

Rodrigo Cacho Casal. *La esfera del ingenio: Las silvas de Quevedo y la tradición europea*.

Estudios críticos de literatura y de lingüística. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2012. 264 pp. €17. ISBN: 978-84-9940-423-3.

This book is at once deeply satisfying and at the same time mildly frustrating. The satisfying part is that it explores four of Quevedo's thirty-six *silvas* in depth, with one chapter devoted to each. The frustrating part is that these four are not the only interesting poems in the group, and not the only ones deserving of such lavish attention. To some readers the selection may seem somewhat arbitrary, although this is in part explained by the book's genesis as a series of scholarly articles first published separately before they were gathered together into this volume. The quality of the scholarship is so high, however, that it leaves the reader wanting more. The only chapter that appears to break the one-chapter-per-*silva* paradigm is chapter 3, "La poesía entre las estrellas," which discusses both "Himno a las estrellas" and "Pharmaceutria o medicamentos enamorados." So in essence the book covers five *silvas* rather than four, and in this regard it follows in the tradition of María del Carmen Rocha de Sigler's book-length edition of *Cinco silvas* or even Angelo Poliziano's literary creation of four *silvae* as one important precursor to Quevedo, in addition to the Latin Silver Age poet Statius, who wrote thirty-two. The *silvas* as a genre are so dense, so complex, that they seem to invite both scholars and readers to sample them in small doses.

The title of the book is curious and demands some explanation. The "sphere" is to be taken quite literally and refers to a diagram reproduced in the text as an illustration titled "the sphere of the concept" (31). *Concept* here is a technical term referring to *conceptism*, a poetic and, more broadly, literary movement spearheaded by Quevedo himself. The first chapter of Cacho Casal's book, "Conceptismo y modernidad poética," explains this movement in depth, incorporating discussions also of other poems by Quevedo that do not pertain to the *silva* corpus. These are difficult ideas to grapple with; but while some readers may appreciate this expert assistance, specialists may find themselves impatient to reach the meat of the book's argument.

While this book may appear to fit the mold of traditional philology, in fact its level of theoretical sophistication is extremely high. Cacho Casal is up to date on

his theory, citing Deleuze and Foucault but also Agamben. My only quarrel with the book, theory-wise, would be that he rejects Neo-Baroque theoretical formulations in favor of some Freudian psychobabble about associative processes (56n68, 57). Pronouncements about how psychoanalysis can help us understand “the essence of conceptism” should be explored further, once they are mentioned, and not simply dropped.

Another positive feature of this book is its interdisciplinarity. Cacho Casal makes good use of art theory and Counter-Reformation manuals on painting, of which there were many, for example when he discusses the *silva* “Al pincel.” The book partakes in interesting ways of typically New Historicist moves, such as when the author identifies a reference to “aquella sin igual lozana Rosa” in this poem as an allusion to the legendary wife of the sultan Solimán I (105–07), or when he creatively recycles biographical material by setting Quevedo’s poem against the invention of artillery before the backdrop of the poet’s own inventory of weapons as recorded in his last will and testament (129–30). He also employs the methods of book history, such as incorporating Quevedo’s annotations to his exemplar of the geometrical-astronomical treatise *Sphaericorum libri tres* (1558) into a clever conclusion that ties back in with the book’s overall title and the introductory material on conceptism.

This review would be incomplete without some discussion of this book’s own historical moment. Critical interest in Quevedo’s *silvas* has been steadily building ever since Craig Kallendorf and I announced to the scholarly world in 2000 our discovery of Quevedo’s autograph annotations to Statius’s *Silvae* in a 1502 edition of that work, which he owned, preserved in the Princeton University Library. Now, a dozen years later, I have recently published an English translation of all thirty-six of Quevedo’s *silvas* in a bilingual edition (Universidad Nacional de San Marcos, 2011), which marks the first time this group of poems has ever been collected together as a distinct entity, even though that was always the poet’s own wish. I am delighted to see this scholarly movement begin to gather momentum and can only applaud Cacho Casal’s self-described “close reading” (15) of a handful of these poems. It is my fervent wish to see every single one of these beautiful poems receive such thorough critical treatment.

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