

Alonso de Ercilla, *La Araucana*, edited by Luis Gómez Canseco.  
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While always an important component of the Golden Age canon, *La Araucana* has been the object of a steady growth in scholarship over recent decades, which shows no signs of abating. Both a cause and symptom of this renewed interest is a current rethinking of the contours of the early modern Spanish literary world in which epic poetry can be seen as a barometer for literary experimentation and a broad, indeed encyclopedic, engagement with all kinds of problems and questions emerging from the epoch of early globalization. In a newly published volume (*The War Trumpet: Iberian Epic Poetry, 1543-1639*, University of Toronto Press, 2023), the editors Emiro Martínez-Osorio and Mercedes Blanco go so far as to dub the period that falls within the book's parameters, daringly, the 'age of Iberian epics' (9), not in order to propose that this traditionally more neglected form should push out others, but to show how intertwined are these Spanish and Portuguese creations with the evolution of other genres. Among several new critical editions of Spanish-language epics which have accompanied this interest, one significant absence until now has been *La Araucana*, certainly the most read and one of the most consequential. This tardiness is owing in part to the continuing accessibility and scholarly value of Isaías Lerner's edition (Cátedra, 1993). It is also because editing Ercilla's masterpiece is uniquely challenging, and secondarily because few scholars have been aware of just how challenging it is, and how crucial its complex material history is to any well-founded understanding of the poem. Gómez Canseco's edition, one of the latest in the rapidly expanding Biblioteca Clásica series, which combine scholarly rigor with attractive presentation, will thus be justly celebrated and take its place as the most authoritative modern edition of the poem.

In an important doctoral thesis which lay buried until a handful of scholars drew attention to it a few years ago, Juan Alberto Méndez Herrera referred to *La Araucana* as 'un poema que [...] vive en variantes' (*Estudio de las ediciones de "La Araucana", con una edición crítica de la tercera parte*, Harvard University, 1976, iii). The reasons for adopting the phrase could not be more different than those for which it was originally coined by Ramón Menéndez Pidal to describe the *romancero viejo*'s oral and anonymous circulation. Ercilla's work is absolutely a product of the sixteenth-century print market and emerging possibilities for authorial self-fashioning it facilitated. As a bestseller, it enjoyed no less than twenty-one editions during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, six of which (the 1569 *Primera parte*, three simultaneous editions of the 1578 *Segunda parte*, and 1589 and 1590 printings of the *Tercera parte*) took place under the author's direct supervision in Madrid, with several more financed or promoted by him. Ercilla not only astutely marketed his work but continuously revised each new

installment of his text before, during and after its production, striving for a degree of control that was highly unusual for the period and quite possibly '[raya] en lo obsesivo' (1022). Thus, all of the princeps editions show a mix of amendments to molds in the print shop, hand-written corrections, cancels and addenda, notably including the 115 new octaves describing an attempted new conquest to the south of Chile in the *Tercera parte* which have much vexed later scholars. These authorial interventions, together with the less than systematic mechanics of early modern printing and collation of sheets, result in such a plethora of different states of each edition that 'cada ejemplar resulta relevante no ya para la historia material de esas ediciones, sino para la misma constitución del texto' (1044). Added to this, many of the variants are 'adiáforas, esto es, lecciones igualmente válidas a la hora de editar el texto' (1028). Gómez Canseco handles these editorial conundrums with rigor and aplomb. There is a real question over whether the model texts for the first two parts should be their princeps or the significantly modified 1589-90 three-part edition, the answer to which partly depends on the degree to which the different parts of the poem are regarded as autonomous. Gómez Canseco opts for seeing the latter edition as definitive, but a full range of early and modern editions are consulted and discussed, and several copies compared in some cases, with variants listed exhaustively in a positive critical apparatus (the full version of which is downloadable from the RAE website). The only change of method which might have made the (perhaps ever elusive) fixing of the text even more precise and streamlined would have been to use as the unit for analysis the forme rather than the whole book, as indeed Méndez Herrera suggested. This would have enabled some groups of variants to be considered collectively rather than on a case-by-case basis, and might have resolved some doubtful cases. Nonetheless, the end result is a philological work of very high quality. The rationale for selecting each variant is carefully and succinctly documented where there is room for debate, and the editor's choices seem sound.

Following the publisher's policy, the text of the poem (which includes the 1589 paratexts) has only minimal footnotes, mainly lexical glosses, while complementary endnotes expand on a number of themes, and also signpost to the very extensive bibliography. This combination strikes a wise balance, presenting a clean, uncluttered text for the general reader without much inhibiting the amount of further material made available to specialists. Particularly valuable is the precise pinpointing of Ercilla's sources: both notes and introduction persuasively demonstrate the extent of the poem's indebtedness to Garcilaso, Ariosto, Virgil and Lucan (the latter three in Spanish translation), and to a lesser extent to other *libros de caballería*, Mena, and Vivar's unpublished chronicle, as well as the extensive mining of other texts as models for particular episodes, including Paulo Giovio, Francisco de Enzinas's translation of Livy, an anonymous work of propaganda on Philip II's annexation of Portugal, Fernando de Herrera's account of Lepanto, and a treatise of Ercilla's own father. The poem is followed also by Gómez Canseco's 200-page study,

paratexts from earlier editions, a timeline, a canto-by-canto synopsis, and another shorter study by Alfonso Doctor Cabrera, a specialist in the geography of Andalucía, who has also produced maps of the Chilean campaign.

The editor's study will be another landmark in Ercilla scholarship. Based on extensive consultation of the primary sources for Ercilla's life, including some not previously remarked, it introduces significant new findings, most of which have already been set out in a dozen or so articles published over the last five years, but which it is useful and revealing to see brought together into a single analysis. The different sections – on Ercilla's biography, the poem's sources, the mix of autobiography and history, poetic practices, the relationship of poet and crown, and the process of composition and publication – often overlap, which leads to some repetitiveness but also reveals how intertwined they are in Gómez Canseco's understanding of the poem, which is markedly biographical and idiosyncratic. Many findings illuminate the ways in which Ercilla used his book as an instrument of self-promotion as well as a lucrative commercial venture. From José Toribio Medina's 1916 *Vida de Ercilla* onwards, we have known that Ercilla was a rich man, belying the rhetorical protestation of 'miseria suma' at the end of the poem, but Gómez Canseco elaborates starkly on the extent of his ruthlessness in the acquisition of wealth and social capital. One telling detail is the way in which Ercilla used his woodcut portrait to immortalize 'el personaje que protagoniza la obra y no el hombre que la escribe' (907). The problem with this view is that the medium comes to dominate the message: since most of our sources for Ercilla's life, in the absence of any significant body of personal correspondence, are related to commercial and legal transactions and petitions, the poet emerges in Gómez Canseco's view as a man virtually devoid of any broader intellectual preoccupations or complexities (even the death of Ercilla's only son in the Armada merits only the comment that 'Las muertes sucesivas de familiares vienen también a aumentar su patrimonio', 871). The poem is, without nuance, seen as an 'exaltación del monarca y de su imperio' (904), indeed as an extended personal epistle to Philip II, since no other perspective is admitted as possible for a courtier of Ercilla's time and ambitions; the problematic third part can only be integrated into this analysis by being dismissed as a jumble of incoherent materials, padding out a waning poetic inspiration to secure further dividends. Despite the eclectic range of sources indicated above, the poet is decidedly seen as not an erudite man, and certainly not a humanist: he is said to have a 'sentido utilitario de la imitación y la escritura' (900), and the possibility of any readings or allusions beyond those for which the editor finds direct and unequivocal evidence is rejected out of hand. There is more than a grain of truth in many of these observations, but despite occasional lip service to the complexities of the poem, they are presented in a rigid and monolithic fashion which ignores or disparages much important scholarship, especially works written in English: much of this is relegated to a single footnote listing forty or so works on p. 963.

The facts set out in the study might be presented in quite a different fashion. One might say that the unusual degree of financial and editorial independence enjoyed by Ercilla, his keen awareness of a commercial readership rather than dependence on patronage, could provide scope for thinking and writing more freely than some of his contemporaries. Fundamental though his symbolic dependence on Philip II is, most of his life was lived at the peripheries of the court, interacting with other circles, political, intellectual and military, within which both recent and classic historiography has shown us that a variety of positions and debates were possible. One might say that the poet positions himself as a *consejero* rather than a *lisonjero* of the king, one capable of understanding and imparting 'algo escondido' (I. 4). One might say that the obsessive revision of the poem suggests not a selection of materials levered together without much forethought but a process of careful thought over almost a whole lifetime, perhaps even the marks of trauma from the author's short but indelible experience of warfare in his early twenties. One might say that not having a fully-fledged formal humanist education is not generally seen as impeding writers of the period from creatively working with a range of texts and discourses, that the practice of *occultatio* was commonplace, and so that not all of these sources need be used in the functionalist way which is the only one that meets Gómez Canseco's litmus test for imitation. Finally, while brimming with important information, the introductory studies also leave some gaps. These emerge perhaps most clearly from Doctor Cabrera's piece, which helpfully elucidates the interaction of the physical topography of Chile with the limitations it imposed on military tactics, but then expands into a discussion of the Chilean campaign and armies which is based on little more than paraphrase of the poem. The Reche-Mapuche antagonists of the poem, who remain deeply imbricated in its reception in twenty-first-century Chile, merit hardly a word in thousands of pages, which speaks to the fact that the poem is recast somewhat exclusively as a cultural artefact of peninsular Spain. Fortunately, Gómez Canseco's rich and thought-provoking study coincides with a series of other publications which fill some of these gaps and give space for a variety of voices and approaches to the text, such as the volume referenced at the outset of the review and a special anniversary issue of *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* dedicated to *La Araucana*, while a new English translation by Cyrus Moore will make the poem more accessible to students. I anticipate that the final word has not yet been spoken on Ercilla's open-ended poem.