Pulling Strings with Master Peter's Puppets: Fiction and History in Don Quixote

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It is only fitting that an essay about chapter 26 of Part Two of Don Quixote, should have taken shape through a series of stops and starts. After all, the circuitous novelistic route which puts knight and squire once again in the way of the shady character they have encountered as Ginés de Pasamonte in chapter 22 of Part One is nothing if not accident-ridden; and the story of their second encounter a prose ode to happenstance.

When he puts on his little play, Maese Pedro unwittingly stages one of the most celebrated acts in the vast wondershow of Cervantes's fiction. In this episode, replicating the pattern of the interlude, already well-established in the first Quixote, the author turns his protagonist into an interventionist spectator of the puppet-play-within-a-novel produced by the frame story's Protean rogue. The sequence wears the same metaliterary signature as another, similarly acclaimed Cervantine retablo, the Entremés del Retablo de las maravillas, published in the collected Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses in the same year (1615) as Part Two of Don Quixote's history. For me, as for many scholars, the two plays are inextricably linked. Indeed I have found my way into the present reading of the Retablo de Maese Pedro through the other wonder-filled interlude, in a manner inflected by chance, as will be seen.

The other, purely dramatic retablo (hereafter Maravillas) condenses a veritable festival of metatheatre. If the representational business of metatheatre revolves around the play of intersecting acts, actors, authors (in whose number here we must include Golden Age autores de comedias) and levels of reality, its power resides in its capacity to give form to the unspoken lines and the unscripted gestures of the separate players, thereby reciprocally illuminating their worlds. During the unfolding of this most metatheatrical of Cervantes's entremeses, a whole village gets into the act staged by a pair of charlatans who know exactly how to pull the strings of Old Christian superstition and bigotry. As the crafty Chanfalla and Chirinos weave their invisible dramatic web, they find a whole crowd of easy marks among the villagers, who are already caught, as Molho and Wardropper have shown, in the tangle of their own ideologically sanctioned racism and repressed sexuality.

The pull which the tricksters' play-within-a-play exerts on the fictional audience of Maravillas is symbolized by the unreal sarabande that dominates its last "act" of their wonder show. A highly sensual dance of mysteriously "other" origins, the sarabande, Covarrubias notes in his Tesoro (394-95), seduces all who hear it, compelling them to imitate its movements. In the entremés, in strangely public intimacy, an Old Christian youth rushes headlong into the imaginary arms of the very castrating Jewess credited in the New Testament (The Gospel According to Mark 6:14-29) with beheading John the Baptist. In partnership with his trickster surrogate authors, Cervantes puts the irresistible force of his imagined dance at the service of a scathing, satric paraadox: as a symbolic enactment of their racial and sexual anxieties, the sarabande's hypnotic movement (not danced, but narrated to the distracting accompaniment of Rabelin) lures the nephew of Benito Repollo perversely into the phantom embrace of what he and his uncle's friends of the Castrado and Macho tribes most fear. And, while these "simple" folk remain largely unaware of the complex acts they are getting into, authors real and fictional share with the reader the knowledge that their characters are dancing in sure time to the imperfectly suppressed rhythms of what we would call their cultural imaginary.

Getting into the act, in any fictional work, can never be a matter of characters' desires alone. The interference of one plot or one level of reality with another must always be arranged by authorial contrivance. With the Entremés del Retablo de las maravillas Chanfalla and...
Chirinos's play-within-a-play is meant, by generic convention at least, to be inserted between the acts of a longer *comedia*. Getting into the act defines the character's side of a coin whose other face invariably shows one or more authors deliberately *pulling strings* to get him there. Readers of Cervantes's two-sided *retablos* have sometimes focused on one side of the dramatic coin more than on the other, privileging the characters' perspective over the "author's," or vice versa. Thus, with *Maravillas*, Molho's and Wardropper's unraveling of the tangles of Old Christian imaginary has kept our sights focused

5 The *Tesoro* describes *zarabanda* as a "bayle alegre y lascivo, porque se hase con meneos del cuerpo descompuestos." Covarrubias gives the sarabande a Roman and Hebrew genealogy: "la palabra zarabanda es hebreá... vale esparcir o cernir, ventilar, andar a la redonda; todo lo cual tiene la que bayla la zarabanda, que cierne con el cuerpo a una parte y a otra y va rodeando el teatro... poniendo casi en condición a los que la miran de imitar sus movimientos, y salir a bailar..." (395). Twentieth-century musicologists, with help from Gallardo's *Ensayo de una Biblioteca Española de Libros Raros y Curiosos* (1889-89), locate the first literary references to the zarabanda in sixteenth-century texts from Panama and Mexico, suggesting that there may be a case for other "other" origins in the New World or even in Africa. See *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (16: 489) and *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (726). On the role of music, poetry and dance in *Maravillas*, see my "La poesía y los poetas en los Entremeses de Cervantes."

120

MARY MALCOM GAYLORD

Cervantes

on the subjectivity of the *entremés* deluded villagers; Chirafalla and Chirinos fade as individuals, becoming instruments of its revelation. With the *Retablo de Maese Pedro*, that preference is apparently reversed: for a variety of reasons, including Cervantes's choice of a puppet theatre as his interior frame, we have opted to stress authorial and narrative string-pulling. We have examined the elaborate metafictional and metatheatrical maneuvers of Part Two, chapter 26, largely without asking just what historical and cultural acts its multiple authors are staging and, consequently, what acts Don Quixote compulsively gets himself into. As a result, the possibility of links between the world of Maese Pedro's play and that of its fictional spectators and seventeenth-century readers, has not received careful scrutiny of the kind accorded *Maravillas*.

Inasmuch as we admit, in the case of this most celebrated *entremés*, that Cervantes's characters and authors share with each other a cultural space that also encompasses the world of the play's reader / spectators, we need to recognize the limits of our two-sided coin metaphor. Cervantes presents us not simply with the entertaining interactions of manipulators and dupes and super-manipulators. His authors themselves often turn out to be the targets of string-pulling, as well as its architects: character-authors, like *Maravillas* duo and like Maese Pedro, not infrequently find that the strings they think they hold securely in their hands are simultaneously being tugged in other directions than those they had it mind. What all of these texts' would-be manipulators are made to discover are the powerful workings of culture, understood as the "non-hereditary memory of the community" (Lotman and Uspensky 213) which both enables and encumbers them. Like Montesinos's cave in Dunn's reading, the *Retablo de Maese Pedro* has an outside as well as an inside, an outside that reaches beyond its fictional spectators into the historical and cultural conditions of seventeenth-century Spain. This essay proposes to explore some of those conditions and their implications for Cervantes's agenda in staging the beguiling nested spectacles of Part Two, chapter 26.

My growing sense that such a line of inquiry would lead to interesting territory got an unexpected prod during the winter I spent drafting the first version of this essay. In the course of a week's interlude in the Caribbean, I found myself one evening listening to a Creole band, who were playing to as staid a family audience as ever challenged Chirinos and Chanfalla. Half an hour of catchy beat had listeners like me rocking in their seats, feet tapping, but not dancing. Yet the empty terrace beckoned. Finally one young mother bounced up, with a drowsy toddler hugged against her chest, and began to whirl around. Her move broke the ice: soon the floor was packed with bodies swaying to the beat. From amid the dancers, I happened to look for a moment in the direction of the musicians. Their faces were variously lined with bemusement and alienation, either in understandable response to the assignment of playing for an affluent, foreign resort crowd. I found myself unable to stop watching them watching us watching them . . ., but one glance had sufficed to give me the acute sense of having been lured into a dance by hypnotic rhythms, of having gotten into somebody else's act, and at the same time of not fully understanding what act I had gotten into. What was going on, on the surface and beneath it, was clearly something more than a tropical evening's entertainment. As an American taking my leisure in St. Martin, a French territory whose social and economic lines are still disturbingly colonial, I had, by so simple an act as stepping onto a dance floor, entered a far more complex world than I bargained for. As powerful as the music was, I knew that other strings were being pulled, and that far more was at stake than just keeping time.

The experience of that night in Marigot helped me to revisit Cervantes's *retablos* with new eyes. As I found myself playing not only the ironic observer, but the hypnotized spectator as well, I understood in a different way what it could mean to say that "Life" (read History) was at least as deeply implicated in the show as "Art" (read Music, Poetry, Fiction). I realized too that the strange sensation of being lured into the dance was very much akin to what I had recently experienced, as a critical reader, upon reentering the magnetic field of Maese Pedro's spectacle. Drawn into that field not only by the power of the text itself, but, second-hand, by the strong readings of my scholarly predecessors, I found myself faced with a scene which was thoroughly familiar, yet which seemed to spill over the edges of the frames I had been accustomed to bringing to it into a newly visible strangeness. That reaction might be described as an experience of the "critical uncanny". It was, in any case, one of those moments in which what we think we know about the sacred texts of our tradition is suddenly defamiliarized into mystery. In and around the miniature space of Maese Pedro's puppet play, I found myself hearing resonances from other historical and textual worlds.

It is only fair to warn the reader at this point that, just as Maese Pedro's story weaves its intricate threads into Cervantes's grand fictional tapestry, so the same episode inevitably connects in my thinking to a broader inquiry of my own. In this case that inquiry entails
rereading canonical texts of what we have been used to calling Spain's Golden Age in the light of their historical two-world contexts. Beyond the work of recovering direct references to New World people, places and events, I have been seeking to understand how the dramatically new perspective afforded by a particular set of historical events and by awareness of a previously unimagined geography alters the agendas, the content and even the forms of literary production in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Hispanic world. In this undertaking, the greatest challenge and the most compelling interest attach to those works which, like Cervantes's masterpiece, we have grown accustomed to thinking of as quintessentially "Old World" writings. Many may wonder how in the world Maese Pedro will get into my two-hemisphere act. I hope I may succeed in persuading some that the implicit stage of Don Quixote's rogue empresario, and that of his historical author, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, is indeed the newly enlarged global horizon of the early seventeenth-century Hispanic world. At a minimum, I hope to suggest that Maese Pedro's act still has a great deal to tell us about the complexity of its author's literary project and about the other acts (beyond fiction) that Cervantes's works get into.

For his appearance in Part Two of Don Quixote's history, Ginés de Pasamonte / Maese Pedro has exchanged his galley slave's chains and his picturesque lexicon for a new persona which at first blush seems more benign than his earlier one. His new fictional wares as master puppeteer appear less menacing. In place of the shocking "Rogue's Progress" of his outlandish delinquent's autobiography ("sus infinitas bellaquerias y delitos . . . fueron tantos y tales, que él mismo compuso un grande volumen contándolos" [II, 250]), literally in progress when we met him in Part One, what he offers this time is billed as "historia verdadera . . . sacada al pie de la letra de las corónicas francesas y de los romances españoles" (II, 240). In reality, he is peddling a bit of theatrical déjà vu. Muted and miniaturized into a puppet pantomime, his play draws on an especially well-worn legend from the vast corpus of legends to spring up around the historical figure of the Emperor Charlemagne: as we hear from the narrator after the fact, his offerings "unas veces eran de una historia,

The seemingly unexceptional cast of this repertory notwithstanding, a number of details hint that exceptions rather than rules will be the episode's main order of business. For one thing, as our own Master Peter has shown, the very name of Ginés evokes the Roman actor who experienced conversion to Christianity while impersonating a Christian and suffered martyrdom as the price of his revelation (Dunn 1982). As Cervantes's rogue author turns to a dramatic genre, the shadow of this theatrical Saint Genesius implicitly promises that life and art will mingle on the puppet stage. Maese Pedro shows up for this new encounter equipped not only with his puppets and the retablo itself, but with a mysterious talking monkey as well. What is more, theventa where the performance is to take place is the one to which Knight and Squire repair after the former's descent to the Cave of Montesinos and the very first inn in all his travels to date that Quixote recognizes as a commercial establishment open to paying lodgers. Timing, placement, casting, plotting all promise to hold up one vision to the mirror of another, with dramatic consequences.

The knight Gaiferos gives the retablo a foundation that is less than rock-solid. His name alone rings with oxymoronic suggestion, its two parts, gai and feros, seeming to bind love of fun in onomastic tension with manly strength. Gaiferos, so this chapter of his story goes, torn between his affections for Melisenda and his love of gaming, has to be shamefully set off for Spain to rescue his Christian lady from her Moorish captors. The lengthy ballad sequence based on the same story is already deeply skeptical about its unlikely hero (Durán I, 248-254; Di Stefano 386-402). Under Maese Pedro's direction, chivalric legend flirts compulsively with farce. The puppet Gaiferos turns out to be as inept as he is effete, barely managing to extricate his lady from captivity, rescuing her as she dangles in very unladylike fashion by the skirt of her gown snagged on a turrett of her prison. As the fabled pair ride off toward the safety of Christendom, trailing a horde of their Moslem pursuers, suspense reaches the breaking point. When Don Quixote, unable to tolerate more uncertainty, leaps to his feet and does disastrous battle with the puppet Moors, gentle farce plunges into chaos. In an instant the show is interrupted in the radical sense, the stage and most of the marionettes smashed. As his theatrical world comes crumbling down around him, the rogue entrepreneur, ever ready with a new literary paradigm, borrows the ballad lines attributed to Rodrigo,

6 Portions of this project which have appeared in print are: "El lenguaje de la conquista y la conquista del lenguaje en las poéticas del siglo de oro," "Spain's Renaissance Conquests and the Retroping of Identity," "The True History of Early Modern Writing in Spanish: An American Perspective," and "Don Quixote and the National Citizenship of Masterpieces.”

18.2 (1998) Pulling Strings With Master Peter's Puppets 123

y otras de otra; pero todas alegres, regocijadas y conocidas’ ([II, 250; emphasis mine]).

last of the Goths, to bemoan the loss of his kingdoms to Moorish invaders: “Ayer fui señor de España . . . / y hoy no tengo una almena / que pueda decir que es mía” (DQ II, 245-46). Yet, in Cervantes’s hands, farce is quick to rise again from the ashes of his tragedy. Maese Pedro is soon heard haggling with the unlikely avenging angel over the market value of his marionettes, while Don Quixote declines to reimburse him for the figure of Melisenda, who, everyone knows, has escaped with his help to France.

As I have been telling it, the episode focuses on the Retablo's ostensible plot. But chapter 26 causes attention to be diverted from its announced subject at every turn by the compulsive interventions of its multiple narrators, who honor in the breach their own rules about linear, unaffected narration ([II, 242-43]. It appears that virtually no member of Maese Pedro's audience is prepared to let the spectacle continue uninterrupted. By the time Don Quixote literally breaks up the show, it has nearly been done in a half-dozen times by their
verbal outbursts. Not only the rambling boy-narrator, but also those irrepressible kibbitzers Maese Pedro and Don Quixote make frequent reference to their persons and to their own activity at the expense of Gaiferos's. In other words, they call attention to the business of telling at the expense of the told.

It is in this sense that George Haley reads the Retablo de Maese Pedro as a striking emblem of Cervantes's novel as a whole. In it he finds condensed, in brilliant miniature, the narrative themes and techniques we can see at work throughout the Quixote: the cajas chinas of "origins," gestured towards through endless versions, translations, interpretations, filtered through plural authors, translators, historians, characters, readers inside and outside the text. Most of these narratological techniques and themes, Haley asserts, Cervantes imports from the romances of chivalry in his parodic imitation. But his playful borrowings have a sober point, namely, to discredit the novels of chivalry and to make the reader prove against their sham veracity: "In order to achieve this end, he shows the reader how such fictions masquerading as history are put together by laying bare their inner workings" (164-65). These various workings exhibit in common the stamp of unreliability. Haley's ideal reader finds his every fresh inclination toward belief frustrated by a new encounter with artifice: "The reader, if he did not know this before, can see the process demonstrated with variations again and again. He witnesses the illusion of life-like history alternately created and torn down before his very eyes. He therefore cannot take the illusion at face value unless he is as mad as Don Quijote" (165).

18.2 (1998)

Pulling Strings With Master Peter's Puppets

As he rejects Don Quixote's credulity, the reader experiences the alienation and distancing that this critic considers essential to the only "appropriate aesthetic response" to the novel, the recognition of Don Quixote's fiction as fiction.

Haley's essay keeps distinguished critical company with a number of readings which insist that the central, overriding concern of Cervantes's most celebrated novel is a concern with the nature and the making of fictions (cf. Ortega, Spitzer, Percas, Dunn 1982, El Saffar 1975, Azar). Each one of these justly celebrated readings is, in one way or another, bound up with post-Romantic proposals to re-allegorize Cervantes's masterpiece, not as an exemplary story of moral or political idealism, but as a fable of the artistic, fictional, linguistic adventures of human writers and speakers. Michel Foucault's stunning appropriation of the Manchegan knight's peculiar form ("a long, thin graphism" [46]) and ill-fated wanderings over the endless, familiar plane of the Same as a figure for Language itself is another case in point. In pages which are among the most graceful of Les mots et les choses, Foucault turns Cervantes's novel into a new kind of theoretical allegory for the emergence of modern Representation from the ruins of medieval practices of signification. The allegorical energy behind Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of Don Quixote as founding text of modern heteroglossia in The Dialogic Imagination is less obvious, but no less real.

The quasi-historical form both of Cervantes's masterpiece and of the modern novel as a genre has also been explored extensively. Historians and theorists of fiction attribute to the modern novel deep roots in historiography and discover its construction to be supported by precisely the same techniques that underpin non-fiction historical writing. Bruce Wardropper, making a point also stressed by Riley, asserts that Don Quixote's author calls his novel a true history, "but naturally we know he is not in earnest . . . The Quixote may be an adventure story, a novel or some other kind of fiction, but it is not history" (El Saffar Cervantes 80, emphasis mine).

Cervantes, he argues, borrows and holds up to mockery the techniques of phony or burlesque histories, with the aim of dramatizing the difference, and advocating the need for distance, between spurious history (also known as fiction) and "real," "serious," "true" history. Wardropper separates the historiographic sheep from the story-telling goats of

7 See the recent contributions of Roland Barthes, Michel de Certeau, Gérard Genette, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, and Hayden White to theoretical discussion of the shared territories of history and fiction.

126

MARY MALCOLM GAYLORD

Cervantes

sixteenth-century Spain, placing respected historians like Jerónimo de Zurita, Ambrosio de Morales, Juan de Mariana clearly in the one camp and charlatans like Pedro del Corral, Miguel de Luna, the infamous "libros plúmbeos," and the "falsos cronicones" just as clearly in the other. The Quixote's cautionary tale was necessary, he insists, because "a whole generation [of confused sixteenth-century readers] had lost respect for historical truth (El Saffar Cervantes 88)."

Yet, curiously, to the extent that these distinguished readers of Don Quixote show its author shedding light on techniques of historical writing, they would have it that the historiographic gestures in question come not from history itself, but rather from the pseudo-history of chivalric romance. Cervantes sets out to discredit the libros de caballerías, it is alleged, not in order to replace them with genuine historical writing, as some of his own characters might urge him to do, but so as to supplant them with his own better-engineered pseudo-history. In Cervantes's hands, fiction-masquerading-as-history paradoxically relies for its effectiveness on flaunting artifice at the same time that it cultivates verisimilitude by means of a set of quasi-documentary tricks. And Cervantes frequently works along the "ill-defined" frontier between the two, "encouraging . . . in his reader the very defect he was ridiculing (El Saffar Cervantes 89). Wardropper rightly notes that this is a dangerous game. But where he sees, in the author's alleged desire to distinguish true from sham history, while relishing the overlap of the two orders, a fictional paradox, I find a more serious contradiction. Why would Cervantes choose to give serious lessons about history if he had only fictional play in mind?

I review these seminal essays here not in order to set myself apart from habits of thinking which I, in company with many other twentieth-century readers of Don Quixote, have long shared. I do so, rather, in order to bring into sharper relief the fact that, for many decades, we have gone about our business assuming that Cervantes's literary metalanguage is focused, primarily and reflexively, on fiction and its creators. It may in fact be so focused. Nonetheless, I find something unsettling in the habits of mind that make it quite

8 Cf. Riley on the alleged confusion of sixteenth-century readers.
natural for us to use quasi-historical fictional devices to make an historical argument about literature and writing without bringing history proper into the center of the picture. Foucault's Don Quixote pinpoints the paradox. Although the French philosopher's allegory is placed at the service of an argument about moments of dramatic historical change in ways of understanding the world, he makes his case by reference not to history, but instead to literary language talking about literary language, to fiction reflecting on fiction. It is perhaps just as strange that, in their attention to the parody of pseudo-histories and to the transcendence of Truth, cervantistas regularly pass over the possibility that Cervantes might be engaging, in serious fictional dialogue, not only with the phonies but with the earnest historians of his day 10.

Why, it is time for us to ask, should fictional representation not be deeply engaged with History? I concur with those who like Martin de Riquer have held that Cervantes's educated public probably did not, in the main, need to have the fictionality of the books of chivalry spelled out to them again. By 1605, generations of moralists and authors of poetic had beaten that subject to death. Nor is it likely that Cervantes would have expended such effort, reproducing its historiographic operation in such exquisite detail, merely to castigate the pulp fiction writers of his time. Surely the wily author of Don Quixote was after much bigger game than the Amadís de Gaula. I believe that, in his great novel generally and with the Maese Pedro episode and its textual frames in particular, Cervantes takes on a very real, and often very serious national and cultural historiographic project that had been carried forward with special intensity since the end of the fifteenth century and continued to occupy the Spanish historical imagination into the seventeenth. Though its texts are extremely diverse, in subject, in mode and in argument, the broad aims of the project are clear: to historify the new nation, giving it deep roots in Judeo-Christian time, to rewrite the past in terms of contemporary projects; to justify Spain's imperial status and messianic mission in the Peninsula, in Europe and the Mediterranean, on the American continents. In short, whether through panegyric or polemic, many of those who wrote History (proper or improper) during this period were participating in the collective work of fashioning some sense of Spanish achievements and identity out of a variety of materials. 11

In chapter 26 of Part Two, the projects of Maese Pedro, his boy narrator, and Don Quixote all are made to intersect in conspicuous ways with a larger cultural work that reaches both beyond history and beyond fiction. The author sets their stories in a narrative frame that makes the puppet play part of Don Quixote's fictional history and at the same time part of the implied historical moment (understood here as both event and discourse or text) that serves as backdrop for the narrated time of the novel. Barging into the puppet show and thereby, he and we may think, into a fixed moment of Reconquest history, Don Quixote actually gets into a much vaster act (understood here as both discourse and narrative) that makes the puppet play part of Don Quixote's fictional history and at the same time part of the implied historical moment.

What, then, are the narrative practices that invite such a reading? In the remainder of this essay, I turn to a number of features of the text of the Retablo which, in my view, press the case for an intimate connection between Cervantes's metafictional play (in the two senses of Maese Pedro's show in chapter 26 and the novelistic's ubiquitous fiction games) and contemporary practice of "History proper", or serious historical writing understood as such by its authors. These features are grouped under three headings: 1) the narrative content of the legend which is staged, 2) the episode's celebrated focus on "historiographical" issues, and finally 3) the fictional context in which the episode is presented.

Narrative content of the "Retablo" As critics, we have, in the main, given short shrift to the subject matter of Maese Pedro's play. Haley rightly

10 It cannot of course be claimed that critics of Cervantes's novel have not devoted serious attention to its engagement with historical events. Vicente Lloréns's essay poses a question whose workings out have occupied a host of distinguished scholars. The particular point I make here is that metafiction in the Quixote has not, as it needs to be, been linked to the texts and contexts of serious historiography. For a recent consideration of the historical dimension of Cervantes's text, see Lezra, chapter 3, "The Matter of Naming in don Quixote."

11 Lotman and Uspensky offer an extremely useful analysis of the individual's participation in the "semiotics of culture." In his Cuestión de límites, Díaz-Plaja notes that Cervantes's knowledge of Italian puppetry is itself rooted in the author's historical experience in Italy during the 1570's.
while the stories of Dorotea / Micomicona and Aldonza / Dulcinea are conceived, even improvised, by participants in the novel's action, and of course by their fictional author-creator, the Carolingian legends about Gaiferos and his lady antedate Cervantes's novel and are very much in the public domain, as the proliferation of ballad recreations of the episode attests.13

It is true that Gaiferos's story rests less comfortably on any real historical support than do other legends whose Spanish heroes are known to have existed. But neither is this tale just another damsel-in-distress story unattached to any historical context. Its ideal subject is the rescue by a French Christian knight of a Christian woman from her Moslem captors in Spain. By "ideal subject", I mean the plot that the narrator and his most powerful (in the sense of highest-ranking) character, the Emperor Charlemagne (who is, moreover, an actual historical figure) propose and continue to press, with timely help from Don Quixote. That fable is bound up intimately not only with vague chivalric ethics, but with a whole cultural mythology surrounding the so-called "Reconquest," Spain's homegrown Crusade against the infidel, seen from the Catholic Kings' victory in Granada on as glorious triumph in an enduring cultural script that celebrates Christianity's victory over Islam. In Reconquest lore and in persisting habits of Spanish literary imagination, as Juan Goytisolo has argued convincingly, masculine Virtus, identified with Christian men at arms, is given endless opportunities to assert its superiority over feminine Eros, variously identified with feminized Moorish adversaries and with actual women. In the Retablo's staging, the ritual triumph of Mars over Venus encounters so many hindrances that it virtually fails to materialize.

Traditional plotting does, however, make Maese Pedro and company something to push against. Like that of the legend, their down-to-earth dramatic subject is not Christian heroism, but the reluctance and ineptitude of the sad sack nominated as protagonist. In order for

the heroic fable to play itself out in any sense, the Christian knight himself must first be mobilized. Caricaturing the disinterested lover's foot-dragging, the puppeteers really stage a kind of cheerleading session aimed at rousing Melisendra's knight from his own indolence. The weight given to this part of the story, as well as its irreverent tone, serves to infantilize the foot-dragging hero (Charlemagne "parece que le quiere dar con el ceptro media docena de coscorrones" [II, 241]). Through uncanny authorial arrangement, if not by that of the puppeteers, the principal player in this homespun version of "The Rousing of Gaiferos" is another erstwhile creature of leisure, the very one whose passage from passivity to heroic frenzy the narrator and his readers have been tracing since the beginning of Cervantes's history. Don Quixote makes so much of his own famous move to get in on the cheerleading, and to take over the heroic action himself, that he and we may fail to remember that he too was not so long ago a sleeping giant.

We may also fail to notice the complexity of his motivation for acting. Slapstick and sloth are not the only distinctive marks of this dramatic retelling. In the narrator's youthful (perhaps pubescent) hands, heroic desire reveals, or recovers, its partnership with sexual energy.14 Indecorous notes abound in the Retablo, or at least in the running commentary that gives us ekphrastic access to it. In advance of her rescuer's eleventh-hour arrival on the scene, Melisendra is shown enduring the openly sexual advances of a lecherous Moor ("¿No veven aquel moro que callandico y pasato a paso, puesto el dedo en la boca, se llega por las espaldas de Melisendra? Pues, miren cómo la da un beso en mitad de los labios y la priesa que ella se da a escupir, y a limpiárselos con la blanca manga de su camisa" [II, 242-45]). More suggestive body language is heard later, during the lovers' escape, describing the damsel's figure astride the horse ("a horcadas como hombre") and in an allegedly necessary, but tight embrace with her rescuer ("la manda que se tenga fuertemente y le eche los brazos por las espaldas, de modo que los cruce en el pecho, porque no caiga, a causa que no esta la señora Melisendra acostumbrada a semejantes caballerías" [II, 243]). Voyeuristic details like these serve up a spicy preamble to the rhapsodic ejaculations with which the lovers are wished Godspeed: "¡Vais en paz, oh par

13 See Menéndez Pidal (24-27) on the double origin of the Gaiferos legend (cited by Murillo in Don Quijote II, 240, n.3).

14 On the sexually charged language of the boy's narrative, and on its relation to Don Quixote's unconscious desires masked by lethargy, see El Saffar, Beyond Fiction (118-19).
Spain's cultural imaginary. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, King Rodrigo and his namesakes turn up everywhere. Rodrigo gets his own entry in Covarrubias's *Tesor de la Lengua Castellana o Española* (1611). The Gothic king's story as told in the earliest chronicles and old ballads receives a learned reworking from Fray Luis de León in his famous "Profecía del Tajo." Even in so solemn a piece of historiography as Juan de Mariana's *Historia general de España* Rodrigo and La Cava have to be reckoned with. A bibliography of Rodrigo lore must also include not only fictionalized chronicles such as Pedro del Corral's *Crónica del Rey Rodrigoor Crónica sarracina* (compiled around 1430, published in 1499) and Miguel de Luna's *Historia verdadera del Rey don Rodrigo, compuesta por Alcubacim Tarif* (Granada 1592 and 1600), but an extended family of homonymous (usually redemptive) heroes (Ruy / Rodrigo Díaz del Vivar and Captain Rodrigo de Narváez) each with his own historical-fictional pedigree.  

The sheer quantity of Rodrigo-centered historical and fictional material in contemporary circulation gave his story, like Gaferos's, considerable festive potential, especially when the hero fails to deliver on the redemptive promise implicit in his name. Even an operator and a reprobate like Maese Pedro dons Rodrigo's rhetorical garb. But here again Cervantes builds a serious design into the maneuvers by which he would make up laugh. What we are invited to witness, in and around chapter 26's puppet performance, is not idle play with the mechanisms of representation. It is nothing less than the distortion and dissolution of one of Spanish culture's master narratives. Maese Pedro sums up the far-reaching sense of his enterprise in this purloined lament, signaling the fall of his own story back into the mode of the picaresean, a transition clearly marked by the narrator in the clarifications which open the following chapter (II, 249-50).

*Metafiction and metahistory in Part Two, chapter 26* We have been invited, persuasively, to see the metalanguage of Maese Pedro's show as overwhelmingly metafictional. In a sense, there is little to disagree with in the notion that mock-historiographic discourse is used in *Don Quijote* as the privileged vehicle for self-conscious imaginative writing. Yet to neglect the possibility of resonances between a feigned mode of narration and the serious historiographical narrative projects of Cervantes's contemporaries is, I think, to underestimate the complexity of this wiliest of writers. If we review the historiographic aspects of chapter 26, we find its author not simply holding his pseudo-historic romance predecessors up to ridicule, but rather raising what were the most pressing questions faced by virtually all serious historians of his time. Many of these issues held particular relevance for the ongoing official and entrepreneurial business of New World Conquest historiography, but they posed similar challenges for historians of the Peninsula.

Chief among these questions, and the most burning of them, is the nature of historical authority and its relation to historical truth. How was the historian's authority to be constructed? What kinds of support could it muster? How much evidence did historical writing require, and of what kind? What guarantees would suffice to place the substance of a veridical account beyond the reach of doubters or gainsayers? In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century histories and their prologues, the reader finds ongoing, anxious attention to the credibility and reliability of historical sources, and to the way either quality is likely to be affected by translation or retelling. Fernando de Herrera's prologue to his *Relación de la guerra de Chipey y Suceso de la batalla naval de Lepanta* sums up his generation's skepticism and its anxiety of transmission, when he cautions the reader who may wish to fault him for some error of fact to consider "cuán incierta es la voz de la verdad, traída de partes tan remotas y de lenguas tan varias" (248).

One explanation for sixteenth-century anxiety about the epistemological foundations of historical discourse is to be found in the fact that scholars faced an explosion in the production of information whose effects on them, mutatis mutandis, were no less far-reaching than those of the information-technology revolution of our own era. The technological coup accomplished by the printing press, in alliance with social change that made for widespread travel and increasing literacy, and with humanism's focus on the human worldly past and present, combined to invest all kinds of historical sources with new interest. And there were simply more sources available than there had been before. Would-be historians were blessed, and cursed, with a baffling array: received histories and chronicles, ancient and modern, sacred texts, mythologies and epic (poetic) recreations of the past, newly translated into the vernaculars, the highly popular marvel literature (to which Maese Pedro alludes when he promises his play will offer "60 mil maravillas" [II, 239]). Beyond these, and of particular interest to historians of the most recent past,
layering of narrative upon narrative and the quasi-synchronous argumentative dialogue in which history's writing subjects advance conflicting truths and competing ideas about how to tell the truth are made audible and visible in discussions that run from trivial pursuit of anachronism (Don Quixote's insistence that medieval Moors had no campañas) to such fundamental questions as what has become of the heroine.

The editor who titles Bernal Diaz's Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España its posthumous publication in 1632 offers in that label an emblematic reading of that work which identifies it for all time with the quest for reliable accounts of national history, and the rush to produce them. The Historia verdadera itself has made of Bernal the quintessential teller in the tale, a teller interested in his tale for reasons of social and economic credit as well as of credibility. With the boy-narrator's touting of the show to come as “Esta historia verdadera”, Cervantes introduces the problematic of reliable narrative under the light-hearted sign of Lucian, whose fantastic, pseudo-documentary True History was a sixteenth-century favorite. Yet, to launch chapter 26's dramatic exploration of tellers in a tale, Cervantes's frame narrator borrows a telling line from one of classical antiquity’s most venerated texts, Virgil's Aeneid in Gregorio Hernández de Velasco's 1555 verse translation, which, in a delightful —and significant— narrative pirouette, the same narrator immediately retranslates into colloquial prose. By no accident, his “Callaron tiri los troyanos” renders the opening to that poem's second book, which introduces Aeneas, who will serve for some time thereafter as teller of his own tale (Virgil 294-95). The picture we are offered of Maese Pedro's performance is one in which so many tellers try to get into the tale that they scarcely leave any room for the story itself. And it is a picture which places the goal of “credibility” (the puppeteers's aim of convincing their audience of the “reality” of “esta historia verdadera”) in an unstable equilibrium that turns into outright conflict with material interest (Maese Pedro's and Don Quixote's) in the course of the play.

Even the puppet play's explicit engagement with the language of historical narrative (seen in the celebrated rhetorical expectations to which the boy-narrator is held) and with the generic variety of historical representations places the episode on the inside of a lively cultural discussion on the question of language's capacity to tell the truth of history and to translate unfamiliar realities. Not surprisingly, the complex of issues surrounding truthful telling was aired as vigorously in late sixteenth-century poems dealing with historical subjects (such as Alonso de Ercilla's La Araucana, Juan de Castellanos's Elégias de varones ilustres de Indias, and Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega's La Mexicana) as in prose texts. Between the frame narrator and his story-telling characters, chapter 26's fictional “historians” put on the table such pressing matters as the competition for authority between prose and verse, the status of epic poems and ballads as history, the legitimacy of the frame narrator and his story-telling characters, and the rush to produce them. The episode's persistent attention to the relation between words and deeds. When play distracts Sancho and Don Quixote from their dispute over the truth of the latter's adventures in Montesinos's Cave, Maese Pedro assures them (invoking the Gospel According to John [10:38]) “que es una de las cosas más de ver que tiene el mundo, y operibus credite, et non verbis, y manos a labor; que se hace tarde y tenemos mucho que hacer y que decir y que mostrar” (II, 109).
dramatic fusion of saying and doing ("diciendo y haciendo, desenvainó la espada, y de un brinco se puso junto al retablo" [II, 249]).

History, whose mission it is to transform deeds that deserve to be remembered into words, necessarily grounds itself on the symbiosis of doing and saying, of acting and reporting. Yet, at the same time that writing serves as record or repository of memorable acts which have already occurred, exemplary history is also charged with using language to incite its readers toward exemplary deeds of their own. In this way, history uses present discourse to link past and future orders. This projection into the future of exemplary and monumentalizing historical narratives can take the form of implicit promises or openly prophetic utterances about the future of persons, dynasties and nations. The American chronicles that circulated in Cervantes's lifetime, carrying on a classical and Medieval tradition, had continual recourse to the prophetic mode, which both first- and third-person historians used to confer significance on the deeds of their historical actors and to confer authority on their own written accounts. Promises, based on Spain's providential history and of noble genealogy, serve not only as framing premise, but as part of the compelling subject matter of these histories.

From a variety of personal and ideological positions, and often in the face of less than heroic outcomes, conquest chroniclers faced the inevitable question of whether the facts of the conquest lived up to the promises which had launched them. Columbus, who set sail with the winds of Messianic mission and dynastic foundation at his back, struggled at the end of his life to reconcile the incompleteness of both programs; Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, whose name and the crusading history from which it came seemed to guarantee him a glorious place in history, ended writing about a Providence that restored him to his homeland with no heroic story to tell, and with nothing more than the skin on his back; Las Casas, witness to extremes of conquistador cruelty, railed against the broken promises of evangelist rhetoric. After Las Casas, from mid-sixteenth century on, virtually all writing about Spaniards in America contended at least implicitly with the Black Legend he is credited with creating, a version of history which accentuated the distance between the desire for

Fame, presumed in the Renaissance to be a noble impulse, and the frequently ignoble means by which it was sought: a story, in short, which shows vainglorious words and repugnant deeds incongruously linked.

Even if Maese Pedro serves up his dish of mismatched words and deeds sauced in hilarity, his show has Don Quixote playing out once more the interconnectedness of words and deeds that lies at the core of his project and of his tragedy. What Cervantes's protagonist seeks, here and throughout the novel, is both to make real the written world of words, and to inscribe himself in turn into its pages. Foucault sees the Don facing the epistemological challenge of his brave new era, that of matching words to things. But the existential challenge of the self-nominated hero is to see that his promissory words are matched by deeds and that his deeds are matched by the exemplary text of his once and future history. Not unlike many of his allegedly saner contemporaries, Quixote asks history to serve as example, as prophesy and as monument. And not unlike quite a few, he finds that project impeded both from without and from within.

Before proceeding to assess the fictional context which conditions our reading of Part Two, chapter 26, I would insist, with respect to the Retablo's fictional content and to the intensity of historiographic issues surrounding its scenes, that neither its legendary material nor its quasi-historical gestures alone would permit the reading I propose. Rather, it is the combination of national myth-history, of conspicuous fussing about how that history is to be told, and finally the desire of one spectator-reader to get into its sweeping act, that seems to press the connection, not simply with fantastic narrative projects, but with the most serious ones of Cervantes's era. Just how serious these were, we shall soon see.

The fictional context of Maese Pedro's Retablo Looking back over the chapters which construct the Retablo's context in the novel, and bearing these aspects of its narrative material and form in mind, we find that the puppet play is set carefully in the midst of an intricate nest of episodes that interpose historical themes and historiographical issues into Cervantes's text.

The most striking, not to say the most intensively read, of these is the adventure of Montesinos's Cave. Scholars (including Dunn and Sieber) have looked at the Cueva as a space in which Cervantes examines the paradoxes of literary, epic and mythic time and of its links to "real", lived time. It is well known that Don Quixote's emergence from the Cave to tell the story of his experience—or dream—raises within the narrative not only metaphysical questions, but...
Quixote and Sancho, between the Cave and the Inn, encountered the commercial motives (another frequent chronicle subject) has been hovering over the cluster of episodes under scrutiny, since Don. 257]) rings in parodic inversion of the American expeditions' original equation of landings and gain. The thematics of war and its disappointment ("cada día / lo poco que puedo esperar, / soy mudo de dolor y de ausencia") (II, 255-55). The same cousin proposes to capitalize on the Don's underground odyssey to add a few fresh bits of data to his files. The Retablo's two animal frames, apparently the stuff of farce, can be shown to carry some weightier freight as well. Maese Pedro's marvelous talking monkey, who provides all possible information about past and present, but none about things to come, surely acts out a critique not only of narrative omniscience, but of the premises of providential and prophetic histories. "La aventura del rebuzno," whose action hangs on the mimetic prowess of two rival villages, can be read as a metafictional tragicalomedy of imitation. But it is also a history in which failure of two political groups to communicate produces armed conflict. In the aftermath of the episode, Don Quixote launches into a disquisition on the grounds for just war, an enduring topic of legal and historical discussions in and around New World histories (II, 235-55). A good bit of the talk here centers on the question of whether individuals or groups of individuals have the power to "affront" the honor of another social group, a subject which

Cervantes may turn the whole matter into merriment, but the fun is far from being point-less. Before Don Quixote is allowed to commence his narrative, the frame narrator uses the "translator" to bring the "original" history's author back into the picture, and to reproduce his hand-written marginal musings on the truth question. His oft-quoted ponderings also constitute a referendum on the matter of Don Quixote's sanity. Faced with two impossible alternatives ("No me puedo dar a entender, ni me puedo persuadir, que al valeroso don Quijote se pasase puntualmente todo lo que en el antecedente capítulo queda escrito" versus "pensar yo que don Quijote mintiese, siendo el más verdadero hidalgo y el más noble caballero de sus tiempos, no es posible"), Cide Hamete famously refuses to rule on its truth, remitting that question to the reader: "si esta aventura parece apócrifa, yo no tengo la culpa, y así sin afirmarla por falsa o verdadera, la escribo. Tú, lector, pues eres prudente, juzga lo que te pareciere pues yo no debo ni puedo más" (II, 223; emphasis mine).

I am not aware of any source for this memorable declaration that has been proposed, much less one from "serious" historiography. Yet the expression of the Arab historian, now "puntual," now "mentirioso" in Cervantes's text, bears an uncanny resemblance to the caveat Juan de Mariana appends to chapter 21 of his solemn Historia general de España where he has just finished recounting Spain's founding fiction, the same story of King Rodrigo and La Cava that will soon insinuate itself into Maese Pedro's space. After rehearsing the sentimental history in lavish detail, the Jesuit cautions: "Algunos tienen todo esto por fábula, por invención y patraña: no nos ni la aprobamos por verdadera, ni la desechamos como falsa: el lector podrá juzgar lo que le pareciere probable. No pareció pasalla en silencio, por los muchos y muygrandes autores que la relatan, bien que no todos de una misma manera" (I, 149; emphasis mine). The historian's other reasons for retaining this questionable material are implicit in early parts of the chapter, where he casts the eighth-century Goths as once-proud conquistadors, who have let sloth and appetite undermine their prowess and their polity, in thinly veiled allegory of contemporary Hispanic dilemmas, particularly those reported from the American continent. The Cervantes who located the model for Cide Hamete's marginalia would have been quick to recognize, and to capitalize on, the political implications of the Historia general. On the ground of striking similarities, however, differences no less significant inevitably come into view: where Mariana sees his alternatives in terms of approving truth or discarding falsehood, Cervantes's surrogate speaks of "affirming" the one or the other, with no surcharge of judgement; and the quixotic narrator addresses the reader directly, as "tú".

Beyond the immediate space of the Cave, historiographic references continue to pile up. Before the knight's momentous descent, we meet Basilio's cousin and hear of his several scholarly projects in progress: a burlesque imitation of Ovid's Metamorphoses, which provides Spanish wonders like the Giralda with mythic origins; and a Supplement to Polydore Virgil, "que trata de la invención de las cosas," another pedantic book of shaggy origin stories (II, 206). The same cousin proposes to capitalize on the Don's underground odyssey to add a few fresh bits of data to his files.

The Retablo's two animal frames, apparently the stuff of farce, can be shown to carry some weightier freight as well. Maese Pedro's marvelous talking monkey, who provides all possible information about past and present, but none about things to come, surely acts out a critique not only of narrative omniscience, but of the premises of providential and prophetic histories. "La aventura del rebuzno," whose action hangs on the mimetic prowess of two rival villages, can be read as a metafictional tragicalomedy of imitation. But it is also a history in which failure of two political groups to communicate produces armed conflict. In the aftermath of the episode, Don Quixote launches into a disquisition on the grounds for just war, an enduring topic of legal and historical discussions in and around New World histories (II, 235-55). A good bit of the talk here centers on the question of whether individuals or groups of individuals have the power to "affront" the honor of another social group, a subject which

invokes not only historiography of Spanish national honor but diplomatic protocols like the infamous 1513 Requerimiento, which make dealing with native resistance into something akin to an honor drama. When Sancho intervenes with his own opinionated commentary and re-presents the rebuzno with his own voice, incensed villages shower him with a hail of stones, a commonplace reception given by native Americans to their European visitors in the chronicles (II, 255).

Still another incursion into the historical problematices of New World conquest history comes with the discussions of knight and squire in the next chapter (28) over the matter of the latter's material expectations of insula and salary. The phrase Sancho uses to vent his disappointment ("cada día voy descubriendo tierra de lo poco que puedo esperar de la compañía que con vuestra merced tengo" (II, 257)) rings in parodic inversion of the American expeditions' original equation of landings and gain. The thematics of war and its commercial motives (another frequent chronicle subject) has been hovering over the cluster of episodes under scrutiny, since Don Quixote and Sancho, between the Cave and the Inn, encountered the mancebito-paje who makes his martial motives crystal clear: "A la guerra me lleva / mi necesidad; / si tuviera dineros, / no fuera, en verdad" (II, 226).
Quixote mixes fantasies of chivalric enchantment with talk about navigational instruments and voyages to the East Indies.

On the strength of the foregoing, I submit that, as a telling miniature of its author's narrative practice, the Retablo de Maese Pedro is also a model for his stirring up of the dust storms of history—not just flimsy mists of pseudo-history but the engrossing swirl of dead-serious, nationalist, expansionist History—within the shadowbox of his fiction. Nor is the historical content of Don Quijote merely a matter of techniques imported from non-fictional writing as a model for constructing more believable fictions. If we recognize that Quixote's whole project is not only redemptive, but historiographical, that his most cherished goal is to ensure that an exemplary chronicle will have been written about his heroic life, then we may be able to entertain the notion that Cervantes saw in his protagonist's agenda a noble, comic, grotesque model for imperial Spain's no less contradictory strivings to get its story out, and to keep Spanish serious, nationalist, expansionist History—within the shadowbox of his fiction. Nor is the historical content of

The alienation effect which the Retablo and its framing episode cultivate, making the reader aware of artifice, artificiality, unreality, is one from which serious early modern historiography was in no sense exempt. Too many tellers can inject doubt into any tale. The sharply contrastiing mirrors of rival versions of contemporary history (I believe that American conquest history has a privileged place in Cervantes's thinking) end by distorting experience into unreality. The paradox, both on the inside of Don Quijote's fiction and outside it, is that even the most earnest quest for truth can actually produce phantasmagoric effects. If indeed Cervantes has succeeded in convincing us, through his marionette tricks, that in his novel we can expect to find "only art," that may be his slyest trick of all, meant to divert attention from his irreverent treatment of the projects of serious national history. Once we have opened our eyes and ears to the insistent reminders of the agendas of history and historiography, in this episode and in the larger text, it is hard not to hear a message that reverses any such expectation. The Retablo de Maese Pedro reminds us that art is never "only art", that our favorite fictions, even our myths, are always rooted in historical time, and that they always can be caught dancing irresistible sarabandes with our histories.

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