



Summer 8-13-2007

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### Recommended Citation

Aubry, Ann, "Professor Publishes Critical Edition of Picaresque Novel" (2007). *News and Events*. 3214.

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## Professor Publishes Critical Edition of Picaresque Novel

August 13, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – When Hispanic Studies Professor Carolyn Nadeau began teaching a new advanced Spanish literature course in the spring of 2005, she discovered that the influential novel she wanted to teach didn't exist in a text geared toward undergraduate study.

She soon contacted the publishing house Cervantes & Co. and had a contract to produce such a text herself.

*La vida del Buscón*, her critical edition of the 17th-century Spanish novel *El Buscón* by Francisco de Quevedo, was released this summer. *El Buscón* follows the misadventures of Pablos, son of a thief and a prostitute, as he pursues a lifelong dream of rising above his lowly upbringing and becoming a gentleman. As is typical of its genre, the novel is heavy with social criticism.

"*El Buscón* is one of the most important of the picaresque novels, which is a genre that started in Spain," Nadeau said. The genre differs from literature before it, she explained, "because it deals with marginal characters who are – hopefully – inferior to the reader, where most books, from Greek myths to chivalric romances, have characters who are greater than the average reader: superheroes, gods, and knights who are like these James Bond characters. Other genres dealt with the aristocracy or bucolic ideal life. Then this (genre) comes along and deals with people who are just surviving, trying to find their way and having to turn to perhaps some immoral or illegal activities just to survive. It was new for readers."



Carolyn Nadeau

She also finds Quevedo's novel a good choice for students because of his beautiful writing.

"Quevedo was known for his poetry," Nadeau said. "He's just a genius with words, so there are these great plays on words and metaphors and social commentary that are fabulous. (The novel) really holds a lot for students today to get a sense of what was happening in 16th and 17th century Spain."

Students in her class, "The Marginalized and Society in the Golden Age Novel," offered valuable feedback as she developed the footnotes and glossary information to help explain the book's rich language, cultural and historical context.

Nadeau was excited by how much she learned herself in researching the edition. For the introduction she mapped out a chart showing the values of various types of money mentioned throughout the novel, and student Peter Gray '07 provided sketches to illustrate the detailed clothing references that are key to understanding the aspirations of a would-be gentleman.

While Nadeau will be spending a sabbatical year in Madrid, researching her next book on food representations in early modern Spanish literature – including picaresque tales – she is eager to see how her text is received in others' classes.

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