

Letters, Beers, and The Great Spanish Novel

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Baena, Julio. *Tosilos*. Madrid: Huerga y Fierro Editores, 2015. 235 pp. ISBN 978-84-943805-3-2.

Tosilos is the first published work in prose fiction that follows several other books by Julio Baena. In his afterword, the author describes his work as “barely a minor pseudo-sequel to the Great Spanish Novel”. The Spanish novel he refers to here is *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes. In *Tosilos*, the reader experiences firsthand narrations from Don Quixote’s character named Tosilos, the lackey who is ordered to fight Don Quixote. In addition, the author includes fictional narratives from the perspective of a bartender in a bar in the United States as well as from a group of foreign students, most likely from Spain, as he opens with a letter to a nun that the author includes as he initiates the story.

The reader is a witness to Tosilos’ journey through life as he ponders his agency. The author uses the meaning of the lackey’s name along with his actions and decisions in life to map out this journey. *Tosilos* offers an alternative in-depth view of several characters found in *Don Quixote*. The narrative utilizes the fictional research findings of both an older character and a foreign group of students who attempt to discover and unravel Tosilos’ history. As the narrative progresses, the two are unaware of their common interests for Tosilos, even though they can frequently be found at the same bar. The bartender also offers her perspective of the two in what becomes an impression of self-realization for all involved.

Julio Baena oscillates between contemporary and past events and weaves various genres such as poetry and epistolary into his prose in order to fuse the various events and characters. The story unravels the fictional circumstances that led Tosilos to his encounter with Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. *Tosilos* gives the reader a glance at what life was like for the lackey prior to this encounter and thereafter. It is through this chain of events that Tosilos discovers he can be anyone or anything as described in the book:

Recordaba que le gustaba que lo enviaran de correo. Que estando solo, y quitada la gorra, y vuelto el jubón del revés, se descargaba de su peso diario, de ser y parecer lacayo en cada cosa que hiciera. Solo, de camino, si entraba a refrescarse al pozo de cualquier corral, no era lacayo de nadie. Ni siquiera

era Tosilos. Era, en cada encuentro, como un comienzo de existencia. Podían preguntarle quién era, e incluso de quién servía—, pero él podía callar, o mentir, o informar, y partir de ahí con quien fuese. Sólo tenía que disfrazar su ropa de lacayo. (131)

The use of clothing, whether it is Tosilos in his usual garb, or Lidia in men's clothing, is used as a manner in which to shed one's limitations. In a similar manner, the other characters discover their agency through self-reflection.

The book uses historical events such as the expulsion of the moors in Spain while interlacing characters and situations from *Don Quixote* to develop and elaborate Tosilos' story. The narrative offers the reader an alternative and expanded outcome to the events witnessed in *Don Quixote* while providing a firsthand testimony of what life may have been like during the period. This process unites the various characters in the book by highlighting the subject matter and concerns that transcend time and continue to be relevant to a contemporary audience.