

*Las musas ramera: Oficio dramático y conciencia profesional en Lope de Vega.*

Alejandro García Reidy.

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Lope de Vega (1562–1635) is yet to attain his merited place in the study of early modern European literature, particularly drama. This exceptionally well-documented and argued monograph should go some distance toward remedying this unfortunate state of affairs, particularly if it is translated into English, which it deserves to be.

García Reidy examines the figure of Lope de Vega as an outstanding example of an early modern writer who is becoming conscious of himself as exercising a profession. While he sought patronage and recognition from aristocrats and kings, Lope was aware that he earned his living — frequently a very good one — from his pen, thanks in the main to a new public that was hungry to consume his plays.

In his first chapter, the author takes an overview of the well-known factors that, across Europe, began to effect the role of the writer in society, enhancing his status and the possibilities for betterment, fame, and self-fashioning. There is a welcome comparative slant to this chapter (and, indeed, to the study as a whole) that helps to demonstrate not only that Spain was not a case apart, but that, with the richness of its theatrical culture and the extant documentation surrounding it, there is much for early modern scholars and cultural historians to learn from its history.

In his second chapter García Reidy bases his analysis on the above-mentioned documentation, arguing that by the 1580s in Spain playwriting had become central to the literary marketplace for the first time. Lope was ideally placed and receptive to the public, writing for and selling his plays to a good number of the best actor-managers at any one time and, as he turned into the leading dramatist of his generation, making good money from his work. He could also earn well from writing *autos sacramentales* (Corpus Christi plays) for various towns and cities and from commissions from the palace, religious institutions, and private individuals. The author, thanks to his enlightened reading of Lope's letters, theatrical contracts, and other documents, provides the fullest picture available to date of the relationship between dramatists and the other significant players in the burgeoning and lucrative theatrical world.

This picture is developed in chapter 3, which makes a fresh attempt, building on the work of scholars such as Díez Borque, to ascertain how well off Lope was throughout his life as a result of his professional writing. The author calculates, with due caution, that Lope averaged twelve full-length plays a year (mainly for the public *corrales*) until his production level tailed off as he grew old and disillusioned. From just this writing he could earn an average of 416 *reales* a month, enough to pay the rent for a year in some cities in Spain. The academic rigor of this fascinating study-within-the-study is exemplary and its conclusions far reaching for Lope de Vega and comedia scholarship.

The second half of García Reidy's study switches focus somewhat in order to examine, in two very substantial chapters, Lope's evolving attitude to the works he penned, poetic, prose, and dramatic. The author argues convincingly, and with frequent comparisons to the situation of writers in England and France, that Lope de Vega's attitude to his own literary production was complicated by his social class and his pretensions. Thus, for example, he was quick to claim, when Lope was a younger man, that he wrote drama for his own pleasure and not for financial gain. He further analyzes, with precision and great acumen, both how Lope began to construct a version of himself through the medium of print and how his view of his own dramatic writing became more overtly positive in the years between 1609 and 1624, after the success of the first publication of his plays in the very early years of the seventeenth century. Lope's

relationship with his work was both complex and at times contradictory, and our knowledge of it emerges not from a single document but from correspondence, paratexts, the writings of his contemporaries, and the works themselves, all of which need careful decoding.

Alejandro García Reidy has produced a fine study of the development of Lope de Vega as an “escritor protoprofesionalizado” (“protoprofessionalized writer”) (398). His knowledge of his source materials is outstanding and his interpretation of them authoritative, surefooted, and persuasive. This is a book that will be welcomed by scholars of early modern Spanish drama who are already aware of the importance of Lope, and ought to be read by early modernists everywhere who may not be.

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