

III. Drama

• General • China

A. General

The Jesuit school system employed theater as a primary means of education during its first period (until the order's suppression in 1773). Thus, Jesuit theater is strongly related to the history of the Society's schools (on the latter, see O'Malley: 200–42). The order opened its first college in Messina in 1548. One of the earliest plays staged at a Jesuit school was *Jephthah Sacrificing His Daughter* by the then fifteen-year-old Jesuit student José de Acosta at Medina del Campo in 1555 (O'Malley: 223). By the time of Ignatius' death (1556), the Jesuits operated some thirty-five colleges. By 1749 the number had grown to 700 schools across Europe and another 100 in other parts of the world, creating "the first free education system" (Grendler: 7–8).

1. A Broad Cultural Phenomenon (1555–1773). Each school would stage at least one major theatrical production every year, so the total number of performances amounted to tens of thousands (Valentin's *Répertoire* lists, for the German-speaking countries alone, evidence of 7,650 performances). The students of a Jesuit school could make up five to ten percent of the total population of a town (Tilg: 184), which means that public performances reached large sections of the population. Jesuit theater thus constituted – together with the school theater practice of other orders – a broad cultural phenomenon in Catholic areas of Europe over two centuries. Drama was also employed as a catechetical tool by missionaries such as José de Anchieta in the Amazonas region (Fernández).

2. Court Theater and Festival Plays. With the help of aristocratic sponsors, such as the ducal House of Wittelsbach in Munich, Jesuit theater could rise above the limitations of school theater. On the occasion of the consecration of St Michael's Church in Munich on July 11, 1597, the performance of *Triumphus Divi Michaelis Archangeli Bavarici* (drawing on Rev 12) took eight hours and involved more than 900 performers (Rädle 2013: 226). In Vienna, Nikolas Avancini (1612–1686) created pompous theater (*ludus caesareus*) under the protection of that lover of the arts, Emperor Leopold I (r. 1658–1705). Cologne was a comparable center of festival plays.

3. Pedagogical Purpose. Despite some preoccupation with the moral dangers of theater, Jesuits firmly believed – as Martin Luther did (Washof: 42–43), but in contrast to the Calvinists (Kohler: 1–6) – in the pedagogical value of theater: it provided training in language, style, public proclamation, and courtly manners; offered moral examples; and could lead both actors and audience towards *vera pietas* (Rädle 2013: 217–20). Jesuits happily related how a performance could move the audience to

tears and sighing, and lead to conversion (Meyer: 222). For the sake of training in classical language and style, most dramas were written in Latin. For greater comprehensibility and entertainment for the (less erudite) audience, elements in the vernacular could be inserted (Pérez González) or provided on program leaflets. Performances frequently employed highly developed staging techniques, music, and dance and were thus conceived as multi-media events (for an example of opera see Kennedy). An *Elias* in Prague (1610), for example, involved fireworks, a carriage driving towards heaven, and the parting of the waters of the Jordan (McNapsy: 3709). Since the restoration of the order (1814), theater has been re-activated in Jesuit schools, but to a lesser extent.

4. State of Research. Only a small percentage of the dramas staged by Jesuits have survived in manuscripts or in printed form. The main evidence that has come down to us is program leaflets produced for audiences. The only regions for which larger collections of material exist are the German-speaking lands (Valentin 1983–1984; Szarota 1979–1983) and Hungary (Staud). Although much research still needs to be done, helpful introductions are available (esp. Rädle 2013; Pohle: 19–38; McNapsy; McCabe; bibliographies in Griffin; Valentin 1984: 1137–1242; Isewijn/Sacré: 139–164; Neo-Latin drama in general: Bloemendal 2014; Jesuit comedy: Tilg 2015: 95–97).

5. Biblical Reception. The main areas from which Jesuits drew the themes for their plays were classical literature, history, the lives of saints, and the Bible. A great number of plays interpret biblical stories and motifs, but other subjects were typologically related to biblical figures and themes as well (Rädle 1989: 247–250; Spanily). The didactic purpose of the plays made young biblical characters with potential for offering moral and spiritual instruction especially attractive, such as Joseph (Wimmer 1982), Isaac (Gen 22; Reckling: 90–95), Tobias (Wick), Jephthah's daughter (Sypherd: 241; Stroh), Daniel, Susanna (Casey), and the prodigal son (Rädle 2013: 204–208). Aristocratic or royal sponsors frequently inspired playwrights to choose figures such as David, Solomon, Nebuchadnezzar, or Cyrus as examples (Bloemendal; Meyer 2003, 2008; on Ahab and Jezebel Griffin 1976: xi–xviii; for the thematic bibliography see Valentin 1984: 1211–1225; Wimmer 1983: 655–65; for analysis esp. Szarota 1979; Rädle 1989).

While Jesuit biblical drama is in effective continuity with the Protestant biblical drama that was thriving during the Reformation period, the Jesuits set new standards especially in its technical elaboration (Washof: 465). Jesuits could – drawing on Prov 8:30–31 and traditional authors such as Augustine – even conceive of the world as divine theater (Rädle 1981: 137). Thus a program leaflet from

Augsburger (1721) informs us that when the Joseph drama was staged “more than 3,400 years ago,” God was very pleased.

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