

**Review of *El teatro español del siglo de oro: métodos y enfoques críticos***

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**Abstract:**

This article is a review of *El teatro español del siglo de oro: métodos y enfoques críticos*.

**Keywords:** Book Review | Theater | Spanish Classical Theatre | Literary Criticism

**\*\*\*Note: Full text of article below**

the “*comedia de teatro calderoniana* está también íntimamente ligada al edificio teatral, a su estructura arquitectónica, a la organización interior del espacio teatral donde el espectador percibe ocularmente la acción de la comedia” (151).

The book’s examination ends with Amadei-Pulice’s “Conclusiones,” a reiteration of the principal arguments with additional supporting evidence about epistemological issues concerning seventeenth-century artistic and scientific thought. Following this section are the endnotes, the bibliography, and thirty four pages of reproduced drawings of stage machinery, scenery, and designs that enhance her textual explanations. Regrettably there is no index. With its solid theoretical basis and its clarity of expression, this volume is a welcome contribution to Calderonian studies.

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*El teatro español del siglo de oro: métodos y enfoques críticos.* Actas del V Coloquio del G.E.S.T.E. *Criticón* [Toulouse: Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail], 42 (1988): 258 pp.

This volume opens with a prologue recalling those elements of the 1988 G.E.S.T.E. symposium which cannot be captured in print, such as “la sonriente fraternidad de los participantes y la fervorosa comunión intelectual y amistosa de tanto eminente crítico internacional.” Yet, in many ways, the text does manage to communicate the spirit of the conference. The reproductions of program materials and César Oliva’s masterful caricatures give one a sense of the ambience. Of more scholarly import is the inclusion of abstracts in Spanish, French and English that provide an excellent overview of the collection and summaries of the discussions that follow each article. These allow the reader to benefit from the dialogue—often a lively exchange of diverse opinions—generated by each study. One drawback of trying to convey the immediacy of the conference is that some of the essays read more as oral presentations than as published articles. Although the studies in question acknowledge their provisional nature, a few papers may leave the reader somewhat dissatisfied. For example, Milagros Ezquerro begins her semiotic analysis of *La cueva de Salamanca* by stating that she has “prescindido deliberadamente de toda erudición cervantista. No por falta de interés [sic], desde luego, sino por falta de competencia...” (42). In addition to the *actas* themselves, this issue

also includes several of the series' regular features, including a critical response and three book reviews.

As Marc Vitse points out in the closing article, "A modo de síntesis: arqueología y crítica, the collection proves difficult to synthesize because of the wide variety of methods employed and the diverse subjects addressed. In order to attempt an analysis, he divides the studies into four categories: a) "history of theatre," b) "theatre of history," c) "ahistorical theatre" and d) "the theatre in history." It might have been helpful if the essays appeared in similar groupings to those proposed by Vitse rather than following what seems to be an arbitrary order.

Luciano García Lorenzo's opening article, "Teatro clásico y crítica actual" analyses the state of contemporary scholarship from 1981 to 1988. In the closing portion of his essay, he outlines what he believes to be important areas requiring further investigation, including the need for collaborative, "encyclopedic" studies such as dictionaries of dramatic terminology and rigorous critical editions of works from the period. He also suggests the creation of a center for bibliographic information. To the several worthy areas he identifies, one might add a study of "teatro clásico" in the Americas, a possibility he seems to ignore when proposing "la catalogación y publicación de documentos sobre la historia teatral de numerosos lugares de España..." (37). In fact, of all the essays in the volume, only the one by Francisco Ruiz Ramón even mentions the importance of Hispanic classical theatre outside Spain.

The second essay by Milagros Ezquerro, "Análisis semiológico de *La cueva de Salamanca*" proposes a semiotic reading of the *entremés*. As the commentary following her piece attests, her presentation generated active discussion regarding the merits and limitations of a semiotic approach to literature. Trevor J. Dadson's article examines "Una comedia problemática: *El Emperador fingido* de Gabriel Bocángel," a work he criticizes for its "pésima estructura dramática." The only interesting facet of the play, in his point of view, is the presentation of the character Bernardo whom he describes as a "verdadero hijo de la tierra" (60).

In the third article, "Tipología de los *lazzi* en los pasos de Lope de Rueda," César Oliva not only examines the evolution of the definition of *paso* and its relationship with the Italian tradition, he also considers the importance of the actor's code of mimic and gesture for the study of theatre and proposes a method of studying the "didascalias no textuales" involved. José María Ruano de la Haza, in "Hacia una metodología para la reconstrucción de la puesta en escena de la comedia en los teatros comerciales del siglo XVII" also considers elements belonging to the realm of performance. He perceptively sustains that, as critics, we must bear in mind the impact of physical staging on

the *comedia*. Although only one of the diagrams he includes is labelled, the illustrations do serve to help the reader visualize the spaces he describes. José María Díez Borque, in his study "Obritas de teatralidad y géneros fronterizos en la dramaturgia del XVII" argues convincingly that we need to expand our consideration to include theatrical manifestations often overlooked in favor of "canonical" genres.

In his study "El enredo y la Comedia: deslinde preliminar," Frédéric Serralta considers the role of "enredos" and proposes that critics adopt a "genetic" approach to complement other methodologies. He argues that by keeping in mind the creative possibilities and impossibilities faced by playwrights of the period, we can come to understand their work more completely. For example, he suggests that women often become the active forces in *enredos* as "una consecuencia directa de su inferioridad—en este caso, de su relativa irresponsabilidad—en la sociedad de su tiempo" (135). Although he uses this argument to contest Wardropper's earlier affirmation that "Aunque escrita por hombres, la comedia adopta un punto de vista femenino...para compensar a las víctimas de la injusta sociedad...", both scholars seem to conceive of *comedia* authorship as being the exclusive domain of men. The comments following the study reveal that the audience did question Serralta's classification of the role of women; however, none mentioned the need to reexamine such claims, given our growing awareness of the activities of women writers of the period.

Agustín de la Granja's study of "El entremés y la fiesta del Corpus" complements Oliva's and Díez Borque's essays as it examines the development of the *entremés* and its relationship to other terms including "paso." He proposes that far from being a "secondary, dependent" genre, the *entremés* enjoyed a considerable reign of autonomy. In the next study, "'Su Majestad habla, en fin / como quien tanto ha acertado': la conclusión ejemplar de *Fuente Ovejuna*," Victor Dixon reexamines the ending of the play, concluding that: "Difícilmente podríamos imaginar una escena final más calculada y equilibrada, que sintetizara mejor los distintos temas de la obra, o una serie de soluciones que complaciera más a todo el variado público de la época de Lope" (166). Ignacio Arellano's study, "Teoría dramática y práctica teatral: Sobre el teatro áulico y político de Bances Candamo" also offers a critical reexamination. In this case, he proposes that current interest in the political nature of Bances Candamo's production has obscured other important facets of his work, particularly the aulic element.

In the penultimate article, "Una anomalía sociocultural: la recepción hispana del teatro clásico español," Francisco Ruiz Ramón examines the "gap" that separates "the Hispanic world and its classical theatre." He suggests that

the solution to this crisis “consiste en leer e interpretar a los clásicos, no literalmente, sino haciendo contemporáneas las claves de lectura del texto.” His remarks sparked lively debate regarding contemporary stagings of the classics. While a few of the participants were concerned that this process might lead us away from the works themselves, others maintained that “cualquier artificio es válido con tal que no se traicione el original” (202). Marc Vitse’s closing remarks not only offer an insightful summary of the proceedings, but also raise important questions regarding their implications. He astutely warns against the divorce of criticism (portrayed as the arbitrary use of “subjective” methodologies) from history or archeology (perceived as the paradise of scientific objectivity) that some studies implicitly seem to evoke. He concludes by saying that our task is not only to study the historical reality of Golden Age theatre, but also to “translate” it into modern terms, to bring it to life.

Despite the shortcomings of a few of the selections, overall, the collection represents a significant contribution to our understanding of Spanish Classical Theatre in its different manifestations and should prove useful to scholars in the discipline. Moreover, it demonstrates the need for continued studies dedicated to this rich and varied field which we have only begun to explore.

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Vitse, Marc. *Eléments pour une théorie du théâtre espagnol du XVIIe siècle*. Toulouse: France-Ibérie Recherche, Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 1988. Paper. 719 pp.

This *thèse d’Etat*, which includes topics formulated in the medieval sense of *questiones disputatae*, is a fundamentally polemical work that makes two major contributions to our knowledge of the historical context and dramatic innovations of the *Comedia*.

First, Vitse addresses the issue of the concept of Golden-Age theater, dividing it arbitrarily, though conveniently, into two parts: a) the ethical controversy and b) the aesthetic controversy. Employing an historical methodology, he launches into revisionist readings of a) Cotarelo y Mori’s *Bibliografía de las controversias sobre la licitud del teatro en España* (1904) and b) Sánchez Escribano and Porqueras Mayo’s *Preceptiva dramática española del Renacimiento y el Barroco* (1965 and 1972).

In the first instance, he reformulates Cotarelo’s material (originally organized alphabetically) in a diachronic sense and also supplies eight “miss-