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Emilio Martínez Mata. *Cervantes comenta el Quijote*. Madrid: Cátedra, 2008. 156 pp. ISBN: 978-84-376-2435-8.

In this unusual and deceptively simple little book, Emilio Martínez Mata gives an account of authorial intention in *Don Quijote*. An introductory citation of Alejandro Malaspina describes his goal: “Despojar al «Quijote» de unas bellezas imaginarias es dar nuevo realce a las muchas que le son propias.” The imaginary beauties, according to Martínez Mata, include post-Romantic claims regarding perspectivism and don Quijote as an advocate of the creative imagination, as set forth by the likes of Ortega, Castro, Spitzer, and Forcione (a brief and enthusiastic prologue to the study is provided by Anthony Close). The fruits of paring away such embellishments? A refined appreciation of some basic concerns of *Don Quijote* criticism: the novels accommodating representation of literature and experience, the narrative designs which draw the complicit reader into an elaborate game of interpretation, the centrality of dialogue, the development of don Quijote and Sancho. The study is unusual in its lack of any imposing theoretical apparatus. It breezes along in sections ranging from five to fifteen pages, with parenthetical and short footnote references to the pertinent secondary literature. Concentrating on the prologue to Part I and the opening dialogues of Part II as the nuclei of Cervantes’ expressions of purpose, Martínez Mata favors substantial textual citations followed by commentary. He thereby reinforces the importance of the primary context of key utterances (e.g., the stated aim of destroying the *libros de caballerías*, the meaning of “la verdad de la historia”), and he inserts bracketed clarifications of certain archaic usages (one of the most central and slippery being the permutations of *curiosidad*). The interpretative frame is occasionally expanded to include other Cervantine writings, some biographical information, as well as Cervantes’ literary and conceptual horizon, including *La Celestina*, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, Garcilaso, Lope, and El Pinciano.

A major contention is that the fixation of critics on chivalric romance—whether we should take at face value authorial assertions that the principle aim of the book is to do away with the genre, or whether Cervantes in fact sets out to redeem it within a contemporary aesthetic—has been a limiting distraction. In this sense, Martínez Mata’s treatment is broader than Daniel Eisenberg’s heftier

and more exhaustive study (1987), which is based on similar premises regarding authorial intent. Martínez Mata asserts that, especially in Part II, Cervantes is less engaged with knight-errantry novels than with his own literary production (Part I, his own *novelas*), contemporary Spanish theater, *Guzmán de Alfarache*, Avellaneda's spurious continuation. He discusses some of Cervantes' main aesthetic concerns—unpretentious style, verisimilitude, variety—and how they serve a relatively novel, un-Horatian emphasis on pleasure over didacticism (123–27).

Particularly good is the discussion of Cervantes' nuanced sense of a varied readership (75–81), and of how he cultivates a dynamic relationship with a reader who is both independent and complicit. Martínez Mata traces this relationship through the address to the reader in the prologue and the famous narrative interventions regarding the precision and plausibility of the material at hand. He repeatedly refers to a “juego con el lector,” and the ludic elements range from the fairly superficial playfulness of making it clear to the reader that the proclamations regarding sources and precise names are not to be taken seriously, to the more complicated game of enlisting the reader's active role in interpretation (e.g., 118). There is a dialogic principle at work here, and Martínez Mata shows how the relationship between author and reader is in certain ways analogous to the interactions between characters. His comments on concessive expressions, such as *con todo*, provide an illustration of an underlying flexibility and collaboration in the determination of meaning: “si mi examen no es erróneo, hay ciento cincuenta y tres casos con valor concesivo. De ellos, una buena parte corresponde al narrador o a un personaje matizando su razonamiento, pero en nada menos que treinta y nueve ocasiones es utilizado por un interlocutor admitiendo de algún modo el razonamiento del otro, generalmente para iniciar la exposición de sus razones, es decir, presentando los argumentos propios sobre la base de que lo afirmado por el interlocutor, pese a las discrepancias, puede tener algún fundamento” (111).

It is in his attempts to delineate precisely what is and is not at play in Cervantes' novel where Martínez Mata's discussion becomes most interesting, and tenuous. As mentioned above, he rejects the notion that *Don Quijote* contains an authentic perspectivism, any serious questioning of reality or setting forth of epistemological quandaries. Nor does he accept the related claim that Cervantes ambivalently endorses don Quijote's enthusiasm for knight-errantry narratives. A reasonable reading of the *baciyelmo* episode (I, 21) reminds us that, despite Spitzer's attractive formulation, there is no “hybrid reality,” never any real doubt regarding the ontology of the barbers' basin (105–08). Similarly, a review of the “contexto burlesco” in which don Quijote delivers his impassioned narrative of the knight and the boiling lake (I, 50) reveals that Cervantes considers it an artistically flawed and ethically perilous transgression of the sage Canon's neo-Aristotelian precepts. I grant the first point more readily than the second, although they are, as mentioned, not unrelated. But before I complain too loudly that Martínez Mata is out to deprive me of my reading fun, let us examine what he does allow. Rather

than a Faulknerian perspectivism, Martínez Mata discusses the “haz y envés” in *Don Quijote*, which he characterizes as Cervantes’ non-dogmatic appreciation of the good and the bad in people and situations. He speculates that this empathy and complex view, evidenced in his depictions of characters such as Maritornes, Zoraida’s father, and Teresa Panza, is the product of Cervantes’ experiences in captivity in Algiers (99–113). If reality is not hybrid in Cervantes, Martínez Mata suggests that people are, as he speaks of the “doble condición de los personajes” (103). There is more to them than initially meets the eye, and their conduct must be seen in the context of their circumstances (100). He is walking a fine line here, and occasionally resorts to hazy generalizations: “la vida es compleja” (100), “un comportamiento complejo” (103), “la ambigüedad del juego entablado con el lector” (105). I do not necessarily claim that he is inconsistent, and his attempts to avoid anachronistic excess while still allowing for a good deal of range and implication are commendable: “Cervantes no plantea ninguna duda sobre la naturaleza de la realidad, aunque, al mismo tiempo, nos muestra cómo los hombres por interés o, incluso, por diversión están dispuestos a falsearla” (105). Still, I am also not sure whether the distinctions that he is at pains to establish, with his intriguing portrayals of an attenuated perspectivism and relativity in Cervantes, always hold up. On the one hand, Cervantes should not be seen in light of Ortega’s absence of “una verdad absoluta” (106); on the other, Cervantes tends, with some exceptions, to not represent “personajes que representan absolutos” (102). And while Cervantes does not seriously present epistemological problems (e.g., 107), he does offer “diálogos en los que un interlocutor, sin necesidad de modificar por completo su enfoque, acaba admitiendo una parte de verdad en el razonamiento del otro” (110). Martínez Mata himself seems to admit some truth in the reasoning of the views he critiques—in this case, Castro and Spitzer. I suspect he might agree that, despite the liberty taken with the implications of *baciyelmo*, Spitzer’s analysis of the relationship between characters’ life experience, language and perception of the world is valid and insightful.

As for Martínez Mata’s disallowance of don Quijote as a persuasive spokesman for imaginative literature, I remain partially convinced. Yes, don Quijote’s rhapsodic boiling lake narrative lacks the verisimilitude that could legitimize the marvelous (Martínez Mata holds up the Capitán cautivo story from Part I as a positive example), he hopelessly confuses historical, legendary and fictional characters, is unable to retain a critical distance to his material, and is naively swayed by the authority of the printed word. But the vivid and varied detail of don Quijote’s narrative, and the beauty of the wish-fulfillment dream, bespeak more than regressive dementia. While of course we should not forget the irony and “burlesque context” of the knights’ utterances, much of the pastoral imagery he deploys recalls Garcilaso more than the “razón de la sin razón” of Feliciano de Silva (I, 1), and his claims regarding the effects of chivalric fantasy (“verá cómo le destierran la melancolía que tuviere”; “después que soy caballero andante soy valiente [...] sufridor

de trabajos, de prisiones”) contain clear echoes of authorial sentiments and values. Again, much of what don Quijote says is contradicted by his behavior and the sordid reality of his “adventures,” but Cervantes’ insistent combining of the ridiculous and the dignified, the absurd and authoritative throughout *Don Quijote* (take for example, don Quijote’s reference to biblical and archeological evidence of giants in the beginning of Part II), make authorial positions seem ambiguous indeed. This is partly due to the way Cervantes cultivates in the reader a critical sensibility and also an affection for don Quijote and Sancho. The squire himself becomes a primary “banisher of melancholy” in Part II, in no small part due to his adoption of the imaginative literary values of his master. As for the notion that such a reaction to don Quijote is necessarily mired in the concerns of Romanticism, it should be noted that a predisposition toward seeing fools as ambiguous, and a susceptibility to the pleasures of fantasy and implausible adventure can also result from reading Erasmus and Burton, Ariosto, Martorell, and Spenser. As Martínez Mata himself observes with regard to Cervantes’ self-portrait in the prologue to *Don Quijote* (I): “Al retratarse de esta forma, Cervantes se muestra sin duda influido por la positiva consideración renacentista de la melancolía como don divino, propia del hombre del genio” (37). The “Romantic approach” has certainly produced anachronistic distortions, to which *Cervantes comenta el Quijote* proposes a clear-sighted counterweight. Thankfully, Martínez Mata does not throw out the baby with the bathwater. This illuminating, amiable study can be read with pleasure and profit for beginners and specialists alike.

MICHAEL SCHAM
msscham@stthomas.edu