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Review: Women and power in the Spanish Theatre of the Golden Age: The figure of the Queen

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Mujer y poder en el teatro español del Siglo de Oro: La figura de la reina.

Ana Zúñiga Lacruz.

2 vols. Teatro del Siglo de Oro: Estudios de Literatura 124 and 125. Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 2015. xxi + 1,140 pp. €140.

Ana Zúñiga Lacruz's two-volume book is an impressive achievement: 1,140 pages documenting and categorizing 305 plays from early modern Spain that dramatize women in power. Specifically, she studies 240 feminine rulers: queens, consorts, infantas, princesses, and other women who wield or aspire to political power. Based on a dissertation written for the University of Navarra and winner of a prize for best doctoral thesis from TC/12, an association that encourages the use of new technologies in the study of early modern Spanish theater, this project at times resembles more a database in prose than a traditional work of research. It brings to mind Cayetano Barrera's classic

Catálogo bibliográfico and biográfico; the invaluable *Fuentes Para la Historia del Teatro en España* by J. E. Varey, N. D. Shergold, et al.; and, more recently, the excellent work carried out by Teresa Ferrer Vals and her team of researchers. The topic of gender, women, and power in Golden Age theater is an important and complicated one, and in this encyclopedic endeavor, Zúñiga goes well beyond listing titles, authors, and dates. In the short introduction and throughout the two volumes, Zúñiga addresses key topics, such as theories of kingship, attitudes toward gender, and the nature of feminine authority, often alluding to early modern treatises and incorporating recent criticism.

The work is comprised of four sections, with the first volume devoted to an exhaustive typology of different queens who appear in Golden Age theater: mythological, saintly, biblical, historical, and fictional, and including well-known figures such as Isabel de Castilla as well as obscure ones such as Petronila de Aragón and Rosimunda de Normandía. There are further subcategories as well within each general topic. For example, under historical queens, Zúñiga further differentiates between ancient history, European monarchs, and Spanish queens. After providing a brief background, she then lists all of the plays where these figures appear, providing synopses of the plots regardless of whether the women are protagonists, minor characters, or even passing allusions.

The second volume contains three sections, with the longest titled “Imagen de la Reina: Proyección, cualidades y atributos,” where the groupings become more specific and at times idiosyncratic. For example, Zúñiga groups queens according to whether they are beautiful or celibate, mothers, wives, widows, daughters, or usurpers. As in the first section, the author then alludes to all the plays that incorporate these figures or topics. It is clear that Zúñiga endeavored to elaborate a taxonomy that would allow her to account for the myriad manners in which these feminine characters are presented. At times, however, the categories become overly specific. Thus, under the overarching category of “Retórica estilística,” there is a subsection titled “Comparaciones, metáforas y correlaciones”; under that category, we have several groupings including “Alimentos,” “Biblia,” “Elementos fluviales,” “Flora,” and many more. Most of those, in turn, are subdivided even further, with “Fauna,” for example, documenting every play where queens are compared to deer, crocodiles, lambs, silkworms, and many other creatures. The third section is shorter than the previous two and deals with the more conventional classification of dramatic genres: tragedies, comedies, honor plays, and so on. The final main section, “Recapitulaciones,” includes a general conclusion, appendixes (listing, for example, the names of the characters in alphabetical order next to the plays where they appear), and some fifty pages of bibliography.

All of this makes for an often rewarding but at times exhausting reading experience. Plays and figures that are featured in one section will reappear in others under various categories. For example, the figure of Semiramis is introduced in the section on historical queens and then again in several other sections including mothers who are “Ominosas y desnaturaladas,” “Reinas usurpadoras,” and “Tiranícidas.” While the author may have felt that this fragmentation was necessary, it makes for a confusing

and frustrating read especially since the book does not include an index. Earlier, I called this work a database in prose and, indeed, it would have been useful if the editors had provided a DVD, like Ferrer Vals does in the important DICAT project, so that plays, topics, and figures could have been easily searched. Nevertheless, this is a book that captures the wealth of representations of feminine power in the *comedia* and will be tremendously useful to anyone interested in the interplay of gender and power in early modern Spain.

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