LIBRO RESEÑADO
Ignacio Padilla (2005), El diablo y Cervantes,
ISBN: 968-167-797-8

AUTORA DE LA RESEÑA
Hilaire Kallendorf
Texas A&M University

FECHA
3 noviembre 2006
This book is dynamically—even shockingly—original both in conception and execution. Pertaining more to the essayistic tradition of Hispanic literary criticism, in the form of meditations à la Ortega y Gassett, it must be read in the impressionistic (as opposed to philological) genre in order to be fully appreciated. Written by a novelist and short story writer, this book displays flashes of insight which normally hit their mark, some of them landing so close to home that they make the careful observer shiver with pleasure. Padilla understands Cervantes in the way that only a fellow novelist could. As a cervantista, I believe most of his perceptions are accurate.

Unfortunately, the dialogue about Cervantes and the demonic is a conversation to which he has arrived too late. In the ten years it took him to write this book (1995-2005), multiple new studies have been published on almost every aspect of the demonic in Cervantes, an area which he treats as if it were uncharted territory. He does not realize that this is “old news.” His slopppy scholarship and almost total lack of relevant bibliography make this book fulfill the old proverb: “a day late and a dollar short.”

Padilla does not use Spanish demonologies for milieu, but instead just gives cursory summaries of such unlikely
candidates as Erasmus, Ficino and Bruno. He barely mentions such demonological giants as Torquemada, Ciruelo, and Castañega. He does, however, imitate the typical structure of treatises on demonology by dividing his book not into chapters, but instead into six “tratados,” which treat such varied topics as demonic animals and objects, as well as the more figurative demonization of women and minorities during the Golden Age. Of these, Tratado II is definitely the heart of the work. In it, he addresses specific demonological components of Cervantes’s œuvre, including La Galatea, La casa de los celos, Don Quijote, El Licenciado Vidriera, and the Persiles. Here he is stunningly ambitious, attacking the whole of Cervantes’s works with a global vision which is almost unheard of in a field which normally privileges narrow specialization.

Although he unwittingly reduces my list of eleven theologemes for the exorcism ritual to a mere three, his approach is nonetheless recognizably structuralist in form. For his entire theoretical framework, he relies generally upon Jean Starobinsky’s somewhat dated La posesión demoniaca (1976), and more specifically upon this author’s treatment of the Gerasene pig episode in the gospels. Padilla in turn reads the Sierra Morena as a sort of latter-day Gerasa, with Don Quijote acting as a failed exorcist, progressively, of Cardenio, Basilio, and Grisóstomo. At one point he disagrees with Hasbrouck, saying that Don Quijote does not perform a self-exorcism, but instead—in his anachronistic throwback to the world of the romances of chivalry—attempts, with heartbreaking idealism, to perform an exorcism upon the whole world.

Padilla’s real contribution lies in extending the work of Hasbrouck and other scholars beyond Don Quijote to other Cervantine characters. But he does not neglect Don Quijote; in fact, he blames him for his own demonic possession, providing a laundry list of his “sins,” and argues that the altar and throne, representing the Church and State respectively, are the loco manchego’s real exorcists. There are several important points here that Padilla intuitively gets right. His emphasis on libre
albedrío, or free will, and its relationship to demonic possession is on target, for this has always been recognized as one of Cervantes’s primary preoccupations. Padilla’s message is that demonic possession does not annul free will, and in this respect Cervantes is punctiliously orthodox.

The major problem with this book is its almost total lack of documentation or knowledge of philological procedure. Padilla usually does not quote from even the primary texts; if he does, he (almost unbelievably) provides no page numbers. The lack of up-to-date secondary scholarship is lamentable. There are also serious factual errors, such as the attribution of the exorcistic phrase “¡Fugite, partes adversae!” (which he also misspells) to the Doña Rodríguez episode instead of to the Noche de San Juan in Barcelona, where it actually occurs in the text. He refers to an exorcism with “ayuda bendita” when he clearly means “agua bendita,” a mistake which could have been avoided with a proper citation.

Unfortunately these weaknesses are so acute that they will prevent most cervantistas from taking the book very seriously. This is not a Cervantes specialist, but a polymath / dilettante—and between these two categories, there is indeed a very fine line.

In the same ten years during which he was researching and writing this book, I alone (not to mention more august names in Hispanism) have published articles in Renaissance Quarterly, Romance Quarterly, Anuario de Estudios Cervantinos, and Bulletin of the Comediantes which would have been relevant to his study (not to mention my 2003 book Exorcism and Its Texts, which anticipates many if not all of the points he raises). His total ignorance of these studies relegates his own work to a place of painful solipsism.

Nonetheless, I would challenge specialists in the field to read this book. Some of his hypotheses are as yet unproven, but that does not mean they are unproveable. Attention, graduate students: several of you could make your careers by seizing upon, and carefully demonstrating, any one of his numerous brilliant ideas. Future generations should take it upon
themselves to document what Padilla has merely suggested. In doing so, they will help bring to term this infant who was thrown into the world, as Cervantes would say paradoxically, being at the same time both overdue and hideously premature.