

A Day in the Life: The Performance of Playgoing in Early Modern Madrid and London¹

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Going to the theater was one of the most distinctive—as well as conspicuous—cultural activities to take place regularly in early modern European cities. Precisely because so many people from all walks of life partook of this highly visible pastime, public theaters became spaces wherein social and cultural boundaries between spectators were easily (and sometimes purposefully) blurred. By focusing on the performative dimension of playgoing in Madrid and London, Western Europe's two strongholds of public theater during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this study probes some of the social meanings and intentions underlying the practice of attending commercial theater performances in these two capitals.

IN 1654, THE SPANISH WRITER JUAN DE ZABALETA published a bulky assemblage of literary portraits of manners under the title *El día de fiesta por la tarde*. The best known of these *cuadros* follows a man first and two women later as they attend a theatrical performance in one of the courtyard playhouses of Baroque Madrid. Zabaleta adopts a sarcastic and, on occasion, shrill voice when he describes a number of incidents purported to have been quite frequent in the *corrales de comedias* of the Spanish capital, such as attendees refusing to pay the fee collectors, squabbles over seat theft, and even a lively brawl—human avalanche included—in the women's viewing gallery. Additionally, the narrator seasons the whole episode with a series of moralistic interpellations. It comes across as, without doubt, an extraordinarily entertaining caricature of an ordinary Golden Age Spanish performance: not by the players on the stage, of whom we hear relatively little, but by the playgoers themselves. Because what happens in Zabaleta's text—a one-of-a-kind account of early modern playgoing practices interlaced with social trickery—can only be described as a performance, albeit not in the conventional thespian sense.

What is meant here by *performance*, then? This notion has given rise to a number of interesting theoretical explorations. One of the first social scientists to make the notion of performance a central theme in his work was the sociologist Erving Goffman, who considered social interactions to be a series of representational choices individual actors made, whether consciously

or not (3). Goffman's understanding of the fundamentally performative dimension of human behavior sheds light on why Zabaleta considered an ordinary practice such as going to the theater a suitable writing topic: they—the North American sociologist and the Spanish Baroque writer—clearly would agree that every action, however ordinary it may seem, invites closer analysis of the speech, gestures, and movements that constitute the informal theater of daily interaction.

Leaning into this interpretation of the term, the pages ahead explore the performative aspects of the culture of playgoing in the *corrales* of mid-seventeenth-century Madrid. In particular, they examine the means by which socially aware (and ambitious) theatergoers used the conspicuous nature of the public playhouse as an opportunity to project a favorable public persona. To do so, in addition to taking as a point of departure Goffman's foundational insight into the presence of performance in ordinary activities, I anchor my analysis in the theories of everyday life developed by the French philosopher and cultural critic Michel de Certeau. Moreover, I compare playgoing experiences in the Spanish capital with those in Shakespearean London, whose apparent similarities have attracted the attention of scholars of both Golden Age and Shakespearean drama. Through the combined analysis of fictionalized accounts of playgoers such as that in *El día de fiesta por la tarde* alongside those that appear in historical texts and sumptuary laws from both early modern capitals, this comparative exploration delves into the thought process and signification behind that ordinary practice that Zabaleta—and many of us as well—found and find so extraordinary.²

Strategies, Tactics, and Early Modern Playgoing

In 1980, Michel de Certeau published a groundbreaking study of the intricacies of ordinary behavior, *L'invention du quotidien (The Practice of Everyday Life)*. Much like his contemporary Michel Foucault, Certeau understood society as crucially determined by institutionalized power, with every historical conjuncture being defined by an imbalance in the power relations among different social groups. Even if the boundaries are more blurred in some societies and in some periods than in others, the traditional division between the *strong* and *weak*, to use Certeau's terms, has always been present in the collective imagery of social arrangements. He did not, however, fully share Foucault's bleak vision of such domination, and he criticized *Discipline and Punish* (1975) for failing to acknowledge the ability of the less-powerful effectively to subvert dominating forces:³ “If it is true that the grid of ‘discipline’ is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive,” he argues, “it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it” (Certeau xiv). *The Practice of Everyday Life* took up this challenge by focusing not only on a broad range of minuscule and quotidian procedures such as walking, reading, talking, and a cluster of other small ordinary activities, but also on *how* these ordinary activities are carried out, which he terms “ways of operating.”

Within the spectrum of everyday ways of operating, Certeau further distinguishes between acting strategically and doing so tactically. Linking the former with proper ways of behaving—which differ according to factors

such as class, wealth, race, gender, and profession—Certeau associates strategies with the will of the strong, since they “conceal beneath objective calculations their connection with the power that sustains them from within the stronghold of its own ‘proper’ place or institution” (xx). His concept of strategy fits in well with other theoretical notions such as Clifford Geertz’s control mechanisms, as well as Stephen Greenblatt’s self-fashioning, which he defines as “the cultural system of meanings that creates specific individuals by governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment” (3–4).⁴ That said, one also has the option to rebel against the prescriptions imposed by the elite and to behave differently by adopting the strategies assigned to someone else. This is what Certeau describes as behaving tactically: if strategies are the proper expression of everyday operations, then tactics are the subversive other. “A tactic is an art of the weak” (37), a way for the less powerful to slip out of the yoke of scripted inferiority by assuming roles other than those assigned on casting day.

Renaissance Europe was no stranger to such strategic and tactical performances. Indeed, the increasingly fluid social relations in early modern European cities differed from the more rigid hierarchies of the feudal (and rural) past by providing new opportunities for tactical maneuvering among those seeking to improve their situation. Before the seismic shifts we associate with the Renaissance or early modernity, each social category had assigned to it, in theory, a clearly defined way of operating according to rank, gender, profession, and other attributes; these distinct ways of operating, in turn, reinforced the notion of a society made up of qualitatively different sorts of people. However, the emergence and consolidation throughout early modern Europe of the *citizen* or *middling sort* (in Spanish *vecino* and in some contexts *ciudadano*), a diffuse social category defining those who stood between the civic elite and the urban poor, led to ever more confused understandings of the proper ways of behaving (Casey 119–21; French; Herzog 17–42; Thompson; Wrightson 28–41). And it was precisely such situations or moments of confusion that provided individuals with opportunities for performing tactically.

Nowhere were these changes and tensions in social relations more visible than in the common spaces shared by all members of a community. This was certainly true of the most prominent type of shared space in both urban and rural settings in Renaissance Europe, the local church: even though all parishioners joined together in the same venue for the duration of the religious service, formal social divisions were visibly marked within the shared space (Wrightson 30). The same can be said of the public playhouses of Zabaleta’s Madrid or their better-known counterparts in Elizabethan London. Indeed, the Spanish *corrales de comedias* and the Globe-like amphitheatres of the English capital resembled each other in a surprising variety of ways, despite there being no evidence of direct contact between the theater cultures of the two cities during the early years of their consolidation. Most prominently, they were both open-air and—particularly germane to this article—they were both public. This means that, unlike in the theaters of other countries such as Italy or France, members of virtually all levels of society partook in the same event and attended the same performances in the same

venues, even if within the playhouse the sorts of people were segregated. In the estimation of José María Díez Borque,

el corral de comedias es un reflejo exacto, y cuantificable en dinero, de la estructura social del Madrid de los Austrias; un microcosmos social que refleja, a la perfección, la inasequibilidad de los estratos superiores, aunque, ilusoriamente, todos convivían, por dos horas, en un mismo lugar, participando de un espectáculo común ...
(Díez Borque, *Sociedad* 141)

Andrew Gurr argues much the same for sixteenth-century London's playhouses, which he documents with an appendix listing the surviving accounts by spectators from all sorts of social backgrounds (Gurr, *Playgoing* 65–66, 19–204). In this way, the theatrical cultures of early modern Madrid and London were uniquely conspicuous platforms for the deployment of tactical behavior, since the physical proximity between the social groups that shared in the event of playgoing could easily be confused for closer social relations as well.

Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* calls for historians, sociologists, ethnographers, and, why not, even theater historians, to avoid making the mistake of simply analyzing *what* is being used, to use his own expression: the *ways* of using also require explaining (Certeau 35). Regarding what pertains specifically to this article's interests, not enough analysis of the *ways* of playgoing has been undertaken; rather, a more distanced approach has prevailed.⁵ This, as Certeau warns, can only take us so far, because "surveys of routes miss what was the act itself of passing by" (95). On the other hand, if one replaces the bird's-eye point of view for that of the *Wandersmänner* ("walkers," 93), or, when possible, combines the two, more insight may be gained into the strategies as well as the tactics involved in the complex practice that was playgoing in an early modern European city.

Beware: it is undeniably true that, in a literal sense, playgoing in early modern Madrid and London should not be understood as an everyday affair. In the early years of the permanent playhouses in both cities, plays were performed once a week at the very most. In time the frequency of shows increased to almost daily performances, but it is difficult to believe that even the most avid of theatergoers would go to the playhouse every time there was a show.⁶ That said, due to the relatively frequent visits to the playhouse in these early modern cities, especially in comparison with playgoing frequency today, audiences no doubt established routines and ways of operating during playgoing afternoons much as they would have done for other daily events. We thus find ourselves discussing the paradoxical concept of an *occasional everyday* event for which Certeau's insight can still apply, although without ever losing sight of the fact that playgoing was not a daily staple, and that thus the ways of operating in relation to the theaters were essentially unordinary.

Traveling in Style: Boats, Horses, and Carriages

Grooves of habit and social predetermination marked the streets of an early modern city. Londoners in the times of Shakespeare and Golden Age *madrileños*, like all other city dwellers in Renaissance Europe, for the

most part performed their pedestrian speech acts according to the social conventions that arbitrated over who they were and what they could aspire to achieve in life. Status and wealth were two of the most immediate attributes that conditioned one's literal perambulation through and interaction with what the city had to offer: thus, the gentry had different methods of transport than those of the average man or woman, preferring to travel by horse, coach, sedan chairs, or water transport instead of on foot. Another crucial distinction would naturally be gender: men and women were expected to move around in different ways, respecting geosocial boundaries that depended on their class and profession.⁷ Moreover, the male-dominated stereotyping gaze would quickly judge a woman's virtue depending on the neighborhood in which she was seen; as a result, unaccompanied women avoided certain parts of town so as to not be treated as prostitutes (Shoemaker 148–49). And during the night, apart from the standard threats of assault and robbery of which all women had to be wary, it would be best for a nonaristocratic woman not to be caught out in the streets or she might run the risk of being accused of *nightwalking*, a term that included being a prostitute or a burglar or anything in between (Griffiths; Koslofsky 174–97).

All these predefined paths and pathologies would have also been marked in the early modern playgoer's journey to the playhouse. Nevertheless, the particularity of the event could prompt theatergoers to behave tactically in order to refashion themselves into something they were not supposed to be according to the relatively rigid official configurations of early modern urban societies. Hiring a carriage on a daily basis, for instance, was out of most people's reach, but doing so every once in a while (and in the highly visible context provided by the surroundings of a playhouse on a performance afternoon) could improve one's public appearance immensely, even if at considerable personal expense. The objective of tactical operations, thus, is not so much to rebel against and eventually depose the systemic unfairness of hierarchical societies, but to find ways of improving an individual's standing without upsetting the established order of things.

A particularly illustrative example of ordinary tactical operations is the use of water transport for playgoing purposes in London. A large proportion of London's theatergoers crossed the Thames via boat instead of walking—or riding—across London Bridge. In truth, most Londoners avoided taking the bridge whenever possible, and one can hardly blame them, as it was a particularly uncomfortable crossing. London Bridge, writes Karen Newman,

like most medieval bridges, was dark and narrow, built up several stories on both sides with houses and shops ... in Shakespeare's day Londoners traversed a narrow passage and were confronted with the remains of executed traitors and criminals whose heads were commonly mounted on the bridge. (Newman 55–56)

Instead, Londoners going to the playhouses in the southern suburbs hired boats to cross the river to Southwark. So important were playgoers to the boating business that, in 1614, the Watermen's Company presented a complaint to King James I against the playhouses in northern London, saying that performances there were taking an estimate of three to four thousand fares away from the boatmen each day (Capp, *World* 15–16). Common sense makes one doubt the

accuracy of such a high estimate, at least in direct relation with the theaters, which received the visit of approximately 15,000–25,000 Londoners every week (Keenan 129). Doubts redouble when considering that said complaint was written by the extraordinary “waterman-poet” John Taylor, who was well known for his overly generous calculations, including his own estimation of how many books he had published and sold; after all, and in the words of the courtier Sir Thomas Overbury, a waterman “is one that hath learned to speak well of himself: for always he names himself the first man” (Overbury, sig. Lr). However, there must have been a certain kernel of truth to the claim if the company went as far as to ask the king to intervene on its behalf (Capp, “John Taylor” 537). The implied message that many if not most Londoners north of the river used boats to reach the Southwark playhouses alters the everyday status quo, the predetermined strategic mind-set. Because even though water travel in and out of Southwark was certainly much more comfortable than crossing the always crowded London Bridge, it clearly was not inexpensive. According to the musician John Playford’s 1679 *Vade Mecum*, the cheapest sculler fare one could take—that is to say, immediately across the river—cost two pence (Playford 206); the price for any longer journey within the city ranged between three pennies and a shilling, depending on the type of boat (Cook 195–96). The entrance price to a Southwark theater show ran from one penny to a full shilling depending on the location, comfort, and added extras, and remained constant until the closing of the playhouses in 1642 (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 12, 215). The cost of attending a performance thus increased considerably when the boat fare is taken into account. And yet, all the scant evidence hints at playgoers preferring to travel in fashion to the playhouses than to walk across the bridge and save the fare money for a different occasion or show. An opportunity such as this one to appear in public as well heeled as possible may explain why this abnormal choice to use water transport to reach the Southbank amphitheaters, outside the confines of social logic, became a playgoing staple in Shakespeare’s time.

If a tactic is not offensive enough to be met with response, as is the case of the use of boats for London playgoing, other social aspirants may find themselves emboldened to make similar attempts to capitalize on its advantage. Thus, what was once an outlying tactic could be absorbed into the mainstream, shedding its opportunistic nature. Joanna Guldi explains this procedure as a sort of evolution of social habits:

Miniscule changes in the patterns of habit ... gradually coalesce into changes of attitude and political behavior. Manipulation of habit therefore constitutes the “tactics” available to modern subalterns, who frequently have little representation in the processes of governance or production. (Guldi 119)

However, the opposite also happens: tactical operations to undermine the institutional order of things, if not always technically illegal, could provoke response in the form of sanction by the strong of the weak. Sometimes matters went as far as to provoke the establishment of sumptuary laws in order to keep tactical maneuverings in check; “society’s elite demands the playing out of roles it deems acceptable,” Jonathan Thacker explains, “and is stung into retributive action when these roles appear to be undermined” (48).

One such case of retributive action took place against the tactical use of carriages in Habsburg Madrid. Initially, recourse to use of carriages along with sedan chairs was restricted to the Crown as representative vehicles of the *caballerizas reales*. Although the restrictions were later lifted, it was implied that only members of the Court would be able to afford such luxuries; indeed, across Europe, coaches surfaced as urban symbols that drew “a public difference between nobility and the multitude,” in the words of the English rhetorician Henry Peacham (qtd. in Newman 74).⁸ However, renting a *cochera* in Madrid cost only two ducats—not an exorbitant amount for a month’s worth of aristocratizing oneself (Corral 25). Eventually coaches became so popular in the Habsburg capital that toward the end of the sixteenth century, new laws were passed so that only those with a royal permit were allowed to travel in them, in the hope of avoiding confusion between members of Court and up-and-coming middle class. Moreover, the use of carriages, horses, and chairs was subjected to new rules, the most remarkable of which was the prohibition of lending one’s vehicle or animal to anybody else—although owners were permitted to take guests along—and that under no circumstances were prostitutes allowed to be taken as passengers (López Álvarez, “Coches” 887–91). Needless to say, for these clauses to make it into the new legislation, the practice of lending one’s vehicle must have been a common one. From the nobility’s perspective, this would dangerously blur the lines between the privileged class and the less-deserving others, since the former’s elite identity was compromised by the suspicion of demotic use of aristocratic signifiers: after all, how could one know whether it was an aristocrat in the vehicle or if it was on loan? Thus, the Madrid government moved toward removing carriages, chairs, and horses from the list of possibilities a *madrileño* could transform into tactical opportunities. However, until 1611—the year in which legislation restricting the use of carriages was passed—it would not be far-fetched to assume that those who wanted to improve their public image used these methods of travelling to the *corrales*. It is equally likely that they found ways of circumventing the law after this year, for that matter.

Behaving Tactically in Madrid and London’s Playhouses

In addition to the journey to the playhouse, accessing the venues themselves could be taken as another opportunity to improve one’s social appearance. Both cities’ public theaters had similar layered fee-collecting systems in which the further up in comfort and style the playgoer climbed the more fees he or she would have to pay. The English amphitheaters adopted this system from the neighboring animal baiting arenas, as the peripatetic antiquarian William Lambarde explains in his 1576 *Perambulation of Kent*:

no more than such as to go to Paris Garden, the Bel Savage, or Theater, to behold bear baiting, Interludes or fence play, can account of any pleasant spectacle unless they first pay one penny at the gate, another at the entry of the scaffold, and the third for a quiet standing.
(qtd. in White 154)

This being the standard formula, all London’s diverse entertainment arenas had their own idiosyncratic procedures, some more refined than others

(Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 134–35). Madrid's *corrales* followed the same scheme, with a progressive admission cost for the *localidades populares*, and for roughly the equivalent amounts as their English counterparts (Albrecht 54–55; Allen, *Reconstruction* 6; Varey and Shergold 33–35). The main difference between the English and Spanish amphitheaters is that, whereas in the former, men and women stood together as groundlings in the yard, in the latter, nonaristocratic women were not allowed to enter the patio's main viewing area. Even though evidence suggests that in the very beginning women and men were not segregated in Spain's first *corrales*, the complaints from the nation's moralists forced them to arrange a separate box only for women—normally on the first level—known as the *cazuela* (Allen, *Reconstruction* 28; Ruano de la Haza). The remainder of the top galleries were restricted to the most privileged playgoers: the *desván* or *tertulia* for the clergy and academics, the *aposentos* and the *rejas* for aristocratic playgoers who rented them out for full seasons, and the *apósito de la villa* permanently reserved for local government officials who wished to attend the event. The system of payment was a faithful economic representation of the prevalent notions of social gradation and ranking within early modern European societies, reinforced by the expectation that only the upper classes would be able to afford the better seats. The Spanish system added insult to injury, or, in truth, privilege to honor, since the *corral* was initially not allowed to charge entrance fees from nobles and public officials who sought access to the patio and benches on the ground floor.

However, the same payment system could undermine the hierarchical nature of the playhouse: any playgoer could mobilize a tactic to appear wealthier by purchasing access to a higher position than his or her status ostensibly allowed. One of the passages in Ben Jonson's satirical contract for his audience members in the prologue to *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) alludes to this very practice:

It is further agreed that every person here have his or their free-will of censure, to like or dislike at their own charge, the author having now departed with his right. It shall be lawful for any man to judge his sixpenn'orth his twelvepenn'orth, so to his eighteen pence, two shillings, half a crown, to the value of his place—provided always his place get not above his. (Jonson 277–78)⁹

Jonson's words clearly resonate with Sir Thomas Overbury's description of "a proud man," of whom he writes, "if he have but twelve pence in his purse he will give it for the best room in a play" (N3v). This same tactic of social self-fashioning-via-the-playhouse is evoked in Zabaleta's *El día de fiesta por la tarde*, but with a twist. His male playgoer makes a big fuss about *not* wanting to pay in an attempt to appear to belong, quite literally, to the privileged classes:

Todos se quieren parecer al privilegiado, por parecer dignos de privilegio. Esto se desea con tan grande agonía, que por conseguirlo se riñe; pero en riñendo se está conseguido. Raro es el que una vez riño por no pagar, que no entre sin pagar de allí adelante. (Zabaleta 16)

Zabaleta was not the first writer to notice this practice. Agustín de Rojas, Spain's most celebrated writer of *loas*, dedicated a full passage in his *El viaje*

entretenido (1603) to the misfortunes of the comedia fee-collector, who often would find himself in particularly unpleasant situations:

¡Oh! milagroso ejemplo del que cobra
la entrada resistiendo a mil don Juanes,
sin nombre, sin virtud, sin fama ni obra,
y al preguntar quién paga: son Guzmanes.
Dineros pido. “Ser quien soy, ¿no sobra?”
“¡El nombre me han de dar!” “¡Somos rufianes!”
Demanda el nombre y entran sin dinero,
paje, rufián, valiente y caballero. (Rojas 91)

Once again, it is difficult to gauge the precise amount of fact in such fictions. However, when different accounts agree on describing the same behavior, the kernel of underlying truth appears ever more convincing.

Immediately after entering, Zabaleta’s playgoer sits on a bench for which somebody else had already paid; when the legitimate owner comes, they argue once again, and he manages to keep the spot, and eventually the other man is offered a different bench by the caretakers in charge of controlling these frequent scuffles. In a matter of seconds, a man who has not paid a dime to get into the theater finds himself in one of the most comfortable and privileged positions a nonaristocratic theatergoer had access to, which—as he probably intended—does not pass by unnoticed:

dice la una de las nuestras a la otra, en tono de admiración: “¡Ay amiga, fulanillo, que ayer herreteaba agujetas, se siente en banco de barandillas!” La otra se incorpora un poco a mirarle, como a cosa extraña: “pues no es gran milagro, que de un pobre se haga un rico.” (Zabaleta 31)

“La primera desdicha de los comediantes,” Zabaleta’s narrator laments, “es esta: trabajar mucho, para que solo paguen pocos” (15). Indeed, the habit of avoiding paying the fee and simultaneously improving one’s public image seems to have been common; thus, seventeenth-century Madrid theater ordinances (as for example the 1608 and 1615 *reglamentos de los teatros*) repeatedly caution against this and other forms of disorderly behavior (Varey and Shergold 47–58). Despite these rules, disobedience was common, even among the higher classes. For instance, public officials were often seen bringing two or three friends along with them to the exclusive *apostento de la villa*. Such nonpayment not only affected the proceeds of the *comediantes*, but also that of the religious brotherhoods in charge of managing Madrid’s *corrales*, and, consequently, the city’s charities and hospitals the playhouse fees financed. It is hardly surprising that in 1632 a new law was passed stipulating prison sentences for those caught going to the *corrales* without paying when they should (Ball, *Treating* 32; Díez Borque, *Sociedad* 149). However, it is difficult to imagine that the crackdown on the impersonation of one’s social betters in Madrid was only financially motivated, especially after reading Jonson and Overbury’s ridicule of those who legitimately paid for their better standing. Neither was it a public chastisement of vanity. A ruse to circumvent any form of social predetermination, whether legal or not, when spotted, cannot be condoned or the whole premise of society’s self-regulatory systems would be put into question.

In the public theaters, each member of the audience belonged to a category marked by his or her location within the venue, and it was very difficult if not impossible to shed the label during the rest of the show. All the same, this does not mean that the performance of playgoing stopped when the actors took the stage. As Paul Yachnin notes, “the new configuration of space and vision and the new practices of looking in the playhouse trained the assembled playgoers to form complex, collaborative and self-disclosing judgments” (“Reformation” 262). The theater was a space within which to see as well as to be seen, which meant that, and as Yachnin also explains, its limelight provided “nobodies” the opportunity “to pretend that they were somebodies” through their performances of self (“Shakespeare” 18). Predictably, it was the women who attracted most attention and judgment from their male counterparts. For nonaristocratic women in particular, whether they were standing as groundlings in the yard or sitting in the exposed galleries or *cazuela*, “to be at the public theater, especially without a male companion, was to transgress the physical and symbolic boundaries of the middle-class woman’s domestic containment” (Howard 440). This point raises another equally important facet of the performance of playgoing: whereas male audience members understood the theatrical event as an opportunity for improving one’s presentation of self, the double standard applied to women meant that they had to keep myriad negative interpretations of their actions in mind as well. Attending the playhouse or the *corral* simply as a passive consumer of theater was not an option for women. In typically unpleasant fashion, the Puritan preacher Stephen Gosson reveals, in his antithespian treatise *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), the pressure female theatergoers were under in the commercial playhouses of Elizabethan London: “Thought is free; you can forbid no man, that vieweth you, to note you and having noted you, to judge you, for entering places of suspicion” (qtd. in Howard 439–40).¹⁰ For women in these environments, one’s reputation was constantly on the line, and oftentimes one’s safety as well; at one point Madrid’s *corrales* managers decided to post guards at the *cazuela* entrance to keep the levels of unsolicited attention under control (Sanz Ayán and García García 7). Since the virtues of modesty and decorum were not evenly required from both genders, this in turn goes a long way in explaining why most of the extravagant incidents and accounts—whether real or fictional—of audience behavior in the commercial theaters of Madrid and London almost invariably feature male playgoers.

Once inside the playhouse certain conventions were allowed, or even expected. Smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol, eating nuts and fruit, talking and cheering and jeering were all staples of early modern performance (Ball, “Water” 61–62; Gurr, *Playgoing* 36–43). London’s theater personnel do not seem to have had very fond feelings regarding these practices, especially the loud cracking of nuts, and many of them mock or criticize them in their works (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 225–27). In the Spanish context, the women in *El día de fiesta por la tarde* also crack and eat nuts quite audibly, to the dismay of the narrator, while the male audience member attempts to flirt with a woman in the *cazuela* by sending her a dozen limes, one of the several edibles sold in the *corrales*. This practice is confirmed in an entry in the diary of a Dutch traveller, Lodewijk Huygens, who visited Madrid’s two playhouses in

winter 1660 and noted how men would often send the women of the *cazuela* oranges and such other delicacies (Zabaleta 19–20, 29–30; Ebben 182). Logically, theatergoers could ascribe to themselves certain connotations of wealth and social standing by participating in transactions that had publicly visible price tags. On the other hand, if used skillfully and conspicuously, any of these playhouse practices also could be turned into a tactical opportunity for feigning prosperity, as Jonson, Zabaleta, and Rojas warn, and thus being treated as above one's place.

Perhaps the most illuminating deployment of amphitheater-related tactical operations is the one the Jacobean dramatist Francis Beaumont provided via his metatheatrical audience members in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607, although first published in 1613). George the grocer and his wife, Nell, do it all: they sit on stools on the stage, as was the custom for wealthy patrons in the amphitheaters; in order to ingratiate themselves with the other spectators, they ask the musicians to play songs known to have been very popular in the amphitheaters at the time; they even go as far as to buy their neighbors a round of beers, the choice drink of the urban masses. George and Nell perform their role superbly, and their tactical maneuvering to raise their social profile is second to none. There is but one problem: they are expert actors in the wrong play, as I note by way of conclusion.

Coda: Social Anxiety on Display in the Public Theaters

In her recent *The Anxiety of Sameness in Early Modern Spain* (2016), Christina Lee explores various forms of discourse that flourished in Habsburg Spain, including one which reflected the elite's growing belief that "their ranks were under siege by wealthy commoners whose goal was to promote themselves while demoting the lineages of the established nobility" (24). Throughout her study, she charts the different ways in which this anxiety of sameness that pervaded the upper echelons of Spanish society manifested itself, as well as the social phenomena that fomented this discourse of discomfort. In addition to wealth and social networks, Lee notes that there was a performative aspect to nobility that the upper classes feared a social impersonator could appropriate in the hope of appearing to belong to the privileged few. Naturally, this usurpation could only take place in the physical and cultural spaces where individuals from across the social spectrum might meet. Commercial playgoing in Madrid, or London for that matter, provided an ideal setting for such interactions. A scholar of theater history sees how this potential for mobility could entice social climbers. But it engendered social anxiety as well.

It is precisely this form of anxiety that explains why throughout the early modern period the upper classes in many parts of Europe began slowly to back away from what was once a shared culture, leaving large portions of it in the hands of the lesser sorts, as the elites developed their own, more refined and restricted cultural practices. The most visible case of elite withdrawal involved retiring from public festivities such as carnival, especially in urban contexts (see Davis, "Reasons" 58–64). However, and as Peter Burke perceptively noted in his influential *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, something similar happened to London's commercial theater with the revival of the indoor

public playhouses in Blackfriars District and in Saint Paul's around 1600:

By the early seventeenth century, the public theaters, where Shakespeare had been played to noblemen and apprentices alike, were no longer good enough for the upper classes, and private theaters were established where a seat cost sixpence. (Burke 277)

At least in part, London's elites withdrew from the shared spaces that were the amphitheaters in the poorer suburbs into more exclusive playhouses inside city limits, often referred to as *private* due to their prohibitive prices. As to why a similar public-yet-elitist performance space never emerged in the Spanish capital, I am willing to guess that were it not for the circumstances that allowed the *corrales* to isolate Madrid's wealthier theatergoers from their less illustrious neighbors, they may well have joined London's in retiring to a more exclusive and homogeneous environment. In addition to the capital's two large *corrales*, Madrid's elites could also attend performances at the royal theaters in the Alcázar and the Retiro palaces, and, alternatively, aristocrats often hired acting companies to hold private performances, known as *particulares*, in their own residences.¹¹

The emergence of London's private theaters leads us back to *Pestle's* duo of fictionalized audience members. George and Nell—commoners in a comfortable economic situation (i.e., citizens)—would have been the sort of people near the top of the social pyramid in an Globe performance. Their wealth would have not only bought them a privileged position in an amphitheater, but also their liberality in inviting neighboring playgoers to a round of beers would have enhanced their charisma and their public personae. Unfortunately for them, however, they are performing all these tactics associated with the suburban amphitheaters in the Blackfriars playhouse, one of London's private theater venues. Not only were these elite playhouses much more expensive to get into than the amphitheaters, but they also offered a theatrical experience that was different from that of their suburban counterparts. The plays were different, the music and dancing were different, the drinking habits of the patrons were different, and so on. George and Nell's obvious lack of familiarity with the conventions of Blackfriars performances visibly sets them apart from the other patrons. Indeed, that Beaumont decided to write a play that revolved continuously around the lack of sophistication of even the most informed of amphitheater playgoers speaks to the vast distance between the two very different playgoing cultures that coexisted in Jacobean London. Nobody questions that George and Nell's antics are grotesquely exaggerated in pursuit of satirical effect and that they do not necessarily mirror the historical truth of popular as opposed to aristocratic theatergoing practices. That said, and as Andrew Gurr remarks, “the extremes, of course, give some hints by their very notability about where the lines for good behavior were usually drawn” (*Playgoing* 44).¹²

Such highly theatrical extremes of George, Nell, and their Spanish coevals act as a magnifying glass through which to see more clearly the ways of “making do” of those whom Certeau provocatively called the “unrecognized producers, poets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality” (xviii). In an era that saw growing opportunities for upward social mobility, particularly in urban contexts,

shared spaces such as public playhouses offered the most advantageous turf for the tactical player. Theaters become, as I have argued, loci of change in London, Madrid, and other early modern European cities. Additionally, the elites' withdrawal from London's suburban amphitheaters in favor of a space of their own—a migration with parallels in many other mixed spaces across early modern Europe—is emblematic of a broader sociocultural response to what they understood as a perceived threat to various dimensions of their situation of privilege. As the ground was moving under them, audience members in the public theaters of Golden Age Madrid and Shakespearean London negotiated their changing worlds through their theatergoing. Whether in words, deeds, or gestures, their performances as playgoers in turn gave rise to social dramas that were in many respects as intricate and full of meaning as those taking place on the theaters' boards.

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NOTES

1. This article reads as a companion piece to my “Comparing the Commercial Theaters of Early Modern London and Madrid.” I thank Andreas Mahler, Marion O’Connor, and Sabine Schülting for their generous advice and comments. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own; following the journal’s policy, I have modernized spelling of primary sources when necessary.
2. A select list of studies focused on theater audiences in early modern Spain includes Albrecht; Allen (“El papel” 9–18); Díez Borque (*Sociedad* 118–65); Sanz Ayán and García García (53–65); Ball (*Treating*). For England, see Bayer; Cook; Dawson and Yachnin; Gurr (*Playgoing*); Harbage; Lopez; Sell et al.; Whitney. This article also draws inspiration from many of the observations Jonathan Thacker makes in his *Role-Play and the World as Stage in the Comedia* (2002), a versatile study in metatheater, role theory, and social history in Golden Age Spanish drama.
3. For a perceptive review of Michel de Certeau’s scholarship and a pertinent juxtaposition with Foucault’s, see Natalie Zemon Davis’s remarks (“The Quest”). See also Davis and Crouzet (86).
4. The notion of self-fashioning—along with other aspects of the Foucault-inspired poetics of culture that Greenblatt developed early in his career—plays a pivotal role in the conception of this article and remains a constant ghost presence throughout. Nonetheless, I find that Certeau’s activity-centric observations, as well as their ability to locate meaning in the actions of anonymous agents, are better suited to my objective here.
5. One recent Certeau-infused exception is Andreas Mahler’s article in the 2010 issue of the *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* devoted to studying the ways of operating in the Inns of Court, one of the most important privileged playgoing and playmaking pockets in Elizabethan London.
6. For the frequency of performances in the public theaters of early modern Spain and England, see Barbadillo de la Fuente (244); Díez Borque (*Teatro* 28–29); Forgeng (183); Kinney (76–80); and Oehrlein (123–31).
7. For an illustrative juxtaposition between the streets of London seen through the eyes of a privileged young man (John Donne) and a poor woman (Isabella Whitney), see Newman (63–73).
8. Peacham is writing about seventeenth century London, of course; however, Newman’s *Cultural Capitals* (61–75) renders a portrait of early modern London and Paris that is pertinent for my analysis of Madrid.
9. Paul Yachin draws attention to this passage (“Reformation” 269).
10. For evidence of female playgoers and their behavior in the public theaters of London, see Gurr (*Playgoing* 60–64).
11. I discuss in detail these and other reasons behind Golden Age Madrid’s lack of a Blackfriars equivalent (Amelang, “Comparing”).
12. For a detailed walkthrough of George and Nell’s disruptive interludes, see Smith.