

REVIEWS

Louise Ciallella. *Quixotic Modernists: Reading Gender in Tristana, Trigo, and Martínez Sierra*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 2007. 308 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8387-5663-8.

This engaging study offers a close reading of three novels: Benito Pérez Galdós's *Tristana* (1892), Felipe Trigo's *Las ingenuas* (1901), and María Martínez Sierra's *Tú eres la paz* (1906). The title is a bit infelicitous; the author is not claiming that Galdós is a "quixotic modernist," and, as she comments, Trigo and Martínez Sierra are now rarely read, so that either the titles of their works (alongside *Tristana*) or the authors' full names might have been appropriate. An introductory chapter provides important data on literary, social, and political issues that faced writers at the end of the nineteenth century in Spain. Ciallella sees the status of women and gender issues as a "metaphorical battleground" (16) for the problems of the nation. Because it receives far less attention than other areas of feminism, the commentary on the agenda of conservative feminists (which some might consider an oxymoron) is especially useful. A survey of the role of women in Spanish society must bear in mind the issue of interpellation, the concept that reminds us that we are, to a large degree, products of controlled (and controlling) environments. Feminism, in short, cannot shake the patriarchy. Among the topics treated in the introduction is *Don Quijote* and its relation to the novels under scrutiny. Informed in part by Bakhtin, a rather lengthy discussion of Teresa Panza as "a productive working woman within an agrarian household" (25) is interesting, but perhaps less symbolic or intertextually relevant than Ciallella would propose. The introduction does not intend to be comprehensive, but its allusions to fundamental elements of social, literary, and theoretical debates are key to an understanding of *fin-de-siglo* narrative. The critical core is the thesis that, in the three novels, "women's bodies and words are inseparable from the Spanish landscape in terms of the texts' revision of gender and class constructs" (45).

Ciallella frames her chapter on *Tristana* around Emilia Pardo Bazán's well-known critique of the novel. Pardo Bazán finds the suggestion of a "new ideal" to be promising, but she is not convinced by the execution. Following the path of critics who have cited Cervantine resonances in Galdós, Ciallella sees an ironic reversal of *Don Quijote* in *Tristana*, with "a quixotically sympathetic, double-voiced heroine"; a male protagonist (or antagonist), Don Lope, who "shows a powerful affinity with the Duchess, through both characters' applications of proverbs and maxims, and their ostensibly whole yet

privately decaying bodies"; and a love object, Horacio, who "fluctuates between the invalidated domestic arguments of Teresa Panza... and the Duchess's chivalric solutions" (95). Using the term *nongendered nature*, Ciallella signals a radical destabilization of conventional masculinity and femininity in *Tristana*, while referring to "Tristana's own masculinization of her creative capacity" and Lope's "childlike old age at the end of the novel" as "a feminization of middle-class men as a result of their application of inherited controls" (95). Ultimately, she judges *Tristana* to posit a negative view of both the *ángel del hogar* archetype and individual feminist attempts to produce change, but the meaningful ellipsis at the end of the novel anticipates paradigm shifts that can be gleaned in the novels of Trigo and Martínez Sierra.

Tristana is, in many ways, the most significant novel here, because it stands between the literary past (notably, *Don Quijote*) and the immediate future (modernism). Its intermediary status and its compelling but ironic feminism strike me as stronger than Ciallella acknowledges. Without necessarily meaning to, she would seem to corroborate Pardo Bazán's reading. In his so-called thesis novels, Galdós permits the victory of injustice precisely to foreground injustice, to demonstrate—through irony—the case for (poetic) justice. In similar fashion, by punishing Tristana for her unrealistic ambitions through illness and by forcing her into a final compromise through marriage, Galdós may not be refuting her lofty goals but applauding them, while placing them within the parameters of social reality. His adherence to reality principles—and to the principles of narrative realism—does not exclude a push for social reform. Tristana is not only a beautiful literary creation but also an idealist in a world that is not ready for her, and that, for me, is the basis of her quixotism, which Galdós has rendered as thoughtful, serious, and precocious. *Don Quijote* is anachronistic; his ideals lie in the past. Tristana is forward-looking; her ideals project the future of feminism. Galdós's technique, while rooted in realism and naturalism, never elides the playful self-consciousness that he has learned from Cervantes.

If *Don Quijote* comprises the point of departure and *Tristana* the center of *Quixotic Modernists*, the strongest contribution of the book may lie in its recuperative effort, in the analyses of *Las ingenuas* and *Tú eres la paz*. For Ciallella, Trigo portrays social matters as sexual matters; that is, he seeks an analogue, or synecdoche, for larger questions of education and liberation by concentrating on feminine sexuality, a practice that angers and confuses some of his readers and critics. Ciallella effectively relates his social preoccupations to his modernist theory on narrative style and technique. She observes in Trigo's novel a correspondence between subversion of language and support of the opposition to institutional restraints by the ingenuous women of the title. Because women often are silenced in the public domain, Trigo allots substantial space to male characters, who help him to inscribe his social and political—as well as his literary—stance; these men become paradoxical agents of activism. Ciallella concludes that two of Trigo's basic tenets are "that the messy material body is the object of a private fascination and a public repulsion, and that at the same time it is contradictorily an open secret" (170). She accentuates self-consciousness in the articulation of the

story and detects an echo of Galdós's exposure of violence behind middle-class façades, but she differentiates between the avoidance of female hysteria (and male melancholy) in *Tristana* and the depiction in *Las ingenuas* of "a modern man as well as repressed women [who] suffer directly from the ailment" (171). The juxtaposition of theory and praxis is a major strength of this chapter, as is, for me, the poststructuralist flourish of reading women through men.

Tú eres la paz was written by a woman, but published under the name of her husband, Gregorio Martínez Sierra. This was a concession to the difficulties of the woman writer, and it gives an odd gender inflection to the narrative. Ciallella sees the novel as exemplary in its blurring of traditional associations of men with the intellect and women with the emotions. She includes a section on María Martínez Sierra's *La tristeza del Quijote* (1905)—a commentary to go along with a set of illustrations for the three-hundredth anniversary—which she classifies as "a modernist poetics that spiritually unites the unreasonable figures of the madman, the child, and woman with that of the poet (and the reader)" (181). In *Tú eres la paz*, Martínez Sierra sets forth an array of female characters whose common denominator is their separation from dominant notions of femininity. The protagonist Ana moves from quixotic woman, marked by her imaginative gifts, to precursor of the feminists who will succeed her, and who will succeed.

Ciallella challenges and enlightens the reader. Her theses might have been stronger had she stressed the particular manner in which she is defining modernism, and her borrowings from Bakhtinian discourse on occasion obscure rather than clarify her position. Nonetheless, *Quixotic Modernists* fills a number of gaps in contemporary literary history, which has forgotten some of the texts that were part of the spirit of their times. For this reason and for its exploration of feminism in transition, the book is worthy of notice.

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