

Frederick A. De Armas, *Cervantes' Architectures: The Dangers Outside*, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 2022, 384 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4875-4241-2

Maxim Rigaux

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6741-3737>

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

ESPAÑA

maxim.rigaux@uab.cat

[*Hipogrifo*, (issn: 2328-1308), 11.2, 2023, pp. 849-852]

Recibido: 13-10-2023 / Aceptado: 26-10-2023

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13035/H.2023.11.02.55>

For his latest book, De Armas turns to the buildings in Cervantes' prose fiction and takes us on an engaging journey from *La Galatea* (1585) to the *Persiles* (1617) in nine chapters. Readers often take for granted references to or descriptions of buildings, but De Armas shows us why it is important not to do so, and how, in the case of Cervantes, they can convey new and provocative insights into some of his most studied works. In line with the «spatial turn» in literary studies, De Armas focuses on how place or space – a distinction further explained through the Chinese architect Yi-Fu Tuan's definitions of place as security and space as freedom – give meaning to the text, even when seemingly no interest is taken in the spatiality of a certain episode. Probably the most revealing chapters of the book are the ones dedicated to the elliptical and ellipsis in Cervantes' posthumous novel (chapters 7 to 9). By pointing out the lack of windows in the North in the first two books or the double focus in the last two (when often unexpected architectures are used in order to say something about the ones that are left unmentioned), De Armas convincingly suggests new readings of not only key episodes but also the broader meaning of the novel itself.

In the first chapter of the book, «Breaking Eurithmia», De Armas sketches a panorama of the main topics and concepts that will be used and discussed along the way. Foregrounding the concept of *eurithmia*, a term from Vitruvius' influential *Ten Books on Architecture* that refers to a sort of harmonious grace, De Armas points out that, paradoxically, to achieve eurithmia, it is often necessary to modify or even manipulate the symmetry and proportion of a building. As De Armas acknowledg-

es, this book builds on his previous work but takes into account something he had previously overlooked: «inns, castles, palaces, temples, and even smaller architectural pointers such as corners and keyholes» (p. 6). How do these and other objects affect our reading of Cervantes' prose fiction? The focus then goes to Cervantes as architect, or, in other words, «a new Daedalus» who «dazzles us with new and unexpected turns in his labyrinth» (p. 6). Interestingly, De Armas points out that a sort of progressive insight is observable in Cervantes' critical views on architecture from his earliest work *La Galatea* (1585) to the posthumous *Persiles* (1617). Moreover, De Armas does not limit his insights to material objects, but connects them to larger discussions of the heavens (as divine architecture) and human bodies.

Chapter 2, «Temples and Tombs», focuses on *La Galatea* (1585) and serves as a first encounter with Cervantes' earliest architectural ideas, contrasting the pastoral setting of the novel as a seemingly safe space against menacing presences from outside such as poison, plague and climate change: «Topophilia is shaded by topophobia, while eurhythmia turns to dysrhythmia» (p. 33). De Armas examines the idea of *contrapposto* (in the sense of antithesis) through the figure of Lisandro, linking it to Sandro Botticelli's representation of Mercury in his *Primavera* (ca. 1477-82). He then moves on to the hermitages, temples and tombs, all of which reveal certain dangers coming from the urban towns (perhaps even Seville) outside the pastoral landscape. Meliso's tomb in the Valley of Cypresses at the end of the novel is significant in this regard, as it contains a veiled reference to the humanist Diego Hurtado de Mendoza (1503-75) and his fierce criticisms of the politics of the Spanish empire.

The next two chapters, «Unstable Architectures» and «Windows», take us to the first part of *Don Quixote* (1605). De Armas attaches great importance to the Royal Jail in Seville, from which the narrator addresses his reader in the prologue. Linking it to the author Cervantes' own experiences in jail, the prologue prefigures in some ways the knight's desires for freedom and imagination. It concerns, moreover, an unstable building, since the beautiful façade hides a grim place of despair behind its walls. This idea is then connected to the famous chapter of the windmills/giants, in which Don Quixote and Sancho discuss their different, transformative views on reality. The inn as a castle (but also an ancient city, an Italian villa and observatory to the heavens) is another example of the forever changing architecture in Cervantes' narrative. De Armas ends the third chapter where he began: the incarceration of Don Quixote in a cage at the end of the 1605 novel (chapter 47) reminds the reader of Cervantes' prologue and the Royal Jail in Seville. The second part of this diptych is dedicated to the four interpolated tales of the first part and highlights the key role that is played by windows. Understood as liminal spaces, that is, between the inside and the outside, the windows either let in the danger from the outside or reveal secrets from inside to the outer world.

Chapters 5, «Grotesque: Vying with Vitruvius», and 6, «Treacherous Architectures», take a closer look at the second part of *Don Quixote* (1615). A total of ten architectures are discussed. In chapter 5, as the title suggests, emphasis is placed on the grotesque. De Armas connects Dulcinea's imaginary palace to the Roman

Pantheon of the classical past. This parallel also transforms Don Quixote into the emperor of his beloved. Another comparison with a historical building is brought up by Sansón Carrasco, who claims that his Casildea had ordered him to defeat the «famous giantess of Seville, called Giralda» (p. 133). The next architectural description has demonic features as it compares the Sima de Cabra (a deep chasm close to Córdoba) to a hell-mouth. This dantesque scene is followed by a thorough discussion of the disproportional nose of Sansón's false squire, Tomé Cecial, which brings to mind some of Arcimboldo's portraits of vegetables that take the features of humans. It also highlights the importance of the nose for the measuring of the Vitruvian man. The sixth edifice is the house of Diego de Miranda, a structure of silence and one of the few places where eurhythmia is finally reached, away from the grotesque of the other architectures.

Chapter 6 opens with a discussion of one of the most famous locations of the novel: the Cave of Montesinos. Once again, demonic forces seem to be gaining the upper hand, but a transformation takes place when Don Quixote imagines himself in another magnificent palace. As De Armas explains, after this dream vision with echoes of Nero's Domus Aurea, the knight moves on to yet «another palace, that is even more devilish» (p. 162). The private room, with a single window, at the Duke and the Duchess's palace turns into a «torture chamber» (p. 174). Finally, his arrival at Barcelona does not bring much solace. While Don Quixote utters a laudatory speech on the city, its «architectures hide the sinister purposes of Antonio Moreno and his circle» (p. 186). Once again, the knight feels betrayed and ridiculed. Consequently, the city's beautiful architectures do not provide a safe space for Don Quixote, as it is replete with pitfalls and other risks, leading up to his final defeat by Sansón Carrasco.

Finally, the last three chapters of the book are devoted to *Persiles y Segismunda* (1617) and clearly form the climax of De Armas' original insights and theories. The findings presented here are easier to understand thanks to the previous chapters on *La Galatea* and *Don Quixote*. Chapter 7, «A Windowless North», deals with the first two books of the *Persiles*, that is, the windowless spaces of the North, and, according to De Armas, «dazzle [most] with their *inventio*» (p. 190). The darkness of these lands contrasts with the celestial light symbolized in *Persiles* and *Segismunda* (Periandro and Auristela). Five spaces are singled out in the North: another prison (though different from the one in *Don Quixote's* prologue), a moment's place (there are three such instances in which characters experience something mystical), the ship as tomb, the deceitful palace of Policarpo, and a space of dark magic. All of them are called «vanishing architectures» (p. 192) by De Armas.

Chapter 8, «Structures of Flight», takes us to the south, where we follow the pilgrims to Portugal, Spain and France. Here, De Armas explains his theory of the ellipses he encounters in the *Persiles* and the idea of a double focus, which he connects to the theories of Kepler about the elliptical orbits of the planets. First, he turns to the cityscapes of Lisbon and Toledo, pointing out how Cervantes makes use of «allusive ekphrasis» (p. 217) to foreground the untold. Next, De Armas discusses the two *lienços* of Periandro, which he defines as «a kind of reverse forging

ekphrasis» (p. 223), which he believes to be Cervantes' strategy to warn for «fake architects» (p. 226). The remaining part deals with the sacred architecture of the monastery of Guadalupe, the French tower with new technologies as human miracles and the episode of the Veranzio woman. Chapter 9, «Roman Architectures», is devoted to six buildings from the Eternal City, which are, however, not the usual suspects: two pagan villas, a Jewish and two Christian homes, and, finally, another threatening tower. Here, as De Armas notes, «[p]laces and spaces clash with one another as Jewish, Classical, and Christian constructions counter old ways of writing epic» (p. 266). The book ends with a suggestive epilogue that wraps up De Armas' insights and ideas and sets architectures from the different chapters and works against one another.

Although the topic of the book had been lingering in De Armas' mind for more than a decade, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic gave a significant boost to its publication and also strengthened some of his ideas regarding the instability of certain buildings; or, at least, of our perceptions of them. Due to the pandemic, we now have an increased awareness of the importance of spaces and of the protean character of architectural structures, the ways in which a place of safety becomes a space of danger, or vice versa. Cervantes' own spatial experiences, as a consequence of his time in jail, the plagues that struck Spain, or the hardships of climate change, have naturally influenced his own views on the places/spaces of his time. In *Cervantes' Architectures*, the reader is repeatedly invited to reflect on how certain literary strategies in Cervantes' prose fiction prefigure modern ideas by artists from different fields. De Armas suggestively connects the strategies of Cervantes not only to those of contemporary architects (such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Juhani Pallasmaa or Alberto Campo Baeza), but also to techniques used by directors such as Alfred Hitchcock. At the same time, De Armas also points to the many innovations that influenced Cervantes (the theories of Kepler or the invention of the parachute, among others).

As De Armas already anticipates in the first chapter, this book «serves as an invitation to open up this field for further research» (p. 11). He deliberately selects a number of passages in the four selected works to demonstrate the great importance of architecture for Cervantes, but at the same time he triggers our interest in the subject in other passages and even other works. Opening this door to draw our attention to the importance of architecture in Cervantes is perhaps the most important achievement of this book. It makes you want to go back to certain passages of the four works discussed or to others in Cervantes' oeuvre or even that of his contemporaries, to reread them with the insights provided by De Armas. Consequently, this book will be of interest not only to specialists of Cervantes, but also, more generally, to literary critics and even to students of architecture.