

Tracy Crowe Morey. *Between History and Fiction: The Early Modern Spanish Siege Play*.

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Tracy Crowe Morey here analyzes five historical plays “in terms of imperial politics” (19), situating her work in a well-known body of criticism that explores signs of political dissidence in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish literature. All the plays deal with military campaigns and focus specifically on sieges. The works under examination include Cervantes’ *La Numancia* and lesser-known works like Lope’s *El asalto de mastrique*, Calderón’s *El sitio de Breda*, Lope’s *La nueva victoria de don Gonzalo de Córdoba*, and Luis Vélez de Guevara’s *El Hércules de Ocaña*. Morey’s primary assumption throughout the book is that diachronic changes effecting portrayals of sieges depend on the historical moment both of the author and of the event itself.

At the center of her comparative study is *La Numancia*, which offers a sub-generic model of the siege drama that informs all four lesser-known plays. Morey explains that she compares “*La Numancia* with other siege plays in terms of the intellectual and historical conditions that affect how each dramatist interprets history according to his particular literary purposes” (19). Such a mission rests upon a serious reconsideration of the relationship between history and fiction as well as of the concept of verisimilitude. According to Morey, simplistic theoretical discrimination between history and fiction, from the early modern period up to postmodern theory, “has proven inadequate and illusive” (10).

In the first chapter, Morey takes issue with early modern theories and practices of history and fiction writing. If plays about historical exploits were to be marketable, she posits, playwrights needed authorial license to revise and dramatize facts and events. Fiction proved superior to history when writers took the liberty of engaging such literary techniques as romantic elaboration, vocal polyphony, and secondary plotting. Indeed, it is invention that sets apart the poet from the historian (38). The book’s evaluation of poetic invention focuses on changing representations of a series of items such as arms and warfare, the decorum,

the deeds and words of the *gracioso*, the romance in the subplots, and the resolution of the play.

In the second chapter, Morey explores the ways that authors complicated historical sources by using classical literature as well as secondary characters and subplots (53). While reassessing previous criticism on *La Numancia*, Morey sets the ground for comparing a number of (anti)epical aspects of this canonical siege play with the other four plays (54–71). In the third chapter, the author returns to Northrop Frye's ideas about romance as an archetypal genre and Frederick Jameson's revision of these concepts in his analyses of the historical implications of romance. Morey sees in Jameson's approach a framework for examining the relationship between romance, historical drama, and political ideology (106–07) and argues for romance as constructing a domestic space inside imperial discourse. As for *La Numancia*, Morey examines domestic interludes, such as Marandro, Lira, and Leoncio's conversations, as well as comparisons with the *Aeneid*, to remind us that the play is an anti-epic and an ambiguous text that resists classification within literary genres. Furthermore, she argues that the failures of Scipion in Numancia parallel the military problems of the Habsburgs in the sixteenth century (107–22). In her reading of *El asalto the Mastroque*, Morey argues that subplots of love and domesticity subvert the "traditional values of military conduct" through humor and romance (135). Contrary to these two works, *Hércules de Ocaña* and *El sitio de Bredá* dramatize "open battle scenes" and demonstrate "Spanish fortitude and resilience" (139). The exiting romance in these military plays "compliment[s] rather than disrupt[s] the epic action" (142).

Morey borrows substantially from the works of Frederick de Armas, Barbara Simerka, and David Quint, among others. But she also uniquely draws our attention to critical reinterpretations of the relationship between history and fiction without resorting to structuralist and poststructuralist theories. The usefulness of such an approach remains to be tested by future work on early modern *comedia*.

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