

Baroque, Allegory, Comedia: The Transfiguration of Tragedy in Seventeenth-Century Spain. by Kluge, Sofie.

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***Baroque, Allegory, Comedia: The Transfiguration of Tragedy in Seventeenth-Century Spain.* by Kluge, Sofie (review)**

Margaret M. Olsen

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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Sofie Kluge's erudite study *Baroque, Allegory, Comedia* posits that the Spanish Baroque evolves in equivocal tension between medievalism and modernity and that this ideological conflict generates a unique creative impetus in the literary arts, particularly in the *comedia*. Kluge views this innovative spirit as an alternative modernity in the realm of aesthetics, one that seeks to resolve anxieties arising from the significant historical transformations taking place in seventeenth-century Spain: bankruptcy, decadence, and the loss of global hegemony, the rise of early modern capitalism, and concomitant societal reconfigurations. Kluge argues that allegory is the primary device by which Baroque artists and critics confront secular materialism, and that they do so by employing allegory's ambiguous capacities to transfigure the aesthetic pursuits of classical antiquity and Renaissance neo-paganism into morally didactic works that reflect post-Tridentine concerns. Kluge succinctly states that "allegory is an essentially syncretistic mode and its revival at different times in Western literary history is always a symptom of the co-existence of profound cultural contradictions as well as of the endeavour to reconcile them" (287). Thus, Baroque aesthetics turns to allegory in the midst of a historical, ideological crisis in order to assuage the tension between the immanent and the transcendent, the profane and the sacred.

While her central thesis may not seem especially novel to some scholars, Kluge's extensive and meticulous exemplification of seventeenth-century allegory, as well as her elegant form of expression, make this book a valuable contribution to the fields of early modern studies and Baroque aesthetics. Kluge demonstrates an extensive knowledge of Renaissance and Baroque literary works and of the ancient texts with which they are in dialogue. Moreover, her discussion of aesthetics includes an array of written and visual genres from the Golden Age that includes poetics, literary criticism, masterworks of Baroque painting, emblems, and all manner of dramatic expression such as the

comedia, *autos sacramentales*, and seventeenth-century tragedy. This reviewer especially appreciates Kluge's discussion of *desengaño* and apotheosis in [End Page 181] Baroque painting, along with a detailed analysis of how the Jesuits made use of ancient culture and myth according to moral-didactic exigencies of the Baroque. Equally instructive is the author's thorough outlining of the emergence of the *comedia* as a hybrid, even monstrous, dramatic form in which playwrights reinvent classical topoi such as *theatrum mundi* and *somnium*. To exemplify this point fully, Kluge uses select plays of Lope and Calderón and contemporary seventeenth-century criticism to show how both playwrights attempt to appeal at once to the secular and sacred interests of their wide publics. The final chapter of the book, which treats comedy and tragedy in Calderón's dramatic works, reveals how *La vida es sueño* simultaneously respects Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* but also places increased moral agency in the hands of his protagonist, thus defying Fortune's tragic determinism.

The book's seven chapters are organized into three central parts, in addition to an introduction and closing remarks, both of which serve to successfully frame the text with thoughtful critical commentary. Kluge dedicates the first two chapters of the book to well-researched and useful discussions of the concept of the Baroque and the history of allegory, properly orienting the reader to the textual analysis that follows. While there is lamentably no index to the book, likely a characteristic of the series or publisher, each of the chapters is divided into smaller sections indicated by page numbers in the table of contents, allowing the reader to make quick consultation of specific topics of interest. Each of the sections of the text is effective as a discreet piece of research, but all of the chapters also flow together with elegant coherence as a full book-length study. Finally, extensive and meticulously detailed footnotes provide the reader with immediate bibliographic references as well as additional textual citations and critical commentary on the primary sources the author analyzes.

In sum, this highly informative, beautifully written book offers...

Kluge, Sofie.

*Baroque, Allegory, Comedia: The Transfiguration of Tragedy
in Seventeenth-Century Spain.*

Estudios de Literatura 114.

Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 2010. 327 pp.

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