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RESEARCH ARTICLE

On the Extracurricular Again: The Enduring Pedagogical Aims of Jesuit School Theater

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the development and enduring pedagogical role of Jesuit school theater from its sixteenth-century origins through its transformations in the modern era. Far from being a marginal activity, theater as well as other performative arts functioned as central instruments of Jesuit education, serving both formative and public purposes. Performances cultivated eloquence, fostered moral habits, and refined students' social skills, while simultaneously enhancing the reputation of Jesuit colleges within broader civic and cultural contexts. Drawing on historiographical scholarship, pedagogical treatises, and dramatic repertory, the study highlights how Jesuit theater consistently pursued a formative aim—integrating intellectual, spiritual, and social education—even as its scale and public impact evolved over time. Ultimately, Jesuit theater stands as a paradigmatic expression of the Society of Jesus's integral vision of pedagogy, in which curricular and so-called "extracurricular" dimensions are equally indispensable to the work of formative education.

Keywords:
school theater; pedagogy; performance; early modern drama; extracurriculars; formative education

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Introduction

Jesuit schools deliberately integrated the performing arts as a key dimension of their educational mission.[1] Far from being mere secondary elements, theatrical and rhetorical performances were integral to the Jesuit pedagogical model, advancing the education of character, the cultivation of cultural sensibility, and the strengthening of religious formation. These expressive practices—ranging from theater, ballet, and music to rhetorical exercises such as declamations, oratory, and philosophical disputations—were designed for both private instruction and public display.

Significantly, it was often these so-called "extracurricular" activities that most visibly represented the school to the outside world and played a central role in shaping its public reputation.[2] The sophistication and quality of public performances in Jesuit colleges often rivaled those of professional companies, particularly during the seventeenth century, which marked a golden age for Jesuit theater.

The culmination of this public dimension was the annual prize-award ceremony at the end of the academic year. But many other occasions throughout the school calendar offered opportunities for public performance: celebrations of saints and patrons, visits from royalty or civic dignitaries, and civic festivities such as Carnival. On these occasions, Jesuit schools were on full display, staging elaborate programs that showcased student talent and reflected the educational excellence for which they aspired to be known.

This theatrical culture reached a remarkable level of institutional maturity and artistic refinement in the early modern period. By the mid-seventeenth century, Jesuit theater had developed a sophisticated infrastructure, including a widespread network of permanent stages, dedicated performance

1 The author expresses his gratitude to Claudio Ferlan, Katherine (Kasey) Kimball, A. Taiga Guterres, and Holly Hoffmann who read the draft and provided substantial help to refine this paper.

2 In contemporary educational discourse, particularly within Jesuit institutions worldwide, there has been an increasing tendency to adopt the expression 'co-curricular' in place of the earlier designation 'extracurricular.' This linguistic shift is meant to underscore the recognition that such activities are not external to the educational enterprise but rather integral to the formative aims of Jesuit pedagogy. For the purposes of this study, however, I will retain the expression 'extracurricular,' both for the sake of conceptual clarity and to remain consistent with earlier secondary sources in which this terminology predominates. The term 'extracurricular' should not be taken to suggest a strict separation from the curriculum; rather, it denotes those activities and dimensions of school life that were not always systematically articulated, emphasized, or in some cases even mentioned in official curricular prescriptions, yet which were nonetheless cultivated within Jesuit schools and campuses as part of their broader formative mission.

calendars, and a rich body of original plays composed by Jesuit dramatists. Thematically, these productions blended classical models with Christian ethics, engaging audiences in complex questions of virtue, vice, and religious and moral dilemmas. The performances were not only pedagogically effective but also culturally influential, attracting large audiences from surrounding communities and elevating the prestige of Jesuit schools within urban and courtly circles. In some regions, Jesuit plays became fixtures of the local theatrical calendar, and their authors, often professors of Rhetoric in the school, gained acclaim well beyond the confines of Jesuit institutions.

While Jesuit playwrights, directors, and performers held a prominent position within the broader landscape of early modern performing arts, this level of cultural influence declined after the Restoration of the Society. By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Jesuit schools no longer produced the grand-scale productions that had characterized earlier periods. As a result, many historians have drawn a stark contrast between the theatrical splendor of the Baroque era and the more modest, domesticated, and underfunded theatrical practices that followed in modern Jesuit institutions.

Nonetheless—and this is the central claim of this article—the formative role of the performing arts endured as a vital element of Jesuit pedagogy across both periods. Once institutionalized, the educational model that supported Jesuit theatrical practice proved remarkably resilient, continuing to shape student formation long after the decline of theatrical spectacle. Michael Zampelli, S.J., whose scholarship remains foundational in the study of Jesuit theater and dance, has recently underscored this continuity. He describes the Jesuits' enduring "devotion to performance" as a distinctive mark of their pedagogical vision, emphasizing its integrative role in cultivating both intellect and character.[3]

This article explores the evolution of Jesuit theater with particular attention to the educational model that sustained these expressive practices over time—activities that, while technically extracurricular, became one of the most visible and enduring hallmarks of Jesuit education in the communities the Society of Jesus has long served.

Development of Jesuit School Theater

An extensive body of literature—most notably, the work of William McCabe, S.J.—continues to serve as a key foundation to exploring the his-

3 Michael Donnay, host, *History of Education Society Passing Notes,* podcast, season 2, episode 12, "Performance Nineteenth Century Jesuit Schools with Michael Zampelli, S.J.," November 21, 2022, https://historyofeducation.org.uk/season-2-episode-12-performance-nineteenth-century-jesuit-schools-with-michael-zampelli-sj/.

torical significance of Jesuit theater, often referred to as the "theater of the Jesuits."[4] To uncover the roots of the Jesuit inclination toward theatrical performance and pedagogy, some scholars have linked it to Ignatius's own spirituality, which emphasized the role of imagery, imagination, and the importance of senses and emotions.[5] Others speculate about his biographical exposure to theater during his time as a student in Paris. For instance, it remains uncertain whether Ignatius's arrival at the Collège de Sainte-Barbe in Paris coincided with the tenure of poet, historian, and playwright George Buchanan (1506–82), who served as regent and professor there for three years. Buchanan, known for his theatrical pedagogy, went on to teach at the Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux and later at the Royal College of Arts in Coimbra, following his friend André de Gouveia (1497–1548), who was principal at Sainte-Barbe, then in Bordeaux, and finally in Coimbra. Buchanan, a renowned humanist and suspected reformer, left a lasting impact on these institutions by staging dramas and organizing school theater. After Buchanan and other teachers were arrested for suspected heresy (Buchanan was released shortly after the arrest), the Jesuits were entrusted with the governance of the College of Arts in Coimbra, where they continued the production of plays and stage dramas, preserving Buchanan's educational legacy.[6]

4 William McCabe, S.J., *An Introduction to the Jesuit Theater,* ed. Louis J. Oldani, S.J. (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1983). See also Anne-Sophie Gallo, "Jesuit Theater," in *The Oxford Companion of the Jesuits,* ed. Ines G. Županov (Oxford University Press, 2017), 578. The distinction between "Jesuit theater" and "theater of the Jesuits" was initially proposed by Jean-Marie Valentin. See "Etudes récentes sur le théâtre des jésuites: problèmes et méthodes," *Etudes germaniques: Allemagne, Autriche, Suisse, pays scandinaves et néerlandais* 22 (1967): 247–53.

5 Among the earliest modern scholars who endorsed this idea there was cultural historian René Fülöp-Miller (1891–1963), who wrote: "In quite in an unmistakable manner, the purpose, substance, dramaturgy and management of the Jesuit theatre corresponds with the dramatic technique used by Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises*." *Macht und Geheimnis der Jesuiten. Eine Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte* (Grethlein, 1929), 469–70, quoted in Victor R. Yanitelli, S.J., "Jesuit Education and the Jesuit Theatre," *Jesuit Educational Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1949): 144. Connecting the Jesuit theatrical tradition to the "performative spirituality," Kevin Wetmore articulates this very same opinion. See Kevin Wetmore, "Jesuit Theater and Drama," in *Oxford Handbook Topics in Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2014), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935420.013.55. Other scholars have provided a different opinion on the possibility of a direct derivation of Jesuit theater from Ignatius's spirituality. Cf. Gallo, "Jesuit Theater," 589.

6 See Cristiano Casalini, *Aristotle in Coimbra: The Cursus Conimbricensis and the Education at the College of Arts* (Routledge, 2017).

School theater developed in the sixteenth century within both universities and humanist circles. At Oxford and Cambridge, the study of classical drama soon led to the production and performance of ancient plays, a trend also embraced by schools linked to humanist education, such as Sturm's College in Strasbourg. The Jesuits, as in many other aspects of their curriculum, quickly recognized the pedagogical value of theater and adopted it early. By 1551, only three years after the opening of the College of Messina, students staged a tragedy—an early expression of what would become a central tradition in Jesuit pedagogy.[7] The *scaenicis tragoediarum ludi* ("staged tragedy") referred to these performances, which were part of a broader set of literary exercises that students offered to their city, showcasing both the rigor of Jesuit education and the civic role of the schools.

It is important to note that, from its very inception, staged theater was regarded by the Jesuits in relation to other performing arts such as declamations, dialectical disputations, mathematical problem expositions, poetry recitations, and dialogues. Indeed, it is this latter form of dialogue recitation that is recognized as the earliest documented instance of theatrical performance by students in Jesuit schools. A record on the progress of the Roman College in 1555 reported that the staging of a dialogue "was so successful that it pleased everybody supremely and left most spectators in admiration and amazement. Its finest feature was the acting of the well-trained boys, so remarkable that some said the actors must have been hand-picked and rehearsed for many months."[8] Although this early form of staging would eventually be surpassed by the more elaborate machinery of Jesuit school drama, the language surrounding 'dialogues' attests to the performative, theatrical nature of these practices. The success of such performances at the Roman College in 1555 may have influenced Ignatius himself, who, shortly before his death in 1556, dictated instructions to his secretary, Juan Alfonso de Polanco (1517–76), for the establishment of a college in Ingolstadt. In these instructions, he emphasized the importance of staging: "At times during the year orations should be delivered, and vers-

7 McCabe, *Jesuit Theater,* 11. McCabe refers to Emmanuel Aguilera, S.J., who reported that in 1551 the college was making progress thanks to public exercises that included theatrical performances: "ad omnem proclivia doctrinae cultum Messanensium ingenia, publicum eruditionis saepenumero dabat spectaculum civibus, jam actuosis declmationibus, jam dialecticis disceptationibus, *jam scaenicis tragaediarum ludis,* jam Matheseos problematis." Aguilera, *Provinciae Siculae Ortus et Res Gestae* (Palermo, 1737), 1:69. See Mirella Saulini, *Stephanus Tuccius S.J., Goliath Tragoedia* (Edizioni Espera, 2017), 7.

8 *Epistolae et Instructiones,* X, 421. Quoted (and translated) in McCabe, *Jesuit Theater,* 12.

es and dialogues recited, as is done in Rome. This will also add to the prestige of the school."[9]

Plays quickly rose in prominence over other literary exercises, evolving into a model that gained formal recognition from Jesuit superior generals, despite early efforts to limit their scope. In 1576, Everard Mercurian (1514–1580) advised provincials to restrict the number of tragedies and comedies performed, providing general guidelines on what to stage—requiring Latin language, appropriate content, and so forth. These limitations, which echoed Diego de Ledesma (1519–75)'s recommendations for the Roman College, were later codified in the official *Ratio Studiorum* of 1599. However, as the saying goes, limitations often emerge to regulate practices that have already become popular and widespread.

To illustrate this point, records of tragedies, comedies, and other theatrical productions at Jesuit schools, in fact, date back to 1555, where the Jesuit theater staged *Euripus* in Vienna. In 1588, the play *Philoplutus seu de misero avaritiae exitu* was performed in Messina. The 1560s and 70s saw a significant boom in theatrical productions, with major Jesuit schools in Rome, Coimbra, and beyond staging performances. Prominent professors of poetry (humane letters) and rhetoric earned renown through their involvement in these productions and their success resonated across Catholic Europe. Among them was Miguel Venegas (1529–after 1588), whose popular plays, *Saul* and *Achabus*, contributed to his rising reputation.[10] Stefano Tuccio (1540–97), a master dramatist in Messina, authored *Nabuchodonosor* (first staged in 1562), *Goliath* (1563), *Juditha* (1565), and *Christus Iudex* (1569), the latter being regarded as his masterpiece.[11]

In the initial draft of the *Ratio Studiorum* which was sent to the Provinces for feedback, the editors observed that regarding school theater, "our students and their parents become wonderfully enthusiastic, and at the same time become very much attached to our Society."[12] Subsequent versions of the *Ratio Studiorum* replaced the initial, enthusiastic tone with a more restrained guideline, recommending only a few performances during

9 See McCabe, *Jesuit Theater,* 12.

10 On Venegas see Margarida Miranda, *Miguel Venegas and the Earliest Jesuit Theater: Choruses for Tragedies in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Brill, 2019); Nigel Griffin, "Miguel Venegas and the Sixteenth-century Jesuit School Theater," *Modern Language Review* 68, no. 4 (October 1973): 796–806; and Cristiano Casalini and Luana Salvarani, "Roma 1566: I collegi gesuiti alle origini del teatro barocco," *Educazione. Giornale di Pedagogia Critica* 2, no. 1 (2013): 29–51.

11 See Mirella Saulini, ed., *Christus nascens; Christus patiens; Christus iudex: tragoediae / Stephanus Tuccius S.J.; edizione, introduzione, traduzione di Mirella Saulini* (Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2011).

12 Quoted and translated in McCabe, *Jesuit Theater,* 13.

the academic year (Rector's Rule 13, *Ratio* 1599). But the formalization of this practice, as well as its pedagogical codification was established, making Jesuit theater a "clear and structured program"[13] in the Jesuit tradition.

The Expansion of Jesuit Theater

The repertory of Jesuit plays expanded significantly during the seventeenth century, driven by the popularity of Jesuit theater in the communities surrounding their colleges and the high regard in which rulers, nobility, and ecclesiastical authorities often held these performances.[14] In provincial areas, Jesuit theater was the predominant, if not the sole, theatrical option.[15] In urban contexts, Jesuit productions competed with professional theater and often drew larger audiences. Sources report hundreds, sometimes even thousands, of spectators attending public performances staged by Jesuit colleges.

These public plays were most often performed in the school theaters that many Jesuit colleges had built—some even had two theaters: one for public shows and the other dedicated to smaller, internal performances, often staged during the winter. Plays were also held in courtyards, churches, or other public spaces within the city. During the summer, performances were sometimes moved to the Society's villas, the residences outside city walls where students and teachers spent the hottest days.

Despite the limitations set by the *Ratio Studiorum,* the schedule for plays could be quite full throughout the year. Typically, two major public performances were staged: one at Carnival and another during the award ceremonies at the end of the academic year. Particularly in urban settings, the Jesuits used the Carnival period to provide the public with an alterna-

13 Bruna Filippi, *La Scène jésuite: le théâtre scolaire au Collège Romain au XVII siècle* (PhD Diss., École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1994), 6.

14 See Nigel Griffin, *Jesuit School Drama: A Checklist of Critical Literature*: *Supplement No. 1* (Grant and Cutler, 1986).

15 Among the earliest modern scholars to emphasize the social relevance of Jesuit theaters for minor urban centers in early modern France, Gofflot also stressed the influence that such a theater exerted on major dramatists and intellectuals as students attending Jesuit colleges: "Under the influence of the Jesuits, school theater took on a significant role in the educational curriculum, to such an extent that one can say that, for the provinces, the popular taste for drama dates back to the performances given within the college walls. At that time, in towns far from the capital and lacking permanent theaters, the college was the only center for theatrical art. It was on the school benches that the writers whom France honors—Molière, Corneille, Voltaire—felt the blossoming of their talent. It was for a college stage that Racine wrote his two masterpieces: *Esther* and *Athalie*." L. -V. Gofflot, *Le théâtre au college du moyen âge a nos jours, avec bibliographie et appendices; le Cercle français de l'université Harvard* (Librairie Honoré Champion, 1907), xviii.

tive to secular theater—viewed as morally corrupt and lacking in educational merit. Often, Jesuit colleges were even required by local authorities to perform these plays.[16] Considering the global spread of Jesuit educational institutions since the sixteenth century, the richness of the repertoire and the involvement of students, teachers, and the public in Jesuit theater, one can see the magnitude of the impact of this artistic and educational tradition in the early modern period.

In addition to these regular performances, plays were staged on special occasions, such as Church festivals, feast days of local patron saints, royal visits, or events in honor of noble patrons, weddings, and visits. They also marked extraordinary moments, such as the canonizations of Jesuit saints—most notably in 1622 with the canonizations of Saint Ignatius and Francis Xavier—or centennial celebrations of the Society, as in 1640.

Productions and plays sometimes presented challenges that superiors had to address. On occasion, local colleges failed to invite key authorities or dignitaries to attend performances, as happened in 1569, when the Jesuits in Messina neglected to invite the inquisitor to a private performance of *Sancta Catharina*, which was later to be staged publicly at the college.[17] In the highly-codified society of the early modern period, such an oversight could have proved disastrous for the play and jeopardized the college's standing. Fortunately for the college, the local superiors were able to remedy the situation, and the inquisitor attended the first official performance of the tragedy. In other instances, issues arose due to the overwhelming popularity of Jesuit plays, which led to chaos in the overcrowded college spaces. For example, in 1566, during a performance of the same *Sancta Catharina* at the German College in Rome, the crowd broke through the college's doors despite the presence of papal troops assigned to guard the entrance. The unruly surge of spectators caused significant disruption, much to the dissatisfaction of the distinguished guests for whom the play had been intended.[18] Sometimes issues arose from within the student body itself, as in the 1570 riot at the German College, which resulted in the removal of the rector and the dismissal or punishment of several students. The fact that "certain comedies" slated to be staged were seen as the cause of that riot led to direct intervention from the Superior General, who personally forbade the staging of any future plays.[19] The staging of comedic pieces

16 Clauses requiring performances were sometimes added on to the foundation charts of Jesuit colleges. See François de Dainville, *L'Éducation des jésuites* (Les Éditions de Minuit, 1978), 481.

17 McCabe, *Jesuit Theater,* 21.

18 McCabe, *Jesuit Theater,* 46.

19 McCabe, *Jesuit Theater,* 35.

or the portrayal of female roles, which were essential to certain plots, often raised concerns among Jesuit superiors or provoked scandal within local communities. In response to such incidents, superiors would temporarily suspend theater programs or impose formal restrictions on the number, content, and editing of plays in the colleges.

Besides the *Ratio Studiorum* (1599), where the aforementioned recommendation was made to limit the number of plays, restrict their language to Latin, and focus on tragedies, Superior General Mutio Vitelleschi (1563–1645) issued further limitations, such as a 1630 directive restricting the number of plays to two per year.[20] Despite these official limitations, sources suggest that such restrictions were frequently contradicted by the actual practices on the ground, as the popularity and educational value of Jesuit theater often led to continued performances.[21]

Codifying a Pedagogic Model for Jesuit School Theater

Jesuit school theater emerged from a pedagogical need that historians have termed "formative," a trait it maintained consistently over the centuries.[22] While Jesuit theater competed with its professional counterpart in terms of appeal and public success, its essence was intentionally different. It was designed primarily for and with students, aiming to achieve educational and moral objectives that went beyond theater as an art form in itself. This focus on formation distinguished it from professional theater, as its core mission was always rooted in the broader goals of Jesuit education. What has been called the "anti-professional" nature of historical Jesuit theater was a defining feature and even became a point of public contention in the early modern period.[23]

20 Dainville, *L'Éducation,* 504.

21 See Griffin, *Jesuit School Drama*.

22 Giovanna Zanlonghi, "Il Teatro nella pedagogia gesuitica: una scuola di virtù," in *I Gesuiti e la Ratio studiorum,* ed. Manfred Hinz, Roberto Righi, and Danilo Zardin (Bulzoni, 2004), 163.

23 "The theater they envisioned was something quite different from professional theater, and even when . . . influences from musical drama began to penetrate their scholastic world, the awareness of the distinct function of their theater remained always very much alive." Zanlonghi, 160. Of similar opinions, Ferdinando Taviani, "Il Teatro per i gesuiti: una questione di metodo," in *Alle origine della Università dell'Aquila: cultura, università, collegi gesuitici all'inizio dell'età moderna in Italia*, ed. Filippo Iapelli and Ulderico Parente (Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2000), 225–50; Zampelli, "'Lascivi Spettacoli'"; and Ruth Olaizola Sánchez, *Les Jésuites au théâtre dans l'Espagne du Siècle d'Or: théories et pratiques, 1588–1689* (PhD diss., École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2005).

If most scholars agree on the paradoxically "antitheatrical" nature of Jesuit theater, which stems from its foundational pedagogical dimension, the challenge lies in defining the scope of this *pedagogical* dimension.[24] When scholarship links the purpose of Jesuit school theater with the educational ideal of *eloquentia perfecta* as stated in the *Ratio Studiorum* (1599), it is certainly accurate.[25] However, this connection does not fully capture the complexity of the pedagogy behind the practice of school theater in Jesuit colleges, which extended far beyond the mere cultivation of individual oratorical skills. Theatrical performances in Jesuit schools were not only a tool for developing eloquence but were also intended to form students morally, socially, and intellectually. By staging plays, Jesuit educators sought to instill virtues, promote teamwork, foster a sense of community, and encourage reflection on ethical and spiritual questions—making theater a holistic educational tool.[26]

In 1619, the Rhine Provincial Congregation listed the goals of educating students through theatrical performances in the following way:

> All the plays should be fitted to the end that the Society is aiming for: moving people's hearts to detest bad character and perverse habits, and to avoid occasions for sinning; to have a greater zeal for the virtues; and to imitate the saints. If saints' lives are presented on stage it should not be allowed that their good and holy deeds and whatever can stand as good example should be

24 Gallo, "Jesuit Theater," 579.

25 See McCabe, *Jesuit Theater*, 19, and Thomas Worcester, S.J., ed. "Theater," in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Jesuits* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 781–81. As we will see later, staging theater was one of the responsibilities assigned to the professor of Rhetoric in Jesuit schools. The first rule in the *Ratio Studiorum* for the professor of Rhetoric clearly states that the primary feature of Rhetoric is that "Ad perfectam eloquentiam informat"—it forms students to perfect eloquence. See Claude N. Pavur, S.J., ed., *The* Ratio Studiorum: *The Official Plan for Jesuit Education* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005), 155.

26 Zanlonghi provides a convincing definition the purpose of Jesuit theater that approximates the complexity of the pedagogical intent I am sketching here. Jesuit theater "was characterized by its *specific* connotation as a formative experience, which encompassed an obvious pedagogical intent (theater as a 'school of virtue'), an anthropological aspect explicitly theorized by the order's theology (the unity of the subject), and a spiritual and moral dimension (an exercise in *perceiving* reality to *navigate the world*). Such a concept of theater, oriented towards the formation of both the public person, a master in communicating, and the religious and ethical person, aimed to foster a spirituality open to engagement in the world, encouraging mechanisms for sharing values." Zanlonghi, "Il teatro nella pedagogia gesuitica," 163.

> treated weakly and merely in passing while more extended attention is given to irrelevant humorous routines and to certain childish trivialities.[27]

Moreover, school theater served as an instrument to connect the community of students and teachers with the broader urban social fabric. Performances were designed to attract local audiences, creating a sense of shared experience and mutual belonging. Through these public events, Jesuit colleges extended their educational mission beyond the classroom, fostering a deeper engagement with the surrounding community and reinforcing both the idea that the moral and intellectual formation of students was a collective societal endeavor and that students could serve as leading examples for a more virtuous society. These aspects were intrinsic to the Jesuit superiors' hopes of enhancing the prestige of their schools within local communities. While there was certainly a promotional intent, a "frank purpose of advertising,"[28] it was intertwined with a deeper pedagogical goal that extended beyond the formation of students. This broader aim was directed toward society as a whole, reflecting the Jesuits' desire to engage the public in moral and intellectual considerations through theatrical performances, thus positioning their schools as vital contributors to the cultural, religious, and educational life of the community.

Alongside the social values and individual skills that the formative experience of staging plays provided to Jesuit students, it is important to consider school theater as a pedagogical tool per se. As we will discuss later, theater was performed during festivities, it was meant to entertain, temper the academic demands placed on students, and foster an intensely prepared, extra-curricular, and public school event. It had a ludic, recreational dimension.[29] It was intended to harness a pedagogy of interest, motivation, and group spirit, and to create what Cortesono, the rector of the German College I previously cited, referred to as "a happy" climate within the college.[30]

The process of codifying school theater as a complex pedagogical tool evolved from Ignatius's simple invitation to include staged dialogues "as it is done in Rome"—a practice meant to please both students and parents—to a more nuanced recognition of the educational benefits that student per-

27 Georg M. Pachtler, S.J., ed., *Ratio studiorum et institutiones scholasticae Societatis Jesu per Germaniam olim vigentes collectae concinnatae*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1894), 186.

28 McCabe, *Jesuit Theater*, 29.

29 Zanlonghi, "Il teatro nella pedagogia gesuitica," 163.

30 Giuseppe Cortesono, "Constitutions for the German College (1570)," in *Jesuit Pedagogy, 1540–1616: A Reader,* ed. Cristiano Casalini and Claude N. Pavur, S.J. (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2016), 152.

formances offered to schools, as documented in the 1586 version of the *Ratio Studiorum*.

Outlining some rules for the staging of plays, the editors of the *Ratio Studiorum* first assert their utility in the following terms:

> the young men and their parents are marvelously delighted and enthused, and they get even bonded fast to our Society, when by our effort the boys can exhibit in a theater some sample of their study, performance, and memory.[31]

This passage from the *Ratio Studiorum* confirms that theater effectively demonstrated the quality of education provided by Jesuit schools. It highlights how plays could showcase students' mastery of content (proficiency in curricular subjects), their practical skills (such as memorization and performance ability), and their teachers' dedication ("our effort"). Additionally, it underscores two key elements: first, the audience comprises students and their parents, forming an intentional community that is both choral and, in some respects, domestic. This community implies a familiarity with the performance's cultural and material setting. As noted in the previous chapter, this audience often extended to include local authorities and dignitaries, and occasionally, commoners and crowds when performances were held in public squares or churches. The Jesuit theater's strategy was to project a message of social cohesion between the community and the college through high-quality student performances and a "professional-level" production apparatus.[32] Secondly, entertainment and emotions were crucial motivations for pursuing theater formation.[33] Not only did parents experience wonder and amazement at seeing their sons perform well on stage—a common experience in schools still today—but the students themselves, both actors and their peers, were also uplifted by the production of plays. This communal spirit and the sense of belonging to a school that garnered social admiration were central pedagogical elements in the Jesuit philosophy of education.

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31 "Adolescentes tandem eorumque parentes mirifice exhilantur atque accenduntur, nostrae etiam devinciuntur societati, cum nostra opera possunt in theatro pueri aliquod sui studii, actionis, memoriae specimen exhibere." Pachtler, ed., *Ratio studiorum et Institutiones scholasticae societatis Jesu per Germaniam olim vigentes*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1887), 176. I thank Claude N. Pavur, S.J. for the translation of this passage.

32 Zanlonghi, "Il teatro nella pedagogia gesuitica," 163.

33 See Jean-Baptiste Herman, S.J., *La pédagogie des Jésuites au XVIe siècle: Ses sources–Ses caractéristiques* (Bureaux du Recueil, 1914), 88.

Student Participation and Social Dynamics in Jesuit School Theater

Among the characteristics of Jesuit school theater, one of the most notable was the participants involved in the performances. Typically, the actors were selected from the student body. However, this practice, though seemingly straightforward, brought up questions about the selection process, the nature of the roles themselves, and whether professionals or outside guests were ever involved on stage. Generally, plays were important events for the school, particularly the two annual performances staged during Carnival and awards ceremonies. These were typically organized by the professor of Rhetoric, a figure whose role will be discussed later. As a result, students in the Rhetoric class often formed the core of the cast. However, some plays were the exclusive product of individual classes, thus limiting the pool of potential actors. In cases where Jesuit colleges hosted both boarding students and externs (those who lived outside the college but attended classes for free), the selection of actors for theatrical performances could become a divisive issue within the school community. This process sometimes led to tensions and even open conflict, as it fostered competition between the two groups. The situation could escalate into polemic disputes or even riots, as was the case at the German College in 1570, where the selection process sparked significant unrest.[34]

While roles were generally assigned based on each student's acting skills and ability to perform on stage, social factors inevitably played a role here, as they did in most aspects of early modern school life. Noble students, for instance, were more likely to be given prominent roles. Over time, a specific group within Jesuit colleges, known as the academies, took on a more central role in staging their own plays. By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the academies often assumed responsibility for organizing theatrical productions in Jesuit schools. Rather than large-scale events, plays became more intimate or exclusive, tailored for the best students, the most significant patrons, and the noble families.[35]

34 McCabe, *Jesuit Theater*, 35.

35 Nonetheless, "private" events such as class exercises that involved recitations with no scenery were performed, as recommended by the 1586 version of the *Ratio Studiorum*: "Tragedies cannot be performed everywhere nor always nor frequently, so in order to keep it from becoming such a rare thing that we altogether lose this exercise, without which poetry almost completely freezes and lies dormant, it helps considerably to have, three or four times a year privately in the classes of humanistic studies and rhetoric, without scenery, recitations done by the boys with one another, using their own compositions of eclogues, scenes, dialogs that the teacher will so arrange and divide up to be written by the more advanced students so that when later joined together they would cohere as a single work." Pachtler, *Ratio Studiorum*, 2:176.

When Jesuit plays were of significant civic interest and the college was expected to stage performances in public spaces, the cast often expanded beyond the student body. For example, in the case of *Constantinus*, staged in Munich in 1574, additional actors were brought in to meet the demands of a larger, more public production. In certain instances, Jesuit plays were performed entirely by townspeople, demonstrating the integration of local communities into these theatrical events.[36] The involvement of nonstudent actors in Jesuit theater productions occasionally led to controversy, especially when professional performers were hired. Given the mixed nature of many Jesuit plays—often tragicomedies or featuring comic interludes—the use of professional actors, who were frequently associated with immorality, was met with suspicion. This tension reflects a significant aspect of the "antitheatrical" sentiment surrounding Jesuit theater.

In the nineteenth century, this issue remained particularly contentious. One incident in France during the 1860s and 1870s illustrates the sensitivity surrounding the use of external performers. According to John W. Padberg, S.J. (1926–2021), actors from the *Théâtre Français* were invited to participate in productions staged at a Jesuit college.[37] When news of this reached Peter Jan Beckx (1795–1887), the Jesuit Superior General in Rome, he sought clarification on whether these "outside actors" had indeed performed and sung pieces from their own repertoire on the Jesuit stage. In response, the Superior Provincials quickly assured Beckx that these were not ordinary actors but rather "artists," meaning their reputations were untainted, and the school's honor was preserved. Nevertheless, the French Jesuits deemed it prudent to avoid inviting external actors in the future, reflecting the ongoing concerns about maintaining moral standards and the integrity of Jesuit educational theater.[38]

The concern of Jesuit superiors about positioning their theater as an alternative to professional theater was so strong that they implemented strict rules for students in the *Ratio Studiorum* (1599). This document recommended that students abstain from attending public plays and comedies and explicitly forbade them from participating as actors in such performances. Exceptions to this rule could only be made if explicit permission was granted by both the teacher and the prefect of studies.[39]

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36 McCabe, *Jesuit Theater*, 32.

37 John W. Padberg, S.J., *Colleges in Controversy: The Jesuit Schools in France from Revival to Suppression, 1815–1880* (Harvard University Press, 1969), 240.

38 Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy,* 240–41.

39 See Rule 13 for non-Jesuit Students: "They should not go to public shows, comedies, or plays, or to the punishments of criminals, except perhaps heretics. And they should not play any role in the stage production of non-Jesuits, unless per-

Jesuit theater, as a multi-purpose pedagogical tool, was designed to offer a virtuous alternative to the morally questionable aspects of contemporary society, particularly as seen in popular theater. Scholars have likened this approach to the Jesuit use of classical and pagan thought, seeing theater as a form of "spoils of Egypt"—something valuable yet in need of tempering and adaptation to serve educational and moral ends. This explains several practices: the exclusion of external actors from Jesuit plays, the prohibition on students participating in non-Jesuit performances, and the scheduling of Jesuit productions during Carnival feasts, when the broader atmosphere of societal indulgence and licentiousness could threaten the moral integrity of the actors and audience alike.

Tragedy, Comedy, and Sacred Drama: The Evolving Repertoire of Jesuit School Theater

The range of theatrical genres performed by the Jesuits included tragedies, dialogues, and comedies, with comic interludes frequently inciting internal debates. Throughout the early modern period, controversy persisted regarding the appropriateness of comedies on stage, and if permissible, the nature of such comedies. Nonetheless, comedies, as well as farcical and popular elements woven into other theatrical genres, were consistently and frequently staged in Jesuit colleges.[40] Tragedies in Latin, crafted in accordance with Aristotelian theory of *medietas*, were clearly suitable for theater with a didactic purpose. However, such accordance with the Aristotelian theory was less apparent when the central figures in these tragedies were Christ, saints, prophets, martyrs, or messianic precursors from the Old Testament.[41] These were sacred tragedies in which the characters, although presented as "heroes," could not exhibit *medietas.*[42] Other plays included classical subjects and personage, such as Alexander the Great, Julius Cesar, Antonius, Richard III, Crispus, and Belisar; as well as moral subjects with allegories of virtues and vices, embodiments of good and evil spirits, and personifications of abstractions "to teach a moral lesson."[43]

While Latin undoubtedly dominated the theatrical repertoire, vernacular theater began to emerge during the early modern period. Despite initial doubts and discussions, it expanded notably in the late modern period and after the restoration of the Society in date. Often, vernacular theater

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mission has first been given by their teachers and the school's prefect." Pavur, *The* Ratio Studiorum, 201.

40 See Gallo, "Jesuit Theater," 578; and McCabe, *Jesuit Theater,* 24–25.

41 Examples are countless. For one example, see Griffin, *Jesuit School Drama*.

42 Zanlonghi, "Il Teatro nella pedagogia gesuitica," 167.

43 Wetmore, "Jesuit Theater."

was constrained to the Jesuit adaptation of a non-Jesuit (yet now canonical in the schools) repertoire, encompassing works by Shakespeare and other classical authors.

The success of these productions was often supported by dedicated dramatists who were responsible for both writing and overseeing the performances. It was customary for Jesuit teachers to rotate through different courses over the span of their careers. This applied not only to those who transitioned from teaching philosophy to theology, but also to those assigned to the lower classes, which included grammar and humane letters. Often, scholastics—Jesuits still in formation—were tasked with teaching these subjects. However, when a Jesuit demonstrated exceptional skill in a particular discipline, superiors often kept him in that role for extended periods or even for his entire career. This was especially true for mathematicians and rhetoricians, particularly those who excelled as playwrights and in staging performances. Such a role demanded not only deep personal familiarity with Latin, Greek, and classical theatrical literature, but also natural talents and a mastery of the production process.

With the characteristic Jesuit inclination for identifying and cultivating natural talents, Franz Lang (1654–1725) articulated the essential qualities demanded by the art of the playwright:

> Gifts required in the playwright: apart from native genius, without which there is no hope of success in this field, he must first of all be a poet, and a Latin poet; he needs a brilliant imagination; he must be an unexceptionable moralist; he must be himself an actor of more than ordinary ability; and finally, a person of some technical skill. These? things are essential, and without them his work will be inferior. If, over and above, he is gifted in music and painting—a very desirable, though not essential, gift—he will be perfect.[44]

The ability to manage the staging of a play became an even more selective criterion than expertise in rhetoric alone. Indeed, the responsibility for overseeing theatrical productions typically fell to the Jesuit rhetoric teacher, whether he was the playwright or not. Colleges could stage plays written by playwrights from other institutions or restage works initially performed elsewhere. Given the public significance of these productions, the task was immense, and some of those Jesuits who could manage them became to be considered a theatrical "elite."

For many teachers, however, the burden of managing theater was overwhelming. Superiors frequently addressed this concern, beginning with the 1586 *Ratio Studiorum*, which recognized the issue of overburdening Rhetoric professors with the responsibilities of theatrical production:

44 Quoted in McCabe, *Jesuit Theater*, 37.

> It also seems good to point out here that this matter, troublesome and toilsome enough in itself, even becomes almost impossible to bear, because that complex effort involved in stage production rests almost entirely on the poetic creator, who by all rights has worked hard enough in the composition of the poetry; in the rest of the work, those matters that have to do with rehearsing the boys, the expense, costuming, set design, he ought to be relieved by the help of others under his direction. Otherwise he will fall into serious danger with regard to both his religious devotion and his health. Therefore it would be better to abstain from these matters.[45]

As with many other regulations—such as those limiting the number and nature of plays to be staged, or the prohibition against portraying female characters—the rules outlined in the *Ratio Studiorum* do not appear to have been strictly enforced during the early modern period. Just a few years before the suppression of the Order, Superior General Ignazio Visconti (in office from 1751– 55) found it necessary to remind rectors to avoid overburdening teachers by making them solely responsible for fundraising and managing theatrical productions.[46]

This solitude of Jesuit dramatists did not prevent more than a few of them from rising to public renown. A selection of names from the Society's first hundred years alone demonstrates the depth and breadth of the impact of Jesuit theater on the broader history of drama: Pedro Pablo de Acevedo (1522–73), Stefano Tuccio (1540–97), Bernardino Stefonio (1560–1620), Emanuele Tesauro (1592–1675), Luís da Cruz (1543–1604), Miguel Venegas (1680–1764), Jacob Bidermann (1578–1649), Jakob Gretser (1562–1625), Jacob Masen (1606–81), Juan Bonifacio (1538–1606), Nicola Avancini (1611–86), Nicolas Caussin (1583–1651), and Joseph Simon (1594–1671). Important Jesuits like Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), Edmund Campion (1540–81), and Robert Southwell (1561–95) authored or directed plays as well.

It is thanks to these dramatists, as well as to Jesuits who engaged with the nature of theater from various disciplinary perspectives—such as Jacob Pontanus (Spänmuller, 1542–1626), Gian Domenico Ottonelli (1583–1670), Tarquinio Galluzzi (1574–1649), Pietro Sforza Pallavicino (1607–67), and later Joseph de Jouvancy (1643–1719) and Charles Porée (1675–1741)—that we gain deeper insights into the pedagogical values of school theater. What objectives were they pursuing through the medium of theater? Answers to this fundamental question can be found in the Jesuits'

45 Pachtler, *Ratio Studiorum*, 2:176. I thank Claude N. Pavur, S.J. for the translation of this passage. The 1591 version of the *Ratio Studiorum* insisted that these teachers should not be left alone with other fellows. McCabe, *Jesuit Theater*, 13.

46 See Pachtler, *Ratio Studiorum,* 3:131.

writings on theater, as well as in the prefaces and arguments accompanying their published plays.

Pontanus provided one of the earliest and most comprehensive discussions of the pedagogical aims of school theater. Interestingly, this discussion appears as an "exercise" in his *Progymnasmatum Latinitatis* (1588), a collection of dialogues with commentaries designed to train students in the art of rhetoric.[47] The 100th dialogue, titled "Actio Scenica," features two fictional students, Conradus and Helisaeus, debating the merits and drawbacks of staging theater in a Jesuit college. Conradus, is a shy student who admits to freezing when performing "a comedy or a dialogue"[48] before the scrutinizing, judgmental eyes of spectators, who closely observe not only the lead actors but every individual performer. In an effort to comfort and encourage his anxious classmate, Helisaeus describes performing on stage as an inexhaustible source of joy. When Conradus asks Helisaeus to enumerate the joys of performing, Helisaeus begins with a striking observation on the financial and patronage benefits for students who excel on stage—an aspect that may surprise those who still view early modern Jesuit colleges as elitist institutions: "The vast majority of students in the humane letters rely on the benevolence and generosity of others,"[49] Helisaeus explains. Exceptional student performances could attract enthusiastic patrons from among the wealthy spectators, who might support them financially in the coming years. "I myself," Helisaeus continues, "belong to this group, as my portrayal of the young Solomon in the comedy *The Crowning of Solomon* was so well-received that I now receive an annual income of 50 gold pieces from an illustrious and generous benefactor."[50]

Not only could students benefit from unexpected patronage by impressed spectators, but families also intentionally sought this training for their children. As Helisaeus reminds his classmate, parents want their children to learn how to regulate their gestures, master the use of their hands, face, and entire body, modulate their voice to convey a range of expressions, and overcome debilitating shyness, allowing them to present themselves as "free and fearless men."[51]

47 Bruna Filippi pointed out to the relevance of this sources and discussed it thoroughly in Filippi, "'Accompagnare il diletto d'un ragionevole trattenimento con l'utile di qualche giovevole ammaestramento . . . ': il teatro dei Gesuiti a Roma nel XVII secolo," *Teatro e Storia* 16 (1994): 91–128.

48 Pontanus, "Actio Scenica. Conradus, Helisaeus," in *Progymnasmatum latinitatis, sive Dialogorum* (Ingolstadt, 1588), 1:373.

49 Pontanus, "Actio Scenica. Conradus, Helisaeus," *Progymnasmatum*, 1:374.

50 Pontanus, "Actio Scenica. Conradus, Helisaeus," *Progymnasmatum*, 1:374.

51 Pontanus, "Actio Scenica. Conradus, Helisaeus," *Progymnasmatum*, 1:374.

With this remark, Helisaeus echoes a common theme in various sources that highlight the psychosocial benefits of theater in shaping students according to the Jesuit ideal of *eloquentia Latina*. This ideal emphasized not only the cultivation of verbal eloquence but also the refinement and expressivity of the body—one of the key reasons Jesuit schools pursued physical training and ballet, as we will explore later. The modulation of the voice, an obvious component of oratorical training, and a form of "exposure therapy" (insert citation) aimed at overcoming personal traits incompatible with the public and civic aims of Jesuit pedagogy, were central to this formation.

The very same list of benefits, successfully pursued as pedagogical goals through Jesuit theater, appears in an unexpected source: Francis Bacon (1561–1626)'s praise of Jesuit education in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605). According to Bacon, while professional theater was often held in disrepute, school theater excelled in preparing young students in the essential skills of eloquence and public speaking:

> It also deserves to be remarked, that even ordinary talents in great men, used on great occasions, may sometimes produce remarkable effects. And of this we will give an eminent instance, the rather because the Jesuits judiciously retain the discipline among them. And though the thing itself be disreputable in the profession of it, yet it is excellent as a discipline; we mean the action of the theatre, which strengthens the memory, regulates the tone of the voice and the efficacy of pronunciation; gracefully composes the countenance and the gesture; procures a becoming degree of assurance; and lastly, accustoms youth to the eye of men.[52]

While Bacon praised the skills cultivated by Jesuit theater, likely drawing from a Jesuit source for his observation, he avoided delving into its political implications. In contrast, Helisaeus's portrayal of the ideal outcome of Jesuit education—"free and fearless men"—appeals to both the moral and religious virtues that theater was particularly well-suited to cultivate. In this sense, plays such as sacred dramas and tragedies featuring martyrs, Christ, and biblical figures served as instruments for forming courageous Catholics equipped for the public (and not necessarily Catholic) arena.[53]

Theater also proved valuable for students' training in the curricular and disciplinary aspects connected to the script being performed. Encouraged by Helisaeus's praise of the practice, Conradus confesses that he, too, feels more educated from having to memorize "excellent lines" and enhance his mem-

52 Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning,* ed. Joseph Devey (P. F. Collier and Son, 1901), 303.

53 See Zanlonghi, "Il teatro nella pedagogia gesuitica," 183.

ory. "At one point," he recalls, "I could recite three to five hundred verses from memory as easily as counting on my fingers or pronouncing a name."[54] Helisaeus further notes that by regularly attending general rehearsals, students learn not only their own roles but all the parts, thereby refining their command of excellent Latin and their mastery of the "art of discourse."[55]

It is no surprise, then, that parents and families eagerly anticipated news that their children's school was staging a comedy, and were especially proud when their sons secured a role. Staging theater not only brought glory to the actors but also to the college itself. Though intended as a pedagogical tool, theater was also seen as a strategic means for the school—and the Society of Jesus more broadly—to influence the local community. "Do not forget," Helisaeus concludes,

> that this is also about the honor and glory of the college. Through theater, both the institution and the teachers who form students of such excellent character and produce such masterpieces are praised. As for us, if we follow the author's instructions, beyond the satisfaction this gives us, we bring the most honest and noble pleasure to ourselves, our classmates, the spectators, the authorities, and entire cities.[56]

Helisaeus's final comment on the social impact of Jesuit theater echoes numerous sources, such as Luís da Cruz's *Tragicae comicaeque actiones*.[57] By staging theater, the Jesuits sought to convey a political message to their audience, one that reflected the role of the school within the city, the state, and the broader Christian community. What has often been described as an "advertising" purpose was, in fact, a multifaceted call for unity and a sense of belonging. The Jesuit school positioned itself as a unifying institution dedicated to the common good. This approach helps explain the

54 Pontanus, "Actio Scenica. Conradus, Helisaeus," *Progymnasmatum*, 1:375.

55 Pontanus, "Actio Scenica. Conradus, Helisaeus," *Progymnasmatum*, 1:375.

56 Pontanus, "Actio Scenica. Conradus, Helisaeus," *Progymnasmatum*, 1:375.

57 "With great eagerness, [the Society of Jesus] undertakes the education of youth. In order to keep them busy in this work (of getting educated), besides the daily labor of teaching, the Society seeks these entertainments, which are abundantly shared from parents, learned men, the magistrates of cities and citizens, the rectors and teachers of academies, and the most noble bishops and dignitaries." Luís da Cruz, S.J., "Ad Lectorem Praefatio," *Tragicae comicaeque actiones a regio Artium Collegio Societatis Iesu, datae Conimbricae in Publicum Theatrum* (Lyon, 1605), da Cruz also made it clear that there a tight connection between school theater, the education endeavor of the Society of Jesus, and the common good: "One principle prevails and will always prevail among us: to help the commonwealth (*res publica*) and, even at the cost of our own detriment, to promote good morals. The Society spares neither itself nor its own members, provided that it may spread the Christian cause or at least protect it."

inclusive strategy employed by Jesuit colleges in Protestant regions, where Protestant students and audiences were invited to participate in theatrical events. Except for rare cases, superiors advised caution in selecting playwrights and other aspects of the plays, ensuring that the productions not only avoided scandal or hostility toward the Church but actively fostered a sense of collective endeavor and unity.[58]

If the public is therefore an important reason for Jesuit theater to be staged *publicly*, though, one does not need to forget that the pedagogical aim of it was the most important reasons for the Jesuits to pursue such a practice in their schools, even during the early modern period, when in fact their theater productions had the largest and most profound impact on spectators. In her analysis of the didactic dimension of theater as portrayed in Pontanus' dialogue, Bruna Filippi insightfully captures its fundamentally educational purpose:

> The fulfillment of the internal purposes and objectives of the school, related to those who perform theater, is therefore prior to and superior to the approval and enjoyment of the audience in front of whom the performance takes place. . . . The fact is that [Jesuit] college theater, by its pedagogical nature, must place the formation of the student-actor at the pinnacle of its goals and must recognize that, from its perspective, the performance is not *for* the audience but occurs *in front* of the audience.[59]

Jesuit Theater in a Changing Era

Anne-Sophie Gallo suggested that the tide of Jesuit theater's popularity began to reverse in the eighteenth century, as the "age of eloquence" transitioned into the era of literature and the novel.[60] According to this perspective, the success and growth of Jesuit theater during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were largely due to the public relevance of the plays staged by Jesuit schools, which rivaled professional theater. Sometimes scholars have explained this by emphasizing what they called the anti-theatrical nature of Jesuit theater—despite its religious focus, Jesuit schools managed to produce plays that could compete with professional theater.[61]

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58 See McCabe, *Jesuit Theater,* 25–29.

59 Bruna Filippi, "'Accompagnare il diletto," 91–128. Similarly, Zanlonghi emphasizes the pedagogical goal of Jesuit theater, but she expands the scope of such a "formation" of the student-actor to the development of a sense of belonging to the school community as well as to the broader urban collectivity (and vice versa, the spectators as called to share this sense of communal sharing). Zanlonghi, "Il teatro nella pedagogia gesuitica," 178.

60 Gallo, "Jesuit Theater," 582.

61 Michael Zampelli, S.J., "'Lascivi Spettacoli': Jesuits and Theatre (from the Underside)," in *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences and the Arts, 1540–1773*, ed. John

However, by the eighteenth century, productions outside of the colleges, coupled with shifting public tastes, began to challenge the success and nature of Jesuit theater. Gallo suggests that the popularity of theatrical productions in Jesuit institutions began to decline during this period, particularly in France, where annual performances—previously a fixture of the prize-giving ceremonies—became less frequent in the years preceding to the suppression of the Jesuit order in 1773.[62] On the other hand, the Jesuits began to develop a different relationship with theater itself, shifting their focus from being at the forefront of theatrical production to engaging with it as a kind/form of literary criticism. While plays continued to be written, Gallo suggests that the growing trend of publishing (rather than performing) them signals that in Jesuit school, theater had transformed into primarily a "literary object" than a living artistic practice. This change marked a significant departure from earlier centuries, where Jesuit theater held a prominent place in both education and public entertainment. Instead of being artistic vanguards, the Jesuits increasingly approached theater as a subject for scholarly analysis and critique.[63]

This shift did not mean that the writing and staging of plays disappeared entirely from Jesuit environments. Even during the survival period following the suppression, theatrical activities continued in some respects. In some Jesuit colleges, such as those in Russia, theatrical performances persisted.[64] In other Catholic contexts, former Jesuits remained involved in both writing and staging plays, demonstrating that the Jesuit connection to theater endured, albeit in a more limited or transformed capacity.

After the restoration of the Society in 1814, Jesuit theater initially struggled to reclaim the prominent role it once held in Jesuit pedagogy. Gallo remarks that theater "became an occasional event," "less central in the curriculum," and was often the result of specific educational institutions' initiatives, rather than a universally structured practice across Jesuit schools.[65] This decline in the formal role of theater was further reflected in the 1832 draft of the revised *Ratio Studiorum* circulated by Superior General Jan Roothaan (1785–1853), which notably dropped the entire Rector's rule on dramatic staging, although this revision was never officially implemented.

W. O'Malley, Gauvin Alexander Bailey, Steven J. Harris, and T. Frank Kennedy (University of Toronto Press, 2006), 550–71.

62 Gallo, "Jesuit Theater," 582.

63 Gallo, "Jesuit Theater," 583.

64 Sabina Pavone, *Una strana alleanza: la Compagnia di Gesù in Russia dal 1772 al 1820* (Bibliopolis, 2008), 185.

65 Gallo, "Jesuit Theater," 586.

Particularly in France, theater in Jesuit schools seemed to be surrounded by unfavorable circumstances. In 1825, local superiors prohibited theatrical performances in the minor seminaries that the Jesuits ran in a semi-clandestine manner, as Jesuit colleges were not legalized until the Falloux Law of 1850. This prohibition further constrained the role of theater in Jesuit education during this period, reflecting the cautious and restrictive environment in which these institutions operated.[66] However, theatrical performances stubbornly persisted. Referring to the situation in minor seminaries and exiled institutions like the College of Brugellette in Belgium, Padberg notes that "theater was held in disfavor."[67] The provincial superior even expressed concerns about the "deleterious influence" he believed theater exerted on both the schools and the student body, indicating the ambivalence surrounding the role of theater in these educational settings.[68]

> You see, Father [General]—once wrote the superior Provincial to Roothaan on April 28, 1842—that I do not conceal my fears, theatrical productions—even religious, even pious, even holy ones—in my opinion, founded on experience, will always involve more harm than good. They will not be anything but a *lesser evil*, and, as a consequence, only *tolerable* by *necessity*; without that *necessity* I would not want any of them at all.[69]

Given such a hostile framework, one might wonder whether theatrical performances were staged at all. Contrary to expectations, however, Padberg reports that various works from the previous century, along with other pieces, were indeed performed. These included *Joseph Sold by His Brothers*, *Hermenegild*, *Agapite*, and melodramas such as *The Man from the Black Forest*. Additionally, large-scale biblical dramas, such as the five-act piece *The Maccabees*, were also staged.[70] Brugellette eventually obtained permission to stage two plays per year, which was the same regulation as in the pre-suppression colleges.[71] The same mix of superiors' reluctance and regulations obtained can be tracked in other French Jesuit colleges during the nineteenth century.

The "reluctance" by local superiors toward Jesuit theater, as described by Padberg, can be better understood when considering both the historical context and the practical constraints of the period. While there appears to

66 Gallo, "Jesuit Theater," 585.
67 Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy,* 74.
68 Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy,* 74.
69 Quoted in Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy,* 74.
70 Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy,* 74.
71 Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy,* 238.

be a significant shift when compared to the "enthusiastic commitment"[72] to theater in the pre-suppression era, it is important to remember that even at the height of Jesuit theater's success, official documents, such as the *Ratio Studiorum* (1599), imposed strict limitations on theatrical performances. These included restricting plays to two per year, requiring they be in Latin, and regulating the use of female roles. These same regulations were applied to Jesuit schools after the order was restored in 1814. According to some scholars, the major shift lay in how the *Ratio Studiorum*'s regulations on theater could be circumvented, a practice that paradoxically seemed easier before the suppression than in the nineteenth century.[73] This raises the question of how the same rules could reflect both enthusiasm and reluctance.

The answer lies largely in the specific circumstances of the post-restoration period, particularly in France, where Jesuit schools faced two significant challenges: financial precarity and political vulnerability. The financial challenges were a direct consequence of the Society's suppression, which resulted in the loss of their properties and resources. The restoration of the Order did not fully address these losses, and the Jesuits struggled to regain financial stability for a long time in many countries. Jesuit theater had flourished in the early modern period partly because of the significant investment and fundraising efforts made by schools as well as by individual Jesuit professors. These performances were grand public events, capable of competing with events at other institutions. In the first decades following the restoration, it was simply impossible to replicate this splendor. This financial reality likely explains why alternative oratorical exercises took precedence in events such as the prize-giving ceremonies, as they were less costly to organize. Drama and staging were often confined to the activities of academic societies rather than being the product of the entire school. Productions were typically presented within the framework of academic public exercises, which initially took the form of declamatory exercises. These performances required minimal decoration and costume, focusing more on oratory and rhetoric than on elaborate theatrical elements. Over time, however, these productions gradually regained a degree of sophistication, incorporating more elaborate staging and costumes. This revival of theatrical complexity, while enhancing the artistic quality of the performances, also raised concerns among local superiors.[74]

In addition to financial constraints, Jesuit schools in France operated under the burden of political vulnerability. Formally illegal in France until 1850, these schools existed in a semi-clandestine state, and the Jesuits

72 Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy,* 238.
73 Cf. Gallo, "Jesuit Theater," 585.
74 Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy,* 238.

adopted what Gallo calls a "culture of secrecy and discretion"[75] to avoid further expulsions. The public staging of plays posed a risk of exposing the Jesuit nature of these schools, which could have drawn unwanted attention. In this context, the reluctance of local superiors to allow theatrical performances was more about the political risks than a rejection of theater itself. Public performances could have been seen as "telling the public our secret," as Gallo suggests, thus compromising the delicate balance of Jesuit operations in France.[76]

This context suggests that the superiors' reluctance to stage plays was driven by circumstantial discretion rather than a fundamental shift in pedagogical priorities. While theater was temporarily restricted, it was still seen as an essential element of Jesuit pedagogy.

Expansion and Adaptation of Jesuit School Theater in the 19th and 20th Centuries

The central place of theater in Jesuit pedagogy is further demonstrated by the expansion of school theater in other Jesuit educational environments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in missionary contexts and in the growing network of Jesuit colleges in the United States.[77] In such contexts, school theater performances were still able to attract spectators from the local community and become public major events like the had been in Europe in the early modern period.

It is noteworthy that some of the earliest accounts of Jesuit school theater in the United States come from French missionaries. When French Jesuits were sent to Kentucky and took over St. Mary's College in Marion County near Lebanon in 1833, they introduced all aspects of Jesuit pedagogy, including the staging of plays. In Jesuit William McGucken's *The Jesuits and Education* (1932), we have a record of one of the earliest of such performances. According to a diary McGucken consulted, the exercises were held on a rustic stage set up beneath the shady trees surrounding the school building. In a tone that sought to celebrate the Jesuits' "adaptability" to local contexts—an adaptation that might seem controversial today—McGucken notes that Père Chazelle, the Rector of St. Mary's, wrote a tragedy entitled

75 Gallo, "Jesuit Theater," 585.

76 Gallo, "Jesuit Theater," 585.

77 An example for the thriving of theater in missionary contexts is St. Joseph University in Beirut. See Chantal Verdeil, "Martyrs de la foi catholique, combattants de l'Eglise romaine: les héros du théâtre de l'Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth (1875–1914)," in *Entangled Education: Foreign and Local Schools in Ottoman Syria and Mandate Lebanon (19th–20th centuries)*, ed. Julia Hauser, Christine B. Lindner, and Esther Möller (Orient Institut-Beïrut, 2016), 181–99.

Red-hawk for the 1834 commencement ceremony because he was "convinced that to promote the glory of God in America and in Kentucky, he must first become a real American and a Kentuckian." The play aimed "to illustrate the ancient customs of the Indians" and "the labors of the early American settlers," with all elements culminating in praise of Christianity.[78] The sources also mention that "the bright costumes of the natives," worn by the actors, "contributed significantly to the success of the drama."[79]

Jesuit colleges in the United States began establishing drama troupes in the 1850s, marking the rise of organized theatrical activities in these institutions. Holy Cross launched its dramatic club in 1851, followed by Georgetown, which instituted the Mask and Bauble Dramatic Society in 1852, having been preceded by a Shakespearean Club in 1850. St. John's College (now Fordham University) sponsored a drama club in 1855, and Loyola (Baltimore) established one in 1865. In a notable development, Santa Clara College, founded just six years earlier, built its first dedicated theater in 1857, a space that notably doubled as a gymnasium.[80]

Staging theater became a go-to practice for commencement ceremonies in American Jesuit colleges, continuing the tradition of including theater early modern European prize-giving events. At the end of its first academic year (1864–65), Boston College had no degrees to confer yet, but it still seized the opportunity to organize a public "exhibition" where students could showcase their academic achievements and mark the successful completion of the inaugural year. Then professor and Prefect of Studies, Robert Fulton, planned a two-night celebration. The first night featured regular examinations, while the second night highlighted the staging of

78 William J. McGucken, S.J., *The Jesuits and Education: The Society's Teaching Principles and Practice, Especially in Secondary Education in the United States* (The Bruce Publishing Company, 1932), 94. Without relinquishing any sense of militant pride, McGucken emphasized that theater was a distinctive feature of Jesuit culture, one that the Society steadfastly maintained even in contexts like America, where Protestantism dominated the educational landscape: "The Puritan prejudice against the theater never took hold of the Jesuit schools." McGucken, *The Jesuits and Education,* 194.

79 McGucken, *The Jesuits and Education,* 94.

80 See Gerald McKevitt, S.J., *The University of Santa Clara: A History 1851–1977* (Stanford University Press, 1979), 61. In his study on American Jesuit colleges, Michael Rizzi points out that, although Harvard's secular Hasty Pudding Society was technically older, Jesuit drama troupes—especially Georgetown's—could claim to be the oldest continuously performing college drama troupes in the United States. While remaining, as Rizzi emphasizes, "an extra-curricular activity," school theater nonetheless held a prominent place in these contexts. Michael T. Rizzi, *Jesuit Colleges and Universities in the United States* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 160.

a "religious drama" composed by Fulton himself. The chosen drama was *Joseph Sold by His Brothers*, one of the most celebrated plays from the early modern Jesuit theatrical tradition, emphasizing the continuity of Jesuit pedagogical values through performance.[81]

Despite the official regulations governing theatrical performances, discussed above, Jesuit colleges in the United States staged a significant number of plays that went beyond these limitations.[82] They presented Shakespearean works and other vernacular plays in addition to traditional Latin dramas, and over time, gradually opened to the inclusion of female roles. In 1869, students at Boston College performed their first of several plays in French, which enriched a consistent and solid Latin repertory; by 1900, *The Merchant of Venice* was allegedly the first play in which students were permitted to portray a female character.[83]

There is also evidence that Jesuit college theater continued to be staged at major public events, as it had been in the early modern period. At the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, St. Francis Xavier College of New York per-

81 James M. O'Toole, *Ever to Excel: A History of Boston College* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2021), 68. The reporter of *The Pilot* commented that "Notwithstanding the excessive heat, the biblical drama was performed the next evening before an appreciative audience."

82 French colleges grew frustrated about the limitations on vernacular plays and on theater in general. In 1862, the rector at the college of Metz praised the recent staging of a production about a Roman boy martyr, which according to him proved more formative than a series of sermons and a whole preaching course. The same rector shared his frustration with Jesuit and philosopher Gaston Fessard about the fact that, although well performed, Latin plays were boring for the public that the college nevertheless attracted.

> We have succeeded in attracting here the elite of society and the authorities [of the city], but we cannot disguise the fact that they come through good will and to show their sympathy for our work rather than through taste or pleasure. . . . Is it not proper to offer to your invited guests a show which interests, instructs and edifies them, and not a performance which bores and humiliates them? I use the word *humiliate,* because it has often been distressing to some of the men present, to some colonels, for example, not to be able to answer a word to their wives or to those sitting next to them when they would be asked for an explanation of a scene that had just finished. . . . Why then, on a day of rejoicing, impose a sacrifice and an obligatory boredom? (Quoted in Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy,* 239.)

One year after this letter, the Paris provincial gave limited permission for a drama in vernacular, "especially since other provinces were already acting thus." Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy,* 240.

83 Ben Birnbaum and Seth Meehan, *The Heights: An Illustrated History of Boston College* (Linden Lane Press of Boston College, 2014), 30.

formed a Latin play, *Duo Captivi* by Plautus.[84]As with the development of sports and athletic programs, theater programs in Jesuit colleges, universities, and high schools around the world underwent significant growth and transformation throughout the twentieth century. Drama clubs and student performances became increasingly cultivated, particularly in contexts like the United States and the anglophone world, where the private education sector encouraged a rich and varied array of extracurricular programs within institutions. At the university level, theatrical performances continued to flourish; new theaters were built or expanded; and theater was introduced as a field of academic research and teaching.[85]

When Jesuit higher education institutions separated from secondary education ones throughout the early twentieth century, most Jesuit high schools continued to pursue theater as part of their broader extracurricular offerings. However, they did so in an educational landscape where many institutions embraced similar programs, often without explicit ties to the Jesuit tradition. Over time, the question of whether and how to perform plays with female characters was resolved by the co-educational shift in Jesuit colleges and universities. Additionally, Jesuit high schools increasingly partnered with girls-only Catholic institutions within their local communities, further integrating female characters and actors into their productions.[86]

When examining the historical development of Jesuit school theater, historians have often noted a clear hiatus between the early modern period, during which Jesuit theatrical productions had a significant public dimension and impact on the broader history of drama, and the more localized, community-focused theater that emerged in Jesuit educational institutions after the restoration. This shift suggests a move away from the large-scale public spectacles of the early modern era to performances aimed primarily at the school and local community.

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84 McGucken, *The Jesuits and Education,* 194.

85 Rizzi, *Jesuit Colleges and Universities,* 160.

86 An example is found at Strake Jesuit High School in Houston, Texas. Founded in 1960, Strake Jesuit quickly developed a reputation for excellence, and by 1967, it was recognized for having one of the best drama programs in the city. The school's drama club, known as the Southwell Players, was named after the Jesuit poet Robert Southwell, underscoring the deep artistic lineage within the Society of Jesus. Female students from the neighboring St. Agnes Academy, a Catholic girls' school, were included in the productions, reflecting the collaborative nature of Jesuit theater. In addition to acting, students took on significant roles in building, designing, and constructing the sets, contributing to a well-rounded theatrical experience. This integration of performance and craftsmanship highlights the continued importance of theater in Jesuit education during the twentieth century. *Crusader*, Strake Jesuit College Preparatory Yearbook, 1966–67, 60.

However, this change does not imply that individual Jesuits ceased pursuing professional or artistic achievements within the broader theatrical and entertainment landscape. On the contrary, as Kevin Wetmore has pointed out, several Jesuits achieved considerable renown in the contemporary artistic scene, demonstrating that Jesuit involvement in the arts extended beyond the confines of educational institutions.[87]

Gallo succinctly describes the transformation of Jesuit school theater between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a shift from the early ambition of Jesuit schools to compete with professional troupes, to what became a "private and amateur theater with its own identity."[88] "Domestic" repertoire, where school life was primarily depicted, became a prominent feature of theatrical performances during the nineteenth century. The Jesuit tragic repertoire of the late modern period (largely focused on religious and martyr tragedies), was given even greater emphasis in the increasingly secular societies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For some scholars, this shift signified the transformation of Jesuit theater into a more amateur and domestic practice, with its purpose becoming more "internal" and "heritage"-based. Rather than seeking broad public appeal, late modern Jesuit theater appeared to turn inward, focusing on preserving and continuing its own religious and historical traditions within a more contained, educational environment. While this may hold true for the introduction of new material into the repertoire, a different story unfolds when considering the adaptation of the old repertory to modern times. A striking example of the continuity in the public dimension of Jesuit theater is the enduring legacy of Jesuit Jakob Bidermann's *Cenodoxus Doctor Parisiensis*. First staged in Munich in 1609, *Cenodoxus* was a masterful drama that satirized and condemned the vainglory of academic pride. The play was a success, quickly becoming Bidermann's masterpiece, and it enjoyed widespread popularity throughout the early modern period.

This public resonance did not fade with modernity. In the vibrant intellectual milieu of Vienna, *Cenodoxus* was given a gala production in 1933 at the prestigious Burgtheater, performed by leading actors of the time. The play's cultural significance remained potent, but its public trajectory was interrupted by political developments. In 1934, a planned German production at the Berliner Stadttheater was abruptly canceled when the Nazi government forbade the performance.[89]

Nevertheless, *Cenodoxus* found new life in the United States. In 1940, Richard F. Grady, S.J., prepared a translation of Bidermann's works, leading

87 Wetmore, "Jesuit Theater and Drama."

88 Gallo, "Jesuit Theater," 586.

89 McCabe, *Jesuit Theater,* 40–41.

to a highly successful staging of the play in a central theater in Baltimore during Lent.[90]

The Enduring Pedagogical Aims of Jesuit School Theater

The Jesuit codification of the pedagogical model for school theater is rooted in its formative goals. Despite the varying scope, quality, innovation, and social impact of theatrical performances in Jesuit colleges and schools from the eighteenth century onward, the underlying model remained consistent in its purpose and fundamental assumptions: school theater was a layered, multifaceted extracurricular tool designed to educate students according to the principles of Jesuit pedagogy.[91]

In 1737, when the Jesuits at a French college considered staging a simple dialogue instead of the traditional full-length drama during the prize-giving ceremony, the mayor protested, urging them to uphold the custom. Among his arguments, he reminded the Jesuits of the pedagogical value of their own theater: "One good thing about this practice is that it trains young men to speak in public, to declaim well; and it instills in them grace of gesture and fluency, a training that is beneficial both for the pulpit and the bar."[92] It is interesting that, on such an occasion, the mayor emphasized the oratorical skills cultivated through theater—an art form which, in his view, should be seen as a developed and refined exercise in declamation and eloquence—while neglecting the moral dimensions of this formative practice. In earlier sources, virtues such as good habits, piety, and moral values were commonly cited by both internal members of the order *and* external supporters as central to the pedagogical value of Jesuit theater. By contrast, the eighteenth century seemingly marked a shift toward a period of "withdrawal" from the public sphere, with Jesuit theater becoming more internally focused. During this time, Jesuits simplified their theatrical productions, returning to the basic oratory and declamatory purposes of their origins. Short rhetorical exercises increasingly replaced the public grandeur of seventeenth-century staging, as illustrated by the complaint of the mayor in 1737. Renowned Jesuit teachers—such as Le Jay, Porée, and Jacques Lenoir Duparc (1702–89)—began to emphasize the *oratorical plea*, a brief rhetorical exercise easily staged in smaller-scale performances.[93]

90 McCabe, *Jesuit Theater,* 40–41. See also Richard F. Grady, S.J., "Revival of Jesuit Theatre at Loyola, Baltimore," *Jesuit Educational Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (1939): 141–43.

91 See Mario Scaduto, S.J., "Il teatro gesuitico," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 36 (1967): 194.

92 Quoted in McCabe, *Jesuit Theater,* 19.

93 According to Gallo, the *Theatrum Asceticum* (1747) by Franz Neumayr (1697–

This trend, particularly evident in the French Jesuit landscape of the eighteenth century, is exemplified by Joseph de Jouvancy's *The Way to Learn and the Way to Teach*, a work that apparently paved the way for this shift. This work gained significant success not only within the Society of Jesus but also among the broader intellectual community of the period. In this work, Jouvancy emphasized that the ultimate aim of formative practices such as theatrical performances—which included ballet—was the cultivation of eloquent men. While moral considerations were undoubtedly a vital component of this development, they remained a necessary yet implicit foundation, serving as a kind of moral backdrop to the more detailed discussion of how performing plays and ballets contributed to the cognitive and social skills essential for eloquence. The indispensability of the moral aspects is evident in Schwickerath's reflection/observation on the integration of theater into the Jesuit pedagogical model:

> As the nature and function of the theatre the Jesuits considered the stirring up of the pious emotions, the guardianship of youth against the corrupting influence of evil society, the portrayal of vice as something intrinsically despicable, the rousing up of the inner man to a zealous crusade for virtue, and the imitations of the Saints.[94]

Remaining intentional about the centrality of formation as a primary aim of staging plays in their schools, the Jesuit approach to the pedagogy of school theater remained consistent from the early modern period through to the time after the restoration. As Charmot wrote, theater was to be pursued for the purpose of "formation, not for pleasure."[95]

In 1947, Joseph Maxwell reminded readers that by practicing dramatics, students in American Jesuit schools were exposed to a list of benefits that closely aligned with those emphasized throughout the long history of Jesuit theater. These benefits, which extended beyond mere performance, reflected the core educational values of Jesuit pedagogy—fostering eloquence, moral development, and social cooperation.[96] Between 1949

1755) and the *Exercitationes Theatrales* (1750–55) by Anton Claus (1691–1754) were further examples of this scaling back of Jesuit theater. See Gallo, "Jesuit Theater," 582.

94 Robert Schwickerath, S.J., *Jesuit Education: Its History and Principles Viewed in the Light of Modern Educational Problems* (B. Herder, 1904), 166–67. Schwickerath viewed these aspects through a militant lens, as evidenced by his rhetorical critique of the "degeneration" of the times.

95 François Charmot, S.J. *La pédagogie des Jésuites: ses principes – son actualité* (Aux Éditions Spes, 1951), 260.

96 The list is worth quoting in full: "The discovery and the development of elocutionary powers, the development of qualities of voice, articulation, enunciation,

and 1952, Victor Yanitelli published two articles in the *Jesuit Educational Quarterly*, revisiting the Renaissance origins of Jesuit theater and highlighting its continued importance for Jesuit education in contemporary schools.[97] After stressing that the Jesuits had never pursued theater as "an end in itself," Yanitelli noted the continuities between the Renaissance tradition and contemporary practices of staging performances:

> The Jesuit College theater, though more limited in scope, stands even now as it did in its more famous days, as an instrument, a means for educating men to the objectives of life, to a sense of values, to standards and norms of action compatible with the greater importance of the life to come, and like the higher educational system of which it is an integral part, it has dedicated itself to use as a means to achieve this end, together with the Humanities, all artistic and cultural pursuits.[98]

What connects Yanitelli's conception of theater as an educational instrument to the original early modern Jesuit theater is the scope and complexity of this tool. Staging plays was a means of imparting skills to student-actors who, through learning, rehearsing, and memorizing scripts, underwent training that encompassed both cultural and performative dimensions. Scripts themselves were rich with cultural content: quotations from ancient and classical works; Latin proverbs and phrase; a variety of metrical verses tailored to the message, the character, and the genre (whether tragedy or comedy), and grammatically complex constructions that reinforced lessons from Latin classes. These scripts also conveyed histories, gestures, and human examples that the plays sought to dramatize. Student-actors, through repeated rehearsals, would absorb, practice, and internalize this vast array of content.

Simultaneously, student-actors acquired performative skills crucial to public life: memorization, oration, modulation of voice, gestures, posture, and persuasive acting. The intended outcome was the formation of a

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gesture, mimetic powers, the development of personality, the interpretation of character in certain situations and in relation to other characters, an appreciation of human nature, poise, self-assurance, the experience of social cooperation, the effect of the ethical import of good plays, the broadening of a student's horizons through insight into other times, other places, other persons." Joseph R. N. Maxwell, S.J., "Extracurricular Activities," *Jesuit Educational Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1947): 44.

97 Victor R. Yanitelli, S.J., "Jesuit Education and the Jesuit Theatre," *Jesuit Educational Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1949): 133–45; Yanitelli, "Heir of the Renaissance: The Jesuit Theatre," *Jesuit Educational Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1952): 133–47.

98 Yanitelli, "Jesuit Education," 145.

well-trained orator—an eloquent man capable of persuading and stirring crowds in the public sphere.

At the same time, both student-actors and student-spectators were formed in moral habits, influenced by the virtuous stories and exemplary models presented on stage. For the Jesuits, theater was above all "a school of virtues." Through poetry, humane letters, and the strong foundation of the classics, Jesuit pedagogy once again demonstrated its alignment with the goals of humanistic education: the formation of character remained a primary concern. Just as the Jesuits did not hesitate to adopt elements from pagan, gentile, or—in mission territories—native cultures that did not conflict with Catholic faith, Jesuit dramatists embraced both tragedies and comedies to offer what they viewed as positive theatrical alternatives for their students and the broader public. Although comedies were often regarded with suspicion due to their reliance on mechanisms that provoked laughter and appealed to the common folk, the Jesuits staged comedies even when it went against the norms established by superiors. The overarching goal, even in such instances, was the cultivation of virtuous social interaction.

Similarly, religious zeal and piety were encouraged through the subject matter of tragedies, which frequently focused on martyrdom, sacred stories from Scripture, or the lives of saints. These plays sought to inspire heroism that often surpassed Aristotle's notion of the golden mean for both virtues and tragedies. This form of heroism was designed to help students and audiences deepen their faith, and, in some cases, even led students to consider religious life. More rarely, these plays took on an apologetic or combative tone in regions where Catholicism was not the dominant religion. Superiors were careful to avoid causing scandals, especially in Protestant territories, where controversial topics were often sidestepped in favor of plays that promoted themes of piety and unity.

Most importantly, theater functioned as a pedagogical tool in its own right. Often described as part of the distinctly Jesuit "game-like education,"[99] theater was always designed to cultivate what Charmot referred to as the "spurs of intellectual activity"[100]—students' interest, appetite, enthusiasm, and sense of honor. These traits have frequently been highlighted in Jesuit sources from the early modern period, and theater was certainly a primary means of stimulating them. While these elements could be seen as individualistic aspects of the learning process, Jesuit theater was always

99 Dainville, *L'Éducation*, 471.

100 I refer to the title of the fourth part of Charmot, *La pédagogie des Jesuites*: "Les aiguillons de l'activité intellectuelle."

intended as a public performance, and thereby involving the extended college community.

In this context, Jesuit theater became a pedagogical tool by fostering a sense of belonging, pride, and enjoyment. Students not only relished well-executed performances in front of an audience but also shared in the school's glory and the enthusiastic approval that surrounded it.[101]

Throughout the twentieth century, while professional heater reappeared on the horizon of Jesuit school and college theater through collaboration rather than competition as in the early modern period, historiographers have often depicted Jesuit theater as a minor, granular tradition with a primarily local scope, contrasting sharply with the artistic grandeur of its early modern counterpart. However, what is often overlooked in this narrative is the unchanging centrality of the pedagogic intent behind Jesuit theater across all periods. Both the prominent Jesuit playwright in seventeenth-century Rome and the Jesuit professor translating, re-writing a tragedy, or crafting an allegorical play in an early twentieth-century U.S. college, were driven by the same educational purpose. The staging of plays, regardless of the era, was always fundamentally about fulfilling a pedagogical mission, a continuity that transcended any shifts in style, scale, or public engagement over time. Or, to put it more precisely, the public engagement that Jesuit theater enjoyed during the early modern period was integral to the pedagogical objectives that motivated Jesuit colleges to embrace theatrical performances as a hallmark of their educational model. The widespread appeal and community involvement in these performances were not incidental but rather a deliberate aspect of the Jesuit approach to formation, where theater served as both a cultural and didactic tool within the broader mission of their educational institutions.

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101 As Zanlonghi concluded: "The performance, with its playful dimension, is a regenerative force through which the individual is refreshed and measures themselves against shared values. It is an experience that elevates the spirit in the enjoyment of the 'delectationes ludorum,' thus becoming a virtuous habit in itself." Zanlonghi, "Il teatro nella pedagogia gesuitica," 190.