

Towards a Definition of Picaresque Drawing: the Comic Adaptation of *El Guitón Honofre* (2005)

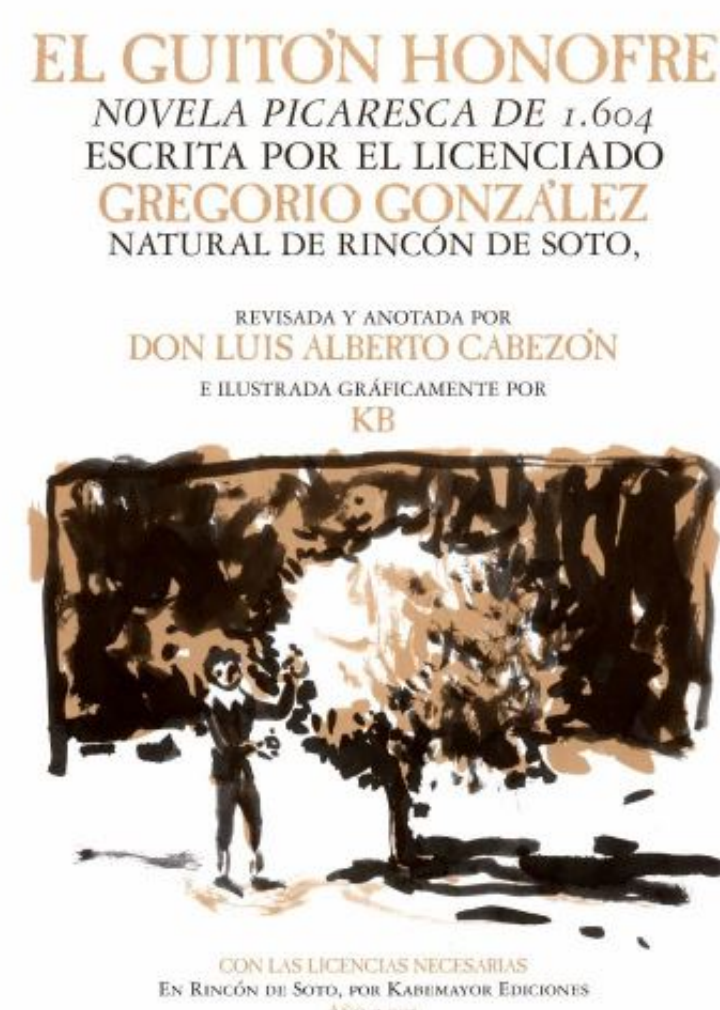
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Research Problem

The tradition of the picaresque in the visual arts, specifically picaresque *drawing*, has yet to be adequately addressed. This is a timely issue given the recent adaptation of Gregorio González' *El Guitón Honofre* (c.1604) into comic form by author and graphic artist brother-duo Luis Alberto Cabezón and Enrique Cabezón (alias KB) respectively. Art Historian Leoni Schmidt recently argued that "[t]he picaresque tradition connects to drawing as a visual arts practice eminently suited to the representation of instability and migration as it is itself unsettled, provisional, incomplete" (6). Using Schmidt's ideas as a starting point, the aim of this paper is to build upon the notion of picaresque drawing through an exploration of the comic *El Guitón Honofre*.

Research Questions

1. How does the comic form lend itself to the tradition of the picaresque?
2. What does this alternative mode of storytelling mean for the pícaro-artist in his dual-narrative role as author and illustrator of his adventures and misfortunes?
3. And, more specifically, how do the loose brush strokes and provisional style of *El Guitón Honofre* evoke the idea that instability is the only stability in the life of the pícaro?
4. How might the reader in 21st-century Spain identify with this picaresque tale?



1. The comic form and the tradition of the picaresque:

- *visual language*: the pícaro narrates his tale so that his reader might see his life, from the very start. (Fig. 1). A *visualized* comprehension.
- Picaresque structure of loosely-tied episodes goes hand-in-hand with the notion of 'sequence' at the heart of the comic defined by Will Eisner.
- Accordingly, in considering that the pícaro narrates in order to bring order to his disordered life, the comic appears as an invaluable tool.
- Basic elements (panels, frames, gutters, margins) work symbolically to communicate exclusion that is the 'essential picaresque situation' (Wicks 22) as well as the shapelessness of the pícaro's life (Fig. 2).

Figure 1. in which Onofre narrates his pícaro origins (1,15).



2. The dual-narrative role as author and illustrator:

- Relationship with the reader: the comic requires a participatory reader who fills in the gaps. The control of the participatory reader must be *attained* and *retained* through images, i.e. their intelligibility and logical arrangement (Eisner 58).
- Sieber states that "we are no more, no less, than the language we speak and write" (Sieber 17). To this we would add "and draw". Language is a type of self-portrait; both verbal *and* visual in the comic.

Figure 2. In which Onofre narrates his life while simultaneously experiencing it (8,74)



3. Style that communicates stability of instability :

- Even Onofre's self-portrait is unstable: refined when studying under don Diego, a mere outline when suffering from starvation, and at times extremely minimalistic when reduced to his most essential form – the 'excrement' of society (Fig. 3)
- Partial, disintegrating frames reveal what Wicks calls the 'dis-integration' of the pícaro with society; repeated yet futile efforts to integrate themselves into society (22).
- Tension of wanting to tell their story but also living it rather precariously at the same time, and lacking refined tools to do so, as seen in the earthy aesthetic.

Figure 3. in which Onofre tells of a misfortune that happened to him (4,43)



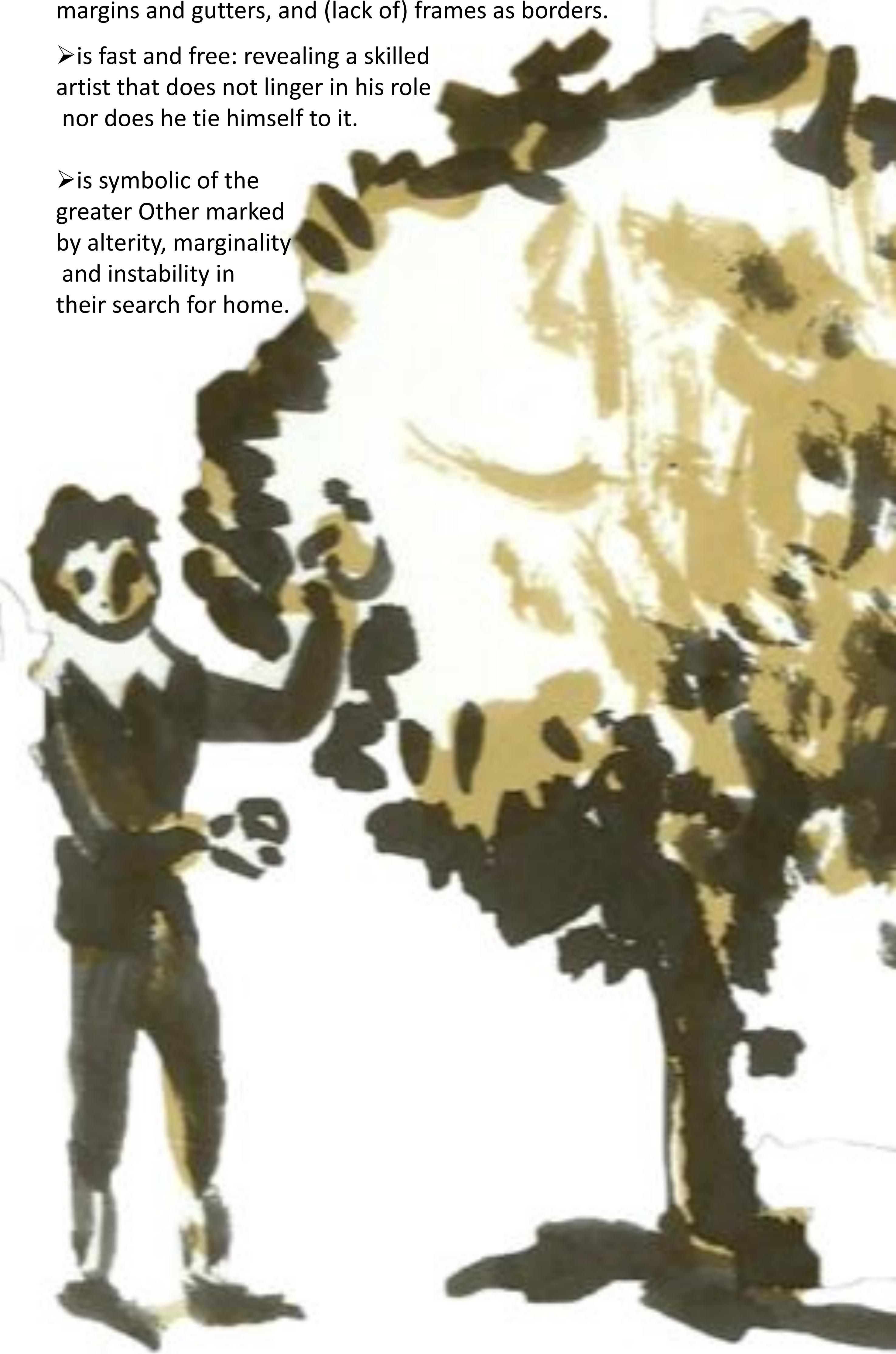
4. Identifying with Onofre in 21st-century Spain:

- The Postmodern Age of the comic: the protagonization of previously marginalized demographics, with a focus on identification.
- Meanwhile, the pícaro in contemporary fiction is the "archetype of not being at home in the world" (Wicks 24).
- Context(s): A 'displaced' middle class and a redefinition of the poor following the economic crises in 1600s and 2008.
- Anti-heroic relationship between Onofre Caballero Redondo (not a saint, not a gentleman and not well fed) and *generación ni-ni* ("ni estudian, ni trabajan"): being defined by what they are *not* by society (the inhospitable hero).
- Reversal of the "Original Sin": for both Onofre and the *ni-ni* their vagrant life does not lead to an expulsion from home, but rather their expulsion from home leads to their vagrant life.



Conclusions: Picaresque drawing...

- is "unsettled, provisional, incomplete" (Schmidt 6)
- reveals a tension of (in)stability: external structure is orderly, repetitive and uniform, yet the internal structure is chaotic, loose and unfinished.
- is equally defined by the negative spaces. In the comic medium this is the margins and gutters, and (lack of) frames as borders.
- is fast and free: revealing a skilled artist that does not linger in his role nor does he tie himself to it.
- is symbolic of the greater Other marked by alterity, marginality and instability in their search for home.



Works Cited:

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