Women Onstage and behind the Scenes: Playwrights, Entrepreneurs, and Actors in Early Modern Spain and France

In the seventeenth century a small group of Spanish and French women claimed space on the stage, distinguishing themselves not only as actresses but also as writers, directors, and impresarios. Drawing from economics, performance studies (including the semiotics of theater), literature, and history (including archival research), this panel will explore ways in which early modern women found economic independence and social agency through the theater.

Organizers:

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An excerpt from a document discussing women's representation in Seventeenth-Century Spain. The text is too long and complex to summarize fully, but it touches on themes of gender equality, representation in the arts, and social and economic conditions during that period.
monarch's claim to the age of exequion with a supension of social standing, which, together with the monarch's own close ties to the Church, led to a phenomenon of monarchs and masses becoming involved in the same political and religious conflicts.

The French Revolution of 1789 marked a significant change in the structure of power in France, with the rise of new social and political movements. The revolution led to the fall of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic, which had a profound impact on the development of modern political systems.

In conclusion, the monarch's claim to the age of exequion with a supension of social standing was a complex phenomenon that had significant implications for the development of modern political systems. The French Revolution of 1789 marked a significant change in the structure of power in France, with the rise of new social and political movements. The revolution led to the fall of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic, which had a profound impact on the development of modern political systems.

And again:

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It is necessary to remember when thinking about these issues of history, to recall the important part that religion may have played in the shaping of the national consciousness. The church, with its strong organization, provided a framework within which the national identity could be defined and reinforced. The Bible, with its stories of nationhood and valour, provided a means for the nation to reflect on its past and to project its future. The church also played a key role in the education system, with the establishment of missionary schools and the promotion of religious education, helping to shape the minds of the young and to instil a sense of duty to the church and the nation. In this way, the church became an important force in the shaping of the national consciousness, and its influence can still be felt today.
The Duke had a large and prominent piece of land, the heir apparent, and they were successful in their efforts to maintain their position. Given the aristocratic nature of the times, the Duke was often involved in political and social affairs, attending the court and participating in the governance of the kingdom. His influence extended beyond the immediate family, and he often acted as a mediator in disputes among the nobility. The Duke's wealth and status allowed him to maintain a large and lavish lifestyle, surrounded by servants and retainers who attended to his every need.

In addition to his political and social activities, the Duke was also a patron of the arts, supporting the work of poets, painters, and musicians. His love of learning and culture was evident in his interest in the arts, and he often hosted gatherings where artists and intellectuals could come together to discuss the latest developments in their fields.

Despite his wealth and prominence, the Duke remained a humble and modest man, always willing to lend a helping hand to those in need. His generosity and kindness were well-known, and he was respected by all who knew him. His legacy lives on today, as a reminder of the importance of maintaining a strong and respected position in society, while also using that position to help others and make a positive difference in the world.
The sex difference in proportion of access to the media, and the reasons.

It is often claimed that men have better access to the media than women, but this is not always the case. In many countries, women have better access to the media than men, but in others, the opposite is true. The reasons for this are complex and vary from country to country.

In some countries, women have better access to the media because they have more opportunities to work and earn money. This may allow them to afford to buy newspapers, magazines, and other media products. In other countries, women may have better access to the media because they are more likely to be educated and have better qualifications. This may allow them to work in media-related fields, or to have better access to media-related training and education.

In some countries, women have better access to the media because they have more opportunities to use media technology. For example, they may have more access to the internet, which allows them to access media content online. In other countries, women may have better access to the media because they have more opportunities to use traditional media, such as radio and television.

In some countries, women have better access to the media because they have more opportunities to participate in media-related activities. For example, they may have more opportunities to be involved in media-related organizations, or to participate in media-related events.

In some countries, women have better access to the media because they have more opportunities to be involved in media-related decision-making. For example, they may have more opportunities to participate in media-related policy-making, or to have a voice in media-related decision-making.

In some countries, women have better access to the media because they have more opportunities to be involved in media-related research. For example, they may have more opportunities to conduct research on media issues, or to participate in media-related research projects.

In some countries, women have better access to the media because they have more opportunities to be involved in media-related advocacy. For example, they may have more opportunities to advocate for media-related issues, or to participate in media-related advocacy campaigns.

In some countries, women have better access to the media because they have more opportunities to be involved in media-related education. For example, they may have more opportunities to teach media-related courses, or to participate in media-related training programs.

In some countries, women have better access to the media because they have more opportunities to be involved in media-related funding. For example, they may have more opportunities to secure funding for media-related projects, or to participate in media-related fundraising activities.

In some countries, women have better access to the media because they have more opportunities to be involved in media-related partnerships. For example, they may have more opportunities to form media-related partnerships, or to participate in media-related networking events.

In some countries, women have better access to the media because they have more opportunities to be involved in media-related collaborations. For example, they may have more opportunities to collaborate on media-related projects, or to participate in media-related collaborative initiatives.

“Why can’t a woman be more like a man?” Professor Henry Higgins famously asks in the musical My Fair Lady.¹ Gila, protagonist of La Serrana de la Vera, by Luis Vélez de Guevara (1579?–1644), is more like a man. She is a tough character who can fight, shoot, swear, and compete in games better than any male. She is the proud successor of her father and grandfather. .. She brags that she is “muy hombre” (very manly) (352, 1579) and should be judged “más que por mujer, por hombre” (as a man rather than as a woman) (756). However, physical strength and daring are not what Professor Higgins has in mind when he laments that women--to him, opaque, bewildering creatures--aren’t more like men. If he had known Gila, who eventually becomes a menace to the community, he might have rejoiced that more women are not like men.

Gila is a hermaphroditic character, famous for her feminine beauty as well as her masculine strength. She lives in the town of Garganta la Olla, near the vibrant western city of Plasencia, in the comarca (administrative division) of La Vera, during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. On his way to fight the Moors in Granada, Don Lucas, a captain in the King’s army, passes through La Vera and demands garrison in Garganta de Olla, choosing for himself the richest house, which happens to belong to Giraldo, Gila’s father. At that time, townspeople were obligated by law to provide lodging for the King’s troops, but Giraldo, a proud peasant, refuses. The Captain threatens force, and Giraldo responds with his own threat, boasting that although he has no sons to defend him, his daughter is as brave and strong as any man. Giraldo’s description of Gila, known as La Serrana² de la Vera, serves to kindle not only the Captain’s curiosity, but also the audience’s.

Gila’s spectacular entrance underscores her dual identity and is contrived to elicit expressions of admiratio from the public. The country folk sing her praises as she arrives on horseback from the hunt, her hair loose and flying in the wind. She brings with her a wolf skin, a bear skin, and a wild boar--evidence of her extraordinary skill at bagging dangerous prey. Her gun and hunting knife underscore her manly prowess, yet she wears a wide skirt, dangling religious images (patenas), a plummed hat, and feminine boots that highlight her womanly charms. Gila is, as her costume indicates, a paradox. The violence of her description of the hunt foreshadows her future persecution of men, but also reveals a powerful sensuality. Intrigued by this exotic creature, the Captain repeats his demand for quarters, but Gila seconds her father’s
refusal and drives Don Lucas out of town. Humiliated, the Captain vows to get even. In a conversation with his lieutenant, Don García, he reveals his plan to dishonor Gila.

The action now shifts to Plasencia, where Ferdinand and Isabella are attending a celebration in their honor. Gila displays her remarkable skill at arms and at wrestling bulls. The King and Queen are greatly taken with her, especially Isabella, who comments on her courage and beauty. Gila, in turn, expresses her veneration for the Queen. Unexpectedly, news arrives that the prince has been seriously injured in a horseback riding accident. The festivities are canceled, depriving Gila of her prizes.

The Captain returns to Garganta la Olla to put his plan into action. He convinces Giraldo to give him Gila’s hand in marriage, despite the difference in social class. Gila at first opposes the plan, but then consents because the union will permit her to emulate the Queen, whom she reveres. Don Lucas sweet-talks Gila into going to bed with him before the marriage ceremony. When she awakens to find him gone and realizes she has been duped, she vows to avenge her honor. She takes to the mountains, swearing to murder every man she meets until she can kill Don Lucas. In the meantime, word comes that the prince has died.

In the craggy peaks on the outskirts of town, Gila slaughters so many men that she becomes the subject of ballads... She threatens the King, but spares his life because he is not a mere man, but “Dios en la tierra” (III: 2565). Shortly afterward, Don Lucas wanders unwittingly into the mountains and knocks at the door of Gila’s hut. When she answers and confronts him, he begs forgiveness and promises to marry her, but Gila grabs him and hurls him over a cliff.


In the 1620s titillating stories began to circulate about a Basque noblewoman, Catalina de Erauso, who as a girl had escaped from the Convent of San Sebastián el Antiguo, shed her nun’s habit for male garb, and gone to fight Araucano Indians in South America, where she was known as the monja alférez, the “lieutenant nun.” Eventually she confessed her sex to the Bishop in Guamanga (Peru). He had her examined and confirmed that she was not only a woman, but a virgin. By the time Juan Pérez de Montalbán wrote his play in 1626, Erauso was already a celebrity. Upon her return to Spain she traveled around the country on what might be compared to a modern-day publicity tour, promoting her feats as a female virgin alférez. A curious public was anxious to learn more about her, and Pérez de Montalbán knew how to exploit the market. La monja alférez can be considered an early version of the sensationalistic biographical
docudramas or exposés that enthrall audiences today. The play was performed in Madrid shortly after it was written, just when curiosity about Catalina was peaking and she was in Rome petitioning the Pope to allow her to wear male garb.

Dramatists had always made use of the public’s appetite for controversial themes. Lope de Vega was well aware of popular tastes and "made no mystery of the importance of teasing the limits of conventional decorum" (Cañadas 19). His comment in Arte nuevo de hacer comedias that "suele / el disfraz varonil agradar mucho" (masculine costume usually pleases the public) shows that he consciously and deliberately sought to create dramatic appeal by flaunting decorum. Cross-dressed damas not only wore revealing garments, they engaged in decidedly unladylike behavior, traveling alone, carrying swords, provoking fights. The audaciousness of their conduct was always titillating...

Selection from La Serrana de la Vera

She can run faster than any farmhand in La Vera de Plasencia.
She can jump, wrestle, throw the javelin better than anyone.
No one can beat her at any of these things...

She can hold back an oxcart.
She can stop a spinning windmill with her hands.
She rides a horse as though she were sewn to the saddle, and just when it's tearing most furiously, and seems to be doomed to crash headlong into a mountain, she lets go of the reins and brakes it with her legs and feet.

Gila's arrival: Whinnying of horses. The whole company charges onstage, except for the two who are already there. The rustics carry wreathes of flowers, and has a long stake with a wolf, complete with head, hanging on it. Another carries a bear, and another a wild boar. And finally,
behind the others, comes GILA, the Mountain Woman of La Vera, dressed in the female garb of the mountain folks, with a skirt and many religious medals, her hair hanging loose and a hunting cap with plumes, a hunting knife hanging at her side, white riding boots, and a shotgun beneath the horse’s blanket. The others sing until she dismounts.

Selections from *La Monja Alférez*.

The Alférez (field marshall), Guzmán (Catalina), and Miguel are playing cards.

**Alférez:** I’m better than you.

**Guzmán:** You’re a liar, scum!

*Guzmán hits the Alférez over the head with a dagger. They all take out their swords.*

**Alférez:** I’ll cut off your tongue, and your hand.

**Miguel:** Aren’t I carrying a sword, Guzmán? What are you doing?

Don’t you see you’re insulting me by taking vengeance, when I can do it myself?

**Guzmán:** Whenever I get the chance, I just take over.

That’s just the way I am.

**Miguel:** Well, to hell with that Basque guy and good riddance.

*Guzmán confronts the Alférez on another occasion.*

**Alférez:** *Aside.* (It’s him, and he’s alone.

Luck is finally on my side.

After so much time trying to punish him, I’ll finally get to avenge myself.

He’ll pay with his life for insulting me!)

*They draw their swords move offstage.*

**Guzmán:** Ah, vile traitor!

**Alférez:** Just try to defend yourself!

**Guzmán:** Do you realize whom you’re fighting?

It is I, Guzmán!

**Alférez:** Oh no! I’m mortally wounded!

Confession! Let me at least confess before I die!
ACT III. 1835

KING

Yes, and I will ask her
if she acknowledges my love now.

LEONOR

Well, I will take my leave.

(EXIT Leonor. Don Carlos enters at the discovery space curtain.)

CARLOS

I have been following the king.
The commitment to my friendship
with Don Juan has brought me.
From here, I can hear better
what the king is saying.

(Exit King. The king has been turned away.)

KING

If dawn sleeps, who has seen
the sun now? For it is he who gives her light.
But now I see that the sun has stopped;
he suspends all movement,
attentive to such fairness,
and exalted by such beauty.
Do you not hear me, cruel despiser?
You are made of snow amidst fire,
I never touch you, though I try,
for I am the sun god Apollo and you, Daphne the laurel tree.
Take pity on a king in submission,
angel in human form!
Remember that heaven takes offense
at such spiteful harshness at my expense.

(ARMESINDA speaks in her sleep.)

ARMESINDA

He tries in vain,
for I am what I was.
Do not fear for me, Don Juan,
for that tyrant will never have me.

KING

She speaks in her sleep. Oh, heavens!
I want to get closer
and hear what she says.

ARMESINDA

Do not let jealousy of the king anger you.

KING

She says that to Don Juan?
Yet, my power and grandeur
will vanquish such harshness
and disaffection.

ARMESINDA  They will not.

KING  They will not? Strange case! But, why do I doubt, if she is but a faithless woman.

ARMESINDA  It cannot be.

KING  How can this be? I am on fire!

CARLOS  (Aside) Even in her dreams she despises him! Things are not going too badly up to now.

KING  Look, I am dying for you! Love me!

ARMESINDA  I am not such a fool, for I would not esteem your love more, than whatever the king could give me.

KING  She says all this to set things right towards me! Alright, what more can I hope for now?

ARMESINDA  Not one single favor has he been able to attain from me.

KING  By my faith she speaks the truth well, though it seems like madness.

ARMESINDA  Only you are to enjoy me.

KING  What am I hearing now?

ARMESINDA  For, I am dying for you.

KING  Alas, beautiful slayer, for even in sleep you repay my love that I haves for you so poorly. But her hair tempts me now, I will come closer and kiss her hand.

(Before he reaches her, Don Carlos appears from where he was and pretends he is very
distressed.)

CARLOS My lord, there is such great confusion!

KING What is this? What has happened?

CARLOS Oh, you are so forgetful!

KING Well, what is the news?

CARLOS Only that for certain, I found out
Don Juan is about to enter
Naples.

KING What bad luck!

CARLOS And he is about to end the happiness
that these maneuvers afford.
Make short your letting her understand
that he is dead, before he gets here.
Thus, you will conquer
the scorn of this woman.
I did not want to wait,
since he had already arrived,
for the time that you had ordered,
for me to do it, but I came to warn you.

KING What I have received from you now
is the greater service you have done for me.

CARLOS Thus, I perform my duty.
(Aside) How well I was able to stop his love-making!

KING Well, go behind that curtain,
for I want to awaken her,
so that we can bring both
beginning and end to the deceit.
I will hide there with you.

CARLOS (Aside) My ruse turned out valiantly
and I fulfilled my obligation famously;
Such is the law of the good friend.

(The king pulls on Armesinda's sleeve and hides with Don Carlos.)

KING I will hide here.
And this, not so that Don Juan would believe it, for it was a foolish hope, that he would appreciate such undying love, such steadfastness, I could not continue on with my gallant presumptions, in submission to him who was my first love. But, now that cruel Fate has wanted Don Juan to die. Here, my soul is torn from my breast, yet, I remain alive. My lord, kneeling at your feet, humbly I beg your forgiveness for my ingratitude.

(On her knees)

Please give me license to withdraw from court and in a convent, end the sorrows that consume me here. Do not refuse my request, I beg of you, for in this way I will be obliged to commend to heaven the wealth of your house. Valiant lord, may the tears that flow from my eyes move you, for, turned into fountains, they are enough to form an ocean. Thus, in this manner will cease the troubles, pains, and anguish, the memories, grievances, the sorrow, the misfortune, the ingratitude, the offenses that torment me and kill me slowly. But now intense pain cuts my voice short and will not let me continue with this knot in my throat, for cruel oppression impedes my words. Or you must do what I ask, or kill me with your sword!

(She rises with a handkerchief to her eyes.)

KING

(Aside) Is there any woman like her? Let Greeks and Romans keep silent!
LINDAMIRA: No, no, dear Don Alvar, the time to feign is past.
When hope is gone, there's nothing left to fear.
CARLOS: But, madam, the King will be there before us.
If you please, we must . . .
LINDAMIRA: Yes, Carlos, that's enough.
Let's go.

Enter King.

CARLOS: Forgive me, Gods! The king advances.
We must have made him lose all patience with us.
LINDAMIRA: You see, sire, I am going to withdraw,
And Carlos is my witness that I don't complain.
KING: Stop, stop, you're necessary to me. You
Have too much of a share in all this business
To be deprived of the joy of witnessing it.
You, Carlos, listen.

CARLOS: I'll take care of it.

Exit Carlos; enter Clotaire.

CLOTaire: Despite all your contempt, I swear to you
That, madam, I fully share your anxieties.
LINDAMIRA: Your heart could be dispensed from such a trouble.
My cares are not as great as you dare think.
KING: Now gently! We have learned from your own mouth
How excessively you love that guilty man.
You vainly try to hide from us the passion . . .
LINDAMIRA: No, no, sire, if you wish, I shall confess it.
Is it a crime to love a great-souled hero
Who has won esteem from all the universe?
CLOTaire: Sire, after such a speech, what are you waiting for?
KING: You give these titles to the object of my wrath.
The amazing power of a foolhardy passion
Dares go to such lengths to defy my anger!
LINDAMIRA: Why, sire, you are the one who caused that passion
That rages in my heart in spite of me.
It's by placing Moncade on glory's summit,
Let us withdraw.

My moon, my dew, my place to reach The truth that you dare to speak.

Forgive me, everywhere in all things: theirs.

Believe; you see, I know; the trust of your affection.

Its pitch is immense, but it isn't done.

Wherefore do you make work?

Love has no part in the real Spintharites.

Israel alone give you their marks, unanswerable, act.

A weak feature of magnitude

And don't confound with such severity

Monaco. Ah, sir, these lectures of the world's desires

Would support here thought, in such a passion.

And for the guilty love, my pains.

She loves him who attends me the fitness in

Wants to share your color, and dummer in, the

Liberation, open to all my senses.

Foolish man, I am less kind than Nelson.

Look at Don Alvar's approval. Consider her

Commanded to be satisfied for you.

Come see those of whom we are our brains.

When you see the Initiates are around here.

Come, with them, come see by a hundred private proofs.

Every doubling and chance.

Queen: Where will the prince? Here he is, standing! ... All these little things make up on my knees.

To answer for him love in other eyes.

Yes, Don Alvar, is not our, we know his loves.

In answer, there happens due to me, I don't take it from me.

I think myself, site, to the creature death.

Yes, if he is convinced of the slightest.

AS guarantor of the pledge.

I give myself up to your mercy, dear prince.

And I dare declare him in your sign.

To you, sir, he did! I know the announcement.

It was because the reply did his duty,

Conceive: Great gods, what more can we say after that.

Indeed produced the other in answer us,

I acknowledge her merit and his loyalty since.

In answer, we return the favor he had from the king.

And well, they find no answer, as is.

Judge by this single case, what he can do

Winning your subjects, pairing them with your eyes.

12. He will not let the darkness come.

Their factions, here, that united collection.

Colonial: The answer, and this invention revealed.

In my right, may read this increasing blow.

I am the one whot King, who secure him accorded

and whom he was always careful to himself.

But, who would observe him with great care.

That he expected vines to win her service.

One another's pleasure, doubting Latimer.

Weel, when I speak here the absence of other love.

I shrowd here can see the papers, there read this!...

When can answer for the lawyer.

I know, Monsieur. Well! it is 1. sir. I

Presence can force me to keep silent now.

I cannot stay, nor can I open my eyes.

He read your letter to do him service.

And the home so many times with such kindness.

When he, and those country he has considered.

11. When I see, Monsieur vacated here by a prince.

If escape my heart despite my respects.

Forbear me, sire.
END.

KING

Don't let's waste time in my consideration.

LENORA: All this is not worth any consideration.

WILL: You make a great strain in the public esteem.

WILL: Carry one.

KING:

Lenora, all that is finished. Let's go in and finish this.

LENORA: Nothing like finishing off.

ANDREW: I am not aware of so great a danger.

LENORA: I am not aware of any mortal's heart.

ANDREW: But his example must serve as a sign to all.

LENORA: He has well deserved such an illustrious self-republic.

KING: No, leave him to the Justiciary.

MONOCC: Prince...
Women and the Comedia Stage (Petersen)

Somaesthesetics techniques serve as a means of perfecting ones bodily senses, improving on knowledge and experiences. How, then, does the aesthetic theory of somaesthesetics figure into performance arts? How is Stanislavski’s System, a coherent and practical method that aims toward ‘truthful, realistic performance,’ useful in explaining the relationship of somaesthesetics to theater, specifically to early modern Spanish women thespians? How did the actor’s embodiment of her on-stage role empower and enrich her off-stage life?

Additional Readings


Early Modern Spanish Women Actors (Mujica)

What physical demands were made on actresses playing “pants” roles?

Additional Readings:


Sharon D. Voros  
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QUESTIONS on *Tyranny and Performance in Leonor de la Cueva (1611-1717) and Madame de Villedieu (1640-1682).*

1. From the excerpts of *La firmeza en la ausencia* [Steadfastness in Absence] and *Le favori* [The Favorite Minister], how does the topic of tyranny give dramatic structure to these plays? Examine the confrontation scenes: Armesindas’s dream scene from Act III in Cueva and Lindamire’s declaration of love in Act V in Villedieu.

2. For the methodology, how does the concept of the narreme or recurrent scenic structure, adapted from structural linguistics, provide a comparative approach to two different works with common source, Tirso de Molina’s *El amor y el Amistad* [Love and Friendship]? Examine the narreme of transgression (fall from grace of the court favorite / warrior) followed by reconciliation (loyalty test or trial).

3. In what ways are both plays tragicomedies regarding the narreme of the fall from grace / trial and what elements are “dismarrated,” suggested or even threatened actions of the monarch, such a rape (Cueva) or imprisonment (Villedieu), which do not really occur?

ADDITIONAL READINGS:


