

STORY AND DISCOURSE IN *DON QUIJOTE*

Narrative has traditionally been considered to be composed of a flow of events, performed by characters, in a setting, recounted at some later time by a narrator. Aristotle held that the imitation of actions in the real world (*praxis*) formed an argument (*logos*) from which were selected, and possibly rearranged for retelling, the units that formed the plot (*mythos*). What was explicit in Aristotle became implicit and remained so in discussions of narrative theory until Russian formalism. Ever since, it has been customary to regard a narrative text as being composed of a *story* (*fabula, histoire*) and a *discourse* (*sjuzhet, récit*), and to concentrate attention on the relation between the two. The story may be thought of as the "content": what happened, to whom, when, in what setting. Discourse involves the selection of the important events for inclusion and the suppression of all or some of the rest, the ordering of their sequence, the fact that the story is told from a particular vantage point and with reference usually to one particular character, and so on.¹ Logic requires that the story precede the discourse; the Trojan war precedes Aeneas' narration of certain events of it. Even drama, where story and discourse coincide in the actions and speeches of the characters, is filled with narratives of events presumed to have taken place or to be taking place offstage. When Lope observed in the *Arte nuevo* that "las relaciones piden los romances," he was speaking of narratives embedded in the dramatic representation and recommending a particular metrical form as part of their discourse.

Until recently the discussions of narrative theory and technique have assumed the priority of the story over the discourse, as logic demands. When I was preparing my doctoral thesis under Professor Gilman's direction in the mid-sixties I turned principally to Forster, Lubbock and Booth for the theoretical underpinnings of my discussion of narrative technique in Matías de los Reyes.² All these authors take for granted the priority of story

¹ See, among others, Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1978), 19, 26.

² See E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927); Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (1954); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961); C.B. Johnson, *Matías de los Reyes and the Craft of Fiction* (Berkeley: California, 1973).

over discourse, and the narrative issues they raise—point of view, alteration of chronology, selection of episodes, and the like—all spring from this basic relationship. As recently as 1978, Seymour Chatman reveals how deeply rooted is the notion that the story comes first: “Events have strictly determined positions in story: X happens, then Y happens because of X, then Z as a final consequence. The order in story is fixed; even if discourse presents a different order, the natural order can always be reconstructed.”³ A readily accessible and relatively unproblematical example of this relationship of story to discourse in the *Quijote* is found in the narrative offered by Ruy Pérez de Viedma in I, 39-41. Certain things happened to him during his captivity in Algiers (the story). He recounts his adventures after the fact to the assembled company at Juan Palomeque’s inn (the discourse). Both the story and the discourse are explicitly commented upon at the conclusion of the narrative. Subsequently, the Cura rearranges the events of the Captain’s story into a new discourse, a piece of rhetoric designed to explain and excuse the old soldier’s poverty in the eyes of his prosperous and successful brother when their paths happen to cross in I, 42.⁴ The same story precedes and generates two different discourses—the Captain’s and the Cura’s—offered for two distinct purposes. One is realized in Cervantes’ text and the other is merely alluded to, but both depend on the prior events in Algiers.

Recent theoretical speculation has given us tools to deal with other, more complex and baffling narrative situations in the *Quijote* in a more satisfying way than has heretofore been possible. We might begin by observing that a story need not be fact. Indeed, it may consist of a pre-existing folktale or fiction, or something made up *ad hoc* at the moment of narration. Robert Scholes posits a letter writer who describes the rain falling outside his window as he is writing, then adds a P S saying that it really wasn’t raining at all, that he had just made the rain up. We can never know whether the writer was looking out a real window at real rain or not. “The fictional status of the rain does not depend on the fact or non-fact of the rain,” Scholes concludes, “but on the absence of the ‘real’ context from the reader. Any description we read is thus a fiction.”⁵ Consider an even more striking example. Marshall McLuhan once prophesied that the first war to be televised would also be the last one to be fought, for the horrors of war would be (literally) brought home so massively, brutally and unequivocally that war would become impossible. What happened instead was that

³ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 128.

⁴ See Jaime Oliver Asín, “La hija de Agi Morato en las obras de Cervantes,” *Boletín de la Real Academia Española*, 27 (1947-48), 245-339; Helena Percas de Ponseti, *Cervantes y su concepto del arte* (Madrid: Gredos, 1975), 227-235; J.J. Allen, “Autobiografía y ficción: El relato del Capitán Cautivo,” *Anales Cervantinos*, 15 (1976), 149-155; Francisco Márquez Villanueva, *Personajes y temas del Quijote* (Madrid: Taurus, 1975), 98-99; J.A. Maravall, *Utopía y contrautopía en el Quijote* (Santiago de Compostela: Pío Sacro, 1976), 50; C.B. Johnson, “Organic Unity in Unlikely Places,” *Cervantes*, 2 (1982), 133-154.

⁵ “Toward a Semiotics of Literature,” in his *Semiotics and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale, 1982), 26.

we could not distinguish between real war, real blood, real mutilation, real death, and their imitation in the John Wayne war movies we had all grown up on. Instead of being terrified, we were entertained. Like Don Quijote, we lost the ability to distinguish between fact and fiction, history and poetry, and the Viet Nam war turned out to be the longest one in our national experience. The absence of the events themselves, their mediation through a narrator or narrative medium (film, TV) turns any narrative into a fiction. Perhaps Don Quijote's response in I, 1 to narrative texts is not as deviant as we had supposed.

If the distinction between fact and fiction is a casualty of the narrative process, the priority of the story over the discourse is called into question by the same mechanism. When we read a narrative we are concerned with reconstructing the story from the data provided by the discourse. Scholes refers to this process as "narrativity."⁶ It involves several operations: visualizing the characters and setting, supplying details of the action missing from the discourse, and so on. The story, in short, is the creation of the apprehender, a mental construct. It is not only something that precedes and governs the discourse; it also follows and springs from it.

We have always considered Cervantes' fictional poetics in terms of what was overt in sixteenth-century Aristotelian theory: the questions of history *vs.* poetry, truth *vs.* verisimilitude.⁷ The ambiguity of the Spanish word *historia* has not helped to clarify the discussion.⁸ Recent insights into the nature of the relationship of story to discourse make it possible to dismiss the story/history debate as irrelevant. The act of narration that mediates between the events narrated and the narratee has the effect, as we have just seen, of turning any such events, be they fact or fantasy, into a "story," a mental construct elaborated by the narratee—in a word, fiction. Cervantes, of course, was considerably in advance of his critics. He had either intuited or consciously concluded that the Aristotelian categories constituted a critical red herring, and the results of his thought, embodied in concrete but problematical texts, abound in his works. Periandro's narration in the *Persiles*, or the entire *Casamiento engañoso y coloquio de los perros* are examples.

Within the *Quijote*, two narratives constructed by Sancho Panza have as their theme the relation of story to discourse and the questions we have been discussing.

Before Sancho begins the story of Lope Ruiz and Torralba in I, 20 he draws attention to both the story and the discourse: "una historia, que si la

⁶ Robert Scholes, "Narration and Narrativity in Film and Fiction," in his *Semiotics and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale, 1982), 62.

⁷ See in particular E.C. Riley, *Cervantes's Theory of the Novel* (Oxford, 1962); and Alban Forcione, *Cervantes, Aristotle and the Persiles* (Princeton, 1970).

⁸ See Bruce W. Wardropper's classic "Don Quixote: Story or History?", *Modern Philology*, 63 (1965), 1-11.

acierto a contar y no me van a la mano, es la mejor de las historias." Again at the end Don Quijote comments: "que tú has contado una de las más nuevas consejas, cuento o historia, que nadie supo pensar en el mundo, y que tal modo de contarla ni dejarla, jamás se podrá ver ni habrá visto en toda la vida, aunque no esperaba otra cosa de tu buen discurso."⁹ Within the narration proper the relation between story and discourse is in the main straightforward. That is, the discourse is the result of a pre-existing story. Many questions and some pseudo-questions are raised, however. At the level of story, we are led to wonder whether what Sancho is telling is a folktale of some kind, a true story recounted to him by someone else, or a true series of events witnessed by him at least in part. Sancho begins with a formula reserved for tales: "Erase que se era." Later, however, he describes Torralba in some detail, as rather mannish and with a slight moustache. Don Quijote concludes from this that Sancho actually knew her. This conclusion is wrong. It turns out that Sancho heard this story, presumably including the description, from someone else, who told him "que era tan cierto y verdadero, que podrá bien, cuando lo contase a otro, afirmar y jurar que lo había visto todo" (242). It does not matter whether or not Sancho actually knew Torralba, just as it does not matter whether or not Torralba is real at all. She comes to Don Quijote through Sancho's narration and is thus automatically rendered a fiction. The story about her is pre-existing material, just as the events at Troy precede Aeneas' narration of them, yet at the same time the story is also a mental construct generated by the discourse. When Sancho describes her he concludes "que parece que ahora la veo." She exists in his own mind, as we see from the exchange with Don Quijote that follows immediately, only as a result of his own description of her! Again, the question of her historicity becomes irrelevant.

Sancho had begun by referring to the Torralba story as already in existence and expressing some doubt about his ability to tell it properly. This doubt invites us to consider the problems posed by the discourse and its relation to the story. The first of these is the question of narrative coherence and continuity. At first Sancho is so afraid that Don Quijote will be unable to follow the chain of characters and events that he names everything, with a noun, each time it occurs. His discourse thus purchases clarity and a certain mimetic quality at the price of violence to the normal processes of communication. His hearer can be expected and is indeed accustomed to relating pronouns to their antecedents and events to those which have gone before. He thus experiences Sancho's repetitions as bothersome and instructs him to discontinue the practice. The second problem posed by the priority of story to discourse is that of selection: which events need to be narrated and which can be left out, or the division of events into

⁹ All references to the *Quijote* are made to the edition of Luis Andrés Murillo (Madrid: Castalia, 1978), vol. I, pp. 241, 244.

what Roland Barthes calls *noyeux* and *catalyse*.¹⁰ There is an intimate connection between this matter and the problem of narrative continuity. As Chatman observes, "there is a virtually infinite continuum of imaginable details between the incidents, which will not ordinarily be expressed, but which could be. The author selects those events he feels are sufficient to elicit the necessary sense of continuum. Normally, the audience is content to accept his main lines and to fill in the interstices with knowledge it has acquired through ordinary living and art experience. The convention of 'filling in' by verisimilitude is basic to narrative coherence."¹¹

It is here that Sancho has serious difficulty, so serious, in fact, that he appears to select out of his narrative all the important elements and include only the trivial and accessory. His abject refusal to summarize the passage of the goats across the river is the most obvious example of this, but his insistence on detailing the content of Torralba's handbag—which turn out to be exactly what one would expect to find there—would do just as well. Conversely, Sancho selects out of his discourse precisely those events which might have allowed Don Quijote and the rest of us to make sense of the Lope Ruiz-Torralba affair and the motivation for his flight from her (in turn the motivation for her pursuit of him). All Sancho says is that Lope fell out of love with Torralba, "y la causa fue, según malas lenguas, una cierta cantidad de celillos que ella le dio, tales, que pasaban de la raya y llegaban a lo vedado" (243). Here, obviously, is the kernel of the story. With whom did Torralba do what, which exceeded the bounds of the permissible, which motivated the ironically diminituitized jealousy on Lope's part and culminated in his abhorrence of her? Did she become involved with another shepherd? Or, in view of her masculine appearance, could the object of her affections have been another woman—in which case Sancho's reticence to provide the information we need is more readily explicable. In any case, the kernel of the story does not reside in the contents of Torralba's handbag, nor in the number of goats that crossed the river, but in the relationship between Torralba and Lope, and how that relationship was undone. Sancho's discourse is in inverse relation to the story. He selects out the kernels, and insists on narrating the satellites.

Finally, this narrative dramatizes another problem of the relation between discourse and a pre-existing story—that posed by the narrator's fallible memory. Sancho's narration does not end because the precise number of goats taken across the river is of the essence of the story, as his answer to Don Quijote's question to him makes clear, but rather because with the interruption of his thought occasioned by the brief conversation with his master, the remaining events of the story have simply slipped his mind.

¹⁰ Seymour Chatman prefers to call them *kernels* and *satellites*. *Story and Discourse*, 53.

¹¹ *Story and Discourse*, 30, 48.

In I, 20 Cervantes dramatizes some of the principal narrative issues involved in what we might term the “normal” situation, in which the story precedes and governs the discourse. In I, 30-31 things are different. Don Quijote has sent Sancho to El Toboso, but we know he did not go there. Consequently, when Don Quijote asks him for a report of his adventures, we know that his narrative is not, cannot be composed of a discourse based on events that took place. Not only are there no real events, there are no pre-fabricated fictitious ones either. There is, in a word, no pre-existing story.. At least not in reality. Two stories exist in this episode, however, as mental constructs, one in the Don Quijote’s mind and the other in Sancho’s. The characters and setting are different: Don Quijote imagines a princess in a palace, Sancho a farm girl in a corral. The events—the delivery by Sancho of a letter to the woman in the setting and her reactions to it—are more similar. Don Quijote begins with explicit reference to both story (¿qué pasó?) and discourse: “todo aquello que vieses que en este caso es digno de saberse, de preguntarse y satisfacerse, sin que añadas o mientas por darme gusto, ni menos te acortes por no quitármele” (381). He then takes the lead, attempting to generate through questions the story he hopes to hear transformed into discourse on Sancho’s lips. There occurs a dialogue, a dialectic of the two stories as mental constructs, which produces a kind of double discourse, or two parallel discourses, which at a certain moment coalesce into one, with (*mirabile dictu*) only one story.

Don Quijote’s discourse comprises 427 words. It includes a good deal of action, almost always in the form of questions, such as: “qué hacía...? A buen seguro que la hallaste ensartando perlas o bordando una empresa...”. There is also a fair amount of description, generally of sumptuous phenomena: “alguna empresa de oro”; “los granos de trigo eran perlas”; “un olor sabeo, una fragancia aromática, un no sé qué de bueno, ...La tienda de un curioso guantero”; “aquella rosa entre espinas, aquel lirio del campo, aquel ámbar desleído.” No direct speech and no indirect speech is reported. There is one *refrán*, and some references to Sancho’s discourse: “Prosigue adelante, Llegaste”; “acaba, cuéntamelo todo: no se te quede en el tintero una mínima”; “Y bien, he aquí que acabó de limpiar su trigo y de enviarlo al molino.” This last is most important, for it provides the nexus between the two discourses.

Sancho’s discourse contains 502 words. It includes lots of action, all in response to Don Quijote’s questions, but refusing to follow any of his leads. The actions imagined and then narrated by Sancho are all coarse and plebian: “La hallé ahechando dos fanegas de trigo”; “estaba en la fuga del meneo de una buena parte de trigo que tenía en la criba”; “Sentí un olorcillo”; “La carta no la leyó..., antes la rasgó y la hizo menudas piezas.” Description in Sancho’s discourse stands in violent contrast to its richness of Don Quijote’s: “el trigo era rubión”; “un olorcillo algo hombruno..., estaba sudada y algo correosa”; “era el queso ovejuno.” There is one *refrán*. Sancho comes into his own in the area of reported speech. His discourse is

in fact composed principally of indirect speech: "Ella no me preguntó nada, mas yo le dije..."; "dijo que.."; "diciendo que no quería..."; "Preguntada, mas yo le dije..."; "dijo que..."; "diciendo que no quería..."; "Y finalmente me dijo que dijese a vuestra merced"; "Rióse mucho cuando le dije..."; "Preguntéle... díjome que sí." It even contains one example of direct speech, imagined by him and spoken by Dulcinea.

The two discourses come together at Don Quijote's suggested elipsis: "Y bien, he aquí que acabó de limpiar el trigo y de enviarlo al molino. ¿Qué hizo cuando leyó la carta?" Sancho accepts the proposed elipsis. He now begins to invent, and Don Quijote to accept, a chain of imagined conversations that culminates in Dulcinea's request that the knight cease his penance and report to her directly in El Toboso. Sancho's story, and Sancho's discourse, are now the only ones. Furthermore, real events—a real trip to El Toboso and indeed the entire Second Part of the novel—are called into being by Sancho's discourse, which consists of nothing except an imaginary story existing only in his mind, realized with Don Quijote's collaboration from the point of view of his own mental construct.

The Aristotelian poetics current in Cervantes' time make no provision for the narrative situation we have just observed. Aristotle and his commentators assume that "in the beginning was the Deed," that is, the priority of story over discourse in the construction of narrative. In fact, Sophocles had already offered a situation in which the story—the murder of Laius—takes form in response to the demands of the discourse.¹² Now Cervantes creates a situation in which two pre-existing mental constructs with no basis in fact generate together a totally fictitious discourse which in turn becomes the basis for a whole series of real actions by his protagonists. The Aristotelian division of texts into history and poetry, with their respective criteria of truth and verisimilitude, is rendered irrelevant. Much later, Freud discovered that a primal *fantasy* produces the same psychic effect as a real primal *scene*, that is, that mental constructs are just as real as palpable objects, and indeed may exert equally or more far-reaching effects on those who enter into relationships with them. Cervantes, working within the categories of Aristotelian poetics in the sixteenth century, appears to have discovered the same principle and to have consciously incorporated it as a theme of the *Quijote*.

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¹² See Jonathan Culler's insightful discussion of *Oedipus, rex* in "Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative," in his *The Pursuit of Signs. Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1981), 174-175.