

Abstract

“El periquillo y el *Quijote*”

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“El *Periquillo* y el *Quijote*” is a comparative analysis between the Spanish Classic *Quijote* of Cervantes and the first Spanish-American novel *El Periquillo Sarniento* by Mexican novelist and essayist Jose Joaquin Fernandez de Lizardi. This study investigates the picaresque qualities and style that impacted the first novel just prior to the independence of Mexico. While Cervantes’ *Quijote* including all other European classics were censored in Spanish-America for three hundred years, the *Periquillo Sarniento* was influenced to a large extent by the Cervantine work of the late sixteenth century. During the colonial era, such literary works were not permitted due to the didactic mission of the Spanish Crown, although it has been attested that there were many books in circulation as a result of contraband during the colonial period. While both works have the picaresque element in common, there are distinct differences between the Spanish picaresque character and the Mexican picaresque protagonist. The former reveals cowardice in the face of death while the latter, shows a confronting attitude towards death. Still, the influences are duly noted, particularly in language and style as noted in this study.

In the “Apology” of the *Periquillo Sarniento* preceding the text, Fernandez de Lizardi uses the *Quijote* to defend his work from the attacks of his critics. He cites the pedestrian as well as the pedantic, preaching and moralizing, notwithstanding, as exemplary of the picaresque elements common to both works. And like the *Quijote*, the

Periquillo Sarniento employs a plethora of characters: nuns, friars, priests, lawyers, barbers, scribes, doctors, colonels, businessmen etc. In both cases, the authors are jailed more than once for their rebelliousness in thinking in a closed society. Thus, the mocking vein becomes standard in the narration and we read the outrageous explanations of the protagonists of both works which elicit laughter and originality. Sancho Panza, while seemingly uncouth in the beginning of the *Quijote*, actually becomes learned and wise at the end of the novel. The *Periquillo* as a character, likewise, becomes a type of "Quijotesque Sancho" using latinisms and lecturing as a learned character. Humor, without question, is salient throughout both works, but beneath the adventures and survivability of the picaresque character is a strong but subtle critical commentary on society. As the picaresque character moves from one institution to another, the reader discovers the weaknesses and injustices that are present in society. It is not surprising, as a consequence, that Spanish-America had to wait three hundred years before the appearance of the first novel; neither is it surprising that underneath the humorous episodes, preaching and moralizing, there is a socio-political critique that is exemplary of Independence thinking. In fact, the *Periquillo Sarniento* was written for that purpose after colonial authorities burned Fernandez de Lizardi's press for printing critically incisive commentary against the government.

In conclusion, it can be stated that (1) while the *Quijote* was censored by the *Librorum Prohibitorum* of the Inquisition, it was, nevertheless, circulated via the avenues of contraband, (2) through genre and stylistic analysis of the *Periquillo*, one can see the picaresque influence of Cervantes' *Quijote*, (3) differences between the Spanish picaresque character and the Mexican picaresque protagonist can be seen in the following characteristics: hypocrisy, extreme pride, indolence, cynicism and cowardness in the former and humility, generosity, innocence and courageousness in the latter, (4) the Middle Ages continue in Mexico until the end of the XVIII century, (5) It is surmised that due to the access of contraband novels, Lizardi may have, in fact, been influenced further by Fielding, Defoe, Smollet, Sterne or Thackeray, (6) the picaresque influence will not die with the XVIII and XIX centuries; rather, it will surface in the form of a *novela costumbrista* or "novel of customs" in a contemporary setting in the XX century.

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