

1

The politics of imitation

Throughout his literary career Cervantes was engaged in a conversation and a contest with the classical authors of Greece and Rome. From his early pastoral romance *La Galatea* (1585), whose very title evokes the mythology of Polyphemus's love for the nymph Galatea, to his posthumously published *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda* (1617), by which Cervantes sought to ensure his fame by rivaling Heliodorus's *Aethiopica*,¹ his works constantly call upon the textual remains of the ancients. Indeed, Cervantes's poetic career imitates the intellectual and artistic journey of the ancient poet whose compositions move from the pastoral to the higher genres, and particularly the epic. This movement through the genres was well known to the Renaissance. Petrarch, who was particularly conscious of his antique predecessors, proceeded from pastoral (*Bucolicum carmen*) to epic (*Africa*). In Renaissance England, Spenser begins as a "young bird" proving his tender wings with pastoral (*The Shepherdes Calender*) and then moves to epic (*The Faerie Queene*).² It is thus no coincidence that Cervantes begins his career with pastoral (*Galatea*) and ends it with *Persiles y Sigismunda*. Since this romance is an imitation of Heliodorus, it was viewed during the epoch as a work akin to epic. As Alban K. Forcione explains, the discovery of Heliodorus's romance came at a key moment in European fiction: "Educated circles, from the early sixteenth century on, universally condemned the popular romances of chivalry . . . and seized upon the newly discovered *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus as an alternative type of prose fiction" (1970, 85–6). Indeed, the Greek romance was equated with the epic. In Spain, López Pinciano's *Philosophía antigua poética* (1596) compares Heliodorus's work with the epics of Homer and Virgil, showing how it at times surpasses those of the epic masters. Aware of this situation, then, Cervantes turned to Heliodorus. As he explains in the prologue to Part 2 of *Don Quijote*, this future work would be "o el más malo o el mejor que en nuestra lengua se haya compuesto" (1978, 2.38). He thus hoped to compete and even surpass Heliodorus's epic.

And yet, there are very few studies that deal with Cervantes and the classics. As early as 1780 Vicente de los Ríos argued that Cervantes's novel

was an imitation of the Homeric epic, but his view was criticized throughout the nineteenth century. Early in this century, Arturo Marasso revived Cervantes's connection with the classical epic, this time discovering parallels with Virgil. His studies also failed to convince the critics. Even Michael D. McGaha's 1980 essay on Cervantes and Virgil has failed to stimulate critical response. Perhaps *Don Quijote's* anticlassical bias, its foregrounding of the chivalric romances, may have contributed to this disregard. The juxtaposition of Cervantes and Aristotle, for example, leads Forcione to proclaim an "anticlassical stance" in the Spanish author (1970, 343). It is certainly true that literary classicism gives way to "the historical stuff of everyday experience" in *Don Quijote* (Forcione 1970, 224). A similar claim has been made for the *Viaje del Parnaso*. In his edition, Vicente Gaos compares *Don Quijote* with this poem: "si aquél es la parodia del mundo caballeresco, éste lo es del mundo mitológico del clasicismo" (Cervantes 1984b, 32). Gaos claims that Cervantes enjoys debasing the gods of mythology: "se regocija presentándonos unos dioses apeados de su majestuoso pedestal, trasmutados en seres corrientes y molientes, a más de anacrónicos, pues su atuendo, costumbres y lenguaje son los de los españoles vulgares de la época" (1984b, 32). And yet, this critic also asserts that the ambience of the work is Lucianesque (1984b, 32). In depicting the gods, then, Cervantes is not turning away from the classics but is imitating a specific tradition within antique literature. Cervantes's playful tone is somewhat removed from the many burlesque works on mythology written during the Golden Age. His gods, although closer to sixteenth-century Spaniards, often retain a certain aura of divinity, which is rather striking in a poem that has been called an "epopeya burlesca" (1984b, 31). The *Viaje del Parnaso* contains careful descriptions of the ancient gods,³ verbal reminiscences of ancient texts,⁴ and numerous references to the writers of classical antiquity.⁵ Although playful in tone, the poem's construction reveals a clear knowledge of the classics.

Other works by Cervantes evince a more obvious reverence for the classics. *La Galatea* is imbued with classical mythology and ancient pastoral formulas. And, as Forcione masterfully shows, Cervantes's *Persiles y Sigismunda* is constantly reacting to conceptions, constructions, and images from the ancients. Thus Cervantes's anticlassical bias is a red herring, a deceptive veering away from the ancients. The prologue to Part 1 of *Don Quijote* shows that Cervantes has not ignored the classicist position regarding fiction. The author's friend states that the work aims to "derribar la máquina mal fundada destos caballerescos libros" (1978, 1.58).

Although this intention simplifies ad infinitum the polyvalence of the work, it is precisely what the imitators of Heliodorus sought to do, and what many Renaissance humanists sought to accomplish.⁶ More than this, *Don Quijote* may have been conceived as an apprenticeship in the epic genre. Indeed, a recent study on the ideology of figure in the epic includes Cervantes's masterpiece along with Homer's *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. It even labels *Don Quijote* as an "'epic' in prose" (Wofford 1992, 1). Of course, Wofford recognizes a difference in narrative technique between the traditional epic and *Don Quijote*. Cervantes's narrator "uses no epic similies, avoids invocations . . . resists personifying the landscape or the settings of his poem; his principal figure, one might say, is don Quixote himself, a walking (or riding) machine of figuration" (1992, 398). Indeed, don Quijote often has the epic in mind as he pursues his adventures. When the knight decides to do penance in the Sierra Morena, for example, he wonders whether to imitate the melancholy penance portrayed in *Amadís de Gaula* or the choleric madness found in *Orlando furioso*. But, as he debates this question, the knight also recalls two ancient heroes: Homer's Odysseus and Virgil's Aeneas (1978, 1.25.303; McGaha 1980, 43). Beneath the chivalric surface, a deeper subtext can be perceived, one that derives from antiquity. *Don Quijote's* playfulness is a way of approaching the unapproachable, of turning to epic without being engulfed in its monumentality. Revising and rethinking classical motifs, Cervantes is preparing himself for *Persiles y Sigismunda*. The irony, of course, is that in playing with the ancients, Cervantes can display his own sense of authority, his own originality, whereas in *Persiles y Sigismunda*, he is at times the victim of a tradition. But *Don Quijote* may not have been his first attempt at epic themes. One of the purposes of this study is to show the epic elements in his early tragedy, *La Numancia*. The "playful" opposition between the prudence of Odysseus and the valor of Aeneas in *Don Quijote* was a theme that had already been utilized by Cervantes in *La Numancia* – but more on this when we discuss the Homeric epic.

In the prologue to the first part of Cervantes's *Don Quijote*, the "author" bemoans the fact that his book (as well as his prologue) is lacking in learning and instruction whereas other works are "tan llenos de sentencias de Aristóteles, de Platón y de toda la caterva de filósofos, que admiran a los leyentes y tienen a sus autores por hombres leídos, eruditos y elocuentes" (1978, 1.52). This allusion, as will be explained in Chapter 2, may have been triggered by Raphael's fresco *The School of Athens*, in which Plato and

Aristotle stand at the center of a whole “caterva” of classical thinkers. When faced with the majesty of Raphael’s evocation, all subsequent attempts at imitations fail. Consequently, the fictional author portrays himself in a melancholy pose with “la mano en la mejilla” (1978, 1.52), not knowing how to proceed. His friend’s counsel allows him to emerge from this state of sadness and inaction. The friend advises him, among other things, to sprinkle or adorn his text with Latin *sententiae* and classical allusions so as to include in the margins (*acotaciones*) or in footnotes (*anotaciones*) the sources for these bits of erudition (1978, 1.54–5). Ruth El Saffar claims: “The friend’s discussion, in fact, is nothing more than a criticism of the typical inflated, pompous and irrelevant prologue and the manner in which such a prologue can be imitated” (1975, 36). James Parr goes even further: “The 1605 prologue is a subordinate text that serves as a transition . . . , while at the same time mirroring both the structure and the ironic texture of the story of Don Quijote” (1984, 23). Although the “author’s” attitude is one of anxiety over ancient texts and Renaissance evocations of these, the friend’s response adds a playfulness that breaks through the barriers of authority.

There is yet one more contextual level. The friend’s discussion is not just a criticism of prologues but also a criticism of the uses of imitation. Not only in *Don Quijote* but throughout his works, Cervantes criticizes those who would cloak themselves in robes of learning by using a sprinkling of classical *sententiae* and allusions. A case in point is the interlude *El retablo de las maravillas* where the villagers’ honor and the pretensions of learning are satirized. The swindlers Chanfalla and Chirinos, posing as puppeteers, use adulation to confound the villagers. By sprinkling their speeches with Latin phrases, they establish their knowledge and authority. When Chirinos uses the phrase “ante omnia” (1982a, 221), Capacho, one of the villagers, proudly translates the Latin. He even corrects Benito Repollo’s reference to Cicero (1982a, 219). As Michael Gerli astutely observes, *El retablo* is “an elaborate theatrical mirror which reflects not only insights into the ontology of the theater but, more specifically, Cervantes’ opposition to some of the prevailing theatrical theories and practices of his day. *El retablo* especially shows Cervantes’ rejection of Lope de Vega’s poetics as set down in the *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias* (1609)” (1989, 478). Cervantes’s interlude portrays Lope’s plays as “failed, indeed bogus commercial fabrication – an art form which, if it succeeds, does so not because of its aesthetic perfection, its ability to imply a relation to reality, but because of its compromise with social delusions”

(Gerli 1989, 481). For Cervantes, honor and wisdom are displayed in these plays through certain outer trappings and disguises that have more to do with delusion than with innate or acquired worth.

The same attitude prevails in the prologue to Part 1 of *Don Quijote*. As Clemencín noted long ago, many of the erudite strategies proposed by the friend appear in Lope de Vega's works. *El Isidro* (1599), for example, contains a wealth of citations in the margins and a list of 267 authors cited, while *El peregrino en su patria* has a table of more than 150 authors (Clemencín 1933, 1.1.liv). In order to appear as properly erudite, the "author" of *Don Quijote* need only follow very specific advice: "Si tratáredes de ladrones, yo os diré la historia de Caco, que la sé de coro; si de mujeres rameras, ahí está el obispo de Mondoñedo, que os presentará a Lamia, Laida y Flora, cuya anotación os dará gran crédito; si de crueles, Ovidio os entregará a Medea; si de encantadores y hechiceras, Homero tiene a Calipso, y Virgilio a Circe; si de capitanes valerosos, el mesmo Julio César os prestará a sí mismo en sus *Comentarios*, y Plutarco os dará mil Alejandro" (1978, 1.56). Even though such advice serves to satirize Lope de Vega's practices, *Don Quijote* incorporates at least some of the (fictional) "friend's" advice. The Innkeeper is described as being thievish as Cacus (1978, 1.84). This thief from antiquity, caught by Hercules, appears, for example, in the eighth canto of the *Aeneid*. After reading the prologue, a reader may be inclined to disregard the importance of such a reference as a type of eclectic imitation that is mere adornment or show. And yet, Arturo Marasso has shown that in addition to being an imitation of books of chivalry *Don Quijote* contains "un Virgilio intencionalmente contrahecho, pero no por eso es menor el estímulo del gran poeta" (1954, 52). Among the episodes which imitate Virgil in Part 1, Marasso points to the windmills (the Cyclops in *Aeneid* 3), the pastoral episode of Grisóstomo and Marcela (Dido and Aeneas in *Aeneid* 4), the catalogue of armies (*Aeneid* 7), the fulling hammers (*Aeneid* 8), and the adventure of the corpse (*Aeneid* 11) (Marasso 1954, 54ff.). But there is much more than this. As Carolyn Nadeau has shown, the friend's advice to include references to Ovid's Medea, Virgil's Circe, and Homer's Calypso is carried out in the text of the novel. Utilizing Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and *Heroides*, Cervantes builds Dorotea's conflict between passion and loyalty and Zoraida's decision to leave her homeland from these Ovidian models. Dulcinea as a Circe-like enchantress and Maritornes as a Calypso figure show Cervantes's "respectful acknowledgement of ancient sources, and also a gesture of departure from those texts" (Nadeau 1994, 139). How

can Cervantes satirize Lope's learning and yet turn to such classical stories himself in the construction of *Don Quijote*?

In criticizing Lope de Vega's stance on honor and learning, Cervantes is only pointing to the false uses of these terms. Honor, as defined in *Don Quijote*, is an attribute of the soul, not a social commodity. Learning, as Don Quijote well knows, comes with intense study and is acquired at great peril.⁷ Cervantes portrays Lope as entranced by outer trappings, while *Don Quijote* exhibits an apparent simplicity and a textual integrity. While Lope commits the sin of "pretentiousness,"⁸ Cervantes carefully covers up his own learned subtext, appearing to deauthorize imitation through the friend's advice. Salvador J. Fajardo explains: "The first author does not say that he undertook to follow his friend's advice but that his friend's words left an imprint on him. . . . Thus, he adopts his friend's statement as worthy of imitation because it has been voided of authoritative content" (1994, 11). Critics since Américo Castro have pointed out that the prologues to Parts 1 and 2 were written after the novel: "En realidad se trata de epílogos, redactados después de concluida la obra . . . su sentido no se revela sino a quien posea noticia muy cabal del libro" (Castro 1960, 231).

One of the "senses" of the prologue as a commentary on Part 1, I would argue, is the sense of what constitutes true or appropriate uses of learning. Two types of knowledge are exhibited, each leading to a very different disorder: don Quijote's brings on madness, while the friend's advice on the uses of erudition denotes vanity and pretentiousness. Don Quijote knows almost too much but is unable to transform the books of chivalry into a social reality, while the "author's" friend knows so little that he boasts of his erudition. This contrastive approach lends an ethical dimension to the uses of learning. There is no obvious moralizing here. Rather, the contrastive approach becomes, in Aníbal González's words, "una invitación a reflexionar sobre los problemas éticos de la literatura" (1994, 498).⁹ It also points to the ethics of writing. Does erudite adornment serve to create a fictional representation of an author as authoritative? Are the writers of chivalric fictions guilty of poisoning don Quijote's mind?¹⁰ Is don Quijote's madness contagious? Does it lead him to heroism or foolishness?

Although the knight's life may be deemed a failure in terms of the chivalric ideals, it succeeds when viewed in terms of its textuality. Don Quijote seeks to "vivir la vida como obra de arte" (Avalle Arce and Riley 1973, 53), and the text shows how countless imitative strategies serve to flesh out an "original" character whose search for an elusive truth is

more important than his attainments.¹¹ In *Don Quijote*, knowledge in the guise of imitation allows the author and his audience to delve deeper into actions and ideas, thus leading the reader to reenvision herself in the light of past heroes and fools. This contrastive type of imitation that takes an ancient model and juxtaposes it to an unworthy modern frame is evinced through the novel's Virgilian subtext and the construction of women characters after Medea, Circe, and Calypso. A number of other ancient building blocks can also be found in the novel. At the very center of Part 1, for example, the interpolated tale "Curioso impertinente" develops out of the tale of Gyges in Plato and Herodotus (see de Armas 1992b; de Armas Wilson 1987). Don Quijote's own intrusion into the interpolation when he slays the giants/wineskins is but an imitation of Lucius's similar "feat" in Apuleius's *Golden Ass*. Both ancient and modern novel foreground curiosity and invisibility through interpolations – the tale of Cupid and Psyche is thus refashioned into the "Curioso impertinente" (de Armas 1992b). If the center of Part 1 deals with Gyges' vision and Psyche's curiosity, the center of Part 2, the Cave of Montesinos, is based on the epic *catabasis*, the descent to the underworld made by antique heroes in order to attain a certain knowledge. Even the prologue itself imitates the ancients. As Francisco J. Martín suggests, the friend that comes to counsel the "author" is none other than "Prologus," an ancient Latin character (1993, 80).

The rivalry between Cervantes and Lope de Vega led the former to fashion a negative portrait of his successful opponent. Although there are some factual elements in this fashioning, it does not allow for Lope's own successes in classical imitation. It also obscures the curiously similar attitude toward imitation held by both of these writers.¹² Even though Lope de Vega's *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias* begins with a rejection of Aristotelian precepts and classical models,¹³ the poem is framed in such a way that the reader is constantly reminded of the classics. Indeed, Lope introduces his subject with a comparison between a Spanish academy and those of Plato and Cicero. Lope, along with many other playwrights of the period, is resisting the pressures to imitate what were then considered to be the authoritative models, the Greek and Roman "classics." Thomas M. Greene documents both "resistance and ambivalence toward imitation" throughout the Renaissance, showing them to be a "congenital feature of humanism" (1982, 43). What Greene calls "Leonardo's heresy" is not very different from Lope's stance. The Italian painter asserts: "One must never imitate the manner of another, because as an artist he will be called

the grandchild and not the son of Nature” (Greene 1982, 44). Lope de Vega also invokes nature when he goes against the imitation of Aristotelian precepts, claiming that the tragic and the comic should not be separated since variety is part of nature (“Buen exemplo nos da naturaleza” [1971, 291]). What Cervantes criticizes is Lope de Vega’s pretentiousness in showing off his learning. Although Lope de Vega often points to classical models, in reality he has not read many of the primary works but derives his seeming erudition from Renaissance compendia.¹⁴ But there is much more to Lope. His plays deliberately break with classical notions while at the same time cleverly concealing a series of mythical layers. Lope de Vega’s texts resist the classics in the sense that they do not follow particular classical models. They simply retell and reinvent classical mythology, using not only classical authorities but also the many Renaissance mythographers who allegorized, euhemerized, and transformed gods into natural forces.¹⁵ This type of approach will be imitated by many of Lope’s followers. If Spanish theater is different from that of the rest of Europe during this period,¹⁶ it is not because it fails to imitate the classics, but because, through a greater resistance to imitation, it cleverly hides or pretends to reject its models – and it also accepts the gods of the ancients in their medieval and Renaissance incarnations.

La Numancia, however, differs from both *Don Quijote* and Lope de Vega’s theater in that it hides this resistance while exhibiting a series of classical models. It also turns its back on the mythographers and prefers to deal with classical authorities, albeit through translations or refashionings of many of these. *La Numancia* thus becomes both an archive of the past and an archeological site that demands attention. As Willard F. King has shown, Cervantes rejects “fallacious half-fictionalized chronicles or ballads” (1979, 202) as historical sources and turns instead to Ambrosio de Morales’s *Corónica general de España* since this author was “the first to combine the aim of writing an imperial history with the new humanist standards of historiographical rigor” (King 1979, 203). In the prologue to his *Corónica*, Morales is careful to differentiate his approach to history from those of his predecessors: “Corónicas tenemos en España, en que se cuenta destos tiempos de los Romanos, mas son muy defectuosas, faltándoles muchas cosas” (1791, 3.iv). Indeed, Morales claims that they are “desconformes de la verdad” (1791, 3.iv). In order to arrive at a more accurate history, Morales utilizes a number of “archeological” approaches. Ancient inscriptions on Spanish stones, for example, are scrutinized for data (1791, 3.xx). He also searches for historical infor-

mation on ancient coins: “Ayudéme tambien en muchas partes de las monedas antiguas, y destas no puse ninguna que no la tenga, o por lo ménos la haya visto” (1791, 3.xxi).

Quite unlike the *ventero* in *Don Quijote* (1978, 1.32.394–6) who confuses history with fiction, Morales is very careful to scrutinize ancient histories looking for the “true” events. For example, speaking of Scipio Africanus (the grandfather of the Scipio who laid siege to Numantia), Morales attempts to ascertain his title when he first went to Spain. In order to do this, he compares the different ancient accounts: “Solo Paulo Osorio dice, que vino Scipion con oficio y título de Procónsul, y Plinio que tuvo cargo de Prétor: pero yo creo mas á Tito Livio y á Valerio Máximo, que dan despues manifiesta razón, según verémos en su lugar de come no truxo oficio ninguno ordinario, sino solo título y cargo de Capitan General” (1791, 3.33). Thus, Cervantes would have been well informed of all the classical accounts of the battle of Numantia by Ambrosio de Morales, who repeatedly compares ancient accounts.

In modern times, a number of scholars have reviewed the classical historians that deal with the battle, and some have compared these accounts with Cervantes’s play.¹⁷ Santiago Gómez Santacruz (1914), for example, examines numerous accounts from Roman times that deal with Numantia. He asserts that Appian of Alexandria is the most reliable, since he learned of the events from Polybius, who was present at Numantia. Unfortunately, Polybius’s own account is lost – although in a recent work of fiction Carlos Fuentes imagines that the Greek historian only pretended to lose his papers on Numantia.¹⁸ Morales, like modern historians, uses Appian as his primary source on matters of Numantia, bemoaning the fact that Titus Livius’s accounts also are lost (1791, 3.305). Other accounts of the events are found in the works of Valerius Maximus, Lucius Anneus Florus, Paulus Orosius, Julius Frontinus, and others. These chronicles differ significantly on the fate of the city. While Appian, for example, relates that a number of the Numantians committed suicide when the order was given to surrender,¹⁹ later narratives describe how the inhabitants of the city decided on a collective suicide after setting fire to all their possessions. Some believe that this second account arose out of an anecdote found in Valerius Maximus in which a certain Retógenes led the citizens in his neighborhood to set fire to their buildings and possessions and to kill each other instead of surrendering (Gómez Santacruz 1914, 143).²⁰ It is interesting to note that Morales, when dealing with the final suicide, rejects Appian of Alexandria’s account, even though up to

this point Appian has been his main source for the siege of Numantia.²¹ In this choice, Morales may have influenced Cervantes to accept the legendary collective suicide as historical. Anneus Florus's narrative, for example, is certainly more heroic and more amenable to being turned into a tragedy than Appian's more measured account: "not a single Numantine was left to be led in triumph as a prisoner . . . their arms they themselves burned" (1929, 157). It would seem, then, that Cervantes's archeological interest in the reconstruction of Numantia was mediated by his readings of Ambrosio Morales and by his desire to re-create an extreme example of tragic valor. In this, Cervantes may have also followed Juan Luis Vives's *Vigilia al margen del sueño de Escipión*. Although praising Scipio, Vives shows how the city, in the end, becomes a mere simulacrum, a source of neither prisoners nor booty.

Although Cervantes may have turned to a number of historical accounts from classical antiquity, Morales's own discussion of the ancients may have been all he used. After all, Morales carefully listed his ancient sources and debated their merits. Having said all this, we can now turn to more pertinent matters, since this book is not about Cervantes and classical history. I am interested in the literary texts he imitated rather than the historical ones. Or to put it another way, I would like to envision the literary adumbrations of history that can be gleaned from the play. This is not to say that I have not taken Morales into account. When historical and literary models seem to coalesce, I will point to Morales's contribution. But the main thrust of the book has to do with Renaissance art and classical literature. Cervantes's play conjoins the historical edifice with a series of literary allusions, images, and structures from the literature of classical antiquity and from the reenvisioning of antiquity by Renaissance artists. It is as if he were reconstructing Numantia using other ancient cities as models. His archeology of the Celtiberian city is based on visions of Troy and Rome by the foremost classical writers.

Cervantes, I will argue, derived this interest in the archeology of the ancients not only from his early humanistic studies but, more important, from his trip to Rome, where he saw the frescoes of Raphael and his disciples, and where he must have read Giorgio Vasari's account of many of the paintings and other works of art he viewed. Indeed, Vasari's conception of art history did not differ significantly from Morales's careful reconstruction of the "truths" of ancient history. As Patricia Lee Rubin has shown, in the second edition Vasari carefully revised his work to reflect