



The *Comedia* of Virginity

Mirzam C. Perez

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Few characters were as ubiquitous in the collective consciousness of early modern Spain as the Virgin Mary. By the 1600s, the cult of the Immaculate Conception had become so popularized that the Hapsburg monarchy issued a decree in defense of the Virgin's purity. In a climate of political disharmony, however, this revered icon—often pictured as the passive, chaste, and pious mother of God—would become an archetype of paradox within the Spanish imagination.

In *The Comedia of Virginity*, Mirzam Pérez underscores how the character of the Virgin Mary was represented on the theater stage. Following a concise account of the historical, academic, and political forces operating within Hapsburg Spain, Pérez dissects three *comedias*—three-act productions featuring both drama and comedy—and draws out their multivalent interpretations of Mary. In their own ways, these secular *comedias* reproduced an uncommonly empowering feminine vision while making light of the Virgin's purity. The Mary of the stage was an active, sinuous, even sensual force whom playwrights would ultimately use to support a fracturing monarchy.

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