

From: *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America*, 24.1 (2004): 265-72.
Copyright © 2004, The Cervantes Society of America.

Robert ter Horst. *The Fortunes of the Novel. A Study in the Transposition of a Genre*. Studies on Cervantes and his Times, 8. New York: Peter Lang, 2003. 303 pp. ISBN: 0-8204-4436-7.

Robert ter Horst does not steer a completely new course; the development of the novel has been charted before, although most often in English waters. Both Ian Watt (*The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*) and Michael McKeon (*The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740*) give accounts of the novel's rise in England. Watt's central hypotheses suggest that only with Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding is the novel's formal realism, "the lowest common denominator of the genre as a whole," brought into being, and that the formal developments of the genre are analogous to the emergence of individualism in a world view derived from "the rise of modern industrial capitalism and the spread of Protestantism, especially in its Calvinist and Puritan forms." Yet McKeon points out that, on the one hand, in novelists like Fielding there is a "persistence" of the "anti-individualist and idealizing tradition of romance," and, on the other, there are frequently encountered features of formal realism in ancient and medieval prose fiction, as well as a persistence of romance and the aristocracy. For McKeon, genre is determined by usage, linked to modes of perception and evaluation broader than those confined to the realm of literature. Watt bases his differentiation of the novel as a new literary form by distinguishing it from the prose fiction of the past, so that he could look into the "conditions of the time" that allowed early English novelists to create the "new form." McKeon instead looks at the terms "romance" and "history," charting the destabilization of the former through fundamental "questions of truth" paralleled by "questions of value." His history of changing conceptions of "honor" leads to the manifestation of a social ideology based on class as distinct from an earlier aristocratic ideology based on status.

In *Fortunes of the Novel*, Robert ter Horst's views are not vastly different from those of Watt and McKeon, but the expression of the author's ideas is unique in its conception and in its execution. For ter Horst, the origins of the novel lie in the fall of poetry into prose, and evidence of this fall is seen in Spain, in the early picaresque texts in particular. Through an invocation of binary oppositions and a wealth of references, allusions, and quotes, ter Horst moves from sixteenth-century Spanish beginnings to nineteenth-century English evolutions, framing his analysis in terms of "fortune." In doing so, he evokes various connotations of the term, adapting them to his particu-

lar points in each case.

Ter Horst's study is itself an extended metaphor; the novel is the principal character of a *Bildungsroman*, now an amphibious creature crawling out of the poetic sea and slogging in the mud of incipient capitalism, now a heavily laden ship that wrecks on economic shoals. The prime mover of this metaphorical ship is fortune, exceedingly multivalent, encompassing meanings related to the unknown or unpredictable phenomena that lead to favorable or unfavorable outcomes, as well as wealth, or even one's overall circumstances or condition in life. Fortune, the "force" behind chance events, invoked so often in classical and Renaissance literature, is lamented constantly in the picaresque tradition. Of course, fortune can also refer to prosperity attained partly through luck, as well as the turns and courses of luck accompanying one's progress, and finally, one's wealth as the result of this progress. Accident, incident, fate, riches: all are facets of fortune and of the novel as ter Horst traces its progress.

As ter Horst notes, the British have long rejected the influence of Spain and Cervantes in the paternity of the novel, an omission and/or error that he dedicates himself to disproving and correcting. For ter Horst, "the European novel is, in the broadest sense, a translation of Cervantes, Cervantes understood as incorporating himself and his Hispanic predecessors, most notably Alemán and the author of the *Lazarillo*" (290). This wide-ranging disquisition takes its starting point in poetry, from which the novel is seen to "descend." The focus of this study, its purpose or goal is "to see the rise of the novel in the perspective of early-modern Spanish prose fiction, particularly in terms of a dialectic between poetry as both a literal and a moral phenomenon and that profound involvement with financial gain and loss which we now call economics but which early moderns, like the ancients, called greed" (85).

Although ter Horst does not suggest a world system of literature along the lines of that conceived by Claudio Guillén or most recently by Franco Moretti (who in his initial writings suggested a relationship between markets and forms, using the metaphor of a "wave of diffusion" from one country to another), his study is comparative "in a larger and truer reckoning where the artistic forms of one culture, period, and society reveal significant similarities to those of another period, culture, and society, even when these are worlds apart" (Preface). This would seem to be a much broader focus than those suggested by Moretti or Guillén, making it possibly less useful as an analytical lens, but certainly suggestive as an impressionistic or interpretative one.

Ter Horst's book is a work of reflection, appealing to the imagination and provoking contemplation. The author's "plays of musement" and poetical insights at times please and at times frustrate, as do certain lamentable

mechanical flaws (typographical errors throughout and a confused numeration of footnotes in Chapter 6), but ter Horst's hypotheses and illustrations offer ample food for thought for anyone with an interest in European literature, especially scholars of early Spanish and English prose fiction. Ter Horst's versatility and erudition are evident; he has read much and read well, as the chapter titles suggest:

Introduction: Poetics and Economics

Chapter 1. From Lyric to Narrative: A Common Feminine Subtext

Chapter 2. The *Lazarillo* and Female Narrative Sustenance

Chapter 3. *Guzmán de Alfarache* and the Licitness of Desire

Chapter 4. *Une saison en enfer*: "La gitanilla"

Chapter 5. Cervantes and the Paternity of the English Novel

Chapter 6. The Fiction of Daniel Defoe

Chapter 7. The Great Conveyancer: The Exemplum of *Rob-Roy*

Chapter 8. Dickens: The English Quevedo prefacing *Our Mutual Friend*

In each chapter ter Horst discusses the foundations and implications for successive works, shifting and evolving the central metaphors and binaries. In the Introduction, he begins with an essential opposition of high and low, seeing prose as violated poetry, where material meets moral, where *codicia* struggles with the spiritual, thus establishing the fundamental axes upon which he charts the journey of the novel. In his evocation of the metaphor of the shipwreck, I was reminded of the engraving in the first edition of the *Buscón*, with the ship of the picaresque being towed by *Lazarillo*.

Chapter One focuses on *Lazarillo de Tormes* as a challenge to both a moral system and a poetic one, that is the predication that God provides, as well as "its associated poetico-moral system." The novel investigates the failure of the male to nurture, and in exposing that failure strips away the medieval semantics of *almus* to revert to a primordial *alma Ceres, alma Venus, alma Mater*: "...in descending to the maternal stratum, one reaches the feminine, the mammary subtext of the novel, that of the starveling, suckling child who, though he has been physically weaned, has metaphorically never ceased longing to draw sustenance from an inexhaustible breast. Poverty and hunger result from severance from this source, ease and plenty from the life-giving flow of liquid into the mouth. The *Lazarillo de Tormes* is a script of orality under the aegis of the female, of Minerva" (17).

Chapter Two discusses the institution of *criar*, meaning variously to feed, to raise, to promote, to foster, and in Spanish, to nurse (only a woman can do

this). Biological fostering leads to spiritual nurturing, the former by the mother, the latter by the father. However, ter Horst points out, there are confused moralities afoot: aristocrats take on commercial coloration, while successful parvenus assume aristocratic manners. According to the old social contract, the master will provide the servant with food. "When that contract collapses, a new economy of self-reliance begins to take shape and to prosper, modestly, on the exploitation of old arrangement. ... Once change occurs, once there is rise or fall, moral judgment intervenes" (45). Lázaro's rise can be evaluated in several ways: moral (based on a will to endure physically that any ethic would sanction), immoral (Lázaro persists and prospers more by guile than by open exertion), moral (Lázaro enjoys a well-being that one in his station might never have expected to have), immoral (Lázaro purchased comfort at the price of his conjugal honor). "Consequently, moral multiplicity in the *Lazarillo* replaces a lyric clarity of moral topography as in Fray Luis" (45).

In Chapter Three ter Horst discusses the *Guzmán*, whose "literary perspective derives from Fray Luis's *cumber* and, more approximately, from Lázaro's Toledan peak of prosperity" (51). But Fray Luis refuses to participate in "the low primal scene" while this "in the *Lazarillo* and the *Guzmán* [is] turned about as their protagonists look to the heights from the depths." Height and depth are the poles of this section, as are ebb and flow: "Thus the whole undulation, now flowing, now ebbing, is erotic, the concealed erotic of the Fray Luis poem, but a dark erotic of dominance and submission, the evil inequality that permits exchange between high and low" (51). Alemán's formula is encapsulated as "dragging down of the genuinely or spuriously lofty person, female above all" (51). In his descent through desire, Guzmán's action is opposite to *Lazarillo*'s struggle to ascend (55). Yet for ter Horst, the first great problem of this novel and of *the novel*, "one which after Alemán will preoccupy Cervantes, Scott, and Dickens, is that of how to modulate between romance and novel, from romance to novel" (56). Alemán, in "Ozmín y Daraja," "finds a solution not so much in hypocritical language as in hypocritical narrative technique. The Moorish tale is a front for a hostile underground society whose *morisco*, Christian and "formerly" Jewish members are engaged in constant scrutiny of one another as well as in constant hidden battle. The principles of this society, nobly masked by fair words, are fear and hatred, not love. The conversion actually realized by the story as a whole is that of romance into novel, with the romance shielding the novel that subverts it" (56). The constant is deceit. In this chapter, the metaphors become maritime, with Guzmán described as a reptile: "However, this reptile is one of the amphibia and comes from the sea, as do the rhythmic of the

novel which, as far back as the Byzantine Greek story, acquires a frequency from the Mediterranean that it brings ashore, just as the sailor, merchant, or wayfarer carries with him to the land the peaks and depressions that his inner ear has conformed to in consonance with the waves" (72). If Defoe brings the novel (a shipwreck) ashore, it was poised to make the "great transition from water to land" long before (72). Pursuing the metaphor further, Ter Horst positions his later arguments in terms of shipwrecks and survivors: "Even when they are completely landlocked, the greatest novels, like the *Quijote* in the "Captive's Tale" and in the "Story of Ana Félix," recall the perils of the sea and understand their destiny to be survivorship, much as the vessel of the *Lazarillo* through good seamanship safely reaches port. Guzmán's fate is somewhat different, for he shipwrecks ashore, is a case of *naufragium in portu*" (72).

Ter Horst devotes the next section, Chapter Four, to a disquisition on Cervantes' *Novelas ejemplares*, which owe a direct debt to Alemán's interpolated novels: "the fallen world of the *Guzmán de Alfarache* is the point of departure for the *Novelas ejemplares* and especially for the liminal piece in the collection, 'La gitanilla'" (92). Theft is the major mode of ignominy that links the two novels. In *Guzmán*, the great struggle is between two basic natures, the acquisitive and the non-acquisitive, the economic and the moral, the low and the high. In Cervantes, gypsies become a synecdoche of the whole society, in which loss is the prime experience, while recovery is its great concomitant aspiration. "Thus the core event in Cervantine fiction comes to be what it will be in later fiction—a transaction, an instrument of exchange, a deal.... *Codicía* is the point of departure for Cervantes, who, the captive of his fecundating opponent, his enemy's inferior, seeks to rise above the rules of profit to a generous and noble dispensation of abundance where there is more than enough for all thus to translate the sterility of the marketplace into the profusions of an economy of blessedness" (111).

Chapter Five centers on Cervantes' paternity of the English novel, which Ter Horst sees represented in "La española inglesa," emblematic of the technological transfer between a culture on the wane and another on the rise:

The novel is, then, an aspect of technological transfer between a culture on the wane and another on the rise. The British mastery of finance is already visible in the Queen's careful and accomplished handling of Isabel's letter of credit. Like it, the novel must make its way not through poetic scenes of love and harmony but through the European arena of conflict in the age of the Thirty Years' War. Most technological transfer is effected under adverse conditions,

and once the new possessor of knowledge has wrested it by force or stealth from the old, theirs is a fierce and bitter filiation, better concealed than confessed (139).

In Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight, ter Horst's attention turns to Defoe, Scott, and Dickens, respectively. The novel as ship has left the Spanish shores, suffering storms and shipwrecks that change its course and progress. In fact, the tempest is viewed as "an economic trial that the materialist in the novel tends very much to survive" (200). Ter Horst's controlling metaphor here is life as an ocean voyage, the passage through spiritual and economic gales. Now, shipwrecked on an unknown shore, the novel, like *Robinson Crusoe*, must (re)invent itself. For the author, *Robinson Crusoe* is a hybrid compounded of hostile elements, an amphibian, while *Moll Flanders* suffers her disaster on land, with bankruptcy the equivalent of sinking in a storm at sea. These two characters, circumstances, and metaphors chart the future course of the novel:

And so just as, in poetry, shipwreck at sea is the crucial event that brings covetousness up against morality in order to put greed to the supreme test, so ashore, in prose fiction, bankruptcy is the tempest that tries the endurance of the newly founded economic individual. ...The fortunes of the novel are tested in the challenge of storm and bankruptcy. The ability to handle credit skillfully means not only the continuation of the individual who manages money well but signifies in addition the perpetuation of the genre, its prosperity and proliferation. Central to the novel is the financially motivated person who must solve the problem of how to acquire wealth and the even greater problem of how to preserve it (184-85).

Discussing Scott, ter Horst returns to the tension between poetry and prose, romance and novel. In Scott, "poetry represents the savage, age-old culture of epic lawlessness in permanent contention with the lowlands as they strive to advance under the rule of law. The novels are myths that mediate between nature and civilization and their author is as much a position as he is a person" (206). Ter Horst believes that Scott has been misread. Rather than want to take his readers into the past, his "mission as an artist is to transport the reader from the modes of the past, despite their potent appeal, to those of the present, despite their want of attraction.... [The mercantile] Napoleonic actuality is in fact his ineluctable and rather distasteful terminus" (233). In this basic motion between two such poles, ter Horst finds the prime

impetus in Cervantes and *Don Quijote*, where the medieval and the actual meet.

In ter Horst's scheme, Dickens marks a shift away from the sea to the river, bringing the scene into the city, the urban, the bourgeois obsession with climbing, rising: "the riverine is the dominant voice.... Indeed, submersion, immersion is one great mode of *Our Mutual Friend*, which must be described as in many ways an underwater narration which by flooding adds a vertical axis to the familiar horizon of pilgrimage.... The novel as device is, then, a sort of lock that gives depth, adding inversion to the surface technique of reversal through reflection. Or a device that drains to a minimum depth, so that the reader has a plane on which to posit the final two-dimensional picture" (255). Here ter Horst's Spanish connection is not with prose but rather with Quevedo's poetry, a somewhat disconcerting albeit interesting shift.

The reader's journey began with ter Horst's initial claim that "prose fiction springs from the exhaustion of the poetic, the moral, and the social idea that God or people acting for Him will provide, will at least prevent starvation" (191-92). By the end, the reader arrives at the conclusion that "in the fictional world of the rising Spanish novel, Lázaro and Guzmán have indelibly stamped human character with their incessant, their eternal desire, greatly unsettling the old balance of power. Cervantes's art comes to restore equilibrium but the proportions have already been so profoundly altered that poetry is lastingly outlawed, is *Paradise Lost*, is *Le Livre* of Mallarmé" (116). However, the translation of the novel to new shores in new times and new circumstances upsets the equilibrium, and the novel must account for itself, seeking its fortune in a non-poetic world.

For this reader, ter Horst was at his best in his discussions of Alemán and Defoe, which are more organic and have a tighter sense of connection to the overall project. The author seems to know where he is going, but the reader might get lost, and have to backtrack, staying along the coast for fear of falling off the edge of the world at the end of the ocean. In the preface, ter Horst confesses that his original manuscript grew to a thousand pages, and one senses in this, the shortened version, a loss. The prose flows freely in some parts, and seems abruptly rechanneled in others. Ter Horst describes his book as long overdue, meant to have been published in 1986 or 1987, but the original was too lengthy. Those broadly familiar with the field will be impressed at how much ground ter Horst is able to cover, although one does get the sense that the longer version of the monograph would have made for a better read, less jumpy, more unified perhaps. As it is, the text wanders, sometimes in a helpful preview of things to come, sometimes as a recap and

reminder of previous points. No matter. It is a provocative, inspiring read.

Susan Paun de Garcia
Dept. of Modern Languages
Denison University
Granville, OH 43023
garcia@denison.edu