
Review

José Belmonte Serrano. *Arturo Pérez-Reverte: la sonrisa del cazador*. Murcia: Nausica Edición Electrónica S.L., 2002.

Belmonte Serrano's critical book on Pérez-Reverte provides an excellent groundwork for what will become, given the author's extensive readership, an important area study in itself. In line with critical studies opening areas of inquiry, the critic is careful to place Pérez-Reverte's work in the context of Spanish and European literature while addressing major aspects of the Spanish author's oeuvre. Also of interest is Belmonte Serrano's relationship to the author's work. He has been both a critic and a chronicler of the author's literary career from the outset; in fact, not surprisingly, this shared trajectory has led to a friendship. Thus, owing to the critic's intimate knowledge of the author's work, this collection of essays can be read as a genealogy of his discursive evolution as a Pérez-Reverte critical reader as well as part of the founding process of a discursive field.

The book is made up of twelve essays and an interview, all arranged chronologically. The critical purview encompasses all of Pérez-Reverte's works, from his first fiction –*El húsar*– to the last one –*La reina del Sur*– as well as his newspaper articles in *El semanal*, a weekly magazine. Despite the chronological arrangement a number of recurring themes allow the reader to cluster the articles thematically. Leaving aside the interview, centred on one of Pérez-Reverte's most celebrated characters, Alatríste, Belmonte Serrano deals with the author's place in contemporary fiction, his literary technique, the study of his literary characters, the historical novel, the serialized novel, the pedagogic vein, and the use of cinematic technique. Additionally there is an essay on Pérez-Reverte's cultural articles, where the critic places the author in a long-standing tradition of cultural criticism, which he traces back to the romantic Larra.

In contextualizing the author's work, Belmonte Serrano studies the literary tradition behind the oeuvre. He carefully elucidates the nineteenth-century models –such as Dumas, Dickens, Melville, Clarín and Galdós, among others– and how the author's seductive literary technique reworks the successful serialized novels. Regarding Galdós, Belmonte Serrano argues for example that the Madrid of *El maestro de esgrima* is encoded by the literary representation of this Spanish writer. As for the author's literary technique, the critic details all the reworked aspects of the nineteenth-century models (style, action, suspense) while properly locating Pérez-Reverte in post-modern writing. In this context, he studies the interactive, the intertextual and metafictional elements and corresponding calculated demands made on the reader. Literary theory and the author's literary practice are carefully studied in relation to *El Club Dumas*, the author's most auto-reflective novel. In the essay entitled "La teoría literaria y su didáctica: Arturo Pérez Reverte y la novela española actual," the critic elucidates the role of the reader in the author's fiction. In the tradition of Cervantes and Unamuno's *Niebla*, the reader is made to reflect on the writing process and

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its relation to literature in general. According to Belmonte Serrano, this aspect of the author's writing coupled with his popularity make him an ideal candidate for the Spanish academic curriculum. Belmonte Serrano is in fact very concerned with pedagogy and the future of the humanities, and particularly literature, in the Spanish education system. Consequently, Belmonte Serrano, the critical reader, who explores, among many other facets, the metafictional and interactive quality of Reverte's works, sees in turn, from a pedagogical standpoint, these texts as excellent didactic tools to apprehend the creative process.

Belmonte Serrano studies as well the didactic vein in Pérez-Reverte in relation to the historical novel. The author is placed in the historical novel's boom of the eighties in Europe and Spain, the beginning of which the critic sees in Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980), coincidentally a text that thwarted the writing of Pérez-Reverte own historical novel on the knights templar. The author's first published work was a historical novel —*El húsar* (1986)— set in the context of the Napoleonic Wars. Belmonte Serrano approaches the text in many of the essays analysing generic questions, treatment of characters, intertextual elements such as the *ekphrastic* encoding of *Los horrores de la guerra* in textual descriptions. The critic also studies the series of novels set in the Golden Age period, starting with *El capitán Alatriste* (1996). Belmonte Serrano shows, tracing the literary reworkings of the intertextual and historical, how these texts are an attempt to didactically and critically revisit the history and literature of a period often seen only for its literary splendour.

The author's work in relation to cinematography is recurrently studied. Belmonte Serrano identifies Spanish authors and generations characterized by this cinematic tendency, analyses the role of cinema in the author's fictions and reflects on the several film adaptations made of his works.

Belmonte Serrano's book is an excellent introduction to Pérez-Reverte. For those interested in exploring critically the Spanish author, the book offers countless avenues of inquiry.

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