"EL ESPEJISMO DEL ENTUSIASMO VIDENTE": *DON QUIJOTE* IN *LA REGENTA*

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A number of years ago - almost twenty, to be more precise - I examined the relationship between *Don Quijote* and *La Regenta* from the vantage point of my interest in self-reflexive fiction.[1] Now, in the midst of fourth-centennial celebrations of the publication of Part I of Cervantes' classic, it has seemed appropriate to re-visit this relationship with a different focus and with the advantage of having read and experienced a good bit more in the intervening years. As I think back over what I wrote in that early article, I see that I was writing at a time when it was necessary to stress the self-reflexive aspects of the novels of the nineteenth century. At that time, the term "metafiction" had just caught on, and many critics, "Clarinistas" among them, had not yet come to recognize the metafictional dimension of novels like *La Regenta*. If they were interested in metafiction, they tended to think in terms of two separate traditions of the novel, as Robert Alter had suggested in his influential *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre*. According to Alter, Cervantes was the initiator of both novelistic traditions, "his juxtaposition of high-flown literary fantasies with grubby actuality pointing the way to the realists, his zestfully ostentatious manipulation of the artifice he constructs setting a precedent for all the self-conscious novelists to come."[2] As far as I could tell, only John

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[1] "From World to Word: Realism and Reflexivity in *Don Quijote* and *La Regenta*," *Hispanic Review*, Vol. 55, No. 1, Winter 1987, pp. 27-39.

[2] (Berkeley, 1975), pp. 3-4. Other book-length studies of reflexivity in narrative that were useful to me at the time were Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Urbana, 1979); Inger Christensen, *The Meaning of Metafiction* (Oslo, 1981); Larry McCaffery,

Rutherford and Germán Gullón had made the case for considering Clarín's narrator as a device for directing reader attention away from the story and towards an interest in how the novel works.[3] My study built on their insights, and it took as its starting point Robert Jackson's much earlier and ground-breaking "'Cervantismo' in the Creative Process of Clarín's *La Regenta*."[4] A few years later I was pleased to note that others were also interested in *La Regenta*'s quixotic structure and had provided what still seems to be an exhaustive account of the reflexive elements in the novel.[5]

The point of departure of the present study will be a comparison of two familiar episodes that serve as major reflecting devices. I am referring to Maese Pedro's "retablo," or "puppet show," presented in Chapter XXVI of Part II of *Don Quijote*, and the performance of *Don Juan Tenorio*, which appears in Chapter XVI of Part II of *La Regenta*.[6] Both episodes are examples of full-fledged *mises en abyme*, that is, each is "a textual segment which constitutes a microcosm, a schematic, condensed version, of the entire text as macrocosm."[7] As such, they should offer convenient entry points into the novels and readymade "objects" for comparison. Much has been written about both scenes, but to

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The Metafictional Muse: The Works of Robert Coover, Donald Barthelme, and William H. Gass (Pittsburgh, 1982); Michael Boyd, *The Reflexive Novel: Fiction as Critique* (London, 1983); Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London, 1984); and Robert Spires, *Beyond the Metafictional Mode: Directions in the Modern Spanish Novel* (Lexington, 1984).

[3] When I was preparing the article for *Hispanic Review*, I consulted John Rutherford's 1984 MLA paper, "El desafío del lenguaje de *La Regenta*." This paper was subsequently expanded into *La Regenta y el lector cómplice* (Murcia, 1988). I also consulted Germán Gullón's *La novela como acto imaginativo* (Madrid, 1983).

[4] *MLN*, 84 (1969), 208-27.

[5] I am referring to Stephanie Sieburth, *Reading "La Regenta": Duplicitous Discourse and the Entropy of Structure* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 1990).

[6] The usual comparison is between *La Regenta* and *Madame Bovary*; the presentation of the performance of *Lucie de Lamamoor* in *Madame Bovary* has often been cited as an influence on Clarín's novel precisely because of its similarities with the way Zorrilla's play is included in the latter. See Gonzalo Sobejano, "*Madame Bovary* en *La Regenta*," in "*La Regenta" de Leopoldo Alas*, ed. Frank Durand (Madrid, 1988), 223-233. "Retablo" refers to a portable puppet theater.

[7] Sieburth, p. 77. She continues: "The *mise en abyme* may be a condensed version of the plot or it may be a doubling, on the level of the characters, of the activities associated with literature - reading and writing. Finally, when the text contains a commentary on its own generic procedures and on the linguistic signs which compose it, we have a *mise en abyme* of its code." It will not be necessary to apply these distinctions to the comparison I will be making.

my knowledge no one has placed them side by side, so to speak, to see what they might reveal about the evolution of the modern novel from its beginnings in *Don Quijote* to its late nineteenth-century, realist-naturalist-decadent phase that is so admirably represented in *La Regenta*. Ever mindful of Ortega's challenge - "Falta el libro donde se demuestre al detalle que toda novela lleva dentro, como una íntima filigrana, el *Quijote*, de la misma manera que todo poema épico lleva, como el fruto el hueso, la *Ilíada.*"[8] I have eagerly embraced this approach, for it seems to me that, though we already know a lot about the development of the novel, a point by point comparison of these two condensed versions of the respective novels should bring their differences into sharper focus.

Had Maese Pedro's "retablo" appeared in *Don Quijote* Part I, we would have been able to say that it marked a midway point (26 out of 52 chapters). That is not the case, however, since there are 74 chapters in Part II of the *Quijote*. In spite of its off-center placement, this adventure is one of the most memorable of the entire novel, perhaps because it constitutes such a perfect analogue of the whole - without a doubt the most complete - in a text filled with internal mirrors.[9] The performance of *Don Juan Tenorio* does fall at the center of *La Regenta*, as if the nineteenth-century author were more attentive to this kind of symmetry than his seventeenth-century precursor (XVI is the first chapter of Part II, and there are a total of 30 chapters in the novel). It, too, constitutes a "full-scale" *mise en abyme* and, in Stephanie Sieburth's words, it is "by far the most explicit *mise en abyme*" (78) in a novel which, I might add, like the *Quijote* has an extraordinarily rich reflexive structure. What makes these two scenes even more interesting to us here is that in both the protagonists are presented as watching a dramatic representation of a story that in many respects is identical to their own life story.

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[8] *Meditaciones del "Quijote"* in *Obras completas* (Madrid, 1946), p. 398.

[9] There have been numerous studies of the textual mirrors in *Don Quijote*, perhaps the most memorable being Chapter I, "The Mirror of Knighthood and the World of Mirror," of Alter's *Partial Magic*. I have long wanted to study *Don Quijote* as a fractal, as I did for *La Regenta*, *Doña Inés*, and *Pedro Páramo* ("*La Regenta* as Fractal*," Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 26 [1992], 251-76; "Spatial Forms and Fractals: A Reconsideration of Azorín's *Doña Inés*," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 5.2 [1993], 197-220; and "The Fractal Structure of *Pedro Páramo*: Comala, When Will You Rest?," *Hispania* 86.2 [2003], 231-236).

Moreover, both characters interact with the performance in ways that have come to typify them and which may give a clue into how the nineteenth-century novel has built upon and transformed the Cervantine tradition.

Don Quijote's story, that which gives meaning to his life, is of course his knight-errant mission to right wrongs and aid damsels in distress. The puppet show dramatizes the story of Don Gaiferos, who sets off from Paris on a mission to rescue his wife Melisendra from captivity by the Moors in the kingdom of Sansueña (modern-day Zaragoza). As the story unfolds before him and the threats to the character-puppets multiply - and the noise level rises and the suspense increases to a maddening degree - Don Quijote can no longer contain himself. Predictably (though we may want to rethink whether his actions are so predictable), he charges the puppets, destroying and damaging many of them. This is the Don Quijote we remember from Part I, the naïve reader (in this case dramatized as an overly zealous spectator) who becomes so involved in the stories that he is following (especially when they call for acts of chivalry) that he loses touch with what is real and what is fictional. Much like a caricature, this scene emphasizes the automatic nature of the "mad" knight's actions; it helps us see clearly how his behavior all along is merely a reflex, a reaction to external stimuli, as if something in the situation had pushed a button in his brain. It is also a graphic representation of his characteristic mental confusion or "locura," that which prevents him from distinguishing between the contents of his imaginaton and the "real" world he encounters when he sallies forth. The breaching of the boundary between fiction and reality that normally goes on only in his head before and during an adventure (such as when he transforms ordinary reality into the stuff of his favorite fictions and then acts as if the imagined were real) is here acted out before the eyes of stunned observers: all watch in amazement as Don Quijote reaches across or lunges from his position in the audience into the puppet "box" to slash the enemy puppets. Only a madman would take things this far. The scene is emblematic and memorable.[10] It traces an image of the mechanism we may call the "dialectic of realism" which *Don Quijote* introduces into the world of fiction and which will become the central device or

[10] This is no doubt why Ortega dedicated a section to it in his *Meditaciones.*

mainspring of the modern novel: the interplay between fiction and fact, the ideal world and concrete reality, conventional literature and "real" life.[11]

Ana Ozores' main story is the process of her seduction by Don Alvaro; her resistance to the advances of the Vetustan Don Juan gives her life meaning and a higher purpose - "poesía" as she refers to it in the post-Romantic vocabulary of her author. Without her sense of a heroic struggle with temptation to maintain her honor, La Regenta would find the "prose" of her daily existence unbearable. In this she is very much like her Manchegan predecessor, who through boredom with his empty hidalgo lifestyle sought escape in those books of chivalry which eventually caused him to lose contact with reality. Ana's witnessing of Part I of Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio* for the first time in her life is a veritable revelation. We readers are allowed a glimpse into her mind: in this she is the beneficiary of nearly three centuries of development of the Cervantine novel. Our privileged perspective enables us to see how the protagonist of *La Regenta* recognizes elements of her own story acted out before her eyes, how she identifies directly with the Doña Inés of Act III as the latter falls in love with Don Juan, and how she allows herself to be swept away by the poetic magic of this Romantic play. Once Inés has been seduced, however, Ana loses interest, since the parallels between her story and the one being dramatized seem harder to come by - after all, she does not intend to be seduced! She misses all of the second part of the play because she decides to leave the theater at the end of Part I. Like Don Quijote in the "retablo" episode, then, Ana is presented as a less-than-ideal spectator, for it is clear that she is unable to accept the play on its own terms. Both characters begin well, that is, they both demonstrate an ability to respond fully to the "drama" or "poetry" of the enacted scene and to identify with the characters. But in both cases their limited perception - let's call it their "ego" - gets the best of them. For Don Quijote, this "ego" is the *idée fixe* of his mission; for Ana, it is her self-absorption. The similarities are striking in spite of the differences. For even though readers of *La Regenta* have much greater access to Ana's

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[11] For a more thorough-going definition of what I mean by "dialectic of realism," see p. 410 of my "Why Read *Don Quixote*?," *Literary Imagination: The Review of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics*, 5-3 (2003), 407-21.

mind than readers of the *Quijote* have into Alonso Quijano's, we are made aware of how the former superimposes her story on the play, distorting it for her own purposes and confusing her fiction with Zorrilla's, much like Don Quijote does with Maese Pedro's version of the tale of Don Gaiferos. Her refusal to stay for the ending is analogous to Don Quijote's interruption of the puppet show. The aborted ending serves as a metaphor for a "bad" reading - for what happens to a text in the hands of an out-of-control or overly-controlling (though ultimately controlled) reader. Don Quijote merely renders the metaphor literal.

Both *mises en abyme* are much more complex in their structure and their relationship to the whole than this initial sketch would indicate. My intent here has been to trace out the primary lines of the comparison. I will dedicate the remainder of this study to examining each episode separately with an eye to identifying both a common pattern and the points in which the two diverge. I will begin with the *Quijote*.

The Maese Pedro episode actually extends beyond Chapter XXVI to include XXV and a portion of XXVII. If one were to do a full study, as George Haley did - and did so well! - many years ago, it would be necessary to widen the focus to include the talking ape, the braying aldermen, and other elements that are part of the context of the puppet-show presentation at the inn - such as the discovery in Chapter XXVII that Maese Pedro is none other than Ginés de Pasamonte, the notorious galley slave.[12] I plan to limit myself in the main to XXVI, but it will be necessary to start with the last paragraph of XXV, where the "retablo" scene is carefully described before the show begins. Don Quijote and Sancho are led up to the puppet stage, which is all aglow with the light of many small candles; Maese Pedro steps into the box (or behind the stage) so as to be able to work the puppets; a boy-servant to Maese Pedro places himself alongside the stage (outside the box) to narrate the story, pointer (*varilla*) in hand; and the audience takes its place. We are reminded of who is present (everyone at the inn, along with Don Quijote, Sancho, and the characters who arrived with them), and we as readers (as Haley points out) are subtly included in the audience

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[12] "The Narrator in *Don Quijote*: Maese Pedro's Puppet Show," *MLN*, 80 (1965), 145-165. I am very much indebted to Haley's reading of this adventure. It has been in the background of my understanding of *Don Quijote* for years.

by virtue of the use of "o" ("or") instead of the "y" that links "oirá" and "verá" in the last phrase of XXV: "el trujamán comenzó a decir lo que oirá y verá el que le oyere o viere el capítulo siguiente" (597).[13] The fictive audience will both hear and see, whereas Cervantes' readers may merely "see" the words (unless they are being read to), and what they see will be through the mind's eye. In any case, we readers are, as it were, invited to take our seats alongside the other characters. Yet at the same time, in the same sentence, we are "uninvited" or pushed away by being reminded that we are reading a novel and that the chapter is about to change - in other words, that we really can't be part of the audience. That audience is part of a wider "show": ours; and ours cannot be the same as theirs because ours includes theirs. Our awareness of this adds another layer of fiction. Calling attention to the reading process through foregrounding the mechanics of the composition is an essential feature of the *Quijote*, starting on the very first page. The mention of an impending chapter change is one device among many that has the effect of making us aware that we are readers reading, and this particular device is used repeatedly throughout. It is fitting, then, that it should introduce our full-scale *mise en abyme*.

Chapter XXVI begins with the words of Cervantes' narrator, who describes the spectacle with a composite quotation from the 1555 Spanish translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* ("Callaron todos, tirios y troyanos.") This may remind well-informed readers (especially readers of the Martín de Riquer edition) of the fact that the famous first sentence of the *Quijote* is a composite of a line from a Spanish ballad ("En un lugar de la Mancha") and a formula for beginning folk tales ("de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme").[14] If at the very beginning of his highly original masterpiece Cervantes had seemed to be inviting us to consider how even the most innovative literature is always built upon other literature, here, in his "miniature" of the whole, he reminds us once again of this truth. After Cervantes' narrator describes the fanfare which introduces the show, the voice of the boy narrator begins: "Esta verdadera historia que a vuesas mercedes se

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[13] All citations of *Don Quijote* are from the Tom Lathrop edition, (Newark, Delaware, 2001) and will be included as parenthetical elements in my text.

[14] See Martín de Riquer, ed., *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (Barcelona, 1995), p. 32 (first footnote).

representa, es sacada al pie de la letra de la corónicas francesas y de los romances españoles que andan en boca de las gentes y de los muchachos por esas calles" (598). His insistence on the truth of the story and attempt to document its truth in the oral tradition should remind us of Cervantes' ironic use of devices from the books of chivalry, which in the latter are included for the purpose of bolstering the authority of the text, but here in the *Quijote* have just the opposite effect. That is, just as the author of the *Quijote*, time and again, in one bold stroke establishes his authority as a "historian" (writer of a "true history") and simultaneously undercuts it, so the narrator of the puppet show gives and then takes away in the very same sentence. Who, upon reflection, would give credence to the reliability of "las gentes" and "los muchachos por esas calles"?

The subject matter of the puppet show also mirrors that of the main narrative. Variants of the tale of the liberation of Melisendra by Don Gaiferos circulated in sixteenth-century Spain in the form of popular ballads, but, as I mentioned earlier, the story is akin to many of those told in the prose narratives of chivalry that transformed the hidalgo's life and gave him a mission. In both cases, however, there is a lowering of the style of the telling, for the "unheroic" world of everyday reality intervenes in both to deflate the high seriousness of the traditional material. If *Don Quijote* is a comic version of a book of chivalry, the puppet show is pure farce. Appropriately, given the fact that it is an internal mirror, it represents a further reduction of the mythic elements in the direction of the comic.[15]

Calling attention to chapter divisions, highlighting the literariness of the supposed "real" material, undercutting the authority of the narrating voice while at the same time (apparently) authenticating it - all of these devices form part of a general strategy or pattern that reverberates across the levels of the *Quijote*. For convenience, I'll refer to it as the principle of "interruption," interruption of our acceptance of the illusion of the story. When the narrator reminds us of a chapter change, he is interrupting the

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[15] Some examples of the "Punch-and-Judy" atmosphere of the puppet show: Charlemagne (Melisendra's father, as tradition has it), angry over Don Gaiferos' prolonged procrastination in rescuing his wife, Melisendra, hits the former on the head with his sceptre; Melisendra, as she descends to meet her husband, gets her skirt caught on one of the balcony railings; Don Gaiferos pulls her down rather brusquely, in the process ripping her skirt, and then sets her on his horse "a horcadas como hombre."

telling of his story and causing reader attention to shift momentarily from "story" to "discourse," from the "what" to the "how," from "product" to "process." This shift back and forth from one level to the other of the narrative corresponds also to our continual movement between involvement with the characters and their story and detachment from them, as we are forced to take a critical step backward to consider the manner in which the story is being told. One other very prominent way in which Cervantes interrupts his narration is through the use of multiple narrators. I will discuss this aspect of the novel in a moment. What is interesting about the interruptions is that they occur not only on this level between the narrator and the reader but also within the *Quijote* narrative itself, with a character's story being interrupted by other characters for commentary, correction, or criticism. In Part I there are a number of such interruptions of internal stories, including the goatherd's account of Grisóstomo and Marcela, Cardenio's tale, and Sancho's peasant joke, which depends on the principle of interruption for its effect.[16] Not surprisingly, given the prominence of interruptions which temporarily halt the narrating voices in Part I, the narrative accompanying the puppet show is interrupted several times before the final and (literally) show-stopping interruption. The main interrupter is Don Quijote, but Maese Pedro himself chimes in to admonish his servant and to argue with Don Quijote. This use of internal interruption is one more instance of how the part reflects the whole as well as so many other parts. Moreover, interruption as a narrative technique will serve as a useful point of comparison between *Don Quijote* and *La Regenta*.

Perhaps the most striking of the parallels between the Maese Pedro episode and the main narrative has to do with the narrative situation, the fact that in the performance of the puppet show, there is a slot that corresponds to each of the entities responsible for the transmission of the novel from author to reader. As Haley has demonstrated, we may begin with Maese Pedro, the puppeteer, or author of the farce, who it turns out is really Ginés de Pasamonte in disguise, just as Cide Hamete Benengeli is the stand-in "autor arábigo" for Miguel de Cervantes. The servant (also referred to as "trujamán," "declarador," and "intérprete") who acts as narrator and thus serves as an intermediary between

[16] In all these cases, the interruptor is Don Quijote himself.

Maese Pedro and the audience, brings to mind both the Morisco translator and the "second author," the two fictive intermediaries who, along with Cide Hamete, serve as narrators in Cervantes' elaborate narrative apparatus. Finally, we have the slot for the reader, who in this case is the audience, of which Don Quijote is the active member. In this schematic way, Cervantes' text calls attention to its own narrative structure, as it had done so blatantly in Chapters VIII and IX of Part I, with the interruption of the story and the introduction of Cide Hamete and the other narrators. In Part II, though the story is not interrupted as dramatically as on that one occasion in Part I, the series of "narrators" (Cide Hamete, the Morisco, and the "second author") interrupt the story repeatedly to comment on its veracity, on the style of its telling, on the woes of having to stick to a monotonous story, and on various and sundry related topics. The metafictional commentary becomes so conspicuous at times that the narrators seem to be disputing amongst themselves. This dialogue at the margin of the story is replicated in the *retablo* scene as Maese Pedro, the boy-narrator, and Don Quijote interrupt the progress of the tale to discuss matters of style and details. It may seem strange to readers that barely a moment before he charges, Don Quijote criticizes the author of the show for inaccuracies in the representation of the Moors, to which Maese Pedro responds by pointing out that such errors abound in many contemporary plays which nevertheless remain popular and are highly praised. He admits, rather astonishingly, that as long as he fills his pockets with money, he could care less about these discrepancies. Don Quijote's reply ("Así es verdad") shows not only his awareness of the fact that the show is merely a show but also his concurrence in Maese Pedro's cinicism. How, then, is he able so quickly and so willingly to suspend disbelief and enter this world of "figurillas de pasta" (as Maese Pedro calls them a moment later when he is trying to stop Don Quijote)? Such an anomaly is doubly strange to readers of Part II, who have witnessed a much more cautious and less gullible Don Quijote on the third sally. Is this a momentary lapse on the part of both Cervantes and his character? Or is it an example of the author's attempting to take back control of his character by highlighting once again the latter's characteristic behavior and the epistemological error that underlies it?

My inclination is for the second possibility, given the fact that an important theme in Part II is loss of control, especially in the form of the loss of authorial control and the growing autonomy

of both reader and character.[17] Maese Pedro's inability to stop Don Quijote from destroying his fictional world dramatizes this theme for us in a rather spectacular fashion. When Don Quijote admits his earlier delusion ("Real y verdaderamente os digo, señores que me oís, que a mí me pareció todo lo que aquí ha pasado que pasaba al pie de la letra - que Melisendra era Melisendra; don Gaiferos, don Gaiferos…." 603), it almost seems as if he is being forced back into a familiar mold, one that he had seemed to have outgrown in some of the earlier chapters of Part II; this older pattern is especially visible when Don Quijote shifts the blame for his blind rage to "los malos que me persiguen." And yet almost immediately Don Quijote frees himself from the pattern by agreeing to pay generously for the destruction he has wrought. It's as if the flesh and blood Don Quijote cannot be held in check, and it almost seems that the author wants us to be aware of his dilemma.

The description/narration of the *Don Juan Tenorio* performance occupies roughly half of Chapter XVI, which begins with Ana Ozores alone and in the depths of depression on All Saint's Day. The arrival of a dapper though aging Don Alvaro Mesía on horseback (obviously intended to bring to mind her ideal knight) is what rescues Ana from her doldrums and leads to her decision to attend the play. Her attendance at the play is announced tersely in the following manner: "Entró a las ocho y cuarto (la función comenzaba a las ocho) en el palco de los Vegallana en compañía de la Marquesa, Edelmira, Paco, y Quintanar" (496)[18]. But the account of the performance does not start at this point. Using a technique that will be familiar to readers of Part I, the

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[17] The Duke and Duchess are the "stage managers" or authors of a good number of spectacles and pranks in Part II, not the least of which is Sancho's governorship of Barataria. In many cases one of their subjects escapes their control and improvises or invents something totally unanticipated (the most notorious being the "jilted" Altisidora). Both Don Quijote and Sancho eventually prove that they are nobody's fools, leading Cide Hamete to comment that the "burladores" were as crazy as the "burlados." In the meantime, the "authors" (Cide Hamete, the Morisco translator, and the second author) show that they haven't followed closely enough the development of the main characters, since they repeatedly return to outdated concepts of the two - this to the irritation of faithful readers who have come to sympathize more and more with the beleaguered pair. Finally, the existence of the spurious Second Part (the Avellaneda *Quijote*) plays beautifully into the hands of Cervantes, who shows that he is trying to regain control over his creation, which was taken away from him by one of the readers of Part I.

[18] All quotations from *La Regenta* are from the Noguer edition (Barcelona, 1976) and will be cited parenthetically in my text.

narrator has advanced us to the moment of Ana's arrival at the theater, only to pause for a long description of Vetusta's theater. One might be reminded of how Cervantes had proceeded with his Maese Pedro interlude, but here the "*costumbrista* moment" is dense in detail and drawn out for several paragraphs, as befitting a nineteenth-century realist/naturalist narrative. We learn, for example, that the theater is old and falling apart, like so many institutions of the "heroic city"; that this neglect does not really bother the "decent folk" (meaning the cream of Vetustan society), who come to the theater not to see the play but rather to "mirarse y despellejarse de lejos" (498). The gossipy and highly critical narrator (who would fit quite well into the audience which he so obviously detests) expounds at length the attitudes towards the theater of the different groups of Vetustans, quoting selected words from local newspapers with parodic intention. This long pause to give readers a glimpse of the pretentious mediocrity of Vetustan society is typical of the *modus operandi* of the Clarinian narrator; by contrast Cervantes' narrator appears matter-of-fact and almost laconic.[19]

When the narrator turns his attention back to Ana's arrival several paragraphs/pages later, it is to restate with a few more details the grand manner of her arrival: "Cuando Ana Ozores se sentó en el palco de Vegallana, en el sitio de preferencia, que la Marquesa no quería ocupar nunca, en las plateas y principales hubo cuchicheos y movimiento" (499). We are told that the public takes notice of her arrival for several reasons - the fact that she rarely comes to the theater, the fact that she has just gotten a new confessor (the ambitious Magistral, Don Fermín de Pas), and (for those in the know), that there might be someone (Don Alvaro is implied) who could counter the powerful influence of the Magistral. We can almost hear the malicious whispers, and we are offered a direct quote of the opinion of the envious Obdulia, who insists that Ana will be like all the Vetustan women, herself included; that is, she will fall prey to Don Alvaro's efforts to seduce her ("¡La Regenta, bah! la Regenta será como todas…."). Whether or not this is something she is saying tonight at the theater (and this is not clear), we are meant

[19] Such is the case at least in this episode, although there are many instances in which Cervantes' narrator (that is, any one of the "authors") becomes overly chatty, gossipy, or "philosophical," as if in anticipation of the intrusive narrator of later novels.

to understand that it is representative of what Obdulia has been saying all along to others in her group. The narrator continues in his long digression by quoting Obdulia once more, this time in order to emphasize her scorn for the prudish backwardness of Vetustan women. All of this, of course, provides a context for Ana's viewing of the Romantic play, which must be going on at this point, although we readers are not allowed to see it just yet. How different this is from the presentation of Maese Pedro's show!

After the excursion into the petty world of Obdulia, our attention is directed back to Ana and her enjoyment of the spontaneous tribute to her beauty that she detects in the crowd as she takes her seat. Normally, we are told, she is not interested in the effect she has on the Vetustan public, whose opinions she tends to scorn (in this, she is not unlike Obdulia, as attentive readers are sure to note) but today, after Don Alvaro's appearance before her balcony overlooking the square, her entire mood has changed; she no longer rejects this admiration; she inwardly declares herself open to the emotions and sensuality she had denied herself, deeming them a sin, when she was under the influence of Don Fermín ("la Regenta no vaciló en creer lo que le decían voces interiores de independencia, amor, alegría, voluptuosidad pura, bella, digna de las almas grandes," 501). A fairly long flashback establishes that it is in this rebellious state-of-mind that Ana has come to the theater; she is ready to *"dejarse ir*," to accept whatever happens - an attitude which the narrator qualifies as "cobarde" and "egoísta." As it turns out, this is the perfect mood for appreciating the Romantic poetry of *Don Juan Tenorio*, but she does not know that yet. The narrator brings us back briefly to the present ("Así llegó al teatro," 502), reiterating what he had said about her reasons for coming (that she had been pressured by her husband, Don Víctor Quintanar, and by Don Alvaro); then he hints again that all is not entirely well with Ana's conscience by offering a portion of her conversation with herself a little earlier, when she was getting ready. We are allowed to see how she had reasssured herself that she would never allow Alvaro to compromise her honor ("Bueno, voy; pero es claro que si voy me comprometo con mi honra a no dejar que ese hombre adquiera sobre mí derecho alguno" 502). All of these details are meant to give us a full appreciation of Ana's inner state to match her outer presence that has caused such a stir.

Our return to the outer world of the narrative present, the theater, does not have us focus on the show, but rather on the seat-

ing arrangements of the most important members of the audience (the Vegallana's box, that of Mesía, and that of his "rival," Pepe Ronzal). In the longest descriptive pause yet (four and a half pages) we are entertained with an extended satire of the theater-going upper and middle classes of the provincial capital: we "overhear" their views of one another, their opinions on plays, dramatic performances, singers, politics, etc., all with characteristic snatches of their conversations. Just when we thought we had lost ourselves in this maze of petty likes, dislikes, and gestures, we are brought back abruptly to Ana's next move: "Después de saborear el tributo de admiración del público, Ana miró a la bolsa de Mesía" (507). She is looking, of course, for Don Alvaro, who is indeed there, "reluciente." Just as she spots him, she is forced to look at the stage for the first time because Don Juan has just torn the mask from his father's face, and the crowd in the upper gallery has reacted. The show has finally begun for Ana, and for us readers, but we know by now that the show we are watching is much wider and more intricately constructed than the Zorrilla play. The latter is merely a pretext - the base line for multiple layers of both mental and physical interaction between the actors and the audience and between members of the audience. Clarín is a master of characterization, and this episode is only one among many in which an event serves him as a kind of anchor from which the narrator can peer into minds, register reactions, both present and past, of various characters as well as their representative dialogues, and thus make all sorts of connections that would not be possible in a straightfoward manner of telling. Certainly there is much more for us readers to take in here than for readers of Maese Pedro! The narrator, nonetheless, may remind us of Maese Pedro's "boy" with his pointer, directing our attention to everything that we should see both on and off stage (mainly off), making sure that we don't miss a comment, a thought, or a gesture in response to the performance.

First, for example, the narrator treats us to a short dialogue that reveals the scorn of specific middle-class characters for what they deem to be an immoral and uninformed reaction on the part of the people (that is, those in the gallery) to the unmasking of Don Gonzalo. The hypocrisy of such a judgment is underlined by the fact that the "judge" is ogling Obdulia through his binoculars. Then we are told that Ana began to focus on the drama precisely at the moment in which Perales (the actor playing Don Juan) repeated the line: "Son pláticas de familia/de las que nunca hice caso…." Now we focus, along with Ana, on the

physical appearance of the actor - his good looks, his "traje fantástico" that suits him well. But instead of watching him perform, we are suddenly in the mind of Don Víctor, who is "in love with" Perales and remembers him in other performances, citing full lines from them. Don Víctor notices Ana's current interest in Perales, and whispers in her ear: "¿Verdad, hijita, que es un buen mozo?"(508) and then begins carrying on about Spanish past greatness (his usual theme). Fully engrossed in the play, Ana pays no attention to what her husband is saying. As the curtain falls on Act I, she wonders about how the bet between Don Juan and Mejía will turn out. Between acts, the Vetustan Tenorio bides his time, every so often glancing discretely at his victim but not yet daring to make his move. Two or three times their glances meet, and they smile.

When Act II begins, Don Alvaro realizes that he has a powerful rival in the drama. Ana is totally absorbed, and with her full attention on the play, we begin to follow it by way of the narrator's summary of the prime moments, which so impress her: "llegaron al alma de la Regenta con todo el vigor y frescura dramáticos que tienen y que muchos no saben apreciar" (509). We now witness how Ana's imagination responds to the poetry of the performance, how it transforms the flimsy stage settings into "solid buildings from another age"; how she feels much more solidarity with the enthusiastic reception of the people in the gallery than with that of her own class; how she wishes she could have lived in that glorious past which she wrongly believes is the Middle Ages; how she identifies Don Alvaro with Don Juan. Act III adds a new twist and a new level to the fiction, when the audience realizes that the actress who plays Inés resembles La Regenta and when we learn that the actors playing the protagonists are married and that the actress is very much in love with her husband. Ana is one of the few to appreciate this "poetic realism" underlying the acting. Upon witnessing for the first time the reading of Don Juan's letter, she exclaims to her own husband: "¡Pero esto es divino!" (511).

Up to here, as I mentioned earlier, Ana shows herself to be the ideal spectator. Her identification with Doña Inés, even her associating her own story with that of her Romantic counterpart, is essential for a full-bodied "reading" of the work. It is what comes next - or what doesn't come next - that points to the flaw in Ana's powers of perception. It is in this flaw that we can detect a kinship with her seventeenth-century predecessor.

Between the third and fourth acts, Don Alvaro comes over to

the Vegallana box. Dismayed when he realizes to what extent Ana has let herself be carried away with the poetic beauty and passion of Zorrilla's play (which for him in this post-Romantic epoch is beyond "passé"), he remarks to himself: "¡Si el *Don Juan* de Zorrilla ya sólo servía para hacer parodias….!" In order to seduce Ana, he figures, he will have to go to the trouble of posing as a sentimental Romantic, an idealist, who in these jaded times must hide his true feelings under a rough exterior. The ironies here are various. Ana had been able to detect the "poetic realism" of the acting of the *Don Juan* performance, where the love and idealism were genuine, but she is unable to detect the falsity in Alvaro's performance because she is too emotionally involved in the "poetry" of *Don Juan*, that is, in her imaginative recreation of it as her own story, to see what is really going on. Like Don Quijote, she forces reality (in this case, Don Alvaro's true nature) to match her own wishful-thinking version of it. The narrator refers to her blindness as "este espeijismo del entusiasmo vidente" (512), a phrase which could describe equally well Don Quijote's malady. Don Alvaro, for his part, prides himself on his acting skills and on making clever use of Ana's identification of him with Don Juan. It is only a matter of luck that his good looks and dissipated lifestyle now in the dark of the theater lend a certain spiritual and melancholy expression to his features that fits the role he is playing. He could not realize that for the narrator, and by extension, for the reader, he is but a poor actor and a second-rate Don Juan. By contrast, the original - in his mind fit only for parodies - appears fresh and vigorous. The mythic ideal is forever young when compared to a hollow and decadent "real."

But the ironies don't stop here. The context for Ana's flights of imagination has been all along the theater packed with unromantic Vetustans. Now that Act IV has begun and Don Alvaro has made his move and is trying to figure out how best to attack, the ironic contrast between the poetry of Ana's thoughts and the prose of her environment has reached a critical limit. It has become grotesque, like the contrast between the idealized figures in Don Quijote's imagination and the puppets in Maese Pedro's farce. Don Alvaro wants desperately to touch Ana's leg with his knees, but he is held in check by his knowledge that he cannot do so as long as she is in her sublime state ("¡Pero la buena señora se había sublimizado tanto!," he complains). At the same time, the sort of erotic foreplay he desires with Ana is going on inches away from the pair, in their very same box,

between Edelmira and her cousin Paco Vegallana. Edelmira can barely breathe - this, we are told, just as Don Juan has fallen to his knees before Doña Inés asking her if "se respiraba mejor" in his beautiful estate on the Guadalquivir!

The rest of the scene is artfully managed by the narrator, who registers his sympathy for Ana's naïve romanticism as she listens to the famous lines in which Doña Inés confesses her love for Don Juan: "Estos versos que ha querido hacer ridículos y vulgares, manchándolos con su baba, la necedad prosaica, pasándolos mil y mil veces por sus labios viscosos como vientre de sapo, sonaron en los oídos de Ana aquella noche como frase sublime de un amor inocente y puro que se entrega con la fe en el objeto amado. . . ." (514). The mention of the "belly of the toad" anticipates the lesson of the ending of the novel, which neither reader nor character is prepared to appreciate just yet. What is clear to the reader at this point is that for Ana the love scene is tantamount to a religious experience and that she is totally immune to the erotic undercurrents in both the Don Juan story and her own. The narrator, though apparently siding with Ana against the crudeness of the Vetustans, seems to relish the opportunity to point out fresh ironies. For example, he notes that Don Alvaro, believing that Ana's emotional reaction to the play (the heaving of her breast) is really a physical reaction to his presence ("creyó en un influjo "*puramente fisiológico*," 514-515) seeks her foot with his; this occurs at the very moment in which she begins to think of God, "en el amor ideal, puro, universal que abarcaba al Creador y a la criatura…." Fortunately for Mesía, we are told, Ana's feet are safely out of danger, propped up against Edelmira's chair.

The final irony signaled in this episode is Ana's premonition of Don Víctor's death as the result of a duel with Don Alvaro. Since Ana connects what she is witnessing (Don Juan shooting the stubborn Comendador) with persons and situations in her own life, the parallels naturally suggest this terrible possibility. The central irony will be that she does not heed the warning in the play, imagining herself above being seduced by Don Alvaro. Just as she will leave the play before the beginning of Part II, deeming the rest not to be worthy of her attention since it doesn't match up with her own interests, she will refuse to consider the serious possible consequences of playing around with temptation.

We have, then, two character-spectators - one pre-Romantic and the other post-Romantic - who are blinded in their apprecia-

tion of a live performance of their own "life story" not so much by idealism *per se* as by a limited perception of reality or an inappropriate application of the ideal to their specific circumstances. Their interaction with the "show" duplicates their particular shortsightedness in reading and interpreting the events of their life. Whereas our protagonists are unable to see the full image of themselves provided by the textual mirror, this is not true for their readers, who are in a position to see so much more and who are being prepared for the moment of truth that will come at the end of the novel.

Such is the bare-bones sketch of the Quixotic mechanism at the core of the modern novel, the dialectic of realism, which, as we have seen, is so graphically portrayed in the Maese Pedro episode. The *Don Juan Tenorio* section of *La Regenta* embroiders on this sketch and enrichs its texture in a peculiar Clarinian way that begs for closer scrutiny. What I referred to as the principle of "interruption" in the *Quijote* should perhaps more appropriately be called that of systematic pausing, or "digression," in *La Regenta*. The effect on Clarín's readers of the long pauses, and pauses within pauses, is not immediately one of awareness of the reading process brought on by forced attention to the manner of the telling, as in the case of the *Quijote* interruptions. Nonetheless, the practice of repeatedly halting the narration for the purpose of introducing long descriptive passages does have the effect of shifting our attention away from what is happening in the story and towards consideration of formal elements, since we begin to seek out patterns relationships across textual levels; this tends to "spatialize" the text, as I explain elsewhere.[20]

The task of outlining the huge advances in novelistic techniques that have transformed the modern novel since Cervantes, and from which Clarin has obviously benefited, falls beyond the scope of this study. What interests me here, as I conclude, is a consideration of how Cervantes' dialectic of realism is raised to a higher degree for readers of *La Regenta* who find themselves compelled by the reading process to adopt a relational kind of thinking. This relational thinking is mirrored in the techniques of characterization and in the manner in which the inner and outer worlds of individual characters are embedded in those of the col-

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[20]See my "La Regenta as Spatial-Form Narrative: A Twentieth-Century Perspective," *MLN*, 103.2 (March 1988: Hispanic Issue), 335 49.

lective protagonist, Vetusta. It represents a radical critique of an extreme form of individualism which has been prevalent in Western societies since Romanticism and which informs the world view of the main characters. Let me give an example from the scene we have just analyzed. Ana's separation of herself in her mind from her community (her contempt for Vetusta), as if she were an autonomous individual who was in no way dependent on her environment, is shown to be a false premise by virtue of the ironic context in which she and her thoughts are placed. In this particular instance, the key is Obdulia, who correctly predicts that Ana will fall, like everyone else, and who duplicates Ana's scorn for everything Vetustan (as if it were fashionable to do so in certain circles of Vetustan society), making it quite apparent that Ana is not alone even in her elitist attitude. The same can be said of La Regenta's habit of separating her spirit or soul out from her body, relegating the latter to her husband, and the former to whatever "higher" purpose strikes her at the moment, be it romantic flirtation with Don Alvaro or mystical deliberations with the Magistral. Though her spirit soars with the poetry of *Don Juan Tenorio*, the physiological grounding of her response to Don Alvaro and to the play is evident to readers. The correction of her erroneous belief in separateness and her false perceptions of reality is the function of the dialectic of realism. Clarín's novel is thus readily recognizable as a variation on the theme of *Don Quijote*. What is different about *La Regenta* is that the interdependency of the real and the ideal, body and spirit, individual and human community is figured in the manner of characterization, in those long descriptive pauses, and pauses within pauses, which we noted as we made our way through the narration/description of the performance. Were we to map out all the connections, we would discover the image of a complex network or system in which whole and parts are interrelated.