Theatralía

El teatro de Miguel de Cervantes ante el IV Centenaria

Jesús G. Maestro (ed.)

Mirabel Editorial - 2003
Theatralia

5

Revista de Poética del Teatro

V

Congreso Internacional de Poética del Teatro
codirigido y coorganizado
por

Maria Grazia Profeti
Università degli Studi di Firenze

Florecia, 17-19 de diciembre de 2003

Mirabel Editorial, S.L.
&

Vanderbilt University
Department of Spanish and Portuguese
2003
CERVANTES’ COSMOPOLITAN EL GALLARDO ESPAÑOL
DURING AN EARLIER CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

Minni SAWHNEY
University of Delhi

Interpreting Don Fernando’s behaviour in El gallardo español has always seemed challenging. How is it that a ranked soldier in the face of strict instructions from his bosses could leave his post to satisfy the whim and curiosity of an obscure Muslim princess? Indeed the strangeness of the story of Don Fernando, his defections and quixotic statements almost tempt one to agree with Michael Gerli that “El gallardo deconstructs its own claim to historical verisimilitude”1.

Within the play protagonists like Guzman too seem to hint at the fiction laden nature of their experiences as when Guzmán says at the end that the main aim of the story has been to “mezclar verdades con fabulosos intentos”2. However following the path opened by Canevaggio that the work cannot be taken as one of pure fantasy but is a mix of fictive elements and history, I would like to attempt an historical grounding of this play and analyze the characteristics of Don Fernando that have already been teased out through a different prism, one that will see forces at work between the two cultures that Don Fernando’s seemingly bizarre actions throw light on. His behavior is a poser that critics have resolved in different ways. Calsalduero, unfazed by the obvious desertion of Don Fernando still refers to him as the quintessential Spanish hero who even in his desertion upholds Spanish glory and national pride3.

Differing strongly from Casalsdruero, Gethin Hughes finds Don Fernando selfish and petulant and ascribes his behaviour to a case of misplaced honour and a kind of madness. But surely we are placing ourselves squarely on the side of the Spanish army if we consider his behaviour an aberration. Friedman's comment that Don Fernando’s adventure is an expression of his need to express his individuality limns a path for my analysis. Though a soldier whose first duty is to king and country his wilful disobedience is understandable as he sees himself as an individual first and wishes to exhibit his military and professional prowess not only for the benefit of people of his own culture but others as well.

In a scenario where Spain had been intermittently fighting a half-hearted war for two centuries in North Africa the real fighting was done by soldiers from the presidios from where Don Fernando proceeds. The presidios, from Fernand Braudel’s account, were isolated outposts filled with badly paid soldiers and rampant with defections. Spain’s official policy towards North Africa has been described by Braudel as “occupation restreinte”, a kind of “empire light”, dependant on the flagging interest of the monarch Phillip II. The African adventure had as its initial justification the ridding of the African coasts of pirates, but the continued loss of life soon weakened Spanish resolve and then European affairs started claiming the monarch’s attention. If this context underpinned Fernando’s adventure we can appreciate the cavalier way in which he treats military discipline. In fact at the end of the Second Jornada when he is talking to Doña Margarita in the Muslim camp about the man she is in search of, the possible motives of a soldier who wants to leave the Christian side are revealed. As he says: “¿Qué va a la vida le enflada / soldadescas y desgarrada / y como el vicio le doma / viene tras la de Mahoma, / que es más ancha y regalada?”. The monotony of life in the presidios is one reason and when Don Fernando has to fabricate viable and credible reasons to Arlaza for leaving the presidio he also refers to the bad service conditions.

7 Miguel de Cervantes, op. cit., p. 212.

Soy un soldado
que me he venido a entregar
a vuestra prisión de grado,
por no poder tolerar
ser valiente y mal pagado.

Though in the play Don Fernando is unique in his disobedience, there was, according to Braudel, a general disconnect between the official line and the willingness to follow it, the soldiers often developed ambivalent attitudes against the people they were supposed to be fighting against. “Prisoners between the sea and the indigenous peoples”, as Braudel refers to them, and forgotten by Spain for long stretches of time these defenders of the country’s honor must have felt a dislocation and distance from imperial ambitions hence their availability for adventures outside the pale. Canavaggio remarks on the symbolic value of the play because through the skirmishes that occasionally flared up we get a picture of the nuanced rapport between the two civilizations. These altercations forced contact between the two sides and essence came into contact with existence, as Canavaggio puts it giving rise to a new space full of unforeseen possibilities.

By dwelling on the different ways in which the protagonists communicate with each other: their improvisations and continuous moving away from given national character essences, in Casalsdruero, a review of Don Fernando’s character becomes possible. His various contradictory impulses are comprehensible in a cosmopolitan like paradigm in which individualistic behaviour as opposed to the confrontations between empires or states is brought to the fore. If we compare Fernando’s behavior to other protagonists we notice how these characteristics, the desire to transcend the constraints of empire exist in some measure or are absent in them too. By drawing comparisons with other protagonists, Fernando’s attitude towards the Other becomes more clearly delineated.

8 Ibid., p. 195.
9 Fernand Braudel, op. cit., p. 56.
11 Ibid., p. 421.
Don Alonso for example is circumspect but always respectful towards the other side. When he hears of Alimuzel’s strange request he first advises Don Fernando against taking up any such challenge and then sends Guzmán, a more lowly soldier, with an answer. When Alimuzel first arrives in Oran he explains that it is not religion or civilizational imperatives that brought him there but the overweening curiosity of one woman and Alimuzel’s own devotion to her. Guzmán in what he thinks is a befitting manner in which to talk about the enemy is full of bluster when he replies: "...si me dan licencia que yo le dé al morico ganápmel tal rato que quede frío de amor con el desafío," Don Alonso reproves him saying, "Respondele cortesemente con el término prudente." Don Alonso’s tone unlike Guzman’s bespeaks a recognition of Ali’s role as an emissary, there has to be a degree of solidarity for another military soldier because in a way they are not binarily opposed but constitutive. Similarly, in the Muslim camp, Arlaxa chides Alimuzel (¿Qué platica impertinente!) when he talks about Don Fernando in a similar vein during a three way discussion with Don Fernando present.

Alimuzel’s comment (a don Fernando el valiente vencerá el flaco Muzel) is made given his amorous predicament: he wants to impress on Arlaxa the onerous nature of his task. But if we compare his statements to those of the goading Nacor and duplicitous Buitrago we see how in a given situation there are those who internalize the official discourse and situation of war and for those whom it seems an unwelcome prospect and are loathe to play along with it. This putative cosmopolitanism, reaching out to the Other, characteristic of Arlaxa and Don Fernando, Alimuzel and Don Alonso is undoubtedly an individual phenomenon because minor characters like Buitrago prefer to imitate the brusque style of their superiors when they deal with Muslims. When Buitrago in the Segunda Jornada begs from Doña Margarita and Vozmediano, the latter winces at his aggressive style “Esta es manera de hacer sacar la esclava y no el dinero”, leaving Don Martin to explain Buitrago’s boorishness “No es enfadéis galán, que de este modo / se piden la limosa en esta tierra; / todo es aquí bravure; / es aquí todo / rigor y duros términos de guerra.”

13 “No me traes ahora Mahoma / a averiguar en el campo / si su secta es buena o mala / que él tiene de eso cuidado”. Miguel de Cervantes, op. cit., p. 187.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., pp. 196-197.
17 Ibid., p. 204.

Compared to Don Fernando of course, Don Alonso stops short of taking his civility very much further. Faced with a novel situation he quickly invokes the rules of his own culture. Anything, in this case Fernando’s individualism, that could undermine the sacrosanct nature of the task they are there for, is quashed. But what has happened with Alimuzel’s entry is that it has thrown off balance the ways in which the protagonists view their world. The quandary that Don Alonso is faced with: the level of civility that should be accorded to individuals from the opposite side is also that of King of Azan of Algiers who arrives in the Tercera Jornada to help Arlaxa with her territory after Nacor’s betrayal.

When Don Juan, Doña Margarita’s brother is captured, Azán wishes he be freed if he is a gentleman. Azán’s tone with him is conversational whereas the King of Alabez is brusque and wants to underscore the status of the former.

AZAN: De que tierra eres, cristiano?
DON JUAN: De Jerez de la Frontera.
AZAN: ¿Eres hidalgo o villano?

When Don Juan admits he came to fight a war, Azán describes his intentions as laudable. (¡Honrados son tus intentos!) and asks him about the news in Spain.
What is completely absent here is any kind of visceral hatred for the other side but instead a camaraderie and an admission of duty. Circumstances have pitted them against each other and yet as individuals they can still show courtesies. The rapport between the two peoples is evident and if empires are at war, whole civilizations are only reluctantly and despite themselves dragged in.

However Don Fernando and to a lesser extent Don Alonso are anomalies in a scenario where the Conde and Doña Avalleda represent the hard face of war and work consciously for religion and country. It is inevitable to consider Don Fernando’s actions as frivolous if set against Doña Avalleda’s seriousness in defense against the enemy. When the Conde de Alcaudete tells Don Martin to go to Mazalquivir with reinforcements because they expect light attacks there, he does so with typical military bravado in the Primera Jornada: “Mas que venzais no lo dudo; / que el cobarde está desnudo, / aunque se vista de acero. / En su muchedumbre estriba / aquesta mora canalla

18 Ibid., p. 217.
19 Ibid., p. 218.
/ que así se nos muestra esquiva"20; Don Martín is Don Alonso's brother and replies deferentially promising that if there were sufficient munitions he would blazon the stars with Spanish escutcheons. There is no doubt that love of country runs deep in certain pockets but Casalduero's claim of homogenous blocks of people21; Spaniards on the one hand Muslims on the other who act and feel in unison still seems unlikely and contrary to the historical situation that both peoples find themselves in. Rather, each character has a particular attitude towards the Other. Left on their own for long stretches of time linkages could not but have developed between the Muslims and Christian cultures. They either cultivate an aggressive style because the official line comes down strongly against fraternization or have the freedom like Arlaxa's or the courage of Don Fernando to reach out to the Other. Statements like Arlaxa's "Tengo un alma bizarra"22 and Don Fernando's "Yo de disparates vivo"23 when Arlaxa exclaims at his unconventional behaviour make his actions understandable and less fantastic. Moreover Don Fernando and Arlaxa are conscious of transgressing laws. Its not as if they involuntarily forget themselves. Like Don Fernando who is warned against warming to the enemy, Arlaxa is also advised by Oropesa to give up her fantasies about Don Fernando because her expectations would always be thwarted. He says:

Pero si acaso da el Cielo
a Don Fernando victoria
cierto está tu desconsuelo,
pues si suena a en memoria
alzar más alto el vuelo,
y de no poderle ver,
vendra el deseo a creer
de verle"24.

But Arlaxa's curiosity prevents her ever being at home with herself. She of course is more at liberty to do so having none of the encumbrances of being a serving soldier like Don Fernando. Prone to

20 Ibid., p. 190.
21 Joaquín Casalduero, op. cit., "Un hombre del pueblo sin idealizar, los seres débiles: mujeres viejos niños todos forman un conjunto orgánico, un bloque una unidad la comunidad catolica, española la mantiene, que sostiene fondo y apoyo las raíces del gallardo español de un hombre", p. 33.
22 Miguel de Cervantes op. cit., p.193.
23 Ibid., p. 195.
24 Ibid., p. 193.
any internal necessity of the text\textsuperscript{30}. His return to fighting for the Christians and his decisive turning around of the war for Spain is as we know occasioned by the entry of the Kings of Cuco and Alabez into the scenario to help Arlaxa after Nacor’s betrayal. Till that point however Don Fernando remains ambivalent not wishing to let down Arlaxa. When Arlaxa complains of a bad dream, of Nacor and Christians raiding her aduar, Alimuzel says he is there and Don Fernando joins in the chorus, caught up in the situation and pledges to fight. However when there is an all out war and he has to choose sides perhaps it isn’t so surprising that he goes back to his people. He had never really defected due to ideological or monetary reasons and there were never any doubts about his allegiance, albeit watery, to the causes his country upheld. Despite this he never took the Conde’s injunctions seriously and this has been taken as a serious contradiction by critics. That it isn’t is my argument. His defection had never been opportunistic. He had just questioned the ultimate authority of those who had set up as guardians of his culture and tried to thwart his aspirations in exhibiting his military prowess. And so he had proceeded, as Friedman has said to fulfill himself as an individual. This kind of foray into the unknown is possible, one could venture, only if one already has a strong sense of self. When Guzmán asks him in the Segunda Jornada ¿Sois ya de Cristo enemigo? He replies “Ni de veras ni burlando”\textsuperscript{31}. Without this sense of self, his defection would have just degenerated into a trade off like Nacor’s. Indeed the comparison with Nacor’s betrayal is very clear. Nacor tried to buy love through treachery and we see him as a worthless traitor. And yet even Casalduero who roots continually for Spain and Christianity cannot bear to see Fernando as even a momentary betrayer. Perhaps Don Fernando never really let down any side. If we think of the beginning, we remember that he is flattered because Arlaxa has appreciated the aesthetic side of his military prowess despite her own affiliations to her religion. Fernando by taking her desire to get to know him seriously identifies with the sentiment that a certain irony towards country is possible even while there mightn’t be any doubt as to one’s intrinsic loyalties. And here we touch upon the core of his cosmopolitanism: that even though he formed part of such a nationalistic institution like the army, his sense of identity is never forged as one of conflict with others. This is what is hinted at when

Guzman asks him ¿Por qué a defender acudes este aduar? He replies ambiguously: “Porque encierra / la paz que causa esta guerra, / la salud de mis saludes”\textsuperscript{32}.

As he says he never intended to defeat Christians. He just didn’t think that disobeying the Conde amounted to letting down the country. Of course Nacor’s move is a major upset that changes everyone’s plans. It prompts the kings of Cuco and Alabez to come to Arlaxa’s rescue and professional duties beckon Don Fernando. Faced with a continuous clash of cultures in his own life is it surprising finally that he treats with ironic distance all authority and sees himself not as an epiphenomenon of his culture but a free floating soldier?

\textsuperscript{30} Canavaggio, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 267.

\textsuperscript{31} Miguel de Cervantes, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 208.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 208.