

Narrative Time in *Don Quijote* From Parody to Paradigm

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I WILL BEGIN WITH the simplest statement I can make about narrative time in *Don Quijote*.¹ Narrative time in the book, Part I, 1605, Part II, 1615, is solar time. It is that simple. The story is etched out according to sunlight on Spanish soil, as the sun determines night and day, dawn and dusk, and its effects on the inhabitants *en un lugar de la Mancha*. When Cervantes committed himself as exemplary narrator to parody the style and action of chivalric romances, *libros de caballerías*, he necessarily adopted as his means, that is to say, as models, their scale of narrative,—hours, days, years, according to solar motion. Those chivalric narratives like *Amadís de Gaula* and *Esplandián* are as for time and space historical accounts or chronicles: adventures, trials, travels, told in units of time, from hours of the day, months, to years but within an immutable generic season of summer.

From the first day of the story, the exemplary narrator devises a plot that mimics a chivalric sally or quest and return, with a sequel to come, an accounting of days and nights whereby his protagonist's madness and illusion can be played out. The season of summer, light and heat, long days, allow for freedom of movement; no turn of the weather or climate, wind-storm, rain, no inclemency, can interrupt or threaten the protagonist's aim or the narrator's sense of timing or his story line.

Primera Salida: at dawn in the countryside, "*antes del día... de los calurosos del mes de julio...*" the protagonist finds imaginative release from his choleric nature, sexual ardor and sexual repression, in a series of invocations: to his lady, future historian, horse-companion; at the end of this *uneventful* day, he finds an inn and an innkeeper who satisfies his wish to

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be dubbed a knight according to his illusion. The next day he attempts to 'right a wrong'—child abuse—, challenges and attacks a group of merchants from Toledo and is severely beaten.

The first sally has a duration of three days and nights, a sequence, or quest formula, of three episodes, reversal and return. The narrator describes an action as possible and imminent adventure, with, mounting expectations but resulting in a reversal that only heightens the mock-hero's illusion and resolve, with a return to the village, his body slung on the back of a *borrico* as resolution, on the third night.

In the interval of a fourth day the village priest and barber carry out the *escrutinio* of books that purportedly have caused Quijote's madness. After a period of rest for fifteen days and recovery, Sancho appears and consents to serve as squire with the promise of an island to govern.

Segunda Salida. The second sally follows in the month of August; tracing a similar but much expanded action, a going forth with heightened expectations, from the attack on the windmills, combat with the Basque to freeing the galley slaves; then reversal that obliges a retreat into the wilds of Sierra Morena and the turning point,—the love letter to Dulcinea and Sancho's trip to El Toboso; the appearance of secondary characters, Cardenio, Dorotea, and the rest; the ruse and artifice of Micomicona to turn the course of adventure homeward, the sequence of days and nights at the inn; the uproar over the "Helmet of Mambrino"; the hoax of enchanted knight riding in a cart engaged finally arrival back in the village, a public scene on a Sunday at noon. The resolution as closure is satirical: the protagonist, confined but confirmed in his illusion by the turn of events, is put to bed to recover. The prognosis is a third sally.

For my purposes today, I ask you to consider three aspects of narrative time from Part I to Part II. Reader's or a reader's grasp of the fictional time and setting of the story. The second, the narrator's sense of timing, where and how he positions the action and disclosures within the passage of time or the units of time, hours, night and day "...[un] *día de los calurosos del mes de julio;*" "*acertó a ser viernes;*" "... *a cabo de seis días llegaron a la aldea... acertó a ser domingo...*" Third, the time sense of the characters in the story, above all Quijote, whose illusion is to revive chivalry by imitating literary models.

Dichosa edad y siglo dichoso aquel adonde saldrán a luz las famosas hazañas mías... ¡ O tú, sabio-encantador... a quien ha de tocar el ser coronista desta peregrina historia! I.2

From the moment the protagonist Quijote begins to speak and act in the reasoned imitation, that is, mimicry, of a "*caballero andante*, the reader perceives the satirical connection between two schemes, the realistic depiction of his sally onto the countryside of La Mancha and the legendary place and time of the fiction he invents, his role as knight-errant in a latent, imagined *history* he is acting out. Embedded in the narrator's account is the 'original' text of Quijote's 'feats' from the hand of Cide Hamete. That this account has 'originated' within the protagonist's illusion of himself is the satirical (clinical, novelistic) device the narrator will elaborate into the climax of his story.

To read *Don Quijote*, I propose, is to keep in mind these multiple planes simultaneously; what the narrative tells us directly about space and time, and what we can imagine as the line of story, the cause and direction of the mock- hero's madness, or how he misconceives reality as an imagined time and place of chivalric adventure.

The fictional time of *Don Quijote* in the text is this multiple interplay of satirical fiction as mock romance. It is, so to speak, a Quixotic time of day, or of reading along planes of story time, superimposed or in opposition.

If the narrative in Part One is parody of the quest of chivalric romance, Part Two is an extended parody of the abduction motif and triangle: lady abducted and her abductor; Quijote, enchanted Dulinea, and Sancho the usurper of the lady's identity. The solar period of summer extends across the two narratives, whether we see one or two summers or a generic summer; the sequence is July to August in Part One, and in Part Two, from April to the festival of midsummer, 24th June.

Even the connective between the two Parts, the one month when Quijote rests and recovers, and Sansón Carrasco appears, is a summer period, or more exactly, an early, spring-like summer, as befits a new start in the same solar year.

Tercera Salida. In the parodic sense, then, the spring-like season of Part Two is a re-play of the summer of Part One, on the level of a carnivalesque and mythical trajectory, from El Toboso to the cave of Montesinos, to the ducal palace in Aragon, to Barcelona. The reader's time and picture of the satirical story line will have been turned inside out. With arrival at the ducal palace the story has become a celebration of Quijote's illusion of himself as knight and Sancho becomes Governor of Barataria. With arrival at Barcelona at midsummer, the reader is treated to the spectacle of the protagonist's social identity as wish-fulfilment, as if he were a solar

hero; that is, a mock solar hero.

For the modern reader, or, let us say, the critical reader, there is an historical dimension to the story to keep in mind. The action of Part I has to have taken place in a summer before 1598, while Felipe II is still the living monarch. The action of Part Two, published in 1615, and the second summer of the same solar year, has to take place after 1614 with the intervention of Roque Guinart, Avellaneda's spurious sequel, and the Morisco question, the Spain of Felipe III.

What we can conclude from this historical dimension is that Cervantes imagined Quijote and Sancho as creatures of his invention across a period of composition of more than twenty years, creatures who remained more or less the same age with almost the same characteristics as when he began their story as when he wrote the final scene. In some way similar nowadays to the creation of heroes or heroines— Super- or Spidermen or woman— or a comic strip or comic book, or a story serialized across decades.

Assuming the story line of Part II is continuous from the end of Part I, events in Part II—the search for a Princess on the visit to El Toboso, descent into the cave of Montesinos, arrival at the ducal palace and hoax of disenchantment of Dulcinea by Sancho—the narrative time of a second summer is forcibly imposed on the first, so that the narrative time of the whole, of the idea of the book or our text, is the imposition of the story line of Part II on Part I.

At any point in the story, in the reader's mind Quijote and Sancho retain their characteristics whatever the course of mishaps or adventures the narrator springs on them or on the reader. This effect is commensurate to the 'time' of their narrative, a summer season unfolding as both realistic and mythical. In the story a middle-aged hidalgo, facing a mid-life crisis, in an alienated state, is depicted on the road in the countryside a maybe social reformer and psychosexual case, an antiquated knight, ineffectual as to deed or intentions against a hostile and painful social reality, but in the process at the hands of the narrator's 'self-conscious' artistry becomes an original character of fiction. In other words, the 'time' of the story has been not only rejuvenation for the hidalgo but likewise his emergence as an authentic 'chivalric' fiction.

The solar summer, its elongated days, nocturnal surprises, has been the necessary setting for tracing and then re-tracing a story line that is both realism and romance, character development and then devolution, from the clinical to the mythical: a paradigm of modern fiction. Despite reversals

and ridicule, Quijote and Sancho, whatever their satirical characteristics, are confirmed in their illusion by the narrator's stratagem and techniques. At the climax of the story, the ride on Clavileño, Sancho on Barataria, the scene of welcome at Barcelona, the narrator himself, behind the mask of Cide Hamete, in celebration of their mythical identities, is prepared to devolve his narrative to the deep time of comical realism and wish-fulfilment that is romance.

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