

Pedagogical Perspectives: Pedagogy, Cervantes and the Place of Materialist Criticism

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George Mariscal is an Associate Professor of Spanish and Chicano/a Literatures at the University of California, San Diego. His Contradictory Subjects: Quevedo and Cervantes in Seventeenth-Century Spanish Culture (1991) was co-winner of the Modern Language Association's prize for outstanding study of Spanish literature (in English). He has published widely on early modern Spanish society, and currently is exploring the politics of Spanish studies in the U.S.

Introduction

We have altered the format for pedagogical perspectives for Volume 5. We devote it to a critical exchange between George Mariscal and Carroll B. Johnson. It is motivated by the publication of the latter's work *Cervantes and the Material World* (Urbana: Illinois UP, 2000). The body of the exchange consists of Mariscal's lengthy review of Johnson's book and Johnson's response to Mariscal's reading. The exchange of opinions revolves around the place of theory—in this case materialist—in the reading of early modern Spanish literature, a timely topic indeed since the *Chronicle of Higher Education* only several months ago led off its "Research" section with "The New Geography of Classical Spanish Literature," [February 2, 2001, A14-15], an article on the changing face of early modern Spanish literature. Materialist thought is clearly one of the most formative elements of Cultural Studies, particularly as it evolves from sources as diverse as the Frankfurt School, Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams and the lively exchange materialist criticism provokes here certainly has pedagogical implications. In fact, the issue of pedagogy figures prominently in the point-counterpoint of the debate clearly demonstrating that pedagogical practices, in this, and as they effect the formation of graduate students, are important. The tone of the dialogue befits the strength of the beliefs of the two scholars herein engaged. The *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* altered neither the tone nor the content making only minor editorial changes to fit the exchange within the structure of

this section of the journal. We will let our readers draw their own conclusions. Suffice it to say that the opinions voiced by Mariscal and Johnson, while articulate and forceful, are far from the last word on the issue. We hope to continue the strands of this conversation on Cervantes and the material world, materialist criticism, and pedagogy of theory and try to facilitate others in the pages of the journal and on the new interactive section of our website: <http://www.coh.arizona.edu/spanish.ajhcs.html>

Malcolm Alan Compitello
Executive Editor

Review of Carroll Johnson's *Cervantes and the Material World* (Illinois UP, 2000)

Carroll B. Johnson's new study of Cervantes is a useful compendium of references to economic practices in the Cervantine corpus. On one level, it is a thematic reading of several texts which catalogues the presence of "economic systems and practices" (10). This undoubtedly will be of great service to young scholars already moving in the direction of a method more grounded in archival research and ethnographic detail than earlier poststructuralist and psychoanalytic reading strategies. On another level, the book presents itself as a call for a new kind of Spanish Golden Age criticism that is less inhibited by traditional ideologies of "the literary" and more open to an analysis of the material practices of everyday life.

Johnson has an encyclopedic knowledge of Cervantes's works and an equally impressive mastery of the secondary bibliography of the last thirty years. To a great

degree, this book is a recapitulation of many of the major critical arguments within Hispanism albeit with carefully chosen lacunae, as we shall see. Johnson's gathering together of a formidable array of allusions to economic practices complemented by his grasp of the relevant historiography produces a "deep context" for Cervantes's texts reminiscent of the New Historicism. Johnson does not mention this critical school, whose influence peaked in early modern English studies during the late 1980s, but it would be difficult to imagine his book without the precedent of New Historicism. At the level of method, then, Johnson's book is not particularly innovative although it certainly is an interesting contribution to what has always been a minority critical position within Spanish Golden Age studies.

His readings of Cervantine texts dealing with *morisco* characters, e.g. Zoraida, Ricote, are especially well done because they extend the search for relationships of contract, commerce, and commodification beyond the European framework to include Ottoman and North African contexts. They also expand Johnson's analysis to issues of gender and ethnicity. Chapter Three on the role of the *morisco* community in the primitive accumulation of capital enhances our understanding of the economic and cultural aftershocks of the *morisco* expulsions. Chapter Six on *El amante liberal* is a fascinating interpretation of one of the more complex and often ignored *novelas ejemplares*. Chapter Five on *La gitanilla* and Chapter Seven on *La española inglesa* also provide elaborate historical contextualizations of the literary object in order to demonstrate how it is embedded in an intricate network of ideological formations.

The original readings and impressive collection of references to economic relations, however, are not held together by any rigorous theoretical frame. Johnson's only gestures towards a theory, which would explain the link between literary texts and the economic relationships he catalogues, are to a base/superstructure model and the notion of marching modes of production (a caricature of historical materialism and a model rejected by all dialectical thinkers in the Marxist tradition). A fleeting reference to the work of Jean-Joseph Goux owes more to Johnson's earlier incarnation as a psychoanalytic critic (144-45). Thus the dialectical relationship between the literary text and the political economy of a given society, a critical problem that has produced a formidable genealogy ranging from Marx to Lukács to Goldmann to Raymond Williams and others, is not addressed here except in occasional invocations of a mechanical economism of the base/superstructure model which Johnson seems to want to rescue from the critique launched against it by contemporary materialist critics (68). On page 107, he approvingly cites Williams's adjustment of Marx's notion of productive labor (as inherited from Adam Smith) in order to show the "inadequacy" of Marx's formulation but neglects to add that Williams's point in this section of *Marxism and Literature* was to do away with the base/superstructure model altogether.

Near the conclusion of Chapter One, Johnson tells us: "Marxism is presumed to offer a dialectical vision of history but has always seemed to me more like a master narrative divided into chapters" (35-66). At several points Johnson refers to "a recurrent preoccupation with the clash of two different economic systems, a reenergized feudalism and an incipient capitalism" (1). But

specific conjunctures that produced the so-called passage from feudal to capitalist relations of production are the subject of a rich dialogue that continues to this day. The so-called "Brenner Debate" in English studies, for example, has generated a number of theories about changes in the early modern European economy and their relationship to the emerging world market. In his *The Colonizer's Model of the World* (1993), for example, J.M. Blaut is only the latest of a distinguished line of thinkers ranging from Samir Amin to Immanuel Wallerstein who argue that capitalism in Europe could never have developed as it did without the impact of massive colonial projects. Of equal importance, the issue of whether or not "feudalism" in the classic sense (based on developments in France) ever really existed on the Iberian Peninsula is still a subject of some controversy.

Johnson's book addresses none of these issues, and contains only passing references to the Spanish colonies and their impact on the metropolis. This is a serious deficiency in a study claiming to elucidate the function of economic practices and emerging social relations in Cervantes's opus. After all, several Cervantine characters are *indianos* and Cervantes himself had extensive experience in Seville, a multicultural and market-driven society fueled by contact with the Indies. The section in Chapter One on Sancho's desire to sell his subjects into slavery should he become governor of an island affords Johnson the opportunity to develop an analysis of transatlantic economic structures but he chooses not to do so. In another section on the "Historia del cautivo," Johnson notes that one of the *cautivo's* brothers who is in the Indies is "the only true capitalist, or true representative of the new economic order" (82). But he

again fails to develop his own insight. Less a personal than a disciplinary failing, Johnson's inability to extend to the colonies his search for references to economic issues may be the result of the rigid separation between Spanish peninsular and Latin American studies that marked his generation's training. I would argue that any materialist reading of early modern Spanish culture will have to move in the direction of a broad global analysis if it is to be taken seriously. This analysis would include not only the Atlantic world but also the Spanish colonial and missionary projects in the Philippines and elsewhere in Asia.

At one point in the chapter on Sancho's salary demands, Johnson makes the following startling admission:

I think we also consider Sancho less interesting than Don Quixote simply because he is a poor peasant, and we would rather identify imaginatively with an aristocrat. (16)

The attempt to attribute these sentiments to a collective "we" of Golden Age scholars for whom Johnson claims to speak is presumptuous at best. Certainly many of us who have written on Cervantes have never shared this sentiment and in fact precisely because we did not relate to aristocratic privilege (either in Cervantes's time or our own) we have consciously produced research that seeks to understand the "poor peasant" with whom Johnson cannot identify. Johnson's revelation in this section is that Sancho "is affected by the same economic dynamics" as Don Quixote, a fact painfully obvious to anyone who has studied representations of subaltern and marginalized groups in imperial Spain.

Despite his broad knowledge of the extant criticism on Cervantes, Johnson

employs a selective memory that seeks to revise the history of Spanish studies in the U.S. in order to present his new work as innovative. By erasing an important group of scholars [de] "cuyos nombres no quiere acordarse," Johnson opens himself up to charges of a self-serving manipulation of disciplinary history if not outright intellectual dishonesty. For some inexplicable reason, he tells us, Golden Age scholars have not incorporated the insights of thinkers like Américo Castro, Fernand Braudel, and José Antonio Maravall. In a passage repeated word for word in two places in the book, Johnson claims:

For reasons that differ in each case, none of these seminal thinkers has defined or even particularly affected the course of mainstream Cervantes studies in the United States. This is a pity and disservice to scholarship. (3; 199)

But this patently false assertion crumbles when confronted with the important body of writings by U.S. Hispanists who not only employ the work of these men but in fact consider themselves to be working in the tradition of committed scholarship they initiated. Maravall, for example, who taught regularly in the Department of Spanish at the University of Minnesota, influenced an entire school of literary analysis that includes critics such as Anthony Zahareas, Nicholas Spadaccini, David Castillo, and Oscar Pereira. Other U.S. critics who developed historical and materialist approaches to Golden Age culture include John Beverley, whose 1980 study of Góngora broke new ground that few Golden Age specialists in the U.S. were willing to enter. In 1987, Beverley's *Del Lazarillo al Sandinismo* included the seminal essays

“Lazarillo y la acumulación primitiva,” “La economía política del *locus amoenus*,” and “¿Puede el hispanismo ser una práctica radical?” Walter Cohen proposed a sophisticated Marxist reading of Spanish public theater in his 1989 *Drama of a Nation*. In my 1991 book, *Contradictory Subjects: Quevedo, Cervantes, and Seventeenth-Century Spanish Culture*, I devoted an entire section to the work of Castro, Braudel, and Maravall. Yvonne Yarbro Bejarano’s *Feminism and the Honor Plays of Lope de Vega* (1993) proposed a materialist feminist model for rethinking the *comedia*. More recently, Malcolm Read, a British scholar working in the U.S., has developed an original synthesis of materialist and psychoanalytic methods.

Johnson’s omission of an entire critical tradition in his own area of study is not limited to the U.S. In terms of the Spanish materialist tradition, we find no mention of the multi-volume *Historia social de la literatura española* edited by Iris Zavala, Julio Rodríguez Puértolas, and Carlos Blanco Aguinaga in 1978. The important work of Juan Carlos Rodríguez of the University of Granada is also erased in Johnson’s account. Rodríguez is perhaps the one Spanish critic who has investigated most fruitfully early modern Spanish cultural production from a materialist perspective, from his *Teoría e historia de la producción ideológica* (1974) to his *Literatura del pobre* (1994) in which he explores “la infraestructura básica [del primer mercado capitalista] que es la relación entre amos y criados.” Since these scholars long ago advocated the kind of attention to economic relations that Johnson proposes, one can only wonder why they are the targets of his expulsion.

Johnson’s “Afterword: On the Urgency of Materialist Studies” is a curious coda to a career premised on the bracketing out of

politics from the critical enterprise. Expressing moral indignation at the excesses of late twentieth-century capitalism, he exclaims:

We have a situation that cries out for some kind of dialogue and negotiation between labor and ownership, in the interests of the economic well-being and personal dignity of the workers, and the ultimate self-interest of the owners. (196)

In one sense, this could have been written only by a “liberal” scholar a full decade after the end of the Cold War, for earlier expressions of solidarity with working-class and colonized people were met almost without exception by red-baiting and charges of “playing the race card” or “politicizing the aesthetic” on the part of Golden Age scholars in the United States. The collective effort by critics who controlled (and in some cases continue to control) faculty hiring and publishing venues to marginalize political and politicizing scholarship and prevent it from infiltrating their discipline had tangible effects on the careers of young scholars struggling to reinvigorate Golden Age studies by moving beyond traditional idealist methods. Johnson’s self-presentation, therefore, as being the first to express empathy for poor people and their issues is both self-aggrandizing and historically inaccurate. Although he is to be commended for his belated attention to “the economic” in Cervantes, the attentive reader will approach with suspicion his attempt to present this particular book as groundbreaking. In a collection titled *Conflicts of Discourse: Spanish Literature in the Golden Age* (1990) edited by Peter Evans, I wrote: “Perhaps it is now [...] that we can renew the project of a political Anglo-American criticism of early

modern Spain.” Apparently, Carroll Johnson finally agrees. With the hope that his distorted account of the genealogy of early modern Spanish studies does not mislead future historians, we welcome him to the ranks of a materialist and politically engaged criticism.

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Response to George Mariscal

This public exchange continues one we had in private following the publication of *Cervantes and His Postmodern Constitutions* (Garland, 1999), which I co-edited with Anne Cruz. In my introduction I took Mariscal to task for what seemed to me to be a probably unconscious subordination of Cervantes’s cultural politics to Mariscal’s own. He responded in a spirited email, to which I in turn responded in what I hoped was a thoughtful clarification of how I had come to interpret his writing as I had. For reasons that escape me now, both of us declined Anne Cruz’s invitation to air our differences in print, and George responded with silence to my invitation to a public discussion at our annual Southern California Cervantes symposium. For this reason I am especially grateful for this opportunity to engage in a public dialogue.

Mariscal begins by crediting me, overgenerously, with “an encyclopedic knowledge of Cervantes’s works and an equally impressive mastery of the secondary bibliography of the last thirty years.” I only wish I deserved that accolade; in fact my knowledge is fragmentary, like everybody else’s. I haven’t read everything, and what I have

read has been refracted, as all readings are, by the prism of my own psychological and ideological blinders. If, however, my knowledge is in fact encyclopedic, then it follows that any omission from my text must be willful. It is in this context that Mariscal evokes what he calls “carefully chosen lacunae” which leave me open to “charges of a self-serving manipulation of disciplinary history if not outright intellectual dishonesty.” This is a brilliant rhetorical move, for, if I defend myself on the grounds of ignorance (as I more or less just have), intellectual dishonesty becomes professional incompetence. Talk about a rock and a hard place. I’ll try to respond, from this uncomfortable locale, to the more serious of Mariscal’s criticisms.

I have no theory. I am not conversant with recent theoretical debates. To say that I have not followed the vicissitudes of Marxist theorizing (as summarized, for example, in Julio Rodríguez Puértolas’ prologue to the *Historia social de la literatura española (en lengua castellana)*), would be an understatement. Nor have I followed the evolution of the New Historicism and its more politically-engaged British cousin, cultural materialism. Jean-Joseph Goux was brought to my attention by a colleague, as was the un-theoretical David Vassberg. I do not pretend to anything beyond what I described on another occasion as an “entry-level” Marxist (a term I prefer to “caricature”), which I have attempted elsewhere to join to an equally entry-level psychoanalysis. Mariscal is therefore correct to conclude that my book is “not held together by any rigorous theoretical frame.”

My book is “not particularly innovative at the level of method.” I would argue for a modicum of innovation in the sense that it is not customary, for example, to lo-

cate the tortured interpersonal relation of Don Quijote and Sancho throughout Part II within an economic debate between feudalism and some kind of a money economy.

I fail to mention America, without which any transition from feudalism to capitalism is impossible, and I am ignorant of the work of J.M. Blaut, among others. This is not entirely accurate, but since I don't cite Blaut, how was Mariscal to know. The "America is essential" thesis is advanced by Blaut in *1492. The Debate on Colonialism, Eurocentrism and History*, where it is immediately subjected to critical review, supported and challenged by other thinkers brought together for that purpose by Blaut himself. Apparently I'm not alone in remaining not entirely convinced by the thesis. I believe I read somewhere that the requisite primitive accumulation of capital had already occurred, or was occurring in Germany thanks to the extraction and exploitation of precious metals there. Martin Luther's father was involved in it. With respect to Spain, I cite Pierre Vilar, who

defined the American treasure as the accumulation that made capitalism possible in northern Europe but which passed unproductively through Spain. (63)

In addition, besides the reference to the anonymous third Pérez de Viedma brother in Peru (82), pointed out by Mariscal only to chastise me for failing to make it the centerpiece of my analysis, the chapter on *La Gitanilla* rehearses the unproductive movement of precious metal from America through Spain to Augsburg and later to Genoa. That said, I could have moved the book off in a different direction by making America and economic relations with America more important. As Mariscal sug-

gests, I could indeed have pondered *indianos* like Felipe Carrizales who set up shop in what I describe in Chapter 2 as "the commercial capital of the Spanish empire" (38). I could have repeated or at least cited Mariscal's own excellent observations on the presence of America and the economics of colonialism in the *Persiles*. Mariscal is correct to point out that: "any materialist reading of early modern Spanish culture will have to move in the direction of a broad global analysis if it is to be taken seriously," and he is also correct to attribute my relative peninsularity to the "rigid separation between peninsular and American studies that marked his generation's training." Yes, indeed. I did my undergraduate work in a department that prided itself on having been the first to elevate the study of Spanish-American literature to the status of an academic discipline and to have established an absolute parity between Iberian and American studies. When I was a graduate student, in another, less forward-looking department, there simply was no program in American studies. What is ironic, and what Mariscal had no way of knowing, is that I recently partnered with Efraín Kristal to redesign our departmental undergraduate major with a view to eliminating the rigid separation I too have come to see as a profound disservice to understanding, the result of an all-too-human turf war. For the past few years I have been attempting to acquire the knowledge that would enable me to do exactly what Mariscal would require of me.

I make the "patently false assertion" that "for some inexplicable reason," "Golden Age scholars have not incorporated the insights of Américo Castro, Fernand Braudel and José Antonio Maravall." Actually, what I said was that "for reasons that differ in each

case,” neither Castro, Braudel nor Maravall “has defined or even particularly affected the course of mainstream Cervantes studies in the United States.” Curiously, Mariscal quotes my words, then attributes to me others of his own devising. Mariscal’s ventriloquism does indeed constitute a “patently false assertion,” but my words don’t.

I fail to mention the “important body of writings by U.S. Hispanists who [...] consider themselves to be working in the tradition of committed scholarship they initiated.”

Actually, what I said was that

historical materialism is not a well-trod path of literary inquiry in the Anglo-American tradition in general, although notable exceptions come readily to mind. It is still less traveled by Golden Age studies in the United States, although, again, there are exceptions. (198)

I had in mind, and I presumed my reader would also, scholars such as Tony Zaharias and Nick Spadaccini and the Minnesota *I&L* group, John Beverley, whom I first met precisely at Minnesota in the 1970s, and the others Mariscal enumerates, including Mariscal himself. I mistakenly assumed my readers would supply the names; in retrospect I see I should have supplied them myself. These colleagues are by no means “targets of expulsion.” I never meant to imply that I am the first to embrace material studies, nor am I “the first to express empathy for poor people” (cheap shot, George).

The point I hoped to make was simply that the mainstream of Cervantes scholarship in this country remains relatively immune to the insights of Castro, Braudel

and Maravall. I forget which AIH it was where I heard Bruce Wardropper define U.S. Cervantes studies as dominated by “tres líderes”: Juan Bautista Avalu-Arce, Ruth El Saffar, and Alban Forcione. That’s the mainstream. In fact, my book was conceived originally as an alternative to Forcione’s *Cervantes and the Humanist Vision*, where *Humanist* would be replaced by *Materialist*. The press (not Anne Cruz) thought otherwise, and my intertextual allusion was replaced by the (hopefully) more commercially viable *Material World*.

I want to come back to the trio of Castro, Braudel and Maravall, and supply a little history. I was educated mainly by students and followers of Américo Castro: Steve Gilman, Sam Armistead and Dick Andrews, who studied with Castro at Princeton; José Rubia Barcia, whom Castro brought there after the Spanish Civil War; Francisco Márquez Villanueva, who taught me at Harvard and has continued to teach me ever since; and my first teacher, Joe Silverman, who might be described, *mutatis mutandis*, as “más papista que el papa.” I also had the opportunity on two occasions to study with Don Américo himself and to experience his powerful personality firsthand. This means that I learned first that the study of literature is inseparable from the study of its relevant historical and cultural context, and second, I learned that in Spain, that sociocultural context is a very particular one.

To be a follower of Américo Castro is *ipso facto* to be marginalized. Castro’s ideas were never fashionable, and although he has made something of a comeback among Spanish intellectuals like Juan Goytisolo (who incidentally still finds it preferable to live outside of Spain), he continues to be the object of a more or less benign neglect

over here. Nevertheless, the older I get and the more I read, the more convinced I become that he was basically right, that what distinguishes Spanish civilization from what was going on elsewhere in early modern Europe is precisely that organization of society along ethnic lines with resultant social tensions.

What I did not absorb, doubtless because Don Américo himself didn't want to hear about it, was the notion that there might be other social determinants of literary production, and they might be the same ones that were present elsewhere in early modern Europe. It wasn't until I came into contact with French Hispanism grounded in Braudel and the *Annales* school, especially the works of Michel Cavillac and Augustin Redondo, that I began to take seriously the idea that the vertical division of society into *hidalgos* and *pecheros*, and the material division into rich and poor, haves and have-nots, might also exercise some influence on the ways in which individuals might perceive their particular place in it, and write about human relationships enmeshed in a larger structure of economic relationships. This larger structure opposes an official feudalism to a stunted and struggling form of capitalist enterprise, well studied by Braudel and Valentín Vázquez de Prada among others. For me to entertain, and finally come to accept these ideas entailed an oedipal conflict the magnitude of whose proportions only becomes clear in retrospect. Mariscal himself has written on the antagonism Castro expressed toward Braudel and his project (*Contradictory Subjects* 13-14). For-

tunately for me, it was easy to observe an analogy between this feudalism-capitalism conflict in the economic sphere and the ethnic division into Old and New Christians, and it is no coincidence that the great majority of the Spanish *hombres de negocios* were New Christians.

At about the same time I was introduced (by Jim Iffland, another materialist critic, but one Mariscal forgot to mention) to the work of Pierre Machery, who offers what I think is still the most cogent analysis of how the economic infrastructure of a given society is refracted into the literature that society produces and consumes. This in turn led me to frequent the work of José Antonio Maravall, whom Don Américo considered, if not the devil himself, then one of his closest associates. Maravall provides massive documentation of the relationship between literary text and socio-historical context, with special attention to the role of economics and technology. For me he provided a new chapter in the ongoing oedipal saga, with special attention to the role of Spaniards who stayed and of *emigrados*.

This is the infrahistory, at least my version, of what Mariscal perceives as "a career premised on the bracketing out of politics from the critical enterprise." There was no premise. What there has been is psychology and ideology. It has taken me a long time to become aware of the brackets, let alone dismantle them.

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