

## ◆ Afterword

### **Cervantine Fiction, Inflationary Media, and Reality Literacy**

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The recent publication of David Castillo and William Egginton's *Medialogies: Reading Reality in the Age of Inflationary Media* has provided a timely opportunity for reflection on current media conditions and the shifting constructions and presentations of reality, which are presently manifested by an ever-increasing dissemination of fake news and "alternative facts" to achieve political objectives. In practice, this appropriation of *reality* seems to go hand in hand with the employment of certain instruments of state power, which in the United States is currently manifested through the use of presidential executive orders that have been heralded to one extent or another by various strains and outlets of right-wing media. This "major strategy" has been, and continues to be, countered by the courts as well as by mainstream news outlets and left-leaning comedians of the major networks, among them CBS's Stephen Colbert and skits generated by NBC's popular "Saturday Night Live," which use parody, satire, and irony to maximum effect and often elicit immediate Twitter responses from the former actor-in-chief of *The Apprentice*, who comments on such "bad" performances and their lack of realistic resemblance to his self-image: that of a master deal-maker who can fabricate "the truth" as needed (in real time) by virtue of his newly acquired political position.

To counter "major strategies," Castillo and Egginton (henceforth referenced as C&E) appeal to Humanistic values, critical thinking, and media (and *reality*) literacy, which they consider to be strong attributes for the preservation of a democratic society (see also Nussbaum). This reminder seems to be of particular pertinence today as various Western liberal democracies are tested by strong political divisions, economic nationalism, the scapegoating of immigrants and minorities, and Russia's propaganda machine of "fake news."

C&E's reading of Cervantes and the first age of inflationary media in

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Spain's early baroque period serves as a springboard for a broader analysis that touches on the modern society of the spectacle as well as on the impact of digital technologies on the representation of reality and the larger problem of truth in present-day consumer society. A related issue emerging from those reflections is a preoccupation that many institutions of higher learning (including major state universities) are moving away from the Humanities through the adoption of metrics that follow corporate practices of accountability and the lowering of standards to please the student-consumer, who often feels entitled to his or her "own private fundamentalism" (*Medialogies* 117).

While it is difficult to fully assess the consequences of such a retreat in higher education, the debates in recent years about the role of the Humanities in the formation of an educated citizenry have engaged intellectuals both within and outside of our profession. In this respect, *Medialogies* argues powerfully for the continued importance of "rigorous training in literature, philosophy, and history" (113) in our own second age of inflationary media, one that "turns copies into things and, in so doing promotes the idea of portable and individualized realities" (116).

This state of affairs is further complicated by the rapid proliferation of new technologies and unbridled access to information, with the user often presented with a menu of confounding realities. As posited recently by Bruno Latour, the "double click" (the computer mouse or trackpad) as his foil provides immediate access, while the technology, consumed by habit, remains invisible, receding from a user's awareness.<sup>1</sup> Latour's ultimate foil is turned into the Cartesian evil demon, who claims "free, indisputable, and immediate access to pure, *untransformed* information" (cited by Val Dusek 93). But, of course, we know that such is a mere illusion since political speech, for example, does not deal with scientific rationality, for "politicians must speak in curves; use crooked talk [rather than straight talk]" to get at their differentiated audiences. Moreover, they "must continually recreate groupings of people by means of new turns of speech and new actions" in order to appeal to groups of constituents with different beliefs (Dusek *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*).

In the early baroque period, writers such as Cervantes were forced to think of the impact of technology (especially the printing press) as an agent of change in the dissemination of ideas and the likelihood of multiple appropriations and recycling of the same. They also kept in mind the fact that both the State and the Church had something to say about a book's publication through the exercise of censorship, which was an attempt to control reality and truth. The discussion that follows in this section deals largely with Cervantes's writing and its contestation of the propagandistic tendencies of the baroque culture of crisis of the early 1600s. We touch upon its dialogue with Lope de Vega's theater, as well as with the conventional *entremés* and the first-person picaresque narrative, understanding full well that some of those

same texts can be (have been) analyzed and interpreted from other perspectives (see Avilés and Souto in this volume). Thereafter, we return to questions regarding our own media conditions and touch briefly on matters raised by other colleagues, whose contributions are discussed in a more comprehensive manner by the editors of this *Polemical Companion* in their “Introduction” and by C&E in their “Penultimate Word.”

In *Medialogies*, the goal of reclaiming Humanistic values is foregrounded by an ethical dimension associated with Cervantine skepticism and, one might add, in the manner in which it valorizes a “reader” capable of penetrating the veils of appearance. Such can be seen not only in Cervantes’s prose-fiction works, especially *Don Quijote*, but also in several of his other texts, among them *Viaje al parnaso* (The Voyage to Parnassus) and the *Adjunta al parnaso* (The Addendum to Parnassus), where a plausible explanation is provided as to why Cervantes preferred having his last plays (“six comedias and six entremeses”) published in print rather than having them be subjected to a staged performance conditioned by sensorial effects. Along those lines, it is also important to stress not only the importance of the visual, but also that of the *auditive*, which resides both on a valorization of novelty as well as on a reliance on “a high level of rhetorical fabrication [which] although orally delivered . . . does not seek to establish a dialogical relation with the audience” (Godzich and Spadaccini 67), which rather than internalizing the arguments, was likely swept away by the persuasive force of rhetoric, by what Luiz Costa Lima calls, in another context, a persuasion without understanding (16ff.) that is also enhanced by theatricality (Godzich and Spadaccini 67). Thus, the audiences of the *corrales* (the public theaters of the time) were not only immersed in the abundant action that took place on stage, but were also affected by the power of visual effects and by the richness of the language they heard, in verse form and arranged polymetrically, to adjust to different kinds of recognizable characters and situations within the play.

In *Adjunta al parnaso*, Cervantes indicates a preference for having his plays read in private rather than having them performed on stage during the time in question: “Pero yo pienso darlas a la estampa para que se vea de espacio lo que pasa apriesa y se disimula o no se entiende cuando las representan. Y las comedias tienen sus sazones y tiempos como los cantares” (Ed. Gaos) (But I plan to have them published so that one might see [read] slowly what moves quickly and is either dissimulated or not understood when they are represented [on stage]. And comedias, like songs, also have their seasons and occasions. [our translation]).

Cervantes reflects two attitudes toward the act of reading: one hinging on spatial development in time (theatricality); the other based on narrativity in a strict sense (Spadaccini and Talens 46–47). Theater is viewed as a system of representation and an institutional apparatus with its own conventions and

mediations, with action and meaning produced through a time imposed on the audience moment by moment. On the other hand, a theatricalized narration allows the discerning “reader” a flexible space of interpretation that precludes the type of closure imposed by the accepted canon of the staged performance (Spadaccini “Writing for Reading”). Cervantes’s position on this issue is in stark contrast to that of Lope de Vega who expresses reluctance at having his plays appear in print for fear of unfavorable scrutiny, distinguishing between the reception accorded to his plays by the audience that listens to the theatrical performance and those readers who criticize the text in the privacy of their reading rooms. He says of his plays: “No las escribí con este ánimo [de imprimirlas], ni para que los oídos del teatro se trasladasen a la censura de los aposentos,” (cited in Castillo and Spadaccini 155) (I did not write them with the intention [of having them appear in print], or to exchange the ears of the theater [audience] for the censure of the [reading] rooms).

Cervantes also senses that his *comedias* and *entremeses* might be given a second look, in a different time and under different experiential conditions. That the staging of his plays is prophetically projected toward a distant future can be attested by the fact that *El retablo de las maravillas* was to be staged successfully by García Lorca’s “La Barraca” and that it has since been produced on countless occasions by academic and commercial theater groups, both in Spain and abroad. Another of Cervantes’s gems, *Pedro de Urdemalas*, even made its London stage debut with the Royal Shakespeare Company a decade or so ago, with the title of *Pedro, The Great Pretender*. The reviewer for *The Guardian* was to call the performance “admirable,” while wishing that “the RSC had left this curiosity to the academics” (Gardner).

Both plays incorporate a meta-theatrical artifice: the first, to underscore the extent to which those ignorant, impotent peasants and village administrators (Castrado, Repollo, and company) will go to “act out” (to use C&E’s words) the conditions of visibility established by the inventors and manipulators of the magic tableau, so as not to be seen racially tainted in the eyes of their own community; the second to invert the Lopean *comedia*’s proposal for the theater as a model of life, something that was ideologically projected upon the “vulgo,” who received as reflection what was nothing less than manipulation (Talens and Spadaccini, “Introducción” 79).

We have argued that Cervantes does not associate a critical capacity and disposition with the audience of the *corrales*, even while some of his plays, especially *El retablo de las maravillas* and *Pedro de Urdemalas*, parody the very commonplace ideas propagated by the Lopean *comedia*, among them, the notion of solidarity between the people and the monarchy, the harmony of country life (at a time of considerable migration from the countryside to the cities), the social and political integration of the rich peasant (*labrador rico*), and the stability of the traditional honor code. Moreover, *Pedro de Urdemalas*

even touches on the manipulative uses of the new popular theater and how perceptions are mediated by the material conditions of the stage with its ever greater reliance on special effects (*tramoyas*), a recognizable character typology, constant twists of the plot, extraordinary emphasis on action rather than characterization, the repetitive uses of the themes mentioned above, and the predictable resolution of conflict through the intervention of royal authorities, something that is clearly parodied, as the king in this particular play is an unscrupulous, lecherous man who seeks to seduce his own niece. Thus, there is a clear distancing from the Lopean *comedia*, which, as in the case of the modern “culture industry” in line with Adorno and Horkheimer’s characterization (“The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”) shows the limitations of the consumer’s capacity to project him/herself imaginatively in the cultural process in which s/he is immersed. Moreover, there is a close connection between the visceral or emotional attraction felt by the consumer or *vulgo* and the spectacle’s commercial success (Castillo and Spadaccini 157).

Across the spectrum of Cervantes’s writing, skepticism is a foil to “authorized truth,” a check on authoritarian thoughts and practices, and a way to approach the question of “truth and reality” without relinquishing a personal voice. Thus, his experimental prose-fiction writing displays extraordinary storytelling skills and experimentation—multiple authors, narrators and narratees, stories within stories, “frame” novellas, and constant incursions into literary and social discourses, all of which fit within the larger project of decentering traditional *loci* of authority. That same writing also shows a high degree of self-reflexivity and the testing of classical concepts of poetic discourse, which are challenged by a narrative practice that is highly resistant to rules. Yet, through it all, one always feels the presence of a universal personal voice (Spadaccini and Talens, *Through the Shattering Glass* 17) that speaks with moral authority, that calls attention to a common humanity that transcends boundaries and “-isms.” Of crucial importance in this process is also the special role that his writing reserves for a discerning, ethical “reader” (*lector mio*).

In *Don Quijote*, for example, there are ample discussions of history and fiction, truth and fiction, truth in fiction, truth and reality, authority and legitimacy, the weight of blood statutes, racism and ethnic cleansing, justice and injustice, sanity and madness, love and marriage, the uses and misuses of the law, the bureaucratic modern state with its *letrados* and mercenary armies, the role of money in a pre-capitalist economy, the social, economic, and political realities of a reactionary Spain perceived to be in permanent crisis and experienced as “una República de hombres encantados que viven fuera del orden natural” (González de Cellorigo 79) (a Republic of enchanted men who live outside of the natural order of things), questions of otherness and gender-related issues, and so forth and so on. But, as we have argued, this apparent preoccupation with an ethical “reading” of (and confrontation with) the text was

also envisioned for his late plays, i.e., his “six *comedias* and six *entremeses*” published near the end of his life, and for which Cervantes invoked a “reader” or a “reading” capable of imagining a performance by way of “a narrating theatricality” inscribed in the text.

A preoccupation with the reception of his work is further registered in the prologue to his *Novelas ejemplares* (1613), in which Cervantes sees print technology as facilitator of a process that alters the relationship between author, text, and reader. Referring to his novellas we are told: “Mi ingenio las engendró, y las parió mi pluma, y van creciendo en los brazos de la estampa” (Ed. Sieber I, 52) (My mind engendered them, and my pen gave birth to them, and they keep on growing in the arms of the printing press [our translation]). The circulation of novellas in print form allows for appropriations or uses that are contingent upon the experiences and expectations of different types of readers and/or listeners, something that is also discussed in several of his other prose-fiction texts, especially *Don Quijote*, which expands the discussion to the related concepts of “originality,” “authority,” and “authorship,” and invokes a discerning “reader” who is knowledgeable and capable of critically engaging the text along artistic and ethical lines, as opposed to the “vulgo,” defined as “aquel que no sabe, aunque sea señor o príncipe” (*Don Quijote*, II, 16) (one who lacks knowledge, even if a lord or a prince [our translation]).<sup>2</sup>

As advanced above, Cervantes the playwright was to express a similar concern regarding the reception of his works, as he reflects deeply about what it means to write for the stage in the Spain of the early 1600s, when Lope de Vega advocates for a “new art” of writing plays (“Arte Nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo” [1609]) and, putting his ideas into practice, managed to turn his work into a “mercadería vendible” (*DQ*, I, 48) (marketable commodity) generating many hundreds of plays following a compositional formula alluded to earlier, that helped to sustain a collective ideology.

Like Lope de Vega, Cervantes also seems to have understood the new theater’s social and political implications, i.e., its propagation of social myths and the *vulgo*’s propensity for a “mass-oriented” reception, an idea that José Antonio Maravall (*La cultura del barroco* and *Teatro y literatura en la sociedad barroca*) was to advance some four hundred years later in a well-known interpretation of the Baroque as a “guided,” “conservative,” “urban,” and “mass”-oriented culture that saw the dominant segments of Spanish society (the “complejo monárquico señorial”) and their surrogates use repression and socio-political propaganda to preserve their privileges, an interpretation that could seem totalizing and, perhaps, simplistic to readers of Lope de Vega’s plays today but that is quite compelling if one thinks of the type of Lopean *comedia* staged during the time that Cervantes is referencing (see Salomon, 807–810; Spanish ed. 676–677ff; and Díez Borque, respectively), and if one takes into account other cultural artifacts that fit the mold of a “major strat-

egy” within the context of their production/reception of the early 1600s. In this respect, one could also point to the sacramental plays that were staged in the urban centers of baroque Spain as well as to the performances of sermons by famous preachers on sacred occasions and spectacular displays connected with religious and/or secular celebrations (catafalques, triumphal arches, elaborately decorated altars, processions, and various other auditory and/or visual effects, including illuminations and pyrotechnics).

Among other cultural artifacts that would fall largely under the umbrella of a “major strategy” during those years (some of which Cervantes was to challenge through his inimitable humor), one could also make a case for a large body of *pliegos sueltos* (folded loose leaves; chapbooks), and, yes, even some of the well-known picaresque narratives of the early 1600s, including the bestseller *Vida de Guzman de Alfarache* (1599; 1604), which was to go through twenty-six editions, with some fifty-thousand copies sold in the course of the baroque century.

Regarding *pliegos sueltos*, one need only look at the wide array of subjects covered by them, including accounts of Catholic religious celebrations and other materials that reinforced the teachings of the Church, sensationalistic reports on urban crime for law and order purposes (as some would say today), and propaganda pieces dealing with current political events, including the expulsion of Moriscos from Spain (1609–1614) by Philip III, the very subject that Cervantes, a master of the “minor strategy,” was to deal with through the powerful lenses of fiction, with his usual irony, in the story of Ricote and his family in *Don Quijote* (II, 54–65) (Spadaccini, “Metaficción” 1039–1043). Moreover, he was to further ironize anti-Morisco discourse in other well-known texts such as *El coloquio de los perros* and the posthumously-published *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda* (1617).<sup>4</sup> Significantly, in *El retablo de las maravillas* (ca. 1612), a text that has served as an important part of the discussion about inflationary media and the question of reality and truth in Spain’s early modern period, Cervantes underscores the paralyzing effects of all types of ethnic, religious, and racial phobias, turning the very group exalted by Lope de Vega’s *comedia* (the rich peasants imbued in his plays with social esteem and economic power) into victims of their own prejudices and ignorance.

As to the popular picaresque *Vidas* (Lives) of the early baroque period, a case can also be made (in contrast to the interesting alternative readings of Avilés and Souto, in this volume) that they tend to offer a totalizing conception of morality vis-à-vis an individual (the *pícaro*) who is seen as breaking the rules established by an aristocratic and ecclesiastical state. Thus, at the hands of writers such as Francisco de Quevedo, and in a different sense Mateo Alemán, the voice that relates his own story is made to express a clear disillusion with a lifestyle that involves a usurpation of roles and symbols that are not in accord with his position in a society of orders and estates. One thinks

of Pablos, the protagonist of the *Buscón* and teller of his life story (*Vida*), bemoaning his “desgracias encadenadas” (chain of misfortunes) when he is caught in his various pretensions to be a nobleman (Don Felipe Tristán) and is unmasked unceremoniously for what he is: the son of a barber and a prostitute, and a nephew of the executioner of Segovia; or, when at the end of his first-person account he sounds like a stoic-Christian philosopher: “Y fuéme peor . . . pues nunca mejora su estado quien muda solamente de lugar, y no de vida y costumbres” (Ed. Lázaro Carreter 254) (But things went worse [in the New World] . . . as they always will for anyone who believes that he has only to move his dwelling without changing his life or ways). In Alemán’s case, the *pícaro* defined by tainted blood (through allusions to his *converso* past) and antisocial behavior in part I of the novel (1599) is turned into a sermonizer in part II (1604) as he reflects on his desperate condition as a galley slave and finds solace in the teachings of the Church, which extends the possibility of salvation regardless of one’s social position. The last two chapters of the novel, in particular, emphasize his spiritual transformation and rebirth in accordance with Church dogma (Ed. Rico, II, iii, 8: 875–905).

Cervantes was to respond playfully to the limitations imposed by this type of writing in the episode of the defiant and unrepentant galley slave Ginés de Pasamonte (*DQ*: I, 22), who, in answer to one of Don Quijote’s questions about his book, answers that he has pawned it and that he plans to redeem it upon his return to jail, for he already knows how to end it (“me lo sé de coro” [I know it [the ending] by heart). But while Ginés mentions the “fakeness” of *Lazarillo de Tormes* and similar types of stories that followed in its wake, his critique is implicitly aimed at the dual structure (“consejos y consejas” [“moral advice and storyline”]) of *Guzmán de Alfarache* and the conventional, religious transformation (or *mea culpa*) of Guzmán, who expresses a sentiment that is conspicuously absent some fifty years earlier in the Erasmian *Lazarillo de Tormes*, which undertakes a powerful and sustained critique of an unjust social system (and of “those who inherited noble estates” and thus were favored by fortune rather than by one’s own efforts and merit) and the institutions that sustain it, including a hypocritical Church that has drifted away from the teachings of Christ and has abandoned the poor to their misery.<sup>3</sup>

Cervantes returns to the picaresque on a number of other occasions, most significantly in *El coloquio de los perros*, a story of dogs and witches framed by another novella (*El casamiento engañoso*), whose protagonist (the soldier Campuzano) is revealed to be the writer, or “transcriber” of a colloquy between two dogs (Cipión and Berganza), which he imagines having heard in a state of stupor in the Hospital of the Resurrection in Valladolid while they stood guard at the main gate and he was recovering from a bad case of venereal disease contracted in the course of a deceitful marriage. We better under-



stand the framing of the story when Campuzano leaves the hospital and runs into his friend Peralta, who inquires about his cadaverous physical state and invites him to his house for lunch. After the repast, Peralta is handed the manuscript of the *Coloquio* to read and Campuzano falls asleep, only to awaken at the precise moment that the reading is completed, after which Peralta lauds the good writing and entertainment value of the story and invites Campuzano for a stroll to the mall so that they might stop thinking, enjoy each other's company, and feast their eyes (for a suggestive discussion of this novella, see "Introduction" to this volume).

The *Coloquio* counters the rigidity of the first-person narrative, or center-point perspective as practiced in the picaresque, and calls attention to the disjunction between words and things and the manner in which language can be manipulated. The story also strikes at the rigidity of aprioristic, systematic thought in contrast to a more materialistic and experimental attitude toward a world without certainties. The latter is seen in Cipión's attempts to modulate and correct Berganzá's octopus-like story, as it digresses from a linear type of narration that follows neoaristotelian principles, and in Berganza's resistance to those rules, a resistance that ultimately opens a space for negotiation between the two, especially when Berganza reveals that he is the son of a witch, which arises the curiosity of his friend, who suddenly grows impatient with his own rules.

One of the trademarks of Cervantine writing is the challenge it poses to the discerning "reader" to go beyond the veils of appearance and get at the question of reality and truth. In fact, the implications of theater as spectacle is a recurring motif in much of Cervantes's writing; and in metatheatrical plays, such as *Pedro de Urdemalas* and *El retablo de las maravillas*, this very question is inscribed in their respective textual spaces. One might say that by opting for a narration of the spectacular rather than for the spectacle as such, the discerning "reader" is challenged to reflect on the fictional status of theater and the manner in which it functions ideologically. Such a confrontation with the text is precisely what seems to be suppressed in Lope de Vega's theater, which tends to promote the audience's identification, i.e., integration with the spectacle.

C&E's suggestive analysis of *El retablo de las maravillas* underscores why and how today's media consumers must learn to navigate the performances of present-day hucksters who rely on the consumers' own fundamentalisms to play to their fears and/or desires. In Cervantes's writing, such fundamentalisms are often abetted by ignorance and xenophobia, which play into the hands of "major strategies" that are unmasked through humor, with a hopeful appeal to the discerning "reader" of his time and an enlightened theater-going public (or "emancipated spectator," see Avilés in this volume) of the future. Through it all, Cervantes's writing confronts us with ethical and moral issues that transcend the Spain of Cervantes's time. Perhaps that is

why, in reading Cervantes, one experiences the presence of a human body (as Borges is thought to have said), and to deal with his writing “is to engage in a living dialogue with ‘something’ or ‘someone’ who can speak our own language, and who can be our contemporary” (Spadaccini and Talens, *Through the Shattering Glass* xvi).

The call for a Cervantine-type of skepticism and an ethical “reading” of the world with fiction as our guidepost, is a proposal that can be argued productively (even if there are divergent assessments as to its value in terms of political action), as seen in *Medialogies* as well as in the excellent contributions to this *Polemical Companion*. We agree with C&E that fiction “has the power to infect our beliefs” (“The Screen Behind the Screen” 151), and we have also argued that Cervantes carves out a special place for a discerning, ethical “reader” across his literary production, a “reader” who also speaks in a universal, personal voice that does not lose sight of our common humanity. We also agree about the importance of a humanistic education and the need for analysis and interpretation of “media frames and position reality” (151). Yet, while it may well be that digital technologies “promise us our own personal alt-reality: the world the way we want it” (“The Screen Behind the Screen” 153), in the end, one wonders to what extent we are “really” isolated bodies trapped by the stimulation and promises of technology and are overwhelmed by the pull of the double click and media frames. Despite these slight doubts, it is difficult to argue against an urgent need for media and reality literacy and the importance of an educated citizenry that can “read” and interpret an increasingly complex world marked by cultural and political divisions that often forget our common humanity and destiny.

Today, a baroque major strategy continues to foment ideological formations of masculinity (see Schmidt in this volume), sexuality, wealth, and zombification of the mass consumers of media (see Álvarez-Blanco in this volume). And yet the hermeneutics proposed here require adaptation to contemporary inflationary media that focus critical attention to how copies turn into ineffable things, or as Baudrillard suggests, “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (1). C&E build upon the work of Maravall, Debord, Augé, Benjamin, and Baudrillard to understand the human’s positionality as both producer and product of this form of commodity fetishism. Our ability to grapple with this question in the second age of inflationary media largely depends on an ocular mode akin to the ideology sunglasses of John Carpenter’s *They Live!*, sunglasses that allow us to read the subliminal messages of ideology and commodities alike.<sup>5</sup>

As we have seen in this *Polemical Companion*, film, photography, and other uses of imagery loom heavily on our *visiocentric* age of inflationary media. In fact, the reproduction and proliferation *ad infinitum* of images poses familiar questions to Hispanism: while photographs pretend to be, in and of themselves,

reality, or truth, they raise serious ethical issues pertaining to the pain of others (see Foster in this volume). Richard Sherwin (*Visualizing Law in the Age of the Digital Baroque*) has a slightly different take, which, nevertheless, enriches present-day discussions regarding the question of reality and truth:

For if reality remains unmediated, [. . .] how then can we hope to know, much less communicate its meaning? At the same time, if mediated reality is all there is, if we must live amid endless streams of contingent signifiers that have broken free of the gravitational pull of the real (the signified), what then remains to validate visual meaning apart from aesthetic delight of baroque ornamentation and spectacle? (174)

This question at the heart of *Medialogies* and this *Polemical Companion* alike (see Avilés, Moreira, and Mowitt) remains fundamental for the analysis and use of visual media. Such can be seen, for example, in the capturing of police violence through live streaming, reminding us not only of the need for “ethical optics” or “visual literacy” in jurisprudence, but in everyday life as well.

Humor in the form of parody, irony, and satire are essential to Cervantine skepticism, a hermeneutics in defense of being. This takes on an interesting form if one considers the debate about journalism as we knew it, wherein long held assumptions of the framing of reality have broken down and their contradictions brought to light, often through the use of humor that debunks a kind of romantic/nostalgic interpretation of *Don Quijote* (see Childers in this volume). At times a fact is even turned on its head, as in a recent case of unintended self-parody in the Dominican newspaper *El nacional*, which mistook (and printed) the puckered lips and golden hair of Alec Baldwin’s SNL impersonation (or copy) of Trump for Trump himself (the thing).

C&E conclude *Medialogies* with what they describe as an “almost obnoxiously simple yet totally urgent prescription: more humanities!” (216), a prescription that raises important questions and some skepticism (see Avilés and Moreira in this volume). Yet, the case is often made that a humanistic education strengthens our ability to think critically, to question certainties, to interpret texts, and to think more broadly about ourselves in relation to others (Brooks), something that is, perhaps, even more urgent in this complex second age of inflationary media characterized by new socialities (see Álvarez-Blanco in this volume) and sovereignties (see Souto in this volume), and by the zombification of our social lives. It seems that ours is an age demarcated by modern technologies that enframe the human in pervasive ways: mobile devices, computers, and television constantly threaten to maroon us on those isolated islands of the empires of our own solitude, our own entitled individualism, where data is un-

limited and curated news sources to which we feel entitled lie along ideological lines. Yet, we might be too pessimistic. There are those who are disillusioned by the liberal media, hoping for a more “authentic,” “real” experience of the world, as well as the liberal middle-left who may laugh off the satire of comedians (see Simerka in this volume) and forego other forms of political action, or leave the arena altogether, or adopt stances that could also be seen as being indifferent to the reproduction of a “guided” culture.

Finally, a humanistic education is, perhaps, more important than ever, despite the marginalization of the Humanities from the university curriculum, which is due to many factors, among them the adoption of corporate models of accountability and the promotion of a kind of vocationalism geared to the student consumer, who, in many cases, will have a difficult time repaying student debt. Yet, despite these conditions, we can continue to advocate for the Humanities in light of the very issues raised both in *Medialogies* and this *Polemical Companion* edited by Brad Nelson and Julio Baena. In fact, most if not all of the stimulating contributions also bring into relief, directly or indirectly, the need for media (and *reality*) literacy, issues of concern both in the inflationary media context of the historical Baroque of Spain’s seventeenth century (underscoring the tensions between major and minor strategies as seen in key writers of the period) and in our own inflationary times, as the explosion of new electronic and visual technologies add further complexity to the discussions regarding presentations of reality and truth.

## Notes

1. See Bruno Latour’s chapter three “A Perilous Change of Correspondence” in *An Enquiry into Modes of Being* regarding the question of technology.
2. It is further asserted that poetry should not be conceived of as a marketable commodity (“No ha de ser vendible”), unless it is the stuff of “poemas heroicos” (heroic poems), “lamentables tragedias” (lamentable tragedies), or “comedias alegres y artificiosas” (happy and artificial comedias) (*Don Quijote* II, 16).
3. Some estimates have them run into the hundreds of thousands, if not in the low millions if one were to take into account both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as presses filled their schedules with *pliegos sueltos* to supplement income derived from book printing.
4. Childers (*Transnational Cervantes*, 171–193), provides both a compelling analysis and interpretation of the Morisco question and the matter of islamophobia in early modern Spain, as well as powerful arguments as to why the expulsion need not be

the primary focus of attention today, preferring, instead, to concentrate “on the *convivencia* between Christians and Muslims (or former Muslims) as it is represented in the texts themselves: a complex relationship characterized by a mixture of desire, nostalgia, anger, and fear. The main thing is to see how certain aspects of the cultural past can be useful for understanding and responding to the current situation. Can Cervantes help us learn to recognize the new immigrants [Moroccans] as the descendants of Spaniards long ago expelled, now returned to claim their rightful place within the nation?” (171)

5. See Žižek’s caustic and cogent analysis of postmodern ideology *A Pervert’s Guide to Ideology* directed by Sophie Finnes.

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