Cervantes, Raphael and the Classics

Although much has been written about the literary, cultural, and artistic influences in the work of Cervantes, very little has been said about his interest in the classics. Frederick de Armas argues convincingly in this book that throughout his literary career, Cervantes was in fact engaged in a conversation with the classical authors of Greece and Rome, especially through the interpretations of antiquity presented by the artist Raphael.

Rather than looking at Cervantes's texts in relation to other literary works, this book demonstrates how Cervantes's trip to Italy and his observation of Italian Renaissance art – particularly the works of Raphael at the Vatican – led him to create new images and structures in his works. By examining together a Spanish writer of the Golden Age and an Italian Renaissance painter, de Armas illuminates Cervantes's use of Raphael's frescoes, as well as the ways in which the Spanish writer came to understand and interpret these works of art.

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521152778

First published 1998
First paperback printing 2010

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

De Armas, Frederick Alfred.

Cervantes, Raphael and the classics / Frederick A. de Armas.
p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in Latin American and Iberian literature)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-59302-6 (hardcover)

1. Cervantes Saavadra. Miguel de. 1547–1616 – Knowledge – Civilization. Classical. 2. Civilization. Classical, in literature. 3. Raphael. 1483–1520 – Influence. I. Title, II. Series.
P95358.C5704 1998 97-30187
883′.3–DC21 CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-59302-1 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-15277-8 Paperback

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Preface

This book is about a journey to Rome, a journey Cervantes undertook for religion (and politics) when he was in the service of Cardinal Acquaviva. It was a sojourn that led him to consort with the philosophers and writers of antiquity as seen through the eyes of the Renaissance. When he left the city, he took with him the memories of a past he wished to resurrect. If this artistic, literary, religious and political pilgrimage led him to open the doors of perception to new ways of viewing, writing, and thinking, his future *stasis* as writer allowed him to bring together the different steps of the journey into a coherent yet kaleidoscopic artistic vision. Even memories of war would be infused with a memory of the classics. Reminiscing on the battle of Lepanto he would compare it to the glories of Salamis. On remembering Rome he would eventually perceive not only the classical and Renaissance city but also Troy and Numantia.

Ironically, it was the seat of Catholic power, the Vatican, that led him to glimpse the power of the pagan past. Through the archeological work done by Renaissance painters and displayed in order to praise the papacy, Cervantes came to visualize the possibilities inherent in the recuperation of the ancients. Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, a sixteenth-century text that molded the way Renaissance art was perceived then and is even seen today, describes one of the artists who brought Italian art to the summit of perfection thusly: "One can claim that artists like Raphael are not simply men but, if it be allowed to say so, mortal gods" (1971, 284). Vasari's praise of this artist clearly shows the syncretism of the Renaissance, where the gods of Greece and Rome could seemingly coexist with Christianity. The pious Raphael could as easily revel in the wisdom of the ancients (which he seeks to capture in *The School of Athens*) as represent the triumphant power of the papacy (as in *The Liberation of Saint Peter*). Admired by Renaissance popes, Raphael often portrayed the greatness of the church through the authority of the ancients. Christianity he saw as completing the vision of pagan Rome. In *The Fire in the Borgo*, for example, he includes Aeneas saving his father, Anchises, from the fires of Troy. But this fresco conveys the notion that the fires of destruction can be put

out. The pope making the sign of the cross in the background will bring about a miracle.

It was to Rome, "infected" with paganism (as Lutherans and even Erasmians would have it), that Cervantes journeyed some sixty years after the triumphs of Raphael. The syncretism of the Renaissance had given way to a more dogmatic and strict method of looking at things. For some Counter-Reformation thinkers, the Sistine Chapel was nothing more than "a bathroom full of nudes" (Hersey 1993, 25). But for a young poet who had undergone a humanist education and who had just come in contact with the masterpieces of Renaissance art and the archeological impetus to bring back that ancient culture, these works were precious gifts from the heavens. Raphael's frescoes taught Cervantes to envision the heavens as both pagan (*Parnassus*) and Christian. The Renaissance artist also taught him that such visions balanced wisdom with politics, beauty with power. Indeed, the four great *halls* by Raphael at the Vatican Palace have as their purpose the glorification of the power of the papacy. But Raphael made them much more than that. This contest between laudatory program and the artist's personal vision may have been translated into Cervantes's mixture of tones, from the acclamatory to the subversive. If Raphael saw Christianity as completing the classics, Cervantes would represent his religion as competing with the ancients in *La Numancia.*

It is puzzling that so little has been said about Cervantes and Renaissance art. Cervantes learned from it the way of the ancients and the politics of imitation. It is even stranger that his interest in the classics has received so little attention. Perhaps because *Don Quijote* consistently breaks with *auctoritas* and seems to turn to the romances of chivalry rather than to the classics as the object of imitation, studies on the relationship between Cervantes and the literature of Greece and Rome have been few and far between. This book, however, is not an odyssey through the treacherous seas of classical imitation in *Don Quijote.* Rather, it is a briefer (although not necessarily a safer) voyage, one that takes as a point of departure the critical belief that Cervantes's *La Numancia* is a work akin to classical tragedy. In this study, I would like to open up the discussion of Cervantes and the classics by focusing mostly (although not exclusively) on this play and by extending imitation to include not only ancient tragedy but also other classical genres – the epic, in particular. An understanding of the levels, methods, and politics of imitation should be of use to those who wish to expand this approach to *Don Quijote* and other works by Cervantes.

My first encounter with *La Numancia* and the classics goes back more than twenty years. In 1974, I published an essay on the relationship between classical tragedy and Cervantes's play. Focusing on Aeschylus's *The Persians*, I showed how the Greek tragedy had departed from the norm by representing the defeat of the Persians rather than the triumph of the Greeks. The enemy, embodied in the Persian ruler Xerxes, thus became the tragic hero. This led me to argue that it was possible to conceive of the tragic elements of *La Numancia* from the point of view of the Roman enemy rather than from the perspective of the "Spanish" city. In showing how an enemy is worthy of admiration and even sorrow, I knew I was going against the traditionally accepted imperialist and patriotic conceptions of the work. But shortly after writing this essay I came to realize that I had touched upon just one of the many levels of imitation in *La Numancia* and that I had not fully pursued how and why Cervantes utilized even this particular model.

Having turned in the 1980s to the relationship between myth and empire in Calderón's theater, I also began to conceive of new ways of thinking about Cervantes and the politics of imitation. These ideas remained just that until the appearance of two articles in 1987 and 1990: the first, by Paul Lewis-Smith, is a "sequel and riposte" to my 1974 piece, and the second, by Jane Tar, tries to chart a middle course between my conception of *La Numancia* and the one advanced by Lewis-Smith in the 1987 essay. These two publications led me to formulate my thoughts on Cervantes, empire, and the classics. A fortuitous letter from Barbara Simerka inviting me to contribute an article in which I would reconsider my thesis on *La Numancia* confirmed that it was time to embark upon a detailed study of Cervantes's canonical tragedy. A book length study would allow me to bring together the different thoughts and insights I had been gathering over the years on the politics of imitation in *La Numancia*. It would also be a way to open up the vast topic of the relationship of Cervantes's texts to Greek and Roman literature. If the phantom of *Don Quijote* haunts this book, it is here so that others will either exorcise it or bring it back to life – its numinous presence should encourage others to take a stand on classical imitation in Cervantes's novel.

In this study, I approach Cervantes's tragedy through a constellation of classical writers whom I believe he consciously and conscientiously imitated. Very much like the *Tempest*, where Shakespeare "situates his writing between two authorities, the poet Virgil and the monarch James I" (Hamilton 1990, ix), *La Numancia* situates itself between a constella-

tion of classical writers and a vision of imperial power. Classical views of cosmology, heroism, and empire serve to evaluate a present in which Spain wishes to carry the mantle of imperial authority. After an introductory chapter, I turn to Cervantes's Italian sojourn, when his interest in archeology, the classics, and politics was heightened through his careful observation and appreciation of a series of frescoes in the Vatican by Raphael (Chapters 2 and 3) and his disciple Giulio Romano (Chapter 4). Chapter 5 revisits my 1974 piece and attempts to answer questions that have been raised in the last twenty years concerning the link between Cervantes and Aeschylus. Even though in my early essay I did not take up the question of direct imitation, I now believe that Cervantes could well have had the Greek play in mind as a model. I then dedicate one chapter to each of other classical authors whose writings are inscribed in the play: Homer, Virgil, Lucan, and Cicero/Macrobius. Plato's numerology and Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Poetics* will serve to further comprehend the architecture of the play.

Sections of this book are derived from previously published material, but all have been revised, rethought and expanded: "Classical Tragedy and Cervantes' *La Numancia*," *Neophilologus* 58 (1974): 34–40; "Achilles and Odysseus: An Epic Contest in Cervantes' *La Numancia*," in *Cervantes. Estudios cervantinos en la víspera de su centenario*, ed. Kurt Reichenberger (Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 1994), vol. 2, pp. 357–70; "The Necromancy of Imitation: Lucan and Cervantes' *La Numancia*," in *El arte nuevo de estudiar comedias: Literary Theory and Spanish Age Drama*, ed. Barbara Simerka (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1996), pp. 246–58; and "Painting and Graffiti: (Sub)Versions of History in Golden Age Theater (Notes on Cervantes and Claramonte)," *Gestos* 11 (1996): 83–101. All citations in the Romance languages have been left in the original. However, references to the Greek and Roman classics are given in English translation. When citing *Don Quijote*, I always give the part and the chapter number in addition to the page for those using other editions. References to Homer, Ovid, Seneca, and Virgil include not only the page number of the actual edition used but also, after a slash, the standard book and line numbers.

I would like to thank *Gestos*, *Neophilologus*, Edition Reichenberger, and Bucknell University Press for permission to include material from these essays. I would also like to express my indebtedness to James Nicolopulos, since it was while reading the manuscript of his book *Prophecy, Empire and Imitation in the "Araucana" in the Light of the "Lusiadas"* that I came to

realize the importance of Lucan's necromancy for the study of how Cervantes subverted imperial and heroic concerns in *La Numancia*. Many *comediantes* and other colleagues have helped me to focus and rethink my arguments through discussions and letters. I would like to thank in particular Timothy Ambrose, Mary Barnard, William R. Blue, Anne J. Cruz, Robert Fiore, Edward H. Friedman, Eric Graf, Daniel L. Heiple, Robert Lima, Leon Lyday, Charles Oriel, James Parr, Mary Beth Rose, and Anthony Zahareas for their encouragement, support, and suggestions. I owe a debt of gratitude to James Mandrell and Christopher Weimer for their careful reading of the manuscript. I would also like to thank my graduate research assistants Marie Gillette and Ron Friis for all their valuable assistance. My thanks also to Mary Malcom Gaylord, to Carmen Peraita, and to Edward Dudley for sharing with me their latest work on Cervantes in manuscript. The research for this book has been made possible by a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Audrey Lumsden Kouvel Fellowship in Renaissance Studies at the Newberry Library, and a sabbatical leave from Pennsylvania State University.