



Maria Caterina Ruta. *Il Chisciotte e i suoi dettagli*. Palermo: Flaccovio, 2000. 257 pp.

This book consists of ten previously published essays that treat problems which *cervantistas* have pondered for a long time. Whatever the familiar topic—the apocryphal second part, story intercalation, theatricality, myth versus reality—Ruta’s work is carefully researched and pleasingly methodical. To introduce a topic, she often (though not always) begins with the origins of key words or concepts; or she merely isolates a definition of a word, such as *amistad*, *visualidad*, *beldad*, *teatro*, *apócrifo*. Then, after surveying the scholarship on the theme in question, she sensitively chooses her critical path. For example, Don Quijote’s library: After discussing the books he bought and read Ruta comes to the conclusion that the *Quijote* is not a parody or an intertextual recreation of an earlier genre, but that “the intent of the *Quijote* is the *Quijote*,” as Morón Arroyo has said. She finds that Cervantes wholeheartedly depended on the autodidacticism of a bookish character searching for a new direction for what the author believed was the prototypical “*historia maravillosa, imaginativa*.” A sound judgment on Ruta’s part, though she sometimes unnecessarily relies on the voice of another critic for a conclusion.

In her chapter on the mythic structure of the *Quijote* she offers the

following pattern of action: equilibrium, equilibrium broken, probing, disorder. Ruta explains that there is much tension between Don Quijote's original thinking and the anti-intellectual climate surrounding him, which obfuscates his objectives. In Part I he is scoffed at by persons of higher social class, but in Part II he sees the world more objectively. Ruta finds that the literary antitheses of life-death, *cuerto-loco*, action-inaction, which lie beneath the plot, match the mentality of the hero who refuses to respond to the predominant social forces.

Regarding the Avellaneda continuation, Ruta first sorts out the differences between *continuación*, *imitación*, and *obra apócrifa* and then asks what Avellaneda's work legitimately may be labeled. Using recent criticism as her point of departure, she deduces that parody would best explain Cervantes' motive for including Avellaneda in Part II. Avellaneda's Don Álvaro Tarfe is incarnated in Cervantes' book so that the characters of the two authors may confront one another on the same turf, thus to prove that Cervantes' are genuine while Avellaneda's are mere simulations. No matter the opinion one has about Avellaneda, there is little doubt that by calling attention to the apocryphal author, Cervantes simultaneously, and perhaps intentionally, documents the popularity of his own Part I. Readers and listeners enjoyed Part I as valuable entertainment, while Avellaneda's response to it was a failed attempt at correcting it.

Ruta's chapter on the visual nature of the *Quijote* ("lo sguardo") treats an aspect of Cervantes' style that suffers from a lack of critical inquiry (as E. C. Riley has said). The *Quijote* was for some—notably Ortega y Gasset—a book with an incomparable visual sense. Ruta recapitulates the movement and the sights of the *Quijote*'s narrative to prove its sensitivity to the contemporary landscapes, whether concrete or imaginary, natural or fabricated, terrestrial or marine. She then reviews the problem of realism in the Renaissance, the object-subject doubleness of reality and the artist's coming to terms with it by combining the world of the senses with the forms and ideas beyond that world. This approach results in the broadening of the scope of her remarks about the fusion of detail and Cervantes' ability to select the extraneous matter from that detail and to root it out by casting irony upon it.

Detail and its role in defining verisimilitude is a central issue of the *Quijote*. Ruta concludes that Cervantes was keenly aware of people and things of his environment, and for that reason, the loaded term "detail" intervenes in her study. Cervantes struggles with detail, from the first page of his novel. In many ways detail can be seen as a subterfuge diverting the reader who is sincere about discovering Cervantes' specific intentions; or from another perspective, detail may be a point of departure for building a case for the illusion of truth in the *Quijote*.

Among Ruta's other incursions into the interpretation of the *Quijote* are the interpolated stories and the role that women play in them. Ruta is correct in concentrating upon the dramatic nature of the *Quijote* (where once again the visual has an important part to play)—that is, on its theatricality as the narrator guides the audience with words related to the verb *ver* through his literary journey. The Maese Pedro episode epitomizes this approach, but Cervantes' theatricality is highlighted from the earlier chapters, like the Grisóstomo-Marcela interlude, in which Marcela's *coup de théâtre* occurs upon a rock overlooking Grisóstomo's tomb. While the theatrical increases in intensity in Part II, Ruta claims that it is present from the beginning, because Cervantes' worldview is one in which the unifying center has lost its force. The shift occurred because Cervantes ceded to individuals who draw the spectators' attention with their shocking conspicuousness. Theatricality thus enhances the feminine perspective, because Dorotea impressively shields her honor with a profound knowledge of the dramatic that leaves her spectators (especially Don Fernando) reeling.

"Lo brutto delle donne" is a chapter that examines the decomposition (or perhaps it is better to call it the ultimate evolution) of the Petrarchan extreme into a form that adjusts itself to the reality that Cervantes believed he had to confront in the *Quijote*. Such disintegration of ideals creates obstacles for Don Quijote. Ruta reviews the Petrarchan influences in Europe and earlier in Spain, and she then applies the Petrarchan principles to the women in the *Quijote*. The pages devoted to Dulcinea are especially well worth reading. Her image, which changes from Part I to Part II, stands in contrast to the portraits of Marcela, Dorotea, Claudia Jerónima, and Ana Félix, who break away from traditions built upon moral premises and physical conventions, which they subvert with their unusual candor and attractiveness. Ruta appropriately concentrates on Dorotea in this chapter because of her boldness and because of Cervantes' use of minute detail in the narrative of her story and in the ornateness and seductive quality of her physical postures and poses.

Sancho's rustic portrayal of Dulcinea as Aldonza of course runs contrary to the Petrarchan ideas of his master. As Part II moves along, this sometimes grotesque feature, which Ruta refers to as "lo brutto," prevails not only in the figure of Dulcinea emerging in El Toboso, but also in the characterization of Altisidora, Doña Rodríguez, and the Dulcinea of Montesinos' cave. Here, the Petrarchan code begins to be scrambled, such that caricature, like the Petrarchan antithesis Maritornes, becomes an aspect of Cervantes' style and technique that did not offend the aesthetic sensibilities of his public.

Generally, Ruta's approach with solidly based semantic probing and

Cervantes' challenge to literary tradition, her judicious application of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theory, and her highly discriminating choice of cited texts all contribute to a balanced and sober study of the *Quijote* that is thought-provoking and gratifying.

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