

Dear colleagues,

I am writing to request a summer research grant in order to carry out my proposed project titled "Performing Blood Purity in Recent Golden Age Productions." For this project, I plan to study the ways in which contemporary theater directors make the complex early modern concept of blood purity accessible to today's audiences.

Background

An estimated 10,000 plays were written and performed during Spain's Golden Age (1500-1700), yet few have had a subsequent performance tradition comparable to that of Shakespeare's works. They are, however, beginning to experience a revival, both in Spain and in the English-speaking world. For example, both the Almagro Festival in Spain and the Siglo de Oro Festival in El Paso, Texas feature Golden Age productions by companies from around the world. In Britain, for the first time ever, a Spanish Golden Age play was recently performed in Shakespeare's Globe.

The Golden Age's lack of a major performance tradition from the eighteenth to the twentieth century provides directors with unique opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, they are relatively unfettered by previous interpretations and audience expectations. On the other, they have no precedents to follow when it comes to making the peculiarities of early modern culture and society accessible to contemporary audiences.

One of these peculiarities is the concept of blood purity. In 1492 Spain expelled the Jews from its borders. While hundreds of thousands left, many chose to convert to Catholicism in order to remain. Since these conversions happened under duress, the Catholic Church, and Spanish society in general, doubted the religious sincerity of the former Jews. The result was a division into two main castes: those who could prove their non-Semitic ancestry were called Old Christians, while those of Jewish descent, even if only through one family line, were called New Christians or *conversos*. Privileges such as important government or ecclesiastical positions were restricted to Old Christians only, while New Christians suffered discrimination, ridicule, and Inquisitorial persecution, leading them to hide their roots. Proving, or, in many cases, falsifying, one's blood purity as an Old Christian became a national obsession.

The Project

Since many Golden Age plays take for granted a familiarity with blood purity that today's audiences lack, I propose to analyze the ways that modern directors adapt these works to make them relevant.

Methodology: I will limit the scope of my study to the performances of two plays: *Fuenteovejuna*, by Lope de Vega, and *El retablo de las maravillas*, by Miguel de Cervantes. I will develop a system for classifying directorial approaches to blood purity allusions, and then use this system to analyze a corpus of performances of each play. I will also do a qualitative analysis of the implications and effectiveness of each approach. This combination of data and evaluation will allow me to draw conclusions regarding current trends in Golden Age productions and propose a path forward for directors.

Resources: As a member of the Association for Hispanic Classical Theatre, I have access to that organization's archive of video recordings of Golden Age plays, which are available through mail order. According to the archive's current catalogue, there are six versions of each of the plays that I propose to study.

Dissemination: I plan to write up the results of this study as an article for publication in *Comedia Performance*, a peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the study of Golden Age theater in performance.

Timeline:

June: Viewing of performances and coding of approaches.

July: Review of secondary sources relating to blood purity and Golden Age theater performance.

August: Writing/revision

September: Final revisions and submission to *Comedia Performance*.

Impacts

Impact on discipline: There are two main approaches to Golden Age theater today. The traditional approach views play texts as literary artifacts and historical-cultural documents. The performance studies approach views play texts as scripts for current stage productions, and tends to focus on the ways in which theater companies interpret them through performance. While the traditional approach has explored in great depth the theme of blood purity in the early modern period, the performance studies approach has yet to analyze how today's theater practitioners deal with it. My study will advance our understanding of Golden Age theater performance by bridging the two approaches and shedding light on the processes by which an early modern work can be made relevant for contemporary audiences. In addition to this considerable scholarly contribution, theater practitioners will also find my study useful as they develop ways to bring the Golden Age to the stage.

Impact on researcher: In my own career trajectory I have moved from the traditional approach to the performance studies approach, which uniquely positions me to carry out this study. Although I already have a handful of publications in the field of Golden Age performance studies, this project will help to establish me as a pioneer in the new direction that I am proposing. This study is limited enough in its scope to allow me to complete it within the stipulated time frame, but I will be able to employ the methodology that I will develop for it when I subsequently turn my attention to other plays and/or other themes in my future research projects.

Impact on students: No part of the grant will be used to develop curricular materials. The discoveries that I will make as I carry out the research, however, will enrich the way that I teach the courses in my regular teaching assignment. For example, I regularly teach courses on the culture and literature of Spain, both of which include discussion of both early modern and contemporary Spanish society. I also often teach a special topics course on Golden Age theater that includes exercises in performance analysis. My findings will allow me to bring new perspectives these courses.

Conclusion

There is a clear need in Golden Age performance studies for research on the way that theater practitioners deal with the early modern concept of blood purity. Expanding the field in this direction will require experience, resources, and time. I have the necessary experience, and the necessary resources are readily available to me. The Summer Research Grant would afford me the time that I need to carry out this important project next summer.

Thank you for your consideration,

Charles Patterson

Selected Bibliography

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¹ Bracketed translations of titles are my own.