

MODERN SPANISH DRAMATISTS

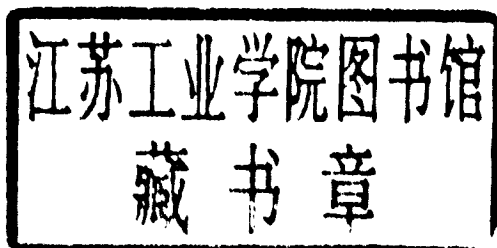
*A Bio-Bibliographical
Sourcebook*

Edited by
MARY PARKER

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PREFACE

Modern Spanish Dramatists contains entries on thirty-three dramatists who wrote from 1700 to 1999. When we began the present book, Spanish was fashionable and the language of choice in academe. Yet the existing sources and specialized studies circulated solely among subscribers to professional scholarly publications; materials in English needed to catch up with the enthusiastic and growing interest in the artistic creations of Spain and other countries. Of course, major dramatists are featured in dictionaries, and generally these same names are covered within studies that span the whole literary history of Spanish drama and literature. That realization and the small but increasing number of English translations of modern classics inspired us to make available to the contemporary English speaker a larger picture of the changing modern Spanish drama. Not to publish it on time offered others the opportunity to develop the idea in similar publications.

Each of the thirty-three entries is divided into the following sections: Biography, Dramaturgy: Major Works and Themes, Critics' Response, Awards and Distinctions, Notes (where applicable), and Bibliography. Dramaturgy contains evaluative and analytical commentary on the literary and historical contexts; the principal texts; dominant themes, structure, styles, and techniques; edition(s), date(s) of publication, staging(s), and opening night performance, if recorded; and reception of the play. Critics' Response examines the scholarship and critical interpretations the plays have elicited, including the contributor's original analysis and interpretation of one major play. The Bibliography at the end of each entry lists the major short and full-length plays, well-received editions and translations, and the central books and articles on the specific dramatist and on the major play chosen by each contributing author. The General Bibliography, Index, and About the Contributors sections conclude the book.

The entries in *Modern Spanish Dramatists* follow an alphabetical format. Our scope and format facilitate the appreciation of each author and his or her art. Both the scope and format help to sketch a larger image of the authors, their writings, and the stage than the one portrayed in existing English-oriented

encyclopedias, histories of literature, one-theme or one-author collected essays.

The total range of dramatists spans from Arniches to Zorrilla. It includes writers who have been translated, anthologized, and studied for centuries as Spanish classic authors; major names who—not without disagreement—are considered the classical writers of today (Ramón de la Cruz, Duque de Rivas, Zorrilla, Benavente, Buero Vallejo, J. E. Hartzenbusch, Lorca, Sastre, and most recently, Arrabal); well-known writers such as Pérez Galdós, Salinas, and Unamuno, whose theater remains mainly known to specialists, Martínez de la Rosa, Aub, and Casona; and prolific playwrights whose proven box office successes and strong popularity have always been questioned, their fame disputed, discounted, denied, or diminished, not always for artistic reasons. Uninterrupted interest in their plays continues to be strong. The book also treats some disdained and little known, but significant, plays that mark a particular dramatist's artistic and/or ideological evolution. Among these dramatists are Echegaray, García Gutiérrez, Jardiel Poncela, and even Benavente. A number of emerging and promising dramatists who have been successful on the Spanish stage have become drama critics, television scriptwriters, play-text or play-act authors, professors, directors, and producers. Those who have shown the most talent as dramatists are seen in academic and theatrical circles as talent who are on their way to joining or changing the canon.

As a unit, the thirty-three entries in the book highlight the trends, movements, and historical situations to which modern and postmodern dramatists have been responsive.¹ They apply the various theories of interpretation that informed conventional thought and current methods of reading and interpreting plays—the themes, styles, and techniques through which the *modern Spanish* dramatists expressed their attitudes, experiences, dreams, and concerns. The contributors' original views suggest new approaches to commenting or judging the dramatists. Their opinions and the plays they treat sometimes project changing ideologies, opinions, and attitudes toward history, the theater, and modernity.

Here are a few examples: It is an error to consider Echegaray a lesser dramatist who wrote modern melodrama. A reassessment of the playwright shows that in the context of their time his plays do not represent the typical melodrama of the Restoration. It is fundamental to note his use of the immersion technique and to mark the difference that exists between melodrama and the melodramatic. Martínez de la Rosa “is not a hot headed rebel or an overthrower of accepted eighteenth-century forms.” Duque de Rivas's *Don Alvaro* illuminates his unique perspective on Spanish nationalism. Galdós's feminism relates to his way of life. His liberal creed represents a continuation of the progressive ideology of the Enlightenment. However, when his teachings are examined closely, they appear less than altruistic. The “new women,” “new couple,” “new world” he wants and advocates are also *realidad*—more self-serving concepts than a reformer's idealistic dreams. The strong, unconventional female protagonists glorified as models in Galdós's novels and dramas were created for, or inspired by,

the married women in his multiple unorthodox unions. Alejandro Casona, a promoter of the Spanish classic drama and known mostly for a couple of plays, authored works on a wide range of issues, including the violation of taboos treated as society's system of oppression. A balanced analysis of Alfonso Paso's dramaturgy consistently shows that critics and writers hostile to the Franco regime disparage Paso's evolution from an early writer and would-be reformer to a dramatist whose later comedies they strongly condemn for their blatant ideological conformism. Concha Romero's feminist approach to historical women adds the long-missing feminine perspective. There is renewed interest and a newfound significance in the local color, humor, and mordant sociopolitical satire inherent to the short theatrical forms called *Teatro Menor*. These deceptively trivial subgenre pieces, *interludes*, *sainetes*, *tonadillas* (short sung pieces) by Ramón de la Cruz, Arniches, and the highly stylized *esperpentos* of Valle Inclán, reflect standpoints, issues, and disagreements on the methods used to carry out the commonly perceived need for cultural renovation and renewal. Their longevity confirms the assertion that, in each century, dramatists weight the reconfiguration of the national popular play and the restoration of the classics as the means to take the stage and the state from slumber to modernity.

Worthwhile dramatists whose plays are in any of the other languages of Spain—Guimera, Rusiñol, Sirera, and Bonet i Jornet, for example—will be missed. The double language limitation and lack of or hard-to-find English or Spanish editions or translations make them and others who are significant in their particular geographical areas basically unknown to bilingual specialists and stages even in Spain. In faraway places, they, like their predecessors, remain known, sometimes by choice, as Catalanian or, separately, as Valencian, and Galician celebrities. Belbel is translating, directing, and producing Bonet i Jornet. Happily, since this project began, Catalán authors, who do not write in Spanish, have been the subject of studies published as books, monographs, and articles in books or professional journals in Spain, England, and the United States.²

Among this volume's authors are academics, literary critics, editors, and publishers of journals dedicated to the theater. They also introduce, actively promote, perform, translate, stage, or host them in their colleges and universities. Their contributions ensure the value of this book to other specialists in Spanish and other drama and literature. The specialized reader will find that along with the new paths for understanding the works, political change appears central to our knowledge of recently surfaced, published, or staged plays whose heroes are radical social agitators. Recent history is the framework for the drama that Aub, Arrabal, Buero Vallejo, Sastre, and many of their contemporaries wrote during the dictatorship period and made known in exile or, in Spain, after Franco's death. In such plays, dramatists go from criticism and antagonism to radicalism and social activism. Radical social agitators as heroes no longer seem relevant or artistically fashionable today, but the plays they wrote remain significant among those who adhere to the world view of the writers or know them

personally. These rebels created models meant to be a strong force in society, influential living voices that would make art and life one. As Susan Polansky points out, Salinas found such force lacking in both moral stimulus and profound spiritual orientation. The hope is that easy access to the life, writing career, and source materials on a number of modern Spanish dramatists will nurture enthusiasm and interest in their lives and work. As a reference book, this volume is meant to attract attention and stimulate curiosity and to give English-speaking audiences a helpful guide to reading and understanding a distinguished group of modern Spanish dramatists.

The Introduction that follows highlights trends that will help to define and trace modernity, its forces, voices, and influence. It explores their effects on the dramatists, their plays, the culture, and the stage. In addition, the Introduction touches on salient issues, contrasting comments, ideas, and further information on dramatists or plays that are central to the balanced picture we endeavor to present.

NOTES

1. Ignacio Armestoy Egiguren, "La literatura dramática española en la encrucijada de la posmodernidad," *Insula* 601–602 (1997): 2–5.
2. See the special issue of *Estreno* entitled *Homage to Catalán Theater* 24.2 (1998).

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To all of my collaborators, I appreciate all of your hard work. If we have succeeded in our purpose, the reader will find the fruits of our efforts *dulce e utile*.

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INTRODUCTION: MODERN SPANISH DRAMATISTS

Mary Parker

The word *modern* in our volume's title will stir curiosity, perhaps even controversy. Its concept and terms are topics of endless contention among playwrights, theater professionals, drama historians, strict linguists, critics, and audiences. It is helpful, and fitting, to recall known notions, voices, and definitions intended to capture its evolving nature and unsettling spirit.

Modernity has been described as the transient, as fugitive, as contingent aesthetic curiosities—one half of what art is; the other is the eternal and the immutable.¹ Earlier, with irony, the Theologian Benito Jerónimo Feijoo (1676–1764) determines the indescribable, essential quality of artistic creations, “talent,” in his *El no sé qué*, the translation of the well-known French expression. He also addresses the modern artistic contingencies of the Age of Reason in *La razón de la Moda*. While investigating the transcendental value of art as a way to truth and discovery during *modernism*, Valle-Inclán held *La lámpara maravillosa* [The Magic Lantern] and discovered that the creative spirit is timeless—“El alma creadora está fuera del tiempo”—and that the same eternal quality of the spirit is the very essence of artistic creation.²

Modern drama exhibits a constant search for the new, the old, the physical, the essential, the contingent, and the permanent. That search illuminates the quality and distinctive connection that dramatists of any present time have with their artistic and literary past. It portrays modernity as an ambitious aesthetic project aimed at artistic regeneration on the basis that values would emerge from the theater's honest representation of historical and immediate reality. The dramatists' struggle for permanence and change can be seen in terms of Bloom's affirmation that “poets wrestle with their precursors so as to clear imaginative space for themselves.”³ Harold Bloom's notion also aids understanding artistic change. It helps sort out the tangible from the intangible regarding data such as David T. Gies's finding that “throughout the nineteenth century it became almost *de rigueur* to begin a piece on the theater by bemoaning the terrible state to which the theater had sunk in the previous few years.”⁴ At its less evident level, it reveals the writer's determination to penetrate the secrets of mastery and

survival, an attempt to transcend time, be like their masters, an example in life, an inspiration in death. At an immediate, practical level the dramatist's struggle for survival is a sustained commitment to effect cultural and social change. Plays expressing conflicts and clashes between cultural heritage and fashion, or between Spain's two dramatic traditions, typically define modern drama further as a cultural product as much as an instrument of it. Wilfried Floeck posits, correctly, that for modern Spanish dramatists commitment is "universal law, the conscience of the nation, the reason of artistic creation, the immediate political crisis, the ideological indoctrination of the reader, the aggressive criticism of society or plans for future utopias."⁵ What that utopia became is—and perhaps it should be—a matter of contention.

Plays as well as nondramatic writings, plans, and manifestos reveal the basic stands and united commitment to modernize, reformulate, and reconceptualize the nation and the stage. A radical stance is to abandon Lope's *arte nuevo* tradition (the *new play* or *comedia nueva*) to follow the French neoclassic aesthetic fashionable in Europe. A moderate position, the most successful and far-reaching, is to continue the popular tradition; maintain the best plays; and rewrite, "improve," and adapt them to the neoclassic artistic mold in fashion. A notable example of the compromised position is García de la Huerta's adaptation of *La judía de Toledo* [The Jewess from Toledo]. It was immediately hailed, and remains, the most artful, successful, controversial neoclassic tragedy, for in the spirit of the age, it wrongs the reputation of a Spanish king and/or his court by forcing historical connections with the distant past. With the wrong and adulterous acts of a monarch, and the tragic consequence for his paramour, Huerta reconstructs a moral tragedy where he expresses the vision (many still hold today) of Spain's history as tragic history. A third stance, indicative of modernity's pervasive influence and changing nature, is to write as Azorín recommends, *Al margen de los clásicos*. Azorín's twentieth-century title in favor of leaving the classics at the margins⁶ represents a moment of avid innovation—a time when both the ancient and the modern classic traditions seemed an obstacle to creativity or artistic freedom. Dramatists saw hope (some say it was false hope) for renewal, new freedom, energy and opportunity for innovation, experimentation, and success in the revolutionary avant-garde movements of Europe, particularly, in the aesthetics of surrealism. The persistent hope and commitment to modernity introduce recurring conflicts and divisions between circles that welcome influences from Europe, the East, or the United States and those that favor and insist on modernization from within, especially in periods defined by social revolt, political unrest, crisis, or confrontations. Stricken by the neoclassic fashion, enlightened dramatists enact their hard decision and determination to bring dead drama to life—also their ambition to leave an imprint of their own while dredging the classic past.

Along with the major political and cultural upheavals, social changes, and reactions that take place in 1688, 1810–1813, the 1820s, 1865, 1868, 1898, and 1936, drama takes its course against magical comedies and *autos* (sacramental

plays) and in favor of earthy realism. With the migration to the cities for employment and abandonment of the farmland arrives the new unsung hero—the laboring farmer; the peasant (Saint Isidore the Farmer, the patron saint, becomes one ideal role model); the progressive, salaried middle-class individual; the ideological, working-class hero in Dicenta; the young, liberal and liberated, modern man, woman, and couple in Galdós, next to the new urban poor. They and the land workers in Gimera's plays—all are made examples of the assertive, modern, and ideologically progressive citizens. This baggage and hero take the stage from elegance to foppish dandyism, or *majismo*, which is well studied by René Andioc.⁷ After him, Caro Baroja, Coulon, Varela, and Vilches have written on “Los majos.”⁸ It takes society from idealism to realism, from farming to industrialism, to Marxism and socialism; aesthetics from a continuing Iberianism/regionalism to neoclassicism, Romanticism, modernism, avant-gardism, aesthetic technicism, to neoprimitivism and simplicity of means in the year 2000. In short, when one examines the multifarious panorama of real life and art, it becomes clearer that choices or changes in modern drama are not fortuitous, that dramatists' choices and decisions are essentially ideological, expressing attitudes about life in the capital, in other cities, and in rural settings and, ultimately, about class and power, which underpin the structure of the society they see, avow, or reject. To assess the modernity of Spanish dramatists entails a side view of the drama of earlier times when the modern experiment began. To explore their significance further, bits of history and dramatic context are useful.

Renaissance influences sparked the first literary debates about ancient and modern attitudes toward literature and art. In the seventeenth century, Cervantes and Lope participated in the polemic going on in their century over how the work of art should be. They forcefully argued for and against imitating the artistic beauty of ancient classic models or creating an *arte nuevo* copying life. The polemic is between the secular and the worshipful artistic views—between awe, respect, and admiration versus the deification of art. The new attitude or idea attempts to free the curious imagination, to write drama that speaks for the spirit of the age, addresses its contemporaries or records them. The dramatists represented in this volume are combatants in favor of the new attitude. Plays by them—and others such as Iriarte, Cadalso, Cienfuegos Jovellanos, Moratín (the father and son), García de la Huerta, Zamora, Cañizares, Grimaldi, Rodríguez Rubí, Tamayo y Baus, N. Serra, Azorín, and Sanchiz Sinisterra—are expressions of an irrepressible sensibility and style deemed necessary for the modern nation, a free country, an equitable society, and the mass communal ideal that invaded and subjugated large parts of Europe. The Enlightenment's dream was to bring back high culture, to raise society's artistic, ethical, and moral levels. The opponents' dream was to recapture the prestige and defend what they posited as the unique, indomitable spirit of the nation and its plays. The struggle to effect their vision of the theater, the nation, and society is depicted in similar struggles, with different degrees of imagination and success.

For the most part, their tragedy, farce, comedy, or tragicomedy consistently mask, reveal, and ingenuously record living tragedy and human drama.

Eighteenth-century drama records a peculiar bitterness of strife that had been ravishing the country (and all of Europe) since the two previous centuries. Atheists, Protestants, Catholics, and Calvinists assail one another over issues involving the interrelationship of the monarchy, the kingdom, and the church, the nature of authority, and scopes of freedom. A new form of individualism is depicted in rebellions of wronged proud town's folk against the lesser nobility, or between lower and high nobility against the king. The monarchs side with the common people, who have just cause. In return the king has their total loyalty and unending support. A deeply felt need to modernize and "save" Spain from itself, its theater, and the ideas and beliefs it portrays delineates, with precision, events, issues, themes, and techniques that map the roads to modernity. Arguably, Percy Shelley's dictum "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world"⁹ is a fitting characterization of many Spanish dramatists of the three centuries that concern us.

Eighteenth-century Spanish writers—intellectual, religious, and political leaders—looked beyond their boundaries and saw a much different world: developments in science, philosophy, theology, and social and moral ideology. They saw that the framework of the prosperous modern nation was a composite of democratic philosophy, a work ethic, empirical methodology, and strict moral and aesthetic principles. The modernizers who favored Europeanization sought to influence high arts, intellectual disciplines, and public spheres guided by the progressive social ideologies of Bacon, Newton, Locke, Adam Smith, and Hobbes (who believed that man needs to be governed). They were guided, also, by the strict neoclassic aesthetic and French philosophic thought, especially the doctrines espoused by Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot. Reason, peace, progress, and prosperity obsessed the heart and intellect of a few but influential leaders who laid down the foundations that would give Spain and its theater a modern outlook. Modernity became the axis and axiom in the fierce literary and culture wars of their radical reform movement. They fought for change and for control of the collective mind as a fundamental moral imperative; they pursued it with evangelical conviction, a didactic purpose, and a dogmatic stance. Their quest for progress and social uplift invigorates the tension that exists between leaders who favor openness and Europeanization and their opponents who insist on keeping a cultural independence from Europe. Not totally without reason, they felt that the European model and plans for radical reform and modernization posed a threat to Spain. They argued that by advancing it the reformers were betraying their own culture. They foresaw their larger goals were to change Spain's political power structure, to take away the Church's influence over the king on social issues, to increase theirs, to recover nobility's rights and privileges, and to turn the government and country into an autocratic, secular, modern power.

The social concept of privilege protecting the old proud lineage of Castile

was being debated in Cervantes's time by unsung heroes of modern wars. The privilege given to inhabitants of old Castile, "el Castellano viejo," who populated the area, farmed the land, or fought to forge or free the country was extended to their descendants, not to heroes of recent wars. Drama records that reality. With disaffection, Cervantes, a warrior of modern wars, treats fear, anxiety, and boasting of pure, old Castilian blood as fiction and theater. *El retablo de las maravillas* [The Magical Little Theater] deals with two well-known motifs: "the world as theater" and "the emperor has no clothes." Neither is Spanish. But *El retablo* develops its theme of truth and deception or appearance, illusion and reality, in the context of a particular place and language of Spain. As a theatrical piece (metatheatrical in anachronic modern idiom), *El retablo* embraces the definition that "art is a lie that tells the truth." Lope places *purity of blood* at the core of honor, the theme of his success. A 1990s play entitled *Purasangre* will probably justify my digression. Its sardonic nominalism personalizes the treatment of the concept. Its theme underscores the essential relationship that connects the present drama of any age with its classic Spanish past. Anxiety over cultural contamination for ideological and political reasons is not always unfounded in any country. Strict Spanish national statesmen, writers, and political leaders in the 1600s and 1700s were distrustful of rulers born outside Spain who could threaten to turn the Spanish empire into one part of their dreamed great or universal empire. They were not pleased with being left out or being left with very little power in government to oppose what they viewed as the devastation of Spain's financial and human capital in foreign wars. A three-year war, in the nineteenth century (1810–1813), to regain independence from France, plus France's contribution to the wars for independence in Spain's New World colonies, probably confirmed their distrust and trepidations.

On the basis of a needed purpose, moral commitment, and artistic discipline, 1700 Spain made popular theater and its ideas the target and centerpiece of reform. Luzán,¹⁰ the patriarch of neoclassicism, wrote his *Poética* to advance Horacio's neo-Aristotelian principles: Language and action must be believable, enjoyable, and beneficial; the neoclassic play respects the unities of place, time, and action, and it has a moral didactic purpose. Tragedy shows the actions of legendary kings, heroes, or noblemen whose fall, death, or defeats impart examples to rulers and high nobility. Comedy entertains but corrects the behavior of the citizenry. In their plays the flawed character repents, reforms, ends tragically, or is publicly ridiculed. Besides their underestimated drama, mostly based on contrary history, they write drama of biblical depth such as *Guzmán el Bueno* by Nicolás Fernández de Moratín. Like Isaac, Guzmán's moral duty or sacred obligation to God interplays the love-honor commitment with the conflict and drama of choice in the new historical time.

Jovellanos probably knew of Jeremy Collier or his book *English Stage*.¹¹ They coincide or share the common belief in the efficacy of the theater as an institution of social and moral reform. As spokesman for the prevailing attitude of the eighteenth century, Jovellanos summarizes the general sentiment when he

writes that the theater is not only a source of diversion but an important instrument commonly used to deform the heart of the citizens.¹² Popular Spanish plays—in particular, the short popular pieces being represented—were, in their view, an impediment to the creation of the modern (moral, enlightened, and happier) citizen. Jovellanos favors reforming the Golden Age *comedia* to “correct” its defects and weaknesses in structure, moral laxity, and ideological misconceptions. When asked, Jovellanos formulated the reformers’ dramatic ideal, which remains contentious to today. They wanted a theater that would “exalt virtue” and ignite the emotions that burned the human heart—a theater that diverts the mind from wanderings about truth and dogma that may lead to erroneous notions about doctrine or prevent the practice of virtue by exciting sinful passions and sentiments. Vice, in the theater, far from deserving protection, will warrant hate and censorship from the authorities. Government officials, in turn, should be humane and incorruptible citizens, full of virtue and patriotism, prudent and faithful heads of family, and loyal friends. In short, Jovellanos continues, they should be heroic and strong government officials, guardians of the public welfare, freedom, and rights of the citizens, protectors of the innocent, and the unrelenting persecutors of inequity (*Memorias* 460). As a dramatist, Jovellanos wrote several plays that advance the neoclassic, didactic, moral principle and artistic norm. He follows structural order, linear development, a simple plot; the nobility learns through tragically flawed characters who meet their due punishment. His drama aims to help form the new honorable man, the citizen who will make a better society.

El delincuente honrado [The Honorable Culprit], Jovellanos’s best-known play, introduces the sentimental play, which was popular all over Europe, and a new sentiment toward crime and punishment. *El delincuente* reflects a social evolution inspired by the influential judicial tenets contained in *Dei delitti e delle pene*, which Cesare Beccaria penned in 1764.¹³ Jovellanos warrants the modern system of criminal justice, adapting its ideas to a specific, immediate reality. When the characters, a husband and his wife, denounce absurd, cruel, and unjust laws, Jovellanos compares the different social and artistic contexts. They specifically underscore basic contradictions between the social law that requires gentlemen to live by the code of honor and the criminal law that imparts capital punishment on duelists. The contrasting attitude toward law and convention lends a new universal dimension to the honor theme, which distances *El delincuente* from a number of notable *comedia* precedents. Dramatists who carry on the *comedia* popular tradition today attack the influence of what dramatist Rodríguez Méndez, as historian of the theater, says is the influence of a liberal middle class that arrived in Spain in the 1850s with the Bourbon age.

García de la Huerta, Moratín, Iriarte, Nicolás Fernández de Moratín, and his son Leandro are all involved in the cultural warfare that radical reform, recuperation, and reconstruction signify. They write dramatic theory; put it into practice in plays corrective of society and aesthetics; and help form other neoclassic writers by providing them with concrete, perfectly structured, neoclassic