

REVIEWS

Alicia Parodi. *Las Ejemplares: una sola novela. La construcción alegórica de las Novelas ejemplares de Miguel de Cervantes*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 2002. 234 pp. ISBN: 950-23-1227-9.

The critical furor of the past few decades, and the parallel distancing of religious faith from academic investigation, has potentially decreased scholars' willingness—even ability—to note the religious allegory that, according to Alicia Parodi, permeates every aspect of Cervantes' writings, especially the *Novelas ejemplares*. Cervantes, a man of deep religious convictions, a man, above all, of his Christian, Renaissance times, utilizes the *Novelas ejemplares* to novelize Catholic dogma. Like a Mannerist painter, Cervantes employs the natural world to depict a higher order, elongating or deforming, as required, the raw materials to allegorize the higher, perfect order that the lower, natural world represents.

In her introduction Parodi laments that all too often critics misinterpret the *Novelas'* Prologue, placing emphasis on the “de por sí” rather than the “todas juntas” in the passage “si no fuera por no alargar este sujeto, quizá te mostrara el sabroso y honesto fruto que se podría sacar, así de todas juntas, como de cada una de por sí” (31). After a brief review of previous critical approaches that attempt with greater or lesser success to view the novellas as a unified whole, Parodi proposes that the unity lies in the concept of the Creation, that the novellas serve as an allegory for the history of the Creative periods, or, in her words, of the “saga del pueblo de Dios” (36).

Chapter One outlines the genesis of Parodi's allegorical approach. Parodi suggests that Cervantes deposits the key to the interpretation of the novellas in the miraculous dialogue between the loquacious canines in the final story of the collection. Cipión repeats, in reference to the prophecy of the witch Cañizares, that “sus palabras se han de tomar en un sentido que he oído decir se llama alegórico, el cual sentido no quiere decir lo que la letra suena, sino otra cosa que, aunque diferente, le haga semejanza” (37). This statement

leads Parodi to a discussion on the development of allegory from the Greeks to the Renaissance Christians, and to the differences between the Neoaristotelian and the Neoplatonic interpretations of the concept. She then demonstrates that the *Novelas ejemplares* serve as a prophetic allegory of the creative process, both in art and as a reinterpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Parodi supports her theories by suggesting that the witch's prophecy refers to the *Magnificat*, Mary's joyful praise of God when she meets Elizabeth during her pregnancy (Luke 1.46–55). Using a witch to represent Mary is a Mannerist-like approach to narrative, or "apophatic symbolism," by which Parodi means that Cervantes uses distorted (negative) figures from the natural world to point to a greater spiritual truth.

Chapter Two structurally reflects Parodi's conceptualization of the novellas in that it is a single chapter divided into subsections on each of the novellas, with an introductory subsection as well. Ironically, however, the structure equally emphasizes the singularity of each novella, since each tale receives its own separate space and consideration. The preliminary section of Chapter Two breaks the novellas into three different representations of the Creation, "Primera Creación," "Segunda Creación," and "Vuelta a la casa del Padre": "la primera parte focaliza arquetipos; ... en la segunda, aparecen los tipos históricos; en la tercera, el lector depende de la mirada de los personajes y experimenta en su propia historia extratextual los rigores de la lectura" (59–60). The first period is comprised of "La gitanilla," "El amante liberal," and "Rinconete y Cortadillo"; the second of "La española inglesa," "El licenciado Vidriera," and "La fuerza de la sangre," with "El celoso extremeño" being related to them through a type of inversion; and the third of "La ilustre fregona," "Las dos doncellas," and "La señora Cornelia," with the addition of "El casamiento engañoso" and "El coloquio de los perros" "como si fuera una redondilla que culmina la serie de tercetos" (62). Parodi alerts us that her analysis will utilize every small reference, every name and word, to draw connections between, on the one hand, Cervantes' texts, and on the other, Biblical and/or traditional Catholic representations of God, the Virgin, the Creation, and other spiritual concepts potentially allegorized by the collection (of tales) which "encierra un 'misterio escondido,' nos avisa Cervantes en el Prólogo" (63).

The twelve subsections on each individual novella present a dizzying array of "intertextual" references to seventeenth-century culture, to Catholic tradition and theology across the ages, and to history and literature of all peoples in all times. Parodi does not seek to elucidate the tales as much as to brainstorm potential connections mentioned, alluded to, or conjured that support an allegorical reading. The name Clemencia, for example, in "La gitanilla," might remind readers of Pope Clemente V or Pope Clemente VII; if not to the bishops of Rome, the name may lead readers to the God of the

Old Testament, who was merciful (showed clemency) to some peoples; or, if not to Jehovah, perhaps to the Resurrection, since the final words of the novella associate *clemency* with *resurrection*: “se enterró la venganza y resucitó la clemencia” (72). Commenting on another novella, Parodi suggests that the name Cornelia leads readers to think of *cuerno*, under whose listing in the Covarrubias one finds reference to the significance of “rayos de luz en la tradición judeocristiana, y recuerda que cuando Moisés descendió del Sinaí después de que Yahveh le entregara las tablas de la Ley, sus ojos lanzaban rayos” (181). Parodi then notes that in the Vulgate *cuernos* appears rather than *rayos*, thus inspiring artists to paint Moses with horns. She also reminds us that Moses covered his face with a veil after his meeting with deity, and she projects a symbolic connection with the veil Cornelia uses as she breast-feeds her baby: “¿no simbolizará la vida que nace también del autor-hacedor emergente, dux como Moisés?” (181). These fascinatingly free and fluid associations flow rapidly throughout Parodi’s analysis of the novellas. In one way or another they all combine to allegorize the Catholic message of the Creation, of the Father, of the Virgin.

In Chapter Three, the final chapter, Parodi quickly recapitulates the ideas of Chapter Two, suggesting further intertextual connections and concluding, in the end, that the novellas are symbolic of the Rosary, “diez novelas y una doble al final: éste es el ‘misterio escondido’ en la colección” (217). Thus, true to the Christian belief that all things, good and bad, in one way or another symbolize Christ, the *Novelas ejemplares* serve as a type of religious chain, linking together to serve as a mechanism through which the author, a reflection of the Creator, leads readers to a better understanding of their Maker.

The book also includes a laudatory introduction to and careful review of Parodi’s work by Juan Diego Vila. In addition to summarizing her ideas, he also provides his own insightful opinions on the direction of Cervantes scholarship across the centuries, agreeing with Parodi that allegorical readings of Cervantes’ novelistic writings are long overdue. The bibliography lists principally works on the *Novelas ejemplares*, along with a few entries on religious topics. There are no entries that would indicate the source of Parodi’s application of the concept of intertextuality.

Written in a delectably baroque style, steeped in Catholic history, tradition, and philosophy, and riddled with Biblical allusions and references: this book is for the intrepid rather than the casual reader. Although at times the connections between the use of an isolated word in Cervantes’ text and the institution of Catholic dogma seem tenuous, we modern-day readers may readily admit, at least, that Cervantes was probably more aware than we are of the doctrinal flavor of his texts. Indeed, it may be that the mystery of the *Novelas ejemplares* is that they enclose if not conceal the truths of the Creation,

preserved in a secular text, awaiting discovery by a readership attuned to the intricacies of allegory.

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