

Economic and Social World in Shakespeare and Cervantes

Nowadays we are used to analyze economic and social problems almost exclusively through social sciences and other modern conceptual tools. Economic science, sociology, political science and various disciplines and complementary instruments such as statistics, modeling, impact assessments and other increasingly varied and sophisticated indicators seem to have occupied almost the entire space of academic and public debate on social issues. Certainly the development of these sciences and instruments is a very important step forward in understanding the problems and in formulating policies and interventions more adjusted and effective to solve social problems. However, these are not the only possible ways to understand and influence social reality. Other human sciences, such as history, psychology, anthropology, geography, linguistics, philology, ethnography, philosophy or theology, open up essential horizons for understanding society. Within the sphere of culture that we commonly call the “humanities,” literature brings a fundamental perspective to the comprehension of society.

The value of literature is undoubtedly related to an often neglected dimension of social life: the narrative dimension. Beyond the dominant influence of the positivist mentality that tends to equate social reality with physical reality, by considering it an object that can be reduced to the pure quantitative range, lies the fact that much of the phenomena of social life cannot be simply measured or modeled. Society is not only composed by continuous and more or less predictable structural processes assimilable to the processes of nature, but also by events which are the result of an unpredictable, complex and always dynamic network of human intentions and actions. This framework cannot be “photographed” or objectified by the means of a mathematical technique—even the most sophisticated one—it has to be “narrated.” Whether it is historical or fictional narrative, both account for the temporality of life, not only in its final material effects but also in the non-objectified experience of its own existence. As Paul Ricoeur teaches and it is checked daily by non-positivist oriented empirical research, narrative in general, and literary narrative in particular, is an essential activity for the self-understanding and development of the identity of both human beings and societies. Literature also offers other dimensions such as poetry and drama, which in the history of all societies have played a fundamental role in expressing and channeling the most varied problems, desires, feelings, dilemmas and conflicts of social life.

William Shakespeare and Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra have certainly been well aware of the narrative, lyrical and dramatic dimension of both the human soul and the social and economic world, that is ultimately an expression of the former. Their works, endowed with a unique sensitivity and immediacy, transmit a vision of the human being and its social reality at such a great level of universality and depth that they remain valid even in our time. Thus, on the occasion of the celebration of the fourth centenary of the death of these two great exponents of universal literature, this issue of *Cultura Económica* brings together, in the first place, the work that emerged from the project of collaboration between the Center for Studies in Economics and Culture of the Faculty of Economics of UCA and the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the same University that resulted in the Workshop “Economic and social world in Shakespeare and Cervantes” in which several aspects of the work of both authors were analyzed from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Firstly, we present *Don Quixote, or The First Modern Subject*, an article in which Javier González, Professor of Medieval Spanish Literature, analyzes the figure of Don Quixote in the light of three great narrative matrixes —cosmogonic, heroic, and novelistic— that define the gradual decline in will, power and effectiveness of the subject in his relations with the world. González presents the case of Don Quixote as emblematic to understand the parable of modern individual and social subjectivity that ranges from omnipotence and effectiveness, to impotence and failure.

In the second place, *The Worlds of Don Quixote* by Silvia Lastra Paz, Professor of Literary Theory and Spanish Golden Age Literature, analyzes from a semiological and sociological perspective, the body and mental imagery that emerges in *Don Quixote*, based on the perception of the change from a typical Old Regime society to the new individualistic social and economic practices of the rising modernity. Within this horizon of tense and contradictory expectations are the characters, their pyramidal stratification, and their main symbolic consumption: food and clothing.

Thirdly, in *The Age of Shakespeare: Culture, Society and Economics from a Literary Perspective* Daniel Altamiranda, professor of English Literature, analyzes the socio-economic context in the production of two key Shakespearian texts: *The Merchant of Venice* and *Timon of Athens*. On the basis of a commentary on the way in which the texts here written and grounded on contemporary historical and critical sources, Altamiranda accounts for his own interpretation of this dimension.

Along with the works mentioned, in the section *Essays* we publish for the first time in Spanish the article *The Law of Gresham, inflation, the subjective theory of value, price control and usury in Don Quixote de la Mancha* by Eric Graf, Professor of Spanish Literature. In this article Graf analyzes Cervantes's great knowledge of the economic problems of his time, and asserts that *Don Quixote* is an acute criticism of economic and monetary policies that oppose individual liberty.

Likewise, in the same section we include the article *Values of a Christian civilization in The Merchant of Venice by Shakespeare*, published several decades ago in our journal, in which Inés de Cassagne, former Professor of Literature and Christianity analyzes and reflects on the experiences and principles of life behind the characters and circumstances of the mentioned Shakespearian work.

Finally, we offer our readers the essay *Shakespeare, Theatricality as Literary Polyphony*, a text by Gustavo Manzanal, Professor of Literature, Actor and Drama teacher, presented in the scope of the aforementioned workshop. The author offers both the reflections of a scholar and the testimony of an actor who has played different Shakespearian characters, thus giving a personal hallmark of singular power at the closure of our issue.

As Manzanal himself points out referring to Shakespeare at the end of his testimonial essay, “the whole society is enclosed within the four walls of his stage; governmental functioning, social reactions, common and intimate values. Literature, theater, science, politics... knowledge.” And we can say the same about Cervantes. Thus, we hope this issue of *Cultura Económica*, devoted to the analysis of the social and economic dimensions of these two great literary geniuses, will serve as an inspiration for those who seek to recover a more enthused, broad and profound vision to illuminate the complex and dramatic situations of the social and economic reality of our time.

C.H.