LIBRO RESEÑADO


AUTOR DE LA RESEÑA

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This commemorative volume contains twenty essays by well-known Hispanic scholars on various aspects of Cervantes’ literary production which, according to the editors, has “shaped and profoundly influenced the different literatures and cultures of numerous countries worldwide” (front piece). Individually, the essays are unlike each other and, in terms of approach, method and conclusions, perhaps radically so. Together, however, they form a group divided into three critically conceived sections: 1) four discussions of general aspects of Cervantes’ fiction analyzed in terms of the cultural conditions of the Spanish Golden Age; 2) eight studies of specific situations in the Quijote, textual situations which lead to discussions of general problems; and 3) seven reappraisals of works other than Don Quijote, ranging from the “art of discretion” in La Galatea to the “birth of metatheatre” and to “history and fiction in the Persiles.” The introduction by the two editors is followed by José Montero’s detailed itinerary of E. C. Riley’s invaluable contributions to
Cervantine studies (among them the pioneering Cervantes’s *Theory of the Novel*); they purport to provide, as indicated in the title (“in memory of E. C. Riley”), a framework for the collected essays.

What the volume succeeds in doing is to raise certain subtle theoretical problems and pose certain thorny textual questions about the diverse—and often contradictory—critical approaches (not to mention diverse conclusions) offered by modern experts in past and present publications (especially during the recent occasions celebrating the “quatercentenary” of *Don Quijote*) about the remarkable variety of literary genres developed by Cervantes—besides *Don Quijote*, pastoral, byzantine and exemplary novels, dramas, entremeses, poetry, prologues etc. More particularly, it refers persistently to the corpus of Riley’s comprehensive publications from which several of the authors in this collection have supposedly drawn their Cervantine inspiration.

These scholars (to narrow the scope of the review even further) are considered during the past 3-4 decades among the leading “cervantistas”; the quality of their critical writing about the puzzling life, or the diverse works and historical meaning of Cervantes is as excellent as its quantity is great. There is no doubt that each one of the essays holds great interest and deserves individual scrutiny. Therefore the problem posed by such a volume (at least for reviewers) is whether the essays, ranging over a remarkable variety—and diversity—of pertinent subjects, are merely strung together as a miscellany of critical Cervantine studies, or arranged collectively to form, willy-nilly, a book on Cervantes. Since the volume consists of individual essays ranging over so many distinct topics by distinct authors, it cannot and does not pretend to be a unified book.

But, of course, many collections of Cervantes studies have been published in recent years, and surely it has not been the editors’ purpose to add one to their number. The purpose here is to exhibit the works of Cervantes, in all their surprising variety and diversity, not simply as the isolated texts of a remarkable “genius,” but also as both an effect and a cause of the cultural conditions within which each narrative, poetic and dramatic genre written by Cervantes—indeed each text—was composed, published and received (including the “ecdotic” circumstances of first publications.) This is why the critical range of the volume is vast, for a variety of viable approaches or methods or schools are, directly or indirectly, represented by the essays. In fact, a subtitle of the volume could easily be “Varieties of the Cervantine literary experience”. The group of essays manifests an accumulation of characteristics or patterns (irony, distance,
imagination, verisimilitude, burlesque, characterization, discretion, exemplarity, images of the world as a stage, etc.,) that, by adapting themselves in different circumstances are repeated, even institutionalized to the point of representing a symbolic accumulation of scholarly patterns or standards that, considered collectively, constitute the so-called “cervantismo.”

It has been usual to view “cervantismo” as a set of critical approaches (sometimes overly canonized) to what are the varied works of Cervantes all about, how they first appeared, why they are structured as they are and in the broad meaning of the expression to what effect. As in paradigms, Cervantine studies by now function both as a field of knowledge and an object of continuous research and inquiry. These critical approaches are necessarily general (often debatable, even unreliable or even irrelevant) but they have provided a series of frameworks within which readers, students and scholars understand and participate in the varied experiences manifested in Cervantes’ literature. This is the background against which each one of the new essays as well as the collection of them are to be viewed and judged. The combination of standard scholarship, questions of editorial difficulties and critical interpretations, because of their solid historical or textual foundations, often combined with elegance and illumination, make the essays, individually and collectively, as worthy of consideration as any other in the massive corpus of recent Cervantes scholarship.

Moreover, what is striking about the assembled essays is that at times they exhibit a capacity to cross disciplinary boundary lines and stimulate discussions that go beyond the concerns, as traditionally conceived, of Cervantine studies. The editorial introduction highlights succinctly the benefits of Riley’s landmark studies on the many-sided inventiveness of Cervantes; next, Montero’s solid bibliographical itinerary is a judicious historical survey of Riley’s publications from before 1950 to the major works of the later period: Montero charts historically the consistent ways in which Riley’s particular interpretations developed as the Cervantine studies in which they were rooted were also developing. They provide valuable impressions of the critical flavor of Riley’s “cervantismo,” showing readers where to turn back for allusions that crop up in the studies. The critical reappraisal sets the stage for the three sections that follow by sticking in the reader’s mind enough fundamental insights into the problems involving theory and practice by Cervantes (and, at least speaking for this reviewer, has created the urge to reread the seminal critical appraisals of this “cervantista de profesión”).
The four essays of the first section, CERVANTES’ FICTION, deal with some thorny but indispensable problems that can be deducted from a textual analysis of fictive situations; that is, textual situations are treated as imaginary representations of social relations among characters which nevertheless correspond to historical and cultural realities of the time. That involves the immense historiographical problem of how best to approach the highly entertaining works of Cervantes. For example, as opposed to what he deems the anachronistic notions of modern critics, Close argues that the comic mind of the Spanish Golden Age is a more accurate and hence more viable way of understanding how Cervantes’ burlesque manner determines the function of the narrative episodes as a whole, as well as the psychology of the characters within them. (The penchant for a slum clearance of post-romantic influences is evident). With considerable textual erudition he evaluates the burlesque function of Cervantine characters or episodes (like the Cave of Montesinos) in the light of the comic norms of the time and especially the implicit standards of judgment by contemporary readers regarding outlandish characters and zanily improvised stories.

The provocative doubts posed by Anthony Close regarding modern estimations of the Quijote dramatize the problem whether, in general, post-Romantic interpretations, though often fascinating and insightful, are always the most calibrated instrument for defining or interpreting the burlesque situations and odd characters depicted in Cervantes’s narratives (and the answer of course is “no” in thunder). The point made about the burlesque effects of Cervantes’ fiction (in many ways too obvious to need repetition or expansion) is too important for this volume to leave undeclared: whether our modern notions of fiction may or may not blind us to the aesthetic concerns of a work by Cervantes, in one way or another concerns every one of the essays that follow. For Maria Augusta da Costa Vieira, the protagonist’s madness (along with the contradictory characters and ironic dialogue of Don Quijote) is the factor that has influenced the novels of Brazil’s Machado de Assis (especially O Alienista). The manifestations of past works in modern fiction are a way to revisit and reappraise the 400-year old Quijote.

With impressive cross-disciplinary skills, Alban Forcione tackles Cervantes’ engagement with 15th-17th century ideological currents and this approach skillfully provides a series of dazzling literary parallels which lead him to reexamine diverse story-telling details (among others, Sancho’s articulation of his comical journey through
fire) in terms of intellectual history. In an intimidating display of cultural readings and cross-references (literary, poetic, Aristotelian, scientific, artistic etc,) about the vision of man subordinated to a world order (a surge of impressive cultural history difficult to summarize), he sees them in Cervantes’ works as pervasive, implicit, inhering in details, phrases, metaphors, characters and actions, each one qualifying and being qualified by every other. It’s a tour-de-force not only of critical readings of texts but intellectual history.

Next, B. W. Ife examines the “trick shots” that Cervantes plays in the Persiles y Sigismunda (eg., aerial flights like that of “la mujer voladora” or the Clavileño episode in Don Quijote) as a way of reexamining how invention and plausibility blend effectively (“cosa posible sin ser milagro”—p. 65) to create authentic verisimilitude. It’s a clearly articulated and persuasive argument about the penchant of Cervantes (dubbed as that “cunning old devil”) to surround even his own imaginary flights with the safeguards of a reasonable “plausibility” (p. 64). Ife’s is a very solid explanation of the factors that lie behind the misleading appearance of things and Cervantes’s skilfull manner of forging verisimilar solutions.

An implied point in the above essays is that the fictive texts of Cervantes, no matter how autonomous, were transmitted in historical times and only through their literary form; they thus functioned historically as imaginary representations of human problems that corresponded to cultural moments within which Cervantes’ fictions were composed, published and read.

Each one of the essays in the following section, DON QUIJOTE, has a unique flavor, not easily comparable with the rest. As a group, however, they share a common critical process: that of working from the “inside out,” using the scrutiny of known textual situations as a new explanation and/or interpretation of important literary issues. First, for the tireless Juan Bautista de Avalle-Arce (one of my early mentors), Sancho’s dilemma at Toboso (Part II,1615) in his monologue about his lies regarding Dulcinea (1605) hark back to the monologues of Celestina and anticipate Galdós’ realistic bent of “interior monologue,” as in the case of Villaamil’s pre-suicidal reflexions at the end of Miau. Next, a new reading of the travesty in Don Quijote’s unforeseen triumph over the disguised Sansón Carrasco, especially the contradictory aftermath, leads Jean Canavaggio to reexamine the ambiguous situation of the mad hidalgo; he is trapped more and more between appearances and realities regarding Dulcinea and confused by the enchanters who thwart his heroic or amorous plans.
Peter Dunn’s approach to various problematic discourses in the Quijote, in contrast to Close’s critical position of questioning outdated approaches, manifests, along with traditional scholarship, a use of modern insights, like, for example, the chaplinesque-type “contradictory, conceptual comedy,” in order to explain the one thorny but fundamental aspect of the narrative: the “contested discourses” throughout the burlesque episodes are quid pro quo balanced by seriously conceived problems in these same contested (even though burlesque) discourses—hence, in this vein, Dunn’s concluding query, “can we dissociate ourselves completely from the ‘Romantic Approach?’” (100). As for Cervantes’ notorious narrative distance in episodes like the encounter between don Quijote and the galley-slaves, Pablo Juralde Pou (with a dosis of gentle didacticism) highlights the novel’s artistic ambiguity as a paradigm of great works of literature.

Somewhat in the same vein, M. Moner starts with Riley’s reading of the Vida de Ginés de Pasamonte and, in particular, the paradox of how to end one’s “autobiography,” next investigates further the origins and manifestations of this paradox, compares and contrasts the versions of Alemán and Cervantes and, finally, defends the complexities of the galley-slave’s “vida inacabada” pace the amusing burlesque elements of the episode. In the next highly complicated essay, what Benengeli (or familiarly, “Cide”) does with the characters in the episode of the Cave of Montesinos and how in Part II he interprets don Quijote’s own version of the cave or the mythical figure of Durandarte, leads Alicia Prodi to hop, somewhat “post-structurally”, all over the narrative and its emblems (in a highly essayistic—and rather impressionistic—reading not easy to summarize), interconnecting events, figures and symbols in order to give prominence to the narrative process of “inverting” opposites so that, among other effects, “ésa es la trascendencia—libresca, y por libresca verdadera—del personaje” (p.125). Throughout these essays, the phenomenon of contradictions in the Quijote seems quite indisputable; it is the interpretation of Cervantes’s dangling, teasingly unresolved ambiguities that keeps on raising difficulties.

The last two essays of this section deal with the always tricky—and bothersome—question of, indeed, which is the Quijote we read in modern editions? The road from the elementary “manufacture of titles” to the various vicissitudes involved in establishing an accurate and at the same time readable text is fraught with serious hardships, creating endless uncertainties and often hard-line polemics. Both Francisco Rico and Eduardo Urbina et al refer to the same “textual”
problems of *Quijote* editions but they have different senses and thus offer distinct solutions. Following his critical edition of the *Quijote* plus a series of exploratory studies regarding “el texto del Quijote,” and above all based on a minute examination of textual data in an intelligible sequence, Francisco Rico (equipped with his overpowering philological experience) concludes: once we distinguish between “book cover” and “title page,” both in the original *Quijote* texts of 1605 and 1615 we may suspect that the name of the protagonist, “*don Quijote*”, tagged after the more simple “*ingenioso hidalgo*”, was an addition, the result of “razones editoriales o tipográficas extrañas al autor”. This phenomenon might help to explain the differences between the 1605 and 1615 titles—“hidalgo” shifted to “caballero”. Two striking ironies: one of the most quoted names in world literature “*Don Quijote*” (“increíblemente copioso en sugerencias”) was not Cervantes’ title of 1605; and in general, without indispensable “ecdotic” information (“ekdotik??”) or legitimate doubts, can we in modern times be sure if we are reading exactly what an author like Cervantes wrote?

It’s not easy to simplify this always troublesome dilemma of what text we read when we read works like the *Quijote*. Simply put, without the distinction between what was in the folio texts and what was not so, there can be no certainty about an authentic reading. What modern editions transcribe may not always be what was in the original publications. For this reason, how in modern times we assemble—assemble and interpret—our chosen samples of verified textual data (which usually include not only what the author wrote but also the unavoidable interventions of others) is another troublesome matter—witness the copious bibliographical footnotes throughout the two studies, full of references to others who have struggled with textual difficulties regarding readings of the *Quijote*.

In the light of recent uncertainties about all previous editions of the *Quijote*, the solution offered by the team under Eduardo Urbina (working for years on the “Proyecto Cervantes”), might be an electronic “Edición variorum” (that is, assemblage of exact variants, notes and other data and thus authentically critical) based on “un acceso amplio e inmediato a una importante colección de textos y documentos” (142). This monumental project of producing simultaneous texts, based on recent digital technologies, has been in the works for many years (it has already been presented in conferences “por entregas,” as work in progress) and is about to be finished.

The seven essays in the final section of the volume, *OTHER WORKS BY CERVANTES*, are not a potpourri but a critical estimate of the diverse
genres cultivated by Cervantes; by implication what is emphasized are the vitality and continuity of Cervantes’ literary production from the early *Galatea* to the posthumous *Persiles* (only the *Viaje al Parnaso* and poetry are left out.) First, based on a review of the history of emblems and the consideration of how traditional myths function as emblems, Ignacio Arellano discusses how they function in *La Galatea* (where the images of pastoral suffering are emblematic) and, next, analyzes the more varied and complex uses of them in the *Persiles*, especially in the confrontation between virtues and vices. In short, from the early *Galatea* to the later *Persiles*, Cervantes knew how to use pertinently the long emblematic tradition. Next, with her accustomed broad erudition in tracing evolution of themes, images and motifs, Aurora Egido reviews the tradition of a key aspect of Cervantes’ work, “discretion” (both as moral and literary virtue) and shows that, much earlier than his later uses as in the *Quijote*, “todo en *La Galatea* rezuma discreción.” (p. 176). The prudent and thus commonsensical ways of making judgments and taking decisions are of course at the heart of Cervantes’ well-known tendency (as in the case of other humanists) to secularize (my emphasis) inherited notions of religion and culture—hence the fascinating relationships between discretion and freedom.

Cervantes’ theater comes next. Wisely avoiding a repetition of the always repeated anecdotal aspects regarding the so-called theatrical failures of Cervantes’ plays as far as being publicly staged, Jesús G. Maestro focuses on the “theatrics” of his dramatic literature, that is, the penchant of a dramatic performance reflecting, during the very performance, how the play has been scripted, rehearsed or acted out—“teatro dentro del teatro.” This type of theatrical “self-reflexivity” (stunningly exploited in the *Quijote*), modernly labeled “metatheater”, is the one factor that compares Cervantes to Shakespeare. In this context “al desmantelar la ilusión dramática,” Cervantes’ dramas, like later those of Brecht, “desmitifica[n],” being “literatura de confrontación” (p.185). Maestro considers Cervantes the most modern of Spanish dramatists. Among the many examples mentioned, including those from the Renaissance and Baroque culture is how Cervantes added to the allegorical situation of “the world is a stage” the hitherto non-existent role of the figure of actor who, full of self-reflexivity, is necessarily an actor within an actor—a radical innovation. His essay concerns the history of metatheaters from past to present (a la Ernst R. Curtius) and, in particular, its applicability to selected plays by Shakespeare and Cervantes.

The essay that follows by Francisco Márquez Villanueva about Cervantes’ narrative mastery (here illustrated by *El casamiento*
engañoso and its relation to the Coloquio de los perros) in dealing with the complex problems of intimate relations—“el sello... problemático de toda relación entre los sexos” (p. 209)—should be given special consideration. Intellectually moving, his accurate yet attractive reading of the double exemplary novel, as it oscillates from fábula to novela, is a critically thrilling experience; it provides as thoughtful and convincing an insight to Cervantes’s ways with “historia verdadera o fingida” as we are likely to get. And, amazingly, as a critic, his main success is to ascertain just “what happens” in the double novella (especially when it comes to the human relationships between characters) as the sine qua non factor for any large-scale interpretive criticism. “Cervantes, el ambiguo, el perspectivista, el siempre irónico no ha podido esta vez dejar el campo más limpio ni más desbrozado para la posteridad” (p. 211). And the essay ends, neatly, by reproducing intact the end of the Coloquio—a brilliant combination of theory and practice. (This essay reminds one of Dover Wilson’s impressive elucidations of Shakespeare’s conceptions of human relations in What Happens in Hamlet.)

The final three essays deal with the Persiles and two problems presented by the Novelas ejemplares. For Jeremy Robbins the penchant in the Pessiles of the intentions by some characters to present or take a piece of fiction “literally as true,” raises the question (like the chicken and the egg) of the problematic relations between history and fiction which, at least in the case of Cervantes’ works, are inseparable, necessary and, even though opposites, complementary to each other. This is why Cervantes makes it difficult for readers “to discriminate fact from lies” (a homage to Riley’s earlier readings). As opposed to critical standpoints within the texts themselves of the Novelas ejemplares, however, Carlos Romero examines the laborious process of providing an accurate reading of them; he patiently shows that an edition based on the original folios entails the complicated “ecdotic”/ekdotik? process and the endless interaction of diverse disciplines. (This essay should be read in tandem with those of Rico and Urbina). This is the fifth presentation of Romero’s on-going work toward a critical edition in which, in the light of and in contrast to previous editions of the novelas, he provides a series of correct readings, all of them based on what were exactly the realities that words were referring to in the 16th-17th centuries, that is, realities of a remote past which in their time were contemporary. One aim of the ecdotic process is to capture the contemporariness of the expressions and their meaning. The implication is that the pleasure of reading fascinating
interpretations of any one of the modern editions of the *Novelas ejemplares* should not blind us to the fact that without a genuine textual erudition we may not be sure if we really understand what was meant by what is narrated or said in the texts.

The last essay of the volume, by Edwin Williamson, deals convincingly with the aesthetic and social consequences of Cervantes’ deliberate practice of blurring the traditional boundaries of opposite modes of writing; that is, he tackles the implications of an immense problem regarding the function of genres through the limited angle of one exemplary novel, *La ilustre fregona*. It’s a subtle approach to the difficult issue of the historical function of literary forms. The effort succeeds admirably: after monitoring carefully the sequence of amazing “coincidences” in the two story patterns, the “picaresque” and “romance,” and next showing how they affect and expose the character of parents and children, he concludes with the provocation that the shift from one genre to another during the denouement (when, ironically all seems to end well even if all was not well) creates “a strange, ambiguous territory” which subtly challenges by severely criticizing the nobility’s exploitation of hierarchies. For example, one can commit rape, not show repentance and still get away with crime. The ambiguities regarding justice are therefore both aesthetic and moral; we are confronted with calculated paradoxes which, predictably, Cervantes “does nothing to resolve these ambiguities” (p. 259).

The ambiguities in *La ilustre fregona*, as analyzed by Williamson, pose problems that (directly or indirectly) concern all the other essays of the collection. This is perhaps due to the fact that the notorious contradictions and paradoxes manifested not only in the *Quijote* (once called “equívocos”) but also in other works as in the *Fregona* (cf. studies above) are of significance because they contain a series of paradoxical problems of life which it is true are not resolved, but which nevertheless are revealed prominently in the very contradictions.

The bird’s eye view of the twenty essays raises the issue of evaluation, already mentioned at the start of the review. So, then, what’s the specific contribution to Hispanic studies of this group of twenty new essays? Each chosen article looks well enough in its place, but when strung along with the others, each one forms a more or less independent unit within an anthology. Of course, it’s not easy for a collection of articles to have the so-called uniformity usually expected of any book about Cervantes: among the diverse contributions to this volume, for example, there are considerable differences both in terms of interest, critical approach, emphasis and conclusions. The very
appearance of each piece in the volume is organized alphabetically by placing it, within each of the three sections, in the alphabetical order of each author’s name. In such a scheme, except for the subject of Cervantes, or the quatercentenary of the Quijote, and E. C. Riley’s “cervantismo,” the collected articles do not receive any underlying unity which could be illustrated by their variety. Not so. The task of the brief descriptions above is to indicate the positive and constructive contributions of the volume as a whole—the pros and cons about each one of the essays (a critique of each one requires careful scrutiny) seem out of place.

To begin, unlike in most books on Cervantes, this particular volume cannot submit to its anthological design every useful detail of the assembled studies. Nor do the assembled authors cohere as a mass other than having been brought together for being expert cervantistas. Nevertheless, the diverse contents of this collection, precisely because of the variety of views and authors provides a welcome flexibility: that is, the decision to integrate in one volume diverse but pertinent perspectives on the always commented works of Cervantes may be powerful proof that no stable frame (as is demanded of books or monographs) always continues the same: perhaps nothing is more important in Cervantine studies than to lay bare—and be aware of—the manifestations of, in the face of coherence, change and contradiction (the last decades of proliferating studies should be enough proof).

Books on Cervantes are in the good sense of the word exclusive; they rely on careful compromises between topic and tools in order to form some kind of “constructed” and hence unified totality. The volume of essays on Cervantes (also in the good sense of the word) is inclusive: it provides the significant alternative of twenty different instances of a unified, coherent totality. Inclusiveness and flexibility are discernible and hence useful throughout these essays, providing the consistency of what we earlier referred to as the variety of problems within cervantismo—witness the diverse uses of Riley’s Cervantine studies by several of the authors.

Despite being various in time, depth, and subject, the essays about Cervantes, have had in common an underlying unity which is best illustrated by their very difference: that unity is evident in the critical process of producing knowledge and insights about the works of Cervantes by going behind the textual or superficial appearance of things. It has been considered by cervantistas a difficult task because the intentions and messages and meanings which lie behind the formal
facades of Cervantes’ fictions are not there waiting to be found. This volume is particularly valuable, one essay after another, in illustrating how in order to analyze concrete texts of Cervantes, their cultural conditions must be developed through several levels of historiography until it is ultimately possible to grasp the complexities of the concrete works. At the same time, the so-called fixity of texts has been constantly challenged within the field of cervantismo itself; the grounds of Cervantine criticism keeps on shifting as it enters the larger field of cross-disciplinary studies. What is at issue at this juncture (as illustrated in different ways by most of the collected essays) is not the value or quality of each Cervantine literary analysis but the alleged need to account for the variety of cultural patterns and discourses on display in the history of the Spain of Cervantes.

The critical approaches associated with Cervantine studies involve (and often take for granted) certain fundamental hypotheses which (to borrow from Kuhn’s discussion of paradigms) carry with them appropriate methods of discovering, establishing and imparting information about the age of Cervantes and offering explanations of his works in terms of that age. If a major aim of Cervantine studies is to understand the ideas, values and tendencies by which the contemporaries of Cervantes, indeed the readers of his works, were experiencing their society and culture at that time, then certain of these ideas, values and tendencies are available in Cervantine studies like the ones collected in this volume. Over the past years, however, a series of anomalies have accumulated until, inevitably, they have by now reached a level of extreme flexibility. This stage of flux may be where “cervantismo” is now, although it’s difficult to gage at what point of a crisis, if any. The volume’s variety of topics and approaches is at the heart of this flux.

What matters is that this edition, in which most aspects of “cervantismo” are manifested both in each one and in all the collected essays, is an indication that perhaps “cervantismo” itself does not really function as a fixed category. If the studies reviewed here are any indication, this may be a healthy situation for the discipline: there are only Cervantine studies, each one driven by conflicting causes and effects and subject to every kind of estimation or judgment. Only by way of abstraction or questionable theories can we now talk of “cervantismo” as a field or category that coherently defines diverse Cervantine problems. Such general categories cannot cope with the flexible realities analyzed by the diverse essays of this volume—which, clearly, is a veritable picture of the complexities of the fictive worlds of
Cervantes. The recommendation here is to read each essay (not necessarily in the alphabetical order of the authors), considering the parallels, comparisons and contrasts with the others in the whole. Opening our eyes to the flexible and thus multifaceted problems involved in “cervantismo” is the real accomplishment of the “Essays in Memory of E. C. Riley,”— que no es cosa que se hace todos los días.