

## The Italian And Spanish Schools in European Renaissance Theatre

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Received: 10 Mar 2026 | Received Revised Version: 02 Apr 2026 | Accepted: 26 Apr 2026 | Published: 16 May 2026

Volume 08 Issue 05 2026 | Crossref DOI: 10.37547/tajas/Volume08Issue05-10

### Abstract

*The article analyses the development of Italian and Spanish Renaissance theatre, as well as their common features and differences. It also highlights how the two theatrical schools made a significant contribution to the history of European theatre by artistically expressing Renaissance ideas, humanism, and popular themes. After the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century AD, under the influence of Christian ideology, classical art experienced a decline; however, by the 14th–16th centuries, the emergence of new social relations led to the revival of theatre. At the same time, the article scientifically examines the process by which Italian and Spanish theatre emerged from medieval conservatism to reach a stage of popular, humanistic, and artistically mature development.*

**Keywords:** Renaissance, Italian theatre, Spanish theatre, Machiavelli, Ariosto, tragedy, comedy, the three unities rule, theatre history, dramaturgy, stagecraft.

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**Cite This Article:** Ominaxon Khamidova. (2026). The Italian And Spanish Schools in European Renaissance Theatre. The American Journal of Applied Sciences, 8(5), 44–46. <https://doi.org/10.37547/tajas/Volume08Issue05-10>

### 1. Introduction

Theatre is a complex, multi-layered phenomenon closely intertwined with the spiritual development of society, human thought and aesthetic perspectives. Each historical era has expressed its worldview, social issues and moral values through theatre. In particular, Renaissance theatre served as a crucial stage in the formation of a new artistic mindset that placed the individual at its centre. During this period, the stage ceased to be merely a religious or ceremonial medium and became an independent art form, artistically reflecting society, human psychology and social relationships. Italy and Spain hold a special significance as the leading centres of the Renaissance in Europe. In these two countries, the art of theatre developed based on various historical conditions, social processes, and cultural traditions. In Italy, the main focus was on drawing on the classical heritage, developing dramaturgy theory and codifying stage conventions, whereas in

Spain, theatre was shaped in harmony with the people's life, historical struggles and national spirit. Nevertheless, the unifying aspect of both theatrical schools was the promotion of humanist ideas through the stage and the strengthening of the social role of art.

This article provides a comparative analysis of the formation, developmental stages, and common and distinct features of Renaissance theatre in Italy and Spain. Furthermore, the process of the theatre's revival after the crisis of ancient art, and the artistic innovations in dramaturgy and the performing arts, are scientifically illuminated. This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the place and significance of Renaissance theatre in Europe's cultural heritage.

### 2. Discussion

The Renaissance was an era when human thought awoke, art and literature found their new content, and creative

freedom was valued. This process was reflected not only in science and philosophy, but also in the art of theatre. Italy and Spain, in particular, became the two major centres of European theatrical development during this period. In Italy, theatre drew upon the classical heritage, renewing aesthetic theory and stage conventions, whereas in Spain it was shaped by the national spirit, a martial history, and a sense of nationalism. Both countries' theatres chose their own paths, yet they converged on one point: expressing the spirit of the people and the voice of the age through the stage. Italian theatre was one of the earliest centres of the Renaissance, and its development was inextricably linked to Rome's rich historical heritage. Here, the rules of ancient tragedy and comedy were revived, and playwrights such as Ariosto, Machiavelli and, above all, Goldoni portrayed the life of ordinary people through comedy. They strove to rebuild the art, to rid comedy of artificiality and to depict the natural state of man and the life of the common people. Thus, on the Italian stage order, theory and artistic discipline prevailed; tragedies were portrayed through wrath, fury, jealousy and calamities. In Spanish theatre, however, an entirely different scene is observed. After five centuries of struggle in the Reconquista, the unity and pride of the people were brought to the stage. This can be seen in the works of playwrights such as Lope de Rueda, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, and Calderón. Spanish tragedy relies not on the rules of Italy, but on the turbulent flow of the action. Its comedies, meanwhile, reflect the language of the people, popular humour, realism and simple wisdom. In Spanish theatre, it was considered more important to follow the stage's own charm, the power of the story, and the national spirit, rather than the strict 'three unities' rule. There are also commonalities between these two theatrical schools. Both promoted the spirit of the Renaissance – humanism, free thought and artistic innovation. In both theatres, popular life took centre stage, and real events were brought to life in artistic interpretation. Most importantly, both Italy and Spain established their own theatrical traditions and laid a solid foundation for the development of European dramaturgy. However, the differences that set them apart are also significant. Italy is a theatre founded on theory and tradition, whereas Spain is a free, passionate school of the stage, drawing its strength from the popular spirit. While Italian tragedy is bound by rules, Spanish tragedy is governed by emotion itself. Whereas Italian comedy has an intellectual character, Spanish comedy relies on the people's joy and bitter truths. In conclusion, it can be

said that the similarities and differences between Italian and Spanish theatre encourage us to view each as a distinct artistic world. The former is distinguished by discipline and theory, while the latter is characterised by emotion and the spirit of the people. However, what unites them is one thing: the aspiration to gain a deeper understanding of humanity, society, and life through the stage. It is this very aspiration that made Renaissance theatre an invaluable part of the world's cultural heritage.

Italy gained renown as a major centre in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. Many artistic and stylistic movements that were formed and developed here also achieved fame beyond Italy. Rome, in turn, played the role of a key centre of artistic life in Europe. In Rome, which has preserved the gems of antiquity and the Renaissance, ancient and modern art intermingled, and under the influence of local and foreign artistic traditions, a distinctive new art emerged [3. -P. 11].

The early formation of bourgeois relations in Italy served as the foundation for the emergence and flourishing of modern literature and the art of theatre in the country, ahead of other nations. Works by the celebrated Italian poet Ludovico Ariosto, such as “The Comedy of the Trunk” and “The Swapped”, became such early examples of the Renaissance. Niccolò Machiavelli's “Mandragora” marked the development of the satirical comedy genre. This period, which entered history under the name “Comedy of Manners”, became a valuable literary asset for Italian dramaturgy by reviving ancient comic traditions and had a significant influence on the development of European comedy[2.-P. 47].

The Renaissance originated in Italy, and the art of this period is characterised by the placement of the human being at its centre, a striving for realism and aesthetic perfection; It was precisely these principles that later exerted a strong influence on the development of European theatre art, including stage composition and the means of dramatic expression[5.-P. 128].

While Italian Renaissance comedy was modelled on ancient Roman examples, in tragedy the myths, choruses and dramatic conventions employed by Sophocles, Euripides and, above all, Seneca were adopted in their entirety. The unities of action, place and time, proposed in Aristotle's Poetics, were developed and put into practice by Italian theorists, who added the unities of place and time alongside the unity of action. Playwrights were particularly fascinated by bloody events: not a

single tragedy created during this period is free from the horrors of bloody revenge, blind jealousy, and cruelty. It was established that a tragedy should consist of five acts, be written in verse, and, of course, be subject to the three unities. Later, these rules served as the basis for French classical theatre [1. -P. 43].

In the social, political and spiritual life of Italy, where the doctrines and ideas of the Old World prevailed, the Enlightenment ideology began to exert its influence. This influence also led to a radical reform of the art of theatre. It is impossible not to acknowledge the contributions of the two great playwrights, Carlo Goldoni and Carlo Gozzi, who, drawing on advanced artistic traditions, created the genre of written literary drama in Italian dramaturgy. Carlo Goldoni went down in history as the reformer of Italian dramaturgy. He is the figure who created the Italian national comedy by assimilating the most advanced experiences in the field of dramaturgy. He wrote a total of 155 comedies, as well as several tragedies and tragicomedies. The vast majority of his works possess theatrical vitality and universal human content. They are characterised by their folk-like quality and theatricality. It is these very qualities that have ensured his works continue to grace stages worldwide to this day [4. -P. 46].

The Renaissance in Spain began later than in Italy, in the late 15th century. In Spain, a struggle against Arab occupation had been waged for five centuries. This war of liberation, known as the Reconquista (reconquest), ended in 1492 with the victory of the Spanish people. During this struggle, a single nation and a centralised monarchy were formed. These struggles defined the popular character and distinctiveness of Spanish theatre and dramaturgy. From its very inception, Spanish drama and theatre stood out for their realism and popular character. A devotee of the theatrical arts, actor and playwright Lope de Rueda emerged as the founder of the national theatre. Spanish theatre was born out of the work of many itinerant actors and troupes, much like Lope de Rueda. With his short plays, Lope de Rueda set the standard for using the vernacular and depicting popular life. But this was only the beginning of the Spanish theatre. The new period of development in Spanish theatre is associated with the name of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, the author of the famous novel 'Don Quixote'. One of Cervantes's major plays is the historical tragedy 'Numantia', which depicts the heroic struggle of the Numantines against the Roman invaders, led by Scipio, in 135 BC. 'Numantia' is a tragedy about

immense popular heroism. In times when patriotism becomes a pressing issue, the Spanish turn to this work with particular vigour [1. -P. 47].

In Spain, the cradle of the Inquisition and the centre of Catholicism, the creative genius of one of the torchbearers of the Spanish Renaissance theatre is progressively weakened as religious bigotry runs rampant. However, the finest examples of Calderón's work, alongside those of Cervantes, Lope de Vega and Tirso de Molina, have firmly secured their place in the world theatre repertoire [1. -P. 55].

### 3. Conclusion

Although the development of Italian and Spanish Renaissance theatre centred on humanism, realism, and theatrical vitality in both countries, their paths of formation were different. Italian theatre, drawing on classical heritage and theoretical rules, prioritised classical discipline and poetic order, whereas Spanish theatre, relying on the national spirit and historical events, displayed freedom and drama on stage. At the same time, their common aspects – realism, populism and the artistic reflection of Renaissance ideas – made a significant contribution to the history of European theatre. Through their contrasts and harmonies, these two theatrical schools ensured the rich and diverse development of the performing arts.

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