"Ocean Chivalry": Issues of Alterity in Don Quixote

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By DIANA DE ARMAS WILSON

ALTHOUGH DON QUIXOTE stridently identifies himself with the fictional figures of his favorite books—chivalric heroes such as Lancelot or Amadís or Renaldo de Montalbán—he has of late been assimilated, in studies of spiraling scholarly confidence, to the historical figures of the *conquistadores*. One critic claims that it is easy for the twentieth-century reader to see Don Quixote as "a comic incarnation" of "the *conquistador* mentality of Golden Age Spain" (Skinner 54). Another calls Cervantes's hero an "aspiring" and even "divinely inspired" conqueror, a figure who embodies "what is great and what is insane about Spanish imperialism" (Higuera 1-2). Such New World axes of identity for Don Quixote are an intrepid development from older constructions, which often used assertion as a mode of argument or, as what follows will show, invoked some literally preposterous connections. The aim of this essay is to explore the state of the union between Don Quixote and the "quixotic" conquistadores—all of whom are "other identified" with the heroic figures in the *libros de caballerías* [books of chivalry].[1] After sampling the representational practices that hover over this triple interalterity, I shall suggest that Don Quixote not so much "incarnates" or even "aspires to" the conquistador mentality as that he "mimics" it. To that end, I shall borrow some of the recent insights on mimicry that address, from various colonial and postcolonial perspectives, the contingencies of identity formation.

A generation before any postcolonial notions of mimicry were circulating, Don Quixote's status as a sterile imitator had been established, albeit from a metaphysical rather than a colonial perspective. In René Girard's study of the history of imitative desire in novels beginning with Cervantes, he famously fulminated against the condition, which he regarded as a highly "contagious" ontological sickness (98). Where Girard saw Don Quixote as an essentially sick man, a character whose metaphysical desire is "to be another," I would reinterpret Don Quixote as a mimic man, a character whose strategic vocation is to mimic another. There is a method to his mimicry. Don Quixote so closely imi-

1. I translate the phrase *libros de caballerías* literally in this essay. On the Anglo-American penchant, not adopted by other European literary languages, for separating the Novel from the genre of Romance, see Doody 1 and 487n1.

tates the same fictional chivalric heroes who motivated the conquistadores that these New World figures, by a kind of synchronic retaliation, are then identified as "quixotic." Two discursive domains intersect here: chivalry, the feudal institution whose available and automatic language Don Quixote aims to revive, and imperialism, the more contemporaneous, if more covert, institution to which his exploits so often allude. Although this intersection has become more visible in the postmodern, Cervantes's response to the issue of "ocean chivalry"—William Prescott's poetic notion of what the conquistadores were practicing in the New World (1:217)—remains undertheorized.

The "Quixotic" Conquistadores

LET'S BEGIN LOOKING AT the dark alterity between Don Quixote and the conquistadores through the perspective of William Prescott, the mid-nineteenth-century American historian, who availed himself of the one in order to describe the other:

> What wonder, then, if the Spaniard of that day, feeding his imagination with dreams of enchantment at home, and with its realities abroad, should have displayed a *Quixotic* enthusiasm,—a romantic exaltation of character, not to be comprehended by the colder spirits of other lands! (2:59)

Elsewhere and in the same ecstatic language, Prescott celebrates the "bold spirit" of the Spanish conquistador who, "not content with the dangers that lay in his path, seemed to court them from the mere *Quixotic* love of adventure" (2:45). Prescott's New World "cavaliers" are construed as displaying "Quixotic" qualities long before Don Quixote himself does. As such, they anticipate by precisely a century those conquistadores whom Father Bayle would describe in 1943, with notably fascistic overtones, as "Quijotes de la raza" ["Don Quixotes of the race"] (Gil 1:14). They also foreshadow Valentín de Pedro's conquistadores, still being described, in 1954, as quixotic dreamers: "participaron del sueño delirante de don Quijote" ["they participated in the delirious dream of Don Quixote"] (80). One of these delirious participants, Francisco de Pizarro, is even celebrated for the "palabras quijotescas" ["quixotic words"] that he vented on the Isla del Gallo (78). The application of the term "quixotic" to the conquistadores, it would seem, shows no sign of abating: Fernando Arrabal's new psychobiography of Cervantes celebrates Columbus for his "quijotesca empresa inspiradora de Cervantes" ["quixotic enterprise that inspired Cervantes"] (153).

The above linkages between Don Quixote and the conquistadores are preposterous—in the sense of the rhetorical scheme of *prae-postere*, i.e., putting the cart before the horse.[2] Sometimes the use of such preposterous rhetoric is rectified in situ, as when Todorov describes Columbus as having been "a kind

2. The figure of praepostere is variously known as reversio, inversio, anastrophe, epanastrophe, and hypallage.

of Quixote a few centuries behind his times" (11). That so many quixotic words and deeds are located in events prior to Cervantes's time shows—a la Pierre Menard—how the later text of *Don Quixote* has altered our reading of the historiography of the Indies. America, it would seem, had been exceedingly hospitable to "quixotic" careers long before the adjective existed.

A number of more concrete, less rhetorical, connections between *Don Quixote* and the Americas have been surfacing since mid-century. In the 1950s, *Don Quixote* was described as "una sátira benévola del conquistador de ínsulas o de Indias" ["a benevolent satire of the conquistador of *ínsulas* or Indies"] (Porras 238). In the 1960s, Don Quixote (in his saner persona as Alonso Quesada) was linked to Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, explorer of El Dorado, founder of the Kingdom of New Granada, and governor of Cartagena—places in the Indies where Cervantes applied for work (Arciniegas 16). By the 1970s, various conquest chronicles available to Cervantes were being carefully catalogued (Cro). In the 1980s, *Don Quixote* was linked, on the grounds of its "textualidad caballeresca" ["chivalric textuality"] to "los primeros conquistadores y buscadores de mundos nuevos" ["the first conquistadors and seekers of new worlds"] (Testa 69). By 1992, the year of the Columbian Quincentenary, one writer wondered "si acaso hubiera sido posible la existencia del Quijote de no ser por el descubrimiento" ["whether the existence of *Don Quixote* would have been possible without the discovery"] (Acosta 15). In 1994, Bernal Díaz's "relación de fechos"—sent from Guatemala to Spain in 1575—was examined as a precedent to Cervantes's narratological experiments in *Don Quixote* (Mayer). Our New World readings of *Don Quixote*, in short, are beginning to move well beyond mere inventories of Americana.[3]

Remembering the Amadís

CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF THE conquistadores often references their proclivity for the same books that crazed Don Quixote. The conquistadores "remember the *Amadís*," Stephen Gilman notes, because "their impetus and vocation . . . are of the same stuff as Don Quijote's" (110). Let's take a closer look at the "stuff" that triggers Don Quixote's chivalric vocation. It is a commonplace that Cervantes ransacked, for his novel, a huge variety of already fixed narrative forms: epic poetry, Ovidian metamorphosis, Menippean satire (as a genre like Petronius's *Satyricon*), the ancient novel, pastoral romance, topographical legends, criminal/picaresque biography, the Italian *novella*, critical treatises, and even stage plays (masques and closet dramas and Arcadian plays). But although

3. James D. Fernández cites some of these older "inventories" of the presence of America in Cervantes (969-70). Fernández's strong and persuasive "New World reading" of "El celoso extremeño" interprets the fortified house of the aged Carrizales "as an *ínsula* inhabited by a racially diverse group of natives" and zealously ruled over by an "*indiano* governor" (974).

we confront a virtual encyclopedia of literary kinds in the parasitic and protean *Don Quixote,* the most resonant New World connections surface in the books of chivalry.

The discursive properties of these books had been codified into a genre long before Cervantes's invective against it. Originating in medieval feudal discourse, the genre flourished across the sixteenth century in both Spain and its colonies. Beginning with Montalvo's *Amadís de Gaula* in 1508, some fifty different books of chivalry were published in Spain and Portugal, many of which were either hand-carried or exported to the colonies.[4] The role of these books in the production of Castilian cultural identity—in the cultural representation of Spain to the Spanish—was enormous. Like most literary genres, the books of chivalry were codified "forms of thought." They originated in crucial and recurrent real-life situations, which were institutionalized, across time, into patterns of ritualized response to Spain's social order. The genre propped up the ideology of the Castilian ruling class, bringing to light many of its constitutive features and reaffirming its social hierarchies, its imperial schemes, and its chivalric ideals.

If the *Amadís* is a codification of the discourses of hegemony that "repeat" the values of Spain's aristocratic and chivalric class, then remembering the *Amadís* is, to say the least, a conservative gesture. Don Quixote remembers the *Amadís*, however, within a text that repeatedly announces its intentions to destroy the whole chivalric genre. *Don Quixote* parodies the books of chivalry with such a high degree of affectionate malice that, in the end, Cervantes's novel frees itself from the "stuff" of its chivalric subtexts. But it never frees the critic from rethinking the process of this parodic liberation—the moves required to dislodge the books of chivalry as a representational practice—as well as Cervantes's role in this process.

Books have their fates (*Habent sua fata libelli*), as Terence long ago remarked. And the books of chivalry were fated, before their decanonization, to produce at least three major psychological upheavals: the same genre gave the conquistadores their delirious dreams, Alonso Quijano a psychotic turn, and Cervantes a creative fit. Careful readers may wish to negotiate these three different responses—delirium,[5] psychosis, and creativity—to one literary kind. Before undertaking any of these psychological negotiations, however, readers should ponder why it was also the fate of these books to be reviled, in Spain as well as the New World, long before Cervantes thematized their demolition.

4. For these publication facts on the romances of chivalry, see Chevalier 64-65. Among the large number of studies of the books of chivalry, see especially Daniels, Eisenberg, Riquer, Sieber, and Thomas.

5. Although the "delirium" of the conquest has been marked and remarked (Adorno *xx*), it bears noting that, as Kristeva defines it, delirium is "a discourse which has supposedly strayed from a presumed reality," a discourse that presents, above all, a state of desire which has ensnarled the paths of knowledge (307).

Fear of Lying

WITH THE ADVENT OF THE books of chivalry in 1508, New World chroniclers were no longer obliged to call upon God—as Dr. Diego Álvarez Chanca had done in his letter to the Cabildo of Seville describing Columbus's Second Voyage[6]—to witness the truth of their texts. They could, instead, call upon a family of texts, the books of chivalry, to witness what lying—really shameless lying—would look like. Wishing to deny any connections between the books of chivalry and their accounts of the New World, writers abroad would continue, in the spirit of peninsular invectives, to vilify the genre. The virulent sixteenth-century attacks in Spain on these books of chivalry generally stress their toxicity. Although the genre was variously censured as "filth," "excrement," "infection," and—in the colorful "poison topos" favored by writers like Vives—as "scorpion oil" ("aceite de escorpiones"), it was regarded, above all, as the genre of lies.[7] Charles V enrolled himself in the catalogue of book abusers when he published a royal decree in 1531, prohibiting the export to Amerindian readers of "historias vanas o de profanidad como son las de *Amadís* y otros de esta calidad" ["vain or profane histories such as those of *Amadís* and others of its kind"], a piece of legislation reissued in 1543 and extended to include Spaniards (Torre Revello *iii-vi*). Some critics believe that these prohibitions went largely ignored (Adorno *xv-xvi*). Others lament their existence, arguing that the same books that served as both an "acicate y modelo de conquistadores" ["a goad and a model for the conquistadores"] would have served, after the "brutal" conquest of America, "de instrumento de liberación de nativos" ["as an instrument for the liberation of the natives"] (Arrabal 139). Whatever their degree of familiarity with *Amadís* as a literary model, however, the natives were all too familiar with the superhuman, and sometimes inhuman, behavior of the conquistadores.

Several years after these royal prohibitions, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Spain's official chronicler of the Indies, divorced himself from the books of chivalry in his *Historia general y natural de las Indias* (1535): "no cuento los disparates de los libros de Amadís ni los que dellos dependen" ["I do not recount the nonsense of the books of Amadís nor those that depend on them"] (1:179). Oviedo was well acquainted with all that lying nonsense, given the earlier publication of his *Claribalte* (1519), a work that earned him the status of America's first chivalric novelist. Cervantes's Canon of Toledo—who claims to have tried his hand at romance but privileges history—will iterate the attitude of an Oviedo: only a "bárbaro" culto, the Canon sniffs, could be satisfied to read about how "una gran torre llena de caballeros va por la mar adelante . . .

6. Dr. Álvarez Chanca, a physician to the fleet and a man given more to botanizing than theorizing, closes his eyewitness account anxious that readers may find him prolix or given to exaggeration. But as God is his witness, he concludes, he has not strayed "una jota de los términos de la verdad" ["one iota from the bounds of truth"] (Álvarez Chanca 1:72-73).

7. See the long and censorious catalogue in Ife 12n20; also 34.

y hoy anochece en Lombardía, y mañana amanezca en tierras del Preste Juan de las Indias" ["a tall tower full of knights goes sailing off to sea . . . and tonight it will be in Lombardy and the next day in the land of Prester John of India"] (*Don Quixote* 1:47).

The same fear of lying may be found in Pedro de Castañeda Nájera, chronicler of a narrative about Coronado's expedition to Cíbola (1540-42), who identifies himself as "an author who does not write fables, like some things we read now-a-days in books of chivalry." Having advertised his allergy to the fabulous, however, Castañeda immediately lapses into the outdoing topos: "there are events that have happened recently in these parts to our Spaniards in conquests and clashes with the natives that surpass, as deeds of amazement, not only the aforesaid books but even the ones written about the twelve peers of France" (276). At the start of the 1590s, a decade in which no new books of chivalry would be published, the New World Jesuit historian José de Acosta continues to attack the genre. Anxious that readers might confound his *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* with one of the detested books of chivalry, Acosta seems to have anticipated and even epitomized the plot of *Don Quixote*: the world of Amerindians, he cautioned his readers, was not at all "like the world of Amadís, Palmerín or Don Belianís, a dangerous fantasy whose irreality might endanger the sanity of those foolish enough to read about it" (Pagden 149).

As one of those foolish readers, Don Quixote would soon after serve as a cautionary tale of both the psychic dangers of reading chivalric fictions and of their power to compel belief. The text that contains him, however, would simultaneously explode the notion that these fictions have less authority than history. Although both "true" and "fictive" modes of writing interpenetrate in the chronicles of the Indies, their writers ritually insist on the truthfulness of their texts, serenely unaware, as Bakhtin would put it, that "the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction are not laid up in heaven" (33). The historiographers of the Indies, in short, serve among the "real life" precursors for Cide Hamete, whose frequent truth claims and tireless self-presentation as a "veracious" historian strategically break down across the novel. Indeed, the fulsome praise lavished on Cide Hamete for having narrated every detail of his story—"por la curiosidad que tuvo en contarnos las semínimas [de la historia], sin dejar cosa, por menuda que fuese, que no la sacase a luz distintamente" ["for his curiosity in relating the most minor events of his story, without bringing to light every particular, no matter how small"] (2:59)—notably parodies the truth-telling anxiety of New World chroniclers such as Castañeda, Coronado's chronicler, who admits that his very status as a "reliable author" depends on his relating all the exploits of Captain Juan Gallego that he had "passed over in silence" in a former chapter (276). In making such an issue of the truth of his history, in short, Cide Hamete may be counted among the "parodists of history," to use

Homi Bhabha's felicitous phrase. And the writing that contains him, emerging somewhere "between mimesis and mimicry," not only destabilizes the authority of the books of chivalry, but also "marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which makes it imitable" ("Mimicry" 87-88). Cervantes, in short, mimes to deauthorize both the discourses of chivalry and "ocean chivalry."

Books and Their Pathologies

WHAT SIXTEENTH-CENTURY New World chroniclers had tried to put asunder—the lying books of chivalry and the "truthful" narratives of their conquests—would be put together again in the modern era. The romantic-minded Prescott anticipated, as early as 1843, a critical trend beginning in the 1920s that would link, in one way or another, the books of chivalry to the "empresa de las Indias" ["enterprise of the Indies"].[8] Writing for an Anglo-American reading public primed by the publication of Tennyson's chivalric "Morte d'Arthur" (1842), Prescott declared that the spirit of enterprise which "glowed in the breast" of the sixteenth-century Spanish cavalier was "not inferior to that of his own romances of chivalry" (2:47). This exalted comparison between the conquistadores and their reading materials had been foreshadowed by the fanciful and sentimental Washington Irving, whose life of Columbus (1828) had declared the stories of the conquistadores as both beautiful *and* true: "The extraordinary actions and adventures of these men, while they rival the exploits recorded in chivalric romance, have the additional interest of verity" (1:*xv*). A number of contemporary scholars have reiterated the notion that the exploits of the New World Spanish explorers "to some extent copied," or were "shadowed" by, or were "not very different from" the books of chivalry.[9] Because most of these remarks look back to Irving A. Leonard's 1949 classic, *Books of the Brave*, his strenuous attempt to document the negative influence of the books of chivalry on the conquistadores bears a closer look.

As its title suggests, *Books of the Brave* reinforced Prescott's triumphalist notions—the notions of institutionalized Anglo-American historiography—about

8. This trend, which Adorno carefully documents, includes, among others, such figures as Thomas, Torre Revello, Rodríguez Prampolini, and Leonard, who seriously confronted the issue of the role of chivalric fiction on the popular imagination (*xxviii*n1 and *xxxv*n32).

9. Deyermond writes that "the Spanish and Portuguese explorers were often inspired by, and formed their expectations on, the model of what they read in the romances, while the chroniclers of discovery and conquest wrote in similar terms; there is no doubt that life to some extent copied literature, as it always does" (162). Ramón Iglesia notes that "la *sombra* de los libros de caballería se proyecta sobre la empresa de los conquistadores" ["the shadow of the books of chivalry projects itself over the enterprise of the conquistadores"] (Gilman 110). Commenting on the confusion of fiction and reality during the sixteenth century, Juan Francisco Maura, editor of Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios*, speaks of it as a time when "lo fantástico de los Libros de Caballería no se diferenciaba mucho de lo que estaba aconteciendo en el Nuevo Mundo" ["the fantastic in the Books of Chivalry did not differ much from what was happening in the New World"] ("Introducción" 41). According to Kathleen N. March and Kristina M. Passman, *Las Sergas de Esplandián* cast "such a long *shadow* that the coast of California was named for Queen Calafia's domain" (297).

the glorious exploits of Spain's conquistadores. But Leonard also responded to some of their less glorious exploits.[10] Many soldiers loitering about Seville while awaiting their sailing orders to the Indies, he argued, bought copies of *Las Sergas de Esplandián*, the fifth book of the Amadís cycle, on sale in the *talleres* of the Cromberger press in Sevilla in 1510. *Las Sergas*, as all *cervantistas* know, was the first book to be thrown into the bonfire of Don Quixote's library.[11] It exemplified, for Leonard, "the highly seasoned fiction which inflamed their imaginations and distorted their conceptions of the lands they were to penetrate" (96). Reading *Esplandián* in camp and discussing it on the march seems also to have inflamed the acquisitive imaginations of these soldiers: "the ruthless confiscation of the treasures of Montezuma, of Atahualpa, and of other victims of Spanish greed owed not a little to the imaginative quill of the storytelling regidor of Medina del Campo" (Leonard 34-35). This remark is precisely in the humanist tradition of Juan Luis Vives, who wrote in *De Officio Mariti* (1529) that the "fables" of Tristan, Lancelot, Amadís, and Arthur are harmful for they "kindle and stir up covetousness" (Ife 14).

There can be no Talmudic knowledge about the exact influence of these books—or of any art—on life. Pronouncements about their influence will always remain speculative. But although "the degree to which chivalric fictions and values contributed to the psychology of the conquistadores remains open to debate," as Adorno notes,[12] that debate must be kept open. The assertion that fictions contribute to group psychology needs to be reformulated. Todorov's fourfold schematization of reading as construction leads, after a long itinerary through "projective psychology," to the conclusion that readerly reinterpretation will be controlled by cultural constraints—"which are nothing but the commonplaces of a social group (notions its members deem plausible)" (39-49). It is to these commonplaces, modified by time, that any debate of influence must turn. Various postcolonial commonplaces, the fruits of an exploration of social and psychological pathologies, assist my own readerly reinterpretation.

Don Quixote as a Mimic Man

In calling Cervantes's hero a mimic man, I do not mean to agitate the English line of descent of mimic men, which can be traced through such writers as Kipling, Forster, Naipaul, and Anderson. It is not only the discourse of English colonialism, however, that speaks in a forked tongue. Civilizing missions have

10. "Careful readers take exception to the notion, implicit in chapter 1 [of *Books of the Brave*], that the conquistadores' consumption of tales of chivalry as 'men of their times' could be used to explain or even to justify their roles in wars of enslavement and destruction" (Adorno *x*).

11. Leonard mentions Cervantes's "realistic picture of the reading of romances of chivalry in the 16th century by those of a social status similar to that of many of Cortés's soldiers" (44).

12. Leonard's "most compelling demonstration" of the links between the conquistadores and the books of chivalry is his "case of the Amazons," articulated in chapters 4-5 (Adorno *ix*). See also Leonard 25, 31, 53, and 65.

epic intentions that often produce texts rich in the traditions of "irony, mimicry and repetition," texts distinguished by a "comic turn from the high ideals of the colonial imagination to its low mimetic literary effects" (Bhabha, "Mimicry" 85-87). Although never invoked in Homi Bhabha's studies, *Don Quixote*—written toward the close of a century-long civilizing mission that left many visible traces in its text—instances this comic turn with astonishing precision. There are, of course, major differences between the English and Spanish civilizing missions, including their respective colonial ideals, which in Spain were feudal and chivalric. "We should not forget," Peter Russell remarks in an untroubled tribute to the conquistadores,

> that even the narrow and militant chivalric ideals of fifteenth-century Spanish knights in their way made some important offerings to the history of the Renaissance. It was, for example, men sustained by such ideals who had the energy and stubbornness to find and conquer the New World. ("Arms" 58)

Don Quixote is "other identified" with these energetic men in an ambivalent way. Although on the side of the colonizers, he behaves like the colonized. In his mimicry he anticipates Daniel Dravot, the British colonial in Kipling's "The Man Who Would Be King," who goes "mad in his head" as "king" of Kafiristan, even entertaining chivalric aspirations to become "a Knight of the Queen" (164). Like Dravot's, Don Quixote's mimicry *repeats*, not *re-presents*, its models. He is "*almost the same, but not quite*" a conquistador, to bend Bhabha's instructive formula to our purposes ("Mimicry" 86).

As a mode of colonial discourse, Bhabha's mimicry—also known as "colonial imitation" or "colonial mimesis"—has a double vision. It is, to begin with, a system of subject formation, a "complex strategy of reform": mimicry desires "a recognizable Other" whose sense of personal identity will be "almost the same, but not quite" that of the conquering caste. But mimicry is also "the sign of the inappropriate, a difference or recalcitrance" which poses a threat to the authority of colonial discourse ("Mimicry" 86). Such discourse and power, as Bhabha claims elsewhere, is never "possessed entirely by the colonizer" ("Difference" 200). The colonizer is shorn of his power when instanced by Don Quixote, a kind of would-be world colonizer. As strategies of reform, signs of recalcitrance, and menaces to authority, modes of mimicry appear throughout *Don Quixote*. And when they surface, they profoundly disturb the regnant authorities. Don Quixote's "inappropriate" liberation of the galley slaves (1:22), for example, is explicitly depicted as a threat to, and a disruption of, the King's disciplinary powers. The king in question is, of course, Philip II, who presided over Spain's New World colonies and whom Cervantes irreverently addresses, in his popular sonnet to his ostentatious tomb ("Al túmulo de Felipe II"), as "el muerto" ["the dead man"].

The disrupting effect of Don Quixote's mimicry of the conquistadores is

perhaps most visible in his offer of an *ínsula* to Sancho. The novel's very first allusion to Sancho mentions him as a "pobre villano" ["poor villager"] seduced into Don Quixote's service by the knight's promise to win "alguna ínsula y le dejase a él por gobernador della" ["some island and to leave him there as its governor"] (1:7). This promise functions as a parody of a feudal topos found in the books of chivalry: in *Amadís*, for example, the protagonist made his squire Count of Ínsula Firme. Parody has been classically defined as dealing with strictly literary norms: it is precisely through the metalinguistic uses of the preformed language of chivalry that we recognize *Don Quixote* as a parodic text. But satire can be transmitted through parody (Rose 47).[13] And what is transmitted here is a satire of the conquistadores, who were far more likely to be made governors than counts. Columbus's gift of the island of "Bella Saonese" to Michele da Cuneo, for example (which anticipated innumerable other American "gifts" of this territorial kind), is as operative a Cervantine subtext as Amadís's gift of "Ínsula Firme" to his squire. The landlocked "ínsula" in Navarre over which Sancho, as the dupe of the Dukes, is finally installed as governor is neither *firme* nor worth his sufferings. In renouncing the governorship of Isla Barataria, Sancho renounces his squirely mimicry of the codes of chivalry, which the corrupt aristocracy are themselves mimicking. The episodes in *Don Quixote* on *ínsulas*—promised, desired, granted, and renounced—reprove the books of chivalry not only as medieval artistic forms but also as Renaissance codifications of Spain's imperialist culture in America.

Sancho's choice to leave the sham governorship of Barataria and to return to his barren village in La Mancha signifies, among other things, his renunciation of mimicry, his refusal to subscribe any longer to the ideology of chivalry. This ideology at work in a colonial context is sketched out by V.S. Naipaul, whose despairing portraits of "mimic men" differ radically from Bhabha's more emancipatory theories of mimicry.[14] What Naipaul brings to any profile of the conquistadores, however, is an exemplary portrait of how the Spaniards in the New World—"paying for their history, the centuries of Muslim rule and the slow cleansing of their land"—remained committed to "an outdated code of chivalry" (*El Dorado* 43). This commitment is documented in Naipaul's case study of Antonio de Berrío, a chivalric conquistador who arrived in the Indies in 1580 (the year Cervantes was released from captivity), eventually to become governor of the Island of Trinidad. Naipaul works out of a number of chronicles to show exactly how Berrío "is made to look like a man from another age" (*El*

13. For Rose, the terminological confusion between parody and satire stands as a sign of their cooperation, and, indeed, "the transmission of literary satire through the medium of parody has . . . been common practice" (47).

14. Apart from the quixotic ability to choose his own character (if not the character of a dandy which he *does* choose), Ralph Singh, one of Naipaul's "mimic men of the New World" (*Mimic Men* 146), has little or no retrievable relation to Don Quixote. I thank Sharmila Mukherjee, a Naipaul scholar, for helpful commentary on an early draft of this essay.

Dorado 43). Cervantes may or may not have heard about Antonio de Berrío when he began to fashion his own cultural nostalgic, Don Quixote. What unites the two men—one a "real life" conquistador, the other a fictional would-be conquistador—is a shared commitment to the same abstract cognitive structure: the outmoded ideology of chivalry.

Summing Up

Don Quixote mounts a five-pronged attack on the books of chivalry: through satire, parody, irony, generic transgression, and intention—this last the explicit wish to topple "la máquina mal fundada" ["the ill-founded machine"] of the books of chivalry (Prologue 58). Cervantes's novel examines the chivalric genre within a context of a static past: the complacency, grandiosity, and vainglorious chivalric pretensions of its hero are systematically eroded across Part 2. But the text also examines the books of chivalry within the dynamic present, an age of American colonization that began, as Arrabal puts it, the very year of Cervantes's birth (152). Cervantes wrote during a time of tremendous social upheaval in Philip II's Spain, with its rise of a bureaucratic absolutism that extended from a centralized state across an empire bestriding two oceans. Cervantes's parody, a vehicle of satire, holds a mirror up to empire. The satire is aimed not at medieval chivalry (which would *really* be quixotic!), but at its Renaissance revival, an enterprise common to both Don Quixote and the conquistadores.

By the time Cervantes was writing *Don Quixote*, the books of chivalry already displayed what Bakhtin would have called "a hardened and no longer flexible skeleton" (3). With the Cave of Montesinos episode, Cervantes constructs a sepulchre to house that generic skeleton. "Only a man who 'lives in language,'" as a Lacanian critic wisely notes, "can construct the dwelling we call a sepulchre" (Safouan 81). Cervantes forces his hero, moreover, to visit that sepulchre, where his chivalric identity begins to unravel. As his earlier attack on the Canon of Toledo demonstrates, Don Quixote regarded chivalry as an institution that had to be protected from the kind of blasphemies ["tantas blasfemias"] uttered by the Canon in his dismissal of Amadís, King Arthur, Tristan and Iseult, and Lancelot and Guinevere as apocryphal (1:49). When Don Quixote encounters the superannuated chivalric figures in the Cave of Montesinos, he discovers, amid much psychic distress, that chivalry is dead with Durandarte, a literally heartless and mummified figure who enjoins him to have patience and shuffle the cards ["Paciencia y barajar"].[15] Enchanted for centuries, the erstwhile heroic figures in the Cave of Montesinos suffer financial hardships and rotten teeth and menopause, all the coarse realities of life designed to jolt Don Quixote out of his "other identified" state (2:22-23).

15. See Wilson on this episode.

Cervantes helped to bury the closed, monolithic, and aristocratic narrative forms of the books of chivalry, a genre that had codified the discursive practices embedded in the social and political institutions of imperial Spain. The task of transition to Castilian-only as a national language—the project articulated by Antonio de Nebrija in 1492—had firmly tied grammar to empire. The loosening, if not the conscious subversion, of those imperial ties allowed for the birth of the Cervantine novel. Although I acknowledge the many complexities surrounding Cervantes's campaign against the books of chivalry—including the argument that he was "flogging a horse that was already dead" (Russell, *Cervantes* 25)—I nevertheless concur with Edward Friedman's claim that "the destruction of chivalric romance is what *Don Quijote* is about, if one understands the attempted erasure as a symbolic gesture" (41-42).[16] The same literature that had propped up the medieval aristocracy, galvanized the conquistadores into performing acts of "ocean chivalry," and turned Don Quixote into a crazed "mimic man" needed to be erased. And Cervantes was happy to oblige. Lord Byron tried to sum up Cervantes's accomplishment in a memorable canto of *Don Juan*:

> Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away;
> A single laugh demolished the right arm
> Of his own country;—seldom since that day
> Has Spain had heroes. (358; canto 13, stanza 11)

Henry Thomas's assessment of the degree to which Cervantes accomplished his goals provides a check to such Byronic hyperbole: "si no obtuvo la dudosa distinción de extinguir de golpe un género ya moribundo, tuvo al menos la satisfacción de salvarnos de un posible renacimiento" ["if he did not earn the dubious distinction of extinguishing a moribund genre with one blow, he at least had the satisfaction of saving us from a possible renaissance"] (136). Neither assessment is wholly accurate. The chivalric genre has had its numerous renaissances and Spain has had its heroes. What we can safely conclude, however, is that Cervantes, like Byron, was "No Childe of Chivalry."

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16. Although Friedman understands the attempted destruction as more of a metafictional than a moral attack, he justly allows that chivalry itself has ties to both literary convention and social reality.

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