

REVIEWS

Eric J. Kartchner. *Unhappily Ever After: Deceptive Idealism in Cervantes's Marriage Tales*. Documentación cervantina, 22. Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 2005. 153 pp. ISBN: 1-58871-075-0.

This pithy and attractively bound book consists of "Introduction" and "Conclusion," plus an additional eight chapters treating the five *Novelas ejemplares* which the author considers marriage tales. Three chapters—3, 4, and 6—are re-workings of publications found in *Romance Languages Annual* 7 (1996), 10 (1999), and 9 (1998), respectively (9).

Chapter 1, "Metafiction: The Word and Concept," is Kartchner's introduction to the subject and what he understands by these terms, citing as he does his influences in arriving at this understanding. An intelligent discussion of the matter, it would make an excellent point of departure for classes, graduate or undergraduate, in which metafiction forms one of the course topics.

Chapter 2, "Approaches to the *Novelas ejemplares*," is a fine review of what has been written on the topic, critiquing to a greater or lesser degree Casaldueiro, Amezúa, El Saffar, Rodríguez-Luis, Forcione, Hart, Ricapito, Clamurro, and others. He admittedly excludes the works by "Aylward, Mancing, Rey Hazas, and Zimic," admonishing that they "should not be omitted" (62 n. 3), without explaining why he himself has done so. That he notes them, however, is commendable. As Kartchner himself indicates, a fuller treatment of the writings of Ricapito and Clamurro can be found in his reviews of their works in *Cervantes* (9). Aside from this, again, anyone wishing to treat the *Novelas ejemplares* would do well to consult this chapter as a point of departure.

Chapters 3–7 treat, in this order, the following marriage tales: "Las dos doncellas," "La ilustre fregona," "La señora Cornelia," "La fuerza de la sangre," and "La española inglesa." He considers them all as flaunting a "self-conscious literary expression" (26), one of the various ways the author defines metafiction.

His goal is to examine their metafictional aspects as a preview of the writings of María de Zayas, and also to counter the omission of these idealistic tales from the canon, an omission which the author explains as a result of their being considered "less interesting, qualitatively inferior, or too far removed from positivistic definitions of literary reality" (12). It is his hope that his "endeavor will demonstrate that the marriage tales are not only interesting because of their metafictional qualities, but that they are intellectually stimulating, entertaining, and worthy of scholarly attention"

(16). Kartchner examines the various devices that manifest the self-consciousness of these works. In brief, these include: the narrator and characters undermining their own stories and, thus at times, their authority; wordplay with words and names; ironic and parodic discourse; and in general, the instability of the sign.

In Chapter 8, "Negative Exemplarity in Marriage Plots: Cervantes and Beyond" he takes up the matter of María de Zayas as a literary heiress of Cervantes: "María de Zayas, a close contemporary of Cervantes and one of the first to comment on his writing indirectly, appears to have understood the embedded tensions in Cervantes's idealistic fiction. She reworks many of the same plot devices used by Cervantes, complicating the outcome, heightening the irony" (132). In essence, he agrees with Edward Friedman, whom he cites, that Zayas continues the Cervantine mode of narration. As regards the deceptive idealism in the marriage work, Kartchner concludes that Cervantes, like Zayas, "seems to see marriage as a proper outcome for a relationship," although Kartchner himself here seems to emphasize the deception involved in these relationships. As he states with regard to *Don Quijote*, for the *novelas ejemplares* he examines, "the wrap-up discourse is at odds with the story" (133). The endings seem to be a matter of convenience and as such are unrealistic and unsatisfactory to a modern reader. Marriage as a *deus-ex-machina* literary solution, however, is rampant throughout this period, as the denouements in Lope's *comedia* substantiate. It seems that Kartchner revels in the self-consciousness of these stories, but then balks at their unrealistic endings, perhaps the same factor that has made critics shy away from favoring them as much as they have the more realistic of the *Novelas ejemplares*. It may be worth noting here that although Don Quijote's repentance at the end belies the challenging of church and state which went before, as Kartchner ably elucidates, and although Alonso Quijano did come to his senses, finding salvation in the process, he still did what he did. Kartchner, nevertheless, does point out how Cervantes ably handles the tensions in his works, preventing him from becoming exclusively an advocate for the patriarchal status quo.

In closing, although one might take issue with minor details of Kartchner's translations of Spanish texts, and point out minor issues such as occasional misspellings—problematicize (132), jealousy (137), suspicion (137), for example—, in all, he has produced an intelligent treatment of metafiction in the marriage tales, helping subsequent readers thereby to a greater appreciation of them, despite their deceptive endings.

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