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# Staging and Stage Décor

Early Modern Spanish Theater

Edited by  
Bárbara Mujica



Elizabeth Cruz Peters  
Florida Atlantic University

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Georgetown University

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# Introduction

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The “plays” traditionally studied in literature courses are really not plays. They are merely words on a page, texts that come alive only when they are staged. Staging requires actors, a performance space, and often (but not always) some sort of set, which may or may not include painted flats, props, or special lighting. A play also requires spectators, for, without an audience, there is no performance.

The first early Spanish theatrical works used few props or none at all. They were performed in town squares, patios, and private residences. In churches, unscripted reenactments of Bible stories were often performed at Easter or Christmas. Entertainments in Latin also took place in universities, where students and their instructors performed *juegos de escarnio* [games of jokes and jibes] on profane (non-religious) subjects such as unrequited love, usually following Latin models. *Juegos escolares*, composed by students and priests, dealt with religious themes. In 1574, the humanist Lorenzo Palmyreno composed a play in Castilian, the language spoken by the masses, thereby taking a significant step toward the creation of a theater targeted at a general audience.

From the beginning of the fifteenth century, strong cultural and political ties existed between Spain and Italy, due to the conquest of Naples in 1442 by Alfonso V of Aragon, uncle of the future King Ferdinand. In time, Spain came to govern Naples, Sicily, Sardinia, and Milan. Ferdinand and his wife, Isabella I of Castile, were strong supporters of the arts and often sponsored theatrical entertainments. Many Spanish writers went to Italy, where the Renaissance was blossoming. One of these was Bartolomé de Torres Naharro (1480?-1530?), who lived in Rome and was influenced by the Italian humanists. While most playwrights of his time developed religious or pastoral themes inherited from the Middle Ages, Torres Naharro wrote lively, amusing plays with novelistic plots that were performed mainly for aristocratic audiences.

At the same time, another kind of theater was developing in Spain, one intended for a mass audience. Lope de Rueda, called Spain’s first true man of

the theater because he wrote, directed, acted, and produced plays, headed a traveling troupe of actors that performed in public streets or plazas. Their repertoire consisted largely of short, humorous, fast-moving plays called *pasos*, in which most characters came from the lower strata of society. Many featured archetypes that would later become stock characters in early modern Spanish theater. The *pasos* could be performed independently or as part of a *comedia* (a term that at the time referred to any full-length play). Furthermore, traveling troupes from Italy performed plays in the style of the *commedia dell'arte*, a kind of improvised theater based on a fixed corpus of themes.

In 1558, Lope de Rueda requested money of the city council of Valladolid to build several permanent locales, a sign that interest in professional theater was growing. These theaters, called *corrales*, were open-air patios with a platform at one end on which plays were performed. The early *corrales* were very simple. Scenery might be painted on the wall of the building that housed the theater or on curtains that could be changed easily. The balconies and windows of the main and adjacent structures formed *apostentos*, boxes occupied by aristocrats of either sex. Lower-class men, called *mosqueteros*, stood in the uncovered area in front of the stage or sat in the *gradas* [bleachers] on the sides of the stage or at the back of the patio. Lower-class women sat in the *cazuela* [cooking pot], an area of the *corral* reserved for them. Props for these productions were generally kept to a minimum.

By the early sixteenth century, playwrights had begun to compose plays that were similar to the early modern *comedia*. The term *comedia*, which is used throughout this book, originally referred to a full-length play—sometimes with four or five acts—of any genre. Lope de Vega, who is credited with creating Spain's national theater, redefined the *comedia* in his *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo* [New Way of Writing Plays in These Times] (1609). The *Arte nuevo* is not a set of hard-and-fast rules, but rather a practical guide to composing successful plays. Lope wrote for a wide range of viewers, and his *Arte nuevo* is a compendium of recommendations based on his experience of what worked for a *corral* audience. It influenced playwrights during his own time and for generations to come.

Lope limited the number of acts—called *jornadas*—in a *comedia* to three, after which the term *comedia* referred to any three-act play. He recommended using a variety of verse forms and specified the function of each one. He mentions that love and honor are themes that appeal to audiences. He thought theater should mirror reality, and so he included characters from all walks of life in his plays, mixed comedy and tragedy, and rejected a strict adherence to the three unities of time, place, and action that prevailed in classical theater.

Lope's earliest plays are quite simple in terms of staging and stage décor, but over the years, *comedia* productions became more intricate. Stage devices called *tramoyas* were incorporated into different types of plays. The *tramoya* was a type of fly system consisting of ropes, pulleys and counterweights that enabled the crew to hoist objects or people into the air for scene changes. Eventually, thanks to *tramoyas*, actors could appear to soar through the air, while trapdoors allowed them to suddenly disappear.

The second half of the seventeenth century saw a decline in the *corrales*, and playwrights turned increasingly to the court for patronage. Philip IV (1605-1665), who ascended to the throne in 1621, loved spectacles. He had many plays performed at the Palace of the Buen Retiro [Good Retreat], which he had constructed in the 1630s. He also sponsored tournaments, masques, bullfights, and other entertainments. At first, the court plays were performed by courtiers, but as the theater became increasingly professionalized, impresarios and acting troupes were contracted to produce ever more elaborate spectacles. Especially popular were the *comedias de tramoyas*, that is, plays that made extensive use of stage devices, which were more sophisticated and extravagant than those used in the *corrales*.

The famous Italian stage designer Cosimo Lotti came to Spain in 1626, and after the Buen Retiro was constructed, began to mount productions in the many dramatic spaces of the palace. In addition to ever more intricate stage devices that made possible multiple set changes, he introduced Italianate perspective scenery and extensive props. While the *corral* performances were usually in the afternoon, the use of artificial light made night performances possible at court. Outdoor performances were sometimes held in the Buen Retiro park, where full-scale naval battles could be reproduced on the artificial lake. In 1638, a thoroughly equipped theater called the Coliseo [Coliseum] was constructed.

Toward the end of Lope's life, a new generation of playwrights, headed by Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681), began producing complex and spectacular plays for the court. The extraordinarily talented son of a noble family, Calderón was introduced to elite circles at an early age and began writing plays for King Philip IV in 1623. Unlike Lope, who wrote for the masses, Calderón wrote for aristocrats. Although he preserved the structure of the *comedia nueva* [new type of play] described by Lope, he imbued his characters with greater psychological depth than his predecessors. At first, he wrote for the *corral* theater, but later in life became a Franciscan friar and wrote principally *autos sacramentales* [one-act religious plays] and mythological plays for the court. These were complex productions that made use of sophisticated stage machinery. Angels or mythological characters soared through the heavens to the delight of the spectators below. Scenery

was painted on backcloths that could be easily changed. The public could attend these performances for a fee, and court theaters maintained the general layout and popular atmosphere of the *corral*. Sometimes spectators engaged in catcalls and whistles. Sometimes fights broke out, to the general amusement of the King and Queen.

The *corral* theater enjoyed support in Spain until the first decades of the eighteenth century, when Philip V, grandson of Louis XIV of France, ascended to the throne. Neither he nor his wife, Maria Luisa Gabriela de Saboya, spoke Spanish well, and they were quick to introduce French and Italian cultural norms to Spain. Nevertheless, the *corral* continued drawing popular audiences—in particular the *comedia de magia* [magic play], which made use of stage devices to create the illusion of magic.

Audiences had always been drawn to the spectacularity of theater, even before the age of sophisticated stage machinery. Romantic intrigue, fast-moving swordplay, and, for the mostly male audience, the sight of pretty actresses in revealing breeches in plays in which women dressed as men, were only a few of the attractions of the *comedia*. Yet, for decades, this aspect of theater was nearly overlooked by scholars. Students of early modern Spanish theater read plays as though they were stories, analyzing characters, plot, and underlying philosophical messages, but without paying much attention to staging.

However, in the 1970s, scholars' attention shifted from the written text to the practice of theater. Research into early modern theater spaces, stage devices, costumes, actor training, acting techniques, and audience composition has enhanced our knowledge of how plays were actually presented and experienced. In 1984, the Association for Hispanic Classical Theater, Inc. (AHCT) was formed to promote greater appreciation for Spain's classical drama in production. The AHCT meets once a year for a conference in El Paso, Texas, in which staging issues are explored. In cooperation with the National Park Service, every evening the participants attend a modern production of an early modern Spanish play, then meet to discuss it.

The advent of postmodernism also influenced the ways in which historical plays are studied. For one thing, by blurring the boundaries between “high” and “low” culture, postmodernism directed attention to previously neglected genres such as the *entremeses*, *jácaras*, *mojigangas*, and *pasos*. (The *entremés* [interlude] is a jocular one-act play performed between the acts of a longer play. The *jácara* is a short, humorous play in verse, with music and dancing, that usually deals with the antics of crooks and criminals. The *mojiganga* is a short farce, and a *paso* is a short humorous play in prose in which most characters come from the lower strata of society; it may occur in a longer play or be performed independently.) By challenging the dichotomy between “center”

(nucleus of power) and “margins,” postmodernism made possible a new focus on previously neglected groups such as women, gays, and ethnic minorities.

The fourteen essays in this collection continue these trends and carry them further. The focus of all the articles included here is staging and stage décor, and how these have evolved over the years. The playtext has never been static. Early modern playwrights, impresarios, and actors constantly tweaked their scripts, adding, changing, or omitting words, reworking stage choreography, or making other alterations—sometimes right in the middle of rehearsals or even performances. Today’s directors continue this practice, imbuing the *comedia* with a new vibrancy and meaning to appeal to the twenty-first-century audience.

The authors of these essays explore both early modern and contemporary stagings of the *comedia*. They ask themselves: How might these plays have been performed in the seventeenth century? What stage properties and devices were used? How have modern directors adapted the text for a new generation of theatergoers? How has technology enhanced the staging of these plays? How do modern directors use scenography, props, and costuming to make statements relevant to contemporary audiences? How might theatrical archetypes that were familiar to early modern audiences be staged in such a way that contemporary audiences can relate to them?

The essays are divided into four categories: Props and Space; Costume; Theatrical Archetypes; Music, Movement, and Adaptation, although there is necessarily some overlap. For example, although the essays in Part 1 deal specifically with props and space, several authors mention these topics in their discussions of stage movement and costume, and although the essays in Part 2 deal specifically with costume, this topic is also relevant to props and archetypes.

Of the four essays in Part 1, Christopher Gascón’s is perhaps the most theoretical. In “Supplementary Aesthetics, Affordances, and Dynamic Props: Added Objects in Isabel Ramos’s *El perro del hortelano* (2004),” Gascón discusses how Ramos uses objects not mentioned in Lope’s original play to enhance the performance or indicate absences in the work. In “Sketching *Portugalidade: Reinar después de morir* for the Twenty-First Century Stage,” Esther Fernández discusses the innovative staging of Vélez de Guevara’s play by Ignacio García and Pepa Pedroche, noting how the directors of this hispanolusa co-production capture the *Portugalidade* [Portuguese-ness] at the core of the play. In “Staging the *Comedia de magia* in the Reign of Felipe V,” Susan Paun de García discusses the influence of Italian scenographers in the staging of the *comedia de magia*, which continued to be popular in Spain long after the death of Calderón. In “Incarcerated Performance: The Space and Context of Prison as Stage,” Megan M. Echevarría and Iñaki Pérez-Ibáñez

broaden our understanding of performance space in early modern Spain. Plays were not mounted only in theaters and palaces, but also in other venues, such as private residences, convents, and even prisons. In their article, Echevarría and Pérez-Ibáñez share their research on legal proceedings resulting from two prison performances.

Part 2 of this volume is devoted to costume. In “¡Dios me guarde, que estoy bella!” [Heaven help me, but I really am pretty!]: *Los empeños de una casa* and Castaño’s Performance of Pretty,” Mindy Badía examines four productions of *Los empeños de una casa* [*The Pawns of a House*], by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. She argues that critical discussions of the subversive nature of gender in this *comedia* cannot be based solely on text, but must consider the effects of the crossed-dressed character Castaño in performance. In “The *Guardainfante* Exposes More than Legs: Adapting Tirso’s *Marta the Divine* for the Stage,” Elizabeth Cruz Petersen examines how director Gina Kaufmann uses the *guardainfante* [farthingale], a wide hoop skirt that impedes a woman’s movement, and unconventional casting, to subvert gender norms in a modern production of Tirso de Molina’s *Marta la piadosa* [*Marta the Divine*].

Part 3, Staging Archetypes, deals with some less commonly explored *comedia* character types. Although much has been written about the Monarch on the Spanish stage, and staged versions of Isabella I of Castile have also been the subject of numerous studies, Susan L. Fischer casts a new light on Spain’s much glorified late-medieval queen. In “(Re)Performing Isabel I of Castile: Pious Cruelty, Saintly Hypocrisy, and Lope de Vega’s *El niño inocente de La Guardia* [*The Innocent Child of La Guardia*],” Fischer examines the legend of Isabella I of Castile, focusing on how she herself constructed an image of piety and religious zeal for public consumption—an image her biographers perpetuated. However, Fischer argues that in reconstructing Isabella for the stage, Lope de Vega suggests that the queen manipulated Catholic piety for reasons of political expediency. Eduardo Paredes Ocampo explores a relatively overlooked archetype in early modern Spanish theater, the melancholiac, in “A Bicephalic Melancholiac: Acting a Royal Pathology in Spanish Golden Age Drama.” Paredes Ocampo shows that by carefully examining the paralinguistic signs in Lope’s text and representations of melancholia in early modern paintings and medical manuals, it is possible to glean clues about how Lope’s *El Príncipe melancólico* [*The Melancholic Prince*] was actually performed. “Staging Female Melancholia: Calderón’s *No hay burlas con el amor*,” by Bárbara Mujica, also deals with melancholia, but this time, in women. Mujica argues that while male melancholia was associated with genius and creativity, female melancholia—often diagnosed as hysteria—was associated with inarticulateness and antisocial behavior. The female melancholiac was often represented on the Spanish stage as a *mujer*

*esquivia* [standoffish woman]. One example is Doña Beatriz, protagonist of Calderón's *No hay burlas con el amor* [Love Is No Laughing Matter]. Although fewer examples of female melancholiacs exist in art than of male melancholiacs, medical manuals, letters, and diaries provide descriptions of the “babbling,” gestures, and rebellious attitudes of female melancholiacs that can help guide directors. In “*Streleros*” *buenos y malos* [Good and Evil Star-Gazers]: Staging Astrology in Early Modern Spanish Theater,” Valerie Hegstrom and Dale J. Pratt examine a popular type in early modern Spanish theater: the astrologer. Hegstrom and Pratt show that serious astrologers used complex instruments and had their own professional jargon, which made them easy to spoof onstage. Furthermore, many superstitions grew up around the power of astrologers, sparking the public's curiosity. While astrology and astrologers could be represented onstage with a few stereotypical props and actions, some playwrights and directors engaged in extravagant staging.

Part 4 of this collection explores three fundamental components of early modern staging: Music, Movement, and Adaptation. Early modern theater made ample use of music. Performances typically ended with a *fin de fiesta* [end of the festivities], a short, cheerful piece with music and dance. The *entremés* between the acts of a *comedia* also included music. In “Reading Music in Cervantes's *Entremeses*,” Yoel Castillo Botello explains that Cervantes used music and dance not only to entertain, but also to provide social commentary. However, since the *entremeses* were never performed during Cervantes's lifetime, it is difficult to assess how music might have been integrated into the stage action. “Finding the Beat in *¡Risas aquí y después, ganancia!* [Laughter First, and Afterward, Profits!] by The Grupo La Hormiga,” by Sharon Voros, analyzes four short burlesque plays and shows how dividing them into “beats” can assist in developing a production concept. An understanding of “beats” can point to moments of intensification within the play and help track the movements of actors. In “Juan Ruiz de Alarcón's *Mudarse por mejorarse* [To Change in Order to Improve One's Lot] and Changes over Time,” Edward H. Friedman discusses the staging, social, and cultural issues involved in translating / adapting this play.

*Staging and Stage Décor: The Theater of Early Modern Spain* covers a wide range of topics. Some essays deal with early modern productions, attempting to decipher how plays were mounted and costumed, and how they spoke to seventeenth-century audiences. Other essays deal with modern stagings and show that not only the *comedia*, but also minor genres such as the *entremés* and *mojiganga*, are evolving for modern theatergoers. Directors have adapted early modern Spanish theater forms for twenty-first-century spectators with innovative, technologically sophisticated staging and costuming, sometimes imbuing their productions with political or social messages. To remain vibrant



and relevant, any theater creation must change and adapt. The abundance of new productions of the *comedia* and other early modern plays shows that these theater forms continue to thrive.

# Part 2: Costume

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Chapter 7

# The *Guardainfante* Exposes More than Legs: Adapting Tirso's *Marta the Divine* for the Stage

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on the proxemics and the social implications of actors donning *guardainfantes* or wide hoopskirts in Harley Erdman's adaptation of the relatively unknown early modern play *Marta la piadosa* [Marta the Divine] by Tirso de Molina. Director Gina Kaufmann subverts the gender and identity social constructs of the early modern Spanish hoopskirt. In collaboration with Erdman, Kaufmann's stage adaptation exposes the hidden internal assumptions and contradictions of gender norms by casting a man and a woman to play the lead female characters, Marta and Lucía. The actors, dressed in wide, padded hoopskirts, navigate the play's physical and social spaces. The top layers concealing the actors' legs are stripped away in the final garden scene, uncovering the metal-skeletons that empirically and metaphorically limit the characters'/actors' movement and space. In the staging of *Marta the Divine*, the *guardainfante* serves to highlight the play's themes of hypocrisy, faith, and desire.

**Keywords:** *guardainfante*, farthingale, early modern women, Tirso de Molina, *Marta la piadosa*, proxemics, gender, early modern Spanish theater, actors

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In the 2010 premiere of Harley Erdman's *Marta the Divine* at the Chamizal Festival in El Paso, Texas, the *guardainfante* [farthingale] surpasses historical significance in a refashioning that appeals to modern-day audiences. In the relatively unknown early modern play *Marta la piadosa* [Marta the Divine] by

Tirso de Molina, two sisters, Marta and Lucía, fall in love with Felipe, who, unbeknownst to them, killed their brother in a duel. Felipe, disguised as a tutor, and Marta, who feigns a religious conversion to avoid an arranged marriage, become lovers. Their charade intensifies when Lucía catches on to their façade. In the production of Erdman's adaptation of Tirso's *comedia*, director Gina Kaufmann made untraditional directorial choices that proved effective and entertaining. The gender-bending casting of characters, the stripped-down costumes at the end of the play, and the minimalistic set design where actors entered through and exited from metal-frame doorways are examples. This article, however, focuses explicitly on the proxemics and the social implications of the actors donning the wide hoopskirts, which serves to highlight the play's themes of hypocrisy, faith, and desire.

The Spanish *guardainfantes*, wide hoopskirts worn with tightly fitted bodices, were all the rage from the early to mid-1600s. The metal hoops that hung from ribbons tied around women's waists were covered with rich fabrics that matched the close-fitting bodices, creating the illusion of tiny waists, accentuated by the skirts' wide hips. Clerics, poets, and playwrights made fun of the large hoopskirts, comparing the women who wore them to church bells or turtles (González Cañal 81). As a means of controlling women's bodies, critics of the *guardainfantes*, most of whom were men, advocated for banning them. Fear that women would rebel against male authority, these men claimed that women wore the *guardainfantes* to conceal illicit pregnancies, thus the name *guardainfante*. However, Amanda Wunder dismisses these accusations as "pure fiction and polemic." She argues: "While there were many different reasons why a woman might have worn a *guardainfante*, hiding a belly swollen with child does not appear to have been among them: there is no historical evidence to corroborate the long-standing assertion that women used *guardainfantes* to conceal illegitimate pregnancies" (179). Nevertheless, men of authority condemned the fashion, which they also believed contributed to miscarriages. Regardless of the validity of their reasoning, the courts succeeded in passing a ban.

Ironically, however, the 1639 decree that outlawed the *guardainfante* only served to fuel its popularity. The king's own wives and daughters continued to wear the fashionable garment, which grew in size in the following decades. The wide skirts, which "took up an enormous amount of space, literally and figuratively" (Wunder 174), became a powerful symbol in Spain for women on and off the public stage. Wunder explains: "Women played a crucial role in making, disseminating, and debating the *guardainfante*, which inspired such passionate political debate in seventeenth-century Spain" (143). While critics felt threatened by the hoopskirt, seeing it "as a weapon that women were using to subvert male authority," it served as a *guardia* for women, giving

them “control over a wide perimeter around their own bodies, and kept men at arm’s length” (143; fig. 7.1). Dressed in wide, padded hoopskirts, women could navigate the physical and social space with abandon.



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**Figure 7.1:** An 18th-century illustration of the crinoline skirts. James Francis Driscoll collection of historical American sheet music/The Internet Archive, CC BY-SA.

In theater, *guardainfantes* were among the acting companies' most valuable assets. Laura R. Bass and Amanda Wunder note, "One of the major attractions of the theater, whose set decorations were notably spartan, was the sumptuous costuming of the actors," which included the latest fashion in farthingales (365). Consequently, sumptuary laws were put in place to curtail expenditures of extravagant attire for actors. The decrees of 1615 and 1644 also restricted the women actors from wearing their own garments outside the theater.

Furthermore, evidence found in early modern plays shows the *guardainfante*, which held a significant position in the female actor's wardrobe, contributed to her spatial relationships on stage. Early modern plays depicted the size of the *guardainfantes*. For instance, Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *comedia Darlo todo y no dar nada* [Give Everything and Give Nothing], characters discuss the type of seating needed to accommodate the large hoopskirt:

APELES: Traed  
en que esta dama se siente.  
CHICHÓN: Aquí un taburete está,  
y es dicha ser taburete,  
porque quepa el guardainfante,  
ya que ellos son solamente  
los que medran, no teniendo  
brazos. (2. 2510-2516)

[APELES: Find / this lady someplace to sit. / CHICHÓN: Here is a stool,  
/ known as a *taburete*, / with no armrests, / it's the only seat where /  
the growing *guardainfante* fits.]

Another play highlighted by Wunder reflects critics' negative responses to the hoopskirt. In Luis Quiñones de Benavente's *entremés* (vignette) *El guardainfante*, the protagonist Josefa's ostentatious appearance causes men much distress (fig. 7.2):

Por sus condiciones y por sus usos  
ya no caben las hembras dentro del mundo.  
¡Tirar, tirar, tirar, tirar!  
Ya cabe, ya entra, ya viene, ya llega;  
que aunque quiere no puede;

que es mucha la ropa que trae,  
la ropa que trae. (59-65) <sup>1</sup>

[Due to their conditions and habits / females no longer inside this world reside. / Pull, pull, pull, pull! / Almost fits, almost enters, almost reaches, almost arrives; / although she wants to, she's unable; / because of the many clothes she wears, / the many clothes she wears.]

To which Josefa responds:

JOSEFA        Miren cómo tiran, canalla ignorante,  
que me ajan mi guarda-infante. (66-67)

[JOSEFA: Just look at how they pull me, ignorant wretch, / that my *guarda-infante* they will wreck.]

Expressing his disgust and fear for the garment, the mayor “vows to take revenge on all women ‘walking around so wide’ in their *guardainfantes*” (Wunder 147-48). However, this outrageous garment is not exclusive to the female gender. Wunder finds that Quiñones de Benavente also employs cross-dressing by reversing the actors’ costumes in a later skit. The actress Josefa Román dons male clothing and the actor Juan Rana, the *guardainfante* (147n45). Thus, both men and women actors used the hoopskirts for comic effect, as demonstrated in the modern production of *Marta the Divine*.

### **Marta the Divine**

Dennis Berfield’s simple scene design for *Marta the Divine* consisted of a white drop cloth and five moveable metal doorframes. In contrast, Felicia McNeill Malachite’s costume design included farthingales with metal frames covered with layers of petticoats to soften and disguise the structure. Malachite fashioned the costume after the seventeenth-century *guardainfante*, which reappeared in the eighteenth century with the pannier or side hoop, “known as the *tontillo* in Spain” (Wunder 142).

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers refer to verses in this one-act play.





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**Figure 7.2:** Early modern Spanish actress wearing a *guardainfante*. Colección de trajes de Juan de la Cruz y Olmedilla, 1777. <http://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?lang=en&id=0000051081>.

The *guardainfantes* were explicitly designed for the two principal female roles Marta and Lucía, whom Kaufmann cast as a man and a woman “side by side in identical constraints of movement, dress, and behavior” (159). Kaufmann wanted audiences “to consider matters of gender and identity,” provoking spectators to look beyond the characters’ rigid gender and class roles within Tirso’s play: “As a director, it was important for me to highlight those rules and roles in a way that would bring a contemporary audience’s attention to them so as to enhance rather than detract from the storytelling” (156). In his theater review, Jonathan Wade exclaims, “In any number of *comedias*, a leading male or female character could be played by someone of the opposite sex for comic relief. In this particular production, the gender switches underlined the contemporary feel of the play and created a point of entry for modern audiences” (160).

### **Gender-bending casting**

In early modern theaters, women playing the male roles excited their spectators, but today, Kaufmann affirms, the opposite is true. Most people responded to Samuel Bosworth’s Lucía “with loud whoops and cheering at every performance,” according to Kaufmann (159). Wade also agrees: “when Sam Bosworth entered the stage playing the role of Lucía, it became altogether clear that this was not to be just another night of Golden Age Theater. The UMass-Amherst group took gender-bending to a whole new level, which is difficult within a dramatic tradition already characterized by cross-dressing” (160).

### **Movement language**

Kaufmann used Laban-based exercises to facilitate the actors’ movements, and enhance the characters’ particular traits. Twentieth-century Austro-Hungarian dance artist and theorist Rudolf Laban had created a sophisticated movement language for dancers that describes basic principles of human movement. Theater directors incorporated Laban’s Basic Efforts exercises for actors, adapting the eight key types of “Efforts”—punch, dab, press, glide, slash, flick, wring, and float. These ‘efforts’ emerge when combined with what Laban labels the Motion Factors, “awareness of the body, its range of dynamic expression, and the body’s relationship to space” (Bloom et al. 2). Actors look for the rhythm, flow, and balance of the play’s text, analyzing scenes and individual characters and their interactions with others. According to John Hodgson, “Laban’s principles enable the directorial process to become creative, developmental, collaborative and exhilarating, resulting in lively and effective theatre” (239). Through Laban exercises, actors gain an awareness of the body and its relationship with the stage in areas such as entrances and

exits, floor and movement patterns, grouping, blocking, characterization, crowd work, sustaining spontaneity, and levels (239). Actors choose specific “efforts” to work with to explore how they might physically communicate or express their particular characters, as in the case of Sam Bosworth, whose acting skills were “honest and compelling in the role” (Kaufmann 150). His tall, slender body, accentuated by his natural kinesthetic sense, gave him an on-stage presence that was undeniable.

Kaufmann, who agreed that “at times, the size of Sam’s performance was out of balance with the rest of the production,” encouraged her team of actors “to make larger choices” (159). Combined with Laban principles, Russian-American actor Michael Chekhov’s acting techniques assisted the actors in finding the physical core of their characters. According to Chekhov, the characters’ physical movement and speech depend on the origins of their emotions—the head, heart (chest), or groin. For example, a ‘head-centered’ character whose emotional energy derives from the head compels her to walk forward on the balls of her feet, while a ‘chest-centered’ character whose emotions come from the heart stands straight and walks with her feet flat on the ground. Keeping this approach in mind, Kaufmann and the actors generated a “specific movement vocabulary” for their characters:

Lucía, for example, was chest-centered, light, fast, and indirect, while her father, Don Gómez, was head-centered, heavy, slow, and direct. This way of working keyed the actors into strong physical choices that were supported by textual evidence and helped them be specific, truthful, and consistent. For the audience, a precise, physical vocabulary quickly clarified where these characters stood in the hierarchy of the world of the play and further emphasized traits such as ‘femme,’ ‘macho,’ ‘subservient,’ or ‘uppity’ as types of physical full-body masks—masks that anyone, of any gender or body type, could take on. (160-61)

Similarly, early modern Spanish actors incorporated dance styles to establish their characters’ personal traits and social positions. They followed the dance master Juan de Esquivel Navarro’s particular movement terminology found in his *Discursos sobre el arte del danzado* [1642; *The Art of Dancing in Seventeenth-Century Spain*]. To illustrate, Esquivel Navarro used the terms *aire* (elegance, charm), *gracia* (grace, wit), *viveza* (energy), *gallardía* (gallant manner), and *distreza* (virtuosity, mastery) to describe the “smooth, dignified, and controlled” movements (Brooks 91–92). Actors moved with an upright carriage to portray aristocrats as instructed by Esquivel Navarro and engaged in lively and impulsive movements taken from the *villano* dance when

representing peasants. The *villano* featured flying steps in which an actor lifts a leg as high into the air as possible, “*levantando el pie con todo extremo*” (Esquivel Navarro f. 19).

### Textual cues

Since early modern Spanish playwrights wrote mainly for a stage without curtains, scenery, or lighting, actors relied primarily on the textual cues or *didascalias habladas* to develop their characters. As José María Ruano de la Haza observes, this method gave rise to creative and malleable use of the stage space, “sometimes resulting in the inversion or subversion of natural physical relationship” (55). Semantics permit directors and actors to bring to life elements of scenic space in the modern versions of the *comedias*.

In Tirso’s play *Marta the Divine*, Kaufmann explored the subplots to enhance the storyline. At the top of Act 2, Lucía and Felipe’s exchange from the original script reveals Felipe holding a ribbon Lucía once gave him. Although the playwright provides no information for this small detail, Kaufmann creates a storyline drawn from the play’s *didascalias habladas* that indicates the couple had once engaged in a romantic relationship. Kaufmann explains:

We decided to enact the giving of the ribbon as part of our on-stage storytelling ... in which [Lucía] flirtatiously entices Felipe behind her father’s back with a large, long blue ribbon, a ribbon which Felipe eventually takes from her in order to stop her outrageous dance. ... Thus, small indications in the text were used as jumping-off points for rich stage action and relationships. (160)

Even though the text does not indicate from where Lucía obtains her ribbon, spectators from early modern Spain familiar with the bands that held together the hoopskirt’s metal frame might have interpreted it as a sign of sexual desire. As mentioned above, many who had advocated banning the garment claimed that women wore the *guardainfante* to engage in illicit affairs. In the case of the modern version, Lucía not only takes command of the stage but also exposes the meaning of the ribbon.

Lucía adds another layer of complexity to the text by subverting the gender and identity social constructs of the early modern Spanish *guardainfante*. Like the women in early modern dramas, who, in Robert Bayliss’s words, “subvert societal constraints that would keep them enclosed and silenced,” Lucía disrupts the natural physical and social relationship of the stage space (304). She invokes Esquivel Navarro’s peasant dance *villano* by playing with spatial relationships. During her flirtatious dance, Lucía wraps the blue

ribbon around Felipe's waist, pulling him close to her, and pressing her body against his from behind. When he escapes her embrace, she chases him. With her arms swinging freely in air as she spins in her *guardainfante*, Lucía kicks her legs up high behind her, exposing her undergarments (fig. 3).



**Figure 7.3:** Lucía (Samuel Bosworth) dancing. (Jon Crispin/joncrispin.photoshelter.com).

Lucía uses the ribbon to infringe on Felipe's space at one moment and at another, to declare her own agency, as her arms, legs, and feet stretch beyond the confines of her twirling hoopskirt. The elaborate and exaggerated hand gestures and foot movements emphasized by, or caused by, the *guardainfante's* size and constraints strengthen the sexual tension. What may seem like a dizzying moment of unfettered emotions is a calculated move to entrap Felipe, who eventually gives in to her ruse. In the end, Lucía's height and long arms allow her to reach beyond the range of the hoopskirt to hold Felipe, jumping and wrapping her legs around him for their final passionate kiss, which elicits laughter and cheers from the audience. She subverts the strict rules that govern women found in behavior treatises such as Juan Luis Vives's *The Education of a Christian Woman*, which denounces all "shameful desires" that threaten a woman's "chastity" (90).

To audiences' delight, Lucía's sister Marta (played by Monica Giordano) also expresses her desire to break from the patriarchal laws that force her to accept a paternally arranged marriage. She publicly announces her calling to become a *beata*:

MARTA: My calling is virtuous.  
I've long kept it a secret from you,  
father, but now your sudden insistence  
makes me declare my true intentions  
before you all, at this instant.  
I have a holy calling. I must  
renounce this world and its weary ways.

No more finery, no more fiestas, no more bullfights—I must make this sacrifice. (Kaufmann 163)

A *beata* professed her life to God, taking a vow of chastity, “but not of poverty or of obedience to any religious order” (Perry 25). *Beatas* did not have to adhere to strict social conventions that dictated that women must be silent and obedient: “Under the cover of religion, *beatas* could laugh and shriek and cry. They could read the gospel aloud in formal groups and audaciously present their own interpretations of it. They shared intimate experiences with males and other females, and they hugged and kissed them” (101). Trading the *guardainfante* for a *beata*'s modest habit liberates Marta from society's constraints by releasing her from the physical constraints of the hoopskirt. Dressed as a humble servant of the Lord, she can now move freely without a chaperone and with no regard for a curfew.

Erdman points out that Marta never actually takes the vows of a *beata*, which places her “outside all categories [neither “wife, nun, nor *beata*”], occupying a strangely freeing liminal space she improvises for herself” (23):

MARTA: Oh, Pastrana, there's nothing like  
hypocrisy to get the juices  
flowing! When I lived the life of a fine  
young lady, my life was never mine—  
I never had the freedom I do now.  
If I tried to go out, I'd get a scolding.  
Now I don't need a chaperone or a carriage.  
I can go out alone and if I come back late, nobody  
rebukes or reprimands. This life  
is easy and sweet. (Kaufmann 164)

No longer tied to the metal cage that served as a chastity belt strapped around her waist, Marta discovers her own specific movement vocabulary, challenging the moral undertones of the term ‘faith.’ The *guardainfante*'s metal barrier limited her physical space; it forced her to take small steps and rest her hands on her skirt. Through the guise of faith, she now reinterprets not only the role of the *beata* but also the “modern” woman. Ignoring social conventions, Marta laughs, shrieks, and cries. She effortlessly moves through the metal doors, initiates close contact with Ensign as she adjusts his hat, and holds tight onto her father's ankle as he physically drags her across the stage. She embraces and kisses her lover passionately in plain view. Freed from the physical and metaphorical constraints of the *guardainfante*, Marta comes of age sexually. As Kaufmann puts it, she “forges reality, creates reality” (164).

Empowered with this newfound maturity, Marta changes back into her hoopskirt—albeit in a new form.

### **The *guardainfante* refashioned**

Patrice Pavis asserts, “A body is ‘worn’ and ‘carried’ by a costume as much as the costume is worn and carried by the body. Actors develop their character and refine their underscore while exploring their costume; one helps the other find its identity” (175). Pavis defines ‘underscore’ as a “guiding schema of kinesthetic and emotional nature, articulated through the actor’s own points of reference and support” (100). The actors use their costumes as skin to privilege their own physical and vocal energy, even after shedding layers of material. In the play’s climactic scene, the *guardainfante* not only functions as an extension of the actors’ bodies and their characters, but also serves to tear the fabric of reality.

Disguised as countesses, Marta and Lucía appear on stage, standing in separate doorframes (fig. 4). Their veiled faces contrast with the skirts’ metallic bones, which expose the actors’ legs and undergarments. The *guardainfante*, which provided a panel where the elaborate fabric could be displayed and fully appreciated, now becomes a French-panel window frame that reveals the metaphorical skeletons hidden under the skirt’s guise. This inversion of space within space, which allows what was hidden to be seen, reveals the hypocrisy Tirso intended to expose. Kaufmann writes that both of Don Gómez’s daughters “have been transformed by the choices they have made and by the sexual liberation they have just experienced in the ‘ardent, darkened groves’” (165). While the veil creates a gender/identity ambiguity, the see-through skirts render the naked truth of desire, subverting the typical seventeenth-century role of sexual passivity assigned to women.



**Figure 7.4:** Marta (Monica Giordano) and Lucía in the garden scene. (Jon Crispin/joncrispin.photoshelter.com).

### The Chamizal production: Unexpected challenges

At the Chamizal Festival production of *Marta the Divine*, the large, bell-shaped *guardainfantes* posed unsuspecting challenges that physically tested the actors. After Giordano (Marta) and Bosworth (Lucía) delivered their sonnets at the beginning of the play, Giordano's dress smoothly unfolded as she stood up after sitting sideways on the floor. Bosworth's, on the other hand, offered difficulties. As Bosworth attempted to stand from a kneeling position, his feet became trapped under the skirt's hem. When Giordano threw herself to the floor downstage in a later scene, she underestimated her skirt's width and left little space between the hoopskirt and the edge of the stage for the other actors to pass. One half of Bosworth's dress awkwardly brushed over Giordano's as the actor carefully crossed in front of her, half of his skirt hanging over the rim of the stage. In Act 3, Bosworth tried to retrieve his fan from the floor; however, the hoopskirt, swinging like a bell, hid the fan from view, frustrating the first couple of attempts. He eventually had to lift his skirt to find it.



**Figure 7.5:** Marta and Lucía in the opening scene. (Jon Crispin/joncrispin.photoshelter.com).

Finally, during the curtain call, Bosworth and Rebecca Keohane (Don Gómez) became entangled while dancing to the play's closing song, when the metal structure of Bosworth's costume latched onto a key attached to Keohane's vest. The actors frantically tried to free themselves from each other. After a few unsuccessful attempts, they proceeded downstage attached to one another to take their bows. Only as they turned to exit did the costumes detach.

### Conclusion

In the production of *Marta the Divine*, Kaufmann's stage adaptation exposed the hidden internal assumptions and contradictions of gender norms. In order to communicate the characters' private, social, and unconscious journeys, Kaufmann worked to "outline this rigid hierarchical world in a



simple, straightforward way so that the actors could step into it and tell the story with the energy of their physicality and vocal work” (162). The *guardainfante* served as a tool to modulate this distance and elaborate on the themes of hypocrisy, faith, and desire. The actors, dressed in wide, padded hoopskirts, navigated the play’s physical and social spaces. When the top layers of the *guardainfante*, which concealed the actors’ legs, were stripped away in the climactic garden scene, it not only “offered a show within the show for the audience to enjoy,” in Wade’s words, but also uncovered the hypocrisy that actually and metaphorically limited the characters’ movement and space (161). Even though Lucía never experiences freedom from the physical restraints of the hoopskirt, and in a sense, from society, she manages to break the social barriers meant to contain her—not even the metal bars can hold her back (as evident in the final bow).

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Elizabeth Cruz Petersen

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