



## SPECIAL SECTION (REVIEW)

Jeffrey T. Bersett, ed. *Número monográfico en homenaje al profesor David Thatcher Gies. Miriada Hispánica 15 (2021)*. Valencia: Calambur, 2021.

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The most recent volume of *Miriada Hispánica* is dedicated to the beloved and recently retired Professor David T. Gies. The journal, composed of articles written by former students who are now university professors themselves, honors David as professor and scholar of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century canonical literature, in addition to his role as catalyst and contributor in new fields of inquiry in Hispanic Studies and Philology during a period of fundamental change. Much of his research and teaching has encompassed social, popular culture, the spectacle of movies and theater, architecture, painting, culinary customs, and just about every facet of Spanish culture. He is an inspiration to all of us, his grateful students, who themselves are or were professors at colleges and universities all around the world.

When Joseph Schumpeter wrote his famous eulogy for his teacher Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, he was doing more than praising a famous teacher and scholar; he was praising an intellectual ideal, the ideal embodied by a certain kind of academic, a heroic figure whose life is a completed whole, and who, by virtue of his courage, empathy, integrity, intelligence, and intellectual curiosity, inspires students to love the life of the mind.

Unfortunately, this noble ideal has come under increasing attack. Everywhere one looks, it would seem that one sees the rise of two new kinds of academics. To apply the unforgettable language of Max Weber at the end of his *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, one group consists of “specialists without spirit” and the other consists of “sensualists without heart.” Note that Weber is NOT attacking “specialists” or “sensualists” as such; he is criticizing “specialists without spirit” and “sensualists without heart.” Anyone who has done time in the modern academy has encountered at least one “specialist without spirit” who can be found in a variety of guises: the pedantic bore, the narrow-minded specialist or perhaps the self-important snob. They, and others like them, can be found in faculty lounges the world over. These “later day Casaubons” approach scholarship without any sense of adventure and are capable of turning the most colorful subjects a dull gray (the Reverend Edward Casaubon was a fictional character and the pedant in George Eliot’s masterpiece *Middlemarch* who weds Dorothea Brooke.)

In contrast to the “specialist without spirit,” academia is also home to an equally pernicious figure, the “sensualists without heart.” While this specialist succeeds in draining learning of all its charms they, paradoxically enough, make learning too much fun. Proud of their flamboyance, these people hope to become intellectual and cultural celebrities.

One cannot understand the achievement of David Gies unless one grasps that he is both a “specialist with spirit” and a “sensualist with a heart.” This happy

combination of traits has enabled him to become a brilliant and insightful scholar, a teacher of rare empathy and humanity, and finally, one of the finest department chairs in American higher education. Let us begin with his extraordinary scholarship.

The title of David Gies' undisputed masterpiece, *The Theatre in Nineteenth Century Spain*, might make the casual reader think that Gies is just another narrowly focused scholar concentrating on an arcane, if not dull, subfield of Spanish Literature. After all, everyone knows that the Golden Age of Spanish drama was in the early part of the seventeenth century, when Calderon, Lope de Vega, and their contemporaries ruled the stages.

However, David Gies' achievement was to get his fellow scholars to take a renewed look at texts and authors that they had ignored. More than that, Gies showed that a close examination of nineteenth-century Spanish drama shed new light on two of the most important transitions of Spanish literary and cultural history, the shift from the Enlightenment Spain of men like the great historian and reformer Jovellanos to the Romantic Spain of the early nineteenth century and then, the decline of Romanticism and the rise of Realism and even Naturalism, exemplified by that second greatest of Spanish novelists, Benito Pérez Galdós.

Since writing *The Theatre in Nineteenth Century Spain*, David Gies has written essays and reviews touching on many aspects of eighteenth- and nineteenth century Spanish literature and cultural life. He has edited both *The Cambridge History of Spanish Literature* and *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture*, and co-edited *A History of Theatre in Spain* (with Maria M. Delgado). Through all these impressive accomplishments, Gies has been a specialist of impeccable erudition and focused clarity. At the same time, he has been a specialist with spirit, who is courageous, sensitive, and honest.

The eight essays in *Miriada Hispánica's* "Festschrift" for David Gies, cover a dazzling array of subjects, from a currently popular science fiction series on Spanish TV to the language of tears in Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*. One essay examines a minor, but culturally important, character in an early novel by Galdós, yet another looks at a notorious classic of Spanish erotica. Many of the essays are important contributions to contemporary debates about selfhood, agency, and identity.

The first two essays focus on Enlightenment themes. "Amor Caduco: Love, Aging, and Women Writers in the Spanish Enlightenment" by Elizabeth (Betsy) Franklin Lewis, Professor of Spanish at University of Mary Washington, discusses changing attitudes toward the female aging process in Enlightenment Spain. Professor Lewis argues that proto-feminists called for an affirmative attitude toward the aging process and encouraged women to cope with the approach of old age by loving themselves and each other.

The second essay on eighteenth-century literature and thought is by Mattheu Raillard of Lewis & Clark College. In "Codifying the Ineffable: Nature, Hypocrisy, and the Rhetoric of the *Fábulas Futosóficas*," Raillard argues that this minor classic of Spanish erotic literature was actually written by the Spanish Enlightenment reformer and intellectual Leandro Fernández de Moratín, and, more importantly, that the book is an anti-clerical polemic.

The next three essays examine texts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Zorrilla's updating of the Don Juan legend, *Don Juan Tenorio*, an early novel by Galdós, and a one-act play from the early twentieth century

inspired by Zorrilla's drama. Irene Gomez-Castellano explores "El discurso líquido" in Don Juan Tenorio, quite literally, the 'language of tears' in Zorrilla's play. Jeffrey Bersett, Professor of Spanish and Film Studies at Westminster College, studies a one-act play (Eduardo Gómez Gereda and Antonio Soler's satirical *Imposible l'haís dejado*, from 1907) inspired by Zorrilla's masterpiece, and is interesting precisely in proportion to how interesting one finds Zorrilla's play. While most scholars of Spanish literature will find it fascinating, the play has its detractors. For example, the theologian and man of letters David Bentley Hart, dismisses its "glutinous piety."

The fourth essay, by José V. Saval of the University of Edinburgh, deals with Galdós's early novel, *La desheredada*. It has a minor but interesting character, the unnamed brother of the protagonist who, unlike the hero, eschews education and succumbs to a life of gambling and dissipation, culminating in an attempt on the life of the king. This essay focuses on the role that naturalism and determinism played in Galdós' novels, and how it affected his political thought and his view of the working class.

Of the last three essays, two are on recent Spanish "meta novels" and the third deals with Spain's most popular television series. All of these essays pose important questions about personal identity, narrative, history, and the difficulty of drawing the line between fact and fiction. "Lies, Imagination, and Self-Narration" in Rosa Montero's *La loca de la casa*, by Iana Konstantinova of Southern Virginia University, explores how Montero's "metafiction" *La loca de la casa* foregrounds the paradoxes and ambiguities of post-modern self-fashioning. While it purports to be a "true" autobiography of its author, it is instead three enigmatic fictional texts. A common cliché holds that "truth is stranger than fiction." Rosa Montero's "autobiography" suggests that truth is often largely composed of a set of very strange fictions. In Konstantinova's words: "The stories and reflections in Montero's novel serve to demonstrate that we are all the narrators of our own lives and that we all possess a lunatic who is able to show us new possibilities. Reality is but the beginning for a much richer narrative once we let the imagination take over."

In "Implausible Deniability: History, Fiction, and the Enigma of TRUTH in Javier Cercas' *El Impostor*," Alvin Sherman of Brigham Young University, examines an even stranger meta novel, in which Cercas purports to tell the "true" story of a famous figure from twentieth-century Spanish history, Enryk Marco (Marco, needless to say, is Cercas' invention). Once more, the enigmas of truth and history are explored. In Sherman's words, "the truthfulness of history should just be viewed within the frame of a nonfiction fiction that reaches only a nominal degree of reality and truthfulness."

For all of the ambiguities and uncertainties of the past, there still remain certain incontrovertible facts. Or are there? It is perhaps revealing that the most popular Spanish language TV show of recent years, *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (*Ministry Of Time*), should be about time travel or that the last, and in many ways the best, essay in the book should look at it and at its implications. After all, David Gies has always sought to teach Spanish culture as a whole, and film and television are important parts of modern culture. In *El Ministerio del Tiempo*, three Spaniards from various periods of the nation's history, are sent into the past by the powerful and mysterious "Ministry of Time." Working as a team, they seek to prevent history from being changed. Like almost every other nationality, Spaniards love to construct myths about their past. In a nation of competing

ethnicities and competing ideologies, these myths will also conflict. For example, many Spaniards still cherish the memory of the greatest and most ill-fated of the Spanish Hapsburgs, Philip II. Was he a wise and compassionate monarch or a foolish and vain glorious tyrant? Or was he, as recent biographies by Geoffrey Parker and Henry Kamen argue, a more complex figure, a man of great vices and great virtues? In their essay, "Cambio de tiempo/Cambio de memoria histórica: *El Ministerio del Tiempo's* season two finale and Felipe II's Historical Legacy," Christine Blackshaw of Mount St. Mary's University and her former student, Saribel Morales-Rivera, analyze an episode in which our heroes have prevented Philip II from traveling forward in time to prevent modern, liberal Spain from coming into existence.

All of these essays are tributes to the many sided brilliance of the man they seek to honor and emulate, David Thatcher Gies.

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\* I was surprised and honored when I was invited to write this review. As a professor and Department Chair at the University of Virginia, David Gies taught any number of graduate students who have gone on to teach at exceptional schools. And yet, when I think of David, what first comes to mind is not his brilliance but his kindness. I arrived at UVA in the fall of 1985, an anxious graduate student and a single mother with two small children in tow. My children and I were warmly welcomed and even encouraged to sit in the back of classrooms on film night and at the back of the Spanish theater while I was practicing my roles. In my memories at UVA, what I learned in classes cannot be separated from the ways I was nurtured, encouraged, and "seen". Every fall David's backyard was filled with graduate students, faculty, and everyone's families. My kids were delighted to help make and serve the Baked Alaska, along with the paella. I write the following to honor a great teacher and a great man, my friend David Gies.