



**The Golden Age of Spanish Drama.** Ed. Barbara Fuchs. Trans. G. J. Racz.  
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We currently find ourselves at a peak moment in the importance and visibility of Spanish baroque drama within the eminently Shakespearean community of Anglophone early modern literary studies. Capitalizing on this momentum, Norton's timely publication of its new anthology *The Golden Age of Spanish Drama* both testifies to this academic trend and pushes the ball forward with its new and accessible translations into English of some of the period's most important plays written by Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, and their contemporaries. Curated by Barbara Fuchs, who has proven to be one of the most accomplished scholars to bridge the gap between the study of early modern English and Spanish literature, this anthology includes five of the most iconic dramatic works written in the Spanish-speaking world during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The plays, translated into English by G. J. Racz and organized in chronological order, include Miguel de Cervantes, *The Siege of Numantia* [El

cerco de Numancia]; Félix Lope de Vega, *Fuenteovejuna*; Félix Lope de Vega, *The Dog in the Manger* [El perro del hortelano]; Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Life Is a Dream* [La vida es sueño]; and, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Trials of a Noble House* [Los empeños de una casa].

Cervantes's *Numantia*, written around 1585, is a classicist tragedy inspired by the heroic but suicidal resistance against the Romans by the Celtiberian people of Northern Castile in the second century BC. It is followed by Lope de Vega's much more famous *Fuenteovejuna* (ca. 1612), which dramatizes the historical insurrection of a small Andalusian town against a tyrannical commander of the powerful military Order of Calatrava. The most conventional of the *comedias* included in this anthology is Lope's *The Dog in the Manger* (ca. 1613). In this palatine comedy, Countess Diana falls in love with her secretary Teodoro, who is in turn engaged to the countess' maid; his preexisting relationship, as well as the stigma against her marrying below her station, centers the conflict of the witty and light-humored play, for while Diana is unwilling to admit her feelings for Teodoro she also refuses to allow him to marry anyone else. Perhaps the best-known play of Golden Age Spain, Calderón's *Life Is a Dream* (ca. 1635) is a philosophical exploration of the nature of power and of the purpose of human existence itself. It tells the story of the fictional Prince Segismund in Poland, who after growing up alone and imprisoned in a tower due to a prophecy heralding the destruction of the kingdom at his hand, is released by his father, King Basil, and brought back to court. His beast-like and sociopathic behavior (a result of his cruel upbringing) immediately becomes apparent, which prompts the king to lock his son up again, telling him that his brief interlude of freedom was but a figment of his imagination. The last play of the anthology is the Mexican nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *Trials of a Noble House*, a problem comedy centered around the trials and tribulations two young couples have to undergo in order to solve their intricate romantic quadrangle. First performed in 1683, Cruz's play boasts one of the most emblematic and sophisticated female protagonists in Spanish Golden Age drama, Doña Leonor, and testifies to the growing involvement of women in the theatre-making process throughout the Spanish-speaking world during the seventeenth century.

This anthology was prepared with newcomers to early modern Spanish theatre in mind, primarily undergraduate students who will be better acquainted with Shakespeare and other English playwrights than with Lope or Calderón. This is evident in the editor's notes and added stage directions, which provide sufficient but not excessive background, as well as in Racz's translations. Opting for Elizabethan iambic pentameter, Racz has produced accessible modern-English renditions of the plays while mixing crossed (ABAB) and enveloping (ABBA) rhyme schemes and patterns throughout, thus preserving the musicality that defines the polymetric verse of Golden Age drama. Conveying the aural profile of the plays was precisely one of the objectives set out by Racz, who strived to fulfil four criteria: "linguistic accuracy, stylistic accuracy (as much as possible),

readability (for the contemporary student), and playability (from a theatrical perspective—especially acting)” [xx]. The fact that he, in close consultation with Fuchs, was able to meet all four standards, ensures the long shelf life of these translations, which are as enjoyable as they are instructive.

Although it is difficult to argue with the selection of plays, it also must be noted that the five dramatic texts here included are more exceptional than exemplary in respect to the dominant features of seventeenth-century Spanish drama. This is especially true of *The Siege of Numantia*, a modestly successful play written by an otherwise discreet dramatist who is much more celebrated (both then and now) for his narrative works. Cervantes’s throwback classicism failed to captivate the playgoing audience of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Spain, much more inclined toward the new and eclectic playwriting style championed by then up-and-coming Lope de Vega. As Fuchs sums up in her introduction to the anthology, in the *comedia* “[w]it, rather than force, frequently carried the day. Women, country folk and servants were often central to the plot. Playing outsize roles on the stage, these figures often transcended their social position” [vii]. With the exception of *The Dog in the Manger*, none of the plays here collected epitomize the trend-setting conventions of Lopean comedy. They do, however, effectively encapsulate the broad spectrum of styles and themes represented on the seventeenth-century Spanish stage, which will come as a pleasant surprise to more than one newcomer to Golden Age Spanish theatre.

In addition to the five plays, this collection includes an assortment of supporting material to help better understand the fabric of baroque Spain’s theatrical culture. This comprises both non-dramatic primary sources from the period as well as a selection of essays and articles written by some of the most influential scholars and critics of Golden Age theatre of the last fifty years. The crown jewel of this selection is Marvin Carlson’s English rendition of Lope’s apologia *The New Art of Writing Plays*. A one-of-a-kind defense of the hybridization of drama in defiance of Aristotelian purism, Lope’s 376-line poem speaks directly to the innovations taking place in dramatic literature not only in Habsburg Spain, but also in similar theatre systems such as that of Shakespearean England. Other primary sources in the anthology include period accounts of the life and art of playwrights and actors, moralists’ complaints against public theatre, and Sor Juana’s passionate denunciation of the double standard Spanish women were being held to at the time, which raises the question of how much or little society has changed in the last four centuries in this respect. Essays by José Antonio Maravall, Margaret Greer, and Melveena McKendrick among others round out a compendium that provides English-speaking students and scholars all the tools necessary to familiarize themselves with the dramatic works and culture of the most prolific theatrical milieu in early modern Europe. Quite simply, this is a remarkable achievement by Fuchs, Racz, and all the contributors to the collection, and a crucial contribution to expanding familiarity with Golden Age drama far beyond the ranks of Hispanists.

