



Cruz, Anne J. *Discourses of Poverty: Social Reform and the Picaresque Novel in Early Modern Spain*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. xvii + 297 pp.

In this thought-provoking, comprehensive, well-researched and well-written book, Anne J. Cruz studies the divergent discourses that emerged in early modern Spain in response to increasing numbers of marginalized poor, equally focusing on fictional (picaresque) and non-fictional texts, on literary and extra-literary sources. The use of Foucauldian social paradigms allows Cruz to move not only beyond formalist parameters but also beyond strict sociological and moralist approaches as she views the picaresque's dialectical engagement with the multiple conditions that generated its appearance. In Cruz's own words, by analyzing the narratives as "cultural discourses rather than solely literary artifacts" she is able "to foreground the pressing questions of poverty, delinquency, vagrancy, and prostitution embedded in the novels" (xiii). Following along parallel lines the development of the genre and the evolution of the country, Cruz concludes that the end of the picaresque coincides with the decline of Hapsburg Imperial rule and that the "last" picaresque novel—*Estebanillo González*—"records both failed history and the failure of history" (xvii).

Each chapter contains three sections that integrate penetrating discussions of specific literary texts (picaresque novels) with assessments of other documents and issues relevant to the book's main topic: poverty and social reform. Chapter 1 discusses *Lazarillo* as a tale that explores the relationship between society and its poor, in this case the growing numbers of vagabonds and beggars who invaded the emerging urban centers in sixteenth-century Spain and led to an increase in criminality as well as the "later conflation of the poor with the delinquent" (5). In the section entitled "Lepers and Liminality" Cruz states that, as the number of lepers began to dwindle at the end of the Middle Ages, their traditional role as "other" was taken by marginal groups—*conversos*, *moriscos*, loose women, *pícaros*, that is to say, the disenfranchised and dispossessed. The unrelenting poverty and persistent hunger that mark *Lazarillo's* narrative and contribute to its structural cohesion

also match inescapable social realities. Cruz further elaborates on and supports her textual analysis in the following section (“Mid-Sixteenth-Century Debates on Poverty: Soto versus Robles”) which examines some of the serious debates taking place at the time on how to view and deal with the plight of the poor; in particular, the conflicting positions held by the Dominican Domingo de Soto and the Benedictine Juan de Robles are carefully reviewed and the questions they raise insightfully linked to *Lazarillo’s* ambiguity, the marked ambivalence displayed by the author in presenting his concerns regarding poverty and its treatment.

Chapter 2 examines economic treatises and their influence on contemporary thinking on the poor. Cruz argues that pauperism had previously been seen as mostly a moral problem to be solved through personalized charity within a religious context but that, in the mid-16th century, a more systematic, better organized approach to poor-relief began to be favored, an approach that opposed incipient bourgeois rationalism to aristocratic values. The following sections (separate but closely related) explore secularization and social containment, Miguel de Giginta’s syncretic reform movement (which attempted to reconcile confinement with a certain degree of freedom for the poor) and Cristóbal Pérez de Herrera’s visionary and totalizing reform projects (which addressed economic and social issues as well as moral and spiritual concerns).

Chapter 3 (“The Picaresque as *Pharmakos*”) is mostly devoted to Alemán’s *Guzmán de Alfarache* and to its eponymous protagonist, the first formally so-named *pícaro* who, in the text, plays the role of *pharmakos*, “at once responsible for and sacrificed to the country’s social and economic degradation” (79). According to Cruz, the writer’s *converso* origins might have fostered his reformist ideals and strengthened his ideological ties with a group of *arbitristas* that included Pérez de Herrera, whose social philosophy Alemán seems to share. Also influencing Alemán were the debates on divine grace and free will so operative in defining Guzmán’s character in Part One, while Part Two addresses the “‘false’ poor threat to the social body” (93) following the lead of Cellorigo’s treatise *Restauración de estado*. The next section in this chapter reviews Alemán’s defense of mercantilism and again emphasizes the *pícaro’s* role “as the expiatory element in the narrative, as the scapegoat that must be sacrificed to safeguard the nation-state” (106). From here Cruz moves on to explore in depth several critics’ views on the reader’s role in picaresque fiction. Cruz’s conclusion—that the need to control the reader might offer the best explanation for the abundance of prologue literature in modern Spain—is both perceptive and convincing.

Chapter 4 (“Textualizing the Other’s Body”) focuses on Quevedo’s *Buscón* and reviews diverse interpretive approaches to that picaresque novel, ranging from the theological (Pablos as sinner) to the aesthetic (the text as “dazzling fireworks”). For Cruz, Quevedo’s fascination with the socially marginalized manifests itself in the depiction of Pablos and his cohorts, but

does not negate the writer's allegiance to the dominant order. Though concern for the poor is not the main inspiration for the narrative, Cruz believes that the "text's unspoken message" (123) conveys the threatening presence of multiple "others" (*conversos*, *moriscos*, vagabonds, etc.) and expresses a generalized fear of all the unwanted elements in the social body. In the following sections, Cruz considers the significance of scatology in the *Buscón* (applying and elaborating on Bakhtinian models) and sees it as an effective way to highlight chaos and social disease. Most interesting is the section on "*Pícaras as Prostitutes*" with its excellent analysis of how the female picaresque differs from its male counterparts and why the *pícaro* is almost always presented as a prostitute. The male-dominated and male-oriented discourse in female picaresque texts clearly shows the extent of authorial control over the protagonist who is relegated to a "primarily sexualized role" (144). In the final section of this chapter, Cruz deals with issues of misogyny, male voice-over and female enclosure as she engages in detailed analysis of *La Celestina*, *La lozana andaluza*, and *La pícaro Justina*, among others, and concludes that in all these texts, woman's voice is suppressed, woman's sexuality denounced as a disruptive element, and woman's very existence seen as a "necessary evil" requiring constant vigilance and control by the (male) establishment.

Chapter 5—last in the book—examines the evolution "From *Pícaro* to Soldier" and the way in which picaresque narratives expand their angle of vision by following the *pícaro*'s exploits as he leaves the Spanish countryside and moves on to larger spaces (what Cruz calls "the Hapsburg theaters of war" [164]). Cruz's valid argument to justify the inclusion of soldiers' tales in the picaresque canon reflects the basic thrust of her book, namely the intersection of literary with non-literary texts and their location within a specific socio-historical context. (She appropriately reminds us that a term often given as the etymological root of *pícaro* has to do with "piker," a soldier carrying a pike/*pica*). As she surveys a variety of soldiers' stories, Cruz points out both what connects them with and separates them from more traditional picaresque narratives: they all respond to issues of poverty and vagrancy, but soldiers' tales lack the picaresque's ironic critical perspective. That's not the case, though, with *Vida del Capitán Alonso de Contreras* (a "transitional narrative" [199]) and even less with *Estebanillo González* (which "retains the ambiguity and irony inherent in the conventional picaresque genre" [201]). Yet—Cruz affirms—the increasing popularity of this genre eventually domesticated its subversive nature and diminished its satirical power so that, as the reality of Spain's decadence became "painfully manifest in the streets" (206), it ceased to appear in writing. As the Thirty Years War ended, the picaresque novel also came to an end in Spain, though it continued to develop and flourish in other parts of Europe and the New World.

Also in Chapter 5, and while discussing Michael Murrin's studies on military advancements and their far-reaching impact during the Renaissance,

Cruz refers to Cervantes' participation in the battle of Lepanto and to his assessment of new military technology. Don Quixote's denunciation of firearms and gunpowder conveys—according to Cruz—"his author's ironic criticism" which extends to "warfare's elitist constellation...and to the egotistical self-serving motives behind men's military aspirations" (166). Although Cruz, following current critical opinion, does not place any of Cervantes' texts within the picaresque canon, her analysis of how literary genres intersect not only with each other but also with non-literary discourses and, particularly, of how historical changes—in this case, in methods of warfare—influence generic development, helps us to understand more fully Cervantes' own experience as a soldier and the way in which it affected his work as a writer and his own distinctive engagement with the picaresque itself.

Anne J. Cruz displays a solid grasp of relevant scholarship as well as of the latest critical theories. Skillfully blending the literary (texts), the non-literary (documents), and the historical (facts), Cruz's book represents a very valuable contribution to the study of picaresque texts and the picaresque tradition.

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