

Vicente Pérez de León. *Cervantes y el Cuarto misterio*. Alcalá de Henares: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 2010. 726 pp. ISBN: 978-84-96408-74-6.

This is an important philosophical study of Cervantes' narrative technique, his experiments, innovations, and excellence in making complex fictions out of a complex reality. Our understanding of the nature of his works is enriched. More important, Pérez de León illuminates in a new way the evolution of Cervantes' fiction, and shows in yet another way how *Persiles* is the apex and culmination of his narrative art:

El viaje artesanalmente metartístico cervantino, que parte de la admiración a Lope de Rueda y culmina en la lonja de Hipólita[,] se asemeja a una catedral del saber técnico-artístico de su época, en la que hacer alarde de las técnicas literarias más sofisticadas y poder juntar en su espacio cultura popular y elevada no sólo es aceptado, sino promovido con entusiasmo. . . . Creemos que toda su narrativa se puede también entender como una experimentación técnica sobre los límites de la realidad improvisada, de una manera trascendental y siendo llevada hasta sus últimas consecuencias artísticas. (710-11)

Pérez is also spot-on about Cervantes' religious beliefs:

[S]u creencia religiosa, tal y como se manifiesta en su novela [not a specific work], no es una al uso. No es que en el corpus narrativo de Cervantes se aprecien detalles de fe dogmática o un nihilismo religioso, sino que el modo en que se articula la fe religiosa tiende a enfocarse persistentemente en la dificultad individual y colectiva de la interpretación unidimensional de la realidad. . . . (113)

Unfortunately, this book has many problems, which have hampered my understanding of it and prevent me from giving a more thorough exposition of what the author has accomplished.

The problems begin with the title. A title is supposed to briefly introduce a book to a potential reader or purchaser. A helpful title for this book might have been *Cervantes, la realidad y la creación artística*. *Cervantes y el Cuarto* [sic] misterio is meaningless to one who has not read the book, and is obscure even after reading. The only one-two-three sequence in the work are three enigmas surrounding an anonymous sixteenth-century painting found in the Oberlin College art museum: authorship, technique, and meaning (82-88).

Aside from a brief reference in the prologue (19), the first and most extensive presentation of *cuarto misterio* in the text is the following:

El problema del universo acausal cervantino se entenderá siempre en el contexto de la proyección del *Cuarto misterio* católico de las sincronicidades, Cuaternidad que complementa la Trinidad. Entendemos que la universalidad y prevalencia del arte narrativo cervantino en la historia literaria se explica por ser una de las contadas propuestas del arte literario universal de su tiempo[,] preocupada en aportar luz al *Cuarto misterio* de la religión católica, principio que ordena la conciencia acausal que explica el lado más numinoso del ser humano. (44)

This passage seems to say something, but despite reading it many times, and looking for context in the preceding and following pages, I cannot make sense of it. The same is true of many other passages. The parts I understand best are the plot summaries, which increase the size of the book and seem superfluous for the scholarly readers this book will have.

The author makes up new words, such as *sincrulacro*, *re-ligión*, *acausalidad*, *intromission* and *extramission*, *virtosura*, and *virtumoso*, as well as the unexplained concept of *verosimilitud mágica*, which he calls a law (15). These seem to give him great satisfaction, and he uses them frequently and prominently. Thus we end up with a cryptic heading like:

Cervantes, (a)causalidad, religión y *re-ligión* (132)

It would have helped if there were a glossary or page on which the definitions of these complicated words and concepts were collected. There is not, and since there is no index, one is frequently flipping back and forth in the text trying to find out what they mean, and what the passages that include them are saying.

The list of works cited, which Pérez mistakenly calls a bibliography, is very sloppy. The way information is presented can vary significantly from one entry to the next; he seems never to have looked at the MLA or any other style guide. There are various errors of alphabetical order. The same article is cited twice, in two different places (Avalle-Arce, which Pérez erroneously writes as Avalle Arce, “Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda,” with no italics). Information is missing in some entries, and others are hopelessly confused (Brown, David Alan, and Hill, Edmund, the latter found between De Rentiis and Díez Fernández). One author, López

García-Berduy, is found in the middle of Cervantes entries, with the title of the work missing. Gómez Pereira in the text (28 n. 6) is listed as Pereira Gómez.

To top off this sad story, the book is poorly written. He strings out very long sequences of prepositional phrases:

Se concluye así que la comprensión *de* un acto acausal nacido *del* profundo sentimiento colectivo *del* honor compartido *por* muchos seres humanos es necesaria *para* el profundo reconocimiento *del* significado *de* la totalidad *de* la existencia *del* protagonista cervantino *en* su concienciación *sobre* la resolución justa *de* sus actos. (41)

Many sentences are overly long and complicated:

La creación de una nueva propuesta literaria en la que se experimenta sobre el concepto de verosimilitud en su época, entregando las herramientas creativas al lector, anticipa un tipo de ficción cuyo testigo fue recogido por autores muy posteriores en el tiempo como Pirandello, Unamuno y Borges – a pesar de que el arte de estos últimos destaque por aplicarse en muchos casos y principalmente en el propio proceso, en su mera aplicación sin mantener siempre el apuntado *justo equilibrio de conciencia lógica (a)causal*. (128)

A style manual would call these flabby sentences, that impact the reader weakly.

Pérez does not capitalize either Spanish or English correctly (for example: North Carolina studies in the Romance languages and literatures, *Eros Y Magia En El Renacimiento*). He does not know how to accentuate either, confusing *aun* and *aún*, *quien* and *quién*, *donde* and *dónde*, *cual* and *cuál* (*los cuáles*, 121). There is an error in the use of the subjunctive (*pueda* for *puede*, 16).

All of this matters. Small things add up. When you cannot check an author's references conveniently – and some not at all – authority suffers. Punctuation, on which I spare you details, is important, as explained to doubters in *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*. Conventions in capitalization and accentuation are, like correct spelling and proper use of italic, aids to readers' understanding. It is unfortunate that the book of a highly intelligent author, with important things to say, has so many large and small deficiencies. They make the book hard to read and harder to understand. I wish I understood it better. The reader should be prepared for a slog.

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