

*Retórica del infortunio: Persuasión, deleite y ejemplaridad en el siglo XVI.* Sarissa Carneiro. Parecos y australes: Ensayos de Cultura de la Colonia 13. Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2015. 236 pp. €28.

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*Rhetoric of Misfortune: Persuasion, Delight and Exemplarity in the Sixteenth Century* offers the specialized reader a work of research on the rhetorical codification of dangerous situations that appear in texts of shipwrecks and maritime mishaps related to the

conquest and colonization of America. Among previous studies on this topic is “Épica y retórica del infortunio” (“Epic and rhetoric of misfortune”) by Margo Glantz in 2005. Carneiro justifies the choice of tales and descriptions of shipwrecks because of their great symbolical power within the historical-cultural context that produced them (20). Shipwrecks were the antitheses of successful voyages and warned of the vulnerability of the human condition and the necessity of seeking eternal salvation by correct behavior. Thus, in order that such unhappy events fulfilled their educational and moral purpose, from antiquity onward rhetoric had always provided a series of strategies that the author of this study tries to clarify. The final objective of the work, however, goes further than merely rhetorical study, and is interdisciplinary since it seeks “to enlarge, from the perspective of rhetoric, the research already carried out on Fate at the heart of the history of culture, the history of art, iconology, philosophy and literary studies” (15).

After the introduction, the content of the book is divided into two parts. In the first, entitled “Persuading with Misfortune,” the author relies on an ample collection of rhetorical texts that span the great authorities of classical and late antiquity through to treatise writers of the sixteenth century, in the fields of both profane and sacred rhetoric (Arias Montano, Vives, Miguel de Salinas, Luis de Granada, and others). The objective is to analyze the doctrine of persuasive power of the feelings produced by suffering and passion in different phases of discourse composition (invention, arrangement, style, and even pronunciation and gesticulation). As Carneiro shows, such doctrine, complex and not always coherent among the various authors treated, tended to identify the epilogue as the best place within the discourse to stimulate compassion within the listeners and offered strategies to bring them closer to the unfortunate event via vivid description (*evidentia*), the use of examples (*exempla*), and amplification with the commonplace. Once the theoretical base is established, the author analyzes the impact of such rhetorical strategies in the composition of the *Libro de infortunios y naufragios* (Book of misfortunes and shipwrecks, 1535) by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo. The theory put forward is that this book, full of narratives and descriptions of deaths, misadventures, and losses, constructed with the amplificatory resources established by rhetoric, was considered by Fernández de Oviedo as the colophon of his *Historia general y natural de las Indias* (General and natural history of the Indies) in order to maximize its exemplary power over the fluidity of fortune. The “grand finale” (106) of the work supposed an extreme and edifying contrast to the beginning, which dealt with the fortunate voyage of Columbus.

The second part of *Rhetoric of Misfortune* is called “Delight and Exemplarity.” It analyzes how the pain and compassion that are aroused by the narration of the sad events of the sinking of ships was also a formula used to unite moral education with the enjoyment of the reader, which explains the success of narratives of Portuguese shipwrecks in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Carneiro seeks support for her interpretation of this phenomenon in the analysis of Aristotelian catharsis, which was used in the era, for which she cites sources such as González de Salas and López Pinciano. Basing her argument on these texts, the author analyzes the Portuguese narratives of shipwrecks in the light of pleasure and exemplarity through a section of fragments where

the use of topics such as the pleasure in remembering weariness, praise of the nobility of spirit in misfortune, and the Christian patience that cleanses sin is obvious.

An appendix follows the second part, which contains fragments taken from Renaissance sources on the feelings aroused by the narration of sad mishaps and their use as both a means of education and pleasure. The book closes with a bibliography relevant to the material and an index of proper and common nouns.

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