



REVIEWS

James Iffland. *De fiestas y aguafiestas: risa, locura e ideología en Cervantes y Avellaneda*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 1999. 605 pp.

Hidden within this massive, "exhaustive" (touse the author's own word) consideration of three versions of *Don Quijote* in the light of Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque is a cogent, elegant interrogation of the relationship between two works of complex, multifaceted genius (Cervantes' *Don Quijote* of 1605 and 1615) and another simpler, unidimensional one (Avellaneda's *Segundo tomo*, 1614). It can be difficult, however, to discern the outline of this delicate and useful analysis through the dense theorizing that surrounds and nearly overwhelms it.

De fiestas y aguafiestas consists of an Introduction, which establishes the rationale for a comparative study of Cervantes and Avellaneda and distinguishes Iffland's approach from those of previous studies, principally those of Gilman and Aylward; three parts, which correspond roughly to the *Quijotes* of 1605, 1614, and 1615; and an epilogue that emphasizes Avellaneda's dedication to generic decorum and the approval that such a stance received during the Neoclassical period that followed Cervantes' own Baroque.

Iffland begins by asserting the importance of reading Avellaneda's *Quijote* for understanding Cervantes' obviously much greater accomplishment. The author correctly reasons that it makes no sense to scorn the lesser work, since almost all other literary attempts suffer in comparison to the Cervantine standard. Furthermore, Avellaneda's version provides a clear idea of how that of Cervantes was read in the seventeenth century: "estudiar a Avellaneda es estudiar la recepción contemporánea del *Quijote*" (17). Finally, *cervantistas* ought to read Avellaneda because the master himself did, and his reading helped to shape the second part of his work: "Avellaneda influye en Cervantes, es así de simple" (17).

Iffland then explains how his interpretation of Avellaneda's ideological dispute with Cervantes differs from Gilman's, pointing out that, among other things, the eminent critic's view of Avellaneda as operating within a tradition of asceticism reemphasized by the Counterreformation discounts the promi-

nence of obscene humor in the *Segundo tomo*, and implies a substantial ecclesiastic, theological presence that the work itself does not portray. Iffland (correctly, in this reviewer's opinion) finds the true difference between Cervantes and Avellaneda in the sociopolitical and aesthetic, as opposed to the theological realm. He argues that the latter's avatars at the level of the fiction are the "caballeros de buen gusto" who make Avellaneda's hero perform for their own collective enjoyment and who, in Iffland's words, "en su papel de baluartes de la sociedad monárquico-señorial se sienten amenazados por cualquier artefacto cultural que pudiera contribuir siquiera un poquito a la gran ebullición social de la época" (26). Thus, Avellaneda functions as an "intelectual al servicio de la nobleza terrateniente y de la monarquía absoluta" (27).

Iffland then enters into a microscopic examination of the three works through the lens of the ories of the carnivalesque in order to demonstrate that Cervantes' 1605 *Don Quijote* was "una obra que emite resonancias desestabilizadoras" (34), which was bound to upset the status quo so valued by Avellaneda. According to Iffland, Cervantes portrays a carnivalesque world of inverted social hierarchies, in which his hero clashes with both secular and ecclesiastic authorities, and in which those of lower rank are permitted, indeed encouraged, to laugh at those supposedly above them. Iffland identifies this laughter with the concept of "Renaissance laughter" described by Bakhtin, and sets in within the carnivalesque world with its roots in "lo festivo popular" (62). This permits the critic to associate Don Quijote with a series of characters who appear in popular (which is to say, folk) festivals throughout European history, principally the carnival king, but also Saturn, the holy fool, the warrior-god, and the prophet. All of this is also related to Don Quijote's reversible role as the *loco/cuerdo*, and to his mobility as a self-appointed *caballero andante*.

Don Quijote's practice of inventing new roles for others in the service of his chivalric project, Iffland argues, has the effect of "carnavalizando toda la estructura social a cada paso" (63), and both Sancho and Dulcinea play an important part in this process. Sancho, like his master, functions as the carnival king and embodies reversibility as the figure of the *tonto/listo*. In addition, those qualities traditionally associated with the stereotypical peasant—gluttony, drunkenness, contact with lower animals such as swine and asses, as well as the earth, and ignorance of social niceties with regard to sex and elimination—are highlighted as those celebrated by the popular festivals termed collectively "carnival." As for Dulcinea, as a peasant girl raised to the status of chivalric lady or princess, she becomes the most extreme example of the "carnavalesque coronation" that Don Quijote performs throughout the first part of his story.

In Part II, Iffland focuses on the divergence between the 1605 *Don Quijote* and Avellaneda's continuation, concentrating especially on the ideological motivations for the "flattening" that the characters undergo. Central to his

argument is the contrast between Cervantes' laughter, which is characterized as "polidireccional" (236), and Avellaneda's, which "parte con preferencia desde instancias aristocráticas o nobles, desde arriba para abajo." Iffland aptly compares this supercilious and ubiquitous laughter to situation comedy "laugh tracks," the purpose of which is to incite the audience to laugh whether the spectacle justifies it or not. He also highlights the difference between Don Quijote's literary dreams of chivalric fame in Cervantes with Avellaneda's hero's social ambitions: "Este don Quijote, aunque loco, propone un plan de acción que no dista mucho de lo que querría hacer cualquier trepador cortesano de la época: ir a la corte—centro del poder—y buscar apoyos. Ya no se trata tanto de viajes a tierras lejanas, peleas contra gigantes y ejércitos inmensos, una vida ascética, llena de sufrimientos... Ha quedado en forma desnuda el proyecto de ascenso social, siguiendo el camino que tantos de sus contemporáneos están siguiendo junto con él" (247). Gone are Don Quijote's moments of clarity and eloquence, his ethical idealism, and ultimately, his pathos and grandeur. Avellaneda reduces him to a crazy *arriviste*, one who richly deserves both his casting as court buffoon by the "caballeros de buen gusto" and his eventual incarceration in the *manicomio* by those same gentlemen. Sancho and Dulcinea suffer the same simplifying treatment at Avellaneda's hands, becoming, in the case of the former, a greasy grotesque constantly stuffing his face with as much food as he can cram in and who cheerfully sells out to accept a permanent position as a court buffoon, and in that of the latter, a slatternly prostitute and procuress named Bárbara of outstanding ugliness and debasement, whom Avellaneda places in the "idealized" woman's role after his Don Quijote renounces Dulcinea and love.

The cultural result of Avellaneda's changes is what Iffland terms "una fiesta confiscada," in which the traditional elements of Carnival are usurped by the ruling class for its own purposes, rather than representing a true expression of popular cultural revolt. Iffland tests this conclusion against Cervantes' 1615 second part, which, the critic maintains, underwent crucial changes after Cervantes read Avellaneda's version, which the former used "no tanto como inspiración, ni mucho menos como plagio, sino para jugar con él, superándolo" (380). In particular, Iffland asserts that the changes Cervantes made went beyond the various rancorous comments about Avellaneda and his work, the appearances of characters from the "false" continuation, and the redirection of Don Quijote's itinerary away from Zaragoza. Instead, Cervantes altered those aspects to which Avellaneda had reacted most strongly, in order to emphasize their differences. One of the areas most affected by this process was precisely the reversibility of Don Quijote and Sancho, and it is true that in the 1615 text, many more characters comment with surprise on the difficulty they have deciding whether master and squire are, respectively, crazy and simple, or sane and clever.

The reason that Cervantes magnified his protagonists' reversible tenden-

cies, according to Iffland, was to maintain the carnivalesque ambiance of the work, in contrast to the political confiscation of popular festival in Avellaneda, and in spite of the more courtly settings of the major episodes of the 1615 work. In fact, Iffland places Cervantes' sociopolitical orientation in the context of an incipient bourgeoisie that opposed the decaying nobility and monarchic absolutism (580). Similarly, Iffland presents aesthetic reasons for insisting on Don Quijote's moments of discretion and dignity, arguing that Cervantes objected to the "trivialización" (559) to which Avellaneda subjects his protagonist. This accounts for the somber ending accorded to Don Quijote's story. Iffland maintains that this is a relatively ad hoc moment, and not one that the text prepares for during the entire second part. Instead, it is a late decision based on Cervantes' reading of Avellaneda; otherwise, "la lógica carnavalesca sobre la que está erigido el texto permitía perfectamente una futura resurrección, seguida por más aventuras" (559), most likely, "aventuras pastoriles." Iffland continues to question whether the "carnavalesque logic" would not make it "conceivable que Cervantes dejara vivir a don Quijote al final de la obra" (562), and even speculates that this logic makes it likely that we are meant to laugh at Don Quijote's death (565).

The extent to which *Fiestas y aguafiestas* insists on the dominance of Cervantes' carnivalesque spirit, even to the point of rewriting the master's work and supporting a contrarian reading of one of the more ambiguous and yet poignant scenes in literature, leads us to the problematic aspect of this study, which can be summed up in the question, Which came first, the theory or the text? Iffland, although he does mention in passing that "el Carnaval y los festivales allegados pueden funcionar como las clásicas válvulas de escape, permitiendo esa catarsis transgresiva que fortalece la jerarquía del poder" (168), never really confronts this fundamental weakness of the theory for literary, as well as social, analysis. That is to say, because Carnival is a moment and not a movement, it is ultimately either futile, since it does not fundamentally change the system, or worse, complicit with and a function of the same order. The established power creates a moving theater bounded by spatial and temporal limits within which the lower order acts out an illusory freedom which it then surrenders without complaint or permanent rebellion. It is this aspect which permits the ruling power to confiscate the festival without much change or effort.

Whether it is because Iffland wants to correct for this weakness, or because he is truly unaware of it, he compounds the problem by over-argumentation, in which every point is carried out to its logical extreme. Everything that Don Quijote and Sancho do is termed "carnivalesque," every fall is a dethroning of the carnival king and every time they pick themselves up, it is a re-crowning. Even in those cases where the text or characters themselves resist such an analysis, it is applied. For example, for Iffland, the *yelmo de Mambrino* represents a crown, and the fact that Don Quijote, who is perfectly capable of such extrapolations, does not do so in this case, is

dismissed with "Esto importa poco, porque se trata de analizar cómo lo que ocurre a continuación sigue de cerca la lógica de los ritos de Carnaval" (82). But does it? To choose another case, the study does not acknowledge that the *galeotes* episode may correspond not to a carnivalesque, archetypal logic, but rather to a historical logic, in which an old, chivalric system of justice comes into conflict with a new, absolutist mechanism.

Iffland overstates his case in other ways as well. One is by the overuse of certain theoretical terms: *carnaval* (obviously, in all of its nominal, adjectival, verbal, and adverbial variants), *desterritorializar*, *reterritorializar*, *festivo*, *cuaresmal*, *destronar*, etc. Another is by assigning massive symbolic value to the slightest gestures or actions. The fact that Don Quijote, upon gaining his freedom from the cage, gives Rocinante a couple of affectionate pats on the rump, is laden with the following interpretive significance: "También es notable que le dé palmadas 'en las ancas' a Rocinante, esto es, *en la parte trasera de su cuerpo*. Son sus propias partes traseras lo que han permitido esta libertad que está gozando, y el tocar las de su caballo, instrumento máximo de su movilidad, parecería manifestar una especie de inconsciente solidaridad con ellas" (132, emphasis added). The tendency to belabor the obvious, as in the unnecessary explanation of where one would find a horse's *ancas*, runs throughout Iffland's analysis. In this case, the following discussion of the fact that Don Quijote is free due to certain bodily necessities is also carried to an extreme. Cervantes, after all, makes it perfectly clear exactly what the moment means for him: it is one of the ordinary, human things that the knights in romance never do, and which he inserts to create a new kind of knight, and of romance, for his time. In addition, it is something that those under enchantment never do, which leads to Sancho's important realization of his own logical and literary competence.

If at some moments, Iffland overextends his analytical theorizing, in others he glosses over important distinctions. He seldom discusses the complex narratorial apparatus, and is apt to blur the distinction between narrative voice and the characters themselves. In the critical case of Dulcinea, Iffland conflates the distant model of Aldonza Lorenzo and the idealized *dama*, sometimes as explicitly as in the phrase "se encomienda a su señora Dulcinea (campesina de un pueblo de moriscos)" (230) in order to place her squarely in a carnivalesque, as opposed to chivalric romance/poetic, context. Dulcinea is perhaps the most elusive and allusive of all literary figures, and she cannot (and I would insist) should not be simplified to coincide with the original model. Similarly, Iffland takes seriously the supposedly revolutionary connotations of Sancho's dreams of advancement, disregarding the complex way in which Cervantes qualifies them. They are, first and foremost, a literary artefact that has comically been lifted from its appropriate context, in which squires are members of the nobility who earn advancement by service and/or valor. Sancho himself regards his dreams ambivalently, never able to believe or disbelieve them completely. Furthermore, when Iffland asserts "ahora es

cuestión de ostentar sus raíces campesinas, como un verdadero *self-made man*, precursor del 'sueño americano'" (534), he forgets that Sancho's "dream" does not involve working hard to improve his lot in life; he is looking for someone else (Don Quijote, la princesa Micomicona, los duques, divine providence) to make him. He declares himself over and over too lazy and cowardly to make himself.

In effect, *Fiestas y aguafiestas* does exactly what Avellaneda does, albeit in the opposite direction: it simplifies Cervantes' complex ambiguities to prove a sociopolitical point: "es evidente que un sector social disidente que empleaba el lenguaje carnavalesco para abrir brechas en la hegemonía aristocrática era justamente la incipiente burguesía o clase media" (581). Such a conclusion fails to acknowledge the fragile nature of the middle class in seventeenth-century Spain, which, as Maravall has demonstrated, was much more often committed to imitating the aristocracy than to rising up against it. It also ignores the very strong thread of nostalgia for idealized aristocratic values that runs through virtually all of Cervantes' works. When Don Quijote evokes the difference between noble blood and noble deeds, he looks backward, towards the time when blood and deeds were one, and the nobility of one's birth was displayed by the virtue of one's comportment, rather than forward, towards a future when all social distinctions are leveled.

In *Fiestas y aguafiestas*, Iffland has produced a work that contains valuable insights into Cervantes and Avellaneda and the worlds that they have built around the characters of Don Quijote and Sancho Panza. In the determination to nail every action and speech firmly to the carnivalesque theoretical framework, however, it loses touch with the very complexity and subtlety of Cervantes' achievement.

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