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Allison Jackson

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, mcx133@mocs.utc.edu

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Decades of *Don Quixote*: Tracking Social Progression Through Marcela and Grisóstomo

Allison Jackson

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The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures

Examination date: November 13, 2023

Dr. José Luís Gastañaga

Professor of Spanish

Thesis Director

Dr. Carmen Jiménez

Professor of Spanish

Department Examiner

Dr. Lynn Purkey

Department Head of Modern & Classical Languages

Department Examiner

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As feminist theory has evolved over the course of history, the story of Marcela and Grisostmo has evolved with it. This story is in part one of *Don Quijote*, but can indeed be considered as its own short story, not unlike Cervantes' *Novelas Ejemplares*. The nature of Marcela's story is so tragic and pitiful, yet presents Marcela as an admirable character who staunchly defends her honor against the accusations that she has murdered the beloved poet, Grisóstomo, through the simple act of rejection. His suicide and the subsequent reading of his "Canción Desesperada" leads Marcela to come out of hiding to explain to a mob of shepherds that Grisóstomo does not deserve her love simply because he asked for it, before fleeing back into permanent exile. The entirety of *Don Quixote* has been rightfully discussed and admired since it was first written, but the Marcela and Grisóstomo episode in particular has maintained critical relevance due to globally shifting cultural norms and conversations. Grisóstomo's manner of death has, as I will discuss here, come into question due to the shock and abhorrence society treated suicide with in the past. We all know that Cervantes was a pioneer of great literature and an author that pushed the limits of social expectations, but the concept of suicide was very extreme for many people until recently. In addition, women's autonomy has consistently been at the center of men's debates in history, but women have rarely been able to insert themselves into those discussions. Although *Don Quijote* is a dense novel with eternally relevant themes, the Marcela and Grisóstomo episode is unique due to its changing academic attention to sensitive content. Many of the past debates about this story have been from a male perspective; a new, female, feminist perspective has changed the way academics approach this episode. In this essay, I will track the evolution of academic opinions in the late 20th and early 21st century of two main components of the episode: Marcela's character and what it says about

Cervantes' perception of women's autonomy, as well as Grisóstomo's death and the rejection of the notion of suicide by past academics. Marcela's dramatic rejection of societal demands and Grisóstomo's tragic and confusing death are radically exciting since there is so much left to be assumed about the two main characters that is not explicitly written. The story relies on irony and subversion to enunciate a certain message; this means that, inevitably, the message will be read differently by each reader. By tracing the episode's critical attention, it becomes clear that Cervantes has made the themes in *Don Quixote* timelessly liable to interpretation; of course, this doesn't mean that there isn't a consensus on the meaning of the story today. Generally, most readers of Marcela's story can agree that Cervantes has made it clear that Grisóstomo committed suicide; there has also been a sharp decline in the amount of papers published criticizing Marcela's attitude, and a steady growth of papers instead recognizing Marcela as a pioneer of the independent woman. The ambiguity of the story, alongside the bucolic atmosphere, the parodic nature of the text, and the question of love and honor through Marcela and Grisóstomo's actions have cemented this story into persistent cultural relevance and discussion.

Marcela as Parody

The evolution of opinions on Marcela as a feminist figure hasn't been straightforward or linear. Starting from before Cervantes' era, the literature of the late medieval period helped enforce the patriarchal thinking that kept women suppressed and reminded Spaniards that what was honorable was to maintain a family structure featuring the men as the strong protectors and the women as the helpers who are supposed to bow to their husbands' desires. In the collection of didactic short stories titled *El Conde Lucanor* written by Don Juan Manuel, the story "Lo que sucedió a un mozo que casó con una muchacha de muy mal carácter" recounts the efforts a new

husband makes in order to house break his new, disobedient wife. He goes to extremely violent measures, killing animals in front of her and threatening her life, until she finally starts to obey. At the end of the story, he is praised by the wife's family for changing her; the moral of the story goes: "Si al principio no te muestras como eres, no podrás hacerlo cuando tú quisieras" (139). *El Conde Lucanor* is an example of literature mandating social roles; even further, there were sixteenth century conduct manuals published by nobility that outlined the appropriate social roles and behaviors for men and women (Ibarreche 1). Similar to *El Conde Lucanor*, these manuals encouraged traditionally stark differences in the expectations of men and women, and contributed to a national attitude that what is considered abnormal should not be shown to the public. In contrast to the gender inequity represented through stories in the many years before him, Miguel Cervantes de Saavedra changes the expectations of chivalry through the female protagonists in *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. Although the roots of past chivalric tales were deeply entrenched in patriarchal values, Cervantes shifts the expectation of the women in his novel through subversive irony and parody. This is especially prominent in the tragic tale of Marcela and Grisóstomo, wherein Grisóstomo takes his own life because of his love for Marcela, and her rejection of his desires. Right before Marcela's tale begins, Don Quixote gives a characteristically impassioned speech about the role of women. In this specific scenario, Don Quixote is chiding his new friends with his opinions of the golden age, and the fall of society since that time. In the nature of his other speeches, it is hard to take Don Quixote seriously when he waxes poetic about a topic he has hardly learned enough about from his chivalry tales; his advice to Sancho Panza about how to properly comport himself in chapter XLIII, II comes to mind, when he promises to Sancho: "serán luengos tus días, tu fama será eterna, tus premios colmados, tu felicidad indecible, casarás tus hijos como quisieras, títulos tendrán ellos y tus

nietos, vivirás en paz, y beneplácito de las gentes,” only if Sancho would simply listen to his indispensable advice (754). In a less lighthearted but equally as ironic manner, when discussing the demeanor of women in his Golden Age speech, Don Quixote says “no está segura ninguna, aunque la oculte y cierre otro nuevo laberinto como el de Creta, porque allí, por los resquicios, o por el aire, con el celo de la maldita solicitud, se les entra la amorosa pestilencia y les hace dar con todo su recogimiento al traste” (90). Here, before the reader is even introduced to Marcela, Cervantes establishes the general perception of women that is held among the men in the story: women are dependent, feeble, and constantly awaiting their chivalric savior. Even though Don Quixote is objectively describing women as weak, the parodic connotation of the entire novel as well as the inevitable appearance and social rebellion of Marcela work against what is literally said. In a parody, “the reader sees, with the extended vision offered by parody, that it is as vulnerable and tenuous as the parodied work itself” and the nuances of the entire novel are exactly that: tenuous. Even though this tale is outwardly about a group of men shaming Marcela, and even though she ends her social life in exile, the story of Marcela and Grisóstomo can be read as a feminist tale, just with an unhappy ending (Hannoosh 117).

At the beginning of the episode, before the reader is ever introduced to Marcela herself, the shepherds take turns narrating their perspective of her story. Our first narrator, Pedro, describes Grisóstomo by saying: “Grisóstomo, el difunto, fue grande hombre de componer coplas...y en verdad que todo lo merecía; que era muy buen compañero, y caritativo, y amigo de los buenos, y tenía una cara como una bendición” (95). He certainly describes Marcela as exceptional as well; but to the world, Grisostomo is exceptionally smart, and Marcela is exceptionally beautiful. To him, her beauty is the root of her power, the sole reason for her existence; Pedro compares her to her mother earlier in the story, only to say that “Creció la niña

con tanta belleza, que nos hacía acordar de la de su madre, que la tuvo muy grande, y con todo esto, se juzgaba que le había de pasar la de la hija” (96). This dotting admiration changes at the end of his story, as he somberly describes how “la melindrosa Marcela hecha pastora,” and denies all suitors, most importantly Grisostomo, her hand in marriage. Finally, Pedro contends that Marcela’s beauty, as well as her rejection of Grisostomo’s hand in marriage is “la causa de la muerte de Grisóstomo” (97). The next narrator, Ambrosio, takes a more aggressive approach with his speech. He describes how poor Grisóstomo “Quiso bien, fue aborrecido; adoró, fue desdeñado; rogó a una fiera, importunó a un mármol, corrió tras el viento, dio voces a la soledad, sirvió a la ingratitud” (106). Here, there is a harsh binary represented between Marcela and Grisóstomo; Grisóstomo only wants love, and is only capable of adoration and service. Meanwhile, Marcela is the evil, ungrateful, cold one, even though both of them only ever simply expressed their emotions. In both narrations, Grisóstomo’s desires are respected and sympathized with, while Marcela is expected to contain her emotions and give in to what the men want her to do since, after all, a beautiful woman must be in want of a husband. This manner of contrasting Marcela and Grisóstomo through two external narrators solidifies the generally held opinions of the other shepherds: Marcela is evil, and Grisostomo is a martyr. However, in simplifying this complex tragedy into a good versus evil binary, Pedro and Ambrosio end up as the simple minded representatives of an overwhelmingly judgemental society. The caricature-like descriptions of Marcela and Grisostomo are examples of the irony throughout the story since even though she is being objectively spoken about in hateful words, Cervantes is using those words to represent Pedro and Ambrosio as naive gossips.

In Xabier Granja Ibarreche’s essay “Happily Ever After? Marriage, Honor, and Feminism in Two Novelas Ejemplares” he highlights the idea of subversive irony, saying that in Cervantes’

works “it is only through his ironic ambiguity that we may appreciate further levels of criticism within these problematic, apparently antifeminist resolutions” (Ibarreche 8). Although Ibarreche is talking about two short stories in *Novelas Ejemplares* instead of *Don Quixote*, the idea that Cervantes is “mindful of women’s suffering due to men’s harmful extremes” remains true. It could be easy to simply read the story of Marcela and only see a group of men who hate a woman, for reasons that could be argued as just, but within the context of the novel Marcela ultimately prevails as the more wise and level-headed character in the face of adversity.

The subversive irony continues, especially so, when we actually come to meet Marcela and Grisóstomo. Grisóstomo’s unsatisfied passion for Marcela leads him to commit suicide; in his song, he first addresses the reader, saying “atenta oído,/ no al concertado son, sino al ruído/ que de lo hondo de mi amargo pecho,/ llevado de un forzoso desvarío,/ por gusto mío sale y tu despecho” and continues to refer to Marcela using a series of hateful names, such as “escamosa serpiente” y “el viento contrastado en mar inestable” (107-108). Grisóstomo’s letter is full of emotion, and he shifts the blame onto serpentine Marcela in an effort to gain sympathy from the reader. In comparison, Marcela remains logical and uses reason to defend herself. She explains to the men, “Mas no alcanzo que, por razón de ser amado, esté obligado lo que es amado por hermoso, a amar a quien le ama. Y más, que podría acontecer que el amador de lo hermoso fuese feo, y siendo lo feo digno de ser aborrecido, cae muy mal el decir: ‘Quiérote por hermosa; hasme de amar aunque sea feo’” (113). Marcela’s argument is calculated and pensative, laying out a Platonic string of thoughts that even the men watching can’t refute; Don Quixote concludes at the end of Marcela’s speech that “Ella ha mostrado, con claras y suficientes razones, la poca o ninguna culpa que ha tenido en la muerte de Grisóstomo, y cuán ajena vive de condescender con los deseos de ninguno de sus amantes; a cuya es justo que, en lugar de ser seguida y perseguida,

sea honrada y estimada de todos los buenos del mundo, pues muestra que en él, ella es sola la que con tan honesta intención vive” (115). Her argument is especially impressive compared to her former admirer’s, who creates a baseless, selfish argument centered around his personal desires.

Even though the reader can see that Marcela’s argument is more grounded than Gristostomo’s, the shepherds decide to believe Grisóstomo over Marcela, and she ultimately is exiled into the forest for refusing to conform to the societal expectation that she get married. At this point, Marcela has no choice but to defend herself in one final effort to convince the shepherds that she is not a murderer, but rather a woman who had the audacity to say no. On the surface, it looks like Marcela has lost this fight and seceded by going into the woods, but, in depicting a woman who speaks her truth to a field full of men who hate her, “Cervantes echa mano de la definición aristotélica de la mujer como “animal imperfecto”” and in turn represents a strong woman who can act with grace in the face of hate and criticism (Ocaña 228). In this whole episode, Cervantes is subversively portraying Marcela as the strongest character, even though he is writing about men who outcast a woman who refuses to marry and inadvertently kills her admirer through her selfishness. Earlier in the novel, Don Quixote said, “se instituyó la orden de los caballeros andantes para defender las doncellas,” but in this case, the gentlemen that are present do nothing but criticize the woman, while she is left to defend herself (90). Through the men in *Don Quixote* Cervantes has depicted what it means to be a good, Christian gentleman; yet through Marcela, he has depicted that the social hierarchy is fruitless and gives way to a negative perception and underrepresentation of strong, intelligent women.

Cervantes’ irony ultimately lends itself to being able to read Marcela’s episode from a feminist lens and, therefore, perceiving Marcela as a character that resists the patriarchal

expectations of her society. Many academics, such as the earlier mentioned Xabier Granja Ibarreche, as well as John P. Gabriele and Isabel Navas Ocaña have published fluent defenses of Marcela as a feminist figure. Ibarreche discusses Cervantes' use of irony throughout all of his works. Specifically, Ibarreche looks at the *Novelas Ejemplares*. These short stories mirror the Marcela and Grisóstomo story, as their story could in itself have been a short story outside of the context of *Don Quixote*. Ibarreche specifically cites "Las dos doncellas" and "La fuerza de la sangre" as having the vagueness and subversive irony that I described earlier, and "looking at this vagueness through the lens of irony we see the paradox between an antifeminist abandonment of women to their misfortune – a perpetuation of centuries of masculine domination – and its feminist or at least pro-woman effect in Cervantes' audience" (5). Similarly, Gabriele argues that Marcela grappling with autonomy, authorship, and existence within a male authored text especially gives her the ability to subvert and expose the "social and theoretical conventions of what Susan Lanser calls the 'fictions of authority' (522). Additionally, Ocaña appropriately asks her readers: "¿cómo no iba a ser más fácil leer desde el feminismo al Cervantes que no puso en boca de Marcela esa hermosísima reivindicación de la libertad femenina?" (223). All of these articles are, in some way, defending Marcela's feminist character. However, there are several feminist voices who criticize the Marcela Grisóstomo episode as perpetuating gender ideals and actually representing misogyny because of the perceived feminine oppression. Irony is, at its core, about what is left unsaid. The plot of this episode is not entirely complicated on its surface, but what makes the story great is what is in the gap between what is said and what is understood; this also means that, in that gap, there is plenty of room for debating and looking for understanding. Due to the layers of ambiguity of her story, academics have often argued the validity of Marcela's relevance and position as a feminist figure in the story.

However, “For every study that has concluded that Marcella’s character is ‘awkward’, ‘humorous’ and ‘not fully believable’, there is a more recent one that has defended her as a woman who actively resists objectification and inscription as the helpless female” and thus challenges the earlier claims to her irrelevancy (Gabriele 508).

In comparison with the aforementioned critical analyses of Marcela’s feminist representation, authors like Michael McGaha, Peter N. Dunn, and Theresa Ann Sears have criticized Marcela as being a selfish, uncomplicated character, and have pushed back on authors that defend her character. The study by Dunn shows its age when he pokes fun at the sex-oriented second wave feminism of the 70s, saying that, “To put it in current jargon, she has simply refused to be a “sex object” (3). Dunn’s analysis of the episode is more centered around Don Quixote’s Golden Age speech, and he speaks matter of factly about the fact that Marcela’s character is unconvincing, off-handedly referencing her “impassioned plea for freedom, in which she denies any responsibility either for his desiring or for his death” (3). This was written in 1972, which may explain his attitude around Marcela; the articles I spoke about in defense of Quixotic women weren’t published until 2003 at the earliest, and popular academic and defender of Marcela, Ruth El Saffar, only published one of the first major feminist views on Don Quixote in 1988 where she points out that even though “again and again across the pages of *Don Quixote* Part I the tendency to both turn the desired woman into an object and create a rival who will assure the lover’s failure” which therefore “turns attention to her place of marginalization” ultimately represents “not female helplessness, but ingenuity, strength, and perdurability” (207-211). The feminist perspective on Marcela’s story wasn’t always accepted, and authors like Michael McGaha make that clear. Unlike Dunn, in McGaha’s paper *The Sources and Meaning in the Grisóstomo-Marcela Episode in the 1605 Quixote*, he speaks about Marcela as if she isn’t

just a secondary character in the story, but rather the villain. Throughout the article, he is analyzing references and sources from part I of *Don Quixote*, and in regard to Marcela's argument, he says this:

“St. John Chrysostom had written that the strength of concupiscence is comparable to that of fire or sword. If the soul cannot resist its allurements, it will surely perish. Successful defense against such a powerful enemy requires ‘a heart of diamond, an eye always open, patience in every trial, strong ramparts, outer walls and bolts, vigilant and courageous guardians and, above all else, the intervention of the most high’. Marcela cannot compare herself to a ‘distant fire’, because it is she who burst the walls and bolts and rejected the protection of her guardian, all of which kept her from being an object of temptation. Since she freely chose to leave the ‘labyrinth’ of her uncle’s house, live in the country and frequent the company of men, she cannot escape responsibility for the consequences of her actions” (65).

He also adds that, in addition to having a completely baseless argument, “She could hardly have chosen a less appropriate time or place of her arrogant, self-serving speech. Even if everything she said were completely accurate, a modicum of humanity and respect for the man who killed himself out of love for her would surely have compelled her to keep silence” (65). This argument sounds wildly different from the arguments about subversive irony; according to McGaha, this story isn't about female triumph, but rather about female selfishness. McGaha wrote this in 1977, so compared to opinions that come from the late 20th and early 21st centuries, his is an extreme idea. By suggesting that Marcela “cannot escape the responsibility” of her actions, he suggests that a woman shouldn't at all behave like Marcela if they don't want to be punished. The only sin Marcela committed, according to McGaha, was leaving “the ‘labyrinth’ of her uncle’s house,”

and therefore choosing to live alone. To McGaha, the shepherds who left home and committed to a lifetime in nature are the victims of a woman who did the exact same thing as they did - only when she does it, it's a sin with dire consequences.

Later, in 1993, Theresa Ann Sears pushed back on the concept of Cervantes as a revolutionary feminist author, saying that feminist critics are too quick to view his female characters through a personal lens. She specifically criticizes Ruth El Saffar; as Sears points out, El Saffar self-describes as a “minoritarian, proto-feminist” which, according to Sears, “it is unlikely that a man of Cervantes’ place and time would be, and that therefore we are unlikely to find it in his work” (7). Sears is arguing that modern feminist analyses of Cervantes’ writing are being purposefully skewed by modern-day feminists who are reading his stories without consideration for the state of Cervantes’ society. Although it is true that the period in which Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote* was resistant to ideologies in line with modern-day feminism, that does not mean that Cervantes was equally uninterested in women’s liberation or independence. In fact, the argument against Sears’ is also related to Cervantes’ attitude towards honor, and contradicts what we know about his personal life.

Marcela and Honor

In the novel, and especially the scene with Marcela and Grisóstomo, the question raised is not only what it means to have honor, but also what it means to be cowardly. The literal and metaphorical deaths of our two main characters are the first place to look; Grisóstomo and Marcela both committed a form of suicide, only Grisóstomo dies literally and Marcela exiles herself into the woods, thus committing a type of social suicide. Although their endings are seemingly related, Cervantes delineates a clear difference between respectability and cowardice using the two characters, as well as through the novel itself. As much as the novel depicts

Cervantes' perception of honor through intelligence, as discussed in the last paragraph, his life history and the cultural setting of the time period in which the story is written are also important to think about when concluding what message Cervantes is portraying to the audience. To start with, Cervantes served in the Spanish Navy for many years, 5 of which he was held captive in Algiers as a prisoner of war, when he "also displayed moral courage of a high order when in Algiers, after the failure of plans to escape, assumed sole responsibility for the conspiracies, offered himself as a scapegoat, resolutely shielding his companions" (Northup 398). His family was also very formative to him. He grew up in a family full of women, which meant that Cervantes was constantly seeing examples of women taking charge of the family in times of need. His sisters, Andrea and Magdalena, "came to help the family ... whenever poverty threatened, with all of their brains and their beauty. It did not pain Miguel that such should be the means by which, from time to time, fortune smiled on the Cervantes family. He felt for the girls nothing but an acquiescent affection" (Tomás 15). In the 15th century, it was not common for the men of the family to step aside and allow the women to earn their income. To the women, it was more honorable to live a life of hard work rather than accept their poverty simply due to the lack of men in the family. To Cervantes, it was honorable to accept their matriarchy and work alongside them. Not only is this reflected in the cowardly life of Grisóstomo, who would rather die than see a woman stand her ground against him, but also stands against Theresa Ann Sears' point that someone of Cervantes' time would be unwilling to accept social values that are more respected in modern society.

It is also useful to mention that in Spain at this time, Catholicism was the dominant religion, and suicide is a grave sin according to the tenants of Catholicism. Cervantes' family certainly did follow the Catholic religion, as "Cervantes' biographer and noted Hispanist Jean

Canavaggio postulates that Cervantes was a faithful and obedient member who followed the Order's strict rules 'to the letter'" (McGrath 7). The religious atmosphere only amplifies Grisóstomo's untimely ending because of the severity of the decision. Of course, many scholars of the 20th century debated whether he really did commit suicide, especially since "Cervantes was under a very real pressure to treat such matters with delicacy" and therefore left the matter of Grisóstomo's death extremely vague, which we will explore later on in this essay (Iventosch 64). Cervantes' life, history, and religion all serve to emphasize that he values individuality of opinion and strength. According to the tenants of Catholicism, as well as the ideals of Cervantes, Grisóstomo died a shameful death because of his unwillingness to leave Marcela alone and accept her final decision, in turn deciding to commit a grave sin. In comparison, Marcela "is also deaf to those who offer her practical advice in an attempt to thwart her efforts" and decides to take responsibility for her own life and decisions, therefore becoming the morally superior, although most abjectly punished in the story (Gabriele 508).

In the confrontation between Marcela and the shepherds, Marcela's strength and resiliency represents a key value that Cervantes weaves throughout *Don Quixote*: honor. As Don Quixote explains to Sancho Panza, "“La vida de los caballeros andantes está sujeta a mil peligros y desventuras, y ni más ni menos está en potencia propinqua de ser los caballeros andantes reyes y emperadores,”" showing that although the life of a knight errant is difficult and painful, the dedication to remaining honorable will ultimately prove rewarding (121). *Don Quixote* shows what honor meant to Cervantes through the actions of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza; even though there is humor in his adventures, Don Quixote has a purpose and won't give up on his goals of chivalry. His resiliency goes hand in hand with his intelligence; he is just smart enough to be confident in what he says, while being crazy enough to be insensible to sane onlookers. In

the midst of the most ridiculous situations, he is hiding a vast knowledge of history and geography under his farce. In chapter XVIII, I, Don Quixote shows his understanding of Spanish geography in describing knight errants of the past, “nombrando muchos caballeros del uno y del otro escuadrón, que él se imaginaba, y a todos les dio sus armas, colores, empresas y mote de improviso, llevado de la imaginación de su nunca vista locura, y sin parar, prosiguió diciendo: ‘A este escuadrón frontero forman y hacen gentes de diversas naciones: aquí están los que bebían las dulces aguas del famoso Janto; los montuosos que pisan los masílicos campos; los que criban el finísimo y menudo oro en la felice Arabia; los que gozan las famosas y frescas riberas del claro Termodonte” and more, going on for another half a page (144-145). This tirade, although absurd, has provided Don Quixote with a usable, albeit general understanding of Spanish geography that has been largely memorized through his books of chivalry. Marcela mimics this surprising level of knowledge when she presents her argument, although she shows a deeper level of genuine intelligence. Although she comes from a wealthy family, it is surprising that she is so well educated since she is a woman, but her argument against her accusation as a murderer shows her ability to formulate a logical, competent argument. Her argument goes as follows:

“‘Hízome el cielo, según vosotros decís, hermosa, y de tal manera, que, sin ser poderosos a otra cosa, a que me améis os mueve mi hermosura. Y por el amor que me mostráis, decís, y aun queréis, que esté yo obligada a amaros. Yo conozco, con el natural entendimiento que Dios me ha dado, que todo lo hermoso es amable. Mas no alcanzo que, por razón de ser amado, esté obligado lo que es amado por hermoso, a amar a quien le ama. Y más, que podría acontecer que el amador de lo hermoso fuese feo, y siendo lo feo digno de ser aborrecido, cae muy mal el decir: ‘Quiérote por hermosa; hasme de amar aunque sea feo’” (113, I).

Her articulate thoughts and well-formed arguments mean that she most likely spent a lot of time reading and studying during her adolescence, when her uncle tried to hide her away from the world inside their house. Therefore, it is notable that she would be doing this study either on her own or at least privately. Jacqueline Holler investigated the lives of sixteenth-century Spanish teenage women, and found that “strictures on mobility were another hallmark of female youth, and another marker of the period between girlhood and womanhood. Confinement and control were, of course, hallmarks of ideal girlhood” (103). Even if Marcela did have access to a formal education, in schools “girls were constantly reminded of their destiny...the girls’ curriculum was a weak echo of boys’ studies, eschewing numeracy and competence in writing in favor of Christian doctrine and ‘womanly’ training in darning, weaving, and embroidery” (101). Marcela wouldn’t have been offered an academically enriching education by default; whether or not she was self-taught or had a teacher, she sought out logic and intelligence, showing that she is far more capable of independent thought and reason than the rest of the shepherds, who cling onto each others’ thoughts and follow behind each other just like their sheep do.

Pastoralism

Well before Cervantes was born, let alone published, the pastoral story was solidified into existence as a way to portray the idyllic simplicity of shepherding. According to López Estrada, “El *género literario pastoril* agruparía un vasto cúmulo de obras desde Grecia y Roma a través de las literaturas europeas, en las cuales se establecería la consideración del ‘pastor’ como ente que condiciona de un modo u otro por su naturaleza la obra de creación literaria que a él se refiera y que en él tome fundamento y razón de ser, y en torno del cual se sitúa un ambiente determinado con el que se formaliza el conjunto de la expresión poemática,” meaning that,

essentially, in ancient Greece and Rome the pastoral genre emerged as a way to establish the shepherd as an entity in which to represent the nature and fundamental reason for being within the pastoral space, especially in the poetic form (18-19). Virgil is commonly recognized as the first poet to establish the pastoral poem as a genre, but it has naturally progressed past what Harry Berger refers to as “weak pastoral,” or poetry that might be complex, ironic, or critical, but still does “not take criticism to be directed toward the genre itself nor...do they take it to reflect on the very poetry making the criticism” (Berger 4). In highlighting the differences between weak and strong pastoral poetry, Berger summarizes the points made by David M. Halperin in tracing the development of the modern pastoral:

1. Pastoral is the name commonly given to literature about or pertaining to herdsmen and their activities in a country setting; these activities are conventionally assumed to be three in number: caring for the animals under their charge, singing or playing musical instruments, and making love.
2. Pastoral achieves significance by oppositions, by the set of contrasts, expressed or implied, which the values embodied in its world create with other ways of life. The most traditional contrast is between the little world of natural simplicity and the great world of civilization, power, statecraft, ordered society, established codes of behavior, and artifice in general.
3. A different kind of contrast equally intimate to pastoral’s manner of representation is that between a confused or conflict-ridden reality and the artistic depiction of it as comprehensible, meaningful, or harmonious.
4. A work which satisfies the requirements of any two of the three preceding points has fulfilled the necessary and sufficient conditions of pastoral.

This guideline is helpful in shaping an understanding of the general tenants of pastoral, while still remembering that “*strong* pastoral criticizes the attitudes encoded in the generic conventions by which pastoral ‘achieves significance’ (point 2) and it criticizes the particular kinds of comprehensibility, meaningfulness, and harmony attributed to the green world of pastoral” (Berger 4). The pastoral that Cervantes has presented the reader with both contrasts “the little world of natural simplicity and the great world of civilization” while also using irony to critique the attitudes of the pastoral nostalgia. The pastoral genre was once, in antiquity, a manner of representing an idyllic pasture full of love and harmony, and eventually became a source of leverage for authors to use the antiquated hopefulness of the pastoral as a source for ironic comparison of their respective modern-day woes. One of the first authors to create this ironic, critical perspective of pastoralism was, of course, Cervantes. As in the way that the Marcela and Grisóstomo episode has generated critical attention from the question of honor and the irony of Marcela’s discourse, there is also academic attention to the story’s nostalgia, tension, and duality amongst the characters of the pastoral.

Immediately preceding Marcela and Grisóstomo’s episode, Don Quixote gives a rambling speech about the Golden Age and the demise of society since then. In his speech, Don Quixote recalls “Las claras fuentes y corrientes ríos, en magnífica abundancia,...su fértil y espacioso seno” as well as that “en las quiebras de las peñas y en lo hueco de los árboles formaban su república las ‘solícitas y discretas abejas, ofreciendo a cualquiera mano, sin interés alguno, la fértil cosecha de su dulcísimo trabajo” (89). Don Quixote is not only nostalgic for the beauty of the golden age, but he also uses the bees (las abejas) as metaphor for the way Golden-age men were harder workers. Going on, he moves from metaphors to explicitly comparing the people of his time with that of the Golden Age. He begins with the women:

“Entonces sí que andaban las simples y hermosas zagalejas de valle en valle y de otero en otero, en trenza y en caballo, sin más vestidos de aquellos que eran menester para cubrir honestamente lo que la honestidad quiere y ha querido siempre se cubra, y no eran sus adornos de los que ahora se usan, a quien la púrpura de Tiro y la por tantos modos martirizada seda encarecen, sino de algunas hojas verdes de lampazos y yedra entretejidas, con lo que quizá iban tan pomposas y compuestas como van agora nuestras cortesanas con las raras y peregrinas invenciones que la curiosidad ociosa les ha mostrado” (89).

In this segment, Don Quijote praises women of the Golden Age for their modesty, both in clothing and in intelligence. As you may recall, earlier in this essay he says a very similar thing, saying that “no está segura ninguna, aunque la oculte y cierre otro nuevo laberinto como el de Creta, porque allí, por los resquicios, o por el aire, con el celo de la maldita solicitud, se les entra la amorosa pestilencia y les hace dar con todo su recogimiento al traste,” saying, in both passages, that women are delicate, and should not draw attention to themselves (90). Continuing along, Don Quixote speaks about justice: “La justicia se estaba en sus propios términos, sin que la osasen turbar ni ofender los del favor y los del interese, que tanto ahora la menoscaban, turban y persiguen” and that is the reason why “se instituyó la orden de los caballeros andantes para defender las doncellas, amparar las viudas, y socorrer a los huérfanos y a los menesterosos” (90). We will see in the episode that the subject of justice is not so simple, and that the knightly savior cannot always solve the issue;. Yet, Don Quixote argues that it is up to the “caballeros” to save and care for the women, children, and elderly. In the same way that the quote from earlier worked as subversive irony, since Marcela challenges the notion of female delicacy with her daring confrontation, this passage about women and the ensuing comments about the Golden

Age similarly function as a prop for comparison and criticism. Even for the men of the Golden Age, Don Quixote says that they speak “sencillamente, del mesmo modo y manera que ella los concebía, sin buscar artificioso rodeo de palabras para encarecerlos,” which Don Quixote does not, by proof of this very speech, value in his own life (89-90). By describing “los antiguos..dorados” Cervantes is reflecting the goodness of the bucolic man, representing “the Golden Age as the true world of the pastoral... its people being, as Cervantes says with some irony, ‘golden’” (Iventosch 71). Although Cervantes’ shepherds don’t seem to completely embody Virgil’s Arcadian shepherds, his Golden Age speech is a stand-in for the glorification of pastoralism, as well as a prop to compare his characters to the expectations of pastoralism.

Through tradition, such as song, poetry, and landscape, the pastoral novel “expresses a wide range of human belief and sentiment from the antithesis of nature and art and court and country to the act of seeking solace in Nature’s inviting peacefulness” (Finello 7). The central episode of this thesis, that of Marcela and Grisóstomo, is the most explicit example of a pastoral tale in Don Quijote. This story is primarily narrated by the shepherds themselves, especially through the use of poetry and storytelling. Firstly, the night before Don Quixote and Sancho Panza attend Grisóstomo’s funeral, Antonio shares a poem with all of the men. Here is the last bit of his poem from I, II:

“Coyundas tiene la Iglesia
 que son lazadas de sirgo;
 pon tú el cuello en la gamella,
 verás como pongo el mío.
 Donde no, desde aquí juro
 por el santo más bendito

de no salir de estas sierras
sino para capuchino” (93).

In his poem, he highlights the melancholy loneliness of shepherding, as well as the characteristics of the landscape and his job, such as the metaphor of the “coyundas” and the suggestion that he will never leave “estas sierras”. Along with the religious references, this poem references shepherding, love, and nature, which is characteristic of a pastoral poem. Unlike pastoral poems of the past, however, Antonio is shed in a light that is more vulnerable and more humanized, as he says “pon tú cuello en la gamella, verás como pongo el mío,” showing his affinity for the realities of life, love and, in this example, marriage. In comparison with the way Cervantes depicts Antonio’s forthright understanding of life, “Classical poets, such as Virgil, created from the rugged terrain of the Arcadia of the central Peloponessus an imaginary land where shepherds leisurely play and love in a state of uninhibited joy and leisure” (Finello 14). Whereas pastoral stories from the past focused on representing an ethereal, idyllic setting, Cervantes is focused on subverting this expectation by maintaining many of the same traditions of pastoralism while presenting the characters in a much more human way.

Earlier in the episode, we heard Ambrosio tell Don Quixote that “Marcela le acabó de desengañar y desdeñar, de suerte que puso fin a la tragedia de su miserable vida” and the shepherd that came alongside Vivaldo referred to Marcela as “la pastora homicida” (99, 105). If one were to only hear the story of Marcela and Grisóstomo from the shepherds, you might think, as many have before, that Marcela is solely responsible for Grisóstomo’s death, whether by force or by the power of the emotional turmoil she caused. However, reading more closely into his poem, Grisóstomo leaves hints of his own suicide. In his poem, Grisóstomo narrates his demise by saying this:

“Y con esta opinión, y un duro lazo,
 acelerando el miserable plazo
 a que me han conducido sus desdenes,
 ofreceré a los vientos cuerpo y alma,
 sin lauro o palma de futuros bienes...”
 “Y todos juntos su mortal quebranto
 trasladen en mi pecho, y en voz baja,
 si ya a un desesperado son debidas,
 canten obsequias tristes, doloridas,
 al cuerpo, a quien se niegue aun la mortaja” (109- 110).

In this section of his poem, Grisóstomo appears to be referring to his own death, especially since the line “sin lauro o palma de futuro bienes” seems to “anticipate the condemnation in the after-life that such an act would incur” (Rupp 9). This passage of *Canción Desesperada* is especially deviant from the pastoral norm, since a suicide is on the opposite end of the spectrum of the bucolic ideal of fraternity and harmony.

I find it important to mention the tenets of classical pastoralism and the way Cervantes resists following the traditional “commitment to the ideals of retirement and creativity” in order to present the most critically debated aspect of this episode: Grisóstomo’s “Canción Desesperada” (Rupp 7). The Marcela Grisóstomo episode focuses on the funeral of recently departed Grisóstomo. The “bucolic funeral scenes, in fact, are of the very essence of the Renaissance pastoral” and they are often elaborate, involving many days of mourning and song. In this funeral, Grisóstomo’s song is particularly interesting. After hearing several iterations of his story through other narrators, like Vivaldo and Pedro, we are able to hear his perspective

through his “Canción Desesperada”. It is at this point that many scholars, namely Américo Castro, Juan Bautista Avalle-Arce, Herman Iventosch, and Javier Herrero, find many points of contention as to whether Grisóstomo committed suicide at all, and if he did, whether it was by suicide or hanging. The argument between these men, especially between Avalle-Arce and Iventosch, spans throughout many articles, which I will summarize briefly here. Américo Castro is credited as one of the first Cervantine academics to mention this theory. To start with his argument, he writes:

“Antes vimos cómo la angustia absoluta llevaba a la muerte. Un caso extremo es el de Grisóstomo. Primero se dice: “*Se murmura que ha muerto de amores*”(I,12); luego: “Allí fue la última vez donde Marcela le acabó de desengañar y desdeñar, de suerte que puso fin a la tragedia de su miserable vida” (I, 13). Como todos insisten en que Marcela ha sido la causa de la muerte del enamorado pastor, creemos, en efecto, que su muerte ha sido causada por melancolía consunción, como la de Anselmo. Marcela contesta a sus detractores: “Antes le mató su porfía que mi crueldad” (I,14). Del contexto de la prosa del *Quijote* en que se hable de la muerte de Grisóstomo, nadie saca la impresión de que el pastor obstinado se suicidó; eso es, sin embargo, lo que hizo y anuncia que va a hacer en la canción del capítulo 14, en donde dice que tomará una soga, se ahoracará, flotará su cuerpo al viento, no lo enterrarán en sagrado, irá al infierno, porque muere “sin lauro o palma de futuros bienes”. Cervantes sabía que la casi totalidad de los lectores se saltan los versos al leer las novelas, y se expresó en verso una forma que no armoniza con [lo exigido por la “Opinión”]. El suicidio es un tema de *La Celestina* o del teatro de Juan del Encina, que detona en el *Quijote*. Cervantes

satisfizo en los versos su afán de introspección, de bucear en lo profundo de la soledad absoluta - angustia de quien se va de esta vida por su propia decisión-.

Mas a la vez tenía que satisfacer a su público y a su tiempo, a los que no cree debe escandalizar, y entonces pasa sobre el suicidio como sobre ascuas. He hecho la experiencia de preguntar muchas veces a quienes han leído el *Quijote* de qué mal murió Grisóstomo, y la respuesta era que “de amores”. No habían leído la canción.” (*Hacia Cervantes* p. 559).

Américo Castro is clear in saying that he has no doubts that Grisóstomo committed suicide, and that it is not comprehensible to him why this has been debated heretofore. This was written by Castro in 1941. In response to this article, in 1957, Avalu-Arce writes that it is actually not possible that Grisóstomo committed suicide, and instead simply died from love. He gives several reasons, blaming primarily “la condena ético-religiosa... y la índole estético-literaria” as well as “La ambigüedad del título de la *Canción desesperada*” (194,197). According to Avalu-Arce, “la Reforma católica identifica el suicidio con la condenación del alma” and that “El suicidio, como acto de sangre, no tiene cabida en el orbe de lo pastoril, que es donde se han refugiado Grisóstomo y Marcela” (194). Avalu-Arce specifically references Luis Rosales’ book *Cervantes y la Libertad* citing his main arguments as: “a) desde la época del *Pensamiento de Cervantes* (1925) Américo Castro acusa al novelista de una heterodoxia embozada en hipocresía; b) al dictaminar que Grisóstomo se suicidó Castro refuerza su tesis de heterodoxia cervantina, pues tal muerte en el mundo post-tridentino es anticatólica; c) si Grisóstomo murió de amores, esto sería un grave socavón en la heterodoxia cervantina” (93). The whole bucolic setting is insupportable to a suicide since, as Avalu-Arce contends, the Catholic and pastoral setting would make it completely incomprehensible that Cervantes would write in a suicide since those ideas were so

controversial at that point in history and “Ciertos misterios de la vida no deben verse expuestos sin discriminación al impertinente escrutinio de nuestros raciocinio: ‘No todas las verdades han de salir en público, ni a los ojos de todos’, nos dice en el *Persiles*” (198). Notably, he also mentions that “si tenemos en cuenta la primera acepción del verbo *desesperarse*, el título de la canción de Grisóstomo puede significar ‘canción del suicida’ o ‘del suicido’” but that “el título del poema puede interpretarse simplemente como ‘canción desesperanzada’, canción de un amante que ya no espera conseguir sus deseos” (195). Several years later, in 1974, Herman Iventosch argues against Avalle-Arce by saying that his “insistent and total dichotomizing of the Cervantine technique and vision falsifies...their basic character, and thus their strikingly modern presentation of reality. To be sure, Cervantes’ irony - Don Quixote-Sancho Panza, bacía-yelmo, etc. - begins with bipartite members...But thereupon the two faces of irony subdivide into the many-faced reality that is Cervantes’ vision, something quite beyond the Christian-oriented world of good-evil, black-white, ‘sic et non’, etc” (67). In 1978, Javier Herrero comes to the same conclusion, that he “cannot see a single reason to doubt the suicide” and, going even further, that he believes Grisóstomo stabbed himself, as evidenced by the remark of Ambrosio to Marcela: “Vienes a ver por ventura, ¡oh fiero basilico destas montañas!, si con tu presencia vierten sangre las heridas deste miserable a quien tu crueldad quitó la vida... (I, 14)” (291). In 1979, Harold Jones makes one of the most compelling arguments in support of Grisóstomo committing suicide, using this sentence as proof: “Ahora digo, señor Caballero de la Triste Figura, que no solamente puede y debe vuestra merced hacer locuras por ella, sino que, con justo título, puede *desesperarse* y *ahorcarse*, que nadie nabrá que lo sepa no digan que hizo demasiado de bien, puesto que [i.e. aunque] *le lleve el diablo*” (86). Since it is unlikely that Sancho Panza would reasonably assume that being in love with an unattainable woman would merit hanging

and that his “experience with the reactions of disdained lovers has been limited...Sancho’s knowledge could only have come from what he observed at Grisóstomo’s funeral. It is unlikely that he paid much attention to the reading of the ‘Canción Desesperada,’ and he probably would not have comprehended its veiled allusions to suicide if he had...Don Quixote’s situation in the Sierra Morena is comparable to that of Grisóstomo, so the *Caballero de la Triste Figura* too can justifiably ‘*desesperarse y ahorcarse*,’ even if it may mean damnation” (86). After Harold Jones’ final argument, the decade-long battle for evidence had come to a close. As for more modern-day academics, the overwhelming opinion is that Grisóstomo did, in fact, commit suicide. Salvatore Poeta says in 2006 that it is “true that he does have Grisóstomo take his own life and that suicide is an anti-Christian concept” and in 2018 Salvador Fijardo says similarly that “Grisóstomo’s intention to commit suicide is quite clear” (69, 405).

Conclusion

Our thoughts and opinions develop with time, and especially in today’s technologically advanced society, social changes are able to be enacted faster than ever. That being said, individuals’ opinions are usually formed based on their interpretation of other’s opinions and their relation to the text. For that reason, Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* is a great variable in which we can use to trace the development of critical attention to literature, especially in regards to feminism and progressiveness. In Theresa Ann Sears’ argument against Ruth El Saffar’s contention that Marcela is a feminist figure, she mentions that El Saffar is merely a product of her ideology, and that her reading of Cervantes is skewed by her desire to push a feminist agenda onto the novel. This type of backlash is ironic, especially since Sears goes on to argue exactly the opposite of what El Saffar argues, that “woman’s will, rhetorically conceived as ‘free’, is brought to choose the role that society has already chosen for her” (Sears 8). Without knowing

anything about Sears other than what she's written, I would assume that she is similarly swayed by some underlying desire to make her point heard; we all are!

The critiques against Marcela were mainly written by American men in the middle of the 20th century, from 1972 through to 1986. It's no surprise that the articles in support of Marcela came later, from 1988 all the way to 2020. Naturally, some of this was written as a response to the attitudes surrounding Marcela's character. However, there definitely has been a shift in the way readers perceive Marcela's behavior. In the 70's, the idea of female empowerment came into the cultural zeitgeist. As Shelley Eversley and Michelle Habel-Pallan recount, "popular versions of empowered women reflected the revolutionary potential of the 1970s. Following the various strands of activism around civil and human rights in the previous decades, women activists - second wave feminists - worked to shape new paradigms for thinking about gender, sexism, racism, sexuality, reproductive rights, religion, labor, colonialism, technology, art, music, and the environment. They transformed accepted notions of female power regarding their bodies, their pleasure, and their work. And they launched a host of interventions and institutions that will continue to haunt and inspire for generations to come" (14). Second wave feminism was different than the first wave; it was stronger, more sexual, and gave women an even louder voice than before. For men like McGaha, Dunn, and Finello, they probably grew up closer to the 50s, when women were still expected to be subordinate to the patriarchy, just the opposite of Marcela.

The episode of Marcela and Grisóstomo is an especially notable episode of *Don Quixote* to discuss in this regard because the irony, ambiguity, and commentary on society allow space for ample discussion; notably, in both the case of Marcela's position as a feminist figure and the question of Grisóstomo's suicide, the opinions divide along generational and gender lines. Many

of the researchers I've mentioned in this article come from different countries, however most of them are either from the US or Spain. Both of these countries have different social progressions, but have generally become more progressive throughout the 20th century. When the authors of the studies highlighted in this essay wrote their opinions on the Marcela and Grisóstomo episode, they not only developed their opinions based on the prose in the novel, but also on the climate of their culture. This episode just happens to be a perfectly divisive piece of literature because each reader has a different reaction to the way the information is presented in the text; the ambiguous nature of the story gives way to multiple interpretations.

Recognizing the way opinions evolve around certain texts is important for the larger, permanently changing discussions pertaining to representation and meaning in literature. In the case of *Don Quixote*, this text is one of the oldest novels to be translated and read around the world. Going forward, the idea of examining ideologies through literature could easily be broken down by country, region, or time period. I focused on the 20th and 21st century because the rapid growth of feminist ideals could be seen in the discussions of Marcela and Grisostomo. In comparison, the 18th and 19th century saw many wars and revolutions, which would similarly affect the perception of readers, especially in stories like the Duke and Duchess episodes or Zoraida's episode. Additionally, almost every country sees *Don Quixote* as a seminal text, but not every country shares the same values, culture, or history. Ultimately, using iconic works like *Don Quixote* to compare ideas from different times or places gives us a singular factor from which to compare and recognize the way societies' opinions change based on their social environment.

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