



Maestro, Jesus G., ed. *Theatralia. El teatro de Miguel de Cervantes ante el IV centenario*. Pontevedra: Mirabel, 2003. Pp. 569. ISBN 84-931983-2-3.

Hispania Journal . Vol. 90, No. 1 March 2007. 69-70

It is fair to say that Jean Canavaggio's *Cervantes dramaturge: un theatre a naitre* (1977) gave new and refocused impetus to our interest in Cervantes's dramatic works. In the epilogal piece to this special number of *Theatralia*, Canavaggio recalls the genesis and critical fortunes of that study as a means of identifying prior and subsequent trends in the study of Cervantes's dramaturgy. For his part, Canavaggio remains convinced that a global approach to the plays allowed him to understand better Cervantes's interpretation of character in relation to plot in the context of issues of identity, his constant experimentation, and his intent to give to the stage synecdochic representations of a disordered, unstable world. In this manner, he went against the grain of the "comedia nueva," whose ideology was generally conservative and its questions restrained.

Theatralia gathers presentations given at the Fifth International Conference on the Poetics of the Theater, held in Florence in 2003 and coordinated by Maria Grazia Profeti, who is also co-editor of the collection with Jesus Maestro. The latter, in a substantial, introductory essay, "El triunfo de la heterodoxia. El teatro de Cervantes y la literatura europea," sets the general tone in that he emphasizes precisely those aspects of Cervantes's theater that would leave it unperformed in his day and make it appealing in ours. Maestro shows, for instance, how the metatheatrical component of Cervantes's plays was especially attractive to such widely different dramatists as Brecht, Pirandello, and Lorca.

Besides the introduction (I) and epilogue (IV), the collection consists of two general sections, II: "El teatro de Cervantes en la historia," and III: "El teatro de Cervantes en la poetica," as well as a detailed bibliography (V) of material on Cervantes's dramatic works, and a section (VI) of book reviews on items of related interest. The articles in Part II are organized in a generally chronological order that begins with the imprint of antiquity on Cervantes's plays and follows their impact and reception through the Baroque to the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Articles in Part III are organized around *La Numancia*, the *entremeses*, the *comedias*, and the dramatization of two other works (parts of *Don Quijote*, *Lafuerza de la sangre*). The sheer quantity and diversity of material in the volume makes it impossible to give more than an overview of its contents, though one can say that, on the whole, while the intellectual quality of the articles is high, they merit some further editorial work (the typos are rather too numerous).

La Numancia receives more attention than any other Cervantine dramatic work. Three articles were of particular interest to this reviewer: the play is approached from a historical-ideological perspective by Cory Reed ("Identity Formation and Collective Anagnorisis in *Numancia*"), who examines its classical roots while underlining the modernity of the play and its breaking of traditional generic boundaries and sees it principally as an occasion for

the audience to reflect on issues of national identity and imperial destiny. In the section on poetics, Georges Guntert ("Ars' y furor: reflexion poetica y caracter tragico de *La Numancia*") suggests that a middle ground between the "art," or cool strategy of Scipio, and the "heart" or passionate sacrifice of the *numantinos* is accessible to the spectator whose historical knowledge mediates between the two positions and allows reflection as much as engagement. More pointedly, E.G. Graf, in "*Valla dolid dellenda est: la politica teologica de 'La Numancia'*" sees in the sacrifice of the city's inhabitants a critique of Philip II's persecution and sacrifice of "heretics."

Although the *entremeses* are variously alluded to and examined in terms of the historical fortunes of Cervantes's drama, there are only two articles specifically devoted to them, which is a pity, since the verve, inventiveness, and bite of these short pieces have secured for them a preeminent place in the Cervantine canon. In this context, Vicente Perez de Leon's "¿Quien diablos acertara a concertar estos relojes, estando las ruedas tan desconcertadas?' Ingenios destemplados en los entremeses cervantinos" addresses the appearance, in most of the *entremeses*, of what he names "hiperpersonajes," that is, individuals who combine in themselves actor, author, and character roles, in the sense that they create a fiction, enact it, manipulate the staging of it, and even the audience's response. Paradoxically, the extravagant behavior of these characters in its metatheatrical frame shows how such "dramatized" defects easily exceed their staging; this characteristic, together with the fragility and temporary aspect of the conciliations with which the *entremeses* end, are faithful mirrors to a society whose idealism needs a good dose of hard-headed objectivity.

Cervantes's heterodoxy in his dramatic compositions, introduced by Maestro, referred to as well by Canavaggio, and alluded to variously by a number of the contributors to the volume, leads him to compose plays where his characters appear to exceed their peripeteia in depth and complexity, and where dramatic unity tends to be thematic, rather than purely dramatic. This tendency, together with his inclination to experiment, set him against the more conservative tenor of the *comedia nueva* and certainly contributed to the rejection of his drama by his contemporaries. The present collection makes such a view clear. It is an important contribution to Cervantes studies and a spur to our re-reading and, one would hope, a continued re-staging of the plays.

Salvador J. Fajardo *Binghamton University*
(SUNY)