

The Renaissance Woman vs. the Woman of the Middle Ages in Cervantes's *Don Quixote*

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*“For the same may be said
of knight-errantry as of love,
that it levels all.”*
(Cervantes)

A Lady Is Needed

CHANGING THE system of religious values for a fundamental secular one and bringing the human being into the center of the universe during the Renaissance imposed significant mutations in the vision on womanhood. This vision is gradually freed from the entire imaginary of corporeal culpability, and also from the allegoric-idealistic corporeality created by the troubadour poetry and the chivalrous novel. Severity and moralism become stale, being replaced by an Epicureanism which comes to assert life's values. *L'uomo piacevole*, whom Dante would have intended for the Inferno, is the greatest sage in regard to the science of emotion, a violently sensual one. This return to reality also shapes literary convention. In the prologues to the two volumes of *Don Quixote*, Cervantes signs a pact with reality and his real readers and defines his novel

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as a self-aware game played by literature and life: “Undoing the conventions of literature, Cervantes exposed the pedantry and artifice of the pastoral, chivalric, byzantine, and epic genres so popular in his day. He drew on all of those genres to produce a new entity that spoke directly to readers and their world.”²¹

By virtue of the general principle saying that “a cultural analysis deals with the structure of an ideology in connection with the relation between mythicisation and demythicisation,”²² Cervantes’s novel becomes a space where different worlds meet; it reveals the old and the new, the idealistic poetics and the realistic one, without losing sight, while dismantling obsolete forms, of the everlasting spirit of chivalry and particularly of its capacity to give life a lofty meaning. Dulcinea is denounced as an imaginary woman and her presence is compulsory in the chivalrous scenario whose essence lies in *mediation*,³ namely, in the existence of a third party placed between the subject and the object of his/her desire. In the present case, the third party is the chivalrous model inferred from bookish sources (among which *Amadís de Gaula* is the most established), a model that *Don Quixote* copies.

One would therefore expect that the woman’s image should oscillate between the outdated forms and a superhuman, supertemporal essence that can influence human events towards an ascending course. Aldonza Lorenzo is the exterior form, a harsh peasant woman, but her spirit’s name is Dulcinea and she is the Lady of the Heart. You cannot be a true wandering knight without a Lady, without being in love. Otherwise, says Don Quixote, you would be a just bastard who enters the fortress of chivalry not through the gate, but by jumping over the walls.

What does the Lady stand for? It is a compulsory banner carried with pride. What is love? Nothing but a formal necessity. The custom is all that remains from the old erotic and fighting structures of chivalry. Love stagnates at the level of masterful rhetoric; there is neither ordeal nor ecstasy in this conceptual feeling, equal to itself, a rather ultimate expression of love for the sake of love. So the Lady of the Heart could be any real lady, no matter how she looks or how she behaves.

In real life, the greatest limitation of Don Quixote remains his incapacity to experience love, which comes from the otherwise objective impossibility to externalize the object of his love. This is an emotional rigidity that was interpreted as “the clear sign of decadence, a revealing testimony of an era drained of human values [the Middle Ages, our note], in which formalism and conventionalism penetrate even the most intimate human levels.”²⁴ The sterility and medieval asceticism preached by the Church reach their ultimate limits, imagining the sublimation of physical love into metaphysical love by denying one of the partners. Don Quixote’s love, which critics have debated upon so intensely, far from being

true love, is not even the sublimation of love, it is an empty form, a beautiful fiction as chivalrous love is, but even less than that, because it lacks an object.

Dulcinea, says Unamuno,⁵ is Gloria, the thirst for immortality as a sublimation of the erotic instinct, in order to give birth to spiritual sons, according to the classic pattern of unhappy love that comes to spiritual fruition. Harold Bloom also sees in Don Quixote “a pure case of the unlived life,”⁶ a chaste man who has spent fifty years of his life within the walls of his house, surrounded by a housekeeper, a niece, somebody who helps him to work his land and two friends, the priest and the barber of the village. His absolute heroism, his insane courage—beyond the courage of any hero of Western literature—would be nothing else than a sublimation of sexual energy, while the delightful Dulcinea would be “the emblem of glory to be attained in and through violence.”⁷ In her honor he grimly keeps his chastity, because love is only a means of transcendence, not a purpose, not even an experience in itself. It is the arms that matter, not the letters or the women. But his woman, like Dante’s Beatrice, is not only the pillar of his world, but also the mirror in which he can see his own image. She reveals the profile of a man for whom love is a state of being; it is the love for an ideal, for everything that is high, beautiful and noble.

Marcela or “Being Yourself”

DULCINEA’S PORTRAIT shows that the ideal woman is a compulsory combination of beauty and virtue, the Greek *kalos kagathos*. Nobility is undoubtedly important, but it becomes a nobility of merit. However, in the novel, the woman has other faces as well, except for that of the Lady of the Heart. The stories inserted within the plot reveal the couple’s problem in many sequences which have a certain epic autonomy. There are stories about burning passions which bring happiness or unhappiness to lovers. Only Don Quixote lives on a sentimental plateau, in a kind of utopia. The others suffer and agonize within the labyrinth of their own emotions, generally arriving to happy conclusions, because they dare make the pact with reality, including with love. All the “other” women are the screen on which Dulcinea’s abstract image is projected.

A classical motif, “the enemy lover,” appears embodied in Marcela, an Amazon in a pastoral setting, and the episode dedicated to her is a praise of free love. Chrysostom, a former student at Salamanca, comes home and dresses as a shepherd with a staff and sheepskin coat, only to follow Marcela, the shepherdess he has fallen in love with. Marcela, orphan of both parents, raised by her uncle who managed her property, was courted for her beauty and wealth by countless suitors, but she rejected any marriage proposal for which she did not feel

ready. Moreover, owing to her voluntary nature, the girl decided to become a shepherdess in order to live free and alone. Two of her qualities become fatal for the men who meet her: the predatory beauty and the kindness she shows to everybody. As Marcela triggers a true “fashion” for pastoral life, young men leave their riches behind and put on shepherd clothes in order to follow her in the wilderness. This girl, who feels the appeal of a different life than the one offered by the eternal wife–mother–grandmother cycle, stirs in the hearts of others the revolt against a dull life. She prompts the revelation of man’s ability to discover himself, to live according to the laws of his intimate nature. More than with her beauty, she magnetizes others with her determination, with her brave heart, with the courage to have another perspective on life. The magic of Don Quixotism is already here.

Marcela’s courteous and open way of being gives delusive hopes to those who see more than friendship in her and drives them to despair. Once they reveal their amorous intentions to her, she becomes intractable and is suspected of cruelty and arrogance. “Marble,” “beast,” “wind,” “wild basilisk” are the metaphors of this new Helen of Troy, a woman of fatal beauty. Among the many victims whom she involuntarily makes there is Chrysostom, the unhappiest, the weakest suitor, since he commits suicide. The enemy lover’s trope appears here in a different light. In troubadour poetry the lover’s “enmity” is deliberate; it belongs to a code of virtue, not to her inner structure. Actually it is all about the playfulness of courtly eroticism which demands resistance of the woman, because it enhances her value, complicates the conquest, extends the delights of the “forbidden fruit” and, of course, sharpens sensuality within the imaginary. The lover’s ailment is deliberate.

This is how things stand with poets like Guillaume de Poitiers, Jaufré Rudel, Cercamon and Bernard Ventadour. With the poets of the “Sweet New Style,” the woman’s image detaches itself from “enmity” to approach the spirit, and sensuality makes room for idealization. From here there is only one step to proclaim the woman as the gateway to the absolute, as Dante does. Along the lines of the medieval ritual, Don Quixote subjects himself to a process of torture, penance and chastisement, and creates real pains from an imaginary guilt. Consequently, he retreats to the Sierra Morena Mountains and punishes himself, taking care to follow his models, Amadís de Gaula and Ariosto’s Roland, the latter driven mad by Angelica’s infidelity. Unlike the troubadours who start from life, but change it in the spirit of art, he starts from art and applies it “in the spirit” of life.

In point of fact, Marcela, this “murderous shepherdess,” symbolizes rebellious, independent femininity, unaffected by emotions or interest in her relation to men. Love means obedience, which is why rebellious Marcela is reluctant to taste it. Her speech at Chrysostom’s funeral, of flawless logic, is the expression

of woman's liberty to follow her free will and her own nature, not the vocation of the species, through which man becomes anonymous: "By that natural understanding which God has given me I know that everything beautiful attracts love, but I cannot see how, by reason of being loved, that which is loved for its beauty is bound to love that which loves it."⁸

Beauty alone is not reason enough for love, because love cannot be born without the help of will, she says. And since she did not encourage Chrysostom in any way, she feels released from any responsibility towards his death.

Marcela is the image of perfect but cold beauty, the image of both the Aphrodite-like and the Artemis-like woman. She does not use her charms, she does not have the intention to seduce, she does not deceive, she does not promise. Nevertheless, she creates disasters among men. Beauty is wasted on this step-daughter of Eve. Marcela is a pastoral Diana who decides to remain a virgin, since, she says: "It has not been so far the will of Heaven that I should love by fate, and to expect me to love by choice is idle." Man's self-respect, as well as the respect for one's own individuality, speaks through her. She is an unprecedented presence in the Renaissance epic, an Amazon not by birth or upbringing, but by choice. This Amazon, the third face of the Renaissance woman—after Eve and Mary, the wife and the nun—is the anticipation of a modern woman, the woman judged not as a sexual identity, but—a substantial change—as a human identity.⁹ From a modern perspective, the motif of the lover's "enmity" is merely a poetic expression of the unequal relations between the two genders.

On the Frailties and Proofs of Virtue: Camilla

A NEW IDEA, brought by Renaissance, is that love is stronger than virtue. No criticism arises from this, no sin taints such an option. A woman is like a bottle you must handle with care for fear of breaking it, according to a song inserted in the novella entitled "The Ill-Advised Curiosity."

The Renaissance woman is no longer an allegory; she is reality. She is as complex as life itself. Virtue remains a fundamental quality, but not without significant changes. It remains a value, but it depends on circumstances and it has to adjust to various life situations. It is frequently associated with nobility, therefore with the highest level of education, because self-construction based on a demanding vision of man is possible especially in this environment. Elitism will suffer many shocks, first through the acceptance of human nature which is the same in any environment, as the supreme law of life, and secondly through some characters embodying images of humanity fulfilled by themselves, not through genealogy or education.

“The Ill-Advised Curiosity” tells us that woman’s virtue should be cherished and that you should not foolishly try to challenge her because you could lose everything. Virtue and honor, as socially induced values, enter here in the equation of love and friendship.

The novella speaks about two inseparable friends, like Achilles and Patroclus or Castor and Pollux. They are such good friends that they trust each other totally. Therefore, only to Lothario can Anselmo entrust the delicate and perverse mission to test the fidelity of his disinterested, beautiful and virtuous wife. This need for certainty will lead doubting Thomas to destruction.

The two friends illustrate the classic conflict between the call of the absolute and the acceptance of the limits of reality. Lothario thinks that beauty must be guarded against temptations. But Anselmo is also right; he believes that “a woman is virtuous only in proportion as she is or is not tempted; and that she alone is strong who does not yield to the promises, gifts, tears, and importunities of earnest lovers.”

You cannot be virtuous only because you fear your husband or because you are not given the opportunity to cheat. Until he has tested Camilla’s virtue, Anselmo cannot cherish what he has and considers he lives a warm and easy life, not a real one. He is a perfect Renaissance man for whom theory is not enough and scholasticism is a simple game. Everything must be checked through experience. But reckless Anselmo makes a mistake: he does not anticipate—as he probably does not conceive of it—the greatest evil that can happen to him, namely, the possibility of his virtuous wife’s falling into his friend’s arms. Under these circumstances, it is natural for his own curiosity to remain unsatisfied, because lovers would have no interest in disclosing themselves.

Virtue is a theory according to this exemplary story with three young people who are perfect thanks to their inborn qualities, social condition, and education. All of them become lost when facing life, because they neglect its strength and bet only on reason and self-control, ignoring the power of feelings. Their story would have been improbable in the Homeric epic. It is hard to imagine Achilles betraying his friend because of a woman. Here we have the script of “an exemplary story,” meaning a realistic one of deep psychological insight.

Three characters, three valuable young people die because one of them is too vain and asks the impossible both from the woman and his friend. All that remains from the whole history is the moral that Anselmo will understand eventually: “A foolish and ill-advised desire has robbed me of life. If the news of my death should reach the ears of Camilla, let her know that I forgive her, for she was not bound to perform miracles, nor ought I to have required her to perform them; and since I have been the author of my own dishonor, there is no reason why...”

The Renaissance woman, as Anselmo says, does not perform any miracles. She is no longer a transcendental essence, she does not intend to stimulate man's propensity for lofty deeds from a distance, because she wants him near her, she wants to cherish the happiness of being with him. Abstract principles and theories do not matter anymore; what matters is only the *hic et nunc* fulfillment. The woman loses a part of her ideality, but gains in realism, without regressing to an inferior, frivolous register. Nevertheless, she does not lose her value; she is only seen in such various contexts which shape her behavior. Her image is not given from the beginning as a prototype, but becomes fluid, a consequence of experience and circumstances. Absolute fidelity, like Don Quixote's fidelity for Dulcinea, can only be found within the boundaries of imagination. Transferred to reality, this fidelity would probably prove its weakness. A character of common sense, the modest daughter of the innkeeper Maritornes, speaks about the illogical scenarios in chivalrous love, but the noble and educated Camilla might speak as well, as the difference of status does not matter. What really matters for the Renaissance woman is to live by the rhythm of nature, to do her best to be happy: "I only know that there are some of those ladies so cruel that they call their knights tigers and lions and a thousand other foul names: and Jesus! I don't know what sort of folk they can be, so unfeeling and heartless, that rather than bestow a glance upon a worthy man they leave him to die or go mad. I don't know what the good of such prudery is; if it is for honor's sake, why not marry them? That's all they want."

In this circuit of ideas, asceticism becomes ridiculous. This Don Quixote, who makes penances in the mountains, stark-naked, hungry, in order to honor the perfect image of his love, is laughable. In fact, all his gestures of gratitude towards Dulcinea become embarrassing and are laughed at. The only reward that our hero expects from all those who rejoice over his "benefits" is to go to Toboso and pay his tribute to his Lady of the Heart. This will cause perplexity to this woman who does not know how courtesy functions. But any other educated woman, instead of this ignoble peasant, would respond the same way, maybe not in manner, but certainly in substance. Camilla, for example, listening to the sonnet composed by Lothario in her honor, skeptically asks him if what love poets say is true and finds out that "as poets they do not tell the truth . . . but as lovers they are not more defective in expression than they are truthful."

For the Renaissance woman words are suspicious, at least as long as they are not confirmed by facts. A long exercise of medieval rhetoric which proved its artificiality and falseness collapses. "Words, words, words!" Shakespeare also says through Hamlet's mouth. Words, multiplied too much, are dangerous; they keep you away from the truth or replace it, as chivalrous books alienated Don Quixote from reality. If they are false, they produce false things, equally danger-

ous. We need them in order to direct our reality, always too narrow and too unsatisfactory, towards the heights of thought and sensibility, but the divorce between experience and idea carries with it the disastrous germ of alienation. And then, instead of elevating, words only measure a huge fracture between worlds that have nothing in common. Don Quixote wants to come closer to the real, consistent and essential life not by way of the chivalrous model—which no longer exists as historical reality—, but through what he knows about it from books. It is a second-degree imitation, as in Plato’s poetic fiction, a successive and all the more dangerous forging of Reality.

Within the Limits of Humanity: Imperfection, but Happiness

LOVE IS born out of admiration of perfect beauty; all stories from the Quixotic novel say it. Beauty has not only the gift to generate feelings, but also to reconcile minds and make people better. Cervantes’s adherence to the Renaissance Platonizing philosophy, that “beauty represents the apex of physical organization” was noticed by G. Călinescu¹⁰ in *La Galatea* and *Persiles y Sigismunda*. All women are so beautiful that, in the end, the title of being the most beautiful is granted, with great hesitation, to the last one to come.

The many love stories with novella-like features scattered throughout the novel may seem to be collateral to the subject, if we do not see them as alternatives to the hero’s “perfect” and virtual love. They do not talk about a fidelity assumed from the very beginning, but about a gradually realized one. “Nothing could be more different from the love depicted in idealistic novels—independent of the surrounding world, perfect, indestructible—than love represented in the novella,” Toma Pavel says,¹¹ contrasting the novella as an established genre of human imperfection to the idealizing genres, respectively to the Hellenistic, chivalrous and pastoral novel. The novella requires psychological and moral truth, hence the typology of the fickle lover—a typology inherited from comedy, but which became, in this case, the object of serious intrigue. This lover, by a process of self-clarification, finds out his abandoned inamorata. It proves at every turn that, unlike the characters’ stability in the chivalrous novel, “in the imperfect world—but perfectible—described by Cervantes, the most honorable characters happen to cheat and those who are the most subjected to errors end by admitting them.”¹²

All the histories inserted in the novel are focused on love pains which finally change into lasting happiness. In place of the couple established once for all in the Hellenistic novel, the lovers’ hesitation in search of the right one occurs. They are lovers who still do not know to love or who do not succeed in remov-

ing the obstacles, reaching a terrible rift. Adultery as a theme appears more and more often in Renaissance literature, drawn out of the popular tradition and exploited in Boccaccio's and Chaucer's novellas, as a response to the medieval utopia of absolute loyalty. That is why Ariosto replaces the heroic dimension with the passion of an Orlando driven mad by Angelica's betrayal.

The combination Cardenio–Luscinda–Fernando–Dorothea quartet reveals, by way of intermingling stories, the avatars of passion when self-ignorance or distrust in the other occurs. The happiness of two couples constituted naturally—that is, through love—is destroyed because of Don Fernando's reckless idea to marry noble Luscinda, Cardenio's fiancée, despite the fact that he had promised to wed a beautiful and intelligent peasant, Dorothea. All that remains for the two disappointed lovers is to consume their pain far from the madding crowd. When the four of them meet, they put together the former events and regain hope on the grounds that a marriage assumed by simple oath is a valid contract, which means that Dorothea must be Don Fernando's and Luscinda must be Cardenio's. This happens at an inn, where Dorothea's words full of insight and love make Don Fernando see his fulfillment next to her and return Luscinda to her rightful husband. The “resolving” Dorothea, one of the best depicted female figures in *Don Quixote*, solves her serious problem of love and honor with tenacity, perfect common sense, with the courage to call things by their names, but also with female delicacy, so that Don Fernando will acknowledge that “it is impossible to have the heart to deny the united force of so many truths.” The moral of the story comes to praise human value, in whose equation beauty and virtue are to be found, but also the dignity of he who appreciates human value in itself, by its merits.

Unrequited love leads to extreme manifestations or is, at least, the cause of madness and of a hunger for absolute solitude, from where either relief, or death may come. Living in seclusion and adopting the bucolic model is an alternative to the injustice suffered in the social world. The reason of clandestinity settles all the avatars of passion. Other couples are included in the same spirit that gives satisfaction to love and removes all the obstacles a couple has to face. It is the case of the interethnic and interreligious love experienced by the Moor woman Zoraida, who leaves her homeland and becomes a Christian for Captain Viedma's sake, accompanying him to Spain. Similar is the love of two teenagers, like Romeo and Juliet: young Luis, the only son of an Aragon knight, runs away from home after Clara of Viedma, the daughter of a modest magistrate. And these youngsters' love is so strong that he tells the servants sent by his father to bring him home that “however you take me, it will be without life,” and the girl recognizes that “I have never spoken a word to him in my life; and for all that I love him so that I could not live without him.” Equally, Basilio, a poor but

gifted peasant, takes the beautiful Quiteria away from the wealthy Camacho on the very day of their wedding. Briefly, with a sword stuck in his chest, Basilio asks his lover to accept him as her husband in his last moments of life according to the initial pledge, which actually happens; but, surprise, soon after the marriage has been announced, Basilio, safe and sound, reveals the trick, which outrages the guests, especially because they realize the bride has been a party to this trick. The conflict is adjusted by Don Quixote's intervention, who says that in love as in war "it is allowable and common to make use of wiles and stratagems to overcome the enemy, so in the contests and rivalries of love the tricks and devices employed to attain the desired end are justifiable, provided they be not to the discredit or dishonor of the loved object." The pragmatic Camacho, instead of falling into melancholy, judges in a realistic way that "if Quiteria as a maiden had such a love for Basilio, she would have loved him too as a married woman, and that he ought to thank heaven more for having taken her than for having given her."

It is interesting that in all these characters of such a different social origin, the strong passion is expressed in a lofty, sober style, with no concrete sensorial details. It is a style which, as Auerbach contends, "as a result of the long-lasting convention, switched, to some degree, from the area of the sublime tragic to the area of the gracious, the sweet and self-irony,"¹³ but still dominates in serious circumstances. This happens because in Cervantes's novel love represents a very serious theme, completely different from the delight encountered in comic texts, with their flippancy and vividness.

Under the Sign of Feelings

SOCIOLOGICALLY, WOMEN'S status in the Renaissance does not register any changes as compared to the Middle Ages, but the important difference lies in their struggle to express themselves. Literature, as a reflection of society, provides a realistic vision of women. The woman is life, she is Eve. She is not regarded as *sub specie religionis* anymore; she is neither a sin to be kept under control by marriage nor an ideal which has to be maintained by lack of consumption, nor a path to salvation, as Dante's Beatrice. She is a living human being. No fiction, no shade, no spirit, but immanence, mind and body at the same time. She's a woman who earns—does not ask, does not expect—the right to reach fulfilment within this life. Bovarism is totally strange to her. As Don Quixote's case shows, Bovarism is rather typical to men, to those who feed on the written word and not on the reality they experience.

Don Quixote shows two polar perspectives on women, which reciprocally define this narrative construction based on the law of reverse symmetry. The ridicule of idealism serves the realistic cause. After all, there are two types of women in this book, rightly considered a cornerstone of the modern realistic novel; these types mark a turn in the collective mentality: the imaginary and the real woman, respectively the purely idealistic, abstract vs. realistic, concretely erotic one. The Middle Ages fear the subjugating power of the flesh, they decree the opposition body–soul and conceive love as unconsumed history with the thought that physical experience will lead to exhaustion. But the absolute refusal betrays the fear of losing control in managing “vice” (physical love). In this context, Jaufré Rudel’s “amor de lonh” can make a career in the ideology of love. The Renaissance, rediscovering, through the ancients, the unity between spirit and substance, seeks beyond the body for the divine essence of love, seeks transcendence into immanence. Transcendence being always an open way, the possibilities to explore the body become limitless. The *Song of Songs* said nothing else but that God himself can be glimpsed in the other’s beautiful body and in the intoxication of the senses. Here is Marsilio Ficino Platonizing on the insatiableness which the physical union, so much despised by the troubadours, contains within itself: “This explains why the lover’s effusion is not extinguished neither at the sight nor at the touch of any body; for he does not want this or that body, but he wants the light of supreme greatness that dwells in bodies; this is what he marvels at.”¹⁴ The immortal aspiration towards higher forms on the existential scale induces into love a perpetual sense of dissatisfaction, stimulating the melancholy which is the very spark that rekindles desire.

The Renaissance woman is considered above all in her relation to love. She is highly sensual, an Aphrodite from head to toe. This attribute is the common denominator of all the women in the novel, irrespective of their social position, age, religion and marital status. There are virgins who abandon themselves without hesitation to the power of passion, married women of noble condition who discover outside marriage the hidden faces of love, courageous maids like Altisidora, who are not ashamed to declare their feelings, but all of them are women who live intensely and who are determined to tenaciously follow their purpose, which is happiness. Nothing fits the Renaissance woman better than the motto “memento letari” which comes to replace the medieval “memento mori.” True happiness is always conquered, sometimes paid for dearly, but never abandoned. If circumstances are not favorable to them or if they do not feel anything, as in Marcela’s case, women choose, out of fidelity to themselves, a life of solitude, not the compromise, and assume all responsibilities which arise from their courageous decisions. The intuition of the personality occurs for the first

time in this framework of female typologies. And personality is not necessarily equated with chosen beings, with leaders, as in the old epics, but can be found in the common man.

*Mundus imaginabilis*¹⁵ and *Realia* constantly clash in the work of Cervantes. The one who holds the central place in the ideology of the work, Dulcinea vs. Aldonza Lorenzo, can be the emblem of the Renaissance spirit, as she illustrates the shift from myth to reality, the intention of non-idealization. Perfection does not exist, Cervantes's novel tells us, there is only perfectibility. The perfection of "Dulcinea's model" is that of an icon you must worship, otherwise a dead letter in the book of life, as long as she cannot stir the Eros. From this point of view, *Don Quixote* denounces, symptomatically, a big gap in chivalrous literature. □

Notes

1. Lisa Vollendorf, "Cervantes and His Women Readers," *Romance Quarterly* 52, 4 (2005): 312.
2. Ion Cordoneanu, "Sex și ideologie," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 2, 6 (2003): 185.
3. René Girard, *Minciună romantică și adevăr românesc*, trans. (Bucharest: Univers, 1972).
4. Ioana Mustață, *În preajma lui Don Quijote* (Bucharest: Roza Vânturilor, 1991), 45.
5. Miguel de Unamuno, *Viața lui Don Quijote și Sancho*, trans. (Bucharest: Univers, 1973), 132.
6. Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York–San Diego–London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 133.
7. *Ibid.*, 135.
8. All the quotations are taken from Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, translated into English by John Ormsby [online]. Available at: http://www.online-literature.com/cervantes/don_quixote/ [29 March 2012].
9. Margaret L. King, "Femeia Renașterii," in *Omul renascentist*, ed. Eugenio Garin, trans. (Iași: Polirom, 2000), 241–284.
10. G. Călinescu, "Cervantes," in *Scriitori străini* (Bucharest: ELU, 1967), 217.
11. Toma Pavel, *Gândirea romanului*, trans. (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008), 119.
12. *Ibid.*, 122.
13. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: Reprezentarea realității în literatura occidentală*, trans. (Bucharest: ELU, 1967), 374.
14. Marsilio Ficino, *Asupra iubirii*, trans. (Timișoara: Editura de Vest, 1992), 116.
15. A concept defined by Henry Corbin—*L'Imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn Arabi* (Paris: Flammarion, 1958)—in order to designate fantasies as self-sustained, ontological beings and used by Corin Braga in connection with the related concepts

of “imagination” and “imaginaire”: “Neoplatonic, Muslim, Renaissance, or Romantic fantasy has an *imaginal* quality: it can give material form and presence to incorporeal ideas and essences. *Mundus imaginalis* is a world of metaphysical images, having the same consistency and reality as the world of Platonic ideas.” Corin Braga, “‘Imagination’, ‘imaginaire’, ‘imaginal’: Three concepts for defining creative fantasy,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 6, 16 (2007): 65.

Abstract

The Renaissance Woman vs. the Woman of the Middle Ages in Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*

The present study depicts the hypostases of the Renaissance woman in Cervantes’s antichivalrous novel *Don Quixote*. All these hypostases lead to a common element: the real woman, the woman who feels and lives according to her human nature, versus the imaginary woman belonging to chivalrous literature. The many feminine characters populating Cervantes’s work—Camilla, Marcela, Luscinda, Dorothea—are, unlike their literary predecessors, the Ladies of the Middle Ages, prominent expressions of free will. Even though sociologically speaking the women’s status during the Renaissance does not register mutations as compared to the previous era, the marked difference promoted by literature lies in their struggle to achieve fulfillment as human beings within life’s boundaries.

Keywords

antichivalrous novel, Renaissance, Aphrodite-like woman, idealist/realistic love