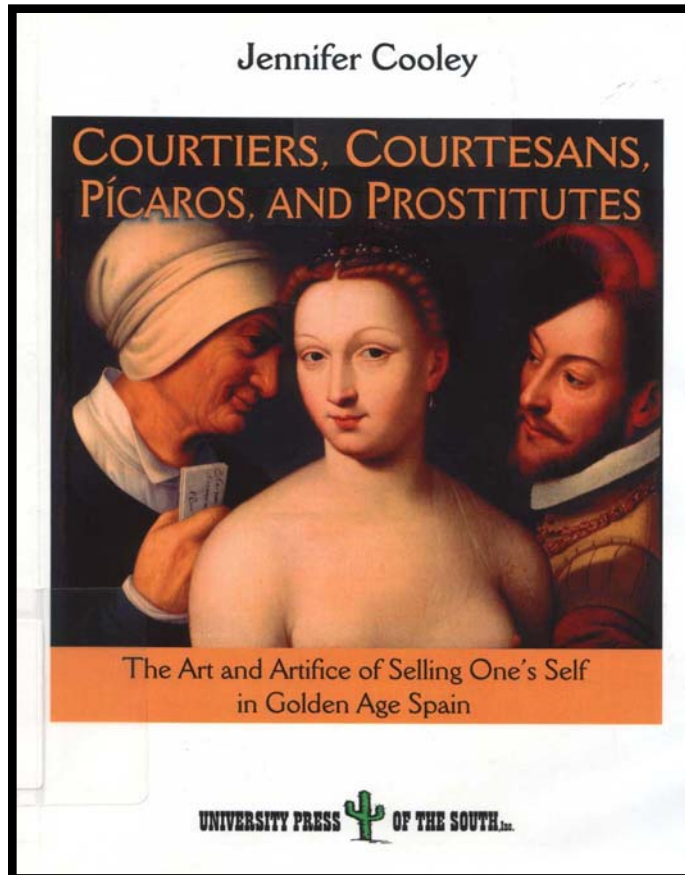


Cooley, Jennifer. *Courtiers, Courtesans, Pícaros, and Prostitutes: The Art and Artifice of Selling One's Self in Golden Age Spain*. New Orleans: UP of the South, 2002. 231pp.
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In this book Jennifer Cooley examines features of the picaresque literary tradition in the light of social changes in Spain during the 1500s and first half of the seventeenth century. In her opening chapter, “Introducing the Subject of Golden Age Spanish Literature” (1-45), Cooley focuses on the relationship between social changes in Spain –such as the growth of the bureaucracy, the emergence of the aristocracy at the royal court, and the preoccupation with purity of blood (*limpieza de sangre*)– and the disparity between the courtly elite and the marginalized classes (including manual laborers and *conversos*). Cooley’s aim is “to show that it is within this context of unbridled social change that the literary representations of the formation of an elite individual in the literature of the court can be compared and contrasted to an equally rich tradition that articulated the identity formation and subjectivity of

a marginalized self in the Spanish picaresque” (5). In order to establish a foundation for her textual analyses, Cooley devotes part of her opening chapter to discussing critical theories regarding the connection between Golden Age Spanish culture and the picaresque, that is, with regard to the parallel between the literary marginalization of *pícaros* (along with prostitutes and go-betweens) and the limited social mobility in contemporary Spain.

Cooley draws on these theories in the process of arriving at her conclusions concerning the manner by which exchanges between literary characters reflect Golden Age notions of social status, according to which “discursive acts became the primary means by which one was evaluated...[and] [o]utward representation of status became a function of one’s verbal abilities” (35). Cooley expands on this concept in the second chapter, “The Courtier and the Courtesan: Discourse and Social Mobility” (47-92), in her analysis of Baldassare Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*, which made a significant impact at the court of King Charles V. Cooley explores parallels between discursive techniques utilized by courtiers, as illustrated in Castiglione’s work, and those employed by a variety of characters in Fernando de Rojas’ *La Celestina* and Francisco Delicado’s *La Lozana andaluza*. Some of the most interesting observations concern the figure of

the go-between, namely Celestina and Lozana, whose discourse is shown to demonstrate that, as in courtly circles, “[l]inguistic expertise is linked to material gain...[and that] speaking well has the capacity to override factors that would otherwise close off possibilities for success in the social field” (90).

In the following chapter, “*Honor vs. Valor: The Pícaro as Marketer of Symbolic Goods*” (93-159), Cooley shifts the focus to Francisco López’s *La pícaro Justina* and Francisco de Quevedo’s *El Buscón*, two seventeenth century picaresque works. Published during an “age of increasing sensitivity about social mobility” (36), these works include characters, as Cooley explains, that manipulate discourse in order to create the illusion that they possess greater social status. Cooley’s remarks concerning Pablos, the protagonist of *El Buscón*, are especially poignant. According to this scholar’s reading of Quevedo’s work, the verbal astuteness of Pablos, such as his ability to utilize *conceptismos*, establishes a parallel between the mannerisms of the marginalized *pícaro* and contemporary courtly “dictates for social success” (151).

The final chapter, “Baltasar Gracián and the Verbal Performances of a Courtly Pícaro” (161-208), examines representations of the social subject (which Cooley, building on ideas expressed by George Mariscal and José Antonio Maravall, defines as “a monad who forges momentary relations with several different individuals and groups throughout life” [29]) in a variety of works by Gracián: *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, *El Criticón*, *El Discreto*, *El Héroe*, and *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*. Cooley demonstrates that the theme that “Gracián shares with the picaresque is the visceral mistrust of others that converts social activity into a calculated event” (177). In this context, Gracián’s depictions of the shrewd and aggressive courtier who manipulates discursive exchanges in order to enhance his status are shown to recall the quest of the *pícaro* for social acceptance and material gain.

Cooley’s study is complemented by a thorough bibliography and a helpful index. This book would have benefited, however, from shorter chapters and from the inclusion of a final chapter that might have summarized Cooley’s theories on the different works she considers. In spite of these flaws, Cooley’s book is informative and her arguments are well developed, supported by the textual evidence she presents, and solidly grounded in previous criticism. Her observations on discursive strategies make significant contributions to the field of Golden Age literary studies and should inspire further critical debate with regard to manipulation of language in works inspired in the picaresque literary tradition.