

Symposium on  
Eric Clifford Graf,  
*Anatomy of Liberty  
in Don Quijote de  
la Mancha: Religion,  
Feminism, Slavery, Politics,  
and Economics in the  
First Modern Novel*

BRIAN BREWER  
Trinity College Dublin

Miguel de Cervantes, today Spain's most revered and iconographic author, was born in Alcalá de Henares, near Madrid, in 1547, the son of a poor surgeon and the third of five children. He studied at a humanist academy in Madrid but never attended a university, and by the end of his own lifetime he was known as *el ingenio lego* (intelligent but unlettered), although he was clearly a person of immense reading and culture. In 1569 he abruptly left Madrid for Italy, possibly to escape punishment for wounding a man in a duel, and served briefly in the household of Cardinal Acquaviva in Rome. In 1571 he enlisted in the military and fought with bravery as a harquebusier at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, a great maritime victory for the Holy League against the Ottoman navy in which he was wounded and lost the use of his left hand, thus earning the subsequent sobriquet *el manco de Lepanto* (the one-handed man from Lepanto). Cervantes was captured by North African corsairs in 1575 and spent five years as a prisoner in Algiers, making four unsuccessful escape attempts before being ransomed back to Spain. There, he tried repeatedly but without success to obtain royal remuneration for his military service, even soliciting administrative positions in the American colonies. In 1584 he had a daughter with the wife of an innkeeper, and that same year married a woman whose company appears to have held little attraction for him. After a moderately successful career as a playwright and publishing the pastoral novel *La Galatea* in 1585, Cervantes embarked on a two-decade period of itinerancy in the region of Andalusia, first as a requisitioning officer for the Armada and later as a tax collector, activities for which he was excommunicated once and unjustly imprisoned twice. He again took up his quill around 1600 and produced a string of masterful prose works (among other interesting theatrical and poetic compositions): *Don Quijote*, Part one (1605); a collection of short stories, *Novelas ejemplares* (*Exemplary Novels*, 1613); *Don Quijote*, Part two (1615); and *Persiles y Sigismunda* (1617), an epic romance following the Greek model of Heliodorus's *Aethiopica*, which Cervantes considered his masterpiece and which he rushed to complete three days before his death on 22 April, 1616.

If today Cervantes occupies a place in Spanish culture equivalent to that of Shakespeare in England, *Don Quijote* has no such analogue in its centrality as a work of foundational national identity. Non-specialists are therefore often surprised to learn that, while very popular, *Don Quijote* was not the biggest best-seller of its age. Nor did Cervantes's contemporaries deem it a masterpiece or even a work of importance, and certainly not expressive of some deep national character. Rather, they reacted to it as a work of pure com-

edy. From their perspective, it is not difficult to see why. *Don Quijote* is the story of a poor country hidalgo, a member of the lowest level of Spanish nobility, who has very little to do other than read books of knight errantry, long prose romances of chivalry based on Arthurian legends that, in content, popularity, and critical reputation, were somewhat akin to James Bond and the superhero movies of today (they are packed with sex, violence, magic, dastardly villains, and superhuman heroes). Such is the hidalgo's mania that he spends most of his money acquiring new tomes, even selling off his one asset, his land, to do so. He reads night and day until finally his brain dries up and he goes insane, believing not only that his books of fiction are true chronicles of real warriors, but that he is a heroic knight himself. He cleans up some rusty old armour, fashioning a new paper mache mask for the one his helmet lacks; names himself Don Quijote (a *quijote* is the thigh guard in a suit of armour); recruits as his squire a dimwitted peasant farmer named Sancho Panza with the promise of the governorship of an island (a familiar trope in the chivalric romances); and goes riding on his emaciated nag through the hot and dusty landscape of La Mancha (south-central Iberia) in search of knightly adventures. He finds them, at least in his own mind: he takes windmills for giants, roadside inns for castles, prostitutes for princesses, and a host of passersby as adversaries whom he challenges to combat, usually taking a fall or a beating as a result and losing half an ear and most of his teeth in the process. In all of these particulars, *Don Quijote* is an obvious parody of the chivalric romances so beloved of its eponymous protagonist. Another aspect of this parody is the conceit, carried over from the books of knight errantry, that *Don Quijote* is a true history about a real hidalgo who becomes a knight. In *Don Quijote*, Part two, however, Cervantes elevates this concept to high art by incorporating into the fiction the historical fact of the publication and popularity of Part one. Don Quijote and Sancho meet many people who have read their "history" and are delighted to encounter them in "real life." Critics are fond of noting the paradox of literary characters being received as real people, but within the fiction this is simply the consistent application of the conceit of historicity: all the characters occupy the same plane of fictional "reality," and so, for them, seeing Don Quijote, while surprising, no more causes them to question the line between life and literature than would meeting the subject of a biography in real life today. Nor did it move any of Cervantes's contemporaries to read *Don Quijote* as anything other than a splendidly funny work of comic entertainment.

Such remained the dominant reading for nearly two centuries. Some evolution in that time did occur: during the Enlightenment, *Don Quijote* was read as a national epic comparable to the *Aeneid* and, while comic, also the supreme example of neoclassical good taste whose satire of chivalric romance transcended the literary and expounded coherent ethical principles. But a sea change came with the German romantics, who saw in *Don Quijote*, not a work classifiable in terms of established genres, and certainly not a trivial comedy, but something *sui generis*, a novel, infused with Romantic Irony and expressive of a national Spanish essence. For the romantics, Don Quijote was no lunatic or figure of fun, but a noble hero estranged from a tragically alienated modern society. All subsequent readings of *Don Quijote* exist in the shadow of this interpretation.

In the prologue to *Don Quijote*, Part one, Cervantes showily bestows interpretative *carte blanche* on his readers, and modern critics have taken him up on the offer. A reasonably comprehensive bibliographic survey would easily sprawl to book length. Nevertheless, some of the critical history that is particularly germane to this Symposium can be sketched in broad outline. Though a philosophical treatise, not a literary exegesis, the foundational work of twentieth-century scholarship on *Don Quijote* is José Ortega y Gasset's *Meditaciones del Quijote* (*Meditations on Don Quijote*, 1914), which established the basic parameters of much subsequent Cervantes criticism. According to Ortega, the novel arises in the Renaissance in opposition to the epic and encapsulates the new world view of individualism and rationality characteristic of its age. The novel does not discard epic mimesis, expressive of an always-past time (Achilles is as far from Plato as he is from us); rather, it treats it ironically, subsuming it into the hero's psychology and supplanting its mythic narrative with the description of contemporary reality and everyday characters. This ironic perspective allows the novel to peer beneath the mirage of appearance to the deeper essence of the ideal, thereby rendering the real, which is anti-poetic by nature, poetic. *Don Quijote* dramatizes this process metafic-

tionally in a famous scene in which its protagonist intervenes, sword drawn, in a chivalric adventure staged in a puppet theatre, thus establishing a new paradigm by which culture acts on individuals. By showing its hero's self-actualization as a product of his will, the novel rehearses the reader's own process of self-realization. The tragic hero lives a perpetual act of utopian becoming; reduced to the brute reality of merely being, he is rendered comic. The novel is the tragicomic synthesis of the poetic and the real; Don Quijote, the idealistic protagonist of the first modern novel who carries the mythic adventure of epic within his own mind across an unyielding material reality, is a mediating figure between these two planes of existence; and *Don Quijote* is a guide to Spanish cultural and political renewal, a means of recovering its forgotten Germanic (ultimately, Hellenic) essence beneath its Latin reality.

Ortega's brief *Meditaciones* anticipate many of the fundamental themes taken up by twentieth-century critics (not only specialists in Cervantes but important theorists of the novel such as György Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin): the relationship between epic and novel and their respective chronotopes; the role of comedy in the rise of the novel; the novel as reflective of an historically specific epistemology; the history-fiction dialectic; the romance-novel binary; irony; existentialism; perspectivism; metafiction. Ortega had a profound impact on the two most important works of twentieth-century Cervantes criticism, Américo Castro's *El pensamiento de Cervantes* (*Cervantes's Thought*, 1925) and E. C. Riley's *Cervantes's Theory of the Novel* (1962); either directly or indirectly, his influence has permeated the aesthetic, philosophical, and cultural analyses of successive generations of scholars. Running somewhat parallel to this tradition but ultimately accepting its basic premises and hermeneutic framework are explications of *Don Quijote* in its specifically socio-political and economic contexts. José Montero Reguera (*El Quijote durante cuatro siglos: lecturas y lectores*, 2005) has shown that the earliest explicitly political interpretation (of a single episode, not the whole novel) is in a comment from 1639 by Manuel de Faria y Sousa on Luís de Camões's epic poem *Os Lusíadas* (1572). Writing in the context of impending Portuguese independence from Spain (1640), and from that perspective advancing a reading not taken up by subsequent critics, Faria e Sousa reads Sancho Panza's governorship of the "island" Barataria in *Don Quijote* as a satire of the incompetent governors that Spain foisted on its Italian territories. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the "esoteric" school of interpretation initiated by Nicolás Díaz de Benjumea anticipated more modern analyses both in its search for hidden clues to textual meaning and in some of its conclusions. It sees in Cervantes a liberal republican, while the satire of chivalric romance in *Don Quijote* reflected the crisis of late feudalism and the rise of rational, bourgeois democracy. More rigorous and textually grounded studies arrived with the turn of the twentieth century. Alfred Morel-Fatio's "Le Don Quichotte envisagé comme peinture et critique de la société espagnole du XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle" ("*Don Quijote* Considered as a Painting and Critique of Spanish Society of the XVI<sup>th</sup> and XVII<sup>th</sup> Centuries," 1895) and Ángel Salcedo Ruiz's *Estado social que refleja el Quijote* (*Social Reality Reflected in Don Quijote*, 1905) present strikingly positivist analyses of *Don Quijote* as a faithful description (a "painting" or "reflection") of contemporary Spanish society and a criticism of its increasingly anachronistic noble mentality at an historical moment of waning feudalism. But the two foundational studies for modern socio-political and economic approaches to *Don Quijote* belong to the second half of the twentieth century: José Antonio Maravall's *Utopía y contrautopía en el Quijote* (*Utopia and Counterutopia in Don Quijote*, published in 1976 as a revised version of 1948's *El humanismo de las armas en Don Quijote* [*The Humanism of Arms in Don Quijote*]) and Pierre Vilar's "El tiempo del Quijote" (*The Time of Don Quijote*, 1956).

Maravall reads *Don Quijote* as a satirical socio-political allegory. He argues that there was no sharp break between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Rather, currents of the former fed into the latter, including in the Erasmian Humanism that produced in sixteenth-century Spain a group of thinkers who, stimulated by the discovery of America, proposed a reformist utopian socio-political programme. Under the social, political, religious, and economic pressures of the Habsburgs' imperial project, however, in the later sixteenth century that reform-minded project curdled into an escapist utopianism of anachronistic chivalric agrarianism. *Don Quijote* is a counter-utopian satire of that delusional current of thought, represented by its protagonist, which responded to the large bureaucracy, professional military, and, above all,

the monetary economy of the modern State with a utopian retreat into the fantasy of a world organized according to traditional social and economic structures and values. According to Maravall, Cervantes clearly perceived the socio-economic and political crisis into which Spain was sliding, and by responding directly and critically to this historical context, he created the first modern novel. His purpose, in this view, was essentially political, not aesthetic.

Vilar, for his part, takes *Don Quijote* as a reflection, not only of its social milieu, but of its broader historical context, the crisis that arose as Spain declined from greatness to decadence in the period 1598-1620, concurrent with the reign Philip III. His Marxist analysis, which has been generally accepted by literary critics, sees the discovery of America as paradoxically ending feudalism in Northern Europe while prolonging it in Castile, where the widespread desire to emulate the nobility and live idly from rents short circuited the nascent bourgeois developments of the mid-fifteenth to mid-sixteenth centuries. The treasure of America was thus squandered on imported luxuries but not invested productively, as some contemporary observers (the so-called *arbitristas* or early political economists) argued. Like Maravall, Vilar sees in *Don Quijote* the embodiment of an escapist fantasy, but for Vilar he is not an analogue of an unrealizable humanist utopia, but an anachronistic representative of the feudalism that Castile could not overcome and a comforting affirmation of the traditional values (honor, goodness, etc.) of the Old World.

The general approaches of Maravall and Vilar have proven very influential on a broad range of scholars, independently of their ideological premises. Some have followed Vilar in concentrating primarily on the socio-economic and political contexts in Cervantes's Spain. Notable examples include: Javier Salazar Rincón, *El mundo social del "Quijote"* (*The Social World of Don Quijote*, 1986); Antonio Feros and Juan Gelabert (eds.), *España en tiempos del Quijote* (*Spain in the Time of Don Quijote*, 2004); Manuel Rivero Rodríguez, *La España de don Quijote* (*The Spain of Don Quijote*, 2005); and Miguel Ángel Galindo Martín (ed.), *Cervantes y la economía* (*Cervantes and the Economy*, 2007). Other scholars have adopted Maravall's methodology of using the historical context to advance a critical interpretation of *Don Quijote* itself. One of the earliest works in the latter tradition, Ludovik Osterc's *El pensamiento social y político del Quijote* (*Social and Political Thought in Don Quijote*, 1962) cites neither Maravall nor Vilar, however, mentioning only Díaz de Benjumea as a predecessor. Osterc's aggressively Marxist analysis (critics who disagree with him are pilloried as being blinded by their bourgeois class interests) reads *Don Quijote* as a realist novel that satirizes a moribund feudal society transitioning toward capitalism. It is anti-clerical, anti-aristocratic, and anti-bourgeoisie, Osterc contends, and Cervantes was a radical Erasmian humanist and democrat. Possibly due to its stridently ideological interpretation, Osterc's study has had little impact, but its materialist approach has recurred in more influential analyses, for example, Carroll Johnson's widely cited *Cervantes and the Material World* (2000), which situates *Don Quijote* (and other works by Cervantes) within the socio-economic fissures between a fractured feudalism and a frustrated Castilian capitalism. David Quint's *Cervantes's Novel of Modern Times* (2003) jettisons the explicitly Marxist rhetoric but retains the feudalism-to-capitalism context and adds a more formally literary analysis. For Quint, the generic multiplicity exemplified by *Don Quijote* directly corresponds to the increasingly fluid social classes of the early capitalist period. We could dramatically expand this list by including the works of cultural studies published over the past quarter century that incorporate the basic feudalism-to-capitalism framework and locate *Don Quijote* at the nexus of that historical change, while expanding the frame to include law, history, Islam, feminism, colonialism, imperialism, etc.

Eric Clifford Graf's *Anatomy of Liberty in Don Quijote de la Mancha: Religion, Feminism, Slavery, Politics, and Economics in the First Modern Novel* (2021) belongs to this tradition, although it is different from its predecessors in important ways. For Graf, *Don Quijote* is the first modern novel, realist, ironic, and perspectivist. It descends directly from the picaresque novel and, like the foundational text of that genre, *Lazarillo de Tormes* (c. 1554), is an inheritor of the ancient Menippean satire, a protean fiction that was notable for its stylistic promiscuity and thematic diversity. Graf accepts that *Don Quijote* takes place in and actively reflects an historical moment of decaying feudalism and burgeoning capitalism. He contends that Cervantes clearly perceived this epochal transition and wrote *Don Quijote* as an explicitly so-

cio-political commentary, a materialist satire of the prevailing ideologies of the time: religious orthodoxy, gender inequality, racial categories, arbitrary political power, and economic dirigisme. The unifying theme in Cervantes's treatment of these topics is liberty. As the title of his study indicates, Graf conceives of *Don Quijote* as an anatomy of liberty, that is, a compilation and systematic analysis of the concept of freedom in its multiple personal, political, economic, and religious manifestations. Accordingly, Graf organizes his own dissection of liberty in *Don Quijote* into five categories: religious tolerance, respect for women, abolition of slavery, resistance to tyranny, and economic freedom. Most modern scholars would agree that Cervantes was at least relatively anti-Inquisition, anti-imperialist, anti-misogyny, anti-slavery, anti-aristocratic, and anti-tyranny. Where Graf departs decisively from the critical mainstream is in his argument that these positive values are particular to modern Western democracies and that Cervantes was not only critical of his own society, but actively in favour of common-sense bourgeois realism. This he set in contraposition to Don Quijote's medieval chivalric idealism and thereby created the modern realist novel. As Graf sees it, in *Don Quijote* Cervantes was not only documenting the end of medieval feudalism, he was celebrating, and spurring on, the arrival of bourgeois capitalism and its promise of personal liberty, which he viewed as an antidote to the tyranny and oppression of the past. Such was Cervantes's intention in *Don Quijote*, in the writing of which he drew on the pro-freedom philosophical tradition of a group of sixteenth-century Spanish theologians and moral philosophers collectively known as the School of Salamanca, who were an important influence on Friedrich Hayek and other twentieth-century economists of the Austrian School. Cervantes also anticipated and influenced the socio-economic and political philosophies of later generations of classical liberal thinkers, such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, David Hume, Edmund Burke, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Stuart Mill, Frédéric Bastiat, Mark Twain, and Mario Vargas Llosa. *Don Quijote* therefore occupies a privileged position, not only in the rise of the modern novel, but in the development of philosophical liberalism. The novel retains its vital political relevance today because Cervantes's pro-liberty, bourgeois message remains the best solution to the pervasive poverty and tyranny that continue to menace far too many people around the world.

Graf draws on an array of disciplines to make his arguments, including literary criticism, historiography, intellectual and cultural history, political science, and economic theory. The essays collected in this Symposium are similarly eclectic in their approaches to Graf's book. Nicolai Wenzel first summarizes Graf's study and then situates it in relation to Deirdre McCloskey's concept of the bourgeois virtues. Bourgeois capitalism not only makes us rich, McCloskey argues, it also improves us ethically. Wenzel applies this framework to *Don Quijote* to argue that the novel, and especially the relationship between Don Quijote and Sancho Panza, demonstrates precisely the ethically beneficial effects of capitalism posited by McCloskey, while also showing the fraught nature of the uneven historical transition away from the traditional, aristocratic virtues of feudalism towards the modern, meritocratic virtues of the bourgeoisie.

David Harper and Félix-Fernando Muñoz apply economist Bruce Yandle's theory of "Bootleggers and Baptists" to the changing regulation of brothels and prostitution in early modern Spain. They show how ostensibly adversarial interest groups, e.g., brothel owners and moral reformers, could tacitly form an unanticipated coalition that propelled political action. Their public choice analysis of early modern political reality and rent seeking elaborates on ideas that are hinted at in *Don Quijote* and suggested but undeveloped in Graf's *Anatomy*.

Francisco Cabrillo analyzes the Jesuit Juan de Mariana's reaction to the economic crisis of the early seventeenth century, especially the inflation caused by the Crown's opportunistic debasement of Castile's copper petty coinage (*vellón*), which he considered the theft of the people's property. Mariana was a radical defender of popular rights, even going so far as to countenance regicide in the face of incorrigible tyranny. But, Cabrillo notes, he was not an original economic thinker in the mould of his predecessor, Martín de Azpilcueta, who in 1556 first correctly diagnosed the cause of Spain's early inflation and elaborated the still-current quantity theory of money. Cabrillo qualifies Graf's description of Mariana as a liberal thinker, observing, for example, that the Jesuit's ideas about international trade were mercantilist.



Nayeli Riano advances a more direct challenge to Graf's core arguments, not just his conclusions but his fundamental premises, by contending that *Don Quijote* is not a philosophical or political treatise and does not present Cervantes's personal views. Riano draws a sharp distinction between non-literary and literary texts, which are only "about" their relationship with their readers. Liberty is the crucial theme in *Don Quijote*, and all literature, but the question remains, What kind of liberty? For Riano, it is not political but existential, which she illustrates through a comparison of José Ortega y Gasset's concept of rational liberty in contrast to Miguel de Unamuno's idealism as reflected in both thinkers' divergent interpretations of *Don Quijote*. Riano argues that María Zambrano's formulation of a synthetic "poetic reason" expressed through literature transcends the realism-idealism dialectic of Ortega and Unamuno. *Don Quijote* depicts, without an imposed philosophical unity, the ineluctable heterogeneity of real life, its "fragile unity" of hope and failure.

Frederick A. de Armas also addresses the fundamental concept of liberty in *Don Quijote*. He poses the question, What are the margins of freedom? Focusing on the five Latin sayings included in the Prologue to Part one, de Armas posits that Cervantes is playfully expositing a novel paradigm of epistemic independence, challenging readers to consider new forms of thought and expression that undermine established categories of authority by means of a disorienting series of literary games that provide material for thought experiments on the nature of freedom. De Armas argues that this interpretation refutes Graf's characterization of perspectivist readings of *Don Quijote* as unserious ("lighthearted entertainment") and counters his explicit attempt to recover Cervantes's authorial intentions. Liberty, de Armas observes, is not an unconditional proposition but a constant socio-political negotiation between the extremes of absolute freedom and slavery; autonomy and authority; expression and restraint. De Armas proposes that Cervantes's declaration of epistemic independence is simpatico with the freedom of speech enshrined in the United States Constitution and contrary to any kind of ideological censorship. He concludes with a philological flourish, linking Cervantes's fictive authorial pose to Saturn, the planet of melancholy and esoteric knowledge, the hidden wisdom of plurality that *Don Quijote* invites us to contemplate.

Brian Brewer argues that Cervantes's liberalism is pre-political and expressed through his treatment of character. *Don Quijote* is a comedy, and Don Quijote and Sancho Panza are based on longstanding comic tropes as codified in contemporary treatises on literary theory. Rather than depict them with derision as traditional figures of fun, however, Cervantes invests unprecedented care in developing Don Quijote's and Sancho's individual psychologies from within the established parameters of comic characterization. Cervantes ultimately transcends the characters' typological origins in collective identity by imbuing them with a level of individuality, complexity, and dignity unlike any previously afforded to such personages.

In the final article in this Symposium, Eric Clifford Graf extends the historical context that he analyzes in *Anatomy of Liberty in Don Quijote de la Mancha* to the young United States republic and its "monstrous" constitution. He begins with the debates, voiced in *The Federalist Papers*, between Alexander Hamilton and James Madison on the structures of the new government and the tension between Hamilton's preference for centralization expressed in a strong federal executive and Madison's defense of the sovereignty of the states, institutionalized in the Senate. Both Founders recognized that the egalitarian, bourgeois North would soon surpass the aristocratic, agrarian South in population, wealth, and power. In the short term, each assumed, this would lead to the forcible abolition of slavery in the southern states and, eventually, to the extension of the franchise to women and racial minorities. But Hamilton and Madison also acknowledged the need to protect the fledgling democracy from the (unknown and unknowable) unchecked passions of future majorities, hence the incorporation of an archaic and anti-democratic Senate. Graf sees in this socio-political dialectic the outworking of the same process that Cervantes documented in *Don Quijote*: the eclipse of oligarchic, aristocratic feudalism, represented by Don Quijote, by democratic, merchant capitalism, embodied by Sancho Panza. Graf advances the original argument that Alexis de Tocqueville perceived this same relationship in *Don Quijote* and included it as the principal source for his characterizations of liberal society and politics in the second volume of *Democracy in America*. Therefore, *Don Quijote*'s influence as a political document in the second volume of *Democracy in America* is symmetrical to that of *The Federalist Papers* in

the first. In Graf's analysis, Don Quijote comes to represent the Madisonian minority that must safeguard freedom in a future ruled by Sancho's Hamiltonian majority. By synthesizing *The Federalist Papers* and *Don Quijote*, Tocqueville created a new kind of epic, a manual on liberal political philosophy and a guide for future generations of Americans. Graf's essay undertakes a detailed exposition of the "philosophical precision" with which Tocqueville read *Don Quijote* as part of his meditations on the nature and limits of freedom; and it offers *Democracy in America* as a liberal romantic rejoinder to the critical tradition that reads *Don Quijote* as a comedy. In doing so, it addresses arguments advanced elsewhere in this volume by Riano, de Armas, and Brewer and serves as a fitting capstone to this Symposium.

In *Anatomy of Liberty in Don Quijote de la Mancha*, Graf is generous in seeking common critical and ideological ground with those scholars who take alternative viewpoints. He demonstrates the same *esprit de camaraderie* in his formal responses to the essays collected in this volume.