



Diana de Armas Wilson. *Cervantes, the Novel, and the New World*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 270 pp. ISBN: 0-19-816005-4.

During the first week of my course on Cervantes, I mention to students that had the author of *Don Quixote* been granted the employment he sought in the Indies in the 1590s, in all likelihood the class they are about to begin would not exist and the long text before them never would have been written. Cervantes' request was denied, however, and rather than becoming a wealthy *indiano*, he became instead the progenitor of the modern novel.

In her new study, Diana de Armas Wilson has decided to transport Cervantes and his writings to the New World and, more important perhaps, she has chosen to situate the New World firmly in the literary and political reality that was Cervantes' Spain. These initial moves—in effect to think against the grain of artificial disciplinary boundaries that have separated peninsular and Latin American studies—are in themselves a major contribution to the field of early modern Spanish research. For although literary scholars have long known that Habsburg Spain was an imperial power, they have been unwilling to investigate the ways in which empire permeated the discursive field of Spanish writing and how cultural forms and styles thought to be European in origin were in fact the hybrid offspring of the colonial experience. The fact that Sancho Panza glibly remarks that any black subjects he may find on his *ínsula* will be sold into slavery—to mention only one of the many fascinating examples cataloged by Wilson—already catapults us out of Europe and into the Atlantic world that stretched from Seville to Lisbon to West Africa, the Caribbean and

back again. Although Cervantes never traversed any of these transatlantic (or transpacific) routes, they nonetheless constituted an integral part of his creative geography. Situated next to the inns and palaces of Andalucía and Castilla, the soldiers' barracks of Naples, and the dank bagnios of North Africa were islands filled with "bárbaros," gold, and human sacrifice.

Wilson begins her study with an inventory of references to America found in the Cervantine opus. Each of these references on its own might render a sustained analysis, and Wilson offers a number of suggestive models for further research. Her contribution here, however, is more general insofar as she proposes to construct an inclusive theory of intertextuality that might move us, as she puts it, from "inventory to interpretation" (30). According to Wilson, the "Americanist Cervantes" must be understood both through his literary relationships with New World *cronistas* as well as through the geographical and spatial relations that structure his texts and biography. In this first chapter, then, Wilson expands and enriches the image of a "traveling Cervantes," an image previously fashioned into a different variation by Steven Hutchinson in his *Cervantine Journeys* (1992).

In Chapter Two, "The Novel about the Novel," Wilson enters the heavily trampled terrain of debates about the origins of the novel. In response to theories disseminated by professors of English literature, most notably Ian Watt in his influential *Rise of the Novel* (1957), Wilson argues (correctly in my opinion) that the most productive approach to the issue is to trace the "multiple rises of the novel" or, to put it another way, the intersecting genealogies of what today we understand to be the modern narrative form. Given the premise of Wilson's project, one is struck by the "European" focus of this chapter where the proposed shift to New World concerns is reduced momentarily to the level of thematics. But in a sense the entire second chapter is a prelude to Wilson's reading of Cervantine allusions to America and their intertextual relationship to *Robinson Crusoe*. Thus the title of Chapter Three: "The Novel as 'Moletta': Cervantes and Defoe."

It is in the third chapter that Wilson makes one of her more potentially ground-breaking assertions. Because the texts of both Cervantes (especially in *Persiles y Sigismunda*) and Defoe are intimately linked through an imaginary populated by islands and cannibals (that is, the discursive and material realities of the English and Spanish colonial projects), Wilson argues that the novel must be seen as the product of early modern global relations and not isolated national identities or even the rise of particular classes or ideologies such as individualism. Once we understand that Defoe had more than a passing knowledge of Spanish writers, among them Las Casas and Cervantes, the process of what Wilson calls "imperial mime-

sis" becomes easier to appreciate. This assertion offers a promising new direction for comparative Spanish-English studies at a time when traditional approaches to the discipline of comparative literature have been exhausted. In fact, and here Wilson might have productively expanded the context for her chapter to include relevant historiography, English colonialism in its early stages imitated Spanish colonial practices not only in the literary realm but in the real-life domain of population control and economic exploitation. Historian Nicholas Canny, for example, has convincingly shown that already in the occupation of Ireland, colonizers such as Sidney and Spenser were well-versed in Spanish colonial strategies. As one English ideologue claimed, Spain in America had "invented good lawes and statutes for the brideling of the barbarous and wicked, and for the maintayning and defending of the just."

Chapter Four deploys a number of contemporary theories of "hybridity" that have grown out of disparate critical traditions. By drawing upon the Bakhtin school in Russia, post-structuralist inspired "post-colonial" texts by writers such as Homi Bhabha, the work of Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, and more recent studies by Latin American critics Antonio Cornejo Polar, Ángel Rama, and Néstor García Canclini, Wilson argues that the novel as a mixed form may have flourished in geographical spaces that tolerated "hybridity." The potential danger here is to mix and match thinkers who, despite their shared interest in transculturated cultural phenomena, were in fact developing very different intellectual and political projects that share little beyond the umbrella concept of heterogeneity. Although her theoretical excursions might have been better coordinated, Wilson's basic point is well-taken: Cervantes' extended narratives represent a multilingual reality, and thus reveal the global reach of Spanish culture and its indebtedness to the dialectical exchange between metropolis and colony. Wilson's contention that Cervantes' use of the Nahuatl word "cacao" in "La gitanilla" may be the first in Spanish literature is interesting, yet I suspect that by the time Cervantes composed the *Novelas ejemplares*, Americanisms were part of the standard lexicon in some regions of the peninsula, especially in cities like Sevilla which had close ties to America and which Cervantes knew well. Already in Hernando Colón's *Vida del Almirante* (1535), to cite only one early example, we find anecdotes in which Europeans sarcastically comment on the function of cacao as currency in Amerindian cultures.

Chapter Five traces the resonances of chivalric literature throughout the Cervantine opus and throughout Spanish imperial rhetoric. The influence of the *libros de caballerías* on Don Quixote is well-documented. In this chapter, Wilson convincingly argues that *Amadís de Gaula* and other chivalric texts played a key role in the thinking of real-life *conquistadores*.

Her reading of the Felician de la Voz episode in *Persiles y Sigismunda* is especially noteworthy. Chapter Six develops the argument of the preceding chapter by reopening the issue of Cervantes' relationship to early modern utopian writing. According to Wilson, Cervantes picks up the mantle of Thomas More in which "utopia" serves as a pretext for social critique directed at European institutions, i.e. "to condemn—or, rather, to benevolently satirize—imperial, ducal, or gubernatorial corruption, both at home and abroad" (141).

In her final two chapters, Wilson outlines the more properly literary correspondences between Cervantes and two American writers: Alonso de Ercilla and Inca Garcilaso. This section of the book has the feel of more traditional influence studies in which biographical parallels and shared sources, themes, and stylistic tropes form the basis for comparative readings. Nevertheless, Wilson's assertion that Cervantes' gloss, in the *Persiles*, on Ercilla's and Garcilaso's "barbarians" is in fact a strong "parody of the discourses of Iberian expansionism" (181) is persuasive and potentially generative for future studies that might "repoliticize" Cervantes according to the terms of his particular time and place. Perhaps most promising of all is the concluding section on translation and the figures of Transila (a fictional character in the *Persiles*) and La Malinche (the historical indigenous woman Malintzin Tenépal associated with the conquest of Mexico) where Wilson begins a highly original analysis of the ways in which conquest and conversion in their earliest stages rely heavily on a gendered division of cultural labor.

*Cervantes, the Novel, and the New World* is a welcome addition to the Cervantes bibliography and will serve as a source of inspiration for younger scholars who wish to continue the on-going renewal of Spanish peninsular studies. It also will be of interest to comparatists and Latin American colonial experts who will find in it a preliminary cartography for connecting the multiple global circuits that made up Spanish imperial culture.

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