
Laura R. Bass and Margaret R. Greer, eds. *Approaches to Teaching Early Modern Spanish Drama*. New York: MLA, 2006. 281p.

ANA ISABEL CARBALLAL
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA – OMAHA

This volume belongs to a collection series prepared by Joseph Gibaldi with the purpose of helping instructors learn effective ways in teaching specific literary genres, works, and authors in undergraduate and graduate classes in higher education. Edited by Bass and Greer, it is a well-researched and thorough introduction to the different works, resources, and approaches used in the American university today to teach drama of the Spanish Golden Age in combination with other social and literary discourses. One of the interesting features of this volume is the unambiguous distribution of its contents, which not only makes it easy for their reading but also provides wonderful tools for quick reference. The book is divided in two parts. The first part, titled “Materials,” is devoted to an in-depth review of the anthologies, series, bilingual editions, and translations of the major Golden Age works in Spanish published in the United States and abroad. Besides a complete reference to secondary sources, including scholarly studies on each subject and author in the form of books and articles, it offers analysis of the main academic journals dedicated to the study of this period of Spanish literature. At the end of this part, there are also a few pages listing a series of visual supports such as illustrated books, movies, and internet resources that are essential in this age of technology and indispensable for any instructor who wants to attract and engage students in the classroom.

The second part of the book, titled “Approaches,” is a collection of 25 articles, written by some of the most experienced teachers in the field, addressing some of the challenges instructors are confronted with, and revealing the practices and pedagogies applied successfully to the teaching and learning of the theater of the Spanish Golden Age. One of those challenges, bridging the gap in space and time between living in Spain in the 16th and 17th centuries and living in the United States in the 21st century is answered by instructors who open their classes with a consideration of those plays as products of social processes that should be studied, such as: the difference between *honor* and *honra* at all social levels, the definition of the concepts such as *limpieza de sangre* (blood purity) and the consideration of women and marriage in the Spain of that time. Innovative approaches are also the use of Italian renaissance art, emblems, and dresses as a way to help the students learn about the culture of Spain, show them the interconnections among different European countries, and make them aware of the social differences and mobility of the time.

A second challenge taken up by the authors is to provide students with a theoretical background that will help them to combine the study of Spanish theater with the most important issues addressed by language and literary theory. In this regard, for some of these authors, *polimetría* (poetic meters) must be studied as a critical example of how the different discourses were formulated and how the use of one meter or other could defy the social and political order. Besides a historical and literary approach to the dramas, it is also necessary to analyze notions such as poetic discourse, dramatic space, and gender issues, this last component being crucial to a course on Spanish plays written by women.

A third issue of discussion is the study of these plays within a comparative context that will aim to connect them with some of the most famous literature written in the same period but in different countries or with similar topics, contents, characters, and points of view. Examples of this are courses where students are forced to make connections between the Spanish *comedia* of the 16th and 17th centuries and the Greek tragedy, the theatrical performances of the 20th century in Spain and even the American sitcom. There are also courses that bring together the Spanish plays with those written at the same time in England and France, resulting in a very interesting mixture between, for instance, *Life is a Dream* by Calderón and *The Tempest* by Shakespeare, or between Lope's *Fuenteovejuna* and Molière's *Le Misanthrope*. These juxtapositions not only compel the students to realize the economic, social, and political connections between countries but also the emergence in all of them of an ever more powerful middle class.

The last nine articles of the volume address the study of these Golden Age plays from a cross-cultural and transatlantic perspective and the use of pedagogical and technological innovations to attract the attention and increase the understanding of these increasingly technologically engaged students. The connections between Spain and America in the study of the Golden Age facilitates the learning and application of postcolonial theories and the realization of the influence between the colonizers and the colonies that started in modern times and continues today. Pedagogically, it is important to notice the use of trials where students have to act out the roles of specific play characters, analyzing and judging their behavior, and the use of mentors within the class that forces the students to stop being passive recipients of knowledge to become a part of the plays, do research and data collection and share their findings with the rest of the class. Technologically, the use of web sites, streaming video, Macromedia Flash animations (used to demonstrate some theatrical concepts), library electronic reserves, and particularly notable, the creation of annotated editions of the plays read in class by the students themselves, are some of the ideas these scholars propose in their essays.

Finally, it is important to notice two sections at the end of this volume; one, a glossary of key terms, that should be shared with students, and two, a list of works cited, plays, and playwrights that complements very nicely the first part of the volume and that will become very handy when instructors get ready to put together a course of these characteristics.

As stated, this volume could become a wonderful tool for new and more seasoned instructors of Golden Age. Its clarity and the variety of approaches described offer an indispensable collection of resources that will help towards the solution of many challenges. Maybe the only criticism would be that at times some authors focused more on the content of the course than on the pedagogical development of it, which may cause some readers difficulty in seeing how these concepts are better applied to a particular course or audience. Some of the articles lack an analysis of the possible problems that may result from the implementation of certain types of instruction. Although nearly every scholar reported success using these approaches, sometimes readers may miss ideas on how to apply these different approaches to integrate the various learning styles of their students. ✱