

Ciriaco Morón. *Para entender el Quijote*. Madrid: Rialp, 2005. 348 pp.  
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Ciriaco Morón Arroyo's latest contribution to Cervantes studies is the result of a series of lectures on *Don Quijote* that he gave in February and October of 2004 as part of the Curso de Alta Especialización en Filología Hispánica, organized by the CSIC's Instituto de la Lengua Española (Madrid). It is only fitting, then, that the most fundamental quality of Morón's outstanding book is its impressive pedagogical value for students and scholars alike.

In his introduction Morón states that "la mejor lectura es la que haga el texto más transparente" (27), a tenet of literary analysis that the critic is careful to maintain throughout his cogent study. The author's lucid prose avoids intricate digressions that could hinder the understanding of his principal ideas. His structure and organization also pursue that pedagogical model by dividing the book into two complementary sections. In the first part of his book, "En el *Quijote*," the author delves into the text "para explicar los pasajes difíciles de entender y los que tienen especial importancia para la inteligencia del valor humano y artístico del libro" (25). The following seven chapters make up this first section of 182 pages: 1. "Parodia y crítica (del prólogo al capítulo 6)"; 2. "Sarta de aventuras (capítulos 7-22)"; 3. "La aventura con final feliz (capítulos 23-37)"; 4. "Novelas: realidad y discurso (capítulos 33-52)"; 5. "Autoconciencia y géneros literarios (Segunda parte: de los preliminares al capítulo 29)"; 6. "El gran teatro (capítulos 30-57)"; 7. "Para mí tan sola nació don Quijote (capítulos 58-74)."

Morón's textual commentary stems from the theory of reading that he outlined in his 1998 publication, *Las humanidades en la era tecnológica*, and which he continues to practice here: "una lectura ideal del *Quijote*: Todo el texto, pero sólo el texto" (26). The author reads against the "impressionistic" (27) interpretations of both academics and non-academics, which run the risk of "divagando sobre la 'mentalidad' de Cervantes, las condiciones socioeconómicas en que surge la obra, o el *Quijote* como expresión o rechazo de los 'valores de su sociedad'" (23). In this section, Morón is unambiguous about reading *Don Quijote* as a text and not as a context, and he centers his close reading on "la experiencia sobre la identidad y las aspiraciones humanas que Cervantes dramatiza" (27). In these seven chapters, Morón shines a light not only on his subject matter, but also on his method; we are guided through *Don Quijote* by a seasoned thinker and writer who teaches us what it means to read the humanities, and how to undertake such a formidable task.

Morón launches his exegesis on the first two sentences of Cervantes' prologue, in which the narrator a) reveals his intention and desire to create a book seemingly beyond his ability, and b) describes his work as "hijo del entendimiento." This genealogy clearly places *Don Quijote* in direct opposition to books of chivalry, which are generated instead by "la fantasía loca" (31), and the declaration gives Morón a springboard for his weighty discussion on the faculties of the soul (understanding and will) and the bodily senses, both interior and exterior. Morón sees understanding as "uno de los signos de

mayor virtualidad significativa en todo el libro" (32), and he ably recaps the scholastic philosophy that underlies Cervantes' use of this concept. Morón then follows the rhetorical link between *ingenium* and *iudicium*, derived from the senses attributed by Juan de Valdés to the terms *inventio* (corresponding to *ingenio*) and *dispositio* (corresponding to *juicio*), which Ernst Robert Curtius would later trace in his analysis of Gracián, although Morón does not cite any specific sources: "el entendimiento tiene dos funciones: la inventiva, que es el ingenio, y la facultad de selección y disposición, que es el juicio. La locura de don Quijote consiste en que se le queda suelto el ingenio—la capacidad de imaginar y de ilusionarse—porque pierde el juicio, o sea, la capacidad de distinguir entre la ilusión y la realidad" (34).

Morón concludes his commentary on these first two sentences of the prologue by pointing out not only that Cervantes' "libro no responde de manera exacta a su intención," but much more significantly, he reveals Cervantes' perception on the phenomenon of writing: "Todo texto es el resultado de un lucha entre el *querer* (todos deseamos escribir el mejor libro del mundo) y el *poder* (el fruto de su 'estéril y mal cultivado ingenio)" (35). This leads to his second thesis on writing: "Todo texto es a la vez una creación del esfuerzo del autor y un regalo de las musas. Por su esfuerzo, el autor es padre de su obra; en cambio, como receptor del regalo, es padrastro de un hijo que adopta" (35). However, this relationship quickly changes when the author/narrator discovers Avellaneda's *Don Quijote* (II, 59), at which point "abandona el juego y proclama su absoluta y exclusiva paternidad" (35).

Such meaty commentaries on passages of *Don Quijote* interlaced with some theoretical musings on the craft of writing make the first section of this book useful for readers approaching *Don Quijote* for the first time or for the twenty-first time. As is well known, Ciriaco Morón Arroyo brings a tremendous amount of erudition to his reading, yet his explanations are wholly digestible. And this is a view shared by my graduate students, who have found the present book to be a perfect complement to Cervantes' novel.

Naturally, Morón does not comment on each and every scene, whereby his selection process is implicitly underscored. Why, for example, does Morón not discuss the symbolism of the cricket cage and the hare, which Don Quijote himself interprets as images of Dulcinea (II, 73)? Don Quijote's reading of these omens, as E. C. Riley has pointed out, demonstrates a marked shift in his interpretation of and his interaction with external reality, something that Morón's readers might find worthy of his philosophical meditations. Or why does Morón not frame for his reader Sancho's speech to the dying Don Quijote (II, 74)? It is clearly impossible to carry out in any literal sense a reading of "todo el texto" (26) in a book of this length, and Morón's analyses seem to uphold Paul de Man's theory of reading in which "blindness" (selective attention) and "insight" combine to produce a provocative text in its own right.

The book's second section, "Sobre el *Quijote*," is theoretical in nature, and the following three chapters comprise the final 127 pages of Morón's text: 8. "Síntesis"; 9. "Recepción y simbolismo"; 10. "Hacia la realidad histórica del *Quijote*." Chapter 8 is

divided into three sections (“Estructura,” “Personajes,” and “Obra maestra de arte”), the second of which penetrates Cervantes’ theory of characterization, showing how the “personajes constantes del libro” (225)—Don Quijote, Sancho Panza, Dulcinea, and the author—are the fruit of “criterios ontológicos” and not “criterios psicológicos” (226). This section also reads against Salvador de Madariaga’s notion of a *quijotización* of Sancho and a *sanchificación* of Don Quijote, which Morón returns to in Chapter 10, where he attacks convincingly the ideas on “rivalidad mimética” (329) posited by René Girard and Cesáreo Bandera.

Chapter 10 is particularly stimulating in that it challenges a series of concepts and received ideas that have become part of the canonical discussion on Cervantes’ masterwork, such as *Don Quijote* being the first modern novel (331), or its relation to the “problema de los conversos” (314). While the figure of Américo Castro appears repeatedly in Morón’s rereading of the text in light of certain clichés, Morón is not launching an attack on Castro but rather on the perpetuity of ideas that cannot be substantiated through a close reading of Cervantes’ text. For example, Morón traces the line of thought, based on an ardent desire to place the novelist within our own modernity, that produced a twentieth-century “tendencia a integrar a Cervantes en el racionalismo renacentista” (300). In *Meditaciones del Quijote*, Ortega y Gasset saw Cervantes’ novel as an example of rational modernity in clear opposition to the prerational culture of medieval life. The young Ortega inherited Hermann Cohen’s notion that religion and culture are diametrically opposite concepts, and Américo Castro would incorporate this system of thought into *El pensamiento de Cervantes*. With textual evidence from *Don Quijote*, Morón refutes such misreadings in Renaissance and Cervantine rationalism, and points out that what such neo-Kantian readings fail to grasp is the presence of “la filosofía escolástica, que constituye el verdadero trasfondo del ideario de Cervantes” (302).

This chapter goes on to revisit the age-old question of Cervantes’ purported Erasmianism. Again, the misreading traces back to Américo Castro, who would later recant this position, but novelists (e.g., Juan Goytisolo and Carlos Fuentes), Hispanists, and other professors of the Humanities (e.g., Harold Bloom) continue to give life to this “tópico mostrenco” (314), in spite of stronger readers such as Morón, who since his *Nuevas meditaciones del Quijote* (1976) has endorsed the belief that “hablar del erasmismo cervantino es una ilusión quijotesca” (310). Morón lays out the basic features of Erasmianism: “1) Estudio del texto de la Biblia; 2) Antiescolasticismo; 3) *Monachatus non est pietas*; 4) Catolicismo de conducta frente a fórmulas; 5) La *Moria* y la ironía erasmiana” (310). He then proceeds to demonstrate the fallacy of linking Cervantes to Erasmus’s humanistic project.

The reevaluation of these and other received ideas makes Morón’s book a perfect tool for beginners and rethinkers alike. His arguments are well supported and easy to

grasp, yet the ideas he tackles lie at the core of any close reading of *Don Quijote*. The bivalent nature of this book—"En el *Quijote*" and "Sobre el *Quijote*"—make it an extremely valuable secondary text for advanced students looking for a profound "guide" through Cervantes' masterpiece. I certainly plan to put Morón's book on the required reading list for my graduate seminar on *Don Quijote* again next year.

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