An Inn-Yard Empire: Theater and Hospitals in the Spanish Golden Age

Dissertation

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Abstract

This study examines the development of commercial theater in important urban locations of the Spanish Empire during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and compares them with their English counterparts. Based on manuscript and printed sources, it argues that the Spanish theaters developed into a well-entrenched and exportable system of public drama through their financial relationship to hospitals in those cities. Unlike in cities in the Anglo-Atlantic, this meant that theater was centrally integrated into the physical space of cities in Spain and its colonies. This relationship also gave Spanish public playhouses an upper hand when dealing with anti-theatrical moralizers.

Additionally this study examines the impact that various groups had on the development of Renaissance theaters. Actors, playwrights, troupe directors, hospital administrators, actresses, and audience members, as well as imperial, local, and religious authorities, played a role in the creation of the most productive and most attended public drama of the early modern period.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Bailey.
Acknowledgments

Upon my arrival as a graduate student at the Ohio State University, I was lucky enough to work with John Brooke, whose energy, kindness, and brilliance never fail to astound. He guided me through my MA. Geoffrey Parker and Dale van Kley have supervised my PhD thesis, and I could not have asked for two more grounded, reliable, patient, kind, and willing advisors. Elizabeth Davis has been a helpful and kind mentor. She and Tom Postlewait have read drafts, given criticism and feedback, and written letters of recommendation for grants that enabled me to complete my dissertation research. I am also grateful to Jim Amelang, Bernardo García García, Fernando Bouza, David Cressy, Richard Dutton, Don Larson, and Ruth Mackay. I’m thankful to my faculty mentor at Kenyon College Jeff Bowman for letting me bounce ideas off of him and for arranging for me to present my research.

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Introduction: Commercial Theater in the Spanish Atlantic World: 
An Exportable and Charitable Commodity

In the English speaking world, when one thinks of Renaissance drama the first thing that usually comes to mind is William Shakespeare and the Globe Theatre of London. Shakespeare and his works have been and will continue to be the subjects of countless biographies and studies, and several scholarly journals are devoted solely to the study of Shakespeare’s writings. The paucity of documentary evidence about his life has meant that scholars have looked to his plays and poems for evidence about his character. This dearth of archival evidence has also meant that Shakespeare’s identity has been and remains a matter of contention. Most scholars claim that he was a man from Stratford-Upon-Avon, but other groups contend that he was really the Earl of Oxford, or Francis Bacon, directing a group of skilled writers, or a still-alive but in-hiding Christopher Marlowe. Fewer dispute the quality of the thirty-seven plays attributed to Shakespeare.¹ This is perhaps ironic as Shakespeare did not attempt to correct his plays for publication nor did he achieve the same level of celebrity during his lifetime as his contemporary, the Spanish playwright Lope de Vega.

¹ The anti-Stratfordians are numerous. The first of the Baconians was (also ironically named) Delia Bacon. See Delia Bacon, The Philosophy of Shakespeare’s Plays Unfolded (London: Groombridge, 1857; reprinted: New York: AMS Press, 1970). Numerous others, including Mark Twain, would later take up her argument. Thomas Looney was the first major proponent of the argument that Shakespeare was actually the Earl of Oxford. See Thomas J. Looney, Shakespeare Identified in Edward De Vere the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, and the Poems of Edward De Vere (London: Frederick A. Stokes, 1920). Looney’s ideas became the basis of a new society called the Shakespeare Fellowship, an Oxonian stronghold. Joseph Sobran is currently the leading Oxfordian. See Joseph Sobran, Alias Shakespeare: Solving the Greatest Literary Mystery of All Times (New York: Free Press, 1998). Rodney Bolt’s scholarly satire, History Play: The Lives and Afterlife of Christopher Marlowe (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), which posits the potentiality that Marlowe was Shakespeare, examines these issues.
Unlike the English bard, Lope tried to correct his many hundreds of plays for publication toward the end of his life and he constantly worked to fashion himself into an even greater celebrity. Perhaps the best example of their level of comparative celebrity within their own lifetimes is that Lope’s portrait hung in many Spanish homes during the second half of the Golden Age, a period in Spanish history which encompasses the last decades of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century and which corresponds with the tremendous output of brilliant literary and visual artists, such as Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, Pedro Calderón de la Barca, and Diego Velázquez.

During the last decades of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century it was not the theater of Shakespeare that became the most integrated into the daily lives of the people that watched it. Although scholars of the English Renaissance theater, such as Andrew Gurr, have demonstrated that many Londoners were playgoers during Shakespeare’s time, the commercial theater of the early modern Spanish Empire was the greatest blockbuster of its day. This connection between the developing theater of the *comedia* and charitable funds devoted to the care of patients in the hospitals of early modern Spanish cities fostered the production of commercial drama, both in Castile, the heart of Spain’s realms, and in the American colonies. This project is a socio-cultural study of the relationship between commercial drama and public health in important cities of Spain’s Atlantic Empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. While this study compares Spanish cities with their English counterparts, the heart of the

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study is Spain rather than England. Comparing and contrasting the development of public theater in Madrid versus London, Seville versus Dublin, and colonial cities in Mexico, such as Mexico City and Puebla, versus colonial British North American locations, such as Williamsburg, Virginia, helps to establish the uniqueness of the system of public theater and charitable hospitals that developed in Castile during the early modern period and that Spaniards exported to their colonies.

 Actors, directors, and playwrights, who were looking to make a living and administrators, who were looking to fund social services in Spain, created an inn-yard empire, in which theaters were a regular and central feature of cities and in which the production of plays helped to finance the physical and spiritual care of the marginalized sick and impoverished. Acting troupes fanned out from Madrid, performing in other major centers of the Hapsburg realms, such as Seville, Mexico City, Puebla, and Lima, and also in numerous smaller cities, such as Valladolid, Toledo, and Saña, a colonial city in Peru abandoned in the eighteenth century after pirate raids and a severe flood. Audiences welcomed the diversion and city governments and religious brotherhoods welcomed the chance to provide financial assistance to their hospitals.

 During the sixteenth century, as religious reformations swept across much of Europe, Hapsburg-ruled Spain remained staunchly Catholic. Under the Hapsburgs, Spain extended its dominion over large amounts of territory, including much of the Americas, the Philippines (named for the reigning Spanish monarch Philip II), and much of modern-day Italy. Spain was the predominant European power, if not the most powerful realm in the early modern world. In 1580 Spain annexed Portugal through the Union of Crowns
and thus added Brazil to its large New World holdings. Although religious wars on the European continent and revolts within Spain’s holdings troubled the reigns of Philip III (1598-1621) and Philip IV (1621-1665), their rules marked the height of the cultural output of the Spanish Golden Age, including the theater of Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, and Pedro Calderón de la Barca.

In Spanish cities the *corrales de comedias*, or inn-yard theaters, were centrally located and linked financially and culturally to the cities’ hospitals, whereas in English cities the public theaters were located outside the city walls, dependent on court and noble patronage, and served no such charitable function. Since Spaniards paid their *reales* to both the *corrales* and the hospitals upon entrance, the hospitals and public health, such as it was in an era before antibiotics, relied heavily on the production and consumption of performed drama from the sixteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth century.

During the Middle Ages monasteries had reinstituted the tradition of founding hospitals to care for the sick, wounded, and needy of Western Europe. These hospitals flourished during the Crusades, and during the thirteenth century many urban centers began to adopt the institutional form, as well. While some monastic hospitals continued to develop, from the fourteenth century on, municipalities, along with urban religious brotherhoods and wealthy individual patrons began to establish hospitals in cities. These hospitals both cared for the most marginalized – the sick, the poor, the orphaned, the

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3 Such institutions had existed in parts of Roman-ruled Western Europe during the fourth and fifth centuries, but had largely died away during the early Middle Ages. They had, however, continued on in Byzantium and there were places to medically treat ill and injured people in areas ruled by Islamic powers, including Islamic Al-Andalus in the Middle Ages. See S.M. Imamuddin, *Muslim Spain 711-1492 A.D.: A Sociological Study* (Leiden: Brill Academic Press, 1997), pp. 220-229.
abandoned – and cared for society by removing a large segment of its most allegedly disreputable individuals from the public view. After the Protestant Reformation, early modern European hospitals in Catholic lands continued to employ priests, as well as university-educated physicians and licensed phlebotomists and apothecaries. As John Henderson has pointed out, hospitals aimed to heal both the physical body and the soul.

Early modern hospitals varied greatly in size and in their focus; there were military hospitals founded for troops, plague hospitals, small hospitals specifically catering to the elderly members of certain professions, and large hospitals, which were training grounds for young physicians and had anatomy theaters within them by the end of the seventeenth century. However, in general, hospitals in Renaissance Spain and in England fought homelessness and hunger, two problems that plagued early modern cities. They were institutions that combined the qualities of the clinic, the poorhouse, and the nursing home. Some, such as Madrid’s Hospital General, which Philip II founded in 1566 by combining three older hospitals, took in hundreds of patients with curable diseases in any given year.

The symbiotic relationship that emerged between the Spanish theaters and the hospitals is not without irony: the centrally-located theaters were places where people of all classes and walks of life mingled, spreading disease as they sought entertainment and took part in a playgoing public. Yet it was this relationship and the mass production, both literary and theatrical, of the national Spanish drama, or comedia, that allowed theater to

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provide a social service for Spaniards, and this financial relationship made it extremely
difficult to close the playhouses of Spain.

I. The Origins of Public Drama in Golden Age Spain

As in most of Western Europe, the Renaissance drama of Spain and that of
England developed from the mystery and miracle plays of the Middle Ages. The
introduction of the festival of Corpus Christi in the second half of the thirteenth century,
and its institutionalization by Pope Clement V in 1311 provided the setting for
processions, which became increasingly elaborate and, within a century, included plays
and lasted several days. Many theater historians and literary theorists have long assumed
that during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Castilian drama remained rudimentary
in comparison with the mystery and morality plays of the rest of Europe. However, this
is a generalization, as dramatic texts were unlikely to be written down and many of the
texts that were recorded have been lost or remain undiscovered in archives. Likewise,
since many medieval dramas were improvised or pantomimed, the textual record does not
necessarily reflect the diversity of medieval drama in Castile.5

During the early sixteenth century, private patronage and religious celebration
began to make for an early Spanish drama of a fluid and adaptable nature. Juan del
Encina, who has been called “The Father of Spanish Drama,” began writing plays for the

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5 See Charlotte Stern, The Medieval Theatre in Castile (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and
Studies, 1996). Stern argues that a more flexible definition of drama to include medieval semidramatic
poems, such as debates, would not paint a view of such a backwards Castile.
entertainment of his patron, the Duke of Alba. Initially Encina found his inspiration in
traditional sources, such as the Bible and medieval *pastourrelles*, or lyric romances.
After a sojourn in Rome in 1500, Encina’s work changed. He also began to experiment
in his dramas with the themes of literary humanism inspired by the Italian Renaissance.
For example, he began to experiment with Italian meters, and he began to give his
characters names with classical origins or allegorical meaning.

Although he was Portuguese, Gil Vicente wrote eleven of his plays in Castilian
and eighteen others in a mixture of Portuguese and Castilian. He was, according to many
scholars of early modern Spanish drama, the most talented Iberian playwright before
Lope de Vega. Unlike the works of Encina, which contain divisions into scenes and acts,
Vicente’s plays are fast-moving and loosely-knit without divides in the action. He had a
clear understanding of the ways in which fraud and hypocrisy worked, and some of his
works show concern with social and ecclesiastical abuse.

Encina, Vicente, and their rivals and protégées represent one of the two strands of
Spanish drama developing during the first half of the sixteenth century. Their plays were
humanistic in that they contained the classical model of using a chorus and employing
multiple acts – with the exception of Vicente’s works. The other major type of
developing drama was the religious one-act play. At the end of the fifteenth century,
liturgical dramas began to be performed in the vernacular. With the advent of these
vernacular plays came an increase in spoken, as opposed to sung, dialogue. These
vernacular dramas were longer and allowed for greater diversification of characters and
scenes. Over the course of the sixteenth century these religious one act plays developed
into *autos sacramentales*, which are religious one-act, allegorical dramas that typically focus on some aspect of the Eucharist. The *auto sacramental* was usually performed outdoors and became integral to the celebration of Corpus Christi and other religious festivals. These religious one-act plays also became significant in the evangelical theater used by Spanish clerics proselytizing to the indigenous peoples of the New World.

During the second half of the sixteenth century, Spanish theater underwent a series of significant changes. In the 1540s and 1550s companies of actors began to form in order to meet the growing appetite for drama in Spanish cities, particularly Seville, Valencia, and Valladolid. Lope de Rueda and Alonso de la Vega created such companies and wrote their own material for immediate performance. Another crucial development was the arrival of Italian players in Spain. Italian players had visited Spain before, but in the second half of the sixteenth century, a number of actor-managers found Spain a rich prospect. The Italian actors made the comedy of intrigue popular in Spain and put the emphasis on wit and clever dialogue, and their style of performance had a marked effect on Lope de Vega’s *comedia nueva*. They also may have introduced professional actresses to Spain and contributed to the development of a Spanish preference for tragicomedy over tragedy. The *Commedia dell’arte* initially was largely improvised, though based in the study classical manuscripts obtained through memberships in closed learning academies. The names of these Italian troupes emulated those of learned societies, and this helped to legitimize street theater in Italy. Zan Ganassa, a leader of

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6 Both of these key figures in Spanish theater were from Seville, which proved extremely fertile ground for Spanish theatrical activity.

one such troupe of Italian actors, exported this dramatic form from Italy to France and then to Spain, spending a significant amount of time in Madrid.\textsuperscript{8}

The most famous early modern Spanish novelist, Miguel de Cervantes, was also a playwright. However, it is commonly held that he was a better novelist than dramatist, and his dramatic works all suffer “from an inability to create and sustain a properly paced full-length plot, to capture a world of complexity in that emblematic reduction of real space and time to theatrical space and time called a dramatic action.”\textsuperscript{9} His contemporary, Lope de Vega, was the better dramatist. Lope revolutionized Spanish drama and became established as the leading Spanish playwright during his own lifetime and would long be renowned in Spanish public opinion as the Phoenix.

The comedia nueva that developed in the late 1570s and 1580s and that Lope de Vega adopted as his own and popularized has a particular, though not rigidly set, form. Whether Lope should be credited with creating the national drama of Spain or seen as “the culmination of a whole process” as others have argued is still a matter of debate in Golden Age scholarship.\textsuperscript{10} Clearly influenced by other playwrights and always hoping for royal patronage, Lope sought publicity and celebrity constantly.\textsuperscript{11} He played a large role in establishing and in spreading his own legend, and he wrote hundreds, if not thousands, of plays, known as comedias.

\textsuperscript{9} McKendrick, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{10} Joaquin de Entrambasaguas describes it as “el final de todo un proceso” in Lope de Vega y su tiempo (Barcelona: Teide, 1962), p. 254. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.
\textsuperscript{11} Elizabeth R. Wright, Pilgrimage to Patronage: Lope de Vega and the Court of Phillip III, 1598-1621 (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001), pp. 13-16.
These plays contain three act divisions. They are usually approximately three thousand lines long and comprised of polymetric verse, chosen by the playwright to suit the plot and circumstance. *Comedias* vary tremendously in subject matter; however, almost all of these plays have a pair of lovers, comic servants, called *graciosos*, complicating characters, and frequently they also feature representatives of law and order, such as monarchs. In many *comedias* characters tend to be defined more by social status and occupation than by personality. This is especially true of earlier dramas. However, some of the characters created by Golden Age playwrights have forcible personalities and idiosyncratic tendencies and the ability to move the audience to feel emotions, such as fear, happiness, and sorrow, such as Laurencia in Lope’s famous drama *Fuenteovejuna*. *Comedias* also typically have multiple plot lines, and most are tragicomedies. They tend to be of one of two thematic varieties: the nationalistic history play or the cloak and sword drama. Both of these types of drama allowed for a Spanish audience comprised of nobles, middling merchants and artisans, and their servants and other day laborers.

II. From a National Theater to an Atlantic World Export

A large body of scholarship has developed over the past century that has examined the works of the playwrights of the Golden Age and the theater for which they wrote. Some scholars in the past fifty years, including Margaret Wilson, José Antonio Maravall, and José María Diez Borque, have either seen Spanish theater as one of
hegemonic political and/or religious control. Others such as Melveena McKendrick, Jodi Campbell, and Ivan Cañadas, have argued against this model, claiming that the Spanish drama of the Golden Age was a theater of subversion. Still other scholars, have argued that, while the *comedia* did sometimes allow for political critiques of royal authority and for a fluidity that allowed characters to overcome typically proscribed gender and social roles, ultimately this theater negotiated a middle ground between oppressive absolutist norms and outright rebellious subversion.

In *Spanish Drama of the Golden Age* Margaret Wilson observes that most of the populace of Madrid frequented the theaters, including the secular clergy, nobles, officials, commoners, and even the king. Clergy, nobles, and commoners attended the performances of *comedias* in many other cities in Spain’s realms as well, and such a large and habitual audience increased the demand for the production of new plays. As playwrights wrote for the *corrales de comedias* and as Spaniards attended them, the potential opportunity for theater to influence the public increased. Wilson argues that during the seventeenth century a large number of humanist scholars promoted aesthetic reform in the Spanish arts, and that the Counter-Reformation made use of drama as a vehicle for morality and religion.

Perhaps the greatest and most influential proponent of the argument for theater as a political tool for hegemonic control was Spanish historian and cultural critic, José Antonio Maravall. Building on earlier works that depicted Renaissance Spain as an absolutist and hegemonic state, Maravall argues in *Teatro y Literatura en la Sociedad Barroca*, published in 1972, that the Spanish theater was primarily an instrument of
oppressive political and social control. This eminent Spanish historian claims that the comedia served the interests of the Spanish crown and monarchy and the culture of Golden Age Spain was conservative and monolithic.

Alongside Maravall’s critical analysis of the political power of the Spanish theater to control and oppress the common men and women is the work of José María Díez Borque. Díez Borque contends that the Golden Age comedia controlled baroque playgoers by its nature as theater of escapism. He suggests that by going to the playhouse early modern Spaniards were able to forget the troubling times in which they were living. In Sociedad y teatro en la España de Lope de Vega (1978) Díez Borque argues the spectacle of the comedia was a democratized one, but at the same time, the marked separations in the playhouses and the price variations to sit in a box rather than to stand upheld the rigid social structure of early modern Spanish society. While the audience in the corrales de comedias was a microcosm of urban society in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spain, it was still one that was a stratified hierarchy.¹²

While there are certainly elements of truth to the contentions of Wilson, Maravall, and Díez Borque, Golden-Age Spanish theater could just as easily subvert such conventions, as uphold them. Melveena McKendrick and Jodi Campbell, among others, have pushed against Maravall’s thesis of a baroque hegemon. Positioning herself as a revisionist, McKendrick has posited that Spanish drama had a dual identity: national institution and artistic expression, and she argues that the relationship between society, politics, and drama was complex, as was the relationship between state and society. Jodi

Campbell has argued that numerous Golden Age playwrights examined political issues in their comedias, and that Tirso de Molina, who scholars of Spanish drama have long assumed to be an exception for his marked political stances, was merely one of many who wrote plays with a critical edge to them.\footnote{13}{Jodi Campbell, \textit{Monarchy, Political Culture, and Drama in Seventeenth-Century Madrid: Theater of Negotiation} (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006).}

In addition to these revisionist studies, several theater scholars have turned to unearthing archival documents and examining the way the theater as an institution functioned physically and economically on a daily basis. One scholar of Spanish theater, John Allen, has attempted to reconstruct the Corral del Príncipe, one of the two permanent public playhouses in seventeenth-century Madrid and one that operated for over 150 years, and was not demolished until 1744. Allen’s work provides the most in-depth conception of the physical space of the Corral del Príncipe with its lobby, concessions, cazuela for the women, boxes, and tertulia for the clergy on the highest floor. Allen also observed that there were similarities in the design of the corrales and the inn-yard theatres of Tudor-Stuart London. However, he claims the similarities probably came from traveling Italian troops rather than English ones.\footnote{14}{John Allen, \textit{The Reconstruction of a Spanish Golden Age Playhouse: El Corral del Príncipe (1583-1744)} (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1983).}

Spanish historians Carmen Sanz Ayán and Bernardo García García have examined the financial and institutional relationship between the Castilian corrales de comedias and hospitals during the reign of Felipe II in their study, \textit{Teatros y comediantes en el Madrid de Felipe II}.\footnote{15}{Carmen Sanz Ayán y Bernardo J. García García, \textit{Teatros y comediantes en el Madrid de Felipe II}. (Madrid: Editorial Complutense 2000).} In this study, they lay out the fiscal relationship that
developed in the last quarter of the sixteenth century between the \textit{corrales de comedia} of Madrid and the city’s religious brotherhoods and charitable hospitals. They have compellingly demonstrated the influence that social welfare in the court and capital on had on the production of public theater. Their study ends with the change in administration of the \textit{corrales de comedias} that will be discussed at length in the first chapter of this study.\textsuperscript{16}

Most scholars of Renaissance drama, including all those discussed above, have tended to situate their studies within national frameworks or to focus on the theatrical activity of one particular early modern city. However, while there have been several important, comparative studies of Spanish and English theater, none of them have dealt extensively with the differing relationships they had to public health and public opinion in their respective urban environments, nor have they examined how colonists carried these models of drama to cities in the Americas.

Also these previous studies have tended to focus on the similarities between English and Spanish drama from a standpoint that is more literary and cultural than historical. Walter Cohen, writing from a Marxist standpoint, has contended that the Renaissance drama of Spain and England developed in similar ways due to the conflict between feudalism and capitalism in two nations that were both weak absolutist states. According to Cohen, “[w]ithin a larger unity, English and Spanish plays significantly differ in sources, materials, versification, style, act division, speech length, genre, relative

\textsuperscript{16} See below, pp. 48-50.
emphasis on theme and character, and, not least, ideas.”\textsuperscript{17} These theaters allowed for the fusion of the popular and the classic, and were dependent upon the social, political, and cultural frameworks of England and Spain. According to Cohen, the transition from feudalism to capitalism laid the grounds for the development of Renaissance drama. He contends that in England and Spain the growth of partial absolutism and of capitalism allowed for the development of professional acting troupes. While the theater in England developed through what Cohen calls “a constant and complex interaction between learned and popular traditions,” the Spanish theater “underwent a gradual popularization of an initially learned pastime.”\textsuperscript{18} While Cohen does observe that there seems to have been more royal and noble patronage in England than in Spain, he fails to fully develop this theme. He also fails to realize that Castile was not a weak absolutist state.

In his examination of Spanish and English historical plays, John Loftis has argued that the similarities between Spanish and English drama are the result of their independent development from medieval literature. He observes that from 1585 to 1604 the two nations were at war and that although Spanish and English playwrights both wrote about Spain’s attempts to achieve dominion over the globe, the influence of Spanish drama on English was slight and the influence of English drama on Spanish was “nonexistent.”\textsuperscript{19}

In a seminal article, entitled “A Tale of Three Cities: The Place of the Theatre in Early Modern Madrid, Paris, and London,” Margaret Greer has compared the

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p. 124.
Renaissance public drama of these three European court cities. She notes that many of the similarities developed because of cross-fertilization across boundaries particularly court spectacle, which originated in Italy and began to spread across Europe in the late fifteenth century, and humanist interest in the revival of classical works of drama. While commercial theater took place more centrally in Madrid and Paris than it did in London, Greer’s research has also shown that the early modern theater of Paris was stunted in its development by a 1548 ban on religious plays, the turmoil of the French Wars of Religion, and the early monopoly on performance by the Confrérie de la Passion. However, this theater was largely subservient to royal tastes and Louis XIV consolidated all the Paris-based actors into one acting company in 1680.20

Most recently, in a study published in 2005, Ivan Cañadas has examined the discourses of rank, gender, and hierarchy in the texts of plays in order to demonstrate the polyphonic, or multi-voiced, nature of public drama in Tudor-Stuart London and Hapsburg Madrid.21 After looking at the status of acting companies and the role of women as actresses and characters on the stages of the capitals of England and Spain, Cañadas turns to an examination of social rank, gender, and community in several Renaissance plays, particularly several by Lope de Vega and English playwright, Thomas Dekker. Where Cohen has argued that the similarities between the public drama of England and Spain derive from capitalist structures and Loftis has argued they stem from

independent developments from medieval dramatic traditions, Cañadas claims that the similarities are the result of homosocial desires and gendered anxieties.

Scholars of colonial Mexican and Latin American theater have paid scant attention to these larger comparative issues in part because they have no direct British American comparison. Instead, a number of these scholars have tended to focus on the evangelical nature of religious theater in the Americas. For example, Adam Vinyesi, who largely follows Maravall’s understanding of Golden Age theater as an oppressive, aristocratic social force, argues that the explosion of theatrical forms in Latin America during the twentieth century is the result of political and class struggle. Vinyesi claims that colonial Spanish theater in Mexico began in 1524 when Hernán Cortés carefully staged a scene with the Franciscan missionaries. By kneeling and kissing the hems of their robes, he combined religion, politics, and theatre in colonial Latin America. According to Vinyesi, through this act Cortés was imitating Moctezuma and thus reinforcing both his power and the power of the Franciscans in the eyes of the conquered Aztecs.

III. Sources and Organization

This study builds on the work of literary scholars, such as John Loftis, Melveena McKendrick, Margaret Greer, and Ivan Cañadas, but it does so from a more historical than literary stance. It also draws on the foundations provided by historians of the early modern Spanish theater, such as N.D. Shergold, J.E. Varey, Charles Davis, Carmen Sanz
Ayán, and Bernardo García García. However this project employs a more Atlantic World than national perspective. It compares the development of theater in different urban locations in the Spanish Empire and explores how the commercial theater became connected to funding hospitals in those same locations.

I have drawn on a variety of manuscript and print sources. These sources range from royal decrees, town council minutes, and hospital visitation records to the leases of the theaters and the polemics written against them to the licenses of acting companies and the texts of the plays that they performed. I use the manuscripts and printed texts to trace how the commercial theater and its relationship to the hospitals developed in these important urban locations in the Spanish empire. The corrales de comedias became an integral part of life in Madrid, the court and capital; in Seville, the most important port city in the metropole during the early modern period; and in Mexico City and Puebla, the most vibrant and vital cities of the viceroyalty of New Spain. By comparing the public theater in these cities with their counterparts in the Anglo Atlantic world, namely London, Dublin, and Williamsburg, Virginia, it becomes clear that the system of funding that developed in Spain’s Atlantic holdings was unique and had long-term ramifications for the commercial theater, public health policy, welfare, and the daily life of city-dwellers.

This study is broken up into two parts. Part One, which includes the first four chapters of this study, traces the development of the commercial theater in several cities in the Spanish Empire. The first two chapters center on Madrid and draw on London to provide a foil for comparison. The third chapter examines the development of theater in
the port city of Seville and contrasts this vibrant theater with the nascent theater of
Dublin. The fourth chapter follows the exportation of the *comedia* to two cities in New
Spain.

Chapter One “‘The Money that Comes from the Plays:’ The Centrality of Theater
in Early Modern Madrid” examines the development of the theater and its relationship to
the hospitals in capital and court city of Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
It compares the centrally located theaters of the Spanish capital to those of London,
which were outside the city’s jurisdiction, and places the development of Lope’s *comedia
nueva* within the urban setting of Madrid. Because the *corrales de comedias* of Madrid
faced regulation and close scrutiny from both the court and the municipal government,
their charitable function in public health was particularly highlighted by those involved in
the commercial theater business. Theater thus integrated itself into daily life in the court
and capital to an extent that was unmatched in any other European capital during the
Renaissance.

Chapter Two, “‘The playgoers cheered:’ Plays, Players, and Audiences in
Renaissance Madrid and London” examines the development of theatrical professions
and playgoing publics in these early modern court cities. The theaters of Madrid and
London provided a livelihood for dramatists and actors, as well as an opportunity for
common-born men and women to seek fame and celebrity. Playwrights, the characters
they created, and the audiences who watched all had a working knowledge of the urban
landscapes in which they operated. This led to the development of city comedies that
catered to different types of audiences in Madrid and in London. Theatrical language and
events occasionally entered political discourse and swayed public opinion, as the treatment of two diplomatic debacles makes clear.

The third chapter, “‘Notable is the confusion!’: The Publicity of Entertainment in Seventeenth-Century Seville” focuses on the role of theater in public life in Seville, an inland port city which played a crucial role in linking Spain to its Empire during the early modern period. While Seville’s theaters did not develop out of a relationship with the religious brotherhoods, as those in Madrid did, they still provided financial assistance to the hospitals there. Seville was a city in constant flux and a city that particularly mirrored the theatricality of the Golden Age comedia. I compare Seville with Dublin, which was also a port city, but its commercial theater developed far later than that of Seville. While commercial theater was tremendously successful in the chaotic streets of Seville from the middle of the sixteenth century on, the development of Dublin’s public theater was stilted and remained reliant on court patronage late into the seventeenth century.

The fourth chapter, “‘As they use and have in Madrid, Seville, and the other cities of Spain’: The Colonial Theater of New Spain” examines the way Spanish colonists and missionaries took both religious and commercial theater to New Spain and adapted it to particular New World needs. Looking particularly at the cases of Mexico City and Puebla, it becomes clear that the Spanish colonists of the New World transported the symbiotic arrangement between the corrales de comedias and the hospitals to their new urban environments. The theater in Mexico, while strikingly similar to that in Castile, had new uses in the colonial setting, as dramatic performance became a tool for
converting and teaching the Native American population during the sixteenth century and a tool for re-asserting the Spanish identity for both the peninsular Spaniards, and the creoles in colonial Mexico.

Part Two of this study then takes up the issue of how criticisms leveled against the theater impacted the course of its development in the Spanish Atlantic and Anglo Atlantic worlds. Using Madrid and London as particular case studies, the fifth chapter, “The plague of the republic:’ Antitheatrical Sentiment and Legislation in Spain and England,” compares the two developing Renaissance theaters, as well as the ire that the playhouses drew from civil and ecclesiastical authorities. In both cases antitheatrical sentiment needed the catalyst of political crisis to triumph, and Spanish antitheatricality was even further limited because of the constant regulation of theater by the royal and municipal government of Madrid and because of the intended audience of Spanish antitheatrical polemicists. Also while Spanish playwrights viewed doctors ambiguously, in large part because the increasing climate of crisis in Spain led to a metaphor of the state as diseased, the funds provided by commercial theater to Spanish hospitals limited anti-theatrical legislation.

Many of the criticisms the opponents of the theater leveled against the stage had to do with gendered issues, and Chapter Six, “On the Stage, In the Stew pot and in the Streets: Gendered Health and Performance” takes up this issue. It explores the role of gender in the Spanish theater and hospitals, especially in Madrid, but also in Seville and Mexico. Women used the theater and dramatic illusion to pursue careers and celebrity, to earn a living, and to explore new notions of femininity. While women were not allowed
on the Renaissance stages of England and Ireland, they played a prominent role on those of the cities of the Spanish Empire. Women could even become the directors of Spanish acting companies, in spite of frequent legal regulation to prevent women from appearing on stage unless they were the daughter or wife of a male director or player in the same acting troupe. At the same time, the compartmentalization of the corrales de comedias segregated men and women in the audience, and sick and destitute women found themselves enclosed in the Hospital de la Pasión in seventeenth-century Madrid.

This study traces the development of corrales de comedias in important cities of the Spanish Empire and its relationship to financing hospitals in those cities and how that symbiotic relationship was both an exportable model and made theater an important aspect of social welfare in these cities. For this reason, the Spanish theater developed and became firmly entrenched into daily life more quickly in important provincial and colonial cities than the English theater did. Various groups played a part in the development of commercial drama and hospitals in the Spanish Atlantic. Actors and audiences, civil and religious authorities, and women all contributed to the evolving and exportable public drama of the comedia.
Chapter 1: “The Money that Comes from the Plays:”
The Centrality of Theater in Early Modern Madrid

During the second half of the sixteenth century a thriving theatrical business emerged in both Catholic Madrid and Protestant London. A number of social and economic reasons contributed to the significant increase in the number of actors and acting troupes in sixteenth century Europe. Troupes of approximately twelve to eighteen actors developed in order to perform the dramas increasingly being written by (mostly) men with sufficient literacy and economic motivation to do so in lands that had broken from the Catholic Church and in those who remained staunchly allied with Rome. While there were many similarities between the commercial drama that developed in the court cities of Madrid and London in the sixteenth century, such as the size of acting troupes, which had to be licensed by governmental agencies, the popularity of the public playhouses, and even religious opposition to the theaters, there were also key differences. The most important differences between the *corrales de comedias* of Madrid and London’s inn-yard theaters stemmed from the fact that Madrid’s playhouses had strong connections to charitable hospitals and religious brotherhoods in the city whereas London’s theaters did not. The symbiosis between drama and welfare gave the popular theaters of Golden Age Madrid a privileged position, both culturally and geographically within the city. The development of this special relationship, which made Spanish theater easily exportable to provincial cities in Iberia and in the colonies, is most easily
traced through the development of the *corrales de comedias* of the *villa y corte*. By contrast, the public theaters of London, epicenter of the Anglo-Atlantic World, were outside the city walls, and although they were widely attended and took up current and public issues, they did not have the same central role in daily life of the citizens of London, especially during the seventeenth century, as new private theaters drew the wealthier and noble segments of the population away from the older public theaters. The financing of these theaters and their role in London society was also very different, as acting troupes in the English capital relied largely on courtly and aristocratic patronage for their continued existences, and although the acting companies of London paid poor rates to the parishes in which the theaters they were associated with were located, they did not help to finance the care of the sick and impoverished to the same degree that their counterparts in Madrid did.

I. Madrid as the New Court with New *Corrales de Comedias*

Common perceptions have led many to think that at the dawn of the sixteenth century, Madrid was a dusty, backwater village. Although it was unable to compete in terms of population or infrastructure with nearby Toledo, it was actually already a fair-sized town, when the court of Phillip II moved there in 1561. However, Madrid did not have a history as a capital, and the king’s decision surprised many and continues to puzzle historians. While other early modern European capitals, such as London, had
populations that were growing too quickly for their infrastructures, Madrid lacked even the most basic capabilities for dealing with a population that grew significantly from 1561 to 1630. Compared to nearby Toledo, Madrid was a proverbial village in 1561. Its population exploded in the following decades to approximately 85,000 in 1598. Some 79,000 baptisms and 30,000 registered deaths took place in Madrid during the final decades of the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{22} This tremendous growth in population compounded with the fact that the economy of Madrid was based on the court and not on producing any actual goods created both a significant drain on the region’s resources and an urban landscape that changed dramatically in a period of just a few decades.

This changing urban structure engendered innovations, such as the \textit{casas a la malicia}, or houses that were built partially below the ground in order to escape the injunction that all houses in Madrid with more than one story reserve their first floor for members of the royal government. The crowded and dirty capital also inspired criticisms from Spaniards and visiting foreigners alike. For example, in 1593 Camillo Borghese, the papal nuncio in Madrid and the future Pope Paul V, pronounced, “the houses are crude and rough and made almost entirely from earth, and among other imperfections they have neither alleyways for relieving themselves or privies. Because of this, everyone takes care of their needs in chamber pots and afterwards throws the contents into the streets, which produces an unbearable stench…”\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{23} Quoted in Beatriz Blasco Esquivias, \textit{¡Agua Va! La higiene urbana en Madrid (1561-1761)} (Madrid: Caja Madrid, 1998), p. 35. The original reads, “Le case sono cattive et brutte et fatte quasi tutte di terra, e, fra
These types of inconveniences finally began to prompt real debate over whether or not the court should remain a fixed one and whether or not it should remain in Madrid. Indeed, the court moved to Valladolid for five years, between 1601 and 1606. And although many, including the famous playwright Lope de Vega, bemoaned the removal of the court from Madrid, it was not until after its return that the city “began to be seen as the definitive court, and that it began to be talked of without hesitation as the head and even the heart of the monarchy.” Only then did Madrid become truly a court and capital city with no competitors – a fact that, of course, had a pronounced effect on other Spanish cities, such as Valladolid.

Yet even before the permanent return of the court to Madrid in 1606, a thriving and successful commercial drama had developed in the city. In spite of the crowded chaos created by politicos, lackeys, and their servants within Madrid’s labyrinthine streets, the most successful commercial theaters of the early modern period grew up during the last decades of the sixteenth century. As outlined above, Spanish drama had developed during the first half of the sixteenth century fostered by religious celebration and private patronage of talented playwrights, such as Juan del Encina and Gil Vicente. During the 1540s and 1550s, before Madrid became the capital and center of Castile and its realms, innovators, such as Lope de Rueda and Alonso de Vega, became

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25 This, of course, had a seriously detrimental effect on cities, which had formerly housed the peripatetic court. Valladolid in particular suffered severe population loss and overall decline. See Patrick Williams, *The Great Favourite: The Duke of Lerma and the Court and Government of Phillip III of Spain, 1598-1621* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).
playwrights/directors in important cities, such as Seville. Their creation of a new theater that was oriented towards a popular audience and the arrival of Italian commedia dell’arte troupes in Spanish cities and the competition that emerged between the two groups of entertainers shaped the theatrical environment in the 1560s and 1570s and out of which Lope de Vega created the comedia nueva during the following decades. Golden Age Madrid may not have produced many exportable goods, but one thing that it did produce in abundance was an exportable model of commercial theater. The large number of people involved in the thriving theater business of the two commercial playhouses in Madrid by the turn of the century stemmed largely from two phenomena: the incredible growth of Madrid in the second half of the sixteenth century as it became the capital of a global empire and the aforementioned link between commercial drama and social work in Madrid.

Although very little – if any – commercial theater existed in Madrid when it became the center of Castile and its realms, two cofradías decided to provide financing for their hospitals by putting on plays in the 1560s. The Cofradía de la Pasión y Sangre de Jesucristo, which came into being in 1565, received permission from Philip II to build a hospital (Hospital de la Pasión) for the care of poor and sick women in the calle de Toledo. As historians Carmen Sanz Ayán and Bernardo García García have shown, shortly thereafter they received the exclusive right to put on performances during Corpus

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26 See below, pp. 113-116.
27 In Teatros y Comediantes en el Madrid de Felipe II (Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 2000), Carmen Sanz Ayán and Bernardo García García make this very convincing claim. The connection between theater and the hospitals enabled Spanish theater to withstand criticism from religious opponents and made banning theater extremely difficult in the long-term in early modern Castile.
Christi in order to raise funds for their charitable work. In the late 1560s they expanded their connection to performances and began to put on plays in hired yards. Initially, they did this in the Corral de Burguillos, so named for its owner, and later, after its construction, in the Corral de la Pacheca. Another religious brotherhood, the Cofradía de la Soledad de Nuestra Señora, founded in 1567, soon followed suit in order to fund the work for their orphanage, the Hospital de los Niños Expósitos, founded in the late 1570s and moved in 1572 to a larger space in the calle de Preciados. Their use of the same playhouses created conflict between the two religious brotherhoods until the two cofradías decided to share the costs and the profits. Other inn-yard theaters sprang up, including the Corral de la Puente and the Corral de Valdivieso. Thus, the first system of public drama in Madrid was born.

This system changed drastically in the 1570s and 1580s. In 1574 one of the most famous Italian comedia dell’arte players, Alberto Naseli or Ganassa, came to Madrid for the first time. He had performed all over Italy, including for the Duke of Mantua, and in Paris, and possibly also in England before coming to the center of Phillip II’s court. However, upon his arrival, it would seem that Ganassa discovered there was no real court theater in Spain, as there was in the Italian duchies or in France. What he found instead were the nascent corrales de comedias, which the religious brotherhoods of the court city had constructed in the corrales, or courtyards, of houses and which they rented in order to help finance their hospitals for the poor. The actors still probably owned their own stages and erected and dismantled them at every performance. Ganassa realized that this

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28 Carmen Sanz Ayán and Bernardo García García, p. 5.
system was inconvenient and set about establishing a permanent playhouse with a roof, the Corral de la Pacheca, named for the owner of the inn-yard theater Isabel Pacheco. Ganassa persuaded the members of the cofradas to lease the corral de comedias for a period of ten years. He even made a monetary donation and put on two benefit performances to help establish Madrid’s first stable commercial theater. Later, in 1582, Ganassa loaned money to the cofradas to assist them with the construction of the Corral del Principe, the second of the long-standing theaters in Madrid and one that would long outlast the Corral de la Pacheca. However, it should be noted that Ganassa did not simply do these things out of a sense of altruism. He performed in Spanish cities for the next several years, and it was in his best financial interest to have a place to perform in Madrid and connections in the theater business there. It should also be observed that those who had benefitted from the old system of leasing their corrales to the religious confraternities on a regular basis complained about this change and even took their case as far as the Sala de Alcaldes de Casa y Corte, which was a board of magistrates of the royal house and court.

While the Spanish comedia did not take its form from the improvisational Italian commedia dell’arte, these travelling Italian performers, such as Ganassa, certainly influenced the development of drama in Spain. They impacted the development of the physical spaces in which the performances took place, as well as the plot elements and structures of plays. For instance, early Spanish playwrights modeled dramas on Italian

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30 Carmen Sanz Ayán and Bernardo García García, p. 9.
dramas of intrigue, and many similarities existed between the zanni, or clown, of the commedia dell’arte, and the gracioso, or fool, of the Spanish comedia. Also, the structure of the improvisational Italian performances, may have suggested the division of the comedia, as developed particularly by Lope de Vega, into three acts instead of the classical five acts inherited from Roman drama and the humanist tradition.

During the last two decades of the sixteenth century the commercial theaters of Madrid became popular locations for people who wanted to forget their troubles for a couple of hours for a relatively cheap price. By the mid 1580s, it seemed certain that the corrales de comedias would be a permanent fixture in the physical space of Madrid, as well as its social and cultural life. However, the royal government, the city fathers of Madrid, the men and women who wrote for and performed on the stages of the court and capital, and the playgoers themselves were still determining and negotiating the terms under which this integration would continue.

While there were earlier playhouses in Madrid, such as the aforementioned Corral de la Pacheca and the Corral de la Puente, the first truly permanent playhouses in Madrid were the Corral del Príncipe and the Corral de la Cruz, which were the results of a cooperative effort by the cofradías of Madrid. In October of 1579, the cofradías purchased property on the calle de la Cruz and began construction of their first playhouse. They had the benches moved from the Corral de la Puente, which they had been renting, to the new theater. Soon the Corral de la Cruz would have private boxes and a cazuela, or a separate section for the women of the audience to sit in and enjoy the
performances. It also boasted benches on which the *mosqueteros*, or those men who watched the plays from the pit of the theater, sat.

With the financial help of Ganassa, the *cofradías* purchased two houses and yards on the calle del Príncipe in February of 1582. On this property, they laid the foundations for the new theater, but when the first performance of a play took place at the Corral del Príncipe on September 21, 1583, the construction project had not yet been completed. The playhouse still lacked stands, windows, and a gallery. However, this did not stop the new commercial theater from being a success. There was a willing audience of *madrileños*, who wanted to see the show, and the early popularity of the Corral del Príncipe and that of the Corral de la Cruz caught the attention of both municipal and royal authorities. The Council of Castile decided to grant the *cofradías* the right to have more frequent performances in exchange for granting one quarter of the admission fees earned to the Hospital General of Madrid. Also in 1583 the *corrales de comedias* were placed under the supervision of the Protector of the Hospitals, who was a member of the Council of Castile. Shortly thereafter the members of the Council decreed that the deputies of the Soledad y Pasión “charge each person that wanted to see the plays and to sit in the said theaters 16 maravedís, in the same way they had charged four maravedís for each seat in addition to the twelve they had up until then charged…” These funds were diverted to care for the patients of the Hospital General, in addition to those already going to care for the female patients of the Hospital de la Pasión. Thus, the symbiotic relationship that

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31 Archivo Regional de la Comunidad Madrid (hereafter ARM), Signatura 5310, Legajo 4, 24 iv 1584. The original reads “*cobren* de cada persona que quisiere entrar a ver las tales comedias y a sentarse en los asientos de los dichos teatros 16 maravedis de manera que a de cobrar quarto maravedis por cada asiento demas de los 12 que hasta aqui an cobrado....” I have maintained the spelling and capitalization of the original document and those quoted hereafter.
would firmly entrench the commercial theater into the social structures of Madrid officially began.

Both of the permanent commercial theaters were close to the heart of Madrid. As Margaret Greer has observed, “what is striking about the corrales of Madrid, when viewed comparatively, is their absolute stability and relative centrality within the topography of the city.” The theaters and much of the theatrical activity of Madrid took place on the Calles del Príncipe and de la Cruz, streets that intersect near the Plaza de Santa Ana, only a short distance east of the Plaza Mayor and just southeast of the Puerta del Sol, one of the fifteenth century gates of the city, that during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries became an important meeting place in Madrid for the exchange of news, gossip, and letters. Thus, both streets and both theaters were within the limits of Madrid, as determined by Philip II in the 1560s and within the commercial and social center of the city that Philip IV ordered enclosed in 1625. The central locations of the corrales de comedias, along with the fact that these locations were in “respectable” neighborhoods, helped to integrate theater into the daily cultural life and social fabric of Madrid. This legitimization by location helped to make the commercial theater a thriving business in the court and capital of Castile and her realms.

One aspect of the expanding theater business was the increase of entrepreneurial activities connected to the commercial theater, as a way for the cofradías to make even more money off the playhouses to fund their charitable works in their hospitals. These

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33 Ibid. See also the map in Carmen Sanz Ayán and Bernardo García García, pp. 15-18.
opportunities included the right to sell food and drink to playgoers at the *corrales de comedias*. In 1587 the practice of selling fruit and *aloja*, or sweetened water, became institutionalized as part of the entertainment experience in the playhouses of Madrid. In March of that year the deputies of the Hospital de la Pasión granted Francisco Briceño, a *vecino*, or citizen, of Madrid, the right to sell fruit and water in the Corral del Príncipe and the Corral de la Cruz. In turn, the enterprising citizen paid a leasing fee of five *reales* for this business opportunity. Briceño’s opportunity was also an obligation from the viewpoint of the hospital officials. If Briceño failed to sell these two things “each day that they put on a play in either of the said two [play]houses” he opened himself up, not only to potential competition from other venders, but also to the potential revocation of his lease agreement.\(^{34}\) In 1602 the *cofradías* sublet the right to rent benches and boxes to Alonso and Juan Estébenez.\(^{35}\)

The theater was doing good business in Madrid. It was during the middle of the 1580s, just as the Principe and Cruz began providing regular dramatic entertainment for the citizens of Madrid, that Lope de Vega began to write for the theater and to develop a new type of dramatic entertainment, the *comedia nueva*, or three-act play, typically of tragi-comic style. His plays and the emerging permanent theaters worked in tandem to cement the place of theater in the Spanish-speaking world, as central and as prolific.\(^{36}\)


\(^{36}\) For more on Lope de Vega and the *comedia nueva*, see the following chapter.
The entrenchment of theater into the daily life of Madrid also coincided with efforts at consolidating the hospitals of the court and capital. In 1566 Madrid had over a dozen hospitals, but by 1587, there were only four: the Court Hospital, the Hospital de La Latina, the Hospital de Antón Martín, and the Hospital General, which was an umbrella organization and moved to the calle Atoche in 1603. It included the Hospital de la Pasión, the Hospital de Convalecientes, and the Hospital Inclusa, an orphanage for foundlings. The crown spearheaded consolidation efforts in Madrid, and the monarchy accomplished them with relative ease because the cofradas of the new capital were fewer in number and less powerful.\textsuperscript{37} While the hospitals had other sources of income, such as taxes on meat and oil and a portion of money and goods seized by the courts in legal cases, they relied heavily on the theater box offices of the city.

During the 1590s the theaters began to expand, as did the theatrical business in general. In 1590, all the proceeds from the Corral de la Cruz began to be taken to a counting house, where, the accounts of the theater were kept and the proceeds divided. The Protector of the Hospitals had the job of licensing the plays for performance. He also initiated the practice of appointing special money collectors, or cobradores, who took up their posts at noon and stayed at them, taking admission fees, until after the performance of the play began. In 1596 and 1597 the cofradas began to make alterations and expansions to the theaters, and this contributed to increased income for the hospitals.

According to Carmen Sanz Ayán and Bernardo García García, by the late 1580s the Cofradía de la Soledad could depend upon several hundred thousands of maravedís in

alms from the performance of *comedias* each year. It is easy to discern the impact of the removal of the court to Valladolid’s on the number of playgoers who frequented the *corrales de comedias* and the corresponding decrease in the amount of money raised for the hospitals. The large amount of alms that the performances of *comedias* brought in for the hospitals of Madrid in the 1580s and 1590s can serve as a baseline for gauging the expectations of the administrators of the hospitals and theaters in the seventeenth century, particularly after the return of the court to Madrid in 1606. In the early seventeenth century a loaf of bread cost around 34 maravedís. Hence it becomes apparent that several hundred thousand loaves of bread could have been purchased by these funds over this twenty-year period. The price to stand in the *corrales* varied but was approximately twelve to sixteen maravedís over much of the seventeenth century.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Years</th>
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<tr>
<td>1586-1588</td>
<td>1,113,678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1589-1591</td>
<td>1,525,728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1592-1594</td>
<td>1,660,308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1595-1597</td>
<td>1,999,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1598</td>
<td>Theaters closed for period of mourning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1599-1601</td>
<td>2,053,702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1602-1604</td>
<td>615,399</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Alms from the Playhouses for the Cofradía de la Soledad (1586-1604)

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38 Adapted from Carmen Sanz Ayán and Bernardo García García, p. 71.
II. Changes in the Administration of the Theaters: The Seventeenth Century

Part of the proceeds from performances at both of these playhouses began to go to the Hospital General in 1583. In 1604 the corrales de comedias came under the official supervision of the Protector del Hospital General. At the same time all of the concessions, such as box rentals and the selling of aloja, came under the control of the lessee, who took half a real for each performance, a cuarto for each bench rental, and the proceeds from the refreshments.

The success of the comedia nueva and that of the two permanent corrales de comedias in Madrid, however, was not always enough to sustain the hospitals of that city, with their work in curing the sick and aiding the poor. Some comedias ran to greater success than others, and bad weather and rival attractions, such as bullfights or public executions, could always drive down the number of spectators at any given performance. Likewise, the court’s removal to Valladolid from 1601 to 1606 drove down the size of the audiences at the Madrid theaters (although this provided a boon to the city of Valladolid and its theatrical business).

Due to these circumstances a number of changes in the administration of the corrales de comedia began in the second decade of the seventeenth century. For example, the Council of Castile had already chosen the autores, who each managed one of the licensed acting companies. The number of legally licensed acting companies fluctuated, but in 1615 the Council of Castile approved the increase in acting companies from eight to twelve. At this time the Council named Alonso Riquelme, Fernán Sánchez, Tomás Fernández, Pedro de Valdés, Diego López de Alcaraz, Pedro Cebriano, Pedro
Llorente, Juan de Morales, Juan Acacio, Antonio Granados, Alonso de Heredia, and Án
Andrés de Claramonte as autores, stipulating that “no one else could be [a troupe
director] for a period of two years.”

It was the autores of these companies and others who would later direct acting companies who commissioned plays from playwrights or purchased the rights to perform plays that had already been written.

The autores were also responsible for submitting the scripts of these plays to the Inquisitorial censors and to the Protector in order to receive permission in the form of a license to perform the plays. This did not preclude enterprising autores from making changes, cuts, or additions to scripts after they had passed the requirements of the censors for licensing. And while it was the dramatist who wrote the raw material of the comedia, it was the autor who interpreted it for the stage. Thus, the autor needed good raw material in order to stage a successful play, but playwrights also depended on the success of the staging of these plays by the autores and their acting companies, since typically only comedias that had achieved a successful run at the box office made it into publication either in single volumes or as part of compilations of a dramatist’s works.

Another seventeenth-century administrative change was the logistics of the financial relationship between the hospitals and the theaters. By an order of King Philip III dispatched by the members of the Council of Castile on April 11, 1615, the Hospitales General, de la Pasión, de los Niños Expositos, y de los Desamparados were to receive

39 Archivo de Villa de Madrid (hereafter AMM), Sección 2, Legajo 475, Num 2, undated. “No otros ningunos lo pueden ser por tiempo de dos años…”  
40 Jodi Campbell makes this point about the publication of plays in Monarchy, Political Culture, and Drama: Theater of Negotiation (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), p. 22. She observes that since these collections were either paid for by booksellers or the playwrights themselves it was likely that plays that had already achieved popularity would be printed, while ones that had not done well on stage were not likely to do any better in print format.
sum of money from the excise taxes of a sixth part of 54,000 ducats. The Council mandated that payments be made to the hospital in thirds and that “the final payment be subtracted from what [the hospitals] have earned from alms and the production of plays.” From this point on, until the nineteenth century, the Council of Castile required the municipal government of Madrid to provide an annual subsidy to supplement the income of the hospitals, in case the corrales de comedias did not make enough money in a given year to support them. The city fathers and the Council of Castile mandated this alteration in June of 1615. According to the Libros de Actas of the city of Madrid, the municipal government agreed to the terms laid out by Philip III and his council, and they agreed to the funding from “the plays be removed and that in the place of their profit” that the hospitals receive their profit up to the amount of the subsidy. The city, with the approval of the royal government, then began to lease the rights to run the corrales to lessee-managers on the basis of four-year contracts.

The goal of this new system was to make the theater business more efficient and more profitable for the city and its hospitals. The municipal government further streamlined the process in 1638, when the payments from the arrendador, or lessee, began to be made directly to the city treasury, which then in turn paid a fixed subsidy to the hospitals. This change also brought the corrales de comedias more completely under control of the city fathers of Madrid, although rules and regulations for hours of

\[\text{\textsuperscript{41}}\text{ARM, Signatura 5347, Legajo 5, 11 iv 1615. The original reads “en la postrera paga lo que les huvieren valido las limosnas y aprovechamyentos de comedias....”}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{42}}\text{AMM, Sección Secretaria, Libros de Actas, Tomo 33, Fol. 181r, undated. The original document begins in the following way: “En este ayuntam[ient]o aviendo entendido ... que las comedias se quiten y que en lugar del aprovecham[ien]to que los ospitales demas [sic] de las comedias se hechan a estas sisas...”}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{43}}\text{See McKendrick, p. 178, and Charles Davis and J.E. Varey, Los corrales de comedias y los hospitales de Madrid: 1574-1615 (London: Tamesis, 1997), p. 159.}\]
operation and the selection of plays to be performed still came under the supervision of
the Protector of the Hospital General. Madrid’s municipal government clearly hoped that
the profits from the corrales de comedias would be sufficient for the hospitals or that at
least the profits would come close to making up the amount of the fixed subsidy that it
had to pay the hospitals. In cases when they did not, the brunt of this burden fell on the
individual arrendador rather than on the city government.

For this reason, it was in the best interest of the coffers of the city’s treasury that
the public theaters of the Principe and the Cruz remain open and that as many capacity
audiences as possible saw the performances that took place in them, and to make sure that
the members of the audience actually paid their admission fees. One of most persistent
difficulties in bringing in sufficient funds for the hospitals was the number of people who
entered the playhouses without paying. In 1632 the Protector of the Hospitals, José
González, complained of the “great disorder that has occurred in the corrales due to
many people entering them to see the plays without paying, to the great damage of the
hospitals and the diminishment of their alms….”\(^{44}\) In order to quash this problem the city
fathers demanded that playgoers pay the admission fees or face arrest and imprisonment.
The Protector of the Hospitals ordered that “the guards who are in attendance not consent
to this [entry without paying] and that if anyone wants to enter without paying they be put
in jail…”\(^{45}\) The city fathers of Madrid ordered that the notice be put up in each of the

\(^{44}\) AMM, Signatura 4, Legajo 52, Num. 131, 24 ix 1632. The original reads, “el desorden grande que a
abido en los dichos corrales, entrando en ellos a ber las comedias muchas personas sin pagar, en gran
daño de los dichos ospitales y menoscabo de la limosna de ellos…..”

\(^{45}\) Ibid. The original reads, “…los alguaciles que asisten en ellos no lo consientan, y si alguno quisiere
entrar sin pagar le pongan en la carcel…”
playhouses so that it could be read and obeyed. However, many audience members in Madrid and other cities continued to infiltrate the corrales de comedias without paying.\footnote{See below, p. 110.}

Any temporary or long-term closure of these playhouses meant increased financial losses for the municipal government of Madrid. The Hospital General and all of its subsidiary institutions depended on the subsidies, which the city government could not afford to pay without a substantial amount of revenue flowing from the contractual arrangement made with the lessees of the theaters. This also put significant financial pressure and difficulties on the lessee. This was the case for the enterprising arrendador, Antonio de Soria, in 1644 upon the death of the queen. While Soria also drew income from his other business ventures, such as his lease of the right to run snuff stalls in Madrid, one of his major business ventures was the lease of the theaters.\footnote{See Pilar Huelga Criado, En la raya de Portugal: solidaridad y tensiones en la comunidad judeoconversa (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1994), p.113.} Soria’s financial success depended on theatrical productivity. In 1644 Pedro Trigoso the collector of the excise taxes of Madrid, who had not received the full payment from Soria for his lease of the corrales de comedias, brought a lawsuit against Antonio de Soria. Soria petitioned for relief reminding the city that the Protector of the Hospitales, Don Gregorio López de Mendiçabal “[had] ordered the closure of the said corrales and that no other performance of any kind be enacted in them due to the sadness and due grief caused by the death of the queen.”\footnote{AMM, Signatura 2, Legajo 468, Num. 9, 14 x 1644. The original reads, “el Sr[enior] don Greg[orij] lopez de mendicabal cavaller[sic] del orden de Santiago del Consejo de su Mag[estad] Protector de las dichas comedias ha mandado se cierren los dichos corrales y no se represente ni haga otra fiesta alguna en ellos por el dolor y sentimiento Justo de la muerte de la Reina....”}

On February 13, 1645 Antonio de Soria was granted a discounted rent to pay to the municipality as the city fathers and the Council of Castile
recognized that “it was the season and the months of winter in which the comedias were profitable….“\textsuperscript{49}

In more normal years, during the first half of the seventeenth century, one of the means by which the lessees of the corrales de comedias tried to recoup the money that they paid the city fathers in return for the rights to operate the theaters was through the renting of the boxes to members of the nobility who were willing to pay hundreds of ducados for the privilege of watching the plays from the ostentatious privacy of one of the aposentos. Don Pedro Antonio de Aragon, the Marques de Povar, one of Castile’s great grandees, for example, had rented an aposento in both of Madrid’s theaters in 1636. He paid 200 ducados for his box in the Corral de la Cruz and 150 ducados for the one in the Príncipe.\textsuperscript{50}

It is difficult to reconstruct the continued expansion of the Madrid theaters over the first half of the seventeenth century. Theater historian John Allen has suggested that there are numerous indications, such as a contractor hired to build staircases up to the women’s gallery and to the men’s seats on the upper levels and a double-pitched roof, that the original structures of the theaters had either been casas a la malicia or two-story buildings.\textsuperscript{51} Allen also observes that it is difficult to discern how many boxes there were in the Corral del Príncipe at any given time, as some of them might have been

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 13 ii, 1645. The original reads, “se le bajen al dicho Antonio de Soria demas de lo que toca a los cinco meses de invierno que son octubre, noviembre, y diciembre, enero y febrero a 12.000 reales cada mes y si el de mayo no hubiere tampoco comedias, otros 12,000 reales demas de la rata que se le a de descontar del precio de su arrendamiento, por ser el tiempo y meses de invierno en que tienen valor las comedias….”


\textsuperscript{51} John Allen, p. 55.
constructed long before documentary evidence corroborates their existence. In any case, by the early 1640s the two inn-yard theaters of Madrid had undergone extensive use. Countless men and women had attended performances over a period of more than five decades. The daily use of the corrales de comedias by actors and sometimes extremely rowdy audiences alike meant that they were in need of repairs and, it would seem, further expansion. However, it also seemed that these repairs were not finished before the Council of Castile banned theatrical activity for a period of five years in 1646 due to the lack of funds.52

The popularity of the Spanish corrales de comedias and the love of Philip IV for the theater led to the creation the Coliseo del Buen Retiro, which was simultaneously a court theater and a public playhouse. Although numerous performances had taken place at court and at the private homes of grandees in the previous century, the Buen Retiro was the first of these court theaters to truly open itself up to a paying public. The construction of the Coliseo began in 1638, the same year that the hospitals of Madrid began to draw their funds directly from the municipality. This new, magnificent theater opened for performances that were public, as well as courtly, two years later on February 4, 1640. Philip IV’s first wife, Elizabeth de Bourbon, was a fan of theatrical spectacle and even enjoyed the bawdy, raucous nature that public drama could frequently take. So much so, that for the first performance that was open to public admission, on February 14, 1640 previous arrangements had been made for the audience to heckle and whistle at

52 AMM, Signatura 1, Legajo 467, Num. 1, undated. The document states “Carta de Lucas Crespo, pidiendo que se mande a Miguel del Valle inspeccione y taze los gastos que ha tenido al comenzar ciertas reparaciones en el corral del Principe. Por falta de dinero no ha podido llevarlas a cabo.”
the actors and for the women of the *cazuela* to have fake fights, including scratching faces, pulling hair, and shouting insults. Contributions from the public performances at the Buen Retiro went to the hospitals just as the proceeds of the performances at the Principe and the Cruz helped to fill the city coffers, which since 1615 had funded the Hospitals General, de la Pasión, y de los Niños Expositos directly.

Public theatrical activity in the Buen Retiro came to an abrupt halt in the 1640s due to the closure of Castile’s theaters. Before the Coliseo reopened to the public in 1651, it already needed serious repairs and refurbishments. From this point on an *alcalde*, or city father, had to be present at performances at the Coliseo, just as one had to be present in the two *corrales de comedias* for each performance. After its reopening, the Coliseo became increasingly associated with the performance of *comedias de tramoya*, or machine plays. *Tramoyas* used pulleys and cranes to change the scenery, add special effects, and to lift and drop actors into position, as if by magic. Associated with Italian designers, such as Cossimo Lotte, designer of the Buen Retiro, and Baccio del Bianco, the *tramoya* indicated a new trend in Spanish Golden Age theater, as these plays incorporated much more lavish costuming and props than their counterparts performed in the *corrales* did.

The commercial theater that developed in Madrid, beginning in the 1570s and 1580s and continuing under the influence of Lope de Vega’s developing and then triumphant *comedia nueva* in the final decade of the sixteenth century and the first half of seventeenth century, was perhaps the most successful commercial theater in history. It

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was a truly popular art, and in terms of the output of plays written and performed it was the blockbuster of its day. And people went to see these plays, although many tried to avoid paying the price of admission to see the latest works by Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, or even Pérez de Montalbán and Andrés de Claramonte. From the late 1580s on, the Corral de Principe and the Corral de la Cruz depended on the regular output of new material from the playwrights of Madrid. Since the average comedia had a run of about three to five performances, each of the corrales de comedias of Madrid had to be supplied with about six to eight plays a month. Although there were occasionally revivals of older dramatic works, the need for the output of new material was incredibly high – higher than any other commercial theater in early modern Europe.

III. The London Comparison

Although Brutus of Troy might not have actually founded the city of London, as claimed by Geoffrey of Monmouth, or its walls first built by Helen, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, as alluded to by John Stow in his Survey of London, the city had a lengthy history. Unlike upstart Madrid, London had been a populous urban center long before the sixteenth century. Established by the Roman invaders around 50 AD, Londinium grew despite several sackings and within a century had become the capital of Roman Britain. The Romans also built defensive walls around London to deter Saxon

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invaders – walls that would keep out invaders with more or less success, walls that
would define London’s shape and boundaries and even demography throughout the
medieval and early modern periods. With the fall of the Roman Empire, Londinium was
essentially abandoned. However, its prime location made it attractive to Saxons, Vikings,
and Normans in due succession.

Medieval London grew rapidly. The London Bridge was constructed and nearby
Westminster became the primary seat of English kings, after the Norman invasion of
England in 1066. During the Middle Ages, London continued to grow in population and
trade and commerce increased to such a degree that by the end of the sixteenth century,
the area between the city of London and the court at Westminster had become urbanized.
The city’s twisting and narrow streets and its numerous wood and thatch buildings made
it prone to fire. Medieval London was also a scene of vagrancy and outbreaks of
epidemic disease. Yet, in spite of losing an estimated half of its population to the “Great
Pestilence” of the fourteenth century, the city recovered and its population began to
increase again over the next two centuries.

With the court at Westminster and with the City Fathers in control of the city itself,
the jurisdiction of London could be complicated and fraught. Jurisdictional problems
became compounded by London’s growth during the early modern period. Its population
roughly doubled between 1520 and 1620, in large part because of immigration to the city.
Along with the growth in population came increased problems with crime and poverty
and vagrancy. This growing population also sought theatrical entertainment.
The commercial theater that developed in sixteenth century London had many similarities to the public *corrales de comedias* of Madrid and other Spanish cities. During the 1560s through the 1580s troupes of actors came into being, looking for places to perform in London. One of the main differences between these two capital cities was that London already had a large population, though it was still increasing, and that it its inhabitants had undergone the Protestant Reformation.

When Henry VIII separated from the Catholic Church with the 1534 Act of Supremacy, he set England on the path of Reformation. The effect this religious revolution had on drama in England was enormous. Because Latin was the language of the Pope, it became associated with idolatry, heresy, and sedition. The English Reformation interrupted the pursuit of classical, humanist drama and English playwrights and actors returned to more medieval dramatic constructions. They also began to use the morality play as a means of satirizing the Catholic Church, of fueling the fires of anti-clericalism, of spreading Protestant propaganda. John Bale, a former Carmelite monk who gained the patronage and protection of Thomas Cromwell, wrote just such plays. He vilified the monastic system and its supporters. His most famous drama, *King Johan*, has been considered the piece that marks the transition from morality play to historical drama. With the abolition of the Corpus Christi festival in 1548 and the removal of many saints’ days from the calendar of English daily life, the medieval passion plays,  

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although they did not completely disappear, were staged far less frequently. The lack of traditional dramatic festivities abetted the rise of professional playing companies who toured England with a new repertoire of plays.

With the accession of Elizabeth I to the throne of England in November of 1558 and the ensuing growth of the court and capital, came an increasing demand for public spectacle, and professional companies of actors saw the opportunity to make money. As regular venues for theater developed in London, it became an increasingly attractive place for actors and would-be actors. There they could give regular performances and have regular incomes. Likewise, self-made men with writing skills sought to make careers for themselves as professional playwrights and authors. In order to work quickly and maximize profits, Elizabethan playwrights, like their Spanish counterparts, frequently collaborated with one another and borrowed material from older plays, either published or not.

The growth of a new commercial theater in London required new means of regulating those involved with performed drama. Typically far from draconian, restrictions on the theater and actors stemmed from issues of having to deal with a growing and increasingly unclean and plague-prone city as much as from partisan censorship. However, there was a fear on the part of the city fathers that theatrical

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56 I am grateful to Gina di Salvo for pointing out that there are numerous problems with the issues of periodization of Early Modern English Saints’ Plays, and that the Records of Early English Drama do not indicate a complete break in the performance of these saints’ plays during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I.
recreation could, if taken too far, subvert the social order and create disturbances. The development of giving patents to companies through a system of patronage transformed actors’ status. While still seen by many as a threat and nuisance, they were no longer treated legally like vagrants. In 1574 the Common Council of the City of London passed an ordinance requiring places of performance to be licensed and condemning the theaters for a number of less than seemly activities. In 1576 the first permanent playhouses were built outside of the city walls, near the bawdy houses, leading some to further associate public drama with disreputable behavior. Theaters would continue to be built outside of the city limits of London in order to get around problems of jurisdiction and to escape the purview of the city fathers.

One of the most famous of these Elizabethan public playhouses was The Globe. Built in 1599 using the wood from an earlier playhouse, The Theatre was owned by the acting company, The Lord Chamberlain’s Men. William Shakespeare was one of the shareholders in this theater venture and wrote plays for the acting company to perform there. Scholar of English drama Steve Sohmer has argued that Shakespeare’s play, *Julius Caesar*, was the first drama performed in the Globe after its construction. After it burnt to the ground in 1613, the troupe rebuilt The Globe over the course of the next year. The Globe was one of the theaters still in existence when an Act of Parliament closed all the public playhouses of London in 1642. The theater itself was destroyed in the 1640s in order to prevent illicit activities from taking place in it.

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Theaters, like the Globe, the Rose, and the Swan, could not exist without actors performing plays or playwrights producing material. However, they also required royal patronage in order to survive and succeed in early modern London. As Andrew Gurr has pointed out, the court lacked the same personal interest in the problems of regulation, control, and sanitation of the city that the city fathers had. Therefore, in the early 1570s the court began to take the leading acting companies of London under its umbrella of patronage and protection. Although initially, they could receive backing from either a noble or a group comprised of at least two judicial dignitaries, by 1598, the licensing power was stripped from the magistrates and only great nobles and royals had the authority to authorize an acting company. It is thus not surprising that English acting companies were named for and defined by their patron; they were the King’s Men, the Chamberlain’s Men, and so on. This is markedly different from the practice in Spain that associated an acting company with its autor: the company of Antonio de Rueda, the company of Antonio de Prado, the company of Jusepa Vaca and so forth.

The theatrical landscape in London underwent an extreme alteration at the turn of the century, when private hall theaters began to be built within the city walls. However, these theaters, like the playhouse at Blackfriars, catered to wealthy audiences and most Londoners could not afford to venture within the city walls for theatrical entertainment and continued to haunt the older playhouses. Even the repertoires of these theaters began to diverge, as new plays were increasingly only written for the private theaters and the older, public theaters continued to rely on older material. The private hall theaters

became increasingly associated with court culture and court tastes. The new plays performed in them tended to mock or deplore social mobility and preferred duels of wits to the duels with swords that continued to take place with such frequency on the stages of the public amphitheaters outside the walls. Thus, a separation of theatrical cultures occurred during the seventeenth century in London; one that divided the audience between the “citizens” who could pay a penny for their entrance – roughly the equivalent of an entrance to stand in the corrales de comedias of the Madrid – and the wealthy gentlemen and gentlewomen, who could and did pay at least six pennies for an entrance into the cheapest seats in the private playhouses. On any given day, several theater publics in London saw different plays and contained different social classes. This is not what happened in the central and integrated theaters of Madrid.

IV. The Confessionalization of the Theater Season

The public theaters of Madrid and London underwent numerous developments over the course of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. However, their operations remained rooted in seasonal time and weekly rhythms. These weekly rhythms diverged in part because of the Protestant Reformation that impacted English society but had little to no effect in staunchly Catholic Spain. The Counter Reformation Church reaffirmed the traditions of Catholic society, including the veneration of the cult of the saints and breathed new life into the cofradías, each of which had their own patron saint for veneration and protection. The cycles of Lent and the religious processions of Corpus
Christi, which relied on the performances of successful acting companies, continued to develop over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, shaping the role that public theater and public performances had in Madrid.

In Madrid, the *corrales de comedias* only closed for periods of mourning, Lent, and occasionally during the stifling heat of the summers in central Spain. The seasonal rhythms dictated the starting times of the performances of the *comedias* in the Principe and the Cruz. In the fall and winter, when darkness and cold beset Madrid, plays began at two o’clock. It was during this time that the playhouses of Madrid were at their busiest. Both of the public theaters held daily performances from October until the beginning of Lent. Lent divided the two theatrical seasons and provided an opportunity for *autores* to recruit and contract new players. During the spring and summer months, performances typically began later to take advantage of the sunlight and to avoid the heat of midday. Instead of 2:00, performances began at four o’clock. The late spring theatrical season culminated in the elaborate religious theater of the *autos sacramentales* during the feast of Corpus Christi, when many of the same *autores* who directed profane comedies and many of the same actors and actresses who performed in them played the roles of saints and even of Christ, himself. Usually, only success in the commercial theater could lead to these coveted positions in the performance of religious drama. The performance of the *autos sacramentales* led to a reduced number of performances during the summer months, when performances were only regularly given in one of the two *corrales de comedias*. 
It is difficult to discern how theatrical activity in London compared with that of Madrid in terms of the exact number of performances and the variety of different plays that audiences could see. In 1590 there were 199 different performances given in the two public playhouses of Madrid. In the London theaters, at least ten different plays were put on, but due to the loss of and lack of records it is often unknown which acting company had purchased some of these plays and thus which theater they were performed in. It is also uncertain how many performances of any of these given plays occurred. Since it was rare for an English play to have a run of more than a week or so, it is unlikely that there were as many performances in London that year as there were in Madrid. However,

Table 2 Number of Performances by Month, 1590

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Adapted from Carmen Sanz Ayán and Bernardo García García, p. 61. Their numbers for the previous year show a similar pattern, as does the ruling in the case of Antonio de Soria in 1644 discussed above.
there may have been other plays purchased that have been lost to the historical record. This makes it difficult to draw such a conclusion with certainty.\footnote{See Tom Dale Keever’s work in the Early Modern Drama Database, http://homepage.mac.com/tomdalekeever/earlymodern.html.}

The best day for performances and the day on which most performances in the Spanish theaters, including the Corrales del Príncipe and de la Cruz, was Sundays. Augustín de Rojas remarked in *El viaje entretenido* that “We want Sundays because on Sundays many people come, and we always perform the plays on Sunday with more pleasure, because on Sundays there is always more money [to be made].”\footnote{Augustín de Rojas Villandrando, *El viaje entretenido*, Tomo 2, p. 138. “Nosotros deseamos los domingos/porque en domingo viene mucha gente,/y siempre las comedias en domingo,/representamos todos con más gusto,/porque en domingo hay siempre más dineros.”} Between 1579 and 1601, Sunday boasted the most performances. Although certainly not devoid of theatrical activity, Saturday was the day on which the fewest performances took place in Madrid. During the rest of the week, theatrical activity held steady, with performances being spread out fairly evenly over Monday through Friday.\footnote{See Carmen Sanz Ayán and Bernardo García García, *Teatros y comediantes en el Madrid de Felipe II* (Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 2000), p. 58.} The vogue of the theaters, though, could bring in audiences throughout the week. For example, during the first week of January of 1584, the Corral de la Cruz boasted a daily performance, while the Corral de Príncipe was the venue for a performance every day that week except for Monday, when Ganassa, the *autor* currently contracted, had been called to perform elsewhere.\footnote{Charles Davis and J.E. Varey, *Los corrales de comedia y los hospitals de Madrid: 1574-1615* (Madrid: Tamesis, 1997) pp. 296-298.}
In London, the opponents of the public theaters won a major victory in 1603, when performances were banned on Sundays. The typical theatrical season began in late August or early September and ran up to Christmas. As in Madrid, performances began around 2:00. Some plays continued through winter, but Lent restricted performances, although some evidence suggests that performance activities continued in spite of injunctions against them during this annual period of penitence. For example, in March of 1636 when the Privy Council thanked the mayor of Canterbury for his firm action against players who had been performing during Lent. Many companies went on tour

Table 3 Number of Performances in the Corrales by Day of the Week, 1579-1601

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65 Adapted from Carmen Sanz Ayán and Bernardo García García, p. 58.
66 A. Bonet Correa, “La arquitectura y el urbanismo” Las Letras, Las Artes, t. XXIV, V. II de la Historia de España Menéndez Pidal, Madrid, 1986, p. 579, quoted in Esquivias, p. 85. Although this statistic seems rather on the high side, there is no doubt that Madrid grew significantly during the Golden Age.
during July and August when outbreaks of plague tended to do the greatest damage in London.\textsuperscript{67}

V. Charitable Hospitality and the Battle Against Disease and Poverty

Plague and disease did not just interrupt theatrical activity, but impacted cities on every basic level, taxing their pre-modern capacities to deal with such health crises. As mentioned above, Madrid had very little pre-existing infrastructure to support its tremendous growth during the Golden Age. While some of this population had been siphoned off during the court’s removal to Valladolid in 1601, many of these people relocated to Madrid once more in 1606, when the court came back. And even more followed them through birth and emigration. By 1617, Madrid had almost 150,000 inhabitants and by the early 1640s some estimates put Madrid’s population at almost 400,000 people.\textsuperscript{68}

This growing populace was comprised of increasing numbers of the impoverished, the sick and the orphaned. Inundated with proposals to found beggars hospitals from cities all over the realm, the Spanish crown authorized a beggars’ hospital to be opened in 1582 in Madrid.\textsuperscript{69} The striking contrast between the lavish luxury of the court and the poorest beggars of the city must have been striking. Even the parish of San Sebastian, home of both Madrid’s \textit{corrales de comedias} and the Hospitales General y de

\textsuperscript{67}Peter Thomson, \textit{Shakespeare’s Theatre} (Boston: Routlege, 1983), p. 20.
\textsuperscript{68}Esquivias, p. 85.
la Pasión, had many inhabitants who were comfortably well-off, while the other fifty percent of the parish’s population had access to less than five percent of the wealth in San Sebastian.\footnote{See Miguel Ángel García Sánchez, Análisis sociológico de la pobreza en Madrid, 1578-1650 (PhD diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2004), pp. 108-110.}

The hospitals of early modern Madrid, thus, fought a battle in which the odds were stacked against them. But fight they did. In 1613 the Hospital de la Pasion chose 24 deputies to serve the hospital. Their job was to collect and use “the money that comes from the plays” in order to provide for the poor.\footnote{ARM, Sección Visitas, Signatura 8483, Carpeta 1, Fol. 30. The original reads, “el dinero que procedía de las comedias... reparte a la comida y cena de los pobres....” This particular set of documents corresponds to June through September of 1613, two years before the shift in the administration of the hospitals.}

The visitation records, petitions by the hospitals, and tracts all provide information about this relationship between the corrales de comedias and the important role that the hospitals actually played in curing the sick and succoring the impoverished of Madrid. And while it is important to recognize that the authors of such treatises had particular agendas and that they employed a certain rhetoric that promoted the usefulness of the hospitals and supplicated for more money, the hospitals were actually performing a useful function and cured people. They were not just places to go to die, although many of their inmates did, but places to seek respite from the discomforts of diseases and even permanent recovery from such afflictions.

One such tract, written in 1666 by Gregorio de Aldana y Arellano, the official accountant of the royal hospitals, and dedicated to the Queen Mariana de Austria, not only carefully and with much kissing of the hands reminded the queen of her duties to provide additional financial aid and protection to the hospitals, but it also provided a justification of the expenses paid out to the Hospital General and the Hospital de la
Pasión for the previous year. Aldana was very careful to lay out the history of the Hospital General y de la Pasión, the composition of its employees and its responsibilities, and its great value to the capital. For example, Aldana explained the roles played by the brothers who served in these hospitals and their obligations. He pointed out that the General Hermano Mayor, who was elected for a three-year term by the Consejo de Castilla to serve in the hospitals, had a number of obligations related to his position. The Enfermero Mayor served under him and had the responsibility “of caring for and seeing how the remedies were applied, attending first to the review of the doctors, surgeons, and barber-surgeons, later to that of meals….”72 In short, the Enfermero Mayor was the man on the ground overseeing the daily operations of the Hospital General.

According to the tract, the sick patients who entered the hospital received certain benefits until they left cured. If they happened to die while being cared for in the hospital, their presence there guaranteed their interment in the hallowed ground of the Catholic Church. Aldana had to walk a fine line between advertising charitable giving without seeming to be wasteful with the resources provided by the royal government, the municipal government of Madrid, and by the performances that took place at the corrales de comedias. He reminded his benevolent monarch that patients slept where the doctors instructed them to sleep and that the sick did so in warm beds with a

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72 BNE, Libros Antiguos, Gregorio de Aldana y Arellano, Los hospitales reales, general, y passion de esta Corte; con sus convalencias, obligaciones, salario, su gobierno politico, y assistencia, rentas que gozan, con la quenta y razon de lo que gastaron el año pasado de 1665, (Madrid: 1666), p. 11. “...de cuidar y ver como se aplican los remedios, assistiendo el primero a la visita de Medicos, Cirujanos, y Sangradores, despues a las comidas y cenas...”
pillow, but that “ordinarily for lunches they give them raisins, hardtack or fatback and in the summer season healthy and fresh fruits…”73

Leonardo Galdiano y Croy, formerly secretary of the Hospital’s Junta and then the Contador, or official accountant, of the Hospitals of Madrid, wrote a similar tract, Breve tratado de los hospitales y casas de recogimiento desta corte, in 1677. Writing at the behest of the Protector de los Hospitales, Galdiano y Croy set down the budgets, lists of employees, and the benefits that the hospitals provided to those that they cared for in precise terms. For example, he listed all the offices held by workers in the Hospital General in the year 1676. This included 160 employees. The Hospital General employed 24 brothers, one accountant, one scribe, one lawyer, four doctors, two doctor’s apprentices, two surgeons, two phlebotomists, one head cook, four kitchen helpers, six laundresses, and eighty servants for the rooms, and two priests, among other workers.

Meanwhile that same year, the Hospital de la Pasión, an institution devoted to the care for and curing of women, employed another 33 persons. The Hospital de Niños Expositos also employed 33 people, 25 of whom were wet nurses.74 The hospitals purchased some 127,398 loaves of bread at different prices totaling 13,629 Spanish ducats to feed the sick and the poor inmates of the hospital that year. Likewise, the expenses of the Hospital General y de la Pasión included other dietary staples. Meat, wine, eggs, hardtack, oil, and fruit, along with other ordinary foods made up a large part of the annual budget.

73 Ibid., p. 26. “Los almuerços que de ordinario se les dan son passas, vizcochos o gruesos y en tiempo de Verano frutas saludables y frescas….”
74 BNE, Libros Antiguos, Leonardo Galdiano y Croy, Breve tratado de los hospitales y casas de recogimiento de esta Corte..., (Madrid, 1677), pp. 4-5 and 15.
According to Galdiano y Croy, in these Casas (the Hospital General, the Hospital de la Pasión, the Convalencencia del General, and the Casas de faltos de juizio) or branches of the hospitals, during 1676, some 9,807 inmates came to be cured by these institutions. Out of these 8,278 people were cured. Only 967 died during their stay in the hospitals and another 562 remained there in December of that year.\textsuperscript{75} These numbers suggest an 84\% chance of being cured in the main hospice institutions of Madrid during that year. While one does not want to accuse the Hospitals’ accountant of falsifying the statistics these numbers are rather astonishing. It is worth noting that 1676 was not a year in which there was an outbreak of plague in Madrid, so statistics such as these might have been very different from a tract that dealt with the hospitals in 1602, when the plague created a crisis in many Castilian cities, including Madrid.\textsuperscript{76} Even so, this high rate of cures suggests that those inmates of the hospitals of Madrid had access to medicines, nourishment, and a chance for recuperation. Admittance into the Hospital General y de la Pasión was not a death sentence for the majority of the sick and poor who needed its shelter.

Regardless of the accuracy of the 84\% cure rate, the message of Galdiano y Croy’s tract is a clear one. The hospitals of Madrid could only care for and cure so many patients, and they could only afford to employ so many people and pay property rents and buy foodstuffs, clothing, and other necessary items for the inmates of the hospitals. They required sufficient funding. And this funding remained connected to the commercial

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, p. 6-7.
theater of Madrid. Without the maravedís of playgoers, there could be no ducats to buy the bread and wine or pay the rents. While the system of transferring the monetary disbursement away from the corrales de comedias and to the municipal government meant that the money no longer came directly from the performances of plays after 1615, it continued to come indirectly from these performances, though routed through the coffers of the city government of Madrid, until the nineteenth century.

Madrid and London both fought uphill battles against poverty, disease, and problems with sanitation during the early modern period, but they did so differently. This was so in part because of their different historical infrastructures, partly because of their religious differences from the mid-sixteenth century onward, and partly because of how public theater became incorporated into the daily lives of the two capitals.

The main institution in London for dealing with vagrants up to the middle of the seventeenth century was Bridewell Hospital, founded in 1552 by Edward VI specifically to employ the poor, particularly homeless youth and disorderly women. The creation of such an institution was innovative social welfare without precedent in London. Bridewell’s foundations lay in particular English circumstances. The English Reformation, as well as the inflation of the 1540s and the failure of statutes that founded the poor law led to the creation of Bridewell and the development of London’s hospital
Initially Bridewell trained its inmates to be useful, but by 1600 it had attained a primarily penal function.78

Other hospitals, such as St. Bartholomew’s and St. Thomas’ cared for the sick and the elderly inhabitants of London. Christ’s Hospital cared for orphans and foundlings until it burnt to the ground in 1666. However, these royal hospitals could not meet the needs of a growing population, particularly in an increasingly impoverished population. Although it had been proposed in 1574 that proceeds from the emerging London playhouses be earmarked by the City of London to help subsidize the hospitals of that city, when the Hospitals asked for the money, the city fathers supposedly told them to try to collect the money from the players themselves. The players, as mentioned above, went on to establish playhouses outside the city walls.79 While the acting troupes did pay poor rates to the parishes in which they were located, the charitable function of the London theaters did not take on the importance that it did in Madrid, or elsewhere in cities of the Spanish Atlantic world. London’s hospitals relied largely on royal endowments, private charity, and income from monopolies on salt in order to fund their activities.

The parts of London outside the city walls underwent development fairly late in the history of London. During the sixteenth century this area began to serve as home to a significant segment of the poorer populace and to foreigners. With the wealthier population established in the center of the city, the suburbs underwent the full scope of

serious problems related to early modern expansion. Neighborhoods beyond the walls were locations of poverty, poor housing, and disease. The avenues of the vagrants were also the venues of entertainment: in early modern London the public theaters also laid outside the walls.

London boasted a sewage system of sorts, which Ben Jonson’s foully descriptive poem, “On the Famous Voyage,” first printed in 1616, immortalized. In the poem, two men take a light rowing boat, or a wherry, from Bridewell, the hospital and penal institution for whores and nightwalkers and other criminals to Holborn, the location of London’s mercurial bathhouses, down the Fleet River, where raw sewage was “the cause of those thick frequent mists/Arising in that place, through which, who goes,/Must try the unused valour of a nose.” Jonson vividly depicted the stench of the human waste of mercury-encrusted turds and urine, the carcasses of dead animals, and the other various forms of filth that comprised that “most liquid deed” of the makeshift London sewage system. But at least there was a sewage system of sorts.

Yet, even if Golden Age Madrid lacked a proper sewage system for its own inhabitants’ turds and “liquid deeds” and even if it was the object of scorn and ridicule from foreign observers and from many madrileños alike, this early modern court city did not lack in cofradías and charitable institutions. Some of the institutions even had a significant impact on the fate of many inhabitants of the court and capital. For as easy as it is for people living in the twenty-first century to mock the state of public health in the

81 Jonson, p. 91.
early modern era, the hospitals of Madrid actually did perform a crucial function in curing and caring for the poor and the infirm, and aiding some of the most marginalized men, women, and children in early modern Spanish society.

The relationship that developed between the city of Madrid and its corrales de comedias was shaped by the connection between the commercial theater and the hospitals of the city. Even after 1615 and 1638 when the municipal government and the Council of Castile altered the mechanisms by which this relationship worked, the hospitals – and thus the charitable poor relief and the care of the ill – remained linked to the success of the commercial theater of the Spanish court and capital. While some have argued that the constant regulation of the theater by the city and royal government made for a public drama that was subservient to the tastes of the crown, the reality was more complicated than that. While extreme outright subversion was not often the case either, the playwrights and acting companies of Madrid negotiated a metaphorical middle ground, just as the corrales de comedias themselves took root in the middle of the city and owed their success to the link they provided between two theoretically marginal groups: actors and sick beggars. The actors and the plays performed before the audiences of the public theaters of Renaissance Madrid allowed playwrights, directors, and actors to have a livelihood, a theatergoing public to be entertained, and inmates of the hospitals to be admitted and cured.
On May 29, 1623 a theater riot broke out in the Corral de la Cruz in Madrid. Before the performance began, the autor de comedias, Antonio de Prado, addressed the capacity audience of the playhouse. He told the entertainment seekers that the play that they expected to see performed that afternoon, *La primera parte del Emperador Carlos Quinto*, would not be performed by order of the government. Prado begged the playgoers’ forgiveness and told them “he would put on another that they requested or return their money.”¹ However, the audience would have none of this. These men and women demanded that *Carlos Quinto* be performed and when they realized that it would not be, the men in the pit expressed their displeasure in no uncertain terms. They “shattered the benches with daggers; tore the taffeta of the costumes to bits; they threw rocks at the actors hitting one of them in the face…. ” The authorities wanted to know who had perpetrated this assault.² Eventually, the following day one of the members of this riotous and rock-throwing mob and the gentleman who had accused him of throwing the rock that struck the actor fought in the Puerta del Sol. Also the next day, Prado’s company advertised that they would put on *Carlos Quinto* for free and many people went

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² Ibid. According to Palencia, the men “quebraron los bancos con las dagas; hicieron pedazos los tafetanes del vestuario; tiraron piedras a los representantes; y habiendo dado a uno en la cara….”
to see it even though they “had to stand since there were no benches. And at the opening of the first act they forgave the comedians and the playgoers in the pit cheered.”

Not long before this riot took place a lessee of the inn-yard theater stipulated that he and his money collectors should be allowed more means of protection at their jobs. In October of 1620, Baltasar Ruiz, the holder of the lease for the corrales de comedias, petitioned and received a new amendment to the terms of his lease. He and “his money collectors must be allowed to wear protective armor for the defense of their persons because of the risk to their lives in the said collections without any guard bothering them for it.”

After all, after sunset, at the close of a performance, the corrales de comedias could become a scene of something more than entertainment. The public theaters of Madrid could become hot zones for public disorder, where purses could be picked, fights could break out, and women could be harassed and molested as they left. In some cases, as in the one aforementioned, a violent riot could break out in a playhouse even before the action of the comedia began. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that those involved in the commercial theater business wanted exemption from the city ordinances that forbade ordinary citizens from going around armed.

Of course, the potential of a riot or social violence could be a deterrent for potential playgoers, but the appeal of public, relatively cheap entertainment usually outweighed these concerns. As mentioned previously, in Spanish cities the corrales de comedias, or inn-yard theaters, enjoyed a special place in the early modern society in

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3 Ibid. “Estuvieron en pie, por no haber bancos. Y al salir la primera jornada se disculparon los comediantes y los vitorearon los mosqueteros.”

4 J.E. Varey y N.D. Shergold, Los arriendos de los corrales de comedias de Madrid: 1587-1719 (London: Tamesis, 1987), p. 93. “...sus cobradores an de poder traer coletos para defensa de sus personas por el riesgo que tienen allí de sus vidas en las dichas cobranças sin que alguacil ninguno los moleste por ello.”
which they operated. These playhouses were centrally located and linked financially and culturally to the cities’ hospitals. Madrid was a city in which playwrights and actors could and did seek celebrity before a large playgoing public that was made up of madrileños from all occupations and social classes.

I. Playwrights and Players in Golden Age Madrid

The most famous of the many Golden Age playwrights was Lope de Vega. Born in 1562 and educated at the University of Alcalá, Félix Lope de Vega Carpio made his living as a professional writer. He wrote prose and verse and performed secretarial duties for members of the nobility, particularly the Duke of Sessa, Luis Fernández de Córdoba y Aragón, his long-term patron. However, most of his income came from writing for the public theaters. By his early twenties, Lope had become the leading playwright in Madrid, which, with its booming population and its large number of nobles and courtiers, provided Lope with excellent raw material for dramatic writing. In 1588 an incident occurred that was to alter the course of Lope’s career. He was exiled from Castile for two years and from Madrid for eight years for libeling Elena Osorio, his former mistress and the daughter of Jerónimo Velázquez, a successful acting troupe manager. His banishment from the capital put him in contact with playwrights in Valencia, and this contact probably influenced his style.5 Upon his return to Madrid, he continued to develop his comedia nueva, the three-act tragic-comedy that so successfully deviated

5 Lope may also have learnt from the metrical skill of Tarrega during this period of exile. See Malveena MckKendrick, *Theatre in Spain 1490-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 70-71.
from the classical Aristotelian formula of five-act plays which shunned mixing tragic and comic elements. Lope and his fellow dramatists placed kings and heroes on the same stage as buffoons and commoners.

This new type of drama was so successful that Lope de Vega’s compulsion to put pen to paper found a lucrative outlet. In 1604, Lope claimed that he had written some 448 comedias to that point. His protégée, Juan Pérez de Montalbán, later claimed that Lope wrote close to two thousand comedias. Lope wrote drama, and his life was intensely dramatic. He was a man of intense passions – a man who was larger than life: he had two wives, three long-term mistresses, countless other love affairs, and fourteen children. He served as a familiar of the Inquisition and he entered the priesthood concurrent with the death of his last mistress, Marta de Nevares, and the abduction and seduction of his daughter, Antonia, by a courtier in the late 1620s.\(^6\) Despite his frustrations and his lack of appointment to the position that he coveted as royal chronicler, Lope was a hero in his own time. When he died, his funeral rites lasted nine days. However, in spite of his talent, his popularity, and the patronage of the Duke of Sessa, Lope’s low birth and his talent for scandal meant that he never became a regular court dramatist. Although Lope never got the royal patronage that he so desperately desired, this failure actually served to benefit the playgoers of early modern Spain.

Lope played a large role in perpetuating his own legendary status during his own lifetime. While he was willing to credit others, he either consciously or unconsciously did so in ways that would build his reputation as the creator of the comedia nueva. Thus, Lope credited his predecessor, the Valencian poet and dramatist Cristóbal de Virués with

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\(^6\) On Antonia’s subsequent life as a nun, poet, and dramatist, see below, p. 230.
reducing the Spanish play to three acts, but Lope never acknowledged that the Valencian poet’s tragedies were more tragicomedies than pure tragedies. The comedia nueva was Lope’s domain and his fame spread so widely throughout Castile that by the middle of the seventeenth century, Spaniards had coined the phrase “es de Lope” to signify that something was of superb quality.

Lope’s contemporaries and successors attempted to emulate his style and his success. One of the most talented of the Lopistas was Tirso de Molina. Tirso de Molina was the pseudonym for Fray Gabriel Téllez, a Mercedarian monk, who along with Lope, dominated the Spanish stage in the early 1620s. He entered the priesthood in 1610 and had been writing plays for around a decade, when his superiors sent him to the Indies in 1615. Upon his return to Madrid in 1617, he continued writing for the playhouses. Madrid provided him with abundant material and willing audiences for his comedias.

Many of Tirso’s plays dealt with politics, in particular with questions of absolute power and its potential abuse by monarchs and their favorites. The Mercedarian monk and playwright was exiled on March 6, 1625, when the Council of Castile’s Committee for Reform deemed his dramatic activities scandalous for his calling and recommended his exile to a remote monastery. Tirso had been quite critical of the government and of corruption in some of his comedias. For example, La prudencia en la mujer was both a history play about the medieval Queen Maria de Molina and a critique of her son’s shortcomings as a monarch. Philip IV more or less shared these shortcomings – an over-reliance on vassals and favorites and deciding to tax his impoverished people in order to

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8 McKendrick, p. 115. Also see Margaret Wilson, Tirso de Molina (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977).
continue to wage war in the Netherlands. Tirso’s *Privar contra su gusto* had made an enemy of King Philip IV’s *privado*, or favorite, the Count Duke Olivares, but the specifics of Tirso’s exile remain unknown. As theater scholar Jodi Campbell has observed, many earlier scholars have assumed that Tirso’s stance and political edge were uncommon, but indeed many other playwrights, such as the Mexican-born Juan Ruiz de Alarcón and Guillén de Castro, wrote plays that shared similar political ideas. Campbell has pointed out, “Tirso de Molina, rather than having been the exception for his political views, was merely the exception in having been punished for them.”

Second only to Lope de Vega in terms of contemporary and later acclaim was Pedro Calderón de la Barca. Calderón was born in 1600 into an old Castilian family. As a youth, he attended a Jesuit school in Madrid and then studied at the University of Alcalá and the University of Salamanca, where he read theology, philosophy, and logic and received a degree in canonical law. Although his father had intended him for the Church, he chose a different life, one of poetry and partying in Madrid. Calderón participated in poetry contests and won the praise of Lope de Vega. His first play *Amor, honor y poder* was performed in Madrid in 1623. By the late 1620s he had established himself as a favored dramatist of Philip IV, and in the 1640s he was made a knight of the Order of Santiago. He performed military service in the Catalan revolt, but was forced to leave the cavalry in 1642 due to war wounds. The long-term closure of the theatres interrupted his career. When the *corrales* re-opened in 1651, Calderón decided to enter the priesthood, becoming the king’s private chaplain, and he gave up writing for the

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public theatre, although he continued to write religious one act plays, known as *autos sacramentales*. In many of Calderón’s plays “meaning moves at the level of metaphor and symbol rather than in the surface plot.”¹¹ He had a consistent tragic vision that can be seen in many of his plays. Yet, like his fellow playwrights, Calderón also wrote numerous *comedias* that entertained and amused the theatrical public more than they puzzled out philosophical problems.

It was dramatists, such as Lope, Tirso, and Calderón, and their admirers and imitators who wrote for the stages of Golden Age Spanish cities. Madrid’s playwrights provided the material for the *autores* and their acting troupes, who were licensed to perform by the Council of Castile, and who entertained the inhabitants of Madrid and the other cities of Spain and its empire. Some of these playwrights, such as Andrés de Claramonte y Corroy, actually took on numerous roles: writing plays for the stage as well as directing and performing them.

These licensed acting companies, while approved and licensed by the Council of Castile in Madrid, could not remain in the city indefinitely because the Council required “that there not be two companies together in any place, except in the Court and Seville, nor that they be there for more than two months out of each year in each place.”¹² This meant that acting companies had to travel, and it also meant that provincial cities, such as Burgos and Valladolid, had regular access to commercial theater as directors and their troupes rotated in and out of Madrid and Seville. Thus the theater business of Castile had its logistical foundations in Madrid, but this was a model that *autores* and actors exported...

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¹¹ McKendrick, p. 141.
with them to cities in all of the Crown of Castile’s realms, making connections between 
the actors, charitable brotherhoods, and/or municipal governments throughout the towns 
of the Spanish Empire.

For example, it was possible for Spanish historians Carmen Sanz Ayán and 
Bernardo García García to trace most of the theatrical activity of autor Jerónimo 
Velázquez and his troupe of players between 1564 and 1597. Although Velázquez and 
his troupe spent a large part of those three decades in Madrid, they also traveled back and 
forth between Madrid and other locations, such as Segovia, Burgos, Valladolid, Seville, 
Alcalá de Henares, Ávila, León, Valencia, Salamanca, Toledo, and Lisbon.13

Autores, such as Velázquez, were responsible for a number of tasks. They had to 
petition for their licenses in order to hire players and to hire the players to form acting 
troupes. It was their efforts that enabled acting companies to obtain permission to wear 
certain costumes and enabled commoners to violate normal sumptuary laws and put on 
the garb of kings and nobles on the stage. For example, in October of 1590 Francisco 
Osorio petitioned the Council of Castile for a license “so that he and and his other 
companions could wear ruffs around their necks while they were in the theaters 
performing….”14 Costume rentals were key to the theater business, and some of these 
costumes were incredibly sumptuous, such as a dress with “sleeves of gold brocade and 
black camlet, embroidered with silver crests….”15

14 AHN, Consejo de Castilla, Leg. 7051, Num. 16, 5 x 1590. The original reads, “Francisco Osorio, autor de comedias, suplica se le de licencia para que el y los demás sus compañeros puedan traer guarniciones en los qu الروles estuvieron en los teatros representando….”
Autores also had to find and hire talented actors and actresses who would bring in audiences. They engaged players to perform with their companies on a contractual basis, typically on year-by-year terms, and frequently the autores hired actors to perform specific types of roles. For example, Isabel de Góngora played segundas damas, supporting female roles, throughout her career. Góngora spent most of her time as an actress working in the company of the famous autor, Antonio de Prado. Her acting career spanned several decades and took her to playhouses all over Spain.  

Actors and actresses who did not get chosen by the licensed companies often joined touring, unlicensed compañías de la legua, or companies of the road, which scraped by, performing from place to place, and developing an even worse reputation than their colleagues who had more established careers in licensed companies had. For despite all the advantages of yearly contracts, and potential fame and celebrity, the general public continued to regard the acting profession as disreputable. This continued even after the creation of a brotherhood or guild, known as the Cofradía de Nuestra Señora de la Novena, to protect the interests of actors and actresses, especially to aid sick and elderly members and pay for their Christian burials. The majority of these players lived in the parish of San Sebastián, where the corrales de comedias were.

However, even with the cloud of disapproval that hung over the acting profession in Spain and Europe in general, its organization, its constant regulation, and the people involved in it gave it a surprising amount of social space in which to operate. Joseph original describes the sleeves as “mangas de espolín de oro y chamelote negro, bordadas los penachos de plata...”

16 Biblioteca Nacional de España (hereafter BNE), Mss.12.917, Fol. 23, undated.
17 The issues of anti-theatrical legislation and the controversy over morals in which the theater found itself embroiled in are taken up in Chapter Four.
Roach has noted that in England “Restoration actors and actresses worked very hard” performing for English audiences and making themselves the “objects of public fantasy.” The same could be said for the players of the Spanish Golden Age of a century to a half-century earlier. These men and women performed many days of the year and had to learn their lines from new comedias quickly and efficiently. Their talents included incredible memories, the ability to express emotions, strong voices, and in some cases, famous levels of physical attractiveness. Some Spanish actors and actresses, like players elsewhere in Continental Europe and England, achieved a level of acclaim and celebrity that attracted the patronage of royalty, the elaboration of legends and anecdotes about them, and the ire of opponents of the theater. As noted by drama scholar Jane Milling, part of the new vogue of acting was the “Renaissance rediscovery of classical rhetoric [for] the ancients had rejuvenated the idea of performance as a metaphor for social and political behavior.” Indeed many Spanish theologians and thinkers who took up the issue of the place of the stage in their society claimed that the “theater is the mirror of human life.” It reflected the good and the bad, the habits of the rich and the poor, the potential power and potential abuse of power of the monarch, and the potential for honor, dishonor, and tragedy among the common subjects of the land. Theater had the power to

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20 AMM, Sección 2, Legajo 468, Num. 11, not foliated, undated. “Comedia es espejo dela vida humana.” Concerns about the nature of acting and its supposed hypocrisy are taken up in Chapter Four.
move audiences, and those actors and actresses who could play their parts well were “very celebrated for [their] performances…”21

These performers could seek a kind of celebrity or even representational publicity that was open to few people of their social class. Augustín de Rojas, a Golden Age actor from Madrid, toured other Spanish cities and attained fame as an actor and as a writer of loas, the short theatrical pieces that opened a performance of a comedia and set the tone and mood of the performance. Rojas also wrote a picaresque novel called El viaje entretenido, which provides glimpses into the lives of Spanish players in the late sixteenth century, and the first decade of the seventeenth century. The novel depicted a group of traveling players who were on the road from one theatrical city to another. On the way, they talked about women, religion, the problems actors faced, the different types of acting companies, and how “the loa is good.” His description of players as people who were essentially slaves to Spanish society was meant to evoke the sympathy of his reading public. He claimed that performers had to be up and writing and studying their parts “before God awakened” and then quickly eat and perform their piece for the public. Then, as they were leaving the corral de comedias to rest, “they were called by the President/ the Judges, the Mayors, the Prosecutors, the Members of Councils, and they all had to go perform at whatever hour they wanted.”22

Some stage players used these hardships to forge incredible celebrity. For example, Antonia Infanta was a celebrated actress who purportedly took to sleeping in a

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21 BNE, Mss 12917, Fol. 47. This document examines the lives of actresses who “fue mui celebrada por su representacion…” For a fuller treatment of some of Golden Age Spain’s celebrated actresses, see Chapter Five.

bed with black satin sheets. Cosme Pérez, better known by his stage name, Juan Rana, nearly gained the mythical status as an actor that Lope de Vega achieved as a playwright. He had an incredible career that spanned over fifty years, acting and performing from 1617 to 1672 as the gracios, or buffoon, which gained him such fame that he became the star of the later baroque entremeses, or interlude, and had the protection of both Philip IV and many nobles. He was even able to avoid punishment and continue his career after being arrested on charges of the pecado nefando, or the abominable sin of sodomy, in 1636. Peter Thomson has argued that this arrest not only “outed Juan Rana in the eyes of society” but also allowed the actor to use this arrest to his advantage: he gained further celebrity by performing in many entremeses that alluded to his homosexual behavior in covert comedic ways.

Whether or not they were as famous as Juan Rana, many of Madrid’s performers belonged to their own religious brotherhood, which they formed in the seventeenth century. The actors’ confraternity, which verged on being a guild and which was open to both actors and actresses, made the life of performers easier. The cofradía itself was named for the image of a Virgin Mary, who was first known as the Virgin of Silence. In the early 1620s an image of this virgin with the baby Jesus was carved and placed in a niche in the calle del León, a street on which many of the actors and actresses who performed in the two corrales de comedias lived. The virgin received her new name – de la Novena – when she supposedly cured the sick actress Catalina de Flores on the noveno

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23 BNE, Mss 12917, Fol. 254, Genealogía, origen, y noticias de los comediantes de España, Antonia Infanta, undated.
dia, or ninth day. Spanich historian, José Subira, has argued that Catalina de Flores was not and never was an actress; she was merely a humble serving girl. However, the legend of the curative powers of the Virgin de la Novena continued to grow and the image continued working miracles in Madrid. So, it is not surprising that in 1631, the virgin’s neighbors, the players of Madrid took her as their patroness and named their cofradia for her. This cofradia, from its inception, helped to sustain the lives of actors and actresses who had retired or been widowed, and the lives of the children that deceased actors and actresses left behind. Although the municipal government of Madrid paid for their basic needs, the guild provided various forms of financial assistance. It also gave actors and actresses access to a community and connected them with the charitable giving and religious renewal that was so characteristic of Tridentine Catholicism in Castile. The guild received official Church approval in 1634 and came under the wing of the Protector of the Hospitals at the same time.

II. City Comedies: Madrid

Madrid provided the perfect setting and the fodder for numerous comedias and a large population of potential audience members. Because of its labyrinthine streets, its casas a la malicia, its fluctuating population of nobles jockeying for political position and its commoners jockeying for the jobs provided by these nobles, Madrid was a city of chaos – a theatrical city. Many of the most famous playwrights of the Golden Age, such

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25 BNE, Mss 12917, Fol. 47, undated. See also Jose Subira, El gremio de representantes españoles y la cofradía de nuestra señora de la novena (Madrid: CSIC, 1960), p. 18.
as Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, and Calderón de la Barca, lived at least part of their lives in Madrid and many of their plays were written with the actors, the inhabitants, the playgoers, and even the physical spaces of Madrid in mind. As William Blue has argued, the characters created by these playwrights were far from independent of the Madrid cityscape. Rather, the young lovers of the comedias from the 1620s, and possibly other decades as well, relied on intimate knowledge of Madrid’s geography, economy, and social atmosphere in order to solve their dilemmas.²⁶

Playwrights not only used the conventions of the plots of other comedias as devices for furthering the action in their own dramatic works, but they also relied on knowledge of the very architecture of Madrid. For example, Los balcones de Madrid, a comedia from the 1620s often attributed to Tirso de Molina, acknowledged the fact that young lovers could visit each other by exploiting the proximity of the balconies of the houses of the court and capital. In this comedia the intrepid lovers, Elisa and Juan contrive to converse with the help of Juan’s servant, Coral, who constructs an extendable bridge between the two balconies. Meanwhile Elisa’s father, Don Alonso sees a veiled lady sitting in conversation with Pedro. He becomes convinced that his daughter is making use of a secret passage, unaware that this passage is actually through the air, from balcony to balcony. Knowing that her father is an avid theatergoer, Elisa’s servant Leonor realizes that she could not stash her veil up her sleeves in order to hide it and warns Elisa: “Bad idea, for once in a play, I saw them hide it like that.” Alonso

must have seen that play as well for he does indeed demand: “Both of you show me your sleeves.”

Another of these Madrid comedies is Tirso de Molina’s *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*. This intricate love triangle comedy features a heroine, who is not only brave, intelligent, and willing to become *una mujer vestido de hombre*, or a woman dressed as a man, but who is also incredibly empathetic in her plight of love and jealousy. While the love triangle and the *mujer varonil*, or masculine woman, were common elements of Golden Age drama, what makes this *comedia* stand out from so many other city comedies is the multiple layers of disguise and deception that Tirso employed. The protagonist, Doña Juana disguises herself as both a man and as another woman, alternating dress and identities throughout the play. At various points throughout the play, she transforms herself from Juana into “Don Gil of the green breeches” and into Doña Elvira. Her male disguise is prompted by her travels to Madrid in hopes of preventing the lover who had jilted her back in Valladolid, Don Martín, from seeking a better marriage prospect: the more attractive and wealthier Doña Ines. Don Martín’s father, who views Juana’s lack of a substantial dowry as a problem is attempting to prevent his son from marrying her, despite earlier promises. In order to thwart the match, he has Don Martín to Madrid under the false name of Don Gil. Doña Juana follows him to Madrid and assumes the identity of one Don Gil, as well, in order to intercept Don Martín, complicate his plans, and compel him to marry her. Using the diamonds that Don Martín had given her in exchange for her favors of intimacy, Doña

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Juana finances her stay in the court city and woos her rival as “Don Gil de las calzas verdes” and in the next instant befriends her, disguising her true identity by calling herself Doña Elvira. The labyrinthine twists of plot mimic those of the streets in which the action of the play is set: Madrid.

The “streets of this court, imitators of the confusing Babel” were important to the development of the confusion of the characters in this *comedia*.28 Tirso’s characters make several direct comparisons between Madrid and Babel, including the lament of Don Martín, when he gets his just desserts. He complains that the streets of Madrid are ones “that lies walk down, flattering to the rich man as they are harsh to the poor; casas a la malicia, at all hours home to malice and vices.”29 Its population in flux, its inhabitants jockeying for position, it is not surprising that such material would make its way into the mouths of Tirso’s characters and the actors and actresses who portrayed them. Yet, for all its confusions, its great expenses, and other problems, Madrid was the place to go in order to see and to be seen. The characters in Tirso’s play knew that – as would an audience at the Corral del Principe or the Corral de la Cruz.

However, *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* was not an immediate Tirso blockbuster hit. The acting company of *autor* Pedro de Valdés had purchased the play and his company had been ordered to Toledo to perform plays during the summer of 1615. It was sometime between the July 8 and August 4 that *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* was first performed, and the audience who saw the play was not one full of madrileños but


29 Ibid. The original reads, “siempre pisadas/de mentiras, al rico adulara/como al pobre severas, desbocadas:/casas a la malicia, a todas horas/de malicias y vicios habitadas....”
instead one of citizens of the provincial city of Toledo.\textsuperscript{30} Perhaps it was bad acting that led to its failure with the spectators in Toledo, but more likely, it had to do with the fact that this play was a Madrid comedy. The query that Doña Ines made to her father: “Isn’t Madrid the sea? Isn’t Valladolid a stream flowing into this sea?” probably did not sit well with the populace of Toledo.\textsuperscript{31} After all, Madrid was a drain on Toledo’s resources, its populace, and its prestige. If the play had been first performed in Madrid, it might have had much more success because it definitely catered to an audience of madrileños and would have made them feel superior to their provincial counterparts in Valladolid. It is also a good possibility that the return of the court from Valladolid just a few years earlier prompted some of these sentiments of superiority among the inhabitants of Madrid.

III. The London Comparison

There is a huge body of literature on the subject of public drama in early modern London. Indeed, as mentioned previously, there is an entire field of English drama devoted to William Shakespeare and an industry devoted to his life and works and their performance. Many scholars of English drama and theater have devoted themselves to the study of famous early modern English playwrights besides Shakespeare, such as Christopher Marlow, Ben Jonson, and Thomas Middleton. These men, among others,


\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, p. 137.
who wrote for the stages of London participated in a buyer’s market for plays. As in Madrid, the demand for new theatrical material was high, which led collaboration and to refashioning older material. However, as time passed and repertories expanded there was less demand for new material, as older plays could be kept in constant rotation. This difference in the market demand for new plays was a difference in the theater businesses of Madrid and London by the 1620s and 1630s.32

Another key difference between the public stages of Madrid and London was the composition of the acting companies. While women performed on the stages of the corrales de comedias from their inception, boy apprentices played all the female parts on the stages, both of the amphitheatres and the private halls, of London and the provinces. The idea of the boy actor playing an actress clearly appealed to the English, because, despite reservations and concerns about transvestitism, the practice continued until the Restoration in 1660.

The companies were typically comprised of between eight and twelve players, who were all typically “sharers” in the company. They hired assistants for smaller parts and musicians to provide additional entertainment. Three or four boy apprentices typically studied under the sharers and played the female roles provided for them. They were paid less than the hired assistants, and they usually entered their apprenticeship around the age of ten. After a period of several years, they might become hired men and then eventually full-members of the company. No one – regardless of their status within

32 For example, in the 1630s the King’s Men only commissioned four new plays each year. See Andrew Gurr, The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 20. By contrast, Spanish playwrights continued to write prolifically through the middle of the seventeenth century.
the acting troupe – received payment during periods when the theaters closed for periods of mourning, because of plague outbreaks, or general prohibitions against playing.

In London the vogue of acting companies entirely comprised of boys became popular during the early modern period. There is no comparable phenomenon in the theater of Golden Age Spain, where women performed by the middle of the sixteenth century in public drama and boys never had the same integral role in the business of commercial theater. The first of these groups, The Chapel Children, performed beginning in 1576 at the Blackfriars playhouse, which though within the city was not under the city’s jurisdiction until 1608. Acting by these boy troupes emerged from the academy and from the older medieval mystery cycles. During the Tudor period, children’s troupes performed fairly regularly during royal banqueting or as entertainment for aristocrats. In fact, the commercialization of these companies under Elizabeth and James depended on this long-standing reputation of the boys as court entertainers.33 The Children of Paul’s were the most active of these groups, and performed from 1557 to 1590, when they became implicated in the Marprelate Controversy, and from 1600-1606.34 Their demise in 1606 and that of the King’s Revels Children in 1609 is indicative of the end of the vogue for child actors in Renaissance English drama.

Peter Thompson has argued in *Shakespeare’s Theatre* that by 1597 things were beginning to get difficult for those involved in the professional theater business in London. He contends that this was largely due to the fact that Puritans, who opposed the

34 The Marprelate Controversy was initiated by a series of pamphlets written by a puritan author, who called himself Martin Marprelate. These scathing tracts attacked the Anglican bishops of England and even upset a number of puritan clergymen, who did not want to be associated with the violent language of these pamphlet attacks. See
theater and courtly privilege within the City, dominated the City of London Coorporation in Guildhall. As Thompson observes, the public theater survived in London through the end of the sixteenth century because it received aristocratic protection, it received protection from Queen Elizabeth I, and the Privy Council accepted the theater in spite of concerns about disorder and disease. He claims that all these points need to be qualified, for the Privy Council wanted to save only two companies. While King James I enjoyed theatre, his reign aided in its shift from the popular audience, and because of the need to perform at court, flexibility and simplicity played a large role in shaping stagecraft.\textsuperscript{35}

While there is evidence to suggest that all segments of London society from aristocrats to servants continued to attend plays at the public amphitheaters outside the city walls upon occasion, it is important to note that the private theaters priced many would-be spectators out of attending.\textsuperscript{36} Since different types of plays tended to be written for the private versus the public theaters this also meant that the theaters engaged in a rivalry and competition in the way that the theaters and acting companies of Madrid and other Spanish cities did not. While particular $autores$ might compete for licensing and the ability to play in Madrid or Seville, there is little evidence to suggest that they engaged in slurs and insult slinging like the London companies and the playwrights who wrote for them did. Since the players of London relied on patronage, as well as commercial success, in a way that the actors of Madrid did not, this level of competition and jockeying in London is not surprising.

\textsuperscript{36} Gurr, p. 217.
Just as there were Madrid comedies that relied on the audience’s intimate knowledge of Madrid’s geography, architecture, and social conventions, there were city comedies that were set in London. Unlike the typical Madrid comedias, the London comedies which became popular on the Jacobean stage between 1603 and 1613 tended to pit one social group of London against the other with some playwrights championing middling merchants and others mocking them. After all, Renaissance English actors and playwrights had nobles, not middling merchants, as their patrons, so it should not be surprising that these plays were written about citizens of London rather than for them.37

Many of these comedies also depicted London as a site of sinful behavior and vice.38 In Thomas Middleton’s city comedy A Chaste Maid in Cheapside the main plot centers around the couple Moll Yellowhammer and Touchwood Junior and around Moll’s parents objection to their courtship. Moll’s father proposes to marry her instead to an older knight, Sir Walter Whorehound. While the play abounds with extramarital affairs, sexual humor, and double entendres, the title of the play was perhaps the biggest joke of all. In the early 1610s when this city comedy was first performed Cheapside was known for its large number of prostitutes and a seedy reputation. Some have claimed that the characters in A Chaste Maide in Cheapside were more varied and the romance treated more sympathetically by Middleton than other of his city comedies because it was written for performance in the public theater rather than the private theaters, where

37 Alexander Leggatt has pointed this out in Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).
38 For further treatment of another London comedy, The Roaring Girl, see below, pp. 221-223.
the gentry preferred to see a mockery of the citizen class.\textsuperscript{39} Yet, even so, many of the characters created by the playwright are both of low birth and low morals.

IV. Theatrical Publics in Early Modern Madrid and London: Audiences, Diplomats, and Heroes

During the early modern period, the number of literate Spaniards increased. Richard Kagan has observed that a revolution in the Spanish education system occurred during this period.\textsuperscript{40} Due to this expanded education and growing print culture, even the vulgo, the Spanish public, had increasing access to literacy, semi-literacy, and even occasionally to book ownership. The widespread use of cartillas de leer, or primers, which were inexpensive, aided the spread of literacy among the vulgo. While religious authors were far more likely to be published and their texts to be purchased than novelists or playwrights, the inventory of Castilian bookshops was not limited to devotional works. Instead, these booksellers sold a variety of different types of works: alongside religious texts, they sold primers, cookbooks, comedias, and broadsheets containing all manner of material.

It is possible that the regular public performances and private readings of comedias and the broadsheet worked in tandem shaping the cultural literacy and the opinions of the vulgo. The vulgo attended plays in the theaters of early modern Madrid and London and could be obnoxious and disorderly in the expressions of approval or

disapproval of what they saw on the stage. A number of theater riots and outbreaks of violence at the public theaters in both capital cities attest to this. One instance of such disorderly behavior took place in November of 1634, when Sir John Sucking and Mr. John Digby quarreled at the playhouse at Blackfriars and were imprisoned for disturbing the peace.41

Even when they were not rioting, playgoers could cause trouble. Juan de Zabeleta described the typical, worldly playgoer in his cuadro de costumbres, or vignette of every day life, entitled El día de fiesta por la tarde, first published in 1666. After quickly and absent-mindedly eating his lunch, the typical entertainment seeker headed to one of Madrid’s theaters. Of course, “the first thing he makes sure to do is to enter without paying.”42 The city fathers of Madrid and other Spanish towns frequently complained about such attempts by playgoers to enter corrales de comedias without paying admission. It could even be problematic for the court theater, as an order from Philip IV reminding his palace guards not to enter and watch the comedias “without paying” illustrates. The king complained in 1655 that he had “ordered that none of the soldiers of my guard nor my servants, may be exempt from paying at the doors of the Comedias, when they enter to see them, which I have repeated on different occasions before and after the said year. It is because I understand that it is not being followed and recently this has caused problems....”43

41 Glynne Wickham, Herbert Berry, and William Ingram, eds., English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 527. However, it would seem that John Suckling made bail almost immediately for he was soon spotted in a coach, riding around town.
42 The original reads, “la primera diligencia que hace es no pagar....”
43 On Philip IV’s troubles with his entertainment-seeking soldiers see BNE, Mss 20273/26, 8 v 1655. The original reads, “Tengo mandado que ninguno de los soldados de mis guardas, ni criados mios, se eximian de pagar en las Puertas de las Comedias quando entran a Veerlas, el qual orden antes y despusde dicho
Juan de Zabeleta’s playgoer continued to cause trouble. Once in the theater, he went on to harass actresses, watching them change into their costumes, get into an altercation over his seating arrangement, and manage to flirt with a woman in the *cazuela*. According to Zabeleta, the actresses had no choice but to put up with this kind of unwelcome intrusion into the dressing room because any refusal or rejection of a member of the audience could result in a derogatory whistle from the playgoer while the actress was on stage. Such whistles and jeering – no matter how unjust – could start a chain reaction among the theater crowd and result in damaging her reputation and her ability to get paid. Zabeleta portrayed the crowd as fickle and judgmental. For example, “if the actor brings out a poor costume [the audience] boos him or whistles at him”.44 Worse yet, the spectators could launch missiles of the fruit sold at the *corrales de comedias* at the actors if so provoked and inspired.

The typical playgoer that Zabeleta depicted was also willing to steal the seat of a fellow audience member. Zabeleta’s typical entertainment-seeker asked for a place on one of the benches, but was told that all the seats on the benches had been sold previously and none were available. After his trip to the ladies’ changing area, the playgoer saw a vacant seat and took it. When the man who had actually paid for the seat finally made his appearance, the cheeky playgoer refused to give up the spot, arguing that if the man wanted to sit there, he should have shown up earlier. Zabeleta’s playgoer refused to give up the seat in spite of not having he paid for it. The man argued his case,

making such a fuss, that other people had to intervene. The owner of the seat eventually conceded and took another elsewhere in the corral. Such altercations prior to the beginning of a dramatic performance seemed to be common in the commercial theaters of Madrid and other cities of the Spanish empire, even if the direct evidence for their occurrence is not overly abundant.

Audiences demanded entertainment even when they did not appreciate the fare that playwrights, directors, and actors offered them. Zabeleta’s account of a typical theatergoer alluded to the problems of the vagaries of public opinion in the corrales de comedias. Whistles, jeers, and the jangling of keys from the cazuela were less problematic than outright rioting and destruction of benches and scenery for those involved in the theatrical business, but these kinds of negative audience responses were what performers had to worry about far more frequently than a rioting crowd. Since playwrights depended on acting companies purchasing their plays, they too had to pander to their public. Yet, many dramatists, such as Lope de Vega, bemoaned what acting companies did to their written texts: slicing and dicing and embellishing in order to please the crowd in the corrales.

Alterations made to comedias by autores also could occasionally thwart the censorship controls of the Inquisition, with its famous index of banned books, and that of the licensing Protector of the Hospitals. Censors typically looked for problems with religious orthodoxy, seditious material, and looked to edit out anything that might be too sympathetic to Protestants or Jews. The controls of censorship, however, were limited by the fact that the commercial theater was a lucrative business, and from the number of plays that have survived to the present day, it would seem that most plays passed by the
censors and received a sort of rubber stamp of approval. This is not entirely dissimilar to the licensing process that dramas had to go through in England. And scholars, such as Richard Dutton, have reminded us that the position of the Master of the Revels was one of lucrative cooperation far more than one of draconian controls.\(^{45}\) The Inquisition could and did stop comedias on the verge of being performed in the corrales de comedias. However, this was not a frequent occurrence in Madrid or in other cities of Spain’s realms.

While the theater probably has never had the ability to influence its audience in the way that its critics claimed it could, censorship and regulation existed to mitigate the worst of these worries. The concerns that watching performances would turn all the men of Madrid and London into vice-ridden, effeminate weaklings and all the cities’ women into cross-dressing adventurers were exaggerated by opponents of the stage. However, there is some evidence to suggest the power of theater events and the theatrical language of plays could influence the vocabulary of politics and political events in early modern society.

The drama of the playhouse and the drama of the streets comingled in certain settings, such as religious processions and executions. In this way the spectacle of political drama unfolded before the audience of Madrid’s seventeenth-century society in the streets. One such example of political theater was the execution of Don Rodrigo Calderón in October of 1621. Calderón’s execution was supposed to be a means for Philip IV’s court to demonstrate that the royal government was distancing itself from

corruption and misdeeds, like those allegedly committed by Don Rodrigo. However, his religious awakening and the way he behaved on the scaffold swayed public opinion in his favor and had a negative impact on perceptions of Philip IV’s government. To this day, Spanish-speakers describe demonstrations of pride as más orgullo que Don Rodrigo en la horca, or more proud than Don Rodrigo on the scaffold. 46 Don Rodrigo no doubt had ample material from which to draw during his performance as penitent: he had had his own private aposento in the Corral del Principe, as had his mentor, Philip III’s favorite the Duke of Lerma.47

Just as theatrical events like executions drew on the vocabulary of the comedia to impact public opinion, so comedias could also occasionally sway public opinion in early modern Madrid. This was the case in October of 1600 in an incident that had implications for foreign relations between Spain and France. Apparently, “certain men standing in the streets” yelled “there they go, just like Lutherans!” at the French ambassador who was driving by in his coach. 48 Several days before this incident there had been a performance “in the public playhouse a certain play about a King of France.” 49 This comedia contained language that was “contemptuous and insulting to

48 Luis Cabrera de Córdoba, Relaciones de las cosas sucedidas en la corte de España desde 1599 hasta 1614 (Madrid: J. Matin Alegria, 1857), p. 85. The original says “ciertos hombres que estaban parados en la calle” … “que tales van los luteranos!”
49 Ibid. The original reads, “En el corral público cierta comedia de un Rey de Francia….” Unfortunately, the source does not name the play, nor do contextual clues indicate which play it might have been. It’s highly plausible that it twas one that was never published because of the controversy of the surrounding circumstances.
the French nation.\textsuperscript{50} Inflamed by the anti-French nature of the \textit{comedia} that they had either seen or heard about in the streets of the city, these men shouted insults at the ambassador’s coach, prompting one of the footman to get out of the coach and slap one of the men. The situation was about to escalate to the point of drawing swords, but the ambassador and his companions got out of the coach and dispersed the crowd. The complaints of the French ambassador led to the city fathers jailing the actors who had performed the play. The city government also found itself in the awkward situation of having to imprison one of its constables because he had not apprehended the disturbers of the peace who had taunted the ambassador. Even if the constable had wished to apprehend them, it might have proved a difficult task, as the ambassador discovered that he still had to endure laughter at his expense in the streets for some time after this incident.\textsuperscript{51}

A similar diplomatic debacle occurred because of a play performed in London a quarter of a century later. In 1624 the Master of the Revels failed to censor a play that by several standards should never have made it to the stage. That August, flocks of Londoners headed to the Globe in search of diversion: a new drama by Thomas Middleton. Entitled \textit{A Game at Chess}, the play ran for an unprecedented nine days straight and garnered immense popularity. Written, licensed by the Master of the Revels, and performed shortly after the failure of marriage negotiations between Prince Charles and the Spanish Infanta, the drama satirizes Spanish foes who had only recently been potential friends. The piece also violated English law by portraying living Christian

\textsuperscript{50} Relaciones de las cosas sucedidas en la corte de España desde 1599 hasta 1614 (Madrid: J. Matin Alegria, 1857), p. 85. The original describes the play’s content as “menosprecio y ultraje de la nación francesa.”

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, p. 87.
monarchs and other court personages. Most famously *A Game at Chess* mercilessly mocked the former Spanish ambassador Gondomar, a purportedly plotting politician, popularly known in London for three things: his seeming ability to bend James’ ear, his fistula, and his special chair to accommodate said sore. 52

When James I returned to his capital he was greeted with a letter, dated August 17, full of complaints about the play from the new Spanish ambassador, the Valencian Don Carlos of Coloma. Three days after writing James I, Coloma also wrote a letter to Philip IV’s *privado*, or favorite, the count-duke Olivares. This letter describes the plotline and the infamies of this “play so scandalous, so impious, so barbaric, and so offensive to my lord, the King.” 53 The response of the English court was immediate but ambiguous. The Privy Council briefly closed the Globe and put an end to the play’s unprecedented run, but it remains uncertain as to whether authorities ever imprisoned or fined Thomas Middleton.

These two incidents that began in the playhouse and carried into the realm of international diplomacy demonstrate that the theater had the ability to influence its audiences and public opinion. In Madrid, the constant regulation and the reliance on the *comedias* to fund the hospitals occasionally opened up a space for commercial theater to operate, to judge, and to be judged. In London plays could also take on a political edge and influence the playgoers of the English court and capital. When players played on

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53 Archivo General de Simancas (hereafter AGS), Consejo de Estado, Libro 375, unpaginated, letter from Don Carlos Coloma to Olivares, 20 viii 1624. Received 3 ix 1624. The original reads, “‘...comedia tan escandalossa tan impia tan barvara y tan ofensiva al Rey mi señor....’” [Unfortunately, I have not found Olivares’s response.]
underlying confessional tensions or patriotic sentiments this influence could become all the more powerful.

The Spanish *comedia* that developed in the chaotic atmosphere of the *villa y corte* was a vibrant one that the *autores* and actors used to make their livelihood. They treated the public of Madrid to a couple of hours of entertainment and relaxation, and their theatrical productions provided for the poor and sick of the city’s hospitals. The space for the theater to become integrated into daily life and public opinion in Madrid was heightened by the central location of the theaters and by the theatrical nature of the court and capital of Castile and its realms. There was only one city that could rival Madrid in its theatrical activity, in its chaos caused by constant immigration, and its problems with poverty, disease, and urban infrastructure. This city was early modern Seville.
After Madrid, the second most important city for theater in the early modern Spanish world was Seville. Its strategic and defensible location as an inland port on the Guadalquivir River and its political and social position within the Empire made it a key location for Golden Age theater. Its place as a crossroads for people, microbes, and treasures between Europe and America also made it a locus of crime, poverty, disease, and disorder. Dublin, like Seville was a port city. However, unlike Seville, it was a colonial city, that in the early modern period, was rife with political and religious, confessional tensions. Dublin’s nascent and court-based theater had a limited existence before military rebellion and civil war shut the doors of its playhouse in Werbourgh Street, and, and even after the war, theater in Dublin was far less integrated into the urban landscape and public life of the city. Comparing these two regional centers of aspiring early modern Empires again demonstrates the unique role that the integrated Spanish theater played in urban life in Castile and its dominions. As in Madrid and elsewhere in the Spanish Empire, in Seville popular dramatic entertainment and public health were linked through the charitable function of the corrales de comedias. However, since Seville’s theaters did not have the direct links provided by cofradías between the theaters and the hospitals but rather ones between the municipality and the city’s coffers, they had a civic dimension that stabilized early modern Seville even as the playhouses were a known focal point for disorder in the city.
Early modern Seville was both a city with a tremendously theatrical civic culture and a city with numerous commercial theaters and in which performers gave countless dramatic entertainments. During the sixteenth century, Seville became known as the *Gran Babilonia*, or the Great Babylon, of Spain, because of its chaotic mix of peoples, goods, and tongues. Others referred to it as the New Rome, because of Seville’s role as a center of classicizing humanist learning in Renaissance Spain, especially during the sixteenth century, when many Spanish authors imitated Petrarch.¹ As historian Mary Perry has pointed out early modern “Seville was really two cities.”² One city was comprised of the nobles, Church leaders, scholars, and wealthy merchants. The former two groups had a well-established history within the city, since Ferdinand III imposed a Christian hierarchy on an already existing society, when Spanish Christians conquered the city in 1248 at the height of the *Reconquista*. The wealthy merchants of Seville had connections with the fleets, which brought treasure from the Americas. Seville was a diverse city, where *conversos*, or Jews and their descendents who had converted rather than be expelled in 1492, New Christians, *moriscos*, and foreigners sought their fortunes, alongside Old Christians. Seville was also a city of an underworld, which included, among others, criminals, beggars, the unemployed, slaves, de-frocked clergymen, and itinerant players, who were members of the *compañias de legua*. Perry draws a

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distinction between this “underworld” and the poor of the city, who “kept a marginal place in respectable society.”

These two cities – the underworld and the respectable – merged into one on the streets of the city, especially during the festivals of Holy Week. They also mingled together in the *corrales de comedias*.

Seville possessed a political and social discourse that was heavily steeped in theatricality. Religion and secular authority merged in the public spectacle of the execution of criminals. Condemned people carried a cross and sang litanies on their way to the gallows, performing the role of the penitent with the prop that the audience expected them to carry: a crucifix. As Edward Muir has noted, executions in Seville might include over two hundred participants. They also involved the performance of elaborate dialogues between condemned criminals and Jesuit priests, who used theater for pedagogical and penitentiary purposes, even as many of them condemned the commercial theater for its promotion of vice. Muir claims that these public executions were carnivalesque in their appeal to large audiences. Indeed many of the same activities took place at performances of *comedias* and at public executions. Entrepreneurs sold refreshments, and men and women watched a spectacle in which they participated by laughing, crying, and screaming in response to the drama that unfolded before them.

Executions allowed private individuals to become part of a public.

The Spanish *corrales de comedias* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly those of Madrid and Seville, had a public nature as well. They transmitted dramas, which included actors masquerading as nobles, and ideas about social order to

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3 Perry, p. 19.
the audience. This social masquerade both promoted the longing for social advancement of members of the audience and reinforced the realities of social hierarchy and authority in Spanish society. And in Seville this social hierarchy was paradoxically rigid and malleable in the same moment.

As a port city, a doorway between the Old World and the New, Seville was a liminal and unsettled space. Anthropologist Victor Turner has outlined the concept of liminality in terms of rites of passage. During such rituals, novices are “temporarily undefined, beyond the normative social structure.” They are at the doorway, between non-social life and death. In the moment of liminality, normal dichotomies of daily life disappear.5 Many of Seville’s inhabitants were in a liminal space, on their way to or on their way home from the Americas; others publicly conformed to Catholic Christianity and privately held on to Islamic or Jewish beliefs, with their doorways serving literally as thresholds over which they passed back and forth; and women, left behind by their sea-faring husbands, crossed over, sometimes many times a day, between traditional and subversive gender roles, between enclosure and freedom.

Early modern Spanish actors, the characters created by Golden-Age playwrights, like the inhabitants of early modern Seville possessed liminal characteristics. In the corrales de comedias, as during Carnival, the world went topsy-turvy, because the traditional social hierarchy that was normally so entrenched could be inverted on the stage and as people of all classes mingled together in the audience, and this was one of the reasons that the stage had so many opponents. On the stage a common-born actor,

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who donned a costume and who spoke the lines written for him, could become a king or a
nobleman. Likewise, a woman in both costume and in disguise could transform herself
from a base-born actress, to a noblewoman, to a gypsy, and back again. An actress
through disguise could also become a man on the stage. In Golden-Age comedias this
cross-dressing theme was common, as Spanish dramas were full of “a number of daring
women, who, for one reason or another, adopt the male dress and launch themselves into
a risky adventure in search of their happiness.”6 Although the original identity of the
female character was typically restored by the conclusion of the drama’s third act, in
disguise she became another person, bound by a different set of rules and expectations
that had been established by her male dress and stage costume. Through the ritual of
representing another, the identity of the player became, at least temporarily, suspended in
the corrales de comedias.

Public dramatic life in Seville began with the Corpus Christi festivals in the late
Middle Ages. Although these processional pageants had been instituted by Pope Urban
IV in 1264 and made obligatory by Pope Clement V in 1311, there is no evidence for a
Corpus Christi procession in Seville until 1454. At this first documented procession one
roca, or float, carried people representing Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the four
Evangels, and two saints, Francis and Dominic.7 Religious one-act plays formed the core
of these public and sacramental spectacles, which continued in an evolving form into the

6 Carmen Bravo-Villasante, La Mujer Vestida de Hombre en el Teatro Español (Siglos XVI-XVII) (Madrid:
7 This piece of evidence has been called upon to argue that medieval Castilian drama was far less advanced
than that of Barcelona or Valencia, where by the fifteenth century hundreds of floats were involved in
Corpus Christi processions. See for example Alexander A. Parker, “Notes on the Religious Drama in
early modern period. Likewise, throughout the early modern period Seville’s *cofradías* performed processional during Holy Week. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries these processions featured detailed, life-like sculptures, which drew strong emotional responses, such as tears and cries of anguish, from the public audience that lined the streets of Seville. The affective nature of the Holy Week spectacle could even lead some *sevillanos* to believe that the spirit of the Virgin Mary inhabited the processional statues representing her. Thus, it’s not surprising that the desire to put on the most elaborate and emotionally evocative spectacle generated fierce competition between the *cofradías*, and occasionally large amounts of debt, as these brotherhoods frequently pawned their silver in order to pay for these sculptures of Jesus and the Virgin Mary.⁸

A Corpus tradition of religious theater that involved professional processions, juggling, and dancing emerged. At some point between 1504 and 1541, the city officials, rather than the guilds, began to control the production of the Corpus festivals.⁹ In 1538 a troupe of Italian players, led by one Mutio, and “took the two pageant carts in the Corpus Christi festival.”¹⁰ It is entirely possible that the arrival of these Italian players whetted the appetites of *sevillanos* for theater for over the succeeding decades a revolution in dramatic entertainment would take place in this city.

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During the 1540s and 1550s a new commercial theater emerged in this city, which was coming to be known as the New Rome. Lope de Rueda and Alonso de la Vega, both from Seville, created the first organized theatrical companies. Lope de Rueda and his “little company of strolling players” were instrumental in the shift from a religious theater to a secular one. They wrote their own material for immediate performance. Although they may have had more than some scholars have assumed, they had few costumes and props. However, what costumes they did have, may have been quite expensive. They wrote for immediate performance in rude board theaters, for an audience assumed to have consisted mainly of groundlings, and performances took place at the market during daylight hours. There are, however, some fragments of evidence that complicate this picture. For example, a passage in Luis Milan’s *El Cortesano*, printed in 1561, indicates that some of Rueda’s performances took place at night. This passage also suggests that women performed as dancers, if not also as actresses, in the employ of Lope de Rueda. The moral and social implications of such a practice were, for the author of *El Cortesano*, highly problematic. There is also evidence to suggest that Rueda’s wife danced in his performances, although there is none to prove that she acted in any of them.

Lope de Rueda was a goldbeater turned actor, playwright, and director. Some scholars have speculated that he may have joined Mutio’s company of Italian players for a time, after their arrival in Seville in 1538. He might have learnt the arts of stagecraft

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12 Milan, Luis, *Libro Entitulado El Cortesano*; *Libro de motes de damas y caballeros*, (Madrid, 1874), pp. 411-412. Rueda is mentioned several times as a “farsante.” Milan’s work is a work loosely based on the more famous, *Il Cortegiano* by Baltasar Castiglione and is largely about courtly life in Valencia.
13 McKendrick, p. 49.
and acting from them. However, according to theater scholar, Richard Hesler, it is much more probable that “Rueda learned the trades of the stage by participating in the Corpus festivals in Seville.” Hesler contends that the performers who took part in these festivals had become increasingly professional and skilled during the first decades of the sixteenth century. Regardless of how he learnt to do so, by the early 1540s Rueda was running his own company in Seville. He did so until 1552, when the city council of Valladolid, which was the administrative capital at that time, engaged him to come to perform and direct Corpus plays. Lope de Rueda performed before Philip II, at Toledo in 1551 and at Benevente in 1554 to mark the king’s journey to England to marry Mary Tudor. Rueda returned to Seville in 1559, when he performed two *autos sacramentales* during the Corpus Christi festivals. Many scholars have considered Rueda a playwright of dubious talent. However, he had an unquestionable talent for exploiting older material and a willingness to experiment with that created a new sense of what theater was and could potentially be in early modern Castile, and especially in Seville. He also achieved incredible fame, being asked repeatedly to perform at the palace in Madrid for Queen Isabel during the 1560s and earning a large sum of ten *ducados* a performance for his efforts.

As a youth, Miguel de Cervantes may have seen Lope de Rueda perform on more than one occasion. It is from Cervantes’s statement about Rueda that scholars of Spanish theater have drawn conclusions about the primitiveness of his props and scenery.

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Cervantes claimed in the prologue to his 1615 volume of his own *Comedias* that during the era of Rueda “...all the properties of a theatrical manager were contained in a sack.” He also claimed that there were no challenges on horse or foot and that there was no theatrical machinery. According to Cervantes, the stage “consisted of four benches arranged in a square with four or five boards upon them.”16 Of course, Cervantes was no doubt attempting to bolster his own reputation as an innovative playwright and doubt has been cast on the veracity his eyewitness account. For example, an ordinance of Emperor Charles V in 1534 prohibited extravagant dress for musicians and actors performing in the comedias, which suggests that some of these actors had been dressing quite lavishly and violating sumptuary laws, which would indicate that their costuming and props might not have been so primitive as Cervantes claimed.17 Additionally, as Melveena McKendrick has pointed out, it is unwise to give too much credence to a childhood memory.18

In the second half of the sixteenth century theater became a regular feature of daily life in Seville. A contemporary printer and fellow playwright of Lope de Rueda and Alonso de la Vega, Juan de Timoneda published three of Alonso de la Vega’s plays. Timoneda also revised and published some of Rueda’s works, after the playwright and troupe manager’s death, in 1567. Timoneda’s decision to publish these works indicates that there was a growing interest in theater in early modern Seville, as well as elsewhere in Castile. This suggests that by the 1570s there were expanding theater-going and play-reading publics in early modern Spain, and that these publics overlapped to some extent.

16 Quoted in Rennert, p. 17.
18 McKendrick, p. 42.
Also Italian commedia dell’arte players, in search of economic opportunity, visited Spanish cities, including Seville. One of these itinerant players, Ganassa, had a large impact on developing dramatic practices in Seville, as he had in Madrid.¹⁹

Ganassa’s entertainments in Seville caused a number of problems. In 1575, after first petitioning Philip II for the removal of the Italian troupe, the city fathers decreed that Ganassa could only perform on holidays because his performances in the Corral de Don Juan were prompting the working classes of Seville to “go there for that novelty, resulting in great harm and detriment to the city....”²⁰ This evidence implies that Ganassa’s improvisational performance of the zanni, or clown, was an even greater draw for sevillanos than the ordinary performances of plays by Spanish players. A nineteenth-century scholar of the early modern Spanish theater, Pellicer speculated that Ganassa’s shows involved dancing, conjurors, puppets, and a dancing monkey. However, as he cites no evidence for this assumption, it cannot be ascertained with any certainty, nor can it be proven that Ganassa’s troupe ever performed in Spanish rather than in their native Italian.²¹ The injunction by the city fathers against Ganassa also indicates that the municipal government wanted to limit the Italian players’ ability to compete against the developing Spanish theater in Seville.

And there was Spanish competition for Ganassa, even if his public performances created greater disruption in the fabric of daily life in Seville. The Corral de Don Juan

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²⁰ Quoted in Sanchez Arjona, p. 84. The original reads, “irse allí tras aquella novedad, resultando de todo ello gran daño y perjuicio á la ciudad.”
²¹ C. Pellicer, Tratado histórico sobre el origen y progresos de la comedia y del histrionismo en España (Madrid: 1804), Parte primera, p. 54.
was only one of the eight or nine playhouses in use in the port city by the 1580s. Others included the Corral de Don Manrique, “whose houses were encircled by three streets... Boceguinería, Soledad, and Aire....  

Three different acting companies were performing plays written by Juan de la Cueva in at least three of these other corrales de comedias.  

Juan de la Cueva was from an aristocratic family and he was a friend and associate of the scholar and humanist, Juan de Mal Lara. Their friendship exposed Cueva to the classicizing tendencies of humanist and Jesuit playwrights.  

While Cueva lacked the synthesizing genius that Lope de Vega possessed, his expansive vision was a key precedent in the development of Spanish drama. Cueva, like Lope de Vega after him, departed from the classical forms and precepts of Aristotelian and Senecan drama. Cueva also turned to historical subjects for the material for his plays. And Juan de la Cueva sought not just an audience in the corrales de comedias for his dramas. He also sought a reading public, indicated by the fact that he was one of the first Spanish playwrights to have his own works published.  

One of the most important corrales de comedias in early modern Seville was the Corral de Doña Elvira. Likely constructed in the early 1570s, this theater was certainly in existence by 1579 when Alonso Rodríguez’s company performed three Juan de la Cueva plays there. The corral was named for the late Doña Elvira de Ayala, who was the daughter of Pedro López de Ayala, Chancellor of Castile, and on whose descendants’ property the playhouse was built. The Corral de Doña Elvira was located near the residence of the Count of Gelves in the parish of the Sagrario.

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22 Sánchez Arjona, p. 83.  
23 McKendrick, p. 53.
The Coliseo, also sometimes referred to as the Corral de los Alcaldes, was another important commercial theater in seventeenth-century Seville. As its alternative name suggests, it belonged to the city government of Seville and not to the hospitals, though the hospitals still benefited from the proceeds of performance. The city council decided to build the Coliseo in an attempt to more tightly control public performances. The city fathers of Seville also wanted greater control of the profits being earned by the city’s successful commercial theaters. The lessee of the Coliseo, in return for a substantial share of the profits, was responsible for paying taxes to the public prison and to the hospitals of Seville.

The city fathers built the Coliseo in its first incarnation in 1607 in the parish of San Pedro in the calle de las Alcázares. It did not originally have a roof, and this caused certain problems for performance, particularly paid performance. Inhabitants of the neighborhood could watch the performances from the roofs of their houses, rather than paying the price of entrance, which was half of a real for a seat. The Coliseo was rebuilt in 1614, and, in its refurbished incarnation, was much more lavish, with marble and paintings decorating it. After it burnt down, in 1620, it was rebuilt again in 1624. After this theater fell into disrepair in the 1630s, the city fathers had the Coliseo rebuilt in 1641. It burnt down again in 1659, at which point the city lacked the money to rebuild it, so the city fathers granted Laura de Herrera, a female autora, and her company the right to use the Coliseo for a period of forty years with no rent, in exchange for rebuilding the theater at their own expense. Laura de Herrera’s company financed the rebuilding of

24 Rennert, p. 51.
the Coliseo, but it burnt again on November 12, 1698, and a number of women tragically met their deaths, while trying to escape the burning cazuela.25

Although the Coliseo was luxurious, plenty of entertainment seekers still went to performances at the older Corral de Doña Elvira. Apparently, its acoustics were superior to those of the Coliseo and so the most talented and famous autores preferred to stage their companies’ performances there. However, the older playhouse was becoming a death trap, with its roof and other portions in “imminent danger of falling.”26 The city fathers decided to close the theater for repairs. However, the autor who was presenting at the corral objected since he would not be able to recoup his financial losses with such a closure. The closure of the Doña Elvira did eventually come in 1620.27 However, it reopened when the Coliseo burnt down later that year. It closed for good in 1631. (In 1679, an asylum for destitute priests was built on the site.)28

Despite city taxes and opposition by the church, the commercial theater flourished in Golden Age Seville, so the officials of the royal palace in Seville decided to build another even more sumptuous theater in the spacious Patio de La Montería. The Montería, the officials decreed, would be built at the expense of the first lessee, who could then take “all the proceeds that came from or might be taken from the street entrance to the second door” of the theater.29 The Montería, which opened in 1626, was made of wood and it had a closed, oval shape, which was unusual, if not unique. The acting troupe of Roque de Figueroa performed the inaugural comedias upon the opening

25 Rennert, p. 61
26 Rennert, p. 52.
27 Archivo Municipal de Sevilla (hereafter AMS), Session Cuarta, Tomo 37, Num. 14, undated.
28 Rennert, p. 59.
29 Quoted in Sanchez Arjona, p. 250. In the original, it reads, “todos los aprovechamientos que hubiere o pudiese haber desde la puerta de la calle hasta la segunda puerta....”
of the corral. Figueroa’s company included the famous performers, Mariana de Olivares, who was also Figueroa’s wife, and Jacinto Varela. Diego de Almonacid was the first arrendador, or lessee of the new corral.  

The Coliseo, the Doña Elvira, and the Montería shared most of the theatrical activity in Seville during the first half of the seventeenth century. When not destroyed by fires, the Coliseo’s special arrangement as the playhouse owned by the municipality meant that this corral got the first choice of the acting companies that were resident within Seville. Yet, the Montería also managed to attract and contract talented autores and actors. In 1632 Antonio de Prado’s troupe of actors began to perform at the latter playhouse.

Typically, actors, especially itinerant players, lived on the margins of early modern society, more part of the underworld than respectable Spanish society. Although they could become famed and beloved, they more often lived a peripatetic life, frequently traveling between towns and their corrales de comedias. However, this was less the case in Seville, where two or more companies shared the use of the city’s theaters. Unlike the unlicensed troupes, the titled companies had a hierarchical structure and organization. These were professionals, whose lives consisted of a daily schedule of learning their lines and rehearsing in the day and performing at the corrales de comedias and before government officials into the night.

As mentioned above, the lifestyle of professional players carried with it both glamour and stigma. Occasionally, members of the upper classes found themselves

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30 Pineda Novo, p. 22.
attracted to a career on the stage. One such example was Alonso de Olmedo, an actor and autor, who was also a hidalgo and had served the Count of Oropesa as a page.\textsuperscript{32}

Some actors and actresses achieved great celebrity. Because of the representation of such comedias by famous performers, Seville’s corrales de comedias were popular. When audiences did not get what they wanted, they threw cucumbers and other missiles and jangled their keys in displeasure. Also there was the dangerous possibility that that an audience might riot. This occurred in 1642, when an audience rioted at the Montería because the Inquisition had banned the comedia due to be performed. The disappointed audience vandalized the theater and the actors fled the scene. Even without riots, the theater could be an unsettled space. Members of the “underworld” of Seville sought amusement in the corrales de comedias. Not only did they gather together in noisy groups on rooftops to watch the performances that took place in the initially roofless Coliseo, but they also created problems for public order in their numerous attempts to enter the corrales “without paying.”

In his study of the Montería, Daniel Pineda Novo has noted several such disorderly incidents. In November of 1632 there was a scandal in the corral, which was caused by a man dressed in black, who “caused a disturbance at the second entrance, shouting that he wanted to enter without paying in order to see the play being performed.”\textsuperscript{33} Two months later an alguacil was wounded when five or six young men in student dress tried to force their way into the main entrance of the Montería without paying for admission. There were also problems with men infiltrating the cazuela. In

\textsuperscript{32} See Rennert, pp. 159-161.

\textsuperscript{33} Pineda Novo, p. 41. The original reads that they “alborotaba en la puerta segunda, gritando que quería entrar sin pagar para ver la comedia que se representaba.”
1654 one man sneaked into the *cazuela* of the Montería, lifted ladies skirts, and touched legs. The city punished him with imprisonment and then with exile.\footnote{Sánchez-Arjona, p. 408.} Disorderly incidents such as these suggest that, despite city and royal officials’ attempts to control the theaters, they remained raucous places rife with the potential for scandal.

As in Madrid, the *corrales de corrales* in Seville where these actors performed were semi-compartmentalized. Although members of the theater-going public came from all classes of respectable society, including clergymen, who deserved a clean and decent place to view the comedias, and even from the criminal underworld of the *Nueva Roma*, the structure of the *corrales de comedias* sought to maintain class boundaries and gender divisions.\footnote{An undated petition for 600 reales for the cleaning of the *tribunas*, or gallery, where the “*capitulares veian las representaciones*” in the Municipal Archive of Sevilla suggests that the city fathers and church leaders frequented the Coliseo. See AMS, Session Cuarta, Tomo 37, Num. 21.} With one male *aguacil* to escort them to their seats and watch over them, the women of the lower and middle classes watched *comedias* from the separate space of the *cazuela*. However, this gender division was not always properly enforced, as a 1627 proposal by a city father suggests. Since women were sitting with the men in the *corrales*, he suggested that men and women be required to enter the theater and their respective seating sections through separate doors.\footnote{Sánchez-Arjona, *Noticias referentes á los anales del teatro en Sevilla desde Lope Rueda hasta fines del siglo XVII* (Sevilla: El Rasco, 1898), pp. 255-56.} Meanwhile, aristocratic women sat in the high *cazuela* or they might accompany their husbands, fathers, or brothers to watch a play in the more private space of a rented or owned box. Working class men paid their half *real* for a seat, and crowded into the central patio. Going to the *corral de comedias* allowed the men of Seville to see and be seen, to be entertained and to take part in a public activity.
Seville’s *corrales de comedias* usually opened in September and continued operating throughout the autumn and winter. *Comedias* were not performed during Lent, but after Easter, the theaters reopened until the unbearable heat of the summer kept the audiences away and they closed the *corrales de comedias*. For example, on June 20, 1632, the city closed the Montería “due to heat.”

During the fall and winter, theatrical activity played a central role in the daily public and cultural life of Spanish cities, such as Seville. The theaters themselves were physically integrated into the topography of the city. They were near the Casa Lonja, built by Philip II, as the Casa de Contracción, which was the hub of activity between the Old World and the Americas, the Cathedral of Santa María de la Sede, and the Real Alcazar. The Coliseo and the Montería, in the Patio de la Montería, were inescapable elements of the urban space of Seville. Their centralized location stemmed from their popularity and from the role the *corrales de comedias* had as moneymakers for the municipal government and thus for the hospitals of the city.

II. Charitable Hospitals and the State of Public Health in Golden Age Seville

The commercial theater of Seville came into existence, unlike those of most of the rest of Castile, without a substantial connection to the *cofradías* of the city. Nevertheless, there were occasional connections between these brotherhoods and commercial theater,

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37 Sanchez-Arjona, p. 281. The original reads, “*por el calor.*”
as the confraternities did sometimes sponsor theater. The confraternity of La Limpieza de Nuestra Señora y Conversión de la Magdalena petitioned Seville’s city fathers in 1586 to allow more performances during the week in order to help fund its charitable activities. Another such mutually beneficial relationship between a confraternity and commercial drama took place in 1608, when the monastery of the Confraternity of Nuestra Señora del Rosario y la Oración en el Huerto asked its confraternity to produce a *comedia* for the celebration of a feast day.\(^{38}\) However, such connections were far less common in Seville than they were in Madrid (and other Spanish cities) during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Undoubtedly, the reluctance of the *cofradías* to associate themselves with the *corrales* came from the repeated ecclesiastical injunctions on acting troupes and public theatrical productions. In addition to the well-known negative perceptions about actors and about actors who performed religious drama, the timing of both the development of the commercial theaters and the network of religious brotherhoods was different in Seville. Unlike the *cofradías* of Madrid, which emerged at the same time as the city expanded as capital and used theater to fund their charitable activities, those of Seville had mostly existed prior to the development of commercial theatrical activity in the New Rome. Considering the number of *sevillanos* who were members of confraternities and the number of *sevillanos* who attended the performance of *comedias*, it seems that the charitable brotherhoods of Seville missed out on an opportunity for alms-giving on a much greater scale.

The cofradías did, however, play a substantial role in religious processional drama and in public welfare programs for the city of Seville. As discussed above, confraternities emerged in Western Europe during the Middle Ages and were especially prevalent in Spain. They ranged in size and membership demography, but they usually chose the performance of acts of mercy for their display of piety. In Seville they organized incredible processions for religious festivals and drew in money through donations and bequests to stage them and to fund their charitable work. Sometimes confraternities organized spectacles of pain even outside of their normal Holy Week activities. This was the case in 1599 when the confraternity of La Oración en el Huerto organized a procession of self-flagellants who cried out for all to pray against the plague as they whipped themselves.

The majority of Seville’s hospitals provided assistance to small numbers of sick and poor men, women, and children. The Hospital Real, founded during the reign of Alfonso X, could only board twelve men. The Amor de Dios was larger with 45 beds for patients, and the Casa Cuna housed 150 orphans and foundlings. During the 1580s the Spanish crown made an effort to cut the confraternities out of the hospital business and consolidate the small hospitals into a few general hospitals. In Seville, over one hundred hospitals – seventy-six different hospitals in the parish of San Pedro alone – merged into just two institutions of charitable care and hospitality, the Espiritu Santo and the Amor de

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40 Webster, p. 29.
However, by the next decade, these efforts at centralization faltered, as the new consolidated hospitals could not meet the needs of the sick and poor, especially with the increasing demand for care created by outbreaks of plague. By 1673, there were at least twenty-four hospitals in Seville.\footnote{Ibid, Apéndice IV, pp. 489-492.}

In spite of the fact that the cofradías only rarely connected themselves with public theater in Seville, the income of the corrales de comedias was charitably linked to the hospitals of city. The financial relationship between the playhouses and the charitable hospitals evolved out of the municipal connections from the start, rather than from a relationship with the cofradías, as mentioned above. This connection can be seen in a petition to King Philip IV from the 1640s, during the theater ban in Castile, regarding the state of the patients of the Hospital Real of Seville and their “very great necessity and poverty” suggested that the performance of comedias be allowed once more in order to alleviate the burden on the city and on individual alms-givers.\footnote{Perry, p. 173.} In careful language, the petitioners reminded the royal government that there were, after all, “three places where plays were performed” in the city.\footnote{AGS, Casas y Sitios Reales (Legajos modernos), 270-2-134, undated, Memorial de Melchor de Alcazar acerca del Hospital del Rey, Corrales de comedias, y salarios de los maestros mayores del alcazar. This petition addresses the “muy grande necesidad y pobresa” of those given care in the hospital.} Such action taken “in order to succor the poor [would be] without aggravation or harm to the persons [nearby].”\footnote{Ibid. The original reads, “tres lugares donde se Representan comedias...”}

As a consequence of the city government’s direct control over the charitable proceeds of public drama, there was an increasing attempt by royal and city authorities to control theater in Seville as early as the end of the sixteenth century. While this occurred
throughout Castile, authorities in Seville, as well as Madrid, seemed especially concerned. Since only Madrid and Seville could have more than one acting troupe at any given time, they were theatrically privileged in legal terms and better able to draw talented autores and actors to their corrales de comedias. The commoditization of theater and of charity through theater and the profits to be made by the municipal government itself continued opening both the real and the discursive spaces in which the comedia operated in Golden Age Seville.

Even with the charitable financial assistance brought in by the corrales de comedias, neither Seville’s hospitals nor its cemeteries could keep up with the problems of the living and dying populace of the city during the latter part of the sixteenth and the first part of the seventeenth century. By 1550 the cemeteries were running out of room for the bodies of the dead, and the situation was dire for many of the living. Despite the charitable function of the theaters, public health in the Great Babylon of Spain hardly improved from the Middle Ages to the end of the early modern period. During the course of the sixteenth century the practice of taking baths had disappeared among sevillanos. Even the professionals began to distrust bathing because they thought that the water could penetrate the skin’s pores and spread dangerous diseases.47

The physical circumstances of living in an early modern urban center did nothing to alleviate the problems of public health. Rats and mice lived alongside humans and lice lived on them in early modern cities, infecting people with typhus and other diseases. Medical doctrine was preoccupied – largely unsuccessfully – with how to get rid of these

pests. As Seville grew, problems with urban cleanliness and waste only got worse. Dirty, sewage-infested water ran through the streets and public plazas of the city. People urinated and defecated in public and even sacred space. For example, the priests of San Isidro’s complained that they had to spend church funds on the frequent cleaning of a corner of the church that people used as a privy.\textsuperscript{48} When sevillanos used proper chamber pots, the contribution to the sanitation of the city was not much greater, despite regulations, such as the 1586 city ordinance that nothing should be emptied onto the streets before midnight, and if waste was thrown into the street during the day, the person tossing out the contents of the chamber pot should give vocal warning three times before doing so.\textsuperscript{49}

Such run-of-the-mill sanitation problems became compounded during times of plague and natural disaster. For example, a plague outbreak that lasted from 1599 to 1601 disrupted all levels of daily life in Seville. In addition to the problem of disease, the weather could disrupt daily life. In 1635-36 there was a great drought that effected Seville, creating a grain shortage and general famine. Sometimes Seville faced the same kind of problems from the opposite cause, such as when the Guadalquivir flooded because of torrential rains. In 1629 and from 1642 to 1649, it frequently overflowed its banks, creating a series of crises in Seville. Such disasters led to such shortages of even the most basic staples of life that the poorest of sevillanos would go to the river to collect dead fish for their sustenance, as an observer noted in a 1655 publication.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{48} Quoted in Carmona, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{49} Carmona, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{50} See Antonio Domínguez Ortíz, \textit{Alteraciones andaluzas} (Madrid: Narcea, 1973), p. 130.
Even during calmer times, the lower classes lived with more or less constant malnourishment, eating mostly pan oscuro, or black bread. The seventeenth century saw a crisis of agriculture. Agrarian contraction, wild price fluctuations, and epidemic disease compounded with the decline of the trade between Seville and the Indies to create a general crisis in seventeenth century Spain.\textsuperscript{51} These crises meant the greater need for cheap distraction from the harsh reality of daily life for those who could afford it, and an increasing number of those who were too poor to afford anything, even enough pan oscuro to avoid hunger and malnutrition.

Despite the grim state of affairs, Castilians and sevillanos, in particular, responded as best they could to the effects of this depression. Public assistance came primarily from the charity of the confraternities. One of the most important of these cofradías was the Misericordia. Founded in Seville in 1476, the house-hospital of the Misericordia was initially very small. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, it moved to a larger building, with a church, various bedrooms, and a space for cooking. Yet, this was no hospital in even the early modern sense. The main charitable function of the Misericordia was providing dowries for poor girls. However, this cofradía was not alone in its charitable works, and there were also numerous hospital-like establishments in sixteenth-century Seville, but, as mentioned above, in 1587, the city government tried to reduce these because, while some of them, did offer help to those in need, others did very little to provide real assistance to the sick and poor of this city. Despite recommendations by the patrons of the hospitals, such as the requirement that the bedclothes of hospital

\textsuperscript{51} For an excellent account of many of these compounding crises see I. A. A. Thompson and B. Yun Casalilla, eds., \textit{The Castilian Crisis of the Seventeenth Century} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
patients be changed every eight days at least and more often if necessary, most establishments came to be dominated by “an environment of poverty and of relative neglect.”

These problems became even worse during times of crisis, and in Seville, and a crisis that could close the theater would only compound the crisis of hospitals. This was just what happened during the middle of the seventeenth century. The Spanish theaters all closed by royal decree in 1644 upon the death of the Queen for a period of public morning. They reopened, only to be closed again in 1646 when the prince and heir to the Empire died. By 1648 and 1649 the hospitals of Madrid and other cities were petitioning the royal government to reopen the theaters. Seville also petitioned for the right to allow the performance of comedias to support the coffers of the Hospital Real. However, in Seville the crisis of the corrales de comedias was compounded by the worst plague outbreaks in early modern Spanish history.

The plague outbreak of 1649 kept the doors of the theaters closed and might have killed almost half of Seville’s population. Its devastation of the human population combined with that of yet another series of torrential rains and flooding of the Guadalquivir made 1649 a turning point in the history of Seville. With flood water so high that as many as one-third of sevillanos could not leave their houses except in boats, the putrid waters carried disease and death. Once the plague began its devastating attack, the fate of many of the inhabitants of Seville that spring was tragic and terminal.

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52 Carmona, p. 130.
53 Carmona, pp. 110-112.
III. The Dublin Comparison

While the theater of Seville came close to rivaling that of Madrid, if it did not in some decades even eclipse it, the commercial theater that developed in London did not get exported to provincial and colonial cities to the same extent. That the theater-going publics of Seville were much more active than those of early modern Dublin is a tremendous understatement. In 1601 Ireland, unlike Seville and also unlike London, did not have any commercial theaters. However, the Irish did have a history of performance, such as druths, or Gaelic clowns, and the braigetóirí, who entertained those around them through the olfactory and auditory art of farting. There was also a developing tradition of liturgical drama and civic professions during Corpus Christi. Although scholars have not yet found any hard evidence to prove it in the Irish sources, there may also have been itinerant players performing in Ireland as the seventeenth century began.

In September of 1601 Baron Mountjoy, the Lord Deputy of Ireland, had Gorbooduc, an English play about a divided kingdom, fratricide, and civil war, performed in the Great Hall of Dublin Castle.54 The play was forty years old, but it resonated with the political climate of the times as Ireland was embroiled in the Nine Years’ War, a politically and religiously motivated war between the English colonizers and the Gaelic Irish, led by Hugh Ó Neill. These types of private performances, which took place in great houses were the staple of Irish theater until Thomas Wentworth, the Earl of Strafford, arrived as Lord Lieutenant in July of 1633. Once there, he set out to make

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54 This play by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, written in 1561 and performed at the Inns of Court in 1562, was advertised as “The First English Tragedy.”
Dublin into a symbol of English royal power and would become known for his harsh methods and autocratic mindset – for ruling like an absolutist monarch.\textsuperscript{55}

Since theater was an important part of court life under Charles I, a theater had to be built in Dublin for the court there. John Ogilby was put in charge of the arrangements and later would be made the first Master of Revels in Ireland. The London theaters had been shut down due to an outbreak of plague in May of 1636. This was fortuitous timing for Ogilby. He was able to recruit a good company of English actors, culled from players who had been connected with the Red Bull and the Cockpit.\textsuperscript{56} Then in November of that year Ogilby convinced the playwright James Shirley to come to Dublin as the resident playwright. There is no documentation that allows a precise dating of the opening of this theater. However, it can be inferred that the theater was open as early as June of 1636, since a letter of Wentworth’s makes reference to a playhouse.

In the autumn of 1637 Shirley’s \textit{The Royal Master} premiered in the Werburgh Street Theatre. This romantic comedy, set in Naples, about a king’s favorite who plots to increase his power by marrying the king’s sister and thwarting the duke who is his rival, was probably the first of the resident playwright’s works to be performed in the Werburgh Street Theatre. A special performance of it was also held at Castle, and \textit{The Royal Master} was published both in Dublin and London. Despite the seeming success of this play, the prologues of other plays known to be have been performed at Dublin’s


theater indicate that the size of the theatrical public in Dublin remained quite small during the seventeenth century. One of these prologues lamented the “foresaken stage.”

Wentworth’s decision to bring Shirley to Dublin is a measure of the dangerous religious and political game that the Lord Lieutenant was playing in Ireland. Shirley had converted to Roman Catholicism in the 1620s, leaving his living as a minister near Saint Albans. He then began to teach and later to write plays for the acting troupe the Queen Henrietta’s Men. Relatively prolific by English standards, he wrote some thirty plays -- at least four of which he wrote while in Dublin as the resident playwright. Later, after Shirley returned to London, he wrote plays for performance by the King’s Men. When the Long Parliament closed the theaters in 1642, Shirley lost his occupation and went on to serve briefly with the Earl of Newcastle during the English Civil War, finally returning to London, where he ended his days by teaching and writing educational texts.

As tensions in Ireland escalated, Dublin’s emerging theater became caught in the maelstrom. In 1640 the actors began to leave and on April 16 of that year Shirley also left for London. However, during the interim, on March 17, 1640, Henry Burnell’s tragicomedy *Landgartha*, which was the first Irish play by an Irish author, was staged in Werbourgh Theater. Burnell was a prominent Catholic royalist, and his play was an attempt to show the possibility of a harmonious relationship between the English Protestants and the Irish Catholics who seemed increasingly to be headed towards war. Burnell based *Landgartha* on a Danish tale about a Norwegian king, an allegorical representation of the English, who is aided by an Amazon maiden, Landgartha, an allegorical representation of Ireland. The title character is steadfast, ethical, chaste, and

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57 Morash, p. 19.
courageous. Her behavior shows Burnell’s attempt to insist upon a politics infused with morality. The comic subplot centers around two characters, Marsisa and Hubba, meant to represent the Irish and the English. And most tellingly, the ending of the play suggests the possibility of a happy marriage between English and Irish – so long as the Catholic religion is upheld.\textsuperscript{58}

Burnell’s efforts were of little avail, though. The political climate, both in Ireland and in England, was worsening, and Wentworth was one of Charles I’s counselors who had been indicted for bad government, although not expressly named, in the Petition of the Twelve Peers.\textsuperscript{59} Numerous members of Parliament realized that an army raised to put down rebellion in Ireland could also be used by the king against them. On 12 May 1641 Wentworth met his end, beheaded for treasonous crimes, including his allegedly lax attitude to Catholicism. His securing of Irish Catholic Parliamentary votes for subsidies to be used against the Presbyterian Scots had been a divisive issue among members of the English Parliament, and the petition made clear that malefactors who had caused fear and discontent numbered both Thomas Wentworth and the Arminian Archbishop Laud. And Wentworth, after all, had brought a Catholic resident playwright to Dublin.

In the meantime, the Lords Justices, Sir William Parsons and Sir John Borlase, closed the Werburgh Theatre, turning it into a military stable. Later Dublin’s first theater fell into utter ruin. In the meantime, Burnell fled to Kilkenny and became a member of the Confederate Assembly, which had been formed in October of 1642 by the Irish and

the Old English as an alternative government that lasted till 1649. Kilkenny became the center of any Irish theatrical activity that might have taken place during the 1640s.

When the war ended and Charles II acceded to the English and Irish thrones, Ogilby saw another opportunity for publicity, and he petitioned to be remade Master of Revels of Ireland. Charles had already given the potentially lucrative position to William Davenant, but he rescinded this commission and granted it to Ogilby on May 8, 1661. Ogilby then began work on a new theater in Dublin in Smock Alley, near the quays on the River Liffey. The playhouse opened in October 1662 and was the first Restoration theater to “have been built and designed as a performance space from the ground up...”

This was not the case with the new Restoration theaters in London, which were being made out of converted tennis courts by William Davenant. Like the Cockpit and English royalist theaters before it, Smock Alley had a proscenium arch and a music loft.

These features magnify the nature of the Smock Alley playhouse. It was a public theater, but it still relied heavily on the support of the James Butler, the first Duke of Ormond. It was his patronage and also on his social cachet that drew audiences from the inner court circle. Although it had been built from the ground up, it was not necessarily built particularly well. In 1670 the upper gallery came crashing down during a performance of *Bartholomew Fair*. Smock Alley also had other problems, in that it was tied to Dublin Castle for its continued existence. Since it was dependent on political appointments, during the 1670s the playhouse in Dublin was frequently closed, which continued the stunted growth of the commercial theater in Ireland, even as the city itself

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60 Morash, p. 13.
61 Butler had been the leader of the Royalist forces during the civil war. He went into exile with Charles II, but upon the latter’s restoration to the throne, Butler recovered his large estate in Ireland and became the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1661.
was growing at an incredible rate, from an estimated population of under 9,000 people in
1659 to almost 70,000 people less than thirty years later in 1687.\textsuperscript{62}

IV. Theater as a Mirror in Seville and Dublin

Seville, like its theaters, was a place of paradoxical order and disorder. Seville
was a port or doorway between the Old World and the New, between riches and poverty,
between the pristine and loyal city of arches, towers, and statues open to the public view
described in great detail by Juan de Mal Lara after the visit of Philip II in 1570 and the
criminal underworld of secrecy centered on the patio of the mafia boss, Monipodio,
brought to life by Miguel de Cervantes in his satirical novella, \textit{Rinconete y Cortadillo}.\textsuperscript{63}
It was the thriving trade from the Americas that transformed Seville from a peaceful
provincial city into a bustling and crime-ridden center of unpredictable and flurrying
activity. In the \textit{corral de comedias}, though, people could forget these dichotomies and
their troubles for the space of a couple of hours.

That is, unless the \textit{comedia} portrayed these very dichotomies on the stage. Lope
de Vega’s 1603 \textit{comedia}, \textit{El Arenal de Sevilla}, is perhaps the best example of theatrical
art representing life in Golden-Age Seville. In many ways, this \textit{comedia} is a very typical
romantic comedy, involving lovers, a love triangle, comic scenes in which disguises lead
to confusion, and a happy ending. The hero of the play, Don Lope, has fled to Seville

from Medina del Campo because he believes he has killed his rival for the affections of Doña Lucinda, Don Alberto, and is now a criminal. Upon arriving in Seville, Don Lope quickly forgets his love for Doña Lucinda and falls for Doña Laura. After thieves in el arenal injure him, he recuperates in Laura’s home. Meanwhile Lucinda believes she has been abandoned by Don Lope and has set out in pursuit of him in the disguise of a gypsy. When she discovers his intentions of marrying Doña Laura instead of her, she seeks revenge by trying to convince her rival that she has been sheltering known thieves. Havoc ensues until Lucinda’s scheme comes to light. Don Lope and Doña Laura marry, as do Doña Lucinda and Don Alberto, who has arrived in Seville in the meantime to seek revenge against Don Lope.

Although the plotline is quite typical of an early modern Spanish play, it also captures much of the essence of this early modern metropolis. “Notable is the confusion” in Lope’s port city, which bustles with people of all classes and both genders: gentlemen, soldiers, Moorish galley slaves, thieves, gentlewomen, women of color, and gypsies, both real and pretended. These men and women (and the actors and actresses who portrayed them) visited the “colossuses, amphitheatres,/ beacons, pyres, mausoleums/ one of a kind and alone,/ the statues, temples, and theaters” of grand Seville. In the port of Lope’s play, as in historical reality, many things were in flux and as constantly changing as the Guadalquivir and the eroding sands of the arenal. Most of the action takes place along the sandy shore where sailors, slaves, and foreigners came into contact with each other.

In this comedia confusing movement and deceptions mimic the chaos of Golden Age

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64 Lope de Vega, El Arenal de Sevilla, in El Perro del Hortelano (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1977), p. 139. The original reads “¡Notable es la confusion!”
Seville. For example, the stockings sold by Moorish slaves are revealed to really be threads and paper but only after a gullible foreigner purchases them in the arena.\textsuperscript{66} Don Lope’s love for Doña Lucinda quickly transforms into love for Doña Laura. Doña Lucinda transforms herself from noble to gypsy. While many female characters in Golden Age comedias disguise themselves in order to seek out adventure or the men who have jilted them, Lope de Vega’s Lucinda transforms herself into a gypsy, which makes her “very much part of the ambiente of the Arenal.”\textsuperscript{67} Even her broken heart and injured pride transform from wounded to healed, as she becomes accustomed to the relationship between Lope and Laura, but not before she manipulates Don Lope’s identity, by convincing him to disguise himself as a gypsy, as well. The effects of the characters’ manipulations and machinations in the play are dizzying. Additionally the constant movement of the unusually large number of thirty-two characters and their ever-changing relationships with each other produce in the reader or spectator the same confusion that characterized Golden-Age Seville.

In the case of El Arenal de Sevilla the theater could and did hold up a mirror for society and the image it reflected was one of movement, confusion, and disorder. Yet, such activity was part and parcel of early modern city living. In Ireland, as well as in Spain, many believed that urban life tended to negate moral and religious values rather than uphold them. For example, in Landgartha Henry Burnell depicted some foolish people as coming to the city in order to drink copiously and engage in other forms of debauchery. As Radgee, one of the foolish coxcombs, proclaims, “For you see, when we

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, p. 150.
come to Towne, we doe/Nothing but runne from Taverne to Taverne;/Oft to blind Ale-
houses, to visit the fine/Wenches, of purpose there plac’d to draw custome; Now and then
to see a Play….68 Radgee and his ilk only attend a sermon when there was no
alternative. They prefer visiting taverns and alehouses, which were commodities – not
t entirely unlike the commercial theater – that were more available in a bustling urban
setting.

Seville and Dublin were port cities into which theater became integrated into the
daily life of their inhabitants at much different paces and under very different
circumstances. While Seville was not confessionally divided like Dublin, both cities were
places where much more than religion demarcated boundaries between people. Yet,
when people visited the corrales de comedias of Seville some of these divisions could
become blurred. Men could and did sneak into the women’s section of the playhouse,
priests mixed with lay persons, actresses turned themselves into gypsies and men, and
common-born players became royalty if only for the space of three acts. People of all
classes sought entertainment, and in doing so they provided financial assistance to the
charitable relief of the city’s hospitals. And this system, along with many of the men of
Seville, sailed down the Guadalquivir and across the Atlantic Ocean to the colonies of the
Spanish Empire – to seek fortune and entertainment in New Spain.

68 Henry Burnell, Landgartha, Act Three, University of Virginia Library,
Chapter 4: “As they use and have in Madrid, Seville, and the other cities of Spain”:
The Colonial Theater of New Spain

In 1626 the city council, or cabildo, of Mexico City came to a sudden realization. The playhouses of the center of New Spain did not provide its most respected audience members with the comfort nor endow them with the symbol of status that the Cabildo thought correct and necessary. The cabildo’s notary recorded the self-pitying and self-aggrandizing complaints of the city fathers, who did not go to theater as often as they liked to “the playhouses because of not having a designated box in which to attend as is customary in Madrid, Seville, and the other cities of Spain, and as it is head of this realm, it is right that it should have a box with complete ornamentation and decency, where the magistrates can [sit] comfortably….“\(^1\)

The city fathers soon had a better box, in at least one of the two public commercial theaters then in existence in Mexico City. Cristobal de Molina, one of the members of the cabildo, and an opponent of the encomienda system, which distributed

\(^1\) Archivo del Ayuntamiento de Distrito Federal (hereafter, referred to as ADF), Sección Ayuntamiento de Mexico, Libros de las Actas del Cabildo de Mexico, printed Vol. 659a, p. 34, 16 iv 1626. The minutes of the city council of Mexico were transcribed and published under the direction of Lucas Alamán during the second half of the nineteenth century. Not all of the records survived to be published. The original reads, “los corrales de representaciones de comedias por no tener aposento capaz señalado en que asista como se usa y le tiene Madrid sevilla y las demas ciudades españa y esta que es cabeza deste reino es justo le tenga con todo ornato y desencia donde pueden estar los regidores comodamente....“
the labor of Indian chiefs and their people to Spanish colonists, was also apparently an expert on the public theater back in Spain. On January 25, 1627 he reported to the council that “in all the cities of the kingdom of Castile, in all the playhouses, the city councils have clearly marked boxes in the best places.”¹ Within six months, the city council and the mayordomo, or superintendent, of the Real Hospital de Los Indios had reached an agreement to make improvements to the cabildo’s box “that is in the said hospital” and to provide a steward to ensure that the box was kept locked so that no one who was not a member of the cabildo could enter it to watch the comedias performed at the playhouse.² The speedy action of the cabildo in this instance and their desire for a more ornate and “decent” box exemplifies both the growing concern for demonstrating class and rank in Mexico City and the increasing centrality of theater in the life of colonial Mexico City. Documents such as these also demonstrate the spread of the symbiotic system of financing hospitals through public theater from the heart of Castile to the Spanish colonies.

This chapter examines the role that the imported Spanish comedia played in urban life in New Spain during the early modern period. Looking particularly at the cases of Mexico City and Puebla, it becomes immediately apparent that the Spanish colonists of the New World transported the symbiotic arrangement between the institutions of the corrales de comedias and the hospitals to their new urban environments. In fact, in Mexico City, these two institutions were even more tightly linked together than they were in Seville, as the inn-yard theaters in Mexico were physically connected to the hospitals.

¹ ADF, Sección Ayuntamiento de Mexico, Actas del Cabildo de Mexico, Impresas, Vol. 659a, p. 90, 25 i 1627. The original reads, “en todas las ciudades de los reinos de castila en los corrales de comedias tienen los cabildos aposentos señalados en el mayor lugar dellos.”
² Ibid, pp. 106-107, 9 iv 1627. The original read, “questa en el dicho hospital....”
The commercial theater in New Spain, while similar to that in Castile, initially had new uses in the colonial setting, as dramatic performance became a tool for converting and teaching the Native American population during the sixteenth century and a tool for re-asserting the Spanishness of both the *gachupines*, or peninsular Spaniards, and the *criollos*, or creoles, in early modern Mexico. Divided by an ocean, the Spanish *comedia* helped to shrink physical distance of the far-flung empire for its viewers and readers in the cities of Spain and of her colonies, especially during the seventeenth century. The commercial theater developed much more quickly in the Spanish colonies than it did in British North America.  

While theater of a particularly religious nature took hold in New Spain during the sixteenth century and both the religious theater of the *auto sacramental* and the commercial theater of the *comedia* developed to accommodate a Mexican audience during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, nothing comparable can be seen in the colonies of British North America until much later. In part this was because English colonists had a more tenuous existence in Americas for much longer. Also, the Puritans that settled Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay were iconoclasts, who had antitheatrical leanings. Antitheatricalism would permeate the culture of what would become New England through the eighteenth century and stunted the development of commercial theater in the English colonies of North America. However, the fact that the cavaliers

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3 "The purpose of this chapter is not to read the colonial commercial theater of Mexico through a lens of neo-liberalism. Rather I argue that the Spanish system produced blockbusters that were performed at home and in the colonies and connected people within the public space of the theater and a wider public of playgoing that spanned the Atlantic. On the Nuevo Teatro Popular see Judith Weiss, et. al. *Latin American Popular Theatre: The First Five Centuries* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993) and Diana Taylor and Juan Villegas, eds., *Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality, and Theatricality in Latin/o America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994)."
and fortune seekers did not establish a theater in Virginia until long after they had settled tobacco plantations is indicative of the different priorities of the British colonists, of the lack of true urbanization in the British North American colonies, and of the vital role that Spanish theater played in daily life, both in the Iberian Peninsula and increasingly in the American holdings of the Spanish Empire. The Spanish Atlantic world was made up of towns and the institutions that came with them. And one of these institutions was the *casa* or *corral de comedias*.

I. American Origins: Indigenous Drama and The Theater of Evangelism in Mexico

From the outset of the Spanish conquest of Latin America, Mexico was a fertile ground for theatrical activity. In 1524, just a few short years after conquering the Aztec empire in central Mesoamerica, Cortés carefully staged a scene with the newly arrived Franciscan missionaries. By kneeling and kissing the hems of their robes, he combined religion, politics, and theatricality in colonial Latin America. Cortés had allegedly already used performance to take full advantage of Moctezuma II, by not only wearing the Quetzalcoátl costume of feathers and gold that the Aztec leader had sent him, but also by assuming the role of deity for whom he had possibly been mistaken. Likewise, Cortés used the performance of the ritual of homage to gain the alliance of the Franciscan missionaries and simultaneously reinforced the power of the Franciscans in the eyes of the conquered Aztecs.⁴

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⁴ For an excellent treatment of this theatrical moment with the friars see Adam Versényi, *Theatre in Latin America: Religion, Politics, and Culture from Cortés to the 1980s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
Before the Spanish conquistadors arrived, there was a great indigenous tradition among the Aztec, Inca, and Maya of performing theatrical religious rituals and ceremonies. The Aztecs and the Maya already had raised earthen platforms on which some form of ritualistic and religious performed drama took place. In the case of the Aztec many of these dramatic rituals had ties to religious sacrifice and the celebration of religious festivals. Some scholars have suggested that one of the reasons that the Spaniards conquered the Aztec Empire with so few battles was that the Aztecs were accustomed to engaging in battle with such ritualistic guidelines, that they had no context for responding to the type of warfare waged by the Spaniards, led by Cortés.

One indigenous festival observed by a Dominican Friar, Diego Durán in his codex, which was compiled in the 1560s, involved brilliant costume and dance. The mendicant claimed that for each of the different idols, the Indians composed a different song and accompanying dance to go with it. The build up to the festivals was intense and involved the practice or rehearsal of numerous songs, dances, costumes, and props. During the festival itself, the dancers dressed “some times like eagles, other like tigers and lions, others, like soldiers, other like jesters, others like hunters, other times like wild animals and like monkeys and dogs and another thousand disguises.”

The Mayas also had various political and religious dramatic spectacles that originated during pre-Columbian times. The one extant script is from the drama Rabinal Achi, a story of two rival warriors, the Varón de Queché and the ultimately triumphant

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Varón de Rabinal. The play contains a number of formal challenges that are broken up with dancing and music. The Mayan performers of Rabinal Achi wore intricately detailed, heavy wooden masks and vibrant plumages that were specific to the character they were portraying. Most scholars of the Rabinal Achi believe that several actors played each of the characters throughout the play, alternating with a fair amount of frequency because of the significant weight of the masks. Likewise, comparisons have been drawn between the formal nature of the indigenous Mayan dramatic spectacle and the theater of the ancient Greeks.⁶

As early as 1526, the tailors of Mexico City requested a site on which to build a hospital and a hermitage for the poor who might come forward in need on Corpus Christi.⁷ While it is possible that Corpus Christi processions and other festivities were already being performed in Nueva España by 1526, there is no evidence that indicates the arrival of Corpus Christi festivals in Mexico before this date. One can perhaps assume that the poor referred to by the tailors were largely comprised of the indigenous Mexican peoples rather than vagabond Spaniards. If worldly succor could not be given, then perhaps spiritual succor could. As early as 1530, missionaries began to write and direct religious dramas in Nahautl, as evidenced by a performance of The Conversion of Saint Paul in given by Indian actors in the parish church where the Cathedral of Mexico City now stands.⁸ Similarly, in 1533 Andrés de Olmos had a Spanish auto sacramental

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⁷ This incident is referred to in Rodolfo Usigli, Mexico in the Theatre (University of Mississippi: Romance Monographs, Inc., 1976), p. 27.
⁸ Fernando Horcasitas, Miguel León Portilla, Sten María, and Germán Viveros Teatro Nahuatl I: Epocas Novohispana y Moderna (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional de Autónoma, 2004), p. 545.
presented in Nahuatl translation as a method of proselytizing to the native Mexican population.

On June 20, 1538 the first recorded *autos sacramentales* for Corpus Christi were put on in Mexico. These religious plays, *The Annunciation of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist, The Annunciation of Our Lady, The Visitation of Our Lady to Saint Elizabeth*, and *The Nativity of Saint John* took place in Tlaxcala and served the purposes of both religious pedagogy and celebration. After their performance, the festivals concluded with numerous baptisms of American Indians. According to Mexican theater historian, playwright, and “father” of contemporary Mexican theater Rodolfo Usigli, this pattern of religious one-act play and baptisms of the natives became the tradition for several decades.9

Although initially adapted and improvised by the mendicant orders as a tool of conversion, the religious theater brought to Mexico by its new conquerors was soon following a markedly similar pattern as that of the conquerors’ native land. As discussed in previous chapters, the guilds and then the city officials took charge of Corpus Christi performances in the urban centers of Spain. The pageantry of the Corpus Christi festival was meant to be an outlet for civic pride, religious fervor, as well as a time for both pageantry and repentance. This idea crossed the Atlantic with colonists and missionaries, but with the added element of evangelism. The staging of *autos sacramentales* was also a means for converting the indigenous population of New Spain to Christianity.

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Since they were the first on the ground in New Spain, Franciscans and Dominicans were at the forefront of the production of this kind of evangelical theater in New Spain. In order to convert Indians and keep them within the fold of the Church, these mendicant friars drew on both the evolving Spanish model of religious theater, the one act morality play and on the blurred division between performer and spectator in the indigenous dramatic spectacles of pre-Columbian times.

Both the conquistador, Bernal Diaz del Castillo, and the opponent of the cruelty of Spanish colonization, Bartolomé de Las Casas, observed a set of two such hybrid theatrical events that took place in 1539.\(^\text{10}\) The rivalry between the Mexicans and their old enemies, the Tlaxcalans, found a new theatrical outlet through the evangelical drama of the Spanish mendicants. There were no more Wars of Flowers, but there would be a competition with different theatrical stakes. The Mexicans performed *La conquista de Rodas* and the Tlaxcalans tried to outdo them by performing *La conquista de Jerusalén* during the Corpus Christi festivals. Franciscans seeking to evangelize their audiences had written both plays, and these proselytizing playwrights manipulated an old, established theatrical rivalry to assist in this.

*La conquista de Rodas*, as envisioned and produced by the Franciscan friars, took place in the Plaza Mayor of Mexico City. And apparently the city council of Mexico spared little expense in financing the sumptuous performance to celebrate the peace of Nice. Bartolomé de Las Casas, a *sevillano* by birth and a Dominican priest who would become the famous defender of Native Americans, described it as “another performance

\(^{10}\) Some sources indicate that these two performances took place in 1543. However, Las Casas claimed that the Mexicans put on *La conquista de Rodas* in 1539. Since Charles V and Francois I signed the Peace of Nice in 1538, the 1539 date seems more plausible, in spite of the delays in trans-Atlantic communication.
among many others put on in Mexico City…. that never had men seen such an admirable thing made by men” took place in 1539 to celebrate the peace treaty between Charles V and the king of France, Francis I made the previous year. 11 The spectacle included “large structures like false [military] theaters as tall as towers” and even “castles and a city made of wood.”12 According to him, several tens of thousands of Indians took part in the spectacle.13 Although Las Casas was perhaps prone to exaggeration and his estimate is no doubt on the high side, it is safe to assume that a large number of Mexicans were involved in both the performance, as well as in the audience of this extravagant performance. The grand scale of the production of *La conquista de Rodas* indicates the existence of a thriving evangelical theater, operating in the language of Nahuatl and beginning to do so in the Spanish language as well. It also possibly suggests the readiness of the municipal government and the general Spanish populace of in the urban centers of New Spain for a more commercial theater within a mere three decades of the conquest.

12 Ibid. The original reads, “grandes edificios como teatros postizos, altos como torres, en la plaza de México… castillos y una ciudad de Madera.”
13 Las Casas claimed that some 80,000 Indians participated in the rival production of *La conquista de Jerusalén*. This is no doubt an exaggeration, but indicates a that a large number of indigenous Mesoamericans took part in this incredible spectacle.
II. Commercial Theater and Charitable Hospitals in Mexico City

However, the commercial theater of New Spain took longer to develop than its counterpart in the Old World. At the same time that the commercial theater of Lope de Rueda was revolutionizing drama in Seville, theatrical activity in Mexico faced an obstacle to its development. The Archbishop of New Spain, Juan de Zumárraga, barred dramatic performances and dances from church premises in 1549 because he thought they were allowing native beliefs and customs to survive in spite of the best efforts of the regular and secular clergy in Mexico. This prohibition and others limited processional theater to religious topics and other outlets for religious activity and enthusiasm, such as the construction and opening of the University, stalled further theatrical development in Mexico during the middle of the sixteenth century.

A new cultural space for commercial theater opened up, though, in the latter half of the sixteenth century, especially the last couple of decades. As more and more Spaniards began to immigrate to New Spain, both the secular clergy and the laity began to outnumber the mendicants on the ground in Mexico. Additionally, the Indian population decreased significantly due to outbreaks of epidemic disease, such as the plague of 1545-48, which might have wiped out as much as three-quarters of the indigenous population. This devastation of the Native American population occurred just as the numbers of whites, blacks, and mestizos began to outgrow the colonial economy of New Spain.14 These new and growing populations, particularly that of the Spanish

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*gachupines* and *criollos*, wanted European entertainment that fostered their imperial, as well, as local identities.

Also among these new arrivals to New Spain were Jesuits, who focused primarily on education and in doing so used theater as a didactic tool, much as they did in Europe. In 1578, upon the receipt of holy relics sent to the Jesuits by Pope Gregory XIII, the Jesuits put on a great festival, which included a procession and performances. One of these was a five-act tragedy, *El triunfo de los santos*.\(^\text{15}\) Performed by students, as part of the six days of celebration, the tragedy exemplified the Jesuits’ use of both classical and innovative forms of drama, as a means of both religious and intellectual instruction.

During the 1560s, the ecclesiastical council of Mexico City began to give out prizes for the best script for performance during Corpus Christi. By this point Mexican playwrights had started to compose their own religious and other types of dramas, as well as continuing to import older dramatic texts from Spain. Juan Pérez Ramírez composed both *auto sacramentales* and other plays. In one of his *entremeses*, he satirized the tax collectors of Mexico City. According to Usigli, the performance of this drama caused quite a stir. The *autor* who directed the performance, Juan de Victoria, met with the ire of the authorities. Both the cabildo de Mexico and the Viceroy censured the Archbishop for allowing the performance, and the unfortunate *autor* found himself imprisoned at the behest of the *cabildo*. However, it does not appear that the playwright himself met with any punishment from either the municipal government or the Church.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{15}\) Usigli, p. 35.
\(^{16}\) Usigli, p. 35.
Although evidence is thin, it would seem that commercial theatrical activity continued to develop in Mexico during the 1570s and 1580s. In December of 1574 the Audiencia of New Spain, which had both judicial and executive functions, notified the Archbishop and the municipal council of Mexico City that no comedias should be performed in the Church during Corpus Christi without prior approval. The Audiencia insisted that this would prevent the plays from having anything “superfluous or indecent” in their content. The need to regulate the content of dramatic performances became an issue again in 1588. At this point, the Inquisition began to censure the comedias and autos sacramenales that were being put on in Mexico City. Apparently comedias that met with the standards of religious orthodoxy could go on to gain accolades and extra income for those who performed in them. According to one historian of Mexican theater, Luis Obregón, any boy who performed well in a play received a “fifty peso gratuity.”

In the 1580s and 1590s commercial theater began to truly emerge in Mexico City. In 1586 Alonso de Buenrostro brought an acting company from Spain to Mexico. Watching the performances of plays and reading plays became such central features of life in Mexico City that, according to Rodolfo Usigli, a Society for Plays was founded in Mexico City in 1597. The Society was located near the Hospital de Jesus, which further indicates this link between public entertainment and health in the colony of New Spain. Likewise, the book trade and printing flourished in Mexico, bringing comedias,
romances, and religious tracts from Spain, as well as allowing for the circulation of printed texts authored in the American colony.\textsuperscript{20}

In 1589 the city council of Mexico City contracted Arias de Villalobos, a peninsular colonist, who was a distinguished literary figure and would later become a priest, to put on the \textit{comedias} for Corpus Christi. However, Villalobos did not fulfill his contract, which infuriated the city council, as it had already paid the troupe manager the full sum and the poet half of his fees. Five years later, Villalobos solicited the \textit{cabildo} for the position of \textit{autor} of the city. This position would have essentially given him a monopoly over the direction of the Holy Week and Corpus Christi festivities and a salary of 2,000 pesos, but the council, perhaps remembering Villalobos’s earlier failure to meet his end of the bargain, ended up naming Gonzalo de Riancho to the post instead. It also helped that Riancho offered the same services as Villalobos for a lower rate – just 1500 pesos a year.\textsuperscript{21} By 1601 Riancho was the head of an acting company in Mexico City, while Villalobos’s career increasingly centered on writing and teaching rather than performing and directing.

Villalobos’s other activities, however, provide further insight into the development of the commercial \textit{corrales de comedias} in Mexico City. He described Mexico City at the turn of the century, in his epic poem \textit{Canto intitulado mercurio}. Composed for the arrival of the Viceroy the Marquis de Guadalcázar in 1612, \textit{Canto intitulado mercurio} glorifies the conquest of the Aztec empire led by Hernán Cortés and

\textsuperscript{21} The run-in between Villalobos and the cabildo is discussed in J. Luis Rocamora, \textit{El Teatro en La América Colonial} (Buenos Aires: Editorial Huarpes, 1947), pp. 304-305.
the subsequent century of Mexican history under Spanish rule, including the institution of commercial theater: there were “For seekers of pleasure/Two houses of officials of happiness/Actors of imported plays/recently delivered there.” In the footnotes to the 1623 printing, Villalobos claimed that there were three acting companies sharing the two public theaters of Mexico City. Since a similar system of sharing the corrales de comedias between companies of actors had developed in Madrid and Seville during this period, Villalobos’s claim seems both plausible and probable. He also boasted about the cofradías and the hospitals of the capital of New Spain. Writing in a genre that glorified his urban setting and established his patriotism on both a local and imperial level, the former autor de comedias painted a picture of a thriving city that was part of an expansive and impressive empire. Canto intitulado mercurio could not be more different from Jonson’s On the Famous Voyage.

The poet Bernardo de Balbuena also portrayed a Mexico City that had none of the attributes of a congested city with stagnant and refuse-filled canals in his lyric poem, La grandeza Mexicana, first published in 1604. Balbuena, a peninsular Spaniard, who grew up in Mexico, sought to focus on the grand public buildings and elaborate façades rather than the putrid passageways, which he incidentally viewed as lovely canals and spacious streets, that ran between them. Balbuena celebrated a Mexico City that, along with gold and other riches, was home to a large variety of townspeople. Mexico City’s layered society included “muleteers, officials, contractors/pininsular Spaniards, soldiers, merchants, attractive young men, gentlemen, litigants/ clergymen, friars, men and

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22 Arias de Villalobos, Canto intitulado mercurio (Mexico, 1620, 1907), p. 273 [microfiche]. The original reads, “Para gentes del gusto aficionadas/Dos casas de oficiales del contento/Actores de comedias traínas/Mas paridas acá.”

23 On Jonson’s poem see Chapter One.
women/of diverse color and occupation,/of various ranks and various appearances....”24

All of these people from different trades, backgrounds, and classes made up audiences for the actors who put on comedias in the capital of New Spain as early as the turn of the seventeenth century. As Balbuena phrased it, “the comic recites his lines/from a discreet and wise man he pretends to be a fool/ to make those in between laugh for an hour”25

And laugh they did. Balbuena suggested that there were new plays on a daily basis as well as new interludes for the audiences of the corrales de comedias of Mexico City to see and enjoy.26

Although it is important to take Balbuena’s rosy picture of a pristine, gleaming, and colorfully harmonious imperial capital with the proverbial grain of salt, other evidence suggests that his depiction of a thriving theater business was not particularly exaggerated. During the same decade that Balbuena’s La grandeza Mexicana was first published, the cabildo of Mexico City ensured that the Corpus Christi festivals each year were extravagant affairs that included comedias. In 1606 the city fathers mandated that comedias be performed and that fireworks and other spectacular things, such as dancers, accompany the performances. This demonstrates a remarkable commitment to the commercial theater because the cabildo was also dealing with problems of “little health and much business.”27

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24 Bernardo de Balbuena, La grandeza Mexicana, ed. José Carlos González Boixo (Roma: Bulzoni Editiore, 1988), p. 43. The original reads, “arrieros, oficiales, contratantes/cachopines, soldados, mercaderes/galanes, caballeros, pleiteantes;/clérigos, frailes, hombres y mujeres,/de diversa color y profesiones,/ de vario estado y varios pareceres....”
25 Ibid, p. 44. The original reads, “… el farsante recita su comedia,/y de discreto y sabio se hace bobo,/para de una hora hacer reír la media.”
26 Ibid, p. 78.
27 ADF, Ayuntamiento de Mexico, Actas del Cabildo de Mexico, impresas, Vol. 646a, p. 283, undated document. The original reads, “poca salud y muchas ocupaciones....”
This evidence, along with Villalobos’s remark about two theaters where actors performed imported Spanish comedias, indicates a growing number of playgoers, which constituted a theatrical public, in Mexico City. Playgoers in this imperial capital could see the same comedias that their counterparts in Madrid and Seville had enjoyed and on an increasingly regular basis. Colonists could also engage in an ever-increasing print culture that allowed them to read the plays being performed in the playhouses of Mexico City, Seville, and Madrid, just as they could read poets like Balbuena and Villalobos, who thought that the corrales de comedias enhanced the grandeur of Mexico City.

The commercial theater played an increasingly integral part in the urban environment and the colonial social fabric of Mexico City because of its growing connection to the charitable function of the hospitals. In January of 1605 the Archbishop of Mexico urged the royal government to take action in regards to the increasing needs of the Hospital del Amor de Dios, the plague hospital of Mexico City, founded in 1534 by Juan de Zumárraga, the first Archbishop of Mexico. On January 21, 1605, the audiencia, in the name of his majesty Philip III, suggested “that the comedias be performed in one of the hospital’s yards and not in another place.” However, the high court also realized that moving the corral de comedias from the Real Hospital de los Indios to the Amor de Dios would cause the Real Hospital de los Indios to lose a major source of its revenue. In the end, the high court of New Spain decided to place a limit on the overhead expenses paid by the Amor de Dios and to maintain the corral in its current location.²⁸

²⁸ AGI, Sección Audiencia de Mexico, 26. Num. 34, not foliated, 21 i 1605. The original reads, “que las comedias se representen en un corral del ospital, y no en otra parte....”
In 1607 the Audiencia realized that the Hospital Real de los Indios faced serious problems due to a lack of sufficient funds. It appealed for a share of taxes placed on the Indians. “And the hospital has not taken advantage of the gift that your majesty has already made and so as not to lose it, it begs to your majesty to grant the same again, increasing it so that the work of the said houses can continue until it is completed, paid for by the taxes that your majesty ordered to be given to the Indians in the “congregations” so that they may execute them in the best and most convenient manner for them and that those that are given for the rents [and] to the expenses of the hospital which are many [and] the rest go on to the repairs….” These repairs extended to the theater. Since the cabildo of Mexico later wanted a better box in the corral de representaciones connected to this hospital both financially and in terms of physical space, it became apparent that the answer to this financial problem was to strengthen the link between the public theater and this hospital that cared for the impoverished Indian population of Mexico City, including its immediate physical needs, its spiritual care and to some degree even its educational needs.

This symbiosis between the commercial theater and the hospitals, which had originated in Castile and been imported to New Spain, meant that there was ample economic opportunity for autores and acting companies in Mexico City. When La conquista de Rodas had been staged in the plaza mayor during the middle of the sixteenth

29 AGI, Audiencia de Mexico, 27. Num. 62, not foliated, 21 vii 1607. The original quote reads, “Y el hospital no ha gozado de la merd que VMD le tiene hecha y para que no la pierda supple[ll]ca a VMD se sirva de conceder la misma aprovacion ampliandola de nuevo para que la obra de las dichas cassas se pueda proseguir hasta acaballas a costa delos Tributos que VMD mando remitir a los indios de las congregaciones para que se passasen en la mayor y mas conveniente Utilidad dellos y esta los era por lo que ayudaran los alquilares a los gastos de el dicho hospital que son muchos demas que prosiguiendose la obras ...."
century, all of the participants in the performance had been Indians. As the seventeenth century dawned, theater events in New Spain would come to be dominated by the emerging form of the *comedia nueva* performed by Spanish professional actors in established commercial theaters and the religious *autos sacramentales* performed during the annual Corpus Christi festivals by those same professional actors.

Commercial theater continued to have success in Mexico City under the direction of *autores* such as Juan Ortiz and Gonzalo de Riancho during the first twenty-five years of the seventeenth century. The cabildo continued to finance increasingly sumptuous performances during the Corpus Christi festivals and to attend the performances of the *comedias* in the *corrales* of the hospitals. Occasionally, the city fathers offered a prize for new *comedias*, as they did in 1619, when they ordered that Juan Ortíz be paid 100 pesos for a piece for “for being a new play.”[^30] Spaniards increasingly viewed theatrical activity as their domain and sought to control the types of spectacle more rigidly. In 1612, when the cabildo of Mexico approved “all the concerts of dances by Spaniards,” adding “that they should not be performed by blacks or mulattos and that everything else be done as is correct and customary and that the festival be very brilliant and of great ornament.”[^31] Of course, the very fact that the council had to make this decree implies that the religious theater of the Corpus Christi festival was becoming a site for contending expressions of cultural and social values in Mexico City.

[^30]: ADF, Ayuntamiento de Mexico, Actas del Cabildo, impresas, Vol. 652a, p. 276, undated. The original describes it as follows, “ser comedia nueva.”
[^31]: ADF, Ayuntamiento de Mexico, Actas del Cabildo, impresas, Vol. 648a, p. 296, abril 1612. The original reads, “todos los conciertos de danzas espáñoles adbiriendo que no a de aver danda [sic] de negros ni mulatos y aga todo lo demas como se suele y acostumbra de suerte que la fiesta sea muy lucida y de mucho ornato….”
“Celebrated” autores in New Spain, such as Juan Ortíz, thus had both opportunities to pursue, such as the award of 100 pesos for writing and producing a new comedia, and responsibilities to fulfill. These men—and occasionally women—were to direct the comedias imported from Spain and to ensure that lavish Corpus Christi performances would be put on each year. With the ever-increasing number of plays arriving from Spain and a growing number of skilled autores and actors in the colony during the 1610s and 1620s, the commercial theaters of Mexico City, like those of Madrid and Seville, became places where a multitude of people converged and were entertained in a way that connected them to a theatrical spectacle and occasionally a kind of discourse that put them in touch with their counterparts in Castile. This also meant that the corrales de comedias became a site to gain both celebrity and publicity. It was exactly this kind of representational publicity that the city councilors of Mexico City sought with their ostentatiously ornamented box in 1626.

However, their newly achieved level of publicity was short-lived because in 1629 a flood devastated Mexico City. Parts of the city remained submerged under floodwaters for the next five years, numerous homes and shops and the corrales de comedias met with destruction or serious damage. The stagnant floodwaters carried pestilential diseases that killed many of those who had survived the flood event itself.

Mexico City had experienced bad floods in 1555, 1580, 1604, and 1607. Royal officials adopted a desagüe, or overspill channel, after the flood of 1607 brought increasing public pressure on the government to find an effective way of dealing with such destructive inundations. The desagüe, according to historian, Louisa Hoberman, “was an eight mile long drainage canal, half tunnel and half open trench, which was to
conduct the floodwaters of the Valley of Mexico … into the Tula River, from which they would flow to the Gulf of Mexico.” An initially impressive structure designed by engineer Enrico Martínez, the desagüe fell into poor maintenance and was never enlarged. Work on it stopped completely in 1623 due to bureaucratic obstacles. Thus, the incredibly expensive structure stood no chance of channeling the massive amounts of water that inundated Mexico City in 1629 when the summer rains came early, frequently, and in large quantity, culminating in a particularly terrible storm in September that supposedly lasted forty hours. In the aftermath of this storm, one storey houses fell, buildings collapsed, and people found themselves stranded in the upper floors of their homes.

After the flood most theatrical activity, along with many residents of the city, moved to nearby Puebla for the next couple of decades. As discussed below, Puebla had a theatrical tradition that made such a move fitting and relatively easy. It was, however, not without consequences for both cities. Since the patio of the Real Hospital de los Indios had flooded and no longer had public entertainment to regularly contribute to its finances, the public health situation of the city suffered even beyond the immediate effects of the flood, which should not be underestimated.

The lack of commercial drama also damaged civic pride and lowered the quality of life for inhabitants of the capital of New Spain. In April of 1630 the cabildo of Mexico decided that it was necessary for the city “to bring an acting company back to where one had been previously because it was not right for the city to be without

33 The biblical comparison of forty hours to forty days might have led to this claim on the part of Mexico City officials.
In all likelihood, the city fathers of the viceregal capital turned to nearby Puebla to send for a troupe of actors to fill this entertainment vacuum. Though the proceedings of the city council suggested that the religious theater of the Corpus Christi festivals continued during the 1630s, it seems that the commercial theater of the *comedia* did not regain its pre-flood prominence until the 1640s.

In 1640 and 1641 the city council of Mexico City proposed, and engaged in negotiations regarding, the renovation of its boxes in the Corral del Coliseo, which was the theater in the patio of the Real Hospital de los Indios. The municipal government also moved that during the Corpus Christi festivals “there not be three-act plays but rather religious one act plays that are dispatched outside of Mexico” – in other words, the city fathers of Mexico wanted Spanish *autos sacramentales*. The city council specifically requested that a religious drama, *Los cisnes* by Lope de Vega, be put on during the festival of the blessed sacrament in 1641. The next year, the Viceroy of New Spain, the Conde de Salvatierra, ordered that the wood left over from repairs to the Hospital Real de los Indios be used to build additions to the theater because “it was impossible to take care of the sick.”

In other words, for the Mexican government, the easiest solution was to use wood from the hospital to enlarge the theater, bringing in more playgoers and therefore more money for the hospital.

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34 ADF, Ayuntamiento de Mexico, Actas del Cabildo, impresas, Vol. 660a, p. 231, 15 iv 1630. The original reads, “*traer una compania de representacion donde estuviere pues no es justo que esta la ciudad sin entretenimiento....*”

35 ADF, Ayuntamiento de Mexico, Actas del cabildo, impresas, Vol. 664a, p. 201, 28 iv 1642. In the original it reads, “*no haya comedias sino autos sacramentales que se despache fuera de Mexico....*”

36 Archivo General de la Nacion (Mexico) (hereafter AGN), Sección: Reales Cédulas, Vol. 49, Exp. 449, fol. 359r, 27 xi 1642. The original reads, “*era imposible sustentar los enfermos....*”
Gaps in the cabildo records during the 1640s make it difficult to ascertain if the theater ban that shut the doors of the *corrales de comedias* in Castile and Aragon also affected New Spain in 1644-1645 and 1646-1651 even considering the antitheatrical position of Bishop Palafox, who arrived in the viceroyalty in 1640. However, it would seem that commercial theater had either never been banned outright in New Spain or that the injunction had been lifted by 1649, as it had essentially been in Madrid and Seville due to the pressure that the hospitals placed on the royal and municipal governments. In July of 1649, the city council of Puebla received an order that Jerónimo Ortíz and his company of actors leave at the request of the mayordomo of the Real Hospital de los Indios. A month later the chief magistrates of Puebla ordered Ortíz to leave Puebla and go to Mexico City with his acting company because his presence was desired there to serve the poor of the Real Hospital de los Indios and to fill the hospital’s coffers. Just in case Ortíz had other ideas, the magistrates ordered him to leave and without delay “nor any excuse on pain of a 500 peso fine.” It would seem that sometimes *autores* and actors could become a little too famous.

Some of the celebrity that these men and women could attain can be glimpsed in an incident that occurred during the following year. In July of 1650, Don Gregorio Marín de Guijo, a prominent citizen of Mexico City, recorded the arrival of the new viceroy in his diary. According to Guijo, his Excellency Luis Enríquez y Guzmán, Conde de Alba de Liste y Marqués de Villaflor, processed through the capital of New Spain in the normal fashion of new viceroys with a large crowd – an audience, really – that included

37 Palafox’s antitheatrical sentiments are taken up below. See pp. 209-210.
38 AGN, Reales Cedulas (Duplicadas), Vol. 14, Exp. 764, Fol. 479, 3 vii 1649.
39 AGN, Reales Cedulas Duplicadas, Vol. 14, Exp. 764, Fol. 479-480, 12 viii 1649. The original reads, “ni escusa alguna pena de quinientos pesos....”
city officials, gentlemen, and other citizens. One member of this audience was an actor. Upon Alba de Liste’s return to the cathedral, this actor explained the painting of Hercules in the portal and the verse that accompanied it. Though Guijo did not mention the farsante, or actor, by name, the fact that one had either been previously designated to explain this bit of the urban landscape to the new viceroy, or happened to do so on the spur of the moment, suggests that actors were capable of acquiring some stature, and not just notoriety, in the society of seventeenth-century Mexico City.

III. Puebla: The City of Angels and Actors

Mexico City was not the only place where peninsular Spaniards and creoles could seek publicity and entertainment in the corrales de comedias of New Spain. This fact was a direct result of the model of colonization that the Spanish used in the Americas. They based their settlement in towns, using urban institutions to bolster imperial identity even as these very institutions simultaneously heightened local identities. One of these urban centers of life in New Spain was la Puebla de los Angeles, often simply called Puebla, located approximately eighty miles east of Mexico City.

The Spanish founded Puebla during the middle of the sixteenth century. The second audiencia of Mexico established this new town with the hopes of inducing Spaniards to settle down and stop being vagabonds and of preventing them from further exploiting the American Indian population of New Spain. Although it grew slowly

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initially, Puebla became one of the three most populous cities in New Spain by the seventeenth century. Many *gachupines* and creoles preferred to take up residence in Puebla rather than Mexico City, since Puebla had been set up on the Spanish grid-pattern and on the model of the Spanish town. Also it was a far more inhabitable place, especially in the years immediately following the massive flood in Mexico City in 1629. Called his “Rachel” by the Bishop Palafox, the colonial city of the angels had much to offer its inhabitants.

For one thing, its populace had options for entertainment. Although the surviving archival evidence does not prove its existence, some scholars think that there was a *corral de comedias* operating in Puebla by the middle of the sixteenth century. By 1600 there was commercial theatrical activity in Puebla in addition to the increasingly extravagant Corpus Christi comedias put on each year in the cathedral of the city with *entremeses*, short comic plays, and music. Juan Gomez Melgarejo, a carpenter and enterprising theater entrepreneur, had leased a house in order to form a *corral de comedias* by 1599 and possibly even earlier, according to the minutes of the city council of Puebla. The city magistrates consulted over the matter of extending Melgarejo’s lease of “the said theater” on April 12, 1600, deciding that it should be extended – especially because “the city councilmen that wanted to see the said plays from a comfortable vantage point” would be able to do so. Without a doubt, Melgarejo’s playhouse was a

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41 Felicia Hardison Londré and Daniel J. Watermeier, *The History of North American Theatre From Pre-Columbian Times to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1998) makes reference to these rumors of a house where comedias are performed in its section on theater in New Spain.

42 See for example, Archivo del Ayuntamiento de Puebla (hereafter AAP), Actas del Cabildo de Puebla, Libro 11, fol. 115f, mayo 1582.

43 AAP, Actas del Cabildo de Puebla, Libro 13, fol. 188f 12 iv 1600. The original states, “el dicho corral ... para los senores regidores que se quisieren hallar a ver las dichas comedias muy acomodado a vista....”
popular staple of public and cultural life in Puebla because the cabildo of Puebla renewed his lease several times and his widow sought an extension of the lease after his death in 1639.44

Melgarajo’s corral de comedias provided a direct source of income, not just for the savvy businessman and his family, but also for the city of Puebla, much as the playhouses in Seville were a boon to its municipal government. Even so, as the commercial theater in Puebla developed it became increasingly linked to charity and public health. In the summer of 1626 “the said city proclaimed that since it neighborhoods and population have greatly increased and each day it is expected that it will be greater augmented … it would be a very great help to make in the city a playhouse that the city can lease and the rent can revert back to the civic corporation.”45

In October of the same year, the city of Puebla received a license from the Viceroy of New Spain, the Marquis de Cerralvo, which granted the city the right to found another corral de comedias, in addition to the one already in existence and operated by Melgarejo, where the city fathers had been attending performances for at least twenty-five years.46 The growing city now could “found a theater [and] from the same taking six pesos of alms from each play that is performed there to go to the Hospital [Real] de los Indios of this city.”47 The increasing population of creoles and peninsular Spaniards in

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44 This subject is taken up at greater length below. See p. 241.
45 AAP, Actas del Cabildo de Puebla, Libro 16, fol. 324v, undated. Although this document is not dated, it corresponds to either May or June of 1626. The original reads, “la dicha ciudad dixo que por quanto su beziad y poblazion ba en muy grande crescimiento y cada dia se espera yra en mayor augmento …. ser de muy grande ayuda hacer en ella un corral de comedias que pudiese arrendar y la Renta se convirtiesse en los dichos propios.”
46 AAP, Actas del Cabildo de Puebla, Libro 13, fol. 188f, 12 iv 1600.
47 AAP, Actas del Cabildo de Puebla, Libro 17, fol. 26v, 16 x 1626. In the Spanish it reads, “fundar un corral de comedias Para propios della dando delimosna de cada comedia q[ue] le rrepresentare seis pesos al ospital de los Yndios desta ciudad.”
Puebla seeking diversion meant that the city could realistically support two playhouses. With one playhouse long-established, the second could provide audiences with even more entertainment, actors and autores with even more work, and the Hospital with even more funds that would not have to come directly out of the city’s coffers.

The provisions that the cabildo made for the Corpus Christi festivities indicates that there was a significant amount of movement of acting companies between the capital in Mexico City and the city of Puebla as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century. Since the more temperate climate of Mexico allowed the corrales de comedias to function at all times of the year apart from the forty days of Lent and times of flooding so long as there was a licensed company to perform in them, autores such as Gonzalo de Riancho and Juan de Sigüenza, as well as the aforementioned Jerónimo Ortíz, moved back and forth with their acting companies between the two cities many times during the course of their careers.48 As mentioned above, the center of commercial theater in New Spain shifted to Puebla during the 1630s, when Mexico City was still recovering from the devastation and dislocation brought on by the flood of 1629. As in the capital, the religious theater that aided the celebration of the end of Lent and the celebration of the physical body of Christ in the Eucharist in Puebla became increasingly ornate and regulated by both the ecclesiastical council, or cathedral chapter who aided the bishop, and the city magistrates, who set up a commission to choose the comedias that would be performed during these celebrations in the 1630s.

In Puebla, as in other cities in the Spanish Empire, the commercial theater provided economic opportunities for more than just impresarios. The corrales de

comedias provided a venue for vendors and a meeting place for the public where it is likely that deals were negotiated and brokered. Occasionally, these opportunities became sites for conflict and contention, as well. In 1637 two citizens of Puebla, Antonio de Toledo and the carpenter/theater operator Juan Gómez Melgarejo, got into a dispute over who had the right to sell *aloja con nieve*, which was a sweet drink made with honey and spices served with ice, at the playhouse connected to the Hospital Real de los Indios. Toledo claimed that he had the sole right to sell the refreshing beverage, but Melgarejo, apparently seeking yet another source of income, had bypassed the city fathers and received permission from his excellency, the viceroy. Toledo urged the city fathers of Puebla to refund him for paying for the right to sell *aloja con nieve* since it was no longer exclusively his.\(^{49}\)

Commercial theater continued to thrive in Puebla and Mexico City in the second half of the seventeenth century, and the relationship between the public theaters and the hospitals continued into the eighteenth century. The *corral de comedias* of the Royal Hospital underwent additions and renovations in the 1640s and then again in 1665. When a fire burned down the structure in 1722, a new theater, the Coliseo, was built. These structures, like those in Madrid and Seville, were located centrally within the city – not far from the zócolo or main square. And they formed an integral part of the urban landscape and the daily life of Spanish colonists, *mestizos*, and Indians throughout the early modern period.

\(^{49}\) AAP, Actas del Cabildo, Libro 18, fols. 177f, 274v, and 326v. Toledo began complaining in April of 1637 and the dispute went on for several months.
IV. Actors, Audiences, and Playwrights in their Colonial Contexts

The charitable function of the theaters in funding the hospitals of the colonial cities of New Spain had no counterpart in the other settlements of North America. Both hospitals and theaters came late to the British colonies and had no regular part in daily life in cities until the second half of the eighteenth century. As eminent historian J.H. Elliott has observed, the societies created by colonists in their new American environments were littered with the “cultural baggage” that these emigrants brought with them. The societies that they created “unmistakably replicated many of the most characteristic features of the metropolitan societies as they knew – or imagined – them at the time of their departure.”50 In the Spanish colonies this meant cities with commercial theater and charitable hospitals. In English colonies this was not the case during the sixteenth – or even the seventeenth – century. This difference was partly due the century-long period of lag-time between the efforts of the Spanish and the English to make new lives for themselves in the Americas and partly due to the antitheatrical stance of many of the English settlers of what would become New England. Unlike their New England Puritan counterparts, British colonists living in the Chesapeake did support theatrical and tavern performances with their attendance and admission fees. They just were not in a position to do so until much later than their Spanish neighbors to the south.

By the time that Puebla had been founded and possibly even had a playhouse, the Englishmen who were interested in overseas colonization beyond the Irish plantations were still looking for arguments to advance their cause. Anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic

sentiments and Protestant patriotism were not enough. Colonization required financial backing and schemes for planting in the New World had to appeal to merchants and the mercantile community. Although the Richard Hakluyt proposed schemes and manifold reasons for colonization in the 1580s and Walter Raleigh led an abortive attempt at colonization off the shores of what is now North Carolina in that same decade, it was not until the first decade of the seventeenth century with the foundation of the Virginia Company that the merchants and gentry of England truly began their overseas colonial enterprise.

Similarly, whereas the Spanish fanned out across jungles, deserts, and mountains in their New World colonies and founded towns within a generation or two of the initial conquests of Mexico and Peru, the English, who had the advantage of a far more hospitable environment and topography, continued to reside close to the Atlantic seaboard well into the eighteenth century.\(^{51}\) The Spanish, following the Roman tradition, saw urban life as a symbol of empire, as well as envisioning cities as communities of citizens rather than a physical grouping of buildings.\(^ {52}\) One of the places where the vecinos, or householders, of a town could come together in community life was in the corrales de comedias of New Spain. The English in Virginia essentially abandoned living in communities and the colonists in New England lived in small towns or villages that could not compare to the large, rectilinear cities of Spanish America with their theaters and monumental and religious buildings.\(^ {53}\)

\(^{51}\) See Elliott, p. 36.


\(^{53}\) Elliott, pp. 41-43.
The first documented occurrence of a performance of a play in the British North American colonies took place in 1665 in Accomack County, Virginia. The reason that this performance was recorded was because someone in the audience objected to the content of the play, *The Bare and the Cubb*, and the court ordered the actors, William Darby, Cornelius Watkinson, and Philip Howard, to appear before it in costume and recite some of their lines.\(^54\) Although the court decided against the complainant, Edward Martin, no one sought to build a theater in the British North American colonies until 1716. Then William Levingston, a merchant in Williamsburg, Virginia, contracted with Charles and Mary Stagg to build a playhouse, provide it with actors, and act and direct in exchange for half the profits. They also had to bear half the expense.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, southern colonists had more opportunities to enjoy entertainment. Both South Carolinians and Virginians attended plays and saw the occasional tumbler or automaton, which were self-operating moving machines. Merchants and artisans in towns and members of the southern gentry, like Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, often comprised a large portion of the audience during the eighteenth century.\(^55\) The urban centers of the mid-Atlantic region, such as New York and Philadelphia, also became places where commercial drama could be seen on a regular, although not a daily basis, during the decades immediately before and after the American Revolution.

\(^{54}\) Odai Johnson cites this instance, which he terms “an unfortunate opening of American theatre studies” in *Absence and Memory in Colonial American Theatre: Fiorelli’s Plaster* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), p. 5.

The composition and reactions of early modern audiences, whether in seventeenth century Puebla or Revolutionary Maryland, are difficult to ascertain because the evidence for such issues is especially scarce in the surviving records. This is so even though commercial theater had a firm foundation in Mexico City by the early 1600s. What can be discerned is that the content of most plays had been examined by Inquisition censors in Spain to make sure that they met certain standards, especially in regards to religious orthodoxy. *Comedias* that had been written in Mexico went through a similar process in New Spain. However, some plays managed to get performed without being particularly orthodox. This was the case in 1600, when a play was performed without being reviewed by the censors beforehand. The Inquisition arrested, tortured with rope and rack, and turned Antonio Lopez, a singer and actor, over to the secular authorities to be burnt at the stake for “being under the suspicion of judaizing.”

The consequence of this incident was the 1601 ruling that all plays had to be reviewed by the censors of the Mexican tribunal of the Inquisition before being performed. Yet, it would seem that occasionally plays still escaped the eyes of critical censors. Usigli pointed out another instance of so-called judaizing theater. In 1649 the author of a *comedia*, entitled *Al fin se canta la gloria*, was burnt at the stake in the Volador plaza, near the main plaza of Mexico City, because the play’s main character was a Jew and this constituted a capital offence.

Although there is a paucity of evidence for the *corrales de comedias* serving as the sites for rioting, subversion, and other unseemly and disruptive behavior that they were in Madrid or Seville, Mexican authorities at the municipal level clearly realized that

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56 Rocamora, p. 306.
57 Usigli, p. 49. Usigli also observed that, unfortunately, the Inquisition records pertaining to this particular instance had been lost during the nineteenth century.
the theaters could be a venue for disorder. For this reason, they frequently appointed and paid an annual salary to a person who had the duties of patrolling the *corrales de comedias* and making sure that the council’s box remained locked at all times when a member of the municipal government was not actually in the box, watching a performance. They also appointed a doorman, Antonio Gonzalez, to take care of the box’s cleanliness, decoration, and ornamentation in return for the payment of 24 pesos each year.\(^{58}\)

Another issue that must be taken into account is the frequency and quantity of Spanish comedias that crossed the Atlantic in print form and served as a basis for both a play-reading and play-going public in Mexico. And the number of these increased significantly after the turn of the century. Records from the Archivo General de Indias demonstrate that the dramatic works of Juan de la Cueva, Lope de Vega, Francisco Tárrega, Tirso de Molina, Juan Pérez de Montalbán and Pedro Calderón de la Barca were all shipped to Veracruz, and from there they passed on to the bookshops and colonists of cities in New Spain, such as Mexico City and Puebla.\(^{59}\) In the hands of the reader, these plays provided entertainment in a far less bulky form than the chivalric novels that had been so popular during the sixteenth century in the colonies. In the hands of autores, they provided material for dramatic performance in the *corrales de comedias*.

The performance of these plays in the commercial theaters of New Spain no doubt allowed colonists to feel a connection with the court and capital back in Castile.

Although the records do not frequently indicate which plays were performed in Mexico

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\(^{58}\) ADF, Actas del Cabildo de Mexico, impress, Vol. 659a, p. 107, 9 iv 1627.

City and Puebla, the role of the Inquisition as censor and the legislation passed regarding the performance of comedias provides evidence of a commercial theater that thrived primarily on imported plays from Spain but that also supplemented its repertoire with ones written in Mexico. The comedias of Spanish playwrights with their typical love triangles provided entertainment without a doubt, but they also provided colonists living in Mexico with a link to Iberia. Scattered with bits of news and gossip, the comedias of Spain served to promote a sense of Spanish identity. In the colonies, these plays were luxury goods sent from the metropole and consumed in the colonial periphery. The plays written in Mexico for performance there made reference to current events, such as the arrival of new viceroyos and the greed of tax collectors, and could seek to influence public opinion on particular matters.

Likewise playwrights could occasionally seek to influence public opinion about and perceptions of the colonies in the metropole of Castile. This was certainly the case with Alarcón. Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza was born a creole in New Spain in the early 1580s, the son of a superintendent of the mines in Real Taxco, a silver mining town 100 miles southwest of Mexico City. Alarcón was small, redheaded, and hunchbacked—all characteristics that brought him the scorn and ridicule of others. In 1600 he travelled to Spain and began his studies at the University of Salamanca. After studying law there, he practiced law in Seville for a few years, before returning to New Spain and receiving his M.A. from the University of Mexico in 1609. In 1611 he returned to Spain and began seeking a court appointment. Frustrated in his efforts, he began to write

60 When he died his one published death notice, published in August of 1639 by José de Pellicer y Tovar, claimed that “Murió don Juan de Alarcón, poeta famosa así por sus comedias como por sus corcovas.” Cited in Antonio Castro Leal in Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, su vida y su obra (Mexico: Ediciones Cuadernos Americanos, 1943), p. 29.
comedias for the commercial theater of Madrid until he finally received a permanent appointment to the Council of the Indies in 1626. At this point, he stopped writing for the theater.

Although he had a much shorter career than and was not as prolific nor as popular as his rival Lope de Vega, Alarcón was an influential playwright of the Golden Age. His drama La verdad sospechosa was the model for Molière’s Le menteur, which many consider the first great play in modern French. The main character of La verdad sospechosa, the mendacious Don García, fabricates at one point in the play’s action an identity as an indiano, recently returned to Madrid from the New World. As a creole Alarcón was able to supply his character with tales of the New World that were just as convincing as the many other duplicitous tales that Don García weaves throughout the course of the play, such as the description of the banquet that he was not actually present at but claims to have given to the romantic interest of his rival, Don Juan, just for the sake of duping Juan.⁶¹ The suspicious truth at the crux of the play is not only Alarcón’s condemnation of dishonesty but also of self-aggrandizement.

Thought to be one of Alarcón’s first plays El semejante a si mismo, probably written between 1611 and 1616 and first published in 1628, is for the most part a typical comedia with a love triangle and the ensuing high-jinx that playwrights tended to connect with said love triangles.⁶² However, it is the only one of Alarcón’s plays that specifically

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⁶² Early critics of the play claimed that it lacked structural coherence and was therefore one of Alarcón’s first efforts at writing a comedia. Some have even suggested that Alarcón penned this comedia while still in Mexico. See Alfred Coester, The Literary History of Spanish America (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1921).
mentions an event in New Spain.\textsuperscript{63} One moment in this first act of this play demonstrates Alarcón’s wider understanding of the Spanish empire, as a well-educated, well-traveled, yet frustrated criollo: he suddenly interrupted the developing action to have one of the characters describe the flood of Mexico City in 1607 and its major public works project, the desagüe.\textsuperscript{64} As the first act opens, Don Juan and Don Leonardo and the servant/comic relief, Sancho, are in Seville, remarking rather cattily on the people that they observe gathering together. Then suddenly a moment of disjunction occurs in the play. Don Leonardo mentions the desagüe in Mexico. Sancho, playing the part of the ignorant gracioso responds, “speak orthodox sir.”\textsuperscript{65} After which Leonardo launches into a lengthy description of “Mexico the celebrated head of the world of the Indies that they call New Spain.”\textsuperscript{66} Don Leonardo knows of Mexico’s valley and lake. Interestingly, he claims that the flood occurred, not in 1607, but in 1605, when the water entered up to the houses. Leonardo and his creator praise the viceroy Velasco for beginning the project of the desagüe, “after a thousand consultations with learned and elderly people.”\textsuperscript{67} Of course, Leonardo’s claim that the desagüe would bring eternal peace to the colony and eternal fame to its engineer was not exactly true. And the playwright had to have known that the desagüe – once impressive – had not been enlarged after the flood of 1607 and was

\textsuperscript{63} I am grateful to Gladys Robalino, a specialist on Alarcón, for this piece of information.

\textsuperscript{64} It has even been suggested that Alarcón met the engineer who designed the desagüe. See Valerie L. Mathes, “Enrico Martinez of New Spain,” \textit{The Americas}, Vol. 33, No. 1, (Jul. 1976): pp. 62-77. This, however, seems unlikely since Martinez sailed to New Spain in 1598 – before Alarcón had left for Spain to begin his education.

\textsuperscript{65} In the original this reads, “\textit{Hable christiano señor.” To speak “christiano” also can connote to speak Spanish.


falling increasingly into disrepair, at the time that he wrote *El semejante a si mismo.*

Certainly, he hoped that Leonardo’s glorious description of the drainage ditch, which had cost “100,000 ducats each year” and Sancho’s incredulity would demonstrate this irony to well-informed audience members and remind more ignorant audience members of Spain’s imperial realms and perhaps her obligations.68

The play has further, albeit more tenuous, connections with the New World, although not with Mexico. During the comic twist of events, Don Juan’s father decides to send him to Lima in order to collect an inheritance. However, Juan has no desire to leave his beloved, Ana. Instead he contrives to send Leonardo in his place and with all of his documents. In an act of double deceit, Juan then fakes his departure for the New World and returns home to Salamanca posing as his cousin, Diego.

Alarcón was not the only playwright to write about Mexico. In fact, many who were not born in the colonies themselves felt a greater freedom to write about the New World. Many playwrights made mention of the New World, including Alarcón’s most famous contemporary and rival playwright, Lope de Vega. The best known of Lope’s plays about the Americas was – and still is – *El mundo nuevo descubierto por Cristóbal Colón.*69 Likely written between 1598 and 1603, this *comedia* dealt with a group of outsiders who were even farther outside the natural early modern Spanish social order than Moors, *moriscos, conversos,* gypsies, or cross-dressed women.70 Lope’s Columbus begins his adventures in the Portuguese court of John III, who laughs in Columbus’s face,

68 Ibid. The original reads, “cada año cien mil ducados.”
69 This *comedia* has been published many times, not only during the seventeenth century, but into the modern era. Numerous bilingual editions exist and it was performed at the International Theater Festival in Almagro in 1992, on the 500 year anniversary of Columbus’s “discovery” of the New World.
when the adventurer claims, “I will go to the New World that will give Portugal tribute for your glory and increase.” Columbus, as Lope portrayed him, already knew of the existence of the Americas; he was not merely on his way to Asia. The explorer then journeys to Spain to consult with the Catholic monarchs, who are still besieging the Moors, who were led by el Rey Chico, in Granada. Once the magnanimous monarchs are victorious they, being ever so wise and just, send Columbus on his way to this New World.

It is not until the second act of *El mundo nuevo* that Lope’s Columbus arrives in the Americas. With his men on the verge of mutiny, the action suddenly shifts to the Indians’ leader, Dulcanquellín, who has just raided his enemies and taken Tacuana, whom he wishes to wed, as a captive. While these inhabitants of the New World have strange gods, they speak the same way that Spanish galants and ladies do in Lope’s comedias rather than like Moors or foresteros. Thus, Lope, without ever having stepped foot on American soil, established in this comedia that Columbus – with the help of the characters, La Providencia, La Imaginación, and La Religión Cristiana, and the foils La Idolatria and Un Demonio – had incorporated the New World and its inhabitants physically into the realms of Spain, spiritually into the folds of Christianity, and ideologically into subjects of the empire in the eyes of his seventeenth-century audience even as they remained exotically “other” in appearance and place.

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Lope also wrote a play entitled *La conquista de México* or *La conquista de Cortés* that was lost during the early modern period. However, he portrayed Cortés in yet another play, *La mayor desgracia de Carlos V y hechicerias de Argel*. In this *comedia*, Lope depicted Cortés as a defender of the valor of the Aztecs, with the particular interest of promoting his own valor and the difficulty of the conquest that he had undertaken. Such a portrayal also simultaneously depicted the Aztecs as alien others and a new group that would be symbolically if not politically incorporated into the developing idea of Spanish imperial identity.

Certain ideas about the New World and even about Mexico City entered into the public lexicon through the arrival of news and people and the performance of *comedias*. Ideas about what it meant to be a Spaniard were reinforced by the institutions of entertainment, public health, and charity in the far-flung cities of the empire: Mexico City and Puebla, as well as in Lima and Cuzco. The urban spaces of the Spanish empire fostered these centrally located institutions where Spanish colonists could both feel their imperial identity and a sense of local pride. However, the theater was not popular with everyone, including some church, city, and royal authorities, and opposition to the theater if backed by governmental power could close the doors of the playhouses.

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Chapter 5: “The Plague of the Republic:”  
Antitheatrical Sentiment and Legislation in Spain and England

During the first half of the seventeenth century, theaters and performed drama played a large role in the cultural and public life of Spanish cities and those of Spain’s colonies. Theatricality and commercial theater were particularly characteristic of capital cities, such as Madrid and London. Madrileños flocked to the Corral de la Cruz, the Corral del Príncipe, or in the 1640s to the new playhouse at the Buen Retiro to see the latest plays by Tirso de Molina, Calderón, or Lope de Vega. The Spanish king, Philip IV, sired an illegitimate son with the famous actress, Maria Calderón. ¹ Playgoers in London also had their choice of theaters, including new commercial theaters, such as the Cockpit, which was renamed The Phoenix in 1617 after being repaired after a fire, and Salisbury Court, which opened in the late 1620s, in order to satiate their appetites for amusement. Sometimes Londoners went to the playhouse in such numbers that their coaches choked off the streets near Blackfriars, creating the early modern equivalent of a traffic jam. Courts masques were frequently staged for Queens Mariana de Austria of Spain and Henrietta Maria of England.

¹ Maria Calderón was no relation of the famous playwright, Pedro Calderón de la Barca.
Along with the approbation, though, came opposition to the performance of public drama. This was a sentiment that could be termed antitheatricality.\footnote{1} During the 1630s and 1640s, governments throughout Western Europe issued bans on public theater that closed the doors of playhouses in Madrid, London, Dublin, Paris, and Amsterdam. Widespread crises in agriculture and the economy compounded by political and social upheaval created revolutionary situations across Western Europe. This opposition usually had a religious foundation, and opponents of the stage objected to the performance of plays far more than they did to drama as a literary genre. It is tempting to blame the long-term bans on performed drama that occurred in both Spain and England in the 1640s on this sentiment, and the closure of the theaters in Madrid and London can to some degree serve as measures of the success of this opposition. However, the playhouses of neither of these two cities were closed by antitheatrical sentiment alone. Particular, contingent events gave meaning and focus to antitheatricalism and led authorities to shut the doors of the theaters in the 1640s, and Spanish and English antitheatricality had different audiences and differing levels of influence.

This chapter examines the nature and impact of polemics against the theater within the context of tradition, particular cases of censorship, rebellion, civil war, threats to succession, and a great foreboding sense of decline and crisis in the Spanish and English realms. It focuses especially on events in the capital cities of Madrid and London. While in both Spain and England antitheatricalism made many similar arguments and had more influence in the wake of the events of political crisis in their respective realms,

\footnote{1 In this chapter I use the terms “antitheatricality” and “antitheatricalism” interchangeably. Antitheatrical polemicists typically objected to the sinful nature of performance. In their view, to perform was akin to lying because it was representing something that the performer was not.}
polemicists sought different kinds of audiences in these two countries and the composition of these audiences played a large part in determining their differing responses to performed drama and the arguments made against it. This was partly due in the case of Spain to the symbiotic, yet uneasy, relationship between the theaters and public health.

The 1640s were not good years for the Spanish corrales de comedias. During this decade Philip IV and The Council of Castile, Castile’s highest governing court which was responsible for domestic government in Castile, faced the catastrophes of revolts in Portugal and in Catalonia, and of deaths in the royal family. The Spanish government responded by closing the corrales de comedias. Indeed, they did it twice. Upon the death of Philip’s queen, Isabel de Bourbon, in 1644 the Council of Castile submitted a Consulta, which recommended the indefinite closure of the corrales and gave advice for reforming them, should they be reopened. Their suggestions included limiting the number of acting troupes to six or eight, that “the plays be confined to subjects that provide a good example, based on exemplary lives and deaths,” a series of regulations about costumes and dancing, and the requirement that no plays be performed without the issuance of a license from the Comisario del Consejo, or Commissioner of the Council.² This initial closure was quickly overturned, but the Spanish banned theater again in Castile and Aragon in March of 1646. To close the public theaters for a brief period under the circumstances of royal mourning or outbreak of disease was normal, and had occurred in the past, such as in 1597-98, when first an infanta and then Philip II died, but

² Don Emilio Cotarelo y Mori, Bibliografía de las controversias sobre la licitud del teatro en España, (Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional, 1904), pp. 164-165. The original reads, “las comedias se reduxesen á materias de buen exemplo, formándose de vidas y muertes exemplars....”
to keep them closed for five years, especially when the Spanish theaters had been thriving for decades, was not and indicates larger political and cultural concerns with the place of the stage.

The Spanish were not alone in closing their theaters during the 1640s. A great deal of scholarly research has focused on the closing of the London theaters in 1642. In the spring of 1640, as the acting company, the Beeston’s Boys, performed plays at the Cockpit, London began to experience even more polarized political activity than was normal. John Venn wrote a letter to his friend, John Winthrop, Governor of Massachusetts, informing him that “God hath called a parliament how long it will continue we are not worthy to know, nor what it will bring forth...” This parliament, known as the Short Parliament, did not sit long, but its closure by Charles I brought the problems of the kingdom into clear view: the unpopularity of the war against the Scots, the feelings of resentment against Charles’s advisers, and the depletion of the treasury. What would become known as the Long Parliament was called on November 3, 1640, and it began the work of constitutional change and reform. This reform was to have a profound effect on public drama.

In response to numerous political crises, such as the outbreak of civil war in Ireland, discussed previously, on September 2, 1642 the English Long Parliament issued

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a proclamation that banned theatrical performances, closed the playhouses of London, and claimed that “Publike Sports do not well agree with Publike Calamities, nor Publike Stage-playes with the Seasons of Humiliation.” Many parliamentarians probably meant the ban to be temporary, but this initial ban gave the anti-theatrical Puritan polemicists what they wanted. The 1642 proclamation was furthered by a second one on February 11, 1647/48 that repeated the ban on stage-plays and proclaimed that “all Stage-players and Players of Interludes and common Playes, are hereby declared to be, and are, and shall be taken to be Rogues….” For eighteen years the doors of the public playhouses remained closed in statute, if not always in reality.

I. Antitheatrical Antecedents

When the Council of Castile and the Long Parliament respectively closed the theaters in the 1640s, they were both to some degree participating in a well-established tradition of opposition to the theater. In spite of the popularity of the early modern commercial theaters of England and Spain, antitheatrical sentiment was still pervasive among both Catholic and Protestant clergy and civil authorities in early modern Europe.

Western antitheatricality originated in Ancient Greece, following the development of performed drama in the poleis. In Europe opposition to the theater has proved to be a durable sentiment. Controversies over the representation of plays occurred in Athens and the Roman Republic and Empire and continued to transpire throughout modern times in

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both the West and the East. Philosophers and political thinkers have voiced their concerns about the meanings and consequences of theatrical representation. In some European countries, such as Spain and France, actors and actresses could be denied Christian burials until film revolutionized the way people viewed their profession. In theory the Catholic Church denied Spanish actors and actresses Christian burial, although this seems to have rarely been practiced. Antitheatrical sentiment existed elsewhere, too. In China, before the Communist Revolution, actresses came from the class of prostitutes and actors of both sexes could be given by their owners as gifts. In 2006 Islamic militants in Mogadishu, Somalia raided cinemas and condemned them as ungodly places.

In Western Europe the Greek philosopher Plato was the first to put his antitheatrical prejudice into writings that survived. He viewed imitation – or representation – as formative. He claimed that people tend to become what they imitate, and that this was nearly always a bad thing. In The Republic he argued that the theater could function as a school for spectators, but it inspired lawlessness when poets turned to vulgar innovation, as usually happened when they wrote to entertain rather than to educate. Plato saw mimesis or the representation of nature in art, as potentially preventing man from his pursuit of Good. He disliked the mimicry in drama because it was false. Plato saw no difference between the imitation of performance and the malice of lies. Like the shadows on the walls of his allegorical cave, mimicry obscured the perception of the presence of Good. The Greek theater was in Plato’s mind partially to blame for the corruption and downfall of the Athenian polis. In spite of Aristotle’s

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critique of his stance on performance, Plato’s opinions became the foundation for opposition to the theater in the West for over two thousand years.\(^7\)

Another foundation for opposition to theater in early modern Europe was Christianity, particularly the body of writings of early Church fathers. Opponents of the theater looked back to the writings of Salvianus, one of St. Augustine’s disciples, for condemnation of the playhouse. Salvianus had claimed that theater’s evil besmirched not only the players, but the spectators as well. He accused the Romans of not being cured of their addiction to spectacle even by the waves of barbarian invasions. His work was translated into English by Anthony Munday in the late sixteenth century and entered into the growing print culture of early modern Europe.

Munday also added his own sentiments, calling the “co-authored” work *A Second and third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theatres*. Munday stated his agenda in his preface: he had included both so that “one of them might showe the abomination of the Theatres in the time present, and the other how odious they have seemed to the godlie in time past, and both allure thee utterlie to forbid them, if thou be a Magistrate of power, and to auoide them more than anie pestilence, be thou whossoever.”\(^8\)

Munday used his translation of Salvianus to reinforce his own argument, which was that the theater was “but the drifts of Satan, which he vseth to blind our eies withal, the more easily to carie us from the obedience of GOD.” A reading of *A Second and third Blast* indicates that while Munday hoped to get rid of the theater entirely, he was enough of a realist to urge reform first. He especially wanted a ban on the performances that took

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place on the Sabbath. He also warned against the complacency with which people listened to the arguments made by his foes, the proponents of the stage, who argued that the tradition of performed drama had its basis in the classical world. In the Third Blast the opponent of the theater cautioned that “the custome of euil is not to be maintained because of antiquitie.”

While Munday got his wish for a ban on Sunday performances through the workings of a Royal Proclamation in May of 1603, his greater hope would take much longer. In fact, it would take so much longer that Munday no longer hoped for it. After 1580, Munday’s sentiments seemingly changed, and he took advantage of the connections between theater and print culture in another way. He began to write plays for performance, mainly for the Admiral’s Men, the acting troupe patronized by and named for the Earl of Nottingham, the Lord Admiral of England, and made famous by their leading actor, the longtime star Edward Alleyn. One such play was Sir Tomas More, which was later revised by Thomas Haywood, Thomas Dekker, and possibly William Shakespeare. Munday also wrote a popular tragedy about Robin Hood, The Death of Robert, Earle of Huntington, which the Admiral’s Men performed and William Leake published in 1601.

Despite Munday’s change of heart about performed drama and the absence of any new polemics opposing the stage, English antitheatrical sentiment lingered past the turn of the century, and it was gaining a new momentum in the 1630s, just as the theaters had attained a wide acceptance and following. Some seventeen theaters had been constructed

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9 Ibid, pp. 86-87 and 119.
in London since the 1560s, although not all remained open for the entire period, and playgoers showed no signs of losing interest. These developments may have given a sense of desperation to opponents of the theater. Certainly there is a sense of urgency and uncontrollable rage in *Histrio-Mastix*, the most infamous, religiously motivated diatribe against the early modern theater, written by William Prynne. Finally published in 1633, the tract contained so much invective that it took him almost a decade to write it, and he needed two volumes to adequately lay out the evil of the theater.¹¹

Prynne, a puritanical and Calvinist-leaning polemicist, argued in “The Epistle Dedicatory” of *Histrio-Mastix* that his book had to be long. It had to counterbalance the bulk of “Players, Play-bookes, Play-haunters, and Play-houses still increasing” in seventeenth-century London much to his annoyance. Prynne found a particular source of irritation in the remodeling of The Fortune and The Red Bull theaters and in the building of the latest London theater, the Salisbury Court playhouse at Whitefriars. These construction projects met with Prynne’s ire and dismay because “even in vitious Nero his raigne there were but (b) three standing Theatres in Pagan Rome.” The polemicist pronounced play-going as one of the most “unlawful of pastimes,” and in holding this opinion, he knew he was not alone. Not only do his footnotes and marginal annotations acknowledge his indebtedness to his predecessors, he claimed in “The Epistle Dedicatory” of *Histrio-Mastix* that such pastimes had been: “condemned in all ages, all places, not onely by (f) councels, (g) Fathers, (h) Divines, (i) Civilians, (k) Canonists, (l) Politicians, and (m) other Christian writers, by (n) divers Pagan Authors of all sorts, and

by (o) Mahomet himself; but likewise by (p) Sundry Heathen… and by the (q) Statues of our Kingdome….”

It is apparent that Prynne had no problem in finding antitheatrical sources. In spite of – and in some cases because of – his own spiritual proclivities, he used the works of the Apostles, the works of Catholic popes and bishops, and the works of heathen philosophers to give his polemic a historical foundation. He found the stage as great an enemy as the writings of Catholics or pagans. Prynne was willing to use any source that fit his model in his personal battle with the playhouse, and these sources included “the very best of Pagans.”

Rather than wringing his hands over the pagan origins of the ancient theater for a thousand pages, Prynne focused on what he considered more pressing problems posed by the playhouse. For instance, he found the idolatrous and formative nature of the early modern theater disturbing. Although this idolatry had connections to paganism and the remainders of pagan practices in the early modern era, he was mainly concerned that contemporary stage plays would bring back popery. This fear of the use of imagery and the superstitions associated with them resonated with his other concerns about representation. Another issue Prynne had with the theaters, those “sugured poysoned potions of the Divell,” was the formative nature of performance. Prynne attacked the stage for the types of representations that took place on it. On the stage, players acted out numerous sins, like rape and murder. According to Prynne’s line of thought, these actions could be and usually were imitated by those who saw them repeatedly acted out,

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12 Prynne, “The Epistle Dedicatory,” pp. 1-4. I have maintained Prynne’s spelling and capitalization to demonstrate its effect.
13 Prynne, “To the Christian Reader,” p. 3.
14 Ibid.
but even if they were not so corrupting, such representations of sins on stage should cause Christians to “feare and tremble.”\textsuperscript{15} He saw performed drama as capable of swaying an audience into bad belief and bad behavior.

Representation’s unstable, and thus evil, nature was compounded for Prynne by one particular practice of playing in early modern England: transvestitism. By the time that Prynne wrote his polemic, the composition of English acting companies was unique in Europe. The Renaissance stages of France, Italy, and Spain provided employment for actresses, but on the English (and Dutch) stages, boy apprentices played the female roles until the middle of the seventeenth century. From \textit{Histrio-Mastix} it is clear that Prynne perceived that boys playing women was more than trouble. He saw such acting as dangerous. Indeed, according to the polemicist, a man clothing himself in women’s attire violated scripture. It was abominable because it aroused “filthy lusts, both in the Actors and Spectators … [and] likewise instigates them to selfe-pollution … and to that unnaturall Sodomiticall sinne of uncleanness.” Likewise, the practice of boys dressing like women and dancing with other men on the stage disgusted Prynne.\textsuperscript{16}

However much Prynne despised transvestitism on the stage, he considered the act of women performing in plays just as abominable. Prynne contended that female performance represented “temptation to whoredome, and adultery.” For the polemicist, male-actors dressed as females and female-actors were “both intolerable, neither of them laudable or necessary; therefore both of them to be abandoned.”\textsuperscript{17} It does not seem that

\textsuperscript{15} Prynne, Part I,” pp. 88 and 90.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, pp. 208 and 220.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, pp. 215-216.
Prynne was capable of completely distinguishing between the problem of women’s presence at the playhouse and cross-dressing on the stage.

The author of Histrio-Mastix met with disfavor from the English monarchy because he went too far in his antitheatricality, especially in his opinions of women and the theater. Prynne also made the mistake of putting his prejudices in writing, submitting them to the scrutiny of both public and royal opinion. The royal government conveniently construed one of his many antitheatrical remarks, an insult to actresses, as directed towards Queen Henrietta Marie. The queen was a fan of drama, and she patronized playwrights and frequently played roles in the court masques written for her; she occasionally visited the public theaters. Indeed, eyewitness accounts suggest that she saw a play at the playhouse at Blackfriars approximately a year after Histrio-Mastix was published. The Star Chamber fined Prynne £5,000. The court sentenced him to imprisonment in the Tower of London, and cropped his ears. Prynne’s book was publicly burnt.

Polemicists such as Anthony Munday and William Prynne shared a set of general religious expectations and understandings that enhanced their hatred for the theater. Both men also voiced their prejudices within the framework of the developing print culture of early modern England. In spite of the danger of angering the court and the hindrance of censorship, both Munday and Prynne hoped to sway public opinion with their arguments. With the publication of his diatribe, Prynne hoped to correct the “popular erroneous good

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opinion which [his] wicked times [conceived] of Stage-plays." While the realities of illiteracy in the society they inhabited certainly circumscribed their spheres of influence, their arguments demonstrate that, if nothing else, these two men saw the theater as the immoral and all-too-public center of a dangerous debate between right and wrong taking place in the public realm.

Prynne’s polemic, published in the decade preceding the outbreak of civil war, was a printed appeal to public opinion that took the form of religiously motivated puritanical discourse. In *Histrio-Mastix*, Prynne announced his intentions. He addressed his readers, seeking their support in what was tantamount to a declaration of war:

“Players and Stageplaies with which I am now to combate in a publike Theatre in the view of sundry partiall Spectators, are grown of late so powerful, so prevalent in the affections…” In the opening pages of his polemic, Prynne cast himself in the role of the underdog. He painted himself as a mere mortal opposing a wicked institution. Like a street-preacher, he knew that his language would have to be dramatic in order to entertain reader page after page. The problem was that theater was also entertaining. Thus, almost in desperation, Prynne proceeded in the following several hundred pages to amass piece after piece of evidence about the evil of theater in a desperate attempt to retain his aforementioned spectators. He sought to counter every possible argument that could be made in defense of the theater, so that he “might satisfie every Reader to [his] power, and meete with all evasions.”

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19 Prynne, “The Epistle Dedicatory,” p. 3.
Since much of the language of English anti-theatricalism was couched in the terms of English Protestantism and sought to connect the evils of theater with those of so-called popery, one might expect that a staunchly Catholic country, such as Spain, would not produce a wealth of anti-theatrical polemicists. However, this was far from the case. Although Spanish anti-theatricality followed a different chronological pattern from its English counterpart, there were numerous Catholic opponents of the theater as well. In spite of the fact that Spain had never severed ties with the Catholic Church and therefore did not have the hysterical fear of a return to Roman “idolatry,” Spanish antitheatrical polemicists voiced many of the same concerns about theatrical practice that their Protestant foes did.

The most influential of these Spanish opponents of theater was the anti-Molinist Jesuit, Juan de Mariana. Mariana had a prolific career and wrote tracts on numerous subjects. Perhaps the most famous of these were his *Historia de rebus Hispaniae libri* and his *De rege et Regis insitutione*. His history, first published in 1592, earned him the nickname of “the Spanish Livy.” In *De rege et Regis insitutione* Mariana attacked absolutist government and even conceded that it was permissible to overthrow a tyrant by force. Little known outside of Spain before the assassination of King Henry IV of France in 1610, this work linked the name of Mariana and that of the Jesuits with the Monarchomachs, or opponents of absolute or tyrannical monarchs, from then on.21

However, these were not the only works that Mariana produced nor were they the only ones that brought his name and ideas into the realm of public opinion. In *De

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spectaculis, one of the seven treatises that comprised his Tractatus VII, published in 1609, he took up the issue of performed drama. Other treatises in Tractatus VII included De mutatione monetae, De die mortis Christi, and De morte et immortalitate libri tres. De spectaculis examined the legitimacy of numerous forms of public diversion.

Mariana’s tract took up the issues of not only theater and music, but also the circus, the running of bulls, bullfights, and prostitution. In the first chapter of his treatise on spectacles the famous Jesuit outlined the history of public spectacles, observing that, “spectacle is nothing but a publically instituted sport to delight the public....”22 As an anti-Molinist, Mariana distrusted those things which delighted the senses because they could mislead a man’s observations.23

Mariana, like Munday before him and Prynne after him, grounded his work in historical sources. To set up his definitions of the genres of entertainment, which he essentially divided into two types of spectacles – scenics and gymnastics – he drew on the works of the ancients, Tertulian, Casiodorus, Salvianus, and on and on the great Spanish author, San Isidoro. Mariana’s definition of scenics included comedies, tragedies, pantomimes, and all the other types of representational drama.

After establishing the types of public entertainments that the Roman Empire bequeathed to its successors, including the large empire of the Spanish Hapsburgs, Mariana turned to the way in which venues for entertainment had been constructed since antiquity. Having grounded his tract in history, Mariana then took up the more philosophical issue of “the delight of the senses.” In the worst-case scenario, which was

22 Juan de Mariana, Tratado contra los juegos públicos, ed. Jose Luis Suárez Garcia (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2004).
23 Molinists, named after the Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina, held that God knows everything that would happen even if he acted differently in addition to knowing everything that does happen and will happen.
the most frequent scenario that occurred, according to the Jesuit author, pleasures caused men to degenerate in their condition and nature. Since the senses could not be separated from the body, delights were “born of the flesh and to that same flesh they return.” The very nature of performed drama, with its reenactment of unbelievable things attracted and delighted an audience. Thus, the pleasure of spectacle trapped the entertained in a cycle of sinful appetite, stripping him little by little of reason and honesty. That is exactly why commercial drama was so dangerous in the minds of polemicists, such as Mariana.

Since mankind was naturally curious, the theaters of Spain, where not only beautiful boys but also attractive women performed on the stage, could influence not only the “the dishonest crowd, but also prudent and honest men.” The fact that actresses could and did appear on stage in either the costume of a man or a woman, Mariana feared, provoked wantonness and corruption in the hearts of susceptible men and women in the audiences of the corrales. Such corruption led to weakness; such weakness could lead to the downfall of Spain, to a kingdom in decline, stripped of her overseas colonies and vanquished by her enemies.

Mariana wrote his De spectaculis in Latin, and, although Mariana translated this work into Spanish, it was not printed in Spanish until the nineteenth century, when it was published as Tratado contra los juegos publicos. Mariana’s target audience was rather different from that of Prynne, who had written his tract in the vernacular. Mariana wrote

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24 Ibid, p. 137. The original reads, “nacidos de la carne [y] a ella misma se vuelven.”
26 Ibid, p. 143. The original reads, “muchedumbre deshonesta, sino de los hombres prudentes y modestos.”
for an audience that was smaller and more learned. The Jesuit hoped to influence an audience that held authority and influence, but one that seemed less likely to find so costly a fault as the Star Chamber did with William Prynne – or at least for his tract on entertainment.

By the time Mariana’s tract on theater was published, he had long been recognized as an authority in theological matters and had been made a synodial examiner, a counselor of the Spanish Inquisition, and a censor of all Scriptural works in the late 1570s. Then, suddenly in 1609, after the publication of *Tractatus VII*, the former adviser and familiar of the Inquisition, was arrested by that very institution, taken to a Franciscan convent in Madrid, and tried for multiple offenses related to his criticism of the fiscal policies of the crown. The final outcome of the trial is rather unclear, but after a year and a transfer of the case to Rome, the Inquisition released Mariana on the condition that his offenses and errors had to be corrected in any future editions of *Tractatus VII*. In the meantime, officials rounded up all the copies of the tract in question and removed *De mutatione monetae* in its entirety from them and covered up other pages with ink. Despite his hardships, Mariana, with his ears, if not his magnum opus, still completely intact, continued to hold the respect of his countrymen. He continued to publish, though less prolifically, over the next decade. Then, in 1621 Philip IV ordered a royal subsidy for a 1623 edition of Mariana’s *Historia*. The Spanish Livy died three years later at the age of eighty-eight.28

Juan de Mariana was not the only Spaniard who wrote antitheatrical tracts. Another opponent of the stage was the Catalan Juan Ferrer. Like Mariana, Ferrer was a

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28 Lewy, pp. 28-33.
member of the Society of Jesus. He joined the Society in 1574 and became a teacher of philosophy in Valencia and of theology in Barcelona. In 1613, his short tract about theaters, *Tradado de las Comedias en el qual se declara si son lícitas*, was approved by both the Church and the Society of Jesus. In his work, he gave a brief history of the *comedia*, described the infamy of the comic, urged that clergymen not go to the theaters, and affirmed that it was a sin to act in or to view a *comedia*. Ferrer thought that theater corrupted the men and women who went to performances. The Jesuit claimed that “[t]he viewing of plays is harmful, in as much as that which one watches influences [the audience] toward the vices of dishonesty or cruelty…. ” Ferrer warned that frequenting the *corrales* caused men to be distracted from work and even from their masculinity. Too much time in the *corrales* made men effeminate, easily conquered, good-for-nothings.

II. Charitable Hospitals, Melancholy Theater and Declinación

Although the charitable function of the playhouses of Spain weakened the arguments of the opponents of the Spanish stage, the very material presented on the stages provided much of the vocabulary for a diseased state in decline. As discussed in previous chapters, by helping to finance the hospitals, which made heroic efforts in assisting and caring for – if not always curing – the ill and the destitute, the theaters of Spain’s Atlantic Empire had created a space in which they became a part of daily life and influenced public opinion. Yet, theater and the state of public health were uneasy

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29 Cotarelo y Mori, p. 251. The original reads, “La vista de las comedias es dañosa, cuanto el que las mira se inclina a los vicios de deshonestidad o de crueldad...”
bedfellows in the early modern Spanish Atlantic world. The *corrales de comedias* could be and were places where diseases could be spread aided by the close proximity of the men standing in the central patio or the women seated in *cazuela*. While recognized as sites where plague could spread, it is unknowable how many other contagious illnesses spread from spectator to spectator in the inn-yard theaters. In an era of declining empire and general crisis, disease and death were constantly close, and while doctors could in some cases relieve the symptoms of diseases through bloodletting and had some knowledge of remedies, this was a time when doctors were just as likely to cause more harm than good. Although it is unfair to judge Spanish physicians living in the Golden Age by twenty-first-century standards, their contemporaries often judged them harshly.

Without a doubt, one of the legacies that medieval society left early modern Spaniards was the idea that physicians had certain social responsibilities to the republic, mainly that they should help to maintain overall good health throughout the polity. The inhabitants of Spanish cities viewed the preservation of good health as “a moral obligation on the part of the public authorities” at the royal or municipal levels.\(^\text{30}\) Due to this long-entrenched conception of medical practitioners’ obligations to the whole of Spanish society, it was not easy to become a licensed physician during the Spain’s Golden Age. As historian J.T. Lanning has observed, “[t]o the Spaniards, nothing was more relevant to public health than the proper education, examination, and licensing of doctors, the inspection of apothecary shops, the prevention of false or dangerous medical

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publications, the enforcement of quackery….”

Over the course of the sixteenth century, Spain had reduced the number of sanitary occupations that required the royal stamp of approval. However, many of them still required a license. These occupations included university-trained physicians, surgeons, blood-letters, barbers, apothecaries, bonesetters, hernia seters, tooth-pullers, and midwives.

In seventeenth-century Spain there were numerous requirements that physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries had to meet in order to obtain their licenses. To be a licensed physician, one needed a BA, four years of study to fulfill the bachelor’s in medicine, a two-year apprenticeship under a licensed physician, and to pass the examination administered by the protomedicato, a board of physicians, including the royal physicians, which constituted a sort of medical court and had first come into being in 1430. In 1617 Phillip III issued a pragmática that required a licensing board of three examiners. Without a license, doctors practiced medicine at the risk of receiving a fine of 6000 maravedies, a relatively small sum equivalent to approximately 175 loaves of bread or the same number of entrances into the corrales de comedias with a seat on the benches.

However, according to those who sought continued reform of the medical profession, it was not difficult to acquire a license if a physician merely spent the required time in university. Unfortunately, as reformers bemoaned, this was possible and occurred frequently because there were few filters for separating those with aptitude and skill from

32 See Jon Arriabalaga, “The Ideal Medical Practitioner in Counter-Reformation Castile: The Perception of the Converso Physician Henrique Jorge Henriques (c. 1555-1622)” in Medicine and Medical Ethics in Medieval and Early Modern, p. 66
those who just barely scraped by while studying for their medical degree. Of course, the problem of incompetent physicians was also compounded by the fact that there were quacks and frauds who were willing to take the chance that they might get caught in order to reap the pecuniary rewards of taking advantage of the public.

In spite of constant regulation, the civil authorities found the medical profession as difficult to control as they did the constantly regulated *corrales de comedias*. The issue of medical mayhem is evidenced by the frequent passage of legislation designed to suppress fraud and quackery. It is also evident that the Spanish system, for all the good it did for the poor through the charitable work of hospitals connected to *cofradías*, guilds, and playhouses, had a serious flaw. Spain relied on its doctors to give free care to the poor since they received good compensation by treating the rich, and many doctors clearly did not fulfill this obligation to society. The failure on the part of individual physicians fed into the ambiguity, suspicion, and even vitriol with which Golden Age Spanish society tended to view doctors and the medical profession.34 This position of ambiguity came to be reflected both in the vocabulary of the *comedia* and the treatment of doctors by numerous Spanish playwrights. It also found reverberations in the political vocabulary used to discuss the health of the state in the seventeenth century, and this political vocabulary of a corrupted or declining state mirrored many of the concerns of antitheatrical polemicists.

The ambivalence with which many regarded physicians was also in part a consequence of the fact that quacks and legitimately trained and licensed doctors alike

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34 See Lanning, pp. 135 and 265-266. While scarcity tended to grant surgeons more dignity, and phlebotomists, who constantly seemed to be in demand, got respect, physicians had a less than stellar reputation in the seventeenth century.
tended to use strange material items as part of their Galenic methods of treatment. These odd things, such as cow’s bladders, buzzard’s wattles, squab pigeons, puppies, earthworms, vipers, leeches, and bezoars, supplemented the treatments of bloodletting, applying poultices, and cleansing wounds with salves. A Golden Age physician might prescribe bloodletting to restore the balance of humors in the body of the patient or to counteract the effects of such an imbalance, during the course of their illnesses. Death as well as attempts to prevent or delay its arrival were part of the daily lives of early modern urban dwellers. So it is little wonder that medical metaphors and scientific imagery permeated the Golden Age dramas written and performed in the cities of Spain and her colonies.

Although the popularity of humeral theory in medical philosophy declined as the seventeenth century began to wane, during the sixteenth century and first half of the seventeenth century, the model of Galen and Hippocrates, somewhat modified and extended by medieval Islamic medical philosophers, such as Avicenna, continued to hold sway in early modern Spanish cities. According to humeral theory, sickness occurred when there was an imbalance in the four bodily humors: black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm. Bloodletting, emetics, and purgatives all aimed at restoring the balance by getting rid of the humor in surplus. Physicians also prescribed foods and herbs associated with particular humors to their ailing patients.

Calderón was one of numerous Renaissance dramatists to draw on humeral theory in order to create the psychology of his characters. According to Teresa Scott Soufas,

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35 Ben Johnson also wrote numerous “comedies of humours,” such as Every Man in His Humour, which popularized this genre. In these plays the characters had strong traits corresponding to the humors:
the playwright did just this in several of the comedias in which he featured wife-murderers. Numerous works on the four humors, particularly that of melancholy, abounded during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. “In popular thinking and in literary representation, the term melancholy thus came to denote a temperament, whether permanent or transient, influenced by the melancholy humor and characterized by fear and sadness, the so-called cold passions.” The authors of tracts on melancholy and their readers, including many Spanish physicians, associated it with mood swings and jealousy, fear, and suspicion. While Soufás notes that there is no direct evidence to suggest Calderón read these tracts, she argues that he was familiar with humeral theory and the connection that theorists made between melancholy and feelings of sadness. Without a doubt, this depressive mental disorder had long been established as a clinical syndrome by the seventeenth century.

The Calderonian tragedy El médico de su honra, set in medieval Seville, certainly features a melancholy wife-killer, Don Gutierre. As Soufás contends in an article about “Calderón’s ‘Melancholy Wife-Murderers,’” Don Gutierre has melancholic tendencies from the moment he enters the scene. In the pre-play action, he has already abandoned a woman, Leonor, because of exaggerated, jealous suspicions. He is unable to control his jealousy and his decision to cure his own honor, summed up by his statement, “Doctor of my honor, I call myself, since I seek to cure my dishonor; and so I have come to visit my

choleric, melancholic, sanguine, phlegmatic. These plays mark a trend toward imitating the works of antiquity -- a method that applied less to the structure of the Spanish comedia nueva initiated by Lope. However, it speaks to the general acceptance of and influence on general vocabulary of humeral theory in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Gutierre’s melancholic jealousy leads him to try to cure his honor by having his wife bled to death. It should come as no surprise that medical tracts directed physicians to bleed patients as a means of reducing the excess of the melancholic humor. Soufas has made the observation that “Gutierre has prescribed the cure for the wrong patient.” Rather than having his own imbalance of humors restored and getting treatment for melancholic disposition, he erroneously has his wife bled to death. Soufas also argues that other characters in the play exhibit melancholy, as well. Doña Mencía falls prey to the melancholic emotions of sadness and then fear. King Pedro finds himself plagued with fear, anxiety, and suspicion, so that he becomes an insomniac. The gracioso Coquín is initially a typically jolly buffoon, but over the course of the play becomes sadder and a hypochondriac, who starts to fear the loss of all of his teeth for failing to make King Pedro laugh.

That Calderón should have known a bit about humeral theory and have created a melancholic character is not surprising, as other Spanish playwrights also drew on general knowledge about melancholy. Tirso de Molina wrote a play called El melancólico, indicating that the clinical problem of melancholy had pervaded much of the drama and literature of the Golden Age. Of course the title character, the melancholic Rogerio, can be and is cured of his humeral imbalance when he is allowed to wed the woman that he truly loves, Leonisa, rather than his cousin Clemencia, whom his father initially wishes him to wed. Interestingly, as the typical love triangle plot unfolds and the usual double-crossing and high-jinx of the comedia ensue, Clemencia takes ill and

38 Pedro Calderón de la Barca, El médico de su honra (Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1989), p.162. The original reads, “Médico de mi honra/me llamo, pues procuro mi deshonra/curar; y así he venido/ a visitar mi enfermo.”
39 Soufas, p. 194.
requires the services of a bleeder. Rogerio’s father, the duke, informs the melancholic lover that he hopes that his son’s presence will restore Clemencia to health. However, just in case that fails, he also tells Rogerio that “Clemencia agrees to be bled, send for the barber-surgeon.” This errand actually allows Rogerio to get a message to Leonisa. It was also perhaps an unnecessary errand as Clemencia finds herself feeling much better as soon as she mistakenly thinks that Rogerio is jealous and thus actually cares for her. Even if her assumption is inaccurate, it would seem that Tirso diagnosed a great deal of his characters’ melancholic tendencies as related to problems in their love lives. The formulaic ending of comedias allowed the personages created by Golden Age dramatists a much better chance of being cured of their melancholic state than the members of their audience – though perhaps a happy ending provided a temporary kind of relief.

These plays suggest that many Spaniards, and indeed many other Europeans, including the English, felt melancholic during the seventeenth century, and their physicians seemed unable to provide lasting cures. Since even the most learned physicians and methodically scientific of doctors could err and almost kill their patients, the merely average doctor or one who practiced “little science” or had “little conscience” in Golden Age Madrid was likely to be viewed with ambiguity at best and as the butt of jokes and the target of vitriol at worst. In Tirso de Molina’s urban comedy, Don Gil de las calzas verdes, the gracioso, Caramanchel, does not mince words when describing the doctor that had previously employed him. While it should be noted that he saves plenty of vitriol for lawyers, as well as doctors, Caramanchel’s attack on the medical profession

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41 Tirso de Molina, Don Gil de las calzas verdes (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1990), p. 103.
comes first and is quite lengthy, and thus has an aspect of primacy. The bearded doctor, whom he had served, turned out to be a fraud, according to the buffoon, “because with four aphorisms, two texts, three syllogisms, he cured an entire street.”

Caramanchel’s experience with this doctor, particularly the fact that the doctor did not pay him well, led him to damn all Galenists, for the injury that they cause to society. In this case, Tirso de Molina, through the character of Caramanchel, suggests the unfortunate frequency with which Spaniards living in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries might have been preyed upon by quacks and frauds. This kind of deception, obscured by the doctors’ silver tongues, and in the case of Caramanchel’s very bearded doctor by his costume of respectability – his luxurious clothing, such as gloves encrusted with amber, silk, and perfectly sized, fancy shoes – created false diagnoses, ineffectual cures, and lined doctors’ pockets to buy more finery. In the bustling capital with a constant influx of new people, recently arrived nobles renting homes, and tremendous and haphazard growth, there was less risk of being exposed as a fraud in a city like Madrid or Seville than in a provincial town, such as Valladolid or Burgos.

Tirso’s rather scathing mockery of ill-intentioned practitioners of medicine probably did not extend to those doctors who truly cared for their patients, working as best they could to heal and cure the sick. The problem that faced madrileños and sevillanos who were wealthy enough to afford the services of a physician was distinguishing the former from the latter. And if the content of Golden Age plays are used to judge the difficulty with which some urban dwellers had in telling quacks and

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42 Ibid, p. 104. The original reads, “porque con cuatro aforismos, dos textos, tres silogismos, curaba una calle entera.”
doctors apart, it was a challenging task indeed. Caramanchel’s master had managed to swindle whole streets without risking more than the censure of his former servant.

The idea that physicians might be cons and liars came to be performed on the stages of the theaters that provided income for hospitals, which employed many physicians and other medical professionals, such as surgeons and phlebotomists. Several Golden Age comedias have plots that hinge on characters who impersonate a physician in order to further her or his own love interests or who impersonate a physician in order to act as a go-between for a master. Perhaps the most brilliant example of this is Tirso de Molina’s El amor médico. The play starts in Seville. The heroine Doña Jerónima provides a perfect example of the character type known as the mujer varonil and often dresses as a man, as well. She would rather study Latin and medicine than marry and has little interest in men. When her servant, Quiteria, asks her why she is interested in medicine, her response is “because I value health.”

Doña Jerónima’s lack of interest in marriage is soon overturned, even if her interest in medicine is not. She falls in love with Don Gaspar, whom she meets because he has fled Toledo to Seville with the intention of escaping to the Indies, because in the pre-play action he has had a love affair that went awry back in Toledo. Conveniently for Jerónima, news shortly arrives that sends her brother Gonzalo to fight the French and Gaspar leaves Seville for Portugal. Suddenly unencumbered by any male guardians, Jerónima follows Gaspar to Portugal and begins to disguise herself as a young doctor, who is “without the authority of a beard.” She calls

43 Tirso de Molina, El amor médico, Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, Acto I, http://213.0.4.19/servlet/SirveObras/07035074399669462977857/p0000001.htm#I_1_. The original reads, “porque estimo la salud....”
herself “el dotor Barbosa.”44 Jerónima seeks to follow her own advice: “In cases of love/ the doctor does not treat well/ if he doesn’t cure herself.”45

Another love triangle and more disguises and deceptions by the varonil follow to further complicate the plot. Jerónima continues to disguise herself as the male physician and also takes on another disguise as “Dr. Barbosa’s” sister, “Doña Marta de Barcelos.” The plot thickens thanks to Jerónima’s long hours of study and her natural talents. “Doctor Barbosa” impresses the ladies with “his” looks and bedside manner and the men with his medical knowledge and skills. “He” is so impressive that the Portuguese king makes him one of the court physicians. The play ends predictably, but with a slightly homoerotic twist and a few extra complications, as “Dr. Barbosa” proposes marriage to Don Gaspar. Gaspar is shocked until the good doctor reveals that he is not who he seems, but rather his sister “Marta” in disguise. In the final moment of the comedia, news arrives that Gonzalo has died in Pamplona, and Jerónima, now in control of her family’s estate in Seville, finally reveals her true identity. Gaspar agrees to marry Barbosa/Marta/Jerónima, and Jerónima sheds her varonil tendencies, conveniently claiming it was only love that made her become a doctor. Yet, doctor she had been in the course of the second and third acts, and a skilled one. In this case, the fraud perpetrated is connected to the doctor’s gender and her identity, not her skills as a physician.

One could also view this clever heroine of Tirso’s as another instance of the ambiguity with which Golden Age playwrights viewed the medical profession. Although she is clearly capable, intelligent, and well-read in the liberal arts and medical treatises,

44 Ibid, Acto II. The original describes her as “sin autoridad de barba.” Yet, her name is a pun on the word for beard.
45 Ibid, Acto I. The original reads, “En accidents de amor,/ no cura bien el dotor/que no cura para si....”
Jerónima is a fraud. She practices her medical craft without going through the proper licensing procedures. Admittedly, she does so in Portugal rather than in Spain, but the love doctor does heal the other characters of their illness and melancholy. Yet, predictably, as the play ends, Tirso encloses Jerónima in marriage and she leaves behind any thoughts of continuing to practice medicine as she sheds the identity of “Dr. Barbosa.”

As mentioned previously, the plot of Lope de Vega’s play, *El acero de Madrid*, hinges on the deception created by Lisardo’s servant posing as a physician who prescribed long walks and iron-water to the heroine, Belisa. It is this fraudulent diagnosis and prescription that enables Belisa and Lisardo to meet frequently and to engage in the pre-marital sexual activity that ultimately gives Belisa the power to prevent an unwanted marriage to another suitor. In fairness to Lope and the characters of this play, it should be noted that the deception is for the sake of love rather than for money. Clearly Lope was familiar with the supposed health benefits of iron-water, and some scholars of Golden Age drama have also suggested that the playwright recognized the tendency of elite ladies to consume clay to lighten their complexions, thus requiring them to be ordered by their physicians to take iron-water to counteract the clay’s effects.

Lope, Tirso, Calderón, and other Golden Age playwrights clearly could and did take part in a discourse that used medical metaphors in the public space of the theaters. They stereotyped both doctors and the frauds that pretended to be them. One has to wonder how many playgoers paused to wonder, while watching *Don Gil de las calzas*

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46 See below, pp. 229-231.
verdes, El amor médico, or El acero de Madrid, if they had been the victim of some fraud on the part of a physician or a quack.

Many Spanish writers linked the state of the polity and the state of the medical profession. Similarly, many viewed the health of Spain as troubled or “diseased.” J.H. Elliott has traced the ubiquitous presence of the medical metaphor in the sermons and arbitrios, or projects, of the first half of the seventeenth century. During the sixteenth century, Spain had grown accustomed to successes that supported the growth and entrenchment of a millenarian nationalism. However, the vulnerabilities of the last two decades of the sixteenth century and the continued declinación, or decline, of the seventeenth century produced a body of literature that claimed the similarities between the government and the human body made both prone to inevitable decline. That diseases of the government and of the body could be diagnosed and that the decline could be put on hold through the treatment of good government in the one case and good medicine in the other was a prominent theme of the arbitristas. This pervasive sense that the state had once been a healthy organism but had developed a wasting disease resulted in ideas for a treatment regimen that would purge the kingdom’s maladies and purify and regenerate the nation. Sumptuary laws, the expulsion of the moriscos, and anti-theatrical sentiment were all results of this Castilian reform movement.48 As part of the prescribed cure, brothels were shut down and “no licenses were granted for the printing of novels and plays because of their tendency to corrupt the manners of the young” from 1625 to

The corrales de comedias, however, remained open, for the time being, in spite of the efforts of anti-theatrical polemicists and reformers.

III. Censorship and Theatrical Crisis

Of course, many of the complaints of the antitheatrical polemicists were exaggerated and some of the concerns of opponents of the stage were addressed during the process that plays underwent in order to be licensed for performance in the theaters of London and the corrales de comedias of Madrid. In England the licensing of plays fell under the jurisdiction of the Master of the Revels, who could refuse to grant a license, grant a license, or grant one conditionally upon the removal of politically offensive or compromising parts of a play. The complicated relationship between the office of the Master of the Revels and the London acting companies was usually mutually beneficial, but at times it could be mutually compromising, as was the case in the above mentioned incident of A Game at Chess.

This was not the only time the Master of the Revels compromised himself through lax censorship, as a series of events that occurred between 1632 and 1634 demonstrate. Almost at the same time as the publication of Histrio-Mastix, the ensuing controversy and the Star Chamber’s ruling that cost Prynne his ears, the Master of the Revels, Sir Henry Herbert, faced the Court of High Commission, the highest ecclesiastical court, the Court of the Star Chamber, and Archbishop William Laud. In the second half of 1632, Herbert had begun to license non-dramatic texts for publication. The Star Chamber called him to

49 Elliott, p. 59
account for licensing John Donne’s *Paradoxes and Problems* because of its profane speech and supposed abuse of scripture. Within days of Herbert’s encounter with William Laud and the Star Chamber, he also had to deal with another licensing issue brought to the attention of the courts. In this instance, the Court of the High Commission, controlled by Laud, called the King’s Men, who had performed Ben Jonson’s *The Magnetic Lady* to answer for their profane speeches and abuse of Scripture. Herbert seems to have been lax in his licensing of this play, allowing profaneness into the public sphere of the theater. After this incident, Herbert became more consistent in his policing of obscenity and profanity, which scholar Richard Dutton argues is indicative of “the heightened religious tensions around the court and the dangers first signalled by *The Magnetic Lady* affair.”

The licensing system in Castile was even more complex than that of England in part because of the presence of the Inquisition and in part because plays had to be licensed separately for performance and for publication. In Spain the acting companies required a license in order to perform in the *corrales de comedias*, and each play required a license in order to be staged. Occasionally, plays with potentially subversive content received licenses and went on to be staged. However, because of the frequency of performances in the *corrales*, a politically objectionable play, such as Andrés de Claramonte’s *La estrella de Sevilla*, which, although set in medieval Seville, portrayed a king who was prey to his own passionate whims and a corrupt favorite, was likely to be

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put on only once or twice, and then abandoned for less explicitly politically problematic comedias.

Spanish plays were less likely to be censored if they were merely performed than if they were printed, or so claimed Lope de Vega. According to the Phoenix, he wrote plays quickly and to be performed rather than read. He did not write plays so that “the sounds of the theater would be transferred to the censorship of the private chambers.”51 Although no other Spanish playwright was as prolific as Lope, they all wrote plays quickly. The comedias they wrote then passed quickly by the eyes of the licensers and before the eyes of the Spanish audiences. Of course, this created an entirely different set of problems for Spanish playwrights. The popularity of a given comedia performed in the corrales usually dictated its initial entrance into print culture, and the playwright usually had little to do with the approval or oversight of these early publications. As scholar Ignacio Arellano observes, the popularity of Calderón’s comedias provoked “the appearance of frequent pirated editions originating in defective texts.”52 In the prologue to Parte XIII of his comedias, Lope de Vega had complained about two thieves, known as Memorilla and Gran Memoria, who could reproduce the texts of entire plays by memory simply by watching a single performance.53

This theft could occur because the theaters were a public space in these early modern cities. While there is limited direct evidence, it seems reasonable that performed plays both influenced and were judged by public opinion. The performances of drama

51 Quoted in José María Díez Borque, Sociedad y teatro en la España de Lope de Vega (Barcelona: A. Bosch, 1978), p. 262. The original reads, “los oídos del teatro se trasladen a la censura de los aposentos....”  
53 Similarly, Renaissance students had been trained to memorize and transcribe dialogues and plays. No doubt those trained in this manner had a greater capacity for retention.
that occurred on the stages of Madrid and London had the potential to sway onlookers’ opinions about diplomatic matters, medical practitioners, and even for and against the theaters or an acting troupe in more general terms. And so they did. In 1642 three of the seventeen public theaters built since the 1560s remained open. In addition, three of the six private theaters still operated right up to the September ban. In Madrid, the Cruz and the Principe remained centers of entertainment, even when the Coliseo of the newly-built Buen Retiro began to open its doors to a popular, as well as a courtly, audience. Theatrical activity seems to have been thriving in both capitals even in the wake of a general sense of decline.

Crisis changed this. Nine months before the September 1642 closure of the London theaters, parliamentarians began to debate what the course of action regarding performed drama should be. On January 26, 1642 Sir Edward Partridge made the motion that the Lord Chamberlain should move that Charles I suppress all stage performances. Partridge had served as a commissioner of sewers in Kent and Sussex prior to his election to parliament, and he kept a religious household. Although he attended conformist services, he was an observer of the puritan Sabbath and had worked with the nonconformist faction in Sandwich. In July of 1641, he had been knighted at Whitehall. Partridge encouraged the closure of the theaters because of the “times of calamity in Ireland and the distractions in this kingdom.” However, Mr. Edmund Waller, a wealthy poet who had many friends in Falkland’s literary circle, and Mr. John Pym,

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54 Possibly four, but the records collected by Wickham suggest that three certainly were still operating right up to the ban.
who had been involved in the loan resistance movement and in the agitation in calling for the parliament, opposed the motion. Waller and Pym claimed that it would hurt the trade of actors and playwrights. For the time being, the Long Parliament laid the motion aside, but the issue soon resurfaced. On the August 31, 1642 the Long Parliament, after celebrating a public fast and listening to two sermons, formulated the order that “all Stage Plays may be put down during this Time of Distractions.” One of these sermons, William Carter’s “Israel’s Peace with God,” was published by order of the House of Commons in 1642. With the sermon’s printing, Carter’s ideas emerged into an even larger public sphere. Carter claimed that “as for a day of Fast, it is the business of that day to make attonement.” He urged the members of the House of Commons that “all the preparations [they could] make, for that great work [they had] in hand, [was] the chiefe.” In the first part of his sermon, Carter drew implicit connections between his audience at the House of Commons and the ancient Israelites; he suggested that, like Israel, Revolutionary England must first through “teares and supplications” regain the favor of God in order to vanquish its enemies. Later in the sermon, Carter made the connection more explicit. He reminded his audience that “God hath put into your hands, a worke of his, the greatest that hath been on foot for God in these Islands…” This great work was the purification of religion, the purging of “Romish factours.” Success depended on the members of Parliament making their peace with God. Carter argued that

60 Ibid, p. 23.
the godly would get rid of their ornaments, and they would fast and pray. Although never mentioned explicitly in Carter’s sermon, theater was just such an ornament, just such a potential “Romish factour.” Two days after Carter’s sermon the order to ban public sport came before the Lords. The theaters closed.

However, the reality of the situation was not so simple. Even after the political and social upheaval that resulted in the legislation that closed the theaters, the London playhouses remained a site for different kinds of illicit entertainment and public activity as long as they remained standing. For example, in the two months before the second ordinance of 1647 there were two reports of performances in the London theaters. Such unlawful acting could be lucrative, but it could also be risky. The latter was the case in December of 1649 when soldiers seized some actors and took away their clothing and swords. A month later Parliamentary soldiers accosted another group of players at the Red Bull, hung their clothes on pikes, and marched them naked through London.

Additionally, lawful drama did not entirely disappear either. Although it certainly played a less significant role in public and cultural life in London, Susan Wiseman contends that the Civil War period produced drama of diverse political position and diverse form. Under the Protectorate, “reformed” drama and operas were performed. In 1653 the position of Master of the Revels was revived, and the government itself had Cupid and Death performed. Opera and the tragicomedy were also new means of dealing with the circumstances of the Interregnum and writers hoped to change the assumptions of censors and of audiences. William Davenant was even allowed to stage plays

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62 Wickham, p. 588.
commercially during the period. His put on his operas and plays at the Cockpit and the Rutland House between 1656 and 1659, and he used old foreign enemies, like the Spanish, and played on nationalism, to avoid politics too close to home.63

Meanwhile in Madrid, the situation developed differently, in large part due to the relationship between the corrales de comedias, the hospitals, and the municipal government, discussed above. The responses of the municipal and royal government are ambiguous at best, for all the strong language and attempts to heed the warnings of the antitheatrical doomsayers and believers in declinación. Much of this is due to one of the primary differences between the corrales de comedias in Spain and the theaters in other seventeenth-century European nations, such as England. Because of the symbiotic connection between commercial theater and city hospitals, government intervention was so regular, so routine, as to have become largely passé. In spite of the concerns of reformers, most of Spanish society supported and enjoyed the representations of comedias.

This symbiotic relationship meant that even an attempt by the government to take an antitheatrical stance would ultimately end in ambiguity, at best. King Philip IV, worn down by political and personal loss, truly believed that God was punishing him for his sins. For this reason, he did not immediately give into the pressure placed on the royal and municipal governments by the hospitals to reopen the corrales de comedias in the 1640s. However, the need for funds and the king’s own love of entertainment resulted in

63 In 1658 he staged The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru. See Susan Wiseman, Drama and Politics in the English Civil War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 137-164. Since England and Spain were at war in 1658 this anti-Spanish sentiment is not surprising.
a sequence of events that reopened and refurbished the Madrid theaters much more quickly than those of London.

After the brief closure of the theaters in 1644, on August 5, 1645, Philip IV issued a *Real Cédula* that ordered that every playgoer pay one quarter more than they had previously in order to aid the Hospital General and to help pay the expenses of the frontier hospitals and thus aid the soldiers, who were fighting to put down the revolts in Catalonia and Portugal. The increase in admission fee seems to have taken place a little over a month later on September 14, 1645, at least in the Corral de Principe. The accounts from 1645 indicate that the 1646 closure was certainly not looming in the minds of the people involved in the theater business, from the actors to the protectors of the hospitals to the people who sold sweets and water to *comedia* viewers.\(^6^4\)

Still troubled by financial problems, foreign wars, rebellious subjects, and meddling ministers, it is not particularly surprising that the monarch felt abandoned by God. In a letter written on March 7, 1646 to his confidante and one of his spiritual advisers, Sor María de Agreda, the king declared, “I clearly see that my sins, and the least of them, deserve more punishment....”\(^6^5\) In order to avoid further sinful behavior, he claimed that he had truly recognized the need to close the theaters. Sor María expressed her gratitude in no uncertain terms. “Very poor and weak am I, but my gratitude extends beyond my strength....”\(^6^6\) On March 28, 1646 Sor María’s gratitude was rewarded with

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\(^6^4\) AMM, Sección 2, Legajo 468, No. 12, 5 viii 1645.
\(^6^5\) Carlos Seco Serrano, ed., *Cartas de Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda*, in *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles: Epistolario Español*, Tomo IV, (Madrid 1958), pp. 52-53. The original reads, “[b]ien veo que mis pecados y el menor dellos, merecen más rigor....”
\(^6^6\) Ibid. The original reads, “Muy pobre y flaca soy, pero mi agradecimiento se extiende más que mis fuerzas....”
the Council of Castile’s recommendation that the performances of comedias be suspended indefinitely.

The death of Baltasar Carlos, the prince and heir of Philip IV, on October 9, 1646, certainly prolonged the closures of the Spanish corrales de comedias. Born in 1629 to Philip IV and his first wife Elizabeth Bourbon, the young Prince of Asturias and of Portugal had been the royal subject of a number of Velázquez paintings. His death left Spain and its Empire without a prince and heir, and Spaniards in a state of mourning. Funeral processions took place in both the Old and New World for the next several years, and numerous theologians dedicated sermons to the memory of the seventeen-year-old prince.

During that same year of 1646, in a move similar to that which the English would make a year later, the Spanish disbanded the compañías de la legua as rogues and criminals. Yet shortly thereafter, the king’s resolve began to crumble. At the end of 1647 he had masques performed at court to celebrate the birthday of his new wife, his niece, Mariana de Austria, and in 1648 he instructed the Council of Castile to reexamine the issue of the propriety of the theater closures. One of their concerns was the charitable work of the hospitals was suffering because of the closure of the theaters. The result was another recommendation by the council and further indecision on the part of the

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67 Some scholars have attributed the 1646 closure of the theater to the death of Baltasar Carlos. However, as his sudden death did not take place until seven months after the March ban, this is not a viable theory. Without a doubt, the loss of the heir prolonged the closure of the Spanish theaters in legal statute if not always in reality.


69 AMM, Sección 2, Legajo 468, No. 11, 8 x 1648. The original passage reads, “...que padezcan los hospitales y los Pobres las obras...."
Spanish monarch regarding the ultimate fate of the *comedias*. Religious plays had already regained approval and were being enacted during festivals, particularly during the feast of Corpus Christi. It was only a matter of time – two more years to be exact - and mounting pressure from the hospitals, with their pious work of succor and care for foundlings before the corrales de *comedias* were repaired and reopened.

Throughout the early modern period, the debate about the legitimacy of Spanish theater was by no means limited to Castile. As mentioned above, ships and men carried not only *comedias* and the symbiotic relationship between the hospitals and the theaters, but also antitheatrical opinions and mechanisms of censorship, across the Atlantic to the Spanish colonies in the Americas. In early modern Mexico the relationship between the hospitals and the theaters was even more entangled than in Madrid.

Don Juan de Palafox y Mendoza was an archbishop of Puebla, a visitor-general of New Spain, and a temporarily appointed viceroy. He was also a reformer.\(^70\) Among his many texts on spiritual and political guidance, he wrote a text related to the questionable legitimacy of the theater. In his 1645 *Epistola exortatoria a los curas y benificiados de la Puebla de los Angeles*, Palafox called *comedias* “the plague of the state” and urged clergymen not to attend performances at the corrales.\(^71\) His arguments against theater were standard ones: *comedias* awakened sensual appetites, stupefied and tricked women, taught men and women how to sin, and poisoned the soul. In response to the argument that *comedias* had long been allowed and even attended by clergymen who sat in their

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\(^71\) Cotarelo y Mori, *Controversias*, p. 495. Palafox called performances of plays, “la peste de la República.”
own special section of the playhouse, called the tertulia, Palafox observed that “the sinagogue is permitted in Oran, and in all other parts judiazers are justly burnt.” By equating the theater with Judaism, Palafox reminded his readers that the Mexican Inquisition had released heretics and practitioners of Jewish belief to the secular authorities to be burnt at the stake, and that attending the playhouse could put a person’s soul in similar jeopardy. Despite his antitheatrical wishes, Palafox failed to rid New Spain of the comedia and was unable to see his other reforms through to their conclusion. Squabbles between Palafox and the viceroy of New Spain, led Philip IV to recall the antitheatrical bishop from his post.

Thus, the relationship between performed drama and opposition to it in the centers of the Spanish and British realms was complex. In London, the office of the Master of Revels was created in order to regulate theater, but the relationship was complicated by the lucrative business of licensing and performing plays, much to the chagrin of people like William Prynne. In Madrid, as in other Spanish cities, it was further complicated by the connection to charity and public health. The corrales de comedias helped to spread messages of ambiguity about the medical profession and about declinación even as they helped to provide funds for those institutions that sought at the most basic levels to restore health to early modern Spanish society. However, antitheatricalism needed the catalyst of other events to prevail, and even the most extreme government regulation of the theater – the banning of public drama – had limitations in reality. Due to this, many Spanish opponents of the theater had turned much of their

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72 Ibid, p. 496. The original reads, “[l]a sinagoga se permite en Orán, y en todas las demás partes se quema justamente al judaizante.”
attention to reform, and in particular to controlling the women who appeared on or directed the activity of the stages of Spanish cities.
Chapter 6: On the stage, in the “stew pot” and in the streets:
Gendered Performance and Health

In the introduction to his evaluation of marriage, *La perfecta casada*, Spanish academic and author Fray Luis de León observed that both the Old and the New Testament indicated that man should not be alone and that Christ, though himself born of a virgin and a lover of virginity, gave his consent and even approval to the state of matrimony. He claimed marriage “is a noble and sacred state and one greatly valued by God.”¹ León proceeded to provide a sketch of the perfect wife. He envisioned a woman who would be honest and faithful, a woman who would produce children, particularly sons, for her husband and would guard her husband’s riches, a woman who would be useful and frugal, and a woman who would love and support her husband. *La perfecta casada* was an ideal form, a prototype, and, in the minds of Spanish male political and religious authorities, she was the complete opposite of most of the woman who performed on stage or stepped onto the streets to transact business, or even of many women who went to the theater as audience members. She was also not the woman who appeared in countless printed and performed *comedias* – or at least she was not the woman who appeared in the first and second and most of the third acts of these

plays, cross-dressing and actively pursuing her honor, although she might have been the woman who consented to marriage at the closure of the *comedia*.

This chapter explores the degree to which women challenged patriarchal norms in the urban centers of the Spanish Empire, particularly Madrid, Seville, and Puebla. Women - from the female characters of *comedias* to the female actresses who played them, from the female *autoras* and operators of the public playhouses of cities in the Spanish Atlantic World to the female patients of the hospitals in these same cities, from the noblewomen who sat in private boxes to the common born women who crowded into the *cazuelas* of the *corrales de comedias* to be entertained – both lived up to and defied the expectations of male theologians and civil authorities. From the stage to the “stew pot” to the street, they became the targets of invective on the parts of creative writers, as well as the beneficiaries of their (sometimes grudging) respect. Many women carved out a space for themselves in the theater business and the *cazuela*. In spite of its reputation as a site for unruly behavior, the public theaters paradoxically became a meeting place for respectable Spanish women.

I. The Enclosed Ideal

Luis de León wrote his 1583 treatise on marriage, *La perfecta casada*, in the wake of new evaluations of women brought on by the writings of Castilian Humanists and
Erasmian reformers, who created a more human ideal of women, at least in literature.¹ These writers also provided new perspectives of the state of matrimony, spurred by the reform efforts of the Catholic Church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During the sixteenth century, literary opinions of women evolved as the novels of chivalry gained popularity. Often, at their center was an “idolized damsel, the dispenser of grace who instills virtue and courage.”² Women and the education of women became important issues in sixteenth-century Spanish society. For Fray Luis de León, woman was not the idealized figure of the chivalric novel or the possible beneficiary of an unlimited education, as Erasmus painted her, but rather, for León, woman was real and had a real social value and function as a wife and a mother. Although León restricted woman to the private sphere of the home, in his view, she was not inferior to man.³

León wrote *La perfecta casada* in the aftermath of the Reformation Era. Part of the response to the Protestant Reformation, unwittingly unleashed by Martin Luther in 1517, was the Council of Trent, which met sporadically from 1545 to 1563. The Council of Trent established a new system of clerical and monastic visitation, clarified matters of theology, and brought marriage under tighter ecclesiastical control through its reaffirmation of marriage as a sacrament. The Catholic Church forbade secret marriages

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¹ Writing about the education of upper class women, Erasmus argued that women’s’ education should not be circumscribed. He logically observed that if a woman could (and should) be taught French, then she could (and should) be taught Latin and Greek.


³ Obviously from a modern feminist perspective, León was not a champion of equality for women. However, he broke with the view perpetrated by Aristotelian theory that woman was somewhere between man and beast or an imperfect human being. In the same line as other Renaissance feminists, he used a harmonious and non-hierarchical model to describe the equality of the sexes.
and made marriage a public ceremony. This new emphasis on the importance of marriage meant that religious and secular authorities in the Spanish realms increasingly scrutinized women who were not enclosed within the legal bounds of marriage or the convent and those married women who did not conform to the ideals of that enclosure.

Yet the enclosure of marriage often allowed women more rather than less freedom in Golden Age Spain. As Georgina Dopico-Black has pointed out, the Spanish term mujer translated (and continues to translate) as both woman and as wife. It was through marriage and taking on the social role of being a wife that the idea of womanliness came to be defined. Unmarried girls frequently found themselves under the watchful eye of the guardians and chaperones, who accompanied them to Mass or to and from school, if they were not educated at home and if they were educated at all. However, once married, a woman could seek the company of other married women. She could visit them and receive visits from them. A married woman could attend Mass or take walks or play cards. In the company of a female relation or servant, she could do these things, as well as go to bull-fights and to the theater, sitting in the cazuela with other women. Noblewomen had the option of sitting in the aposentos with both men and other women. According to N.D. Shergold, noblewomen could and frequently did reserve aposentos in their own names.

Women had certain legal rights and protections in early modern Spain, as well, but many of these stemmed from their status as married women or as women who could

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potentially be married. For example, married women had the right to accept an inheritance, but they did not have the right to decline one. Although a married woman had no legal redress against a husband who committed adultery, she could legally seek redress from the other woman. The *Fuero juzgo*, the law codex which Fernando III enacted in the kingdom of Castile in 1241 and which held legal precedence until the nineteenth century, granted woman legal protection against violence against their person.

Rape, akin to theft of property in the *Fuero juzgo*, could be punished by lashes and by servitude to the victim of the crime.\(^7\) Husbands who sold their wives’ sexual services could be publicly shamed and sentenced to ten years in the galleys, according to the *Nueva recopilación*, the legal corpus sanctioned by Philip II in 1567. Married women had equal rights to wealth and possessions and their proceeds unless it could be proved that one or the other spouse owned the wealth in question before the marriage had occurred.

Along with a revaluation of marriage, the renewal of Catholicism in response to the Protestant Reformation also led to the growth of confraternities in Spain, which have been discussed previously. Even in areas considered by the Church hierarchy to be notoriously backwater and unreformed, such as Galicia, the *cofradías* provided a source of community and religious cohesion for people living in these areas.\(^8\) These confraternities, along with Marian sodalities, venerated the one ideal woman: the Virgin Mary. And these confraternities staged numerous plays and put on extravagant processions that celebrated the mother of Christ. Fierce competition evolved as

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numerous municipal governments began to give away increasingly lucrative awards for the best *carro*, or pageant wagon, in a procession during a religious festival. Likewise, confraternities and city authorities alike began to hire acting companies on a regular basis for the performance of *autos sacramantales* at Easter or Nativity plays during the Christmas holidays.\(^9\)

Occasionally the religious message of these plays collided spectacularly with the human realities of the people performing them. According to one opponent of the reopening of the theaters after the death of Phillip II in 1598, when the actress playing the Virgin Mary reacted in astonishment to the Angel Gabriel’s news that she was with child, the audience erupted into laughter because “it was such public knowledge” that the actress playing Mary and the actor playing the role of Joseph were living together.\(^10\) The proverbial plot thickened toward the end of the Nativity play: suddenly the actor playing Joseph abandoned character and “in a low voice reproached his wife because she looked, it seemed to him, at a man whom he was jealous of, calling her the worst name that one can give bad women.”\(^11\) Perhaps it is not surprising that the author of this memorandum, Lupercía Leonardo de Argensola, had been a playwright, but his failure to adapt to the changes in the *comedia* brought on by the advent of Lope’s *comedia nueva* pushed him out of the business of writing for the *corrales de comedias* and for the men and women who graced their stages.

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\(^9\) For example, the Actas del Cabildo de Puebla housed in the Archivo del Ayuntamiento de Puebla are full of records that illustrate the practice of hiring acting companies for the processions of Corpus Christi.


\(^11\) Ibid. The original reads, “reprendía con voz baja á su muger porque miraba, á su parecer, á un hombre de quien él tenía cellos, llamandola con un nombre el más deshonesto que se suele dar á las malas mugeres.”
The laughing response of the audience to this alleged event is indicative of the shift from the humanizing view of Luis de León, who envisioned women as capable of being perfect, to a more cynical view of women in Spanish society. During the last decades of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century, such cynicism and invective had become increasingly prevalent in the moralistic and creative writing that discussed women and their charms and wiles. Unable to forsake love or women, but embittered by this very fact, poets and playwrights, such as Quevedo and Lope de Vega, unleashed their pens on paper, taking out their frustrations and anger on women in literary form. Sometimes this anger and ambivalence felt towards and about women was re-enacted on the stages of the corrales de comedias of Spanish cities.

II. Cross-dressing Controversies in England and Spain

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the most notable differences between the Spanish and English stages during the Renaissance was the fact that women appeared on the stages of corrales de comedias, whereas they did not perform in the English playhouses. Instead of actresses, boys played female roles up until the Restoration in 1660. The transvestitism of the English Renaissance stage has been the subject of numerous studies, including Stephen Orgel’s Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England, which suggests that both opponents of the theater and those who wrote for the theater in London associated the public playhouses with loose women and with homosexual prostitution. He argues that a deep cultural anxiety reinforced a system that prohibited women from acting on the stage in Shakespeare’s
England. Orgel contends that the problem was “obviously not with theatre but with women, on whom the culture [projected] a natural tendency toward promiscuity of all kinds, and for which theatre [has been] seen as a release mechanism.”

During the second half of the sixteenth century and especially during the seventeenth century the growth in printed material and print culture in England meant that women, as well as men, were both reading and writing at unprecedented rates. Pamphlets and polemics about the female sex abounded as a consequence. One such text by Joseph Swetnam, *The arraignment of lewde, idle, forward, and unconstant women*, construed the fair sex as anything but. However, in doing so, it unleashed a backlash of written responses by authors – some of them probably male and others female – who defended women, and single women in particular.

Pamphlets were not the only genre for responding to Swetnam during this antifeminist controversy. Dramatists wrote plays in response to the misogynist as well, taking up the issue of the place of single women in English society. As drama scholar Adrienne Eastwood has argued these playwrights were “keenly aware of the contested position of the single woman in culture and within the gender debates” and they exploited “both sides of the controversy.” If men learned about expected gender roles from going to the theater, hearing ballads in the market place, and watching their parents and other elders, as English historian Anthony Fletcher, contends, then it could reasonably be

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assumed that women did as well. The gender norms propagated by these sources indicate the English ideal of womanhood was quite similar to the Spanish one: only a married woman could be the true ideal of femininity.

The climax of the controversy came in 1620 with the publication of an anonymously authored play, *Swetnam the Woman-hater, Arraigned by Women*. The play had probably been first performed in 1618 or 1619 at the Red Bull in London. Aside from the controversy itself, another of the sources for the play was a translated Spanish “novelette” called the *Historia de Aurelio e Isabella*, which itself was derived from a fifteenth century work *Grisel y Mirabella* by Juan de Flores. The initial text was one of the aforementioned chivalric works by Spanish Renaissance authors, who took a feminist stance. The major differences between *Grisel y Mirabella* and the newer Spanish novelette were the names of the characters. The *Historia de Aurelio e Isabella* was clearly popular, having been translated into English several times. It provided the main plot for the Swetnam play, with its love story and political intrigues. Swetnam and the controversy that his pamphlet had unleashed provided the subplot, and the historical figure became a fictional character. Swetnam –aka Misogynos – with the help of a scheming official, Nicanor, manages to sway the judges at a trial of the two lovers, Leonida and Lisandro, but as happens in comedy, through a series of twists, including a mock execution, an attempted suicide, and the performance of a court masque, the star-crossed lovers are eventually allowed to be engaged to be married, and the happy ending is achieved.

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Yet, of course, not every woman in early modern England or early modern Spain got married, and playwrights were aware of this fact long before Swetnam ever penned his polemical diatribe. Many English plays already featured single women in complicated ways. Between the archetypes of the virgin and the whore, there were many types of women to be portrayed. And even the archetypes could exhibit behavior that led audiences to empathize with the whore over the virgin, spotless and blameless as she might be.

Mary Firth was a famous/infamous cross-dresser. By wearing masculine dress, playing the lute on the stage, frequenting alehouses and playhouses, and refusing to accept any position as a servant or a dependent in any male-headed household, she took London by storm. Firth occasionally got into trouble with the law for her tendency to keep “lewd company as namely with cut-purses, blasphemous drunkards & others of bad note & of most dissolute behavior.” Immortalized by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker in *The Roaring Girl or Moll Cutpurse*, Firth was the kind of woman that a playwright could base a strong-minded female character on, one who would proclaim “I scorn to prostitute myself to a man,/I that can prostitute a man to me!”

The plot of *The Roaring Girl*, first published in 1611 and probably written in 1607 or 1608, hinged on the premise that a female version of the carousing “roaring boy” would not be the ideal girl to bring home to meet the parents. As the play opens, the young lovers Sebastian and Mary Fitzallard have been thwarted by Sebastian’s father’s demands for a dowry that is beyond Mary’s family’s means. Sebastian devises a plan: he

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will pretend to be in love with Mary Firth, aka Moll Cutpurse, and his father, Sir Alexander, will be so frightened of that prospect that he will immediately acquiesce to the marriage between the young couple. Upon learning that his son has chosen Moll, he proclaims her “a scurvy woman,” saying that “The sun gives her two shadows to one shape;/Nay more, let this strange thing walk, stand, or sit,/No blazing star draws more eyes after it.” Sir Alexander, bound by the necessity of several more plots of action, does not yield to his son; however, he sends a spy, cleverly named Trapdoor, to follow Moll Cutpurse and destroy her. Needless to say, high jinks ensue. Moll duels and debauches, and, unlike so many heroines, she does not marry in the play’s final act.

The cross-dressing controversy at the heart of this London comedy was undoubtedly only heightened by the cross-dressing that took place on the stage during its performances. The boy actors who played the countless female roles on the London stages were, according to Matthew Wikander, in a sense genderless. Their androgynous nature enabled them to be on the cusp of playing women and then men. The English acting companies typically employed around six boys, aged twelve to twenty-one as apprentices. These boys played the non-speaking roles, and as they gained experience, they began to have speaking parts, playing the roles of women. The boy-apprentices typically played female characters, such as Moll and Mary, until the age of nineteen or twenty. Opponents of theater had such a problem with the transvestitism that occurred on the stages of London because one of their basic assumptions about performance held that

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18 Ibid, Scene Two, Lines 125, 132-134.
For those opposed to public drama, one of these realities was that boys dressed as women could elicit a sexual response from the male members of the audience, and another was that some feared that men who dressed as women could unhinge the social and gender norms in a patriarchal society.

In Spain and its colonies the questions about cross-dressing on the stage took on a somewhat different nature. Even though women performed on the stages of the commercial theaters, the question of whether they should be allowed to do so remained intermittently problematic for royal, ecclesiastical, and municipal authorities. In both 1580 and in 1586 the Council of Castile issued a decree that banned women from public performance on the stage. However, this edict seems to have been largely ignored by acting companies, audiences, and authorities alike. The theaters closed briefly for a period of mourning after the death of Philip II in 1598, and upon their reopening, women continued to grace the stages of Madrid, Seville, and other urban locales. The issue, though, had clearly continued to plague lawmakers and theologians, if not actresses themselves, for in 1598 the Council of Castile consented to the presence of women on the stage with certain caveats. “What was agreed to in that which touches upon the plays: that the wives and daughters of the comedians and of the company can perform in their garb and in the garb of men long enough that it passes mid-calf.”

Yet clearly women who were not related to the actors or autores continued to grace the stage during the first

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21 Archivo Historico National (hereafter AHN), Consejos, Libro, 2.768, fol. 149v-150r, undated. The original reads, “Lo que se acordo en lo que toca a las comedias: que puedan representar las mugeres y hijas de los comediantes y de la compania en su avito, y tambien con hauitos de hombres largos que pasen de media pierna.”
half of the seventeenth century. This is suggested by the fact that in 1644, on her
deathbed, Queen Elizabeth, regent during the absence of Philip IV who was on campaign,
reiterated the decree that only married women could perform in the corrales de comedias.

With women allowed on the stage, as long as they were under the watchful eye of
a male family member along with those of the audience members of the playhouse, one
might think that the Spanish did not have to deal with the issue of transvestitism.
However, they did. In fact the particular nature and popularity of the genre of comedia
that featured the mujer varonil – or masculine-acting woman, who frequently wore the
garb of a man, meant that cross-dressed females frequently graced the seventeenth-
century Spanish stage. Playwrights based these characters on adventurous women like
the famous/infamous Catalina de Erauso, who fled from a convent, wore men’s clothing,
passed as a man, and served in the Spanish army for almost two decades before her true
identity was discovered, or like Maria de Estrada, a soldier’s wife, who became renowned
for her abilities with the sword and dagger in sixteenth-century Mexico. According to
Catalina de Erauso’s memoir, one feast day she went see a play in Trujillo, and while
getting ready to enjoy the comedia, got into an altercation with another playgoer. This
dispute, which allegedly began with a simple request that the other entertainment seeker
move a bit to the side so that Catalina could better see the performance, escalated quickly
and ended in a duel the following day.22

The varonil, like these women, departed from social norms regarding femininity –
at least for the better part of three acts in hundreds of comedias. In the sixteenth century,

22 See Catalina de Erauso, *La Monja Alférez*, Biblioteca Digital Andina de la Biblioteca Municipal de Perú,
playwrights, such as Juan de la Cueva and Cristóbal de Virués, used the figure of the strong-minded female in masculine disguise as a plot device. In the seventeenth century, as the commercial art of the *comedia* flourished, the *varonil* became even more widely featured. Playwrights in Seville and Valencia began to use the *varonil* with increasing frequency in the 1570s and 1580s, and, by the 1590s, “this type of female protagonist was well on the way to becoming an established convention of the Madrid stage.”

As literary scholar Anita K. Stoll has observed, over one hundred of the extant plays by Lope de Vega featured the *mujer varonil*. Likewise, almost a quarter of the plays written by Tirso de Molina utilized a cross-dressed female protagonist. Although Calderón, Alarcón, and Cervantes used this type of character less frequently, Golden Age readers of dramatic works and playgoers were accustomed to the appearance of the *varonil* and the *mujer vestido de hombre*.

The cross-dressed woman was freed from the social contraints of her gender by her dress, if not by the conventions of the Golden Age plot itself, and “set forth on a daring adventure in search of happiness.”

Spanish Golden Age transvestitism on the stage functioned differently than it did on the stages of Renaissance England. While boys donning women’s clothes graced the stages of London, in Madrid, Puebla, and other cities in the Spanish empire, women not only appeared on the stage, but they frequently did so dressed in men’s clothing. This caused some Catholic theologians and members of the Council of Castile consternation.

What was a boy in a dress compared to a woman in pants? While in the dress, the young

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23 McKendrick, *Woman and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age*, p. 73.
25 Bravo-Villasante, p. 33. The original reads, “se lanzan a una aventura arriesgada en busca de su felicidad.”
male apprentice’s figure was hidden and distorted. While in pants, the female’s figure was emphasized – her waist and leg suddenly displayed before the audience. Eventually, in 1672 the whole practice of women “entering the stage dressed as men” was banned. However, since the decree was reissued three years later, it probably was not being strictly enforced. It also did not go into effect until after the varonil had influenced generations of Spanish audience members during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.26

III. The Mujer Varonil and the Spanish Comedia

Although the original identity of the “abnormal” female character was typically restored and she was once again in an enclosed state under the watchful eye of a man, and usually a husband, by the conclusion of the drama’s third and final act, in both costume and disguise she became another person, bound by another set of rules. Likewise, the qualities of the varonil were not limited to outward dress. She had courage, honor, and the capacity to love. These were qualities that many men did not think that many women possessed. Acting more like a man in some aspects could warrant their respect and admiration. However, the difference between being a varonil and being a wicked woman, who deviated from social norms in a way that was not so admirable had more to do with the eye of the beholder than the actual behavior of the woman in question. And by the seventeenth century Spanish society viewed most deviant behavior as less than

26 AHN, Sala de Alcaldes de Casa y Corte, Comedias, Libro de gobierno 1.257, fol. 360 and 1.260, fol. 450. The original reads, “que las mujeres no saliesen vestidas de hombres...”
admirable, which is why most women were careful to act with propriety so as not to besmirch their reputations. Yet, men and women alike watched numerous *mujeres varoniles* grace the stages of the *corrales de comedias* of the Spanish Empire and could read about their exploits in published plays.

Melveena McKendrick has argued that pre-Lopistas had been consciously or unconsciously influenced by the feminism of Renaissance writings, by authors such as Erasmus. However, with the advent of Lope’s *comedia nueva* the proto-feminism that shaped the role of the *mujer varonil* became limited. It was “liberal in important respects, but ultimately conservative” in that it upheld and reinforced patriarchal norms. Yet, even so, women’s roles in the *comedia nueva* potentially had positive effects on women’s place in Spanish society, as Lope and other playwrights drew attention to the “injustices of woman’s situation and prepared to devote their talents and a part of their drama to grappling with these.”

This was something that numerous Golden Age playwrights did in many of their *comedias*.

Lope wrote numerous *comedias* that featured a *varonil*, who, after being dishonored by a man – usually her lover – turned to the anti-social behavior of banditry. Yet, these female characters typically maintained their femininity. Most of them lose their virginity either through rape or through seduction, and after failing to persuade the men who have brought shame upon them, they realize that they cannot return home and that they will now be condemned in the opinion of the public. In many cases, for these female characters, their dishonor, which is brought about by one man, turns into a grudge against all men. The *varonil*, of course had other guises, such as the errant lover who fled

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27 McKendrick, p. 105.
parental control or a lover’s rejection by running away and disguising herself as a man and who usually through acts of cunning and bravery won back her man and put back on her dress. And Lope de Vega wrote female characters like these, as well.

Among other things, this *comedia* provided insights into the trend of eating clay as a sign of refinement for seventeenth-century elite *madrileñas* and therefore, their need to treat the sickness that came along with clay consumption by drinking water treated with iron particles. During the seventeenth century, physicians used iron water to treat numerous problems and to promote childbirth, as well. Lope’s play gets its name from this reference, although it is uncertain, both from the text of the play and other sources, whether or not there actually was an iron spring in Madrid or if all this iron water was the result of home manufacturing. Theater scholar, S. Griswold Morley claimed that in Madrid *el acero* had special properties because Madrid was a city that was rich and corrupt, where servants went to homes disguised as physicians in order to gain entry and where taking iron-water was as common as taking vitamins is today.

*El acero de Madrid* is an unusual comedy, especially in that the female protagonist, Belisa, goes so far as to get pregnant to avoid an unwanted, arranged marriage with her cousin Octavo. Naturally, the reason that she has no desire to marry Octavo, aside from his boorish country bumpkin nature, was the fact that she is already in love with Lisardo, who she has been contriving to meet with since the first act of the play by feigning sickness. She writes to Lisardo, informing him of her plan, “I will pretend, my dear husband,/ that I am pale and have an oppilation/ to trick a jealous father/ and an

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untrusting aunt./ Look for a friendly physician to examine me.”\textsuperscript{30} The proscribed regimen to cure her conveniently includes long, morning walks in addition to el acero. It should be noted that the “friendly physician” who prescribes them is actually Beltrán, the servant of Lisardo, in disguise. These long walks, combined with the manipulation of her aunt and chaperone, result in almost unrestrained freedom for Belisa and eventually her pregnancy. In the third act, when her father discovers her pregnancy, Belisa flees his anger and her home disguised as a man. In the end, her father grants permission for Belisa and Lisardo to marry.

Lope created many great female characters. He endowed many of them with intelligence beauty and wit, and they were no doubt inspired by his own relationships with women, including his two wives, his numerous mistresses, and his beloved youngest daughter Antonia Clara. Antonia was the victim of a scenario only too similar to the dishonoring of many of the varoniles that Lope created. She was seduced, abducted, and abandoned by a nobleman in 1634. Many biographers of Lope believe this misfortune hastened the decline of his health. When Lope died in August of 1635, all of Madrid went into mourning. Antonia, who had in the meantime become Sister Marcela, entering the Convent of the Barefoot Trinitarians as a nun, requested that the funeral procession pass by her convent, so that she could see it.\textsuperscript{31} Antonia’s case is indicative of the plight of many women in early modern Spain. Even having a father who was lionized and whose portrait hung in numerous Spanish homes could not make her honor impregnable or give her many options other than enclosure in a convent once she had been seduced.

\textsuperscript{30} El acero de Madrid, Act I, Versos 175-180, p. 100. The original reads, “Yo voy fingiendo, mi querido esposo, /que estoy descolorida y opilada/ para engañar un padre tan celoso/ y una tía tan mal intencionada./ Busca un medico amigo que me vea.”

\textsuperscript{31} Hugo Rennert, The Life of Lope de Vega 1562-1635 (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc. 1968), p. 372.
and abandoned. Lope de Vega pressed his patron the Duke of Sessa to provide Antonio’s dowry so that she could enter this prestigious convent. Once in the convent, Antonia, as Sor Marcela, continued in her father’s footsteps as an author and playwright. She wrote poetry and religious dramas to be performed at her convent and served as the prioress of her convent twice.

Several of Tirso de Molina’s plays featured the varonil in the character of the bandolera, or woman who once disgraced had to take to a life of banditry and because of the theatrical vogue for women in men’s clothing had to do so dressed in doublet and hose. Tirso’s plays all made strong assertions about women’s rights as human beings, regardless of class, and many brought about resolution through the performance of religious penance. In La dama del olivar the low-born heroine, Laurencia, is abducted and raped by not only Don Guillén but also by the gracioso, or buffoon, Gallardo. Both Guillén and Gallardo treat her like a beast without dignity. Her village also further dehumanizes her by refusing to come to her aid. Tirso redeemed his bandolera by first leading her into a life of subhuman, criminal behavior and then bringing her back into fellowship with mankind through a spiritual awakening. Laurencia witnesses the appearance of the Virgin of the Olive Grove and asks, “What light has illuminated my soul…?” Tirso’s plot not only redeems his heroine but heals the emotional scars of her dishonor through a miracle.

33 La dama del olivar was first published in 1636 in the Quinta parte de comedias del maestro de Molina. See Cotarelo y Mori Comedias de Tirso de Molina, Tomo II (Madrid: Nueva Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1907), pp. xvi-xvii and La dama de olivar, Acto Segundo, Escena VIII, pp. 221-2.
34 La dama de olivar, Acto Tercero, Escena xx, p. 237. The original reads, “¿Qué luz es la que ha alumbrado/ mi alma…?”
Considering the increasing cynicism in the way that many men viewed women in Golden Age Spain, it is not surprising that the mujer esquiva, a woman who did not like men or marriage, was the most popular type of varonil. She was adverse to love until the twists of the plot led her to gradually yield to love and marriage. She might even glory in the despair of the numerous suitors wooing her, as she remained cold and distant for the first two acts of the performance. The majority of Golden Age dramatists assumed that one of women’s natural capacities was for love, and that a lack of love was thus unnatural. As mentioned above, even the most liberal stance of Spanish playwrights toward women had its limits. Yet, it should also be noted that the esquivo could be a male, too, and playwrights always manipulated them into love, as well. They, like their female counterparts on the page and on the stage, had little freedom to remain unmarried.\(^{35}\)

In No hay burlas con amor, a rather slapstick comedia, by Calderón, the heroine Beatriz disdains her lover. In this comedy, Calderón took an extremely critical stance toward overly-educated women. While Calderón certainly created heroines of remarkable depth and potential, such as Rosuara, the mujer varonil in La vida es sueño, his female characters in No hay burlas con amor have little of this depth. Beatriz is full of vanity and conceit, proving that as long as her head remains full, her heart remains empty. Bemoaning the ignorance and the stupidity of those around her, Beatriz is more concerned with her library and the works of Ovid than with familial felicity or with behavior that Calderón considered fitting to a woman. She mocks her sister, Leonor, for

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\(^{35}\) McKendrick makes this key observation in Woman and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age, p. 151.
not knowing what “libidinosa” means. She calls her servant, Inés, an “idiota.”

She makes herself insufferable to all those who serve her or see her – that is, until she is manipulated by her sister and the action of the *comedia* into falling in love. Don Alonso is a typical *esquivo*, who hardheartedly laughs at his servant, Moscatel for being in love, saying “If here begins your madness, today I laugh at your sadness.”

Of course, he is no more immune to the power of love than any other *esquivo* in the end. He and Beatriz end up falling in love and getting married at the end of the play, and their love for each other also makes them much more likeable characters.

IV. Women on the Stage and in the Cazuela

While the first three sections of this chapter have largely dealt with fictional females created by male authors and playwrights, this section deals with women who lived in the Spanish Empire during the Golden Age. In the early modern period, numerous women penned plays, directed or performed in plays in the *corrales de comedias*, watched plays as members of the playgoing public, and benefited from the charitable proceeds that the commercial theaters of the Spanish-speaking world generated for the hospitals of urban locations. In Madrid, Seville, and Puebla, as well as other cities, women left the private sphere of the home and became visible on the stage and in

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the streets, and they watched other visible women from the cazuela, where they sought entertainment in a (theoretically) feminine space.\textsuperscript{38}

Men did not have a complete monopoly on dramaturgy any more than they did on performance in early modern Spanish cities. In spite of lower literacy rates for women and prejudices against women in general in seventeenth-century Spain, there were some women who wrote for the stage and directed what happened on it. The most famous of these female playwrights were María de Zayas y Sotomayor, Ana Caro Mallén de Soto, and the Mexican born playwright and nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. María de Zayas y Sotomayor was active in the literary circles of the Spanish court and capital during the 1620s and 1630s. She wrote poetry, including congratulatory verses to other poets who had had their works published, and prose, including her Novelas amorosas y ejemplares, first printed in 1637. She may have written more than one play, but only one has survived. This undated play, Traición en la amistad, criticizes the women who steal their friends’ suitors. The theme of female friendship and the dangers that romantic love presents women were prominent themes in other works by Zayas.\textsuperscript{39} A friend and colleague of María de Zayas, Ana Caro Mallén de Soto was a more prolific playwright. However, only a handful of her comedias and autos sacramentales have survived as compared to the hundreds of some of her male counterparts. The city fathers of both Madrid and Seville paid her for her providing autos sacramentales for the Corpus Christi festivals in the 1630s and 1640s. Caro spent most of her life in the theatrical city of

\textsuperscript{38} I say this is theoretical because as mentioned above, men did occasionally force their way into the cazuelas of playhouses.

\textsuperscript{39} See Kaminsky, Water Lilies, pp. 143-201.
Seville, and she may have died there during the plague epidemic in 1649.\footnote{Teresa Scott Soufas, \textit{Women’s Acts: Plays by Women Dramatists of Spain’s Golden Age} (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), p. 133.} Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz was a child prodigy, who grew up with viceregal patronage in seventeenth-century Mexico. She wrote plays for the viceroy of New Spain and many scholars of Golden Age drama consider her to have been the last luminary of the Spanish Golden Age.

Although there were fewer female playwrights and they tended to be less prolific writers than their male counterparts for a variety of reasons, the actresses who played the female characters created by male and female playwrights achieved a visibility not frequently available to women in Counter-Reformation Spain and its colonies. These actresses could elicit the jangling of keys of the women in the 	extit{cazuela} of the 	extit{corral de comedias} if they did not perform well, or they could successfully seek publicity and even celebrity from the stages of the inn-yard theaters. For example, the famed Maria Calderón frequently performed on the stages of the 	extit{corrales de comedias} during her acting career. Always on the lookout for fresh talent, agents of Philip IV’s favorite, the Count-Duke Olivares, discovered the beautiful and sweet-voiced actress and sent her to act in Madrid. Maria Calderón came to Philip IV’s attention during a theatrical performance given for the king in 1627. In December of 1632, she received a payment of 1050 \textit{reales} for performing in two \textit{comedias} and two \textit{autos sacramentales}.\footnote{Cristóbal Pérez Pastor, \textit{Nuevos datos Acerca del Histrionismo Español en los Siglos XVI y XVII} (Madrid: La Revista Española, 1901), p. 226.} Such information suggests that actresses who were in vogue were paid well for their efforts. The Spanish monarch sired a child with this stage-player, and she came to be called La...
Calderona.\textsuperscript{42} Not long after the conception and birth of her son in 1629, she retired from the public theaters to a convent. Perhaps, it would be more accurate, considering the Philip IV’s reputation, to say that she was dismissed as a mistress. From the records of payment for performances, her confinement to the convent clearly occurred after her 1632 performances, though. However, it is also noteworthy that she was obliged to leave Madrid and go to Pinto, a village south of Madrid where Spanish kings had prominent persons confined.

\textsuperscript{42} La Calderona’s son, Don Juan José de Austria turned out to be much healthier and more capable than his genetically impaired, sickly, but legitimate, half-brothers. Indeed the son of this actress would in time come to be the focus of many of the hopes for the Spanish Empire and its survival. Philip IV recognized Juan José as his illegitimate son in May of 1642. Shortly thereafter, Luis Vélez de Guevara wrote two comedias about the first Don Juan de Austria, who was the natural son of Charles I and the hero of the Battle of Lepanto. Other playwrights also fictionalized the second Don Juan de Austria. Margaret Greer argues in \textit{The Play of Power} that the Perseus of Pedro Calderón de la Barca’s \textit{Fortunas} is actually La Calderona’s son, Juan José, who had ended the Catalan rebellion in 1652.
Some actresses gained celebrity by specializing in the role of the varonil and the mujer vestida de hombre, becoming the inspiration for playwrights’ plots, such as the actress Jusepa Vaca did in Lope de Vega’s La mocedad de Roldán, which the playwright dedicated to this actress. Jusepa Vaca was born into a theater family, the daughter of actress Mariana Vaca. She married an autor, named Juan de Morales Medrano, and her name became synonymous with his. She acted and managed, and they frequently received their payment together. For example, in 1610 they received 600 reales from the
Colegio de Los Niños de la Doctrina of Burgos for their comic services.\textsuperscript{43} The pair acted; they directed; they traveled. And it would seem that she was the greater draw of the two.

Jusepa Vaca was not the only actress who became a celebrity for her frequent appearances on stage as a \textit{mujer varonil}. \textit{La Balthesara} was a play, written by Luís Vélez de Guevara and Francisco de Rojas Zorilla, about an actress who frequently performed the roles of the various types of the \textit{mujer varonil}. Another famous actress, Ana Muñoz, had a reputation for playing these types of roles. In a well-known incident, Muñoz appeared on the stage on horseback and dressed as an Amazon. The audience in the playhouse became so excited and made so much noise that the horse spooked, throwing off Muñoz. The actress was pregnant and the throw caused her to miscarry her unborn son.\textsuperscript{44} This incident indicates the attraction that the Spanish audience had to the character of the \textit{varonil}. It also suggests that actresses continued to perform during their pregnancies.

Barbara Coronel, played the \textit{mujer vestido de hombre} with such frequency that she took to wearing male dress outside the theater as well. Barbara Coronel was far from the perfect woman and wife that Fray Luis de León wrote about in \textit{La perfecta casada}. Allegedly, she murdered her husband with the help of her lover, and the only thing that prevented her from death at the scaffold was the friendship that she had with another famous actor, Cosme Pérez, who was so well-known as a \textit{gracioso} that he came to be called by his stage-name, Juan Rana.\textsuperscript{45} He interceded for Coronel with the king, and she

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{44} McKendrick, pp. 321-2.
\textsuperscript{45} See above, p. 76.
lived to cross-dress another day. Like Jusepa Vaca, the actress eventually became an *autora*, directing and managing an acting company.⁴⁶

The opportunities that Jusepa Vaca and Barbara Colonel took advantage of seem to have been even more available for women in Spain’s colonies, where many women actively participated in the business of the commercial theater. A female *autora*, Ana Maria de los Angeles had been involved in the theater business in Puebla for apparently sometime, but in 1632 she and another Puebla *autor*, Fernando Ramos, got into a feud over who would stay in Puebla and who would go to flood-damaged Mexico City to perform for the royal and municipal authorities there. In the end, she had to leave Puebla and take charge of the celebration of the fiesta of Corpus Christi in Mexico City in the spring of 1632. She had charge of two *comedias* to be performed. In 1633 she petitioned the city council of Puebla for the right for her company to perform the corpus plays there. Perhaps the feud with Ramos is the reason that she teamed up with another *autor*, Juan Antonio de Siguenza.⁴⁷ This incident indicates that while women had opportunities in the theaters of the New World that they faced challenges to their authority and often had to make alliances with men in order to maintain the spaces that they had carved out in the theatrical world. Of course, this kind of competition was not a problem faced exclusively by women in the commercial theater business.

There were other successful female directors in Spain’s colonies. In Lima Maria del Castillo headed the acting company, which used the *corral de comedias* that was

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⁴⁷ AAP, Actas del Cabildo de Puebla, Libro 17, fol 331v, 13 iv 1632, and Libro 18, fol 44f, 19 v 1633. The original reads, “tiene Un arrendamento El corral de las comedias y a Pedimento de Juan Atris Del Spinas.”
linked to the hospital of San Andrés, for a period of thirty years, from 1602-1632. María de Celi, the wife of an actor, became an official autora by decree of the viceroy for the playhouse annexed to the Real Hospital de los Indios in Mexico City in 1687. The viceroy justified granting her petition to become the autora of this playhouse on the grounds that there was no man qualified to hold the position.48

In addition to being actresses and autoras, women could sometimes become involved in the theater business in other ways, such as serving as the lessees of the corrales de comedias in the Spanish Empire. In Seville, the city council granted the exclusive rights for forty years to the autora de comedias, Laura de Herrera, to use the Coliseo, one of the two main theaters of the city, in exchange for rebuilding this corral de comedias at her own expense after a devastating fire. In February of 1639 the colonial city of Puebla, Antonia Sánchez de Prado, the widow of the enterprising theater entrepreneur Juan Gómez Melgarejo, sought an extension of the lease that the city fathers had granted her late husband. She petitioned the cabildo, reminding them that “she has the lease of the playhouse now requested by Juan Atris Del Spinas.” The widow also reminded the council that her family had made numerous renovations and repairs to the playhouse’s boxes (in which many of them probably regularly sat) and that she was “aware that it is a public work.49 Her petition was successful, and the corral de comedias remained in the hands of her family until the 1660s.

The wife of the late Melgarejo was not the only widow whose husband had been involved in the theater business. Cosimo, or Cosme, Lotti, the famous Italian-born

49 AAP, Actas del Cabildo de Puebla, Libro 19, fol. 43f, 5 ii 1639. The original reads, “atenta a que es obra pública....”
engineer, landscape designer, and producer of theatrical spectacle, who designed the
Buen Retiro, the theater at the palace of Philip IV, left his wife without adequate financial
means, when he died in 1643. Lotti had been the recipient of a royal pension and had
lived in Spain for almost twenty years. In 1644 his widow, Doña Palonia Volpa,
petitioned the royal government for assistance in the form of 200 ducados a year,
reminding his Majesty of her husband’s services and begging “for help in sustaining and
raising her five children.”50 Several years later she had to petition again, reminding
authorities of her five children and of the fact that, since she was from Naples and not
from Madrid, she “did not know anyone in Spain.”51 From her repeated petitions, Doña
Palonia, it appeared, was less successful at cashing in on her late husband’s trade than
Antonia Sánchez was in Puebla.

Occasionally women took their husband’s matters into their own hands,
demanding the payment that their husbands were owed. Jerónima de Burgos, a famous
actress and the wife of Pedro de Valdés, petitioned the queen for payments owed to her
husband for three comedias: Los celos en el cavallo, La despreciada querida, and La
perdida de España. She reminded her majesty that her husband usually received 200
reales for each play that he wrote.52 While usualy such petitions recorded widowed
women as viudas, this document refers to Jerónima Burgos as muger, or wife, which
indicates that Valdes was still living.

50 AGS, Seccion: Casas y Sitios Reales, Legajo 310, not foliated, 25 i 1644. The original reads, “para
ayuda a sustentarse y criar sus [cinco] hijos....”
51 AGS, Casas y Sitios Reales, Legajo 311, fol. 120, undated. The original petition she claims she, “no
conoce [sic] a nadie en España.”
52 Archivo del Palacio Real (hereafter APR), Sección de Espectáculos Públicos y Privados, Legajo 666,
Caja 11744, Expediente 7, 4 x 1638.
While some women performed on the stage and some women wrote for and even operated playhouses, even more women went to the corrales de comedias of Spanish cities as spectators. As discussed in previous chapters, the cazuela, where the vast majority of the female audiences sat in the corrales de comedias, could be a site for social disorder. Undoubtedly, this disorderly precedent is what led Queen Isabel to request that fake quarrels be staged in the cazuela of the theater at the Buen Retiro. She had, by previous arrangement, tried to get a taste of what happened on a relatively regular basis in the Corral del Principe and the Corral de la Cruz: women shouting insults at one another, pulling each other’s hair, and trying to scratch each others’ faces. The queen even went so far as to have a box of mice released in the cazuela leading to a spectacle that no doubt competed with the action of the comedia itself.\footnote{Shergold, p. 299.} As mentioned previously, men also occasionally snuck into the cazuela, and attempted to molest and harrass the women seated there.

When they were not being hassled by impudent men, ordered to provide yet another form of spectacle for a capricious monarch, or frightened by mice on the loose, the female audience members could register their approval or disapproval of the comedia being performed. One of the primary methods for advertising a low opinion of a comedia was for the women seated in the cazuela to jangle their keys, creating, along with the jeers and whistles of the musqueteros, a cacophony of noise that the actors had to shout over if they wanted to be heard.

Regardless of how much noise they were making in response to a play, all respectable women wore masks to the cazuela as a matter of propriety. So long as they

\footnote{Shergold, p. 299.}
were masked it was not improper to pay their reales and see the shows. In fact, it was in the commercial theaters’ best financial interests that women attend frequently and that they be able to come to, sit in, and leave the corrales de comedias unmolested by male audience members. For this reason, in 1608, the city council of Madrid decreed that there should be no men near the entrance “where the women enter and exit.”

In 1630 the city fathers of the court city even required that an alcalde clear the area around the women’s entrance after the performance, so that female playgoers could leave the playhouse without fear of molestation by random men on the street either – at least within the vicinity of the corrales de comedias.

When these women went to the theater, they could see friends, enjoy the fellowship of other women, and they could escape the realities of their own lives for the space of the dramatic action. Heroines, such as Lope’s Belisa, were clever, resourceful, loving, and brave. Women in the audience must have enjoyed the escapism provided by roles such as these played by beautiful and talented actresses in the corrales. For two hours, masked in semi-anonymity, they too could have love and adventure, seek the redress of grievances, restore their honor, rebel against patriarchal authority, and avoid unwanted marriages.

Of course, their gazes were not the only ones on the actresses on the stage. The male gaze undoubtedly found much to appreciate in the beauty of the actresses playing the varoniles. And the unobstructed view that men had of women’s legs tightly clothed in hose provided by the mujer vestido de hombre had no match in the Spanish theatrical

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54 AHN, Comedias, Libro de gobierno 1.200, fol. 286, undated. The original reads, “donde entraban y salían las mujeres.”
world and very few in the social reality of Golden Age Spain, where most women led rather secluded lives, and even when they came into view, their clothing did not provide much titillation for Spanish men. No doubt playwrights wrote so many of these plays, which featured a cross-dressed female bandit or star-crossed lover, in order to appeal to and satiate such appetites of the *vulgo*: male and female alike.

If the worst fears of the opponents of the theater had come true in early modern Spain, the streets of cities like Madrid, Seville, and Mexico City would have been overrun with cross-dressed women, causing men to stop in their tracks to gape at the view of female legs in doublet and hose. However, actual cases of such cross-dressing, sensational as they were, were extremely infrequent. This does not mean that the theater had no influence on Golden Age society, as it clearly did, drawing so many Spaniards into the audiences of the *corrales de comedias*. It also helped to provide for women, who might otherwise have been on the street, begging or entering the profession of prostitution.

V. Women, Public Health, and Social Order

The visitation records of the Hospital de la Pasión indicate that in addition to employing women, such as Luisa Mendez the laundress of the hospital, the organization cared for many sick women.\(^55\) For instance, the sacraments were even administered to women, who had little importance to society at large. Often the names of these women

\(^{55}\) ARM, Sección Hospital General y de la Pasión, Visitas, Signatura 8483, Carpeta 1, num. 30, undated. This Libro de Visita contains records from 10 June to 19 September of 1613.
were not even recorded by the charitable workers in the hospitals in which impoverished and ill women found some care and respite.\textsuperscript{56} Much of the care that was available to these women, and indeed to other inhabitants of Spanish cities, was made possible through the admission fees paid at the entrance to the *corrales de comedias*.

Even with the public assistance to the poor and the sick of cities in the Spanish empire, plenty of women remained in need. Sometimes they needed other forms of medical assistance, and sometimes it was a female healer who provided it for them. In Mexico City and Puebla many women of the lower classes, and of mixed blood, practiced the healing arts. For example, Isabel Martín learned medicinal arts from her mother, a *mestiza blanca*, married a Spanish surgeon and became the most renowned healer in Mexico City during the early seventeenth century. Her niece, Isabel de Montoya, learned medicine from her mother, her famous healer aunt, and her surgeon uncle. Her career was cut short, though, by her parents’ desire to marry her to a city councilor. Montoya fled to Puebla and lived there for almost twenty years, working as a part-time healer and a part-time prostitute.\textsuperscript{57}

Montoya’s fate was not an uncommon one. Many women in the Spanish Atlantic world faced hard choices and not all of them had the skills Montoya possessed. These women of the streets lived in Seville and Madrid, as well as Puebla and Mexico City. In fact, it became common knowledge among madrileños that the river Manzanares was “poor in water but rich in women” because of the number of prostitutes who worked

\textsuperscript{56} ARM, Sección Hospital General y de la Pasión, Visitas, Signatura 8483, Carpeta 1, num. 23, 1613. The original reads, “estaba en este hospital … una muger que no supo su nombre…..”

\textsuperscript{57} For an excellent account of Montoya see Amos Megged, “Magic, Popular Medicine, and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Mexico: The Case of Isabel de Montoya,” *Social History*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (May, 1994): pp. 189-207.
along its banks.\textsuperscript{58} Sumptuary laws and the 1610 decree by the Duke of Lerma, Philip III’s favorite, that only respectable ladies should be allowed to travel in coaches and only on the conditions that they travel with their faces uncovered and with fathers, sons, or husbands. As Melveena McKendrick has observed, such a declaration indicated “women of ill repute were encroaching upon the prerogatives of the respectable upper class.”\textsuperscript{59} In Seville, many prostitutes operated out of brothels, which the city fathers sanctioned.\textsuperscript{60} Seen as a necessary evil, prostitution filtered out the potential for even more terrible crimes, and the poverty of many women ensured a booming business. One of the many ironies is that this business was in part concerned with protecting the honor of the women who were outside of this profession. Like the hospitals, the brothels, helped early modern Spanish authorities to order society by removing the marginalized from public view.

Thus, the question of what place women had on the stages of Golden Age Spain as well as the question of what women’s place was in Spanish society remained ambivalent and the reality seldom matched the ideal forms held by religious and civil authorities. These questions were also connected to concerns about the corruption and decline of Spain. The authorities and the inhabitants of the parishes of Madrid and other cities in the Spanish Empire hoped for an acero that could remove the blockages of corruption and decay of the state, as they did those of sick women – in the plays and homes of early modern Spain.

\textsuperscript{58} J. García Mercadal, \textit{España vista por los extranjeros}, Tomo III (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1918), p. 96. The original describes the river as “pobre de agua pero riquísimo de mujeres.”
\textsuperscript{59} McKendrick, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{60} Mary Elizabeth Perry, \textit{Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) p. 47.
Conclusion: Theater Trajectories and an Inn-Yard Empire

This study has devoted a great deal of attention to those who opposed the stage for various reasons, including the presence of women on the stage, but there were also proponents of the stage. Some believed that plays and poetry could serve to educate and instill virtue. In his *Apology for Poetry*, English poet, courtier, and soldier Philip Sidney, claimed that “the poet is indeed the right popular philosopher….” Sydney’s claim suggests that, while the philosopher could only educate those who were already learned, the poet could help to educate all members of society by moving them to virtue. By creating sorrow, fear, or delight, the poet could lead his reader or hearer to right behavior. The poet who wrote for the stage had the potential to do this as well. He might even be better equipped to do so because he could also mobilize a visual image as well as engaging the hearer. According to Sidney, “the right use of Comedy will (I think) by nobody be blamed, and much less the high and excellent Tragedy, that openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue….that with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded…” At the same time, Sidney berates many English poets and playwrights for not living up to their potential as poets. He claims that although most of the plays written and performed in sixteenth-
century England do not observe the rules “neither of honest civility nor of skilful Poetry...” that they could do so.¹

Unsurprisingly, Sidney thought English was the superior language for poetry, but, patriotism aside, his argument could be extended to the poetry and plays of other realms. It was this concern about influence that led the Council of Castile to require that plays be about men and women who had lived exemplary lives – although again there was the difference between a play’s potential to influence and guide an audience and the amount that it actually did. The underlying point Sidney makes, however, is the important one: that poetry – including the poetic word spoken on the stage – has a special power to move its audience.

*An Apology for Poetry* is a work of literary theory that makes the argument that the theater could hold up a mirror to early modern society, and that by doing so it could move and reform those in the audience. This claim was one that concerned antitheatrical polemicists and civil and ecclesiastical authorities in the cities of the early modern Atlantic World. While theater, no doubt, often fell short of its incredible potential because of a number of factors, such as financial interests of the playwright, contentious collaboration, and worries about censorship, there were moments when the early modern theaters did indeed influence their audiences.

They could do this because during the sixteenth century, commercial theaters had evolved across Western Europe, from the Iberian Peninsula to the Netherlands, from the island kingdom of England to the Italian Peninsula. By the middle of the sixteenth

¹ Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, eds. R. W. Maslen and Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 92, 98, and 110. Interestingly, Sidney claims that *Gorboduc* does observe these rules, being full of stately speeches and “notable morality.” On a performance of this play in Dublin, see above pp. 118-119.
century, the Spanish theater had begun to divide into three branches: the commercial theater, the festival play or court theater, and the religious theater. While these three branches had interconnections, the commercial theater of Golden Age Spain was the most important and the most integrated into Spanish society. No other national theater—not the English, the French, the German, or the Dutch—matched that of Spain in terms of output during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This study has focused on the intersection of commercial drama and public health and on how various groups—actors, actresses, playwrights, and administrators—created the most successful and most exported public theater of the early modern period. In doing so, these groups framed many of the discourses concerned with both public theater and the condition of empire in the Spanish Atlantic and Anglo-Atlantic Worlds. Using English examples as foils for comparison, this project has argued that Spanish theater became linked to municipal governments through charitable giving and that this relationship created a space for commercial theater to become a part of daily life in Spanish cities, not just in Castile, the heart of Spain, but also in the Americas, particularly in colonial Mexico.

In many ways, the commercial theaters of early modern Spain and England share similar trajectories. In their respective capitals of Madrid and London public theaters emerged in the second half of the sixteenth century. Acting companies that required licensing came into being and in both Spain and England troupes of players tended to consist of approximately twelve to eighteen members. Playwrights wrote dramas primarily to be performed on the stage, and publication was a secondary consideration for the majority of Renaissance dramatists in both realms. Some playwrights and some particular performers on the stage sought and acquired fame and celebrity during their
own lifetimes. Monarchs and nobles patronized playwrights and performances. Commercial theater seemed to become largely entrenched in the daily lives of many of the inhabitants of Madrid and London – although in the latter many segments of society could only afford the performances in the public playhouses outside the city walls. In spite of the success of the theaters, there were opponents of performed drama in both Catholic Spain and Protestant England, and they gained ground in moments of political crisis during the 1640s and 1650s. In both kingdoms political crisis compounded with antitheatrical sentiment led to the long-term bans of theatrical activity.

But there were differences in these trajectories too. The relationship between the theaters and the hospitals of Madrid and other Spanish cities connected commercial drama to charitable giving and to questions of public health and social order in ways that it did not in English cities. In the sixteenth century, the religious brotherhoods of Spanish cities rounded up paupers, particularly sick ones, and placed them in hospitals. These confraternities also donated food, firewood, and money to hire skilled personnel to care for the impoverished and the infirm, and a great deal of this money came from the admission fees of spectators in the corrales de comedias. Soon the municipal governments of these cities took over the role of administering the funds to the hospitals. In the Americas early theatrical performances actually took place in the physical space of the hospitals themselves. Such a link between charitable care and commercial drama never developed in the English system in spite of early legislation to encourage such a connection in London. In spite of criticism of the medical profession and concerns about the formative power of the theater to corrupt the republic, the financial reality of this symbiotic relationship meant that social work and public health in Spain relied on the
productivity and popularity of commercial drama. This system persisted in the Spanish-speaking world into the nineteenth century.

Ironically, it was this charitable connection, this way of ordering life, which enabled the discursive space created by the Spanish theater to further disorder life in the seventeenth-century cities of the Spanish Empire. Since the theaters charged two fees – one to pay the actors and one to pay the hospital linked to a particular corral de comedias – it was in the best interest of the acting company and the playwright to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, to provide the early modern “blockbuster”. Thus it should not be surprising that many plays had patriotic themes that glorified Spain, its history, and its monarchy. However, some plays, such as Privar contra su gusto by Tirso de Molina, transmitted more ambivalent messages about Spanish society and culture to the spectators in the public space of the corrales.

Similarly, many plays, such as Calderón’s famous La vida es sueño allowed playwrights and their audiences to struggle with intellectual and theological debates within the context of the Counter Reformation. At the center of La vida es sueño is the tension between free will and fate: Basilio, King of Poland, has his son, Prince Segismundo, imprisoned in order to prevent the fulfillment of a prophecy and in attempting to thwart fate he eventually brings his kingdom to civil war. Although the comedia ends with forgiveness between father and son and all seems in order, the question of whether or not Segismundo will truly be a good king has not actually been resolved. Calderón invited his playgoing public to explore the scope of human nature, as well as the paradox of free will in a world ordered by an omniscient God. He also, as in the case of El médico de su honra cautioned his audience to beware of their observations.
because it was not always easy to diagnose what was real and what was the stuff of dreams.

The public theaters of early modern Madrid, Seville, and other cities tended to be centrally located and in what contemporaries considered to be respectable neighborhoods, and this was true from their early beginnings. Although the *corrales de comedias* were compartmentalized with private boxes for the nobles who could afford to rent them (thus providing more money to the hospitals), the special section for women, known as the *cazuela*, the *tertulia* for the clergy, and the pit where men could either sit or stand depending on how much they wanted to pay, their audiences engaged in a theatrical public that was participatory and that resulted in the largest theatrical output of the Renaissance.

Another key difference between the public theater of Spain and that of England was the prominent role that theater took in provincial cities – both important centers of empire and quieter towns – and in the colonial settlements of the Americas. By the middle of the seventeenth century, when the Council of Castile decided to suspend theatrical activity, the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon had theaters to shut down in Madrid, Seville, Valencia, Toledo, Burgos, Valladolid, Córdoba, among other cities. The reconstructed Golden Age *corral de comedias* in Almagro, Spain serves as evidence of the prolific nature of the Renaissance drama of the Spanish-speaking Hapsburg world. Spain’s empire was truly one filled with inn-yard theaters from Castile to the Viceroyalty of Peru. At the same time the English theater in Dublin was still nascent and no professional theatrical performances had yet taken place in England’s North American colonies.
The Renaissance stages of Spain and England also developed differently because of who was able to perform on them. Unlike in England, where boys played the roles of women in the theaters, on the stages of the corrales de comedias of Madrid and other Golden Age cities in the Spanish Empire women performed alongside men, and they often did it in men’s clothing. Although there were frequent attempts on the part of civil authorities to regulate the behavior and dress of women on the stage and to restrict exactly which women could perform in the playhouses, the frequency of the legislation itself suggests that these attempts were largely unsuccessful. The theater opened up a space for women in Spain and the Spanish colonies to earn an income by acting in or writing for the corrales de comedias, to seek publicity and celebrity, and to direct acting troupes as autoras. Such opportunities would not be available to their English counterparts until after the Restoration in the 1660s.

Thus, the Spanish comedia that developed during the Golden Age was a vibrant one that treated the public of spectators to two hours of entertainment in the inn-yard theaters, as it provided financial assistance to the hospitals of Spanish cities and a trade for many actors, directors, and playwrights, including women. While the paucity of sources does not allow for overarching conclusions about the theater’s ability to influence public opinion in sixteenth and seventeenth century cities, there are instances that indicate that the Spanish comedia could do so – that it could subvert, as well as amuse. The mechanisms of censorship and the commercial interests of all involved, including municipal authorities and the Protector of the Hospitals, meant that the early modern Spanish frequently negotiated a middle ground between the imperial and local controls of regulation, which hoped to maintain order, decorum, and to gain financially by the
theater, and the limits of those controls, which dealt daily with rowdy audiences and sometimes politically-minded playwrights. In the end, or as Spanish playwrights often concluded, “al fin y al cabo,” the centrality of the Spanish theater in urban daily life and its connection to assisting the poor and diseased patients of the hospitals expanded the discursive space for theater to entertain and to influence the public.
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