

Bryant Creel. *The 'Voice' of the Phoenix: Metaphors of Death and Rebirth in Classics of the Iberian Renaissance*. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004. 371 pp. ISBN: 0-86698-31-5-5.

In this collection of articles Creel fascinates the reader with his application of myriad contemporary critical approaches to early modern Spanish and Portuguese literature. He gathers his articles previously published on Garcilaso (Chapters 4 and 6), Fray Luis de León (Chapter 6), Bernardino Ribeiro (Chapter 8), Jorge de Montemayor (Chapter 9), and Cervantes (Chapter 10), revising some of them extensively in light of his present critical stance and rounding out the collection with new studies on the fifteenth-century *cancionero* (Chapter 1), Garcilaso (Chapters 2, 3, 5), Fray Luis de León (Chapter 5), and *Lazarillo de Tormes* (Chapter 7). Combining “value theory, psychoanalytic insight, and the power of metaphor” and investigating “the interaction of the writer’s state of mind when writing and the reader’s state of mind when receiving the work,” Creel shows the impact of the real world upon the naïve innocence (goodness) of the authors’ personae. The “loss and regeneration” of that innocence is signaled in Creel’s subtitle: *Metaphors of Death and Regeneration*, which he sees exemplified in the phoenix reborn from its own ashes. For Creel the topic of frustrated love of the courtly love tradition serves as a vehicle to show the persona’s frustration in attempting to enforce his will upon the world, and not merely upon the lady, who serves as its icon. Many poems that modern readers relegate to the scrap heap of the literature of courtly love reveal earlier authors’ affective and material experience of the society as a whole. Furthermore, Creel believes the personae adopted by the authors constitute a response to the larger society, i.e. the state of Spain or Portugal and their interactions with other nations on the world stage. Entire works can be read as metaphors of the persona’s responses to the society’s central concerns. Thus, a poem, which on the literal level develops courtly love *topoi*, may metaphorically reveal the affirmation and often the alienation of the individual in the development of capitalism, but it may also mirror the Spanish state’s frustrated effort to defend the faith against the encroachments of Protestantism. Creel points out that the persona as victim of fateful loves does not negate but rather affirms his heroism in “the tragic-heroic terms of a rebellious individualism” (8).

Taking issue with Rafael Lapesa’s biographical reading of Garcilaso’s poetry, specifically with his identifying the poems of fateful love as his earliest work, Creel sees the stance as more indicative of the Renaissance sensibility than of the earlier *cancionero* poetry. In fact, he perceives the adoption of the stance of fated lover by *cancionero* poets as precursor of the “Renaissance representation of the reckless intensity of passionate willing” (3) and as the affirmation of the individual’s moral freedom along with his corresponding rejection of original sin and the perception of erotic love as inherently

sinful. The stance figures in few lyrics of the popular tradition because societal restraint upon love was less pervasive for the common folk. Creel analyzes its appearance in poems by Juan del Encina, Diego del Castillo, and Soria to affirm that the persona's stance can be seen as heroic and willful perseverance in an idealized love as easily as it can be seen as a slavish entrapment by love. Creel offers ten interpretations of the *villancico* "¡Ah, cadenas de amor, / cuán malas sois de quebrar!" to demonstrate the persona's self-affirmation in rebellion against society's constraints. In Chapter 2 Creel compares Garcilaso's Sonnet 1 with Hernán Mexía's poem ("yo ya me quiero perder") to affirm the persona's deliberate choice to persevere in love. Detailed analysis of Garcilaso's Sonnet 2 and *Canción 1* in light of "Llama de amor viva" of San Juan de la Cruz and "Vivo sin vivir en mí" of Santa Teresa shows the similarity between "the Christian idea of individual salvation and romantic love" (83). Both insist upon gratification of the libido through rescue by the object of passion, be it a sadistic lady or Christ. Creel submits interpretations labeled "a" through "s" of the persona's identification with the beloved in Garcilaso's Sonnet 4 and compares it to Don Quijote's neurotic behavior of protecting his own ego from the perception of his real failure to achieve material success in life through escape into a delusion. Here Creel has recourse to Adler's psychological theory as well as to Hegel's concept of the empty self, Dilthey's concept of Renaissance freedom and Maxim Gorky's description of the Renaissance return to a pagan instinct of self-preservation (92). Such marshaling of insight from a vast array of sources—from psychology to philosophy, from history to literature—characterizes Creel's fecund exegesis. He has complete mastery of earlier work done in literary criticism and combines this with voracious reading in other fields.

Chapter 4 is devoted to exegesis of Garcilaso's Sonnet 22; here Creel focuses upon the persona's contemplation of the harmony or the dissonance of his ideal concept of the lady and her real character. Previous critics have commented principally upon the persona's "advance" upon the lady, i.e. his ogling of her décolletage to see beyond dress and breasts to the heart beneath these delicious obstacles. Garcilaso participates in the Renaissance sensibility which rejects the mutual exclusion of sensuous and spiritual beauty. Creel considers Fernando de Herrera's commentaries as well as those of Elias Rivers, Antonio Gargano, Dan Heiple, Ana María Snell, Alicia de Colombí-Monguió, and Anne J. Cruz in the course of contrasting Petrarch's timid submission to the lady with Garcilaso's heroic assertion of his own feelings and judgments.

In Chapter 5 Creel offers a new explanation of Garcilaso's Sonnet 38, interpreting both the road the persona would leave behind and the peak he strives to reach as metaphors for the lady herself. Application of W.R.D. Fairbairn's psychoanalytic theory explains the poet's ambivalent treatment of the lady as simultaneously good and bad, "the present and absent, breast of the mother" (129). Creel then turns to Jung's theory of individuation to affirm a more heroic explanation of the sonnet as record of the persona's struggle between regressing to an immature, even infantile, condition and striving to accomplish an integrated mature one by "overcoming the harsh resistance of the external world" (137). The unresolved tension of the poem reflects the manner-

ist subjectivity of the age with its oscillation between rebellion and conformity (140). Creel then deals with the same conflict in Fray Luis de León's Sonnet 2, where the poet's ambivalence between abandoning Nise and his resolve to continue adoring her mirrors the persona's struggle to reach a higher plane of individuation. Comparisons of Fray Luis de León and Garcilaso continue in Chapter 6 with the analysis of the former's "En la ascensión." The poet depicts the disciples' protest against Christ's leaving them behind in his ascension to heaven, placing them in a condition similar to Job's in the face of God's abandonment of the faithful. Again the poem depicts on a metaphoric level the persona's struggle to overcome the longing to return to an infantile, dependent condition so that a higher one of independent maturity may be achieved.

An illuminating study of *Lazarillo de Tormes* (Chapter 7) considers the question of the baseness or the goodness of the protagonist. Should the reader excuse or blame him for his satisfaction upon achieving a comfortable situation through the expedient of allowing himself to be cuckolded? Creel points out that the protagonist never adopts a firm ethical standard even in adulthood, from whence he recounts his life and present comfort. *Lazarillo's* moral apathy typifies numerous picaresque works in which authors present human degradation without explicitly judging it.

Chapter 8 analyzes Bernardim Ribeiro's *Book of Sorrowful Longing*, also known as *Menina e Moça*, within the context of the pastoral tradition. Creel shows that the text, despite its apparently truncated form and elliptical plot, thematically develops the opposition of fertility and sterility and exemplifies the sensitive individual's reaction to society's disparagement of sentiment (198). Creel then turns to two of Jorge de Montemayor's letters to Diego Ramírez Pagán and Jorge Meneses, in which the poet proposes the cultivation of the emotions in the pastoral life against the insincerity of courtiers in modern urban life, developing "the tension between nature and civilization" (205). Ribeiro's novel reflects the temper of the mid-sixteenth century with its increasingly authoritarian dogmatism against which humanists rebelled to affirm the superiority of compassion. Creel continues analyzing this theme in Chapter 9, "Chaste Love as Metaphorical Death: Montemayor's 'Nicodemist' Vindication of Human Passion in the *Diana*." Like the Pharisee Nicodemus, who secretly visited Jesus, Montemayor cloaked his affirmation of pagan values (the joy of this world and the sensual life) with seeming adherence to Counter-Reformation austerity. Though the surface of the *Diana* celebrates chastity, its predominant tone celebrates sensuous nature.

Creel devotes Chapter 10 to study of Don Quijote's idea of enchantment. Critics generally explain the enchantment as Don Quijote's attempt to make the world conform to its image in the chivalric novels and to protect that illusion or fantasy from empirical fact (255). Creel places the enchantment within the context of Renaissance Neoplatonism, which he perceives as "source of a new, widespread independence of spirit and speculative rationalism, especially as it combined with nominalism and the voluntaristic teachings of St. Augustine" (256). Cervantes depicted the enchantment from within the premises of Plato's concept of the active and creative mind which employs memory to supply images to render external objects intelligible. Don Quijote

refused to let empirical fact correct his ideal vision. Creel relates Cervantes' concept to nineteenth- (Fichte) and twentieth-century (Derrida, Ernst Cassirer) philosophers who also claim that subjective conceptions constitute a world existing in the mind, relational elements combined in systems or ideologies that may have no basis in external reality. Don Quijote believes that others have mistakenly imposed their visions upon external reality and he offsets their vision with his own. Both, Cervantes suggested, may be equally fictional. The desirable course then becomes imposing the best and the brightest construction upon reality and through force of will bringing a better world into existence. Creel concludes that all the Renaissance texts he has treated develop a view of the persona as endowed with childlike innocence rather than tainted by original sin and they synthesize this view with the medieval conception of "the world as a vale of tears" (278). The moral ideal becomes to see the world with clear eyes but to remain pure and not to fall into cynicism or malice (279).

Creel's essays make the reader reevaluate his/her interpretations of these Renaissance classics. Their erudition never overwhelms the reader; instead the conversational tone of the essays, in which ancient and modern voices are heard in an eternal present, engages the reader to whom Creel presents his interpretations not as final and definitive but as working theses. This collection will prove valuable to teachers of the Spanish Literature survey course as well as to undergraduate and graduate courses in Spanish literature of the Golden Age.

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