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Science on Stage. Science on stage in early modern Spain. Ed. by Enrique García Santo-Tomás. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019.

Science on stage in early modern Spain, edited by García Santo Tomás, is a collection of essays “by scholars in the fields of literary and cultural studies and the history of science[...] between 1500 and 1700” with a focus on the “emergence of a scientific culture in Spain” (4,9). The first of the three parts in which the book is divided, “Technologies of Knowledge,” explores “the intellectual and physical conditions which facilitated the production of these “science plots”” (10). It includes a chapter on the presence of ancient and medieval knowledge in Lope de Vega (Szpiech), followed by two additional ones on technology (Reidy) and geometry (Slater) in Early Modern Spanish drama plays or *comedias*. The second part, “Stages of Science” is on the representation of melancholy in pre-*comedia* theatre (Vélez Sainz), in addition to poisoning (Albuixech) and warfaring (Rupp) in *comedias*. The final section, “Performing numbers,” includes essays on staging Mathematics (Vilches), automatons (Kimmel) and labyrinths (Ansell).

Science on stage in early modern Spain ends with a recapitulation on “some recent trends in historical studies of science in Spain” and “what the essays in this volume contribute to this historical discourse” (252). Portuondo’s essay confirms that the existence of scientific approaches and knowledge presented in fictional works should not necessarily be taken as accurate reflections of the technical and scientific progress in the period. In fact, one of the most valuable contribution of this collection of essays is its confirmation that *comedias* were key literary works in the dissemination of a specific and diverse scientific and technical knowledge, which may have contributed to shape the Baroque mainstream worldview. Spanish *comedias* were conditioned by their dependence on both audiences and oligarchic powers such as the Monarchy’s and the Catholic Church’s strongly ideologically biased “gustos” or preferences. In fact, *comedias*, usually represented during key national Catholic celebrations and local festivities, were used in many occasions as propagandistic media to disseminate specific oligarchic agendas, as Maravall has demonstrated. The diversity in the proposed cultural approaches to scientific and technological knowledge in this volume reflects the unique early modern Spanish political, fictional and technical complexities, encompassed in the *comedia* genre.

The contribution of this volume to the culture of science dissemination discussion can be additionally measured by assessing to what extent this media (*comedia*) was able to accurately portray and absorb current scientific and technical discoveries. This epistemological question is partially answered in the great the variety of topics represented, which are studied in the three parts of this monograph. They combine, among others, medical, technological and mathematical knowledge, ranging from automatons to the Pythagorean universe. The proposed selection of scientific knowledge dissemination case studies presents a both diverse and disperse picture of key Spanish scientific progress and discoveries in the period. *Comedia* shows had a strong impact on audiences, amazing them with certain level of “disorder” and general decontextualization, often enhanced by advanced technical wonders, in celebration of “a world full of epistemic uncertainty also shared by natural philosophers” (271). These early modern spectacles were not detached from the complex Spanish political reality, which identity as a nation was conditioned by its political origin as an empire, as Gustavo Bueno and other historians have demonstrated.

In sum, the essays included in this volume evidence how a great variety of technological and scientific knowledge was disseminated and assimilated in the period, accurately portraying the many different ways that *comedias* were used in filtering/propagating new ideas whilst shaping audiences' worldview conceptualization in the process. This monograph also demonstrates evident absences, such as the approach to knowledge provided by the New Science, which materialized in great medical progress and scientific advancement in Northern Europe, not completely understood, and often openly rejected in Spain (254). The assimilation of scientific and technological knowledge was aligned to the Spanish historical reality and specificity. The Spanish imperial political structure was mainly focusing on efficiently absorbing and resourcing its expansive, overreaching capacity. But it lacked the pause and inner focus that other European nations were developing at the time, which facilitated the promotion of a more overreaching and daring scientific thinking. But its more conservative and less fluid scientific position did not prevent Spain excelling in specific technical and practical knowledge in key disciplines such as the arts of navigation, warfare, medicine and architecture, among others. In fact, some institutions such as the different Jesuit educational centers, together with *The Casa de contratación de Indias*, among others, facilitated the assimilation of some of the northern scientific wave learning, which would shape European knowledge in the years to come, in key technical and scientific disciplines.

This collection of essays will impact future works on Spanish scientific knowledge culture during the Baroque. Early Modern Spain was a key transition time towards the development of a more scientific, evidence-based thinking, which was living together with a, still very well-supported, superstitious worldview. The proposed cultural analysis of science in *comedias* corroborate that some of the most advanced scientific and technical knowledge was naturally under discussion in Spain at the period. But also that many of those responsible of filtering and censoring scientific discussions were efficient in making sure that these intellectual debates did not transcend their fictional level, preventing scientific thinking to make a key difference in informing Spanish society's mainstream worldview. A combination of religious fanaticism, superstition and ambitious oligarchic mass manipulation facilitated that Spain did not take full advantage of key opportunities to turn its privileged imperial position into a leading scientific one during the Baroque period.