

A Study of "Don Quixote," in Which Cervantes' Goals in Don Quixote Are Examined: With Index and Copious Notes



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A Study of "Don Quixote," in which Cervantes' Goals in Don Quixote Are Examined: With Index and Copious Notes. By Daniel Eisenberg. Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 1987. xi+317 pages.

Daniel Eisenberg's latest book fairly cries out to be considered within various historical contexts. Its presentation is ostentatiously archaic. An anachronistic title is embedded in what appears to be the 1605 *Quijote*. Archaic spelling is followed in all quotations from the text. In a real, material sense, this book offers itself as a recreation of Cervantes' original.

Eisenberg himself has long been identified with a conservative, intentionalist reading of the text. This seems particularly justified in the case of the *Quijote*, where Cervantes' stated intention is routinely downplayed if not totally disregarded nowadays. Eisenberg, in contrast, has spent years reading, studying and editing the romances of chivalry. He owns the material. He knows how to read the *Quijote* in terms of the *libros*.

The book presents itself within its own history. It began as a contribution to Richard Bjornson's *Approaches to Teaching Cervantes' "Don Quixote"* (New York: MLA, 1984) entitled "Teaching *Don Quixote* as a Funny Book." It took form in response to a suggestion that this thesis, in the line of P. E. Russell and A. J. Close (and haunted by the spirit of Oscar Mandel), be developed further. The present volume, however, is more than an extension of the idea that Cervantes' text is unintelligible, and his intention betrayed, unless proper attention is paid to his dialogue with the *libros*. In the course of Eisenberg's own dialogue with his material that thesis is ultimately undone, and we are left instead with a much richer approximation to the *Quijote*.

Chapter i, "Cervantes and the *Libros de caballerías*," is a veritable gold mine of information about the *libros* and their unabated popularity in the sixteenth century. Massive documentation makes it impossible to believe any longer that the *libros*' day was already over when Cervantes began the *Quijote*. When Eisenberg promises "copious notes," he delivers. The first 100 lines of this chapter, for example, are supported by 246 lines of documentation.

The intensity of Cervantes' involvement with the *libros* cannot be dismissed. I find it harder to accept at least some of Eisenberg's explanation of his desire to take up arms against them. What is indisputable is his demonstration of Cervantes' engagement with the *libros*, of the fact that his readers were similarly engaged, that the context within which they read and reacted to *Don Quijote* was determined by the *libros*, and that no modern reader can share that interpretative context (19, 106).

The second chapter offers an ingenious theory, adumbrated in *A Cervantes* 21 (1983), to the effect that like the Canon of Toledo, Cervantes had underway a serious *libro de caballerías*. This book, the "famoso Bernardo" mentioned in the *Persiles*, would observe the precepts outlined in *DQ I*,

47, and provide an alternative superior to the ordinary, mendacious variety. Instead of the *Bernardo*, we have the *Quijote*, defined in the next chapter as a *libro de caballerías burlesco*, designed presumably to laugh, rather than shame the others out of existence, a counter-genre that offered a series of opposite values within the recognizable chivalric framework.

Some of these opposite values are intended to be edifying, others humorous. In general, Eisenberg's concept of the humor in the *Quijote* is intertextual, depending for its effect on the reader's recognition of a subversion of a generic norm. Thus Don Quijote grotesquely exaggerates the rules of chivalry, which, contrary to an almost universally maintained belief, do not mandate that the *caballero* be an *amador* at all (117-20). Consequently, his obsessive insistence on love and sex becomes laughable, and his chastity merely the unfortunate consequence of his amorous ineptitude (124). Similarly, his "enthusiasm for criminals" is a "hilarious distortion of the rules of knighthood" (128). It is not self evident, however, that inversion of the generic norm is *ipso facto* humorous. The discussion of humor in Part II is tempered by the oft-observed fact that Don Quijote is frequently morally superior to his tormentors (134 *et seq.*). Instead of invoking notions of evolution and character development to explain this change, however, Eisenberg attributes it to a simple miscalculation when he observes that the episodes at the *duques'* "are not as humorous as Cervantes thought they would be" (138). Eisenberg insists that "Don Quixote is intended to be laughed at throughout the book" (143), even as he notes that he "becomes less crazy and less funny" as it progresses. He turns finally to the "proper attitude toward Don Quixote," as the key to interpretation, and in the process reveals something of his own inner struggle with the constraints of the "funny book" thesis.

This conflict comes into full view in Chapter v, "*Don Quixote as a Classic.*" Here Eisenberg summarizes what has gone before, and proceeds to undo it. The humor dependent on the *libros*, the instruction and even the literary discussions are ultimately trivial. Instead, there is "a work whose content is primarily human" (181), in which Don Quijote and Sancho share a "non-sexual yet loving relationship" (182), which portrays the human condition (183), and in which we see ourselves. "What this implies," he concludes, "is that the 'soft' interpretation . . . is no more a distortion than the 'hard' one, *probably less so*" (187). The text is intractably paradoxical. "The . . . search for a single interpretation . . . is itself quixotic and unsuccessful" (189). Eisenberg cannot bring himself to believe that Cervantes actually intended this ambiguity, which was "in his day no virtue" (140). "How then," he asks, "did it happen that he wrote a book which differs so dramatically from what he intended?" (194). He notes that Don Quijote is very like his creator, that the slipshod composition of the text allowed it to evolve and escape Cervantes' conscious censorship, revealing finally the author's own ambiguities and inner conflicts. Except

that there is nothing slipshod about it, Eisenberg's text has followed a similar path. Its evolution can be observed in the reading of it. It is thus a courageous work, and one that gives both "hard" and "soft" critics cause for self examination.

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Gracián y su época. Actas de la I Reunión de Filólogos Aragoneses.
Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 1986, 422 páginas.

Con riqueza y profundidad inusitadas, la obra de Gracián incorpora buena parte de las actitudes que definen la mentalidad barroca. Al estudiar varios aspectos de esta obra, *Gracián y su época* rinde justo homenaje al escritor aragonés. El libro reproduce veinticuatro ponencias y comunicaciones del Congreso celebrado en Zaragoza en 1985, y, salvo escasas excepciones, los trabajos poseen un alto nivel de calidad. Pues los límites de mi reseña impiden que me ocupe de todos ellos, abordaré sólo tres, los más sobresalientes a mi juicio. Cada uno ilumina facetas capitales del *Criticón*.

Lázaro Carreter se propone deslindar el género del *Criticón*, un problema que hasta ahora únicamente ha encontrado respuestas vagas e inexactas. Para cumplir su objetivo, Lázaro no ofrece de entrada una definición de la obra, sino que investiga primero las fases de su gestación intelectual. En el proceso se combinan nociones estético-literarias paulatinamente elaboradas en otros textos de Gracián (su idea de la "crisis" o de la "agudeza compuesta") con una peculiar asimilación de modelos narrativos. Junto a la reconocida importancia de ficciones como la *Odisea*, las *Etiópicas* y el *Guzmán de Alfarache*, Lázaro pone en evidencia el destacado papel que aquí tienen las sátiras del inglés Barclay; en la *Argenis*, sobre todo, se defiende claramente la licitud de exponer la verdad de modo indirecto, envolviéndola en el disfraz de la alegoría (cabe agregar que el tratado de Vives *Veritas fucata* propugnó una táctica semejante). Relacionando los influjos épicos que adopta Gracián con una visión satírica heredada del Humanismo, Lázaro concluye que la definición "epopeya menipea" es la que mejor se adecúa al *Criticón*. Lázaro extrae de Bajtin los rasgos del "espíritu menipeo," aunque la certera idea de aplicarlos al texto de Gracián se lleva a cabo en la práctica de una manera algo apresurada y esquemática. Es el único punto débil de una ponencia realmente excepcional.

El trabajo de Aurora Egido constituye una feliz síntesis de inteligencia y rigor erudito. Su título bímembre—"El arte de la memoria y *El Criticón*"—sugiere los dos focos de interés que en él se complementan. Uno es