

The common themes, poetic images, clever and complex plots, and frenetic action, costume changes, and disguise of seventeenth-century Spanish plays make these three hundred-year-old comedies surprisingly familiar to readers today. However, Spanish comedza was popular, commercial entertainment that had to hold its audiences attention. In this study William Blue reminds us of the importance of the historical context in understanding seventeenth-century Spanish plays. The author covers twenty Spanish plays of the 1620s, a pivotal decade that saw a radical change in both the style and substance of government accompanied by new national and international orientations, changes in economic policies, demographic shifts, and a certain social mobility. By focusing precisely on the local derails that a contemporary audience would have immediately grasped, Blue shows what happens for todays audience if those details are seen as central rather than incidental to understanding the plays. He Ultimately examines how the plays encourage a new and complex understanding of the self by presenting individuals in moments of decision and self-examination, always enmeshed in social relations as well as in the economic, legal, and other material conditions of life.

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