

REVIEW ARTICLE

Laughter Tamed¹

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The appearance of Anthony Close's *The Romantic Approach to Don Quixote: A Critical History of the Romantic Tradition in Quixote Criticism* in 1978 was met with cheers by some and brickbats by others. Those who cheered were those who sympathized with Peter Russell's "funny book" approach to *Don Quijote*, in which stress was placed on a historicizing return to the work's *vis comica* to the detriment of the more philosophizing or sociopolitical readings which had prevailed since the early nineteenth century. In effect, Close's book put on display rather convincingly the Romantic roots of virtually all the principal approaches to Cervantes' masterpiece, up through and including that of Américo Castro and his followers.

Those who threw brickbats tended to see Close's book as unjustifiably cutting off fertile theoretical reflection on the part of *cervantistas*, including the first few attempts to use more *au courant* critical approaches. Any attempt to look for a "deeper" meaning in *Don Quijote* Close deemed "symbolic," or even "esoteric," and therefore anachronistic. The lesson dinned in by *The Romantic Approach* was that scholars needed to slough off the

¹ Anthony Close. *Cervantes and the Comic Mind of His Age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. viii + 375 pp. ISBN: 0-19-815998-6.

accretions of erroneous readings generated over the past two hundred years and to see *Don Quijote* for what it fundamentally was: a funny book.

Russell himself did not continue to wage war on behalf of his argument, at least in print, after the appearance of his seminal article. Close's major support emerged from the influential readings of Daniel Eisenberg, who continued to highlight the need to understand more deeply the parodic connection of *Don Quijote* with the books of chivalry which most of us never bothered to read with much attention (if at all).²

As the years wore on, Close emerged as the primary standard bearer of the funny-book school, as even Eisenberg seemed to back away from some of his more severe pronouncements.³ Close's situation within Cervantes studies became even more dramatic as the eighties and nineties generated even more theoretical approaches, which could only be dismissed as "symbolic" from within the terms of *The Romantic Approach*. And just in case we had any doubts about our critic's attitudes towards these more recent efforts, he would occasionally put forth an *aggiornamento* of his original position in which he in fact extended his condemnation to include them.⁴

One of the most solid critiques that was aimed at Close's argument centered on the implicit premise that it was, in fact, possible to reconstruct the seventeenth-century reception of *Don Quijote*—more "accurate" *a priori* because it would obviously center on the book's risibility. How, in fact, could we really know

² Many of Eisenberg's thoughts on the subject are synthesized in *A Study of Don Quixote*. His earlier formulation is found in "Teaching *Don Quixote* as a Funny Book," an article with which, according to a prefatory statement to the version posted on his Web site, he no longer agrees.

³ This is noticeable in an appendix to *A Study of Don Quixote*, entitled "The Influence of *Don Quixote* on the Romantic Movement" (205–23; 193–208 of the translation).

⁴ See, for example, his "Theory vs. the Humanist Tradition Stemming from Américo Castro" and "Sobre delirios filosóficos y aproximaciones ortodoxas."

how a Spaniard would read Cervantes' work, especially given the relatively scarce written record left to us?⁵ Close seemed to give the impression that his "hard-nosed" historicizing approach was based on some kind of direct access unavailable to the rest of us.

Some twenty years after *The Romantic Approach*, Close has provided us with an answer to many of the objections that could be raised against it. Indeed, I would venture to suggest that had he published *Cervantes and the Comic Mind of His Age* first, the negative reaction to the work of 1978 would have been less voluminous (or at least more muted). This is because *Comic Mind* engages in a nuanced and exhaustive exploration of the comic landscape of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, striving to explain from an historicizing perspective why—and about what—Spaniards laughed.

The result of Close's labors is a monumental work which will no doubt influence the study of Cervantes for years to come. Indeed, it is the type of scholarly effort which has become increasingly rare in recent years as the academy has inexorably evolved into the "fast-food" mode. The twenty years Close spent working on *Comic Mind* were well-invested, as evidenced in his painstaking reading of Cervantes in the light of an abundance of primary texts from the period in question. And in what will be a big surprise to those who have typecasted Close as a traditionalizing "theory-phobe," our critic does so with judicious use of some of the major twentieth-century thinkers on culture and literary theory (Foucault, Norbert Elias, Genette).

What will *not* come as a surprise is the superb quality of the prose in which Close fashions his arguments: it is the witty and finely chiseled variety we find in everything he has published over the years. Indeed, a true delight to read.

In the pages which follow I will try to synthesize the major

⁵ For a succinct and valuable appraisal of that record, see Cherchi. Needless to say, another important question altogether is whether a work's ultimate "meaning" must necessarily be tied to its historical moment.

directions of Close's arguments. I will also point out the areas on which I disagree. For although I find the overwhelming bulk of Close's analysis to be convincing, I also believe that there are some trouble spots in need of scrutiny.

II

In his Introduction, Close rehearses many of the objections to recent critical approaches which have turned him into such a tempting target for his colleagues. Among the commonplaces he attacks are those centering on *Don Quijote* as presciently laying the foundation for the "modern novel" (1, 3–4) and/or as evincing a "perspectivistic" or radically skeptical approach to reality (4–5)—all in ways that rip it from its historical context.

To all these approaches that tend "to treat Cervantes as though he were an honorary modernist or postmodernist" (1), Close proposes his antidote, a "historical understanding of Cervantes's poetics and practice of comic fiction, putting primary emphasis on the poetics, and considering the practice as a means of confirmation and illustration" (1). To achieve this it becomes necessary to delve into the richly comic dimension of Cervantes' works which has been largely ignored since the Romantics: "one cannot treat the comicality of Cervantes's fiction as simply an obvious and superficial layer, detachable from more thought-provoking layers that lie beneath it. It pervades and conditions the whole work, and if we neglect it, our understanding of the work is basically skewed" (7). While many *cervantistas* would not have a problem with that statement, others will cringe at Close's tight linking of the comic with moral and ethical concerns he attributes to Cervantes: "my purpose is not to paint Cervantes as a moralist, but to foreground concerns of his which, in that age, were deemed to overlap with the ethical: taste, propriety, the requirements of good art. His aesthetics are an aspect of the regulatory mentality of the age, whose significance in our canonical authors we moderns prefer to discount" (5).

As seen in this passage, the notion of Cervantes the “subversive” begins to take heavy hits very early on. Close is quite right in pointing out that Cervantes could not have floated effortlessly above a cultural climate dominated in many ways by ethical and moral concerns generated by the Church (in conjunction with Classical philosophy, of course). The big question (to which we will return) is how tightly did he hew to a conventional approach to these matters.

The other major aspect of Close’s initial formulation of the comic dimension of Cervantes’ work which may raise some eyebrows is the link he establishes with drama: “I contend that Cervantes saw his fiction in the ‘low’ or comic mode primarily as an extension of comedy, the dramatic genre. If the discourse of the Canon of Toledo in *Don Quijote* I, 47 is Cervantes’s major statement about the prose epic, the concluding part of the friend’s advice to Cervantes in the prologue to *Don Quijote* Part I, which is complementary to the priest’s discourse about the *comedia* in *Don Quijote* I, 48, is Cervantes’s manifesto of comic fiction. A mini-manifesto no doubt, but not to be sniffed at; it states that *Don Quijote*’s primary aim is incitement to laughter, in terms which unmistakably link it to an Aristotelian conception of comedy’s purpose” (8).

Close is keen very early in his text to identify the thrust of his project as it relates to E. C. Riley’s ground-breaking *Cervantes’s Theory of the Novel*. Indeed, *Comic Mind* in its entirety might be looked at as a hard-hitting, but very respectful jousting match with his mentor (who passed away, of course, shortly after the book’s publication).⁶ As Close puts it: “one of the purposes of this book is to supplement Riley’s treatment of Cervantes’s poetics of prose fiction in one particular aspect [i.e., its relation to the comic]. Supplement, not supplant it. ...A sufficient sign of my estimation of Riley’s book is that after the thirty-six years since its publication, measured from the moment when I write these lines, it

⁶ For a touchingly perceptive remembrance of Riley, see Close’s recent text in *Cervantes*.

still seems to me eminently worth arguing with. Unlike most of what has been written subsequently on Cervantine poetics, it cuts consistently *with* the grain of Renaissance theory and of what Cervantes explicitly says” (9).

Close’s attitude toward another set of his principal interlocutors is decidedly less benign. After acknowledging that the application of Bakhtin’s theories to Cervantes has done much to refocus our attention on the comic dimension of *Don Quijote*, Close proceeds to accuse its American practitioners in particular of using Bakhtin “as an alibi for interpreting Cervantes on our terms rather than his” (12). Part of the problem, we are told, is that “Cervantes scarcely ever mentions ‘carnival’ or its synonyms and never specifically portrays the festivities of that season” (11–12).⁷

The need to face Bakhtinians head-on is crucial, because of Close’s overarching hypothesis about Cervantes’ attitudes toward comic material and its deployment in a broad gamut of literature (including his own). Those attitudes are firmly—and laudably—linked with a complex process of socio-genesis (in Elias’s sense):

I start from the assumption...that the comic genres of the Spanish Golden Age, and the social practices related to them, reveal and are unified by a collective mentality, a “comic mind.” This underwent modification in the course of the sixteenth century, during which its coarse, Aristophanic strain had to contend with various forces of repression and control, some operating at an ideological and institutional level, others at a socio-genetic or behavioural one. I see this struggle...as a creative tension, and the surge of comic creativity from about 1600 onwards as the fruit of it. ...In the area of comic prose, all the writers involved in its resurgence around 1600—Mateo Alemán, Francisco de Quevedo, López de Úbeda,

⁷ Among the guilty parties, who come at Cervantes from both the “dialogic” angle and the carnivalizing one, are James Parr, Charlotte Gorfkle, Carroll Johnson, and James Iffland (see 11).

Gaspar Lucas Hidalgo, Cervantes—create eclectic and imaginative syntheses of traditional material, and, in so doing, take up deliberate positions towards it and towards each other which reflect that evolutionary process and are its result. ...For all those involved, the decorum of comedy, in one sense or another, was a central bone of contention. Cervantes's voice is part of a larger chorus, distinct and commanding certainly, but not unique. (10–11)

In this perhaps overly long quotation we find the crux of Close's argument. While I thoroughly agree with the general premise about the socially and ideologically generated pressures brought to bear on what Close calls the "Aristophanic" elements in traditional manifestations of the comic in Spain, what I find less convincing is the degree to which Cervantes himself forms part of this decorum-driven project. My agreement stems from the fact that what Close finds in the socio-genetic dynamics of comic fiction of the period falls in line with what I myself have found to be the case in the confrontation between Cervantes and Avellaneda. Indeed, had Close's book been published in time for me to use it in my *De fiestas y aguafiestas*, many of the latter's arguments would have been substantially bolstered.

My disagreement is rooted in the fact that I do not see Cervantes falling quite so comfortably into the ranks of writers—including Avellaneda himself, I might add—among whom Close places him. In other words, the regulatory project which Close describes so magnificently was, indeed, going on, but the question is how fully did Cervantes himself support it.

The Cervantes depicted by Close is one who fits naturally into a campaign designed to bring the ruder dimensions of Spain's traditional—"Aristophanic"—*vis comica* under control. He begins by attempting to gauge Cervantes' attitudes towards the omnipresent *burlas* in Spanish literature and culture, coming to the conclusion very quickly that rather than eradicating them entirely, Cervantes wants them to be "restrained by discretion and taste" (17). The key concepts of "propiedad," "discreción,"

and “decoro” emerge at this point (see pp. 18 and ff.), with Close doing yeoman service in defining their contemporary meaning.

With regard to the first two, Close states: “Both presuppose the exercise of purposeful intelligence, with the first laying emphasis on appropriateness in its various aspects, and the second on wit and imagination” (21). (“Decoro,” in turn, runs together very closely with “propiedad”; see 18.) Their application to the comic does not translate automatically into prudish avoidance of slapstick cruelty, but into an intelligent selectivity governed by good taste.

As part of the illustration of his argument, Close contrasts Cervantes’ treatment of a specific *burla* with one which bears a strong resemblance from Mateo Alemán’s *Guzmán de Alfarache*: that is, Don Quijote’s nocturnal encounter with the *dueña* Rodríguez in II, 48 and Guzmán’s encounter, also at night, with the innkeeper’s wife (I.ii.6). Close’s analysis of the respective scenes is brilliantly subtle (59–70) as he makes good use of Genette’s notion of focalization (65–66) to point out the depth of Cervantes’ narrative artistry. Synthesizing the results of his scrutiny, our critic deploys a kind of language that permeates his whole approach: “The whole scene [in Cervantes], then, is comedy of a broad, hilarious kind: the ludicrous misapprehension of the two characters create incongruities of burlesque proportions; the outcome is pure farce. Yet within that framework we have consummate artistry: perceptive characterization, sparkling linguistic invention, mock-heroic elegance, all added to a witty spiral of confusion of fiction and reality” (68).

Cervantes, conceiving his activity as subject to “canonical poetics” (70), ends up distancing himself from even the most talented of his fellow writers of the period: “For Cervantes, the skilful and effective telling of a comic story is an end in itself and an art in its own right, requiring the highest qualities of taste, intelligence, wit. It is for that very reason, and not merely because he is a writer who tends to think theoretically, that Cervantes has a poetics of comic fiction; the care that it requires in practice is translated into thought” (70).

Close argues that this attitude pervades Cervantes' treatment of a huge range of comic raw material inherited from the Spanish tradition, e.g., "the character of Sancho Panza, the *entremés*, *burlas*, and the figure of the *burlador*" (70). Whenever he dips his ladle into the rich, "Aristophanic" pot, he does so with an overriding concern for *propiedad*: "it has implications for structure, tone and style, narrative viewpoint, and the semblance of directly experienced truth that fiction should present" (71). A kind of literary "Mr. Clean" (or "Don Limpio," if you prefer), the Cervantes Close is intent on highlighting is one constantly on the lookout for corners of the "Augean stables" (his metaphor, not mine—see 17) of Spanish comic literature in need of a good scouring: "Cervantes's critical attitude to the comic genres of his age, his sense of their coarseness and vulgarity, acts as a conscious and active spur to his modifications of motifs taken from them. Censure, and the basic values presupposed by it, are motors of his creativity" (72).

As one would suppose, this regulatory penchant does have sociopolitical ramifications. In reviewing Cervantes' generally negative attitudes towards satire, Close cites a passage from *La elección de los alcaldes de Daganzo*⁸ which for him synthesizes our writer's attitude regarding the interface between literature and politics:

Under the authoritarian monarchy by which Spain was ruled in Cervantes's lifetime, it is understandable that intelligent men should have adopted an attitude of submissive resignation. However, what we have here is something more: the principled assumption that the king and his counsellors know better, and that it is not for private citizens to be free with their censures or alternative suggestions. The idea is

⁸ It runs as follows:

Dexa a los que gouiernan, que ellos saben
 lo que han de hacer mejor que no nosotros:
 si fueren malos, ruega por su enmienda;
 si buenos, porque Dios no nos los quite.

repeated too insistently in Cervantes's works to be casually discounted. It should lead us to question the commonly presented image of him as a writer deeply critical of the political regime and, by extension, social system and ideology, of the Spain in which it was his lot to live. I do not mean that he was an acquiescent supporter of all this. ...[Here Close offers some counter-examples.] Cervantes's attitude is better described as one of principled non-intervention, based on deferential loyalty, but not exempt from private reservations. (30)

Needless to say, Close's contrary approach to yet another deeply held tenet of much Cervantes scholarship of the last two hundred years is likely to raise hackles. All in all, he is probably right to throw cold water on some of the more extreme attempts to cast Cervantes in the contestarian mode, but one might ask if he ends up going too far in the other direction when trying to establish a counterweight. We will return to this matter later on.

III

At this juncture, it is more pressing to point out how Close essentially abandons these reflections on the slippery matter of Cervantes' ideological propensities in the sociopolitical terrain so as to focus on those in the area of aesthetics. Close returns to subjects surveyed earlier by Riley, pointing to Cervantes' relation to Renaissance theorization on Classical poetics, particularly Aristotle and Horace. Our author is seen aligning himself closely with Aristotle's attitudes toward humor, which stressed that "humour should be urbane, rather than buffoonish" (73), and whose preference was thus "for the New Comedy rather than the Old" (73). The *locus classicus* of this sensibility is the Prologue of Part I: "The insistence on merriment, unpretentious style, and educative purpose brings *Don Quijote* firmly into the sphere of the Classical art of comedy, which aims to purge the emotions

through laughter...and portrays, in easy and familiar language, the ridiculous foibles of ordinary folk in order to teach them prudence in the conduct of their private lives" (75). Close realizes that this notion of a Cervantes essentially respectful of Classical norms flies in the face of our image of him as the Promethean creator of the "modern novel" (see 76), but nevertheless insists that we have gone way too far in our packaging of him thus.

Close, I should add, does not see Cervantes' ideas about "comic catharsis" as coming from readings of theoretical treatises, but as being rooted in "his own temperament" (77). Our critic returns again and again to the "friendly ethos" he sees as omnipresent in Cervantes, an ethos related to "laughter's cheering and therapeutic function" (77). Although he is right in suggesting that one does not develop a sense of humor by reading theories, the question arises as to whether the risible matter found in Cervantes is always as tame and intelligent and civilized as he suggests (e.g., "the values of civilized wit and restorative laughter...lie at the heart of Cervantes's poetics of comic fiction"; 79). Close engages in a nuanced reading of the "Arcadia fingida" episode of Part II, pointing out the genteel humor and feelings of "universal joy and harmony" (79) found there, and "which fix the dominant tonality of Part II" (79). What he fails to describe in any detail is the climax of this episode, referring only to the "predictable ignominy" (79) with which it ends. The "predictable ignominy" resides, of course, in Don Quijote's being trampled by a herd of bulls on their way to a *fiesta*—a scene replete with the ideological resonances of symbolic inversion.

I will return to this omission later on, as it is emblematic of Close's whole take on the comic in Cervantes, and goes a long way in explaining his rejection of Bakhtinian approaches to it. At this juncture I would like to return to Close's attempt to link Cervantes with issues relating to Classical comedy, particularly of the Terentian variety. Indeed, in reviewing Cervantes' own theatrical output our critic does not hesitate to state the following: "The Terentian levity of Cervantes's theatre is symptomatic of his partial, conservative adherence to a neoclassical and Italianate

conception of comedy, represented for sixteenth-century Spaniards by Torres Naharro, Lope de Rueda, and Juan de Timoneda" (84). Throughout Cervantes' theater (and elsewhere in his *oeuvre*), Close finds what he sagely refers to as "coded exemplariness" (85) related to the theatrical tradition from which he derives inspiration. A didactic dimension is present, but always with a light touch, always oblique.

Indeed, if one *bête noire* for Cervantes is coarse slapstick, another is the heavy-handed moralistic literature which abounded in the period. In whatever genre he worked, Cervantes attempted to steer clear of oppressively direct approaches to moral matters. This does not translate, for Close, into any kind of "relativism" of the type modern critics love to attribute to our author:

In conclusion, though Cervantes's comic fiction and comic theatre show too many formal and thematic dissimilarities to allow them to be considered virtually convertible into each other, they have important affinities, summed up in the elusive word "ethos": the focus on extravagant "characters"; pervasive verbal humour; the conception of *burlas* and the figure of the *burlador*; the treatment of conflict as trivial storm in a teacup; the endings in reconciliation, convivial gaiety, song and dance. These features, imported with appropriate modifications into Cervantes's fiction, determine the tonality and catharsis of comedy, which, in Classical poetics, define its generic essence. I want particularly to stress the light, ironic detachment that is common to both genres. Modern Cervantine criticism has tended to treat it as a symptom of a benignly indulgent and Olympian relativism. Nothing in Cervantes's comic theatre warrants that conclusion. The comedies convey moral lessons, and to some extent do so explicitly. (95)

According to Close, this light and easy "ethos" is even carried over to the *entremés*, as his finales tend to "civilize the genre's traditional coarseness" (93).

Our critic is probably right to center in on Cervantes' participation within the polemics surrounding the theatrical world of his day as a way of explaining many aspects of the direction in which he takes his comic art. As part of his examination of that key Prologue of Part I, which expresses unambiguously "what literature of entertainment should *not* be" (96), Close also looks carefully at the "Lope complex" (my term) which haunts it. While Cervantes in fact ends up sharing with Lope many basic tenets, as he writes his prologue for the 1605 work his resentment toward "el Fénix" is seen everywhere. Cervantes' tendency to pick bones with the Lopean school of the *comedia* is rooted in the impact the latter not only had exercised (with disastrous effect) on his own theatrical career, but with his literary efforts in other areas.

Close has this to say about Pero Pérez's famous pronouncements on the subject: "At first sight, the censure of the *comedia nueva* in *Don Quijote* I, 48 seems an afterthought, elicited coincidentally by the critique of chivalry books. In fact, it is the implicit premiss of that critique, and of the very conception of *Don Quijote* as a comic story with a polemical purpose, a conception implicitly guided by the rules of comedy, the dramatic genre" (110).

Pointing out that Cervantes' critiques of the books of chivalry differed a great deal from the moralizing variety common at the time (111), Close works hard to establish close links between Cervantes' theoretical concerns as a dramatist and his practice of writing comic prose fiction. Indeed, the connection helps to explain a matter which has proven to be a perennial source of vexation for *cervantistas*:

It is important to grasp why Cervantes connects the *comedia* with chivalry books in order to comprehend the polemical vehemence of his attack on the latter, whose consistency or seriousness has often been called in question. Why should he have bothered with a genre virtually defunct, in terms of composition if not consumption, in early seventeenth-century Spain? The answer is that he saw in it the threatening

shadow of one which was very much alive and kicking, as he knew to personal cost. He considered its influence on public taste as queering the pitch for the kind of fiction—specifically, heroic, prose romance; more generally, the romantic *novela*—he wanted to write, and was already in the process of writing in *Don Quijote* Part I. His *Persiles* is the fulfilment of the ideal prose epic sketched by the Canon of Toledo after his critique of chivalry books in *Don Quijote* I, 47, hence the logical sequel to Cervantes's parodic demolition of them in this novel. The connection that Cervantes perceives between those books and the *comedia* also helps to explain his assumption that comedy—good, orthodox comedy—is the paradigm on which *Don Quijote* should be based. (113–14)

There is much about this argument that is convincing, particularly the notion of the strategy of beating a dead horse as a way of doing so with a live one. What is less convincing in this section of the book is Close's attempts to link *Don Quijote*'s wide-ranging intertextuality, its hybridity, with a parodic attack on the kind of pseudo-erudition attacked in the Prologue to Part I:

The prologue to Part I supplies us with a specific, historical reason for the oil slick's existence and tendency to spread uncontrollably [Close refers to the aforementioned intertextuality]. It may be seen, at least in part, as a satiric or parodic reaction to the current literary vogue for the pompous parade of erudition. Don Quijote, the mad bookish pundit versed in all matters under the sun, is a comic counterpart to lackeys, lunatics, shepherds, and *pícaros* solemnly presented in a similarly didactic and omniscient guise. That is, the satire of pedantic affectation in the prologue has implications which extend well beyond its bounds. The quarrel with the theatre of Lope's school is its unseen motivation. It prompts Cervantes, in *Don Quijote*, to adopt an attitude of strident academic orthodoxy: towards the theatre, towards chivalric romances, and towards the composition of *Don Quijote* itself. (115–16)

Much of this would appear, in large part, to be a coded attack on the Bakhtinian approach to the evolution of the novel, the hybridizing genre *par excellence*. Rather than seeing the proliferation of discourses bouncing off each other as a fertile crucible from which the “modern novel” emerges, Close prefers to see it as a part of a consciously tendentious attack on a literary trend not to his liking. This notion, ultimately, would seem to diminish Cervantes’ achievement, partly as a result of Close’s own polemics with a critical approach he opposes.

Close presses his attack further by even putting into question the degree to which Cervantes initiates any kind of revolutionary upheaval within the literary practices of his day. Our critic sees Cervantes as fundamentally respecting entrenched notions of literary decorum, seeing the latter as the “tiller of Cervantes’s theory and practice of comic fiction” (117). And not only are we talking about decorum as a “principle of authorial selection and narrative pitch” (117), but also about its application to social life and the subsequent incorporation of aspects of that life in fiction. (Nobles need to be presented in a certain way, plebeians in another—all, of course, based on ideological norms of great sociopolitical resonance.)

Regarding the more purely literary aspects of decorum, Close is quick to point out that *Don Quijote* scarcely produced a ripple on that front, at least as compared to the reactions sparked by *Guzmán de Alfarache*, Góngora’s *Soledades*, or Lope’s *comedias*. If it was so outrageously out of kilter, why did not his contemporaries perceive it as such?⁹ Here Close takes on Riley (and much of the *cervantista* Establishment) by questioning the subversiveness of Cervantes’ project, while simultaneously lending credence to it from a very peculiar angle: “The revolutionary explosiveness that Riley attributes to *Don Quijote* is potentially, rather than actually, present in it. Yet in a fundamental sense, Riley is

⁹ I should point out that in *De fiestas y aguafiestas*, I argue precisely that Avellaneda’s continuation is a sustained assault on the “indecorousness” of Cervantes’ Part I.

right. *Don Quijote* Part II, in particular, opens up a road which would eventually lead right away from the segregation of styles and matters on which the traditional poetics was based. Paradoxically, however, it was Cervantes's fidelity to that poetics which led him in that direction; the explosion mentioned by Riley resulted from diligently following what the canonical manuals and models prescribed" (121). Needless to say, there is a paradoxical quality about this argument, which may leave some readers less than convinced. How, indeed, is it possible to be innovative or revolutionary by assiduously following convention? If we hew so closely to traditional rules of decorum, how do we suddenly find ourselves "outside the box"?

Realizing the opposition his argument is likely to provoke, Close engages in acute analysis of several passages from Cervantes' work in the hopes of convincing us that our author is quite conscious of and loyal to the theory of styles which guided literary production since Classical times. But he is careful to qualify his position in the following terms: "I have no wish to foist on Cervantes a rigid taxonomy of styles, but, rather, to establish the underlying principle: each work, in accordance with its subject and intended effect upon the reader, adopts a distinctive rhetorical pitch, which legitimizes certain options and discourages others. These differences are particularly clear in the contrast between high style and the lower ones" (126–27). Whereas many of us might feel comfortable with this idea as it applies to many of Cervantes' *novelas*, for example, we might feel less so with respect to the complex art of *Don Quijote*. How do we get to that dazzlingly effervescent mix, recognized as such by Close himself, from a narrative praxis tied to manuals of rhetoric and their stylistic precepts?

Much of Close's way of resolving the paradox flows through the notion of "la verdad de la historia," found with relative frequency throughout *Don Quijote*. Particularly with respect to Part II, Close insists on the connection with the theories of Luis Cabrera de Córdoba about the art of the historian, as developed in *De la historia, para entenderla y escribirla* (1611): "teniendo la ma-

teria delante de los ojos, verá lo que della para esto ha de elegir o dexar, qué dezir, qué callar, para formar la verdad, materia de su historia, juntando las cosas para saber empear, proseguir y acabar; con tal conueniencia de las partes entre sí, según el estilo y orden, que haga un cuerpo gallardo y hermoso” (135). Close proceeds to gloss this passage in a way that is crucial to the rest of his analysis: “Thus, the historian’s objective is not just to tell the truth, but to tell ‘one truth,’ thematically unified, concordant, stripped of irrelevant details” (135).

Cervantes ultimately transmutes this *modus operandi* of the ideal historical chronicler into that of the weaver of fictions. Much of Close’s analysis has to do with the way Cervantes understands the notion of “episodios.” While steadfastly fixing his gaze on the “one truth” of Don Quijote’s story, Cervantes also enriches it consistently with material that could initially be deemed as “extraneous.” But he does so in a way which ends up subordinating this material in an organic fashion.

The practice of “ornamenting” a long narrative with interpolated stories was fully consecrated by tradition. In a number of cases, especially in Part I, Cervantes introduces interpolated material in a way which followed that tradition closely, which our critic defines as “juxtapositive” (e.g., “La novela del curioso impertinente”). But according to Close, Cervantes steadily outgrew that simpler practice, even within Part I. After reviewing a number of instances from the latter, Close concludes: “with a tradition over a millennium old encouraging him to adopt the ‘juxtapositive’ option, Cervantes, with striking originality, chooses a ‘co-ordinative’ one. By means of this method, the interpolated story is told by its protagonist [e.g., “el capitán cautivo”], or some other actor in it or witness of it, who occupies the same chronotope as that of the main action, and narrates events which, though they begin independently from it, become entangled with it” (138).

Close points out that this innovative strategy was not actually invented by Cervantes, there being antecedents for it (e.g., in Heliodorus himself and pastoral romances). But he then proceeds to suggest that what we find in Cervantes does represent a

quantum leap with respect to the earlier instances: "What is revolutionary about his practice in *Don Quijote* is his adaptation of it in order to synthesize incongruous narrative strands. Instead of combining like with like, courtly or Byzantine *novelas* with pastoral fiction, as he does in *La Galatea*, he combines romantic stories with the comic doings of the mad *hidalgo*. Indeed, the word 'combines' scarcely does justice to the thoroughness of the synthesis" (138).

If this is true of Part I, it is even more so in Part II, where Cervantes deploys the notion of *episodios* in overt fashion. Close disagrees with Riley's identification of what segments or aspects of the novel Cervantes would think of as *episodios* (140–41), which our critic conceives in the following terms: "what constitutes an episode in *Don Quijote* is not necessarily a fictional tale unconnected in its origin with the hero but, rather, any kind of well-developed matter extraneous to his chivalric mania, which is the novel's essential theme" (142). *Episodios* in Part II, for Close, are "more diverse..., more fragmentary, dispersed, and elusive [in] character than those of Part I" (149), running the gamut from Camacho's wedding to all of the "lúcidos intervalos" Don Quijote enjoys, including his advice to Sancho before the latter's assumption of power in Barataria (see 141). All of them are so tightly woven into the fabric of "la verdad de la historia" (or "one truth") that they end up being the "non-episodic episodes" (149) described by Cide Hamete in II, 44.

Close summarizes his view of the novelty of this practice in the following terms:

Cervantes's experiment is as fertile as it is original. Situated firmly within the prevailing aesthetic norms, as they relate to episodic embellishment, the quasi-historical nature of epic narrative, and the unpretentious tone appropriate to comedy, he tries dutifully to comply with their conflicting requirements and ends up with a result which virtually subverts the episode as normally understood: virtuoso ornament, pleasantly distracting tale, elegant and moralistic pa-

renthesis. Whereas *Don Quijote* Part I, for all the novelty of its co-ordinative techniques, more or less conforms to the traditional formulae, Part II offers instead a sweeping mosaic of contemporary life in which novelesque motifs combine with documentary ones, the picturesque focus with the morally satiric, politics with ethics and religion, all designed to provoke the reflection of the two heroes, as well as their familiar idiosyncrasies. (149–50)

Here, again, we return to a central motif of Close's approach: Cervantine innovation emerges from a peculiar way of being respectful to tradition. There is, of course, something attractive about this notion, as it strives to locate Cervantes firmly within cultural-literary practices of his time. He did, indeed, have to use the only tools available him to create something new. *Don Quijote* did not emerge *ex nihilo*. But I still find there to be considerable dissonance between Close's image of the neo-Classicizing "Horacio cristiano," punctilious about decorum and *propiedad*, combined with Cervantes the ingenious *bricoleur* in the process of developing something essentially unprecedented (whether the "modern novel" or not). Can Close really have it both ways? Is the "gloriously anarchic association of all kinds of literary representation: picaresque, pastoral, farcical, tragic, mythic on a single, quasi-historical plane of representation" (161) he describes (in an almost Bakhtinian-inflected flourish) the product of a neo-Classicizing bean-counter?

This latter quotation comes from a chapter dedicated to the other meanings Close ascribes to the key phrase "la verdad de la historia." Rather than having to do with matters of selection and coordination of materials to be narrated, in this part of Close's study it is linked more to questions of mimesis and of "making present." He agrees in part with Riley about the concept's having to do with "the truth of the matter as empirical experience and history typically find it" (155): "The verisimilitude that Cervantes opposes to *Amadís de Gaula* and its kind must indeed, in one aspect, be equated with 'realism' thus defined." Cervantes was able

to generate an impression of “well-documented normality in large part because of that “sharply attentive...eye and ear for places, mannerisms, registers” which characterized him. That capacity gibed well with an increasing demand for fiction which would reflect the burgeoning urban world of contemporary Spain (157).

While it could be pointed out that the demand in question was also being filled by the appearance of the picaresque novel during the same period, a genre from which Cervantes clearly learned a great deal, Close is emphatic about distinguishing between mimetic modes characteristic of the two:

If, in *Don Quijote*, Cervantes strives for a sharply defined sense of everyday normality, and gives it more prominence than in his other works of comic fiction, this is due fundamentally to his ironic method of subverting the brand of literary implausibility exhibited by *Amadís de Gaula* and its kind. It led him to the discovery of a new comic quality, prosaic insignificance. This deviates from the ridiculous, extreme abjection which is exploited by contemporary picaresque novelists, and which is, indeed, reflected in *Don Quijote* itself in the black and white oppositions basic to its parody, including the primordial one between sordid inns and imaginary castles. Cervantes, without ever renouncing that blackness, endemic to his age’s Aristophanic mind, causes it persistently to modulate into a familiar, humdrum grey. (158)

Here, too, we find Close’s Cervantes leaning strongly in the direction of a decorous “don Limpio.” While our critic admits that Cervantes displays symptoms of that “Aristophanic mind” found in the sordid humor of the picaresque, he again insists on the softening of its rough edges.

That “truthfulness” alluded to in the formula of “la verdad de la historia” is also connected to an impression of vividness that authors should strive for. Here, too, Close strives to historicize Cervantes’ narrative practices: “Cervantes’s quest for immediacy

of presentation is deeply influenced by the traditional prescriptions for telling stories in courtesy books” (175). His documentation of this assertion is convincing, as he proceeds to point to specific texts of the period: Castiglione’s *Il cortegiano*, Della Casa’s *Galateo*, Bargagli’s *Dialogo de’giuochi*, and Gracián Dantisco’s *Galateo español* (175).

Close ends his second chapter on “la verdad de la historia” with the following synthesis: “*verdadero* is triumphant shorthand for Cervantes’s whole aesthetic of comic fiction, in which presence is the confirmation of wit, taste, exemplariness, decorum, refinement, risibility, inventiveness” (177). What proves somewhat troubling about this image of Cervantes is its resemblance to what could almost be described as a paradigm of a neo-Classical or English Restoration writer. Indeed, he is the Cervantes revered in the eighteenth century, the level-headed opponent of “enthusiasm” who undermines his target by deft irony.

Now it is true that Close has built a very solid foundation for his case, and I would be the last one to reject it out of hand. But I still cannot help but feel troubled by the tendency to ignore, rather systematically, those aspects of Cervantes which might tend to clash with the refined and decorous image Close has erected so carefully. My concern focuses mainly on *Don Quijote*. Using Close’s terms, there would seem to be large areas of “Aristophanic” humor which go without any mention whatsoever. Where are the slapstick beatings Don Quijote receives on so many occasions? Where are the farcical falls from his mount? Where is the vomit and counter-vomit exchange after the battle of the sheep? Where is Sancho’s bowel movement in the *batanes* episode? Where is the skewering of the wineskins?

Close (and others) might respond that these “Aristophanic” movements diminish steadily in Part II, where Cervantes’ art matures in ever-more sophisticated directions. There may be some truth to this notion, but I would nevertheless submit that it remains flawed. What do we do with the fall from Rocinante as Don Quijote is confronted by a *moharrache* from a group of players on their way to a Corpus celebration? What about the uncer-

monious trampling by pigs, and later by bulls (the latter effaced, as noted earlier, from Close's analysis of the "Arcadia fingida")? What do we do with Don Quijote's fall when mischievous boys stick gorse on Rocinante's rump in Barcelona?

As for the "seemly pranks" played on Don Quijote at the Duke's palace, Close may be right about their general innocuousness. But Don Quijote probably did not consider the painful mauling inflicted by the cats, which puts him in bed for five days, to be all that light-hearted (II, 46).¹⁰ Nor would Sancho find his being sandwiched between two shields and stomped on—to the point of fearing death—to be all that "seemly" (II, 53). And for all their intelligence and wit, why would Cide Hamete, when narrating the second round of *burlas* at the palace (that is, as the two protagonists are on their way home from Barcelona), make the comment that "tiene para sí ser tan locos los burladores como los burlados, y que no estaban los duques dos dedos de parecer tontos, pues tanto ahínco ponían en burlarse de dos tontos" (II, 70; 564–65)? At this point in the work, Cide Hamete has often functioned as a virtually direct mouthpiece for Cervantes, as argued by Close himself in his analysis of the Moor's comments on "episodios." Is Cide Hamete now mistaken in his assessment of the Duke's and Duchess's sense of humor?

At this point it might be worthwhile to return to the way in which Close throws down the gauntlet to those of us who have argued for a "carnavalesque" dimension in *Don Quijote*. Close faults us for the fact that the word "carnaval," as well as representations of the actual festival, are absent from Cervantes. Those familiar with Bakhtin's classic *Rabelais and His World* (as Close obviously is) will remember that his analysis of Rabelais' *Gargantua et Pantagruel* is less concerned with finding actual instances of Carnival depicted in its pages—or actual uses of the word—than with uncovering a "logic" which underlies both the Frenchman's work and many aspects of what he calls "popular-festive" cul-

¹⁰ It should be noted that this *burla* smacks strongly of carnival pranks involving cats and other kinds of animals.

ture. That “logic” is one associated with what the anthropologists call “symbolic inversion.” It is found not only in Carnival *per se* but in many other aspects of popular-festive culture. The term “Carnival” is used by Bakhtin, and by those who use his theories, as a shorthand way of referring to an enormous gamut of cultural practices, not just the pre-Lenten festival.

Having said that, it proves somewhat troubling that efforts to uncover a carnivalesque “logic” in *Don Quijote* can be brushed off so easily as another instance of recent critics’ viewing of it from thoroughly anachronistic perspectives tied to contemporary “Theory.” Bakhtin’s original argument regarding *Gargantua et Pantagruel* was that most attempts to understand the work in recent centuries were off target in large part because they failed to take into account its deep roots in popular cultural practices which, starting roughly in the seventeenth century, were systematically contained or coopted. As the “code” vanished, Rabelais’ work became increasingly bizarre and incomprehensible.

Bakhtin saw Cervantes’ masterpiece as yet another example of that appropriation of popular-festive culture by Renaissance writers (including Erasmus and Shakespeare, among others). As his work centered on Rabelais, Bakhtin did not engage in the kind of systematic analysis with respect to Cervantes as he did in the case of the French author. That task was first taken up in serious fashion by Augustin Redondo toward the end of the 1970s, culminating in his massive *Otra manera de leer el Quijote*.¹¹ Even without the later contributions in the same vein (albeit with significant variations), it is difficult to understand why this approach can be dismissed so summarily. In effect, it attempts to do precisely what Close wishes to do: historicize Cervantes’ sense of humor and its impact on his narrative practices. Those of us who follow the Russian theorist’s lead would argue that much of Cervantes’ whole comic project, starting with the creation of the two main characters themselves, cannot be understood properly without taking into account its connection to popular culture.

¹¹ Another early contributor was Manuel Durán.

This does not mean, of course, that Cervantes was a “man of the people.” Nor would Bakhtin ever say such a thing about Rabelais (or Erasmus or Shakespeare) for that matter. He is talking about a particular moment in European cultural history when writers, particularly from the middling social sectors, activated aspects of popular culture in a very peculiar—and magnificently fertile—way. It was a moment in which festive practices—which were absolutely impossible to ignore, given their overwhelming abundance—erupted in “high culture” in a wide variety of both direct and oblique ways. Cervantes, I would argue (along with my fellow Bakhtinians), represents an outstanding instance of this phenomenon.

Part of Close’s resistance to accepting a “carnivalizing” Cervantes is puzzling because of his admirable efforts in delineating that “rumbustious,” “Aristophanic” sense of humor which was ubiquitous in sixteenth-century Spain. Much of what Close refers to as “Aristophanic” humor has deep roots in popular culture. Indeed, “Aristophanic” would appear to be Close’s way of referring to that aspect of the popular comic spirit that many of us would refer to as “carnavalesque.” Whereas Spaniards of the period would have limited access to Aristophanes, they would have to be blind and deaf not to have encountered instances of popular-festive culture surrounding them.¹² And indeed, if one looks at Aristophanes himself, one must ask about the cultural traditions which gave rise to his own art, many of which also relate to the popular-festive matrix. In other words, Aristophanes did not proceed from a vacuum. As noted earlier, there is a tendency toward symbolic inversion of a satirico-ludic nature permeating huge swaths of human culture going far back into our history, and it is that tendency that would have “jump-started” Aristophanes’ own splendid art.

Close would thus appear to use the adjective “Aristophanic” as a way of focusing our attention on a well-known writer of the Classical world rather than on the rich array of popular-festive

¹² Close fairly well admits this on 182–83.

activities surrounding Cervantes. If he admits the link with the folk matrix, then he is in danger of being seen associated with the Bakhtinian camp, whose premises he rejects.

This rejection, in turn, connects up with Close's effort to place Cervantes squarely into the camp of those writers who saw as their mission the "cleaning up" of the malodorous and aggressively "Aristophanic" dimension of Spanish humor within a variety of cultural practices (including literature).

IV

As noted earlier, Close focuses his attention on the "collective comic mentality or mind-set" (182) in the period in question in an attempt to prove the existence of an evolutionary process which affected the composition of comic fiction. He defines that collective mentality as "inter-subjective thought: concepts, values, intuitive assumptions" (182). I could not agree more with Close about the historical specificity of humor: "whatever universal substrate there may be in laughter and its manifestation, each historical community imprints specific characteristics upon it, related to other features of its culture and social organization" (184). It is also very clear to me that social pressures can be brought to bear, from a wide variety of angles, that will move humor, over time, in other directions. Here Close makes good use of Foucault's notion of discursive formations and social "disciplining" (183-84), Maravall's analysis of different social institutions' molding impact on what he called *mentalidades* (182), and most of all, Elias's theories of socio-genesis (181, 184) in providing a theoretical framework for exploring the phenomena that concern him.

The whole area of *burlas* is one which is particularly ripe for this kind of analysis:

The terminology of *burlas* (jesting, prank playing) embodies assumptions about the nature, limits, and occasions of the

risible, which are made explicit in four formally constituted discourses, concerning, respectively, courtly manners and pastimes, rhetoric, the genre of comedy, medical theory. They are also articulated or implied in literature, theatre, proverbs, and other folklore. Considered in its expressive aspect, as joking, the discourse of comedy can to some extent be treated as a sociolect in the Barthesian sense. Considered as a set of instinctive expectations, that is, as a sense of the ridiculous, it might seem far too diffuse to be treated as an identifiable phenomenon, yet even this shows common and distinctive traits, noted by contemporary observers and modern scholars. (183)

As Close strives to uncover the specific characteristics of the peculiar form of mobilizing *burlas* within a broad expanse of both literary and non-literary phenomena, he focuses in more directly on elusive yet palpable aspects of the comic mind:

What are the traits of this comic mentality? Though I will offer a preliminary general characterization, their specific identity can only be grasped by examination of the particular forms that they took.... That said, the basic trait is the conception of the comic as existing in a simultaneous relation of parasitic intimacy with, and symmetrical opposition to the non-comic. It is proverbially enshrined in the dichotomy of *burlas* and *veras*: though opposite, the two things are sensed as inseparable, and this paradoxical kinship penetrates the most diverse corners of Golden Age culture. (187)

He proceeds to offer in shorthand an idea of the wide variety of phenomena to which he refers: from the *entremés/comedia* interaction present in every theatrical performance to “the relationship between heroic traditional ballads and ballads of thieves’ cant (*romances de germanía*)” (188), from “courtly love lyrics of the *Cancionero general* (1511)...[to] the *Cancionero de obras de burlas*” (188). Indeed, Close even includes as an example the relationship be-

tween “the genre of romance in general and *Don Quijote*” (188).

And interestingly enough for someone who has rejected out of hand any Bakhtinian-inflected reflection on Cervantes, Close goes on to say:

the opposition is not merely reducible to forms familiar to all periods and cultures, such as those defined by Bakhtin: on the one hand, the coarse rebelliousness and sensuous gratifications of the grotesque body, with its language, festivals, and sites, as outlet for the world-upside-down, subversive revelry of the common people. It consists in a systematic, pointed mirroring and inversion of superior by inferior: the burlesque duplication, in countless *comedias*, of the *galán*'s wooing of his lady by the lackey's flirtation with the maid [etc.]. Cervantes offers the quintessential example in the pairing of Don Quijote and Sancho, seen as diametrical opposites, yet described as “forjados en la misma turquesa.” I can only explain the consistency of this phenomenon by positing an underlying mentality which assumes specific manifestations in different genres. (188)

Not only do we have pretty much of a description of varieties of symbolic inversion to which Bakhtin refers as “carnavalesque” (as noted earlier), along with direct reference to popular-festive culture, but a precise attempt to insert Cervantes' protagonists into that matrix.

Rather than engaging in contradiction, what Close wishes to argue is that the carnivalesque (*surrature*) dimension is present in the cluster of writers he wishes to discuss (including Cervantes), but that it is “hand-cuffed” by new levels of restraint associated with the courtly milieu (including middle-class wannabes). An “Apolonian”/“Dionysian” tug-of-war develops, producing works which wavered dangerously in the two directions as writers react to the “juvenile, robust, Aristophanic style of humour which delights in desecrating inversions, wounding derision, exuberant revelling in allusions to the body's base functions”

(189):

My diagnosis is based on the reactions of various Spanish writers around 1600: Gracián Dantisco, Rufo, López Pinciano, Alemán, Cervantes, Salas Barbadillo, Espinel, Lope de Vega, to their native traditions of comedy; in common, they judged those traditions as excessively coarse and licentious and sought to bring them under civilized control. The uniformity of their attitude is striking proof of the existence of a collective humorous mentality. And yet, despite this reaction, the traditionalism inherent in Spanish culture ensured that the Aristophanic spirit survived within the new framework of restraint. It is on the conflicting pulls of control and resurgence, with the first serving as paradoxical catalyst of the second, that I want to concentrate in the rest of this book. (189)

As indicated earlier, there are many aspects of this argument which I find convincing, precisely because they provide solid backing for my own hypotheses in *De fiestas y aguafiestas*. The nub of my disagreement with Close has to do with the degree to which Cervantes fits well in the spectrum of writers mentioned above. He may, in fact, have shared many of the concerns characteristic of this group, but certainly not to the same degree or in the same way. Moreover, if we examine the writers mentioned, we can see that while they all may have been producing literature in the early part of the seventeenth century, they by no means belonged to the same generation. And it is here where I feel Close takes a serious misstep, that is, in his assumption that writers separated by as many as three decades by their dates of birth would all end up manifesting a very comparable sensibility. But more about that later on.

Here I would like to turn to other central aspects of this part of Close's book. Our critic dives into the complex morass of issues concerning the evolution of the comic mentality of the period by examining the evolution of the role of *motes* and *apodos*—a kind

of “sociolect” (193)—as they relate specifically to “El licenciado Vidriera.” Following the pioneering work of scholars such as Chevalier and Joly, Close describes the way in which the often highly aggressive bantering repartee among nobles during the early part of the sixteenth century, fueled by *motes* and *apodos*, began to tail off as we reach 1600. Manuals delineating acceptable courtly etiquette brought this practice under more strict control as ludically insulting wit was increasingly seen as “inappropriate” among members of the upper social strata.

As we cross into the seventeenth century, *motes* are charged with new life as the court comes out from under the mournful pale of Felipe II’s reign. A festive gaiety characterizes many aspects of courtly culture during the Valladolid years, ranging from the reopening of theaters to the flourishing of satirico-burlesque poetry in the hands of Góngora and Quevedo. However, this new license had all sorts of restrictions applied to it. *Motes* and *apodos* were seen as belonging more to the province of *truhanes* and plebeians rather to that of nobles: “The traditional debate [on the appropriateness of *motes*] is now replaced by an ethical discourse which, inspired partly by the precepts of courtesy literature and partly by traditional Christian meditation on the vices of the tongue, differentiates urbane wit from malicious gibes to associate these with buffoons or with the plebs” (206).

Nevertheless, there were also circumstances in which the “discreet” members of the court could engage in this practice without damaging their reputations: “A gentleman could bandy *motes* with buffoons, lackeys, innkeepers, prostitutes; he could shower insults on fellow academicians within the tightly regulated and, in principle, decorous framework of the *vejamen académico*...; in the carnivalesque licence of the ritual caricature (*vejamen* or *gallo*) of recipients of university doctorates, the speakers were given equally free rein” (207–08). Those who engaged in this activity outside these narrowly circumscribed limits were subject to a variety of sanctions, including death (if Villamediana’s demise was indeed related to his scorching satirical poetry). Those like Quevedo got away with it, at least in part, by the typi-

cal practice of adopting a burlesque *persona* which safely separated the author of flesh and blood from his work (211).

According to Close, Cervantes' use of *motes* in "El licenciado Vidriera" emblemizes the new straightjacket being systematically applied to them in Spanish society. He points out, correctly, that Cervantes tends to stay away from this practice in all of his works except this *novela*. (When *motes* do occasionally appear in works such as *Don Quijote*, they appear in the mouths of lower characters.) In "El licenciado Vidriera," he in effect puts the practice under quarantine, reflecting his general dislike for sharper forms of satire. Vidriera's renunciation of his "witty" past at the end of the work as a mere symptom of his madness accurately reflects Cervantes' own repudiation.

Acknowledging his debt to Maravall, Domínguez Ortiz, Eliott, and others, Close synthesizes his views on the reasons for the change in the following terms: "The modification of Spanish attitudes to comedy of the sixteenth century is due, in general to these factors: the emergence of a large urban middle-to-upper class, looking to the court as role-model and acting as the primary cultural consumer; the prescriptive and authoritarian spirit of the age, which sought to observe and control social practices over a wide area; its pervasive academic ethos" (216). Eschewing a simplistic cause-and-effect relationship, Close deftly crafts the following argument: "The point I am trying to make is that in proportion as new forms of social coexistence and recreation became available, new and wider media of entertainment adapted to the changed circumstances. This affects things like ethos and tone, presupposed criteria of value, tokens of quotidian life incidentally interwoven in the fictional world, new kinds of heroism to identify with and scapegoats to laugh at. The bridge between such things and the evolution of society may not be direct and obvious, but it is real" (216).

Crucial to the cultivation of this new milieu were the rise of the literary academies. Close carefully studies the social and ideological terrain occupied by these institutions. While high-ranking nobles did belong to them, they were also awash with

“small fry”: “The lower fringes of the ‘middle class,’ occupied by many of the writers of the age, comprised *hidalgos* of modest income or respectable commoners, who gained their living as majordomos in noble houses, private secretaries, minor government functionaries, tutors, chaplains, and so on” (222). This group hungered for social advancement, and thus needed to be able to incorporate itself with aplomb into the courtly world; hence the aforementioned proliferation of etiquette manuals of various types (such as Gracián Dantisco’s *Galateo español*). Close makes the point that the central goal in most of them was to develop a sense of “appropriateness” as it applied to all social activities (see 228). Needless to say, there was a clear spill-over effect in the area of literature as “decorum” became the hallmark of a good writer’s practice. Close posits that the ethos of the academies slowly but surely penetrated a whole gamut of literary forms during the period from 1610 to 1630 (see 245).

Particularly interesting is that ethos’s impact on the picaresque as writers like Salas Barbadillo and Castillo Solórzano move the *pícaros* toward the sphere of aristocratic salons (243). But comic genres in general, not just the picaresque, found themselves in the cross-hairs of the academies: “The increasingly academic ethos of the culture of Cervantes’s age directly affects the socio-genesis of its attitudes to comedy. It is in the nature of the academies to affirm norms of taste, define a literary canon, debate theoretical principles. It is in their nature also to proclaim themselves as school’s of urbanity. ...[T]he appeal to a criterion of courtliness, as a means of bringing comedy under control, was typically engendered in that context” (248).

Close relates many aspects of López Pinciano’s influential *Filosofía antigua poética* to the growing academicism of many aspects of writing in the early part of the seventeenth century, including treatment of the comic.¹³ López Pinciano’s attitude to-

¹³ Here our critic should probably have made some mention of Eisenberg’s earlier attempts to link Cervantes’ humor with aspects of López Pinciano’s theories (see *A Study* 112–14 or *Interpretación cervantina* 101–02).

ward the comic (253–55) is flush with class-oriented criteria. The interlocutors approve of the rowdier forms of comicality of writers such as Lope de Rueda, but precisely to the degree that they are confined to characters and milieux associated with the lower end of the social scale. Close detects that paradoxical tendency both to appreciate the coarser elements of more traditional Spanish comedy (in the broad sense) and to quarantine it within secure boundaries. *Burlas* and *veras* needed to occupy different and clearly demarcated terrains (257–58). This entire attitude, Close contends, permeates literary production as we move into the first decades of the seventeenth century.

And as I noted earlier, Close sees Cervantes himself as an exemplar of this phenomenon. His *Viaje del Parnaso* is an archetypal instance of the academic ethos and praxis. Our critic would also include many episodes of Part I as belonging to the orbit of the academies, including the discourse on arms and letters, the discussion on the books of chivalry and the *comedia*, and even the reading of “La novela del curioso impertinente” (245). But the academic inflection is even broader: “the most important aspect of academicism’s influence upon Cervantes concerns the form, setting, and ethos of his long fictions, rather than the nature of specific scenes” (245). Examples range from many aspects of *La Galatea* (248) to the tactic of working out his grudges on literary matters in a fictionalized chat with an “amigo gracioso y bien entendido” in the Prologue to Part I (248).

But of much greater importance is Close’s assertion that Cervantes signs on to the whole academicizing project of reining in the comic. As he surveys the literature produced in the first decades of the seventeenth century, Close perceives a commonality of approach to laughter: “This mind-set has a catalytic and legitimizing relation toward laughter, locating the factors which provoke it and warding off the disapproval that it may arouse, and is clearly manifest in the works of merrily entertaining prose fiction from 1599 onwards—*Guzmán de Alfarache*, Hidalgo’s *Diálogos*, Cervantes’s *Don Quijote* and Avellaneda’s, *La pícara Justina*, and so on. Its conspicuousness in them is due to the fact that, collec-

tively, they aim largely at laughter, present a relatively new phenomenon in Spanish literature and could count on a reaction of suspicion or hostility from some quarters. Cervantes, to be sure, by his techniques of co-ordination and in other ways, significantly erodes the mind-set's basic tendency towards segregation. Yet he is far from shaking himself free of it altogether" (273).

Close's qualifications toward the end of this passage are important. While he does throw Cervantes in the same bag with the other authors mentioned (including his arch-rival Avellaneda!), he also perceives significant differences. There is, in fact, a Cervantine twist to the whole problem of the comic that sets him apart, one which would seem to be related *to the precise degree to which our author is truly ensconced in the academic ethos*. Pointing out how Cervantes deviates from the latter in certain matters relating to decorum, Close ends up setting him off from a series of writers deeply involved in the entrenchment of courtly academicism, to wit, "Tirso s *Cigarrales...*, Avellaneda, Salas Barbadillo, Espinel, Lugo y Dávila, Castillo Solórzano" (274). And irony of ironies, Cervantes and Lope de Vega end up being allies rather than rivals in one important respect: "Lope's handling of the comic in the theatre parallels his rival's in prose fiction" (274).

Close's extremely insightful analysis of *Guzmán de Alfarache* shows that rather than being categorically opposite to Alemán in so many ways (as we have been taught to think by Blanco Aguinaga—306), Cervantes learned much from his art while simultaneously transcending it: "Alemán...anticipates and makes possible Cervantes's most innovative achievement: the co-ordination of the planes of *burlas* and *veras*, and the transcendence of the severe segregation that Alemán himself helped to establish" (308).

Interestingly enough, two of the writers Close sets off from the hard-core academicians—i.e., Cervantes and Alemán—are strict contemporaries. Many of the academicians, moreover, were born in a cluster around 1580: Quevedo (1580), Tirso (1580?),

Salas Barbadillo (1581), Castillo Solórzano (1584).¹⁴ The reason I bring this up is an important one: could Cervantes have been subjected to precisely the same set of socio-genetic pressures delineated by Close as this group which was some thirty years younger? Clearly not.

This, in turn, might help to explain the fact that Cervantes' approach to decorum and related matters is patently not as "hard-line" as what we find in those substantially younger writers. When finally answering head-on the question he proposes in his Introduction—"what, in respect to the poetics of comic fiction, is Cervantes's difference from his contemporaries?"—Close first reiterates the Cervantes' role as a "spearhead...of didacticism and courtly academicism which presides over the resurgence of the Aristophanic traditions around 1600" (326), and then goes on to say the following:

Granted the similarity, however, he differs signally from his contemporaries in that he recognized the need for synthesis and rationalization [of "Aristophanic coarseness" and "didacticism and courtly academicism"], whereas they, around 1600, tended to shun both things. His radical conception of that synthesis puts him several decades ahead of his time. (326–27)

That tendency to fuse rather than to segregate might, in fact, be a product of the fact that Cervantes grew up in an era when the reins had yet to be tightened in the ways described by Maravall, Foucault, Domínguez Ortiz, *et al.* I would add that the distinction Close himself makes might be linked to the one that Bakhtin signals when setting off Rabelais, Shakespeare, Erasmus, and yes, Cervantes, from the writers of the seventeenth-century when it comes to the question of laughter and popular-festive culture (including attitudes toward the body).

¹⁴ Francisco Lugo y Dávila was born even later, some time in the decade of the 1590s.

Curiously, Close himself ends up grouping Cervantes with the same cluster highlighted by Bakhtin: "His conception of laughter's cheering, therapeutic power aligns him with Renaissance humanism (Erasmus, Rabelais, Burton) rather than with his own ethnic traditions, though this is due, I think, to his own temperament rather than to any literary influence" (332). This comment comes on the heels of Close's reference to Don Antonio's complaint against Sansón Carrasco for inducing Don Quijote to return home after the definitive battle in Barcelona and to "the mood of levelling and unifying gaiety which is the dominant key of Part II" (331). This language is "crypto-Bakhtinian." And rather than invoking the potentially slippery notion of "temperament," it would seem to make more sense to keep our eyes peeled for the kind of socio-genetic explanation about which Close is so admirably keen.

Bakhtin, I repeat, is trenchant in his comments on the enormous change that begins to emerge as the "logic" of Carnival begins to succumb, finally, to the pressures applied by civic and religious authorities in the seventeenth century, which in turn affects the mobilization of that "logic" by writers from the cultured sectors. All this affects the pitch, nature, and function of the laughter writers attempt to induce.

In *De fiestas y aguafiestas* I argued that the change in question is emblemized in the Cervantes/Avellaneda match-up, with the first author clearly linked to the more traditional popular-festive matrix whereas the second was a product of the new decorum-obsessed milieu which no longer enjoyed the more dynamic interaction with the carnivalesque. The rich ambiguities which haunt *Don Quijote* are systematically eliminated in an attempt to channel laughter in a more "politically correct" direction, one which harmonizes quite nicely with the generally conservative concerns of the courtly academicizing crowd.

When making that argument, I suggested that Avellaneda did probably belong to that generation of writers born around 1580. Oddly enough, in the perennial game of trying to reveal Avellaneda's true identity, scholars have made cases for a num-

ber of the authors of what might be dubbed the “generation of 1580,” including Quevedo, Tirso, Salas Barbadillo, and Castillo Solórzano.¹⁵ Reading Close’s book has convinced me further of the rightness of my hypothesis. And while it may in fact have been none of the authors cited above (I, for one, do not believe that it could have been Quevedo), it was very probably someone close to that group who suffered the impact of the academicizing ethos, which was reaching its zenith around 1620—that is, at a moment when he was a younger writer just hitting his stride.

This hunch was strengthened as I read Close’s analysis of the works of Salas Barbadillo, whose literary and social profile comes very close to how I imagine Avellaneda. The concerns of *El caballero puntual* (1614), which centers on the “the castigation of the pathological social climber Don Juan de Toledo” (322), would seem to circle in the same orbit of those we find in the apocryphal work of 1614. As noted by Close: “[Salas’s] works explicitly aim at the correction of manners, specifically those of middle-class Madrid society, through the arousal of laughter, a response explicitly signalled within them in numerous passages” (322). Indeed, it was precisely the systematic evocation of laughter in Avellaneda’s text that embarked me on the research which gave rise to *De fiestas y aguafiestas* (see 236–37). This is *not* to say that I wish to revive the Salas Barbadillo candidacy for the role of favorite whipping-boy of the *cervantistas*; rather, I wish to suggest that Avellaneda was a close “literary cousin” of that *madrileño* writer. In juxtaposing the two authors, Close highlights other aspects which tie nicely to my own argument regarding the difference between Avellaneda’s art and Cervantes’: “In the second part [Cervantes] virtually overthrows the traditional conception of the separateness and difference of episodes from the main

¹⁵ See Martín de Riquer’s handy summary of the attempts to identify Avellaneda in the Introduction to his edition of Avellaneda (1: lxxxii–lxxxviii). Riquer’s suggestion that the author might be Jerónimo de Pasamonte was developed by Eisenberg, then subject of a book by Riquer and a further book by Martín Jiménez, itself the subject of a review article by Helena Percas de Ponseti. Pasamonte was probably born around 1553 (Martín 24).

action, assimilates them to the affairs of Don Quijote and Sancho, and by this means achieves a revolutionary expansion of comic fiction's range. Let us recall the kinds of things that Salas Barbadillo excludes from comedy: tragic and heroic events, the depiction of a devout Catholic rule and an exemplary counsellor, elegant deliberative rhetoric on matters of state, solemn precepts on the code of marital honour. All these things and more are included in *Don Quijote*, and, especially in Part II, are enmeshed with the main comic theme, not merely confined to compartments segregated from it" (336).

As *Comic Mind* draws toward its conclusion, our critic once again makes sure that we do not attribute to Cervantes "some kind of pre-Bakhtinian poetics: unstable narrative viewpoint; an unmonitored plurality of registers and ideologies; the radical questioning of authority and of mimetic truth" (334). Falling back to the paradoxical approach developed earlier, Close asserts the following: "Remarkably, [Cervantes] is led down this revolutionary path, not by intuition of a futuristic poetics, but on the contrary, by a dogged attempt to implement traditional prescriptions: history's obligation to the truth; the matching of style to matter required by decorum; the storyteller's need to grip his audience's attention; the sense of the light ethos appropriate to comedy" (336).

While I am sure that Close would argue otherwise, this notion of "revolution through tradition" (my term) would seem to enter into oblique conflict, minimally, with another set of comments about the "revolutionary road of generic miscegenation" made in the page that follows:

This imaginary, improvised romance is made to absorb, with madly ingenious and stylish exuberance, a host of 'purple' styles and elevated topics, some more or less akin to the chivalric genre (pastoral, epic, history, ballads, Ariosto), and others quite unrelated to it (Garcilaso, the Golden Age, learned exempla, the Bible, and so on). At the same time, it grotesquely blends or combines with innumerable motifs de-

rived from comic tradition—the picaresque, the *novela*, ballad parodies, jest books, farce—and, in Part I, is pointedly juxtaposed with serious, non-chimerical adventures which tap a different array of sources. This strategy endows Cervantes's parody with a peculiarly internal, empathetic relation to its target, and also a bewildering breadth of eclectic reference. (337)

Quite frankly, this language is redolent of a Bakhtinian spirit which Close is adamant in denying. What our critic describes mirrors the kind of “centrifugal” forces the Russian associates with the “novel” as a kind of transhistorical phenomenon, very much connected up with—dare I say it?—a carnivalization of discourse.¹⁶ And when he says that “these radical and pervasive cross-pollinations of modes and genres, without equivalent in contemporary Spanish literature, generate protagonists who stand half inside and half outside the worlds of Spain’s Aristophanic imagination” (338), it would seem to me that what he is describing is precisely what occurs when a writer of enormous talent finds himself bisected by popular-festive culture at exactly the right historical moment (like Rabelais). Those feet that Don Quijote and Sancho plant firmly on the Aristophanic side of the equation are there because they themselves have emerged from the matrix of popular-festive culture. As López Estrada points out, the huge explosion of success that the two protagonists met on their appearance in print, which included their immediate incorporation into festive contexts, would seem to be the result of a process of “recognition.” Spaniards “knew” them as soon as they saw them.¹⁷

To conclude, let me reiterate what I said at the beginning of

¹⁶ See, for example, “Discourse in the Novel” 272–73.

¹⁷ See his excellent “Fiestas y literatura,” in which he says: “Resulta como si las criaturas de Cervantes hubiesen tenido una preexistencia en la vida de la época y que su presentación literaria fuese un reconocimiento” (317).

this essay: *Comic Mind* is truly a major scholarly accomplishment which will influence the way we think about Cervantes for years to come. Few scholars, if any, have done such a conscientious job of exploring comic fiction of the period with such critical acumen and breadth of knowledge. If I have sounded harsh in some of my judgments, it is only because I believe that Close's arguments could have been strengthened in several respects had he not decided to set himself off so fiercely from "modish" Bakhtinian approaches.

Bakhtin has been abused and over-used: there is no doubt about it. But that is true of many—most?—critical approaches which have found favor in the academy, stretching back over decades. (How much more Frye could we take *circa* 1970? How much more Derrida *circa* 1990?) And while the urge to cry out "¡Basta ya!" may seem irresistible, I think there is a strong possibility of shooting oneself in the foot if one surrenders to it in a way that obviates employing the legitimate contributions of the theorist in question. In Close's case, I think that a prudent incorporation of aspects of Bakhtin would have strengthened his argument rather than weakened it—albeit at the cost of being accused of finally having succumbed to much-despised "Theory." This would have curtailed what I think has happened in certain moments of *Comic Mind*: that is, an excessive tailoring—or even bending—of his argument so as to mark off an "obvious difference" vis-à-vis the Bakhtinians, only to end up as a kind of *vergonzante* Bakhtinian who imports aspects of the Russian's thought under cover. I say this, again, with the deepest respect toward this scholar and his remarkable achievement.

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