

Dunn, Peter N. *Spanish Picaresque Fiction: A New Literary History*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1933. xiv + 330 pp.

The initial landmark critical works which sought to study the phenomenon of picaresque literary works were by F. W. Chandler (1899, 1907). They were a serious effort to examine the origins of the genre in classical and European sources, in history, and to study the masterpieces of the genre in Spain as well as their epigones, in and outside of Spain. The vitality of the genre is such that later critics continue this critical tradition from the perspective of both Hispanic and Comparative Literature. Peter Dunn's book on picaresque fiction is the most recent attempt to explain this important contribution of Spanish literature. In 1979, Dunn produced a Twayne book on this same subject. The intervening years have allowed him to review and refine some of his insights on the picaresque, and the resulting book brings the genre up to date as far as criticism is concerned and offers, as well, important insights into the origins of the genre.

Perhaps the basic thrust of Dunn's work is to be found in an article he published in 1982 ("Cervantes De/Reconstructs the Picaresque," *Cervantes* 2.2 [1982]: 109–31). Here he laments the clouding process which has occurred in regard to Cervantes's alleged picaresque works (and by extension, I presume, other picaresque works): "All his [Cervantes's] best fiction is intergeneric and we as readers have to begin by deconstructing *that nineteenth-century invention, the picaresque and the criticism that has kept it in place*" [emphasis mine] (131). This present book represents just that: an attempt at saving the picaresque genre from the alleged myopia of the nineteenth-century positivist reading that placed limits on the understanding of the genre.

The first part of Dunn's study is devoted to the question of "Genre as Problem" (3–28). Dunn regrets that the critical approaches have left unexamined the play between texts, their significance and meaning (4). Critics devaluated differences between novels and did not study sufficiently the relationship between the canonical texts (*Lazarillo*, *Guzmán de Alfarache*, and the *Buscón*) and works not generally classified as picaresque. In reviewing the genre, Dunn's attempt "will trace relationships—formal and ideological—as they develop within a 'horizon of expectations' . . ." (16). He insists that the picaresque works be read "free from our acquired generic expectations" (17). For Dunn, these works are barometers of a culture at a given time. His interest is in trying to decipher the mechanisms that allowed Spanish writers to focus on the pícaro as literature. The reader-component of this literature is of interest to Dunn because he sees these texts as a challenge to the readers. In effect, he would see the picaresque as a functioning part of a greater whole, not just a separate genre as nineteenth-century criticism did.

It is important for Dunn that Lázaro is discovered as an author. But questions remain—who taught him how to write and other considerations of a practical nature. Lázaro's role as narrator and actor offers a challenge to the reader.

With respect to *Guzmán*, Alemán comes very close to the intuition of the values of society, especially those that deal with honor and virtue. Alemán expands on the narrower social parameters of *Lazarillo*. His pícaro becomes a part of

greater social relations. Alemán, Dunn notes, subjects his fictional world to criticism and even reform.

Quevedo's *Buscón* presents to the reader "the carnivalesque, the scatological, the guignolesque, as part of his satirical project" (75). The *Buscon*, according to Dunn, should be regarded "as the exploiter of oppositions and tensions and the instigator of new ones" (75). The reader will not sympathize with Pablos's wish to "better himself." The *Buscón* stands in a very differentiated position with respect to *Guzmán*. Serious things like Pablos's shame about his family come off as comic. The party of meat pies at his uncle's house is seen by Dunn as an example of a Book of Jests. Elsewhere Dunn discusses models for the picaresque, which cover a wide area of choice for the picaresque authors and the great variety of narrative examples available to them.

In another section, Dunn explores the nineteenth-century tendency to scour society, its history and mores for critical explanations of the literary phenomenon, only to say that "literary depictions of space and geography are not 'real.' . . . Their geography is symbolic and synecdochic" (127). Picaresque novels are hybrids, and therefore the historical reductions we make about these characters really belong to a fictional context.

Dunn subjects the canonical texts to a discussion of their inner and outer worlds. Geography and historical extrapolation are not valid. In *Guzmán* the pessimism of the text belongs to a tradition of orthodox thought: *de contemptu mundi*, rather than to alleged Jewish pessimism. "Failure of containment is what *El buscón* is all about. Nothing is in its place" (159).

Having shown that the reality of the picaresque novels is not rigorously historical, Dunn turns to their inner worlds. Calisto in *Celestina* reveals an inner self when he learns of the death of Celestina and his servants. Calisto, like picaresque characters, is experiencing the process of self-examination and oral confession. Lázaro's account is that of the "relation between self and the world as Lázaro wishes to fix it" (173). Dunn states that, at the end of the *Lazarillo*, "we have to conclude that our search for the self has been a vain pursuit of a false promise. Behind the mask is only another mask. The false promise, mask within mask, is the only self there is in Lázaro's world" (175). Alemán's novelistic aim "was addressed to the regeneration of the inner man and that of the social and economic man also" (197). Pablos is reduced by the author to a ridiculous figure. Quevedo, according to Dunn, "makes no serious attempt to represent self-consciousness" (200).

Concerning Cervantes's alleged picaresque writings, Dunn directs attention to the dual modes of narrative in "Rinconete y Cortadillo" and the phenomenon of desire and linguistic entanglement in many of the *Novelas ejemplares*. Other *novelas* deal with the question of truth ("Casamiento" and "Coloquio"). Truth of the tales is also a study of the truth of fiction.

In a section devoted to rogue females, Dunn notes that the qualities attributed to *pícaras* are usually those to be found in the classical and medieval tradition of rhetoric. The depiction of the female in feminine picaresque responds to the wishes of male authors who depict women according to prevailing conceptions. Dunn believes that ". . . when we look at these females we find that they

have, in effect, been neutered by their separation from a society that is both patrilineal and matrifocal" (250).

In part 8, Dunn gives a wide ranging description of lesser picaresque novels which are usually attached to the canon, from Juan Martí's *Guzmán* to *Estebanillo*. The dissemination of the picaresque also displays, as the section states, "Blurring and Merging of Genres." The novels fall into two subtypes: loose collections of *novelas* and long sententious works. Dunn insists on two fundamental principles—distance and relevance—and he reviews the masterpieces through these two modalities. These works study origins, reaction to society and how one gets along in it. They present a reality so outrageous that one accepts it as "normal."

Dunn's work is ample in its erudition, vast and ambitious in scope. In pursuit of his thesis, Dunn explores all the implications exhaustively. Dunn has approached old problems (some, in all fairness, long superseded) through new critical lenses: reader-response, cultural history, narratology, intertextuality. This is an interesting contribution to picaresque studies, an impressive edifice, but which, unfortunately, in my view has a cracked foundation. Dunn puts little stock in the "Jewish" ingredient of the picaresque. He dismisses this part of the picaresque and seeks origins in other areas, figures and literary sources. He refers to Castro, Gilman and others in a very casual way and gives no credence to the notion of a Jewish point of view or Jewish *amargura* (see 59, n. 28 ff.). Unlike Dunn, I believe the *converso*/Jewish element to be a fundamental and indispensable part of the literary canon of the picaresque. Part of the problem of treating the *converso* element of the picaresque is that to understand it one must go beyond obvious critical stances and enter a complicated existential situation.

It was Castro who took the treatment of *honra* one step beyond the merely notional in *Lazarillo* and made it more significant by suggesting that the theme made far greater sense and acquires greater urgency when he associated it with *converso* rancor and bitterness. *Lazarillo* pulses with scarcely concealed resentment. The *honra* of the Visigoths did not affect Spaniards in the sixteenth century, especially when, in their time, Jews and Judaizers found an unfortunately welcome place in the Inquisition's *autos da fe*. When Lázaro swears on the Holy Host that his wife is as good as any one woman in Toledo, knowing full well of her adultery with the Archpriest, is the author not severely criticizing a society in which the obsession regarding *honra* has replaced more meaningful concerns? What Christian would risk his soul on such an oath? Castro is to be credited with enriching our reading of the work by suggesting this neglected dimension, above all, since the work bristles with resentment, and depicts a life of *zozobras*, as Guillén put it. It is a problem of the author's temporal contingency. The emblematic hero rows against the tide to his *buen puerto*. Survival in sixteenth-century Spain was fraught with dangers which could easily bring someone into disrepute, poverty or death. As Alberto del Monte put it so cogently, Lázaro's life is an odyssey of hunger, pain, cruelty, deception, fakery and corruption, with the clergy at the head of the pack. As in all great works, the *Lazarillo* exists on many levels and his *zozobras* also exist as symbols. Castro's intuition accounts for the presence of all these negative elements in the

work; they make greater sense in the frame of a sixteenth-century historical and social dilemma. I prefer to see the author as a disgruntled and rancorous *converso*. The work's effectiveness is thus enhanced in a way that Saussurian linguistics could never achieve.

In Alemán's life we must ask why he signed off his royalties to Pedro Ledesma before leaving for the Indies. Was it because he was of *converso* origin? *Conversos* were not allowed to emigrate to the New World. It took a wily Alemán to bribe his way across the ocean. In the case of *Guzmán*, the Jewish ingredient is explicit in the text. Guzmán's origins are tainted with religious ambivalence. His model is his father who opportunistically changes faiths twice. Could not *levantisco* mean more than just someone from the coast of the Levant which ran from Valencia to Genoa? *Levantisco* is a euphemism for a Jew, as James Mabbe noted in his translation (cited by Brancaforte). Why does Guzmán go to Genoa to seek his roots? Was it because Genoa was home to large groups of Jews? When Guzmán lands in Genoa to "hacer[se] de los godos" (itself a concealed and ironic reference to the behavior of those who were denied any link with the heroics and prestige of the Reconquest), he is greeted with cat-calls of "Bellaco, marrano," the latter a well-known code word for Jews, one of which readers of the time were unlikely to lose sight. Similarly in the *Buscón*, Quevedo cleverly plays with the word "nuevo" when he arrives at the university. "Nuevo" was also another word for a *converso*, "nuevo" for "cristiano nuevo", as V. Agüera has noted. Alemán has encoded Guzmán's Judaism into the character's essential person.

Guzmán is dismissed by the French ambassador after word gets out about how Guzmán is accidentally attacked by a pig. He ends up astride the pig and is thrown into the sty. Widespread gossip about this episode? Damage to the ambassador's reputation (Guzmán was also his procurer)? This episode, which has not received the critical attention it deserves, symbolically represents the character astride his own Judaism, rushing headlong to his moral decline. What greater punishment than calling Jews "marranos"—piglets—a sign of the religion's greatest prohibition. Speculation by what Rodríguez Marín did *not* give us, as Dunn mentions, is hardly acceptable (see 59–60). The Del Nero clan, with its ties to the entrepreneurial circles of Florence, coupled with generally understood features of Jewish and *converso* social life in Renaissance Europe, is circumstantial enough to give serious consideration to the Judaism of Alemán personally, as was the notion about his grandfather's death at the hands of the Inquisition. He was known as *Poca sangre*, as has McGrady noted.

In the case of Quevedo and the *Buscón*, we have a literary adaptation of what obviously Quevedo considered picaresque material. He avoids the long moral disquisitions of Alemán, but returns to the format of the *Lazarillo*. In the *Buscón*, Quevedo openly makes his character of a *converso* family, noting his mother's surnames, which is humor, satire and social commentary all at once: "Aldonza de San Pedro, hija de Diego de San Juan y nieta de Andrés de San Cristóbal. Sospechábase en el pueblo que no era cristiana vieja. . . ." (ed. Lázaro Carreter, 1965). Like Guzmán in his arrival at Genoa, Pablos wears his "Jewishness" openly; at least, that is how Quevedo presents him. At school with Dómine

Cabra and at the university, he will always be a marginal person. He will never emerge from the shadow of his past life, which is, incidentally, Dunn's point (see also Constance H. Rose's "Damnosa hereditas"). One should, however, add Pablo's *converso* origins to the reasons for his marginalization. It is not that *conversos* in life were incapable of surmounting such obstacles; it is Quevedo's wish to create a work of literature that depicts the painfully riotous existence of someone who is never able to join the good life, in part because of his social and religious origins. From the central character to the jailer, the novel excludes "*converso*/Jewishness," including the figure of Diego Coronel. For me, the "Jewish question" in the picaresque is perhaps its fundamental distinguishing marker.

In reviewing an episode of *La pícaro Justina*, Dunn does not see any evidence of the author's *converso* background: "It has no obvious connection with the possibility that the author *may have been* [emphasis mine] a *converso*" (239). The connection of the work and the author to *converso* life are blatant throughout the text. Even Dunn acknowledges "games" that Justina plays—jokes about ancestry, genealogy—their presence reinforces the case for the work's inclusion in the canon because of this "Jewish" element. Are we to blind ourselves to the subtitle of the work, *La pícaro montañesa*? López de Ubeda, significantly a doctor by profession, and obviously *ex-illis*, creates a character who is the mockery of her own Jewishness, a self-contradiction and walking deconstruction of her own life. This is more than a "joke." It is the accusatory acknowledgement that picaresque characters, male or female, have this distinction. We should recall Bataillon's remarks on López de Ubeda as well as Damiani for whom López de Ubeda "was probably of Andalusian ancestry, and, very likely, of *converso* background" (18). Is it accidental that pre-picaresque works (*La lozana andaluza*) and other picaresque works (*Guzmán de Alfarache*, *La pícaro Justina*) were written by *conversos*, *El buscón* written about a *cristiano nuevo*, and *Lazarillo* built around the problem of *honra*, which is strongly associated with the precarious lives of New Christians?

Castro's idea was thus a fecund one, which the informed reader could try on for size. If Fernando el Católico had a Jewish grandmother, and St. Theresa descended from Jews, could Castro's insights be far off the mark? The array of *converso* authors, discovered by Castro and others, made such a hypothesis no longer just a distant possibility but a definite probability. With respect to the alleged Jewish pessimism, Dunn prefers to turn to medieval strains of pessimism, rather than to the Jeremiads of *conversos*, whose religious traditions predate those of the motif *de contemptu mundi*. Bataillon's essay "*¿Melancolía renacentista o melancolía judía?*" (*Varia lección*, 1964) gives a valuable clue and key to this problem. As for intertextual antecedents of *Guzmán de Alfarache*, I would suggest a reading of Fray Pedro Malón de Chaide's *La conversión de la Magdalena*.

It is surprising that Dunn quotes Bataillon in numerous instances, yet neglects several urgently important essays in which Bataillon admits the force of the Castro hypothesis: "La picaresca: à propos de *La pícaro Justina*" (*Wort und Text*, Frankfurt am Main, 1963); "L'honneur et la matière picaresque" (*ACF*, 42

[1962–63], 485–90): “Les nouveaux chrétiens dans l’essor du roman picaresque,” *Neophilologus*, 4 [1964]: 283–98.

There are a few other observations suggested by a reading of Dunn’s interesting and thought-provoking book. When speaking of the inner/outer selves of the canonical pícaros, I missed an allusion to Claudio Guillén’s dissertation (*Anatomies of Roguery*, Harvard, 1953; now happily available: Garland, 1987). Precisely on this point, Guillén builds his case for the uniqueness of the *Lazarillo* and the beginning of a new literary vogue: the pull between the character’s inwardness in contact with an external reality.

I noticed few allusions to the Squire and his contact with *Lazarillo*. There is no better example of inner self-awareness measured against the outside world than the Squire’s situation. When *Lazarillo* listens to the Squire deceive himself, it tells us as much about Lázaro’s inner person—compassionate, understanding—as it does about the *converso* Squire’s phantasy world. (See also Rico for the reputation of La costanilla de Valladolid as a well-known residence of *conversos*, [Planeta, 1967; 61, n. 89]). I would have also chosen Areusa as an example of intertextual precedence, as Castro does. She is the model of a person who understands her lot as a servant girl and rejects it in favor of prostitution, thus affirming her personal and existential independence.

The strongest point in Dunn’s book is his rejection of the picaresque as a mirror of real life. This was Castro’s purpose in 1935. He wished to dispel notions of an older, historicist reading of the text: he opposed a reading based on the so-called Spanish penchant for realism and the “Abundancia de pícaros y vagabundos en España—explicación que satisfará el materialismo histórico, y que al historiador de literatura le deja indiferente” (“Perspectiva,” 76). This “de-socializing” effort found willing followers in Amado Alonso and Dámaso Alonso, to name just two critics among many. In 1962–63, Bataillon rejected the historical reading which accounted for pícaros in Spain (“L’honneur”). The generation of scholars like Guillén and others also rejected the nineteenth-century reading of social life as real life in the picaresque.

Dunn pays scant attention to the *Lazarillo* as a work of spiritual import. He only mentions Erasmus in passing. In fairness to Dunn, neither Castro nor Bataillon saw Erasmistic influences in the creation of the work either. (However, scholars such as Vilanova, Mancing and Márquez Villanueva have not closed the book on the *Lazarillo*’s Erasmian content). But many of the intellectuals who embraced Erasmian philosophy were also *conversos*; e.g., Alfonso de Valdés, one possible author of *Lazarillo*). The author of the Spanish masterpiece, in my opinion, an obvious *converso* and a social and religious dissident, built his vision of hypocrisy and corruption on the models of friars and priests. This is an urgent dimension of the work; it possesses crucially important spiritual contours that should not be arbitrarily ignored, and they have been stressed by critics, notable among them Manuel J. Asensio, Francisco Márquez Villanueva and J. V. Ricapito (1976).

My remarks concerning Dunn’s treatment of the Jewish ingredient of the picaresque do not imply my rejection of his valuable work; on the contrary, I rec-

ognize and applaud Dunn's vast erudition, the maturity of his thought, the brilliance of his style, and the elegance of his expression. Though obviously influenced by recent critical practices, Dunn avoids the tendency toward obscurantism. This is a book that will be used to good profit by many and for a long time; it will be quoted for its strong points. With its moving dedication, it is a summation of an important stage of Dunn's rich intellectual life.

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