



Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer. *La ética del Quijote: función de las novelas intercaladas*. Madrid: Gredos, 1999. 122 pp.

Erich Auerbach's chapter on *Don Quixote* in *Mimesis*, "The Enchanted Dulcinea," both pleases and perplexes Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer. Neuschäfer applauds Auerbach's efforts to discredit the Romantics' idealistic reading of Cervantes' masterpiece, but it troubles him that Auerbach focuses his analysis primarily on the interaction between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Auerbach, explains Neuschäfer, champions the type of realist fiction that displays a concern for the commoner, that serves as a type of social statement, that problematizes real social conditions, that forces readers to examine the ethics of the society depicted by the novel. As seen by Neuschäfer, Auerbach concludes that *Don Quixote* does not display this type of ethical and social problematization: (1) the society surrounding Don Quixote is well structured; it is the demented knight who is out of place, and, once he recovers his sanity, he returns to the established,

accepted, and unchallenged order; (2) the knight's plight represents a comedy, not a tragedy; he, thus, serves more as a dismissible caricature than as a serious character. Neuschäfer states that he does not entirely disagree with Auerbach's conclusions with regard to the affairs of the knight and his companion. He does, however, question Auerbach's decision to apply his findings to the entire novel without considering the significance of the non-Quixote related events, the so-called interpolated tales. Had Auerbach included these tales in his study, suggests Neuschäfer, his interpretation might have been quite different.

The story of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, misinterpreted for years by the Romantics, explains Neuschäfer, is a tale of pride and humility. Don Quixote, as lunatic knight, haughtily seeks to force his standards on others, to improve the world and humanity, to redeem a fallen society. This deeply blasphemous arrogance does not call into question societal ethics; Cervantes, claims Neuschäfer, uses the knight's arrogance to ridicule personal excess and non-conformity, not to question social establishments. On the other hand, Don Quixote as reasonable gentleman, as Alonso the Good, demonstrates humility and compassion, understanding and tolerance. These positive qualities manifest themselves particularly in the gentleman's relationship with his squire, companion, and eventually friend, Sancho Panza. It is this pacific, conformist Don Quixote who endears himself to his readers, according to Neuschäfer, and who also triumphs, in the end, over the arrogant knight. The literary model set forth by Don Quixote closes the door to the era of epic heroes insulated from the world around them and opens a new era of literary heroes who will exemplify the social and moral difficulties associated with human relationships.

Although Neuschäfer concedes that the narrative of the knight's adventures represents a comedy when viewed in isolation from the interpolated tales, he maintains that moral messages not fully developed in the larger story of Don Quixote are highlighted and fleshed out in the interpolated tales, stories which often, despite their Christian background, have a tragic quality and outline individual ethical behavior. He insists that one can read *Don Quixote* without the interpolations, should one so choose, but that the interpolations, which serve as exemplary tales, significantly alter the interpretation of the core events.

In Part I of *Don Quixote* the interpolated tales reiterate Don Quixote's chief ethical flaw: the desire to force others to conform to his absurd, idealistic view of life. Neuschäfer explains that Don Quixote's outrageous actions all occur within the realm of illusion. The problems that he attempts to resolve (the case of Andrés, the episodes with Maritornes, the distress of the Princess Micomicona, etc.) are grounded not in contemporary reality but rather in the idealism of the fictional world that he seeks to reconstruct.

When faced with true moral injustices worthy of rectification (the slandering of the reputation of Marcela, the infractions of Don Fernando regarding Dorotea and Luscinda), Don Quixote becomes, literally, a bystander, completely ineffectual. If the analysis were to end here, suggests Neuschäfer, one could justifiably conclude that *Don Quixote* is nothing but a farce. As Neuschäfer argues, however, we should notice that the interpolated tales underscore precisely the real ethical issues that Don Quixote, in his delusion, is unable to resolve. Don Quixote's irrational love for Dulcinea and his ridiculous attempts to force others to validate his illusion are replayed in the "real" desires that Grisóstomo feels for Marcela, or in the "real"—within the bounds of the fictional frame—desires of Anselmo to test the faithfulness of his wife. Although Don Quixote's actions may be dismissed as comic, the interpolated events contain an element of tragedy: Grisóstomo dies; Lotario, Anselmo, and Camila also die. They seem, truly, to serve as negative examples of moral problems faced by individuals of the day. Thus, when considered in conjunction with the main story, these supposedly extraneous tales cast new possibilities for interpretation of the central narrative.

Part II, states Neuschäfer, is less prone to contain incidental material, for reasons well explained by the prologuist. Neuschäfer believes, however, that the governorship of Sancho Panza, if not entirely disconnected from the main story (in which, it could be argued, he himself plays a role equally as important as his lord), functions, like the interpolated events of Part I, as an exemplum. The events experienced by Sancho Panza underscore the right and ability of people to direct the affairs of their own lives and not to have people like Don Quixote (or here, we might add, the Duke) dictate their options and decisions. Also, Neuschäfer reminds us, in Part II we find the insertion of real social problems overlooked by Auerbach: (1) the exile of the *moriscos*, with all the accompanying economic, interpersonal, religious, and ethical intricacies, as demonstrated in the episodes involving Ricote and his daughter Ana Félix; and (2) the insertion of Roque Guinart, the good-hearted thief and wise sinner, whose very presence and open rebellion echoes social difficulties of the day. Both these episodes, explains Neuschäfer, serve to underscore the true, gentle, and wise nature of the temporarily insane Alonso Quixano the Good, and to prepare for the knight's reconversion to sanity and reality at the conclusion of the text.

Neuschäfer's study aptly articulates the important connection between the main narrative of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza and the episodes often deemed non-essential interspersed throughout the text. He makes a clear case for considering the interpolated tales as exempla that fortify and reiterate with seriousness the moral issues, flippantly depicted through the antics of the deranged *caballero*. Perhaps Neuschäfer could have gone even

further in disproving Auerbach's position: Carroll B. Johnson, for example, in *Cervantes and the Material World*, deftly demonstrates the presence of the material world not only in the interpolated tales but also in the central narrative, particularly, in Sancho's preoccupation with salary. Nevertheless, *cervantistas* will welcome the opportunity to review Neuschäfer's superb explanation of Cervantes' ingenious ability to interweave plot and episode both thematically and structurally, thus interconnecting the underlying moral issues and outlining an acceptable contemporary social ethic, particularly with regard to individuals and interpersonal relationships.

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