

MARGOT ARCE DE VÁZQUEZ

HUMANIST OF THE YEAR 1981



Master Conference

"THE IDYLIC IN QUIJOTE: THE STORY OF MARCELA AND GRISÓSTOMO"

When Dr. Arturo Morales Carrión, executive director of the Puerto Rican Endowment for the Humanities, told me that the Board of Directors had agreed to invite me to be Humanist of the Year for 1981, I believed this honorable distinction to be awarded more for personal reasons, due to feelings of friendship. I accepted it feeling equally moved by my affection for these good friends: for Arturo, whom I have known since he was an intelligent, thoughtful youth already committed to his career as historian; for Dr. Ricardo Alegría, a long-time friend, from whom we have learned so much about recognizing and valuing our national culture. To both of them, and to my good friends on the Board of Directors, my deepest thanks for such generosity. May God help me live up to the task without disappointing you!

Cervantes, technician of the novel

Some critics have criticized Cervantes for having interjected into the Quijote of 1605 various stories that, at first glance, appear to have no relationship to the main story of the nobleman and his attendant. Upon a closer reading, however, we discover the close ties, the role that these narrations play within the general plan of the work. As Américo Castro has noted, Cervantes was no "natural genius." He was one of the most audacious experimenters in the field of the novel, with full awareness of what he was doing and what he was proposing. The rigor with which he composed his works, the importance and prominence he gave to each detail are reason enough for us to be sure that all of the episodes and tales that appear in Quijote are there because they are needed, and are filled with meaning. One of the obstacles that must be overcome in interpreting any baroque work is, specifically, discovering the rigorous order that is hidden behind what appears to be disorder.

The Quijote of 1605 is of special interest because Cervantes, while creating a myth and an immortal symbol, proposed within the novel the idea of the art of novel writing and created the form of the modern novel. If the literary discussions that take place throughout the narration were ripped from Quijote, we would find a kind of treatise about the novel that is very useful - or, better yet, indispensable - for understanding and analyzing Cervantes' own novels. Cervantes has examined and written about all of the types of novels in fashion in the Golden Age. *La Galatea*, from 1585, is a pastoral novel; *Los Trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*, from 1616, a Byzantine novel. Within the Quijote of 1605 are pastoral narrations: the one about "Marcela and Grisóstomo"; sentimental narrations; picaresque, those of "Dorotea and Cardenio"; that of *Gines de Pasamonte*; psychological, that of the *Curioso Impertinente*; folkloric, that of the "Pastora Torralba"; and Moorish, that of "Cautivo". This Quijote, and the one of 1615, as well as the *Novelas Ejemplares*, take on the new form discovered by Cervantes, which the great novelist believed appropriate for expressing the destiny of modern man in conflict with society.

In the "famous scrutiny" of Chapter VI of the first Quijote, Cervantes examines the chivalresque novels and the pastoral novels and passes definitive judgment upon them; he

condemns the first to be burned and saves the latter, although he reserves the right to expurgate them. And in the Preface, he assures us that his work "has its sights set on demolishing the unfounded machinery of those chivalresque books, loathed by many and praised by many more." In effect, the first eight chapters of the first part of Quijote, and various later episodes, take the form of a parody of the chivalresque novels, in which the mocking and the truth are subtly intertwined.

For the hero of the great novel, reading these books has become much more than a distraction: it has disturbed his "fragile understanding" to the point that he decides to restore the past order of errant knights. In this way, Cervantes brings the literary topic to his work and to all of the subsequent discussions about the art of narration.

From the point of view of the truth, don Quijote - the man - has discovered his calling by reading the chivalresque novels and has recovered a firm awareness of who he is. "I know who I am," he says, "and I know what I may be not only those I have named, but all the Twelve Peers of France and even all the Nine Worthies, since my achievements surpass all that they have done all together and each of them on his own account." Cervantes, so fond of reading that he would even read "the scattered papers in the streets," thus shows the marvelous power of reading. And he perceives the novel, as Unamuno will later see it, though from an ontological point of view, as an efficient instrument for exploring mankind. If the chivalresque novel is judged harshly - although he liked reading them so much - it is because he believed its form and content did not respond to the new baroque social circumstances. And they could not speak to a man who had definitively moved away from medieval ideals. For a similar reason, he expurgates the pastoral novels, because they express the humanistic ideals of the first renaissance and not those of the bourgeoisie of the 17th century. Don Quijote's niece, who belongs to that bourgeoisie and who lives in the realm of history, also wants the pastoral novels condemned to burn. Said the niece:

"If you can grant me the favor, send them to be burned like the rest; because it would be no good if, having healed my uncle of his chivalresque illness, he read these and got the urge to become a shepherd and go about the forests and meadows singing and strumming, and what would be even worse would be to become a poet, which they say is an incurable and contagious disease." But the priest, with greater discretion, saves the pastoral novels. Cervantes will analyze them in the second part of the Quijote of 1605, as part of the story of Marcela and Grisóstomo. This analysis and its findings will be the topic of this humble reflection.

Summary of the story of Marcela and Grisóstomo

The story of Marcela and Grisóstomo covers chapters XI and XIV in the second part of the first Quijote. Having victoriously completed the adventure of the Biscayan (Chapter IX), don Quijote and Sancho quietly talk about chivalresque themes (Chapter X). As night falls, they are taken in by some shepherds who, with spontaneous hospitality and courtesy, invite them to eat, treat don Quijote's wounds and perform for them a rustic version of a love ballad. In the middle of this gathering, don Quijote declares the dawn of the Golden Age (Chapter XI). At that moment, a shepherd arrives from a neighboring village and brings the news of Grisóstomo's death from love for Marcela, and announces he will be buried the following day. Full of curiosity, don Quijote asks about the protagonists and the events leading up to his death, which the shepherd relates in words that don Quijote corrects (Chapter XII). Early in the morning, they all leave for the burial. On the way, don Quijote strikes up a conversation with Vivaldo, another person going to the ceremony out of curiosity, and they talk about errant knights and chivalresque love.

The burial takes place with great pomp, presided over by Ambrosio, Grisóstomo's friend and scrupulous executor of the semi-pagan wishes in his will. When Ambrosio sets out to burn his disgraced friend's papers, Vivaldo tries to stop him from carrying out such

an irrational wish and he snatches the pages of the Canción Desesperada. Out of courtesy, Ambrosio agrees not to burn the papers Vivaldo has taken (Chapter XIII). Reading the Canción leads to a debate over Marcela's responsibility for the events. In the middle of the discussion, the beautiful shepherdess appears atop a rocky outcropping. Ambrosio rebukes her, and she answers with a defense of her conduct, demonstrating her innocence. Don Quijote understands Marcela's reasons and stops the witnesses to the burial, now dazzled and attracted by her beauty, from following her. After the ceremony, everyone leaves and don Quijote sets out to look for Marcela, who has disappeared into the trees. He goes after her, but can find her nowhere (Chapter XIV).

Telling of the story of Marcela and Grisóstomo and Part One

In the first part (Chapters I-VIII), Cervantes had presented to us his hero, don Quijote, and his social and spiritual circumstances. He had described to us the causes of his insanity and his unwavering aim to become an errant knight, and he had told us of his first outing. The adventures that happened to him, his return to his village, "a shattered nobleman on a silent steed," and the futile efforts of his friends and family to cure him of his knightly mania - and along with that, the scrutiny of the books in his library. He had also begun the description of the second outing, accompanied by his attendant Sancho Panza and he suffers - as he describes it - the adventures of the windmills and the friars of San Benito and begins his encounter with the Biscayan. Here, the story is interrupted while Cervantes tells how he sought to find the rest of this "tasty story," motivated by a desire to know about the life and miracles of don Quijote, the first "in our age and in these such calamitous times" who set for himself the task of protecting damsels in distress. At last we continue in Alcalá of Toledo, among the papers of a certain Cide Hamete Benengeli, a dishonest Arab historian. (As a result of these papers, Cervantes talks about the art of history and the qualities of attention to detail, honesty, impartiality and courage that historians should be blessed with.) Then immediately we return to the ending of the adventure of the Biscayan. The combat renews with equal violence and the final victory goes to don Quijote.

The first part - these eight chapters - expresses the general theme of the novel: man's destiny in conflict with society. They begin the analysis of the main character and introduce the literary theme that leads to his insanity. That he proposes to restore the errant knight in the present - "in these calamitous times" - implies a confrontation between the present and the medieval past. The eight chapters are also a parody of the chivalresque novel, a form that Cervantes considered totally used up at the time he was writing, in 1605. Cervantes, a tax collector, imprisoned for debts, hurt and smiling by nature, contemplates the hero of Lepanto's dreams of glory and the magnanimous prisoner of Algiers, now bankrupt in a society of "priests, innkeepers, dukes and merchants." The entire novel is summarized in these eight chapters; the second and third outings are very detailed expansions of this brief initial sketch and, as in a symphony, the themes appear and disappear, intertwine and separate, and are enriched through repetition and various variations.

Upon reaching the adventure of the Biscayan, the novelist creates an interruption to abandon his parody of the chivalresque genre and to begin a new form of novel; to save the elements of the pastoral novel that can still be used, while discarding everything artificial in the form; to distance himself definitively from the Gothic ideals and to evoke melancholically the ideals closer to the humanistic renaissance, and to show us most of all, magnificently, the theme of love.

Motivation of Marcela's story

The shift has been set up carefully. In Chapter II, don Quijote, tired and hungry, looks everywhere "to see if he could find some castle or some shepherd's plot where he could take shelter." He comes to an inn, which he mistakes for a castle. In the second outing,

Chapter XI, don Quijote finds a shepherd's corral and takes shelter there. In Chapter VI, he has saved the pastoral novels from the fire and finds problems with their improbability. When Cervantes looks for Cide Hamete Benengeli's manuscript, in Chapter IX, he is interested in the ending of a story in which the hero uses irony: "in these so evil days the sort of damsels who used to ride about, whip in hand, on their palfreys, with all their virginity about them, from mountain to mountain and valley to valley; for if it were not for some ruffian, or villain with a hood and hatchet, or monstrous giant, that forced them, there were in days of yore damsels who at the end of eighty years, in all of which they never slept a day under a roof, went to their graves as much maids as the mothers that bore them."

These words make a joke of the improbability of the journeys in those novels and serve as a framework and a preface to the discussion of the Golden Age, in which don Quijote, situating himself on the levels of poetry and the idyllic life, asserts that "then it was that innocent and fair young shepherdesses roamed from vale to vale and hill to hill, with flowing locks ... alone and unattended, without fear of insult from lawlessness or libertine assault, and if they were undone it was of their own will and pleasure. But now in this hateful age of ours, no one is safe, even if some new labyrinth like that of Crete conceals and surrounds her; even there, the pestilence of gallantry will make its way to them through chinks or on the air by zeal of its accursed importunity and, despite all seclusion, lead them to ruin." Marcela will be an example of those free and willful figures of the past, a precious symbol of the purest ideals of the renaissance. An example of these, in the present day, is the enchanting Dorotea, a victim of the "accursed importunity" and the "pestilence of gallantry," who will have to struggle alone amid the dangers of the world and of the flesh to recover her honor and her love within the framework of matrimony.

Meaning of the interruption of the adventure of the Biscayan; the way to the idyllic.

At the beginning of the second part, after the violent encounter with the Biscayan, the pace of the narrative again becomes calm and placid. There are no more battles, but rather a calm dialogue about various topics of conversation. Don Quijote is satisfied with his victory. Sancho, full of faith; the night, under the silence of the stars, surprises him with the friendly and respectful acts of the shepherds. All of these notes are preparing us for the ideal, cultured, more poetic than true setting for Marcela's story. Now it is not don Quijote, the nobleman of that forgotten place of La Mancha, whose life passed "not so long ago" in the character of Cide Hamete Belengeli's story.

The events of his life beyond our view take on perspective and are broadened and enriched through a multitude of characters and details. To create in the reader this illusion of a new dimension to the tale, Cervantes has resorted to interrupting the story with a technique similar to "stop motion" in the cinema: the rapid succession of images is suddenly stopped with the immobility of a painting. The passion and spirit of the earlier moment – that of the illusion that the hero sets off to conquer reality – gives way to quiet reflection about the contrast between the past and the present, and the evocation of all of the beauty of beloved and definitively lost ideals. Nostalgia for this idyllic world is one of the most active ingredients in the novelist's spiritual life. This is shown by *La Galatea*, certain passages in *La Gitanilla* and *La Ilustre Fregona*, and by Persiles, and with his words, in the preface to the first *Quijote*, that lament having written it in jail. "The peace, the tranquil spot, the attractiveness of the countryside, the serenity of the heavens, the murmur of the fountains, and the tranquility of the spirit, are a large part of making the most sterile muses become fecund and give birth to the world of marvels and joy." What a melancholy protest from the creator, who is obliged to steal back from his work the precious moments he has wasted on the ungrateful who care only for the physical world!

Analysis and meaning of Marcela's story

In this part of *Quijote*, the scene of the dinner with the goatherds plays the role of the portico to Marcela's story. Cervantes offers us an image of pastoral life, as it is in reality. The goatherds are simple, hospitable, spontaneously courteous and charitable; they eat rustic delicacies, drink in excess and recognize and respect the spiritual hierarchies. Finding himself among them, don Quijote, feeling the enchantment of the nature and the moral beauty around him, feels himself transported to the world of poetry. He quickly tells Sancho to sit beside him and eat from his own plate, because in that ideal plain there are not distinctions of class, just the supreme and essential law of love that equalizes everyone. But Sancho refuses the offer because, he says, he prefers to eat more comfortably and without fussy manners. Cervantes has thus delicately pointed out three levels: that of the natural man, unconcerned and anarchic, represented by Sancho; that of the goatherds, who live a life that is simple, but that is ruled by some rudimentary social customs; and that of don Quijote, rooted in the poetic universal, in the ideal of freedom, subject only to the supreme law of love. Along the way - and implicitly - he has revealed, with this image, all the falseness and artifice of the hypocritical figures of the pastoral novels.

It is at this moment that don Quijote sings his praise for the mythical golden age. His melancholy words evoke the happiness and perfection of times that are now gone forever. The moment is deeply beautiful: the desirable harmony between poetry and reality, between spontaneous culture and humanistic culture, has been realized; the union between reason and nature that was longed for by the Renaissance. On one hand, the shepherds; on the other, the speech. Neither gets in the way of the other. Appearing here and there amid the marvelous style are subjective expressions with which the Cervantes of 1605 years for the dreams of heroism and the poetry of the captive in Algiers. The nostalgia for those ideals still stirs the quiet reflection, the result of such bitter experience. But everything is warm and friendly, everything is idealized and made more beautiful. And everything is plausible, thanks to the skillfully realistic touches of the rustic image. Equally rustic is the tone of the pastoral romance that follow as the speech. In popular verses, in simple and sly words, the goatherd sings of his beloved's disdain. These verses have nothing in common with the conventional ones, or the highly cultured songs inserted into pastoral novels. Their function is, precisely, to point out their artifice.

The narration of Marcela's story, which immediately follows, raises everyone's curiosity. It had already stirred up the village and divided the opinions of the men. The central theme of the tale is "the contrast between man's circumstances and his way of being and feeling." Grisóstomo, with his humanistic education, is the victim of impassioned disorder; Marcela, rich and desired, abandons everything to achieve her calling of a contemplative life. She, who appears to be most free, has voluntarily subjected herself to certain idealistic values. Both disguise themselves as shepherds, though they are not. Cervantes clearly lets us know that he considers the style of the pastoral novel to be the learned and contrived product of humanism. Don Quijote corrects the careless pronunciation of the shepherd who tells the story, to emphasize his educated speech.

The conversation with Vivaldo, on the way to the burial, covers chivalresque topics. Don says that the profession of an errant knight is narrower than that of the friars. The debate is not out of place in this part of the novel, where the world of chivalresque action is contrasted with that of bucolic contemplation. The confrontation is expressed through the polarity of Don Quijote-Marcela. The second topic of conversation is that of the role of women in the chivalresque books. Vivaldo condemns that definition of women as moralistic. We immediately are about to see if the woman of the pastoral novel is the satisfaction of man's senses or the cause of his pain or unhappiness. Marcela has caused Grisóstomo's desperation and death.

The burial takes place with much pomp and baroque drama. Vivaldo reads *La Canción Desesperada*, and the shepherd's rustic ballad contrasts with his cultured vocabulary, the artificiality of his form, and the Petrarchism of his content. The poem leads to a discussion of Marcela's conduct. She appears, atop a rocky crag, with blinding beauty, and puts an end to the debate with her marvelous speech, one of the most perfectly beautiful pages Cervantes has written. Marcela resolves the issue of her cruelty by affirming the gratuitousness of love and the superiority of the contemplation of ideas. "By that natural understanding that 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." She affirms her freedom to choose her state and declares, "I was born free and that I might live in freedom I chose the solitude of these fields; in the trees of these mountains I find my society, the clear waters of these brooks are my mirrors; with the trees and the water I share my thoughts and my beauty... As you know, I have wealth of my own, and I covet nothing that belongs to others. I am free and I wish to be subject to no one; nor do I wish to reject anyone; I do not mislead anyone, nor pursue one, nor trifle with this one or play with that one. Honest conversations with the young people of these villages and the care of my goats entertain me. My desires are bounded by these mountains and if they ever wander hence it is to contemplate the beauty of the heavens, steps by which the soul travels to its primeval abode."

Here is the splendid opening of the great theme of love in Quijote. Cervantes begins with the highest love, the intellectual love in the strictest sense that Plato describes in *The Banquet*. Marcela has rejected human love to raise herself to that summit of perfection from which mankind can contemplate eternal beauty. Her words recall the serene and limpid verses of the *Oda a Francisco Salinas* by Maestro Luis de León and underline the superiority of spiritual beauty: - "Honor and virtue are adornments of the soul without which the body, although it may appear beautiful, should not. And if honesty is one of the virtues that most adorns the body and soul, why must she who is loved for her beauty lose it, because another puts all his efforts and energy into urging her to lose it just because of his attraction to her?" But this pure yearning, this just preference for higher values has caused a tragedy. The dead Grisóstomo lies at the feet of the incomparable Marcela, victim of the eternal conflict of emotions, of the troubles, of human relations, of the enchantment and the mystery of the feminine.

Marcela's speech closes the tale with the same tone of idealism that opened it with the speech about the Golden Age. The perfect and clear reasoning, the nobility of the ideas, the prestige of classical culture, the peaceful breadth of the rhythm, and the procession of words leaves an impression of silences, of harmony... Those present, enthralled, want to follow the imitation shepherdess, but Quijote stops them. Only he understands her reasons and recognizes in her his equal.

For her, it will not be necessary to carry out the duties of chivalry. She, herself, is enough. Her own virtue protects her from lasciviousness. She disappears into the trees and don Quijote searches for her in vain, as he searches for Dulcinea without finding her. Marcela is not flesh and blood. She is the beautiful symbol of the past, ideal and already lost forever. Going after her, don Quijote finds the present, represented in the human and adorable figure of Dorotea, the answer to Marcela. But before he finds Dorotea, don Quijote has the adventure of Rocinante and the ponies (Chapter XV). From the summit of platonic love, we descend abruptly to the level of animals. The irony of Cervantes takes pleasure in these unexpected and sour contrasts, in the tragic plane's debt to the comic.

In the third part, Cervantes sets out to examine the problem of sentimental conflicts in the baroque society of the 17th century. To do this, he relates various stories that revolve around the topic of two speeches: that of don Quijote about the Golden Age and that of Marcela to defend herself against those who blame her for Grisóstomo's death. Cervantes

sets out the conflict between Virtue and Lasciviousness that was not a part of the chivalresque novel nor the pastoral novel. In baroque society, woman would have to oppose the masculine lasciviousness, a heroic and human virtue, would succumb at times to temptation, but would triumph in the end, keeping carnal desires within the bounds of matrimony, then recently revised by the Council of Trent.

Cervantes also discusses in this part the literary problem of the difference between history and the novel (the real lives of the goatherds versus the fictional lives in the pastoral novels) and, also, the validity of the bucolic genre. We are told that the chivalresque books are a dead genre, only fit for parody. The content of the pastoral novel – the relationship between man and woman – is spared, but the artifice of its form and setting are criticized. Finally, he points out the need see the conflicts of emotion in the form that the urban social environment demands. Thus, the novels to come will follow the form of model novels and will analyze the loving relationship from a psychological and realistic point of view.

The protagonists of the following novels, Dorotea, Lucinda, Zoraida and doña Clara, are endowed with beauty, virtue, humanity, and moral awareness. Maritornes will be compassionate and Anselmo will lose his life because of his impertinent curiosity separates him from the idealism in the novel. Cervantes creates a narrative form that, like a painting by Velázquez, casts a brilliant glance at all the dimensions of human life and its conflicts, with its disturbing complexity.