

REVIEWS

Friedman, Edward H. *Cervantes in the Middle: Realism and Reality in the Spanish Novel from Lazarillo de Tormes to Niebla*. Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta Hispanic Monographs, 2006. 327 pp. ISBN: 1-58871-091-2

As is often the case with major celebrations, the 400th anniversary of *Don Quixote, Part I* got the better of the celebrants. Many of the assorted enterprises held during 2005 merely served to commercialize the novel and its protagonist, from the fabrication of a “Ruta del Quijote” that takes the knight’s incautious fan to places never mentioned in the book, to the marketing of overpriced sandals etched with Don Quixote’s doleful countenance, which, I confess, I couldn’t resist buying. Yet the occasion was also marked by academic activities of a far more productive sort, among them, various excellent conferences attended by distinguished *cervantistas* and a number of publications that have brought renewed attention to the centrality of Cervantes’ novel within the Western European literary tradition. One such publication is the book under review, which rescues *Don Quixote* from a superficially iconic status by tracing its theoretical interconnections with the realist novel and its antecedents.

Situating *Don Quixote* at the center of a long tradition of realist fiction, Edward Friedman juxtaposes a series of canonical novels both diachronically and synchronically to stress the metafictionality of the texts that precede and follow *Don Quixote* in its comprehension (and apprehension) of idealist literature. Looking backward from the seventeenth century, the picaresque novel is seen to combine realism and self-reflexivity, attributes that create a radically new paradigm for the novel. In his first chapter “The Picaresque, *Don Quijote*, and the Design of the Novel,” Friedman explains just how advantageous the model is for the modern novel, as not only the three infamous pícaros, Lazarillo, Guzmán, and Pablos, but Lozana, Justina, and other recalcitrant pícaras, each in his or her own way and for different social, moral, and narrative purposes, mediate the author’s voice through their own. This chapter exhaustively details the picaresque novel’s textuality, what Friedman calls its “interplay among the genetic, generic, and functional principles” (94). Although the chapter reiterates much of what is already known to us about the picaresque (untrustworthy narrator, ironic discourse, social

determinism, Baroque excess, etc.), it expertly directs our attention to the ways in which Cervantes reworks these characteristics in *Don Quixote*, exhibiting in the process his greater consciousness of the creative process. Friedman underscores particularly well how picaresque fiction instructs Cervantes in the use of metafiction when dealing with the historical coincidence of his and Mateo Alemán's victimization by plagiarism.

Although numerous citations from other critical studies are footnoted in the text, it is at times difficult to ascertain Friedman's explicit reactions, whether positive or negative, to particular critical interpretations or literary theories. However, he obviously (and rightly, it seems to me) opposes both a unifying narrative perspective in the picaresque and the privileging of a different type of realism in Cervantes. What holds true for what he calls the narrative realism of picaresque novels (and of earlier texts such as *La lozana andaluza*), if in a "minor key," holds equally true, if intensified, for *Don Quixote* and for the later novels' redefinition of the genre, thanks to Cervantes' role as mediator. Among the many significant and perceptive contributions of Friedman's study is his view that any interpretation of the modern novel must contend with the author's play with language and with literary conventions, no matter how de-emphasized by realism. Thus, the second chapter "The Metafictional Imperative: Realism and the Case of *El amigo Manso*" elaborates on Galdós's mediating fiction, as the non-existent narrator arbitrates between realism and idealism, with *Don Quixote* as its primary intertext.

This intercessionary role is one that Friedman attributes as well to Unamuno's novels. For Friedman, Unamuno's *nivola* mixes the mimetic with the anti-mimetic; his third chapter "The Birth of the *Nivola* and the Rebirth of the Novel: *Amor y pedagogía*" stresses the novel's experimentation as well as its ties to *Don Quixote* as it moves away from realism. (I would have wished for a clearer differentiation between this term and naturalism, as the former runs the risk of becoming overdetermined.) Unamuno's fictions, especially *Niebla*, comment on both art and life, as Friedman points out in his fourth and last chapter, "Quixotic Inscription: *Niebla* and the Theory of the Novel." The chapter thoroughly revisits Cervantes' concerns with the written word and its wordliness and with literature and reality in comparison to Unamuno's own anxieties. Arriving at the conclusion that the latter author offers a "metafictional alternative to conventional realism" (244), the chapter convincingly proffers the argument that Unamuno's modernist self-consciousness indeed harks back to early picaresque fiction and anticipates postmodernism.

Friedman's richly intertextual study of canonical exemplars of the Spanish novel, from its early picaresque beginnings through Unamuno's radical antinarratives by way of *Don Quixote*, enjoins us to reflect on how reading Cervantes may also be undertaken from the perspective of later works. As Juan Goytisolo (and Harold Bloom, in another context) once commented, literary influence is a two-way affair: "El influjo, la relación y coincidencias entre obras distintas en el tiempo no opera de modo unilateral sino recíproco, en la medida en que la obra

posterior inyecta nueva savia en la lectura de las obras que la han precedido, entablando diálogo con ellas, y con un nuevo texto general, común y más vasto: el de la totalidad del museo imaginario” [The influences, relations, and coincidences between works from different periods do not occur unilaterally, but reciprocally, to the degree that the later work injects new blood in the reading of the works that precede it, opening a dialogue with them and with a new, collective, general text, vastly more extensive: that of the totality of the imaginary library].¹ By asserting the metafictionality of the texts discussed, *Cervantes in the Middle* proffers a long-needed crosscurrent of critical dialogue from both ends of the historical spectrum.

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1 Juan Goytisolo, *Disidencias* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1997), p. 312.