
Bianco, Paola and Antonio Sobejano-Morán,
eds. *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de*
***pedra* by Tirso de Molina.**

Newburyport, MA: Focus, 2005. ISBN: 1-58510-142-7.

Paola Bianco and Antonio Sobejano-Morán have created a welcome new edition of Tirso de Molino's classic drama of the Spanish Golden Age, *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra*. Their edition is versatile since it may be used in upper-level high school courses (Spanish IV, V, or AP), as well as in intermediate (fourth semester) and in introduction to literature courses at the college level. Bianco and Sobejano-Morán's edition is part of a series from Focus Publishing that makes classic Spanish literature accessible to non-native students. The editors provide the full text of the original *Burlador de Sevilla* of 1622, accompanied by an introduction, and glossed text with notes, footnotes, written exercises for review and analysis, a bibliography of essential studies on Tirso de Molina, the *Burlador de Sevilla*, and an overview of the history of Spanish literature.

The edition opens with a thirteen-page "Introducción" that is both sophisticated and accessible. Divided neatly into four sections ("Vida," "Teatro," "Prosa," and "*El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra*"), the introduction provides a solid framework on Tirso de Molino's life and literary works; his theatrical output in relation to other masters of Golden Age theatre, such as Lope de Vega and Calderón de la Barca; and a brief summary of *El burlador de Sevilla*, followed by the play's unique features and an introduction to the Don Juan figure. Each section of the introduction provides a thorough overview peppered with details to pique the reader's interest.

Included in the "Vida" section on Tirso's life are his entrance into the Orden de la Merced in the convent of Guadalajara at the age of sixteen, followed by his studies there and in Toledo and Salamanca; his time in the Dominican Republic from 1616 to 1618; tensions between Tirso and the church, exemplified in the sanctions imposed on him by the Spanish government in 1624, which prohibited

him from writing works of theatre and profane verse; his entrance into the convent of Trujillo, where he later became *comendador*; his return to the convent of Madrid; and his later deployment to Cuenca as punishment for refusing to give up his books of profane literature in the convent.

The section entitled “Teatro,” meanwhile, contextualizes Tirso’s important place in the “ciclo de Lope” as a bridge between the theatrical innovations established by Lope de Vega and the later psychological Baroque drama of Calderón de la Barca. Among the distinguishing features of Tirso’s theatre included here are the emotional and psychological development of his characters as individuals; the use of lively dialogue, satire, and humor; and the psychological development of female characters, who often figure as protagonists in his plays. This section also contains a detailed discussion of the various types of theatrical works penned by Tirso. These include his biblical plays, such as the psychological thriller *La venganza de Tamar* (1623); hagiographic works, or “comedias de santos,” such as the *Santa Juana* trilogy (1614) and *La ninfa del cielo* (1617); theological pieces, such as *El burlador de Sevilla* (1622) and the classic *El condenado por desconfiado* (1622); historical plays, such as *La prudencia en la mujer* (1622); the “comedias de carácter,” such as *El vergonzoso en palacio* and *Marta la piadosa* (1614-15); and his plays of intrigue, or “comedias de intriga,” such as *La villana de Vallecas* (1620) and the delightful *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* (1615). The editors include the basic plot lines and distinguishing characteristics of the best plays in each of these categories, but at times fall prey to the temptation of providing too much detail, making this section a bit lengthy and tedious to navigate. Nonetheless, this section did bring back many fond memories of these plays for this reviewer, and the basic plots provided here will likely tempt many students to explore further Tirso’s intriguing and satisfying *oeuvre*.

The brief section of “Prosa” provides titles and a few distinguishing features of Tirso’s best-known prose works, such as the frame-tale collection of *Los cigarrales de Toledo* (1635), which includes a variety of short stories, plays, and lyrical poetry, and *Historia de la Merced* (1639), a history of Tirso’s religious order that reveals biographical information about the author and the evolution of his literary style.

The final section of the “Introducción” is “*El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra*,” a detailed discussion of Tirso’s timeless and most important work. Included in this section are a general plot summary of the play; Tirso’s creation of the Don Juan character and its defining characteristics; the play’s moral, sociopolitical, and ideological value and its over-arching theme of divine justice and punishment; the psychological dimension and depth of the figure of Don Juan; and the omnipresence of the Don Juan myth in literature, musicals, the plastic arts, and film across cultures and time.

Immediately following the “Introducción” is the original and complete text of *El burlador de Sevilla*. Bianco and Sobejano-Morán have glossed passages of vocabulary and phrases that would be difficult for the reader unfamiliar with Spanish Golden Age drama. The notes accompanying these passages are clear and concise and are provided in a shaded box at the bottom of each page for quick and easy reference. The editors juxtapose part or all of the original phrase and its

contemporary equivalent. For example, in Act One (*Jornada Primera*) the gloss on the line “mas ha de ir tan bien vendida” is, “Mas ha. . . vendida: alguien pagará las consecuencias si yo pierdo la vida” (3). For “Industria me ha de valer” (5) we find “Industria. . . valer: debo ser ingenioso,” while “la espada en la mano aprieta” (7) appears as “La espada. . . aprieta: con la espada en la mano.” As can be seen, the editors have chosen contemporary language and word order that is clear and concise, while respecting the meaning of the original text. These notes also include modern or more common lexical equivalents for vocabulary that might be unfamiliar to the student reader of today or that has a different orthography. Examples include “Brío: valor” (4), “Mocedad: juventud” (6), “Majadero: tonto” (10), “Menester: necesario” (113), “De regocijo: de estar alegre” (99), and “Escura: oscura” (112).

The editors have also enriched this edition with footnotes that clarify meaning or provide literary and cultural context and appear immediately underneath the glosses. Since there are only 88 footnotes for 120 pages of text, they appear sparingly and enhance the reader’s understanding without becoming a distraction. They are in clear and succinct Spanish, so the student can quickly grasp them and return to the original text. For example, after Don Octavio learns that his wife, the duchess Isabela, was found with another man in their bedroom, he exclaims “¡Ah, veleta!” (16). The footnote provides both the literal meaning of this term, as well as Octavio’s metaphorical use of it, which reflects the frustration and shame he feels from what he believes to be his wife’s infidelity: “*Veleta*: objeto que indica la dirección del viento. Aquí, y en la frase siguiente, se refiere a la inconstancia de la mujer” (16). Another example occurs in the final scene of the play as Don Juan’s servant Catalinón remarks to his master that the plate of stew Don Gonzalo has placed before them must contain “uñas de sastre.” The footnote explains that tailors (*sastres*) were known for being miserly, thus revealing Catalinón’s tongue-in-cheek humor with regard to Don Gonzalo’s hospitality and the comic relief Catalinón provides in the role of *gracioso*: “*Uñas de sastre*: en lugar de uñas de vaca. Hay una crítica a los sastres, conocidos por su avaricia (MacCurdy y Parr)” (115).

Following the play itself is a section of questions and exercises designed to help students review key events and relationships in the play and push them to higher-level thinking and analysis. The section is divided into three parts, each covering an act of the play. Each of these parts begins with a “Cuestionario,” which contains 10 or 11 brief, plot-oriented questions. For Act One, for example, we find “¿Cómo engañó don Juan a Isabela?” and “¿Qué actitud revela Tisbea frente a sus pretendientes?” (121). Each “Cuestionario” is followed by a different exercise: for Act One there is a series of true or false statements; Act Two has a multiple choice activity; and for Act Three there are sentences that students must complete. These three parts are followed by a series of questions under the heading “Análisis crítico.” These questions require more in-depth analysis and thought, as well as a synthesis of major events and their relationship to underlying themes and criticism. For example, “Desde el punto de vista religioso, don Juan es una persona subversiva y heterodoxa, [sic] ¿cómo se manifiesta su oposición a la iglesia y/o a los dogmas de la religión católica?” (126). Another question asks, “El ofrecimiento de la mano, en señal de petición o consentimiento de matrimonio, se registra en varios momentos de la acción dramática. Coméntelos. Asimismo,

explique cómo muere don Juan y qué relación tiene su muerte con las promesas que hace las mujeres” (127). This section closes with four longer essay questions under the heading “Ensayo” that ask students to go beyond the play itself and compare and contrast elements of *El burlador* with other works of literature, forms of art, or political figures of early modern Spain. As with all sections and notes throughout the edition, this section is entirely in Spanish. Finally, there is a one-page bibliography of essential studies and editions of *El burlador de Sevilla* for further reading about the play and its author and Spanish literature in general, including works by Juan Luis Alborg, Américo Castro, and James Parr.

Paola Bianco and Antonio Sobejano-Morán have produced a noteworthy student edition of Tirso de Molino’s classic drama *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra*. Their edition is complete, succinct, and sensibly annotated, making Tirso’s timeless and universal play accessible to advanced high school students of Spanish, as well as to college students at the intermediate to advanced levels.

Bradford G. Ellis, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Spanish
Department of Modern Languages and Literatures
St. Norbert College
De Pere, WI

Publisher’s Response

It might seem strange that we wish to compete with inexpensive, imported editions of these works, available through any number of foreign language book distributors. However, we developed this series in part because of my conviction that there is a chasm between the highly structured readings of first and second year language courses and real literature. This edition of *El burlador de Sevilla* is part of a series designed to bridge that gap for native speakers of English, providing a minimum but important linguistic clues and a cultural context to give them a solid introduction to literature. We have been pleased with the feedback from teachers and are grateful for this very positive review. Professor Ellis understands the objectives we set out to accomplish and describes all the strong points of this classroom edition of *El burlador de Sevilla*.

Ron Pullins
Focus Publishing