableaux*, most memorably at the end of the play with Eve's vision of the crucified Christ and the seven sacraments represented in their popular iconographical forms, with further direct reference to religious painting:

*Descúbrese una cruz con un Cristo crucificado, y un Ángel a los pies, con un cáliz y como se pintan, alrededor los siete sacramentos: la Eucaristía, un cáliz y hostia; el Bautismo, una pila, bautizando un Niño; Confirmación, un Obispo con un Muchacho; la Penitencia, una Mujer con calavera y deciplina; Sacerdocio, un Clérigo revestido; Matrimonio, una Mujer y un Hombre dándose las manos; Extremaunción, un Sacerdote ungiendo a un Enfermo* (stage direction at l. 2161).

The chalice and host, present in this final scene of the play, are the *sine qua non* of Corpus Christi, increasing the likelihood that this play was written to celebrate these festivities, but again it is the grand scale, the freedom from limitations with which Vélez is composing, that is most striking. The dramatist is once again clear about what he expects the audience to see but not about where on stage they will see it: he fails to mention the specific spaces of the *corral* playhouse, unlike Lope in his version of the Biblical story, as we shall see.

Indeed, beside the Eucharistic content of the final scene (which is present only in Vélez's version of the Old Testament story), the kind of grandiose spectacle that the dramatist demands in his stage directions throughout the play is reminiscent of the *auto sacramental* rather than the *comedia*. Vélez is not interested in saving the financial resources of the *cofradía* or the human resources of Rodríguez de Flores's acting troupe (though of course some doubling of roles would be possible). He wants to bring to life the well-known Biblical scenes so that his audience feels fear at the power of humankind's enemies, the anger of God when he is offended by disobedience, some empathy with Adam and Eve when they are cast out and have to scrape a living from the barren earth, and hope for the future with the promise of redemption.

As well as anticipating a generously peopled and elaborately decorated stage, Vélez was ambitious in his use of special effects in his *Creación*. He imagined at least two doors, as in act 2 Adam and Eve enter separately (stage direction before l. 741), two levels representing the celestial and terrestrial worlds, a connecting ramp which is the *monte* down which angels descend, for example at l. 1410, a pit below the stage accessed by a trap-door, a discovery space and the kind of *tramoya* that allows a sudden appearance, ascent or descent. While the staging would have been possible in a *corral* playhouse, the frequency, variety and types of effects, together with the aforementioned lack of precision in the stage directions, make it likely that he was envisaging a street performance on a specially constructed stage. He would have experience, of course, of seeing Corpus Christi plays on the carts and fixed stages in Madrid and on other purpose-built stages, but would have understood that he had no control over the stage built for his *Creación* in Badajoz, or any other square or street in which it might have been performed before or afterwards.

Thus, when the figure of Tiempo appears in the dream scene in act 1 it is 'por una tramoya' and when he subsequently flies away, the playwright instructs, again with a certain degree of vagueness, 'vuelven la tramoya o bofetón por el aire' (stage direction at l. 662). Such technical challenges come thick and fast, as is to be expected in a play designed to move the faithful, and they are ambitious in conception. Perhaps the most demanding moment for the *autor de comedias* and his carpenters is the dramatization of the expression of divine pleasure at Abel's sacrifice:

*Aquí viene bajando una nube, y en llegando sobre el sacrificio de Abel, entra fuego, aunque se abrase el cordero, que será metiéndolo por el escutillón del tablado, y se sube Abel de rodillas y vuelve a bajar* (stage direction at l. 1335).

An effect that involves the descent of a cloud to stage level, a sudden fire produced from below the stage and a kneeling character raised and lowered, is an impressive stunt. Vélez's imagining of this moment of divine approval is much more visual than Lope de Vega's and certainly better suited to a Corpus street performance. Lope's pithy instruction at the same moment of the story reads, 'Sale fuego, que abrasa el sacrificio de Abel' (stage direction at l. 936) and he has a voice within confirm, in four lines of verse, that Abel's offering has pleased God.<sup>7</sup> This speech is not necessary in Vélez's more physical story-telling aimed at the eye of the audience more than the ear.

Shortly after the sacrifice, Abel's murder at the hands of his brother is also visually arresting. He is bloodily killed on stage—*Revuélcase con la sangre* (stage direction at l. 1563)—and his body hidden in a pit opened up via the trap-door. (In Lope's play, Cain merely covers Abel with branches rather than casting him into the pit.) Later, Cain himself is shot by Lamec's arrow fired from on-stage and Lamec is frightened by a lion which emerges. Vélez's directions time and again demonstrate his concern with the spectacular: of course none of this stage-craft was beyond the *corral*, but its centrality to Vélez's play, the sense of scale and of almost constant visual and aural bombardment, together with the simplicity of the dialogue, suggest the kind of appeal to the mass's sense of wonder or *admiratio* redolent of a Corpus Christi performance. The stage directions are not quite *memorias de apariencias*, in the manner that Calderón later wrote them for the *auto* carts, but they are instructions to the *autor de comedias* on stage decoration (and action) which go beyond the norms for the *corral*. The municipal pride of the Badajoz *cofradía* would have been satisfied by the play's ambition and, to an outdoor audience, it would not have mattered unduly if the words spoken by the performers were not always heard.

There is one other certain performance of *La creación del mundo* in the seventeenth century and this also took place at Corpus Christi, in the colonial city of Lima.<sup>8</sup> The records once again fail to mention the playwright's name but Lohmann Villena, who documents this 1614 event, does not hesitate to identify the work as Vélez's, precisely for its nature as an exciting spectacle. He writes: 'la obra ofrecida el primer día [del Corpus en Lima] es de Vélez de Guevara y tenía como muchas de este autor, la característica de ser de gran lujo y entonación, con muchos accesorios efectistas' (130). This scholar felt that Vélez's work was well-suited to performance before a festive audience, as I have argued is likely to have been the case with the Badajoz staging four years earlier.

It may not be possible to prove beyond doubt that Vélez was envisaging a Corpus Christi performance for his *Creación*, or that he was writing to a commission associated with the earliest performance of which we have a record, in Badajoz. However, we can add to the arguments so far marshalled in favour of the Andalusian's *comedia* being the one performed in 1610, the considerable doubt over the candidature of Lope de Vega's play of a similar title, and it is to this aspect that I now turn.

The *prima facie* case against Lope is strong. We shall return to the central question of performance but it is worth remarking first that *La creación del mundo y primera culpa del hombre* was probably not written by 1610. It is not mentioned in either of the lists of plays that Lope included in *El peregrino en su patria* (of 1604 and 1618) and is not published in a



volume of his until the posthumous *Parte XXIV* in Madrid in 1641.<sup>9</sup> Morley and Bruerton's metrical analysis of the work suggests a late date of 1631-35 (270), the final five years of the playwright's life.

Those scholars who support an earlier date of composition for Lope's *Creación*, making it feasibly the play presented in Badajoz, have no concrete evidence to back up their hunches. José María Ruano de la Haza suggests, in an aside, that Lope's play might be a 'comedia temprana' (551), but the purpose of his study is not to investigate its date of composition: his judgement is based on the simplicity of the scenography alone. Julio Duarte, in the introduction to his 1972 edition of Lope's play, is prepared to 'conjeturar la prioridad en tiempo de la pieza de Lope' (35 n. 92). However, this guess that Lope's *Creación* predates Vélez's, is largely based on the critical commonplace that most of Vélez's works were inspired by his contemporaries' (often Lope's) theatre, rather than by a comparison of the two texts or analysis of other relevant evidence. The truism, which has proved stubborn, was most baldly expressed in the seminal work of Emilio Cotarelo y Mori who wrote of Vélez's Old Testament play: '*La Creación del mundo*, aunque el asunto es vulgar, sería tal vez inspirada por la que Lope tiene con el mismo título', underlining his point by drawing attention to 'la suma pobreza de inventiva de Vélez. Con solo leer los títulos de sus obras se adivina que la mayor parte de los argumentos están tomados de Lope de Vega, de Tirso de Molina y de otros poetas de menos fama' (442).<sup>10</sup> Cotarelo's 'tal vez' betrays the speculative nature of this suggestion.

The case for a later date of composition for Lope's *Creación*, closer to the range suggested by Morley and Bruerton, has been strengthened by the recent discovery of a spurious *Parte XXIII* of Lope's dramatic works, apparently published by Miguel Sorolla in Valencia in 1629. The fifth play in the volume is: '*La creación del mundo y primera culpa del hombre*. Comedia famosa de Lope de Vega Carpio. Representóla Vallejo'.<sup>11</sup> The plays of this *Parte* are not all by Lope and the volume was not 'approved' by the playwright, who was unable himself to publish his drama in *partes* during the prohibition years of 1625-1634. The *comedias* in this rare volume are actually *sueltas* bound together and, despite the false preliminaries, were printed in Seville, as Cruickshank has proven. This scholar suggests that the volume is the result of an entrepreneurial move, of dubious legality, by its 'publisher', Luys de Soto Velasco in 1629 (237).<sup>12</sup>

The date of publication would usually be some years later than the date of composition but the mention of Vallejo is further evidence—not conclusive either—for Lope's *Creación* being a late work. Manuel Álvarez Vallejo, who seems to have premièred Lope's Old Testament play became an *autor de comedias* in 1620 and, according to García Reidy, had no documented dealings with Lope until 1630 (*Las musas rameras* 116). (He was famously responsible for the first performance of *El castigo sin venganza* in 1631.) This detail adds to the likelihood that Lope's play was written in in the late 1620s in the playwright's old age, nearly two decades after the *Creación* that formed part of the Corpus Christi celebrations in Badajoz in 1610.

Lope did write frequently for Corpus celebrations, as one might expect. However, his connections at the time of the Badajoz performance of *La creación del mundo* were with Madrid and then Seville, not with Extremadura. Indeed, as García Reidy documents, the Madrid authorities, who had regularly commissioned Lope to write *autos sacramentales* for their festivities up until and including 1610, granted him a sum of 300 *reales* in June 1611 apparently in order to maintain good relations with him, when he wrote instead for Seville.

Lope's temporary abandonment of Madrid in 1611 was due to his friendship with the *autor de comedias*, Alonso de Riquelme, whose troupe was performing the *autos* in Seville that year (*Las musas ramera*s 133-37). Thus, if the 1610 *comedia divina* was Lope's it is unlikely to have been a new one, commissioned for that year in Badajoz, as the city would no doubt have desired. Lope, as the preeminent dramatist of the moment, was being courted in the run-up to each Corpus Christi, by the best actor-managers whose companies were playing in the two most important cities in Spain.

All of this is circumstantial. As with the case in favour of Vélez being the author of the 1610 *Creación*, the strongest argument against Lope having written it is one based on staging and performance norms. Lope's dramatization of the opening chapters of the Old Testament is clearly written for the *corral* theatre and thus not intended for a Corpus Christi performance in the street. Indeed, so typical an example is *La creación del mundo y primera culpa del hombre* of a play destined for the *corral*, that Ruano de la Haza chooses it to illustrate the norms of seventeenth-century staging in a permanent playhouse like those that had evolved in Madrid. He concludes that 'para esta comedia, Lope utiliza prácticamente todos los elementos escénicos que hemos analizado en este libro: escotillones, canales, bofetones, decorado sinecdótico, apariencias, vestuario y utilería de mano para caracterizar al personaje' (Ruano and Allen 551).

Since Ruano's analysis of a possible *corral* performance of Lope's play is set out in precise detail in his study, there is no need to rehearse it here. However, three examples are worth citing to demonstrate how Lope's play was conceived for the stage he knew best and worked for most regularly. First, the opening scene of his *Creación*, a dialogue between Miguel and Luzbel which provides the motive for the latter's temptation of Eve, is performed as an *apariciencia*, 'en lo alto, en uno de los corredores, ya que poco después leemos que "cae Luzbel"' (547). Thus, when Lope writes, 'descúbrese' in his first stage direction, he expects a curtain to be pulled across the space immediately above the *corral*'s *vestuario*, or main discovery space, to reveal a throne and the two disputing figures. When Luzbel falls at l. 55, Miguel speaks for a further sixteen lines to allow for the actor's descent to the stage level and his re-costuming as a devil 'con cola y faldones y tocado de diablo' (stage direction at l. 73). Second, after Luzbel exits in act 1 having delivered his long speech in *tercetos*, another curtain is drawn, this time to reveal the scene set up in the decorated main *vestuario* at stage level: 'Vase, y corren una cortina, donde está hecho un jardín o paraíso, con muchas flores o fuentes, pájaros y animales, y al lado derecho estará Adán y al siniestro Eva, ambos admirados, mirándose el uno al otro' (stage direction at l. 136). The painted earthly paradise, a 'típico decorado sinecdótico' (547), allows the *corral* audience to imagine the undecorated main stage out on to which Adam and Eve step from the *vestuario*, as representing the Garden of Eden. This is a typical *corral* stage economy: Lope (and the *autor de comedias*) are able to employ a small, decorated space to help re-create a whole world.

Finally, the stage directions at the end of act 2 refer specifically to the three *nichos* that occupy the second level above the *corral* stage. Once Adam and Eve, still on the main stage, have been expelled from paradise and lamented the first murder, committed by their offspring, an angel appears next to them, 'Sale por el tablado el Ángel' (stage direction at l. 1140). San Miguel consoles them from his position on the first level above the *vestuario*, where he appeared at the play's opening, and then disappears behind his curtain. The angel ascends two levels 'por una canal' (stage direction at l. 1156) while Miguel is speaking, reaching the *nichos* which reveal three *tableaux*: Noah's ark, the Tower of Babel and the Virgin Mary. The angel explains each vision of the future to the on-stage audience from

above before the act ends with the following stage instruction from the dramatist: ‘*Toquen chirimías, y vuelva a pasar el Ángel del un lado del teatro al otro, llevándose la otra cortina tras de sí, que cubra los nichos*’ (stage direction at l. 1216). Ruano remarks here on Lope’s skill ‘al tener todos los espacios del edificio del vestuario ocupados para el final de la segunda jornada’ and illustrates this staging with in his figure 59 (550) (Figure 3). Indeed, his dramaturgical know-how and the precision of his vision of how the play should be staged are notable, but so is the fit of his work to the fixed *corral* stage, indicated by the technical terms used in the stage directions.

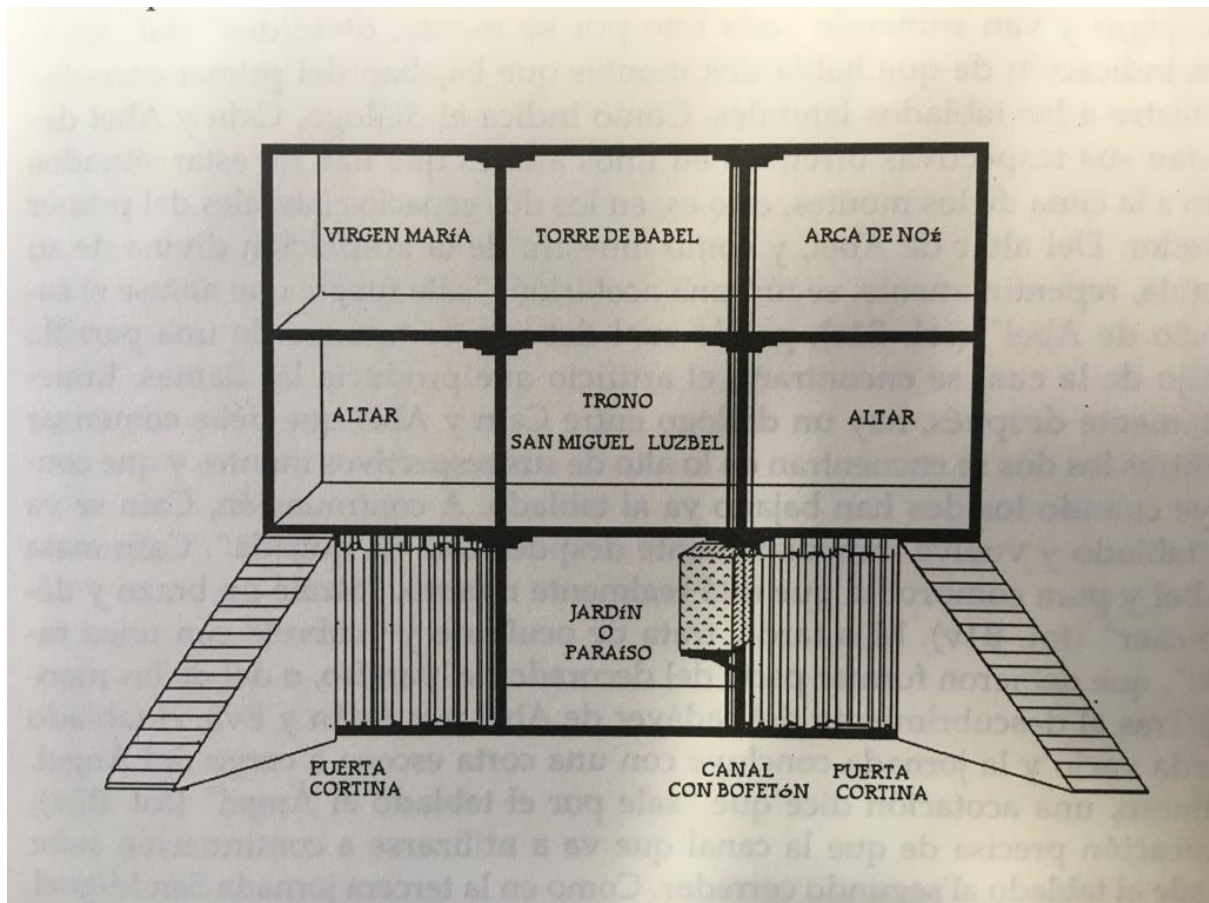


Figure 3: “Teatro” para *La creación del mundo*, de Lope’ (Ruano de la Haza and Allen, 550). Reproduced by kind permission of José María Ruano de la Haza.

One might add to the neat ‘fit’ of Lope’s play with the *corral* space, the fact that he is more dependent on the audience listening to the words he has written than Vélez was. Lope explains more, employs a more rhetorical style in his characters’ speeches and is prone to displays of erudition and poetic flair. Vélez tends to keep his message more simple, relying, as we have suggested, as much on telling the Biblical story visually as through words. One example will illustrate the point: when Adam first sets eyes on his partner, Eve, Vélez cleaves close to the Biblical text whilst Lope allows him a more elaborate poetic expression of his love, employing periphrasis, carefully-wrought parallelistic or chiasmic structures and the terminology of contemporary philosophy and theories of love in his *romance*.

<p>Vélez de Guevara:</p> <p>¡Oh, güeso de mis güesos, carne bella de mi carne, hermosa imagen, cifra de naturaleza, por ésta dejará el hombre su padre y madre, y con tiernas muestras de amor de sus brazos hará hermosas cadenas! (ll. 117–24)</p>	<p>Lope de Vega:</p> <p>Hermoso pedazo mío, que de mi lado siniestro la eterna sabiduría dio materia a su concepto; dulce esposa y compañera, tan igual en los afectos, que sois carne de mis carnes, y siendo mía, soy vuestro; fiel esposa y fiel amiga, en quien recíproco veo, si no un cuerpo con dos almas, un alma, sí, con dos cuerpos; ¿cómo estáis? (ll. 137–49)</p>
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This is not to say that Vélez's play lacks poetic skill. In fact, the Andalusian produces touching verse, especially in his redeployment of Garcíaso's lyrical first *égloga* in Adam and Eve's lament after the expulsion, but his play is more direct, less complex in its expression with much of its affective power and didacticism delivered visually.

It is not yet possible to affirm beyond doubt that the play entitled *La creación del mundo* that was performed, with its *entremeses*, on a temporary stage in front of the church of Santa María del Castillo in Badajoz on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1610 was the one written by Luis Vélez de Guevara which survived in a single theatre manager's manuscript. It might have been Lope de Vega's play with the similar but longer title, or a work by another dramatist which has not survived to the present. However, Vélez was active around this time, being an established and successful playwright; he did write religious dramas; his title matches the documentary record exactly; and, above all, he seems to have written his creation play with a street performance in front of a festive audience in mind. He is particularly concerned with spectacle and impressive aural effects, less so with poetic complexity, and makes little or no reference to the *corral* staging norms in his stage directions. Additionally, Lope's play on the same subject matter is likely to be from the 1620s; he does not remember it in his *Peregrino* lists of 1604 or 1618; he is less likely to have written a commission for Badajoz in 1610 when he was established as Madrid's main author of Corpus Christi *autos*; and, above all, he is certainly envisaging a *corral* performance in front of a paying audience who will appreciate both the visual special effects and his poetic variety and skill. On the balance of probabilities, the Badajoz *Creación* is likely to have been Vélez's work, whether performed as a specific commission or as a play that was in the repertoire of actor-manager Pedro Rodríguez de Flores.

There is room for further comparative work on these two plays and further documentary evidence may come to light to confirm or question this tentative conclusion. However, a certain attribution of the 1610 play to Vélez de Guevara would enrich our understanding of the world of Golden Age drama in a number of ways. It would reveal something of this playwright's connections and dramaturgy. It would help to overturn some of the scholarly truisms about him, for example Cotarelo's contention that most of Vélez's works were

inspired by his contemporaries' (often Lope's) theatre. It would bolster other recent research, by Peale and others, which suggests that Luis Vélez is a more significant playwright in the reign of Philip III than has been recognized. It reminds us of the importance of commissions to the livelihood of Golden Age playwrights and sheds light on the variety and extent of Corpus Christi celebrations beyond the well-studied hub of Calderón's Madrid. Above all, however, it serves as a warning that if we ignore the performative aspects of dramatic works, we can only ever understand half of their story at best.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based upon research initially conducted for the 'estudio introductorio' I prepared for Manson and Peale's edition of Vélez's *La creación del mundo*. I am grateful to George Peale for his invitation to collaborate on that volume. The study has also benefitted from my involvement with the CATCOM project at the Universidad de Valencia and the research projects supported by the Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competitividad, FFI2011-23549 y CDS2009-00033. I would also like to express my gratitude to Fátima Cancho Castellano of the Archivo Histórico Municipal de Badajoz for her guidance and to Alejandro García Reidy who read a draft of this study.

<sup>2</sup> The document, written by the notary Blas González Yáñez, is transcribed by Marcos Álvarez (132).

<sup>3</sup> Martinengo addresses the question of attribution in this critical edition of the play (272-73). In spite of Morley and Bruerton's inclusion of *La creación del mundo y primera culpa del hombre* amongst plays of doubtful authenticity (270), it is generally accepted as Lope's, a view I share.

<sup>4</sup> See my 'estudio introductorio' to Manson and Peale's edition of Vélez's play for a comparison of the two works (26-32).

<sup>5</sup> See my 'estudio introductorio' to Manson and Peale's edition of Vélez's play for details of the usual titles given to Lope's play (26-27 n.33).

<sup>6</sup> Vélez mentions a 'cortina' once, 'Cubren la cortina de Dios Padre', in Act 1 after l. 436 and clearly envisages a space which can be covered, but otherwise avoids referring to the typical features of the *corral* stages. Quotations from Vélez's *La creación del mundo* come from Manson and Peale's edition by line number.

<sup>7</sup> Quotations from Lope's *La creación del mundo y primera culpa del hombre* are taken from Martinengo's edition.

<sup>8</sup> Both records appear in the *Base de datos de comedias mencionadas en la documentación teatral (1540-1700)*, edited by Teresa Ferrer et al.

<sup>9</sup> The date of the *Parte XXIV* is often given as 1640(?) but I follow García Reidy's date ('From Stage to Page' 60).

<sup>10</sup> See Martín Ojeda and Peale for more on this phenomenon.

<sup>11</sup> Incidentally, the attribution of the play to Lope in this volume makes it more likely that he was indeed its author, despite Morley and Bruerton's caution.

<sup>12</sup> This spurious *Parte XXIII* is also assessed by Hernández González in a 1992 article. Though he was unaware of Cruickshank's earlier study, he does note that the 1629 'Valencia' volume brings forward the earliest dates of composition of a number of plays, including Lope's *La creación del mundo* 'de 1640 a 1629' (185).