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The Subversive Tradition in Spanish Renaissance Writing
(review)

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Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies, Volume 10, 2006, pp. 282-283
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Published by University of Arizona

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hcs.2007.0019>



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at the hands of the state, or perhaps NGOs, as in the minds of indigenous activists—but it is one strand in a much more complex field of identity formation.

Finally, an organizing thread for the book is the intersection between a culturalist discourse of difference and ethnic revitalization, often practiced at a local level, by those who see themselves on the “inside,” and a rights-based discourse of sovereignty and autonomy, usually linked to transnational concepts and practiced by those on the frontiers between “inside” and “outside” and those who engage directly with the institutions of the state in seeking to carve out spaces for indigenous rights. Thus the bilingual educational program falls broadly in the first camp, while regional political leaders tended to be in the second. A strength of the book is that this distinction is never reified, but is teased out in different contexts: for example, the same tension could be found within the educational program itself, between different educators and curriculum designers.

Rappaport’s book is a rich, sophisticated and much-needed ethnography of how a “social movement” works in practice. At once depressing, due to the frequent mention of assassinated indigenous leaders, it also inspires with its portrait of indomitable spirit.

Peter Wade
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The Subversive Tradition in Spanish Renaissance Writing
Bucknell University Press, 2005
By Antonio Pérez-Romero

The appealing title of Antonio Pérez-Romero’s study, reinforced by the book’s cover art—Antonio Gisbert Pérez’s 1860 *Los Comuneros, Padilla, Bravo y Maldonado en el patíbulo*—accurately define the discourse of, and reflect the consequences that often attend the countercurrents studied. Unfortunately, the 234 solidly researched pages do not necessarily

convince; the arguments for extensive cultural subversion in the selected texts are weakened in part by the author’s seeming condescension that relegates all disagreement to the arena of “elite” (*sic*) discourse, in part by overinsistence, and in part by refashioning earlier criticism.

The book consists of eight chapters and a conclusion: “Historical Discourse and the Subversive Tradition in Spain”; “Literary-Cultural Discourse and the Subversive Tradition in Spain”; “*Triunfo de las donas* and *La historia de Grisel y Mirabella*: Idealism and Aristocracy, the Gateway for Subversive Feminism”; “*Carajicomedia*: The Erotic Urge and the Deconstruction of Idealist Language”; “*La Celestina* and Inner Desire for Equality: The Search for Lasting Relationships as Existentialist Fulfillment”; “The Subversive Tradition and the Renaissance Revolt of the Masses: The War of the Castilian Communities”; “Alfonso de Valdés: The Subversive Tradition and the Creation of the New World Order”; “*Lazarillo de Tormes*: The Masters versus the Servants.” This list is not merely descriptive but highlights an approach both Marxist and “liberatory” (the author’s word, redolent of a liberation theology that I believe here serves as a critical undercurrent). The critical foundation *per se* is not in question; even though Marxist criticism no longer carries its earlier currency, it still offers a framework for social issues that inform many literary-cultural texts. What annoys is in large measure the author’s vituperative rejection of readings that disagree with his, or those that are merely “literary” and do not incorporate an understanding of the social/sociological concerns of the period. One footnote in the chapter dedicated to *Grisel and Mirabella* refers to Cvitanovic’s 1975 comment on a “new feminism,” but Pérez-Romero adds: “but this label does not include significant subversive socioeconomic features” (250). Even if a critic refers to feminism, for example, if it doesn’t offer a socioeconomic disquisition, the author dismisses it out of hand.

As prelude, Pérez-Romero utterly rejects postmodernism and subscribes to Christopher Norris’s view of its arrogance and exclusivity (14). His moral compass in matters cultural and

political is Noam Chomsky (no argument here), yet filters the too-limited Chomskian readings through the Spanish linguist Carlos P. Otero. It is frequently difficult to distinguish Pérez-Romero's voice from Otero's synthesis. The odd comment occurs: "It is an interesting belief of Chomsky that intellectuals are the most thoroughly indoctrinated members of society and tend to internalize and believe state propaganda at face value" (20). Who these intellectuals are is never clearly defined, and if Pérez-Romero's readers are in the main students of Early Modern Spain, then we are—one hopes—intellectuals who have learned not to accept either dominant or subversive discourse at face value.

Pérez-Romero introduces each text with a review of the critical tradition but the ensuing analyses become a form of interlineal commentary: detailed chapter/section summary followed by critique, often with quotation in English or without additional supporting primary evidence. While this structure does enlighten the reader concerning the lesser known *Carajicomedia*, it becomes cumbersome to the point of frustration when engaging the *Celestina* and *Lazarillo*. Little new information evolves from these respective chapters, but at least Pérez-Romero does bring to bear important studies (such as Gerli on *Celestina* and Ricapito on *Lazarillo*) that have paved the way for him to continue to address class, feminist, and other socioeconomic issues.

Throughout the book the original Spanish texts cited are placed in the notes, when they would be better highlighted in the body with the translation to follow. Notes are copious to the point of overwhelming; in many instances ideas developed there could be synthesized and incorporated into the main body or omitted entirely, especially when they could initiate additional and fruitful studies of their own.

Antonio Pérez-Romero's often one-sided critical discourse in need of an editor well-versed in English—and Spanish—language style to clean up many infelicitous phrases, penchant for imperiously rejecting critical dialogue (ironically placing him in the same camp he criticizes for lack of social conscience), and general lack of synthesis mar what could have been a fascinating

take on other voices that suffused the Early Modern period as Spain became a world power before succumbing to the Counter-Reformation. It requires too much effort to glean potentially insightful observations, and too much patience to wade through the author's dogmatic tone. One political ill should not replace another.

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La tarea política: Narrativa y ética en la España posmoderna
El Viejo Topo, 2004
De Txetxu Aguado

Publicado bajo la rúbrica de "estudios de crítica cultural," *La tarea política* nos invita a considerar lecturas transdisciplinarias a la hora de evaluar textos narrativos de Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Juan Goytisolo, Jorge Semprún y Rosa Montero, publicados entre 1987 y 1995 y abocados a la tarea de dilucidar responsabilidades ético-políticas para momentos históricos específicos. Los ejes conceptuales que guían al autor son los términos claves, "política" y "ética" del título. La "política" se examina desde las consecuencias que han tenido para la misma el neoliberalismo económico y "la implantación del mercado y sus valores a escala planetaria" (64), y prestando atención a las posibilidades de articular una sociedad en base a "convivencias posibles" (291). En lo concerniente a la "ética," las reflexiones que adelanta Txetxu Aguado deben entenderse en un sentido doble pues no sólo implican a los autores estudiados sino también a lectores y lectoras. Lo que el autor nos pide es que estemos atentos y que desde esa atención nuestro sentido de la realidad histórica se ilumine. Por ello considero que este libro acomete una tarea significativa al recordarnos la importante función social que puede tener la literatura para proporcionar conocimiento del momento histórico en el que se inscribe y para adelantar visiones críticas que, en este caso, buscan combatir la amnesia histórica.