
“A Cervantes, manosearlo. El toqueteo, la falta de respeto. Que no quede palabra cervantina sin derogar; busquemos un Cervantes deshonrado: profano. Minúsculo: cervantes.” And so Jacques Lezra begins the prologue to “Contra todos los fueros de la muerte”: El suceso cervantino. The book unites and revises articles and chapters whose publication spans fifteen years, from 1999 to 2014. It includes six chapters, 28 images, and a bibliography. Javier Rodríguez Fernández masterfully translated and revised the original texts to Spanish for the Argentinian publisher.

What does it mean to be so intimate with Cervantes; to reject his word as law; and make him simply a common and profane noun? For Lezra, handling (manosear) Cervantes eschews sacred distance between the authorial object and the critic—the rejection of propping up Cervantes on an untouchable pedestal. For Lezra, to write his name in lower case is to dismiss the oft-beloved critical act of espousing Cervantes’s literary universality. “Contra todos los fueros de la muerte” is an ambitious and densely argued feat that reflects Lezra’s post-structuralist formation. The book is a frank Sephardic expression of a struggle on Hispanism’s inside and outside, and reflects an emerging critical focus on the importance of early modern theater.

Chapter 1 begins with the sense of the materiality of touch, evoked with the verb manosear, a theme at the heart of the book. The chapter draws on a publication dedicated to Lezra’s teacher Manuel Durán. The original publication analyzes the model of Philip II’s catafalque as it appears in Cervantes’s sonnet “Al túmulo de Felipe II.” In the chapter, aside from the supple analysis of Cervantes’s poem, Lezra examines Don Quixote and the novella “El licenciado Vidriera.” In his analysis of the glass-man Tomás Rodaja, within the seemingly inconsequential details of the narrative, Lezra pauses to touch literary moments as constituted through the interplay of characters and objects.
He proposes that there is an appropriate way to do so: “Con mucho tacto y con poco: toqueteo” (55). The narrative details of the membrillo (quince fruit) tell all and nothing: it should be from Toledo, and that its enchantress should be a morisca. The quince emerges from a long, embattled history of uneasy ethnic and religious convivencia, and it, too, as a Cervantine member, evokes Cervantes’s hand itself. The membrillo forces readers to turn through the crowded streets, markets, and inns of the Cervantine literary landscape and to regard otherwise unseen histories by which each product, prop, or personaje finds itself: “El suceso cervantino: con lo que nos topamos y lo que tocamos por casualidad en el mercado; el toque accidental; donde se cruzan y donde se tocan los idiomas y las mercancías” (31).

Chapter 2 examines connections between Spanish philology and Fascism, perhaps the most telling reason as to why Lezra’s study begins with a nod to an anti-universal Cervantes. Don Quixote is commissioned to underwrite Spanish identity at key historical moments: “...el desastre del imperio, el reinado de Fernando VII, el desastre colonial de 1898 y la derrota inminente de la república” (133). “Don Quixote” and “Cervantes” indexed casticismo as Spanish imperial and religious enterprise because they were “Quijotes simbólicos que se sobredeterminan entre sí y que funcionan, cada cual, como conciencia crítica de los otros, como norma o ley expresa que limita y que explica sus usos” (124). Because it counters 1930s casticismo, Lezra celebrates an essay by the philosopher María Zambrano. Zambrano understands the spirit and moral of Quixote as linked to a community built on a series of paradoxes: intimate interiority that is also public; radically distinct and conflated notions of sameness and otherness; and the intimately close friend who is also an unknowable other.

Chapter 3 is an extended gloss of Lezra’s notion of a “profane” Cervantes. Lezra beautifully brings to the foreground Quixote’s bewilderment at finding his private reading study completely gone—the space that has been tapiado by the priest and the barber. The chapter includes seven images that freeze the moment of Quixote looking back and forth and feeling the wall of the former door of his study. Just outside of the place that held his books is the profane moment of feeling lost between biographical interiority (subjectivity) and literary disciplinarity. The Cervantes reader occupies both places, evoking the Zambrano paradox: “frente a la puerta tapiada de la disciplina de los estudios literarios, ni el personaje cervantino, ni nosotros mismos somos simplemente profanos sacerdotes de Baal, ni tampoco disciplinantes, sin que somos, y no lo olvidemos, radicalmente ambos” (184).
Chapter 4, “La mano de Cervantes,” is, aside from its translation to Spanish, a largely unaltered chapter from Lezra’s 1997 monograph *Unspeakable Subjects: The Genealogy of the Event in Early Modern Europe*. Originally, Lezra included the chapter in *Unspeakable Subjects* in the context of Descartes’s *Second Meditation* and Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*. But in the context of his other essays devoted to Cervantes in “Contra todos los fueros de la muerte,” the chapter condenses Lezra’s thesis about rejecting the word of Cervantes as law. Lezra takes the title for his book from a legal semantic register—that of inheritance and wills—from the end of part two when the narrator implores to let Quixote’s rotting bones rest in peace. Recognizing patterns and syntactic structures, Chapter 4 reflects on how Cervantes connects the body—and most forcefully the hand, to creative instruments in particular, as a transcendental whole versus a fragmented construct under the organizational principles by which bodies and their inhabitants are named. Rhetorical choices like syllepsis illuminate deeper psychological factors at work, and the fractal nature of Don Quixote in the self-referencing structures of its unfolding have profound implications as it relates to the telling of human narratives.

The last two chapters of the monograph turn to early modern theater. Chapter 5 “Fantasía del teatro: El mercado del exilio, el exilio como mercancía,” examines how Cervantes represents theater in part two of *Don Quixote*. The chapter seeks to provide a methodological framework by which to consider the transnational exchanges which are now defining characteristics of modernity, but which gained momentum during the early modern period. Lezra is particularly interested with how commodities, understood in a broad sense, are translated across borders and the subsequent effects that are rendered upon them. The chapter focuses on Don Quixote smashing Maese Pedro’s puppet show, an image of which is used as cover for the entire study. Lezra highlights the translation taking place in Cervantes’ puppet show in part two of *Don Quixote* between the fantasy world of the performance and the world of material values as they are assigned to Maese Pedro’s broken puppets. The unstable values assigned to the puppets are both material wood and cloth and immaterial aesthetic performance. The analysis evokes Lezra’s thesis of how traveling theater serves as a perfect model for examining early modern material and aesthetic values in movement, in translation, and in exile.

The final chapter turns from the representation of theater in *Don Quixote* to an examination of the theatrical translation of Turks most especially through an analysis of Cervantes play, *La gran sultana*. Lezra sees the Turk as a stand-in for changing international market relations that developed in
the context of the economic and cultural consequences of early modern globaliza-
tion. The Turk as early modern archetype came to index a dangerous type of eco-
omic and theological pluralism associated with the Ottoman Empire. The translation of people, goods, and ideas from the Orient into the west threatened the stability of values in the market and in prevailing moral codes, but implicitly, also offered scintillating possibilities of freedom from hegemonic norms. Lezra convincingly illustrates how and why Western writers projected their unconscious desires and overstated anxieties onto the figure of the Turk just as the old regime grappled to overcompensate for the instabilities of market and thought concomitant to nascent modernity. The theater served as a medium for the recapitulation and collective venting of these desires and anxieties and served to reinforce or to question the imagined social consequences of the destabilizing foreign elements for which the Turk served as proxy.

Each of our own research trajectories sets us on an academic path apparently quite far from Cervantes—the animal in environmental cultural studies and Mayan-Spanish bilingualism in the Yucatan. Nonetheless, we value more profoundly our own research path, as well as Cervantes’s literary production, because of Lezra’s book. The book’s harshest critic will no doubt be the author himself. The book is an act of critical generosity: as Cervantes left his books in our hands, so Lezra leaves his.

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