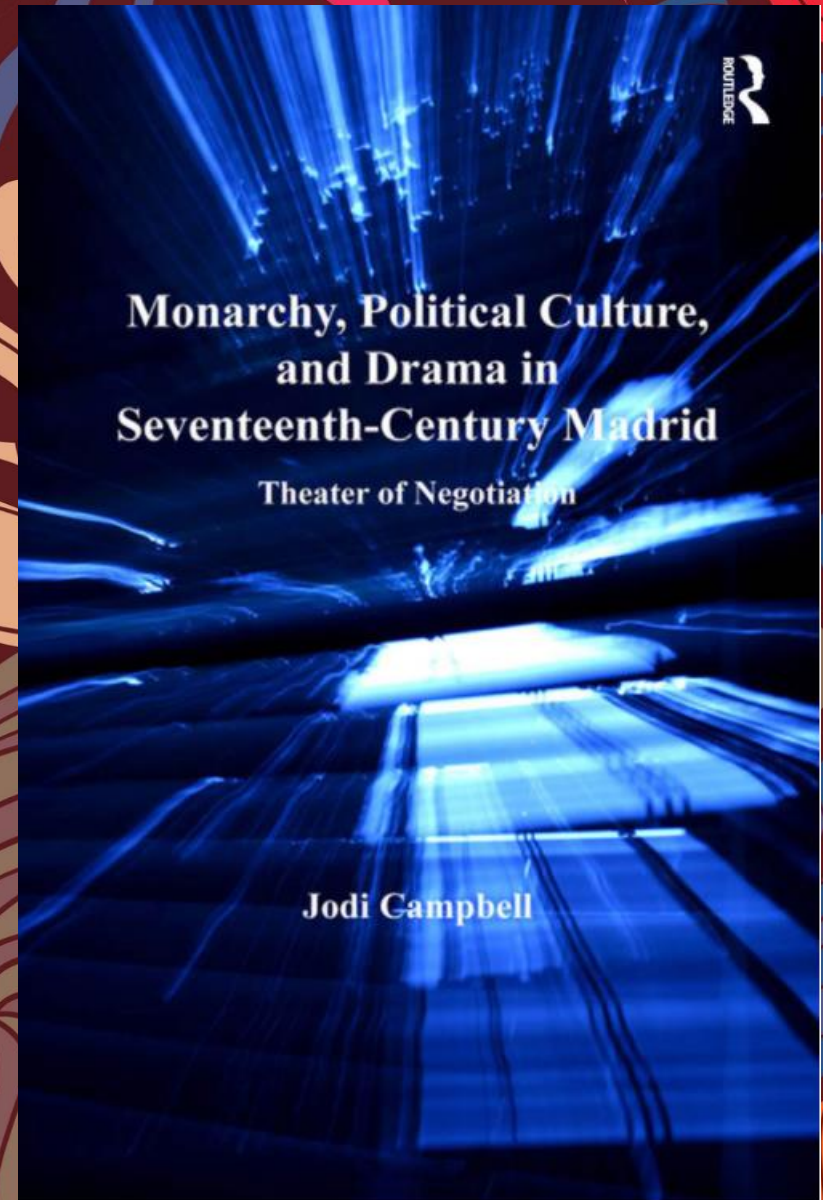


*MONARCHY, POLITICAL
CULTURE, AND DRAMA IN
XVII C MADRID: THEATRE OF
NEGOTIATION*

Jodi Campbell



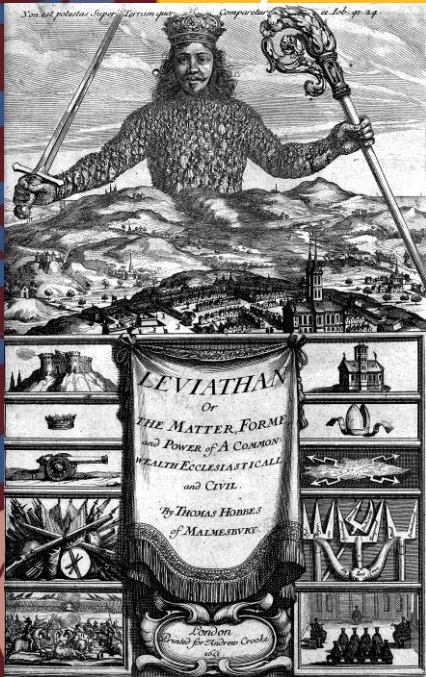


Structure

- I. Plays and Politics
- II. The World of the Stage
- III. Kings in Theory: Competing Ideas of Kingship
- IV. Kings in Action: Evaluations of the Practice of Kingship
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PLAYS AND POLITICS

Kings traditionally appeared in tragedies, but never comedies



*Featuring kings in the comedia had the effect of humanizing them. This was a significant development in the era of **Thomas Hobbes'** quite literal "body politic" and French King **Louis XIV's** famous declaration, "l'état c'est moi!"*

All political power was concentrated between the monarch's shoes and his wig. Absolute authority was not just the king's – it was the king.

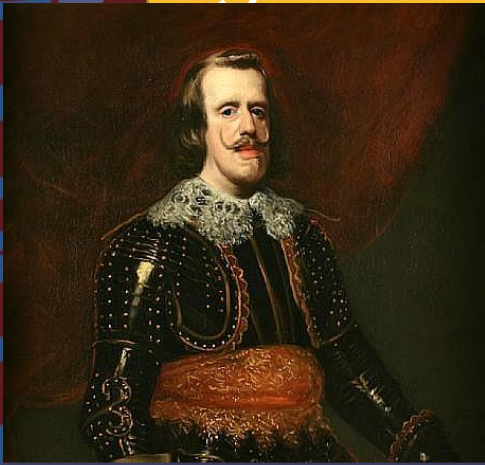


PLAYS AND POLITICS

The representation of kings in the comedy, traditionally the province of the common folk, prefigured ideas of popular sovereignty and national monarchy.

Spanish playwrights of this era found themselves in a unique situation. Across Europe, monarchy was becoming more powerful, but their monarchs were weak and incompetent.

The disconnect between the divine basis of rule and the incompetence of these kings was made clear when similarly inept kings were depicted on the stage in the *comedia*.



Philip IV, r. 1621-1665

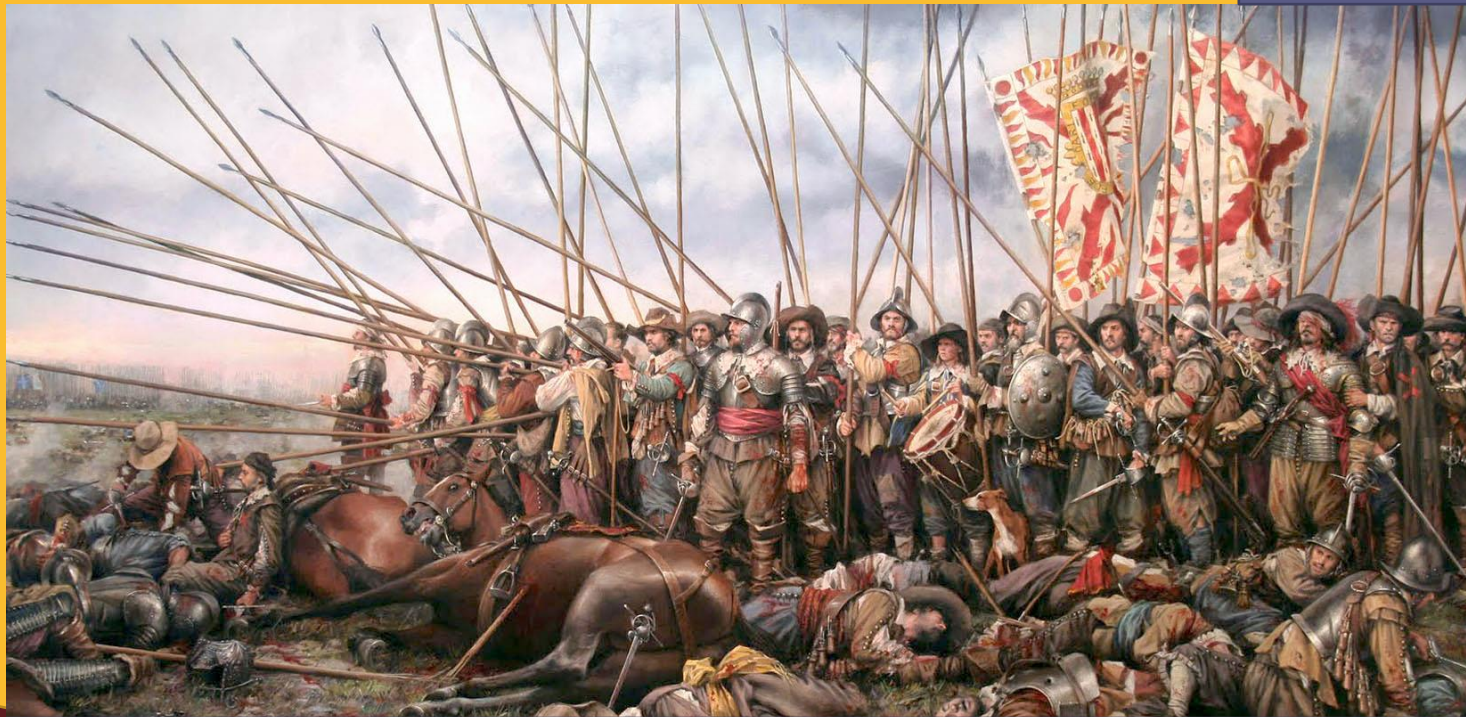


Charles II, r. 1665-1700

PLAYS AND POLITICS

In this unique context, Spanish playwrights could engage critically with the monarchy in a way that their European contemporaries could not.

"Since the decades of the *comedia*'s greatest popularity coincided with the decades of Spain's greatest political crises, the ways in which Spaniards experimented with fictional kingship on stage revealed their concerns and expectations about their own kings."



"Rocroi, el ultima tercio" by Augusto Ferrer-Dalmau, 2011
The 1643 Battle of Rocroi marked the end of Spanish military dominance in Europe

THE WORLD OF THE STAGE

Spanish *comedia* represented a fusion of popular and *élite* traditions and taste.

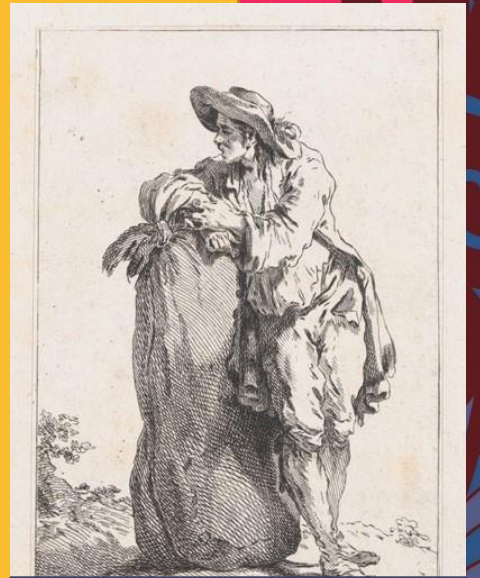


Aristotle, classical theorist of theatre

The *élite* financed many productions and initially imported Italian *comedia della arte* plays. Lope de Rueda (fl. XVIc) was the first to stake out a distinctly Spanish theatrical tradition.

The comedia differed from English theatre by privileging plot over characterization

The popular roots of *comedia* are found in, harvest festivals, street processions for saints' days, and mock battles between Moors and Christians.



A peasant, source of folk tradition

THE WORLD OF THE STAGE

The relationship between theatre and the masses fundamentally changed with the *comedia*

Theatre was secularized in this period. Playwrights and roving troupes of actors were no longer dependent on the Church and the nobility for funding, instead supporting themselves by touring town squares, taverns, and marketplaces all over Spain.



The home of the *comedia* were the *corrales*, purpose-built theatres that could accommodate all social strata. The nobility, the clergy, the gentry, the bourgeois, and the artisanry could all afford to attend plays for the first time.

KINGS IN THEORY

The *comedia* was a means of image-creation for the monarchy and served a propagandistic purpose as well

Aspirational kingship in the *comedia* contrasted with the lackluster performance of Spain's barely competent XVII c Habsburg monarchs

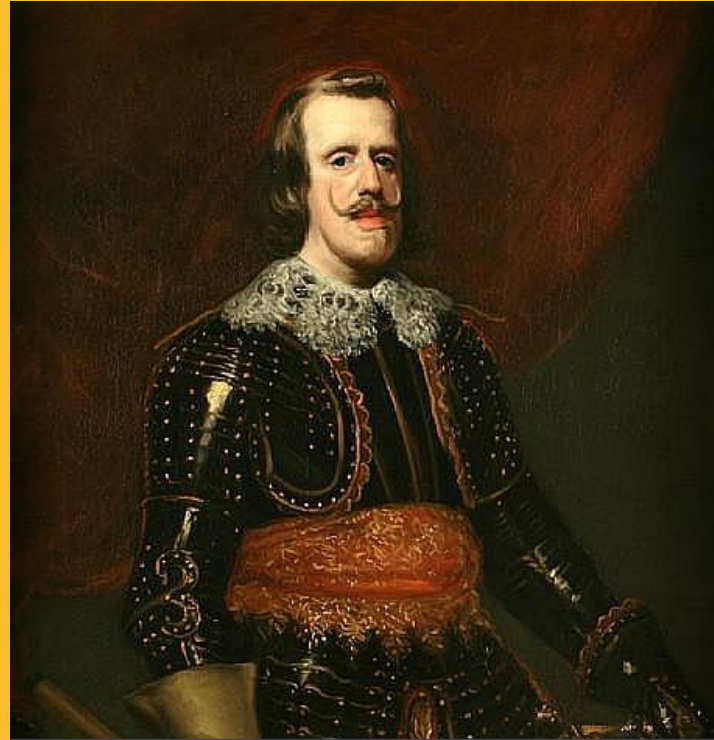
Reputation and perception had a direct and material effect on how effectively the monarchy could exercise political authority.

With the perception of the king so vital to government, the exercise of power became a form of theatre in and of itself.

Personal reputation and an air of magnificence were cornerstones of royal power across Europe. Philip IV tried and came up short; Charles II did not try.

KINGS IN THEORY

Philip IV attempted to create a sense of mystery and grandeur through intentional distancing from the public eye and carefully choreographed court ritual. The people around Charles II attempted to continue this image-making endeavor but were wholly unsuccessful.



Philip IV was competent enough, but only found limited success outside Castile

KINGS IN THEORY

In most cases, the *comedia* presented monarchy in a favorable light, leaving it up to the audience to contrast this aspirational monarchy with their own.

There existed a dire “credibility gap” between aspirational monarchy and the disappointing rule of the Spanish Habsburgs. This disconnect contributed to a widespread sense of stagnation and disillusion.

Fear of censorship limited the degree that the *comedia* could criticize the monarchy, but the *comedia* nonetheless filled a role more akin to satire than outright royalist propaganda.

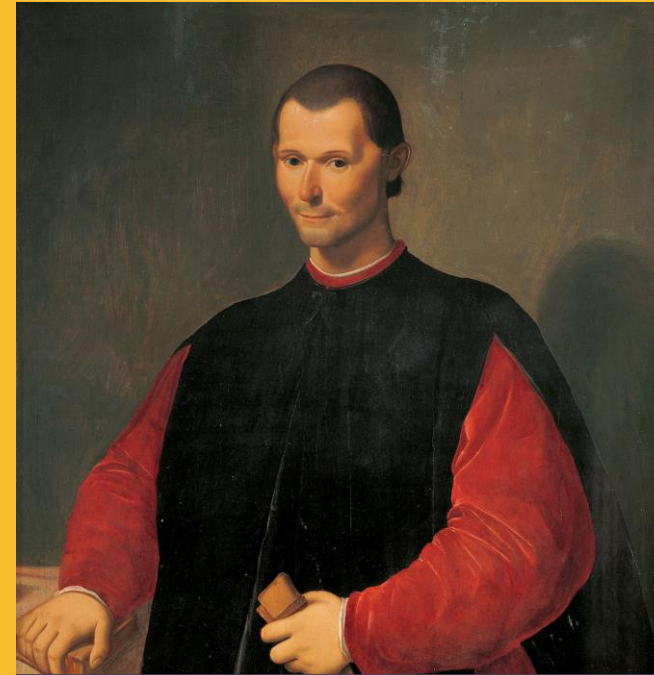
“La Vida es Sueño” critiques outright absolutism. Prince Segismundo, raised in isolation, rules tyrannically by untempered instinct.

KINGS IN ACTION

Kings ought to be virtuous and govern their passions as well as the state.

Comedia involving kings were often set in foreign lands or the dim past to deflect any potential accusations of treason. Many writers of *comedia* presented tales of woe caused by a king's lack of virtue.

Influenced my Machiavellian ideas, kings were expected to be decisive and bold. Spain's XVII c kings were neither.



Niccolò Machiavelli, Italian political theorist fl. 1513

KINGS IN ACTION

Federico, King of Hungary, is a tyrant who believes his secular powers will protect him from the wrath of God. Despite repeated warnings to cease his impropriety, he continues to act immorally and is smote for his insolence.

However, even in the case of an outright tyrant such as Federico, the fundamental assumption that the monarch had the right to rule was never challenged. Federico is eventually replaced by his brother Filippo, but it is never insinuated that Federico was not wholly justified in ruling over Hungary.

Kings could be good or evil, but they must always be kings. In this sense, the range of criticism the authors of *comedia* could engage in was quite limited. Monarchy could not be challenged, but how the monarchy expressed power could be.

Matos Fragoso's "*Poco Aprovechan Avisos Cuando Hay Mala Inclinación*"
(Warnings are of Little Use Against Evil Inclination)



KINGS IN ACTION

The king was a normal man with the same passions and vices as anybody.

However, his relationship to society was unique and his dalliances often had dire consequences for his demesne.

The king could be shown to be lusty and passionate in the *comedia*. The personalization of monarchy did not always have the positive effect Philip IV and Charles II desired. Being a man came with depiction of the bad, not just the good.

The depiction of the king as an imperfect man undermined the centralization of power in the body of the monarch and was a front in the struggle between absolutism and limited monarchy.



THE CURTAIN FALLS

"Placing kings on stage emphasized that they were playing a role, and that the audience could judge how well it was played (Campbell, ChV, 3)."

The king is a man -> men have flaws -> the king is a flawed man -> the king's power should not go unchecked

This was in direct contravention to absolutism. Most Spanish pol. theorists of this period favored constitutional monarchy, a view reflected in *comedia*.

The institution of the monarchy could not be challenged, but this is not to say the king's powers went unquestioned. Many *comedia* plays illustrated how even a bad king could rule well with good counsel. This reflected the aspirations of the emerging bourgeois class and their attendant (classical) liberal politics.





THE CURTAIN FALLS

The writers of *comedia* believed that the king ought to be subject to and bound by the law and showed that disaster followed when the king privileged *gusto* over *justo*.

The portrayal of human kings as flawed men – that is, men – undermined the credibility of absolutism and the divine basis of rule. Campbell posits that, contrary to the general belief of the scholarship, support for limited monarchy, not absolutism, was the majority position of *comedia* writers in this period.

The authors of *comedia* prefigured the idea of popular sovereignty and national monarchy that would gain prominence in the XIX c. The king's right to rule came not from God, but from the people. The *comedia* was never revolutionary and largely called for the preservation of ancient liberties against royal encroachment.



Questions?

