

## BOOK REVIEW

Las musas ramera: Oficio dramático y conciencia profesional en Lope de Vega. *Alejandro García Reidy*. Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2013. Pp. 440.

*Las musas ramera* is an illuminating reflection on the material conditions that shaped the career of Lope de Vega (1562–1635). Building on an award-winning dissertation, it constitutes the most comprehensive and systematic account of all the parameters that, starting in the 1580s, made the so-called *Fénix de los ingenios* such a pivotal and revered figure. In a little over four hundred pages, Alejandro García Reidy—who recently became news for discovering a lost Lope play, the first finding of this kind in many years—dismantles the notion of a careless writer prone to improvisation. Instead, he methodically reveals how Lope de Vega built his network of contacts and clients for whom he wrote ceaselessly and laboriously, producing some of the most relevant titles of the Spanish Golden Age and, for that matter, Spain’s literary history. He also reminds us that the author of classics like *El caballero de Olmedo* (The knight of Olmedo) and *Fuenteovejuna* (The sheep well) was extremely vigilant with the circulation of his plays, not only regarding the craft of actors and actresses onstage but also once they were published under his name in individual *Partes* and in collective volumes. The result is a complete study that unveils a very delicate field of forces surrounding Lope’s dramatic production by combining a set of analytical tools borrowed from cultural sociology, urban and performance studies, and history of the book offering the most thorough account to date of his professionalization in these tumultuous but transformative years. It adds its name to a series of studies—like those of Francisco Rico on Cervantes (2005), Carlos Gutiérrez on Quevedo (2005), Antonio Sánchez Jiménez on Lope the poet (2006), Enrique García Santo-Tomás on Salas Barbadillo (2008), and Don Cruickshank on Calderón (2009)—that have recently provided a detailed account

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of how the most egregious literary careers fared within (and against) the commercial pressures of Hapsburg Madrid.<sup>1</sup>

The book is divided into five chapters, accompanied by a prologue, a conclusion, and an index. The first chapter traces what the author calls the “conciencia profesional” (15) of the early modern writer, along with new notions of authorship within the legal parameters of the time, in which one can already see a critical strategy that works well within the argument, that is, a taste for the connection and comparison with court painters (57, 64–66, 228–36) as well as with fellow dramatists in places like England and France (259–62, 370–72, etc.). The author is a learned and subtle reader who moves with ease in the realms of history and philology, and the passages devoted to playwrights beyond the confines of the Iberian Peninsula are always insightful. Chapter 2 enters into the world of theater(s) and tackles Lope’s early successes in the last two decades of the sixteenth century. Its pages reveal the rich network of clients for whom secular and religious pieces were written, from the audiences of the playhouses (*corrales*) to the private chambers of the aristocracy. The pages on Lope’s dealings with specific *hombres de teatro* (114–18, 124), for example, are extremely useful and illuminating. Lope’s life was peppered with scandal and tragedy, and his dramatic output cannot be understood without taking into consideration the intimate—and oftentimes fraught—relationships he had with actresses, company owners, and choreographers, not to mention printers and fellow dramatists with whom he competed for the favor of the crown. He was in touch with the high and the low, with the key players of the time as well as with those in the margins of society, whose language and humor he incorporated into his work to the delight of his audiences. He breathed and lived theater as a student and as a secretary, as a soldier and as a priest, and wrote incessantly for over six decades, earning and spending large amounts of money (167–99, 285–90). It is precisely this intensity in his approach to life, I have always believed, that makes his writing so pleasurable to read. García Reidy delves into the archives for economic data that help him furnish a telling portrait of how Lope made his fortune and what expenses he incurred and aptly connects his private economy with that of his friends and those he made dealings with, like the printers who published him (33) and the noblemen who protected him (29, 47). Literary

1. Francisco Rico, *El texto del “Quijote”: Preliminares a una ecdótica del Siglo de Oro* (Universidad de Valladolid, 2005); Carlos Gutiérrez, *La espada, el rayo y la pluma: Quevedo y los campos literario y de poder* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005); Antonio Sánchez Jiménez, *Lope pintado por sí mismo: Mito e imagen del autor en la poesía de Lope de Vega* (London: Tamesis, 2006); Enrique García Santo-Tomás, *Modernidad bajo sospecha: Salas Barbadillo y la cultura material del siglo XVII* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2008); Don Cruickshank, *Don Pedro Calderón* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

reputation, argues the third chapter, was no doubt beneficial to Lope, but it also turned against him when, as early as 1603, a number of unscrupulous publishers began printing his plays without his permission. If he had already displayed a constant tension in his 1609 manifesto *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias* (New art of writing plays) regarding his status as a highly popular yet erudite poet, as the fourth chapter indicates, his maturity as a playwright, argues the last and final one, was also the period in which he had to fight back with a number of writings aimed at regaining control over his own theater. To this end it is always paramount, as García Reidy reminds us time and again, to pay attention to his personal correspondence as well as to the paratexts that accompanied his major pieces, for it is in these “minor” compositions that the author tackles the issues that concerned him the most in the second half of his career. If some of these preoccupations had already been identified by most of his biographers, García Reidy’s account gives us a nuanced and balanced view of the problem from its different angles, including a much-needed contextualization of the fortunes of the printing press in the first half of the seventeenth century. The portrait that emerges is that of a Lope de Vega who is more human and less mythical, less mystified and more shaped by the material (prices of books, copyright issues, currency fluctuations) and societal practices (patronage, commissions, literary prizes) of his time.

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