

Consciousness and Truth
in *Don Quijote*
and Connected Essays

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Introduction

THIS BOOK IS MY third attempt at writing about Cervantes's works. I thought that in order to tackle a book on *Don Quijote* I should work with another genre of Cervantes's work as an introduction to his larger work. To that end I published two works on the *Novelas ejemplares*. That proved to be a useful exercise but not a critical one. The *Novelas ejemplares* have a certain amount of material and thematics that coincide with *Don Quijote*, but in the *Novelas ejemplares* Cervantes was attempting to out-Boccaccio Boccaccio. But *Don Quijote* represents a greater challenge, one that goes beyond the perspective of short fiction, at which Boccaccio (and Cervantes) excelled.

In writing *Don Quijote*, Cervantes had a more complete idea and program of the creation of a new form of literature. As E. C. Riley has shown, Cervantes supersedes with great skill and controlled irony the very sub-genres that he wove into the fabric of his *Don Quijote*. In the course of this challenge, Cervantes created the first modern novel.

In order to carry out this challenge successfully Cervantes had to understand the dynamics of the other genres. In doing so, his creation is founded on a number of variables, not the least of which is Cervantes's own vision and understanding about what life was all about, and a deeply felt existential reaction to his own experiences, which he transfers on to his characters.

Dealing with *Don Quijote* involves handling several threads at a time, and many times these threads are functionally independent and do not lend themselves easily to accommodation; thus my decision to focus principally on the themes of consciousness and the search for objective truth and reality.

During the time that I have researched and written this book, I have consulted many colleagues, and I wish to thank them all, especially Sam Armistead who, over the many years of our friendship lent me his moral support and limitless knowledge of literature, language and many, many other areas of knowledge. In the interstices of the work one can see and feel the presence of M.J. Benardete, my first teacher of Spanish literature and to Américo Castro whom I studied through his students and followers, Joseph

H. Silverman, Samuel Armistead, Stephen Gilman, Manuel Durán, A.A. Sicroff, Francisco Márquez Villanueva and Benito Brancaforte. I also proffer my thanks to Ignacio Navarrete, Luigi Imperiale and Manuel Da Costa Fontes, attentive scholars and friends; to Joseph Kronick, who always had time to direct me along newer theoretical dimensions; to Robert L. Fiore, Narciso Bruzzi Costas, Dominic K. Finello, Jesús Torrecilla, and Bryant Creel, whose intelligence stimulated me to chart new paths to the understanding of literature; to Emily Batinski, my current Chair, who offered me unlimited moral support in this project. Above all, to my wife, Carolyn and our children, Frank Peyton Ricapito and Maria Ricapito who have always understood my passion for literature and have given me much support as I pursued my literary critical ends. To all of you, I say “thank you,” and hope that this book does justice to my debt to you.

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1 Consciousness and *Don Quijote*

IN 1975, J.B. AVALLE Arce published an essay that dealt with consciousness in *Don Quijote*. He presented a balanced picture of what this theme was and meant. He especially took pains to point out that at its base, consciousness was linked with the Orteguian concept of an individual's contact with an experienced vital project (this in the Spanish sense of *vital* as in *proyecto vital*). The *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines consciousness as "consciousness or reflection is a person's observing or noticing the 'internal operation' of his mind. It is by means of consciousness that a person acquires the ideas of the various operations or mental states such as the ideas of perceiving, thinking, doubting, reasoning, knowing and willing and learns of his own mental states at any given time" (191b).¹

¹ See Avalle-Arce (Avallé henceforth), *Nuevo*, "El conocimiento se puede definir como la trayectoria que liga nuestra conciencia con una zona determinada de la realidad," p. 40. See also, "Conocimiento y verdad aparecen en la obra cervantina indisolublemente unidos a un tercer término: vida. El problema es, pues, trino y uno." (17-18); Avallé and Riley, "Sin embargo, el punto central del *Don Quijote* es el mismo de *Don Quijote*...Se lee la novela de dentro hacia fuera, por así decir. Partiendo de un punto humano particular, el sentido de la historia va radiando hacia horizontes infinitos de lo universal..." (*Suma*, 71). "My premise [Gaylord's] in this essay is that Cervantes's novel foregrounds intentions—his own, *Don Quijote*'s, those of a whole host of other characters—not in order to tease us into deciphering his own 'true' authorial purpose but rather to dramatize the difficulties inherent in all intending and meaning. In his exposure of the contradictions at the core of orthodox plotting Cervantes not only foreshadows the Freudian account of a masochistic contest between repressing consciousness and intractable unconscious but anticipates ironically Freud's linking of the work of repression to the idea of civilization itself" (117); see also Cascardi, "From an existentialist point of view, *Don Quijote* represents a successful correction of the heroic ideal insofar as Cervantes is compelled to redirect his hero's failures and succeeds in transforming these into sources of authentic self-creation" (42). Riley says, "Cervantes's ironic vision enables him to put within the pages of *Don Quijote* things that are normally outside

This definition gets at the root of the personal aspects of consciousness, and I shall be using this theme as a key to the understanding of Cervantes's *Don Quijote*. In order to do this to my satisfaction and within the purview of the purpose of this book, I shall be extending the definition to include the sense of consciousness not only in the case of Don Quijote but also to that of other characters and of the author himself, in the measure that this can be done deductively from what is known about the man and his life. I realize that I am dangerously crossing boundaries but I believe that to understand *Don Quijote*, the reader and critic must examine how some basic ideas on life and living are proposed and dealt with by Cervantes.²

I begin with a treatment of consciousness through the experience of the Captive (I, 39-41). Consciousness is the awareness of more than how a person manages important life experiences through inner mental procedures. Consciousness is based upon the sense a person has about the self and how one responds to profound questions, and this includes how an individual processes emotions and reactions. To have consciousness means an individual has an awareness of life around him/her, and how such

books automatically and also to manipulate the story so that the principal characters are actually conscious of the world outside the covers of the book" (*Theory*, 40).

² See René Girard who notes that nobility, passion and desire comes from within (116) as well as Efron, "Benedetto Croce spelled out the philosophical and psychological assumptions behind these views when he wrote that all of us are in a state of unshakable sympathy with Don Quijote simply because life is itself a process of necessary illusions" (6). Cfr. Auerbach's definition of what is Cervantean: "First of all it is something spontaneously sensory: a vigorous capacity for the vivid visualization of very different people in very varied situations, for the vivid realization and expression of what thoughts enter their minds, what emotions fill their hearts, and what words come to their lips. This capacity he possesses so directly and strongly, and in a manner so independent of any sort of ulterior motive, that almost everything realistic written before him appears limited, conventional, or propagandistic in comparison" (Lowry Nelson, Jr., 118). Very much to the point, Grinberg and Rodríguez look for the reasons of madness. Freud, they aver, tries to make sense of madness. One must look for the source of "la razón de la sinrazón" (28). Yet, Carlos Feal says, "Don Quijote answers that there is a point in doing something for no reason at all. The reason for his unreason is clear, however: it is the reason of the unconscious, the repressed, which, as we have seen, Cardenio has compelled Don Quijote to face" (187); Márquez Villanueva says, "Su [Cervantes's] mentalidad universalmente crítica desconfía de todas las escolásticas y, en una época de ideologías en pugna, profesa (como sólo él podía hacerlo) una generosa lección sobre la esencial relatividad del hecho humano" (*Personajes*, 13).

awareness leads to action (or, as in some cases, inaction). Being conscious means a person is aware of the self, whence it came and where it is going; how the historical, economic and social factors have molded an individual's world view. Consciousness also means an awareness of the past and how such a memory aims someone in the present or the future.³

In a well-argued book, Martínez Bonati surveys the theme of consciousness in the following way: "As the phenomenological school of criticism has assumed, the fundamental meaning of a work of fiction and art lies in the ideal consciousness that is shaped in it. A new frame of mind, an imaginary and artificial self, is adopted by the reader in the process of experiencing literature. It is through this medium of a consciousness transformed however slightly, that a new image of the world can appear" (xii).

Don Quijote is unique because it is almost impossible to grasp a basic notion or idea that embraces the whole. I do not believe that Cervantes intended to isolate one idea that is the root. *Don Quijote* is composed of so many separate threads that it is almost impossible to say that one emotion dominates the work.⁴

³ See Martínez Bonati, "The *Quixote* can be seen as a vast and subtle rhetorical-didactic operation, in the second of the senses of these terms that I have delineated. It begins by seducing readers with the joys of the comical and its devices, or with conventionally romancesque appearances that conceal a problematic depth, in order to carry them along toward growing uncertainties, to perplexities of ethical judgment, and to symbols of inexhaustible meaning. These complications will temporarily suspend the force of readers' convictions, and at the same time will activate their sensibility and their intelligence" (35).

⁴ Riley's work should inform us adequately about the theoretical foundations of *Don Quijote*. But the very nature of the work, built on ambiguity and the opposite of the national approach to things, instead brings the reader to certain pitfalls (according to traditional Western canons). As Girard says, "A basic contention of this essay is that the great writers apprehend intuitively and concretely, through the medium of their art, if not formally, the system in which they were first imprisoned together with their contemporaries" (3). A Valle/Riley note, "Se puede decir que si el mundo de don Quijote está gobernado por la lógica del absurdo, los mundos de Sancho y de Andrés están gobernados por el absurdo de la lógica" (*Suma*, 54). According to Márquez Villanueva, "Sirven [técnicas cervantinas] así para introducimos en un laberinto determinado por la ambigüedad, la aporía y la paradoja, cuya difícil o, tal vez, imposible salida ha de ser buscada por la conciencia personal de cada uno (*Personajes*, 13). He also notes, "No se olvide que la naturaleza ambigua y aporética de personajes y temas del *Quijote* no tiene nada de casual: deriva de una coherencia interna muy buscada y no al contrario" (14). Focusing on Dorotea, Márquez says,