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Review: Quixotic Frescoes. Cervantes and Italian Renaissance Art

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Libros Reseñados

Frederick A. De Armas (2006), *Quixotic Frescoes. Cervantes and Italian Renaissance Art*, Toronto, Buffalo, University of Toronto Press, 286 pp. ISBN 978-080-2090-7-44

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Continuing his research on Cervantes and Italian Renaissance art, Frederick de Armas offers his fourth book on this interdisciplinary topic, *Quixotic Frescoes. Cervantes and Italian Renaissance Art*, which explores the link between Cervantes' most well-known novel, *Don Quixote I*, and the visual arts. The study, divided into 12 chapters, seeks to establish a new set of models through an interdisciplinary dialogue between Cervantes and other Renaissance and Classical writers and artists. The first two chapters introduce Cervantes' relationship with Italy and provide an excellent explanation of the history of ekphrasis and mnemonic theory. All three issues, previously addressed in his 1998 *Cervantes, Raphael and the Classics*, are critical to understanding de Armas' thesis that visualization is key to Cervantes' writing. Connections between the "Cervantes" of the prologue and Michelangelo, the merchants of Toledo and the Genoese painter Luca Cambiaso's historic frescoes, Don Quixote and Titian's *Charles V at Mühlberg* and Avila y Zuniga's description of the emperor at the same battle, the giants of the windmills and Giulio Romano's *Sala dei Giganti* and Dante's *Inferno*, Marcela and Pontormo's *The Entombment* and Parmigianino's *The Madonna and Child with Saints John the Baptist and Jerome*, are but a few of the correlations de Armas presents in chapters three through eleven. The study closes with reflective comments on the far-reaching implications of ekphrasis in the novel.

Beyond these engaging, creative analyses of character and episode development, de Armas also reveals powerful ekphrases in the novel's structure and theme. For example, in chapter four, "The Fourfold Way: Raphael," he draws connections between Pythagoras' number theory, the quadripartite structure of Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura and how the latter serves as model for the architecture of the novel (four parts to the novel, four days to name horse, four objects of an hidalgo, four types of food Alonso Quijano eats, four members of his household, four chivalric heroes he admires). The theme of empire is explored in at least four different chapters from four different perspectives. In chapter five, de Armas shows how Cervantes' prologue foregrounds the literary, artistic, and politic competition that artists like Cervantes and Lope de Vega and also Michelangelo and Raphael embody and that are fleshed out in the novel. In chapter six, he focuses on mercantile empire. Specifically, the historic fresco of the Genoese artist Luis Cambiaso foregrounds how Genoa, a mercantile empire, triumphs over the eastern, faith-based empire Trebizond, much in the same way as the merchants of Toledo ultimately defeat Don Quixote. In chapter seven and later in chapter ten, de Armas explores the politics of conquest. First, he reviews the link between Charles V and Don Quixote from an ekphrastic perspective using Titian's *Charles V at Mühlberg* as a principal source. Later, he interprets Dulcinea as a feminine map of Europe via the sources Cervantes employs: from the classical tradition, Helen

and Lucrecia represent Greece and Rome, respectively; from chivalric novels, Oriana and Angelica represent Great Britain / Spain's nemesis and the European other; and from nature, Aldonza Lorenzo comes to represent modern Europe.

Additionally, I would underscore three observations about this study. First, de Armas' work expands the dialogue between art and literature that is still wanting in early modern Spanish literary studies today. *Quixotic Frescoes* enriches our understanding of Cervantes and more generally the writings of seventeenth-century authors who regularly drew upon artificial memory, ekphrasis, *invention*, *imitatio*, and *techné* in their diverse artistic reactions. Second, with intellectual precision, de Armas seamlessly incorporates previous Cervantine scholarship and blends it with traditional and recent art history scholarship. For example in chapter nine, "A Mannerist theophany / A Cruel *Teichoskopia*; Pontormo and Parmigianino," de Armas draws from the well-known scholarship of the Marcela-Grisóstomo episode of El Saffar, Cruz, Ullman, and Jehenson, among others, and combines it with that of the art historians Hartt and Freedberg. In doing so, he offers readers a familiar base from which to understand how Virgil and Homer surface in the text through the literary devices of theophany (seeing a divine apparition) and *teichoskopia* (looking out from a high place) that were employed by these epic writers and later exploited by Renaissance painters. Finally, the historical accounts of figures such as Luis Cambiaso (1527-85), Genoese painter who Phillip II invited to El Escorial, Giovan Battista della Porta (1535-1615) whose work on mnemonic theory, *L'Arte del ricordare*, was published just a year before Cervantes arrived in Italy, and Juanelo Turriano (1500-85), engineer at the court of Charles V, are particularly engaging. These "portraits" are but one facet of how de Armas' thoroughly approaches the complexities of Cervantes' historic, literary, and artistic models for *Don Quixote I*. In *Quixotic Frescoes*, Frederick de Armas successfully signals to active readers how to interpret the pictorial signs and, in doing so, discover hidden images of Italian Renaissance art within the pages of Cervantes' most famous artistic creation.