

THEATRICAL ELEMENTS IN BAROQUE FESTIVALS  
(THE JESUIT CELEBRATIONS IN THE GOLDEN AGE)<sup>1</sup>

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FEAST OF THE SAINTS AND DRAMATIC ELEMENTS

In the set of elements integrated into festive and spectacular Baroque hagiographical celebrations, there are some theatrical and para-theatrical. These elements vary from the more or less didactic and religious to the fun, close to the more grotesque comicalness.

There are especially important the series of Jesuit celebrations<sup>2</sup> of the first and last decades of the seventeenth century with the beatification and canonization of Saint Ignatius, Saint Francis Xavier and Saint Francis de Borja (comprehensible due to the strong tendency of the Society of Jesus towards didactic uses of theatre). Other manifestations can be added also in the canonization of Saint Theresa, Saint Philip Neri and Saint Isidro (at the same time as Saint Ignatius and Saint Francis, 1622). These celebrations must be added to those dedicated to Immaculate Conception that proliferate throughout the Golden Age.

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<sup>2</sup> For these celebrations see Serrano Martín, 2010; provided, however, little attention to the theatrical elements.

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I will confine my remarks without any completeness to illustrate some of these elements, pointing out certain modes of dramatization, at various levels and categories, according to partial details that can be extracted from the relationships of events, paying attention especially to the Jesuits celebrations<sup>3</sup>.

We could start with

#### SOUND AND LIGHT IN STREET SHOWS

Certain scenes integrated into the street processions have some components with minimal dramatic elements. Relationships allow us to understand its mode of operation. In the *Breve relación de las fiestas que se hicieron en la ciudad de Toledo*<sup>4</sup> for the canonization of Saint Ignatius and Saint Francis Xavier, for example, a curious scenic composition with live animals is mentioned, among other more literary-dramatic shows (as dialogues, discussions, and the comedy of *El gigante Golías*), due to don Eugenio Ortiz Susunaga, who had arranged this invention to make the salutation to the saints in the square of the Society of Jesus:

on four high stages, four large balloons of painted canvas were displayed, representing the four elements. [...] Once they opened the fire balloon, it expelled flames, fireworks, lightning, salamanders [...] Later on, the air balloon was opened, revealing a lot of poultry, eagles, pigeons, parrots, goldfinches and other birds. [...] The element of water threw out sources and fish and eels and other aquatic animals. Finally the element of earth, produced various animals such as rabbits, hares and others, even a monkey, who entertained the feast with grotesque gestures.

We find little or almost no dramatic action in such games, but the balloons and live animals are common scenery in the sacramental plays too, or in the palace theatre, where we could find often also ephemeral castles and ships.

<sup>3</sup> Torres Olleta (2009) admirably studied many aspects in his research on the iconography of San Francisco Javier. Much more modestly in Arellano, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c.

<sup>4</sup> See the final Bibliography for the details of the cited relationships. *Breve relación de las fiestas que se hicieron en la ciudad de Toledo*, Toledo, Diego Rodríguez, 1622.

Many of these scenic compositions, without text and with little action, have to deal with the elemental drama of a war between the armies of Good and Evil, basic doctrinal aspect of such festivities. A recurrent formula is the fight, in the battlefield of ephemeral architecture. They are represented with mechanical animals and fireworks, in small rudimentary plots from the dramatic point of view, but admirable from the spectacular perspective.

In the celebrations for the beatification of Saint Isidro (1619)<sup>5</sup>, a castle into a wild mountain was designed in Madrid, with painted animals and others lived. Different squads representing the sect of Mahomet, Judaism and Heresy failed in the siege of the fortress defended by dragons, serpents and giants, finally defeated by Saint Isidro helped by angels, between bursts of fire to reduce to ashes the scenery of combat.

A few years later, in the celebrations of the canonization, Miguel de León describes a great burning castle with a terrifying robot devil: «who, having turned all day, moving with a secret mechanism the body, head, wings, hands and feet, threw in the night a lot of fire, and was the most extraordinary invention that have ever been seen». In these same festivities, the Imperial College Jesuit prepared another great show with evident doctrinal implications: in front of the church set up two large tables:

In the middle of the stage a terrified fierce dragon, made with secret veins of gunpowder and rockets, subsisted on what was to be his destruction. Luther, made in the same explosive matter, was above it. A well armed soldier (a figure of Saint Ignatius) conquered the castle, [...]. Started the fire in the first platform, firing many rockets [...]. The dragon approached to San Ignatius and the saint fired it... (Monforte, fol. 69vA)

A new battle was designed later to follow the previous, which represented the fable of Perseus, transformed into a divine sense: Andromeda, a Faith representation, is offered to a dragon (the Gentiles), and later she is released by Perseus in figure of Saint Francis Xavier, who comes with a spear of fire in a flying horse. The firing spear launched rockets that burned the serpent, that «it was slowly

<sup>5</sup> Manuscript in the National Library of Spain, cited by Ferrer, 2003, p. 33.

burning, throwing fires and terrible thunders» (Monforte, fol. 70R-VA).

We can appreciate in these shows some paratheatrical dimensions, with minimal text, deployment of stage machinery (clouds, flights, robots...), and mainly the fireworks display, the true protagonist of this spectacular category.

#### THE PARATHEATRICAL SCENES

The representations called «pasos» (or dramatic scenes) were not much more elaborate from the dramatic point of view. These «pasos» have with different arguments dealing with the life of saints.

In the festivities in Madeira (a Portuguese island), eleven «pasos» placed in certain squares and streets were mentioned and it was said that they were very well prepared. The first festivity celebrated was the canonization of Saint Ignatius and Saint Francis in the consistory of the Pope. The representations took also into account other different episodes of the two Jesuits' lives. The fifth representation, placed in the Plaza del Pez, was the famous Xaverian miracle of the crab<sup>6</sup>, very well staged on a beach covered with

white sand with shells and others curious sea motifs and some live shellfish such as lobsters, crabs, etc. They were getting through the cracks of the rocks, where were born herbs of the sea, and in some gaps were many artificial ornaments as pearl shells and other works of great perfection and curiosity... (Madeira, 1622, fol. 202v).

Saint Francis Xavier was sitting on the beach at this stage and an artificial crab offered him the crucifix, while one black played a harp «and had many listeners».

#### DIALOGUES, COLLOQUIA AND SMALL DRAMATIC PIECES

One of the typical dramatic forms was the dialogue, frequent exercise in the curriculum of the Company.

There was a *Coloquio de San Francisco Javier y San Ignacio* in Lima (1622), and in Madrid for the beatification of Xavier. This colloquy represented another devote dialogue

<sup>6</sup> In a storm Francis drops to the sea a crucifix, which later takes it him a crab in its claws.

written by a priest, because of his devotion to the saint, composed of some biographical episodes of life of St. Xavier, and represented by students chosen from those who were studying at the Jesuit school [...] The dialogue was a devoted and well represented the saint's death... (Madrid, 1619, fol. 7r).

On the other hand, many manuscripts related to these Xaverian dialogues have been preserved. The common aspect of this genre is their short dimension, few characters and no details about the authorship and dates. They should be considered as examples of a religious teaching practice with catechetical purposes, not belonging to the festivities themselves, but certainly very close to the category of dialogues represented.

#### LONG DRAMATIC PLAYS

We also find comedies (or «tragicomedies» and «tragedies»), which are longer and with a more dramatic entity. Many testimonies have mentioned two types of transmission: on one side, we can find those works cited or evoked without details, and, of course, without providing the text, and on the other hand, we come across those representation whose texts we know, usually because they have been preserved in manuscripts or editions not integrated in the relationships.

We have numerous references of the first category, but little substantial.

With some dramatic dimension, we find a play called *tragicomedia of Evora* (Évora, 1622, fol. 81r y ss.), dedicated to the virtues of the two Jesuit saints in their canonization. The narrator pays attention especially to certain scenes with the usual employment of spectacular monsters: Idolatry on a crocodile, Heresy in a seven-headed hydra, Europe riding a bull sea, Asia on an elephant, Fame on a dolphin...

In Goa, it was represented a tragedy of Saint Francis Xavier, which lasted four days, before the Viceroy and authorities, with great success. The account tells us that it was «serious work, with very illustrious and devoted scenes, and if they caused great joy, it also give rise to tears of devotion».

A theatrical performance, rather commented on the relationship of Toledo (1622), was entitled *Comedia del gigante Gollás* in which

Goliath represents Luther, while David was symbolic image of St. Ignatius and the Society of Jesus.

In 1619, the king and the queen attended to the theatre of the Jesuits, to see a work in praise of the beatified F. Xavier. On one side of the platform, it was situated a balloon of three «varas» of diameter where the World was painted on this globe. The play was built with some allegorical characters: Mathematics, History, the four parts of the World and others.

Some year later Philip IV attended the celebration of the first century of the Society of Jesus with the comedia *Las glorias del mejor siglo* (1640) written by Father Valentín de Céspedes. The protagonists were St. Ignatius and St. Francis Xavier, and other allegories, such as the Glory of God, Human Glory, Beauty, Discretion, Virtue, Taste, Zeal, Faith, Idolatry, the four parts of the world or the Society of Jesus, to which must be added the «graciosos» (clowns), etc.

Although P. Elizalde<sup>7</sup> thinks the scenery of this play was made by the famous Cosme Lotti, I deeply consider that the news of José Pellicer, commenting a «solemn comedy of wonderful stage machinery» of Lotti, is not *Las glorias*, —this play does not show an unusually sumptuous staging—. Indeed, the news, to which Elizalde alludes as support, refer to another comedy of Father Céspedes, *Obrar es durar*, apparently represented on the same occasion.

Some decades later, Madrid celebrated the canonization of another Jesuit, Saint Francis de Borja, described in *Días sagrados y geniales celebrados en la canonización de San Francisco de Borja...* The Jesuit students of Humanities prepared in honour of the saint «two sacred representations of his life and a poetic contest» (fol. 86r):

These two plays narrated in verse the life of St. Francis Borgia; the events continued from one to another, without repeating any... The first part with the title of *El gran duque de Gandía* represented his life in the court, his political charges and deserved favours...

The second part was the title of *El Fénix de España*, where the noble ashes were reborn to eternal life. It represented the most important events of his religious life and his heroic humility... (fols. 76v y ss.).

<sup>7</sup> Elizalde, 1961, p. 167.

Cerny assigned the first play to Calderón<sup>8</sup>, but the two authors are Jesuit: probably Pedro de Fomperosa wrote the supposedly calderonian, and Diego Calleja *El fénix*.

Other comedies written on Saint Francis Borgia are *San Francisco de Borja* (by Matías Bocanegra, a mexican Jesuit. It was written before the canonization, but it has to be considered very interesting because it is the earliest preserved play on this theme). Another one is entitled *San Francisco de Borja, duque de Gandía*, by Melchor Fernández de León. Also we could add the *Los agravios satisfechos del Desengaño y la Muerte*, and the sacramental play *El gran duque de Gandía*, attributed by Valbuena Prat to Calderón, with very weak arguments<sup>9</sup>.

In all this plays, there is a unifying element of the disordered plots: that is the «Desengaño» (disillusion), expressing the final moral and religious lesson.

#### MASQUERADES AND FARCES

Masquerades and farces are very close to the doctrine, but they are integrated by fun, comic elements, with clowns and laughable scenes. They appeared on the whole celebration with burlesque components with various forms: *pandorgas*, *matachines*, *tarascas*, *sainetes* and especially *máscaras*. I am only going to adduce a few examples.

In a celebration of Immaculate Conception of the Virgin<sup>10</sup>, in Seville, 1617, students made a farce, which opened with four wild men wearing clothes made of animal skins, messed up hair and fierce faces, escorting a beautiful child, who was the principal leader of all. These men met some adventurers, starting with Don Quixote. This is one of the many appearances of Don Quixote in such masquerades. He was on a «a very perfect Rocinante, wearing very old, damaged and ridiculous weapons». Don Quixote used the cover of an old barrel as a shield and declaimed these verses in it:

I am Don Quixote, manchego.  
And although I was born in La Mancha,  
today I defend the Virgin without stain.

<sup>8</sup> See Iglesias Feijoo, 1983.

<sup>9</sup> See Arellano, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> That is, the doctrine that the Virgin Mary was conceived without original sin.

[*La Mancha* is the name of the region of don Quixote, and means in Spanish also blame, stain].

Another squad represented a ridiculous university, in which were marching Escobar and Aponte, two famous fools of Seville, and many others funny characters.

The integration of laughter in the hagiographic events reached varying degrees of grotesque, with typical carnival expression, as those of a new quixotic masquerade in Salamanca, during the feasts for the beatification of Ignatius of Loyola:

Don Quixote was riding on a horse like a camel, armed with ridiculous weapons and dressed carpets, with a dirty wooden spear, with a goat horn for iron, two unequal stirrups. Next to him came his servant Sancho Panza, dressed as a peasant, riding on a donkey... Before him, a barber's basin appeared with another notice that read: «The helmet of Mambrino»...

Ridiculous and cruel violence played its role in another feasts of Granada (1610, fol. 29r-v) devoted to Loyola's beatification with another spectacular development. It was designed on a mobile platform where an organist in the costume of an old fool was playing an organ.

whose pipes were eight dogs, large and small in proportion whose howls represented well the music of this instrument, as they did against their will. They were tied by a wooden collar and the organ keys rested on her breasts, having each an iron spine, hurting them very badly when pressed, as it was shown by their howls...

The general spectacular inclination, identified as characteristic of the Baroque, appears so privileged in the hagiographic events, where the paratheatrical and theatrical elements are constant, and diverse in its forms and categories. It goes, as mentioned, from the exhibition of special effects and wooden animals to silent scenes and dialogues of short-dramatic entity, reaching up long comedies, exploring the hagiographical material, doctrine and religious fervour; sometimes even the play is not related to the theme of the celebration. Thus, in the centenary of the Monastery of Escorial, the three plays that were represented had little to do with San Lorenzo, but at least they were

all three from the pen of Don Pedro Calderon: *También hay duelo en las damas*, *Dicha y desdicha del nombre* y *El maestro de danzar*.

It appears that although the doctrine was essential, more important was, after all, having fun.

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