

Spanish Plays in the 1800s

My internship through the Fund for Innovative Teaching and Learning was designed to expose me to the field of research in the humanities. I wanted to explore this field in order to experience what it would be like to research literature as a profession. I worked with Spanish Professor Ruth Sanchez-Imizcoz on a research project she had already begun which focused on the evolution of a theatrical genre called the “entremés” which was popular in Spain in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The project sought to look at how the genre changed in that time period by looking in depth at a few lesser-well-known authors and their works. The entremés was a peculiar genre of theater, as it was featured during the intermissions of larger plays and spoke to the issues of the common man that the larger works didn’t address. Its authors came from all different backgrounds and social classes, and used the entremés for purposes of social commentary and satire. My interest in doing this internship came from my love of the Spanish language, and from my desire to learn more about a subject and time period of which I had limited knowledge. Thus, my internship was not only very helpful in learning about a potential profession I might be interested in; it also allowed me to gain knowledge that will help me with my studies inside my Spanish major.

My internship was structured on a task by task basis, which made my day to day activities quite irregular. I spent the first two weeks or so reading and gathering information about the time period and the authors we would be interested in. Upon Professor Sanchez’s instruction, I read from a two-volume text entitled “Historia del teatro español” (History of Spanish Theater) which chronicles the cultural context, authors, works, and actors behind the development of Spanish theater since its beginning.

I read about a list of 11 different authors and their works, the context under which they wrote, and the elements of their style or content that made them important characters in the field of play-writing. This stage in my internship was extremely important for my understanding of the genre's characteristics in general, and of the authors who were writing them, which was foundational for my ability to help do any research on the *entremés*.

After completing this task of orienting myself in the project, I began to delve into my first task of research, which was to find the titles to as many *entremeses* as I could written by those 11 authors that were of interest to us. This task may sound easy, but keep in mind that most of the authors we were concerned with were less famous playwrights of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thus, this assignment proved to be more difficult than it sounded, but with the use of "Historia del teatro español", a few other history texts, and the internet, I developed a working list of authors and their works in the *entremés* genre. This was a good exercise in using multiple sources to check information, which compelled me to make a more accurate and comprehensive list.

My next task was the least informative of all my tasks and it was also the assignment that took the most time to complete, but it was absolutely essential to the project's ability to move forward and be successful. Professor Sanchez had a large collection of primary documents that she had purchased from the national archives of the Spanish government. These included copies of several books from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that contained collections of what were considered to be the best *entremeses* during various eras of the genre's popularity. These manuscripts were such unique and vitally informative primary resources, but there was one problem: they were all preserved

in several rolls of microfilm. Thus, in order for the documents to be of any use to us, they had to be blown up and printed out so that we could read them. So, I spent countless hours printing out those 350 year old books one page at a time, allowing us to deal with each page and the information it provided more easily. During that time, I gained a lot of experience with microfilm machines, and just by looking at the pages over and over as I printed them out, I began to perceive an interesting sense of both the time period and culture in which these plays were performed. Because of the amount of work I knew this assignment was going to take, I broke it up in pieces and did other tasks in between, which made it a lot more manageable. In the end, I printed out 12 full books of entremés collections, which was critical to being able to experience the significance of the pieces and their performance.

One of my other research responsibilities was compiling a bibliography of books and articles that could be useful to learning more about our topic. To do this, I returned to “Historia del teatro español” and copied by hand the bibliographies from all the chapters that mentioned any of the authors that were of interest to us. Not all of the sources used in those volumes were going to be useful to us, so I had to discern which ones were going to give us new information in our specific areas of interest, and which ones would give us information we didn’t need. After painstakingly compiling that information, I searched to see which books or articles were readily available to us at the University library. Having a list of sources readily available was important in case we needed to double check information, or change sources and take the research in a different direction. In the field of research, having a multitude of specific sources at your fingertips is an important key

to quality work, and I learned how to be organized and logical about finding the sources that would be most helpful.

After completing the task of printing the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts (roughly 3,500 pages), I recorded the publishing information of each book and catalogued the contents of each book by title and author so that we could have information on the origins of the works readily available. For many of the books the publishing date, the name of the publisher, and the city where it was published were given before the text, but for many others that information was absent. Furthermore, each book contained between 15 and 20 entremeses, and for the majority of them the name of the author was not given. So using our sources (as well as the internet) I did research to find out as much as I could about the books themselves as well as their contents. This proved to be very difficult because these 17<sup>th</sup> century books seemed to be minimally catalogued or studied. Furthermore, many of the works within these books were written by anonymous authors. This made it very challenging to find information about them, as well as discern which works simply didn't list the known author, as opposed to those which were written anonymously.

All of my responsibilities up to that point had been preparatory, both for my personal understanding of the project, and for the success of the project itself. With the foundation for further research laid, I began to read through some of the sources from the bibliography I organized, but most importantly, I started reading the manuscripts and trying to experience the entremeses as much as I could. This was much more difficult than I expected, as the vocabulary, expressions, and social context were too different for me to interpret well with my knowledge of the Spanish language. Thus, in order to better

understand the content of the plays, I worked closely with Professor Sanchez reading through them line by line and analyzing which aspects of the work would be important to consider or take note of when compiling information. This part of my internship was extremely useful because it gave me a thorough idea of what research in the humanities was all about. Most importantly, I learned that though primary documents may be the most difficult to understand, they offer the most insight and opportunity of experiencing the topic of interest.

All in all, I think my internship was very successful. I feel that I learned exactly what I needed to learn in order to work well doing research in the humanities. Perhaps the most important thing that I learned is that thorough and well-organized preparation is essential to productive and effective research. Without taking the time required to organize one's thoughts and resources before doing research, the project can become confusing and unorganized, ultimately decreasing how compelling the argument is (something I have had problems with in the past). By giving me a series of specific tasks to carry out, Professor Sanchez showed me how thorough preparation is logical, very manageable when executed strategically, and worth all the difference to the outcome of the project. This internship has not dramatically altered my career goals, but it has certainly given me the confidence to be able to execute a research project on my own. With my new experience and knowledge, I plan to undertake an honor's research thesis within my Spanish major, which will test my abilities both as a student and as a researcher, and acting perhaps as a final exam covering what I have learned through my FITL internship this summer.