In Praise of What is Left Unsaid:* 
Thoughts on Women and Lack in *Don Quijote*

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In the fractured mirror that is the mad gentleman of La Mancha we come face to face not only with the defects of character Don Quijote strives to keep hidden from himself, but with those of the society he has decided to take on in his anachronic reversion to knight errantry. A successful account of Don Quixote must attend not only to the hero’s failure but also to weaknesses in the societal structure brought to light through his madness. Cervantes’ unswerving capacity to expose the limitations of social as well as personality structures make of his work something more than a contest in which he can be shown to favor one or the other, either the self against society, or society against the self. It is no longer useful to ask of the text a decision regarding the merits of structure *per se*. Instead I would like here to consider the text for what it leaves unsaid, for its exposure of the voids out of which, willy nilly, language, story, and meaning are generated.

Cervantes haunts the convention by which stories are told and lives are led with a sense of distance and of absence. It is in the gap which the author establishes between story and teller, between story and reader, that the novel depotentiates the absolutizing pretences of ego, and all tendencies to identify with the divisions and

* Cide Hamete asks, in Chapter 44 of Part II, to be praised “no por lo que escribe, sino por lo que ha dejado de escribir”.
oppositions which structure language as well as society. Don Quijote’s conflictive/mimetic role vis à vis his contemporaries is another way by which Cervantes jumbles the patterns of expectation, judgement, belief, and social role that make up our participation in the collective. He also frustrates the reader’s desire for textual stability by putting into question the validity of his sources and the reliability of his narrator. Using a madman for hero and a deceitful Moor for scribe Cervantes clouds his text with an aura of uncertainty whose function is to relativize all those efforts of law, word, and custom to tame the incongruities and anomalies of lived experience.

Cervantes’ challenge of established forms, social as well as literary, extends even to his own authority. The Prologue to Part I reveals his doubts about degrees, titles, and erudition, as well as his capacity to offer a proper introduction to his work. Uncertainty regarding his authority is projected, nine chapters into Part I, onto the figure of the fictional narrator Cide Hamete, who carries for him his sense of incapacity before the task of faithful representation. Debates about how best to represent and formulate in words any given experience run throughout the work, as do implied questions, through the multiplication of voices, dialects and literary forms, of how any verbal construct relates to the events it seeks to recall to the imagination.

The question of authority, however, is too vast for a paper of modest size to encompass. For the sake of limiting the topic, and in order to offer a specific example, I want here to consider how Cervantes challenges in Don Quixote one of the most deeply-ingrained assumptions of literary as well as social structure through the parody of sexual convention Don Quixote’s obsession with distressed damsels invites. The history of Cervantes criticism provides surprisingly little guidance on the role of women in Don Quixote. Those few studies that exist tend either to list them, categorize them, or to single out specific women for special mention.2 Em-

1 For example, Cervantes says in his Prologue: “de todo esto [notas y comentario erudito] ha de carecer mi libro, porque ni tengo que acotar en el margen, ni que notar en el fin, ni menos se que autores sigo en el. . . . También ha de carecer mi libro de sonetos al principio, al menos de sonetos cuyos autores sean duques, marqueses, condes, obispos, damas o poetas celeberrimos” (Prol., 68-69). All quotes come from the John Jay Allen edition of Don Quijote, and will be cited by Part, Chapter, and page.

2 The best-known study devoted exclusively to the women in Don Quixote is Edith Trachman’s book Cervantes’ Woman of Literary Tradition. Regarding the treatment of specific women, I think especially of Casalduero on the inn prostitutes, Madariaga on Dorotea, and Auerbach on Dulcinea, to name only a few of the most prominent.
phasis has fallen far more often on the male characters, the women figuring as symptoms of their conflicts, objects of their desires, figments of their imagination, or obstacles in their forward progress.

Male-based readings, while undeniably rich and rewarding, generally leave unmolested the dominant cultural expectations regarding sexual politics. Those expectations, built into the literary traditions of courtly love, the pastoral, and the chivalric romances, are well described by René Girard. They make of woman an object of desire whom men pursue and about whom they write. Don Quixote, who in this as in so much else is spokesman for a whole tradition, exposes the essential insubstantiality of the female object of desire when he explains to Sancho in Chapter 25 of Part I:

¿Piensas tú que las Amariles, las Filis, las Silvias, las Dianas, las Galateas, las Alidas y otras tales de que los libros, los romances, . . . los teatros de las comedias están llenos, fueron verdaderamente damas de carne y hueso, y de aquellos que las celebran y celebraron? No, por cierto, sino que las más se las fingen, por dar sujeto a sus versos, y porque los tengan por enamorados o por hombres que tienen valor para serlo (I, 25, 300).

As Arthur Efron has so rightly pointed out, “Dulcineism”, far from being the affliction of a single gentleman from La Mancha, is a way of life for a whole culture.

The intercalated stories that tell of Grisostomo’s frustrated love for Marcela, Cardenio’s self-sabotaged effort to marry Luscinda, Anselmos’s hanging over of his wife Camila to his best friend Latorio, and the goatherd Eugenio’s failure to win Leandra, reveal again and again across the pages of Don Quijote Part I the tendency both to turn the desired woman into an object and to create a rival who will assure the lover’s failure. The tales of conflict, rivalry, and madness that surround the stories’ obsessive erotic theme render almost entirely invisible the women who have ostensibly inspired their telling. It is far easier for all concerned to adopt instead the role of pursuer, and to explain away the loved-one as an invention motivated by the hope of fame or the effort to win out over a rival. My point here will be that—just as Freud told us not too long ago,

3 See especially his Deceit: “Triangular desire is one. We can start with Don Quixote and end with Pavlovitch, or we can begin with Tristan and Isolde as Denis de Rougemont does in Love in the Western World and quickly reach that ‘psychology of jealousy’ which pervades our analysis. . . . De Rougemont correctly observes: ‘One reaches the point of wanting the beloved to be unfaithful so that one can court her again’. ” (48).
echoing Aristotle—woman (in the novel and elsewhere) signifies lack: she both represents and embodies his lack. She stands off to the side of male discourse, from which position, in works that turn attention to her place of marginalization, she can be seen unraveling the tales of fragility and helplessness which are generally intended to represent her.

By embedding such tales as those of Cardenio and Grisostomo within a larger context, Cervantes invites a comparison between the words of his character/narrators and the manner in which, outside their stories, they conduct themselves. The absence which for Derrida is language's principle characteristic figures in the novel in the hero's relation to the women he simultaneously desires and refuses. Like that gap—already alluded to—that Cervantes reveals between events and the formulae designed to capture them, the woman figures in the text as that spectral other who is both looked over and overlooked.

Leslie Fiedler has characterized American fiction as featuring as its typical protagonist “a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat—anywhere to avoid ‘civilization’, which is to say, the confrontation of a man and a woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility” (xx), and Edward Said, on a similar tack, has observed of the novel in general its proclivity for celibate male heroes who create an alternate world of fantasy in the place of the expected one of marriage and self-perpetuation through progeny. The case could be made that the novel is the locus of conflicting discourses, all of which, like the wandering male heroes who populate them, fail in precisely what they most desire—to achieve through words and wandering an experience of the real. That failure, furthermore, is intimately related to what those characters, even as they chase after

4 Consider, for example, this reading of Freud from Lacan: “...we arrive at the question of structure, which was introduced by Freud’s approach: which means that the relation of privation or lack-in-being symbolized by the phallus, is established by derivation from the lack-in-having engendered by any particular or global frustration of demand” (90). That sense of woman as imperfect vis à vis man has a long tradition is affirmed in Ian MacClean’s study, which takes the issue back to Aristotle from the Renaissance: “In the distinction [in scholastic thought] of male and female may be discerned Aristotle’s general tendency to produce dualities in which one element is superior and the other inferior. The male principle in nature is associated with active, formative and perfected characteristics, while the female’s is passive, material and depressed, desiring the male in order to become complete” (8).

5 More pointedly, using terms being developed in this paper, Said sees novelistic heroes as caught in the “fear of the void” (92).
it, avoid: the confrontation with woman not as object but as independent other, procreative, relational, obligatory, the woman whose presence, were it fully recognized, would expose in the man who desires her the void.\(^6\)

As should be obvious by now, the void is figured in many guises in the novel. Though frequently imaged as the desirable and maddeningly inaccessible woman, it also is associated with Mother Nature, whose continued status as bountiful and beneficent was the subject of much concern in the sixteenth century. In his famous speech to the goatherds, Don Quixote, while giving his first full-fledged explanation of his mission as knight-errant, also evokes the world of the nurturing mother whose all-giving care of her children has been lost irrevocably in the mists of time. His nostalgia for that bucolic Golden Age betrays both his wish for a return to a condition of dependency and his transformation of that forbidden desire into the more socially-acceptable impulse to be himself the protector. The de-centering implied in that assumption of a false autonomy is basic not only to Don Quixote’s psychological make up, but to that of our own age.\(^7\)

Don Quixote’s Golden Age speech is set in the form of an after-dinner talk and represents his effort to bring his classical/literary orientation into association with the company in which he finds himself. His recourse to the “beatus ille” topos, however, fails to make its mark. The shepherds on whom he drops his version of the pastoral ideal stare at him in dumbfounded silence, munching on the acorns whose literary associations had triggered what Cide

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\(^6\) It must be noted here that the emphasis on the male experience is not intended to suggest that women are not similarly subject to the fear of dependency that makes mutuality of relationship impossible. Intrapsychically, it is the masculine aspect of the self that represents autonomy, activity, forward motion, while the feminine aspect is associated with relationship, passivity, and stasis. That, historically, those aspects have been translated into prescribed modes of behavior for men and women does not mean that either sex in fact is properly identified with only one half of its full nature. Literature, so attuned to the contents of the unconscious, and the novel, so reflective of social realities, however, tend to represent those inner realities in the outer terms here described.

\(^7\) It is only very recently, in the work of such “object relations” psychologists as Margaret Mahler and W. D. Winnicott that the realm of the mother and her role in the dialectic of symbiosis and individuation that underlies all human relationships has been explored. Evelyn Fox Keller and Jessica Benjamin have carried the work into the philosophical realm, calling into question the apotheosis of autonomy that makes of its corollary demand for connection “regressive”. It is such a privileging of activity over passivity, and autonomy over dependency, that has proved so damaging to the half of our life associated with nature, mother, and the child.
Hamete uncharitably called Don Quixote’s “arenga” (I, 11, 159), and changing the subject as quickly as possible.

The separation revealed in Chapter 11 between speaker and listener, as well as that between actual rusticity and its lettered representation reiterates the structures of alienation characteristic of the novel as a whole and basic to the workings of parody. Don Quixote’s speech, being scarcely comprehended either by the goatherds, who listen politely, or by Sancho, who does not, is essentially a monologue whose bi-partite nature measures the span of Don Quixote’s own inner spaces. On the one hand he presents a “then”, when “todo era paz, . . . todo amistad, todo concordia” (I, 11, 158), when “aún no se había atrevido la pesada reja del corvo arado a abrir ni visitar las entrañas piadosas de nuestra primera madre” (I, 11, 158). On the other hand there is the “now” in which “no está segura ninguna” (I, 11, 158).

Refracted off a venerable bucolic tradition, Don Quixote has exposed both the secret of his own erotic history and the nature of discourse, which is to disguise desire in the rhetoric of its denial.8 Spurred on by the unbearable demands of his erotic longings, yet unable to acknowledge them as his own, Don Quixote diverts, like so many of his fellow characters, his energy away from the object of desire toward the “other” on whom it is projected. Between rival and rival is the “distressed damsel” whose place of unapproachability Don Quixote seeks to sustain by force of arms.

When Don Quixote tells his audience of goatherds that women are no longer safe in this age of iron, and that greed and lust have broken the bond of mother earth and her children, he is evoking—as only a madman can—the very heart of the issue. For the “distressed damsels” Don Quixote feels called upon to protect seem vulnerable only in their isolation from the mother principle. Mothers are conspicuous by their absence as much in Part I of Don Quixote as in the literary and dramatic works of Cervantes’ contemporaries. No model of conjugal love or of motherhood exists in the world out of which Don Quixote comes. Nor does he find such

8 Appealing to a Lacanian construct, we could say that what Don Quixote exposes is the emptiness of the Phallic structures in which, willy nilly, he is caught. As Ellie Ragland-Sullivan has put it, “We are faced with a choice between individuation through psychic Castration (that is, learning difference by alienation into language, social conventions and roles) or failure to evolve an identity adequate to social functioning. Lacanian Phallic Law is, therefore, a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it saves people from (m)Other domination; on the other, it tyrannizes because it is arbitrary and artificial” (273).
models in the world into which he escapes. And yet, wherever intimations exist of an intact bond between mother and daughter—as in the cases of Dorotea, Luscinda, and Zoraida—we see instances not of female helplessness but of ingenuity, strength and perdurability.

Cut off from the mother as are, for example, Leandra, doña Clara, and Marcela, the damsel is deeply implicated in the male world of the chase, one which leads to literature, to trickery, to madness, and to other endless displacements of desire. For the fact is that what Don Quixote sees yet does not want to see is that the virgin is an aspect of the mother and that the successful pursuit of her leads inevitably to Fiedler’s “fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility.” By taking the position that he hopes to protect the daughter, Don Quixote is simultaneously affirming and lamenting the mother’s absence. In the mythic substructure of Don Quixote, which we touch in the Golden Age speech, we glimpse the face of Demeter, withdrawing in grief, her daughter Persephone in the process of being snatched into the bowels of earth by Hades.

Don Quixote’s contrasting of that Golden Age, when the dominant female figure was imaged as an all-nourishing mother, with the age of iron, in which she appears as a vulnerable maiden, carries fascinating psycho-mythological implications, bearing as much on the particularities of Cervantes’ own make-up as on issues of importance for his time. Principally, the contrast highlights

9 It needs to be noted that the Demeter/Persephone story from the Homeric Hymns represents a later version of the myth, earlier ones offering no tale of abduction. Charlene Spretnak points out that “whatever the impulse behind portraying Persephone as a rape victim, evidence indicates that this twist to the story was added later after the societal shift from matrifocal to patriarchal, and that it was not part of the original mythology. In fact, it is likely that the story of the rape of the Goddess is a historical reference to the invasion of the northern Zeus-worshippers . . .” (107).

10 From the point of view of individual psychology, Louis Combet’s “psychostructural” study of Cervantes’ works points to a strong identification with the mother in Cervantes, as witness both by the nature of his typical heroes, and by certain events of his biography. That complex relationship to the mother, however, has collective significance as well.

Erich Neumann points to the Renaissance as a period in which mother and earth are strongly figured in the psyches of creative men, while Walter Ong shows how, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that identification with the all-powerful mother is broken through a complex conjunction of historical and technological forces.

Situated just at the cusp, ideologically as well as chronologically, between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, between a Renaissance search for recovery of oneness and the Baroque engagement in duality, Cervantes, through Don Quixote, articulates both man’s archaic, anachronistic yearning to return to the
the struggle between the desire for oneness and union expressed by so many writers and philosophers of the sixteenth century, and the sense of regret, revealed in the formation of the novel, that that union, that mother-child symbiosis, must be broken. From a mythological point of view, Don Quixote’s strange, revisionary update of the old beatus ille topos highlights precisely that moment when the maiden is about to be snatched away—when, concomitantly, the mother will be thrown into mourning, and through that mourning, into the role of rejector.

The idea of a Mother Earth turning cold and rejecting in answer to the predator attitude taken by suitors with regard to the young maiden gives context to both the novel and to the period in which it was written. The “detestable age” of iron of which Don Quixote speaks marks the end of plenty, the expulsion from Eden. But, like the Fall, of which Don Quixote’s discourse is but a variation, the gap left in earth by the discovery of the severing of the mother-child bond is one which language and literature will seek to fill. Don Quixote, separated from home and dreaming, through the absent Dulcinea, of an eventual return, is the figure of his age, the figure of the wanderer, the conquerer, the colonizer. He images his flesh and blood compatriots in their travels about the new world, and enacts, in the imaginations of his readers, their role of restless adventure.

Levi-Strauss’s description of European man’s impact on the New World resembles in many ways that of Don Quixote when lamenting the age of iron, with its destructive attitude toward Mother Nature. And like Levi-Strauss, Don Quixote plays out, as much with respect to the earth as to the woman, the contradictory position of symbiosis with the mother—to what Lacan would call the imaginary realm—, and his participation in the power and literacy of the patriarchal—what Lacan would call the Symbolic. The unwanted knowledge that Don Quixote, in his madness, forces us to recognize, is that desire is organized around the lost identification with the mother. As Ellie Ragland-Sullivan has put it, referring to Lacan, “The Imaginary identification with the mother is the bedrock text of ‘self’, the site of the primordial discourse of the unconscious . . .” (p. 279-80). Nowhere does Don Quixote more clearly articulate that identification than in his Golden Age speech.

He says, in Tristes tropiques: “The relationship between Man and the soil had never been marked by that reciprocity of attention [in the New World] which, in the Old World, has existed for thousands of years . . . Here in Brazil the soil was first violated, then destroyed. Agriculture had been a matter of looting for quick profits. Within a hundred years, in fact, the pioneers had worked their way like a slow fire across the State of Sao Paulo, eating into virgin territory on the one side, leaving nothing but exhausted fallow land on the other” (97-8).
role of counter-adventurer, opposing those who would exploit the one and the other, even as he mimics them. In order to see how Don Quixote carries out his program as outlined in the Golden Age speech we need to see how closely intertwined are the questions of lust and greed in his mind, and how consistently his “mad” adventures of the first half of Part I involve both a protection of the earth and a protection of the woman, as if, by preventing abductions, by stopping, symbolically, the father’s intrusion on the mother-child dyad, Don Quixote could avert the Fall, could stop his painful experience of separation and individuation.

In the incidents immediately preceding Don Quixote’s Golden Age speech, his first two adventures on his second sally, Don Quixote takes on two major symbols of the new economy, while also projecting onto one of them the figure of the damsel in distress. The famous attack on the windmills, as Charles Aubrun has shown, was far from innocent, from an economic point of view, as windmills represented part of an increasing effort in sixteenth century Europe to dominate and subdue by means of machinery the forces of nature. Not long after having been thrown into a heap of bruises by the blades of the windmill, Don Quixote sees a woman in a coach, ahead of whom are riding some Benedictine friars. Don Quixote attacks the friars on the basis that they are necromancers carrying the lady off against her will. The fantasy that a lady is being taken against her will, so basic to the version of the world Don Quixote is bent on enacting, is countered by the narrator, who tells us that she was “going to Seville to meet her husband, who was there in order to embark for the Indies.” Far from being simply a damsel in distress, the lady in fact represents a new class of people, of people who will become successful and wealthy in an economy based on power and greed, on the colonization of the new world. That she may be in distress is also worth considering.

A similar confluence of economic and erotic obsessions can be seen in the incident of the armies of sheep and goats. Don Quixote justified his attack on the flocks, which in the sixteenth century represented another powerful interest that threatened the agricul-

12 Aubrun says: “Windmills altered not only the landscape, but also traditional life. The giants are the origin of the decline and poverty of the hidalgos... [Don Quixote] charges an enormous structure where one grinds grain, his grain, the wheat of La Mancha. It is enough to make one lose one’s head; his unreason is not without reason.” (63).
aturally-based nobility, on the basis that he was saving a Christian princess being taken in marriage against her will by a Moorish warrior.

The attacks are not always linked directly with the question of the woman. Sometimes, as in the cases of the merchants of Toledo, or the episode with the galley slaves, aggression is focused on images associated with the Spain of money, industry, and military power. In either case Don Quixote exhibits an attitude congruent with what Carolyn Merchant has called the organic image of earth—an image that was, precisely in the sixteenth century, losing dominance to an image, and a corresponding set of activities, of subdual. Merchant contrasts the conflicting images of human-kind’s relationship to earth as follows:

Central to the organic theory was the identification of nature, especially the earth, with a nurturing mother: a kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered, planned universe. . . . An organically oriented mentality in which female principles played an important role was undermined and replaced by a mechanically-oriented mentality that either eliminated or used female principles in an exploitative manner. As Western culture became increasingly mechanized in the 1600’s, the female earth and virgin earth spirit were subdued by the machine (2).

Among the machines which Merchant catalogues are lift and force pumps, cranes, windmills, under and overshot water mills, fulling mills, and geared and wheeled bridges.

The reference to fulling mills plunges us once again into the world of Don Quixote with its madness that is not so mad, its sanity that is not so sane. Don Quixote and Sancho spent a night in the mountains terrified by the relentless pounding that later turned out to be “only” fulling mills. The mills, used in the cloth industry, are linked associatively both with the merchants of Toledo and with the sheep herders whose flocks Don Quixote attacked, and even to the silk manufacturers to whom the Arabic version of Don Quixote might well have been sold had not the “Second Author” of chapter 9 rescued it.

The picture becomes more and more compelling of Don Quixote’s lonely battle to protect mother earth from the exploitative approach to her that technology, increasingly, was making possible. His battle, however, serves ironically to strengthen those whom he has set out to defeat, since hidden beneath his anti-authoritarian stance is the same fear-of/desire-for the all-powerful
mother that drives his adversaries. It is far easier to attack figures of oppression and authority than to come to terms with the passivity and vulnerability Mother Nature demands of her children. To allow for such a symbolic identification with the feminine would be to expose mankind’s deepest and best-kept secret.

The sixteenth century writers who worried about the abuse, through mining, damming, and drainage, of Mother Earth, warned that she would not be fruitful if she were ill-treated, a concern worth considering in the context of the barren landscapes of Part I of *Don Quixote* and the general sense that there is never enough food or water. In one last desperate attempt to release the earth goddess from her withdrawal, an attempt made when Don Quixote himself had been caged as a madman and was being taken as if in procession back home, Don Quixote throws himself at a procession of penitents carrying a statue of the Virgin Mary, shouting:

Luego al punto dejéis libre a esa hermosa señora, cuyas lágrimas y triste semblante dan claras muestras que la lleváis contra su voluntad y que algún notorio desaguisado le habedos hecho (I, 52, 574) . . .

Don Quixote, also mournful and being carried off against his will, while once again exposing his unconscious identity with the Virgin/Mother, also reveals the degree to which his unconscious is one with that of the collective, for the penitents whose procession he attacks carry the statue of the Virgin in order to beg of the heavens an end to drought. The text reads:

Era el caso que aquel año habían las nubes negado su rocío a la tierra, y por todos los lugares de aquella comarca se hacían procesiones, rogativas y diciplinas, pidiendo a Dios abriese las manos de su misericordia y les lloviese. (I, 52, 573)

Like the generalized absence of the mother in Part I, the dry, barren landscape serves to underscore the condition of deprivation that abuse of the mother appears to have fostered. But Don Quixote, as we have already seen, inhabits both sides of the dialectic whose terms he set forth in the Golden Age speech. He also enacts, through his addiction to arms and letters, through his abuse of power and his exercise of authority over Sancho, the very patriarchal consciousness whose suppression of the mother and of earth it is his goal to avert. When Don Quixote tells the goatherds about the equality that is at the basis of the knightly ideal he says to Sancho:
Porque veas, Sancho, el bien que en si encierra la andante caballería, y cuán a pique están los que en cualquiera ministerio della se ejercitan de venir brevemente a ser honrados y estimados del mundo, quiero que aquí a mi lado y en compañía desta buena gente te sientes, y que seáis una misma cosa conviniendo, que soy tu amo y natural señor . . . porque de la caballería andante se puede decir lo mismo que del [amor se dice]: que todas las cosas iguala. (I, 11, 156)

Sancho refuses Don Quixote’s demand that he sit with him, saying:

Como yo tuviese bien de comer, tan bien y mejor me lo comería en pie y a mis solas como sentado a par de un emperador (I, 11, 157) . . .

But Don Quixote will not take no for an answer: “Con todo eso, te has de sentar” (I, 11, 157). The text goes on to say, “Y asióndole por el brazo, le forzó a que junto dél se sentase” (I, 11, 157).

Like it or not, Don Quixote is part of the hierarchized world, the world of the intellect, of absence, of abuse of earth and of the body. All his actions intensify the conflict and separation he is seeking to efface. Don Quixote frees the galley slaves and becomes himself, in the process, an outlaw. He rides out to the aid of defenseless maidens and orphans, leaving behind unprotected the maiden niece entrusted to his care. He warns off those who would pursue the independent Marcela, but then goes after her himself. He mourns the depredation of the earth for commercial interests, yet sells off parcels of his own land for money to buy books. As Don Quixote he both combats and perpetuates his core problem, which is alienation from woman and nature, from all that represents nurture: of the body, the child, the land.

It is no accident that Don Quixote experiences, in his adventures across Part I, severe affliction of the body. The servants of the merchants of Toledo beat him senseless in Chapter 4. In his battle against the Basque gentleman in Chapter 9 he nearly loses an ear, and in the trampling by the sheep and goats he loses a handful of molars and gains the title “Caballero de la triste figura” (I, 21, 254). He is battered so badly in his battle with the Yanguesan carriers that he has to be taken to the inn thrown over the back of Sancho’s donkey. And in the inn to which he and Sancho repair his already heavily bruised ribs receive further bone-shattering blows.

As if the external damage were not enough, Don Quixote also torments his body from within, in part by eating far less than he was surely accustomed to eat at home, and in part by inflicting on his stomach such concoctions as Fierabras’ balsam, which cured
him of his afflictions by racking his entrails with a purge that left them cleansed down to the last bacterial remain.

The theme of the body as subject to both battering and ridicule runs throughout Part I. Vomit, excrement, head bashing, exposure of privy parts, lack of nourishment and rest, and finally total exhaustion mark the experience of Don Quixote's two sallies in the 1605 novel. The countryside through which Don Quixote and Sancho travel is equally lacking in softness and plenty, and the landscape is one filled with men no less violence-prone than Don Quixote himself.

In sum, Don Quixote Part I reiterates at every level the theme of the lost Age of Gold of which the mad gentleman spoke so eloquently in Chapter 11. The absence of the all-powerful and nurturing mother creates a vacuum in which violence, competition, lust, greed, and madness come into play. Don Quixote, who is both victim and perpetrator of such a situation only calls attention to the identical if less dramatic behavior of other male characters in the novel.

Grisóstomo, moved by desire for Marcela, gives up control over his property and ultimately kills himself. Cardenio seems incapable first of claiming Luscinda for himself and then of defending her against the desires of his socially superior rival Fernando. In the interpolated tale "El curioso impertinente" Anselmo literally gives his wife Camila over to his best friend Lotario. In the Captive's tale the father is portrayed as a man unable to hold onto his property.

What stands out in Part I and then emerges in Part II as a dominant theme, however, is the real power that belongs to the "defenseless" women over whom the men ostensibly struggle. Don Quixote is only an extreme case of the de-centering that afflicts all the male characters in a novel that exposes above all the damage done when the organic world view—the view that locates self within the context of an all-embracing mother—is lost. When Marcela's mother dies, her father dies soon after of grief. Marcela's celibate priest uncle is unable to persuade her to marry anyone, or to keep her from doing exactly as she chooses. In the woods and mountains that she makes her home she rules over the men who desire her. Dorotea and Luscinda prove far more capable of getting what they want and controlling their fortunes than do either Cardenio or Fernando. The Captive's father, and the father of Leandra, both without wives, prove irresolute, and suc-
cumb to the power of their off-sprung for the important decisions in their lives.

It boils down to a situation discussed at the beginning of this paper: to the separation revealed again and again in the novel between word and deed. The codes used by the chivalric romances, as well as those used by the priests, the readers of courtly love poetry, and in short the whole literate community represented in *Don Quixote* are constructed so as to stereotype the women, leaving completely invisible any distinguishing characteristics. Even the women assume the male-centered discourse. Dorotea, as well as Luscinda, for example, has read the chivalric novels. When need be, they both can play “damsels in distress” to the hilt.

But over and over again we see that out of the chaos of the rivalries—of those of Cardenio and Fernando, or of Anselmo and Lotario; out of the failure of the Captive’s attempt to escape, it is the “distressed damsel” who comes to the rescue, using vision, determination, courage, and ingenuity to untangle the webs of confusion in which their lovers and husbands have become caught.

What Cervantes offers us in *Don Quixote* I is a world in which the traditional structures of authority are called into question. The multiple layers of authors, the conflicting and varied archival documents regarding Don Quixote’s story, the struggle for dominance between Don Quixote and Cide Hamete, Cide Hamete’s own unreliability as narrator, all contribute, on the formal level, to the failure, examined here at the level of theme, of the male characters to exercise the authority their position has granted them.

The plane of consciousness achieved in *Don Quixote* I resembles more than many critics are prepared to admit that underlying the picaresque. *Don Quixote* I, like *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Guzmán de Alfarache* presents figures torn from the mother, figures ungrounded whose disorientation is rendered in the presentation of an ultimately anti-authoritarian central viewpoint. That viewpoint renders every statement, every position, every authorial stance, every social situation problematic, uncertain, subject to change. In such a shifting, uncertain atmosphere debilitating struggles for power take place, and the body, the land and the feminine are further alienated.

What distinguishes *Don Quixote* from the picaresque, however, and here I am referring in particular to Part I, is the presence of traces of an all but lost unitary vision. In the very Chapter 11 in which Don Quixote delivers his Golden Age speech, we glimpse in
the goatherd’s acceptance, caring, and healing of Don Quixote the unspoken, non-literate, non-hierarchical world toward which Don Quixote’s speech points. In Dorotea’s telling of her own story, Cardenio’s careful listening to it, and in the faith of Zoraida, we also intuit the unmediated world where the distinctions between “mine” and “thine” momentarily collapse. The fragmentation of authoritative figures and structures seems designed, in other words, not to deny but rather to expose—in the gaps and breaks—the real world’s redemptive presence.

In Part II a change takes place that both continues and radically alters the balance of forces analysed in Part I. In Part II, where Don Quixote’s hold on his conscious creation as knight errant is breaking down, women take on monstrously, overwhelmingly powerful roles. It starts with the housekeeper and the niece, who, largely silent in Part I, talk loudly and not so kindly to Don Quixote in Chapters 2 and 6, and even take overt action to prevent his escaping for a third sally. That their efforts fail is very much to the point, for what is happening, as the Cave episode later shows very clearly, is that Don Quixote is still both seeking out and resisting his desire to be one with the primordial mother. Images of water and enclosure draw Don Quixote from within, even as he clings to the figure of knight errant that from without is suffering increasing erosion. What needs to be noted is that that external wearing away of the knightly armor and project is one carried out by and large by the female characters, or by figures from the natural world.

Teresa Panza is as vociferous in her protests against Sancho’s wanderings as are Don Quixote’s housekeeper and niece. The peasant women whom Sancho tries to fool Don Quijote into accepting as Dulcinea and her attendants in Chapter 10 are far from the damsels of Don Quixote’s imagination. They push Don Quixote aside and leap onto horses, riding off, as do so many of the women in Part II, “a horcajadas” (II, 10, 98) . . . “astride, like a man” (531). Only a little less assertive is the Duchess, a huntress so eager to show her horsemanship that the author says “pero a todos se adelantara la duquesa, si el duque no se lo estorbara” (II, 34, 287).

The list of aggressive women in Part II is truly astounding. Doña Rodríguez, the Duchess, Altisidora, Claudia Jerónima, Ana Fénix come immediately to mind. There are also the transvestite scenes, in case the situation is not clear enough: the brother and sister on
Sancho's island who dress in one another's clothes; the steward who dresses as Dulcinea; the men in the Duke and Duchess' service who pretend to be Trifoldi and her attendants—women with beards; Don Gregorio, who, dressed as a woman in a harem in Algiers, awaits rescue by his fiancée, who has disguised herself as a Turkish sailor. Even the major characters participate in the sex reversals that underscore the mother-identification that only death and madness can expose as honor's underside. Sancho rides sidesaddle on Calvileño; Don Quixote becomes the object of a serenade, and the victim of attacks by cats and women. In Barcelona Don Quixote is stepped all over at the dance, and on his way home Altisidora humiliates both him and Sancho.

Part II, extending and deepening the challenge to authority and stereotype implied in Part I, totally shatters the reigning illusions, the easy assumptions, the accepted commonplaces. It also undermines faith in the possibility of recovering Eden—that Golden Age of Don Quixote's speech. In Part II the substance of reality itself proves false. The shepherds are now courtiers in disguise; the travelers, dressed as emperors and knights, are actors; the Knight of the mirrors and his squire are figures of papier-mâché. Don Quixote does not descend into the depths of the cave, but rather, remains close to the surface, just as his understanding of the dream he had there remains steadfastly superficial. In Part II Don Quixote finds himself caught in every direction by games, trickery, and deceit, and can only reclaim the world of wholeness and innocence once represented by Mother Nature and the distressed damsel by radically renouncing not only the novels of chivalry, but life itself, allowing death and the mystical reunion with God to take the place of all the precious illusions of safe harbor that he had created.

In Part II the once benign images of Demeter and Persephone have yielded to figures of the Amazon and Medusa, as Don Quixote clings to a persona of knighthood and combat inappropriate to the world he hopes somehow to restore. Yet even as he clings to the image of honor and power, the void is making its claim. Don Quixote seeks out the cave, the underground water systems, the vast expanse of the ocean, even as he comes to perceive the yawning gap between the world of illusion in which he

13 Arthur Efron has developed this theme considerably in "Bearded Waiting Women".
has been caught and the reality which continues to elude. When in Chapter 72 he finally recognizes that Dulcinea will never escape the fragile web of words in which he has caged her image, will never slip into the world of flesh and blood creatures, he is also owning, for the first time, his lack—recognizing her in himself as his own projection. It is then, properly, that the woman-escaping/pursuing hero, and with him the novel designed to bring forth his story, properly dies. On giving up the search for the archetypal distressed damsel, Don Quixote encounters the void he has been, all novel long, avoiding, entering into the space in between.\footnote{My reference to the “void” here is intended in echo of something Ellie Ragland-Sullivan points out in her discussion of Lacan on Castration: “The vide is not the female genitals . . . , but the fact that the mother symbolizes the loss that becomes the unconscious . . . The father is privileged over the mother because his gender difference symbolizes the opposite of need or loss” (288).}

*Don Quijote* situates reader and author in the very place of the in-between which Don Quixote—and with him the other male characters in the novel—seeks so valiantly to escape. As readers we stand outside the established structures, in a place shared by the female characters whom Don Quijote imagines it is his task to rescue or protect. What critics have blinded us to who have insisted on a personalistic view of Don Quijote—the view that the main character is either a champion of misunderstood idealism or of pointless social rebellion—is Don Quixote’s engagement in the central issue of masculine identity as that issue was being experienced in a society rapidly shifting from land to money and technology as principal instruments of power. Only through a parodic presentation of the hero and the society whose conflicts the hero embodies can Cervantes declare his disengagement from its dynamics. *Don Quijote* is “about” neither rebellion nor social conformation. Rather, it is a work that speaks, at every level of analysis, in the direction of silence, toward that which, despite the words, remains irrevocably unsaid.

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**WORKS CITED**


