

Frenk, Margit. *Entre la voz y el silencio (La lectura en tiempos de Cervantes)*. Biblioteca de Estudios Cervantinos 4. Alcalá de Henares: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 1997. 148 pp.

This book by the well-known Margit Frenk consists of a brief introduction, seven succinct chapters, a select bibliography, and two indices. As the author indicates, all chapters but the last were published earlier (in 1991, 1982, 1986, 1984, 1991, and 1992, respectively). Nevertheless, the separate studies give the reader a complete and suggestive vision of the oral aspects that inform not only Cervantes's most important novel but, also, the most significant literary genres of his period: the short story, the lyric poem, the play, and the epistle. In addition, Professor Frenk's book, in spite of a modest aside («No pretendo-ni podría-hacer una crítica de la crítica textual, sino sólo de su carácter limitante» [57]), in effect destabilizes and questions philological practices which we might take for granted and which the author demonstrates to be quite ineffective when one tries, for instance, to do an impossible *stemma* of poems or even stories (*cuentos*) which were meant to circulate orally as ephemeral events and not as fixed or permanent (written) "texts."

Some of Margit Frenk's ideas with respect to orality are based on seminal works of Rivers, Díez Borque, Ife, Moner, Iffland, Ong, Goody, and Schön, as she points out. Moreover, what stands out after one finishes *Entre la voz y el silencio* is the consistent trajectory of the "living" word throughout the ages before it "dies" in the silence of the written page and the solitary modern reader. As the author points out, «Poco a poco la letra va dejando de ser depósito de la voz. El libro habla cada vez más mudamente a un lector cada vez más sordo» (86). Frenk traces the silence of the modern reader to St. Ambrose, who, in the fourth century surprised St. Augustine by his unusual manner of reading. Eventually, of course, the primary rhetorical practice of *actio* or *pronuntiatio* became secondary as readers learned to read almost completely in silence. Although the author entertains several important moments in time when the final switch to silence was established (in the nineteenth century), she notes, with Iffland, that Don Quijote, unlike the other characters of the novel, reads in silence and, in this manner, anticipates the modern reader.

The solid scholarship of this work and the highly suggestive thoughts it provokes, with respect to other genres that would seem to lie beyond the scope of this text (e.g., radio, television, opera, the internet, and other media that rely on what Ong calls "secondary orality"), would not prevent one from imagining that perhaps a brief allusion to Derridean *écriture* or Kristeva's Semiotic realm as it pertains to the sensorial aspects of language, might not have been impertinent as an interesting addendum to this otherwise superb work. Yet Margit Frenk's book clearly does not need additional material to prove its point, namely, that in the process of change from the oral to the visual the modern reader has lost the sensorial aspects of language and the sense of community that once accompanied the now mostly solitary activity of reading.

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