

Playing Gender: Toward a Quantitative Comparison of Female Roles in Lope de Vega and Shakespeare¹

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One of the major differences between the otherwise very similar commercial theatrical cultures of early modern Spain and England was that, whereas in England female roles were performed by young, cross-dressed boys, in Spain female performers were prominent in their industry. Indeed, actresses in Spain played an active role in the creative process of theater-making and could rise to lead their own acting companies and even write their own plays. With this distinction in mind, this article uses quantitative analysis to gauge how Lope de Vega and William Shakespeare—as contemporaries and leading dramatists of their respective countries—depicted female characters in their plays. A comparative measurement of the number of lines pronounced by female as opposed to male characters in the dramatic works of these two playwrights indicates a significant disparity between the two. This quantitative difference invites consideration of the presence—or lack thereof—of actresses in each of the two national theaters, with implications for the amount of speech, protagonism, and agency allocated to female characters in their respective plays.

INTRODUCTION: Performing Women in Early Modern Spanish and English Theater

In the winter season of 2013, a British acting company directed by Laurence Boswell performed a cycle of seventeenth-century Spanish plays at the Ustinov Theater in Bath, United Kingdom. The three comedias chosen for what would be Boswell's third season of Spanish Golden Age drama were Tirso de Molina's *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* and Lope de Vega's *La dama boba* and *El castigo sin venganza*. Translated into English, these plays were performed by actors and intended for audiences who shared the tacit assumption that the theater of Habsburg Spain strongly resembled that of Shakespeare and English Tudor-Stuart playwrights. And their belief stands on solid ground: in an academic environment increasingly drawn toward comparison, scholars and students of Shakespearean and Golden Age Spanish theater have found these two dramatic traditions to be uncannily alike. Yet at a post-performance roundtable with the cast, the female actors surprised much of the audience when they noted how empowered they felt when playing the women's parts written by Lope and Tirso, in sharp contrast with those in the plays of their English counterparts. Their frank remarks led some of the panelists to wonder

about the causes of this divergence, and especially whether this present-day difference might reflect the fact that in the Spain of Lope and Tirso, unlike in Shakespeare's England, women were allowed to work as professional actors.²

Indeed, despite the many similarities shared by the theatrical cultures of early modern England and Spain, some notable differences separated them as well. Among the most significant was the absence of professional female actors in the commercial theater of Shakespeare's England, where, as is well known, cross-dressed male actors performed all female roles. In Golden Age Spain, however, women not only were present on stages, but they also could reach the highest echelons of their profession and ultimately even head their own companies and write their own plays. That one country allowed while the other forbade women from actively partaking in the creative theatrical process must have had a strong, indeed determining impact on the formulation, representation, and reception of women onstage. This article lays the first stone in what will ultimately become an in-depth exploration of this intriguing topic through a quantitative analysis of one important aspect of this broader comparison: the relative presence of female characters in the plays of Lope de Vega and Shakespeare. An accompanying series of charts distills this numerical juxtaposition to facilitate ready comparisons. Taking a first look at the length of female roles in the works of the two best-known playwrights of early modern Spain and England provides a fuller explanation for the way the actresses in Bath felt and sheds light on the ramifications of this crucial difference between two theatrical cultures existing in parallel.³

The causes of the lack of professional actresses on the Shakespearean stage—or, to be more precise, their absence on the stages of the commercial playhouses of Shakespearean London—have long been known. Although various recent studies have traced the numerous and by no means marginal ways in which women performed in all sorts of theatrical events during this period, convincingly chipping away at the long-held belief in the Elizabethan and Jacobean “all-male stage,”⁴ it was illegal for women to perform in the public theaters of early modern London as members of the city's professional acting companies. The moralist class of the capital—spearheaded by its reformist leaders and the Puritan-friendly city council—successfully managed to keep women off the commercial stage by having the troupes' (male) youth apprentices perform female roles in drag. Young cross-dressed men playing women before a large and impressionable crowd was in their eyes still a bad situation, but one preferable to having actual women doing the seducing.

In Spain, on the other hand, the situation was reversed. During the early 1580s, there were several attempts to ban actresses from the nation's public theaters, but they were never successful. Whereas the idea of having women performing publicly in the *corrales de comedias* was morally unpalatable in the eyes of the moralists opposed to the theater industry, the threat of same-sex attraction between cross-dressed male actors and male audience members was considered much worse. For this reason, in 1586 the Council of Castile signed a law officially reinstating Spain's professional actresses. This does not necessarily mean that the two countries had substantially different views on gender or sexuality at the time; indeed, as Iván Cañadas explains, the “English authorities that kept women from the social protagonism of the public stage

and Spanish authorities who reluctantly readmitted women actors after banning the transvestite boy actors responded to similar anxieties” (42).⁵ But the difference in the details did lead to a situation in Spain, unlike in England, in which women were directly involved in the development of female characters for the nation’s commercial dramatic literature. What is more, actresses not only formed an integral part of a Spanish professional company’s personnel, but with time women were able to lead their own troupes as *autoras de comedias* and in extraordinary situations even write plays for the commercial stage.⁶ The central question is, thus, what were the artistic and literary consequences of this contrast in attitudes toward the participation of women in the dramatic worlds of early modern Spain and England?

Reading between the Numbers

This brief article takes a first step toward answering this question—and toward launching a broader exploration of female agency and empowerment in the commercial theatrical cultures of early modern Spain and England—by analyzing the proportion of female characters’ to male characters’ lines pronounced in the dramatic works of Lope de Vega and Shakespeare. Not only can the works of these two playwrights hold their own as representatives of their respective national dramatic traditions, but they are also two playwrights for whom much quantitative analysis and statistical information exists. For Lope’s plays, I rely on the data provided by the Lope de Vega collection in the digital library *ArteLope* (artelope.uv.es): along with the impressive number of online editions of the playwright’s dramatic works it hosts—204 at the time of writing this article, almost half of the approximately 400 plays that have been identified as written by Lope—it also provides an assortment of statistical features for each play, including a breakdown of verses according to dramatis personae. In Shakespeare’s case I have consulted the *Shakespeare’s Words* website (shakespeareswords.com)—a digital platform created by linguist David Crystal and actor Ben Crystal—which includes the texts and line counts for all thirty-nine plays believed to have been written entirely or at least substantially by Shakespeare.⁷

The first pair of charts (see fig. 1) depicts the relative allocation of lines to female characters in these two corpora. The overall numbers reveal a visible difference in the degree to which Lope and Shakespeare featured female characters in their works. Even if at first sight the gap between Shakespeare’s 17.5 percent and Lope’s 24.5 percent might not seem too significant, in *proportional* terms it marks a 40 percent increase in female speech within the latter’s plays over the former’s. This is a considerable disparity, and one far beyond any margin of error caused by their idiosyncratic preferences as storytellers. Thus, it seems unwise to dismiss the sociocultural contexts that yielded these marked differences. In fact, a more nuanced understanding of the numerous roles female performers played within Spanish theatrical culture suggests that the gap in women’s representation between Lope’s and Shakespeare’s plays reflects in various ways the marked differences we find in the presence of professional actresses in the two rival realms.

Early modern Spanish acting troupes featured three distinguishable levels of performers. The first tier was that of the lead players or *primeras figuras*,

which normally included the *autores de comedias* and a handful of actors known as *oficiales*. Following this privileged cohort came the remaining hired adult performers, whose ranks included not only actors and actresses but also specialists such as musicians and dancers. Finally, the lowest echelon of each company comprised a group of apprentices learning the trade from the lead players of the group (Noguera Guirao, “Músicos” 309–11; Oehrlein 19–20; Rodríguez Cuadros 105; Sanz Ayán and García García 43). The *primeras figuras* earned significantly more than the rest of performers, and they tended to specialize in roles, such as the *galán*, the *dama*, the *gracioso*, or the *viejo*. And other than the manager himself (or herself!), the most important player by far was the *primera dama* or female lead. *Primeras damas* were literally the main attraction of their troupes, actresses of renown and significant celebrity who could earn up to three times more money than their male counterparts (Samson 158; Sanz Ayán, “More” 119–20).⁸ Their significance in Golden Age Spain’s theatrical landscape was highlighted in an often quoted passage from the travel account of Sir Richard Wynn, an English courtier who visited Madrid in 1623 as part of Prince Charles’s entourage:

The men are indifferent actors, but the women are very good, and become themselves far better than any that ever I saw act those parts, and far handsomer than any women I saw. To say the truth, they are the only cause their plays are so much frequented. (qtd. in Cañadas 49; Samson 157)

Note that Wynn not only praises the talent and pleasing appearance of Spain’s actresses, but he does so in comparison with the male performers who acted “those parts” back home. The male youths tasked with playing the female roles in the adult companies of Shakespearean England ranged from twelve to twenty-one years old and were closer in stature and experience to apprentices than to national celebrities (Barrie; Kathman; Keenan 19). In the specific case of Shakespeare’s company, the Lord Chamberlain’s / King’s Men, the stars were the troupe’s shareholders, all of them experienced male-role performers—especially Richard Burbage, for whom it is believed Shakespeare wrote most of his most memorable and lengthy roles, such as Hamlet, Lear, or Richard III (Wells 17).⁹ It follows that both Lope and Shakespeare would write plays to serve as vehicles for their moneymakers, which in turn partially explains the larger share of lines allocated to female characters in the former’s works than in the latter’s.

The relation between gender and dramatic genre on the early modern stage reveals a similar dynamic. The First Folio edition of 1623 divided Shakespeare’s plays into three main categories: comedies, histories, and tragedies. Since then, critics have designated some of his late plays *romances*, in recognition of the awkward way their tragicomic nature fit the traditional labels.¹⁰ With this greater precision in mind, there seems to be a direct proportional relation between female speech and the comedic: both the comedies and the romances prove to be much more hospitable environments for female presence and agency than the tragedies and histories (see fig. 2). These numbers are consistent with the observation made by many critics that tragic and military plays were historically more male-centric and male-driven than comedies, a point that has been made for Shakespeare’s plays as well as

Lope's (Giuliani 290; Greer, "Tale" 418–19; Walthaus and Corporaal 1–3).¹¹ Indeed, when one looks at the Spaniard's plays divided by dramatic genres (see fig. 3), comedies also have the highest average share of female spoken lines in his corpus.

There are two important differences, however, between Lope's and Shakespeare's plays in this regard. The first is Lope's overwhelming preference for comedy over the other genres, while in Shakespeare the different genres are more evenly distributed. The second—and very closely related to the first—divergence is that Lope's playwriting style, commonly known as the *comedia nueva*, does not really lend itself to a clean taxonomy. Golden Age theater, and Lope's plays in particular, defy ready categorization as either tragedies or comedies. If anything, the forceful dynamic behind his new way of writing plays was its eclecticism. In a brave effort to define the Spanish *comedia*, Melveena McKendrick explains that in Spanish drama

the tone is varied, with comedy and danger or disaster promiscuously rubbing shoulders. This mixture is capable of ending happily or tragically, but a tragic ending is the exception rather than the rule. As a result, the tragicomedy (for want of a better term)—usually a play heading for tragedy which is finally resolved in some satisfactory way—becomes a high art form in the Spanish theatre, not least because there is often a sting in its tail which compromises the satisfactory nature of the ending. (*Theatre* 74)

It is precisely this lack of generic purity that has led the *ArteLope* team of researchers—and on whose work the previous chart's taxonomy is based—to forgo the classical label of *tragedy* in favor of the more malleable *drama*.¹² This in turn helps explain why the quantity of lines allocated to female characters in this group of plays is much higher than in its Shakespearean tragic counterpart. In fact, it would be more appropriate to compare Lope's dramas with Shakespeare's romances than with his tragedies. And, I would argue, the fact that the theater system whose protagonists include professional actresses shows a preponderance for dramatic writing that features more female voice and protagonism should not be dismissed as mere coincidence.

But what does female speech, and thus female agency, in the works of Shakespeare and Lope actually entail? While it is not the only manifestation of protagonism in a play, speech is arguably the most important one. This is especially true of the language-centric commercial theaters of early modern Spain and England, as opposed to other forms of European drama of the period in which the nonverbal enjoyed a larger share of the limelight, such as court masques or *commedia dell'arte* street performances. And, as one can see above, there is a strong correlation in both Lope and Shakespeare between female protagonism and genre, in that their comedies had a higher percentage of lines spoken by female characters than the other dramatic classifications. However, not all of these lines should be considered *female speech* in its strictest sense. In a chart showing all of Shakespeare's plays divided into roles ordered according to their share of spoken lines and marked according to the character's gender (see fig. 4), one can see that only in four out of the thirty-nine plays entirely or substantially attributed to Shakespeare is the longest-speaking role female: *All's Well that Ends Well*, *As You Like It*,

Cymbeline, and *The Merchant of Venice*. Not surprisingly, all four of them are considered comedies or romances, as are most of the plays with a female character as the second longest speaking part. But what is more, three of the four female protagonists—that is, all but *All's Well's* Helena—spend at least a significant amount of their part disguised as men. Rosalind (*As You Like It*), Imogen (*Cymbeline*), and Portia (*The Merchant of Venice*), as well as Viola (*Twelfth Night*) and Julia (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*), derive their ability—or propriety, to be more accurate—to speak from their disguise, their donned maleness allowing them to circumvent the social constrictions on public female speech.¹³ In other words, even within the more female-friendly genre of comedy, quantitative analysis reveals that the vast majority of characters with agency are gendered male in Shakespeare's plays.

In Lope, on the other hand, protagonism and gender—whether real or feigned—are not linked in the same predictable way as in Shakespeare. Out of the 204 plays with available data, I have deliberately selected the thirty-nine plays in Lope—the same number as in Shakespeare's corpus—with the highest share of female-speaking lines to illustrate what I perceive to be the two main differences in the way the two playwrights wrote female protagonist roles (see fig. 5). First, the works in this chart—roughly one-fourth of the analyzed corpus—clearly signal that within the seemingly endless corpus of Lope's dramatic works, a substantial subset of plays features female protagonism. Most are comedies, specifically what are known as *comedias urbanas*—understood as comic dramas set in the here-and-now in a Spanish city with a relatively small cast of speaking characters—and *comedias palatinas*—understood as romantic plays located in distant and often vague aristocratic settings. The sheer quantity of comedias that fall within these two subgenres suggests that female-led stories starring the companies' celebrity actresses were particularly popular and successful among members of the ticket-buying public. As was *not* the case in Shakespeare, one can argue that in Lope's oeuvre plays led by female protagonists constitute a genre of their own, and a substantial one at that. With *Las bizarrías de Belisa* touching the ceiling at 53.3 percent, the average share of female-spoken lines in these thirty-nine plays is slightly under 40 percent, which is exactly the same amount found in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare's play with by far the highest share of female speech (the second being *Twelfth Night* at a distant 32 percent). My intention in placing the two charts side by side is not to pass off an apples-to-oranges comparison as an apples-to-apples one; on the contrary, my point here is that at least one-fourth of Lope's dramatic cornucopia consists of oranges, as opposed to the one-fortieth in Shakespeare's.

The second conclusion is that in Lope's corpus, even though some of the longer female-speaking roles also involve characters disguised as men, there is still an equally large number of female protagonists leading plays without resorting to cross-dressing. In contrast to Shakespeare's case, where the playwright clearly uses the male disguise as a way of enabling his female characters, the real or assumed gender of the speaker does not predetermine speech and agency in Lope's dramas. Consequently, character cross-dressing serves less as an empowering function than as a source of amusing confusion. What is more, all evidence suggests that the female-to-male cross-dressing on

the Spanish stage was a way of circumventing the rules of propriety, especially since it led to the actresses performing in garters and showing their otherwise covered legs. This was in fact one of the main concerns professional moralists had about allowing women to perform professionally, as exemplified by the following remark by the Carmelite friar José de Jesús María:

Si representar la mujer en su propio hábito pone en tanto peligro la castidad de los que la miran, ¿que hará si representa en traje de hombre, siendo uso tan lascivo y ocasionado para encender los corazones en mortal concupiscencia? (qtd. in Cotarelo y Mori 381)

If a woman acting in her own attire is so dangerous for the chastity of those who watch her, what will occur if she acts in men's clothing, which is so lewd a habit, designed to inflame the hearts in mortal concupiscence? (English translation in Heise 367)

The same fear haunted an even better-known contributor to the moralists' crusade against Spain's public theaters, the influential Jesuit moralist Juan de Mariana:

Mujeres de excelente hermosura, de singular gracia, de meneos y posturas, salen en el teatro a representar diversos personajes en forma y traje y hábito de mujeres y aún de hombres, cosa que grandemente despierta a la lujuria y tiene muy gran fuerza para corromper los hombres. (qtd. in Cotarelo y Mori 431)

[W]omen of excellent beauty, of outstanding grace, movements and postures appear in the theatre to play diverse characters in the shape, clothing and habits of women and even of men, which is something that greatly provokes wantonness and has great power to corrupt men. (English translation in Heise 367)¹⁴

As a way of appeasing such concerns, the Council of Castile's 1586 order reinstating actresses on the commercial stage included provisions intended to keep such undesirable distractions to a tolerable minimum. Unsurprisingly, one article required actresses to perform only and at all times in female dress. However, there seems to be little evidence that this law was ever enforced, and playwrights continued to resort to this plot ploy to such an extreme that certain actresses became well known for their performance of precisely these types of roles, as was the case of the star thespian Josefa "La Gallarda" Vaca (Ball 26–27).¹⁵

Apparently the desire to give the audience what they willed and as they liked it that made this convention a recurring staple in the Spanish *comedia*. This differs notably from the English case, where female characters had to disguise themselves as men in order to increase their agency and public visibility. Might the (male-controlled) hand of the market have played a part in spurring Lope and his fellow Spanish dramatists to write more and longer female parts in their plays, regardless of their attire? The same fate did not befall Shakespeare and other Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, yet this does not speak to a heightened pro-female sensibility among Spaniards over their northern neighbors. As Melveena McKendrick reminds us in her canonical study of Golden Age drama's *mujer varonil*, "in sixteenth-century Spain, woman, not a social but a moral entity, was still a subject of

solemn concern” (*Woman* 5), and the real-life ideal of femininity was very different from that which strolled on stage. Nonetheless, that women became involved in the creative process—first as stars for whom plays were written, and eventually as company leaders or even playwrights—played its part in endowing the *corrales* of Golden Age Spain with a more diverse range of perspectives and voices, at least regarding gender.

What Comes Next? Future Steps

In her plenary speech at the VIII Congreso Internacional Lope de Vega: Lope y el teatro europeo de su época held in Barcelona in 2015, Margaret Greer stepped once more unto the breach and took on the formidable task of locating both Lope and Shakespeare within the broader European theatrical and cultural context of their time. Instead of pitting them against each other to have one come out victorious and the other bloodied, she chose instead to remind her audience how understanding the theatrical environment of one and the other brings benefits to all. She opened her remarks, published by the *Anuario Lope de Vega* in 2017, by confessing her frustration

frente a los críticos, estudiantes, lectores, público y editores, sobre todo los angloamericanos, que no ven más allá de las obras del poeta de Stratford y la voluminosa crítica sobre las mismas, obviando lo que podrían aprender de un análisis comparativo con Lope y con el vital mundo teatral que se alimentó de su creatividad. (319)

with critics, students, readers, audiences and editors, especially coming from an Anglo-American context, who fail to see beyond the works of the poet from Stratford and the voluminous criticism that surrounds them, thus ignoring all which could be learned from comparing his work with that of Lope and the theatrical world that fed his creativity.

As signaled repeatedly throughout this article, this is only the first step in what I intend to be a more nuanced and interdisciplinary exploration of the depictions of gender in early modern Spanish and English drama. The path forward is clear. First, from a quantitative perspective one will have to expand the database and integrate the information regarding the works of Lope de Vega and Shakespeare with that of their other contemporaries, so as to paint a fuller picture of the dynamics of female speech, protagonism, and agency in the two national theatrical cultures. Differences in how playwrights involved their female characters will surface not only on an individual basis but also according to other categories of analysis. One of these comprises plays written specifically for venues with more female audience members in mind; for instance, many more women spectators reportedly attended London’s centrally located and elitist indoor theaters than frequented the resoundingly male-patronized Globe-like amphitheaters of the suburbs.¹⁶ Another is the question of those plays written by playwrights associated with certain actors, female or male, whose talent at performing female parts was particularly celebrated. And of course, there is the overriding issue of the commercial plays written by female dramatists. With time I intend to broaden my scope of research to include plays from other countries and periods; moreover, I also

plan to develop ways of measuring protagonism in dramatic genres that are not as speech-reliant, as well as a more nuanced reading of gender that will include non-binary identities. Tracing the impact all these different factors had on the depiction of gender on a macro-numerical scale will help us take a first step toward identifying where the levers of influence resided when it came to pushing for (and accepting) more female presence and protagonism in public entertainments and more broadly popular cultures of early modern Europe.

Moreover, this statistical evidence will have to be accompanied by a corresponding qualitative analysis based on historical research, close reading, and more problematized theories of gender and culture. It is not enough to acknowledge that in two plays built around a similar premise, such as Lope's *La dama boba* and Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, there are more female characters with longer speaking parts in the former than in the latter; the role the female leads play in the two comedies, as well as their respective resolutions, could not be more different. Here and elsewhere I anticipate many valuable opportunities to extend and enrich this area of study and to broaden our understanding not only of the comparative history of these two prominent Renaissance theatrical cultures, but also of the scope of the impact the social and cultural configurations of early modern England and Spain have had and continue to have on Western culture. In other words, by balancing the stories and histories of these two theatrical traditions against one another, we will be able to provide a more nuanced explanation for why the actresses of the Spanish Golden Age drama cycle in Bath's Ustinov Theater—invoked as my point of departure—felt something inherently different when they performed the roles and declaimed the words of Shakespeare and Lope de Vega's fictional women.

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ENDNOTES

1. I thank Ann Thompson, Marion O'Connor, Carla Della Gatta, Kate De Rycker, and Tiago Sousa García 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. I have also included English translations for long Spanish passages that unless otherwise noted are my own.
2. For more on this performance season, see Fernández and Hernando Vázquez; Fischer, "Spanish"; Larson.
3. This article belongs to a lineage of Anglo-Spanish theater history comparison studies in which Margaret Greer, this volume's honoree, played a fundamental role with her article "A Tale of Three Cities." The milestones within a growing bibliography, in chronological order, are Cohen; Allen; Fischer, *Comedias*; Fothergill-Payne and Fothergill-Payne; Cañadas; Walthaus and Corporaal; Griffin; Delicado Puerto; Fuchs; Ball; to which we can add Greer's latest incursion in the field, which is of particular relevance to this article: "Move over Shakespeare." For a detailed summary of the scholarship comparing these two theatrical cultures, see Ball (1-10).
4. The foundational studies in this area are Brown and Parolin; McManus, *Women*; Tomlinson; as well as the special *Shakespeare Bulletin* issue (vol. 33, no. 1) of 2015. For a thorough summary, see McManus, "Early." Additionally, for a survey of the many other ways in which women were involved in the English commercial theater industry, see Rackin 27-47.
5. For a detailed history of the legal and moral debate surrounding the professional actresses in Spain and cross-dressed actors in England, see Heise.
6. More on *autoras de comedias* in Gonzalez; Ferrer Valls, "Incorporación" and "Mujer"; Noguera Guirao, "Elena Osorio"; Sanz Ayán, "Autoras" and "More." For an overview of Golden Age Spain's women playwrights, see Romero Díaz and Vollendorf (1-23); Samson.
7. While there is an evident disparity in the number of plays written by each author (the number of Lope's plays taken into account in this article roughly quintuples that of Shakespeare's), the objective here is to provide the fullest picture possible based on the available data.
8. For a list of celebrity actresses in Golden Age Spain, see González (135-36), and for an in-depth exploration of one of Spain's most famous *primeras damas*, see Castilla. It is also worth noting that the star system set in the seventeenth century carried over into the eighteenth century as well; more on this in Vicente.
9. For a concise run-down of the members of Shakespeare's company see Kinney (33-44). A brief description of Richard Burbage's career can be found in Wells (17-20).
10. More on the genre of *romance* as applied to Shakespeare in Danson; McDonald 22-27.
11. In the case of Golden Age Spain, one should also include in the group of less female-friendly genres the religious *comedias de santos*; as Luigi Giuliani rightly observes, in these plays female characters serve more as narrative instruments than significant participants in the plots (290).
12. For a concise summary of the different subgenres of the Spanish *comedia nueva*, see Thacker (142-52). A thoughtful deliberation on Golden Age Spain's dramatic taxonomy is Oleza and Antonucci.
13. As David Mann notes in *Shakespeare's Women*, male attire is one of the main recurrent characteristics of the Shakespearean romantic comedy heroine: they

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are “active, enabling, even redemptive, often in breeches or other disguise. They are witty and self-confident, usually well-born, always beautiful ... Many of them are aristocratic young women, often unencumbered by parents” (208).

14. For more on Jesuit discourse against the theater of Golden Age Spain, see Menéndez Peláez (101–33).
15. More in Ferrer Valls (Introducción, 19–23).
16. An instructive text when pursuing this line of inquiry is Mann, “Female.” See also Gurr 11–12.

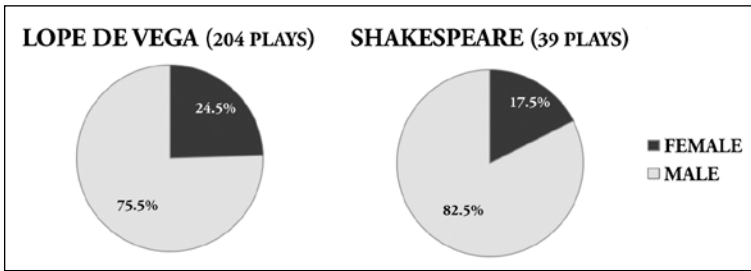


Fig. 1. Proportion of lines allocated to female (dark) and male (light) characters in the plays of Lope de Vega and Shakespeare.

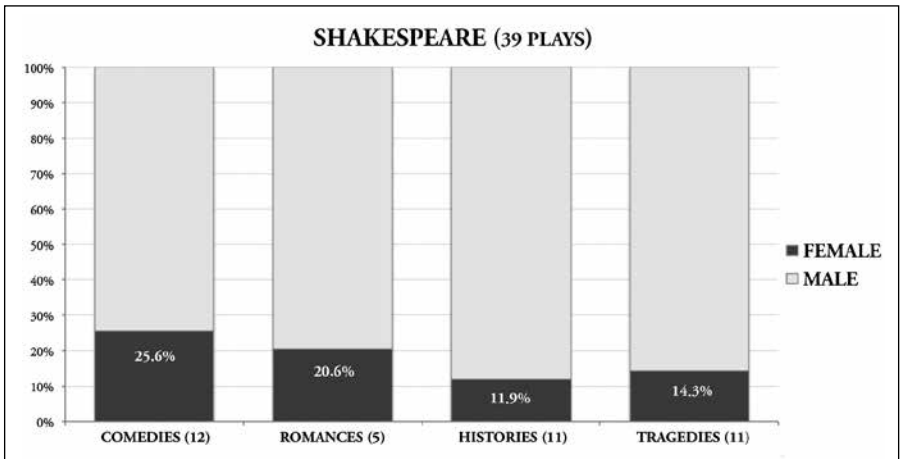


Fig. 2. Proportion of lines allocated to female (dark) and male (light) characters in the plays of Shakespeare, divided according to their dramatic genre.

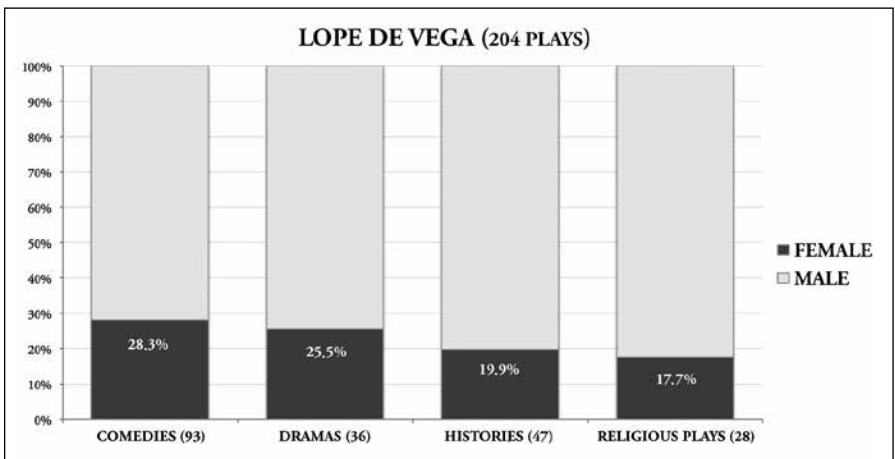


Fig. 3. Proportion of lines allocated to female (dark) and male (light) characters in the plays of Lope de Vega, divided according to their dramatic genre.

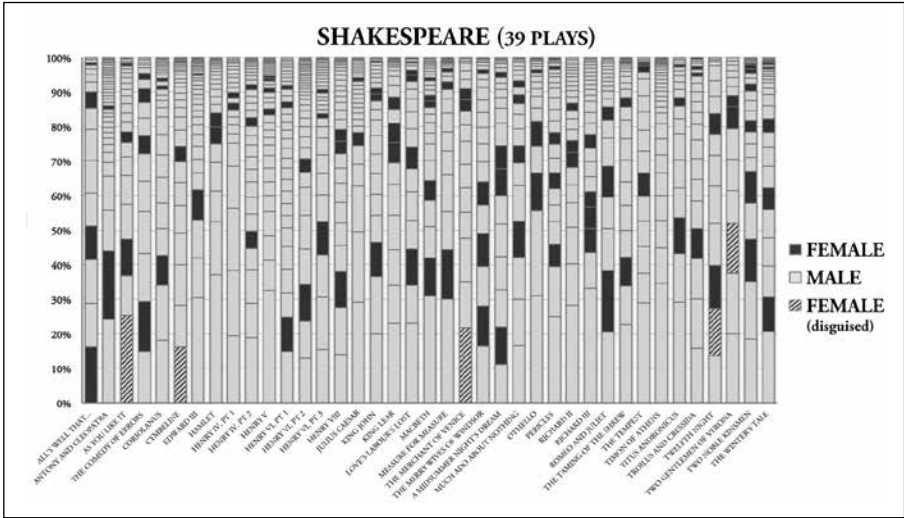


Fig. 4. Shakespeare’s plays divided into roles ordered according to their share of spoken lines (going upwards from longest to shortest) and marked according to the gender of the character (dark for female, light for male, and striped for female characters who spend a substantial amount of the play disguised as male).

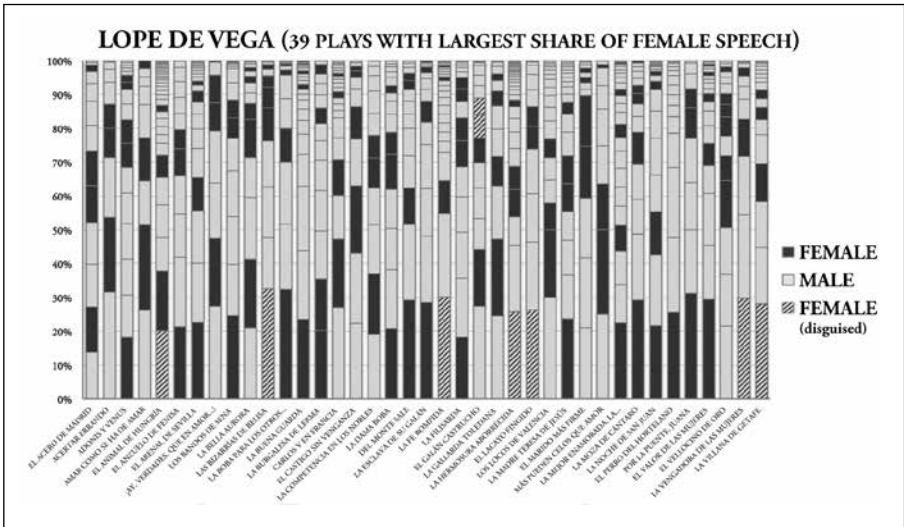


Fig. 5. Lope de Vega’s thirty-nine plays with the largest share of lines spoken by female characters, divided into roles ordered according to their share of spoken lines (going upwards from longest to shortest) and marked according to the gender of the character (dark for female, light for male, and striped for female characters who spend a substantial amount of the play disguised as male).