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Book Reviews

Tablero de Ajedrez: imágenes del negro heroico en la comedia española y en la literatura e iconografía sacra del Brasil esclavista. Por Enrique Martínez López. (Paris: Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian, 1998. 199 pp. Ilustraciones, bibliografía, índice. Precio no disponible.)

Juxtaposed black-and-white spaces upon which opposing kings, queens, bishops, knights, rooks, and pawns eliminate one another with the motivation of outside influences, does not typically conjure images of colonial attitudes on race and slavery. However, Enrique Martínez López's *Tablero de Ajedrez: imágenes del negro heroico en la comedia española y en la literatura e iconografía sacra del Brasil esclavista* offers a fitting description for a clever representation of the complexities of Iberian race relations and their historical impact on ideas regarding the institution of slavery in Spanish and Portuguese America. The reference to a chessboard in the title also speaks to the intimate coupling of varied individual elements divided along several lines and joined in the pursuit of victory over proximal and menacing threats on either side of the playing field. Martínez López demonstrates how historical references to the notions of just war in Spain and Portugal vacillate between condemning poor treatment of the blacks and playing into the politics of colonial domination. He develops critical readings of several sources, including drama, sculpture, painting, and religious homily, to illustrate the ambivalence of the colonial situation in Spain, Portugal, and their American colonies. The sermons of the Portuguese Jesuit, Padre António Vieira, and the theatrical pieces of the Spanish playwright, Lope de Vega, constitute the more prominent sources of his inquiry. He includes a number of others as well, among them the works of sculptors, painters, composers, and lesser-known writers. All of the texts he examines reveal the difficult play between the ancient notion of just war and the colonial institution of transatlantic African slavery.

Through an adept intermingling of historical research and criticism, Martínez López shows how commonly identified opponents of slavery, either wittingly or unwittingly, contributed to the intensification of the institution in the Americas. His strongest example examines how António Vieira combined his grammatical expertise and impressive sense of humor to address the terrible consequences of the slave trade without significantly challenging the power of plantation owners who supported his ministry with the financial backing of a slavocratic economy. Martínez López illustrates how the quick-witted double-speak Vieira employed won him the respect of black slaves as

well as the support of white masters keeping their property in check. Martínez López convincingly argues that Vieira maintained his own position in the game through a combination of ambivalent anti-slave discourse and Catholic ministering.

Martínez López presents equally nuanced critiques of dramatic works by the Spanish writer, Lope de Vega, and his Portuguese contemporaries, Frei Rodrigo Alvarez Pacheco and Juan Bautista Diamante, to reveal how theatrical portrayals of noble and heroic Africans dignified black strength and nobility just as they buttressed the superiority of the Catholic faith. Martínez López provides numerous examples where "sinful" African men or women become Catholic saints worthy of reverence because of their adherence to the domination of the victorious European colonizer. He further illustrates this ambivalent reference to black or white superiority and/or inferiority in his examination of typical representations of Saint Benedict in Brazil. This black saint traditionally holds the Christ child in his arms. His honor is dependent on his relationship to a powerful white icon that represents both strength and vulnerability, not unlike the stereotypical image of the black African in slavery.

The graying of binary juxtapositions in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts examined in Martínez Lopez's *Tablero de Ajedrez* give a nuanced portrayal of the cultural and political circumstances that inspired men to challenge and simultaneously reinforce negative colonialist views of black slaves. Martínez Lopez's critical and comparative study of varied texts is a welcomed addition to the literature on race and slavery in Ibero-American studies. His focus on Spanish and Portuguese sources preceding the abolitionist discourse of the early-nineteenth century breaks from traditionally narrow treatments of these topics. It also contributes an Iberian perspective to current studies on the ambivalence of the colonial situation.

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