

*Mujeres quijotescas: una mirada feminista al texto don
Quijote de la Mancha*
*Quixotic women: a feminist look at the text Don Quixote de la
Mancha*

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Resumen

Los análisis literarios que suscita una obra clásica como lo es don Quijote de la Mancha, en su mayoría, parten del tratamiento que se da a los personajes principales de la misma. La investigación que se presenta, enfatiza en la búsqueda de nuevas miradas para ahondar en temas relacionados con los personajes femeninos presentes en la obra de Miguel de Cervantes. Aunque algunos investigadores han trabajado el tema, son insuficientes los estudios críticos sobre la presencia de la mujer y su importancia en El Quijote. Y es a partir del reconocimiento de esta problemática que surge la presente investigación, su objetivo es proveer a los estudiantes y docentes de la carrera Licenciatura en Educación Español-Literatura de una novedosa línea de investigación que resalta el papel de los personajes femeninos dentro de la obra, todo ello visto desde la concepción interpretativa de la hermenéutica feminista.

Palabras Clave: Protofeminista, Hermenéutica feminista; Discurso literario; Rol femenino.

Summary

The literary analysis of a classic work such as *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, for the most part, is based on the treatment given to its main characters. The research presented here emphasizes the search for new perspectives to delve into issues related to the female characters present in the work of Miguel de Cervantes. Although some researchers have worked on the subject, critical studies on the presence of women and their importance in *Don Quixote* are insufficient. And it is from the recognition of this problem that the present research arises, its objective is to provide students and teachers of the degree in Spanish-Literature Education with a novel line of research that highlights the role of female characters in the work, all seen from the interpretive conception of feminist hermeneutics.

Keywords: Protofeminist, Feminist hermeneutics, Quixotic literary discourse; Feminine role.

Introduction

What has not already been said about *Don Quixote*? From that distant 1605 to the second decade of the 21st century, the novel has been the subject of innumerable investigations and analyses. The textual system of the work, added to the multiplicity of connotations present in it, make necessary its continuous exegesis in order to shed more light and enrich the critical corpus that surrounds it.

In Cuba, literary studies on Cervantes' masterpiece have focused mainly on his characters as the research axis. Researchers and critics such as (Aguirre, 1978; Carpentier, 1990; Henriquez, 1975), and others, have turned their gaze not only to the semantic framework, but also to its textual system.

Examples are the compilation of lectures given by Mirta Aguirre at the University of Havana under the name *The narrative work of Miguel de Cervantes*, published in 1978 by Editorial Arte y Literatura, as well as the extensive research anthology sponsored by the Faculty of Arts and Letters of the University of Havana; an anthology that collects three volumes with the most dissimilar criteria, edges and quixotic interpretations by thinkers and critics and is called "On the donoso and great scrutiny of Cervantism in Cuba".

The above is an evidence of the constant interest of the Cuban intelligentsia towards *Don Quixote*, cornerstone of the Spanish language, as well as literary guideline in the educational system of our country, a compelling reason to continue delving into its pages in search of new educational tools for the society of tomorrow; however, the national critical corpus still lacks studies and research on Cervantes, especially those works that put into perspective the role of women in the quixotic adventures.

The women that surround the novel in question are interesting figures because of the complex characterization that Cervantes gives them. He endows them with attitudes and ways of thinking that

are far ahead of their time. This point of analysis is reinforced by a conscious reading and the effective use of hermeneutics as a tool of narrative discourse.

Hermeneutics, as a theory of interpretation, addresses the relationship between meaning and significations, the former as cultural constructs established by authors, the latter as cultural constructs elaborated by readers. Applied under a perspective that places women at the center of the analysis, it orients the literary discourse of Quixote towards unfrequented paths.

This article recognizes this interpretative approach as "feminist hermeneutics"; a variant inclined to the study of women as discursive figures. This perspective follows the same rules of traditional hermeneutics and respects the spirit of the text. Such an approach sheds light on the important issue of Cervantes' thought in relation to the condition of women and how, in the construction of his characters, it reveals clear indications that allow us to stipulate Don Quixote as a proto-feminist text.

To this end, two of the women who parade through the pages of the book are analyzed: the spirited Marcela and the submissive Camila. By investigating the argumentative conflict, as well as establishing parallels between the two, not only will this lead to a better contextualization of intersexual relations at the time, but it will also make visible the author's conception of the subject in question.

Contextualizing the feminine role in the quixotic literary discourse results in two major advances, on the one hand, it helps the construction of healthier paradigms and the formation of values in classrooms and students in terms of interpersonal relationships. This emphasizes the transforming role of literature in society, whether it is the current one or the one that will be generated tomorrow.

Also, the treatment of this aspect enriches the research framework of the work, besides positioning an advanced line of research in the field of literary studies, both national and foreign, oriented to Cervantes' novel, since the information or works related to the subject are a minority in comparison with other aspects.

This research aims to provide a better approach to the work *The Ingenious Hidalgo don Quixote de La Mancha* by the students and teachers of the Spanish Literature career; to give a fresh, current breath, and incorporate a new nuance to the wide spectrum of meanings patent in the adventures of The Knight of the sad figure.

Such reasoning seems justified if we compare the literary pattern of the young woman with that of the Cervantine figure par excellence, that is, the ingenious gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha, since the utopian character of both the alleged feminist freedom of the former and the chivalric project of the latter made madness and social marginalization the only pillars capable of sustaining them (p.445)

This article aims to demonstrate the hypothesis of Miguel de Cervantes' work as an ideological and avant-garde novel in relation to the social rights of women in Spain and the world.

Development

Miguel de Cervantes y Saavedra wrote what would become his most emblematic work at a time of reforms in the political and social spheres of vice-regal Spain. The first modern European State had just been consolidated, thanks to the unification of the Catholic Monarchs and internal changes that transferred the Crown's command from the judicial to the executive sphere.

These changes established structures and codes to be complied with, which ended up affecting the social, moral and personal life of the individual. The laws concerning the civil state were hardened; marriage took on a high moral rank, besides being doubly legislated, not only by the judicial power but also by the divine power. As a consequence, marriage, more than a virtue, ended up becoming a mandate.

Women were hard hit by the collision between love and law. The alternatives prescribed for her in those times were reduced to marriage and the convent, as expressed by Juan de la Cerda in treatises such as *The political life of all women's states* and in the writings of Fray Luis de León and Juan Luis Vives.

This condition also had repercussions in the literary process. The picaresque novel arose and with it the rogue as an important literary character. The female figure takes ambivalent paths: exalted and exalted in the pastoral genre, on the one hand; criticized and disadvantaged in the picaresque. In addition, the chivalry genre was in decline in favor of the modern novel.

In the midst of this convulsive political, social and literary panorama, *Don Quixote* was born.

The treatment given to the women who inhabit this work is striking. A polychromatic representation that projects the internal and demarcated thought of the time, as well as a sharp inflection in it, thus attests to the behavior of certain characters.

This is because intersexual relationships occupy an important role in the narrative diegesis of the novel. About it, (Dudley, 1979, p.119), affirms that "it could be said that love, that is, the relationship between the sexes, is the basic concern of the whole book".

The aforementioned finds solid bases in the author's execution of his fictional universe, since there are many women who stand out in the quixotic adventures.

Cervantes created female personalities with qualities exclusive to the male characters. He gives them a tessitura sometimes high as Marcela and Dorotea and sometimes pale shades as those of Camila and Zoraida, but they do not go unnoticed.

The observation and study of the female figures in *Don Quixote* elucidate codes that were absent in the context in which it was produced, and which the author included with a vaguely defined intention, codes that easily make the work a pioneer in the vindication of women and a proto-feminist novel.

The analysis of certain passages of the text under a feminist hermeneutic can consolidate the previous hypothesis.

Feminist is understood to be related to visibility, rights and social justice in favor of the female gender. It is not the intention of the research to express a global analysis of quixotic femininity, but to focus only on the cases that contribute to and advocate the formation of values. Therefore, the term "feminist hermeneutics" responds to this interest.

For this purpose, the analysis will focus on two characters as a premise: the shepherdess Marcela, belonging to chapters XII to XIV and Camila, protagonist of the novelette of "The curious impertinent".

Shepherdess Marcela and the dilemma of freedom

Marcela is par excellence the character symbol of freedom.

We have an orphaned maiden of parents and extreme beauty, whose guardianship is in the hands of her uncle, a local parish priest. Perhaps her upbringing allowed her to form a high concept of married life since "at that time she did not want to marry and, being so young, she did not feel able to carry the burden of marriage" (Cervantes, 1615, p.64).

Her uncle, guarding her modesty and youth, consented to wait until she was more mature before marrying, which she agreed to do. This does not prevent the continuous flow of suitors, among who is Grisóstomo, a cultured young man of good name.

Faced with the refusal of the much sought-after girl, Grisóstomo ends up succumbing to despair. The result is suicide. Marcela, in a gesture resigned to the tragedy, decides to leave home and embrace the fields as a shepherdess.

Don Quixote and Sancho are informed of this context in their wanderings. They know the version of events given by the goatherds who accompany them. Right in the middle of the burial of the young Grisóstomo, Marcela appears to give her own version or what is known as her defense.

Many studies and articles focus on the discursive semantics of the character from multiple perspectives, but all of them coincide in the outrageous condition of Marcela before society; a feeling patent in her words:

Heaven has made me, as you say, beautiful, and in such a way that, without being powerful for anything else, you are moved by my beauty to love me, and by the love you show me you say and even want me to be obliged to love you. I know, with the natural understanding that God has given me, that everything that is beautiful is lovable; but I do not understand that, by reason of being loved, what is loved as beautiful is obliged to love the one who loves it no more, because it could happen that the lover of the beautiful is ugly, and the ugly being worthy of being hated, it is very bad to say "Love you as beautiful: make me love you, even if I am ugly. But if the beauties run equally, the desires should not run equally, because not all beauties enamor: some of them delight the sight and do not yield the will; and if all beauties enamored and enraptured, it would be a walk of confused and misguided wills, not knowing in which one they should stop, because, being infinite the beautiful subjects, infinite should be the desires. And, as I have heard it said, true love is not divided, and must be voluntary and not forced. This being so, as I believe it is, why do you want me to surrender my will by force, obliged no more than that you say that you love me well? If not, tell me: if as heaven made me beautiful it would make me ugly, would it be fair for me to leave you because you do not love me? (Cervantes, 1615, p. 75)

The shepherdess presents her personal conception of love. She defends that it should be bilateral and, therefore, a voluntary act, and alludes to her physique in an attempt to clarify the erroneous criterion projected towards her person. She demands a fair treatment, since "just as the viper does not deserve to be blamed for being poisonous, since it kills with it, for having been given it by nature, I do not deserve to be reprimanded for being beautiful" (Cervantes, 1615, p.75).

Here we can appreciate an internal conflict between Marcela's ideas and those prevailing among her contemporaries of the opposite sex. Throughout the discourse, the character does not deny the possibility of loving and being loved, but argues that, this should be her own right and not a social standard.

This is the case when she utters what would be considered her most famous words:

I was born free, and in order to live free I chose the solitude of the fields: the trees of these mountains are my company; the clear waters of these streams, my mirrors; with the trees and with the waters I communicate my thoughts and beauty. Fire I am apart and sword far away.

Those whom I have enamored with my sight I have disenchanted with words; and if desires

are sustained with hopes, not having given any to Grisóstomo, nor to anyone else the end of any of them, it can well be said that he was killed before his defiance than my cruelty. (Cervantes, 1615, p.75-76)

The first sentence of this statement, loaded with significance and object of exegesis, highlights the main virtue of the character and which serves as a banner in her struggle: autonomy.

Parallels are drawn between the Marcela of Don Quixote and Gelasia of "La Galatea". Aguirre argues that both see love as an ailment that causes a state of total alienation and shun it. They want to choose and not be chosen. Both are self-sufficient and strong.

That Miguel de Cervantes placed women of such criteria in his works is an indication of his thinking on the subject of female agency. Their psyche can be attributed to his own psyche.

Redondo (2005), points out: "the role of Cervantes as one of the pioneer authors in giving voice to his female characters, turning them into discursive subjects by letting them express themselves in a direct style".

For his part, Mayoral (2005), states that:

The key to interpreting the shepherdess Marcela lies in the emptiness of the description of her appearance. That is, the fact that the text praises her grace without specifying it leads the reader to pay attention to her words through which a new model of woman can be appreciated. Marcela stands out for her statements. She surprises the reader with a conception too far ahead of her time. She breaks with conservative canons and shows a human side. That is why she serves as a paradigm of independence and freedom (p.436)

However, the creator of Don Quixote, even when he gave her the word so that she could represent herself, ended up recognizing the impossibility of his purpose, so that once his interlocution was over, he secludes her in a mountain from which she is never seen to come out.

Taking a step further in this direction, it can be seen how the association between Marcela's beauty and death not only reaches the young people who desire her, but also relates to her own end. That is, leaving aside the story of Pedro, the shepherdess manifests in her speech, just before disappearing from the play, the decision to give herself exclusively to the earth, allowing it to be the only witness of her grace. She speaks of her beauty as "the spoils of my beauty".

The writer, aware of the utopian emancipation of the character in a society strongly rooted in tradition, ended up reflecting the failure of the same in social and literary terms at the moment when, once Marcela leaves the stage, those present conclude the matter by way of an epitaph, thereby silencing the voice of the young shepherdess.

Here lies of a lover

The miserable frozen body,

Who was a shepherdess of cattle?

Lost through lack of love

He died at the hands of the rigor

Of an elusive, ungrateful beauty,

With whom his empire dilates

The tyranny of love (Cervantes, 1615, p. 77)

Camila: an impertinent example of the times

In the literature of the Spanish Golden Age, everything that occurs before the marriage is material for comedy, and everything that occurs after it is material for tragedy.

The story of " "The curious impertinent " is a case of hypodiegesis within the narrative gear of Don Quixote, and this intentionally responds to the author's motives.

Broadly speaking, it deals with the wager made between two friends to test the integrity of the wife of one of them. Anselmo feels insecurity with respect to Camila, recently betrothed by him, since he believes that she could be unfaithful in his absence. For this, he asks for the help of Lotario, his best friend.

He proposes him a task: to woo Camila and find out how pure and chaste she is in such a situation.

It is natural that the reader, whether contemporary or objective, will find this arrangement appealing, if not morbid. The title of the novelette invites reading. Why use terms such as "impertinent" or "curious"? Writing is a deliberate act of the word, the choice of such words fulfills a specific objective here.

In the story, the predominant ideas about marriage and the concept of women are exposed through the mouths of the actors, as evidenced in the following fragment:

For what is there to be thankful for," he said, "that a woman is good if no one tells her that she is bad? How much is she who is withdrawn and fearful if she is not given the opportunity to let go, and she who knows that she has a husband who, by shrinking her at the first unwrapping, will take her life? So that she who is good for fear or for lack of place, I do not want to hold her in that esteem in which I will hold the sought after and persecuted one who went out with the crown of victory. So that for these reasons, and for many others that I could tell you to accredit and strengthen the opinion that I have, I wish that Camilla, my wife, go through these difficulties and be acrisolate and quilate in the fire of being required and requested, and of whoever has the courage to put her desires in her; and if she comes out, as I believe she will, with the palm of this battle, I will have my fortune without equal: I will be

able to say that the cup of my desires is full, I will say that the strong woman, of whom the Wise Man says that "who will find her?" (Cervantes, 1615, p.203)

Note two things here: the first is the impersonal and cold tone in which the opposite sex is alluded to, A kind of casual talk, devoid of any tact that endows the woman with the quality of being a possession, a kind of sexual object within the reach of man.

The same judgment is seen in the context of the two male protagonist characters in Lope de Vega's "The silly lady" when they dispute the love of one of the heroines without taking into account her opinion. "Both examples are consistent evidence of the context of intersexual relationships in vice-regal Spanish society," concludes the researcher (Mayoral, 2005, p. 324).

The second thing is the cynicism that permeates the fragment: Are these temptations only characteristic of the feminine nature? It is very easy to answer the question however; patriarchal ideology attributes carnal weakness to women.

But the irony is perceptible in the author's pen when constructing the dialogues and twists of this story. Sevilla (2006) considers that this passage of the novel is ambiguously connotative, on the one hand, presenting reality as it is, while on the other hand, it presents the expected reality; what it really should be.

Lotario, in spite of his moral glimpses, agrees to the deal and then a series of situations occur that ultimately end in tragedy. Urrutia (2005) believes that the result of this altercation becomes evident, but, to the reader's surprise, it takes place in a double line such as the edge of a sword: the woman falls and, at the same time, so does the man.

It is in this ending where, with coarse subtlety, the double human morality is drawn and it turns out to be the morality, especially the feminine one, the main motive of the story.

This aspect is strikingly projected in the silences of the protagonist.

Camila offers a passive performance in contrast to her counterpart Marcela. The character is submissive and demure as a result of the education she has received. Cervantes uses this to make the wound fester in the social epidermis.

Silence and obedience under the marital yoke was expected in a good woman. It is these elements combined here, which in turn cause the ruin of the male characters in the story.

The scenes between Lotario and Camila that, as we observe, lead to their ruin, are those that emphasize the absence of words; Camila's silence, for example, is an important element in the mutual seduction.

Pabón (2002), states that when taking into account the absences that exist in her marital relationship with Anselmo, Camila's performance surprises us less than Lotario's betrayal of his best friend, Anselmo.

In the end, lack of communication, ignorance of roles and an incorrect image of the other are the factors that stand out as a moral.

As previously mentioned, the condition of "The Curious Impertinent Curious" as a subordinate story, supposes an advantage on the part of the author to take the freedom to express his thoughts without prior censorship, since what is raised in it is symbolically the intellectual property of another; Rodriguez (1996) emphasizes about this text found by mere chance among the books of an ordinary inn.

In fact, the whole work can be considered as a pretext to denounce the evils present in the context in which it was produced. The adventures of Don Quixote are told as a result of the authorship of third parties in which the author shields himself to, like a knight-errant, undo wrongs and right the wrongs of an already troubled era.

These are not the only existing examples. The pages abound with dissimilar perspectives on the genre worthy of a more extensive analysis. It is more appropriate, due to the length of the format, to treat the subject in broad strokes in order to demonstrate its hypothesis.

However, it is also proposed to develop this line of research in the following ways:

- The elaboration of a booklet to make up for the deficit of existing national bibliography on the subject and to be used for later consultation by future researchers and teachers.
- The implementation of a system of activities for the study and understanding of the work in high school students, whose objective is to renew their interest and understanding of the novel. This could take the form of workshops, seminars, and talks focused on gender and intersexual relations, which would make such a universal work as this one more topical and attractive for the new generations.

It is considered that the execution of any of these two formats will provide the teacher with more effective pedagogical tools and enrich the quality of the classes, as well as contribute new conceptions to the national educational system.

Cervantes gave life to strong and representative women in a hostile environment. It offers a space where they coexist full of concerns, evils, struggles and ideas, just as valid as in the times when the novel was written.

Conclusions

This literary analysis will provide a glimpse of the dilemma of women's autonomy and morality in the Spanish society of the time, giving invaluable merit to the work by exposing them in the skin of its characters Marcela and Camila. The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of La Mancha is a pioneer in the movement for women's rights, a proto-feminist text in a conservative society; it is a pioneer of the equal rights movement through the creation of feminist movements, turning them into beings with equal rights, seen from the interpretative conception of feminist hermeneutics, An everlasting and revolutionary discourse not only in the intellectual panorama, but also in the conscience of those who decide to immerse themselves in its pages.

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William Vargas, Liliana Domínguez, Arianne Díaz: Mujeres quijotescas: una mirada feminista

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