

Title: "Poetry `Bodied Forth` in Time: The Final Ironies of Cervantes' *Viaje del Parnaso*."

Abstract:

In 1981 Amorós welcomed modern criticism's tentative re-evaluation of Cervantes' engagement with poetry, pointing to the interventions of Rivers and Blecua, among others, as indicative of a new attitude that recognised Cervantine irony in the writer's assessment of his own poetic performance: 'Yo, que siempre trabajo y me desvelo, / por parecer que tengo de poeta / la gracia que no quiso darme el cielo' (the oft-cited tercet of the mock epic *Viaje del Parnaso*, [Madrid, 1614]). Over thirty years later, however, the question of 'Cervantes, poeta' continues to confound us. The many (and varied) attempts to 'realize' Cervantes as 'poeta' have failed to coalesce and to effect the revisionist agenda which scholars had predicted.

On the 400th anniversary of Cervantes's death, this paper will suggest that it is time to reformulate the question whose answer so eludes us and that having finally identified the ironic import of Cervantes's poetic self-fashioning, we must now attempt to understand it. Against Gutiérrez (2000) I will suggest that it is precisely in the multi-layered domains of irony that Cervantes seeks to reinforce his poetic reputation and to claim cultural capital. His final 'poetic' journey, a parodic policing of the borders of the canon, is a significant starting point for further inquiry. Although judged relatively recently a 'compelling and fascinating mirror of the literature, society and politics of his time' (Chiong Rivero, 2008), the critical corpus relating to the *Viaje* (is slight in Cervantine terms, numbering 2 monographs (Rojas, Lokos) and fewer than 50 article-length studies. Moreover, notwithstanding some isolated attempts to marry poetry and politics (e.g. Schmidt, Stagg, Rivero) the dominant tendency has been to prioritize a single dimension of the text over others: for instance, questions of generic models (satire/burlesque/poetic encomium) and/or intertextual studies and the autobiographical dimension. What has not been interrogated to date is the import of Cervantes's belated shift into the lyric mode and the conclusions that might be drawn from analysis of the text within the paradigm of 'late style' (identified by Said, Adorno and others; notwithstanding the reservations of Hutcheon). Such an approach to the *Viaje* not only accommodates the polyfaceted nature of the text (as suggested by the divergent readings of its commentators), but also more fully appreciates the intersection of the individual (the subjectively embodied voice) and the epochal (the collectively contingent socio-political body politic). Moreover, in accordance with the characteristics of late works, irony is accorded supremacy in the *Viaje del parnaso* where its synchronic doublings, blended with the diachronic, allegorical shape of the narrative, produce a curious collision of temporal and spatial tensions. As a rhetorical tool that prompts perceptual dissonance, irony demands and depends upon, a contrast of appearance and reality; as a slippery discursive strategy, it has paradoxical implications for contemporary socio-cultural and political ideologies. For what is at stake in the *Viaje*'s frustration of synthesis is the construction of a cultural subject and the leveraging of a political ontology. I will suggest that this is most intensely felt in the 'un-making' of authorial selfhood that is doubly 'made up' in the 'catastrophic' commentary of the narrator-persona and in the aging body of the protagonist.