

## REVIEWS

WILSON, DIANA DE ARMAS. *Allegories of Love: Cervantes's Persiles and Sigismunda*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1991. 260 pages.

High seas adventures, androgynous characterization, attempted gang rape, uncontrollable sexual and erotic appetite, cannibalism, exorcism . . . Considered to be his most archaic and bizarre work, Cervantes's *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda* (posthumously, 1617) offers the reader some of the most graphic and strange writing of Spanish Golden Age prose. While many of Cervantes's contemporaries regarded the *Persiles* as his greatest work of writing, and Cervantes himself was extremely proud of his final work, it "remains to this day an underread text" (xi) according to Diana de Armas Wilson in the "Introduction" to her *Allegories of Love: Cervantes's Persiles and Sigismunda*. The stated purpose of her work is to focus "on an 'alternative' Cervantes . . . based on the concept of gender as a category of analysis" (xiii), while her critical approach is "an avowedly eclectic one" (iv). It is precisely her "eclectic" approach that offers us an innovative, sophisticated, and learned discourse, resulting in an extremely rich and fruitful understanding of one of Cervantes's most difficult works.

Wilson recognizes that a variety of literary critics, both in and out of Hispanic studies, have influenced her critical approach towards Cervantes's "polygeneric work": Ruth El Saffar, Alban Forcione, Harold

Bloom, Rosalie Cohen, Fredric Jameson, Claudio Guillén, M.M. Bakhtin, and others. To her credit, and contrary to certain theorists currently in vogue, she also analyzes what the genre of romance meant to classical thinkers such as Aristotle and Plato, resulting in a theoretical discourse solidified by a clear understanding of literary criticism from a historical perspective. In her successful attempt to offer an eclectic analysis, Wilson also uses an arrayal of literary minds, from Dante and Shakespeare to Borges and Fuentes, to study Cervantes from an intertextual and comparative point of view, in the process further enriching the Cervantine narrative style.

At the heart of Wilson's analysis of the *Persiles* is the fusion and interplay of *gender* and *genre* studies, remindful of Aristotle's notion of the "law of gender," or what our critic labels as the "categories of difference" (37-44). Throughout her book professor Wilson skillfully shows us how Cervantes is able to construct his narrative based upon a solid understanding of literary genre theory punctuated by his thematic interest in women, or the "Other." While Cervantes and other Renaissance writers were well-aware of and influenced by Aristotle's categorization of difference found in his *Metaphysics* and *Categories*, as Wilson points out (37), Cervantes could never have agreed with the Ancient's negative view of women, as illustrated throughout this *Persiles*, a work based on the genre of Greek romance, a genre which "addresses 'feminine' concerns" or "gynocentricity" (41). The union of a feminine genre with feminine gender results, a notion that takes on a more complicated fabric in the *Persiles* due to Cervantes's use of the androgyne, a scheme which the classical thinkers labeled as *syneciosis*, or as Wilson explains, when "a contrary is joined to its opposite" (79). Cervantes, never one to conventionalize the unconventional, takes the

notion of the androgyne to a higher level, resulting in the carnivalesque "ad hoc 'pregnant male'" as personified in Tozuelo (85).

If the *Persiles* is a multigeneric work it has to encompass more than just the idea of Greek romance, prompting Wilson to intelligently dedicate much space to the study of allegory. She first compares Cervantes to other Renaissance writers and works, most notably Spencer's *The Faire Queene*, and then she demonstrates how Cervantes's understanding of allegory anticipates that of Freud. Wilson's ability to deconstruct Cervantine allegory from both comparative and psychoanalytical perspectives further raises our critical understanding of the *Persiles*, complementing rather than competing with Casaldueo's historical allegorizing (*Sentido y forma de Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*, 1947), Forcione's Christian theological perspective (*Cervantes's Christian Romance*, 1972), and El Saffar's primarily feminist approach (*Beyond Fiction*, 1984). Due to Cervantes's use of the dream state as his primary narrative device in the *Persiles* to illustrate sexual allegory, Wilson's intertextual commentary concerning Cervantes and Freud is of particular interest to both Cervantine scholars and literary theorists in general.

While Wilson remains faithful to her goal of writing from an eclectic perspective, she does show a tendency towards Freudian theory while analyzing some of the more bizarre portions of the *Persiles*, such as in her study of the cannibalism found in the Barbaric Isle narrative. She states, for example: "The rites of Cervantes's cannibals invite comparison not only with Freud's promotion of paternity but also with his (not unrelated) Oedipal cannibalism of 'the primal horde,'" resulting "in a blazing orgy of parricide" (115). Although Cervantes's narrative may be suggestive of an Oedipal cannibalism, his "barbarians cannibalize

alien males, a technique for incorporating them into the Barbaric Law" (116).

We have seen so far that Wilson analyzes the importance of androgynous bodies and cannibalistic bodies in Cervantes's allegorical romance. No doubt the *Persiles* could be labeled an allegorical romance based on the human body itself. The final three chapters of *Allegories of Love* focus on the female body, especially those of Transila Fitzmaurice, Feliciano de la voz, and Isabela Castrucha. Wilson's agility as a literary critic is perhaps best seen in her analysis of these three Cervantine female characters. By mixing a variety of critical discourse (comparative, feminist, psychoanalytical, Bakhtinian dialogics), she advances our understanding of three powerful events affecting the female experience in the *Persiles*: rape (Transila), childbirth (Feliciano), and exorcism (Isabela). Scholars of Cervantes will find Wilson's comparative analysis of Transila with Leocadia of *La fuerza de la sangre* to be especially interesting. Her study of Feliciano goes beyond the respected notions of Casalduero and Forcione that Feliciano's episode serves as the "spatial and symbolic center" of the *Persiles* from primarily structural (Casalduero) and biblical (Forcione) understandings, as it is ultimately "the mother's story" (222), a classical theme which Wilson skillfully modernizes from a critical perspective. The chapter concerning Isabela and exorcism takes on a comparative and historical approach, as Wilson analyzes the theme of exorcism in Cervantes in comparison to Shakespeare's treatment of this theme. The differences regarding their attitude towards demonic expulsion are greater than their similarities: While Shakespeare uses the rite of exorcism to promote his literary brand of anti-Catholicism, Cervantes "comically celebrates" his female protagonist "for simulating the state of demonic possession" (224), in

“displacement of erotic love . . . her libido” (225).

In short, Wilson shows her reader that we are to praise the Cervantine female for her resilience and sense of humor, rather than pity her as a helpless social adornment. *Allegories of Love* is a fundamental work on a variety of levels. Not only does this study offer an innovative and refreshing analysis of the *Persiles*, but Wilson also succeeds in advancing our understanding of Cervantes’s enormously complex writing technique in general, all the while putting herself above whatever the latest vogue in literary criticism may be to craft an ecletically sophisticated brand of textual analysis.

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EL SAFFAR, RUTH ANTHONY and DIANA DE ARMAS WILSON, eds. *Quixotic Desire: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Cervantes*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993. xv + 332 pp.

From the tentative beginnings in Salvador de Madariaga’s pioneering *Guía del lector del Quijote, ensayo psicológico* (1926), Cervantine criticism has felt the inevitable impact of the Freudian revolution. The marriage of Cervantine studies and psychoanalytic criticism has been a troubled one however; the critical traditions of genre studies, literary history, as well as humanist philosophy, ethics and aesthetics have ceded little ground in the mainstream to the paradigms of self hood expounded by Freud, Jung and Lacan. Hence the significance of *Quixotic Desire*. For the first time alternative readings of Cervantes’s