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Review of: María M. Carrión, *Subject Stages: Marriage, Theatre, and the Law in Early Modern Spain*

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María M. Carrión. *Subject Stages: Marriage, Theatre, and the Law in Early Modern Spain*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. 240 pp.

María M. Carrión first conceived of this book in the early 1990s as an attempt to disprove José Antonio Maravall's assertion that Baroque culture, including theater, served primarily as propaganda for imposing patriarchal, hierarchical, and Catholic ideas onto early modern Spaniards. While she admits that scholars no longer view drama and literature this way, nevertheless Carrión pressed on with her commitment to demonstrate that the Spanish stage offered different, subversive models of marriage, gender roles, and sexuality to its audience than the orthodox model that the Church and state encouraged. In particular, she explores the connections between the law and the theater and the ways they both imagine marriage. Carrión opens with a discussion of the laws governing marriage in early modern Spain and the court system that enforced them. She then turns her attention to a play about marriage put on for the arrival of Anna de Austria to marry Philip II in 1570, which she calls the birth of the *comedia*. Next she analyzes honor and wife murder in Calderón's *El médico de su honra*, and then considers masochism in the plot of Lope de Vega's *El perro del hortelano*. Carrión turns her attention to the transvestitism of Tirso de Molina's *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* and ends with a discussion of Cervantes's *El entremés del juez de los divorcios*, which she compares, oddly, to a game of tic-tac-toe.

The premise of this book is an intriguing one, promising to juxtapose the inherent theatricality of the courtroom with the central role that marriage and the law play in so many Golden Age plays. Unfortunately, this book is marred throughout with large, even grandiose claims coupled with a thin evidentiary basis, and the premise of the book is never really followed through. Carrión never explains why she chose these four plays, and not others, on which to focus. There is also a lack of sustained engagement with theory. Carrión picks up queer theory, Foucault, "disidentification," Derrida, and other theoretical ideas from time to time, but just as quickly discards them, without really employing them to help her analyze the plays in a meaningful way. She has an unexplained fixation on the power of the law as a disembodied force unto itself. Not only does Carrión ignore how courts enforced, or did not enforce, the laws, despite an entire chapter devoted to the courts. She also ignores all other social pressures, as if the law was the only thing forbidding transvestitism, or the breaking up of marriages, or

homosexuality, ignoring not just the church but the strong conservative culture of many of the regular people of Castile. Carrion fails to acknowledge that social discipline can come not only from above but also from one's neighbors, who after all had to serve as witnesses before any successful prosecution of morality laws. Furthermore, despite Carrion's claim that she is arguing against Maravall, she continually posits something she calls the "absolutist Catholic Universal Monarchy" as the primary drive behind the law and its attempts to enforce a rigid conformity on sex and gender.

A persistent vagueness permeates the book. For example, Carrion assumes a deeply disapproving tone towards marriage, which she clearly believes was an unbearably oppressive institution in early modern Spain, especially for women. This may have been true, and certainly was true for many people in many circumstances, but she never explains what she means – what precisely made marriage so oppressive? Meanwhile Carrion evinces no knowledge of what real marriages were like in the period – she is clearly unfamiliar with the work of Allyson Poska, Ed Behrend-Martinez, and most other historians who have been studying marriage, families, women, and gender.

Throughout the book, the writing aspires to the clever, playful tone so often displayed in heavily theoretical work, but to this reader at least, the attempt falls short, and is full instead of labored wordplay and leaden wit at the expense of clarity. Finally, I do not want to be one of those reviewers who obsess over typos, but the inattention of the University of Toronto Press is such that the chapters are mis-numbered in the table of contents.

It must be conceded that this review is written from the perspective of a historian and that literary scholars might view this book in a more positive light. Nevertheless few people familiar with current scholarship on marriage and the law in early modern Spain will learn much from this book, whose main conclusion can be summarized simply by saying that marriage in real life was more complicated than what the law prescribed. This we already knew, not only from generations' work of study on marriage, but from a moment's reflection and common sense.

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