



Cruz, Anne J., and Carroll B. Johnson, editors. *Cervantes and His Postmodern Constituencies*. New York: Garland, 1999. 275 pp.

Cervantes and His Postmodern Constituencies is a compilation of essays that resulted from the Southern California Cervantes Symposium held in 1996 at UCLA. Carroll B. Johnson tells us in his fine introduction to the collection that the conference and the subsequent book assume "a rupture" in Cervantes studies, a rupture that he ascribes to a "more general crisis in philosophy and literary studies in 'the age of the post'" (ix). I will return to this at the end of the review.

The book is divided into three sections: "*Cervantismo* and the Crisis of Hispanism," "Re-visioning Cervantes Studies," and "The Future of Cervantes Studies." Anthony Close's contribution, the lead article in the collection, contrasts the liberal humanist tradition, which he sees as focusing on the cultural and historical grounding of texts (thereby coopting the postmodernist emphasis on contextualization), with the de-aestheticizing and ahistorical penchant of some postmodernist theories which are "utterly conditioned by discursive power play" (12). Although Close's criticism is not wholly off the mark, as the sometimes sterile self-reflexivity and the obscurantism of some theoretical analyses demonstrate today, he overstates the case by toning down the universalizing claims of humanism and rendering excessive those ascribed to postmodernism. Close laments postmodernism's ludic emphasis and its consequent

indifference to a text's "viability of reference, the specificity of meaning and the accessibility of presence and origins" (13). Humanist and postmodernist may debate the *limits* of reference but neither denies its viability.

Anthony Cascardi's essay, immediately following, is a clear indication that Close's criticism describes only the extreme instances of some "practitioners," as he himself admits (Close 18). Cascardi's analysis situates the *Quijote* in its historical and cultural moment in the seventeenth century and then, espousing a Marxist position, shows how a historically-situated work is able to generate meanings "in contexts quite alien to those in which they originate" (23). What Cascardi theorizes, Diana de Armas Wilson demonstrates in her essay, namely, how deeply the *Quijote* and the *Persiles* are imbricated in "a great variety of New World discourses" (51). Wilson demonstrates that the polyphony and the normalizing of multi-cultural coexistences in Cervantes's fictional worlds also effect different cultural meanings. Her creation of a dialogic third space from which the voice of the marginalized other of Cervantes's time—gypsies, Basques, Amerindians, Moriscos—can be heard, makes possible not only the encounter of the same and the other in his time but a similar encounter in ours. Her article demonstrates, in practice, how "morally enlightening" (*pace* Close 2) the inclusionary approaches of postmodern theories can be. Responsibly applied, they dissolve the binaries between humanism and a supposedly antinomial postmodernism and arrive, in practice, at the same conclusion as Close's, namely, that "[u]nderstanding old texts and understanding the living Other are kindred activities" (Close 2, 12). John J. Allen's position, coming after Cascardi's and Wilson's essays, is not only convincing but wonderfully *terre-à-terre*. He eschews the idea that there is a genuine rupture in Hispanic studies and points instead to the healthy loss of consensus already preceding the intellectual ferment of the 1960s. Allen reminds us that whatever perspective we apply, "the practical *sine qua non* of any literary analysis must still be: "how does [the approach] illuminate the work it treats?" (73).

In Part II, "Re-visioning Cervantes Studies," Charles D. Presberg uses Augustine's trope of two embattled cities—the city of God and the city of Man—to speak of both the *Quijote* itself and to trace a literary history. Like Augustine's *ecclesia*, literary history has struggled to "canonize" and homologize a scholarship that he too reminds us was already disturbed—and as early as 1925—with Américo Castro's work. Pablo Jauralde Pou's essay traces the advantages and the disadvantages of the emphasis on philology in Cervantine studies in Spain and looks for fruitful critical transatlantic interaction in the process. Ellen Lokos returns to the 1569 document surrounding the Sigura affair—"Información de limpieza"—and to the cloud that hangs over Cervantes's possible *converso* ancestry in order to suggest that the women in Cervantes's family may have participated "in degrading arrangements because they [had] no other choice" (122).

Anne Cruz does a fine job of re-visioning the gaps and absences of the female voice in Cervantine criticism before tracing the different changes that have resulted from new feminist perspectives. Cruz privileges reception theory in order to remind her readers that in any textual criticism, regardless of the approach the critic claims to espouse, it is always "through the readers' own

prescribed notions of gender that the protagonists' sexual characteristics are ultimately assumed or presumed"; she argues that critics who "hold to an ordered humanist, Renaissance world view" (135) reify and essentialize the trope of gender, while postmodernist theorists, on the other hand, produce gender as performative, as an enactment of ritualized behaviors. What cannot be emphasized enough in this regard, I believe, is that it is the *kind* of ordering principles, and the way these principles are used to produce meaning, that constitutes the essential differences between the two approaches. Adrienne L. Martín, like Diana de Armas Wilson, seeks to create a space in which a contrapuntal reading of Cervantes's "El amante liberal" can take place. She frames Cervantes's novella in a sociohistorical background equating male effeminacy with sodomy, and points to the link between male homosexuality and effeminacy in the literature of Spain's Golden Age, in treatises of manners such as *Il Cortegiano*, and in the English satires against sodomites where homosexuality is also linked with indolence. Martín privileges romance as "the realm of homosexual allusion and suggestion" (157) in order to focus on the character of Cornelio in "El amante" as a "type of effeminacy closely associated with homosexuality in the early modern mind" (161). Whereas Adrienne Martín focuses on homosexual suggestiveness in Cervantes's work from a historicocultural perspective, Nicolás Wey-Gómez, resorting to Freudian theory, sees jealousy instead as a "symptom" of latent homosexuality in both "El curioso impertinente" and "El celoso extremeño." Jealousy becomes, for Wey-Gómez, the "substitute effect for a libidinal impulse that has been repressed," that of homosexuality (172).

Part III, "The Future of Cervantes Studies," purports to be radical. George Mariscal bids farewell to the "master narratives" of both humanism and postmodernism (213) and promotes political activism over the supposedly "[s]elf-enclosed systems of reading" (205) that for him constitute literary studies in the academy. He chooses to use Cervantes in a way that make the latter's seventeenth-century works "speak from their particular historical situatedness to the present and to a vastly different social and cultural space" (205). Mariscal's focus on the relevance of the *mestiza* Ricla in the *Persiles* to the *mestizaje* of Chicanos-Mexicanos today constitutes the same emphasis Diana de Armas Wilson suggested, citing Homi Bhabha. That is to say, that the alien territories represented by writers like Cervantes can provide spaces in which "contraries are assimilated and an instability created which 'presages powerful and cultural changes'" (Wilson 60). Mariscal's plea for finding "organizing principles of personal ethics and social justice" (207) in Cervantes's texts, *Persiles* specifically, is not incompatible with the "morally enlightening" ends to which Close refers in the humanistic studies he sees proffered by Spitzer and Curtius (2). Alison Weber goes back to the varying history of Cervantine reception and interpretation. She acknowledges that Cervantes resists ideological discourses of his time, as many postmodernist critics have claimed, but agrees with current cultural critics who place limits on the extent of Cervantes's supposed oppositional discourse. She asks that "his work be reread in terms of its possible solidarity-enhancing qualities" and contingent upon the reader's "position in a transformed political landscape" (229). James Iffland, with whom the collection of essays ends, em-

phasizes the fact that as we invent new forms of political discourse in the profession and pepper them with “the language of social transformation and justice” (236), we seem to become increasingly apolitical, caring less and less about transforming the polis. But need it be so? In the light of feminist, ethnic, and gay and lesbian emphases on the very real *political* effects of interpretation, does not the critique of postmodernism as apolitical lose its force? If in generating a new language and theory we become apolitical, the problem lies with *us* and not in the nature of theory or in the search for a more adequate language in which the desires of a new interpretive community can be expressed; and the same reservation applies to Iffland’s query, that the “sophisticated” rejection of master narratives or macrotheories, may serve to legitimize “the very structure of power we hope to modify” (242). It may, but this is not necessarily the case.

If there is a “crisis” in Hispanism, as some of the contributors suggest, it appears on the evidence of these essays to take the familiar form of proposing novel interpretations of texts and questioning the validity of others. If a “rupture” exists between humanism and today’s postmodernism, the postulates of neither approach are clarified in the essays. And this poses a problem. In the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, if we do not define our position then we cannot identify and transcend the limitations of rival postulates. We end up defining and identifying these limitations by the standards to which we as proponents of the rival theory are committed by our allegiance to it (*After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* [Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame Press, 1981], 268–69). Such is the case in those essays which presuppose an ideological chasm between the humanistic tradition and postmodernism. The implied argument assumes for the humanistic tradition a foundationalist notion of knowledge as material content that can be contained and of truths that can be grasped. It is based on the notion of a unified, autonomous self, of a hierarchy in values, and of the accessibility of meaning. Such knowledge, traditionally directed toward the formation of good and informed citizens of the polis, has been supposedly replaced with the linguistic games, relative truths, and the fragmentation of the arbitrary narratives/theories of postmodernism.

It is true that at times the assumption of fragmentation has been a source of concern to feminists struggling to act in concert, to ethnic groups seeking political identity, and to gay and lesbian groups who fear that the lack of consensus in queer theories could result in what Iffland calls a powerless “array of social movements thrashing away in the interstices and at the margins” (242). Responsible postmodernists, of which there are many, however, do not advocate moral relativism. They instead foreground moral *fallibility*. The distinction between the two is important.

Postmodernism does lack the mythical cohesiveness of a humanism that presupposes a common world and a shared body of knowledge, that is, a script in which we can all participate as actors and in which we occupy a place in civilization’s time scale. But how inclusive has that cohesiveness been? Who are the “we” and the “us” represented in this *communitas*? In practice such an approach has been primarily Eurocentric, male, white, heterosexual, Christian, largely indifferent to its exclusionary nature, *naturalized* as universal, and unable or unwilling to be critical of its norms.

Its critical “rival,” today’s postmodernisms, on the other hand, treats knowledge as a historically-contingent notion, not as something that the mind discovers but as something generated by what Richard Rorty, in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, calls the “normal discourse” of a community. From this perspective, interpretations prevail so long as a given community coheres. When that community dissolves, these interpretations lose their legitimacy. Replaced, then, is the foundationalist notion of knowledge as a mental construct with the non-foundationalist notion of knowledge as a social artifact sustained by the existing consensus of a given community. The interpretation of texts consists, then, to quote Rorty in “Hermeneutics, General Studies, and Teaching” in *Synergos*, not in the “encounter with [a] Reality or with [a] Truth,” but in the attempt of a historically-situated author and an equally historically-situated reader “to work out the *potentialities* of the languages and activities available to them . . . by transcending the vocabulary in which these problems [are] posed” (9; emphasis mine).

Responsible theory, then, asks that proponents of both “sides” raise the question: Can we make of Cervantes’s opus genuine texts-in-use in order to discover both his and our blind spots? If we put ourselves in Cervantes’s place, we realize that, like him, we humanists and postmodernists alike are the products of different social and discursive formations that have produced our habits, our tastes, our desires, and even the forms our resistances take to one another’s theoretical positions.

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