

# One

## The Endless Text

In this connection there is a story from the Wichita . . . which is full of significance. It tells of a contest between Coyote and an opponent as to which knew most, i.e., which knew more stories. The contest takes place at night, and the two opponents, sitting beside the fire, tell each a story in turn. Coyote's opponent begins to show signs of fatigue, and is slower and slower at finding a new tale . . . At last the opponent owns himself beaten, and is killed.

Raffaelle Pettazzoni, *Sacred Narrative*

"I Read; Therefore I Am": The Romance Discourse of Celtic Storytellers, Chrétien de Troyes and Cervantes

"- ¿No han leído vuestras mercedes—respondió don Quijote—los anales de historias de Ingalaterra donde se tratan las famosas fazañas del rey Arturo . . . ?" (1.13). " 'Haven't you read,' responded Don Quixote, 'the annals and histories of England where the famous deeds of King Arthur are recounted . . . ?' " This response of Don Quixote to a question about what being a knight errant meant is quite appropriately framed within the problematics of reading. And what is *Don Quixote* about but the problem of reading and in a larger sense about a history of reading?

For both the general reader and the academic specialist, Don Quixote's question about reading Romances grounds the ontological challenge of how-to-be and the epistemological problem of how-to-know within the parameters of the language of Romance. These considerations constitute the paradigm of Romance as the metaphor for all narrative and for any problem of reading. By extension *Don Quixote* becomes the story of stories, the supreme metatext of the Renaissance, in which a dismaying plethora of questions about the nature of language and the nature of knowing are narratized. Don Quixote himself becomes the *figura* of the dilemma of how-to-be in a world in which new modes of knowing have subverted the traditional epistemological arrangements. The emergence of the novel as a new kind of story can be seen therefore as an answer to a specific challenge, and *Don Quixote* becomes a response to the questions that the new science posed about the possibilities of knowing, a conundrum narratized by the story of the "Curioso impertinente."

In the same way, for Don Quixote to begin a disquisition about reading the stories of King Arthur, the knights of the Round Table, and the loves of Lanzarote del lago with a question is also an appropriate rhetorical strategy when addressing the topic of Romance. The aptness of Don Quixote's question about reading can be discovered within the chivalric Romances themselves. As a literary kind, Romance presents more questions about the reader's ability to interpret than what is found in other modes of writing, and the problem of how the reader reads the story is part and parcel of the storytelling process. Reading is thus inscribed within the rhetoric of the text itself. Therefore we find that in both the multiple grail Romances themselves, as well as in the modern scholarly studies, the problem of interpreting the grail has been a central concern. This has created two kinds of discourse directed at solving a single problem. In this way both ancient fictions and modern critical studies, each with its own mode of analysis, search for the meaning of the grail. From its origins, Romance has been a discourse capable of self-reflection and self-criticism, a factor which partially accounts for its newfound vogue among both postmodern writers and the posthumanistic critical establishment.

For the contemporary reader the particular challenge of reading Romance is even more difficult, since for us the reader's ability to "read" Romance has been conditioned by a long tradition of privileging realistic stories over earlier forms of fiction. One disturbing result of this critical tradition has been the tendency of modern critics to consider Romance as

a "primitive" narrative form that was rendered obsolete by the development of the realistic novel, just as myth is now viewed as an imperfect form of science. Thus Romance seems to belong to the prerationalistic view of the world that was left behind by the seventeenth-century formulation of the scientific method.

The subversive strength of this kind of negative hermeneutic can already be seen at work in the *Quixote* where it inhabits the problem of viewing the hero as mad. In fact if the old chivalric Romances are not found as the critics claimed to be "false and deceiving" rather than "true," then the belief that the hero is crazy is itself in peril. It is suitable that the *Quixote* appear in the opening years of the seventeenth century precisely because its publication coincides with the development of the belief that the new scientific methodologies were the only reliable measure of an external reality. As a result Romance is seen as a kind of writing that is deceptive and dangerous. Such an attitude is reinforced for us today by the unquestioned belief that Romance seems to survive only in a "degraded and deprived discourse" found on the women's reading shelves of the drugstore. As in the twelfth century, Romance is relegated to a separate and unequal world of women and therefore is beneath the consideration of the (masculine) critical establishment. Now, as then, Romance is not seen as "serious" writing in part because it belongs to a deliberately distorted view of women.

Furthermore, it is a commonplace of this serious masculine critical enterprise that in fact Cervantes replaced the fashion for Romance with the fashion for the realistic novel. That this change was a broader revolution in ways of reading is not so commonly recognized, even though this hermeneutic phenomenon is fictionalized for the reader by the *Quixote* itself. There, the source of narrative action, the cause of the hero's adventures, always finds its origin in the problem of how to read. At first sight we seem to have a story about a protagonist who doesn't know how to interpret the old books of chivalry, and the hero's madness is presented as a hermeneutic dislocation. However, the failure to see that the narrator's interpretation of the hero's madness is also part of the fiction produced by the text, and not a valid external view that the reader must accept, has been a common critical error. This misconception has led to a lengthy debate about the validity of the old *libros de caballería* as well as to the confusion about the question of whether Don Quixote is a hero of a Romance. The time has come, however, to recognize that these debates are already inscribed within the fiction of the text itself. Therefore scholarly

disputes about such matters are merely continuations of fictions within the story. They are not issues external to the text.

This kind of confusion can be clarified if we recognize that the problems of hermeneutic viability are not restricted to the question of the hidalgo's "madness" but rather that they find their true genesis in the writing strategies of the narrator. Since his storytelling procedure, the scene of writing within the text, is presented as dependent upon his interpreting an undefined collection of source documents, the narrator's first action is also the first hermeneutic event. In such an arrangement we realize that the narrator's act of reading the source documents precedes his writing effort and thereby deprivileges the objectivity of his storytelling agenda. It is the problematics of this kind of narrative authority that calls for an examination of the hermeneutics of Romance, whether in Celtic tales, in the medieval Matter of Britain, or in *Don Quixote*.

#### ARTHURIAN AND "OTHER" STORIES

When in the fourteenth century Charles VI, the young king of France, was advised about his reading habits he was told to pay much attention to the Romances concerning his ancestor Charlemagne but to avoid spending too much time reading about Arthur because the stories contained excessive amounts of "empty fables." At an even earlier date, in the closing years of the twelfth century, the author of the *Chanson des Saisnes*, divided up the current literary materials of Romance into three categories: "de France, de Bretagne et de Rome le grant" (Keen 114). Of these he recommended the stories about Charlemagne and the Romans because of their veracity and instructive value but observed that the matter of Britain was mostly "vain and pleasing." Thus from a very early time we have evidence that some readers clearly distinguished a fundamental difference that separated the "matter of Britain" from the competing matters of Charlemagne and Rome.

One distinction was certainly implicit in the advice to the young king: as a ruler of men he must give special attention to "serious" topics. Vain and pleasing fables might be all right for women, since they had no power and legally did not exist, but such matters were subversive to the roles of kings and leaders of men. In spite of the advice, however, it is likely that Charles VI ignored the warning, and it is obvious that most everyone else did too, since today the stories of Arthur and Guinevere and Lancelot survive in the popular culture of novels, film, musical com-

edy, television, and comic strips, while the other two "matters" are seldom found outside the domain of graduate studies.

However, the two comments cited above are instructive of a basic truth that was very important for the culture of the late Middle Ages. The matters of Charlemagne and of "Rome le grant" did for the most part deal with historical events, whatever amount of legendary material they carried along. In fact it was their weakness in the area of their "historicity" that finally undid their popularity, since later research quickly revealed their faulty knowledge of the subject matter. The fact that no such problem beset the Arthurian tales, however, is not just a question of the status of historical studies then or now. The more fundamental difference is that the Arthurian tales for the most part do not deal with history at all. Thus we have to look elsewhere for the enduring power of the Arthurian matter. We know now that in their origins the narratives derived from a large store of Celtic tales, both Irish and Welsh, that became available in the twelfth century to writers of French, such as Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France. Of particular importance to the Arthurian romancers were two specific genres of Celtic tales, the *echtraí* (adventures) and the *immrama* (voyages) (Dillon and Chadwick 240–241, Lida de Malkiel 265 ff). More than other Gaelic tales these genres deal with situations in which the heroes and heroines have encounters with figures of the Otherworld. They are stories in which the special ontology of the protagonist is due to a fated encounter with the gods and goddesses, involvements from which the protagonist in some way or other cannot return to his or her original identity. The meeting in this sense is both fated and fatal, and the everyday world for the hero is forever changed and inaccessible. We recognize that this basic focus carries with it an essential feeling of adventure and loss that we associate with Romance. The linguistic link to this is found in the word *echtra*, the Gaelic word that Myles Dillon has shown to be the ultimate source for the romance term *aventure* with its Otherworld connotations, (Dillon and Chadwick 145) a meaning that survives in Chrétien and later writers, including Cervantes.

So it has been noted that Arthur, in the stories that have gathered around his name, spends very little time fighting historical forces or figures. Rather he and most of his knights are engaged with individual struggles involving forces of the Otherworld, whether they be giants or enemy enchanters. The Romance knight is the high hero of Western individualism; he is not a member of an organized fighting troop. In fact, many of the knights of the Round Table are in themselves disguised

deities who take the form of euhumerized heroes like Lancelot and Galahad (Darrah 38–46, 75). It is worth recalling that Lancelot originally had nothing to do with Arthur or his court. He was the hero of another cycle of stories, just as Tristan was, and only later did these stories come to rest within the more powerful orbit of Arthurian tales. The fact that Lancelot, unlike Arthur, was originally a god also tells us something about Don Quixote's choice of role model, a problem to which we will return.

In addition to noting the distinction between history and fable that these early commentaries point up, we can suspect that two other problematic attitudes were also involved. They are the high valorization role of reason as a cultural artifact and the marginalized role of women within the hierarchal workings of a society of clerics and warriors. Since these two groups, both exclusively male, shared and competed for the direction of the society as a whole, certain attitudes came to the fore which inevitably effected the channels in which gender roles were segregated. Both of these topics are addressed by R. W. Southern's book *The Making of the Middle Ages* in such a way as to clarify the symbiotic workings of ideas about women and reason. In discussing the role of law in the formation of the idea of liberty Southern makes the following point concerning both women and reason:

Liberty is a creation of law, and *law is reason in action*; it is *reason which makes men ends in themselves*. Tyranny, whether of King John or of the Devil, is a manifestation of the absence of law. The man who lives outside the law, whether under the rule of his own will or that of another, is bound by the iron chains of servitude. The gossiping Franciscan chronicler of the thirteenth century, Salimbene, distinguished five kinds of rule by which a man was disgraced: *the rule of women, of serfs, of fools, of boys and of enemies*. The common feature of all these forms of tyranny was lack of law; *they were destructive of the rational order*. The inclusion of women in this list deserves notice, because it emphasizes the point *that rule over free men should be rational*. In practice of course women often exercised rule, and sometimes with conspicuous success. But equally in the theological and chivalric conceptions of the time, woman stood for that which was either below or above reason: woman, in the person of Eve, was the agent by which sin came into the world, and, in the person of the Virgin,

the agent by which Salvation came; in courtly literature, women stood at once for that which was below reason—*caprice*—and for a higher principle than reason—*love*. But liberty, at least in this world's affairs, was a product of *the masculine quality of reason*, as expressed in law. (109, emphasis added)

Much of this has now passed into the common fund of feminist analysis but it remains freshly relevant to the matter of the status of Romance as a literary kind. For instance, we now can detect a component of anti-feminism in the advice given to the young Charles VI. A king must not be under the rule of women or of fable, for in both these categories he is not a *rational* man, and by implication not a man at all in the legal structure of the society he hopes to rule. Thus, Arthurian romance, like women, is disenfranchised, while the history with its concern for the affairs of this world is not. Hence both fiction and women are of little concern in the affairs of men. This belief that Arthurian stories are contaminated with matters of women and the Otherworld is to have serious consequences for the status of literature in a society increasingly committed to privileging the rational male order. By the time of Cervantes the issue of the role of women and fiction reaches a second stage of conflictive intensity. The new science that challenges the old order, with its civilizing rules of chivalry, is even more fiercely "masculine" and rational. Only "rational" men are functionally men at all, and mad, aging knights belong to the vanishing order of the Arthurian world and the Old Wisdom with its concern for irrational love and dealings with enchantment. The division between this inner world of feeling and intuition projected onto the image of woman and the "serious" affairs of a male society is final. Such a distinction is already clear for the author of the *Chanson de Saisnes*, who affirms that his writings are more important because they do not concern "vain and pleasing" matters, which for him signify fictions already relegated to the world of women. Thus by the seventeenth century it is not surprising that the tone of suspicion toward fiction is even stronger in many of the comments of Cide Hamete. At the same time Don Quixote is clearly mad because his valorizations of literary genres does not conform with those his narrator professes nor with those of the age in which he sees himself imprisoned.

The total effect of these early commentaries, however, provides us with four significant characteristics that constituted Arthurian literature:

1. it concerns a hero or heroine in conflict with the forces of the Otherworld,
2. it is constituted as fiction or fable not history,
3. it displays a suspect attitude toward the value of reason,
4. it places women in roles which subvert the authority of a male society of clerics and warriors.

All of these points deserve fuller analysis but their importance here is that they receive precisely that kind of attention in the text of *Don Quixote*. For the moment, however, we will concentrate on the importance of the textual problems inherent in the transmission of this Arthurian material from its Celtic origins to the time of Cervantes, because the manner of transmission becomes a feature of Romance as a literary discourse.

### The Trouble with Texts and the Blindness of Institutional Readings

The advice to the young monarch cited above reveals another attitude which has an even broader importance for a study of *Don Quixote*. We note that the problem of the valorization of Arthurian narratives was not that the historicity of Arthur himself was doubted but that other material, nonhistorical in nature, had been added to the texts. Empty fables had corrupted the stories, matters that concerned giants and enchantments clearly did not belong to the world of the reasonable men who ran the affairs of state. Such things were purely "vain and pleasing" tales, fit for women and idle, suspect men, men not seriously concerned with practical matters. Cide Hamete, although he too has a subversive side to him, displays similar attitudes, and in fact on the surface of it *Don Quixote* himself also argues that the *libros de caballería* are important because they deal with history and not fiction. Initially, however, the narrator and the hero seem to disagree only on the matter of hermeneutics. What is also at issue is the condition of the texts themselves. Already, from the point of view of the fourteenth century, they are clearly corrupted. "Alien" material has been added which renders them suspect. This problem of course was not confined to Arthurian texts alone but was a genuine concern to both clerics and rulers who sought the lessons of history.



By the time of Cervantes both textual and hermeneutic problems were in a major state of cultural crisis. The concern of Renaissance humanism with accurate texts had inflamed the question of the status of biblical accounts, and tremendous institutional resources, both Catholic and Protestant, were poured into the effort to recover a reliable biblical text. The indefatigable Cardinal Cisneros, Isabel the Catholic's confessor, initiated the tremendous project of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible, published from 1514 to 1517. Given the death and life issue of textual purity, every bit as lethal a challenge as the issue of purity of the blood, it is curious that the Inquisition showed no particular sensitivity to the subversive challenge that *Don Quixote* presents to the problem of textual reliability and authority. No doubt this threat was not perceived because of the apparent generic orientation of *Don Quixote* as a work of comic fiction. This horizon of expectations constricted the hermeneutic foreknowledge with which readers approached the task of reading of the story (Gadamer 235–67). This kind of hermeneutic blindness must have obtained even though it could be argued very reasonably that the task of Cide Hamete, as it is constituted in the work, is a parody of the humanistic editorial practices of the era as they influenced the editing of both secular and canonical texts. Actually the Protestant north should have been even more upset, but, to my knowledge, no one at the time noted any connection. The popularity of the book was unhampered by any of these considerations, and the inquisitorial *aprobación* of part 2 goes so far as to recommend the reading of the book as a healthy pastime. So much for the insights of institutional reading when confronted with the power of genre. If Cervantes himself wrote the *aprobación* he was skillfully protecting himself by placing his work safely outside the hermeneutic anxieties of the Inquisition.

Yet in spite of this blindness, both the prevailing institutional specialists and the general reading public were highly sensitized to the problems of reading corrupted texts. Medieval manuscript traditions had undoubtedly been more reliable than those of the new printing establishments, but everyone knew that all written materials contained a vast range of errors. On a more sophisticated level both church and state authorities were obsessed with the problem of how religious texts were read. People were put to death for what was considered a "misreading" of the Old Testament, the New Testament, or even of St. Augustine, St. Thomas, or other sensitive texts. Sir Thomas More stands as the paradigmatic victim of what price was to be paid for "deviant" hermeneutic

practices, practices clearly narratized in *Don Quixote*. One can also assume that hidden beneath the book's meteoric rise to popularity was the fact that the comic power of the work functioned to release deep reserves of reading anxieties. In any case, the work illustrates a persistent concern with reliable and unreliable texts and with the matter of how written texts should be interpreted. The two questions of textual purity and hermeneutic differences stand as the basic issues motivating the entire story of the hidalgo.

The history of the rise of institutional hermeneutics has been traced by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, a work that itself helps institutionalize the co-opting of hermeneutics by the philosophical establishment (153–234). The consequences of this heady mix of interpretation and philosophy are already inscribed on the reading problems narratized within *Don Quixote* and can be seen in an overview of the stormy history of the book's reception both inside and outside the academy. Both Anthony Close and Robert Flores have documented key aspects of the work's interpretive history.

To begin, however, it will be useful to look at some recent analyses of the interpretive problematics of other texts with long histories of manuscript corruption and hermeneutic disputes as well as at more modern texts that in some way replicate these issues. A study that addresses these concerns in regard to both sacred and secular narrative is Frank Kermode's *Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*. Kermode's analysis has the advantage of considering the same problems of interpretation as they apply to two texts, both of which bear important similarities to *Don Quixote*: the Gospel of Mark and James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

The affinities found in these three works are all fortuitous, or at least I will treat them as fortuitous. This approach is safest in spite of the fact that it can be argued that Cervantes certainly knew, if only from childhood attendance at mass, the Gospel of Mark, and I suppose at some time Joyce read at least part of *Don Quixote*, or, if he didn't, the culture of the modern narrative was too deeply steeped with Cervantine problematics for him to have been innocent of them. In fact the Mark text is already embedded in many hermeneutic and narrative features that reach forward in time to both Cervantes and Joyce. This view assumes the generalized existence of a continuum containing specific narrative strategies found within a very long but unbroken storytelling tradition. What is important here is how these similarities pose similar interpretative problems in all three texts. In my discussion I am conflating ques-

tions addressed both by Kermode and other critics who have dealt with the problems of the Arthurian narratives. In the latter group, which includes Hispanists like Maria Rosa Lida de Malkiel, Luis Murillo, and Martin de Riquer, I specifically need to cite Jessie Weston, Roger Sherman Loomis, Myles Dillon, D. D. R. Owen, Pronsias MacCana, Venceslas Kruta, Alwyn and Brinley Rees, John Darrah, and Miranda Green among many other Celticists. This conflation of two scholarly traditions is particularly relevant to Cervantine studies both because of the Arthurian content in his works and because of the replication, more or less deliberate, that Cervantes presents of the textual/reading problems found in Arthurian texts as part of his own text. At the same time these questions also replicate problems found in biblical studies.

Therefore, I am not positing or discussing a question of influence. Nor do I mean to suggest that as a work of narrative fiction the *Quixote* concerns only these issues. But it is reasonable to assume that, given the content of the story and the fictionalized narrative practices of Cide Hamete, that the work itself assumes a general awareness on the part of readers of the textual anxieties of Renaissance humanism and Reformation hermeneutics, specifically the problems of garbled texts and the interpretative strategies used to extrapolate a variety of meanings. In this way we recognize that both the questions of textual purity and conflicting hermeneutics strategies were prominently inscribed within the *Quixote*.

On an even broader basis of assumption, all the Mark, Cervantes, and Joyce texts present historically significant narratives that deal with problems of narrativity. In the case of the *Quixote* these same problems are themselves narratized from the very first paragraph of the work. But much the same can be said for the Mark text in its straightforward opening assertion: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." We are already in the presence of a self-conscious narrative strategy and a clearly stated hermeneutic goal. As for Joyce, he is the heir to all these narrative riches. It should be emphasized also that I am approaching all of these works as secular texts, whatever their institutional backing may be. *Don Quixote* has proverbially been called "the Spanish Bible," and certainly has often been approached as at least a semi-divine text, an attitude that may have some historical basis as we will see.

Nevertheless, the matter of textual veracity is not the concern of my own approach, and therefore I make no claims for or against the accuracy of the external referentiality of the Mark text. As John P. Meier, the general editor of the *Catholic Bible Quarterly*, has observed, there is a

“hermeneutics of belief” and a “hermeneutics of unbelief” when approaching biblical texts, a distinction which reminds us that all strategies of hermeneutics operate according to their own agendas (*NYT*). In current critical studies there is also the term “hermeneutics of suspicion” applied to all texts. It is in this same spirit that my own study focuses on certain problems of reading in the *Quixote*. The sacred provenance of its ontology is not at issue, and, for purposes of this discussion, the Marcan and Joycean texts will be granted the same privilege.

### The Hermeneutics of Unbelief

In Kermode’s discussion of Mark’s gospel and Joyce’s novel a number of issues are foregrounded in a way relevant to general problems of interpretation. Other difficulties concern what happens to very old texts, texts that have been transmitted in written form by multiple unknown scribes, editors, and other savants, each with problematic agendas of their own. Things may be inserted into a text by anonymous hands either by error or by intent. In the same way other passages may be omitted. Maybe entire episodes have been inserted from other sources, or the position of these episodes may reveal that they were moved there by the scribe even though they were originally placed elsewhere. Cervantists will recognize that many of these questions have been raised about the *Quixote*. One thinks readily of the problem of the location or even inclusion of the interpolated stories in part 1 (Stagg). More important to the issues at hand, however, is the fact that these kinds of problems are already narratized within Cervantes’ text as part of its fiction. The example of the location of the episodes or sequencing of the episodes, as raised by the narrator in chapter 2, clearly illustrates this. A similar problem is also found in *The Táin*.

At the same time the reader is brought into this process as he or she reads. For instance, the question of the validity or historicity of the source materials that Cide Hamete claims to have at hand is a matter of hermeneutic choice for the reader. The fact that most readers have accepted this as a fictional device rather than a statement of historical truth merely reminds us of the always present function of interpretation in the act of reading. In exactly the same way, but with the opposite results, many biblical scholars assume that Mark did have written sources at hand when he redacted the version we now read. There is even a com-

ponent of biblical specialists that assumes there was another version of Mark's text that was later suppressed because of theological considerations about its interpretation.

This same kind of concern is clearly, on a secular level, at issue in chapter 20 when Don Quixote himself calls for the suppression of the entire chapter. If the text had been considered institutionally sacred at the time, heads would have rolled over how it was to be read. Yet the Inquisition's reader considers the work healthful, thereby implying that other kinds of reading are dangerous to the reader's health, whether in London, Geneva, Rome, or Madrid. This merely illustrates that many texts show concern for how they could or should be read, and in this sense Mark's, Cervantes' and Joyce's masterworks are typical. What is also typical is that all three texts have generated an immense quantity of interpretative studies, many of which have produced noticeable heat.

There are other kinds of problems shared by the three works. For instance the advantage of Mark over the other gospels is that it begins its account of Jesus' life with the hero already in operation as a full-blown hero. Mark spends no time on birth or Jesus' childhood events, a deficiency taken up by the other gospel authors. In *Don Quixote's* case we particularly note the absence of this kind of opening information, an ingredient one would expect to find in the story of a Romance hero. Such items are standard genre-linked features of the *libros de caballerías* starting with the *Amadis*, but they are missing in *Don Quixote*. Thus both Mark and Cervantes's works concentrate on what Cide Hamete calls the *caso*, or case of the hero, a matter specifically presented to the reader as a problem calling for interpretation. In this way, the interpretative act becomes a self-conscious genre-linked feature of Romance, one that goes all the way back to Chrétien and to the Irish tales.

It can be argued that in one way or another the act of interpretation is always present even if the narrator makes no note of it. Curiously or not, the Joyce text does not self-consciously inscribe interpretative responses in the opening paragraphs. That absence can be read as either more deceptive or less deceptive on the part of Joyce. Perhaps by the twentieth century the narrative voice was merely embarrassed to include a component that could be confused with the "dear reader" approach popular in nineteenth-century novels. Wayne Booth has accused Joyce and other moderns of this kind of deliberate maneuver, but however the author presents the text the question of interpretation cannot be excluded as a feature of Romance.

Another element of commonality between the biblical text and *Don Quixote* is the fact that the two figures Jesus Christ and Don Quixote have become powerful cultural symbols in society as a whole. Certainly no other figure from secular literature has exceeded Don Quixote in this kind of significance. Most people, readers or not, have some idea who he is and what he has come to stand for. Don Quixote, Hamlet, Faust, Ulysses, Don Juan stand as imposing emblems in Western thought, and I suspect Don Quixote would win out over the others in a scientifically posed opinion poll on name recognition, even in the United States, a nation of nonreaders. Thus we become aware that we are dealing with texts of unusual power and diffusion through time and space.

The word mythic comes to mind in all these cases, but it is worth noting that in its origins Don Quixote as a figure is the only one of this group of five heroes that is an original creation of an individual imagination. What is important to keep in mind, therefore, is that his mythic status is produced entirely by the operations of the text itself and not by an overt calling upon a previously known figure such as the Messiah or Ulysses. There are other considerations to be dealt with, but from these items it is apparent that comparative analogies between or among the Gospel of Mark, *Don Quixote*, and *Ulysses* possess validity. To this list we must add the Arthurian texts which, in their drift from Ireland and Wales to Flanders, reveal the same transmission problems that haunt Mark's account. The only difference is that no single institutionally sanitized and canonically approved version of the Celtic narrative material has been formulated. Unlike the gospels, the Arthurian stories were in most ways left free to infiltrate Western culture in their own subversive way.

The interpretive gestures that emerge from Kermode's study are in any case moveable, since the texts he utilizes are arbitrarily chosen (50–73). His basic concern is to explore possible hermeneutic functions for certain items that somehow stand out from the overall texture of the work. He cites in Mark the young man in a linen shirt who attempts to follow Christ after his arrest but then is stripped of his clothing and flees naked. The figure is particularly enigmatic since he doesn't appear in the passion narratives of the other gospels. In such a heavily studied text as Mark's there have been numerous attempts to explain what the function or meaning of this figure is. Apparently none of the interpretive resolutions has carried the day, and Kermode suggests that maybe, like Joyce's man in the macintosh at Paddy Dignam's funeral, no claim to a definitive meaning can be found for the figure (50). At this point the logocentric

agenda of the theologians has stalled. Suffice to say that every kind of explanation has been dredged up from a simple scribal error to the possibility that he was an impassioned lover.

Nevertheless in a general way we find that the following explanatory procedures have been utilized in biblical hermeneutics:

1. the passage has been erroneously inserted from another text
2. there was more to the passage, but it has been suppressed
3. it is a deliberate enigma
4. there actually was such a young man, and Mark is merely presenting a transparent account of what happened
5. the young man represents all the figures that abandoned Christ when he was arrested, and hence it is an intertextual reference to another text
6. there is a linguistic link between the term used to denote the young man and the word used to describe the angel figure found by the women at the tomb of Christ
7. the figure is emblematic and represents a genre-linked feature of an unknown genre (i.e. the meaning cannot be recovered)
8. the figure is an early attempt at realism, a fortuitous episode presented in order to create the illusion of what happens in everyday events

While I have not reproduced the exact order of Kermode's exposition, I have come up with a broad list of possible interpretive maneuvers. All these explanations fall within the spectrum of two conflicting views:

1. the figure has no "meaning" and we shouldn't attempt to impose closure on all items in a text
2. the figure of the young man points to the possibility of a lost or occult meaning suggesting the existence of a hidden text within the manifest one

In other terms we recognize that the hermeneutic challenge is situated at the center of all logocentric expectations, and therefore all textual "meaning" is uncontrollable. In this way the story is like the "Cheshire

style" forms in Celtic manuscript art depicting scrolls turning into faces or faces turning into scrolls so that the interpretation of the direction of this temporal process is left to the viewer (Kruta 94).

Kermode's analysis of the Joyce text is not quite so suggestive for our purposes, but he finds that the figure known as the man in the macintosh has produced a similar hermeneutic aporia. One explanation, however, relates him to the figure of Theoclymenos in Homer, with the suggestion that both in Homer and Joyce the enigmatic figure is a Hermes-type apparition, the god of tricky texts and thieves. In all these characteristics he resembles the fat innkeeper in part 1, chapter 2, The Hermes *figura* also introduces the problem of borders and border crossings within a literary text and brings to the surface the question of the precarious ontology of certain kinds of heroes. This in turn questions the genre definition of the text being read. Such problems suggest Don Quixote himself, a figure who lives on the edge of many kinds of borders, including those of literary genres. The dilemma is further narratized in the troubled chapter 23 of part 1, where, as we will see, two figures, Ginés and Cardenio, seem to signal a shift in the generic orientation of Don Quixote's adventures. This kind of reading is an example of the hermeneutic use of both typology and intertextuality.

In the case of the *Quixote*, however, one further possibility can be considered. The argument can be made that Cervantes, either deliberately or inadvertently, reproduced "errors" or enigmatic contradictions of the types found in the vast accumulation of Romance literature that he had read. Kermode cites Joyce himself as claiming to have purposely inserted enigmas in *Ulysses* in order to confound his readers (64). But in the *Quixote* the situation is somewhat different, since the case can be made that such "unreadable" items themselves constitute a recognized convention of Romance. The parodic import of the *Quixote* could even have exaggerated these items for comic purposes. Exactly such an example of generic exaggeration is in fact introduced by the narrator himself at the opening of chapter 2 when he considers the problem of the chronology of the hidalgo's adventures, whether Don Quixote came first to the windmills, to Puerto Lapice, or to the inn. Similar editorial problems are also narratized in the *Táin*.

A different example of enigmatic material can be found in the "errors" inserted by Dorotea in her Micomicona story. How are these mistakes to be read? Does she make the geographic and other errors as a deliberate way of presenting herself as a harassed romance heroine and therefore



intend the errors to be a parody of the genre-linked features of Byzantine romances? Or is she really flustered and needs the priest's corrections? Or, on a different level of import, are her errors and omissions a signal to the reader that her original story to the priest, her account of her own adventures with Fernando, is also unreliable? As in other aspects of Dorotea's behavior her words and actions are difficult to read. In fact it seems that the function of her role, like those of Celtic heroines, is to escape logocentric closure. Further consideration of these and other "unreadable" enigmas will be examined later, but it is obvious that this overview of biblical and secular hermeneutic strategies suggests the possibility that the *Quixote*, a text constituted out of other texts, deliberately, and in imitation of the problems found in Arthurian Romance, creates its own hermeneutic quandaries.

Therefore I have chosen the term *hermeneutics of unbelief*, borrowed from biblical studies, as indicative of my own bias. This places my approach within the range of the two opposing interpretive options: Any item may be without significance, or it may signify an occult or suppressed meaning. The fact that these interpretations are in some ways contradictory may not be so lamentable when analyzing a Cervantine text since, as already noted, this condition is part and parcel of the tradition of Arthurian romance, a factor to be more fully explored below. At the same time, the eventuality that the lack of closure for all parts of a text exists enriches its interpretive horizons. A recalcitrant passage in any work may avoid notice or, contrariwise, may have attracted immense attention. Any nondescript phrase or word may abruptly emerge as meaningful once placed within the structure of an unsuspected pattern, while the nonclosure of meaning may signify an occult meaning. Thus these reading strategies exist as binary opposites, each taking meaning from the existence of the other possibility.

What I am proposing is an approach to the *Quixote* in which all these procedures will be considered. As a result we will recognize that certain kinds of hermeneutic clashes are seen to be literary conventions. In this way the "unreadable" items come to be read as a narrative strategy inherited from Romance. At the same time it must be kept in mind that this situation is not just a result of a parodic design within the *Quixote*. Instead, this textual condition becomes an inevitable product of the narrator's agenda. Without being aware of the power of his subtext, Cide Hamete himself is carried along by the force of his own story. Like the Celtic storytellers and like Chrétien before him, he includes an encounter

between the teller of the tale and the tale, an event that constitutes an *aventura* in the Celtic sense of that word, a fateful meeting between a hero and an Otherworld force. In this case the Otherworld force of the Celtic cosmogony becomes the equally mysterious power of language itself. As does the formulation of Celtic art as an artifact that asks for interpretation, language, even when reduced to its smallest signifying components, presents the same question (Jameson 17).

In this way something else emerges that presents a much more radical face, and we are confronted with a configuration of textual energy, an energy of ruthless power and unknowable limits. No other explanation accounts for either the shifting shape of the *Quixote* as a story or for the conflictive history of its interpretation. I will argue also that such a history is part of the ultimate adventure envisioned by the disturbing force of the old Gaelic stories, stories of heroes turned to ashes when they try to return from their Otherworld encounters. Perceval is the best known of this kind of hero, and we have to recognize that medieval attempts at a spiritual transcendence for such a figure were based on the unstable foundation of a fragile Christian logocentrism. In the same way the *Quixote* as a text demonstrates that this effort to control or delimit meaning was an enterprise to which Cervantes did not belong.

### Why Real Men Don't Read Romance

One process we have traced in the history of biblical texts has led to the realization that, in the act of reading, the reader may find that a particular item presents itself as a puzzle or enigma. This same item may in effect have no meaning or, in opposition to that conclusion, may signal the existence of a hidden or forgotten meaning, a condition we have termed an "occult" text. The latter may be the result of some deliberate omission, due to ignorance or the failure to recognize the importance of the item, or it may be the result of deliberate suppression, an institutional cover-up by a group that has a reason to want to remove a meaning not in accord with the prevailing mode of thought. But whatever the cause, the result leaves an incomplete meaning buried but still resonating within the text, a meaning that tantalizes later readers.

What is more surprising, however, is that while this may happen as a historical event in the process of transmission, it is also a process that occurs in the writing of a text by a single author and is, therefore, a

condition found in all texts. It is part of their ontology and part of the way in which they come to be. This same phenomenon of suppression occurs, it would seem, in the creation of any text. The process of writing itself contains similar procedures in which the writer, faced with decisions of what to include and what to exclude, introduces what can be considered a certain amount of "corruption" of the intended discourse. Any work, no matter how seamless it may at first appear, is the result of authorial decisions of this kind, and longer texts, like *Don Quixote* or *Ulysses*, are more prone to show the fissures that mark a turn in the way the tale is told. Kermode's study of Joyce's man-in-the-macintosh figure is one example of such a phenomenon. Hermes figures function as self-referential signs indicating that the text itself has stirred, that some partially hidden force has surfaced and created what we can call a "fissure in the textuality" of the discourse. We will see that Ginés de Pasamonte is such a Hermes figure in the *Quixote*. Through the confrontation between him and Cardenio, the reader becomes aware that the text is taking an abrupt turn, one which signals an interruption we can term a "Ginés point." The fact that he is also a thief accords with his Hermes-like interpretation of his own story, and at the same time this Herm function also marks a boundary in the Cide Hamete text itself. The rupture occurs when the picaresque possibilities of Ginés's story are abruptly suspended, clearing the way for the arrival of the Cardenio and the problematics of love. This in turn precipitates Don Quixote's recognition that it is in the field of love not war that he will excel Amadís. This change in the nature of the knight's adventures is marked by Rocinante's choice of the road, a feature inherited from the Celtic tales, and presages the onset of a prolonged series of interwoven love stories. This interpolative sequence should be seen as a Romance condition that comes to underwrite Don Quixote's own story.

The question of why these narrative fault lines appear is sometimes studied by means of a psychological analysis of the author's mind. This can be fairly hazardous. Missing information about the author's life can easily lead to a "mis-reading" and the results rendered problematic. Since we have very little information about Cervantes's inner life, such an approach would be a great risk, even though it could produce challenging speculations. As an alternative route, the methodologies of biblical hermeneutics offer a safer road, one that is based on the self-presenting strategies of the text itself, and one with the promise of a richer yield. Within this broad approach, however, there is one strategy that demands

further consideration, and that is the question of *translation*, a term important both within the history of Romance as a literary discourse and within the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (345ff.).

At first sight this problem may seem not relevant to a study of the *Quixote*, where we have the text in the author's original language. But at another level of interpretation the idea of translation has been adapted by Gadamer as the most appropriate metaphor for the hermeneutic process itself (349). When we read, according to Gadamer, we in essence "translate" the text into our own terms, into the specific meanings we personally attach to the many aspects of language. I have found for instance that native speakers of Spanish often discover a certain meaning in the text that reveals an orientation in their own particular linguistic heritage. One perceptive student I recall termed the experience of reading Golden Age texts the learning of a new language. On the simplest level this may be due to changed meanings of words. An example of such vagaries of individual language heritage occurred just a few years ago with a phrase that Pedro the rustic shepherd uses in his story of Marcela and Grisostomo (1: 12). In describing the beauty of Marcela's mother, Pedro adds: "No parece sino que ahora la veo, con aquella cara que del *un cabo tenía el sol y del otro la luna*" [It seems that I see her now, with that face that had the moon on one side and the sun on the other.] (my translation). The origins of the phrase seems to have had something to do with an alchemical completion symbol. However, in many years of teaching I have encountered only one native speaker who had ever heard the phrase as an item of current usage, and this student was from Puerto Rico. Curiously or not the peninsular students seem never to have heard the comparison, probably because most of them come from urban backgrounds, while the young woman from Puerto Rico was not. Obviously the reader already familiar with the phrase will "read" it with a different hermeneutic resonance than one who has not. Compounding the matter of familiarity, however, is the problem of what the term may mean in certain contexts and not in others, and this kind of difference in language recognition points up the question of survival of linguistic terms and, even more problematically, the survival of particular meanings attached to the terms. So we all realize that it is not easy to be certain of what such a term might have meant in the Madrid of 1605.

A classic study by Eric Auerbach on the term *figura* provides an opening into the infinite complexity of loss of meaning suffered by a single