

CERVANTES AND THE QUESTION OF METAFICTION

Nicholas Spadaccini
University of Minnesota

Much has been written about the metafictional aspects of Cervantes's *Don Quijote* (1605, 1615), a novel that continues to receive the accolades of literary critics and creative writers after four hundred years of circulation in various languages (Close, "Is Cervantes"). There are many reasons for such interest—among them, the novel's propensity to call attention to itself as a literary artefact and the manner in which it problematizes the issue of "representation": the notion that the "real" world exists as a construction that is shaped through the conventions of perception and interpretation. In fact, while the focus of this kind of discussion tends to center on *Don Quijote*, one could well extend it to much of Cervantes's writing which aims, "simultaneously, toward the production of a new image of the world and toward a dialogue with the very discourses that have constructed the world the way we actually know it" (Spadaccini and Talens 169). For the moment, suffice it to say that Cervantes's writing shares with contemporary metafiction the notion that representation is less focused on the world itself than on the "discourses on the world" (Waugh 41).

In Cervantes, these issues are ultimately tied to a reader ("*lector mío*") as opposed to the public ("*vulgo*"), who is challenged to make sense of the text's often contradictory, ironic incursions into a multitude of topics which are activated through various "authors" and circumstantial readers. Thus, one might say that the world is not translatable in a univocal manner but only through multiple appropriations and interpretations. In this sense, Cervantes's novel represents a formidable attack on dogmatisms while leading toward a philosophy that might be considered dialectical (Spadaccini and Talens 160). Ultimately, it is the discriminate reader or "*lector mío*" invoked by Cervantes who is capable of navigating across the novel's linguistic and social spheres and making sense of the dialectical game that brings to light multiple aspects of a problem. Reading is posited as a liberating activity, especially when contrasted to the brain-washing potential of the commercial, public theater (the *comedia nueva*) of the early 1600s, a time of perceived social crisis when the dominant groups and their surrogates—the monarcho-seigneurial segments of Spanish society—were to use all means at their disposal, including repression and socio-political propaganda (theater, sermons, festivals, etc.) for the purpose of maintaining their privileges (Maravall, *La cultura del barroco*). I shall return to this point later to broaden the discussion on Cervantes's incursion into this topic, specifically, the differentiation between the critical reader vs. the passive spectator who is caught up in a mass-oriented performance, a discussion that is initiated in *Don Quijote* (I, 48), regarding the facile consumption of both the books of chivalry and the *comedia*, and that continues to preoccupy Cervantes in his later writing.

Perhaps it is appropriate to reconsider these issues on this four-hundredth anniversary of the publication of the first part of *Don Quijote* (1605), an occasion which has precipitated a veritable avalanche of commemorations—conferences, symposia, special publications of /and about Cervantes’s text—both in Spain and abroad, including the U.S. academy, where Cervantes’s novel has long been at the center of a tug-of-war between humanist-oriented approaches and post-structuralist ones which celebrate heterogeneity, fragmentation and relativity of values (Castillo and Spadaccini “Afterword”; Cruz and Johnson).

The reception of *Don Quijote* during the last four centuries has been extraordinarily varied, attesting both to the novel’s complexities and readers’ changing tastes. The novel is said to have been read largely as a funny book in the seventeenth century (Russell), while the Romantics and their later brethren were to focus on the Don’s pathos and his quest for impossible dreams. Don Quijote, the reader of signs, the mad *hidalgo* of modest economic means who tilted at windmills and interpreted the world in accordance with the conventions of books of chivalry was to become a symbol of spiritual values and, in the case of Spain, the embodiment of a national ethos (Close, *Romantic Approach* 246). *Don Quijote* has also been called “the classic and purest model of the novel as genre” (Bakhtin 325), encompassing a diversity of voices, social speech types, and even languages (Bakhtin 262–69), which function dialogically by questioning and “relativizing” each other’s authority. This dialogism works against the imposition of a single world-view upon the reader and manifests a resistance to repressive ideologies, such as the notion of blood purity and its consequences for ethnic and racial minorities.

David Lodge has invoked Bakhtin’s notion of the novel as a composite of various discourses and its capacity to resist authoritarian ideologies in order to mediate between humanist-oriented approaches and post-structuralist ones. Lodge, a novelist and academic critic, is particularly resistive to the proclamation of the “death of the author” (Barthes) and the idea that there is absolutely no mimetic connection between fiction and reality. While he is speaking about contemporary fiction, including his own, his points are worth noting, even if our culture is quite distant from that of Cervantes. Lodge argues that the production, circulation and reception of fiction today is, in fact, “obsessively author-centered” (150), citing public readings, press interviews, book launches, and all sorts of attention paid (not to mention monetary rewards) “on the author as a unique creative self, the mysterious, glamorous origin of the text; and the question one is asked on these occasions invariably emphasize the mimetic connection between fiction and reality” (150). Lodge’s astute observations strike a chord because some of these questions also concerned Cervantes, whose work deals with the related issues of authorship, book circulation and readership, that is, the entire circuitry of communication and meaning production; while the matter of the relationship between reality and fiction is part of the very fabric of a novel such as *Don Quijote*.

In reading *Don Quijote*, one has the sense that despite the protagonism of the reader to whom the responsibility for interpretation seems to have shifted, or modern discussions about the loss of an Author-God, or even the idea of the provisionality of history and reality (characteristics of contemporary metafiction [Waugh 6-7]), there are moments in the novel when one seems to be pulled back toward the Author, that is, “the human creature that suffered and rejoiced and wrote out of this suffering or joy” (Clayton vii). It is the Author who, at least in certain moments, seems to emerge powerfully from the shield of fiction to comment through the voices of the oppressed on the question of injustice and xenophobia. Such seems to be the case toward the end of Part II, when we are confronted with the plight of the *moriscos*, a minority that was expelled from Spain by Philip III precisely between 1609 and 1614, at the time in which Cervantes was composing Part II of his novel.

The novel introduces us to this issue when Ricote, a *morisco* who was forced to leave Spain due to Philip III’s edict, returns to Spain surreptitiously to retrieve some treasure which he had buried prior to his going into exile. On the road back to his village, he meets his former neighbor Sancho Panza, and a conversation ensues between the two friends. What is important for our purpose are Ricote’s ironic reflections on a policy which he both “praises” and, implicitly, denounces: he “praises” the expulsion as being just, prudent, and divinely inspired, and then he goes on to affirm his loyalty to Christian Spain, his motherland, and to speak movingly about the pain of exile:

Que me parece que fue inspiración divina la que movió a su Majestad a poner en efecto tan gallarda resolución, no porque todos fuésemos culpados, que algunos había cristianos firmes y verdaderos; pero eran tan pocos, que no se podían oponer a los que no lo eran, y no era bien criar la sierpe en el seno, teniendo los enemigos dentro de casa. Finalmente, con justa razón fuimos castigados con la pena del destierro, blanda y suave al parecer de algunos, pero al nuestro, la más terrible que se nos pueda dar. Doquiera que estamos lloramos por España; que, en fin, nacimos en ella y es nuestra patria natural. (II, 451)

His majesty, Philip III, is said to have been inspired by God, who would thus have condoned an act of collective punishment which, as the historian Antonio Domínguez Ortiz has shown, is not shared by the majority of the populace, even if the crown’s propagandists argued that it made military sense to expel a potential fifth column. The victim, Ricote, “condones” the expulsion as an act of self-protection by the victimizers (the crown and its military establishment), commenting that “it was not right to nurture a serpent in one’s bosom.” Here Ricote echoes the official line propagated in print illustrations such as a famous one by the “grabador” Juan de Courbes that represents the *morisco* as a hydra, a many-headed monster eradicated only through the intervention of an imperial eagle (De la Flor).

Maintaining both his own family’s innocence and the propriety of the expulsion edict (“ni convenimos en ningún modo con la intención de los nuestros, que justamente han sido desterrados” [II,

64: 530]), Ricote then goes to depict with calculated irony, through the use of surgical imagery, the person who carried out the expulsion at the behest of Philip III:

Como él [Don Bernardino de Velasco] vee que todo el cuerpo de nuestra nación está contaminado y podrido, usa con él antes del cauterio que abrasa que del unguento que molifica. . . heroica resolución del gran Filipo Tercero, y inaudita prudencia en haberla encargado al tal don Bernardino de Velasco! (II, 66: 540)

In the end, Ricote's hidden wealth and the connections that he has established with the old Christian aristocracy through his daughter (Ana Félix's betrothal to Don Gregorio) will make possible his family's stay in Spain. The individual who offers to intercede with the bureaucracy at court is none other than Don Antonio Moreno, the very same gentleman who entertains (and is entertained by) Don Quijote in Barcelona with the Enchanted Head, the kind of suspicious contraption that might have gotten less powerful people in trouble with the Inquisition. Don Antonio has every reason to believe that his mission to rescue Ricote's family from the edict of expulsion will be successful, for he knows, that within the bureaucracy of the court, problems are solved through favors and gifts "en la corte por medio del favor y de la dádivas, muchas cosas dificultosas se acaban" (II, 65: 539). Money speaks, or, as Sancho once said, "dos linajes hay en el mundo, el tener y el no tener."

While these are fictional characters who speak, they do so about real problems that are affecting real people in a divided Spain. Moreover, there is little doubt where Cervantes's sympathies lie on the issue of ethnic cleansing or, for that matter, on the question of religious intolerance. This is not to say that these kinds of incursions into contemporary historical and social dramas diminish the metafictional character of Cervantes's novel, but they do bring us back to the question of "representation" and whether or not, in this case, one can irrevocably eliminate any mimetic connection between fiction and reality. More interesting, perhaps, for our purpose is the larger discussion regarding the nature of historical inquiry and the question of truth and reality as discursive constructions. These issues have concerned modern literary/ cultural critics and historians for some time. Already in 1979, Maravall was to note the following: "We never know a purely objective system of phenomena, for it changes the moment ones begins to observe it; what is accessible to us has been created, to a certain extent, in the process of observation (*Teoría del saber histórico* 120; my translation). This comment by the Spanish historian of social mentalities and political institutions was honed not only on his extensive readings in history and philosophy but also on his knowledge of the work of Cervantes and Velázquez (*Velázquez y el espíritu de la modernidad*), among others. Interestingly, this discussion also has a certain resonance in poststructuralist theory, including Lacanian psychoanalysis in reference to the question of historical transference: "symptoms are meaningless traces, their meaning is not discovered, excavated from the hidden depth of the past, but constructed retroactively" (Žižek 55-56; Castillo and Spadaccini 250).

The question of truth and reality as discursive constructions is not simply within the domain of contemporary theorists; it also concerned Cervantes and those other writers and artists of his time who questioned the reality principles of Renaissance humanism, such as “the primacy of mimesis and the diagrammatic imagination that resulted in the centerpoint perspective as theorized by Leon Battista Alberti” in *Della Pittura* (Castillo and Spadaccini, “Afterword” 251). In fact, Milan Kundera (*The Art of the Novel*) has spoken eloquently about two separate, distinct, and counterbalancing traditions in Western writing: one characterized by Cervantes’s “wisdom of uncertainty,” which uses a language of “relativity and ambiguity,” another involving Descartes’s philosophical discourse of certainty which privileges intellectual abstraction and a reduction of experience (Wihl 102).

In Cervantes’s novel, this world of uncertainty is constructed through various techniques, including the use of anamorphosis—an optical phenomenon produced by a change of perspective from which something is observed—or, through the lenses of irony and parody (Castillo, *A[ny] Views*). In *Don Quijote*, for example, Cervantes makes extensive use of Chinese boxes (stories within stories) as well as countless narrators and narratees, inscribing in his text what Lodge, commenting on Bakhtin, calls “discursive polyphony, its subtle and complex interweaving of various types of speeches—direct, indirect and doubly-oriented (e.g., parody)—and its carnivalesque irreverence towards all kinds of authoritarian, repressive, monologic ideologies” (156). This begs the question: who is capable of making sense of the novel’s complex structure? Cascardi suggests that “the perspective for viewing the multiple discourses of *Don Quixote*, Part I, is *Don Quixote*, Part II” (75). But this prompts a follow-up question: what is the perspective for viewing the plurality of discourses in both books since they ultimately enter into dialog with one another? Let us first look at some of the complexities of narration before we focus once again on the reader and Author, respectively.

The Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa locates Cervantes’s legacy to the modern novel in his ability to resolve the problem of the narrator, or the problem of who is going to tell the story, adding that the subtleties and intricacies introduced by Cervantes in that regard continue to be felt today. The complexities alluded to here are already evident when the anonymous narrator in *Don Quijote* introduces the story of the mad *hidalgo* in stereotypical fashion—“En un lugar de la Mancha”—only to be followed by the statement “de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme,” an affirmation of will which, in a parodic vein, pokes fun at the predictable beginnings of chivalric and picaresque narratives in which the narrator recalls the genealogy of the “hero” in minute details and tries to pass it off as “true history” (“historia verdadera”). In contrast to those stories which had long captured the imagination of a reading public accustomed to the formulaic, *Don Quijote*’s anonymous narrator expresses a will to forego those conventions and try something new. Hence, the lack of precision of the *hidalgo*’s surname—Quijada, Quesada, Quejana—or the use of the first or, more often, third person as he edits, adapts, translates, and comments upon a manuscript written in Arabic by the mysterious, yet playful, chronicler by the name of

Cide Hamete Benengeli, a figure who overshadows the narrative despite the protests of Don Quijote and, to some extent, Sancho, when they learn that he is a Moor rather than a historian of old Christian stock. This twist is introduced in *Don Quijote* (I, 9), where the reader is told that the original narrator or “autor” is not to be trusted for he is, after all “arábigo, siendo muy propio de los de aquella nación ser mentirosos” (I, 145). The sly second narrator even transforms himself into a character as he creates his own mini-novel by relating his search for, and discovery of, Don Quijote's story and how he had managed to get it translated.

To further complicate the matter, the first part of *Don Quijote* includes a number of substantive stories, with their own narrators and narratees that are constructed and deconstructed in an elaborate game of mirrors or prisms. This happens, for example, when the priest constructs a novel (that of Dorotea-Micomicona) in order to deceive Don Quijote, while readers within and outside of the text know that Dorotea, who is playing the fictitious role of princess Micomicona, is a damsel in distress in her own right after having been seduced and cast aside by the lascivious Don Fernando, the second-born son of a powerful duke. Dorotea's role in this and other stories has recently been highlighted by Edward Dudley, who considers her the true female protagonist of *Don Quijote*, Part I in her capacity to manage the “many tasks of interlinking the multistoried ontology of the text” in addition to “providing a sufficiently mercurial persona to confront the unraveled psychic needs of Don Quijote, Cardenio, and Don Fernando” (252).

In Cervantes's texts in general, and particularly in the case of *Don Quijote*, the complexities and subtleties of the narrator have its correlate in those of the narratee and, ultimately, even involves a problematization of the reader outside the text. Thus, to the question posed earlier about how Cervantes manages to deal with the problem of the narrator, one might also ask how he deals with the reader. A corollary question is who can read Cervantes's text, or “who can read the fragmentation in such a way that it will be perceived in its fragmentary reception and yet somehow be added up, totalized” (Godzich and Spadaccini 58). If the medieval discursive system had entailed relatively autonomous linguistic entities, such was no longer the case in Cervantes's time. In a sense, if the question is posed along theoretical lines as to who can claim to be an adequate subject for reading a novel like *Don Quijote*, with its dialogical structure and plurality of discourses within its frame, the answer is: the state,

For only the state has attempted to inventory and totalize all these discourses. In practice this means that such a novel serves to provide its readers with an experience of what it is to look at things from the perspective of the state, that is to perceive the limitations of each individual discourse and the configuration of their addition. At the same time it demonstrates powerfully the inordinateness of the state's claim and the impossibility of its realization. Yet, it is an impossibility that both the state and the novel will attempt to

overcome, the first through increased regulatory structures, the latter through a search for the perfect style. (Godzich and Spadaccini 60)

Cervantes points to an astute, inventive reader (“*lector mío*”) who is capable of understanding his epistemological project vs. the “*vulgo*,” the ensemble of readers who focus on particular aspects of the text without discriminating between voices or being capable of making larger, overarching connections.

One of the lessons to be drawn by the discriminate reader is that the boundaries between history and fiction are porous and that with narration there begins a process of fictionalization. This is not to say that in Cervantes the idea of “narrative history” is totally rejected or that the frontiers between fictional and historical discourse are explicitly and categorically denied, à la Barthes (White 113). Rather, what we seem to have is an ongoing dialogue between Renaissance poetics on and a resistance to rules. These issues are verbalized within several of Cervantes’s complex, multi-layered texts, among them *El coloquio de los perros* and its frame novella (*El casamiento engañoso*), and *Don Quijote*, a text which incorporates a multiplicity of stories recoded from various traditions as well as an array of storytellers, listeners, and readers, all of whom bring to the reception of those stories their own particular tastes and experiences. For example, in *Don Quijote* (I, 32) the discussion centers on those aspects of a romance of chivalry that each listener has privileged—the innkeeper’s enjoyment of the knight errant’s fighting prowess and endless battles; the prostitute Maritornes’s attention to details concerning the knight’s physical interest in his lady love, the innkeeper’s daughter’s fixation on the lovers’ emotional separation, and so on. This sort of practice is repeated in the novel in various ways and under different circumstances. Witness, for instance, Don Quijote’s interpretation of his dream at the cave of Montesinos, a paradigmatic example of the power of imagination and a window onto his subconscious. But here, too, the story lends itself to various assessments: Sancho has reasons not to believe it (I, 23). Cide Hamete Benengeli considers the entire episode apocryphal and lacking in verisimilitude, while Don Quijote needs to believe in his own fiction and attempts to strike a bargain with Sancho to change his mind. That opportunity presents itself when Sancho invents a story about what he purports to have seen in the heavens following the carnivalesque episode of the wooden horse Clavileño: “Sancho, pues vos queréis que os crea lo que habéis visto en el cielo, yo quiero que vos me creáis a mí lo que vi en la cueva de Montesinos” (II, 41:355). The difference is that Sancho knows that he has invented his story, while Don Quijote cannot admit to his own fiction.

We noticed that Cide Hamete Benengeli, the mysterious Arab historian, questions the plausibility of the adventure of the cave of Montesinos. But it was earlier in Part I (chapters 47-48) that the lack of compliance with verisimilitude had been hurled against the books of chivalry which, nevertheless, were said to offer great opportunities for imaginative writers. In the dialog between the Canon of Toledo and the village priest Pero Pérez, we learn that the Canon himself had tried his hand at composing one of those books, writing some one hundred pages before abandoning the project for fear of being

misunderstood by the “*vulgo*.” Yet, while these fictional characters are conversant in Aristotelian-oriented narrative theory, one cannot say that they espouse Cervantes’s theory of the novel (Blasco 48). Rather, they function as counterpoint to a narrative practice that is defined by a resistance to rules, as Cervantes writes with “an eye toward those precepts and another toward the reader” (Blasco 49). Ultimately, Cervantes’s narrative formula may be read “simultaneously, as a parody of history, as parody of epic and as a novel of adventure” (Blasco 53).

For Cervantes, the idea was to find a way to resolve the conundrum of the Aristotelian dichotomy of history and poetry, the concrete truth of the former and the universal truth of the latter, and make a story interesting for different kinds of readers while imagining a “*lector mío*,” a reader who could reconcile the variety of viewpoints expressed across the text through stories weaved around recurring topics and motifs through the technique of interlacement (Quint). This kind of reading, exercised at a certain intellectual level, can be part of a demystifying practice; it can “liberate” one from the clutches of dogmatism. It is not accidental that the antiauthoritarian bent of *Don Quijote* has been a source of inspiration to scores of well-known writers, among them Carlos Fuentes, who has written eloquently on Cervantes’s critique of reading, the aforementioned Kundera, who reminds us that with *Don Quijote* the world ceases to be a given and becomes a problem, and Vargas Llosa, who calls *Don Quijote* “a song to liberty,” which he identifies with “a profound distrust of authority, of the violence that can be committed by power, all power” (xix).

Vargas Llosa has also remarked that “*Don Quijote de la Mancha* is a novel about fiction in which imaginary life is everywhere, in the vicissitudes, in the mouths, and even in the air breathed by the characters” (xviii). I would add to this that it is a novel about fiction in which imaginary life challenges the reader to reflect on a whole range of experiences, including that of reading itself and the way in which it might illuminate aspects of one’s life in a society that is experiencing cracks at the very core of its social foundations (witness, for example, the various incursions in *Don Quijote* on the subject of privilege based not on one’s deeds but on genealogy). Cervantes’s writing, then, is also part of a game of dissimulation used to circumvent censorship and to present the reader with alternative viewpoints on a variety of socio-political issues, so that the subject of metafiction is never quite removed from the issue of power relations in Cervantes’s time as well as in our own.

In the pages that follow, I shall reference *Don Quijote*, *El coloquio de los perros* and its frame novella, *El casamiento engañoso*, to address the circuitry of meaning production: author/ text, reader. I shall also introduce into the larger discussion Cervantes’s critique of the *comedia nueva* and the invention of the “*vulgo*” a non-discriminating “mass-receiver” which was prone to internalizing the socio-political myths that were being propagated by official culture (Maravall, *La cultura del barroco*). Finally, I shall offer some concluding remarks on the question of metafiction in Cervantes’s work.

It has been shown convincingly, I believe, that Cervantes's novelistic universe highlights the problem of language and communication, registering the cleavage between words and things and focusing attention on the relation between world and self (Forcione 188-90). It has also been argued (Spadaccini and Talens) that Cervantes redefines the notion of exemplarity and that his texts function as semi-autonomous entities accessible to differentiated publics. It is in the "Prólogo al lector" to the *Novelas ejemplares* where the reader is told explicitly that print technology facilitates the independent growth of those stories, thus alluding implicitly to the inevitable separation between Author and literary creature. In that particular text, Cervantes stresses his paternity and originality in having created a new type of fiction in the Castilian language but also suggests that his experimental fiction and its major circuitry of dissemination (the printing press) make for a highly unpredictable reception "mi ingenio las engendró, y las parió mi pluma, y van creciendo en los brazos de la estampa." (I:52). This statement also goes, implicitly, to the very heart of the question of meaning; how it is arrived at through reading, an activity which relieves the Author of the responsibility of trying to convey a conventional moral lesson. The Author here limits himself to giving the following, apparently conventional, advice to the reader: "si bien lo miras, no hay ninguna de quien no se pueda sacar algún ejemplo provechoso" (I:52).

The burden of harvesting the profit ("*provecho*") is placed on the discerning eye ("*bien mirar*") of the receiver whose imagination and critical acumen can turn reading into a productive enterprise connected to an exploration of the self in the world. The same responsibility is placed by Cervantes upon the reader of his plays when he differentiates between "*ver de espacio*," that is seeing carefully or having the possibility to reflect on what is on the printed page, versus the experience of seeing (and listening to) what passes quickly ("*lo que pasa apriesa*") in the commercial theater of the early 1600s, where the spectator is prone to be taken in by the illusion-making devices of the stage, by the spectacularity of it all, and by the propagation of social myths which reinforce the established system of values (Castillo and Spadaccini, "Cervantes y la comedia nueva").

In *Don Quijote* and *El casamiento engañoso/El coloquio de los perros*, the fictionalization of linguistic problems allows one to witness the drama of the "decentering of language[,] the turning away from absolute authority and the consequent opening of a greater interpretative space for the reader" (Spadaccini and Talens). Such a drama has been perceptively diagnosed by Forcione, who views it as the reflection of "a radical alteration in man's linguistic consciousness," while pointing out that "in its background we can detect the affirmative attitudes toward the plurality of languages working the most innovative of the humanist writings on the subject" (193). The play of perspectives in the *Coloquio* has been seen as the reaffirmation of the value of linguistic fragmentation (Forcione 188-90) as well as a way of drawing attention to language's potential for concealment and violence. It has also been argued (Spadaccini and Talens) that Cervantes's texts dramatize the economy of linguistic exchanges and that in

so doing they force one to see beyond the linguistic properties of discourse to focus on its performative aspects (Bourdieu).

In the *Coloquio de los perros* Cervantes deconstructs the first-person, picaresque autobiographic narrative, returning to an issues that has concerned him in *Don Quijote* (I, 22). There, in the episode of the galley slaves, we were told that Ginés de Pasamonte had written his life story, that he had pawned it, that he aimed to reclaim it, and that he looked forward to completing it upon his return to jail. Ginés compares his narrative favorably to the well-known *Lazarillo de Tormes* and “all others of that kind,” boasting that his account is a truthful one and that the truths contained in it could not be equaled by any lies. In response to Don Quijote’s question he describes his book this way:

Es tan bueno—respondió Ginés—que mal año para *Lazarillo de Tormes* y para todos cuantos de aquel género se han escrito o escribieren. Lo que sé decir a voacé es que trata de verdades , y que son verdades tan lindas y tan donosas, que no pueden haber mentiras que se le igualen. (I, 22:271-72)

When Don Quijote asks him to reveal the title of his book he says, *La vida de Ginés de Pasamonte*, and when he is asked whether or not he has completed writing it he answers playfully: “¿Cómo puede estar acabado ... si aún no está acabada mi vida?” The galley slave pulls Don Quijote’s leg by equating his biological life with its literary rendition, only to undercut this equation when he states that he knows exactly how to end his own story for he had already committed it to memory (“me lo sé de coro” [I, 22: 272]). Moreover, his story is unapologetic about his criminal behavior, unlike the “Life” of Guzmán de Alfarache, in which the narrator distances himself from the antisocial, sinful deeds of the *pícaro* (his former self).

In the *Coloquio de los perros*, Cervantes further underscores the limits of the picaresque, a genre that had become extraordinarily popular following the publication of *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599;1604)—which was to go through twenty- six editions and some fifty thousand printed copies in the seventeenth century—and the subsequent reissuing of *Lazarillo de Tormes*. The deconstructive operation begins in the above-mentioned episode of the galley slaves in *Don Quijote* and is completed in the *Coloquio de los perros*, where the dual protagonists Berganza and Cipión (and their creator, the ensign Campuzano, himself protagonist of the frame novella) struggle with the ambiguities of their text. The two establish a pact: Berganza is charged by Cipión with telling his own story first, promising not to interrupt it unless Berganza digresses. When the latter, following the models of picaresque, autobiographic “Lives,” begins his account in linear fashion but soon digresses and moralizes, Cipión stakes out his own position about what a good story ought to be told: “Quiero decir que la sigas de golpe, sin que la hagas que parezca pulpo, según la vas añadiendo colas” (II, 319).

Cipión's neo-Aristotelian scheme does not allow for the possibility that such digressions “are not the result of [Berganza's] lack of capacity to narrate but an intrinsic necessity to produce a discourse on

the world” (Nerlich 93-94). In other words, Cipión’s corrective draws qualitative distinctions between different kinds of discourses or domains of thought (Nerlich 92) and, as such, constitutes an attempt to censor the production of a new kind of text. A further complication is introduced by the frame novella (*El casamiento engañoso*) when a reader named Peralta reports his impressions of the story to his friend Campuzano: “Aunque este coloquio sea fingido y nunca haya pasado, pareceme que está tan bien compuesto que puede el señor Alférez pasar adelante con el segundo” (II, 359). Peralta praises Ensign Campusano’s writing skills and encourages him to keep writing and produce Cipión’s story. The reference to the “feigned” (“*fingido*”) character of the *Coloquio* relates directly to the problem of verisimilitude which, in Cervantes, is connected not only to the “attitude of the narrator” (El Saffar 21) but also with the experience and expectations of readers (Spadaccini). One might also say that in these novellas, as in *Don Quijote*, issues are dealt with fragmentarily within a complex range of narrative voices and shifting perspectives and that it is precisely such fragmentariness which forces readers to assess and, perhaps, redefine experience as they go on discovering that perceptions are generally shaky and unstable (Forcione 173).

Within this context, the discerning reader is one who is capable of going beyond the simple linguistic properties of discourse to discover that those properties “announce the authority and social competence of speakers” (Bourdieu 65). In fact, the issue of authority and competence of speakers and listeners (of narrators and narratees) is at the heart of the problem of communication which takes center stage not only in the *Coloquio* and other novellas but also, to a much greater extent and depth, in *Don Quijote* and *Persiles y Sigismunda* (1617), Cervantes’s last novel. In all these texts, exemplarity is to be sought in the pragmatic effects on the reader who must cope with the fragmentary nature of language and the illusory connection between words and things. What is remarkable is that while these lessons seem to be at the heart of Cervantes’s writing, with few exceptions (notably Blanco Aguinaga), it was largely after the entrenchment of poststructuralism that they began to be highlighted by professional critics.

Having focused so much on the reader, let us now examine the question of the Author, especially since his or her dissolution or death has become a virtual doctrine following some extraordinary thoughts on the subject by Foucault (“What is an Author?”) and Barthes (“The Death of the Author”). The pertinent passages of those two classic essays are worth reproducing. For the former, an author is defined as “those aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operation that we force texts to undergo, the connections that we make, the traits that we establish as pertinent, the continuities that we recognize, or the exclusions that we practice” (qtd. in Clayton vii). For Barthes,

The Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. In complete contrast the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is

in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now. (qtd. in Lodge 149)

Yet, an interesting aspect of *Don Quijote*, Parts I and II, is the Author's substantive presence in the text, beginning with the prologue to Part I, in which the narrator struggles to introduce his story precisely because of a reticence to imitate models, preferring instead to write a prologue that does away with authority and conventions. More precisely, this position allows the Author to reflect on the experimental writing project that he has just completed and to speculate about its journey in print. In the second paragraph of the prologue, the narrator stages the precise moment when, faced with the choice of either emulating past authorities or deviating from them, he finds himself staring at a blank page: "Muchas veces tomé la pluma para escribille, y muchas la dejé, por no saber lo que escribiría; y estando una suspenso, con el papel delante, la pluma en la oreja, el codo en el bufete y la mano en la mejilla ..." (52-53). At that moment, staring at the paper in front of him, not knowing to proceed, he is rescued by a friend, his alter ego, who convinces him that it does not matter what the "*vulgo*" will think and say about his text's lack of marginalia, or end notes, or references to sources, or sonnets written by people of rank or fame: "Write your own sonnets," he says, and, as for writing about books of chivalry, he suggests that he experiment to his heart's content for Aristotle had never written about them. The final counsel is that he should seek to entertain different types of readers and follow through on his plan to do away with the ill-founded books of chivalry.

We know that Cervantes rearticulates the conventional discourses of all sorts of genres that enter his novel, so that this particular prologue continues in that vein. What are striking, however, are the demonstrated self-consciousness and, one might say, the assertiveness of the Author whose presence in the text, whose claim to authorship and originality, is relentless. This is, perhaps, even more striking in Part II, where Cervantes answers the apocryphal *Don Quijote* of Avellaneda, by deploying all sorts of metafictional strategies to expose it as a fraud. The Author's claim to originality is, of course, tempered by the notion that his literary child (or stepchild) will circulate unencumbered by its creator. Thus, in the "*Prólogo al lector*" to the cited *Novelas ejemplares*, he suggests that his novellas "grow in the arms of the printing press," and that, implicitly, they are accessible to readers whose interests and tastes may well be removed from those of the Author. Moreover, those readers are not bound to accept any sort of expressed intentionality on the latter's part. Yet, it is also the case that if reading or the critique of it takes such a prominent place in Cervantes's texts, one is not allowed to forget the Author for long as he stages, through various textual strategies, his own appearances and disappearances. In so doing, the "*lector mío*" is reconnected with the Author's writing desk: his writing laboratory so to speak. This is done through various devices, including passing mentions of other texts that a certain Cervantes Saavedra has authored and other well-known biographical references. I shall limit myself to a few salient examples.

On the occasion of the purging of Don Quijote's library (I, 6), an event that parodies the discourse of the Inquisition, some books are saved while others are relegated to a bonfire. Among those saved is none other than Miguel de Cervantes's pastoral romance *La Galatea* (1585). Later, at Juan Palomeque's inn (I, 32), the audience's attention is drawn to a mysterious suitcase left there by an unnamed owner, a suitcase containing, in additions two romances of chivalry and the "veridical" stories of two soldiers (Gonzalo Hernández de Córdoba and Diego García de Paredes), a manuscript titled *Novela del curioso impertinente*, which the priest proceeds to read aloud to Cardenio, Dorotea/Micomicona, Nicholas the barber, and Sancho. The innkeeper mentions that other guests have been so pleased and entertained by the story that they sought to take possession of it, only to be rebuffed by him for fear of the reappearance of its rightful owner: "le hago saber que algunos huéspedes que aquí la han leído les ha contentado mucho, y me la han pedido con muchas veras; mas yo no se la he querido dar, pensando volvérsela a quien aquí me dejó esta maleta olvidada con estos libros y esos papeles; que bien puede volver su dueño por aquí algún tiempo" (I, 33:398). Later still, when the possibility of the owner's reappearance is foreclosed, there is renewed discussion about the suitcase and the discovery of yet another manuscript within its fold:

El ventero se llegó al cura y le dio unos papeles, diciéndole que los había hallado en un aforro de la maleta donde se halló la *Novela del curioso impertinente*, y pues que su dueño no había vuelto más por allá, que se los llevase todos; que, pues él no sabía leer, no las quería. El cura se lo agradeció, y abriéndolos luego, vio que al principio de lo escrito decía: *Novela de Rinconete y Cortadillo*, por donde entendió ser alguna novela, y coligió que, pues la del *Curioso impertinente* había sido buena, que también lo sería aquélla, pues podría ser fuesen todas de un mismo autor; y así, la guardó con presupuesto de leerla cuando tuviese comodidad. (I, 47:559-60)

The priest, who enjoyed reading the *Novela del Curioso impertinente*, looks forward to reading the new-found one surmising that they might be by the same author. We see that, throughout Part I of *Don Quijote*, Cervantes's signature seems to reappear when we least expect it, at times through oblique maneuvers, as we have noted with the mention of his manuscripts, including the exemplary novella found in the lining of the mysterious suitcase; at other times, it happens through explicit mentions of his name, first as the author of *La Galatea* (I, 6) and later as "un soldado español llamado tal de Saavedra" in the *Historia del cautivo* (I, 40: 486), a clear reference to Cervantes's own plight in Algiers and his heroic attempts to escape from captivity, a story which has been inculcated into the mind of virtually every reader of *Don Quijote*.

In *Don Quijote*, Part II, the Author reappears with a vengeance to inscribe in his text a critique the apocryphal Part II of Avellaneda's book, a critique which begins in the "*Prólogo al lector*" and runs virtually through the entire last third of the novel. Moreover, the second part of Cervantes's novel also initiates a

critique of the reception of Part I: the manner in which the novel was consumed by different types of readers; its supposedly loose structure, especially the use of the novella, *El curioso impertinente*; and a comment about the way in which printed texts are read: slowly, deliberately, critically. In the voice of Sansón Carrasco, who has just returned from the University of Salamanca, it is stated: “las obras impresas se miran despacio” (II, 65), adding later that it is virtually impossible to compose a book that pleases and satisfies all readers: “que es grandísimo el riesgo a que se pone el que imprime un libro, siendo de toda imposibilidad imposible componerle tal, que satisfaga o contente a todos los que le leyeren” (II, 65).

These points are worth noting, because Cervantes’s self-reflexivity involves intricate connections between different kinds of texts and the way they are consumed. Especially interesting is the differentiation that is established between reading a play and witnessing a staged performance of the same within the framework of a public theater that had accepted the model proposed by Lope de Vega in *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo* (1609). This discussion, which is initiated in *Don Quijote* (I, 48)—and which precedes the actual publication of the Lope de Vega’s manifesto alluded to above—continues in “*Adjunta al Parnaso*,” and is inscribed in a number of his late plays (*comedias* and *entremeses*) which function dialogically to contest the dominant, authoritarian discourse of the new theater of the early 1600s.

Some of those texts elicit a substantive discussion of the potentiality of reading as a practice of contestation, pointing to the tensions between a kind of writing aimed at the expectations of a public oriented toward “mass consumption” (the plays of Lope de Vega and his school of playwrights) and one which implicated the “*lector mío*” in the construction of meaning. This is stated explicitly by Cervantes’s alter ego, Miguel, in “*Adjunta al Parnaso*,” when he explains why he plans to publish his plays rather than having them represented on stage: “Pero yo pienso darlas a la estampa, para que se vea de espacio lo que pasa apriesa, y se disimula, o no se entiende, cuando las representan” (183). His position on this issue is in stark contrast to that of Lope de Vega, who expresses reluctance at having his plays appear in print for fear of being subjected to private scrutiny. Thus, he says of his plays: “No las escribí con este ánimo [de imprimirlas], ni para que los oídos del teatro se trasladasen a la censura de los aposentos” (qtd. in Spadaccini and Talens 45-46). While Lope seems to prefer the “mass” consumption of plays staged in the *corrales*, Cervantes imagines a more intellectual type of reception, much as he does with his novels and novellas when he postulates a “*lector mío*.” One might say that Cervantes seeks to dismantle the contrivances of the new theater through the production of a new kind of discourse, one which “would be capable of inscribing in the space of the written text what in his time seemed not to be materializable as a performance on stage” (Spadaccini and Talens 107).

To return to the question of metafiction, it has been said that it is “a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to

pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Waugh 40). It has also been argued that this type of fictional writing tends to problematize the question of “representation” in that it is not the world as such that can be “represented” but the “discourses on the world” (Waugh 41). Finally, what is often stressed in discussions on metafiction is the provisionality of reality and history or the idea that the world is “a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures” (Waugh 44). These characteristics, which are now used to define contemporary fictional writing, also obtain in Cervantes and they encompass above all his novelistic writing and, secondarily, what one might call “narrating theatricality.” Yet while Cervantes’s texts call attention to themselves as artistic constructs, they also pose a challenge to authority and tradition and, with it, a rejection of all kinds of dogmatisms. This would also suggest that, despite our present-day interest in readings that are essentially anti-humanistic—readings that are highly suggestive, to be sure, and in line with our own critical agendas—the text’s dialogism and the Author’s shadow likewise point to some kind of search for a synthesis. Metafiction, yes. *Ma non troppo*.

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