



Cervantes, Miguel de. *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*. Edición de Carlos Romero Muñoz. Madrid: Cátedra, 1997. [Letras Hispánicas, 427]

This is, as the introduction states, the first truly critical edition of Cervantes's second most important work. It is also the culmination of thirty years of persevering scholarship, starting with *Introduzione al Persiles* (1968), and including *Para la edición crítica del Persiles* (1977). Much of the material from these earlier studies is incorporated here in condensed form, along with a wealth of additional information, either based on Romero's extensive reading in the literature of the Golden Age or culled from other editors and commentators. Both for its carefully-edited text and for the copious notes (over 1,800 in all), this far surpasses all previous editions. It is simply the text to have for anyone seriously interested in *Persiles*.

Romero focuses on the text and its language, with correction and explication given priority over interpretation. No detail is too minute to attract his attention, and he is at his best when explaining that the word *antiparas* in the prologue is not an erratum for *antiparras*, spectacles, but refers, rather, to a kind of leather breeches or chaps worn over a one's clothing when working or traveling; or that the *sierras de agua* observed by the protagonists in Aranjuez are not, as most have believed, mountainous waves caused by overpowering river currents, but the ingenious water-powered sawmills built there in 1588–93, which had become something of a tourist attraction. While Romero occasionally admits the necessity of emending the *princeps* (always scrupulously annotating when he does), more of his energy is spent defending the 1617 edition against unnecessary changes based on a later linguistic standard. What emerges for the reader is a heightened awareness of the baroque elegance of the prose of Cervantes's last-completed work.

The notes concerning sources compliment this textual criticism, emphasizing the erudition which went into *Persiles*, Cervantes's vindication of his ability to write in a 'serious' style, as opposed to the 'comic' *Don Quijote*. This is the first edition which annotates all of the observed parallels with Heliodorus, along

with a number of new ones discovered by Romero himself. The use of geographical-ethnographic treatises and miscellanies, such as Olaus Magnus's *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* and Torquemada's *Jardín de flores curiosas*, is carefully documented. In a more polemical vein, Romero rejects Schevill and Bonilla's widely accepted claim that Cervantes relied on the *Comentarios reales* (1609) of El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega for details in his image of the Northern Lands. Even where the customs evoked are Amerindian, rather than Scandinavian, as in the case of ritual human sacrifice, Romero convincingly argues that other, earlier sources, such as Fernández Oviedo or López de Gómara, could have served as well (or better).

The import of such questions concerning sources has to do with the dating controversy surrounding *Persiles*, a vital issue for our understanding of Cervantes's development as a writer. Does he return to romance after writing Part One of *Don Quijote*, as Ruth El Saffar insisted? Or should we think of romance and its comic parody as two styles he practices interchangeably, as Gonzalo Sobejano has argued? We may never know when Cervantes wrote the books he brought out in rapid succession after the success of the 1605 *Don Quijote*, but in the case of *Persiles* we can at least say that the problem has never before received such equanimous treatment. Romero gives full consideration to all the available hypotheses before presenting his own theory: Cervantes began *Persiles* after reading El Pinciano's *Filosofía antigua poética* (1596) and finished the first two books in 1599, when he abandoned the work until 1615. Though Romero gives no explanation for the long hiatus, an obvious possibility presents itself. Just as its composition may have been inspired by the publication of one book, so its abandonment could have been the result of another, catastrophic initially for Cervantes: that of *Guzmán de Alfarache* (Part I, 1599). How could he have continued to write elegant fantasies about noble characters in exotic lands after Alemán's mordant, socially relevant satire? The problem thus raised of the relation between idealized romance and sordid everyday life would ultimately lead to the composition of *Don Quijote*. In the meantime, *Persiles* would have to wait. So the curious back-and-forth in Cervantes's trajectory presents itself as a complex dialogue with the literary theory and practice of his day.

Concerning the coherence of the events which make up the historical background of the action of *Persiles*, Romero argues for a strict internal chronology of 1557–59, classing all events which do not fit as 'anachronisms.' The primary deficiency of this approach is its circularity. Certainly the announcement of Charles V's death (1559) as 'news' and the 'prophecy' of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (1575) indicate that the action takes place shortly before the completion of the Council of Trent. To insist on greater exactitude in the determination of the time of the action is as arbitrary as the popular view that the chronology is essentially incoherent. Must we commit ourselves to the idea that Cervantes had the specific dates 1557–59 in mind and planned the action of *Persiles* to coincide with them? Romero also offers the suggestive idea of a 'double chronology' at work in *Persiles*; that is, certain events which refer simultaneously to the time of the story and to the present of writer and reader. This would seem to imply an intentional juxtaposition between the present and a moment from the recent

past. If Cervantes chose to set his story in the waning years of what J.H. Elliott once termed the 'open' Spain which preceded the Counter Reformation, presumably it was to emphasize a contrast with his own day. Romero's double chronology, which emerges especially in the last two books of the work, points perhaps to a tacit rejection of the 'closed' Spain of the seventeenth century.

Yet to the extent that Romero offers any overall interpretation of *Persiles*, it is precisely as an expression of the ideals of the Counter Reformation. His historicizing approach, which situates Cervantes's text within a vast network of topoi, idioms, and textual references, tends intrinsically towards interpretation in terms of the prevailing ideology of Baroque Spain. Romero is justifiably impatient with those who see irony wherever an idea repellent to our sensibility is expressed, such as support for the expulsion of the Moors or anti-Semitism. It is true that this convenient hermeneutic 'magic wand' is often evoked without textual evidence, to make Cervantes say whatever the critic wants him to, in a fashion reminiscent of Don Quijote's Moorish enchanters. Even so, Romero goes too far in the opposite direction, losing sight of the distinction between the author and the narrator, whose opinions are attributed directly to Cervantes. In the case of the Morisco raid, moreover, there does seem to be some irony in the fact that while pious speeches celebrating the village's 'Christianization' by abandonment are put into the mouths of the two new-Christian Moors who remain behind, the old Christians of the town, the priest and the scribe, demonstrate no sign of religious fervor. In fact, the scribe's very soul is said to be preoccupied by his concern over the damage to his property, and the priest remains silent. Admittedly, the irony here does not so much serve as a defense of the Moriscos as it constitutes an implicit condemnation of the hypocrisy of their oppressors.

Despite the overall conservatism of his own interpretation, Romero's edition is an invaluable tool for anyone interested in developing a well-grounded reading of *Persiles*, whatever their ideological or theoretical inclinations. Among the many resources he places at the reader's disposal are an exhaustive list of editions and translations, and the best bibliography on *Persiles* available. His introduction offers an excellent general orientation in the history of *Persiles*-criticism, with special attention to recent work. The notes systematically record much information which could be useful in several avenues of critical speculation. For example, Romero documents the unacknowledged censorship which he discovered in the 1617 Lisbon edition, in which references to witchcraft and numerous other passages relating to Christian doctrine were expunged.

Many of the notes point to the remarkably varied genre-affinities of different episodes, indicating such connections as those between the Fishermen's Isle and the bucolic, between Periandro's Tale and heroic or chivalric literature, between some of the episodes in Spain and the *entremes*, and between the French chapters of Book Three and Arthurian literature. However, there is no attempt to address the significance of the multigeneric composition of the work. In this regard, Steven Hutchinson's *Cervantine Journeys* (1992) provides a helpful model, in which the different physical locations, corresponding to different genres, constitute separate fictional worlds linked by the linear trajectory of the protagonists' journey. *Persiles* thus poses a question familiar to the reader of *Don*

*Quijote*: what happens when the stylized worlds of the imagination collide? What happens to characters as they move from world to world? One answer, for the attentive reader of *Persiles*, is that inconsistencies creep in, the famous *deslices*, more frequent here than in any of Cervantes's other works. The lapses which punctuate the text have generally been viewed as defects, and it may be that Cervantes would have eliminated many of them if he had had time. But for that very reason they are valuable evidence of his method of working. In a 1972 article, Rafael Osuna attempted a catalogue of authorial errors in *Persiles*. Romero mentions all the lapses in Osuna's list, while adding quite a few more. Almost all of the numerous inconsistencies in *Persiles* are noted here, making it easier to view them as a whole and to ask what they reveal about this work.

Many of the contradictions can be more clearly understood if they are mapped onto the system of fictional worlds through which the protagonists travel. A character in one world may be dramatically transformed by passage into another, where a different representational mode predominates. The extremely ugly fisherwoman of Book Two, Chapter 10, which takes place in a bucolic world, where the fisherman Carino falls in love with her *spiritual* beauty, is transformed, by Chapter 16, into an extremely beautiful maiden. At this point we are on the maritime chivalric sea of Periandro's adventures, where she has been stolen by pirates. Here the value of her spiritual beauty would be meaningless if it were not visible as physical attractiveness; hence the transformation. To take another example, which Romero did not catch: in Book Four, Chapter 1, the collector of *aforismos peregrinos* tells us he wrote the *illiterate* Bartolomé's aphorism and signed his name for him; in Chapter 5, his 'picaresque' letter from a Roman jail appears, with no explanation of how it was written. Under the corrupting influence of the *mujer liviana*, Luisa la Talaverana, Bartolomé has moved from innocent country rustic to full-fledged urban *pícaro* in the space of a few chapters, and, not unlike the original Lazarillo, has mysteriously learned to write and produced a first-person autobiographical narrative. An exhaustive study of all such contradictions in *Persiles* would reveal, as Casaldueiro argued half a century ago, that expectations about mimetic consistency derived from realism have hindered full appreciation of the richness of Cervantes's kaleidoscopic technique. It may well be that a thorough investigation of the heterogeneity of the fictional universe of *Persiles* would contradict the ideological closure Romero, like many before him, sees at the root of Cervantes's last work.

Romero's edition closes the period of Cervantes studies which began in 1971 with the publication of Alban K. Forcione's *Cervantes, Aristotle, and the "Persiles"*, the study which established a definite place in the canon of Cervantes's works for his posthumous romance. This imperfect masterpiece, alien to our sensibility in ways Cervantes's greatest work is not, has finally been edited with the care and scholarship it deserves. In trying single-handedly to make up for centuries of neglect, however, Romero has taken on an enormous task, one perhaps too great for the efforts of a single individual. Having set for himself the overwhelming goal of keeping a running record of the variants in all the editions ever published, Romero assigns a symbol based on the place of publication to every edition or translation of *Persiles* (M16, for example, is Schevill and

Bonilla's edition; M23 is Avalor-Arce's; AH is the 1994 edition published in Alcalá de Henares by the Centro de Estudios Cervantinos with Florencio Sevilla Arroyo and Antonio Rey Hazas as editors); the editors themselves receive another designation: S-B, AA, SA-RH. A double system of notes is used: the lettered notes simply give the information concerning variants, using the symbols for the different editions; a high percentage of them are accompanied by numbered notes explaining Romero's reasoning, in which the editors' names (or their abbreviations) are used. This system of annotation is too cumbersome, even for him, and he frequently makes mistakes in using his own extensive set of abbreviations, sometimes rendering his notes incoherent. For example, the letter 'S' by itself should stand, according to the list of abbreviations, for Rudolph Schevill, while the 1971 abridgment edited by Emilio Carilla and published by Anaya in Salamanca is 'Sa'; but in practice, Romero forgets and uses 'S' for both. In a number of cases, the reader cannot untangle the correct meaning of a note without help from other editions or Romero's previous publications. I do not personally perceive the need for including in the notes all the variants ever produced by any editor; focusing on the most important editions would have been enough, perhaps, and would have obviated the need for so many confusing abbreviations. Purged of its errors (which are simply too numerous), Romero's edition of *Persiles* would stand as a shining example of the best Golden Age scholarship has to offer, reason enough, in itself, to reread *Persiles*. To maximize its value, I believe Cervantists should communicate to Romero the editor's and typist's errors so that they can be eliminated from future reprints, for, though I grant they might be interesting if they were Cervantes's own, as it is they only obstruct our efforts to understand and enjoy the final fruits of his genius.

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