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Bourbon Reform and *Buen Gusto* at Mexico City's Royal Theater

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Bourbon Reform and *Buen Gusto* at Mexico City's Royal Theater

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Abstract

Bourbon Reform and *Buen Gusto* at Mexico City's Royal Theater

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During the late eighteenth century, as part of a broader reform initiative commonly referred to as the "Bourbon reforms," royal officials attempted to transform theatrical productions at Mexico City's *Real Coliseo* (Royal Theater). Influenced by new intellectual trends in Spain, especially the neoclassical movement, reformers hoped that theater could serve as a school of virtue, rationality and good citizenship. This essay analyzes the theatrical reform effort, traces its foundations from sixteenth-century Spain to eighteenth-century Mexico, and seeks to explain why the initiative failed to transform either the *Coliseo*'s shows or its audience's artistic predilections. It argues that the initiative was unsuccessful for three primary reasons. First, reformers did not have the power to compel impresarios and actors to obey their new regulations, and economic constraints sometimes forced officials to bend their strict aesthetic standards to appease the audience's largely baroque predilections. Second, Mexico City's diverse and thriving

public sphere made imposing a new popular culture profoundly difficult, especially given that reformers' one-dimensional vision of neoclassicism failed to account for the variety and debate within this movement. Consequently, the theater added fuel to public debate over the definition of *buen gusto* (good taste), rather than merely instructing passive citizens as reformers had hoped. Finally, widespread public derision of the performing profession meant that many spectators did not take actors seriously as teachers of morality, taste and rationality. Actors' reputation as immoral lowlifes, which derived in part from late-sixteenth century debates in Spain over morality and illusion in drama, complicated reformers' already difficult project of transforming the theater into a school of sociability and citizenship.

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Introduction

Performances at Mexico City's *Coliseo* (Royal Theater) during the eighteenth century were rowdy social affairs. Audience members chatted amongst themselves, moved around the theater, and were often at least as occupied with their own conversations as with the spectacle in front of them. The boundary between performer and spectator was not firmly set: audience members requested repetitions of pieces they enjoyed and shouted at the actors, who often made signs to their friends in the audience. Performers also tended to chat with one another onstage, and as a result sometimes missed their cues from the prompter. They sometimes had difficulty recovering from such failures, since they often had not rehearsed their parts.[1] For many theatergoers, however, the chaos that occurred both in the audience and onstage was likely of little concern. The often heavily metaphorical and fantastical baroque dramas that the *Coliseo*'s theater troupe performed provided entertainment, but undisturbed illusion was not a necessary precursor to enjoying the show.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, royal officials in New Spain (now Mexico) attempted to remodel the *Coliseo*'s theatrical functions. In place of the chaos and unruliness that reigned both onstage and in the audience, reformers hoped to impose order, "decency," and "better" acting. They issued regulations which, they hoped, would encourage spectators to turn their attention to the stage, leaving social interaction for other occasions. At the same time, officials sought to replace the often magical and lewd baroque dramas performed at the *Coliseo* with the more rational,

virtuous, and realistic plays of the newer neoclassical movement. In sum, reformers sought to transform entirely the experience of theater in Mexico City.

The theatrical reform initiative was part of what historians now refer to as the "Bourbon reforms"—a broad series of policy changes that Spain's Bourbon-dynasty monarchs and their ministers instituted from the mid-eighteenth century on, in hopes of strengthening their increasingly tenuous imperial power. Inspired by new ideas from Enlightenment intellectuals about governance and rationality, Bourbon reformers sought to centralize authority in the hands of the monarch, increase income and bureaucratic efficiency, and improve the empire's citizenry. Royal officials in Spain and New Spain alike borrowed ideas from Spanish neoclassical intellectuals, many of whom argued that theater could and should function as a school of morality and sociability. Through theater, they hoped, spectators could learn to be better, more rational, and more virtuous royal subjects.

This essay analyzes the Bourbon effort to transform Mexico City's citizens through theater, and seeks to explain why the initiative was ultimately unsuccessful. It begins by exploring the theatrical traditions, intellectual trends, and ideological concerns of peninsular Spain that influenced Bourbon theatrical reform efforts, first in the mother country, and later in the colony. It reviews the theatrical reform laws in both Spain and New Spain, revealing that reformers sought to impose a singular vision of *buen gusto* (good taste) that borrowed heavily from Spain's eighteenth-century neoclassical scholars, but failed to account for the variety and debate within this intellectual and artistic

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[1] Juan Pedro Viqueira Albán, *Propriety and Permissiveness in Bourbon Mexico*, trans. Sonya Lipsett-Rivera and Sergio Rivera Ayala (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1999), 44-45.

movement. Finally, this essay examines the uncooperative responses from performers and impresarios, the active atmosphere of public debate, and the cultural attitudes toward actors that thwarted the successful implementation of the reform effort in Mexico City.

Much of the available historical scholarship on the Royal Theater in late colonial Mexico City is outdated, and focuses on reviewing the primary source materials and the types of dramas the theater troupe executed rather than providing any analysis of the reforms or their results.[2] To date, the most analytical and in-depth examination of the reform effort is a chapter by Juan Pedro Viqueira Albán, who argues correctly that it was unsuccessful. He attributes its failure almost entirely to the fact that the *Hospital Real de los Naturales* (Royal Indian Hospital) depended upon the theater for revenues, which meant royal censors frequently had to accede to the audience's baroque tastes rather than enforce their neoclassical standards. Consequently, argues Viqueira, although progress was "substantial," it was also "fragile."[3] This essay departs from his analysis by arguing that not only economic constraints, but also a variety of other factors, which stemmed both from reformers' actions and from audience tastes, doomed the reform efforts to failure.

The intelligentsia's role in Mexico City's theatrical culture during the reform period merits closer attention than scholars have granted it. Viquiera tends to homogenize elites, and he assumes that their "bourgeois" cultural values and ideas about taste

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[2] Manuel Mañon, *Historia del Teatro Principal de México* (México: Editorial "Cvltura," 1932); Enrique de Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña Historica del Teatro en Mexico, 1538-1911*, 3rd edition (México: Editorial Porrua, 1961); Irving A. Leonard, "The 1790 Theater Season of the Mexico City Coliseo," *Hispanic Review* 19 (1951), 104-120 and "The Theater Season of 1791-1792 in Mexico City," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 31 (1951), 349-364; J. R. Spell, "The Theater in Mexico City, 1805-1806," *Hispanic Review* 1 (1933): 55-65.

[3] Viqueira Albán, Propriety and Permissiveness, 88-89.

corresponded precisely to those of reformers. Conversely, Dalia Hernández Reyes acknowledges that the intelligentsia's predilections were not strictly neoclassical. Using articles from the *Diario de México* (Mexico Daily) newspaper, she argues convincingly that the capital's Creole intellectuals did not recognize a firm boundary between baroque and neoclassical aesthetics, and sometimes worked baroque forms into their largely neoclassical tastes.[4] Yet, ideas about theater and taste among Mexico City's intelligentsia were significantly more varied than either Hernández or Viquiera acknowledge. Elites did not have uniform predilections, their preferences did not always align with reformers' ambitions, and they delighted in arguing amongst themselves about good taste and theater. These characteristics of Mexico City's intelligentsia played a critical role in undermining reformers' efforts to mold better citizens through theater.

This essay also builds upon scholarship on the public sphere and the Enlightenment during the eighteenth century. In 1962, Jürgen Habermas argued that the development of a bourgeois public sphere in Europe during the eighteenth century initiated modernity by making possible the common pursuit of universal values. More recently, historians such as T. C. W. Blanning and James Van Horn Melton have updated Habermas's theory by arguing that Europe's public sphere was not solely bourgeois, and included both supporters and critics of the established order.[5] Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, meanwhile, has demonstrated that Spanish America had its own public sphere, whose

[4] Dalia Hernández Reyes, "La Renovación Teatral en las Postremerías del Virreinato Novohispano: Los Concursos del Diario de México," in *El teatro en la Hispanoamérica colonial*, ed. Ignacio Arellano and José Antonio Rodríguez Garrido (Madrid: Editorial Iberoamericana, Universidad de Navarra, 2008), 395-414.

[5] T. C. W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660-1789* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Creole intellectuals often departed from the ideas of European scholars by imbuing their own arguments with New World patriotism.[6]

This essay combines Cañizares-Esguerra's attentiveness to Spanish America's distinction from Europe with Blanning and Melton's notion of a varied and diverse public sphere that was not purely bourgeois. Mexico City had a unique public sphere that did not merely mirror Madrid's. However, patriotism was not the defining feature of all Creole intellectuals' arguments about theater and good taste, and public debate about these ideas occurred among more than just the intelligentsia. The existence of a vibrant and diverse public sphere in Mexico City meant that the theater added fuel to public debate, rather than merely instructing passive citizens as reformers had hoped.

The theatrical reforms in Mexico City were unsuccessful for multiple reasons. First, reformers did not have the power to compel impresarios and actors to obey, and economic constraints sometimes forced officials to bend their strict aesthetic standards to appease the audience's largely baroque predilections. Consequently, the *Coliseo*'s productions often did not conform to reformers' narrow definition of neoclassical good taste.

Second, regardless of whether shows reflected reformers' ideals, the city's diverse and thriving public sphere made imposing a new popular culture profoundly difficult. Most spectators continued to favor baroque drama and rowdy shows, while many members of Mexico City's intelligentsia preferred neoclassical aesthetics and a silent audience. Nevertheless, even the intelligentsia, many of whom contributed to the *Diario*

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[6] Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 266-345.

de México, did not accept passively reformers' definition of taste, nor did their ideas about theater and performers conform exactly to the singular vision of neoclassicism that officials sought to impose. Instead, in private discussions, newspapers, and public places, friends and strangers of a variety of social statuses debated the quality of the *Coliseo*'s productions. They also forwarded their own interpretations of *buen gusto*, which they built upon intellectual sources from around the world. In doing so, theatergoers—and especially contributors to the *Diario de México*—both responded and contributed to worldwide discussion about neoclassical taste. This essay argues that these public debates played a far more decisive role in shaping public taste in Mexico City than did royal officials' attempts at reform.

Finally, widespread disrespect for actors, dancers and musicians who worked in public theaters also contributed to the failure of reform efforts. If Bourbon reformers and neoclassical intellectuals were to attain their goal of turning the theater into a school of virtue and socialization, they would need to hoist much of that responsibility onto not only playwrights, but also performers. Yet, New Spain's professional theatrical tradition derived in large part from Spain, where actors, dancers and musicians had suffered from an ambivalent, and often decidedly negative reputation since the rise of professional theater in the late sixteenth century. Although many of Mexico City's intellectuals had recognized the paradox by the early nineteenth century and hoped to improve these entertainers' public image, most theatergoers continued to hurl insults and decry the lowliness and immorality of the very people who were supposed to be teaching them to be good, virtuous citizens.

This essay uses royal laws, documentation from the *Coliseo*'s administration, writings from Spanish neoclassical intellectuals, and secondary literature to piece together the roots of, and complexities within, the reform initiative. It also relies heavily upon the *Diario de México* newspaper as a source for audience reactions and public discussion about theater. The editors of the paper occasionally wrote their own pieces and announcements, but usually the articles they published were letters submitted by readers. Most of the paper's contributors were Creole elites. The founders of the *Diario* obtained a license from the viceroy to publish it, who granted permission on the condition that they refrain from including political or economic information on the local government or the Crown, since this was reported in the *Gazeta de México*, the government newspaper. Although the editors agreed to these terms, the viceroy sometimes censored the *Diario* regardless.[7]

Despite viceregal censorship, the *Diario* reveals a lively intellectual community, which debated topics ranging from literature to social mores to recent scientific advances. Contributors wrote frequently about theater, and in particular about recent performances at the *Coliseo*, including the reactions and conversations of their fellow attendees. Thus, the *Diario* provides a valuable window into discussions and debates about drama not only within Mexico City's Creole intellectual community, but also among other theatergoers, who hailed from a variety of social classes. Together, consciously or unconsciously, and frequently in conflict with one another, these audience members contributed to worldwide debate over *buen gusto* by defining it on their own terms. By attempting to

[7] Esther Martínez Luna, *Estudio e Índice Onomástico del Diario de México: Primera Época (1805-1812)* (México: UNAM, 2002), xii-xiii, xxix-xxxi, xxxiv-xxxv and Ruth Wold, *El Diario de México, primer*

reform the theater, Bourbon officials helped propel these public discussions, but could not shape them to their liking. Although Mexico City's public sphere and theatrical traditions were by no means mere reflections of their counterparts in the metropole, the roots of both the reform initiative and its failure were located in sixteenth-century Spain. That is where this story begins.

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cotidiano de Nueva España (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, S.A., 1970), 12-14.

Chapter One: The Politics of Drama in Early Modern Spain

THE RISE OF THE *COMEDIA NUEVA*

By the time royal officials in Madrid and Mexico City began their reform efforts in the eighteenth century, theater was already a popular and well-established diversion in urban Spain. By the sixteenth century, Spaniards performed dramatic tropes in church on Christmas and Easter, and acted out nativity plays and pageants to celebrate Corpus Christi. In the secular world, troubadours and mimes entertained in public, and dramatic pageants comprised part of the festivities for coronations of kings and other significant royal occasions.[8] Not until the late sixteenth century, however, did theater become a professional and widely popular form of entertainment in Spain.

The professionalization of Spanish theater began in the 1560s, when *cofradías* (charitable brotherhoods) in Madrid started sponsoring theatrical shows in their courtyards, dedicating part of the proceeds to hospitals run by the brotherhoods. The Cofradía de la Pasión y Sangre de Jesucristo and the Cofradía de la Soledad de Nuestra Señora banded together to sponsor the erection of two public theaters in Madrid—first, the Corral de la Cruz in 1579, followed by the Corral del Príncipe in 1582. In order to convince city councilors to allow them to put on more frequent shows at the two new theaters, the brotherhoods agreed to donate part of the proceeds to other charitable institutions, including Madrid's *Hospital General*.[9] The agreement marked the beginning

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[8] N. D. Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage, From Medieval Times Until the End of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 1-142 and Melveena McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain, 1490-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 6-7.

[9] Margaret R. Greer, "A Tale of Three Cities: The Place of the Theatre in Early Modern Madrid, Paris and London," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 77 (2000), 403.

of a long-standing administrative and economic link between Spain's public theaters and charitable hospitals. The hospital's protector, also a member of the Council of Castile, began to supervise the administration of the *corrales*, although the brotherhoods continued to manage them. Later, in 1615, lessee-managers began running the theaters instead, based on four-year contracts.[10]

The establishment of major, permanent theaters in Madrid and the professionalization of acting stimulated the rise of a new genre of theater: the *comedia nueva* (new comedy). These plays consisted of around 3,000 lines of polymetric verse, usually divided into three acts. Most ended happily, and did not adhere to the classical unities, which were Aristotle's rules concerning place, time and action in drama. They were often humorous, although unlike today's comedic genres, humor did not define the *comedias nueva*. Many focused on love intrigues, honor, epic achievements, and other romantic themes.[11] The *comedia* had already begun its ascent by the time the Corral de la Cruz and the Corral del Príncipe were established in the late sixteenth century, but the genre's popularity skyrocketed afterward, signaling the beginning of what scholars often refer to as the Golden Age of Spanish drama.[12] During this period, Spanish playwrights produced an extraordinarily high number of *comedias*, possibly as many as 10,000, and audiences flocked to public theaters to see them. The most famous Golden Age playwrights, Félix Arturo Lope de Vega Carpio (known as "Lope de Vega") and Pedro Calderón de la Barca, defined the standards of the genre, and their wildly popular

[10] McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain*, 178.
[11] *Ibid*., 73.
[12] Greer, "A Tale of Three Cities," 395 and Richard Pym, "Drama in Golden-Age Spain: The State of the Art," *Shakespeare Studies* 31 (2003), 31.

comedias ensured that audiences kept returning. The period ended in 1680, with the death of Calderón.[13]

The earliest Spanish players were, for religious theater, priests, subdeacons and choirboys, and for secular shows, professional musicians and guild members. By the fifteenth century, for the most part amateur actors of the nobility occupied the stage in secular dramas, which they normally performed in the courts. The sixteenth century saw the rise of professional actors, who worked for theater companies. With occasional exceptions, most of these professional entertainers came from the lower echelons of Spanish society.[14]

People from all sectors of society attended *comedias* at the new public theaters. Most probably went to the theater in part for the show itself, and in part for social interaction and festivity. Audiences were apparently noisy and rambunctious, especially those who stood in the seatless *patio* area in front of the stage. Spectators talked amongst themselves during the show, and applause, whistles, catcalls, jingling keys, and throwing objects at the actors during the show signaled audiences' approval or dissatisfaction with the production. Audience members occasionally even pulled pranks, such as setting off stink bombs or releasing mice in the theater.[15] After the rise of the *comedia nueva*, then, theater was not only an art; it was also a rowdy social function, where Spaniards of all castes mingled, chatted, and reveled in the chaos.

Soon after public theaters began their ascent to popularity, so too did theater at the royal courts. Although Spaniards occasionally put on court plays and pageants in the

[13] McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain* 72 and Pym, "Drama in Golden-Age Spain," 31.
[14] Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage*, 505-543 and McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain*, 188.

sixteenth century, these productions became far more prevalent after Philip III assumed the Spanish throne in 1598. His wife, Queen Margaret, enjoyed theater, but was unable to attend the shows at Madrid's new *corrales*. Instead, she hired professional actors to put on private shows, called *particulares*, at Madrid's royal palace, as well as the other royal residences at Aranjuez, Valladolid and El Pardo. The practice quickly became commonplace in Spain's royal courts for entertaining the King, Queen and other members of the royal family, to the extent that the Alcázar palace in Madrid became known as the *salón de comedias*. Many of the same dramatists and actors who wrote and performed for the *corrales* also worked for the courts, and often the same *comedias* appeared in court and public theaters.

Initially, court theater was restricted to the royal family and their guests. This changed in 1640, with the construction of a *coliseo* in the new Buen Retiro palace just outside of Madrid. The Buen Retiro theater, which became the new focal point for court diversions, was open not only to the royal family, but also to the public, who paid to enter. Consequently, although technically a private venture, the Buen Retiro *coliseo* more or less served as Madrid's third public theater.[16] Among both public audiences and the royal family, by the early seventeenth century professional productions of *comedias nuevas* had become extraordinarily popular in Spain.

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[15] Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage*, 541 and McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain*, 192.
[16] McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain*, 209-237; Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage*, 264-330; Greer, "A Tale of Three Cities," 407.

THE HAZARDS OF ILLUSION

The *comedia nueva*'s rapid ascent to popularity in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries sparked virulent criticism from Spain's moralists, especially from theologians and other churchmen. The act of portraying another individual on stage was a newly popular form of entertainment, and many were unsure of its repercussions for Spanish society. While some Spaniards, including many friars, argued that the theater was useful as an instrument of instruction, numerous others feared that public theaters were a social, moral and religious danger.

Some Spaniards worried that viewing plays could deprive attendees of their ability to distinguish between the represented and the real.[17] In his 1609 manifesto about writing drama, *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo*, Lope de Vega wrote that in real life the theater-going public often identified actors with the characters they played, and treated them accordingly.[18] Whether the public was actually unable to discern between performance and reality is debatable.[19] Regardless, role-playing had a very real and powerful potential to reflect or reshape the public image of high-ranked individuals and common ideas. Some worried about the potentially deleterious social and moral effects of allowing lowly and disreputable actors to portray kings and saints, or of seeing an actress play the Virgin Mary and, in another piece, assume the role of a common prostitute.

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[17] Pym, "Drama in Golden-Age Spain," 31.

[18] McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain*, 195.

[19] McKendrick argues that many theatergoers were actually unable to distinguish between performance and reality. Conversely, Greer contends that they did acknowledge a boundary between illusion and real life, but saw it as porous. That porosity, she asserts, was something that playwrights and performers could exploit in order to subvert the social order quietly. Greer, "A Tale of Three Cities," 402-403 and McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain*, 201.

A 1598 memorandum encouraging the King to prohibit public theaters illustrates some Spaniards' concerns about the effects of illusion. According to the memo, during one theatrical event, when an actress playing the Virgin Mary recited the line, "How can this be, seeing I know not a man?" the audience responded with laughter, as they were apparently well aware that the actors playing Mary and Joseph were living together. Later, Joseph suspected that Mary was flirting with someone else during the show, and called her a whore.[20] Like many moralists of the period, the authors of the memorandum worried that spectators would conflate sacred figures or persons of authority with the lowly actors who portrayed them.

Indeed, the "loose lives" of actors and actresses were another source of anxiety for Spanish theologians and the Catholic Church. These worries stemmed in part from earlier Christian writings that condemned Roman players, and in part from observations of the sometimes less-than-exemplary behavior of Spanish actors and actresses. Many observers considered actresses to be especially morally dubious, in part because they frequently dressed as men in plays. These individuals also tended to liken actresses to prostitutes, because they put their beauty on display for a paying audience.[21] The frequently lewd dances, such as the *zarabanda*, that actresses performed as part of *comedia nueva* productions also worried some theologians.[22]

Churchmen complained of actors' lewd behavior not only because spectators might conflate that behavior with the characters they played onstage, but also out of concern that the *comedia nueva*'s dramatic rise in popularity would spread their immoral

[20] McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain*, 201 and Greer, "A Tale of Three Cities," 402.
[21] Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage*, 523.

ways to the rest of Spanish society.[23] Ecclesiastical anxiety over the behavior of public entertainers was so strong that the Catholic Church technically excommunicated all actors, and outlawed their burial in consecrated ground if they died as members of the lowly profession. In practice, priests rarely enforced this rule, and many considered it not applicable to players who worked with licensed theater companies.[24] Nevertheless, the law is indicative of the level of moral outrage among sixteenth- and seventeenth-century churchmen regarding the newly popular *comedia nueva* and the actors who executed them.

N. D. Shergold's insightful examination of several seventeenth-century picaresque Spanish novels suggests that the acting profession's reputation for immorality was relatively widespread throughout Spanish society. For instance, in Agustín de Rojas's comical *El viaje entretenido* (1604), the author holds a fictional conversation with two *autores de comedias* (who served simultaneously as impresarios, directors, producers and actors) and an actor, who tell stories of professional theater troupe performers with poor reputations who led lives of thievery and squalor. Other picaresque novels frequently feature immoral actresses, sometimes with husbands who encourage them to have affairs with wealthy patrons. These works of fiction also often depicted actresses as vain women who spent too much of their time fretting about the splendor of their stage costumes.[25] Shergold warns, wisely, not to take these fictional and satirical depictions of theater troupe life as fact. Nevertheless, if they were to entertain readers, they must have played

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[22] Pym, "Drama in Golden-Age Spain," 31.
[23] Greer, "A Tale of Three Cities," 401.
[24] Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage*, 523 and McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain*, 188. The Spanish Crown also reiterated the rule in the 1644 regulations.

upon relatively common stereotypes. Whether or not most professional entertainers were in fact lowlife thieves and whores, by the seventeenth century they had acquired a reputation for less-than-exemplary behavior and an impoverished lifestyle.

ROYAL LEGISLATION FOR SPAIN'S THEATERS

Moral concerns regarding the theater prompted the Crown and its administrative bodies to regulate theatrical productions from early on. Spanish lawmakers had involved the Crown in theatrical life even before the *comedia nueva*'s rise to popularity. The earliest Spanish legislation concerning theatrical spectacles may have been a law that appeared in the *Siete Partidas*, a Castilian royal legal code from 1265. The law prohibited priests from participating in *juegos escarnios*—a term whose meaning is uncertain, but which may have referred to a type of *Ludi*.[26] The same order stipulated that priests were allowed to perform in Nativity plays and other dramas depicting biblical events, provided they did so only in large cities, and not for financial gain.[27]

As the *comedia nueva* gained prominence and acting became professionalized, state institutions increasingly involved themselves in regulating Spain's theaters. From the late sixteenth century, the Council of Castile nominated each professional theater company's *autor* every two years, and appointed *alcaldes* and *alguaciles* to attend the plays and ensure their "decency." Theater companies were required to obtain licenses

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[25] Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage*, 508-514.

[26] The Ludi were day-long festivals during which subdeacons or choirboys could replace priests and bishops and conduct mock services. The festivals also involved burlesque acts and masked figures in churches. The Ludi derived from a Roman tradition, and was popular throughout medieval Europe. See Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage*, 20.

[27] *Ibid*., 5. Specifically, priests could perform plays depicting the Resurrection, how the angel came to the shepherds, or how the Magi came to worship. They could only perform them in cities that were seats of bishops or archbishops.

from the Crown in order to perform publicly. From 1615 onward, playwrights had to submit each new work to a censor and a *fiscal*, who sought to remove any indecency, irreverence, profanity, and slander. The Inquisition, too censored or banned any plays that inquisitors deemed heretical or subversive.[28]

Moral concerns over sexual and political decency guided Spanish theatrical law from the sixteenth century onward. Philip II banned actors from portraying knights of the military orders or himself onstage, presumably in order to prevent them from mocking royal authority.[29] The Council of Castile allowed women to perform beginning in 1587, after an Italian company that included many actresses petitioned for the privilege so that it could stage productions in Madrid. From then on, the Council prohibited male actors to appear onstage in women's clothing, and stipulated that women should play female roles instead.[30] Additionally, although it allowed women to appear onstage, it required all them to be married, and they could not wear indecent costumes onstage. Actresses were also prohibited from allowing male visitors, aside from their husbands, into their dressing rooms. The Crown frequently reissued the decrees demanding that actresses abide by these regulations, which, as McKendrick argues, suggests that the laws were not always effective.[31]

On some occasions, moral objections even pushed the Crown to ban theater outright. This occurred twice, once in 1598, and again in 1646.[32] On the first occasion, King Philip II formed a committee of three theologians to examine the effects of public

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[28] McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain*, 179 and 185.
[29] *Ibid*., 202.
[30] Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage*, 507-508.
[31] McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain*, 186.

theaters upon Spanish society. Echoing the moralist concerns that had been circulating over the previous few decades, the committee members determined that theater disseminated evil and immorality by corrupting the innocent with ideas about love intrigues and methods of deceiving others. Worse still, dramas turned these corrupting ideas into entertainment. Moreover, the theologians argued, the idle entertainment public theaters offered discouraged productivity among workers and students, and weakened Spanish soldiers. Public theaters were so detrimental to Spain's military health, decided the committee, "that they might as well be a weapon of the Turk or the English." Ultimately, the theologians recommended that Philip II close Spain's public theaters, which he did. However, both public demand and the key role theaters played in funding Madrid's hospitals forced the King to rescind the ban a year later.[33]

Moral concerns continued to guide royal policy concerning theater well into the seventeenth century. The next royal prohibition of public theaters resulted from a 1644 recommendation from the Council of Castile. The King closed the theaters in 1646, but only two years later, complaints from both the Madrid city councilors and the Cortes (the Castilian parliament) prompted him to ask for a new recommendation from the Council of Castile. This time, the Council argued that theater was not intrinsically evil, and in 1650 the King retracted the ban. In addition to the 1598 and 1646 theater bans, the Crown

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[32] Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage*, 522.
[33] McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain*, 202.

also prohibited the publication of plays in Castile between 1625 and 1635, out of fear that reading them corrupted the morals of young elites.[34]

Despite the concerns that many church and state authorities expressed about theater and performers, not all saw them as negative, nor as necessarily immoral. Civil authorities were, for the most part, receptive to *comedia nueva* productions, provided that laws regulated them.[35] Among ordinary attendees, the most successful and famous actors gained notable popularity and acclaim, regardless of the their profession's scandalous reputation. Some of them even attracted the patronage of rich nobles. McKendrick suggests that the performers at the bottom of the theater company hierarchies, especially dancers, were the targets of most of the moralist criticisms.[36] The negative connotations of entertaining as a profession thus may not have applied to all actors, dancers and musicians, especially those who were popular among audiences and patrons.

Public theaters also played important roles in the economic, and even religious, workings of Spanish cities. After Madrid's *corrales* began to support the Hospital General, it became standard to direct a portion of public theater revenues to funding charitable hospitals. The existence of professional theater companies also made possible the annual *autos sacramentales*—plays that dealt with the redemption of man through the body and blood of Christ, put on during the Corpus Christi festivities. The *autos* required actors, but actors could not live off the proceeds of these yearly festivals alone. Although *autos sacramentales* often included sexual innuendos, by the late sixteenth century they

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[34] *Ibid*., 205-206 and Elizabeth R. Wright, "A Dramatic Diaspora: Spanish Theater and Its Mexican Interpretation," in *Nahuatl Theater* Vol. 3, eds. Barry D. Sell, Louise M. Burkhart and Elizabeth R. Wright (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 12.
[35] Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage*, 522.

were nevertheless an important part of Spanish religious life.[37] The critical role theater companies played in supporting charitable hospitals and the Corpus Christi festivities made them indispensable to both Catholic ritual and helping the poor and ill in urban Spain. Thus, while some saw them as morally dangerous for the public good, they were also morally necessary.

By the end of the seventeenth century, Spain's public theaters and acting companies had acquired an ambivalent social and moral status. On the one hand, religious brotherhoods had established the first public theaters, the proceeds from these theaters funded hospitals, and professional actors supported the Corpus Christi ritual by playing roles in the *autos sacramentales*. Moreover, the *comedia nueva* was wildly popular, and even most monarchs enjoyed the theater and considered it a legitimate diversion. On the other, actors' behavior, and perhaps their lowly origins, had earned theater companies a shady reputation, and many feared the potentially detrimental effects of role-playing and representation upon the social and moral orders. In spite of these concerns, professional theater would remain popular into the eighteenth century. A new intellectual and artistic movement, however, would apply new and harsher criticisms to Spain's performers and baroque *comedias*.

NEOCLASSICISM, OR THE RISE OF *BUEN GUSTO*

The eighteenth century brought considerable changes in Spanish intellectual and artistic culture that would affect significantly the development of royal theatrical policies

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[36] McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain*, 188.
[37] Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage*, 522; Wright, "A Dramatic Diaspora," 8; McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain*, 239-241.

in both Spain and New Spain. Influenced by new ideas from other parts of Europe, intellectuals in Spain began to criticize the previous century's baroque tastes in art, literature and theater, and instead encourage expression based on rationality and classical forms—a movement known today as 'neoclassicism', although the term did not exist at the time.[38] Most scholars define neoclassical theater as a rigid style which, in contrast to baroque, sought to embody Aristotle's three unities (also called the 'classical unities): action, place, and time. This meant that dramas should follow one main action, occur in one physical space, and take place over 24 hours or less. Indeed, for some Spanish intellectuals of the eighteenth century, strict adherence to these rules was paramount. However, as Jesús Pérez Magallón has demonstrated, the unities did not on their own define Spanish neoclassicism, and not all neoclassical intellectuals agreed upon which unities were the most important, or even which ones counted as unities. Although Spanish neoclassicists tended to share broad, vague ideas about what *comedias* should exhibit—usually rationality, nature, and morality—their arguments and emphases were by no means uniform.[39]

As Pérez Magallón illustrates, the expression that appears most frequently in these intellectuals' writings is *buen gusto*, or good taste.[40] Although the idea of *buen gusto* had proliferated in intellectual and artistic circles throughout Europe since the sixteenth

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[38] Although many scholars have argued that Spanish neoclassicism and Enlightenment thought was rooted entirely or predominantly in French trends, recent scholarship has revealed that Spanish neoclassical intellectuals engaged with new ideas from a variety of European regions during this period. See Yvonne Fuentes, "British Aesthetics and the Picturesque in Spain: Jovellanos's Affinity with England," *Hispania* 87 (2004): 210-219 and Christopher Soufas, "The Imagination in Feijoo and Jovellanos," *Dieciocho* 22 (1999): 77-86.

[39] Jesús Pérez Magallón, *El teatro neoclásico* (Madrid: Laberinto, 2001), 31-32.

[40] *Ibid*., 33.

century, the concept was flexible, and varied significantly between regions and periods. Broadly speaking, the term signified:

> some aspect of beauty, which everyone understood to mean (after Alberti and the ancient tradition) a certain harmony and agreement among elements of an object achieved with such a delicate balance that beauty would be compromised were anything added, taken away, or otherwise altered.[41]

The specific artistic characteristics of good taste, however, depended on how artists, intellectuals and others defined beauty and harmony in any given place and time. Even within eighteenth-century Spain, the emphases and ideas associated with the concept varied. Although the diversity within the Spanish neoclassical movement makes a precise, absolute definition of its precepts impossible, a brief overview of the arguments of a few of Spain's foremost neoclassical intellectuals will illustrate some of the broad ideas that these theorists tended to espouse.[42]

Ignacio de Luzán established the basis of Spanish neoclassicism with his 1737 publication, *La Poética, o reglas de la poesia en general, y de sus principales especies*. In this book, Luzán lamented what he considered the deplorable state of Spanish poetry and theater. He thought it had begun its decline in the early seventeenth century, when *comedias nuevas* by playwrights like Lope de Vega became popular. Plays from the past century, he argued, were immoral, and almost entirely ignored the classical unities. Luzán followed Aristotle not only in encouraging adherence to the unities, but also in defining poetry as the imitation of nature. Like many later neoclassical intellectuals, Luzán saw a direct causal link between the quality of Spanish theater and the morals, ideas and

[41] Vernon Hyde Minor, *The Death of the Baroque and the Rhetoric of Good Taste* (New York:Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26.

customs of the general public. "The ignorance and transgression of the poetic precepts have resulted in serious harm to the public," Luzán lamented. "*Comedias*, mirrors of human life, instead of correcting and improving the customs of men, have worsened them, authorizing with their examples a thousand maxims contrary to morality, and to good civility." Moreover, he thought, *comedias* that failed to adhere to the classical unities reflected poorly on Spain as a whole. He contended that, if playwrights like Calderón and Lope de Vega had united the rules of art with their natural talent, "we would have in Spain such well written *comedias*, that they would be the envy and admiration of the other nations; whereas now they are generally the object of their criticism and their laughter."[43]

Other Spanish intellectuals followed Luzán's lead, and published similar, though rarely identical, critiques of Golden Age *comedias*. For instance, Luis José Velázquez wrote in his *Orígenes de la poesía castellana*, published in 1754, that seventeenth-century playwrights Cristóbal de Virués and Lope de Vega had corrupted the theater by neglecting the classical unities, causing Spain to lose its good taste. More than Luzán, Velázquez emphasized the centrality of the unities to good theater. He complained that, in Lope's plays, heroes were born, grew, and died all in the same show, and somehow traveled all over the world. Velázquez also cited a fellow scholar's dissertation on Spanish theater that bemoaned the harmful social and moral effects of Calderón's *comedias* upon Spanish society. For instance, these plays portrayed noble women who

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[42] See Pérez Magallón, *El teatro neoclásico*, for a far more in-depth examination of neoclassical theories, and the significant variation between the ideas of different neoclassical intellectuals.

[43] Ignacio de Luzán, *La Poetica, o Reglas de la poesia en general, y de sus principales especies* (Madrid: Imprenta de Don Antonio de Sancha, 1789), 5-10 and 55; and Juan Carlos de Miguel y Canuto, "Casi un

acted based on "violent and shameful passions," which, the author feared, taught innocent women to cultivate impure love, disrespect their fathers, and focus their lives upon passionate love.[44]

Like Luzán and Velázquez, Nicolás Fernández de Moratín linked theater to patriotism in his three *Desengaños al Teatro Español* (Reproaches of Spanish Theater, 1762-1763), and complained that the current state of Spanish theater was staining the honor of the nation. He argued that Aristotle had not invented the unities, but had merely observed them in nature. The ultimate goal of theatrical representation, then, was to imitate nature, which entailed reason and good taste. Moratín criticized what he considered the "ridiculous style" and "extravagant metaphors" of baroque theater by the likes of Lope de Vega and Calderón, and, like Velázquez, complained of their irrationality. The Spanish people, he argued, were dissatisfied with Spanish *comedias* and their refusal to adhere to the unities: "How is he who is watching [the play] supposed to believe, without moving from there, that he has seen Madrid and Zaragoza, and how is he supposed to be persuaded that (being true) he has seen events from many years...?" Beyond their neglect of Aristotle's unities, the most abhorrent characteristic of contemporary dramas, according to Moratín, was their immorality. "After the pulpit..." he argued, "there is no school more fit for teaching us than the theater, which is today extravagantly corrupted."[45]

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siglo de crítica sobre el teatro de Lope: de la Poética de Luzán (1737) a la de Martínez de la Rosa (1827)," *Criticón* 62 (1994), 34. Translations mine.

[44] Luis José Velázquez, *Orígenes de la poesía castellana* (Malaga: Oficina de Francisco Martinez de Aguilar, 1754), 107-114. Translation mine.

[45] Nicolás Fernández de Moratín, "Desengaño al Teatro Español I and II," in *La Petimetra, Desengaños al teatro español, Sátiras*, eds. David T. Gies and Miguel Ángel Lama (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1996), 149-176. Translations mine.

Moratín also criticized the *autos sacramentales* that had been so popular in Corpus Christi festivals during the seventeenth century. One of his primary qualms with baroque theater was its frequent use of metaphors and allegories, which, he argued, ruined the illusion of realism. *Autos*, he asserted, were especially guilty of this crime. "Tell me," he asked, mocking the plays' flowery, metaphorical language: "Is it possible for spring to speak? Have you ever in your life heard a word to appetite?" Moreover, Moratín contended, anything sacred had no place in the theater, due in part to the "nonsense" that abounded in the *autos*, and in part to the "ignorance and carelessness" with which the actors supposedly executed their parts.[46] Criticizing the *autos* on these and similar grounds became increasingly common in the eighteenth century, especially among neoclassical theorists. Perhaps due in part to neoclassicists' complaints, the Spanish Crown prohibited *autos* in 1765.[47]

As Moratín, Luzán, Velázquez, and other intellectuals redefined *buen gusto* during the eighteenth century, playwrights responded by writing new *comedias* that conformed more closely to what they considered the principles of neoclassicism. Like neoclassical theoretical writings, neoclassical plays varied, but tended to highlight similar themes and ideas. *Comedias*, *sainetes* and other theatrical works by playwrights such as Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, Leandro Fernández de Moratín (son of Nicolás, author of the *Desengaños*), Tomás de Iriarte and Ramón de la Cruz adhered relatively closely to the classical unities, and tended to emphasize friendship, marital fidelity, heroism, productivity, and rationality. These were the plays that Bourbon reformers in both Spain

[46] Nicolás Fernández de Moratín, *Desengaño al Teatro Español II*, 163 and 174. Translation mine.
[47] René Andioc, *Teatro y Sociedad en el Madrid del Siglo XVIII* (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1976), 345.

and New Spain would promote as part of their project to reform the theater. Intellectual ideas about the aesthetics and goals of theater had shifted considerably since the seventeenth century, and theatrical legislation would change more or less accordingly.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF REFORM

The rise of neoclassicism and intellectual criticism of the state of Spanish theater coincided with a dramatic shift in Spain's governing ideology. In the mid-eighteenth century, Bourbon policymakers became increasingly concerned with not only centralizing power and increasing revenue, but also with ensuring that "public happiness and good taste" prevailed throughout the Empire. Reformers argued that the only way to achieve these goals was to increase royal intervention in every aspect of society. The firm hand of the Crown, they thought, "could mold the character and shape the aspirations of the Crown's subjects." The purpose of this project was not to increase obedience to the arbitrary power of the monarch, but to create a better empire for the public good. Nevertheless, it was the responsibility of the Crown, not that of his subjects, to decide what made the public happy and to regulate accordingly.[48] This new concept of governance became the basis of many of the Bourbon monarchy's mid-to-late eighteenth century reforms, including the theatrical reform initiatives in both Spain and Mexico.

Although state institutions had involved themselves in the regulation and administration of theaters since the sixteenth century, both the new Bourbon governing ideology and the increasingly popular principles of neoclassicism encouraged reformers to increase government intervention in theaters during the mid- to late eighteenth century.

Neoclassicists' goal of instructing and enlightening the public through theater complimented the Bourbons' interventionist governing strategy. Broadly speaking, neoclassical plays promoted the values that reformers hoped to instill in their subjects: morality, rationality, obedience, hard work, and efficiency.

Although Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos did not write his *Memoria sobre las Diversiones Públicas* until the 1790s, it nevertheless provides insight into the neoclassical ideas about public diversions and politics that prompted royal officials to reform the theater. In 1786 the Council of Castile issued an order to the *Real Academia de la Historia* (Royal Academy of History) to draw up a report detailing experts' opinions on Spain's spectacles, games and diversions, and to provide advice on the direction of future policies. The RAH gave the job to Jovellanos, who read his report to an Academy gathering in 1796, and later published it as the *Memoria*.

In his report, Jovellanos, like many other neoclassicist intellectuals, argued that state involvement in the direction of the theater would help to achieve social stability and public order. He asserted that the power of any state is reflected in the moral character of its subjects, and that theater could help shape that moral character, for better or for worse. The upper classes were of particular concern, he thought, since they had abundant free time to fill with immoral activities. Therefore, Jovellanos argued, a good government should provide moral diversions to distract the upper classes from less useful, more morally questionable forms of entertainment. Wealth and luxury, he wrote, could lead people into "a slack and pleasurable lifestyle whose principal goal is to spend a good part

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[48] Gabriel Paquette, *Enlightenment, Governance, and Reform in Spain and its Empire, 1759-1808* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 56-61.

of the day contentedly"—a lifestyle that was unproductive for the empire. Therefore, he argued, "it behooves the government to furnish innocent and public diversions to offset pleasures more dark and pernicious."[49]

Unlike the moralists of the previous century, whose concerns were still reflected in the arguments of eighteenth-century theologians, Jovellanos asserted that the theater was the best form of entertainment, and the most deserving of reform. He acknowledged that theater had the power to lead the public astray, and that it so far had not succeeded as a method of moral and social instruction. Like other neoclassicists, he asserted that the theater that predominated in Spain at the time provided poor examples of faith, morals, virtue and decency, and taught innocent theatergoers to be impudent and disrespectful of the law. "Such a theater," Jovellanos argued, "is a public plague." However, he contended, theater was not inherently immoral, and good legislation could transform it into a school of virtue for the Spanish masses.[50]

Good theater, wrote Jovellanos, could "perfect the spirit and the heart" of those who attended, by providing examples of reverence to God, love of the *patria* and the sovereign, filial obedience, and respect for hierarchies and laws. The heroes of good *comedias*, according to Jovellanos, should exhibit all these qualities, and should be "lovers of the public good." Conversely, characters who failed to embody these tendencies should be punished and ridiculed as part of the drama's script. Jovellanos recommended that reformers ensure that all *comedias* adhered to these guidelines, and

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[49] Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, "Memoria sobre las Diversiones Públicas," in *Espectáculos y Diversiones Públicas y Informe sobre la Ley Agraria*, ed. Guillermo Gernero (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1998), 186-191 and Daniel Frost, *Cultivating Madrid: Public Space and Middle-Class Culture in the Spanish Capital, 1833-1890* (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp., 2008), 86. Translation his.

that actors study their art and earn prizes based on the merit of their acting. This, he thought, would help "to honor and improve this profession, which is today so backward and debased."[51] Ultimately, according to Jovellanos, proper royal legislation and extensive funding could improve the morality of the masses and Spain's artistic reputation simultaneously, thereby increasing both state power and social stability.

Jovellanos's report presumably influenced the Crown's post-1796 legislation on theater, and the similar ideas of his predecessors helped to shape earlier reform projects in both Spain and New Spain. In accordance with the ideals of both Bourbon governance and Spanish neoclassicism, reformers would attempt to mold theatrical productions into schools for better citizens.

NEW REGULATIONS

Three decades before officials in New Spain began their project to reform Mexico City's theater in the 1780s, Bourbon policymakers attempted to transform theaters in Spain. Spain's theatrical reform initiative began in the 1750s, along with a number of other reform projects. The Crown had sought to regulate theatrical productions through legislation since the sixteenth century. However, the Bourbons' mid- to late-eighteenth century theater laws reveal a new, far more interventionist approach to regulating theater. In keeping with the new governing ideology that encouraged royal intrusion into public life for the sake of ensuring "public happiness," reformers sought to regulate closely every element of theatrical production, from the dramas to the actors to the audiences. While some of the new laws echoed earlier moral concerns about sexual immodesty

[50] Jovellanos, "Espectáculos," 176-179 and 198. Translation mine.

among actors and dancers both on and offstage, others sought to impose new kinds of social order upon the theater, and new ways of understanding performance and good taste.

Bourbon policymakers began the reform process for Spain's theaters with *Real resolución* (Royal resolution) in 1753, followed by a *Real orden* (Royal order) in 1763. These two decrees stipulated in detail how theatrical administrators should run the production, and how performers and audiences should conduct themselves during the show. The Crown issued additional edicts in 1766, 1797 and 1803, which announced orders concerning audience behavior at theatrical functions. All these decrees technically only pertained to court theaters, as opposed to public ones. However, it is unclear whether officials and jurists applied these laws only to Spain's court theaters, or to other theaters as well. Jovellanos remarked in his 1796 *Memoria* that public theater had not succeeded as a tasteful diversion because it had not been the object of legislation, which suggests that the eighteenth-century reforms might not have applied to the public theaters.[52] However, regulations and viceregal orders in New Spain from the 1780s indicate that at least some viceroys and royal officials understood these same laws to be applicable to Mexico City's *Coliseo*, which was a public, not a court, theater.[53] The

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[51] *Ibid*., 198-209. Translation mine.

[52] *Ibid*., 198.

[53] In his 1786 regulations for Mexico City's *Coliseo*, Viceroy Bernardo de Gálvez complained that previous royal efforts to ensure order and decency at the theater had not succeeded. Moreover, he noted that some of his new regulations conformed to previous royal decrees ("...todo lo que es conforme á otra Real deliberación de 8 de Abril de 1763"). The decrees he was referring to were the eighteenth-century court theater laws. Yet Gálvez neglected to mention that these laws pertained specifically to court theater, creating the impression that they were, in fact, applicable to the Mexico City *Coliseo*, and thus counted as previous legislation for that theater. See Gálvez's regulations, number two in Mañon, *Historia del Teatro Principal*, 23. An angry 1788 letter from a Mexico City *juez de teatro*, Don Cosme de Mier y Trespalacios, to the *asentista*, Lozano, for failing to conform to the laws and for questioning the authority of the viceroy,

complex and flexible nature of Spanish law might have allowed officials to decide for themselves whether the court theater decrees applied to public theaters or not, depending on local circumstances and their own ideas about justice and reform.[54] Regardless of where exactly these court theater laws applied, they reveal a new royal attitude toward theatrical regulation that would have a significant influence upon Mexico City's theater reforms in the 1780s.

In keeping with the ideals of eighteenth-century Spanish neoclassicism, Bourbon policymakers hoped to use the theater to teach spectators to be virtuous, rational and compliant citizens, who comported themselves with civility. For reformers, the ideal dramatic event entailed rational and moral physical organization, separation of the sexes, constant visibility of all audience members, concentration on the show, separation between stage and audience, and strict royal control over the pieces performed. With detailed decrees and regulations, Spanish authorities hoped to micromanage the kingdom's theatrical functions, molding them into models for reformers' definition of *buen gusto*.

Officials attempted to impose rational order upon theaters, in part for greater efficiency of movement, but also to reduce the chaos that made it difficult for royal guards to maintain control of the audience. For this purpose, reformers strove to place spectators' bodies in what they deemed to be the proper places at the proper times. For

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indicates the same. In the letter, Mier referred to numerous laws to which Lozano had failed to adhere, including the court theater laws. AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, caja 2776, exp 011.

[54] On the flexibility of the Spanish legal system, see Brian P. Owensby, *Empire of Law and Indian Justice in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 47 and Christopher Albi, "Derecho Indiano vs. the Bourbon Reforms: The Legal Philosophy of Francisco Xavier de Gamboa" in *Enlightened Reform in Southern Europe and Its Atlantic Colonies, c. 1750-1830*, ed. Gabriel Paquette (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009): 229-250.

instance, in hopes of minimizing disorder before and after the show, the Crown ordered theater guards to ensure that coaches did not remain by the theater doors after dropping people off, and to maintain order while audiences exited the building after the event.[55]

The Crown sought to control the physical placement of spectators not only to rationalize and organize the function, but also to enforce Bourbon ideals of sexual morality. Perhaps to help assuage concerns about the moral effects of theater upon society, the very shape of royal theaters in Spain and its viceroyalties during the early modern period encouraged separation of the sexes: every theater had two *cazuelas* (galleries), one for women, and the other for men. The court theater decrees prohibited what reformers considered indecent interaction between men and women. For instance, before and after the performance, men could not loiter around the corners and doors of royal theaters, especially at the doors where women exited.[56] Men also could not enter the women's *cazuela*, or even speak to women in the *cazuela* from other sections of the theater.[57]

In keeping with concerns about immoral actresses, this attempt to separate genders applied to the entertainers, as well: the Crown ordered that dressing rooms must have "suitable and sufficient separation," to hide undressing actresses from the prying eyes of male actors. This restriction of sexual explicitness also extended to the stage, where performances—especially dances, *sainetes* (short comic plays), and *tonadillas*

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[55] *Novísima Recopilación de las Leyes de España* (Madrid: 1805), Libro VII, Título XXXIII, Leyes IX and XI.
[56] *Ibid*., Libro VII, Título XXXIII, Ley IX.
[57] *Ibid*., Libro VII, Título XXXIII, Leyes IX and XI.

(musical interludes)—had to maintain "due modesty," and avoid provocative or indecent gestures.[58]

In part to discourage fraternization between sexes at theatrical productions, the Crown demanded that all audience members be constantly visible, both to authorities and to other spectators. One of Spain's decrees stipulated that the *aposentos* (boxes) could not have high blinds, which suggests that authorities were concerned that spectators could take advantage of the privacy of the boxes to practice forbidden behaviors. Other decrees ordered women not to cover their faces with veils, obscuring their identities.[59] With these laws, Spanish reformers sought to define the theater as a purely public space, where spectators' behaviors and identities were constantly visible to all in attendance, and open to public judgment.

Spain's Bourbon reformers also strove to redefine the way audiences appreciated dramatic productions. Whereas previously both public and court theatrical functions had served as social functions as much as artistic ones, the new laws stipulated for the first time that theatergoers should pay full attention to the spectacle onstage. A number of the Crown's prohibitions, or so the edicts claimed, would ensure that no one "ruined" the experience for other audience members—which meant preventing fellow spectators from seeing, hearing, and focusing on the stage. Royal edicts also ordered audiences to "observe corresponding composure, rule, tranquility and good order, in order not to inhibit the entertainment of the performance," suggesting that indecent behavior

[58] *Ibid*., Libro VII, Título XXXIII, Ley IX. Translation mine.
[59] *Ibid*., Libro VII, Título XXXIII, Leyes IX and XI.

prevented fellow spectators from enjoying the show.[60] Additionally, regulations prohibited audience members from "using movements, shouts, or words that can offend the decency, good order, tranquility, and diversion of others present." They also ordered audience members to refrain from yelling at spectators in the boxes, and men to remove their hats during the show to avoid obstructing the view of others.[61] With these edicts, reformers attempted to transform the experience of theater, redirecting spectators' focus from social frivolity to the production onstage.

Bourbon reformers' ideal theatrical function also involved a strict boundary between actor and spectator, and between stage and audience. To this end, they prohibited all communication between performers and attendees during the show. The Crown's decrees barred players from submitting to audience requests for them to repeat certain pieces, or for preferred actors to return to the stage.[62] They also prohibited spectators from throwing paper, money, sweets, or other objects on stage, and from talking to the actors. Actors, in turn, could not talk back to audience members, or make signs to them. The decrees also forbid yelling at the performers, even if they made mistakes, "for being against the decency owed to the public."[63] These prohibitions indicate that Spain's reformers wanted, first, for actors to focus on playing their roles, and second, for the stage to appear as a separate world, upon which the audience had little to no influence.

[60] *Ibid*., Libro VII, Título XXXIII, Ley XI. Translation mine.
[61] *Ibid*., Libro VII, Título XXXIII, Ley XI. Translation mine.
[62] *Ibid*., Libro VII, Título XXXIII, Leyes IX and XI.
[63] *Ibid*., Libro VII, Título XXXIII, Ley XI. Translation mine.

It is unclear why reformers attempted to focus audience attention upon the stage and define a strong boundary between actor and spectator. However, there are two probable motives for transforming theater in this way, and reformers were likely inspired by a combination of the two. First, orderly diversions, where actors performed and spectators watched silently, would likely have been far easier to control than rowdy, chaotic social functions. Second, this new kind of dramatic event was far more conducive to achieving the goals of neoclassicism. If theater was a school of virtue, then it was paramount that the audience pay attention to the lessons drama was supposed to teach them. Too much interaction between audience and stage would presumably ruin the realistic illusion that neoclassical theater was supposed to create. Rowdiness and noise in the crowd would have counteracted both the illusion and the moral lessons that dramas presented.

Reducing the audience's influence upon performances might also have made it easier for the Crown to attain complete control over their content. Just as it had since the early seventeenth century, the Crown required playwrights to submit their works for censure, in order to ensure that shows were decent and exhibited "good taste." Bourbon policymakers ordered the authors of comedies, skits and songs to give their pieces to the *Sala de Alcaldes* (court of high justice) for approval before allowing actors and dancers to present them to the public. *Alcaldes*, or mayors, had jurisdiction over not only the content of the songs and plays, but also the conduct of actors and audiences at the show. The Crown expected at least one *alcalde* to attend each production, to observe and ensure that

everyone, onstage and off, adhered to royal laws concerning public order and decency at the theater.[64]

After the court theater reforms of the mid- to late-eighteenth century, the Crown issued other, similar plans. Between 1787 and 1797, Don Santos Diez González, a theatrical censor and poetry professor, formulated a new plan for the regulation of Madrid's theaters, both public and court. The Crown approved the plan in 1799, to be put into effect for the 1800-1801 season. Whereas the earlier court theater regulations had focused primarily on orderliness and moral behavior among actors and audiences, the primary goal of the new reform plan for Madrid was to ensure that the neoclassical rules of art—as reformers defined them—dictated each performance. To this end, the plan increased government jurisdiction over the style and content of the plays presented at Madrid's theaters, and provided new incentives for conforming to their definition of neoclassicism. Among other innovations, the 1799 plan transferred the responsibility of forming the theater companies from the *Ayuntamiento* to a new four-person *junta*, although this returned to the *Ayuntamiento* in 1806. The new Madrid regulations also increased censorship, requiring dramatists and theater troupes to have their plays approved by a new official, the *Juez Protector* (Protector Judge). They sought to increase incentive for playwrights to write pieces that conformed to the principles of neoclassicism, by offering higher pay for "better" plays and allowing writers to retain the

[64] *Ibid*., Libro VII, Título XXXIII, Ley IX. Authorities in Spain or New Spain must have ordered alcaldes to attend performances prior to the 1750s; Viceroy Bernardo de Gálvez y Madrid's 1786 list of orders for Mexico City's *Real Coliseo* notes that *alcaldes* had complained in 1746 that they did not have time to attend the performances.

rights to their plays for ten years, rather than transferring the performance rights to a specific theater company upon selling it.[65]

Another set of regulations, issued by the Crown in 1801, applied specifically to Spain's public theaters. The new laws created the position of *censor subdelegado*, who was responsible for ensuring the "regularity, decorum and good taste of the scene" by censoring the dramas. In hopes of improving the reputation of the actors and perhaps of theater in general, the Crown outlawed *compañías de la legua*, or traveling theater troupes, "whose vagrancy is commonly harmful to good customs, and its group comprised of corrupted people, full of misery and vice, discrediting the comic profession." The stationary urban theater companies, however, remained legal, provided that a government committee had approved them. The Crown ordered that actors who worked for theater companies had to be educated, literate, "and have a regular conduct and disposition for the comic profession."[66]

Bourbon efforts to reform Spain's court and public theaters during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were probably unsuccessful. The Crown had to issue the court theater regulations multiple times—some twice, some four times—which indicates that actors and audiences often did not obey the laws that governed their behavior at the theater.[67] Tastes might not have changed significantly, either. In his study on theater in eighteenth-century Madrid, René Andioc argues that neoclassical *comedias* for the most

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[65] *Plan de Reforma de los Teatros de Madrid, aprobado en 1799*, ed. C.E. Kany (Madrid, Imprenta Municipal, 1929), 3-4 and 7-12, and Andioc, *Teatro y Sociedad*, 547-551.

[66] *Novísima Recopilación*, Libro VII, Título XXXIII, Ley XII, "Instruccion para el arreglo de teatros y compañías cómicas fuera de la Corte." Translations mine.

[67] The Crown reissued 1753's "Precauciones que se han de observar para la representacion de comedias en la Corte" in 1763, and 1766's "Arreglo, tranquilidad y buen órden que ha de observarse por los concurrentes á los coliseos de la Corte" in 1767, 1797, and 1803.

part had little success during this period. The plays were unpopular, and the government was unable to force them upon the population, since until 1799 theater companies had the power to decide which pieces they performed. Companies almost always picked dramas that would bring in the largest audiences, especially since, until the 1799 reform, actors earned their living from ticket sales. Consequently, conservatively neoclassical playwrights like Iriarte and Moratín had trouble getting companies to perform their works. Moreover, argues Andioc, ecclesiastical censors often judged neoclassical plays more harshly than baroque ones, since pious institutions such as hospitals depended upon theater ticket sales for their revenue.[68]

As Andioc demonstrates, Calderón's popularity declined significantly over the eighteenth century, and by 1800 ticket sales for productions of his baroque plays were dismal.[69] Still, tastes were shifting, but not to the extent that reformers had hoped. Nevertheless, the Bourbon government's theatrical reforms in Spain would heavily influence reformers' attempt to transform drama and taste in Mexico City in the 1780s.

[68] Andioc, *Teatro y Sociedad*, 541-544.
[69] *Ibid*., 17-23.

Chapter Two: Theater and Good Taste in Mexico City

PROFESSIONAL THEATER IN NEW SPAIN

By the eighteenth century, theater and its performers had acquired a reputation in Mexico City that was similar to, although not precisely the same as, that in Madrid. As in Spain, theater was part of Catholic ritual in New Spain, where it played a role not only in *autos sacramentales*, but also in friars' efforts to convert indigenous peoples to Christianity.[70] Much like Madrid's public theaters, the Crown ran Mexico City's *Real Coliseo*, and its revenues helped to support the city's Royal Indian Hospital. Men and women from most sectors of society attended the shows, including students, nobles, government officials, and housekeepers, among others. There, as in Madrid, shows were rowdy, loud, and chaotic, and theater troupes performed baroque, Golden Age Spanish *comedias* most often.

As in Spain, many residents of the colony considered acting, dancing or singing onstage to be a dishonorable profession.[71] Yet, New Spain's ethnic diversity added some complexity to performers' social status in the region. Although during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the *Coliseo*'s actors were probably mostly, if not entirely, peninsular Spaniards, during earlier periods many professional actors might been Mexican-born. For instance, Juan Francisco Gemelli Careri, an Italian traveler, wrote in

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[70] See Louise M. Burkhart, "Nahuatl Baroque: How Alva Mexicanized the Spanish Dramas," in *Nahuatl Theater* Vol. 3, eds. Barry D. Sell, Louise M. Burkhart and Elizabeth R. Wright (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), p. 35.

[71] Hildburg Schilling, *Teatro Profano en la Nueva España: Fines del Siglo XVI a mediados del XVIII* (México, Imprenta Universitaria, 1958), 65-67; 144-145; 99-101 and Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña Historica*, 156.

1698 that he had attended a terrible theatrical production at Mexico City's *Coliseo*: "The actors performed badly; there were sixteen of them, American born, for the Europeans consider it discreditable to play to the general public."[72] There is also some evidence that *mulatos* and indigenous peoples sometimes worked as professional actors, although perhaps not in Mexico City's *Coliseo*.[73]

Although Spaniards apparently disparaged performing as a career, they might have preferred peninsular actors to Creole, indigenous or *mulato* ones. In 1711, for instance, Eusebio Vela, a Spanish-born actor and the Coliseo's *autor*, wrote to the viceroy, requesting permission to bring Spanish players to the city, because he thought the native-born ones were not good enough.[74] The later prevalence of Spanish-born actors in the *Coliseo*'s theater company, and continued efforts to import them from Spain, indicate that Vela's attitude was probably relatively common during the late colonial period. Professional performers in Mexico City thus occupied an ambivalent social position, much like in Madrid, although New Spain's ethnic hierarchy further complicated their status. Actors supported the moral order by funding the hospitals, yet Spanish-born audiences disrespected them. By the end of the eighteenth century, most professional actors were Spanish, which placed them at the top of New Spain's caste system. Due to their profession, however, they were likely among the least-respected peninsular Spaniards in Mexico City.

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[72] Irving Leonard, *Baroque Times in Old Mexico: Seventeenth-Century Persons, Places, and Practices* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), 106. Translation his.

[73] Schilling notes a mulatto actor from the sixteenth century, and Olvarría y Ferrari mentions indigenous actors in eighteenth-century Cholula who were "highly applauded, because they knew how to play their roles with great ingenuity." Schilling, *Teatro Profano*, 67 and Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña Historica*, 16-17. Translation mine.

[74] Schilling, *Teatro Profano*, 99-100.

THE BOURBON REFORM PROJECT AT THE *REAL COLISEO*

Although the mid-eighteenth-century court theater reforms from the Spanish Crown technically might have applied to Mexico City's public theater as well, they apparently had little effect. Therefore, in 1786, Viceroy Bernardo de Gálvez y Madrid began a theatrical reform program, influenced heavily by the Spanish court theater reforms, but directed specifically toward Mexico City's *Real Coliseo*. Gálvez's new laws might have been the first reform effort aimed at public theater in the Spanish Empire. It at least predated Madrid's 1799 reforms. Reformers based the new regulations, and censorship efforts that accompanied them, on the precepts of neoclassicism that were popular at the time. The vision of "decency" and "good taste" they sought to impose, however, was a singular, condensed version of the movement, which took seriously the artistic rigidity that many intellectuals promoted at the expense of the variety and debate that characterized Spanish neoclassicism.

Much like the theatrical reform efforts in Spain, the project to transform Mexico City's *Coliseo* was motivated by the new Bourbon governing ideology and neoclassical intellectual trends. In addition, by the time Gálvez released his new rules in 1786, revolutionary ideas of democracy and republicanism had begun to spread throughout Europe and the Americas. The recent American revolution, followed soon after by France's revolution in 1789, made royal officials increasingly wary of the prospect of revolutionary upheaval in Spain's colonies. Therefore, in 1790, New Spain's Viceroy Revillagigedo the Second reported to Madrid that he intended to divert the attention of New Spain's citizens away from thoughts of dissent and revolution by "undertaking public works of common utility, comfort and beauty." He expected that these would

attract people's attention, "please them, and fill them with satisfaction."[75] As Mexico City's most popular form of entertainment, the theater was the ideal venue for distracting the public from revolutionary ideas. At the same time, it would enlighten the viceroyalty's citizens by extolling virtue, discouraging vice, and teaching spectators about good customs, duty and morality.

Gálvez's 1786 regulations dealt with many of the same topics as the earlier Spanish edicts. For instance, like the Spanish laws, the 1786 decree obliged performers to act modestly and decently on stage, and demanded separation between dressing rooms for actors and actresses. Gálvez expected the audience to exhibit decency and civility as well: he ordered spectators not to wear hats or veils during the show, banned men from entering the women's *cazuela*, and ordered audiences not to request repetitions of pieces. Gálvez also prohibited actors from communicating with spectators, ordered guards to prevent drivers from leaving their coaches outside, and required authors to submit their pieces to government authorities before allowing the theater troupe to present them to the public.

Gálvez's regulations also included a variety of rules that had not appeared in Spain's legislation. Most of these new laws were similar to the Spanish ones, but they reveal that New Spain's reformers hoped to regulate the theater even more closely. For instance, unlike the Spanish decrees, Gálvez's 1786 regulations stipulated specifically that actors had to practice and know their parts well. It ordered the theater's administrators to create a list at the beginning of each month of the pieces they intended to present over the coming weeks. This, Gálvez stated, would ensure that actors had

[75] Leonard, "The 1790 Theater Season," 105. Translation mine.

enough time to learn their lines, which they had to have memorized by show time to avoid paying a fine. Moreover, they had to attend rehearsals daily, whether or not they already knew their lines, so that rehearsals would be complete. The 1786 regulations stated that actors who did not attend practices would go to prison. These rehearsals, Gálvez ordered, must occur with closed doors, and exclude non-company members from attending, since they tended to distract the actors with conversations and "extraneous matters," thus preventing them from learning the pieces.[76] Gálvez also demanded that the theater troupe's members fulfill their obligations each season, barring sickness or some other "just motive."[77] The government's expectations of performers had changed considerably. Laws now obliged them to fulfill their contracts and remember their lines, or face punishment from the viceroy.

The 1786 regulations obliged the *Coliseo*'s actors, dancers and singers to take a variety of other precautions to ensure, first, that the show went as planned, and second, that the stage seemed a world entirely separate from that of the audience—something spectators could watch, but not contribute to in an active way. In his regulations, Gálvez complained of performers' constant tardiness, and ordered them to be present in the dressing room at the show's scheduled start time, in order to avoid delays.[78] His edict also prohibited actors from exposing themselves to the sight of the public offstage or from sitting behind the curtains, in order to avoid inhibiting the movement of other actors or the general conduct of the production.[79] Additionally, he banned "uproar" and "racket"

[76] Mañon, *Historia del Teatro Principal*, 25-26. Translation mine.
[77] *Ibid*., 26. Translation mine.
[78] *Ibid*., 25.
[79] *Ibid*., 24.

in the dressing rooms, as this often interrupted the show, preventing actors from hearing their cues.[80] Delays, backstage noise, and visible actors behind the curtains all would have focused attention on actors' true identity, rather than the characters they were supposed to portray. Revealing the actors' true selves during the show would have ruined the illusion of realism, and at the same time encouraged spectators to confuse the lowly performers with the rational, virtuous characters they played in neoclassical dramas.

Gálvez attempted to impose orderliness upon the theater's spectators, as well. In hopes of subduing the chaotic noise that emanated from the audience during shows, he gave theatergoers specific instructions as to how they should express their appreciation for a performance. The 1786 orders dictated that, without oppressing the "festive release and civil liberty" with which audiences expressed their satisfaction with a piece, they were not permitted to cause "racket" or "noisiness" that might disturb their fellow spectators. The viceroy would only permit applause after the actors had completed the deserving passage of the play. Gálvez threatened eight days in jail for anyone who disturbed the production with "audacious voices" or made fun of the actors.[81]

The 1786 decrees also added to Spanish regulations concerning decency and modesty on stage. As the alternative to more scandalous forms of entertainment, the Royal Theater's shows had to embody what reformers considered "proper" sexual morals. Therefore, Gálvez ordered actresses to wear decent clothing, in order to set an example of good customs for audiences.[82] The enforcement of respectable sexual conduct

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[80] *Ibid*., 25.
[81] Or, if the offender was a "distinguished person," guards were to bring him or her to the viceroy. *Ibid*., 26. Translation mine.
[82] *Ibid*., 23-24.

would also involve musical reform: Gálvez demanded that, to help prevent scandalous dances on stage, the theater's musicians should ensure that their rhythms were "honest," forming "colorful and pleasing figures," without "provocative movements."[83]

More than the Spanish court theater regulations, Gálvez's 1786 code made clear that reformers hoped for strictly hierarchical audience seating. One of the regulations stated that the seats in the *luneta*, the section right in front of the orchestra, were the most special and distinguished seats, and thus those who sat there must be dressed decently.[84] *Luneta* seats were costly, and sold by the month, rather than per show. At six pesos monthly—compared to one real per night for a *cazuela* seat—*luneta* seats were well beyond the budget of most of Mexico City's citizens.[85] Gálvez evidently hoped that, with their clothing, the upper-class spectators in the *luneta* would visually demonstrate their superiority, as well as the superiority of their seating. Although reformers strove to focus audience attention on the stage, they appear to have hoped that the theater's organization by social status would reinforce what drama would teach spectators about respect for authority.

Although hierarchical, the Coliseo's audience probably did not include a full cross-section of social statuses. Some of Mexico City's residents, reformers thought, were not visually or socially respectable enough even to set foot on the *Coliseo* premises. In 1799, Viceroy Miguel José de Azanza ordered the theater's guards and impresario to ensure that anyone who was not wearing sufficiently decent clothing did not enter the

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[83] "…solo admitan que al compass de los instrumentos se hagan mudanzas honestas, formando con éllas vistosas y agradables figuras; prohibiéndose, como se prohibe desde luego estrechísimamente, cualquier agregado que se haya inventado, como el que llaman cuchillada, salto ú otros movimientos provocativos…" *Ibid*., 23. Translation mine.

building. He decreed, “The theater is one of the public places in which the attendance of people of all classes makes the decency of the attendees more necessary, and therefore the shameful and voluntary nudity of some plebeian individuals of this city more intolerable.” He therefore prohibited the entrance of anyone dressed only in blankets or sheets, “or other filthy rags,” since such quasi-nudity was “contrary to the decorum of a grand and opulent capital.”[86] Evidently, Azanza hoped to exclude the poorest of the poor from the theater, but it is difficult to tell whether he sought to exclude certain ethnic groups as well. Curiously, there is never any mention in Mexico City's theater regulations, administrative documentation on the *Coliseo*, nor the *Diario de México* concerning the presence of indigenous peoples, blacks or *mulatos* at the theater during the late colonial period. Perhaps regardless of their ethnicity, Mexico City's most impoverished residents were not welcome at the *Coliseo*.

In order to enforce his regulations effectively, Gálvez took measures to ensure that government authorities kept a close eye on the theater’s performances. His 1786 orders dictated that the *corregidor* and *alcaldes ordinarios* (municipal magistrates) should take turns acting as the *Juez de Teatro* (theater judge). The designated *juez* would be responsible for attending every production at the theater, to ensure that actors and audience members complied with the rules. Previously, the *oidor* (judge of the *audiencia*, the high court) who held the position of *juez* of hospitals had taken up the duty of overseeing the theater’s productions. Royal authorities determined, however, that this obligation conflicted with that *juez*’s primary duties with the hospitals. Therefore, these

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[84] *Ibid*., 29.
[85] For full price list, see *Ibid*., 30.

authorities agreed that royal magistrates should take turns holding the position of *juez de teatro*, with no other similar obligations, so that the designated individual would be able to devote the necessary time to ensuring order at the theater's functions.[87]

Royal authorities sought to control the Royal Theater's productions not only by ensuring the attendance of an official, but also by censoring the dramas performed. In 1790 Viceroy Revillagigedo the Second appointed what might have been New Spain's first royal *revisor* (censor), whose job was to inspect the content of all the theater's comedies and interludes.[88] As in Spain, the censor's responsibility was both moral and artistic. According to New Spain's first *revisor*, Father Ramón Fernández de Rincón, Viceroy Revillagigedo intended for the *Real Coliseo* to put on theatrical events that were "worthy of the attention of a civilized crowd."[89] This meant, according to Rincón, that the *comedias* had to be "suitable" and "pleasurable" ("de conveniencia y agrado").[90] His definition of "suitable" and "pleasurable" drama fell largely in line with most Spanish neoclassicists' ideas about theater and good taste.

Like many neoclassical theorists, conformity to the classical unities was Rincón's primary concern. If the "civilized" public would not believe it, then, he thought, it was not worthy of their attention. He refused to allow the theater's administration to present *Troya Abrassada* (Burnt Troy) because it portrayed a 10-year-long war in a show of only two or three hours, thus breaking the unity of time. Rincón thought it impossible to

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[86] AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, caja 4344, exp 009. Translation mine.
[87] Mañon, *Historia del Teatro Principal*, 30-31. In practice, an oidor sometimes held the position of *juez de teatro*.
[88] Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña Historica*, 77.
[89] *Ibid*., 78. Translation mine.
[90] INAH, Colección Colegio de San Gregorio, vol. 151, f. 187r. Translation mine.

persuade the public that 10 years could elapse in the brief span of a single show. He found the piece "all so absurd, so nonsensical, and so contrary to good judgment and sound reason, that it seemed to me that it would lose the respect of the public if they were given a show of this character, capable only of entertaining clowns."[91] Rincón barred the company from performing *El Más Honrado el Más Loco* (The Most Honored, the Most Crazy) for the same reason. Failing to adhere to the unity of place, the play had two plots, one of which took place in Naples, the other in Aragón, and a principal character appeared in both. For this and other irrationalities, he asserted, "the whole play is a mixture of ineptitude and nonsense that is not worthy of the attention of any man who makes use of his reason."[92]

The censor also shared many neoclassicists' aversion to magic. He found "black magic," which involved irreligious acts such as pacts with the Devil, especially heinous. Rincón banned both *El Maxio Catalan* (The Catalan Magician) and Cristóbal de Monroy's *Encanto por los Zelos y Fuente de la Judia* (The Enchantment of Jealousy and Source of the Jewess) for containing black magic.[93] Although Rincón never explained his rationale for condemning magical dramas, he presumably agreed with many neoclassical scholars that magic was irrational and contrary to Catholic dogma, and thus simultaneously offended morality and the classical unities.

Unlike many Spanish neoclassicists, however, Rincón would not reject *comedias* based on the unities alone. If he found a piece sufficiently artistic, he would occasionally

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[91] INAH, Colección Colegio de San Gregorio, vol. 151, f.185r-189v. Translation mine.
[92] Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña Historica*, 77 and Viqueira Albán, *Propriety and Permissiveness*, 77. Translation taken from Viqueira Albán.
[93] INAH, Colección Colegio de San Gregorio, vol. 151, f.185r-189v and f. 195r-198v.

consider this a redeeming factor, and approve the work despite elements of irrationality. In his diatribe against *Troya Abrassada*, he admitted that many other plays contained errors of history, geography and chronology. He argued, however, that such *comedias* had "delicacies" (*primores*) in the versification and sentences that offset their violations of "the precepts of drama." In *Troya Abrassada*, on the other hand, "one does not find the least merit so that it could be performed in front of people brought up well, and who make use of their reason."[94]

Rincón forwarded similar rationale for his rejection of *El Más Honrado el Más Loco*. In other comedies, he argued, "the fluidity and naturalness of the meter, the beauty of the thoughts, the weight of many opportune sentences, the timely linking of some incident with other various details, make tolerable the other defects and even hide them from the eyes of the less intelligent." In *El Más Honrado*, however, he could find no redeeming factors: "the essential laws of drama are not observed, the versification is forced, the concepts are vile and vulgar, the expressions lazy and some impious and irreligious, the jesting insipid and crude, and all of this a heap of foolishness."[95] In Rincón's view, a comedy had to be rational, beautiful, or both. If a piece lacked both of these elements, he would deem it unworthy of the theater's "civilized" audience. While Rincón's arguments in favor of beauty as a defining factor of a play do not conform to the arguments of Luzán, Velázquez or Moratín, they do echo the dissident assertions of a few other Spanish neoclassicists. Pedro Estala, for instance, argued that the richness of a

[94] INAH, Colección Colegio de San Gregorio, vol. 151, f.185r-189v. Translation mine.
[95] Olavarríy y Ferrari, *Reseña Historica*, 77-78. Translation mine.

play's characters and the vividness of its dialogue were more importance than strict adherence to the unities.[96]

Again reflecting the arguments of many contemporary Spanish intellectuals, obedience and respect for authority were also of the utmost importance in the eyes of the censor. Rincón banned *Astucias por Heredar un Sobrino a un Tío* (Tricks for a Nephew to Inherit From his Uncle) in part because he thought it too unlikely that the plot's events could take place in only two and a half hours. More importantly, however, he found it incredulous that the maid, Luisa, would treat her master, Lucas, with such insolence; to him, it was inconceivable and absurd that a maid could be so impudent, and that a master would put up with such behavior.[97] According to Rincón, then, using theater to teach spectators to respect authority was not only a social responsibility, but also a way of illustrating the natural, rational order of society.

In sum, through intensive regulation, supervision and censorship, New Spain's royal authorities sought to turn the *Real Coliseo*'s productions into virtuous and orderly functions, where spectators focused on the stage rather than their own social interactions. Inspired in large part by Spain's neoclassical movement and its court theater reforms, officials in Mexico City hoped to mold happy, rational, and obedient citizens through drama. Although "good taste" had multiple definitions, officials and censors hoped to impose a single version of it.

However, reformers never managed to enforce their artistic standards. By the 1792 theater season, Mexico City's theater company was still performing an abundance of

[96] Pérez Magallón, *El teatro neoclásico*, 71.
[97] Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña Historica*, 78.

the baroque plays that reformers had hoped to extinguish. Although the company also performed some plays with newer, more neoclassical aesthetics by playwrights such as Carlos Goldini and Antonio Valladares de Sotomayor, these were significantly outnumbered by Golden Age pieces. Whereas in Madrid Calderón had fallen out of favor by the end of the eighteenth century, in Mexico City, dramas by Calderón and playwrights who imitated his style, such as José Cañizares and Agustín Moreto, dominated the 1792 season.[98]

By 1805, however, the *Coliseo* company's repertoire had shifted slightly. That season, it presented more plays by neoclassical playwrights like Luciano Francisco Comella and Leandro Fernández Moratín, and had reduced the number of dramas by Calderón and his followers. Still, the older, baroque plays persisted, and, if complaints in the *Diario de México* are any indication, some of the newer plays the company produced strayed far from the precepts of neoclassicism.[99] The persistence of baroque *comedias* in the company's repertoire can be attributed in part to audience rejection of neoclassical plays, and in part to royal officials' inability to determine the actions of actors and impresarios.

RESPONSES TO REFORM: IMPRESARIOS AND PERFORMERS

Controlling the *Coliseo*'s performances turned out to be a difficult endeavor. Many of the impresarios and actors of Mexico City's *Coliseo* did not take kindly to

[98] For the list, see Leonard, "The 1790 Theater Season," 358-364.

[99] Spell, "The Theater in Mexico City, 1805-1806," 61 and 59-60 (footnote 9). For an example of a review in the *Diario* that condemned one of the plays the *Coliseo* company performed for failing to adhere to the rules of art (the tenets of neoclassicism), see "El casamiento de Figaró por Geofroy," Diario de México, 5

officials' attempt to reform the theater. After Gálvez released his regulations in 1786, viceroys and *jueces de teatro* issued a plethora of decrees, rules and complaints, most of which were repetitions of various portions of the 1786 document. This constant stream of repetitive orders and charges of misconduct from royal authorities demonstrates that the theater's managers and performers often refused to comply with reform orders. The viceroy's power to micromanage the theater's employees, and by extension, its productions, was limited. He could issue regulations and punish those who disobeyed, but ultimately, the viceroy could not force the theater's impresarios and actors to comply with his wishes. Royal authorities depended in large part upon these employees to implement the reform program. They were sometimes unwilling to accept regulations, and, consequently, made it impossible for officials to impose their artistic wishes.

The theater's impresarios did not always agree with the rules that viceroys imposed upon them, much to the dismay of the viceroys and theater judges. On multiple occasions, these authorities expressed their frustration with impresarios for repeatedly failing to comply with royal orders. In 1796, for instance, the *juez de teatro*, Francisco Alonso Ferán, issued a stern reminder to the theater's impresario that the rules obliged him to hand in a list of every piece he planned to present in the theater for examination beforehand. This document, he demanded, should include not only full-length *comedias* but also the *sainetes* (short plays), *tonadillas* (musical interludes) and *seguidillas* (a style of Spanish song and dance) performed between acts of the play. The *juez* complained that the impresario had only been providing royal authorities with the *comedias*, and not the

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July 1810, Vol. 13 n. 1737, 18-20, which criticizes Beaumarchais's "El casamiento de Figaro" (The Marriage of Figaro).

intermediary pieces. Because royal authorities had not had the opportunity to censor these short works, he complained, many of them contained "some indecent words in this Kingdom, lacking respect for Superiority or for the Public…"[100]

Viceroy Branciforte also issued stern reminders to the impresario in 1796. At least twice that year, Branciforte accused him of following his own interests rather than adhering to viceregal orders. He also complained of the "decadent" state of the Royal Theater, and lamented that the impresario had repeatedly failed to provide the public with "good functions." He reminded the impresario that his job required him to ensure that the theater's productions were "the most complete, decorous, and decent functions possible."[101]

On the one hand, these letters from the viceroy and the *juez de teatro* demonstrate that Branciforte and Ferán kept a keen eye on the theater's productions in an effort to ensure that these shows occurred according to regulations. On the other, they show that the success of theatrical reforms relied heavily upon the actions of the impresario. He had the power to decide whether to provide "complete, decorous, and decent" events according to regulations, or to forgo orders in favor of attracting larger audiences. Some impresarios might have behaved better than others; the theater's impresario changed annually, when the Royal Indian Hospital leased the management rights out to the highest bidder. Nevertheless, in spite of the severity of royal orders, complaints from the *juez* and the viceroy make clear that impresarios did not always choose to comply.

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[100] INAH, Colección Colegio de San Gregorio vol. 152, f. 72r-73v. Translation mine. The *juez*'s complaint was not new, either: a previous *juez de teatro* had reiterated the order to submit all pieces for revision in 1790. INAH, Colección Colegio de San Gregorio vol. 151, f. 83r-86r.

[101] INAH, Colección Colegio de San Gregorio vol. 152, f. 69-71; 83-87. Translation mine.

On at least one occasion, an impresario spoke out directly against royal orders. In 1788, Manuel Lozano, the impresario at the time, wrote to the *juez de teatro* complaining of an order to use a certain kind of oil for lighting in the theater, due to its high cost.[102] Lozano's complaint was not without consequences: in response, the *juez* sternly, and at length, reprimanded him for questioning his authority and that of the viceroy.[103] Lozano apparently did not protest about the lighting thereafter, but the fact that he complained to begin with illustrates that he saw nothing wrong with asserting his disagreement with royal regulations.

Like the impresarios, the *Coliseo*'s actors did not always acquiesce to the demands of royal authorities. Viceroys and theater judges issued a multitude of decrees and complaints about performers' disobedience. In 1790, *juez de teatro* Cosme de Mier y Trespalacios released a new set of regulations, many of which reiterated or rephrased orders from Gálvez's 1786 decree. Almost every regulation in this 1790 document concerned actors. For instance, Mier y Trespalacios ordered actors to remain silent in the dressing rooms, wear clothing appropriate to the roles they were playing, refrain from introducing new lines or verses, observe "modesty, precision, and composure," refrain from smoking, and fulfill their contractual obligations.[104] Like the 1786 regulations, those from 1790 did not successfully force actors into compliance. In 1794, Viceroy Revillagigedo the Second issued multiple decrees demanding that actors correct the

[102] According to the *juez*, this sort of lighting caused less discomfort to audiences and performers than the materials they had normally used in the past.
[103] AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, caja 2776, exp. 011.
[104] INAH, Colección Colegio de San Gregorio vol. 151, f. 83-86. Translation mine.

"defects" and "improprieties" in their performances, and dress decently on stage.[105] Then, in a 1795 letter, the *juez de teatro* at the time, Bernardo Bonavía y Zapata, criticized the company's actors and musicians for consistently showing up late and delaying the show.[106] No matter how many orders viceroys and theater judges issued, and how many times they repeated them, actors appear to have consistently disregarded them.

The actions of some of the *Coliseo*'s players indicate that they did not have the respect for hierarchy and royal authority that the viceroy expected. In 1796, Viceroy Branciforte issued a decree demanding that actors bow or curtsy ("hacer cortesía") to him, and only him, when he was present, both at the beginning and at the end of the production. He complained that actors had been paying this honor to the audience members seated in the *patio* (pit), as well—a move that signified grave disrespect towards the viceroy, since this action, he thought, should be reserved only for him.[107] In another decree, Branciforte demanded that actors refrain from repeating a song or dance unless they had his permission. Apparently, actors had been doing so at the request of the audience, which both contradicted regulations and offended the viceroy.[108] In both these cases, Branciforte accused the impresario of neglecting to instruct the actors properly. Whether the impresario or the actors were to blame, the latter evidently felt no need to pay respect to royal authority over the audience.

Like the impresario Lozano, some actors spoke out directly against royal orders. In 1793, Viceroy Revillagigedo the Second notified the Royal Theater's actors that he

[105] Mañon, *Historia del Teatro Principal*, 41. Translation mine.
[106] INAH, Colección Colegio de San Gregorio, vol. 152, f. 91-93.
[107] INAH, Colección Colegio de San Gregorio vol. 152, f. 75r-78v.
[108] INAH, Colección Colegio de San Gregorio vol. 152, f. 79r-82v.

was granting them "benefits." In actuality, this meant that he was obliging them to work extra shows during the next theater season, for very little additional pay. Seven performers voiced complaints in response, stating that they could not perform the extra pieces due to illness, or because they needed their few days off. For instance, one actor, Juan Moreno, expressed his gratitude for the "benefit," but stated that he could not accept it, since Saturdays and Wednesdays were the only days that allowed him to rest. The actors' complaints infuriated Revillagigedo, who expelled actor Mariano Arizar from the *Coliseo*'s company and banned him from working in any other theater in the kingdom. The viceroy threatened the others with similar punishments. For instance, he told Moreno that if he did not wish to comply with his orders, then he should turn in his acting license. Some performers held out longer than others, but eventually all conceded to Revillagigedo's request.[109]

Although the actors did not win their struggle, their willingness to stand up for themselves against the viceroy's demands is telling. Like the 1796 incidents in which the players paid respect to the *patio* and neglected to obtain the viceroy's permission to repeat parts, actors' complaints about their "benefits" indicate a distinct lack of respect for the viceroy's authority. Although Revillagigedo eventually forced the actors into accepting their "benefits," he nonetheless did not get his way in the end. Absences due to illness continued unabated, and actors apparently let the quality of their performances slide considerably due to dissatisfaction with their labor conditions.[110]

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[109] INAH, Colección Colegio de San Gregorio vol. 152, f. 130r-149v and Mañon, *Historia del Teatro Principal*, 40.

[110] Mañon, *Historia del Teatro Principal*, 40.

Even colonial authorities complicated Revillagigedo's mission to control the behaviors and actions of the theater's impresarios and performers. Each year, the Royal Indian Hospital leased the theater out to the highest bidder, who would take responsibility for the theater's administration. Perhaps as a result of the financial failure of the 1790 season, all bids for the 1791 season were extremely low. Consequently, Revillagigedo took over the management of the theater that year. Although he managed to increase profits significantly, his direct intervention displeased municipal officials and members of the *Real Audiencia* (High Court), who complained to Spain's Council of the Indies.[111]

Revillagigedo's power was far from absolute. He could interfere with management, issue regulations, and punish disobedient actors, but these actions could provoke the indignation of the players or of fellow royal authorities. If he was to get his way, he had to take into consideration the interests of others, from the highest council members to the seemingly powerless actors.

In part because the viceroy's power was limited, the theater reform effort proved unsuccessful. Despite the constant stream of complaints from viceroys and *jueces de teatro* about the conduct of impresarios and actors during mid-1790s, disobedience did not cease after that time. In 1819, for instance, a judge (*alcalde*) issued a statement concerning a rumor he had heard, that for an upcoming function the theater's actors intended to dress as women, and the actresses as men. The *alcalde* warned the actors not to carry out their plan, and it is unclear whether they did so or not.[112] Regardless of the

[111] Leonard, "The Theater Season of 1791-1792," 352.
[112] AGN, Archivo Histórico de Hacienda, Vol 252, Exp 10.

outcome, years of royal attempts to instill their definition of social and moral behavior amongst Royal Theater employees evidently had not succeeded.

THEATER AND *BUEN GUSTO* IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Performances and new regulations at the *Coliseo* elicited various reactions from audiences. Reformers' attempts to impose order and discipline among attendees for the most part met resistance and refusal to comply, although some theatergoers longed to be able to watch a show without disruption. Tastes varied significantly among spectators, which affected the productions themselves. Most of the intelligentsia, many of whom contributed to the *Diario de México*, agreed with the basic precepts of neoclassicism. They constructed a variety of different arguments about those precepts, which cited scholars and debates from around the world, but did not merely mimic them. The rest of the public sphere, most of whom were of a lower social status, for the most part preferred aesthetics more closely associated with the baroque. Their tastes comprised the majority, and reformers were often forced to accede to their predilections and allow baroque-style dramas. Overall, debate and variety characterized Mexico City's public sphere, which complicated the already difficult process of theatrical reform.

Spectators responded in mixed ways to behavioral regulations at the theater. One theatergoer wrote to the *Diario* in 1806 that he found the Royal Theater comfortable, because "in it good order reigns, due to the vigilance of the *jueces*."[113] At the same time, repeated decrees from the viceroy indicate that the theater's audience did not always manifest "good order." In 1794, for instance, Viceroy Revillagigedo the Second issued a

notice to the public, "for greater safety, decency, and good order in the audience at the diversions of this Theater." The notice included a list of regulations for audience behavior, almost all of which were reiterations of previous decrees. Among other demands, Revillagigedo's notice ordered audience members to remove their hats during the show, refrain from making noise and express their satisfaction with "moderation and decorum," and also prohibited men from entering the women's *cazuela* and vice versa.[114]

Later decrees and complaints from royal authorities, from as late as 1820, indicate that many audience members continued to behave indecently according to Bourbon standards.[115] Many letters in the *Diario* suggest the same, in spite of the 1806 statement in the *Diario* that good order reigned at the theater. For instance, in 1805, another theater attendee wrote a letter to the *Diario* complaining of the constant murmuring during performances, which made it difficult to hear the actors.[116] Overall, government decrees and letters to the editor in the *Diario* suggest that viceroys and *jueces de teatro* were unable to impose discipline upon the theater's audiences.

Behavior might have differed somewhat between sections of the theater. Those who sat in the expensive sections of the theater, like the *palcos* (boxes) and *lunetas*, might have adhered more closely to Bourbon regulations than the "riff-raff" in the *cazuelas*, *mosquete* and *patio*. An 1820 decree from Mexico City's district court (*Sala Capitular*) noted that audience members in the *patio* had continued to shout at the actors,

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[113] "Concluye el resumen histórico," Diario de México, 11 March 1806, Vol. 2 n. 163, 278-279. Translation mine.
[114] AGN, Bandos, Vol. 17, exp 76, f. 311r. Translation mine.
[115] For the 1820 example, see AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, caja 6038, exp 24.
[116] "Policia del teatro," *Diario de México*, 27 November 1805, Vol. 1 n.58, 241-243.

requesting repetitions of parts they enjoyed. The order did not mention any such actions in other, more expensive sections of the theater.[117]

Some *Diario* readers, too, believed there was a distinct difference in behavior between those in the more expensive seats and those in cheaper sections. For example, one letter explained why royal authorities prohibited the "dangerous mix of men and women" in the *cazuela*, but not in the more highly coveted third-level *palcos*. The author argued that "one must not confuse the nobles with the plebes, that all those disorders are of the riff-raff that occupies those places [the *cazuelas*], but not of the people civilized in modern taste… the passions of the nobles are more obedient to reason than those of the plebes…"[118]

However, another *Diario* author complained that spectators seated throughout the theater made noise and heckled the actors, no matter their social status: "If some from the *mosquete* did it, it could be excused, for their rusticity..." But often, he argued the culprits were "ignorant or hotbrained people of another caliber, who sit in other parts, in which other manners should be kept..."[119] In other words, not only the "rustics" in the *mosquete*, but also the higher-status spectators in the more expensive sections of the theater misbehaved at the *Coliseo*.

Mexico City audiences also responded in various ways to the Royal Theater's productions, and to reformers' attempt to transform theatrical taste. Some supported reformers' attempt to show more dramas with neoclassical aesthetics, while others

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[117] AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, caja 6038, exp 24.
[118] "Sigue el apunte de las materias," *Diario de México*, 5 November 1805, Vol. 1 n. 36, 141-142. Translation mine.
[119] "Grosería. Coliseo," *Diario de México*, 11 February, 1810, Vol. 12 n. 1594, 166-168. Translation mine.

preferred *comedias* in the older baroque tradition. Nearly everyone who published letters in the *Diario* was more or less in agreement with the basic principles of neoclassicism. Concepts such as the classical unities, imitation of nature, attentiveness to the stage, and most of all, good taste, all appeared frequently in *Diario* articles about theater between 1805 and 1811. There was no consensus, however, concerning the details of these principles. Just as Spanish neoclassical intellectuals debated the nature of *buen gusto* and argued over the validity of the unities, so too did *Diario* authors. They drew inspiration from a variety of authors from multiple parts of the world, and participated in a transnational dialogue about good taste and art. Most of all, *Diario* writers reveled in debate, and in using a variety of sources to formulate their own, unique arguments.

The theater was one of the city's foremost sites of social interaction and public diversion, which made it a focal point of public discussion. Because most residents of the capital who were not severely impoverished attended the *Coliseo* more or less regularly, its shows were an ideal subject of conversation, especially between individuals who did not know one another. Indeed, articles in the *Diario* reveal not only that Creole intellectuals debated the qualities and merits of the productions through the paper, but also that theatergoers—sometimes strangers to one another—conversed at shows, and talked about theater on other social occasions. The *Coliseo* thus played a central role in Mexico City's thriving and diverse public sphere.

That public sphere drew information and ideas not only from Spain and local sources, but also from debates all over the world. The capital's intelligentsia read books on neoclassicism by scholars from multiple different countries, and once the *Diario de México* was founded in 1805 it helped to foster a dialogue about theater and good taste

between Mexico City and other major cities. The editors published writings from around the world, including *comedia* reviews from a newspaper in Madrid, news reports from various European cities, an essay by German writer and dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing on the principles of comedy, and a review of Moratín's popular play, *El sí de las niñas* (The Maidens' Consent), from a Havana newspaper.[120] Readers in Mexico City who wrote in to the *Diario* cited not only one another, but also sources ranging from Aristotle to Spanish newspapers to colleagues' anecdotes about plays in Paris, London and Madrid. One author cited Scottish writer Hugo Blair, as well as the editor of a French-language collection of Molière's works.[121] Ideas and arguments from around the globe were readily available in books and newspapers, and *Diario* contributors eagerly learned from them and referenced them in their articles.

Nevertheless, *Diario* authors did not merely imitate thinkers from Europe and Havana. Instead, they used these foreign sources to build their own arguments and interpretations about theater and taste. For instance, after seeing the *Diario*'s reprint of the *El sí de las niñas* review from Havana, one *Diario* reader submitted his own review of the same play. Far from echoing the Havana review, which focused largely on praising the Havana production of the play, the Mexican article analyzed the play itself, and

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[120] For the articles from Madrid, see *Diario de México*, 3 February 1808, Vol. 8 n. 857, 133-136 and "Adolfo y Clara, ó los dos presos. Comedia en un acto, y en prosa, con intermedios de música, que llaman melodrama," *Diario de México*, 10 February 1808, Vol. 8 n. 864, 164. For the news reports from various European cities, see *Diario de México*, 17 November 1805, Vol. 1 n. 48, 202. For the Lessing essay, see "Deben ó no cargarse los caractéres en la comedia? Disertacion por G. E. Lessing," *Diario de México*, 12 March 1809, Vol. 10 n. 1258, 291-292 and "Disertacion. Núm. 1258," 13 March 1809, Vol. 10 n. 1259, 294-296. For the review from the Havana paper, see "El Sí de las Niñas," *Diario de México*, 29 January 1808, Vol. 8 n. 852, 113-116 and 30 January 1808, Vol. 8 n. 853, 117-118.

[121] For the article that compares theatrical productions and audiences in Madrid, Paris, London and Mexico City, see "Grosería. Coliseo," *Diario de México*, 11 February, 1810, Vol. 12 n. 1594, 166-168. For the lengthy, multi-part article that cites Blair and the French editor, see "Dramática," *Diario de México*, 21

reviewed its performance in Mexico City. The author praised *El sí de las niñas* for adhering to the unities, but acknowledged that some might criticize it on moral grounds, since one honorable character, Don Diego, falls prey to ridicule. The *Diario* writer noted that Hugo Blair had made a similar criticism of Moratín's *La Comedia nueva, o el café* (the New Comedy, or the Café). The author, however, argued against Blair, asserting that the play moves the audience to pity Don Diego. Rather than join in ridiculing him, argued the *Diario* author, "we try to correct that defect if we find it in ourselves, to avoid exposing ourselves to public censure."

The same author went on to respond to another Havana review, which had criticized the first scene of *El sí de las niñas* for its lengthy dialogue. "The author of that paper," retorted the *Diario* writer, "has forgotten, without doubt, that the first scene is substituted for the prologue of Greek comedy, in which spectators are informed of the intentions and interests of the characters... which is what Don Diego does in the first scene."[122] Building off of reviews from Havana, Blair's writings, and broader neoclassical ideas with his own extensive analysis, the author of this *Diario* article formulated his own critical interpretation of Moratín's play and the comedic genre.

Similarly, the inclusion of Lessing's essay in the *Diario* did not signify that readers necessarily accepted his ideas. His paper argued that, although poetry should imitate nature, comedic playwrights and actors must nevertheless exaggerate character traits in order to make the audience laugh. "In a word," he argued, "all paintings that are

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February 1808, Vol. 8 n. 875, 207-208; 22 February, n. 876, 110-112; 23 February, n. 877, 113-116; 24 February, n. 878, 118-120; and 29 February, n. 883, 138-140.

[122] "Dramática," Diario de México, 21 February 1808, Vol. 8 n. 875, 207-208; 22 February, n. 876, 110-112; 23 February, n. 877, 113-116 and 24 February, n. 878, 118-120. Translation mine.

too natural, are not truly comical paintings." While imitating nature precisely might make for good drama, Lessing argued, it did not make for good comedy.[123]

Various articles by *Diario* readers directly contradicted Lessing's understanding of the role of nature in comedy. Although published prior to the Lessing essay, these pieces nevertheless indicate that Lessing's argument was only one of multiple ideas about the imitation of nature that circulated Mexico City's public sphere during the early nineteenth century. One article, for instance, argued that "all the merit of a performance consists in naturalness, which contributes in a very effective way to creating the illusion..."[124] Another author, similarly, contended that the naturalness of the characters and drama was the most important element of a *comedia*. He praised a play titled *La suegra y la nuera* (The Mother-in-law and the Daughter-in-law) for its adherence to this rule. "None of the characters that comprise it is new in our world," he argued. "A silly antiquarian, who, given over to a ridiculous mania, neglects and abandons the management of his house, which is entangled in disputes between his wife and his daughter-in-law. There is nothing more frequent than this."[125] This author and other *Diario* contributors read and built upon the ideas of foreign scholars like Lessing, but greeted these arguments with a critical eye, and made their own conclusions.

Although most *Diario* writers were generally in agreement with the basic principles of neoclassicism, some expressed opinions that directly contradicted those tenets. Some upheld Calderón, Lope de Vega, or both as some of the world's greatest

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[123] "Deben ó no cargarse los caractéres en la comedia? Disertacion por G. E. Lessing," *Diario de México*, 12 March 1809, Vol. 10 n. 1258, 291-292 and "Disertacion. Núm. 1258," 13 March 1809, Vol. 10 n. 1259, 294-296. Translation mine.

poets, in spite of many neoclassicists' rejection of these playwrights' baroque works. For instance, one poem published in the *Diario* referred to Calderón as a "sublime genius."[126] Remaining quiet in the audience and focusing attention on the stage was a concept that not everyone agreed upon. One author transcribed a conversation he had had with friends, in which one participant expressed annoyance with the constant murmuring in the audiences during the *Coliseo*'s productions. Another friend agreed, noting that, in Madrid, such noise was unacceptable, at least in the *palcos*. The other friend, however, argued that talking in the audience was not a problem, and that it occurred in many theaters, even in Naples. "It would be torture keeping quiet for three hours," he argued.[127] While the conversation detailed in this article may not necessarily have actually occurred, presumably it does depict opinions and ideas that circulated among Mexico City's intelligentsia at the time. The *Diario* makes clear that not all upper-caste urbanites agreed that the basic tenets of neoclassicism were paramount.

Other contributors to the paper agreed with the fundamental principles of neoclassicism, but nevertheless embraced certain forms and aesthetics more closely associated with the baroque. From 1805 to 1806, the *Diario* editors ran a contest to produce the best *sainete*—a short, one-act, comic farce. At first, the contest produced no submissions that the editors deemed worthy of the prize. In hopes of receiving better

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[124] "Execución Dramática," *Diario de México*, 29 February 1808, Vol. 8 n. 883, 138-140. Translation mine.

[125] "Dramática," *Diario de México*, 7 October 1805, Vol. I n. 7, 26. Translation mine.

[126] "Sobre los arbitrios y diversos modos de robar..." *Diario de México*, 23 April 1806, Vol. 2 n. 205, 451. See also "Desagravio de la poesia," *Diario de México*, 16 April 1806, Vol. 2 n. 198, 421-422. Although most Spanish neoclassicists condemned the works of Calderón and the like, some maintained that works by a select few baroque dramatists should be respected in spite of their flaws. Jovellanos, for instance, argued that Calderón and Moreto had rightfully earned their popularity. Jovellanos, *Memoria*, 172. Translation mine.

submissions the second time around, in early 1806 they published a lengthy description of what qualities good *comedias* and *sainetes* should exhibit. Like neoclassical theorists, the editors argued that a *comedia* should avoid vice and "extravagances," and instill in audience members virtues such as conjugal love and "public spirit." A *sainete*, they asserted, should do the same, but in a lighter, more comedic way: using satire and ridicule, it should "stimulate laughter, making a joke of vice, which it attempts to exterminate."[128] According to most neoclassical theorists of the time, however, the *sainete* was an inferior, baroque theatrical form. As Dalia Hernández Reyes has argued, the *Diario* editors saw no contradiction between the *sainete* and neoclassicism. By adhering to the three unities and the principles of morality, they thought, the *sainete* could be reformed in the same manner as the *comedia*.[129] That most neoclassical theorists would have disagreed on this point was apparently of no concern to the editors.

Although *Diario* contributors had varying ideas about which dramatic forms and aesthetics constituted good taste, the vast majority of them espoused ideas that were more or less neoclassical. Yet, these writers' articles suggest that most of their fellow theatergoers disagreed with them. One author who praised naturalness in *comedias* complained that most of his colleagues did not appreciate the same qualities in theater, and would only laugh at "unseemly quibbles or extravagances."[130] Another lamented that "the majority of theater aficionados do not see the show but as an object of rest, and

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[127] "Policía del Teatro," *Diario de México*, 27 November 1805, Vol. 1 n. 59, 241-243. Translation mine.
[128] *Diario de México*, 29 April 1806, Vol. 2 n. 211, 478-479. Translation mine.
[129] Hernández Reyes, "La Renovación Teatral," 412-413.
[130] "Dramática," *Diario de México*, 7 October 1805, Vol. I n. 7, 26. Translation mine.

prefer madness or indecency to the moderate festivity that [the theater] teaches."[131] If these complaints are any indication, the majority of the *Coliseo*'s audience preferred baroque-style aesthetics to the neoclassical artistic precepts that reformers and most *Diario* writers promoted.

Censorship negotiations between the Royal Theater's administrator, the *revisor*, and the *juez de teatro* also indicate that most audience members preferred the older, baroque aesthetics. These negotiations also show that the *revisor* and *juez de teatro* were sometimes willing to bend their artistic rules in order to appease spectators. Keeping audiences happy was crucial, since the Royal Indian Hospital depended upon the theater's revenues for funding. Low ticket sales could therefore seriously compromise the colonial administration's ability to provide health care to natives. A large number of epidemics hit Mexico City during the eighteenth century, making the Hospital's effectiveness—and therefore, ticket sales—essential.[132] Additionally, low attendance at *Coliseo* productions would negate royal officials' attempt to centralize entertainment, improve taste, and distract the masses from immoral diversions or revolutionary ideas.

Twice in 1791, the theater's administrator, Miguel Menezes, asked the *revisor* and the *juez de teatro* to reconsider their condemnation of certain *comedias*. One of these requests was for the aforementioned *Troya Abrassada* and *El Maxio Catalan*. Menezes argued that *Troya Abrassada*'s only flaw was the irrationality of its timeframe, and that it was otherwise a good play. He defended *El Maxio Catalan* on the grounds that the magic in it was not black magic, as it involved no clearly discernable pact with the devil. The

[131] "Teatro," *Diario de México*, 17 October 1805, 65-67. Translation mine.

administrator's argument convinced Rincón, the *revisor*, who approved the plays for performance at the theater.[133]

On another occasion in 1791, Menezes made the same argument for *Encanto por los Zelos y Fuente de la Judia* (The Enchantment of Jealousy and Source of the Jewess) as for *El Maxio Catalan*. Because it contained no explicit pact with the devil, and because it appealed to the public ("de gusto al público"), he requested that Rincón allow him to arrange its performance at the Royal Theater. Once again, Rincón and the *juez de teatro* approved Menezes' request.[134] Presumably, it would have been easy enough for Menezes to find dramas to replace *Troya Abrassada*, *El Maxio Catalan* and *Encanto por los Zelos…* that conformed to Rincón's expectations. He chose instead to dispute the *revisor*'s censorship, because *Encanto por los Zelos…*, and presumably the other two comedies, appealed to most theatergoers.

Menezes' decision to defend these plays indicates that the majority of the audience preferred these magical and "irrational" baroque comedies to those that Rincón had initially approved. In spite of Rincón's largely neoclassical standards, he was willing to bow to the majority's preferences, so long as Menezes could provide evidence that the plays were in fact not so contrary to Bourbon artistic ideals. That evidence was shaky in the case of the two plays involving magic: Menezes clearly expended much effort revealing the subtle differences between black magic and the "safe" magic in these comedies, and neither he nor Rincón indicated that the irrationality of magic, black or

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[132] Jay Kinsbruner, *The Colonial Spanish-American City: Urban Life in the Age of Atlantic Capitalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 61-62.
[133] INAH, Colección Colegio de San Gregorio, vol. 151, f.185r-189v.
[134] INAH, Colección Colegio de San Gregorio vol. 151, f. 195r-198v.

not, was problematic. Menezes' decision to defend these plays, and Rincón's choice to approve them, clearly had little to do with whether or not they adhered to the unities, exhibited rationality and morality, or conformed to other basic principles of neoclassicism. Instead, they allowed *Troya Abrassada*, *El Maxio Catalan* and *Encanto por los Zelos…* to pass inspection in order to fill more seats at the theater.

Royal officials acquiesced to audience tastes at other times, as well. In 1794, Viceroy Revillagigedo and Rincón decided to ban dancing from the *Coliseo*. They argued that paying the dancers cost more money than it was worth, but also implicit in their reasoning was the fact that dancers often did not comply with the viceroy's standards of decency. The dance ban caused a considerable drop in attendance, which prompted Revillagigedo to retract the ban only three days after he had ordered it. His reasoning was that he did not want to inhibit either the public's enjoyment or the interests of the Royal Indian Hospital.[135] The viceroy had no choice but to accede to the audience's fondness of dance, since he could do nothing to persuade the public of the inferiority of such "vulgar" performances.

To some extent, artistic predilections might have differed by social status. Some *Diario* authors, at least, identified baroque styles with the predilections of the lower castes. For instance, one announcement from the editors, which acknowledged criticisms of a play they had announced in the paper, noted that, when the Coliseo company presented the piece, "the *mosquete* and the *cazuelas* are full."[136] In contrast, however, another author suggested that the richer spectators in the more expensive seats might

[135] INAH, Colección Hospital Real de los Naturales, vol. 103, f. 204-205 and Viqueira Albán, *Propriety and Permissiveness*, 66.

have shared those tastes. He lamented, "Why does the sensible part of the audience merge in applauding some interludes that are performed only to sympathize with the inferior plebeians?"[137] Perhaps some of the "sensible" audience members, too, preferred the older dramatic forms, and applauded out of enthusiasm, rather than sympathy.

One *Diario* article summed up nicely the attitudes of Mexico City's citizens toward theater and good taste. The author wrote that he had attended the *Coliseo* the previous evening, when the company put on a play titled *Bonaparte en Egipto* (Bonaparte in Egypt). During the show, he wrote, a fight broke out among the spectators seated near him, over the quality of the play. Some defended the drama's precision (*propiedad*) and elegance, while others condemned its "infinite improprieties." Over the course of the argument, according to the author, these audience members "discussed the unities, invention, disposition and elocution: and ultimately, condemnation of the poet..." He ended the article by asking, "Who was right?"[138]

The public had no clear answer to his question. Even among the intelligentsia, who generally agreed that neoclassical drama was superior to baroque, there was no consensus as to exactly what *buen gusto* entailed. Debate and variety, rather than uniformity, characterized the role of theater and taste in Mexico City's public sphere.

"THE SORDID PROFESSION"

Just as the *Coliseo* served as a cultural reference point in public discussion, its performers, too, were focal points of public attention. Even when discussions centered

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[136] *Diario de México*, 14 May 1806, Vol. 3 n. 226, 59. Translation mine.
[137] "Concluye el resumen histórico," *Diario de México*, 11 March 1806, 278-279. Translation mine.
[138] "Sobre la comedia," *Diario de México*, 18 March 1808, Vol. 8 n. 901, 210-211. Translation mine.

upon other matters, participants in the public sphere sometimes used *Coliseo* actors, dancers or musicians to make a point, since nearly everyone was familiar with them. For example, in 1807, a lengthy article appeared in the *Diario* about discrepancies in pronunciation between people who spoke different variants of Spanish. The author told of a friend of hers, whose Castilian Spanish accent had been made fun of by Mexico City's Creoles. An editor pointed out in a footnote that the nameless friend was one of the *Coliseo*'s most popular actresses, María de la Luz Vallecillo. The article prompted an even lengthier response from another contributor, who argued that the "defects" in Vallecillo's pronunciation should be of no import, given her theatrical skill.[139] The *Coliseo*'s players evidently functioned as a critical point of reference in Mexico City's public sphere. Their visibility to the public both helped and hindered the reputation of the performing profession, whose respectability was crucial for the successful implementation of the Bourbon reform initiative.

In 1753, the Church allowed the leading actor of a Mexican theater troupe, Diego de Arias, to be buried in the convent of San Bernardo. Viqueira Albán argues that the move signified that the Mexican Church had abandoned its previous condemnation of theater and actors.[140] If the Church had changed its policy toward professional entertainers, however, the public at large had not. Articles in the *Diario de México* and *limpieza de sangre* (blood purity) cases indicate that theatrical performers' reputation as dishonorable lowlifes for the most part remained deeply ingrained in Mexico City's culture during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. That reputation created a

[139] "Pronunciacion," *Diario de México*, 5 September 1807, Vol. 7 n. 706, 18-20; 6 September 1807, Vol. 7 n. 707, 22-23; "Teatro," 27 September 1807, Vol. 7 n. 728, 106-108.

troublesome contradiction within the Bourbon theatrical reform program: How could the members of a profession notorious for immorality become the instructors of the new school of virtue? How could the tasteless become purveyors of taste? Numerous contributors to the *Diario de México* recognized the contradiction, and hoped to convince others that actors, dancers and singers deserved more respect than the capital's audiences generally granted them. In some official and intellectual circles, poking fun at entertainers, their supposed immorality, and their low social standing had fallen out of favor. For the most part, however, performing remained a dishonorable and lowly profession, which complicated the theatrical reform initiative.

Most of the members of the *Coliseo*'s entertainers probably made a reasonable living that would have placed them well above the bottom of Mexico City's economic hierarchy. Salary information for the company's performers is available for four theater seasons: 1806-1807, 1807-1808, 1810-1811, and 1811-1812. The "first" actors, actresses and singers who occupied the primary roles, especially those who were most popular, made far more than most of the other members of the company. These "firsts" earned between 1450 and 3200 pesos each annually, or 2319 pesos on average. Meanwhile, the rest of the company's actors, actresses, singers and dancers (between 16 and 24 individuals) earned between 300 and 1800 pesos each per year, with an average of 711 pesos.[141] Even the lowest of these salaries would have placed these

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[140] Viqueira Albán, *Propriety and Permissiveness*, 34.

[141] "Lista de los actores ajustados en el Coliseo para el año de 806 y 807 y sus sueldos," *Diario de México*, 18 March 1806, Vol. 2 n. 169, 306-307; "Lista de los actores que han de representar en éste Coliseo, el año proximo," 28 March 1807, Vol. 5 n. 544, 348; "Lista de los individuos de la compañia del teatro de esta capital, en la presente temporada de 1810," 21 April 1810, Vol. 12 n. 1663, 442-443; "Lista de los individuos que componen la compañia cómica del teatro de esta capital en el presente año," 14 April 1811, Vol. 14 n. 2020, 427-428.

performers well above Mexico City's lowest classes, who probably required about 34 pesos annually per capita to survive, or 136 pesos to support a family of four.[142]

Although all the *Coliseo*'s actors, dancers and musicians technically earned more than enough to survive, the company's lower salaries might not have supported the lifestyle that elites and the performers themselves expected of a respectable profession. Most, if not all of the company's members were white *peninsulares* (from Spain), who likely expected to live well above the standards of Mexico City's lowest classes. For many of them, a few hundred pesos per year probably seemed miniscule, especially given their grueling rehearsal and performance schedules. One individual who wrote to the *Diario* suggested as much. He lamented that, while some of the *Coliseo*'s actors earned sufficient salaries, others did not, much to the detriment of the theater company. He asked, "...how will we be able to find actors of average talent, when they hardly earn enough to live, and lack entirely the hope that their jobs will provide them with a peaceful old age?"[143] Although *Coliseo* players all earned more than enough to survive, therefore, some of their salaries might nevertheless have contributed to widespread mockery of their profession.

Diario authors frequently praised the *Coliseo*'s performers, although to varying degrees. The theater's most popular actors, singers and musicians received nearly universal acclaim in the paper. In particular, they consistently complimented performances by actors Luciano Cortés and María de la Luz Vallecillo, and violinist Don José Manuel Aldana—a rare example of a professional entertainer with the noble "don"

[142] Susan Deans-Smith, *Bureaucrats, Planters, and Workers: The Making of the Tobacco Monopoly in Bourbon Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 199.

in front of his name.[144] One *Diario* contributor thought Vallecillo and Cortés were such good performers that, "They have brought together the unanimous vote of a populace, the voices of men who have taste and discernment." However, his respect for these two players did not extend to the acting profession as a whole. He went on to argue that some of the other company members were fairly good too, considering the "mercenary, low, and crude spirit" he thought so common among actors.[145]

Most *Diario* authors, however, departed from this disdainful attitude toward actors, and identified the low social status of performers as an impediment to theatrical reform. One individual who wrote in to the *Diario* attributed what he considered poor acting at the *Coliseo* to the audience's mocking attitude toward them. He noted that outstanding actors in France, Italy and Spain were treated well, praised in the newspapers, and regarded with esteem. The author lamented that actors received no such treatment in Mexico City:

> [Actors] are considered the most contemptible people; even the lowest of the masses have been inspired to hate them, and say: don't talk to the actors, they are despicable, they are insulted, they are denied sacred burial... The general word at gatherings, cafés and in the audiences is: that they are bad actors, depraved, lost, etc.... Bring the highest ranked actors from Paris, Naples or Madrid, treat them this way, and we will see what happens.[146]

The problem, the author argued, was that theatergoers mocked the actors in order to make themselves appear more cultured and refined in comparison.[147] According to this

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[143] "Teatro," *Diario de México*, 24 January 1811, Vol. 14 n. 1940, 93-95. Translation mine.
[144] For instance, see: "Musica," *Diario de México*, 16 October 1805, Vol. 1 n. 16, 63; "Pronunciacion," 6 September 1807, Vol. 7 n. 707, 22-23 (see footnote 3); "Soneto que se improvisó leyendo otro, hecho a la Señora Maria Bermejo, Dama de los teatros de Madrid," 19 October 1807, Vol. 7 n. 750, 223; "El Sí de las Niñas," 29 January 1808, Vol. 8 n. 852, 113-116 .
[145] "Execucion dramática," *Diario de México*, 1 March 1808, Vol. 8 n. 884, 142-144. Translation mine.
[146] "Teatro. Núm. 729," *Diario de México*, 29 September 1807, Vol. 7 n. 730, 113-116. Translation mine.
[147] "Teatro. Núm. 730," *Diario de México*, 30 September 1807, Vol. 7 n. 731, 117-120.

Diario contributor, the fragile egos of theatergoers, not the actions of performers, were to blame for entertainers' low reputation and for poor theatrical productions.

Another criticized audience members for incessantly criticizing the actors by calling them "good-for-nothings" and complaining that the singers were "unbearable." He wondered how the *Coliseo* singers could possibly perform well in an atmosphere in which the audience mocked and embarrassed them even when they started off singing beautifully.[148] Another wrote in echoing these same concerns, and recounted two recent occasions when the audience began to heckle a singer before she had even begun her performance. On one of those occasions, according to his account, the singer began to cry, and had to cut short the *tonadilla*. This author, too, asked how the *Coliseo* was supposed to find good actors and singers for a theater in which audiences treated them so poorly.[149]

The scornful attitude many of Mexico City's residents apparently espoused toward the *Coliseo*'s actors was problematic not only because it discouraged them from performing well, but also because of the crucial role actors were supposed to play in the reform process. The actor's job, as one *Diario* author put it, was to bring the playwright's paintings to life, which "describe for us the most moving features of virtue, to interest us in their observation, and inspires us to abhor vices." He continued, "Is this not worthy of the greatest attentiveness of an enlightened public,

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[148] "Malcontentos," *Diario de México*, 29 December 1809, Vol. 11 n. 1550, 739-740. Translation mine. Another writer told a similar story about a dancer at the *Coliseo*, who performed beautifully, but the audience denied her any applause. This author, too, argued that such treatment discouraged the performers. "Justicia seca," *Diario de México*, 28 February 1811, Vol. 14 n. 1975, 237-238.

[149] "Grosería. Coliseo," *Diario de México*, 11 February, 1810, Vol. 12 n. 1594, 166-168.

which seeks to maintain virtues as the basis of their happiness?"[150] Indeed, neoclassical intellectuals and Bourbon reformers alike hoped to hoist upon actors much of the responsibility of enlightening and "improving" the masses. For this project to be effective, audiences would need to respect and pay attention to the players who delivered the message. *Diario* readers' complaints indicate, however, that reformers were unable to transform the general public's perception of actors.

While some *Diario* readers condemned audiences for failing to treat entertainers with the respect they deserved, others accused the *Coliseo*'s impresario and other administrative directors of fomenting this attitude. Anger toward *Coliseo* administrators peaked in April 1811, after the paper announced that a number of the theater company's members had not been hired on for the following season. One irate individual wrote to the *Diario* shortly after the announcement, stating that he refused to return to the theater. Although a number of the "defects" in its productions had been fixed in recent years, he argued, the directors treated the actors too poorly, and had committed an injustice by neglecting to sign some of them on for the next season.[151] Other articles voiced similar complaints, including one curious announcement from the editors about a sonnet they had had received, but not published, because it was "defective." They nevertheless stated the poem's contents: it was a protest against the *Coliseo*'s impresarios for attempting to save money by refusing to renew the contracts

[150] "Execución Dramática," *Diario de México*, 29 February 1808, Vol. 8 n. 883, 138-140. Translation mine.
[151] *Diario de México*, 11 May 1811, Vol. 14 n. 2047, 535-536. For the announcement about the cuts to the theater troupe for the 1811 season, see "Lista de los individuos que componen la compañia cómica del teatro de esta capital en el presente año," *Diario de México*, 14 April 1811, Vol. 14 n. 2020, 428.

of some of its good actors, "who long to serve the public."[152] Whether impresarios or audiences were to blame, most *Diario* contributors lamented the lowly reputation of the *Coliseo*'s performers, and hoped to convince the general public that they deserved respect, rather than mockery.

Government and Inquisition records concerning *limpieza de sangre* (blood purity) cases also indicate that some, but not nearly all, of Mexico City's residents thought performers should be treated with respect. In 1792, as part of a case concerning the marriage of his son, *Coliseo* dancer Jerónimo Marani tried to prove his ancestral purity and nobility to the Mexican Inquisition. The inquisitor for the case rejected Marani's claim to nobility, but worded his statement carefully to show that prejudice against entertainers had not influenced his decision. He stated that Marani's profession as a dancer was not, in itself, an indelible obstacle to gaining the rights and privileges of nobility, "it being known that these are not lost by the sordid profession..." Instead, the inquisitor insisted, it was Marani's lack of documentation proving his noble lineage that moved him to reject the claim.[153] The inquisitor made clear that he thought performing (the "sordid profession") was not a respectable career choice. Nevertheless, his careful treatment of the issue suggests that, at least within the Inquisition's administration, discriminating against dancers based on the reputation of their profession had become unacceptable.

A later *limpieza de sangre* case, this one under royal, rather than inquisitorial jurisdiction, reveals a similarly ambivalent reputation for entertaining publicly as a

[152] "NOTA," *Diario de México*, 9 June 1811, Vol. 14 n. 2076, 654. Another article makes a similar complaint: "Teatro," *Diario de México*, 16 June 1811, Vol. 14 n. 2083, 680-682. Translation mine.

career. In 1808, José María Lucío Gómez Moreno y Mistra applied to work as an *alabardero*, or halberdier, a member of the viceroy's royal guard. Along with testimony from numerous individuals who testified that he was of Spanish blood, with no Jewish, Muslim or *mulato* ancestors, Gómez included his own statement in his application, which noted, and attempted to justify, his father's lowly profession. He stated that his father was of "clean origin," but had previously worked as an actor at the *Coliseo* in order to support his family. Gómez argued that his father's profession was a "blemish" that should not remain with him now that he was retired. Moreover, he continued, his own "inclination and occupations" had been very different from those of his father.

The application also included a statement from the Marquis of Guardiola, who defended both Gómez and his father by highlighting the important role of actors in society. In keeping with both the Bourbon reform ideology and the period's neoclassical intellectual trends, he argued that "spectacles serve marvelously to cultivate and polish a nation," since theater was "the best school for customs, for language, and for general urbanity..." In turn, the Marquis asserted, "the *comedia*... is not opposed to reason, because it brings taste, arouses the passions, extols virtue, demonstrates the ugliness of vice, and teaches the people how to fulfill their duties." Therefore, he wrote, the acting profession was "not illicit, as some Moralists have mistakenly wanted to establish..." Instead, actors were "intrinsically good," and had thus been honored among the ancient Greeks and Romans. The Marquis also pointed to a royal order from 1783, which apparently decreed that any job that contributed to

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[153] AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 725, f. 3-5. Translation mine.

the good of the Republic should be considered "honest," and that anyone occupying such a position was not a disgrace to their family. Consequently, he argued, the fact that Gómez's father had once worked as an actor should not prevent him from becoming an *alabardero* for the viceroy.[154] The outcome of the case is unclear, but the viceroy might have taken seriously Marquis's passionate defense, given its strong grounding in contemporary intellectual trends and Bourbon reform ideology.

If the social reputation of theatrical performers was improving during the late colonial period, it was a slow and difficult transition. The most popular leading actors and actresses earned the admiration of *Diario* contributors, and perhaps of other theatergoers as well. Among the intelligentsia, royal officials and inquisitors, it had become unfashionable and incorrect to mock or judge entertainers based on their profession. The majority of theatergoers, however, retained older prejudices against actors, dancers and musicians, and often refused to take them seriously as respectable teachers of virtue and sociability. Consequently, although the *Coliseo*'s performers were in the public spotlight, they were unable to instruct the masses as reformers had hoped.

[154] AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 2408, Exp. 52. Translation mine.

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