

## John Jay Allen's Contributions to Cervantes Studies<sup>1</sup>

First, let me say how happy I am to be here today. When Joe Jones invited me to participate in this symposium, I immediately decided that I would like to talk about Jay Allen's contributions to Cervantes studies, partly because that is the context in which I have known Jay best, but also because it gave me a good excuse to go back and reread many of his writings which have brought me so much pleasure and insight over the years. Jay and I have been friends for twenty-two years, but I knew and admired his work before I met the author. Indeed very few people have had so great an impact on Cervantes studies during the past thirty years as Jay Allen. His contributions have taken many different forms.

Jay completed his dissertation on "An Analysis of the Language and Style of Cervantes' 'Las dos doncellas' and 'El casamiento engañoso,'" directed by Mack Singleton, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1960.<sup>2</sup> Just two years later, he published his first article on Cervantes, "The Evolution of *puesto que* in Cervantes' Prose." Underlying this meticulously researched and carefully written little article is Allen's conviction—which would characterize all of his subsequent work on Cervantes—that broad interpretive strategies can only be validated by subjecting the text to an extraordinarily close reading. Even apparently insignificant details

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<sup>1</sup> A paper given at the Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, at the symposium honoring John J. Allen on his retirement, April 28, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> "Undertaken with a view to the need expressed by Buchanan, Amezúa, and Schevill and Bonilla for dictionaries, concordances, linguistic analyses, and vocabulary counts of Cervantes' works, . . . this analysis is an attempt to isolate and identify more precisely the salient characteristics of the language of two of the *Novelas ejemplares*, to establish a factual statistical basis for the common distinction drawn between the 'romantic' or 'Italianate' stories and the 'realistic' stories. . . . The analysis revealed a number of clearly perceptible differentiating characteristics of language and style" (from the summary in *Dissertation Abstracts International*).

can sometimes yield surprisingly important insights. The article demonstrates that Cervantes' use of *puesto que* as a concessive conjunction equivalent to *aunque* decreased significantly during the course of his career, while his use of *puesto que* in its modern meaning as a causal conjunction increased in his later writings. The two major portions of *Don Quijote*, Part One, which are clearly interpolations—"El curioso impertinente" and the Captive's Tale—contain much higher ratios of the use of concessive *puesto que* than the book as a whole, which suggests that they were in fact written considerably earlier than the remainder of the book. Another very interesting observation is that the ratio of concessive *puesto que* in the *Persiles* suggests that it was "an early work, altered to some extent and published in the wake of the fame achieved by *Don Quijote*." Allen noticed that the single use of the causal *puesto que* in the *Persiles* occurs in Book III, Chapter 6, as part of a short story that is loosely connected to the rest of the novel. Curiously, the same section contains the book's only reference to Philip III's moving of the court to Madrid, which has been a major argument for assigning a late date to the *Persiles*.

Another noteworthy thing about this article is that it is only three pages long. Jay Allen is a man of few words. In all of his books and articles, he has had important things to say, and he has made his arguments clearly, rigorously, and with the utmost concision. As the Spanish proverb tells us, *lo bueno, si breve, dos veces bueno*. *Saber callar a tiempo* is all too rare a quality among literary scholars, but Jay always leaves us wanting more. In a review of his *Don Quijote: Hero or Fool?*, Edward Riley wrote that "my chief regret is that Professor Allen's book is not half long enough." Most of us would be ecstatic if that were the major fault a critic of Riley's caliber could find with our own work!

It was with the publication of *Don Quijote: Hero or Fool?* in 1969 that Jay first became known as an important Cervantes scholar. Though less than a hundred pages long, that little book, in my opinion, was at the time of its publication the most significant attempt to deal with the central question facing any interpreter of *Don Quijote*: how did Cervantes intend the reader to react to Don

Quixote? Was he to be admired as a hero for his sublime idealism or despised as an arrogant fool for his inappropriate and unsuccessful attempts to alter the world he lived in? Most previous critics had taken a firm stand on one side or the other, or else had adopted the "perspectivist" notion that Don Quixote can be seen as either hero or fool, depending on one's point of view. Jay brought to this study a consummate mastery of the vast bibliography of Cervantes criticism and put it to good use. In the introduction to the book he states that its object is "to elucidate Cervantes' devices of disclosure of the proper ethical perspective toward Don Quixote..., with the goal being...to see how so many apparently conflicting judgments have arisen, and to attempt to see the various bases for these judgments as part of a coherent and integral interpretation" (6). He accomplishes this principally by examining the reader-author-character relationship in order to determine the extent to which the reader can rely upon the author's account of Don Quixote's activities; and by analyzing Don Quixote's many defeats and showing how each one can be understood as a punishment for a previous display of pride. In Part Two Don Quixote becomes the butt of a series of cruel hoaxes, undergoes many humiliations, is gradually purified of his pride and takes responsibility for his actions, emerging at the end as an admirable and even heroic figure. The answer to the question posed in the book's title is therefore that Don Quixote begins as fool and ends as hero.

Allen presents this argument very cogently and justifies it with many well chosen examples. I personally found it utterly convincing and have often cited it in my classes on *Don Quixote* and in my own articles. Naturally, however, not everyone agreed with Allen's conclusions. The late Ruth El Saffar, while praising Allen's "excellent insights into the novel's construction" and acknowledging that "all chapters dealing with Cervantes' novelistic techniques are handled with clarity and concision" (273), nevertheless rejected his conclusions, arguing that "Allen introduces a *Quixote* which is at once solipsistic and authoritarian: authoritarian because it establishes an inflexible lack of exchange between reader, character, and

author, and solipsistic because the analysis rests ultimately on reader response. Allen assumes a single correct reading for the novel whose verification arises from subjective response of rejection and identification. Ultimately, it is the reader's feelings which are the basis for the analysis. But it is precisely an exclusive reliance on the reader's subjective response that has produced such fundamental disagreement over Don Quixote's character. By starting with personal reactions and then justifying those reactions textually, Allen places himself on the same shaky ground of other critics. However sophisticated his analytical techniques are, his conclusions are still answerable only to his own subjective appreciation. While the subjective approach could be appropriate, it undermines Allen's declared intention of avoiding the previous critical errors of judgment based on choosing either a tragic or a comic Don Quixote" (271).

El Saffar was particularly disturbed by the fact that Allen had paid insufficient attention to Cide Hamete's unreliability. Jay took these criticisms very much to heart and responded to them ten years later in *Don Quixote: Hero or Fool? (Part Two)*. In that book he insists that Cide Hamete is in fact a reliable narrator in the sense that he keeps his facts straight: "It is his perspective on Don Quixote that is unreliable, because it does not change as the character changes, and so Cervantes contrives to alienate the reader from him to counterbalance the movement toward Don Quixote" (5). Cide Hamete's contempt for Don Quixote actually causes the reader to feel greater sympathy for the character. Allen also demonstrates how the important role played by Sancho in Part Two—especially his conduct as governor, subsequent disillusionment and renunciation of the governorship—parallels the changes in Don Quixote and leads the reader to feel greater respect for both characters. The book's third and final section, which takes up more than half the book, attempts to reply to El Saffar's criticism that his interpretation was overly subjective. Allen does this by examining the strategies of irony in *Don Quixote*, seeking to answer the questions "(1) Who are the victims and what are the objects or targets of Cervantes' irony?... (2) Are there discernible indications as to

where to stop in ironic reconstruction...? In other words, is the irony *limited*? (3) Can we identify the norms implicit in the ironies sufficiently to adumbrate the strategies behind them? In other words, is the irony *stable*?" (40). The answers to these questions are obviously crucial to any interpretation of the novel. The problem with previous one-sided interpretations of *Don Quixote* is that they were based on one or another carefully selected set of passages rather than on the novel as a whole. Hence, one critic's selective reading could be in diametrical opposition to another's interpretation, based on a different set of proof-texts. This essay is the first truly comprehensive study of irony in *Don Quixote*. Moving through the novel from beginning to end, at each stage Allen carefully identifies the victims of irony, the objects of irony, and the ironists. His most important conclusion is that "the level of the irony directed at the knight is very high in the first sally and... continues high in the second, while the third sally is characterized by a sharply reduced and progressively descending level of irony as *both* confident unawareness and the disparity between levels diminish. Don Quixote is not the target of irony at all in the last three chapters" (104). Cervantes employs irony in the novel to illustrate the working of divine Providence in the world. Don Quixote "never suffers for his virtues, but... he is brought through suffering to recognize and repent of his faults. This victory over himself is heroic. And those who correct or ridicule him out of their own base or frivolous motives must answer for it" (106).

During much of the time between the publication of the two volumes of *Don Quixote: Hero or Fool?*, Jay was occupied in the monumental task of preparing a new edition of *Don Quixote*. That edition, first published in 1977 and now in its seventeenth printing,<sup>3</sup> continues to be one of the most widely used editions of Cervantes' masterpiece. It has served as the basis for a new classroom edition prepared by Salvador Fajardo and James Parr in 1998. In his recent book *Grotesque Purgatory: A Study of Cervantes's Don Quixote, Part II* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996),

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<sup>3</sup> As of 2003, the 23rd [ed.note].

Henry Sullivan states that this edition, "both in its regularization of orthographic norms and in its judicious balance between philological clarification and critical commentary in the foot-notes—is one of the finest modern editions available in Spanish" (xv).

In 1978 Jay participated in the Pomona College Cervantes Symposium, reading a memorable paper on "*Don Quixote* and the Origins of the Novel." In that paper he points out that the novelty of *Don Quixote* did not consist of "the rejection or devaluation of the heroic embodied in the mode of romance" (129), as some have thought; rather, what was revolutionary in *Don Quixote* was "the realization that there is a kind of heroism which involves a victory over oneself, and not over the environment" (129–30). "To the façade of pseudo-history of the books of chivalry is opposed the unreliable Cide Hamete Benengeli...., to the fantastic and supernatural is opposed the commonplace and verisimilar, to the mythical past time and legendary place is opposed contemporary Spain, to the single lofty style is opposed a multiplicity of stylistic levels ironically juxtaposed, to exemplary deeds are opposed failures and inconsequential meetings, and so forth.... Don Quixote, who began as a figure from the world of satire, inferior to his environment, moves through a process of self-purification to a position of superiority through humility and self-knowledge" (130). Allen then proceeds to describe the three most important innovations Cervantes accomplished in *Don Quixote*: "(1) the movement from an established genre to generic compendium and confrontation, which provided the answer to the respective limitations of chivalric, pastoral, and picaresque, (2) the movement from the miraculous to the providential, which provided the solution to the problem of achieving the goal of *admiratio* without sacrificing verisimilitude, and (3) the movement from the classical preoccupation with establishing the authority of a narrative to an exploration of the fertile possibilities in the management and manipulation of point of view" (130). "Cervantes," he points out, "is cognizant as no one before him of the inseparability of style and genre, and manages to distinguish between at least five different levels of style...., with characters passing at times from one to another, both straight and

parodied" (131).

In an article on "Style and Genre in *Don Quijote*" published in 1986, Jay would suggest "that the use of many styles functions as part of a lesson in how to read: that it functions to induce a consciousness in the reader of style and its effects, often through extreme and abrupt stylistic variation" (52). Later in that same article he astutely observed that Cervantes' use of stylistic variation "is at the heart of his perspectivism, of his interest in different ways of looking at things" (55-56).

The Cervantes Society of America was established at the symposium where Jay read his paper on "*Don Quixote* and the Origins of the Novel," and shortly afterwards he was chosen to be the first Editor of the Society's journal, *Cervantes*. Jay appointed a very distinguished Editorial Board and Editor's Advisory Council. In collaboration with Tom Lathrop, he designed the attractive format that the journal has retained ever since. The first issue—containing articles by Juan Bautista Avalle-Arce, Bruce Wardropper, Jean Canavaggio, Luis Andrés Murillo, Helena Percas de Ponseti, and Howard Mancing, and a lively exchange of views between Ruth El Saffar and Cesáreo Bandera—appeared in fall 1981 and set a very high standard of excellence for the journal, a standard that Jay managed to uphold with remarkable consistency during his six years as Editor. As I can testify from personal experience, an editor's job is often tedious and mostly thankless, but Jay's work as Editor of *Cervantes* was a model of fairness and judiciousness. By the time he resigned the editorship to move on to other things, *Cervantes* was a widely read and respected journal. By no means the least of his accomplishments as Editor was that he managed to keep the journal fiscally solvent while at the same time keeping subscription rates as low as possible.

Jay has also served the Cervantes Society in many other capacities, most notably as Vice President from 1992 to 1994 and as President from 1995 to 1997. He served in both of those offices with great distinction, presiding at many meetings, carrying on an active correspondence with officers and other members, and organizing panels. It was Jay who first arranged for the Cervantes

Society to meet in conjunction with the annual MLA convention. Since, as Juan Bautista Avallé-Arce once pointed out to me, Cervantes scholars are “un gremio muy atrabiliario,” these offices made great demands on Jay’s considerable diplomatic skills and *don de gentes*, and I am sure that they sometimes taxed his patience, but he always carried them out with grace and dignity.

Since the early 1980s, Jay has increasingly devoted his scholarly endeavors to Golden Age theater but he has at the same time continued to play an active role in Cervantes scholarship. In an essay in the MLA’s volume on *Approaches to Teaching Cervantes’ Don Quixote* Jay explained how humbling an experience he had personally found teaching *Don Quixote* to be, quoting Northrop Frye’s injunction that we bring to literature “an understanding as little inadequate as possible” (47). I found the following passage from that essay particularly insightful: “My ideal student is one who comes to me with a copy of *Don Quixote* and says, ‘I love this book; help me find out why.’ A professor of comparative literature with whom I took a great books course many years ago asked us the following question on the final examination: ‘Which of the books we have read this term did you like least, and to what defect in yourself do you attribute your lack of appreciation?’ An intuitive response to literature is a prerequisite for study, not a result of it. What a teacher can do is to explore with students how and why Cervantes affects us as he does” (48).

Recently Jay spent months painstakingly correcting the hundreds of mistakes in Burton Raffel’s translation of *Don Quixote* so that it could be published as the new Norton Critical Edition of the novel; and he and Patricia contributed an essay on “*Don Quijote Across the Centuries*” to that edition. Jay has also written the introduction and notes for chapters 25, 26, 29, 30, and 31 of Part I of Francisco Rico’s edition of *Don Quixote*, published in 1998.

In an essay published last year in a volume honoring Geoffrey Stagg on his eighty-fifth birthday, Jay once again made the point that, although *Don Quixote* abounds in satire, it is not a satire: “People do not read the novel to appreciate the debunking of romance or the ideal of knighthood, to experience vicariously the



Spanish penchant for living in the past; or to feel superior to Don Quixote, Sancho, or other characters, bad readers, idle folk, or political Utopians; or even to witness the undermining of all accepted systems of understanding. Rather, they read it to watch Don Quixote and Sancho interact and to listen to them talk to each other" (7).

In the time allotted to me today, I have only managed to skim the surface of Jay Allen's contributions to Cervantes studies, to point out what I consider some of his most admirable and enduring achievements. I have actually discussed fewer than half of his publications on Cervantes, choosing the ones that have had the greatest influence on my own thinking. I am sure that all of you have your own favorites, which in some cases will differ from mine. What matters finally is that we have all learned a great deal both from Jay's writings and from his example of professional integrity and personal generosity. I feel deeply privileged to count him among my friends. I hope that retirement will give him the opportunity to continue enjoying all the pleasures and rewards of the intellectual life without the distractions and tedium of the daily academic routine.

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