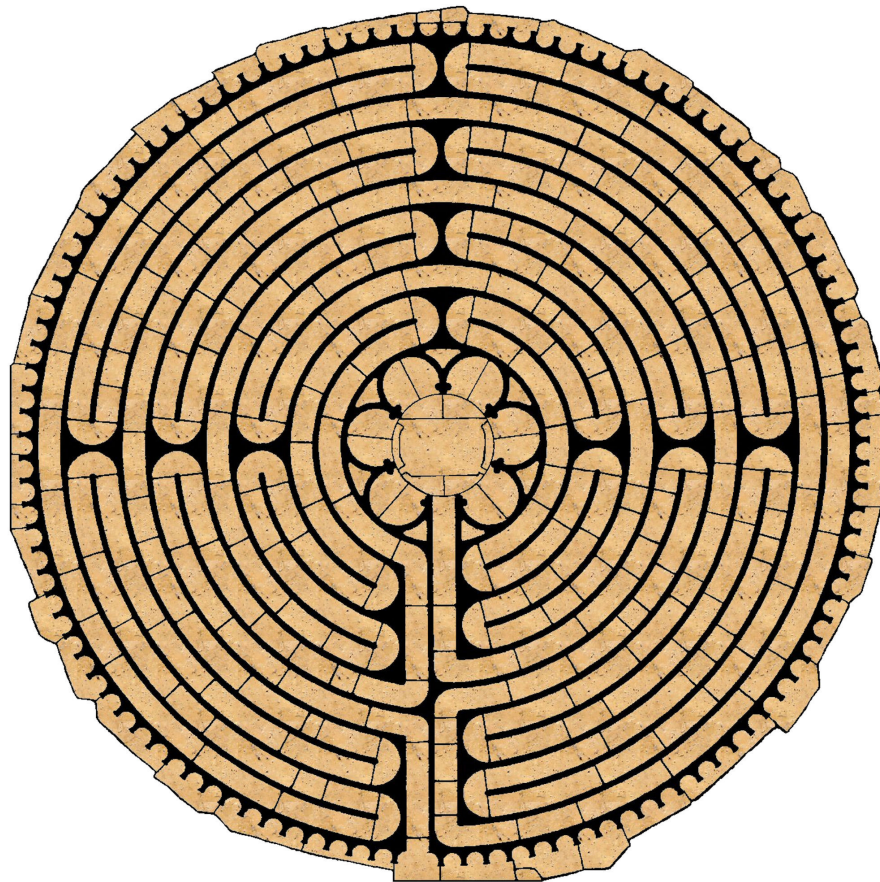


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This fascinating volume, edited by two professors whose research focuses on autobiographies, offers the reader numerous insights about life in Spain from the nineteen-fifties to today, Spanish authors from this time period, and Spanish literature from the medieval to the modern period. Yet the focus of this volume is not authors or texts, but rather the lives of the scholars themselves who have made the literature and culture of Spain the focus of their teaching and research. Anna Caballé, from the Universitat de Barcelona, explains in the Introduction that the idea for the volume came during a semester she spent at the University of Virginia where she worked with Randolph Pope. One day the following question occurred to the two of them: “¿por qué no reunir algunas de las voces más señaladas del hispanismo estadounidense, de modo que estas nos proporcionaran las claves personales de una vocación compartida?” (5). They then invited contributions from distinguished Hispanists working in all regions of the United States. In their essays these professors describe their early years, how they developed an interest in Spanish literature and culture, their undergraduate and graduate education, and finally their career trajectory, touching on teaching, research, service, travels, and family life. The volume, then, gives the reader a rare glimpse of the personal lives of scholars, who discuss their successes, failures, and the state of Hispanism in the United States over the past fifty years. Caballé notes of this project and the scholars who contributed to it: “Pensamos que el lector podría conocer no sólo los motivos que les llevaron a dedicar su vida profesional al estudio de nuestra cultura, sino cómo ese estudio encajó en los *campus* norteamericanos contribuyendo decisivamente a una nueva y fecunda etapa del hispanismo en aquel país” (5). The book consists of Caballé’s Introduction (titled “Veintiuna autobiografías inesperadas”) followed by twenty-one chapters, each written by a different contributor.

The professors who tell their life stories come from all over the United States, some from cities including Brooklyn, Pittsburgh, and Richmond and others from small towns in California, Wyoming, Wisconsin, and Florida. Though the majority of these scholars are from the

United States, Lily Litvak is from Mexico City, Joan Ramon Resina is from Barcelona, Frederick de Armas is from Cuba, Steven Hutchinson is from South Africa, Randolph Pope is from Chile, and Michael Gerli is from Costa Rica. One might suspect that these well-known Spanish professors all must have grown up in Spanish-speaking households, but that is not the case. In fact, many of them were first introduced to Spanish in middle school. David Gies had never taken a Spanish class before receiving a scholarship to spend a summer during high school in Lima, and he explains that before the trip, “formé parte de un grupo de dos que hacía un curso intensivo de español y lo terminé con la asombrosa habilidad de poder decirle a la familia que me hospedara que si la mano del mono estaba atrapada en un pozo, yo podría ayudar” (192). Patricia Hart took her first Spanish class at the age of nineteen.

Were these distinguished Hispanists destined to dedicate their professional lives to the study of Spanish literature and culture? Not necessarily. Lily Litvak majored in chemistry as an undergraduate, Frederick de Armas began graduate school studying geography, Margaret Greer originally planned on getting a doctorate in political science and only began her doctoral studies in Spanish literature when she was thirty-four, and Patricia Hart started in law school before switching to a graduate program in Spanish literature. Anthony Cascardi writes “no me importa decir que nunca pensé en pasar mi vida como estudioso de Literatura Española y Comparada, de Cervantes y la novela, de la Edad de Oro y la primera literatura europea moderna, de filosofía, teoría estética, o cualquiera de las disciplinas que me han ocupado durante más de tres décadas” (67). It is quite clear throughout the volume that these future Hispanists most often would have been unable to predict what the future held for them. To note just one example, the incredibly prolific researcher Frederick de Armas explains that as an undergraduate: “en una de las clases de literatura española me enviaron a la biblioteca a investigar un tema. Después de leer un artículo en la revista *Hispania*, pensé «si yo puedo escribir algo así, seré la persona más feliz del mundo»” (24). Joan Ramon Resina expresses a theme present in a number of the autobiographies when he writes: “a veces algo accidental decide nuestro destino” (555). In his case, a chance encounter at the age of fifteen with Hermann Hesse’s *Steppenwolf*, “una novela que me inculcó el virus literario” (555), determined his future as a literary critic.

Common reasons mentioned in the essays for becoming Spanish professors include a passion for the Spanish language, a love of reading, inspiring middle school and high school teachers, study abroad trips, and positive experiences in Spanish classes at both the undergraduate and graduate level. To note just a few examples of reasons that contributed to these scholars becoming Hispanists, Patricia Hart writes: “[a]prender castellano ha sido sin lugar a duda lo más divertido que he hecho en la vida” (291) while David Gies explains that during a six-month undergraduate study abroad experience in Salamanca “mi mundo intelectual cobró vida” (193) and later adds: “[e]sos seis meses en España me dieron un profundo aprecio por su cultura rica en historia, dinámica en el arte y la literatura, y con una personalidad seductora” (196). Of her year spent studying in Madrid, Susan Kirkpatrick writes: “Me di cuenta de que la propia España era el aula que transformaría mi comprensión del mundo” (423). In a similar vein, Harriet Turner writes of her undergraduate year abroad: “Vivir y estudiar en España había sido una experiencia que me cambió la vida” (602).

In terms of their undergraduate and graduate studies, the contributors write of taking classes with eminent scholars like Ricardo Gullón, María Salgado, Alexander Parker, Stephen Gilman, Samuel Armistead, and Concha Zardoya. Harriet Turner had Borges as a professor at the University of Texas, where she and other students would meet in cafés to hear him talk about metaphors, and she later took a class from Cernuda at UCLA. Noël Valis took graduate classes at Bryn Mawr with Enrique Tierno Galván and eventually became friends with him; he went on years later to be the mayor of Madrid. In their essays these scholars discuss topics like their first academic job search, relations with colleagues, the challenges of getting tenure, and the research agendas they pursued. This distinguished group of scholars most certainly has received numerous academic accolades, but their autobiographies make clear that every career comes with its ups and downs. There are cases of tenure denied, negative reviews of monographs, problems with department chairs and colleagues, and institutions that were just a bad fit. On the other hand, these scholars also write of the satisfaction of working with students, the intellectual challenge inherent in contributing new ideas to a field of study, and the joys of working in a department where everyone gets along well. One gets the sense that all of these contributors are happy to have decided to become

professors focused on Spanish literature and culture. Patricia Grieve, for example, point out: “Puede ser tan fácil olvidar cuán privilegiados somos de llevar una ‘vida intelectual’ y que, como profesores universitarios, se nos pague por leer, escribir y enseñar” (269).

Many of the female contributors write in their essays of the ways that sexism has affected them both during their studies and their career. Several taught in departments that had never granted a woman tenure. Incidents described in the volume range from not receiving a scholarship because male applicants were given priority to working with men intent on showing their power to being groped by a senior male professor who, after his advances were rejected, reminded his junior colleague that he would be on her tenure committee. In the early sixties Susan Kirkpatrick received a Fulbright to study for two years at Cambridge University. When she asked a dean at the University of Wyoming for advice about transitioning to a doctoral program in the US after her studies in England, “[s]e rio y dijo que no había razón para preocuparse por eso: una mujer joven como yo se casaría en dos años y no pensaría más en la escuela graduada.” She adds that “este comentario, típico del sexismo sin disfraz ni conciencia de aquel periodo, me irritó más que cualquier juicio oído durante mis estudios” (434). Lou Charnon-Deutsch notes of her doctoral studies in the seventies: “En la Universidad de Chicago nunca leímos un estudio que siquiera remotamente estuviera relacionado con el tema de la mujer en la literatura. De hecho, que yo pueda acordarme nunca leímos ni un solo libro escrito por una mujer; lo llamábamos «el gran vacío»” (121). Patricia Grieve writes about the advice she received from her female colleagues at Princeton in the late seventies: “Cada una reflexionaba a su modo sobre las dificultades que encarnaban las mujeres en el mundo académico, y acerca de cómo responder de la mejor manera ante situaciones particulares” (26). The status of women in the academy may have improved over the decades, but it is clear that many challenges remain. Roberta Lee Johnson writes that until recently she considered herself a professional woman of the generation between the fifties – when many women “no pensaban en tener una carrera fuera de la de esposa y madre” – and the younger generation of women who “contemplaban desde niñas «lo que iban a hacer en la carrera.»” She then concludes: “Creía ingenuamente que de alguna manera la tensión entre estos dos caminos vitales para la mujer se había resuelto, pero al conversar con mis actuales estudiantes graduadas de UCLA, veo que ellas siguen

luchando por encontrar un equilibrio entre la vida tradicional de la mujer madre y ama de casa y la mujer profesional” (412).

These autobiographies offer the reader insight into the wide range of teaching, research, and service activities that these professors have engaged in over the years. Edward Friedman, for example, taught literary analysis to children from eleven to sixteen years old in summer classes. Linda Gould Levine not only researched and published on contemporary literature, she became friends with Juan Goytisolo and Lidia Falcón. Lily Litvak organized art exhibits while David Gies taught weekend and summer classes on Spanish literature, history, and culture to high school teachers. Michael Gerli helped the Sandia Pueblo Tribe of New Mexico favorably resolve a land dispute with the United States government by reviewing seventeenth-century documents from the King of Spain.

Some of the contributors focus primarily on their investigations, allowing the reader to trace the intellectual trajectory of their careers. Anthony Cascardi, for example, lays out logically each of the major questions that has interested him over the years and then explains how those questions have led him to research and publish his findings. Other contributors, while still addressing their careers, write more of their life experiences. In this regard, Steven Hutchinson’s description of his childhood in South Africa and Margaret Greer’s travels – she lived for two years in Puerto Rico, three years in the Dominican Republic, two years in Guatemala, and two years in Spain – make for interesting reading. Many of the essayists offer intriguing glimpses of life in Spain in the sixties and seventies under Franco.

This volume will be of interest particularly for those who want an inside view of the life of a scholar. Graduate students and early-career professors would benefit most by reading about how these twenty-one scholars have progressed in their careers and why they are so interested in the literature and culture of Spain. Moreover, a reader of these essays can learn a great deal about the various aspects of the life of a professor. In terms of teaching, for instance, David Herzberger explains: “en vez de comenzar una clase sobre la poesía surrealista con una discusión sobre el surrealismo, sus características principales y su contexto histórico, vamos directamente a los textos. Los estudiantes deben esforzarse, pero les permito que vuelen libres de las redes contextuales restrictivas para que puedan buscar por sí mismos las conexiones y las contradicciones.” Once

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the poems have been explored, “[s]olo entonces [...] añadimos el contexto, la teoría y la tradición con lo cual se alcanza un mayor entendimiento.” And the reason he uses this approach? He explains: “Enseñar al revés, es decir comenzar con las características principales del surrealismo, generalmente sofoca el placer que puede hallarse en explorar un texto, en reformularlo, en discernir fragmentos de sentido agrupados imaginativamente” (337). In terms of service, Herzberger and Geraldine Cleary Nichols both provide useful observations on the position of department chair based on their experiences in that role. Linda Gould Levine, who wrote her dissertation on the work of Juan Goytisolo, writes: “Quisiera ofrecer mi consejo a hispanistas jóvenes que escriben tesis o artículos sobre autores o autoras a quienes conocen y cuya obra pueda producir en cierto momento crisis de conciencia o ambivalencia o críticas difíciles de escribir por esa misma relación afectiva que tienen con el escritor o escritora. Hace falta medir muy bien cómo ser fiel a un@ mism@ y mantener intacta la relación que se estima. No traicionar la ética profesional que te motiva a escribir, pero tampoco traicionar a alguien cuya obra respetas por más que te enfrentes con problemas de estilo, ideología o planteamiento” (458). In sum, this volume is an important contribution to the field of Hispanism in the United States, offering insight into the lives and careers of some of today’s most prominent specialists in Spanish literature and culture.

Bill Worden
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