

Spanish Golden Age Theater: Lope de Vega and Don Pedro Calderon

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Please Silence Cell Phones

Renaissance Examples of Self-Fashioning as a Literary Topos

- Montaigne's *Essais*
- Cervantes' Don Quixote; Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda and the "Fake" Author in Don Q. Part II
- Shakespeare: Framing Scene for *Taming of the Shrew* (Christopher Sly and Lord); *King Lear*
- *Masques*: plays written for the court with courtly actors; often reflect the real drama of the court
- Nobles sitting on Stage in Elizabethan Theatres

Lope de Vega (1562-1635)

- Biography by Juan Perez de Montalvan, 1636
- Born in the reign of Philip II in Madrid—"Gold Rush" town; bourgeois family
- University of Alcala de Henares; no degree; got the niece of his host pregnant and fled Madrid in scandal; Many lovers
- Libel and Exile
- Navy: Battle of Spanish Armada, 1588
- Most Popular playwright in Spain; hundreds of plays, as well as epics and poems; No Royal Patronage, however
- Religious Transformation: Priesthood

Spanish Golden Age Theater

- 1570-1650
- Spectacle: music, dancing as interludes
- Elaborate costumes; all contemporary, and not historically accurate
- By 1623, Lope complains about mechanical plays and stunts
- Women acted and were in the audience (masked); Unruly audiences

Plot of *Acting is Believing*

- Act I: Diocletian becomes Emperor; Diocletian, Maximian and a peasant woman, Camilla
- Emperor Aurelius Caesar insults Jupiter and is killed by a lightning bolt
- In Rome, his son and co-emperor, Carinus, is a libertine; killed by a husband
- Aper, father-in-law to Numerianus, brother of Carinus, is poisoned
- Diocletian slays Aper and is acclaimed Emperor by the Army

Act II

- Diocletian makes his friend, Maximian, co-emperor
- Peasant woman, Camilla, is made his wife and Empress
- Acting troupe led by Genesius is to perform for the court
- The play mirrors the love triangle within the troupe (Genesius, Older Actor and Troupe Leader and Writer who loves Marcella; Marcella, young woman he loves; Octavius, lead actor that Marcella loves)
- Play becomes reality; Diocletian is confused

Act III

- Second play within the play: about a Christian Martyr
- As Genesius rehearses his part he hears a voice calling him to be baptized; is it an angel or another actor playing with him?
- During the performance, an “angel” appears and Genesius is baptized; Play breaks down; Reality breaks in as Genesius appears to truly have converted
- Diocletian is outraged and orders him to be executed
- Final Scene: Genesius is impaled; final speech compares the human comedy of this world to the divine comedy of God

Dramatic Parallel: the Play versus the Imperial Drama

- Just as the Plays that are performed highlight how the line between reality and Illusion is fluid, so the Rise to power of Diocletian and his friends reflects how the powerful are powerful by virtue of fortune and illusion
- The emperor is no different than other men; a son of a slave can become emperor; a peasant woman can become the Empress

The Drama of Kings

- Rosarda: You're getting picky! Don't you know they're empresses and queens?
- Celius: Do you think your kingship is better than theirs? The only difference is that their play lasts an hour and a half, while yours lasts all your life. You're an actor too, but you wear the king's costume til death, and ending foreshadowed by the play"
- Emperor Carinus gets angry and Rosarda observes "You're not playing the role of servant very well today, Celius. You're supposed to please, flatter and lie."
- Carinus foolishly believes that his power of Kingship IS real—that his power is greater than death and equal to the gods.

Dramatic Irony

- When the audience knows something a character does not
- In theatre, actor's "asides" often convey this effect
- Felisidarus and Aper: (p. 60); F's asides indicate that he does NOT approve of Aper's actions, but his direct speech to Aper is the opposite
- This sort of dramatic irony dramatizes the duplicity of the world

Characters fall in and out of character (p. 76)

- Marcella: Genesisus, are you acting?
- Why do you call me Marcella, when my name is Fabia?
- This is not in the play. Don't you know Caesar is watching us?
- When Genesisus converts, God has intervened and made his "play" reality; the boundary between Real and Fiction can be bridged by the will of God; God is the ultimate "Director" of the play

Don Pedro Calderon de la Barca (1600-81)

- Noble; educated for the clergy but more interested in Arms and Ladies
- Court entertainer for Philip IV
- Cloak and Sword Dramas; Themes of love and honor
- Philosophical Drama
- 1650, took holy orders after death of loved ones
- Wrote auto sacramentales (religious plays)

"Life Is a Dream" 1636

- Horoscope of Segismundo; King Basilio convinced his son will bring about his downfall and Poland's
- Raised secretly in a tower; Tutor is Clotaldo
- Strangers appear in a storm; Rosaura in disguise
- S. awakened in court from drugged sleep; anger at "Father"; he is returned to prison
- King plans to marry nephew, Astolfo, to niece, Estrella
- Clotaldo convinces S. that the day's events were a Dream
- Soldiers mistake prisoner, Clarin, for S.;
- After being freed, he acts nobly; returns crown
- Marries Astolfo to Rosaura and marries Estrella

Segismundo's Monologue on Life as a Dream, Act II, 17

- "For we are in a world so very strange that life is but a dream; experience has taught me that each man who draws a breath dreams what he is until he wakes in death. The king dreams he is king; believing this illusion, he lives ordering, ruling, and governing; the borrowed plaudits he receives are writ upon the wind, and Death (sad Fate!) converts them all to ashes...I dream that I am here, encumbered with these chains; I dreamed that I once found myself in yet another state more flattering. What is life? A Frenzy. What is life? A shadow, an illusion, and a sham. The greatest good is small; all life it seems, is just a dream, and even dreams are dream."

Fate vs. Free Will: Revenge of Segismundo Restrained by his Moderation and Reason

- Father tried to avoid Fate and in doing so created a beast of a son
- “And so, if one expects to overcome his fate, it must be done with reason and with moderation. Even one who sees it coming cannot stave off harm before it comes;...For it was Heaven’s will, no matter how he wanted to prevent it, he could not. How then shall I, a man of younger years and not so brave as he...counter Heaven’s will?”
- He raises his father up and seeks his forgiveness
- Realization he might wake, and this be a dream, has made him learn self-control

Conclusions

- The Theme of Self-Representation: The dual spheres of Stage and Court, the transformation of soldier to Emperor; prisoner to king
- Distinction between Illusion and Reality is not a firm one; therefore, social distinctions are also an illusion; Actor-King; Prisoner-King
- Acting is Believing questions Divine Kingship; Life is a Dream supports it