

From: Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America, 26.1 (Spring-Fall

José Manuel González Fernández de Sevilla, ed. *Cervantes y/and Shakespeare. Nuevas interpretaciones y aproximaciones comparativas. New Interpretations and Comparative Approaches*. Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, 2006. 203 pp. ISBN 84-608-0448-8.

Cervantes and Shakespeare—two literary geniuses who are frequently the subject of comparative studies—are firmly rooted in the Western literary canon. Two contemporaries penning masterpieces with themes that transcend the test of time point to plausible commonalities, and this is what the contributors of *Cervantes y/and Shakespeare* explore. The end result of a conference held at the University of Alicante in honor of *Don Quixote's* quadricentennial, the contributors to “Cervantes and Shakespeare: New Interpretations and Comparative Approaches” investigate interstices and disparities between the two authors and their major works.

Initially, I was chary of a study of this nature. Yes, Cervantes and Shakespeare were able to transcend thematic boundaries, thereby securing positions in today's canon. Yes, they did write during the same time frame, but the contrasting ideological environments which informed their work were quite dissimilar. Additionally, comparing a dramatist like Shakespeare with Cervantes, a narrative writer who could not penetrate popular theatrical circles, is like comparing apples and oranges. B. W. Ife, the lead-off author of this collection of six essays initially addresses my hesitations in “Cervantes and Shakespeare: Asymmetrical Conversations.” As Ife notes, the authors “are joined by difference as much as similarity, and we should beware of yoking them by violence together” (22).

The majority of Ife's article is spent speculating why the two emerged at the same time, but to do this Ife breaks his study down into smaller hypotheticals thereby giving his article a speculative but suggestive flair. For example, he ponders the possibility of Shakespeare and Cervantes ever meeting. If they had met, what would they discuss? What language would they use? With an encounter between the two unlikely, Ife contemplates what literature would be common between them. He explores what Spanish books, including Cervantes' texts, were translated into English. With a paucity of English literature being exported and translated into Spanish, one can conclude that Shakespeare would have been more influenced by Spanish literature than Cervantes by English literature. Ife concludes his musings by showing why Cervantes, and not a

dramatist like Lope de Vega, deserves to be compared to Shakespeare.

Antonio Rey Hazas retains the speculative but suggestive approach in his contribution, "Cervantes como dramaturgo." As the title indicates, the article examines Cervantes' dramatic production, focusing on the published collection of works: *Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses nuevos, nunca representados*. Sometimes a title is just that, a title, but Rey Hazas views the title as Cervantes' method of protestation, an outlet for his frustration at not being able to have the pieces performed. Early in his career and during the beginnings of Spanish drama, Cervantes was able to see his works produced, but with the arrival of Lope de Vega, the possibility of theatrical success was thwarted and publication remained the only viable means of distributing his works. While "nuevos" could indicate that the works are recently written, Rey Hazas believes instead it refers to their originality, distinguishing him from Lope and the *comedia nueva*. However, due to Lope's monopolization of the industry, Cervantes' uniqueness would never be appreciated and he would be forever relegated to the outside, never encountering the success he once had. The remainder of the essay looks at the rivalry between Cervantes and Lope, specifically at the way in which Cervantes pokes fun at Lope in *La entretenida*.

The two chapters in the volume's second part examine the editing process of each author's masterpiece. In "The Challenges of Editing *Hamlet*," Ann Thompson notes the trials and tribulations of editing the play today, a project with which she is familiar. Today's editor must reckon with the constant influx of new information, for as with *Don Quixote*, the number of critical studies produced yearly is intimidating. With more than 400 articles published yearly during the 1990s, *Hamlet* surpasses *King Lear* as Shakespeare's most scrutinized play (82). In addition, an editor must reckon with previously published editions and the way in which they incorporated the three earliest, and very different, extant editions of the play. Thompson moves beyond the confines of the text to the stage as she provides an insightful glimpse at the staging of *Hamlet*. Actors and directors serve as editors in their own right as they decide upon which text to follow and how they want to represent the protagonist, following in the footsteps of the great Hamlets that preceded them or forging a new path.

Florencio Sevilla Arroyo offers the companion piece as he analyzes the editing of *Don Quixote* in "Editar el *Quijote* según Cervantes." The most thought-provoking piece of the collection, Sevilla Arroyo laments the loss of Cervantes' original manuscript, with the closest document to an original being the first publication by Juan de la Cuesta. Without an authoritative original, editors just do not know which errors can be attributed to Cervantes and which to the publisher, and this lack of information creates two styles of editors (an idea borrowed from Ángel Rosenblat): the "cervánticos" and the "correctistas" (117-18). The *cervánticos* create faithful reproductions of the first manuscript, errors and all, while the *correctistas*, as the title implies, correct the text. The folly of the latter is that, at times, the *correctistas* introduce so many corrections, sometimes bordering on unnecessary hypercorrections (118), that they subvert the assumed intentions of Cervantes. When creating an authoritative edition of the

1605 edition of *Don Quixote*, Sevilla Arroyo contends that we must follow the closest manuscript that we have to the original, that of the *princeps*.

Richard Wilson's "'To great Saint Jaques bound': *All's Well That Ends Well* in Shakespeare's Spain" transitions the collection into its third and final segment, "Comparando Cervantes y Shakespeare." In spite of the section's title, the essay does not compare the two literary figures *per se*, but instead examines the influence of Spain, particularly the references to Saint James, in Shakespeare's play. While insightful and thoroughly researched, the study seems cumbersome at times, for in thirty-two pages, there are seventy-five footnotes, all of which are bibliographic references. Not included in the tally are references to the play itself, which would easily bring the total number of citations over one hundred.

The collection concludes nicely with José Manuel González's "What Else after Cervantes and Shakespeare?" Once again, the question of whether the two authors truly can be compared is presented and, in my opinion, he provides the best justification in support of the undertaking. One reads of the themes that Cervantes and Shakespeare share and how these themes are still able to influence us today. They will continue to remain viable in the modern world and "Their literary heritage will certainly prevail over human nonsense and disaster" (203).

While my hesitations about comparing Cervantes and Shakespeare have not been completely resolved, *Cervantes y/and Shakespeare* should be lauded. I am leery of speculating about chance meetings between the two authors and hidden intentions behind a text's title, but, overall, the book is insightful and successful at continuing a dialogue that has yet to be exhausted. José Manuel González Fernández de Sevilla should be congratulated for his editorial efforts.

Shannon M. Polchow  
Department of Languages,  
Literature and Composition  
University of South Carolina Upstate  
Spartanburg, SC 29303  
spolchow@yahoo.com