

as well as the shift in consciousness that might have been caused by the importation of Soviet commodities. Jacqueline Loss's book will ably guide the student who wants to pursue this subfield as well as experts in Cuban studies.

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KATHRYN M. MAYERS. *Visions of Empire in Colonial Spanish American Ekphrastic Writing*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press. 2012. xix + 165 pp.

Kathryn Mayers's *Visions of Empire* focuses on Luis de Góngora's influence on three colonial writers, Hernando Domínguez Camargo, Juan de Espinosa Medrano and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. The book looks specifically at the role played by Gongorine ekphrases and how these are adapted by Spanish American Creole authors, offering a personal and American approach to European literary codes, thus fostering a complex meeting of perspectives that shift between the Old World and the New. Ekphrasis produces word-pictures that perform both a representation and a contradictory dialogue with imperial power, asserting its prominence whilst exposing its weaknesses that were increasingly apparent in America's late seventeenth-century society, fragmented by various political, racial and sexual hierarchies, divided by the demands of the Creoles against the privileges of the *gachupines* and the exploited native and black population.

*Visions of Empire's* aims are thus manifold. Firstly, it seeks to revisit the often studied topic of Góngora's legacy in America; secondly, it analyses the relationship between writing and visual culture, establishing the ways in which art and ideology complement each other; and finally, it wishes to reconsider the role of Creole intellectuals in colonial Spanish America. The monograph is organised in five chapters where these issues are developed. Chapter one is devoted to the concept of ekphrasis; chapter two focuses on Góngora's original ekphrases and his innovative style; and each of the final chapters is devoted to one of the three colonial writers considered by Mayers. Her approaches are buttressed by a sound grasp of current debates on visual studies and Creole identity, as well as by historical knowledge of the period and valuable close-readings of various ekphrases present in Camargo, Medrano and Sor Juana.

Mayers's monograph is a welcome addition to the field of Spanish American Colonial Studies. Her work has the great virtue of going beyond

conventional and stagnating binary oppositions that see Creole writers as mere perpetrators of European literary and ideological discourses, or as defenders of a proto-nationalist American identity opposed to the Spanish hegemony (*contraconquista*). *Visions of Empire* claims that Creole authors set themselves in more nuanced and contradictory positions with regards to questions of identity and political control. According to Mayers, Domínguez Camargo's *Poema heroico* celebrates "American political legitimacy while simultaneously undermining the rights and rationality of non-Creole Americans" (66); whilst Espinosa Medrano's *Apologético* combines "a kind of authority derived from multiple sectors of Andean society – the cultural authority of European colonizers and their offspring and the moral authority of Andean elites" (105); and Sor Juana's *blasones* picture "a female, Creole self likewise torn by identification with different peoples in conflict and capable of seeing from their very diverse points of view" (112).

Such ambiguities are the product of the combined influences of the American and European background, shared by these authors, who found in Góngora's innovations an invaluable vessel to cater for their multiperspectivism. Mayers believes that the prominence of *cultismo* in the New World lies in the fact that this style "replaces the notion of a single, universal aesthetic ideal with the notion of proliferating ideals and standards" (43). Such proliferation would be at the base of the *Barroco de Indias*, fostering the writing of contradictory and self-reflexive literary works that de-center imperialistic discourse whilst redefining it from various complementary points of view. The trouble is that, as intriguing as these arguments are, there is at times a certain lack of evidence. One would have liked more detailed close-readings as Mayers often appears to be primarily in conversation with other critics rather than with the texts themselves.

An example of this can be found in her analysis of Camargo. Mayers claims that the *Poema heroico*'s use of Gongoran-inspired still lifes shows clear signs of an American re-elaboration that challenges the discourse of empire. However, the examples provided seem insufficient to substantiate this thesis. This can be seen in her discussion of the replacement of the turkey that appears in *Soledades* with, in *Poema heroico*, an American bird whose feathers were used in Inca headbands ("del Inca es diadema") (71). Mayers attempts to use this to prove her argument that Camargo alludes "not just to American riches and exoticism but also to the existence of a separate American political community that predates the Spanish conquest" (73). But why should we let this reading overrule traditional interpretations of these lines that identify them as instances of decorative exoticism, presenting thus the New World as a set of consumable

commodities? Too much weight is granted to a few isolated mentions of American products in a vast and complex poem, which are always interpreted by Mayers as signs of a self-conscious ideological Creole shift. *Visions of Empire* does not elaborate enough on these lines, failing to give evidence that would support its claims.

An additional issue with Mayer's thesis is that not all of the innovations that she identifies in these writers find their main source of inspiration in Góngora. For instance, in Camargo there are several cases of prosopopeia, with various vegetables entertaining a fight amongst themselves (75-76), which seem very likely to be a direct imitation of Quevedo's ballad "Boda y acompañamiento del campo" ("Don Repollo y doña Berza"). The same could be said in several of the poems by Sor Juana studied in chapter five, which are linked with the European Petrarchan tradition, and not merely with Góngora. Thus the net of literary discourses is wider and more complex than *Visions of Empire* suggests.

This monograph is, however, a valuable contribution to the study of colonial poetry. Mayers proposes a very healthy revision of some of the binaries and entrenched positions that have characterized a large number of publications produced in the field of Spanish American Colonial Literature. In that sense her work is an important step towards a more nuanced and balanced approach to these complex sources. Mayers's book is written with clarity and acumen, her scholarship is solid and offers much food for thought for future approaches to Camargo, Medrano and Sor Juana.

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MARILYN G. MILLER, ED. *Tango Lessons: Movement, Sound, Image, and Text in Contemporary Practice*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014. x + 282 pp.

TANGO is one of those master tropes of a culture, deeply embedded in a societal imaginary and its language such that whole spheres of semantic meaning, literal and metaphoric, are built around it. As one well knows, tango has its origins in the Río de la Plata region, on the riverbanks on both sides of the delta (it is of little consequence whether Uruguay or Argentina claim historical preeminence). It was profoundly rooted in immigrant culture, most characteristically recognized for its Italian roots, but also African-slave origins (the modest African community survives with greater evidence in Uruguay than it did in Argentina, a topic of much controversy), and, as we are beginning to document more today, with Jewish immigrant