Jun-2001

Faculty Profile: Kristin Shoaf

Recommended Citation

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.
FACULTY PROFILE
Kristin Shoaf

Cuba, the Cuban Revolution and Fidel Castro have preoccupied Americans ever since the fall of Havana on New Year's Eve, 1959. Kristin Shoaf, Assistant Professor in the Department of Modern Foreign Languages has developed her own interest in Communist Cuba through the famous Cuban playwright, José Triana. Professor Shoaf will publish a book on Triana in November entitled La Evolución Ideológica del Teatro de José Triana (University Press of America). The book is based on her Ph.D. dissertation, which she earned from the University of Georgia in 1999. Professor Shoaf’s book is the first academic study that seeks to examine and interpret the full range of Triana’s work from 1958-1996.

Triana was one of the most influential Cuban playwrights during the early years of the Revolution, but in 1980 he left the island for self-imposed exile in Paris. Triana openly expressed disillusionment with the Castro regime and its promises of revolutionary change. He often criticized Castro for developing into a dictator and moving the Revolution away from its original goals. Not surprisingly, Triana was branded an anti-communist by Castro’s supporters in the Cuban intellectual community. Triana recognized that he could not function as a playwright in Castro’s Cuba and he left the country. Triana, however, took with him his great disappointment with the course of the Revolution and wrote plays that reflected his disappointment. While in exile in Paris, Triana wrote a number of highly acclaimed plays that dealt with the Revolution. Many of the plays are filled with images of revolutionary violence with Castroism as an unstated but powerful underlying theme.

Professor Shoaf interviewed Triana in Paris in 1998 about his plays and his opposition to the path of the Cuban Revolution. Professor Shoaf points out that Triana, despite being in exile, still exudes his passion for his country, a passion that is returned by the Cuban people who still hold him in high regard and perform his plays regularly. In her book Professor Shoaf discusses Triana’s thirteen plays and interprets their meaning within the context of the Cuban revolutionary society and Castro. Triana’s most influential play is the Night of the Assassins, a complex study of a revolutionary family, revenge, and murder. Professor Shoaf also has studied Triana’s The Last Day of Summer, his most recent play that is steeped in violence and confirms his continued resentment towards Castro and the Revolution.

Although Professor Shoaf’s primary research interest focuses on Triana, she also has developed an interest in linking her scholarship to the classroom. She has published an article on techniques to overcome the fear of learning and speaking Spanish. In particular she studies the value of acting in Spanish language plays as a valuable method of conquering the fear of acquiring a new language. Participation in Spanish language plays often improves pronunciation and heightens self-confidence.

Professor Shoaf’s interest in second language acquisition and theater performance has led her to a new project on the campus. She directs Bridgewater State students in a series of one-act plays by Latin American playwrights from countries such as Argentina, Chile and Colombia. These plays are presented to the college community in the Spring semester and give her students the opportunity to hone their Spanish language skills. The one act performances billed as “A Night of Latin American Theater,” have become a popular method of not only learning about Latin American playwrights, but overcoming fears of speaking Spanish.

In only two years at Bridgewater State Professor Shoaf has used her expertise on Latin American playwrights such as José Triana and her commitment to strengthen student language skills to become a valued member of the Modern Foreign Language Department.