

Cervantes's "Republic": On Representation, Imitation, and Unreason

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This essay deals with the relation between representation, imitation, and the affects in *Don Quixote*. In so doing, it focuses on Cervantes's Platonist poetics and his own views of imitation and the books of knighthood. For though much has been written on the topic, little has been done to explain the source of his poetics, as for instance, the basis of his critique of certain forms of art, and why he considered them, along with the Greek philosopher, to be harmful to the psychological health of both individuals and the "republic" at large. Plato and Cervantes obviously belonged to different traditions, cultures, and history, but at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning seventeenth century a handful of commentaries on Plato ignited interest in his ideas in the peninsula. A number of important essays, some which will be referenced here, gave new life to ancient disputations. And Cervantes was very much aware of these ongoing contemporary debates.

Hence, when Cervantes mentions Plato and Aristotle in his Prologue (1973 52/2005 4), he is not merely thinking of them as citable philosophical figures with which to impress his readers, but as thinkers whose ideas impacted his own practice of writing. If he rarely mentions them directly, he often alludes to them, and particularly to Plato, and the Platonist poetics of his contemporaries in a variety of ways. The best example is when he surreptitiously uses the philosophically loaded term "república" or republic in *Don Quixote*. Although most readers, translators, and critics have until now deemed the word unimportant, the word "república" is in fact the entry point to Cervantes' Platonist critique of the novels of knighthood, and his notions of writing, imitation, and the emotions.¹ Significantly this ancient query regarding the impact of artistic expression on the psyche remains to date unresolved and very much debated. In the age of reality TV, video games," Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994), Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* (1998), and *Black Mirror*, the question is currently addressed by affect theory. And thus, in this way, Cervantes' Platonist aesthetics continues to be relevant, even in an age when busts of him are foolishly destroyed.

I

Two pivotal subjects of Plato's *Republic* are imitation and education. And Plato is very clear as to which forms of artistic expression are either prejudicial or beneficial to his Republic. In light of this, Plato was critical of Homer's depiction of the gods (e.g. Zeus) and demigods (e.g. Achilles) as overly sensuous, sexual, violent, and unstable personages. "And if a poet writes of the gods in this way we shall be angry and refuse him the means to produce his play. Nor shall we allow such poetry to be used in educating the young," wrote Plato (1941 III. 387: 74-75). Thus, according to Plato, if one was to have a strong, healthy society, its art had to promote "healthy" values. Any poetry or theater that would make the guardians cowardly or even fearful of death, was the kind of poetry that had to be discouraged or censored. And hence, it was necessary to tone down the language and imagery employed by poets like Hesiod and Homer. Scenes and passages

¹ "In Golden-Age Spain...knowledge of Plato as a critic of literature was not likely to have been very great or very detailed," writes B.W. Ife in *Reading and Fiction in Golden-Age Spain* (20). The exception was someone like Juan Luis Vives (to whom we shall return later). But the claim here is not that Cervantes was directly conversant with Plato's works or even with *The Republic*, but instead that Plato's critique of literature would have been known to Cervantes through certain essays that were widely known and read at the time.

describing excessive behavior needed to be removed if one was to have functional citizens and guardians. Plato wrote:

We must get rid of all terrifying language, the very sound of which is enough to make one shiver [referring to Homer's representation of death] : "loathsome Styx," "the River of Wailing," "infernal spirits "anatomies," and so on. For other purposes such language may be well enough, but we are afraid that fever consequent upon such shivering fits may melt down the fine-tempered spirit of our Guardians. So we will have none of it; and we shall encourage writing in the opposite strain. (*Ibid.* III.387:75)

This is why excessive behavior was not to be depicted. A society of well-balanced and moderate (*sôphrôn*) individuals called for the inculcation of moderation and self-control rather than irrationality, emotional excessiveness, and dissonance. The gods were to be represented as just, moderate, and rational, i.e. exemplary models.

Children and the young imitate what they hear and see; therefore, according to Plato, it was important to depict behaviors that were good for their psychological well-being, and for the stability of the Republic. In fact, what makes the Republic at all possible for Plato is the (correct) configuration of the *psychē*. Or to be more precise, its tripartite structure, wherein Reason came first, followed by the spirit, and desire or the appetites last. It was only when these parts of the soul were in harmony, and in the correct order, that one had achieved the kind of psychological structure that made the complex Republic possible and just. The inversion of this, with desire or the appetites atop the hierarchy and reason at the bottom, was viewed by Plato as the psychological model that corresponded to sickness or madness: in the best case, democracy, in the worst case anarchy. This is why the arts were not to appeal to the appetites as their guiding principle, but rather to reason. To portray and emphasize the ire (*thumos*) and madness of gods/goddesses and heroes/heroines was to promote unreason. For Plato, art could shape our psyche, and hence our behavior and our morals as well. One, then, needed to enjoy them with caution.

II

Curiously, and initially even surprising, in *Don Quixote*, we come across a treatment of writing and its impact on the emotions that recalls Plato's in *The Republic*. In Chapter VI of the novel, the curate, with the help of the barber, selects which books in Don Quixote's library to preserve and which to burn. Reminiscent of Plato's *Republic*, it is the authoritative voice of reason—in this case the curate, representing the church—who determines which literary genres are and are not psychologically beneficial to the society. Don Quixote, we are told, is a casualty of the "novels of knighthood." And in Chapter XLVII, in the episode where Don Quixote is transported in an oxcart cage back home, the book-burning curate from Chapter VI meets the Canon of Toledo along the way. Here the curate explains the reason for Don Quixote's captivity and the source of his madness, to which the Canon of Toledo responds with a lengthy discourse on the dangers of reading books of knighthood (*libros de caballerías*). The canon, then, turns to the curate and says:

"Verdaderamente, señor cura, yo hallo por mi cuenta que son prejudiciales en la república estos que llaman libros de caballerías." (I.XLVII 564)

"Truly, sir curate, I find by own estimation that these so-called books of knighthood are prejudicial to the *republic*." (author's translation, emphasis added)²

² From here on "author's translation" will be designated with the initials "a.t."

One would think that any reader with a modicum of curiosity would want to know what Cervantes meant by “república.”³ Yet surprisingly, not a single English language translator of *Don Quixote*, from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, has translated the word “república” as its direct cognate: “republic.”⁴ And here I dare suggest that if they did not do so is because its English cognate did not make sense to them. Spain in the seventeenth century was not by any means a republic, or at least, not in the modern-day sense of the word.⁵ So perhaps the translators interpreted Cervantes’ use of “república” as an erudite allusion to the Latin *res publica*, and translated the otherwise inexplicable noun as “common weal,” “common wealth,” “nation,” and “public good.” However, what I want to argue here is that Cervantes employed the word “república,” neither arbitrarily nor as a way of demonstrating erudition, but rather because he was very purposely alluding (1) to a post-Platonist, sixteenth century notion of *republic*, and (2) to Plato’s view of literature in *The Republic*.⁶ This will clearly require some initial unpacking, firstly by contextualizing the ways in which the concept of “república” was understood by late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Spanish writers, up to and including Cervantes; and secondly, by considering how Cervantes employed the concept of *república* in his critique of the books of knighthood. As such, then, one may want to begin with the section in Plato’s *Republic* where Socrates differentiates between a well-organized, ethical *polis* and a badly-organized, unethical city-state:

...our aim in founding the commonwealth was not to make any one class especially happy, but to secure the greatest possible happiness for the community as a whole. We thought we should have the best chance of finding justice in a state so constituted, just as we should find injustice where the constitution was of the worst possible type... (Book IV 420b 107)

In short, for Plato “republics” or more accurately city states (*politeia*) could either be just or unjust, depending on their structure. The just polis, based on reason, had the philosopher king as its leader (Book V 473b 174). This was not so, however, for Cicero who baptized Plato’s original text with the name of *Res publica*. For when Cicero translated the title, the term *res publica* (public property) was exclusively associated with the well-organized political power of the people, or as he put it “res publica res populi” (Book I XXV). Cicero wrote: “‘So, then,’ said Scipio, ‘a republic is a thing that belongs to the people. And the people is not just any gathering, but rather the assemblage of a multitude, united by a sense of justice [*iuris*], and common goods’” (Book V XXV, a.t.). This transformation of the Greek *politeia* or hierarchical city-state into the Ciceronian/Roman notion of a society based on civil justice (a social contract of sorts) was significantly new. Yet in

³ Cervantes used the word “república” on five other occasions in the first volume: Chapter XXV (303); Chapter XXXII (397); Chapter XLVII (566); Chapter XLVIII (571); and Chapter XLIX (579).

⁴ Jarvis translated it as “common weal” (1867 301); Cohen as “commonwealth” (1951 424); Rutherford as “the public good” (2000 439); Grossman as “the nation”; and Montgomery as “the state” (2009 367).

⁵ Though this was undoubtedly the case, the word “república” was used by some Spanish writers in the sixteenth century to mean a “well-governed” state or political community (*polis*): the human, terrestrial counterpart to the city of God. Thus when Marco Antonio de Camos writes “bien gobernada y perfect República”/“well governed and perfect Republic” (1592 36) this is what he means: i.e. the ideal governance of a political state; which is why kings have a role to play within this “perfect Republic.” Camos writes: “It is Socrates’ opinion that the art and means of governing cities and republics, requires the kind of royal knowledge that pertains to Kings...” (36). Published in 1592, *Microcosmia y gobierno universal del hombre christiano para todos los estados y qualquiera de ellos* is a philosophical dialogue between Turritano, Benavente, and Valdiglesia.

⁶ For almost two thousand years we have known and referred to Plato’s classic text as *The Republic* largely because this was the way that Cicero translated it. The actual title of Plato’s text was *Politeia*, or “City-States.”

the fourth century, Augustine questioned Cicero's use of the term in reference to Rome. The licentiousness, avarice, criminality, and Godlessness of Rome, argued Augustine in *The City of God*, proved that Rome was anything but a just republic. Rome, "the city of the ungodly, which did not obey the command of God that it should offer no sacrifice save to Him alone, and which, therefore could not give to the soul its proper command over the body, nor to the reason its just authority over the vices, is void of true justice," wrote Augustine (1871 Book XIX 24 340).

It is nearly impossible not to recognize echoes of Plato in such a passage. And so as to make it patently clear that it was indeed Plato (and Cicero's Plato) to which he was referring, Augustine wrote: "...if there is no justice in such an individual, certainly there can be none in a community composed of such persons. Hence, therefore, there is not that common acknowledgement of right which makes an assemblage of men a people whose affairs we call a republic" (Book XIX 21 332). Justice, as in *Plato's Republic*, is to be located both in the individual and in the body politic; and a just republic is a Christian republic: where the rational soul predominates over the bodily desires. This is the reason why Cervantes' Canon declares that the books of knighthood with their "inconceivable deeds, lascivious loves, indecent flirtations, overlong battles, absurd reasoning, crazy journeys; and in short, foreign to sober *artifice*⁷, deserve to be exiled from the *Christian republic*, like *useless*⁸ people" (Cervantes 1973 1. XLVIII 566, a.t., emphasis added). It should be pointed out, nevertheless, that this Platonic/Augustinian notion of a "Christian republic" was not in any way some kind of archaism. Writers of Cervantes' time, like the already mentioned Marco Antonio de Camos frequently, used the term to refer to an ideal Christian government.⁹ In his 1592 philosophical dialogue, *Microcosmia y gobierno universal del hombre christiano*, Camos explained the concept of a Christian Republic as derived from Plato:

Plato cautioned us to be careful regarding which books to bring to light, and prohibiting according to the laws of the Republic those that could be harmful. Accordingly, he himself banished Homer and Hesiod from his Republic...[Now], those of us who live in

⁷ Much like in *Plato's Republic*, it is not poetry itself that is condemned in this passage, but rather a particular kind of poetry or literary artifice practiced by certain poets. Alonso López Pinciano (a.k.a. El Pinciano) has Hugo, one of his interlocutors in *Filosofía antigua poética* say that whatever one may think of Plato, the latter did not "reprimand art in general, but rather the craftsmen [los artifices]...who wrongfully used their art by making people fearful and terrified of death" (91,92, a.t.). And a few pages later, again in reference to Plato, Fadrique says that in an earthly Republic "humans are bad and they should be educated by means of literary creation [artificio] to follow good moral teachings" (98). *Filosofía antigua poética*, a dialogue featuring three interlocutors, Hugo, Fadrique, and El Pinciano, was published in 1596. Though impossible to prove, E.C. Riley theorizes in *Cervantes' Theory of the Novel*, "that Cervantes was indeed indebted to El Pinciano" (1992 8).

⁸ The term used by Cervantes is "gente intuil", a term that bears multiple meanings; for the comparison he makes is significantly between useless texts and useless people. Just as useless people should be exiled from the Republic; "useless" texts should suffer the same fate and be banished. The notion that poetry and literature as a whole should not only entertain but also educate, and thereby be useful, has two major sources in the tradition. One is, of course, Plato, and the other is Horace whose dictum it was that poetry ought to be "dolce et utile" or "sweet and useful." Both of these thinkers are invoked in the passage above. "As we have already said, all art should be aesthetically good, useful, and necessary; and Plato, as we already stated banishes poetry for being disturbing and false..." writes López Picinano (96, a.t.), blending Plato with Horace. Horace was reinvented in the sixteenth century as an Aristotelian philosopher by thinkers like Alessandro Piccolomini (1508-1578) and Vincentius Madius (1498-1564). Madius, for one, emphasized the morally didactic function of Horace's poetics (Gilbert and Snuggs 1947); and in this manner Horace was coopted by the church.

⁹ See footnote 3.

the Christian Republic [Republica Christiana] should heed his advice and pay attention to the great harm and little good these books [of fables and knighthood]¹⁰ do in ours. (3, a.t.)

Novels of knighthood were classified under the category of fables: understood as fictions lacking in verisimilitude. The Canon, as such declares: “‘In my opinion, this kind of writing and composition belongs to the genre called Milesian tales [fábulas]¹¹, which are foolish stories meant only to delight and not to teach, unlike moral tales, which delight and teach at the same time” (Cervantes 2005 1.XLVII 411-412).¹² The world portrayed in the books of knighthood was a world of fantasy, irrationality, immoderate desires, and lies, and thus they failed to meet the Platonic imperative “set upon truthfulness” (*The Republic* 388 76). However, it is worth mentioning that when Plato writes “truth,” he does not mean truth *per se*, devoid of pedagogical praxis, but the kind of representational truth the poets ought to model. And so in this light Socrates explains to Adeimantus what he finds objectionable in Homer. Socrates declares:

“‘If it were not for my regard for Homer, I shall not hesitate to call it downright impiety to make Achilles say to Apollo: ‘Thou has wronged me, thou deadliest of gods; I would surely requite thee, if I had but the power.’ And all those stories of Achilles dragging Hector round the tomb of Patroclus and slaughtering captives on the funeral pyre we shall condemn as false, and not let our Guardians believe that Achilles, who was the son of a goddess and of the wise Peleus...was so disordered that his heart was a prey to two contrary maladies, mean covetousness and arrogant contempt of gods and men.” (Plato 391 77)

And in the middle of the sixteenth century, Juan Luis Vives, who agreed with Plato’s banishing of Homer from the Republic (1913 126) wrote:

There are some things which almost always increase vice, and detract from virtues, e.g., disputations, quarrelsome, contentious books, in which the intellect arms itself against truth, and by an impious affectation of condemnation of the truth prefers to hide the truth, rather than yield to it. To the same class belong books which praise vices, such as cruelty, love of money, tyranny, fraud. But of licentious writings, such as the *Milesian Fables*, than which there is nothing more silly or more impure, there are many among the poets... (1913 33, emphasis added)

Interestingly, by the late sixteenth century, the so-called Milesian fables mentioned in *Don Quixote*, had not only been equated with immoral, pagan literary models of imitation, but more specifically with the books of knighthood. In fact, in 1596, Cervantes’ contemporary, Alonso

¹⁰ “[C]osas prophanas: fabulas, libros de cavallerias” (3)/“Profane things: fables and books of knighthood.” And later he writes: “‘In the city of God and the Christian Republic one finds everything, but incomparably so; with greater excellence and perfection...something which temporal Republics will never achieve, because the Christian Republic we have just mentioned is what we call the Church...” (14, a.t.). It should be mentioned, however, that even before Camos, Francisco Díaz Romano, the printer of Diego de Cabranes’ *Abito y armadura spiritual* (1554), declared that profane books like chivalric novels were to be kept out of the Christian Republic/“la republica christiana” (7).

¹¹ One well-known example of the Milesian genre is Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass*, written circa 160 C.E.

¹² “Y según a mí me parece, este género de escritura y composición cae debajo de aquel de las fábulas que llaman milesias, que son cuentos disparatados, que atienden solamente a deleitar, y no a enseñar: al contrario de lo que hacen las fábulas apólogas, que deleitan y enseñan a la misma juntamente” (Cervantes 1973 1.XLVII 564).

López Pinciano, had Hugo compare the ancient “Milesian fictions” with contemporary “Books of Knighthood,” and conclude that both these genres, “feature events that neither provide good models of imitation nor have any semblance to the truth” (1596 174-175, a.t.). An excellent illustration of the former is El Pinciano’s story of what occurred to his friend Valerio. Having both been invited to a wedding, a few minutes after dinner Valerio retired early to bed with a book, as he usually did, while the celebrations continued. After a while a distraught young maid interrupted the festivities to announce that Valerio had died. Fortunately, however, it was soon discovered, El Pinciano tells us, that his friend had merely lost consciousness. Intrigued by the episode El Pinciano then asked him what had caused to him to faint, to which Valerio answered: “Nothing, sir, I was reading the *Amadís*, where news of his death is announced by [the evil enchanter] Archelaus, and I felt so bad that I began to cry...I don’t know what else happened or what else I felt after that” (95). El Pinciano then declares: “One can easily infer from this case how much harm these fictions can do; for our reader Valerio is not the only one who has ever been perturbed by the *Amadís*, but also many others like him who have been enticed to read it” (96, a.t.). As Ife says in *Reading and Fiction in Golden-Age Spain*: “The story is also interesting for the way it highlights the mental and physical imbalance associated with an over-active imagination. Don Quixote suffered from the same problem: lack of sleep and too much reading dried up his brains and constant physical hardship prevented him from gaining his sanity. The heat of Valerio’s emotion was such that he completely lost consciousness and became dead to the world” (1985 54).¹³

Significantly, the section on Valerio ends with the following exchange between Fadrique and Hugo on the question of the Platonic critique of poetry in relation to novels of knighthood like the *Amadís*:

...Fadrique said...Pinciano is right that Plato did the right thing when he opposed this kind of prejudicial art, of such little benefit.

I don’t agree, said Hugo, because if poetry is disturbing it is so for the sake of peace and the greater good,¹⁴ so it’s Plato who is not right in this case, and in my opinion he did not understand the wondrous thing that is poetry.

Fadrique, then said: Art can be, as we said before, good, useful, and necessary; and Plato, as we have also said, banished poetry for being disturbing and false, and thus Plato was both right and not right to do so. (96, a.t.)

We find a similar ambivalence towards the art of making fiction in Chapter VI, where the barber and the priest ironically debate the artistic and moral qualities of particular books of knighthood. Though Cervantes himself seems to have had some reservations about the *Amadís de*

¹³ It is also striking that the episode of Valerio’s temporary loss of consciousness due to his bed-time reading of the *Amadís* takes place at an inn.

¹⁴Hugo is arguing here for Aristotelian *catharsis* (*Poetics* 6.1449b24-28); the notion that the theatrical representation (in tragedies) of negative emotions like fear and pity can have an emotionally clarifying effect on the listener or reader, and therefore serve a therapeutic function. The much debated concept of catharsis takes up a mere four lines in the *Poetics*, something which I believe reflects Aristotle’s greater emphasis on genre and form than on the relation between mimesis and the emotions. It has also been interpreted as a refutation of Plato’s banishment of Homer from the Republic. For Aristotle, Homer’s heroes and events represented the ideal unity of action and wholeness (8.1451a29-35).

Gaula (“*Las cuatro de Amadís de Gaula*”/*The Four Books of Amadís of Gaul*), it is the barber¹⁵ who ultimately saves the *Amadís* from the pyre.

“This one seems to be a mystery, because I have heard that this was the first book of chivalry printed in Spain, and all the rest found origin and inspiration here, so it seems to me that as the proponent of the doctrine of so harmful a sect, we should, without any excuses, condemn it to the flames.”

“No, Señor,’ said the barber, ‘for I’ve also heard that it is the best of all the books of this kind ever written, and as a unique example of the art, it should be pardoned.”

“That’s true,’ said the priest, ‘and so we’ll spare its life for now.”
(Cervantes 2005 1.VI 46)¹⁶

Yet this is not the only Golden-Age text where the *Amadís* is mentioned as an example of a dangerous book in Platonist terms. In *Microcosmia y gobierno universal del hombre christiano*, Benavente, one of the interlocutors, says:

“Things have improved over the time, with respect to calling attention to those books written in romance... People used to live without paying attention to these things; everything revolved around profane things: fables and books of knighthood; and even though the *Four Books of Amadís of Gaul*, was previously considered to teach the courteous behavior and language used by knights (...)...these books along with others are full of lies; they fail to portray true stories or offer examples of any use (*utilidad*).”
(Camos 2-3, a.t.)

These are precisely the kinds of books, says Turritano that Plato banished from *The Republic* (3). Both knights and Homeric heroes are fictions depicting extraordinary characters in implausible circumstances (battling gods and giants), performing extraordinary actions, and not always behaving well. Even Don Quixote recognizes (at the beginning of Vol. II) that not all knights are exemplary or even worthy of the name (Cervantes 1978 2.VI 82/2005 2.VI 493). And yet, the moral and psychological question of representation and imitation is only one part of the debate. The other part, Platonic-Aristotelian in nature, concerns form. Though they are related, they first need to be considered separately before being united. The Canon, for instance, declares that the soul takes delight in things that are ordered and harmonious, but that the books of knighthood fail to give pleasure precisely because they are full of ugliness and disorder. The Canon says:

¹⁵ It is worth noting that it is the barber, a professional of the age, who advocates saving the *Amadís*. See Sara Nalle’s “Table 5: Profiles of Ninety-one Readers from the Dioceses of Cuenca 1560-1610 by Genre.” Here she lists doctors, barbers, apothecaries, notaries, and students of Latin as comprising 12% of the readers /owners of “chivalric novels” (1989 92).

¹⁶ “Parece cosa de misterio esta; porque he oído decir, este libro fue el primero de caballerías que se imprimió en España, y todos los demás han tomado principio y origen deste; y así me parece que, como a dogmatizador de una secta tan mala, le debemos, sin excusa alguna, condenar al fuego.”

“No señor, ” dijo el barbero, “que también he oído decir que es el mejor de todos los libros que de este género se han compuesto; y así, como a único en su arte, se debe perdonar.”

“Así es verdad,’ dijo el cura, “y por esa razón se le otorga la vida por ahora.” (Cervantes 1973 VI 110-11)

“Although the principal aim of these books is to delight, I do not see how they can, being so full of so many excessively foolish elements; for delight conceived in the soul must arise from the beauty and harmony it sees or contemplates in the things that the eyes of the imagination place before it, and nothing that possess ugliness and disorder can please.” (Cervantes 2005 1.XLVII 412)¹⁷

But for Plato the question of the representation of harmony and disorder had more to do with formal order (the unity of the parts) and psychic wholeness than it did with aesthetic pleasure. Plato writes:

We would not have our Guardians grow up among representations of moral deformity, as in some foul pasture, where day after day, feeding on every poisonous weed they would, little by little, gather insensibly a mass of corruption in their very souls. Rather we must seek out those craftsmen whose instinct guides them to whatsoever is lovely and gracious; so that our young men, dwelling in a wholesome climate, may drink in good from every quarter, whence like a breeze bearing health from happy regions, some influence from noble works constantly falls upon the eye and ear from childhood upward, and imperceptibly draws them into sympathy and harmony with the beauty of reason, whose impress they take. (III. 401: 88)

In *Don Quixote*, however, in addition to the question of mimesis and psychology, there is also a discussion related to form (genres and literary composition) that is both Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian in nature. Therefore, in Chapter XLVII, the Canon of Toledo says:

“What beauty, what proportion between parts and the whole, or the whole and its parts, can there be in a book or a tale in which a boy of sixteen, with one thrust of his sword, fells a giant as big as a tower and splits him in two as if he were marzipan... What mind, unless it is completely barbaric or untutored, can be pleased to read that a great tower filled with knights sails the seas like a ship before a favorable wind, and is in Lombardy at nightfall, and by dawn the next day it is in the land of Prester John of the Indies, or in others never described by Ptolemy or seen by Marco Polo?” (Cervantes 2005 412)¹⁸

Such representations would violate, according to the Canon, the very laws of mimesis and verisimilitude. He goes on:

“Fictional tales must engage the minds of those who read them, and by restraining exaggeration and moderating impossibility, they enthrall the spirit and thereby astonish, captivate, delight, and entertain...none of these things can be accomplished by fleeing

¹⁷ “Y puesto que el principal intento de semejantes libros sea el deleitar, no sé yo como puedan conseguirle, yendo llenos de tantos y tan desaforados disparates que el deleite que en el alma se concibe ha de ser de la hermosura y concordancia que ve o contempla en las cosas que la vista o la imaginación le ponen delante; y toda cosa que tiene en sí fealdad y descompostura no nos puede causar contento alguno” (Cervantes 1973 1.XLVII 564-565).

¹⁸ “Pues ¿qué hermosura puede haber, o qué proporciones de partes con el todo, y del todo con las partes, en un libro de o fábula donde un mozo de diez y seis años da una cuchillada a un gigante como una torre, y le divide en dos mitades como si fuera de alfeñique...? ¿Qué ingenio, si no es del todo bárbaro e inculto, podrá contentarse leyendo que una gran torre llena de caballeros va por la mar adelante, como nave con próspero viento, y hoy anochece en Lombardía, y mañana amanezca en tierras del Preste Juan de las Indias, o en otras que ni las descubrió Tolomeo ni las vio Marco Polo?” (Cervantes 1973 1.XLVII 565).

verisimilitude and mimesis, which together constitute perfection in writing. I have seen no book of chivalry that creates a complete tale, a body with all its members intact, so that the middle corresponds to the beginning, and the end to the beginning and the middle, instead they are composed with so many members that the intention seems to be to shape a chimera or a monster rather than to create a well-proportioned figure.” (Ibid)¹⁹

As anyone can readily see, this time the Canon’s critique of the novels of knighthood is wholly formalistic. “In words recalling the Horatian monstrosity and Aristotle’s unified, living organism, which must be entirely visible to the glance of the beholder, the canon employs an analogy which was used by nearly every theorist of the century who chose to attack the multiplicity of plot and protagonist in the romance,” writes Alban K. Forcione (1970 93). What the Canon finds objectionable in the genre is not so much its deleterious impact on the education and psyche of the citizens of the Christian Republic, but its lack of logical and mimetic unity; its disorder and lack of internal coherence.²⁰ Here we can see where Aristotle breaks from Plato on the question of mimesis and verisimilitude versus truth. Aristotle distinguished poetry from history because for him poetry was the creation of a certain “truth” very different than that of history—an argument that is revisited in *Don Quixote* in neo-Aristotelian terms.²¹ For admired as Aristotle continued to be, neo-Aristotelian writers of import respectfully begged to differ to with Aristotle’s idea that poetry or fiction of whatever kind was in any way superior (philosophically or otherwise) to history.²² In fact, one genre was not to be confused with the other, or even be mixed. This very important debate takes place in Chapters XLVIII and XLIX. In Chapter XLVIII, for instance, the curate objects to the fictional and incorrect use of historical facts in popular plays. He says:

“...if mimesis is the principal quality a play should have, how can it possibly satisfy anyone of even average intelligence if the action is supposed to occur in the days of King Pepin and Charlemagne, but the central character is the Emperor Heraclius, who entered Jerusalem bearing the cross, and conquered the Holy Sepulchre, like Godfrey or

¹⁹ “Hanse de casar las fabulas mentirosas con el entendimiento de los que las leyeran, escribiéndose de suerte que, facilitando los imposibles, allanando las grandezas, suspendiendo los ánimos, admiren, suspendan, alborocen y entretengan...y todas esas cosas no podrá hacer el que huyere de la verisimilitud y de la imitación, en que consiste la perfección de lo que se escribe. No he visto ningún libro de caballerías que haga un cuerpo de fábula entero con todos sus miembros, de manera que el media corresponda al principio, y el fin al principio y al medio; sino que componen con tantos miembros, que más parece que llevan intención a formar una quimera o un monstruo que a hacer una figura proporcionada” (Cervantes 1973 1.XLVII 565).

²⁰ In the *Poetics* Aristotle wrote: “The truth is that, just as in the other imitative arts one imitation is always of one thing, so in poetry the story, as an imitation of action, must represent one action, a complete whole, with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any of them will dislocate the whole” (8.1451a30-35).

²¹ This is what Aristotle wrote in the *Poetics*, which caused so much controversy: “From what we have said it will be seen that the poet’s function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable or necessary. The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose, and the other verse—you might put the work of Herodotus into verse, and it would still be a species of history; it consists really in this, that one the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature of universals, whereas those of history are singulars” (1451b1-8).

²² One possible reason for the neo-Aristotelians’ disagreement on this point is because the Bible was considered history, and thus to say that the truth of history was just different from that of the novels of knighthood would have amounted to heresy. It would have been like saying that there is very little difference between the *Book of Judges* and the *Amadis*, which Cervantes actually comes close to saying.

Bouillon, when there is an infinite number of years between one and the other; if the play is based on fictions, historical truths are introduced and parts of others combined, though they occurred to different people and at different times, and this is done not with any effort at verisimilitude, but with glaring errors that are completely unforgivable.” (Cervantes 2005 416)²³

Here we see the curate argue 1) for the separation of *historiae* as the account of actual events that took place at a *particular* moment in time, and *historiae* as *universal* stories or fictions (free of specificity) of “things that might be” or could have happened; and 2) for a notion of empirical or epistemological unity. Interestingly, El Pinciano, too, is reluctant to accept Aristotle’s hierarchical distinction between fiction and history, and finds a way of differentiating verisimilitude from truth. “I had no intention of returning to the question of verisimilitude, because I didn’t want bore anyone, but since the conversation has turned to it, I have no other option than to deal with something that continues to bother me,” says El Pinciano, “and that is my difficulty with the Philosopher’s [Aristotle’s] teaching that the poets ought to describe things as a simulation of the truth [“verisímil”], because if they are a simulation they cannot be the truth; so in short, I say, narrations that are truthful [“verdaderas”] are not simulations of the truth [“verisímiles”]” (221, a.t.).

Fadrique, always the accommodating one, argues that although eclipses are natural phenomena they can also be simulated or fictionalized [“fingido”] (Ibid); such, he says, constitutes a poetic simulation of the truth (“verisímil”). This separation between the truths of fiction and those of nature and history, are maintained in *Don Quixote* by both the curate and the Canon. In Chapter XLIX the Canon challenges Don Quixote’s mixing of fiction with history. “How is it possible that any human mind could be persuaded that there has existed in the world that infinity of Amadis...” says the Canon to Don Quixote (2005 423),²⁴ as one might say today to an adult believer in Santa Claus or the Three Wise Kings. The Canon continues:

“And if, following your natural inclinations, you still wish to read books of adventure and chivalry, take the scriptures and read the Book of Judges, and there you will find great truths and deeds as authentic as they are brave. Portugal had its Viriatus, Rome its Caesar, Carthage its Hannibal, Greece its Alexander. Castile its Count Fernán González, Valencia its Cid...and reading about their meritorious deeds can entertain, teach, delight and amaze the finest minds. Now this would be reading matter worthy of your excellent understanding, my dear Don Quixote, and it will make you knowledgeable about history...” (Cervantes 2000 452)²⁵

²³ “Y si es que la imitación es lo principal que ha de tener la comedia ¿cómo es posible que satisfaga a ningún mediano entendimiento que, fingiendo una acción que pesa en tiempo del rey Pepino y Carlomagno, el mismo que en ella hace la persona principal le atribuyan que fuel el emperador Heraclio, que entró con la Cruz en Jerusalén, y el que ganó la Casa Santa, como Godofre de Bullón, habiendo infinitos años de lo uno a lo otro; y fundándose la comedia sobre cosa fingida, atribuirle verdades de historia y mezclarle pedazos de otras sucedidas a diferentes personas y tiempos, y esto, no con trazas verisímiles, sino con patente errores, de todo punto inexcusables?” (Cervantes 1973 I.XLVIII 570)

²⁴ “Y ¿cómo es posible que haya entendimiento humano que se dé a entender que ha habido en el mundo aquella infinidad de Amadis...?” (Cervantes 1973 I.XLIX 577).

²⁵ “Y si todavía llevado de su natural inclinación, quisiere leer libros de hazañas y de caballerías, lea en la Santa Escritura el de los Jueces; que allí hallará verdades grandiosas y hechos tan verdaderos como valientes. Un Viriato tuvo Lusitania; un César, Roma; un Aníbal, Cartago; un Alejandro, Grecia; un conde Fernán González, Castilla; un Cid, Valencia...cuya lección de sus valerosos hechos puede entretener, enseñar, deleitar y admirar a los más altos

But quite humorously, the Canon is unprepared for Don Quixote's defense of his beloved books of knighthood which he takes as the true stories of knights. He objects to the Canon's judgment and rejects the idea that "the books of knighthood are false, untrue, harmful, and useless to the republic" (1973 1.XLIX 579, a.t.).²⁶ The deeds of knights-errant, like the Amadís (whether of Gaul or Greece), argues, Don Quixote, are true stories worthy of imitation. The truths of the books of knighthood, he says, have been accepted by everyone. And from this point on he goes on to mix fictional characters with historical figures, which includes his claim that he is the direct descendant of the historical-mythical Spanish knight, Gutierre Quijada. Charlemagne, Juan de Merlo, and the Cid, then, are historically undifferentiated from Hector, Achilles, King Arthur, Lancelot, Guinevere, and Tristan and Isolde. The Canon astonished by Don Quixote's lumping together of historical figures with fictional characters, responds by saying: "As for the Cid, there can be no doubt that he existed, and certainly none about Bernardo del Carpio, but I think it exceedingly doubtful that they performed the deeds people say they did" (2005 1.XLIX 427).²⁷ In this way, the Canon, as a representative of the Neo-Aristotelian position, distinguishes between verisimilitude and (historical) truth. What the Canon seems to find most bewildering about Don Quixote's rebuttal of his criticism is the way in which the latter uses syllogistic logic to argue in favor of the irrational, i.e., the "rational" method of his madness. Consequently, what *prima facie* appears to be an Aristotelian argument is subsumed under a Platonist critique of imitation and psychological well-being. For failure to distinguish between the "real" actions of the Cid and his "fictional" deeds; between the historical Julius Caesar and the literary Amadís; and to acknowledge the difference between history and poetry, leads to madness.

III

Homeric poetry was problematic for Plato primarily as a dramatic art, and not as literary genre in the modern sense. As Erick Havelock and Walter Ong have argued, poems like Hesiod's *Theogony* or Homer's *Iliad* were not read in Plato's time but rather recited and performed.²⁸ Epic poets had to think of their audience and use mnemonic devices that would make it easier for the listeners to follow the plot. "Linguistic statements could be remembered and repeated only as they were specially shaped: they existed solely as sound, memorized through the ears and practiced by the mouths of living persons," writes Erick A. Havelock in "The Alphabetization of Homer" (1982 167).²⁹ "Plato," writes Havelock in *Preface to Plato* "is not interested in the distinction between

ingenios que los leyeren. Esta si será lectura digna del buen entendimiento de vuestra merced, señor don Quijote, de la cual saldrá erudito en la historia..." (Cervantes 1973 1.XLIX 578-579)

²⁶ "... todos los libros de caballerías son falsos, mentirosos, dañadores e inútiles para la república" (Ibid. 579)

²⁷ "En lo de que hubo Cid no hay duda, ni menos Bernardo del Carpio, pero de que hicieron las hazañas que dicen, creo la hay muy grande" (Cervantes 1973 1.XLIX 582-583). A similar critique is made by El Pinciano in *Filosofía antigua poética* who holds that Heliodorus' *History of Ethiopia* is a not a historical text but rather a poem "lacking in historical knowledge, full of errors" (459, a.t.). Interestingly, as Alban Forcione, points out: "The age which witnessed the discovery of Heliodorus' *Ethiopian History* and the emergence of the *Poetics* of Aristotle as the theoretical basis of literary taste was also the age in which the romance of chivalry reached its apogee" (1970 13).

²⁸ "If one wishes to think that Homer composed his poems orally, and then sat down and wrote them out, there is little that can be said in disproof, and little that needs to be said, since the questions ceases to be one of the oral style, and becomes that of the way in which the spoken word was recorded," writes Milman Parry in his essay, "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse Making. I: Homer and Homeric Style" (1971 322). See also Gregory Nagy (1996) for the role that the *rhapsōidoi* or itinerant performers played in the interpretation of the Homeric characters they portrayed.

²⁹ In *Preface of Plato* Havelock gives us the following example of the kind of repetition used by Homer:

Hector is dead; Hector is dead

epic and tragedy as genres, which we find familiar, but in basic types of verbal communication” (1963 21). Because for Plato, then, Homeric poetry manipulated its listeners by means of redundant epithets and metric repetition, the City State ran the risk of sacrificing rational analysis to the emotions. The auditory/oral experience, as Walter Ong points out in *Orality and Literacy* is a bodily experience. The oral word, writes Ong, “never exists in a simply verbal context, as a written word does. Spoken words are always modifications of a total, existential situation, which always engages the body” (1982 67). This is why for Plato the problem of mimesis resided in the audience-reciter relation. The best “singer of tales,” to use Albert Lord’s term, was he who had the ability to have a hypnotic effect upon his listeners. Havelock writes:

The mental effort required is difficult for the literate mind wholly to imagine, but it obviously meant a total absorption, a mental immersion in the act or recital. Plato described it by the term *mimesis*, which in this context comes close to meaning the “miming” of a mythos, its acting out by sympathetic identification with the characters and actions described.(1982 174)

Now, if the audience could become so emotionally captivated by a recitation, to the point of physically and emotionally identifying with the character(s), then one could understand why this would be an issue for a philosopher who privileged reason over the appetites. Any form of poetry (epic or tragic) which triggered negative emotions (e.g. fear, resentment) and caused violent or irrational behavior, was both psychologically and socially dangerous in a reason-based city state. This, argues Havelock, helps explain Plato’s different but related concepts of *mimesis* in Book III and Book X of the Republic. Havelock writes:

As he dissects the poetic account, so he also seeks to define that part of our consciousness to which it is designed to appeal, and to which the poetic language and rhythm are addressed. This is the area of the non-rational, of the pathological emotions, the unbridled and fluctuating sentiments with which we feel but never think. When indulged in this way they can weaken and destroy that rational faculty in which alone lies hope of personal salvation and also scientific assurance. (1963 26)

As for Cervantes, to whom we will now return, the psychological danger resided in both the embodiment of texts, oral and written, and in the affective identification with fantastical characters and events that could lead to madness. That is, in the failure to distinguish between different forms of representation and truth, and the external from the internal world.

IV

It has been said on many occasions that *Don Quixote*, as the first modern novel, marked the transition from an oral to a literate culture. The advent of the printing press made all kinds of books, religious and literary, much more accessible to the general population. It also contributed to a greater number of people being able to read, if not always to write. Sara T. Nalle writes that in the sixteenth century, cities like Valencia, Cuenca, and Toledo enjoyed a literacy rate of between 34% and 57% for males and between 4% and 16% for females (1989 68). “On average, between

*Hector is dead; fallen is Hector.
Yea Achilles slew him
Hector is defeated, Hector is dead. (1963 147)*

1474 and 1560, one third of Valencian males and 16 per cent of the females who made wills did own books and therefore presumably were literate,” writes Nalle (70). And by the seventeenth century a city like Cuenca could count with literacy rate of 52% for males and 28% for females, while in Madrid an astonishing 69% for males and 26% for females (68). These figures culled from depositions conducted by the Inquisition give us a good idea of the increasing number of people who could read the year *Don Quixote* was published. The literary consumption of chivalric novels was mixed with the oral transmission of the same—a fact that is reflected throughout the novel. “I have *read* many extremely serious histories of knights errant, but never have I read, or *seen*, or *heard*, of enchanted knights being carried in this fashion...” says Don Quixote about the strange evil enchantment that landed him in the cart cage (Cervantes 2005 1.XLVII 405, emphasis added).³⁰ Don Quixote’s passing remarks about what he knows concerning enchantments is very telling, for it reveals that his knowledge is derived as much from books as from oral stories (presumably performed: seen and heard). However, it is in Chapter XXXII that the intertwining of the oral and literary transmission of texts is made most evident; for when the priest declares that the books of knighthood are responsible for Don Quixote’s madness, Juan Palomeque, the innkeeper, comes to their defense:

“I don’t know how that can be; the truth is, to my mind, there’s no better reading in the world; I have two or three of them,³¹ along with some papers, and they have put life into me, and not only me but other people, too. (Cervantes 2005 267)³²

Palomeque not only likes books of knighthood; he even boasts of owning two or three of them. And while he doesn’t say anything about reading them, he says he likes listening to their stories.³³ “I can tell you that when I *hear* about those furious, terrible blows struck by the knights, it makes me want to do the same, and I’d be happy to keep *hearing* about them for days and nights on end” (Ibid. 267, emphasis added).³⁴ These adventurous chivalric novels, Palomeque tells us, are occasionally read by some harvester that is staying at his inn:

“Because during the harvest, many of the harvesters gather here during their time off, and there’s always a few who know how to read,³⁵ and one of them takes down one of those

³⁰ “Muchas y muy graves historias yo he *leído* de caballeros andantes; pero jamás he leído, ni *visto*, ni *oído* que a los caballeros andantes los lleven desta manera” (Cervantes 1973 1.XLVII 557, énfasis añadido).

³¹ By 1610, innkeepers, along with other service workers like shopkeepers, carters, and servants, were not only literate but also owned books. Six percent of the 91 readers from the diocese of Cuenca (1560-1610) were readers and owners chivalric novels (Nalle 1989 93). It may be that innkeepers kept such works at their inns for the entertainment of their guests.

³² “No sé yo cómo puede ser so; que en verdad que, a lo que yo no entiendo, no hay mejor letrado en el mundo, y que tengo ahí dos o tres dellos, con otros papeles, que verdaderamente me han dado la vida, no sólo a mí, sino a otros muchos” (Cervantes 1973 1.XXXI 393).

³³ In *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (1611) Covarrubias’ defines reading as “pronouncing with words that which is written with letters” (a.t.); or “pronunciar con palabras lo que por letra está escrito (518). In other words, to read is to give sound to the letters that make up the words on the page.

³⁴ “...a lo menos, de mí sé decir que cuando *oyo* decir aquellos furibundos y terribles golpes que los caballeros pegan, que me toma gana de hacer otro tanto, y querría estar *oyéndolos* noches y días” (Cervantes 1973 1.XXXII 393, énfasis añadido).

³⁵ For reasons that are not altogether clear, “the largest group of book-owners were farmers, who accounted for nearly a third of the readers” in the Inquisition interviews in Cuenca (Nalle 1989 77).

books, and more than thirty of us sit around him and listen to him read with so much pleasure that it saves us a thousand gray hairs..." (Ibid. 267)³⁶

And here Maritornes intercedes and echoes the innkeeper's enthusiasm for such stories. What she likes about them, she says, is that they tell of beautiful love stories between damsels and knights. "I really like to hear those things, too," says Maritornes, "they are very pretty, especially when they *tell* about a lady under some orange tree in the arms of her knight, and a duenna's their lookout, and she's dying of envy and scared to death. I think all that is as sweet as honey" (268, emphasis added).³⁷ The priest then turns to the innkeeper's daughter and asks her what she thinks of these tales, to which she responds:

"Upon my soul, I don't know, Señor...*I listen too*, and the truth is that even if I don't understand, I like to *hear* them, but I don't like all the fighting that my father likes; I like the laments of the knights when they are absent from their ladies; the truth is that sometimes they make me cry, I feel sorry for them." (Ibid. 268)³⁸

What she does not like about them, she says, is how cruel the knights' ladies can be. "I don't know," says Palomeque's daughter, "what kind of people can be so heartless and unfeeling that they don't look at an honorable man, and let him die or lose his mind" (Ibid).³⁹ Her mother then responds by telling her to be quiet, that obviously she knows far too much about these things, and it is not good for young girls to know so much. Clearly, Cervantes was well aware of the controversy surrounding the reading of such books by women,⁴⁰ which is why it is the priest who asks the Juan Palomeque's daughter what she thinks of them.⁴¹ And yet, what is most illuminating

³⁶ "Porque cuando es tiempo de la siega, se recogen aquí, las fiestas, muchos segadores, y siempre hay algunos que saben leer, el cual coge uno destes libros en las manos, y rodeámonos dél más de treinta y estámosle escuchando con tanto gusto, que nos quita mil canas..." (Ibid. 393).

³⁷ "...yo también gusto mucho de *oír* aquellas cosas, que son muy lindas, y más cuando cuentan que se está la otra señora debajo de unos naranjos abrazada con su caballero, y que les está una dueña haciéndoles la guarda, muerta de envidia y con mucho sobresalto. Digo que todo esto es cosa de mieles" (393-394, énfasis añadido).

³⁸ "No sé, señor, en mi ánimo...*también yo lo escucho*, y en verdad que aunque no lo entiendo, que recibo gusto en *oírlo*; pero no gusto yo de los golpes de que mi padre gusta, sino de las lamentaciones que los caballeros hacen cuando están ausentes de sus señoras, que en verdad que algunas veces me hacen llorar, de compasión que les tengo" (Ibid. 394, énfasis añadido).

³⁹ "yo no sé qué gente es aquella tan desalmada y tan sin conciencia, que por no mirar a un hombre honrado, le dejan que se muera, o que se vuelva loco" (394).

⁴⁰ Again, for the percentage of women who could read in the seventeenth century see Sara Nally (1989 68-70).

⁴¹ Already in 1528, the previously mentioned Valencian philosopher, Juan Luis Vive had written against the idea of women reading books like *La Celestina* and the *Amadís de Gaula*, among others. In fact, in *The Education of a Christian Woman* he wrote, almost in response to someone like Cervantes' Maritornes: "Tell me why do you read about other people's loves and imperceptibly absorb venomous allurements and enticements little by little, and often with full consciousness of what you are doing?" (2000 74). He goes on: "...there are some who have already lost all mental equilibrium, who give themselves to this reading in order to find pleasant gratification in amorous reveries of this kind" (Ibid). And he marvels, he says (as though addressing someone like Juan Palomeque), at how "wise fathers permit this to their daughters, husbands concede it to their wives, and public morals and institution ignore the fact the women become addicted to vice through reading" (Ibid). Significantly, according to Nalle, the majority of female readers of chivalric novels were single women in their twenties living at home (89, 92). But more generally, Vives wanted the authorities to "also concern themselves with pernicious books" like the popular "*Amadis, Esplandián, Florisando, Tirant, Tristán*, books filled with endless absurdities." For news ones like "*Celestina*, the brothel-keeper, begetter of wickedness, the *Prison of Love*," he complained, were appearing every day (74-75). Here, as a point of reference, it is crucial recall that Vives agreed with Plato's banishment of Homer from the Republic (1913 126). And

about Chapter XXXII, is that here Cervantes gathers a heterogeneous group of people who like books of knighthood: the literate Don Quixote, the priest, and the occasional harvester; the semi-literate Sancho and Palomeque; the illiterate prostitute Maritornes; and sundry men and women of different social strata, who gather around to listen to the fantastical stories.

However, the “libros de caballerías,” we should point out, were not the only popular books in the sixteenth and the seventeenth century. They competed with professional “how to manuals,” and most importantly with religious books. These latter texts enjoyed wide readership and popularity. In “The Problem of the ‘Best-Seller’ in Spanish Golden-Age Literature” Keith Whinnom writes: “for every work of pure literature there was at least one other book which was more widely read. *Celestina* was outdone by the *Libro de la oración*, *Diana* was overshadowed by Fray Luis de Granada’s *Guía de Pecadores*, *Don Quixote* saw fewer editions than Pedro Mexía’s *Silva de varia lección*, Lope’s *Arcadia* does not match [Fray Antonio de] Guevara’s *Epistolas familiares*” (1980 194). The reason for this, Nalle believes, is that people, regardless of class were interested in the salvation of their souls and looked for Christian models of imitation (1989 81).⁴²

Often when parishioners were asked by the Cuenca Inquisitors, if they owned any books, they answered, according to Nalle: “‘No, but I have heard read aloud such and such a book.’ On these few occasions, the majority of books cited were *caballerías*, and chivalric novels were the only category of book other than devotional works for which recitation was important” (89). In short, regardless of genre, the problem of fictional and religious works⁴³ centered around the question of reader/audience response in terms of possible imitation. That is why the Canon of Toledo who confesses to liking books knighthood, and even attempting to write one himself, says he stopped after completing more than one hundred pages (Cervantes 1973 1.XLVIII 567/Cervantes 2005 1.XLVIII 414). The Canon says:

“...I have not pursued the matter further, for it not only seemed unsuited to my profession, but I also saw that the number of simpleminded men is greater than that of the prudent...But what most influenced me to put the task of finishing it out of my mind was an argument I had with myself, based on the plays that are produced now...” (Ibid. 414)⁴⁴

unsurprisingly in *The Education of a Christian Woman*, he returns to Plato; this time with advise for parents. “Plato forbids nurses from telling old wives’ tales to their charges [*Republic* 377C],” writes Vives. “The same should be prescribed for mothers, for it is from this source that some children from this early upbringing still retain childish and capricious minds in later years and cannot bear to hear serious and sensible discourse, preferring books of foolish tales that do not contain a particle of truth or anything that resembles it” (2000 271). Parents, therefore, ought to tell stories to their children that encourages moral imitation; and this goes for boys and girls equally. For more on women and the novels of knighthood see Ife (1985 13, 25); Marín Pina (1991); and Aguilar Perdomo (2005 60-62).

⁴² The spiritual concerns of the people, notwithstanding, lay entertainment also competed with religious entertainment at a sensorial, imagistic level. Religious people “‘loved Christ bleeding’...Physical realism was essential to the Imitation of Christ. Imitation did not mean vaguely emulating an ideal model of behavior. For the most fervent Christians, whether gathered in pious confraternities or confined to private spiritual exercises, it meant reliving each episode of the Passion in a manner most trying to body and spirit,: write Georges Duby and Philippe Braunstein (1988 622). Certainly, by the seventeenth century, the excesses of Christian martyrdom had diminished, but the images that accompanied it had not. And literary works competed with the religious embodiment of these images. Therefore when Cervantes compared chivalric novels to the *Book of Judges* he understood that the competition was about images.

⁴³ Even Fray Luis de Granada’s religious best-seller, *Guía de pecadores*, nearly ended in the Index.

⁴⁴ “‘no he proseguido adelante, así por parecerme que hago cosa ajena de mi profesión como por ver que es más el número de los simples que de los prudentes...Pero lo que más me le quitó de las manos, y aún del pensamiento, de acabarle, fue un argumento que hice conmigo mismo, sacado de las comedias que ahora se representan...’” (Ibid. 568). This is reminiscent of Socrates’s anxiety about the reception of writing. “When it has once been written down, every discourse roams about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who

Hence, he convinces himself that in order for him to write a chivalric novel he would have to appeal to the lowbrow tastes of the common people or “*vulgo*”: in much the same way that playwrights had to conform their plays to the tastes of the lowest common denominator. In summary, he would be afraid to write a chivalric novel that would not be understood.⁴⁵ The priest agrees, and thanks the Canon for reminding him that he has as much contempt for plays as he does for book of knighthood. According to Cicero, says the priest, drama “should be a mirror of human life, an example of customs, and an image of truth, but those that are produced these days are mirrors of nonsense, examples of foolishness, and images of lewdness” (Ibid. 416).⁴⁶ In other words, for the priest, contemporary plays and chivalric novels were equally guilty of modeling immoral behavior and lacking any sense of verisimilitude. Cut from the same cloth, neither offered an imitable model of truth.

V

If Spanish Golden-Age Theater was as popular as it was, it is because as an art form it combined literature, orality, and visuality. In fact, what Don Quixote likes about the novels of knighthood has nothing to do with their formal structure. He is neither a literary critic nor a philosopher interested in concepts. He likes them because the images they provide him. Unlike Cervantes, he does not care at all for theories of poetics. The novels of knighthood offer him images of chivalric valor, decorum, honor, justice, and love. And it is these images that he carries in his head as models of mimesis. In Chapter XXV, Don Quixote explains to Sancho why the *Amadís de Gaula* is the ideal chivalric model to imitate; or as he puts it, why he seeks to imitate the Amadís as the original knight of all knights. In a moment that is rare in the novel, Don Quixote likens aesthetic mimesis to psychological or social imitation. Painting, interestingly, is the art form he turns to as an example of moral imitation:

“I say likewise that a painter who wants be famous for his art, will attempt to imitate the original works of the greatest painters he knows; and this rule applies to all the other important professions and occupations that serve to adorn the *republic*...”
(Cervantes 1973 303, a.t., emphasis added)⁴⁷

The person who wants to be courageous and prudent, says Don Quixote, can also count with original models of imitation, as for example Ulysses, Aeneas, and of course, Amadís. Whoever wants to be known as a prudent person in a well-organized city state (*república*), can do so by imitating Ulysses, “in whose person and hardships Homer *painted a living portrait of*

have no business with it, and it doesn't know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not,” says Socrates in Plato's *Phaedrus* (1995 275e 81).

⁴⁵ In Chapter XLVII, the Canon is less pessimistic about the possibility of exemplary books of knighthood. After all the things he said against them, “he found one good thing in them, which was the opportunity for display that they offered a good mind...” (Cervantes 2005 413). The Canon “...dijo que, con todo cuanto mal que había dicho de tales libros, hallaba en ellos una cosa buena: que era el sujeto que ofrecían para que un buen entendimiento pudiese mostrarse en ellos...” (Cervantes 1973 566).

⁴⁶ “habiendo ser la comedia, según le parece a Tulio, espejo de la vida humana, ejemplo de las costumbres y imagen de la verdad, las que ahora se representan son especies de disparates, ejemplos de necedades e imagines de lascivia” (Ibid. 569-570)

⁴⁷ “Digo asimismo que, cuando algún pintor quiere salir famoso en su arte, procura imitar los originales de los más únicos pintores que sabe; y esta misma regla corre por todos los oficios o ejercicios de cuenta que sirven para adorno de las *repúblicas*...” (Cervantes 1973 1.XXV 303).

prudence and forbearance...” (Cervantes 2005 XXV 193, emphasis added). These are the images, the narrator tells us, which he carries in his head and projects upon the world:

“...since everything our adventurer thought, *saw*, or *imagined* seemed to happen according to what he had read, as soon as he saw the inn it appeared to him to be a castle complete with four towers and spires of gleaming silver, not to mention a drawbridge and deep moat and all the other details *depicted* on such castles.”
(Cervantes 2005 1.II 26, emphasis added)⁴⁸

Here, then, lies the origin of Don Quixote’s madness: his inability to distinguish the exterior, material reality from the world of images (literary, painterly, and psychic). To him image and reality are one, and in comparison with Descartes, he sees no reason to question their link. He “sees,” ergo he acts. One might recall here, the famous episode where puppet Master Pedro gets his audience to follow the action through oral/visual cues. ““Your graces, turn your *eyes* to the tower that you *see* there; it is one of the towers of Zaragoza’s castle-fortress now called La Aljafería,”” he says; “and that lady you *see* on the balcony, dressed in the Moorish fashion, is the peerless Melisendra...*Look* at what is happening now, perhaps unlike anything you have ever *seen* before. Don’t you *see* that Moor stealing up behind Melisendra, his finger to his lips? Well, *look* at how he kisses her on the mouth...” (Cervantes 2005 2.XXVI 630, emphasis added)⁴⁹

Don Quixote, who takes Master Pedro’s puppet show for reality, objects to the negative depiction of knight Don Gaiferos and his beloved Melisendra running from the Moors. ““Look at the number of brilliant horsemen riding out of the city in pursuit of two Catholic lovers,”” says Master Pedro’s assistant (Ibid. 632).⁵⁰ But Don Quixote, who can no longer sit by and allow such an injustice to be visited upon a great knight in love, rises to his feet and cries out: ““I shall not consent, in my lifetime and in my presence, to any such offense against an enamored knight so famous and bold as Don Gaiferos. Halt, you lowborn rabble; do not follow and do not pursue him unless you wish to do battle with me!”” (Ibid. ⁵¹No sooner does he say this than he unsheathes his sword, leaps to the stage and furiously attacks the “crowd of Moorish puppets, knocking down some, beheading others, ruining this one, destroying that one...” (Ibid).⁵² Unlike Juan Polomeque,

⁴⁸ ““como a nuestro aventurero todo cuanto pensaba, *veía o imaginaba* le parecía ser hecho y pasar al modo de lo que había leído, luego que vio la venta se le representó que era un castillo con sus cuatro torres y chapiteles de luciente plata, sin faltarle su puente levadiza y honda cava, con todos aquellos adherentes que semejantes castillos se *pintan*”” (Cervantes 1973 1.II 82, énfasis añadido).

⁴⁹ ““Vuelvan vuestras mercedes los *ojos* a aquella torre que allí parece, que se presupone que es una de las torres del alcázar de Zaragoza, que ahora llaman la Aljafería; y aquella dama que en aquel blasón parece, vestida a lo moro, es la sin par Melisendra...*Miren* también un nuevo caso que ahora sucede, quizás no *visto* jamás. ¿No *veen* aquel moro que callandico y pasito, puesto el dedo en la boca, se llega por las espaldas de Melisendra? Pues *miren* cómo la da un beso en mitad de los labios...” (Cervantes 1978 2.XXVI 241, énfasis añadido). Incidentally, Juan López de Velasco writes in *Orthographía y pronunciación castellana* (1582) that “writing should not only satisfy the ears; it is also necessary that it please the eyes” (a.t.); or “no sólo se á de escribir a satisfacción del oydo, pero aun es necesario contentar a los ojos” (10).

⁵⁰ ““Miren cuánta y cuán lúcida caballería sale de la ciudad e seguimiento de los católicos amantes”” (Ibid. 244)

⁵¹ ““No consentiré yo que en mis días y en mi presencia se le haga superchería a tan famoso caballero y a tan atrevido enamorado como don Gaiferos. ¡Deteneos, mal nacida canalla, no sigáis ni persigáis; si no conmigo sois en la batalla!”” (Ibid. 244).

⁵² ““Y diciendo y haciendo, desenvainó la espada, y de un brinco se puso justo al retablo, y con acelerada y nunca vista furia comenzó a llover cuchilladas sobre la titerera morisma, derribando a unos, descabezando a otros, estropeando a éste, destrozando a aquél...” (Ibid. 245).

the innkeeper, who is also a fan of the chivalric stories but is able to tell reality from fiction, Don Quixote cannot. Don Quixote is an example of the kind of citizen that a well-ordered city-state or republic ought to exclude. Uncontrollably guided by his emotions, he is unable to think rationally. He imitates the fictional exploits of his heroes, in precisely the manner repudiated by Plato in *The Republic*. What is remarkable is that the Platonist/Cervantine cautionary critique of representation and affective mimesis is, with some minor differences, still with us. Today that critique is focused on the effects of media violence on people in general, but particularly on children and adolescents.

VI

Though *Don Quixote* was a literary best-seller of its age, it also competed with other works of literature and non-fiction, including books devotion and religious instruction. The publication of Latin texts in translation meant that more people than ever before could read them in the vernacular without the need of an ecclesiastical intermediary. Thus for the Church a book's popularity was itself problem. That is the reason why some of the most popular religious books were banned by the Inquisition. The dawn of the printing press and the rise in literacy meant less power in the hands of the church and more power in the hands of individuals. The power/knowledge hierarchy was being subverted. Besides which, people had more leisure and sought out different forms of entertainment with which to occupy their free time: as Cervantes well knew when he addressed the "unoccupied reader" of this novel.⁵³ But *Don Quixote* became popular not merely because it was widely read (in silence), but because it was transmitted in many other ways, as had occurred with the oral recitations and performances of Homer. Plato, we may recall, banned Homeric poetry from the Republic due to its popular form of transmission and reception, and their social ramifications.

When the Canon declares that he fears writing a novel of knighthood lest it suffers the same fate as many of the theatrical plays of his day--including those of Lope--he is doing more than comparing one genre with another. His anxiety is that of someone who mistrusts the representation of performativity and its reception by the populace. Just as the Spanish *corrales* were "attacked as being a disruptive and immoral influence" because "they could not get the balance of art and amusement right" (McKendrick 65) so was Athenian theater. The plays were not produced in front of a well-behaved audience," writes Alexander Nehamas in "Plato and the Mass Media." "The dense crowd was given to whistling (...) and the theater resounded with its 'uneducated noise'" (223). Theater was a "popular" form of entertainment, in the worse sense of the word; which, explains Plato's contempt for it. This was not the kind of art form worthy of a rational republic. The "drama was considered a realistic representation of the world" (Ibid), but then, as José Ortega y Gasset reminds us in *The Dehumanization of Art*, all popular art, regardless of genre, tends to be conceived as a true-to-life portrayal of human reality, and not as an aesthetic construction. Nehamas writes:

To be inherently realistic is to seem to represent reality without artifice, without mediation and convention. Realistic art is, just in the sense in which Plato thought of imitation, transparent...This is the essence of Plato's attack against poetry, and...the essential idea behind a number of attacks against television today...His quarrel with

⁵³ Church doctrine looked upon leisure time as potentially conducive to sin. Unguided and uncontrolled, time, divorced from obligation and utility, could lead individuals to indulge in all kinds morally reprehensible acts. "In sum, "leisure ["ocio"] was one of the causes of Sodom's perdition," wrote Camos in *Microcosmia y gobierno universal del hombre christiano* (30). Inversely, he recommended, "the wise person should spend his/her moments of tranquility and leisure in the pursuit of knowledge and prudence" (30, a.t.).

poetry is not disturbing because anyone seriously believes that Plato could have been right about Homer's pernicious influence. Plato's view is disturbing because we are still agreed with him that representation is transparent—at least in the case of those media...like television. (Ibid. 223-224)

If representation was transparent for Plato, and is such even for us today, then the question of imitation becomes problematically inseparable from that of representation. For Plato poets were imitators of the Truth, creators of images, and the aesthetic objects they produced were thrice removed from the ultimate reality of the Forms. In this way they presented a danger to society. However, it is not so much that Plato himself believed that representation was transparent, but rather that the vast majority of people did—they took what they saw for reality writ large. In Book X of *The Republic*, Plato wrote:

The art of representation, then, is a long way from reality; and apparently the reason why there is nothing it cannot reproduce is that it grasps only a small part of any object, and that only an image. Your painter, for example, will paint us a shoemaker, carpenter, or other workman, without understanding any one of their crafts; and yet, if he were a good painter, he might deceive a child or a simple-minded person into thinking his picture was a real carpenter... (1941 598 321)

Here, therefore, lay the danger for Plato and Cervantes' Canon. The former feared that Homer's representation of Achilles' fury would be taken for reality, and the latter that the fantastical deeds of the knights errant would be "seen" as real. And worse even, as models of imitation. These days we know better. Modern audiences know that when someone is killed in a movie his or her death is not real; yet knowing this to be so does not obviate the effect such images of death and violence have on our emotions and our behavior.⁵⁴ Psychological research into the matter, statistically suggests this to be the case. Affect theory, for instance, tells us that visuality affects both the body and the psyche, and that mimesis has a significant bodily component.

Don Quixote dressed up as knight embodies what Deleuze and Guattari would call a process of *becoming-knight*, and Sancho responds in kind through his own embodiment of *becoming-squire*. "At the heart of mimesis is affect contagion, the bioneurological means by which particular affects are transmitted from body to body," writes Anna Gibbs. "The discrete innate affects...are powerful purveyors of affect contagion, since they are communicated rapidly and automatically via the face [e.g. Knight of the Sorrowful Face], as well as the voice" (191). She continues: "Mimesis can then be understood as the primary mode of apprehension utilized by the body, by the social technologies such as cinema, television, and even the Internet, and by cultural processes involving crowd behavior..." (202). That is what Plato and later Cervantes understood: imitation has more to do with the body than it does with the mind.

In "Plato in Therapy: A Cognitivist Reassessment of the *Republic's* Idea of *Mimesis*," Jonas Grethlein states: "...Plato's account of the aesthetic experience is more nuanced than

⁵⁴ "Infants' tendency to *see* behavior in terms of human acts that can be *imitated* has interesting implications," write child psychologists, Meltzoff and Moore. "First, the world of physical bodies is divisible into those that perform human acts (people) and those that do not (things). Second, after one has made this division in the external world, new meanings become possible. Because human acts are *seen* in others and performed by the self, the infant can grasp that the other is at some level 'like me': the other acts like me, and I can act like the other. This cross-modal knowledge of what it feels like to do *the act seen* provides a privileged access to people not afforded by things" (1995 55, emphasis added).

assumed by his critics. Most importantly, it resonates with an embodied and enactive view of our response to representation” (158). Additionally, this is also the way that Don Quixote bodily responds to representation. Plato’s opposition to the Homeric poets and the Canon’s critique of the chivalric novels, and their subsequent desire to banish them, was due to their recognition that the representation of irrational behavior could be socially harmful: because mimesis, as Gibbs says, can be contagious. But contagious, one must underscore, in a social manner. Hence Plato’s and Cervantes’s emphatic references to the harm the wrong kind of representation could do to either the *polis* (Plato) or “la república” (Cervantes). For even, if Palomeque knows better than to imitate the actions of the knights, he readily admits that when he hears “about those furious, terrible blows struck by the knights,” he is tempted to do the same (Cervantes 2005 1.XXXII 267). So the problem of imitation goes beyond that of eccentrics individuals like Don Quixote who cannot separate fiction from reality.

Significantly, at present we are dealing with the same problem in relation to media violence. In opposition to the Platonist position, some theorist believe that the representation of violence in films and video games, have the opposite effect. In other words, they agree with Aristotle *contra* Plato, and theorize that media violence has a *cathartic* effect that helps viewers experience aggressive emotions without carrying them out. The idea is that “watching media violence or playing violent video games helps to vent aggression and thereby reduces aggressive feelings and behavior,” writes Grethlein. Experiments, however, he argues, demonstrate the opposite. They “show that the medial exposure to, or even engagements in, violence increases aggression. The reason for this is simple: our brain is plastic and shaped by what it does. Simulation, especially repeated simulation, changes neurons and increases the strength of synaptic communication” (163). But Jonas Grethlein is not alone in his conclusions. He is joined by other researchers who dispute the Aristotelian theory of catharsis; as for example, Douglas A Gentile, who in his article, “Catharsis and Media Violence: A Conceptual Analysis” states: “‘Releasing’ the aggression by practicing aggressive scripts while consuming media violence does not lower later odds of aggression when provoked...Furthermore, the belief that consuming media violence reduces aggression itself may amplify the effect of media violence. For example, in a study of 607 8th and 9th grade American students, those who plays violent video games had higher hostile attribution biases, higher hostile personalities, and got in more physical fights” (505). In summary, Plato, not Aristotle, was correct. And he was correct because for him imitation or mimesis was more a question of embodiment than of intellect. Don Quixote embodies the knight errant reality; he does not interpret it. To that end, Nehamas is right when he declares that:

...we do not emulate our literary heroes, in the unfortunate manner of Don Quixote; we understand them through interpretation and information, finding their relevance to life, if anywhere, on a more abstract level. But such literal emulation was just what Plato was afraid of in the case of tragic poetry, and what so many today are afraid of in regard to television: ‘we become what we see.’” (228)

However, Nehamas is right for all the wrong reasons; for indeed most of us today do not “emulate our literary heroes” in the manner of Don Quixote. We read about them, we interpret them. On the other hand, to believe that we have transcended the Platonist notion of imitation is to turn our backs on the empirical evidence presented by contemporary cognitive and affect theory; and to dismiss--irrational as it may be--the reality of a Japanese young man who “marries” an *anime* computer-generated character with whom he is in love.

Conclusion

Although Cervantes never once mentions or even alludes to the Aristotelian concept of catharsis in the whole of *Don Quixote*; he, conversely, is in greater agreement with Aristotle on the independence of poetry and art in general than he is with Plato. For Cervantes, just as it was for Aristotle, the truths of poetry are not to be confused with metaphysical or ontological truths. When Aristotle argues in the *Poetics* that poetry is more philosophical than history because it is more abstract and universal, what he is doing is reserving a special place for poetry—the very place Plato had denied it. The poet invents his or her own truth; and in the seventeenth century Cervantes becomes the first modern writer by recognizing that psychological and aesthetic mimesis, and truth, each has its own place. Don Quixote goes mad because he fails to *understand* this. In the end, *Don Quixote* is not a novel against books of knighthood, but rather about the failure to understand the wonderful artifice of art. From the moment that Cervantes writes “desocupado lector”/“idle reader” (1973 50/2005 3), he takes us on a journey where literature is going to be read, recited, staged, understood, and lived by all, regardless of anyone’s station in life. With that he bids us welcome to his ideal Republic (*res publica*) where its inhabitants enjoy and understand the inventive craftsmanship of the arts.

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