About *Wild Thing*

*Wild Thing* is a production by the University of Massachusetts Department of Theater. The script is taken from UMass professor Harley Erdman’s English translation of *La Serrana de la Vera* by Luis Vélez de Guevara, written in 1613. Erdman’s original translation, *The Mountain Girl from La Vera*, will be published later this year. This production has chosen to shorten the original text to make it more effective for the stage.

The creative team was interested in looking at this text as an exploration of gender across time—what does it mean to tell the story of a 17th century Spanish peasant girl in 2019 Massachusetts? The team has chosen to present the character of Gila as non-binary, a decision which allows the production team to dig into our contemporary understandings of gender roles and gender expression while opening up a new possible interpretation of the classical text. As you watch the play, pay attention to this duality of time—What feels possible and accurate for us today? What feels centuries old? What feels like it could exist in either time?

**SYNOPSIS**

Gila returns home to their mountain village from a successful hunting trip to find their father, Giraldo, arguing with a Captain wishing to be lodged in their home. The Captain is captivated by Gila, who is brash, masculine, and hostile to him, and is determined to dominate them. Through a series of games, fights, and duels with words, Gila proves to the Captain and the already impressed villagers that they are a force to be reckoned with. Their triumphs earn them the affections of another man, the comic Mingo.
When the Captain decides to ask for Gila’s hand in marriage, they agree, imagining all of the possibilities and privileges the union would offer. The dream is soon cut short when the Captain abandons Gila after their first night together, sending Gila into a spiral of madness and revenge. Gila, who has always claimed themselves to be a man, now furiously takes up the mantle of “woman scorned,” exacting revenge on any unlucky man who hikes through their mountains. After finally ensnaring the Captain in their trap, Gila is caught and forced to face punishment for their vengeful streak.

A NOTE ON PRONOUNS

In this guide I have elected to use “they/them” pronouns to refer to the character Gila. This decision is reflective of some of the very complicated gender questions explored both in the text and in the production. You will notice that in the script other characters refer to Gila using “she/her” pronouns:

“she has rare courage” (7)

On the other hand, Gila often refers to themself as a man:

“If you think that I’m a woman, you’re very much deceived: I am very much a man” (11)

So which pronouns should we use to refer to Gila? Some argue that because the character is based in a historical time when the word “transgender” did not yet exist, these modern concepts should not be applied to Gila. Some argue that Gila only claims to be a man in order to have access to “male” activities, social interactions, clothing, or behaviors. Others suggest that,
despite not having language for their experience, Gila has still self-identified as male, and as such should use “he/him” pronouns. In this production, the question becomes more complex as the actor who plays Gila presents their own gender as non-binary, and performs the role of Gila as non-binary.

Because of this complexity, this guide will use “they/them” pronouns to the respect the many facets and possibilities of Gila’s gender. For example, “when Gila first meets the Captain, they argue with him.”

Though I have chosen to use “they/them” pronouns here, I encourage you to analyze the provided information and production and make your own determination. The questions in the next sections will help you analyze their gender more closely.

**TERMS**

These terms come up throughout this guide, and may be useful in answering the questions. These definitions have been taken from *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, a comprehensive resource about transgender people.

**Cisgender (cis)** A person whose gender identity matches their gender assigned at birth. (non-transgender) Often preferred over terms such as “biological” or “natal” man or woman.

**Feminine** A term that describes behavior, dress, qualities, or attitudes that are associated with women. What is considered feminine differs based on culture, race, ethnicity, and environment.
**Gender** A set of social, psychological, and emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual as feminine or masculine.

**Gender Expression** Refers to an individual’s physical characteristics, behaviors, and presentation. This can include one’s appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions that are linked, traditionally, to masculinity or femininity.

**Gender Identity** Our way of understanding our inner sense of being male, female, both, or neither. Sometimes clashes with the way other people view us physically.

**Gender Presentation/Expression** The way that someone presents their gender, including their appearance and behaviors.

**Gender Roles** Positions we take in social relationships based on our genders, such as men being the income earners or women taking responsibilities for housekeeping. The masculinity or femininity of specific roles in our societies differs based on our cultures and/or geographic location.

**Masculine** A term that describes behavior, dress, qualities, or attitudes that are associated with men. What is considered masculine differs based on one’s culture, race, ethnicity, and environment.
Non-binary A gender that is neither strictly male nor strictly female.

Transgender An umbrella term that may be used to describe people whose gender expression does not conform to cultural norms and/or whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth. Transgender is a self-identity, and some gender nonconforming people do not identify with this term.

TRANSLATION

*Wild Thing* is the first English translation of *La Serrana de la Vera* by Luis Vélez de Guevara, written in 1613. I have included some excerpts from translator Harley Erdman’s process below.

I want to highlight three unique aspects of working on a translation of a play: translating across language, translating across time, and translating across culture.

Translating across language is already familiar to many of us. If you are bilingual or multilingual, you are probably aware of how easily meanings are lost or misconstrued when translated into a different language. A pun may make little sense in another language without the signature wordplay. A poem would might sound like prose without the rhythm of carefully crafted syllables. A song could fall flat if the rhymes are lost in translation. Slang would sound absurd without culturally defined colloquial meanings. These questions of meaning, slang, rhyme, and rhythm are all part of the process of translating a play.
If you are bilingual, can you name an example of a phrase that just does not work in another language? If you are monolingual, can you name a pun or wordplay that would be lost in translation?

Translating becomes even more complicated when translating across time. This play first premiered 4 centuries ago, and the way we use and understand language has changed significantly since then. Just a few years ago, the word “boo” was just a sound ghosts made or the cry of rejection when you are “booed off” a stage. Today “boo” can be a noun, as in partner, or even a verb, as in “boo’d up/booed up.” If language can shift so drastically in my own lifetime, imaging how complicated a 4 hundred year old translation must be. The translation needs to retain the original message of the play, but it also needs to make sense to a contemporary audience, so the translator and production team pay close attention to how dated, anachronistic, or fresh the language feels throughout the play.

Can you think of an example of a word that has changed meaning in your lifetime? Can you think of an historical word that would be meaningless or confusing today?

Language is also culturally constructed, making translation necessarily a reflection of multiple cultures. Just as the idioms and slang words above grew out of a specific culture, so do the gender roles, clothing, behaviors, and power dynamics presented in *Wild Thing*. In the process of translating this piece, the director and translator have to work closely with one another to accurately present the story of a peasant in 1613 Spain, but in a way recognizable and understandable within the culture of 2019 Massachusetts. This process is ongoing—as the
production exists in both cultures. The production team uses visual cues, costumes, designs, and music that helps us get a sense for the original milieu, contextualizing Gila’s experience within their culture. As you watch the play, make note of what design and directing choices helped you translate the cultural aspects of the story.

Translation is also the process through which the production team examines Gila’s gender. Using the same three categories above, the team has had to translate the story of Gila across time, space, and language in order to present their perspective on stage. Gender roles, gender identity, and gender expression have all changed enormously throughout time, but much of Gila’s story still feels fresh and relevant to us.

What issues in this play feel familiar to you? What parallels can you draw to today? Can you relate to any of Gila’s choices?

Looking at some of Gila’s key actions (like choosing to accept the Captain’s proposal), what do you think motivates them to make these decisions? Is this motivation something you still see or experience today?
TRANSLATION SAMPLE

In the example below, you can see how much thought and work went into creating the play as you hear it. Translator Harley Erdman says the original Spanish text “has a rigorous syllable count for each line, and a regular rhyme scheme, even though they all don’t sound like rhymes,” and while he was not trying to retain all of the rhyming in his translation, he did want to keep the rhythm, the flow, and the sense of this as spoken language with heightened (theatrical, dramatic, and intentional) qualities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORIGINAL SPANISH TEXT</th>
<th>LITERAL MEANING/ FIRST TRANSLATION</th>
<th>FINAL LINES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hasta agora me imaginaba, padre, por las cosas que yo he visto her hombre, y muy hombre, y ahora echo de ver, pues que me tratas casamiento con este caballero, que soy mujer, que para tanto daño ha sido mi desdicha el desengaño. No me quiero casar, padre, que creo que mientras no me caso que soy hombre. No quiero ver que nadie me sujete. No quiero que ninguno se imagine dueño de mí. La libertad pretendo.</td>
<td>Until this moment, father, I had always imagined myself a man, and very much a man, For all the things I’ve seen myself do, And now I note, since you treat of my marriage To this gentleman, that I am a woman, And in this disillusionment I perceive The great harm of my bad fortune. I do not want to marry, father, For I believe that as long as I do not marry, I am a man. I do not want see anyone subjecting me, I don’t want anyone to think of himself as my owner: I aspire to freedom.</td>
<td>Until this moment, father, I had always Seen myself as a man, and very much one. But now I perceive, with this proposed marriage, I am forced to become a woman. This disillusion is my grave misfortune, My suffering. I do not want to marry. As long as I am unwed, I remain a man. I aspire to be free. I cannot imagine Anyone subjecting or subduing me. No man on earth shall think himself my master.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What are some of the differences you note between the literal translation and the final lines? If you speak Spanish, what do you notice about this translation?
What can you glean about the mood and tone of the play based on these scenic design models?

When you see the play, you will notice a transformation of the space—what does that transformation say about the shifts in characters and in tone?

(scenic models by Scenic Designer Sean Sanford)
What does Gila’s costume in Act I (left) say about their gender? What about their costume in Act III (right)? What does this shift in costume say about the shift in Gila’s character development?

How do you use clothing to represent your gender? How do you see others using clothing for gender expression? In what ways have the associations between gender and certain types of clothing changed (like pants being only for men)?
Gender in *Wild Thing*

1. What words, behaviors, and activities are associated with womanhood or femininity in this play? List examples.

2. What words, behaviors, and activities are associated with manhood or masculinity in this play? List examples.

3. Of your examples listed above, which associations do you feel like fit contemporary expectations of gender? Circle those examples which you think are still part of our contemporary perceptions of gender.

4. What language, visual cues, and behaviors help represent Gila’s gender?

5. What forces, beliefs, and goals motivate Gila to accept the Captain’s marriage proposal?

6. How does gender (or the expectation of gender roles) guide Gila’s choices in this play?

7. How are other characters’ actions guided by these expectations?
This bilingual edition presents Luis Vélez de Guevara’s 1613 play *La Serrana de la Vera* (*The Mountain Girl from La Vera*) for the first time ever in English. This long-forgotten tragedy has come back into focus in recent years because of its extraordinary protagonist, Gila, a peasant girl who calls herself a man and takes pride in doing things men do and doing them one better. She hunts, fences, gambles, ploughs, even bull-fights. In feats of strength and prowess, she outshines the men around her, and relishes bragging about it. Gila also tries to catch the attention of Queen Isabel, with whom she is in love. Gila’s downfall comes when she is seduced and betrayed by a high-ranking military officer, Captain Don Lucas de Carvajal, who promises her power and status but abandons her in order to get revenge for his own earlier public humiliation at her hands. Desperate and outraged, Gila takes to the mountains, where she lives the life of an outlaw, murdering virtually every man she comes across, including, eventually, Don Lucas. In the end, Gila is brought to justice and publically executed in grisly fashion with the consent of Ferdinand and Isabella, the same monarchs she admires.

As many critics have commented, *Mountain Girl* is a strange, unsettling play, ‘*una obra muy problemática*’ (‘a very problematic work’). It features broad comedy, even slapstick, but in the end veers into violence and tragedy. It has many realistic touches, but also is replete with exaggerated and grotesque elements characteristic of folk tales, legend, and myth. It lays out plausible motivations for its characters’ actions yet has these characters undergo unexpected, seemingly unexplained shifts in behavior. Its historical backdrop (the play is set in the late 1400s) features famous characters from Spanish history, but the relationship of this subplot to the main action of the play is puzzling. Finally, *Mountain Girl* features many tropes and character types common to early modern Spanish theater but handles these elements in ways different from other plays of its time.

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1 I follow C. George Peale’s practice of capitalizing *Serrana* in the Spanish title, suggesting that the play references the specific *Serrana* of legend rather than a generic *serrana*, while also distinguishing Vélez de Guevara’s play from Lope de Vega’s *La serrana de la Vera*. Most critical literature on the play follows standard Spanish orthographic convention, rendering it *La serrana de la Vera*.

2 Parr and Albuixech 17.
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For all these reasons, it is fair to call the play ‘non-normative,’ befitting a title character who is non-normative. Gila has been variously labeled by critics over the past generation as manly, irregular, monstrous, feminist, homosexual, bisexual, ambiguous, lesbian, transsexual, hybrid, and queer. It may be that the contemporary category ‘transgender’ offers the best frame for Gila – that is, someone at odds with the gender assigned to them at birth or whose combination of masculine and feminine facets means that they, to cite Christopher Shelley’s criteria in Transpeople, ‘would prefer to be able to retain ambivalence, either in body or comportment’ (8). To put it another way: Gila is gender-queer. Moreover, Vélez has constructed his play so as to make audiences sympathize with this character who so strikingly upsets the gender binary.

Mountain Girl has a lot else to offer. It is a great piece of theater, full of dramatic confrontations, colorful vignettes, striking moments of music and spectacle, and comic relief. The fact that Vélez wrote the play for a specific actress – the acclaimed Jusepa Vaca – adds to our understanding of the play in the dimension of performance. Finally, the surviving autograph manuscript of the play is marked up – whether by the playwright or someone from Vaca’s theater company – so as to give a highly specific indication of what sections of the play might have been edited, cut, or censured for performance, thus offering a singular window into the distinction between what playwrights wrote and what ultimately ended up on stage. All in all, Mountain Girl deserves wide attention as a piece of dramatic literature, a cultural document, and a performance script.

The Playwright and His World

Luis Vélez de Guevara (1579–1644) is gaining recognition as one of the leading playwrights of early modern Spain. This ‘Golden Age,’ which in Spain has been traditionally labeled the Siglo de Oro (Golden Century), corresponds to the roughly hundred-year period from 1580 to 1680 that saw an outpouring of cultural production, ranging from the paintings of Diego de Velázquez to the fiction of Miguel de Cervantes to the imaginative

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3 I am indebted to Harrison Meadows, whose paper at the 2016 ASTR Working Session first articulated the idea of Gila as ‘transgender’ to me. Of the writers who address Gila’s gender non-normativity, Matthew Stroud’s queer reading of her in Plot Twists and Critical Turns has had a major impact on the field. Bergmann, Boyle, Lundelius, Martin (2008), Strother, Otero-Torres (1997, 1998), and Tropé have also published excellent scholarship that has influenced my thinking about Gila and the play.
literary works of writers such as Francisco de Quevedo and Luis de Góngora. Thousands of plays were produced during this time for performances in public theaters known as corrales: open-air courtyards that accommodated up to 2000 people for daily billings that featured full-length plays known as comedias interlaced with songs, dances, and comic sketches. Unlike the public theaters in England, the corrales featured women in the roles of female characters. Indeed, actresses were among the most celebrated performers. All the major playwrights fashioned commanding opportunities for these women, resulting in a repertory that is a treasure trove of female roles.

Vélez was born at precisely the historical moment that many corrales were being created across Spain. The prime years of his adulthood – the first few decades of the seventeenth century – coincide with the flourishing of comedias that adhered to the dramaturgical model put forth by Lope de Vega (1562–1635), the era’s most popular and influential playwright. These comedias invariably had three acts, mixed comic and serious elements, and were written in rhymed verse for theater companies that featured, if not exactly stock characters, at least company members who specialized in certain types of roles, including the dama (leading lady), galán (leading man), and gracioso (clown or comic sidekick).

Vélez was a prolific playwright. He probably wrote over 400 plays, of which 70 comedias and 20 short plays are extant. Frequent cast as a ‘follower’ of Lope, he has been relegated to secondary or tertiary status, a minor playwright even relative to other contemporaries (for example, Tirso de Molina) who also followed Lope’s model of freewheeling, accessible, action-packed plays. The reputation has stuck to him of being a malcontent, complainer, grumbler, rebel, pedigüeño (someone always asking for money), though recent scholarship has called some of these assumptions into question. He was virtually forgotten in the 19th century, the age of romanticism, which prized the genius of originality. Vélez, in contrast, almost always adapted histories and legends rather than generating original plots. Only in the early 20th century did his work slowly come back into light. That effort has been reinvigorated in the 21st century by the tireless efforts of C. George Peale, who, building on work by William R. Manson, has released scholarly editions of many of his plays.

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4 See Bolaños (2001) 9, and Urzáiz 22, for biographical information on Vélez, recently challenged by Martín Ojeda and Peale, who meticulously uncover the roots of these assumptions and myths in these brief biographies.

5 Profeti 3.
Enough is known about the playwright’s life to give us a rough outline. Luis Vélez de Santander was born in 1579 in Écija, near Seville, to petty middle-class circumstances. His father was a lawyer; his mother, the daughter of one. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the nearby University of Osuna in 1596. Except for a brief period in the early 1600s when he served as a soldier in Italy, he spent virtually the entirety of his adult life in formal service to a series of powerful patrons – first, to Cardinal Rodrigo de Castro, then to the Count of Saldaña, and then to the Duke of Osuna, before becoming ‘ usher to the chamber’ of the Prince of Wales during his visit to Spain to arrange a marriage with the Infanta María Ana in 1623. (The marriage never materialized.) Vélez then briefly became *mayordomo* (chief steward) to Carlos, Arch Duke of Austria, in 1624. Finally, in 1625, he secured the appointment that he would hold for the rest of his life: ‘usher to the chamber’ of King Felipe IV. This position, of a partly ceremonial nature, provided him a place of prestige in the court of Madrid, though apparently not enough income to support a family. His playwriting both prior to and during this appointment was therefore probably a way to supplement this modest living.

Vélez was married four times. In two of the first three marriages, he was left a widower due to spouses who died young – in one case, in childbirth. His fourth and final marriage, to María López de Palacios in 1625, lasted the rest of his life. He had at least seven children, including three sons with his second wife, Úrsula Ramisi y Bravo (to whom he was married at the time of *Mountain Girl*), and four daughters with María López. One son from the former marriage, Juan, went on to become a dramatist as well. A tender and unusual touch to the *Mountain Girl* manuscript is Vélez’s inscription of dedication to Úrsula and their three sons. It appears at the beginning of all three acts.

Overall, the picture is of a multi-talented literary man with a flair for bold, colorful plays, often about kings and leaders, as well as a penchant for comedy, satire, and social commentary. According to one contemporary account, he was an ‘hombre chistoso’ (funny man or joker). It is instructive that he was asked to oversee a comic writing festival in 1637. His talents and energies seemed to have outstripped the positions he was able to attain for himself as a person of modest background.

Though from a family of respectable, practicing Christians, Vélez

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6 Austria in these high aristocratic titles references the Spanish crown’s Hapsburg family lineage, not the geographical location of the kingdom.

7 See Bolaños (2001), 20.
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potentially suffered the stigma of being ‘New Christian’ – that is, of Jewish ancestry. The considerable swath of Iberia controlled by Christian rulers in the Middle Ages had large Jewish and Muslim populations; in some communities, they outnumbered Christians. Starting in the 1400s, a series of edicts and decrees, brutally enforced by the newly created Inquisition, effectively eliminated any openly practicing non-Christians from these territories. Meanwhile, in 1492, the last remaining Moorish-Islamic kingdom in Iberia fell under Christian control. The result was that, by the turn of the 16th century, all of Spain was by law monolithically Christian. In this lengthy and violent cultural upheaval, the critical year of which was 1492, many Jewish families ended up leaving Spain. Many, however, converted to Christianity and came to be known as *conversos* (converts) or ‘New Christians,’ to distinguish them from ‘Old Christians’ who reputedly could trace their bloodlines to places in Iberia untainted by Moorish or Jewish settlement. Ironically, many New Christians went on to enjoy positions of power and prestige in 16th- and 17th-century Spain, but only because they were able to shed, hide, or repudiate their family origins. Vélez’s shedding of his original name surname ‘Santander’ and taking on the more reputable Christian name ‘Guevara’ has been seen as such a move. What is distinctive about Vélez is not that he was a writer of *converso* origin but that his own sly winking reference to his heritage in his novel *El diablo cojuelo* helps us to establish him as one. He was one of the few literary figures of Spain’s Golden Age willing to admit it.

Sources and Contexts

‘Manly Women’ and Serranas

Spanish Golden Age playwrights frequently turned to source material to generate ideas for their plays. Such sources included novellas, folk tales, ballads, legends, histories, and lives of saints. Sometimes a single stanza of an old ballad would be enough to inspire an entire play. Successful plays

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8 Martín Ojeda and Peale have recently looked into this ancestry, which, in terms of practicing Jews in the playwright’s family, dates back to before 1492. Their argument, which challenges long-received notions about Vélez, would make any such stigma faint and remote. 
9 See Lee for an excellent analysis of what it meant to be a *converso* at this time.
10 See Urzáiz 39. Again, this has been challenged recently by Martín Ojeda and Peale.
11 For the above short biography, I have drawn on Bolaños (2001), Davies, Urzáiz, and Ziomek and Hughes. Davies is particularly specific in dealing with the references to *converso* heritage in Vélez’s writing.
then spurred imitations, which in turn inspired new versions of these plays, creating a dense intertextual web of dramatic works.

In the broadest terms, Gila exemplifies the Golden Age trope of the *mujer varonil* or ‘manly woman,’ a tremendously popular figure in plays of the time, and one that seemed to have particular appeal to Vélez: one-quarter of his surviving plays feature some version of this character.\(^1\) The *mujer varonil* always enacts some sort of gender transgression, either by displaying masculine characteristics, dressing as a man, or creating some gender-related subterfuge to achieve her ends. Audiences at the time were drawn to these vibrant, sympathetic heroines, and seemed to have delighted in seeing them cross social boundaries that would have been proscribed to women off stage.\(^1\) For many male viewers (and some women), there was also the eroticism of seeing women dressed as men on stage, a costuming that would have been more revealing than standard female attire of the time. Interestingly, reverse transgressions – the dandy or effeminate man – were much less common on stage, and very rarely did male characters dress as women. Given femininity’s traditional subordination to masculinity in the hierarchy of power and status, it makes sense that a woman who acted masculine could be applauded as a heroine and protagonist, while a man who acted feminine was a figure of shame and scorn.\(^1\)

Critics have articulated many varieties of the *mujer varonil*, some of which find resonance in *Mountain Girl*. These include the *bella cazadora* (beautiful huntress), who echoes Artemis/Diana of classical mythology; the *bandolera*, (highwaywoman), who assaults passersby on rural backroads; the *donzella guerrera* (warrior maiden); and the *asesina*, (murderess). All of these types were in particular vogue in the early decades of the 17th century.\(^1\)

The particular incarnation of *mujer varonil* that is the foundation for Vélez’s play is the *serrana*, a term which generically could refer to any young rural woman of Spain’s highlands but more specifically invoked the trope of a dangerous female of the mountains. The prototype is found in Juan Ruiz’s 14th-century epic poem, *El libro de buen Amor* (*The Book of Good Love*), which depicts an enticing mountain woman who lives among high

\(^{12}\) Lundelius 220.

\(^{13}\) McKendrick has written the most influential book on the *mujer varonil*, though her conclusions have been disputed by many, including Bradbury.

\(^{14}\) See, for example, Martin (2008), 114.

\(^{15}\) Parr and Albuixech elaborate on how *Mountain Girl* merges many of these tropes. For a description of the warrior maiden tradition, see Martin (2008), 116–23.
passes associated with beasts and bandits and takes the sexual initiative with male travelers she encounters. This *serrana* tradition, as Adrienne Laskier Martín has shown in her *Erotic Philology of Golden Age Spain*, casts the mountainous regions of Spain as dark zones of transgression – deformed and sinful places, ‘inhospitable wastelands inhabited by monstrous and violent women who beat and rape male travelers.’ Here, a mountain range becomes the supine ‘female erotic body par excellence’ (155).

Related to this larger Iberian tradition are legends associated with La Vera, a highland region in west central Spain, in the northern part of Extremadura, not far from Portugal. A number of traditional ballads recorded in 15th-century *romanceros* (ballad books) tell the story of a *serrana*, originally from the small town of Garganta la Olla. These ballads were part of a larger oral tradition which would have been known to Vélez’s audiences in 1613 and which have continued to be part of popular lore. Somewhat less monstrous than other *serranas*, Garganta la Olla’s mountain girl is a fair-skinned beauty who invites men up to her mountain hut for a meal and a sexual encounter, then murders them so they will not go back to town to spread word of her dishonor. Martín has likened her to a black widow spider who kills men after mating (159). The ballads are always told from the point of view of an unnamed male narrator who has managed to survive the encounter. In one version:

\[
\text{Allá en Garganta la Olla,} \\
\text{en la Vera de Plasencia,} \\
\text{salteóme una serrana,} \\
\text{blanca, rubia, ojimorena.} \\
\text{Trae el cabello trenzado} \\
\text{debajo de una montera} \\
\text{y, porque no la estorbara,} \\
\text{muy corta la faldamenta.} \\
\text{Entre los montes andaba} \\
\text{de una en otra ribera,} \\
\text{con una honda en sus manos} \\
\text{y en sus hombros una flecha.} \\
\text{Tomárame por la mano}
\]

16 There are around 20 different versions of the ballad, according to the celebrated ethnographers the Pidal brothers, as cited in Parr and Albuixech (19). McKendrick gives it as 21 versions (277). Strother argues that the play is not sourced in the ballad tradition per se but in a larger ‘mythic system’ that predates and transcends any specific version of it (166).
y me llevara a su cueva;  
por el camino que iba  
tantas de las cruces viera.  
Atrevíme y preguntéle  
qué cruces eran aquellas,  
y me respondió diciendo  
que de hombres que muerto hubiera.  
Esto me responde y dice,  
como entre medio risueña:  
Y así haré de ti, cuitado,  
cuando mi voluntad sea.  
Diome yesca y pedernal  
para que lumbre encendiera,  
y mientras que la encendía,  
aliña una grande cena;  
de perdices y conejos  
su pretina saca llena,  
y después de haber cenado  
me dice: —Cierra la puerta.  
Hago como que la cierro,  
y la dejé entreabierta.  
Desnudóse y desnudéme  
y me hace acostar con ella.  
Cansada de sus deleites  
muy bien dormida se queda,  
y en sintiéndola dormida  
sálgome la puerta afuera.  
Los zapatos en la mano  
 llevo porque no me sienta,  
y poco a poco me salgo  
y camino a la ligera.  
Más de una legua había andado  
sin revolver la cabeza,  
y cuando mal me pensé  
yo la cabeza volviera.  
Y en esto la vi venir;  
bramando como una fiera,  
saltando de canto en canto,
Introduction

brincando de peña en peña.
Aguarda [me dice], aguarda,
espera, mancebo, espera,
me llevarás una carta
escrita para mi tierra.
Toma, llévala a mi padre,
dirásle que quedo buena.
Enviadla vos con otro,
o sed vos la mensajera.¹⁷

(There in Garganta la Olla
In La Vera of Plasencia,
I was assaulted by a serrana,
Of fair skin, light hair, and dark eyes.
Under her head-covering
She wore her hair in braids,
And so as to be unencumbered,
She had a very short skirt.
She wandered in the mountains
From one river valley to another,
With a slingshot in her hands
And an arrow over her shoulder.
She took me by the hand
And led me to her cave,
And along the way there,
I could see many crosses.
I dared to ask her
What the crosses were for,
And she answered, telling me
That they were men she’d killed.
So she answered, and then
She says, half-laughing:
Beware, I’ll do the same to you
If the feeling strikes me.
She gave me flint and tinder
For me to light a fire,

¹⁷ I am using the version of the ballad reprinted in McKendrick (277), taken from a Menéndez y Pelayo appendix to an anthology of lyric poetry. For other versions, see Gutiérrez Macías.
And while I lit it,
She arranged a large supper,
Her waist bag stuffed full
Of partridges and rabbits,
And after we had suppered,
She tells me: Close the door.
I pretend to close it,
But left it half open.
She got undressed, and so did I,
And she had me go to bed with her.
Exhausted from her delights,
She fell asleep very soundly,
And when I sensed she was sleeping,
I slipped out the door.
My shoes, I kept in my hand,
So she wouldn’t hear me.
And little by little I made my way out,
Treading very carefully.
I had walked more than a league
Before I turned my head,
And then I made the mistake
Of turning my head around:
In that moment, I saw her coming,
Roaring like a beast,
Jumping from stone to stone,
Leaping from cliff to cliff.
Stop, [she tells me], stop,
Wait, young man, wait,
You will carry a letter from me,
Written for the land I’m from.
Take it, bring it to my father,
Tell him I am all right.
You can send it with another
Or you can be the messenger.)

Lope de Vega also wrote a play entitled *La serrana de la Vera* (c. 1599–1600). This work draws on the same ballad tradition and was a likely point of reference for Vélez. Lope’s version, however, has only faint similarities to Vélez’s. The one direct point of coincidence is a female character who
takes to the hills partway through the play to become a bandolera to avenge an insult done to her by a man. Lope’s serrana, Leonarda, however, serves as protagonist for what ultimately plays out as romantic comedy: the tale of a noble woman who through a series of mix-ups and misunderstandings temporarily takes refuge in the mountains. The play ends with her happy marriage and reintegration into society. Vélez, in contrast, allies himself more closely to the dangerous, forbidding serrana of the ballad tradition. In working from the ballad material, Vélez crafted the bolder, more violent and disturbing play, one that pushed limits and challenged conventions.

Vélez de Guevara’s version seems to have found an audience in its time too, for it in turn inspired other dramatic versions of the serrana legend, including one performed by Jusepa Vaca herself in 1618 for Corpus Christi celebrations.  

**Historical Events**

Though not exactly a history play, *Mountain Girl* has a defined historical milieu. It features, in supporting roles, illustrious personages from Spanish history. Vélez situates us in the reign of the famed Reyes Católicos (the Catholic Kings), Ferdinand and Isabella. Their marriage in 1469 joined their respective kingdoms of Aragon and Castile into a powerful alliance that, after surviving a bloody Iberian civil war against Portugal and its allies, led to the unification of the modern nation now known as Spain and ushered in, with due brutality, a great age of Spanish imperial power. The momentous year in Ferdinand and Isabel’s reign was 1492, when they conquered the kingdom of Granada (the last Islamic territory in Spain), expelled all practicing Jews, and authorized Columbus’s long-sought journey to explore a western trade route to the Indies. For early 17th-century audiences, these monarchs were heroic figures – the founding father and mother of the nation – and it was not unusual for them to be featured in plays, most famously Lope’s *Fuente Ovejuna*, written around the same time as *Mountain Girl*. Though it is common to think of Ferdinand and Isabella as Spain’s first modern monarchs, they also can be seen as the last medieval rulers of Spain in that they wielded power personally; with no fixed capital, they travelled constantly throughout their territories to administer disputes, dispense justice, and resolve grievances (Kamen 27). This highly mobile, personalized aspect of their rule is accurately represented in *Mountain Girl*.

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18 See Reyes Peña 86, as well as Boyle 79, for more on this performance.
Mountain Girl telescopes, with considerable creative license, various events from the late 1400s. In Act One, we hear news of the siege of Alhama, a key moment in Ferdinand and Isabella’s decades-long, on-again-off-again war for Granada. Ostensibly, then, we are in 1482, the year of that siege. However the play also dwells at length on the death of their only son, eighteen-year-old Juan, Prince of Asturias. The news of his grave condition, recounted at the end of Act One, was actually delivered in 1497. The play presents the circumstances of his death as quasi-heroic, involving a daring ride on horseback. In real life, they were murkier, and may have involved either tuberculosis or, as was rumored, sexual over-exertion. Vélez is thus giving his own highly subjective version of historical events, using them flexibly and strategically for thematic and dramatic counterpoint, while also placing his narrative in an era roughly contemporaneous with the serrana of popular ballads. This is in sharp contrast to Lope, who weaves no history into his La serrana de la Vera; the circumstances are presented there as contemporary to the time of his audience. It should be recalled, the serrana ballads likewise have no historical or public dimension. Vélez deploys history, therefore, to give his play a social-political dimension, to invest it with proportions of myth and legend associated with great events and people of the past.

Rodrigo Téllez de Girón is also a well-known personage from Spanish history. In his powerful inherited position as Master of Calatrava, he leads a military order that was pivotal to the Christian Reconquest of Spain. He also figures prominently in Fuente Ovejuna. Gila’s antagonist, Captain Don Lucas de Carvajal, is, as far as I can tell, a fictional creation, but the Carvajals were indeed a powerful clan from Plasencia who were closely allied with Ferdinand and Isabella; by the late 1400s, the Carvajals were already occupying important religious and administrative posts in Castile. The name would have been an illustrious one to audiences in 1613, although, as I will show, not one without associations of tainted lineage.

Mountain Girl depicts a period before the modern nation-state, and therefore a society in which there were no standing armies. Ferdinand and

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19 More subtle anachronism is built into this timeline, since Ferdinand and Isabella did not themselves gain direct control of Plasencia from local nobles until 1485 (Kamen 21). The play presents them as already having control over Plasencia, though various moments—including Giraldo’s resistance to the Captain in the opening scene—suggest their rule there is not yet fully implemented.

20 ‘Carvajal’ is sometimes given as ‘Caravajal.’ I have standardized the orthography for this edition.
Isabella were dependent on militias of Christian warriors like the Order of Calatrava – founded in the Middle Ages for the purposes of the Crusades – for military endeavors. They were also dependent on alliances with local noblemen like the fictional Don Lucas, who could muster local troops for national service, as Don Lucas attempts to do in Garganta la Olla, one of the towns under his sway. In Act Three, Gila is hunted down by the Hermandad (Brotherhood), which here is portrayed as a sort of royally authorized posse. These were in fact local police forces in Castile that, after the 1460s, came under the control of Ferdinand and Isabella (Kamen 17–19). Though off on the details, Mountain Girl does nevertheless portray with rough accuracy the array of armed forces that by the 1480s were working together under the banner of Ferdinand and Isabella to impose order upon and extirpate dissent within Spain.\footnote{See Kamen for the most thorough analysis of this dynamic.}

This heroic historical landscape of Christian nationalist reconquest, of peninsular purification and unification, was a rich source of inspiration for the comedia. It was a landscape where manly, warrior women were apt to be found. Tirso de Molina’s Antona García (published in 1635) is another play about a larger-than-life peasant woman from western Spain who undertakes heroic deeds of courage and strength. Though she is based on an historical figure who fought in the wars against Portugal in the 1470s, Tirso’s treatment of her is exaggerated, colorful, folkloric. Less folkloric in treatment is Laurencia in Fuente Ovejuna – another fierce daughter of small-town Spain who, in this case, leads an uprising against a brutal overlord. She is a fictional character, though the events themselves are historical to 1476. All these 17th-century versions of 15th-century women bathe in the glow of the savvy and powerful Isabella, the last woman to fully share in the power of the Spanish throne. Isabella presides over a psycho-historical landscape that, from the nostalgic perspective of 1613, engendered women of uncommon fierceness and strength. The historical milieu therefore raises the stakes for Gila’s conflict, amplifying and intensifying it, even though her story leads in a far more tragic direction than those of other mujeres varoniles. In fact, most striking about Vélez’s play is how it takes tropes, ideas, and characters common to the day and inverts, challenges, or complicates them. The result is a play full of surprises.