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Review of Luis R. Corteguera, *Death by Effigy. A Case from the Mexican Inquisition.*

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Luis R. Corteguera. *Death by Effigy. A Case from the Mexican Inquisition.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. 222 pp.

In *Death by Effigy*, Luis Corteguera carefully traces an investigation conducted by the Mexican tribunal of the Spanish Inquisition between 1578 and 1582. In July 1578, an effigy, dressed in a *sambenito* – the Inquisition's penitential garb – labeled with a placard identifying the figure with a much despised local man, arranged above a pile of kindling and marked by other symbols, appeared overnight, with two further *sambenitos* with signs flanking it, on the façade of the church in Tecamachalco, a small town about eighty miles southeast of Mexico City. Local authorities – the regional secular official and Inquisition commissioner – immediately began an investigation and the inquisitors in Mexico City quickly took an interest in the case. With a rapidly growing list of suspects, the case ground to a halt by September; it was re-opened three years later following the spontaneous appearance of a man with further testimony before the inquisitors in Mexico City. Many twists and turns and another nine months of investigation later, three men and a woman were convicted and sentenced, their guilt publicly displayed in the cathedral and in procession through the streets of the viceregal capital. Framed by a preface, prologue, and epilogue, the book's chapters are organized to both follow the case chronologically and to highlight the experiences of the individual people caught up in it. Through this vivid and engagingly written account of a local scandal and the attempts to uncover its authors, Corteguera crafts a narrative rich with insights into the social, institutional, and cultural history of the early modern Hispanic world.

The study calls attention to the Spanish Inquisition's pursuit of not only heresy and doctrinal error, but also the usurping of its symbols and authority. With a cogent explanation of the use and making of effigies, a less examined piece of the inquisitorial repertoire, it locates the objects as part of broader modes of judicial practice and visual communication. Illuminating how the Inquisition's symbols were creatively appropriated and reimagined to serve particular aims, Corteguera communicates with important veins of recent scholarship, reflecting on how individuals drew upon the symbolic vocabularies available to them and on how honor and authority were contested across early modern societies.

Death by Effigy gives a visceral sense of how scandal, inquisitorial investigation, imprisonment, and interrogative torture impacted individual lives. It nicely complements other scholarship that has mined inquisitorial prosecutions to expose social relations in a particular local context. It also addresses institutional history, taking the officials seriously as historical actors and attempting to unravel inquisitorial reasoning at various junctures in the case. Especially valuable is the attention to change over time and to how the Spanish Inquisition was shaped by

its vast geography. Corteguera observes: "In 1578, the Mexican Inquisition was a newly established institution still trying to assert its authority in the viceroyalty" (20). His analysis suggests how dynamic that process of constructing authority was, as inquisitorial activities and the understanding of them varied from small towns like Tecamachalco to viceregal capitals like Mexico City to Castile. Mobility also shaped the four-year saga; a complex mix of itineraries and life experiences marked the officials involved in the case and the people they investigated, and it was no simple feat to track potential witnesses.

Methodologically, the book is rooted in a venerable tradition of microhistory that makes inquisition records yield insights into the social fabric and political and intellectual culture of particular places. Corteguera uses the Tecamachalco case to explore such aspects of society in colonial Mexico as gender, ethnicity, race, language, and socioeconomic status. He employs several layers of analysis, allowing readers to see the inhabitants of Tecamachalco simultaneously as residents of a small town, as people tied to regional patterns of travel and trade, and as participants in networks that spanned the Atlantic. He offers a glimpse of how institutions and modes of communication initially developed in late medieval Europe were remade in other contexts, and shows how a single interlude in one small place can be made to illuminate issues of significance to the broader early modern Atlantic arena.

In addition to its value for scholars, *Death by Effigy* would be an excellent and accessible book to use in the classroom. It could be used to explore issues of communication – insult, libel, rumor, testimony, memory, and visual representation – in the early modern world or to add an important trans-Atlantic dimension to Inquisition courses. There is a lucid description of Inquisition sources and their difficulties and persistent attention to issues of terminology and translation. With grace, efficiency, and verve, Corteguera has meticulously reconstructed a single scandal and its investigation and then drawn upon his command of scholarship on the early modern world to make the episode in Tecamachalco open up a broader analytical issues.

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