

David R. Castillo. *(A)wry Views: Anamorphosis, Cervantes, and the Early Picaresque*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 2001. xiii + 182 pp.

In the study under review, Castillo adds to the familiar critical discussions of perspectivism and the double-voiced narrative structure in Cervantes and the picaresque by elaborating a critical approach that borrows from theories applied to the visual arts. As the author states at the outset, "In this study, I connect the perspectivistic drive of several Golden Age texts with the aesthetics of anamorphosis, also known as the curious, magic, or secret perspective" (1). In setting up the critical framework for his commentary, Castillo relies upon the works of E. H. Gombrich (*Art and Illusion*, but quoted in the Spanish version, *Arte e ilusión*) and Jurgis Baltrušaitis (*Anamorphic Art*), but also draws heavily on the work of J. A. Maravall and, most revealingly, Slavoj Žižek. At the risk of oversimplification, I would suggest that Castillo begins with an elaboration of the already well-documented perspectivistic approach and, stressing the mechanisms and putative goals of literary irony, then endeavors to illuminate the ideological content and implications of the works under examination.

After the brief "Introduction" (1–17), the book proceeds in two main parts: Part I, "The Picaresque," and Part II, "Cervantes." The section on the picaresque divides into three chapters: "Putting Things in Anamorphic Perspective: The Case of *Lazarillo*," "The Gaze of an-Other in *Guzmán de Alfarache*," and "Look Who's Talking! *Justina* and Cultural Authority." Part II, dealing with Cervantes, is also divided into three chapters: "*Don Quixote*: A Case of Anamorphic Literature," "*Persiles*, or The Cervantine Art of Looking Down and Awry," and "A 'Symptomatic' View of the Honor System in Cervantes's Theater." The brief conclusion (131–38) is followed by five pages of visual examples (including Holbein's "The Ambassadors" and Velázquez's "Las meninas").

While Castillo's choice of picaresque texts may seem a bit limited and in some ways odd (e.g., why not a section on the *Buscón*, a text rich in visual and anamorphic possibilities?), his treatment of the three books selected is supple and sensitive. The commentary on *Lazarillo*, in particular, is suggestive. Castillo underscores the emergence of a certain relationship between the subject and *fortuna* (25) to distinguish the protagonist's painful experience of fortune from a supposedly more traditional and inclusive view. Throughout *Lazarillo de Tormes*, as Castillo reads it, the importance of the young (and the older) protagonist's viewing of his world is held to be crucial to the narrator-protagonist's effort to situate the reader in his suffered, experienced world: "By means of his self-portrait, the narrator-protagonist of *Lazarillo de Tormes* invites the reader to identify with his

drive to achieve power and recognition in a society that has relegated him [Lázaro] to the status of social excrescence" (26).

Perhaps the best summary of Castillo's approach to this work is the following: "Lázaro's refusal to recognize himself in the sum of his representations—how the Other sees and evaluates him—is ultimately the expression of his unwillingness to lay down his weapon, to lower his oblique gaze in a sacrificial act of acceptance of his designated place in the Father's world. Hence, the narrative voice of *Lazarillo* consistently reveals the point of the split between the representations of the *pícaro* in the Other's view—his objective existence—and the marginal or oblique position from which Lázaro sees them—his being-desire, his *persona*" (29). Admittedly this is contentious and contested territory, and not all readers may agree with the notion of a consistently distanced and separated socio-critical voice that Castillo imputes to the anonymous author's complex narrator (e.g., some may disagree with the statement that "one thing he [Lázaro] would never do is identify with the postures of authority, for he knows too much" [30]). But the commentary on the role of a "critical gaze" in the book strikes me as one of the strongest sections of the study as a whole.

The chapter on Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* sees the doubleness of voice and vision as part of the overall pattern and thrust of the narrative to dramatize both the early, fallen experience and the protagonist's later awareness based upon his redemptive transformation. As Castillo succinctly puts it (referring to the moment of Guzmán's awakening): "One can see in retrospect that this is the moment of birth of the narrative voice. From this point of view, the text appears, not as the discourse of the *pícaro*'s life, his *persona*, or desire—as in *Lazarillo*—but rather, as the discourse of the *pícaro*'s death, and his regeneration in the voice of a preacher" (38). This conception of the novel is consistent with Castillo's view of the contrast between *Guzmán* and *Lazarillo*: "In our discussion of the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes*, we saw how the narrator-*pícaro* projected himself (his desire) in a 'subjective' testimony that unveiled the constitutive lack in the Other—i.e., the mark of the contingency and violence of the social order. By contrast, the narrator-watchtower in *Guzmán de Alfarache* fixes on the *pícaro*'s guilt, and thus, retells his story from the point of view of the dominant social groups" (48).

By way of transition to his chapter on López de Úbeda's *Pícara Justina*, Castillo again emphasizes the issue of the all but inevitable doubleness of voice in the picaresque and makes a distinction of degree. In effect, while "*Guzmán*'s 'dialogism' reminds us of the fact that what we see depends on our point of view, even as the narrator privileges the experience of 'desengaño' from a morally correct watchtower perspective...[,] the critical

possibilities of the 'center-periphery dialogics' of the picaresque...will unfold in a more decisive manner in López de Úbeda's *La pícaro Justina*" (53). Castillo pays due attention to the obvious and much debated issue of the book's feminist vs. misogynist implications (55–63), as well as noting the challenges to interpretation posed by the structure and devices of the text itself. As he points out, "The meaning of *La pícaro Justina* is indeed a most difficult historiographic problem, for the difficulties connected to the picaresque 'dialogism' are enhanced here by the author's carnivalesque game of disguises, his flamboyant cross-dressing, and his playful superimposition of perspectives. These baroque excesses may be said to accentuate the dialogic structure of the text to the point of narrative dismembering and burlesque self-deconstruction" (57). Above all, for Castillo the salient feature of this text, which is also its challenge to the reader, is the particular "spin" on subjectivity that arises inescapably from both the baroque complexity of form and the narrator's insistence upon her own "way of seeing" (64).

The three chapters devoted to Cervantes deal respectively, with *Don Quixote*, *Persiles y Sigismunda*, and the question of *honra* (in its dimension as identity and the familiar problematic of *limpieza de sangre*) in selected works of Cervantes' drama. This section takes as its starting point the assumption of a pervasive irony at work in the texts. For Castillo the presence of irony, parody, and even the burlesque is fundamental, given the relevance of such "play" in the phenomenon of anamorphosis in the realm of the visual arts; he thus finds, beyond irony, elements of the parodic and the burlesque in texts or parts of texts where some readers might find their presence less obvious. The treatment of anamorphosis in *Don Quixote* (73–93) is somewhat brief but nonetheless quite suggestive. Principally, Castillo deals with examples of the irony of clashing verbal or rhetorical styles, e.g., between Don Quijote and Sancho (78 ff.), the elements of irony and even parody in the language and action of the Grisóstomo and Marcela episode, and finally the contrast of certain critical views of the whole question of Cervantes as an ironic writer. In this last aspect, Castillo juxtaposes the sharply divergent attitudes of the arch-conservative Spanish writer Ernesto Giménez Caballero (*Genio de España*, 1932) and those of Walter Benjamin (85–93), noting that both critics acknowledge the pervasiveness and power of Cervantine irony, but that for the Spanish conservative this was an alarming and subversive phenomenon, while for the early Marxist critic it was a positive and liberating force (86). In effect, the main thrust of this chapter is to begin with the concept of the ironic, anamorphic view and then, from this starting point, move to a more free-ranging discussion of the possibilities of an ideological reading.

The chapter on *Persiles y Sigismunda* is in many ways the most provoca-

tive section of the commentary on Cervantes. In contrast to the idealist and “Christian allegory” readings (Forcione *et al.*), for Castillo the *Persiles* “is a counter-utopian narrative... that is, an anamorphic mirror that inverts or, at the very least, distorts the symbols of Counter-Reformation culture” (94–95). It is crucial to point out here that Castillo does not reject totally the possibility of reading the text for and as Christian allegory, but rather he insists upon the validity of a contrary and additional, more revealing reading (97). Key to Castillo’s treatment of *Persiles* is allowing the possibility that many of the more violent and grotesque passages may be read as parody and black humor (104–05). But even where a humorous or parodic intention and/or reading is not possible, the straightforward view should not, he insists, be our only one: “our familiarization with the workings of perspective anamorphosis allows us to devise oblique or distorted images of Counter-Reformation culture even in those episodes and situations that do not seem particularly humorous” (105). Then, after citing Žižek’s concept of the criticism of ideology (*The Sublime Object of Ideology*) and how it allows us, as Žižek puts it, “to recognize in it [the element that holds the ideological edifice together] the embodiment of a lack, of a chasm of nonsense gaping in the midst of ideological meaning,” Castillo asserts that “such is precisely the effect—if not necessarily the intention—of much of Cervantes’s writing, including *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*” (106).

This clearly expressed assertion brings us to one of the key critical and no doubt debatable issues of Castillo’s study. For some readers, the differences between “the effect” (a more or less subjective possibility of reading) and “intention” (however difficult or easy to recover, a putative purpose of the author) may not be all that consequential, if one takes as a premise the belief that the “ideological” element will surface, in any case. But for others, this may be an issue of contention. While Castillo’s final chapter—dealing with Cervantes’ drama and especially with the famous *entremés*, “El retablo de las maravillas” (see especially 120–30)—makes what I consider a convincing case for the clearly intended socio-critical function of irony, both verbal and (given that it is theater) visual, I would suggest that other parts of his study, notably the treatment of *Persiles*, will be received with markedly different reactions, depending upon one’s critical stance vis-à-vis ideological readings.

(A) *wry Views* is a clearly written, lively, and refreshingly accessible study of the three picaresque texts and the selected works by Cervantes. Although, given its relative brevity and the particular works chosen for commentary, the book is more suggestive than exhaustive, it nonetheless offers incisive readings and it points to further possibilities of analysis. Perhaps most noteworthy, meanwhile, is the cross-disciplinary application of visual art theory and of the historically well-grounded phenomenon of

the secret perspective to textual commentary, on one hand, and the lucid explication and application of the Žižekian approach to ideological reading, on the other. Castillo's book not only offers challenging readings of its own, but will also stimulate new and provocative discussion of both the canonical works and its own interpretations.

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