

Early Modern Gossip, Rumour and Reputation

The early modern period (c. 1500–1800) saw profound transformations in society, politics, and culture. Gossip played a crucial yet often overlooked role in shaping these developments. Traditionally dismissed as trivial or immoral, gossip has long been associated with women and perceived as a form of idle chatter. Early definitions of gossip in the 16th century linked it specifically to female speech, reinforcing the idea of gossip as a language of powerlessness or a subversive women's culture. However, historical research has increasingly recognized gossip as a complex social and political tool, used not only to forge and police community bonds but also as an informal means of influencing reputations, shaping public opinion, and enforcing moral values.

Gossip was not merely a personal or domestic concern but also an instrument of power, used at different levels of society—from the elite to marginalized groups. Furthermore, while gossip remained closely linked to gender, new studies have highlighted its importance among men as well, challenging rigid stereotypes. This conference seeks to further the interdisciplinary study of gossip, recognizing its role in early modern society as more than mere idle talk.

Organizing Committee:

Ineke Huysman (Huygens Institute)

Gijs Versteegen (Universidad Rey Juan Carlos)

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Huygens Institute

NL-Lab

The Dutch Embassy



Madrid, 19 and 20 November 2025



Early Modern Gossip, Rumours and Reputation

Conference organized by:

Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (Madrid) /Huygens Institute (Amsterdam)

Day 1 – Wednesday 19 November 2025

Locations:

Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Plaza de Manuel Becerra, 14, — Madrid

10:00–10:30 Registration and coffee

10:30–10:35 Welcome and opening remarks

Gijs Versteegen — Universidad Rey Juan Carlos
Ineke Huysman — Huygens Institute Amsterdam

10:35–11:30 Keynote I: Reputation: a Philosophical Approach

Gloria Origgi — Institut Jean Nicod Paris

11:30–12:00 Coffee break

12:00–13:30 Session 1: Codes, Morality and Public Opinion

The People are a Savage Beast? Vox Populi and Gossip

Matthias Roick — Polish Academy of Sciences

Truths and lies in courtly conversations: flattering, slandering, pretending and dissimulating

María Díez Yáñez — Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Gossip and Courtly Love in Batallas y Quinquagenas

Gijs Versteegen — Universidad Rey Juan Carlos

13:30–15:30 Lunch

15:30–16:30 Session 2: Women, Power and Diplomacy

News from the Harem

Rosanne Baars — Leiden University

Early Modern Interpol

Tessa de Boer — Independent researcher

16:30–17:00 Tea break

17:00–18:30 Session 3: Epistolary Networks and Information Circuits

Spies, Scandals, and Secrets: Wicquefort's Letters

Lydia Boer — Leiden University

Early Modern Letters Online: Noise & Tittle-Tattle?

Miranda Lewis — University of Oxford

Banten Calling: Colonial News, Rumours and Diplomacy

Krijn Korsman — Amsterdam University

Day 2 – Thursday 20 November 2025

Locations:

Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Plaza de Manuel Becerra nº 14, 28028 Madrid

Evening Concert: Real Oratorio Del Caballero de Gracia, C. del Caballero de Gracia, 5, Madrid

09:30–10:00 Registration and coffee

10:00–10:05 Opening day 2: Ineke Huysman — Huygens Institute Amsterdam

10:05–11:00 Keynote II: Fake News, Rumors, and Gossip during the Reign of Carlos II, 1665-1700: Political and Diplomatic Contexts

Silvia Z. Mitchell — Purdue University/West Lafayette, USA

11:00–11:30 Coffee break

11:30–13:00 Session 4: Court Intrigues and the Politics of Reputation

Different Forms of Gossip Sharing at the Court of Louis XIV

Jonathan Spangler — Manchester Metropolitan University

The poison of words: rumours, gossip and moral discourse in the view of María de Guevara, Countess of Escalante (1664)

Ezequiel Borgognoni — Universidad Rey Juan Carlos

Rumor as a Mechanism for Discrediting Female Agency during the War of the Spanish Succession

José Antonio López Anguita — Universidad Complutense de Madrid

13:00–14:30 Lunch

14:30–16:00 Session 5: Satire, Culture and the Senses of Gossip

Gossip and Political Ghosts. Satire in the late 17th century

Marie-Charlotte Le Bailly — Hendrik Conscience Heritage Library Antwerp

Being in the Nose: Rumors about Smell and the Smell of Rumor in Early Modern Europe

Kerrewin van Blanken — Leiden University

The Field Has Eyes and the Wood Has Ears

Jeroen Vandommele — National Library of the Netherlands

16:00–16:15 Closing remarks: Gijs Versteegen — Universidad Rey Juan Carlos

20:00–21:30 Evening Concert: *Cuerdas Conectadas: A Spanish-Dutch Musical Dialogue*

Word of welcome from Hanna Schildt, Head of Communications & Culture - Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Spain

La Sfera Armoniosa - Lydia Boer (organ), Mike Fentross (theorbe, guitar), Ineke Huysman (speaker), Lette Vos (vocals)

Location: Real Oratorio Del Caballero de Gracia, C. del Caballero de Gracia, 5, Madrid