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Hispania, Volume 101, Number 1, March 2018, pp. 136-142 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/hpn.2018.0090

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Cervantes, Ariosto, and the Art of Reading

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Abstract: This article aims to help instructors tackle a perennial challenge in teaching one of the classic works of Spanish literature: Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Many instructors teaching the novel for the first time may feel overwhelmed at the prospect of helping students appreciate the numerous ways in which Cervantes references the novel's intertexts, especially given students' general lack of familiarity with earlier literary traditions, and the lack of time in the semester in which to read examples of many of them. The article proposes that in addition to customary lectures on the most important literary genres underpinning the *Quixote*, a carefully structured, systematic approach to one major Cervantine intertext in particular, Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, can help undergraduates gain fuller appreciation for the myriad of ways in which Cervantes addresses the art of reading, as well as for the importance of honing their own judgment regarding the written word.

Keywords: *Don Quixote*, intertextuality/intertextualidad, Ludovico Ariosto, Miguel de Cervantes, *Orlando Furioso*, reading/lectura

Forse altro canterà con miglior plectio

Charles V's coronation as Holy Roman Emperor in Bologna in 1530 meant the arrival on the Italian peninsula of a large number of Spanish courtiers who, as a result of their direct contact with Italian literature, played an important role in bringing about the Spanish literary Renaissance. While we often think of this Renaissance as primarily linked to the rise of Spanish Petrarchism, the Spanish writers living in Italy became familiar with another significant Italian writer as well: Ludovico Ariosto, author of the famed chivalric epic, *Orlando Furioso*, whose final edition was published in 1532. Indeed, even before Jerónimo Jiménez de Urrea published the first Spanish translation of the *Furioso* in 1549, these Spanish courtiers began reading the original and incorporating it into their own work.[1] As a result, the influence of Ariosto's poem on Spanish letters was almost immediate.[2] Not only did echoes of Ariosto's text make their way into Spanish letters quickly, but they were extremely wide-spread and long-lasting. The *Furioso* inspired texts of every major genre of the Spanish early modern period, and even up to the 20th century, writers in Spanish such as Borges continued to create works inspired at least to some degree by Ariosto.[3]

No Spanish work influenced by the *Furioso*, however, has had the enduring appeal and success of Miguel de Cervantes's *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*, whose first volume appeared in 1605, followed by the second in 1615. Maxime Chevalier writes that the *Quixote* represents a turning point in Ariostan echoes in Spanish literature (490). He states that while certain Spanish works throughout the rest of the seventeenth century contain episodes apparently inspired by the *Furioso*, the writing of works that explicitly adopt Ariosto as a predecessor diminished greatly during the following years, a fact that is probably related in large part to Ariosto's waning fortune in Italy during that time.

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There can be no doubt that Cervantes viewed Ariosto's work as a significant intertext in his tale of a mad *hidalgo* turned knight errant. There are echoes of the *Furioso* everywhere in Cervantes's narrative, including but not limited to: the 1605 volume's opening and closing series of poems; the author's choice of a madman/knight as protagonist for his parody (a madman who, moreover, speaks constantly of Ariostan characters as if they were real people); Don Quixote's explicit, if brief, adoption of Orlando as a model during his stay in the Sierra; and the famous intercalated novella *El curioso impertinente*. Cervantes even ends the first volume of his novel with the verse cited in the above epigraph—a verse borrowed, slightly mangled, from the *Furioso*, where Ariosto had used it to invite other writers to continue the story of Angelica and Medoro.[4] By ending the volume as he does with this verse, which encapsulates both Cervantes's role as reader and rewriter of Ariosto and future authors' interactions with the *Quixote*, Cervantes highlights once more the themes of reading and literature that are so crucial throughout his 1605 volume.[5]

Cervantes clearly places issues of readers and reading front and center from the outset of his novel, when his protagonist appears to go mad as a result of his excessive consumption of novels of chivalry. But a challenge for any instructor who wishes to consider the meta-literary aspects of the *Quixote* with his or her students is how to go about structuring the course in such a way as to make it manageable. After all, the concept of reading is so tightly woven into the fabric of nearly every aspect of the *Quixote* that it can be hard to know where to begin when discussing an issue of such import to the text, especially in an undergraduate course in which students are unlikely to be familiar with even the basics of the literary milieu within which Cervantes was working. On the one hand, of course, a familiarity with certain primary texts is indispensable for students to have a basic understanding of Cervantes's literary influences, and instructors can and often do make reference during lectures to some of the intertexts that most influenced *Don Quixote*. Discussion of the chivalric classic *Amadís de Gaula*, along with the picaresque genre, the Italianate novella, or the pastoral novel, for example, can orient students in terms of the characteristics of some of the most important literary genres that Cervantes references in his masterpiece, as can assigned readings of critical articles that the instructor has deemed useful and appropriate.[6] On the other hand, in order for students fully to appreciate Cervantes's homage to the art of reading, it is important that they themselves engage more actively with at least one of his major primary intertexts, as a way to privilege inductive alongside deductive interpretations of the novel's relationship to its predecessors.

As mentioned above, there are many different primary texts that instructors could use to illustrate the *Quixote*'s intertextual aspects, but my focus here will be on the *Furioso*. After all, as we have seen, if readers and reading are constantly referenced in the *Quixote*, so too is Ariosto's text. An analysis of the *Quixote* alongside judicious selections from the *Furioso*—totaling under 35 pages in the Oxford World's Classics English translation of the poem over the course of the semester—can thus provide fodder for discussion of the *Quixote*'s meta-literary aspects on a variety of levels, while not overwhelming students with excessive additional readings of primary texts. By having a concrete, manageable model with which to compare a variety of Cervantine passages and episodes, students can develop a better understanding of the many ways in which the novel represents an important general commentary on the art of reading. Moreover, rather than merely passively absorbing literary history through lecture, students who engage with select passages from the *Furioso* also have the opportunity to recognize firsthand the folly of Don Quixote's interpretive ways as they parallel him in the act of reading primary texts.

Toward the beginning of the semester, instructors can lecture briefly on the basic facts of the *Furioso*, such as its dates of composition, main characters, and overarching plotlines (which include Orlando's madness over his unrequited love for Angelica, the battle between the Christians and the Saracens, and the founding of the Este dynasty by Bradamante and Ruggiero). And prior to embarking on their reading of the *Quixote*, students can read the first

two brief cantos of the *Furioso*, which will serve as useful starting points for further discussion of the *Quixote* throughout the semester for a number of reasons. In addition to outlining the main narrative threads mentioned above—narrative threads to which Don Quixote himself refers repeatedly—the structure of the first two cantos can give twenty-first century students who have likely never read a chivalric romance a taste of some of this sort of literature's most salient characteristics. Just based on the first two cantos, for example, students should pick up on the fact that chivalric literature such as the *Furioso* deals with characters from a social stratum that is far removed from that of Don Quixote. And a few minutes spent in class drawing up a comparison of the nouns and adjectives used in the first four stanzas of the *Furioso* with those found in the first paragraph of *Don Quixote* can help ingrain in students a fuller understanding of the novelty of Cervantes's approach to chivalry.[7]

Equally relevant to Cervantes's novel are the issues of narrative structure that emerge in the *Furioso*'s initial cantos. Canto one, which portrays Angelica's mad dash through the woods in her attempt to escape the advances of various knights, encapsulates the narrative wanderings that underpin so much of the poem's romance-influenced structure. Moreover, the series of battles that unfolds throughout these introductory cantos allows students to understand more clearly the sort of literary models that inspire Don Quixote throughout the early part of his journey, as he clashes with what at times seems an endless stream of perceived "enemies" such as friars, sheep, and windmills.

Discussion of the narrative structure of romance and its importance for the *Quixote* can be further enhanced by calling students' attention to an important image that Ariosto employs in the second canto: that of the tapestry.[8] There, as he leaves Rinaldo on a ship to England in the middle of a storm, the narrator tells the reader, "But as I have need of a number of warps and a variety of threads if I am to complete the whole of my tapestry, I shall leave Rinaldo and his pitching prow and return to the tale of his sister Bradamant" (2.30).[9] Instructors at this point can alert students to the fact that the image of the tapestry is one to which Ariosto will return repeatedly throughout his poem, and that because Cervantes also makes use of the image on more than one occasion, it can be a useful metaphor for the complexity of the *Quixote* as well.[10] Discussion of the significance of this image for a better understanding of Cervantes's novel can then proceed on a number of fronts.

First, the image of the tapestry provides students with a concrete metaphor for understanding Cervantes's text *qua* text: that is, it subtly foregrounds the notion of weaving that etymologically underlies the term itself. And indeed, it is crucial that students of the *Quixote* comprehend from the outset that what they are dealing with is in a sense a hyper-literary, or hyper-textual, work—one whose many self-conscious elements can come into clearer focus when cast against the backdrop of the *Furioso*. Moreover, the tapestry can be used as an analogy when discussing the complexity of the *Quixote* in terms of the types of narrative threads—the pastoral, Byzantine, picaresque, and others—that Cervantes incorporates into his text. By thinking of the *Quixote* in Ariostan terms, as a tapestry, students can develop both a model with which to envision the complex way in which Cervantes's novel and its various narrative threads unfold throughout the semester and a deeper appreciation for the ways in which Cervantes built on his literary predecessors in the process of creating what is often referred to as the first modern novel. As Louis C. Pérez puts it, "Having the enormous advantage of writing almost a century after Ariosto, Cervantes draws not only on the Greek-Roman classics and the Italian writers, but also on the Spanish . . . Cervantes' tapestry *Don Quixote* depicts all sorts of characters from all walks of life and is much more varied than Ariosto's not only in theme and tone, but also in form" (296). If this Ariostan emphasis on the image of the tapestry helps students envision the intricacy of Cervantes's novel more broadly, it can also facilitate their understanding of the particular romance structure that underpins so much of the 1605 *Quixote*: students who have encountered and discussed this sort of narrative structure in their preliminary reading of Ariosto's introductory cantos will be much more prepared to contemplate Cervantes's possible

motivation for the multitude of interwoven narrative threads that form the backbone of Don Quixote's stay in the Sierra Morena.

As an introduction to the interlaced series of episodes that take place there, it is helpful for students to be familiar with some of the criticism of Ariosto that Cervantes implicitly references in the *Quixote*. To that end, instructors can include in a lecture some of the main ideas from Torquato Tasso's *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* (available in English translation in Lawrence Rhu's *The Genesis of Tasso's Narrative Theory*). In that text, Tasso theorized a new definition of Ariostan epic, in part by espousing Aristotelian unity of action and verisimilitude over the fantastic comings and goings associated with romance. By the last years of the sixteenth century, as the Tasso-Ariosto debate emerged, few authors still viewed the *Furioso* as a new model for traditional epic poetry in line with the *Aeneid*, as they had when it was first published. This was true as much in Spain as it was in Italy. What emerges in late sixteenth-century Spanish texts inspired to some degree by the *Furioso* is a decreasing emphasis on its epic and encomiastic elements, and an increasing use of its episodes relating to romance (Chevalier 352). Thus, students familiar with some of the main issues in the Ariosto-Tasso polemic that raged during the years in which Cervantes formulated his novel are more likely to fully grasp the significance of the novel's form when Cervantes interweaves the various narratives (Cardenio and Lucinda, Fernando and Dorotea, the Captive and Zoraida, etc.) that form the backbone of the 1605 *Quixote*. They are more likely as well to perceive some of the nuances of the Canon's tirade against disjointed and fantastic novels of chivalry in chapters 47 and 48, as Don Quixote returns home following his stay at the inn.[11] And finally, they will be much more prepared to discuss the stark differences in narrative format that they will encounter between the 1605 *Quixote* and the much more linear 1615 continuation of the novel.

Along with gaining familiarity with the debate around the narrative structure of the *Furioso*—and chivalric texts in general—students who are just embarking with Don Quixote on his journey through the Sierra can also find it helpful to read a few additional pertinent selections from Ariosto's text itself. Particularly useful, for discussion both of Don Quixote's time in the Sierra Morena and of issues of more general import to the *Quixote*, is the episode in the *Furioso* in which Orlando is driven mad by the realization that Angelica, the woman he has pursued for so long, has fallen in love with Medoro. This episode (recounted in Canto 19, verses 1–42; Canto 23, verses 95–136; and Canto 24, verses 1–14), along with the later scene in which the crazed Orlando attempts to kidnap and rape Angelica (Canto 29, verses 57–74), can be useful pedagogically, in that they both provide key background information for students' understanding of several aspects of the first few incidents in the Sierra Morena interlude. Students can be asked to read the above brief selections from the *Furioso* around the time that they (and Don Quixote) first encounter the crazed Cardenio, whose wild appearance and rash behavior clearly recall the *Furioso*'s insane Orlando, particularly as described in canto 29.[12] Indeed, it can be useful to have students read the initial encounter between Don Quixote and Cardenio in the Sierra in chapter 24 of Part One of the novel, along with Don Quixote's subsequent imitation of the mad Orlando in chapter 25, and ask them to think about the ways, both explicit and more subtle, in which the *Furioso*'s influence makes itself known throughout the episode. Even with the very few selections from the *Furioso* itself that they have read, students should be able to come up with points for discussion that will prove relevant not only to this episode but to many other aspects of the *Quixote* to be discussed throughout the semester.

One of the first aspects of this portion of the *Quixote* that students tend to mention is, probably not surprisingly, its emphasis on narrative interruption (that is, Cardenio's insistence that Don Quixote not interrupt the telling of his tale, Don Quixote's recollection of Sancho's earlier interrupted tale of Lope Ruiz, and the mad hidalgo's eventual interruption of Cardenio's story). The connection between ideas of narrative structure presented here and the structure of the *Furioso* itself is significant: the interruption of narrative threads hints at the *entrelacement* that will come to dominate the 1605 *Quixote*, as the various threads represented by Dorotea,

Fernando, Luscinda, Cardenio, and others are interwoven in the space of the inn. Students who are attuned to this process as it unfolds, thanks both to their familiarity with certain passages from the *Furioso* and to their earlier discussions of the idea of the tapestry and of Tasso's criticism, will be more likely to pay attention to the various ways in which Cervantes's narrative strands play off of and comment on each other, and, as a result, to find their active and engaged reading of the *Quixote* a much more rewarding experience.

Also of significance is the way in which the Ariostan scenes at issue serve as a backdrop for considerations of imitation and parody in the *Quixote*. After all, as students are likely to point out, in these initial scenes in the Sierra Morena, both Cardenio and Don Quixote can be seen as reflective of the mad Orlando: Cardenio's wild appearance and crazed behavior clearly recall the descriptions of Orlando that students have read in the selections related to his rejected desire for Angelica, and Don Quixote talks of adopting Orlando as the model for his own "furious" interlude in the Sierra.[13] Yet the ways in which these two characters recall Ariosto's protagonist could not be more different. Cardenio's Orlando-like deranged behavior and disheveled appearance are authentically inspired by his lost love, while Don Quixote's behavior is specifically posited as an incomplete and inauthentic reenactment of the same.

Significantly for students' overall understanding of Cervantes's literary project, each of these manners of interacting with and representing Cervantes's source text can be seen more broadly as emblematic of the ways in which the Spanish author goes about incorporating and referencing his various literary models throughout his own novel. On the one hand, we could say that Cardenio represents Cervantes's imitative mode—one that recreates more or less faithfully the spirit and substance of the source text even as it is transformed to fit the different circumstances of its new incarnation. This mode is at play in the intercalated tales that are heard and read during Don Quixote's stay at the inn (including the Italianate novella *El curioso impertinente*, which was also borrowed from the *Orlando Furioso*). On the other hand, Don Quixote's reenactment of the *Furioso*, like much of the rest of the novel as a whole, stands for the parodic mode. Margaret A. Rose defines parody as "the comic refunctioning of preformed linguistic or artistic material" (52), and indeed this is precisely what Don Quixote does vis-à-vis Orlando's madness as he proposes to perform a "bosquejo, como mejor pudiere" of the most essential aspects of Orlando's mad rampage (305)—a performance that, as Sancho points out, has no basis in genuine emotional distress and that ends up being little more than a few absurd half-naked somersaults before Don Quixote decides that a reenactment of Amadís de Gaula's penitence would appear more authentic.[14] Cardenio and Don Quixote, emblematic as they are of imitation and parody, thus exemplify more broadly Cervantes's disparate modes of interacting with his literary source material throughout his project.

To conclude, I would note that if Don Quixote's half-naked somersaults encapsulated the incompleteness and absurdity of the mad hidalgo's interpretation of the *Furioso*, his questionable judgment and reading skills are evident as well at the outset of Part Two of the novel, where, in a conversation with the priest, he declares Angelica "destraída, andariega y algo antojadiza" (51). He goes on to criticize her for having fallen in love with "un pajecillo barbilucio, sin otra amistad ni nombre que el que le pudo dar de agradecido la amistad que guardó a su amigo," rather than with one of the "mil señores, mil valientes, y mil discretos" (51) whom she had rejected. Anyone who has read the scenes on which these comments are based, which include multiple attempted rapes of the woman Don Quixote so disparages, as well as the description of Orlando's completely destructive rampage, will recognize that as a reader Don Quixote represents every author's worst nightmare (and particularly an author as full of irony as Ariosto), for he is unable to exercise any true critical judgment about the text at hand. Students of both the *Quixote* and the *Furioso*, then, can find in Cervantes's knight errant a warning—one that could have come from Ariosto himself—about how *not* to read. That is, students who do not develop proper interpretive skills, or the ability to discern the true whole of any textual tapestry that they encounter, can expect to

find themselves playing tomorrow's Don Quixotes, moving nowhere but backwards in a world whose powerful and ever-increasing stream of media and "fake news" could easily delude them, if not leave them behind completely.

NOTES

[1] Unfortunately for Urrea, Cervantes immortalized the translation in a rather insulting reference to it in *Don Quixote*. In one of the most famous episodes of that novel, the village priest consigns to the fire various books that he deems either dangerous or unworthy. When he and the barber come to Ariosto's work, the barber comments that he owns the *Furioso* in Italian but does not understand it. The priest replies that it is just as well that he cannot read the original (due likely to certain content that was later suppressed by the Inquisition) and then goes on to condemn Urrea's translation, saying that it, like most verse translations, cannot do justice to the original.

[2] According to Chevalier, Garcilaso's *Second Eclogue* was the first Spanish text to model itself in part on the *Furioso*. The verses in the poem inspired by the *Furioso* are numerous, but one of the most extensive and important connections to Ariosto's text can be found in Garcilaso's description of the birth of the children of Fernando Alvarez de Toledo, third Duke of Alba, clearly modeled on Ariosto's description of the birth of Ippolito d'Este.

[3] For the most complete study of Ariosto's influence on Spanish literature, see Chevalier. Other discussions of the topic include those of Macrí and Portnoy.

[4] Cervantes appears to have gotten more than he bargained for in borrowing this phrase from Ariosto, however, as a certain Alfonso Fernández de Avellaneda did in fact take up the tale and publish his own continuation of the *Quixote* in 1614. This act greatly angered Cervantes, who spent a good deal of time in his own second volume discrediting this "false" Quixote.

[5] For more on the importance of this verse, which not only closes the 1605 *Quixote* but is referenced again in the first chapter of the 1615 volume, see Selig. See also Brownlee, Durán, Guntert, Hart and Quint for more general comparative discussions of Ariosto and Cervantes.

[6] Instructors looking for helpful resources in this regard will find the "Materials" section of the recent 2nd edition of the MLA's *Approaches to Teaching Cervantes's* Don Quixote, edited by James A. Parr and Lisa Vollendorf, invaluable. Other useful resources include the works of Avalle Arce, Molho, and Márquez Villanueva.

[7] Key nouns in the opening stanzas of the *Furioso* include *knights*, *ladies*, *chivalry*, *anger*, *rage*, *king*, *love*, *arms*, *adornments*, *splendor*, and *valour*. Adjectives include *courageous*, *illustrious*, *noble*, *pre-eminent*, and *splendid*. In *Don Quixote*'s opening paragraph, on the other hand, we find nouns such as *hidalgo*, *rocín*, *olla*, *vaca*, *calzas*, and *pantuflos*, and adjectives that include *flaco*, *recia*, *seco*, and *enjuto*.

[8] For more on the concept of the tapestry as a key link between Ariosto and Cervantes, see Pérez, Donato, and Farmer. Thomas Hart also discusses the image in chapter 2 of his study.

[9] All English translations are those of Waldman. From here forward all citations from the *Furioso* are referenced by canto and stanza.

[10] Cervantes references the idea of his novel as textual tapestry in the following passage, among others: "Felicísimos y venturosos fueron los tiempos donde se echó al mundo el audacísimo caballero don Quijote de la Mancha, pues por haber tenido tan honrosa determinación como fue el querer resucitar y volver al mundo la ya perdida y casi muerta orden de la andante caballería, gozamos ahora, en esta nuestra edad, de su verdadera historia; la cual, prosiguiendo su rastrillado, torcido, y aspado hilo, cuenta que, así como el cura comenzó a prevenirse para consolar a Cardenio, lo impidió una voz que llegó a sus oídos" (344).

[11] Alban Forcione has an excellent discussion of the connections between the Canon's tirade and Tasso's theories in his *Cervantes, Aristotle, and the Persiles*. See also Brownlee and Farmer for discussion of the ways in which the 1605 *Quixote* can be seen more broadly as representative of the Ariosto-Tasso polemic.

[12] For further analysis of Cardenio, see Dudley and Barbagallo.

[13] Of course, in chapter 25 Don Quixote struggles to choose between two of his heroes as models to be imitated, as he notes when he asks Sancho, "¿Ya no te he dicho . . . que quiero imitar a Amadís, haciendo aquí del desesperado, del sandio y del furioso, por imitar juntamente al valiente don Roldán, cuando hallo en una fuente las señales de que Angélica la Bella había cometido vileza con Medoro, de cuya pesadumbre se volvió loco, y arrancó los árboles, enturbió las aguas de las claras fuentes, mató pastores, destruyó ganados, abrasó cosas, derribó casas, arrastró yeguas y hizo otras cien mil insolencias, dignas de eterno nombre y escritura?" (305).

[14] Sancho comments, "Paréceme a mí que los caballeros que lo tal ficieron fueron provocados y tuvieron causa para hacer esas necedades y penitencias; pero vuestra merced, ¿qué causa tiene para volverse loco? ¿Qué dama le ha desdeñado, o qué señales ha hallado que le den a entender que la señora Dulcinea del Toboso ha hecho alguna niñería con moro o cristiano?" (305).

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