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Joseph Rikapito. *Consciousness and Truth in Don Quijote and Connected Essays*. Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 2007. 186 pp. ISBN: 978-1-58871-112-0.

The critical issues of *Don Quijote* considered by Joseph Rikapito are promoted through Cervantes' approach to life as lived and to Don Quijote's awareness of self and environment. Rikapito studies selective chapters and episodes of the novel as he addresses the limitlessness of Cervantes' ideas: a rich variety of concepts that make it impossible to capture simultaneously one dominant meaning which the frustrated reader hopes that Cervantes had wished to project. And because of these variegated suggestions, one has no choice but to follow the lead of Ortega y Gasset as he proclaimed the *Quijote* a colossal ambiguity. From the late nineteenth century on, *ambigüedad* combined with bitter irony mark the vision of the *Quijote*. And this vision was a step that led commentators away from the erstwhile one-dimensional funny book notion of Cervantes' work. Additionally, in two detailed chapters Rikapito traces Cervantes' concerns related to Spanish seventeenth-century history and to Cervantes' early suffering in war at Lepanto and prison in Algiers. The latter subject is termed a "wounding cycle" that the author never forgot. The multitude of clashes that take place in the *Quijote* are

to a good measure a result of those military misfortunes. Cervantes' wounded body is projected outward toward the world, like the phenomenological introspection that discovers all that there is to know about the mind supplemented by empirical research.

Ricapito's chapters on the Christian and Muslim worlds make it clear that Cervantes' experience as a captive methodologically links fictional themes and characters. To understand how the Captive may sidestep life's troublesome static ambiguity Cervantes, notes Ricapito, brings into the reader's purview all the threads of the Captive's complicated life. Such a synthesis is a residual effect of the Christian/Islamic measure of history explored throughout the *Quijote*. Ricapito therefore devotes much space to the "Captive's Tale" because it issues a wide range of emotions, especially the dramatic separation of Zoraida from her father. Ricapito observes the instances of bewilderment in the tale that foster the diversity of twists and turns in the design of consciousness that acknowledges the unpredictability of life (justifying once again Cervantes' claim that he was the first to "novelize" in Spain).

Cervantes uses the formulaic story method of charting human activity, as does Boccaccio, when living becomes dangerous and tales abound for therapeutic reasons. Fictional intrigue along with memory and language contribute to form the congregated mass that makes up consciousness.

On the whole, Ricapito acknowledges and admires Don Quijote's awareness of who he is and what he is doing, and he believes that we must ponder the uniqueness of the Cervantine hero as one who has been invented by a daring act of the author. That is, to have placed a fictive character imposing an ancient order of rules on a contemporary place not only explains the degree of Don Quijote's consciousness, but also supports the genius of Cervantes as a modern novelist. The results of the imposition are startling to say the least—and probably explosive. And the knight's actions are a confirmation that it is impossible to answer questions having to do with so-called madness. Cervantes poses epistemological riddles and leaves many of them "for the reader to decide." Ricapito avers that Don Quijote improvises with an acute responsiveness as he moves along. "Yo sé quién soy," spoken early on to his neighbor Pedro Alonso means that Don Quijote "owns" his behavior, that he can shift his course as he wishes, putting himself into another time and place when he wants to. However, to argue in favor of Don Quijote's resourcefulness Ricapito does not need to follow Van Doren's well-known theory that Don Quijote's behavior is planned theatrics.

The subject of Ricapito's book inevitably leads him to consider the question of humor, since the exercise of folly is a subtle indication of Cervantes' characters' awareness of their concrete and psychological environments. Ricapito reviews a litany of comic techniques and adventures from slapstick, caricature, disguise, play with language, misunderstanding and its resulting chaos, irony, and the grotesque. Ricapito then diminishes the importance of humor in favor of pathos: "The level of hostility that is to be seen in the treatment of Don Quijote can only be called pathos" (119).

Given this assessment of humor in the *Quijote*, Ricapito must reject the funny book syndrome as untenable. Public opinion since the publication of the 1605 *Quijote*'

has tended to view the novel as a stimulus for diversion and boisterous laughter. And well into the twentieth-century there are commentators who have not given up trying to prove that one of Cervantes' primary motives was to make people laugh. But according to Ricapito and others, to propose that fundamentally the *Quijote* is a funny book, written to set off raucous laughter, leaves much to be desired.

It is difficult to argue with Ricapito's criticism here, since the presence of anything funny or comic must presuppose that the opposite affect is much on the mind of hero and author. Besides, Ricapito sifts through the many fine distinctions and gradations of the larger category of humor. Cervantes believed, for example, that his world was unquestionably a world deserving the kind of satire he intentionally imposed on it by means of the chaos created by his inventive protagonist Don Quijote. And to move a step further, humor's dark side points to the mystery of human consciousness as a beacon of the existential puzzle that is far more revealing than that of the limited perspective of the funny book.

Ricapito's volume is insightful and written in the lively and colorful way that has marked his published research. He speaks with the fervor of an experienced scholar involved in creative and interpretative syntheses of Cervantes' *opus* and its relationship to other cultures and literatures. He shows his sensitivity to Arabic influences and to Hispano-Italic relations, mainstays of his scholarly work. Finally, the depth of Ricapito's documentation and its wide spectrum of sources are commensurate with his broad literary culture, erudition, and humanistic sensibility.

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