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Who Is in the Back Room?: The Intertextuality of *Don Quixote* and *El cuarto de atrás*

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Miguel de Cervantes's *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1605, 1615) contributes to the literary canon in at least three major ways. First, it recapitulates and borrows from nearly all literatures of its own time. Second, it reworks these literatures into something entirely new that strikes even contemporary readers as remarkably modern. Third, the resulting novel is a nearly omnipresent subtext in the canon of Spanish (if not world) literature from 1605 on. One example of this subtext lies in Carmen Martín Gaite's *El cuarto de atrás* (1978), which exhibits a clear intertextual dialogue with the seventeenth-century masterpiece. As this article will demonstrate, reading each novel in terms of the other provides a rich opportunity for re-examining the inner needs of each protagonist, especially with regards to the role of literature in his or her life. In each novel, literature allows for the protagonist's posterity, offers him or her a necessary escape from "real" life, provides a model for behavior, and inspires serious discussions of literary theory and criticism.

Before embarking upon this argument, a few caveats and clarifications may be necessary. First, given the three hundred-odd years between the publication dates of the two novels, Martín Gaite not only writes from within an entirely different political and social context, but also makes use of technological advances in the production and consumption of "literature." Whereas books are literature for both protagonists, for the protagonist of the 1978 novel, C., literature also includes magazines, films, and television. Second, in my reading, *El cuarto de atrás* is not by any means an imitation, but rather an emulation, paying homage to one of the fundamental literary works in the world. As I read her, Carmen Martín Gaite, either as a conscious nod to the *Quixote*, or simply in another demonstration of its

far-reaching influence, uses the figure of Don Quixote as a springboard for the development of her own character. Third, *El cuarto de atrás* exhibits a number of topical similarities to *Don Quixote* (*Quixote*), which, although they are peripheral to the argument of the present article, deserve mention. Among these similarities are C.'s need to burn her writings (34), her consumption of books like food (51–52), the imaginary island/ínsula (58), her possible "locura" in the eyes of society (102), her age (136), and the trope of the found manuscript (210). These similarities aside, a much more extensive parallel between the two novels is that each is considered a "book about books."

El cuarto de atrás (*El cuarto*) is a largely autobiographical novel that Carmen Martín Gaite calls "la única novela en la que hablo un poco de mí" (Caron 1). Among other labels, critics have called the work a memoir, an autobiographical fiction, a fantastic novel, and a reflection on literary theory (Uxó). In *El cuarto*, C., a fifty-year old female author, suffers a night of insomnia and writer's block in her Madrid apartment. The telephone rings and a man's voice informs her that she has scheduled an interview at that time. Throughout, the narrator simply calls this man "el hombre de negro" or "el hombre vestido de negro." C. invites him up to the apartment, and the two spend the night talking about C.'s career as an author, her childhood, and her reaction to the recent death of the dictator. All the while a storm rages outside. During the night, a stack of papers grows on the table beneath the man's black hat, and we later discover that these papers constitute the manuscript for *El cuarto de atrás* itself. Eventually, C. falls asleep, the man in black leaves, and it remains somewhat unclear whether his visit has been a dream or reality. When C.'s daughter awakens her in the morning, however, there is physical evidence of the man's earlier presence: two teacups, a gold pillbox, and the finished manuscript.

Stephanie Sieburth argues in *Inventing High and Low* that "While canonical writers such as Cervantes, Machado, and Darío are [. . .] quoted in the novel, their works take a back seat to the mass cultural genres" (188). On the other hand, while the narrator of *El cuarto* does spill more ink in explicit reference to such genres as the *novela rosa*, much of the intertextual presence of the *Quixote* rests more in thematic resonance than in name. Sieburth does concede, albeit in parentheses, that "(*Don Quixote* [is] another subtext for the plot)" but insists that the seventeenth-century novel "is *not* mentioned" by

name (210). In fact, at various moments through the night, the narrator mentions several works by Cervantes including *La Gitanilla* (37, 101, 176), the *Entremeses* (66), and the *Quixote* itself (125). As I will discuss, *El cuarto*'s narrator names the protagonist Don Quixote as a potential literary model to imitate (125).

In addition to its intertextual presence in *El cuarto de atrás*, Carmen Martín Gaite's other writings also reveal her to be an attentive reader of the *Quixote*. She appears in her writing and interviews a thoughtful critic of many works, both Spanish and foreign. Clearly, Carmen Martín Gaite benefited from an extensive education in literature; born in Salamanca in 1925, she received her degree in Romance Philosophy and Letters from the University of Salamanca in 1949, and her doctorate from the Complutense in 1987. She lectured on literature at the UNAM several times between 1976 and 1979, and served as a visiting literature professor at Colombia, Virginia, Yale, and Idaho Universities.

Among the many works that interest her, Martín Gaite professes a great admiration for the *Quixote*. For example, she observes that because "el regodeo y goce de quien lo escribió es casi palpable, llega a darnos envidia" ("Charlar" 30). In fact, she dedicates a large part of her essay "Charlar y dialogar" to drawing a direct comparison between *Don Quixote* and *El cuarto de atrás*. In her essay, Martín Gaite notes that though she had not planned to write *Cuarto* in such a way, dialogue is as central to it as to *Don Quixote*. In her words, she had planned to make the man in black an "interlocutor silencioso y sin personalidad definida, un ser abstracto que visita a la narradora en una noche de tormenta" ("Charlar" 216). However, as she developed the novel, the male character did not remain silent, but rather through his commentary and questioning seemed to develop a personality of his own, an identity of his own. Likewise, in Martín Gaite's analysis, the characters and message of *Don Quixote* develop through the constant conversations between Sancho and his master. According to her, in both *El cuarto de atrás* and *Don Quixote*, conversation comes to take the primary focus, overshadowing the very plot.

In "Charlar y dialogar," Martín Gaite compares the interaction between Don Quixote and the other characters to the relationship between a reader and a work of literature. She notes, "Cuando Don Quijote presta oído atento a ellas (que es en muchas ocasiones) se convierte en lector de una novela que le desvía de la suya y se la hace

olvidar" ("Charlar" 217). As we will see, her metaphor between listening and reading is particularly poignant because of the strong association in *El cuarto* between speaking and writing. To complete Carmen Martín Gaite's analogy, listening is to reading as speaking is to writing. For C., all four are inextricably intertwined, especially in her attempt to create a lasting legacy.

Both C. and Don Quixote see literature as a means to eternal life. Don Quixote considers participating in the literature of chivalry as an author before he changes his mind and sets out to live the life of a character instead. The narrator notes that while the pre-quixotized Alonso Quixano read from his library, "muchas veces le vino deseo de tomar la pluma, y dalle fin al pie de la letra, como allí se promete; y sin duda alguna lo hiciera, y aun saliera con ello, si otros mayores y continuos pensamientos no se lo estorbaran" (I, 1, 35). Then, when Quixote finally sets out on his first sally, having chosen adequate costumes and names, he continues to think of his life in terms of preservation by the pen. He fantasizes:

> ¿Quién duda sino que en los venideros tiempos, cuando salga a luz la verdadera historia de mis famosos hechos, que el sabio que los escribiere no ponga, cuando llegue a contar esta mi primera salida tan de mañana, desta manera?: 'Apenas había el rubicundo Apolo tendido por la faz de la ancha y espaciosa tierra las doradas hebras de sus hermosos cabellos [. . .]. (I, 2, 42)

His thoughts tell us that Don Quixote, having only recently assumed such a moniker, is already quite conscious of the importance of his lasting reputation. He knows that the way in which he will be remembered depends on how a narrator tells his story. Of course, the irony lies in that the tone the real-world narrator of *Don Quixote* employs is far from the respectful and admiring one that Don Quixote imagines (Johnson 44).

In Part II, Sancho, Don Quixote, and Sansón Carrasco discuss Part I's portrayal of the adventurers. Their conversation further clarifies the importance that Don Quixote attributes to literature in creating his legacy, as the protagonist expresses deep concern about his reputation. He knows that the written word (the already published Part I, and presumably the pending publication of later adventures) will

broadcast his life's work to coming generations of readers. Therefore, he awaits Sansón Carrasco "de quien esperaba oír las nuevas de sí mismo puestas en el libro" (II, 3, 580), and worries that the author:

> algún sabio, o ya amigo o enemigo, por arte de encantamento las habrá dado a la estampa, si amigo, para engrandecerlas y levantarlas sobre las más señaladas de caballero andante; si enemigo, para aniquilarlas y ponerlas debajo de las más viles que de algún vil escudero se hubiesen escrito [. . .] [y] [. . .] desconsolóse pensar que su autor era moro, según aquel nombre de Cide, y de los moros no se podía esperar verdad alguna [. . .]. (II, 3, 580)

Don Quixote's reputation as a knight is of supreme importance to him. Confirming this, he notes to Sansón, "Una de las cosas [. . .] que más debe de dar contento a un hombre virtuoso y eminente es verse, viviendo, andar con buen nombre por las lenguas de las gentes, impreso y en estampa" (II, 3, 581). As Don Quixote and Sancho Panza head towards El Toboso, Don Quixote again confesses, "temo que en aquella historia que dicen que anda impresa de mis hazañas, si por ventura ha sido su autor algún sabio mi enemigo, habrá puesto unas cosas por otras, mezclando con una verdad mil mentiras, divirtiéndose a contar otras acciones fuera de los que requiere la continuación de una verdadera historia" (II, 8, 614). In these concerns, as in his fantasized narration of his first sally, Don Quixote shows himself to be extremely conscious of the weight of the written word. As we readers can see, literature does in fact solidify the character's reputation as it has for the fictional and historical knights he admires. Don Quixote would likely be dismayed to know that his reputation as a madman, though it endears him to fictional and real readers alike, supersedes his legacy as a valiant knight.

Whereas Don Quixote wants to establish his reputation through written text, C. possesses the much more drastic Unamunian recognition that without writing she does not exist at all. If there were no risk of loss, she observes aloud, "si no se perdiera nada, la literatura no tendría razón de ser. [. . .] lo importante es saber contar la historia de lo que se ha perdido" (196). C. sees her memories like butterflies and fleeting images from dreams. She must write these memories down in order to preserve them (121–122). For her, then, the written

word carries the weight not just of her reputation, but of her own life experience. That is, she worries that if she does not both speak about her memories and turn that conversation into literature, she will lose the experiences themselves. Of the conversations with the man in black, Stephanie Sieburth notes, "C. has succeeded in saving the past from oblivion" (205). For instance, C. notes that a room she remembers exists only "mientras yo viva" (169). Therefore, writing is the only way to save these memories from a death simultaneous to that of the author.

Perhaps C. wishes only to save her experiences from oblivion, but in so doing, she also establishes a public legacy of the sort that so concerned Don Quixote. As her visitor notes, "la conozco por lo que escribe. Lo que pasa es que entiendo de literatura y sé leer entre líneas" (196). In fact, he knows her well enough from reading her publications to have become her ideal reader. The man fulfills C.'s every conversational and literary need, asking, for instance, "que no se fugue sola, me gusta más que lo haga en voz alta [. . .] o, por lo menos, si se fuga sola, cuéntame luego lo que ha visto" (126–127). He seems to intuit her need to commit her memories to paper, which, in the case of this particular magical night, happens naturally as the two characters converse. The danger of this phenomenon, of course, is that C.'s writings do not save her memories only for herself, but they also publish them to the reading public, who reads what she has previously kept secret.

How exactly this process works is unclear. The man suggests that he is recording their conversation not with a tape recorder, nor with a pad and pen, but rather with an unnamed "sistema que estoy ensayando ahora" (186), or, as we discover throughout the novel, the book that writes itself and records their conversation on the page. This phenomenon, difficult as it may be to explain rationally, also finds resonance in another Cervantine work: the double novellas "El casamiento engañoso" and "El coloquio de los perros." In the first of these two novellas, Campuzano overhears, transcribes, and thus preserves, a nighttime conversation between two dogs. The second novella is the transcript of the conversation, which regards the life stories of the animals and a debate of theoretical literary questions. Campuzano tells Peralta:

> yo oí y casi vi con mis ojos a estos dos perros, que el uno se llama Cipión y el otro Berganza, estar una noche, que fue la penúltima que acabé de sudar, echados, detrás de mi cama, en unas esteras viejas [. . .] oí, escuché, noté y finalmente escribí, sin faltar palabra, por su concierto; de donde se puede tomar indicio bastante que mueva y persuada a creer esta verdad que digo. (535–36)

Here it is a human hand that records the conversation, while, despite Campuzano's insistence on its veracity, the conversation itself seems suspiciously fantastic. In *El cuarto de atrás* the reader is in a position more to Campuzano's, an unseen "fly on the wall" who hears the life story and literary discussion of C. and her mysterious guest.

In *El cuarto*, both the hand that writes and the conversation itself are fantastical. What we do know is that C. needs to write her life in order to save it. These memories depict C. as a lifelong reader of books, magazines, and movie stars' images. She is yet another example of characters for whom, in the words of Carroll B. Johnson, "literature provides a means of coping with the otherwise intolerable pressures of their personal situations" (88). She and Don Quixote both use literature as an escape from their real lives. In examining this phenomenon it is necessary to ask 1) from what does the protagonist need an outlet?, and 2) how does this particular genre of literature fulfill his or her needs?

Throughout nearly all of *Don Quixote*, the protagonist confronts the material world around him in terms of escapist literary models. He seems to use diversionary literature to distract his attention from his bland day-to-day existence, if not for a deeper darker reason. The narrator is able to sum up Don Quixote's pre-sally life in just a few lines. He is "gran madrugador y amigo de la caza," "un hidalgo de los de lanza en astillero, adarga antigua, rocín flaco y galgo corredor" (I, 1, 32–33). In fact, his routine meals and dressing habits merit more ink than do most of his activities. In short, "His lifestyle, described on the memorable opening page, conforms to that of a familiar type, associated with threadbare frugality, hunting, the relics of honourable ancestry, parochial seclusion" (Close 1). It seems the only thing that gives his existence any noteworthiness at all is that "los ratos que estaba ocioso, que eran los más del año, se daba a leer libros de caballerías, con tanta afición y gusto, que olvidó casi de todo punto

el ejercicio de la caza, y aun la administración de su hacienda" (I, 1, 34). Due to his overwhelming interest in books, Don Quixote buys "todos cuantos pudo haber dellos" (I, 1, 34). This obsession with literature is an obvious social deviancy, and it certainly seems to provide the Manchegan gentleman with his only diversion from an otherwise unremarkable daily existence.

In agreement with this reading, Edward Baker notes how unusual it is that Quesada/Quejana would have an entire "room set aside exclusively for his books," and concludes that "the hidalgo's library is the site of a breach of an otherwise harmonious, albeit modest, domestic order" (13–14). Don Quixote's relationship with literature diverges, for example, from that of Don Diego de Miranda, who exhibits a life in perfect accord with the established norms of his social class and position (II, 16). Don Diego has a wife and children and spends the bulk of his time hunting and fishing, not reading. He also has a library, but he keeps his books strictly arranged according to language and theme, and doesn't spend excessive amounts of time or money on them. Of particular note, the books of chivalry that so occupy Don Quixote's time and mind have not yet, Don Diego states, "entrado por los umbrales de mis puertas" (II, 16, 671).

In stark contrast to Don Diego's *mesura*, Don Quixote is so taken by his books of chivalry that he sells off most of his possessions in order to feed his addiction, and ultimately decides to imitate their model. Several hundred years later, C. lives in a Madrid apartment similarly overflowing with texts, and experiences something akin to what Don Quixote experienced; she reads, writes, and discusses literature as a means to divert her attention from the intolerable world of war and violence, and later conformity, dictatorship, restriction, and censorship. Her social deviancy lies in her rejection of the image of the orderly and restrained woman promoted by the official doctrine. Reading (or re-reading) *Don Quixote* in light of the political and cultural climate of *El cuarto* illuminates possible reasons behind Don Quixote's literary obsession. It seems that he, too, needs an escape from an otherwise unbearable cultural and/or political reality.

In their article "*El cuarto de atrás*: Metafiction and the Actualization of Literary Theory," Joanne Lipman Brown and Elaine M. Smith explain that "literature may function as an escape from reality" for Martín Gaite, who has called it "'una evasión de la rutina, como rechazo de un mundo agobiante, obligatorio, y consabido'" (64).

Brown and Smith go on to affirm that literature must, to provide an escape, include ambiguity (65). In Carmen Martín Gaite's experience, as evidenced in her interviews, as well as in C.'s case, ambiguity, imagination, and literary exploits provide an alternative to the rigidity and monotony of Franco's legacy. Emma Martinell agrees with this interpretation as well, noting that "La autora reconoce haber padecido desde pequeña la esclavitud de vivir en un recinto ordenado, y sin novedad ni trasgresión posibles de la limpieza y orden" (146). Finally, Mercedes Carbayo Abengózar also notes that Martín Gaite inserts subversive elements into *El cuarto de atrás* "mediante su único refugio: la literatura" (5). These assertions all hold up well when we examine the text of *El cuarto*.

Of all that C. suffers, she complains that "lo más grave era la falta de libertad" (80). She rebels against the restrictions placed upon her by surrounding herself with piles of written text, delighting in the "aglomeración de letreros, de fotografías, de cachivaches, de libros...!, libros que, para enredar más la cosa, guardan dentro fechas, papelitos, telegramas, dibujos, texto sobre texto: docenas de libros que podían abrir y volver a cerrar, y que luego quedarían descolocados, apilados unos sobre otros, proliferando como la mala yerba" (16). C. notes further that "Yo siempre soñaba con vivir en una buhardilla donde siempre estuvieran los trajes sin colgar y los libros en el suelo" (89). From her delight in disorder, we gather that C. deeply needs to rebel against the strict order that the dictatorship imposes. However, because she lives within the dictatorship for the majority of her life, her rebellion must be within closed doors.

C.'s only escape is into her own disordered apartment and her ambiguous reading and writing. Due to her surroundings, C. does not sally forth, but rather uses her mind to travel. She thinks about her potential escape only "a solas y a escondidas," and explains to her visitor that books are akin to traveling because they allow her to leave the unwanted and uninteresting behind (41). Thus, she manages to set us a dual existence, secretly maintaining what Sieburth calls the "reading, escape, madness" of the Republic within Franco's imposed "activity, sanity" (205). In fact, like Don Quixote, C. believes that some of the best escapism is found in a "novela caballeresca o de cuento de hadas" (43). In her own life, however, she relies primarily on romance novels and fantasy. These works not only provide her with an escape from her daily existence, but also serve as "literatura como

refugio," like the back room itself, protection from such unpleasantness as "el frío" and "los bombardeos" (59).

At various moments in her life, C. uses literature as an escape and a refuge from rejection, suffering, boredom, and war. For instance, when the young men who spark her interest do not reciprocate her affections, she "aprendía a convertir aquella derrota en literatura, otra vez será, a intensificar mis sueños" (182). She picks up this technique from a childhood friend who "me inició en la literatura de evasión" (183), collaborating with C. in planning a romance novel along the same lines as those they frequently read. Her friend needed literature more than she, because "lo pasaba peor" (183), an observation that demonstrates that literature was indeed a response to and salve for suffering. C. interprets her current situation in terms of these same romance novels, wishing she could call her (now dead) girlhood friend to tell her that she has finally met their oft-imagined male character "en carne y hueso" (184). In him, her secret and imaginary love life seems to be taking on a solid form, perhaps suggesting that with the transition to democracy in full swing, she can finally begin to live an enjoyable and fulfilling life. Alternatively, perhaps he is simply another imaginary lover like those of her girlhood.

C. discusses Don Quixote in a similarly confusing light. He is simultaneously a role model for escapism and a national symbol:

> quedarse, conformarse y aguantar era lo bueno; salir, escapar y fugarse era lo malo. Y sin embargo, también lo heroico, porque don Quijote y Cristo y Santa Teresa se habían fugado, habían abandonado casa y familia, ahí estaba la contradicción, nos contestaban que ellos lo hicieron en nombre de un alto ideal y que era la suya una locura noble [. . .]. Yo pensaba que también podía ser heroico escaparse por gusto, sin más, por amor a la libertad y a la alegría—no a la alegría impuesta oficial y mesurada, sino a la carcajada y la canción que brotan de una fuente cuyas aguas nadie canaliza—, lo pensaba a solas y a escondidas. (125)

Here, C. considers Don Quixote in the same vein as Santa Teresa and Christ, all upstanding cultural models that nonetheless contradict the official doctrine of Franco's regime. Santa Teresa and Christ do not

fit into traditional family roles, yet they are heroes within Franco's dictatorship. They have fulfilled C.'s fantasy, have escaped their realities according to their "alto ideal" and because of "locura noble." As much as she admires these rebellious iconoclasts, however, she does not follow their path of literal escape. The figures whose paths she does follow come from a variety of other genres.

Both C. and Don Quixote use literary figures as paradigms for their own behavior. This trait has been well documented with regards to Don Quixote.[1] In just one of many examples, Don Quixote "propuso de hacerse armar caballero del primero que topase, a imitación de otros muchos que así lo hicieron, según él había leído en los libros que tal le tenían" (I, 2, 42). He chooses his name, his love interest, his squire, and his clothing based on what he has read. In short, he builds his entire plan upon the scaffolding established by chivalric literature. Don Quixote also resists doing anything that he has not already read about in his books. For example, he tells the first innkeeper that "no traía blanca, porque él nunca había leído en las historias de los caballeros andantes que ninguno los hubiese traído" (I, 3, 51). During the famous incident with the windmills, Don Quixote tells Sancho that he does not complain about his pain because "no es dado a los caballeros andantes quejarse de herida alguna, aunque se le salgan las tripas por ella," a rule that Sancho hopes does not apply to squires as well (I, 8, 91). Hearing this, Don Quixote laughs and explains that Sancho "podía muy bien quejarse como y cuando quisiese, sin gana o con ella; que hasta entonces no había leído cosa en contrario en la orden de caballería" (I, 8, 91). These few examples are representative of the constant effort by Don Quixote to keep his behavior in line with that of the fictional knights after whom his entire plan is modeled.[2] This approach is possible because the chivalric works follow consistent and predictable patterns, thus allowing Don Quixote to imitate them in a way that subsequently becomes predictable to his companions. For C. this phenomenon is not quite as pronounced, but nonetheless, literary figures do exert a marked influence on her behavior.

C.'s escape into literature causes her to lose touch with the Aristotelian divide between Poetry and History, and even with the difference between reality and fiction. In "De lo (neo)fantástico al Caos," Antonio Pineda notes that for C., "La irrealidad de la literatura (entendida como contradicción, multiplicidad de la identidad y concepción histórica no cronológica) configura [. . .] la realidad,

además de invadirla y suplantarla. La vida se ficcionaliza (y se vive a través del discurso literario) mientras la ficción se hace más real que nunca" (14). When her visitor hands C. a lit cigarette, for example, she thinks "muy de novela rosa este detalle" (190). Sieburth notes that these details make it "impossible to separate a level of the 'real' out of fiction" (206). Much like in Don Quixote, this confusion and interplay between the Aristotelian categories comes from the fact that C. interprets and acts upon her reality with an eye to literary models, especially romance novels.

As noted by Sieburth, the *novelas rosa* are the most present of named intertexts. This genre is effective in C.'s life because its works are idealized love stories that portray a variety of female protagonists and excite C.'s erotic imagination while allowing her to avoid consummating her desires. The *novelas rosa* also provide particularly effective literary models because they follow set patterns. C. notes, "En las novelas rosa, cuando se llegaba a una escena de clima parecido a ésta, se podía apostar doble contra sencillo a que el desconocido iba a revelar su identidad [. . .] eran esquemas invariables, así ocurría también en la primera novela por entregas que escribí con mi amiga del Instituto y que no llegamos a terminar" (140). On the night narrated in *El cuarto*, the bet C. mentions would be a winner. Not only does she discover the name of the man in black, but according to a voice on the phone, his name is precisely the one C. would have expected: Alejandro (144). As with the books of chivalry that Don Quixote reads, romance novels are imitable because of this same predictability. Additionally, both romance novels and chivalric literature are considered "low" or "pop" fiction, not only because they follow set formulae, but also because they attract a broad audience and appeal to "coarser," less intellectual sides of the human psyche. If chivalric literature is all about fighting and romance, *novelas rosa* are all about passion and physical attraction.

The impact of romance novels on C.'s life is evident at several moments throughout the night. For instance, shortly after the man in black arrives, he asks whether C. is afraid of the thunder, and C. smiles with her eyes closed. Suddenly, the narrator jumps to the text of a romance novel: "Oh, Raimundo—exclamó Esperanza, mientras brotaban las lágrimas de sus párpados cerrados" (38). C.'s mind also jumps to the words and themes of the *novelas rosa* each time she feels the pull of sexual tension between her and her visitor. For

instance, she notes "Nos estamos mirando a los ojos ya sin paliativos, el corazón se me echa a latir como un caballo desbocado, esto del caballo desbocado lo decían también con frecuencia aquellos libros" (141). She recalls that as a child, she "Leía tantas novelas rosa, de Eugenia Marlitt, de Berta Ruck [. . .]. Luego vino Carmen de Icaza y desplazó a los demás, ella era el ídolo de la postguerra, introdujo en el género la 'modernidad moderada', la protagonista podía no ser tan joven, incluso peinar canas, era valiente y trabajadora" (141). That C. mentions this older protagonist justifies her own tendency to interpret her adult life in terms of a romance novel; the protagonists of Carmen De Icaza's works are older professional women like C.

Unlike Don Quixote, C. is fully aware of the fact that the *novelas rosa* are—at least in their printed versions—fictional. She recognizes her own tendency to adopt the novels' phraseology, but chalks this up to a generalized phenomenon among girls of her generation. She notes, "es muy importante el papel que jugaron las novelas rosas en la formación de las chicas de los años cuarenta" (138) and that "es difícil escapar a los esquemas literarios de la primera juventud, por mucho que más se reniegue de ellos" (141). C. explicitly acknowledges the role that these novels have played both in her youth and in her current potential romance with her visitor. At one point, she even notes, "me está habitando la literatura" (49). That C. metacognitively comments on her tendency to imitate literature further underscores the extremeness of Don Quixote's mental state. C. accepts her situation and comments "lo que importa es tener en cuenta los modelos literarios que influyen en las conductas, ¿no?, no tiene más que echar una mirada a la literatura universal, no encontrará una sola obra donde los grandes amores no se asienten sobre la carencia de satisfacciones reales" (181). C. allows that her interpretations, here regarding love relationships, depend on the models she takes from romance novels. She even generalizes further, thinking to herself, "Siempre hay un texto soñado, indeciso y fugaz, anterior al que de verdad se recita, barrido por él" (40). Further, not only does C. interpret her interaction with the man in black in line with the patterns of romance novels, but these literary patterns seem to have reached even her subconscious "decorando nuestros sueños con el material que nos suministraban" (153).

The literature that inhabits C.'s consciousness includes not just romance novels, but also magazines, films, and television programs. C. remembers years back "estaba sola, imitando la postura de aquellas

mujeres, inexistentes de puro lejanas, que aparecían en las ilustraciones de la revista 'Lecturas', creadas por Emilio Freixas para novelas cortas de Elisabeth Mulder" (13). She also decorates her room based on what she sees in the same magazine. As an adult, C. adopts the manner of an advice column, suggesting to the woman who calls the house "todos hemos pasado por momentos malos, pero hay que procurar reaccionar," after which she immediately regrets "la esterilidad de mi consejo, formulando en términos de consultorio sentimental, en aquel tono aséptico y escapista de la revista 'Y'" (151). Incidentally, this scene sets up an even more subtle play on the Aristotelian categories, as the magazine takes its name from a historical figure (Ysabel), and then provides advice for "real" letter writers. C. imitates the style of a real but stylized advice columnist, and then regrets the apparent falseness of her imitation.

Along with magazines, films present paradigms of behavior for C. as well. In fact, the young C. thinks being an actress would be wonderful in its possibility to "desdoblarme en cientos de vidas" (85). C. also finds herself inadvertently imitating the artificial tone of a "comedia mala" (123) as she has done with advice columns. In another cinematic imitation, C. literally trips over her Todorov book, and interprets her movement in terms of film:

> Ha sido una caída de película de Buster Keaton. Cuánto me hacían reír esas calamidades del cine mudo que luego he protagonizado cientos de veces: tropezar, confundirse de puerta, darse de brices contra la pared [. . .] accidentes reiterados que, siempre que vuelven a producirse, descargan de tensiones y devuelven la propia identidad más que cualquier esfuerzo deliberado, torpezas que revelan la inseguridad del antihéroe. (20)

In this instance, C. establishes yet another level to the theme of imitating literature. First, having seen the films as a child she chooses to copy their slapstick humor. Then, having imitated Buster Keaton's movements consciously, years later she relates an accidental fall to her own imitations of the film star's planned but fictional falls.

In a third example of the influence of film, C. tries to follow Diana Durbin as she "subministraba modelos americanos de comportamiento" (64). She collects chromes of her along with Claudette

Colbert, Gary Cooper, Clark Gable, Shirley Temple, and others (65). She calls these figures "ídolos" and "dioses" (85) and imagines that Franco's daughter, being of the same age and gender, must collect them as well. As Don Quixote's interest in popular chivalric literature aligns him with characters in the novel, such as those in Palomeque's Inn (I, 32), as well as to contemporary readers of the *Quixote*, the mention of collecting movie stars' chromes builds a bridge between C. and readers who may also have collected them. As a consequence, three "people" in *El cuarto* are placed on a similar playing field: the historical figure of Carmencita Franco (as constructed in a fictional character's mind), the protagonist C., and the real-life readers of the fiction. Real-life details such as these elevate C.'s status, making her more realistic.[3] In a final cinematic example, C.'s behavior mimics that of someone not acting in, but watching a film. She describes, "Me quedo paralizada, con los ojos fijos en la pared de enfrente, esperando que se dibuje allí la siguiente escena, como si estuviera en el cine viendo una película de suspense" (sic) (147). Here she sees not herself, but the space around her in terms of movies.

Meanwhile, other characters in *El cuarto* accept the imitation of literary figures, but opine that C. has simply chosen the wrong role models. For instance, C.'s mother would also have liked to be allowed to "leer y jugar a juegos de chicos" and even "estudiar una carrera, como sus dos hermanos varones" (91). Despite these dreams, however, C.'s mother directs her daughter away from a literary or other professional career. Her mother presents C. with an alternative literary paradigm to imitate: a novel called *El amor catedrático* (92). This book tells the story of a girl who makes a mistake in studying for a professional career. She chooses the right path in the end, though, falling in love with her professor and marrying him instead of pursuing her own career. Ultimately her story is meant to model for C. the correct life of a young Spanish woman.

Certain characters around Don Quixote also try to re-direct his impulse to imitate chivalric literature. For instance, the *canónigo* and the priest suggest that it would be better if Don Quixote would read Byzantine romances instead (I, 47-48). The Byzantine romances of the Early Modern era presented alternative, more productive and contemporary models that Don Quixote could follow rather than aspiring to be an outdated knight errant. In the seventeenth century, "Guardians of literary taste and public morals prized the Byzantine romances and

opposed them to the nefarious romances of chivalry, holding them up to be imitated" (Johnson 79). In the end, though, having been defeated by the Knight of the White Moon, Don Quixote chooses to divert his own impulse to imitate chivalric literature not towards Byzantine, but towards pastoral literature.

In practice, much of the novel's discussion about pastoral, Byzantine, and chivalric literature has less to do with madness and more to do with pressing themes of literary theory. Literature inspires a great deal of theoretical discussion among the characters of *Don Quixote* and *El cuarto de atrás*. For instance, in *Don Quixote* (Part I), such episodes as the scrutiny of books (I, 6), the adventure with Marcela and Gristónomo (I, 12-14), Sancho's story about Lope Ruíz (I, 20), the conversation in Palomeque's inn (I, 32), and especially the caging of Don Quixote (I, 47-50) inspire characters to discuss narrative theory and practice. In Part II, Sansón Carrasco arrives and engages Don Quixote and Sancho in a discussion about Part I (II, 4). Later, Cide Hamete Benengeli responds to criticism about having included "El curioso impertinente" and "Capitán cautivo" in Part I (II, 72), and Álvaro Tarfe, a character from Avellaneda's sequel to the *Quixote*, shows up to pronounce the superiority of Cervantes's version (II, 72). Throughout both volumes of *Don Quixote*, the play on authorial voices allows the narrator to criticize or praise what the various "authors" and "translator" have included or omitted. For example, Cide Hamete Benengeli includes details about Maritornes's lover because he is a friend or even a relative ("el autor desta historia que desse arriero hace particular mención, porque le conocía muy bien, y aun quieren decir que era algo pariente suyo") (I, 16, 158). Clearly, the second author praises this detail ironically, as another critique of inclusion of material for the wrong reason.

For C. and the man in black, their allegorical discussion represents the process of writing and creation. As do the conversations in *Don Quixote*, C.'s conversations with her visitor frequently revolve around questions of literary theory and criticism. For example, the visitor asks that C. "[le cuente] cómo se le ocurrió el libro" (129). They discuss C.'s earlier works, particularly so that the man can assess C.'s lack of commitment to the fantasy genre (31, 48, 105). C. also criticizes the tendency of other writers to end their love stories with weddings. C. disapproves because she imagines there is more to tell about love than just the courtship (92). C.'s overarching view on literature is that "lo

más excitante son las versiones contradictorias, constituyen la base de la literatura, no somos un solo ser, sino muchos, de la misma manera que tampoco la historia es esa que se escribe poniendo en orden las fechas y se nos presenta como inamovible" (167). C. believes that the best literature is that which (like *El cuarto de atrás* and *Don Quixote*) forces readers to grapple with complex characterization.

In a final example of the blurred line between Poetry and History, because of her belief in the importance of complexity, C. has more trouble believing in simplified historical figures than in complex fictional ones. Historical figures, she states, "me parecen tan fantásticos como Wilfredo el Velloso o la sota de bastos, personajes de una baraja con la que se podían hacer toda clase de combinaciones" (132). Her own inventions also seem more real to her than do historical personages like Isabel la Católica. For example, the island Bergai that she dreams up with her girlhood friend "tenía la fuerza y la consistencia de los sueños [. . .] todo podía convertirse en otra cosa, dependía de la imaginación" (195). In a final literary critique, when C. confesses her difficulty in distinguishing between fiction and nonfiction, the man in black encourages, "Pues atrévase a contarla, partiendo justamente de esa sensación. Que no sepa si lo que cuenta lo ha vivido o no, que no lo sepa usted misma. Resultaría una gran novela" (197). The theoretical discussion that ensues about the importance of a title reads much like a conversation Don Quixote and Sancho could have had along the road. Of course, all of C.'s comments lend a positive spin to the resulting novel.

In the end, although C. and Don Quixote follow similar routes, using literature for posterity, escape, imitation, and discussion, they arrive at very different places. Whereas Don Quixote hopes to return to a social order based on chivalry, C. hopes to free herself from the ordered but constricting rules of her past. Unfortunately, in the end Don Quixote's defeat and death signal the impossibility of his dream, the victory of social pressure to conform over individual creativity and quirkiness. Carmen Martín Gaite calls Don Quixote's death "la desembocadura final y no deseada por nadie: la cordura de Don Quijote en su lecho de muerte. 'En los nidos de antaño no hay pájaros hogaño.'" ("Charlar" 217). Perhaps in protest, she writes quite a different end for C., who awakes in her apartment and maintains her belief that fantasy and chaos are superior to order and reality. In *El cuarto de atrás* itself, C.'s dream of chaos and ambiguity has come true.

Notes

1. Incidentally, Don Quixote himself is not the only character to do so. Such characters as Anselmo and Eugenio, who live out a pastoral novel (I, 51), and Ginés de Pasamonte, who lives out a picaresque one (I, 22), also take literary models for their life works.

2. Of course, chivalric literature is not the only genre Don Quixote imitates. In the end, the protagonist decides to follow the life of a literary pastor, and finally, an exemplary Christian (perhaps equally fictionalized). *Don Quixote* recreates other literary models as well, including pastoral, picaresque, and Byzantine romance (See Johnson, Chapter 6).

3. Of course, we should also remember that there are critics who argue that C. and Carmen Martín Gaite, the author, are one in the same.

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