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ANTHONY J. CASCARDI

Introduction

A colleague once remarked, half in jest, that prevailing impressions of Spanish culture in the English-speaking world are dominated by two images: Don Quixote and the Spanish Inquisition. The image of the Inquisition has been reinforced from many angles, not least among which is a Monty Python comedy routine wherein absurdly garbed Inquisitorial figures issue strings of mock-harsh injunctions but manage only to stumble over their own commands. The matter of Don Quixote is, to say the least, more challenging. It is the case of a wonderfully complex and beguiling text that has become reduced in the popular mind to the pencil-thin profile of its principal character, an errant knight of La Mancha seen tilting at windmills or towering precariously over his paunchy squire. As for Cervantes, we are faced with an author whose identity has become similarly reduced, either to this single text or, less frequently, to a sole physical mark – the hand that was maimed by gunfire in the battle of Lepanto. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, "The Man Maimed at Lepanto" ("El Manco de Lepanto"), author of Don Quixote. Whether in spite of or because of these reductive encapsulations, images of Don Quixote the character, Cervantes the author, and Don Quixote the text have spawned a range of successors that are nearly impossible to characterize, from Flaubert's "female Quixote," Madame Bovary, to the pop idealism of the 1965 Broadway musical, Man of La Mancha, and from the richly orchestrated tone-poem by Richard Strauss, Don Quixote, to the infinitely subtle variations of Borges' most famous text, now also massively consumed, "Pierre Menard, Author of the 'Quixote.'" Don Quixote is itself a text that has reached mass audiences, but it is unjustly treated when reduced to a few scenes from Part I – the tilting at windmills, the mistaking of an inn for a castle. Although Cervantes was, by his own description, the "stepfather" of Don Quixote (he attributes fatherhood to a fictional Arabic historian), he was substantially more than this. His great ambition in the early stages of his career was to be a successful poet and dramatist, and his considered view at the end of his life was that the long and intricate Byzantine

1



ANTHONY J. CASCARDI

novel that remained unpublished at the time of his death – the *Trials of Persiles and Sigismunda* (Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda) – was by far his most important work. Don Quixote was a succès de scandale, and Cervantes was justly gratified by its popularity, but his literary ambitions and career amount to considerably more than this. The overwhelming importance of Don Quixote has secured Cervantes an unquestioned place in the history of literature, but it presents challenges for readers who may know Cervantes from Don Quixote alone. Moreover, Don Quixote is itself an uncommonly difficult text, and readers may feel at a loss when faced with its extraordinary range of literary and historical references, its internal narrative complexities, and its disarming combination of earthy humor and philosophical depth.

The present volume is a "companion" to Cervantes. Without slighting Don Quixote in the least, it aims to provide an accompaniment to the broad range of Cervantes' work - in prose fiction, in drama, and in verse. The essays assembled here, all written with this purpose in mind, strive to situate his work historically, to place it within the wider context of early modern (Renaissance) literature, and to give an account of its importance for the subsequent development of the major literary genres. Among these, the novel has pride of place. Rather than look at Cervantes' works as literary creations situated in the distant past of a relatively unfamiliar culture, these essays show how scholars and critics in the present day have come to engage Cervantes's works. Historical interpretation is of course well represented among those modes of engagement, since it represents an unavoidable way of thinking about the relationships not just between a work and its originating context but between that context and our own. But in keeping with the "perspectivism" that has so often been identified as the hallmark of Cervantes' own writing in Don Quixote, and in opposition to any narrow historicism, the essays in this volume draw on the multiple perspectives of modern literary criticism as a way to approach a body of writing that is itself enormously diverse. If Cervantes' works invite complex critical perspectives – psychoanalytical, genre-based, gender-inflected, myth-critical, philosophical, political, and more – this is because the works themselves have important things to say about the core issues that these different approaches raise. The matter is not so much that of a revisionist reading of Cervantes' texts, as it is a discovery of the ways in which Cervantes anticipates, challenges, and in some cases outstrips the insights that contemporary literary criticism brings to them. Reading Cervantes can be a sobering experience, for in doing so one discovers that literary criticism is only now giving systematic formulation to many of the things that he knew intuitively to be true. Rather than striving quixotically to retrieve the past, we as readers of Cervantes are

2



Introduction

more often in the position of trying to catch up with an author whose thinking frequently runs far ahead of our own. A basic Cervantes chronology, a list of his works, recommendations for further reading, and indications of contemporary research tools provide the reader of this volume with a set of scholarly resources that complement the essays' interpretive work. Without presupposing any prior knowledge of Cervantes' writings or the ability to read them in Spanish, these essays provide critical direction for readers who might well have expertise in allied fields, but who may require some orientation to Cervantes' works.

But in introducing Cervantes it is difficult to resist the temptation to allow Cervantes to introduce himself, as he sometimes does in his writings. The temptation is all the greater because of the indirections involved of his selfpresentations, which allow us to glimpse their author not just in a primary, visual way but from oblique and ironic angles. These self-presentations typify his writing at its most cagy and complex. In the prologue to the Exemplary Novels (Novelas ejemplares, 1613), for instance, Cervantes muses that a wellknown artist, his friend Juan de Jáuregui, has painted a portrait of him that might well adorn the collected Novels, thereby saving its author the trouble of writing the prologue in question. This would be all the more welcome, Cervantes remarks, since he did not fare very well with the prologue to his earlier Don Quixote (Part I, 1605). But it seems that the publisher of the Novels did not in the end include the Jáuregui portrait. A prologue must be written after all, but it turns out to include a verbal description of the picture that might have appeared in its place. This bit of ecphrasis is as acute as the portrait is compellingly direct. The result is inimitably Cervantine:

He whom you here behold with aquiline visage, with chestnut hair, smooth and unruffled brow, with sparkling eyes, and a nose arched, although well proportioned, a silver beard, although not twenty years ago it was golden, large moustache, small mouth, teeth not important, for he has but six of them and those in ill condition and worse placed because they do not correspond the one with the other, the body between two extremes, neither large nor small, the complexion bright, rather white than brown, somewhat heavy-shouldered, and not very nimble on his feet; this, I say, is the portrait of the author of the Galatea and of Don Quixote of La Mancha, and of him who wrote the Voyage to Parnassus in imitation of César Caporal of Perugia, and other works which wander up and down, astray, and perchance without the name of the writer. He is commonly called Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. He was a soldier for many years, and for five and a half a captive, where he learned to be patient in adversity. He lost in the naval battle of Lepanto his left hand from a shot from a harquebus, - a wound which, although it appears ugly, he holds for lovely, because he received it on the most memorable and lofty occasion that



ANTHONY J. CASCARDI

past centuries have beheld, – nor do these to come hope to see the like, – when serving beneath the victorious banners of the son of the thunderbolt of war, Charles the Fifth, of happy memory.²

The image described in this 1613 text is that of a proud, old man, one to whom recognition arrived late in life. Cervantes began his literary career at an early age, but he only achieved fame when the first part of Don Quixote was published in 1605. Certain facts about his personal and professional life may help explain why success was so late in coming. Cervantes was born outside Madrid, in the town of Alcalá de Henares, in 1547. He was the fourth son of a surgeon, Rodrigo de Cervantes, and of Leonor de Cortinas. While the family may have had some claim to nobility they often found themselves in financial straits. Moreover, they were almost certainly of converso origin, that is, converts to Catholicism of Jewish ancestry. In the Spain of Cervantes' day this meant living under clouds of official suspicion and social mistrust, with far more limited opportunities than were enjoyed by members of the "Old Christian" caste. Indeed, the very year of Cervantes' birth coincides with the issuance of the first of a series of statutes concerning the racial relations among Christians, Moors, and Jews - the so-called statutes of "purity of blood" (estatutos de limpieza de sangre).3

While very little is known about Cervantes' earliest years, a more or less continuous trail of events can be picked up beginning in 1566 when his family moved to Madrid and Cervantes began to compose his first poems. In 1568 he attended classes given by the humanist teacher López de Hoyos at the Estudio de la Villa, an academy in Madrid financed by the city. Under the auspices of López de Hoyos, Cervantes wrote a sonnet and three miscellaneous poems that appeared in a 1569 volume on the occasion of the death of Queen Isabel of Valois.4 In that same year Cervantes moved to Rome, where he entered the service of Cardinal Giulio Acquaviva. The reasons for the move have never been ascertained, but there is speculation that he may have been fleeing prosecution for having assaulted a man by the name of Antonio de Sigura. Cervantes' works are filled with memories of Italy, and, as Frederick de Armas makes abundantly clear in his contribution to this volume, the influence of Italian culture, combined with Cervantes' humanist education, placed him at the height of contemporary literary and intellectual currents. Ever since the Spanish critic Américo Castro published El pensamiento de Cervantes (Cervantes' Thought) in 1925, the idea that Cervantes was a kind of "lay genius" has given way to the image of a writer who knew the art and literature of the Italian Renaissance, as well as many of its classical antecedents, first-hand.



Introduction

The following year, 1570, finds Cervantes in Naples, and in 1571 he and his brother Rodrigo joined the company of Diego de Urbina, a division of the regiment under the command of Don Miguel de Moncada. It was in this capacity that Cervantes fought aboard the galleon Marquesa in the battle of Lepanto where the Turkish forces were routed by the combined Papal, Venetian, and Spanish fleet (October 7, 1571). It was here that he lost the use of his left hand, "for the greater glory of the right." (As for his right hand, he says in the "Prologue" to the Exemplary Novels that he would sacrifice it too if the stories should offend against virtuous ideals.⁵) Looking back on the occasion of Lepanto from the vantage point of the 1613 Prologue to the Exemplary Novels, Cervantes describes it with overbrimming pride as "the most memorable and lofty occasion that past centuries have beheld, or that future centuries may hope to see" ("la más alta ocasión que vieron los siglos pasados, los presentes, ni esperan ver los venideros"). 6 These terms of praise were repeated nearly verbatim in the Prologue to Don Quixote, Part II. By way of indirect response to Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, the author of a spurious sequel to Don Quixote, Part 1, Cervantes remarks that

it hurts, of course, that he [Avellaneda] calls me "old," and "one-handed," as if I could have stopped Time and kept it from affecting me, or I'd lost my hand in some tavern brawl, rather than the noblest battle ever seen by any past ages, or this age, or any age still to come. My wounds may not glow when you look at them, but they're worthy enough, at least, to those who know where I got them; the soldier looks a lot better killed in action than alive because he ran away – and this means so much to me that, if anyone were right this minute to suggest and even make possible that which is impossible, I'd rather have been at that wonderful battle than, here and now, be cured of my wounds but never before have been there. The marks you can find on a soldier's face, and on his body, are stars, guiding other men to that Heaven which is Honor, and to a longing for well-deserved praise.⁷

The pride remains untarnished, even after thirty-four years.

After recovering from his injury Cervantes returned to military service (1572), this time in the company of Manuel Ponce de León, regiment of Don Lope de Figueroa. In 1575 he began his return to Spain with his brother, but the ship aboard which they were traveling, the *Sol*, was boarded en route by a band of Turkish pirates led by Arnaute Mamí. Cervantes was taken to Algiers, where he spent five years in captivity. The experience of captivity filters into several of his works, including the Captain's story in *Don Quixote*, Part I. It was the time when Cervantes learned what he describes as the ability to have "patience in adversity." Following several unsuccessful escape



ANTHONY J. CASCARDI

attempts, Cervantes' freedom was won on September 19, 1580, when he was ransomed by Trinitarian friars, principal among them Juan Gil. Cervantes returned to Spain on October 24, 1580.

The 1580s mark the beginning of Cervantes' serious literary production, as well as the point where the details of his personal biography cede to his increasingly important literary career. His first novel, a pastoral work entitled Galatea, was published in 1585. Two early plays, The Siege of Numantia (El cerco de Numancia) and The Ways of Algiers (Los tratos de *Argel*) also date from this period (1583–85). Neither of these plays shows the influence of Cervantes' chief dramatic rival, the creator of the Spanish "new comedy" (comedia nueva), Lope de Vega; Cervantes' are four-act works in the tragic vein, whereas Lope's works were comedies written in three acts. In part because Lope achieved such extraordinary popular success with the invention of the "new comedy" Cervantes did not flourish as a dramatist and suffered financially as a result. Possibly for this reason he accepted a commission as Commissary of the Royal Galleons in Seville (1587), where he was charged with securing wheat and oil for what was to be the ill-fated "Invincible" Armada, then preparing for battle against England. In 1590 his application to the Council of Indies to fill a vacancy in the New World was denied, possibly because of his family's converso status. He subsequently took work as a tax collector and was jailed for irregularities in his accounts. His suggestion in the Prologue to Don Quixote, Part I, that the book was engendered in prison, bears at least this degree of plausibility.

These years of misfortune no doubt contributed to an ideological shift that in turn opened new avenues in Cervantes' mature literary works. Though one can identify moments of nationalistic pride as late as the 1613 Prologue to the Exemplary Novels there is no doubt that his works reflect a growing disillusionment with Spain, the colonial-imperial project, and the domestic politics of an absolutist regime bent on achieving the greatest degree of racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic homogeneity possible. Beginning in this period Cervantes' poetry begins to take notably parodic turns, anticipating the mockheroic attitude which turned out to be his strongest literary suit. For example, a burlesque sonnet written to the catafalque of Philip II in 1598 stages a Spanish soldier gasping in awe at the monument, and in doing so turns praise on its head: "i Voto a Dios que me espanta esta grandeza!" (By God, all this grandeur frightens me!). Don Quixote, several of the Exemplary Novels, and all of the comic interludes or farces (entremeses) involve some degree of parody or exaggeration, but the most interesting of these take as their target the historical fictions that were being promulgated in the popular theatre. Among the farces is a piece entitled *The Wonder Show* (*El retablo de las maravillas*) in which the widely held Spanish social ideal of "purity of blood" is exposed



Introduction

as a grandiose social illusion. (Cervantes' farces were published in 1615 along with a group of his later plays [comedias] in a collection entitled Eight Plays and Eight Interludes, New and Never Performed [Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses nuevos, nunca representados].) But certain core elements of the Quixote engage the process by which dramatists like Lope de Vega had appropriated the popular ballads in order to fashion glossy, heroic images of the Spanish past and to idealize the national character. Indeed, the Spanish philologist Ramón Menéndez-Pidal speculated in 1940 that the initial episodes of the Quixote may in fact have been inspired by an anonymous farce that was directed against the popular ballads, the so-called Farce of the Ballads (Entremés de los romances).9 After all, in the early chapters of the novel Don Quixote is as likely to cite the ballads as he is the romances of chivalry.

But it would be wrong to think that the shift in Cervantes' attitude from a youthful idealism inspired by Renaissance Humanism to the kinds of critique that works best by parody was coupled with insurmountable pessimism or despair. Humanism encompassed diverse cultural tendencies sympathetic to new kinds of learning, the values of human judgment, and the products of the creative and critical intellect, and some of the central texts of the movement, such as Erasmus' Praise of Folly no doubt had a profound influence on Cervantes early in his career. 10 But Cervantes' mature works continue to show strains of genuine good will within their critical vision. Whether the topic is the absurdities of a foolish gentleman who imagines himself to be a knight errant, or of a man who thinks he is made of glass ("The Glass Graduate" ["El licenciado Vidriera"]), or of two dogs whose conversation is overheard by someone just recovering from syphilis ("The Colloquy of the Dogs" ["El Coloquio de los perros"]), there is a lightness in Cervantes' comic works that undercuts the potentially devastating effects of his otherwise critical stance. The perspectivism for which he is justly famous represents a further development of the great patience with which he learned to face adversity while a captive in Algiers. It affords the possibility of a critical stance that allows Cervantes to blunt the force of authoritarian views, but it produces a hopeful irony that keeps cynicism at bay by refusing to take itself too seriously. The importance of Cervantine humor becomes all the more apparent when one contrasts the first part of Don Quixote with the spurious continuation of Part I published by Avellaneda in 1614. Avellaneda's Quixote is relatively flat and one-dimensional, and Cervantes was among the first to label it as such. II Cervantes seems to have learned of Avellaneda's Quixote after he was well into the writing of Part II (his first mention of Avellaneda's book is in chapter 52 of Don Quixote, Part II), and in the 1615 Prologue Cervantes does not miss the opportunity to address his tactless rival in a manner that manages to be just barely oblique:



ANTHONY J. CASCARDI

Oh Lord, distinguished (or even plebeian) reader, how you must be eagerly awaiting this prologue, expecting to watch me take revenge on, laugh at, and spit in the face of whoever wrote the second *Don Quixote*, the one they say was conceived in Tordesillas and born in Tarragona! But the fact is, I'm not planning to give you any such satisfaction: it's true, insults may make even the humblest hearts thirst for vengeance, but the rule will have to let me be an exception. You want me to call him an ass, tell him he's a liar, an imprudent, but the idea has never so much as occurred to me: his own sin can punish him, he can eat it with his bread, and that's that.¹²

Debates about the differences between the two parts of *Don Quixote* have long transcended efforts to characterize the one as "Renaissance" and the other as "Baroque," or to chart Cervantes' diminishing optimism as the years advance. There are major differences between the two parts of the *Quixote*, indeed, but foremost among them is the fact that there are characters in Part II who have read Part I. These characters are able to "rig" the world, sometimes mechanistically, so that it appears to coincide with, and to defeat, Don Quixote's expectations. As we enter Part II, we move from the quixotic mishaps of Part I to a world of planned pranks, some of them so cruel as to drive Vladimir Nabokov to declare them downright offensive. ¹³ Nabokov's view may seem extreme, and may fail to account for the fact that violence in Cervantes' day may have been tolerated at different levels than in our own. Still, Nabokov's reaction to the *Quixote*'s violence is notable:

there is something about the ethics of our book that casts a livid laboratory light on the proud flesh of some of its purpler passages. We are going to speak of cruelty. The author seems to plan it thus: Come with me, ungentle reader, who enjoys seeing a live dog inflated and kicked around like a soccer football, who likes, of a Sunday morning, on his way to or from church, to poke his stick or direct his spittle at a poor rogue in the stocks; come, ungentle reader, with me and consider into what ingenious and cruel hands I shall place my ridiculously vulnerable hero. And I hope you will be amused at what I have to offer. ¹⁴

But it would be mistaken to think that Cervantes' "mature" writing consists of works all resembling the *Quixote*, however gentle or violent one may in the end assess its humor to be. Indeed, one of the great puzzles of Cervantes scholarship is the fact that Cervantes must have been busy at work composing an elaborate, Byzantine romance, the *Trials of Persiles and Sigismunda: A Northern Story* (Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda: Historia septentrional), written in imitation of Heliodorus' Ethiopian History, just as he was finishing Don Quixote, Part II. The Persiles seems to run counter to Don Quixote in many important respects: in its treatment



Introduction

of character development, in its narratological structure, and in its moral vision. 15 The *Persiles* is a romance, albeit one that Cervantes worked to purge of the "defects" he thought common in other romances – a lack of verisimilitude, an illegitimate use of marvelous elements, a disregard for the classical unities, etc. - by adherence to a mix of neo-Aristotelian and Horatian literary principles. 16 The issue of Cervantes' simultaneous engagement with and critique of romance is important to bear in mind because it also affects the Exemplary Novels (1613), which were published in between the two parts of the Quixote. There are numerous works in the Exemplary Novels that have a certain affinity with the more "novelistic" aspects of Don Quixote, whereas others are far more Persiles-like in their allegiance to the project of literary romance.¹⁷ Cervantes seems always to have stood in a contradictory relationship to the genre of romance, either in the form of the critical parody we see in Don Quixote or, in the case of the Persiles and the romance-like Novels, in the form of an attempt at some kind of "purification" of the romance. When Cervantes reached the very end of his life (1616), the Persiles remained unpublished. (It would appear posthumously the following year.) The work he thought of as his greatest achievement has only recently begun to attract the level of critical attention it merits. 18 But this is through no fault of Cervantes. The fact of the matter is that academic literary criticism has followed "high" literary history, which has gone the way of Don Quixote. It has consistently stressed the role of the Quixote in the formation of the novel as a genre and has expanded its own critical idiom in order to embrace the philosophical insights that one finds in the writings of Miguel de Unamuno, Georg Lukács, and José Ortega y Gasset. 19 But one would be remiss not to see the genre of romance as having survived at least as well as the novel, if in a different register. Romance is the form of every film of the Indiana Jones sort, and every hero of romance revived in a later age represents an exercise in quixotism. And as many theorists have pointed out, the novel as we know it would be impossible to conceive outside of its tense and contradictory relationship with romance.20

NOTES

I I owe this reference to Mary Gossy (Rutgers University), Modern Language Association annual meeting, December, 2000. The Monty Python skit is available on line at http://www.ai.mit.edu/people/paulfitz/spanish/script.html. The Inquisition has of course been the subject of much serious recent study. See, for example, Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997). See also Américo Castro, "Cervantes y la Inquisición," in *Hacia cervantes*, 3rd edn. (Madrid: Taurus, 1967), pp. 213–21.



ANTHONY J. CASCARDI

- 2 The Complete Works of Cervantes, trans. N. MacColl, ed. James Fitzmaurice Kelly, (Cowans Gray: Glasgow, 1902), vol. III, p. 5.
- 3 See Albert Sicroff, Les Controverses des Statuts de "pureté de sang" en Espagne du XVe au XVIe siècle (Paris: Didier, 1960).
- 4 Cervantes' very first work was a poem published in the previous year to celebrate the birth of Princess Catalina, the second daughter of Philip II and Isabel of Valois.
- 5 "Si por algún modo alcanzara que la lección destas *Novelas* pudiera inducir a quien las leyera a algún mal deseo o pensamiento, antes me cortara la mano con que las escribí, que sacarlas en público."
- 6 I follow the MacColl translation, ed. Fitzmaurice Kelly, p. 5.
- 7 Don Quijote, trans. Burton Raffel (New York: Norton, 1999), p. 360.
- 8 Cervantes, Prologue to the Exemplary Novels. Essential contemporary information can be obtained from Diego de Haedo, Topographía e historia general de Argel (Topography and General History of Algiers) (1612).
- 9 See Ramón Menéndez-Pidal, "The Genesis of 'Don Quijote,'" in M. J. Bernardete and Angel Flores, eds., *Cervantes Across the Centuries* (New York: Dryden Press, 1948).
- 10 See Walter Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).
- 11 See Stephen Gilman, Cervantes y Avellaneda, Estudio de una imitación (Guanajuato: El Colegio de México, 1951).
- 12 Don Quijote, trans. Raffel, p. 360.
- 13 Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Don Quixote* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983).
- 14 Ibid., pp. 51-52.
- 15 See Américo Castro, "La Ejemplaridad de las 'Novelas Ejemplares,'" in *Hacia Cervantes*, pp. 451–74.
- 16 See Alban Forcione, Cervantes, Aristotle, and the "Persiles" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); E. C. Riley, Cervantes's Theory of the Novel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); and Stephen Gilman, "Los Inquisidores Literarios de Cervantes," Actas del tercer Congreso Internacional de Hispanistas (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1970), pp. 3–25.
- 17 See Ruth El Saffar, Novel to Romance: A Study of Cervantes' Novelas ejemplares (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).
- 18 Notable exceptions are Forcione, Cervantes, Aristotle, and the "Persiles", and Diana de Armas Wilson, Allegories of Love: Cervantes's "Persiles and Sigismunda" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
- 19 José Ortega y Gasset, Meditations on Quijote, trans. Evelyn Rugg and Diego Marín (New York: Norton, 1961); Miguel de Unamuno, Our Lord Don Quixote: The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho with Related Essays, trans. Anthony Kerrigan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Georg Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971); Anthony J. Cascardi, The Bounds of Reason: Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Flaubert (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Félix Martínez-Bonati, Don Quixote and the Poetics of the Novel, trans. Dian Fox in collaboration with the author (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).
- 20 See Michael McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 1600–1740 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).