

lacking when confronted with the ‘inexpressibly human’” (p. 123). “For Max, Bigger is . . . a social and not a personal or human problem” (p. 122). But Max, as Bigger realizes, is “trying to comfort him in the face of death,” a comfort without an exploration of the meaning of Bigger’s life that Bigger rejects, just because Bigger is for him a “human problem”: “‘You’re human, Bigger,’ Max said wearily. ‘It’s hell to talk about things like this to one about to die’” (*Native Son*, p. 354).

The meaning of Bigger’s life that Max finds is that, as he expressed it in his courtroom speech, as a result of Bigger’s being “excluded from, and unassimilated in our society, yet longing to gratify impulses akin to our own,” “every thought he thinks is potential murder. . . . Every sunrise and sunset make him guilty of subversive actions. . . . *His very existence is a crime against the state!*” (pp. 335–36; Wright’s italics). When Bigger accepts his overwhelming impulse to kill as good, shouting, “I didn’t want to kill! But what I killed for, I am! . . . What I killed for must’ve been good!” (p. 358), Max is crushed. The revolution against which he warned in a plea to which neither the judge nor the governor paid heed seems to him more than ever inescapable. His eyes are wet as he shakes hands with Bigger, but as he gropes for the door he averts his face from him. It is not “the human reality of Bigger Thomas” that he cannot face but his social significance.

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The Grisóstomo-Marcela Episode of *Don Quixote*

Mr. Iventosch replies:

If by vehemence and insulting tone one could gain a point in an argument such as the present one between Avalle-Arce and myself (*PMLA*, 89, 1974, 1115–16), Avalle would have cleared the lists by now. But since these literary and historical matters can be subjected to a reasonable and objective analysis, Avalle’s criticisms and corrections will not quite do. He is right—I say it with regret—that I intended to “obliterate” his 1961 observations on the Grisóstomo-Marcela episode of the *Don Quixote* (or at least to criticize severely what seemed to me their high irresponsibility), but this was only a small part of my study. When I first read his Forum piece, it seemed to me too idle and too easily refutable to merit a reply. This is perhaps still so. Nevertheless, purely for the record, as they say, there are a series of his points that may with some benefit be corrected. I will follow his own statements in their same order, leaving out a few which seem to me too trivial for serious discussion, such as his exhortations

to consult this or that bibliographical item which I may already have seen and not deemed fit to use.

Concerning Grisóstomo and the “tragedy” or “parody” of his death: Can anyone really discover any tragedy in the pathetic autodestruction of this hapless lover? I believe it is a more generally held view that the realistic prose style developed by Cervantes lends itself little to tragedy. And as for Avalle’s point that Calisto of *La Celestina* is the “real” parody of the courtly lover, does he mean to say that he is the only one?

Concerning the anathema of the Council of Trent against suicide and the question of Christian versus courtly despair: Is Avalle really serious in claiming that in those days of unequaled and widespread secularization of life many people in Spain or anywhere else were constrained from suicide or other life actions by dicta from Trent or other theological codes? And as for despair, does he really think that when people despair over love or other things they are despairing over hope of the future life as expressed in the theological virtue of hope? Avalle upbraids me for “pseudotheological” reasoning, but my point was that there is no theology whatever in these amorous despairings. If Avalle would want to demonstrate a connection between the famous virtue out of the theological triad and lovers’ immemorial despair, I imagine he would encounter difficulty.

Concerning literature and philosophical systems: This had to do with my dismissal of Avalle’s idea that Grisóstomo’s suicide may have been inspired by the Stoic philosophy. I’m aware that this debate over literature and philosophy goes back at least to the days of the ancient Greeks, and there are some philosophical poets on the Mediterranean in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although few. I feel—to elaborate a little on what I said in my article—that literature tends to lean on philosophy when its own independence and inspiration are weak, as today, with its Freudian, Sartrean, and no end of other philosophically inspired creations.

Concerning the poet Gutierre de Cetina and his own “canción desesperada” which, as I suggested, with virtual certainty inspired Cervantes’ own. I gave convincing evidence in note 8, pointing out that many poets in the sixteenth century, following Petrarch, left their “canción” in the final stanza unadorned, without adjectives, and that Cetina and Cervantes were quite striking in their use of the adjective “desesperada.” Avalle, however, says I am wrong, since Cetina “died an obscure death in Mexico, when Cervantes was probably about ten years old, and his poetry was not published until three hundred years after his murder” (p. 1116). But Cetina was one of the best known of the followers of Garcilaso, mentioned with praise by Juan

de la Cueva, Baltasar del Alcázar (4 laudatory sonnets), Cristóbal de Mesa, among others, and with special esteem by the very Fernando de Herrera whom Avalle quotes, in his celebrated *Anotaciones* (1580) to Garcilaso (see the remarks of Hazañas y la Rhua, in Vol. 1 of his edition of Cetina, *Obras de Gutierre de Cetina*, Sevilla, 1895, pp. lviii–lxi, and the *Anotaciones* itself, in *Garcilaso de la Vega y sus comentaristas*, ed. Antonio Gallego Morell, Granada: Univ. of Granada, 1966, pp. 289–90). The fact that his works were not formally published until long after his death is of no account, since literary works commonly circulated and became well known in manuscript in those days. In response, then, to Avalle's round assertion that "it is well nigh impossible that Cervantes had any acquaintance with" (p. 1116) Cetina's poetry, it must in justice be affirmed that it is well nigh impossible that he *did not* know it.

Avalle is correct about the date and place of the publication of the *Tirant lo Blanc*, 1490, rather than, as I said, 1492, and Valencia rather than simply "Catalonia."

But Avalle's chief umbrage throughout is concerned with the matter of suicide. All of this to-do about self-destruction must strike the non-Hispanist reader as slightly comical, but he must keep in mind that we are facing a mixture of a sort of nineteenth century Carlism (archreactionary Catholic dogmatism) and contemporary neomedievalism, according to both of which the religious laws laid down in the past survive

immutable and forever in the spirits of men, whatever the evidence to the contrary. Avalle says that I have neglected certain studies on suicide in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain, availing himself principally of two authorities, the etymologist Joan Corominas (*Diccionario crítico-etimológico de la lengua castellana*) and Otis H. Green (*Spain and the Western Tradition*), and quotes Corominas to the effect that the word suicide "is a neologism documented in England since 1651, where there is a great plague of this sort of thing . . . and whence the rest of Europe must have taken the term" (my translation). The word suicide is immaterial to our discussion. As for the other authority, Otis H. Green and his *Spain and the Western Tradition*, can anyone still take this pretentious and misleading work seriously, or even—which is worse—quote it to the effect (as Avalle does) that "only some very few works—the *Cárcel de amor* and the *Siervo libre de amor*, both prior to the full tide of the Renaissance, and the 1547 imitation of Rojas' *Celestina*, the *Tragedia Policiana*—present suicide without condemnation or extenuation" in the face of the numerous unextenuated and uncondemned Spanish suicides that I demonstrated?

But the trouble is, Avalle is serious; he really seems to believe these things, and I don't know what can be done about that.

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