DON QUIXOTE AND THE IDEALS OF CHIVALRY

ADELA NICULAE

"And I would have your reverence know that I am a knight of La Mancha, Don Quixote by name, and it is my office and exercise to go through the world righting wrongs and redressing grievances."[1]

The sacred world

The image of the knight appears not only in the Western literature of the Middle Ages, but also in the entire modern literature. The idea of *knight* survives even outside its history, representing a "superior type of humanity"[2]. "Even if it does not correspond to certain realities from institutions, it expresses though, in the image of a symbol, a specific number of values."[3] The ideal of chivalry comes down to a total obedience towards special arrangements along the entire life. Above all, what the knight wishes is to be part of a special high moral adventure and in a sacred way. The patron saint of the knights is the Archangel Michael who fights against the army of evil which he chases away. Thus, the ideal of chivalry seems almost impossible to be separated from the religious fervor: "The brave act of the Saint Archangel Michael was the first deed and victory in the chivalry fight, ever accomplished; this is where the chivalry started, organized after the image of the groups of angels around the throne of the Holy One. The Spanish poet Juan Manuel believes that it might be a sort of mystery which he compares with the mystery of the baptism or marriage."[4] The Church is a key element and sometimes it is present at the moment of the assignment of knights, so the ceremony has spiritual elements. Thus, all the fights of the hero will also be spiritual fights, as the cause is also a special (a superior) one. In this way the knight is accepted in a picked society. The real knight is the one who follows Parsifal – in his search of the Holy Grail and the one whom everyone sees as the one who offers spiritual food.

[1] Miguel de Cervantes y Saavedra, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, translated by Charles Jarvis, edited by E.C. Riley (London: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 138.

[2] Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, *Dicționar de simboluri*, I (Bucharest: Artemis, 1994), p. 262.

[3] *Ibidem.*

[4] Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

Synthesis, XXXVIII, p. 13–22, Bucarest, 2011

Because the sacred world calls for its followers with strength and expresses its fascination with intensity, the traps can be subtle, but harmful; especially when the hero spends a long time in this world. Huizinga explains the involvement of the sacred in the chivalry order: "In the significance of the word *ordre* there were both united and even impossible to separate a great number of meanings, starting from the supreme sanctity to the most analyzed group interest. Order means both social class and priest's devotion, chivalric and monastic order. That undoubtedly in the word *ordre*, when it comes to chivalric order, there was still something remaining from the gift of a priest, it was clear from the fact that, for the same meaning it was also used the word *religion* – a word whose meaning we might restrict to the idea of the monastic order. Chastellain used to call The Golden Wool *une religion*, as a priest order and he always talked about it with a tone appropriate to a sacred mystery. [...] So there is no wonder that, to be a member of a chivalric order involved a powerful sacred connection."[5]

In the present case we question whether the old world of chivalry can be considered a fragment of the sacred. If we take into consideration their mission (the missions of the knights), their dubbing ceremony in the church, the searchers of the Grail, then the world of the knights can be considered as a manifestation of the sacred. For Don Quixote the chivalry books are like the icons, they represent all the significant values worth praising and repeating. The time of the books is the time *ab origine*. All the money and the material values have no relevance here; everything is concentrated on the wisdom that Don Quixote can obtain from these "documents". Thus, the hero separates himself from any material possession and nothing is more important for him than to learn certain values from these chivalry books: "You must know, then, that this gentleman aforesaid, at time when he was idle, which was most part of the year, gave himself up to the reading of books of chivalry with so much attachment and relish, that he almost forgot all the purchase books of knight-errantry, and carried home all he could lay hands on of that kind."[6] His job now is to read continuously: "In short he so bewildered himself in this kind of study, that he passed the nights in reading from sunset to sunrise, and the days from sunrise to sunset: and thus, through little sleep and much reading, his brain was dried up in such a manner, that he came at last to lose his wits; and what with little sleep and much reading his brains got so dry that he lost his wits. His imagination was full of all that he read in his books, to wit, enchantments, battles, single combats, challenges, wounds, courtships, amours, tempests, and impossible absurdities. And so firmly was he persuaded that the whole system of chimeras he read of was true, that he thought no history in the world was more to be depended

[5] Johan Huizinga, *Amurgul Evului Mediu. Studiu despre formele de viață și de gândire din secolele al XIV-lea și al XV-lea în Franța și în Țările de Jos*, translated from Dutch by H.R. Radian (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2002), p.118, 119.

[6] Cervantes, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

upon."[7] Starting with this precise moment everything is brought to light: the action of reading is for Quixote the manifestation of the sacred, and this sacred time of the romance cannot be left behind. There were so many stories present in his memory that the knight becomes the prisoner of his own adventures. He knows that he does not belong to that time, but he does everything he can in order to be part of the story. The most important thing is that he creates a new identity for himself. But why does he do that? Maybe because during his reading, Quijano frees himself of identity and realizes that he needs to enter another world and that this one where he lives his life does not suit him anymore. Thus, he creates the key elements which he considers he will need later on. For one thing, he takes the first step towards his new identity and he names himself, an action which also includes his dubbing as a knight (even if about this, the author confesses that, Quixote in his troubled mind "has purposed to get himself knighted by the first person he should meet, in imitation of many other who had done the like, as he had read in the books which had occasioned his madness")[8]. Everything demands a lot of time and care, as there is not such an easy thing to create the names of the characters. In order to choose the name of the horse, he needs four days, and for the name of the knight, the process is even more complicated, as it lasts eight days and the result is regarded as a satisfying one because it resembles the chivalry books he has read.

They were all chosen after the pattern of Amadis de Gaula's books. Just like in the process of naming the actors in a play, Quixote takes care and creates all the characters, borrowing those around him and placing them on the stage in his play. Here is the fragment where he names the lady whom he decides to love and dedicate his victories to: "a very comely country lass, with whom he had formerly been in love; though, as it is supposed, she never knew it, not troubled herself about it. Her name was Aldonza Lorenzo, and her he pitched upon to be the lady of his thoughts; then, casting about for a name, which should have some affinity with her own, and yet incline towards that of a great lady or princess, he resolved to call her Dulcinea del Toboso (for she was born at that place), a name, to his thinking, harmonious, uncommon, and significant, like the rest he had devised for himself, and for all that belonged to him."[9] He does not forget the main properties: "a suit of armour, which had been his great-great-grandfather's, and, being mouldy and rust-eaten, had lain by, many long years, forgotten in a corner. These he cleaned and furbished up the best he could; but he perceived they had one great defect, which was, that, instead of a helmet, they had only a simple morion, or steel cap; but he dexterously supplied this want by contriving a sort of visor of pasteboard, which, being fixed to the head piece, gave it the appearance of a complete helmet."[10]

[7] *Ibidem*, p. 22.
[8] *Ibidem*, p. 26.
[9] *Ibidem*, p. 25.
[10] *Ibidem*, p. 23–24.

Quixote wants to transform these objects too and make them part of his *sacred universe*. By cleaning the weapons he wishes to reactivate a magical function, that of accomplishing the right law. Just like the characters are named (baptized), the weapons are purified. Quixote is convinced that the entire universe will accept him and will allow him start his fight for justice. The reader (who is also the viewer of a play at the same time) could be tempted in a more serious way (to read everything in a more serious way), if he were not to take into consideration the observations of the narrator, who is also involved in the action and who is also a great actor. Both his very authentic language and the absence of a metaphorical speech, announce the strange character of Don Quixote, who has climbed the steps of chivalry and must respect a certain code of manners.

Quixote takes the costume of the knight, but his belief manages to transform him into a real, flesh and bone knight. He tries to force his contemporaries to face their own failure in maintaining the old chivalry code. This conflict between the new and the old has sometimes its chaos moments, when nobody understands Quixote and when he does not understand anybody. Sancho's appearance is the only one that can bring something new, a change, meaning that he is the one who can mediate the relation between the worlds. He succeeds many times in leaving aside the moral values of his time, but he finally amazes his reader by attachment to the knight and to the chivalry code.

Coming back to the first part of the story, it would be worth mentioning that this Quijano transformed in Quixote leaves his *world*. This term of *world* can be seen through Eliade's perception and explanations: "In order to understand better the need of the ritual building of the sacred space, we must insist on the traditional conceptions about *the world*; we shall immediately realize that any type of world is for the religious person a sacred world."[11] The difference here is that in Quixote, facing the sacred is such an intense experience, that the values which should be understood from this well-framed and organized world of chivalry are not just read and learned, but the hero is now in the position of thinking that he is a real knight (he wants to be a model for the others). Leaving his *center* ("because his house is *imago mundi*, it is in a symbolic interpretation in the Center of the World")[12] – he is leaving his house, and this is not a difficult process. This means that the center has changed, it is different now. But, as Eliade mentions in *The Sacred and the Profane*, nobody leaves his house without a pang.

In the world of the sacred, where Quixote thinks he has arrived (by his self transformation as a knight and his projection in that time), the symbols carry a lot of messages. The book is a permanent symbol (on the one hand, because Quixote always remembers fragments from his Romances and, on the other hand, because

[11] Mircea Eliade, *Sacrul şi profanul*, translated by Branduşa Prelipceanu, the second edition (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2000), p. 22.

[12] *Ibidem*, p. 41.

the hero imagines that all his adventures will also become a Romance). It is the symbol of the book on three levels: the first one, there are the books which Quixote has read; the second one, there is the book which Quixote imagines as being written now as his adventures are performed and the third one, the real book that we open and read, where we find the adventures of *Don Quixote de la Mancha* – a Romance with strong ironical features. In conclusion, should we not leave the symbol of the book and continue asking: what is the book? In *Encyclopédie des Symboles*, the book is seen as an object to be interpreted, decoded: "le livre doit être compris en profondeur, afin qu'on y découvre le sens caché de son texte. C'est pourquoi on trouve ainsi le symboledu livre tantôt ouvert qui renvoie à la littéralité du texte, et donc au sens exoterique, et tantôt ferme qui correspond à l'attitude esoterique, indiquant qu'un «joyau de la pensée» est enfermé dans ses pages."[13]

The books and manuscripts which appear in Don Quixote symbolize especially the importance and influence that literature (fiction) can have in one's life. The books are meant to instruct and educate, and for those who have a boring life, without great challenges of destiny they can offer the fascination of imagination. The books are for Quixote the chance to leave his still life aside and also the chance to build another life, even if he has a script to follow. His part in the play is very well controlled, but the adventures still have an unpredictable future[14]. Quixote's imagination builds gradually pieces of madness or scenes of a play. Don Quixote leaves Quijano and his way of thinking and he becomes the director and character of a play, the God of another world. If we accept the idea of play, then we can understand how difficult and troubling can be for a healthy man to show himself as a person without any faculty of reasoning and to behave like someone who lost his mind. Living in a society in which another historical time is present, Quixote will be in many situations alone (except for the moments when he has Sancho around; he sometimes lives the evens close to Quixote and some other times his mind is tempted by the present moments, the reality). Don Quixote, that character full of philosophy and full of meditation and poetry and with an extraordinary rich imagination, chooses Sancho Panza as a partner – a character who is less bright, completely different, willing to accept his ideas. He is a rather practical character, someone who is guided by his will and mostly by reality. By his presence near Quixote, the adventures become more credible for the viewer-reader. For Quixote, Sancho is the only one who joins him everywhere and the only one who has the opportunity to listen to the hero's stories with detailed descriptions – which makes everything very authentic. As a proof, there are some dialog fragments between Quixote and Sancho – fragments which can make us, as

[13] Michel Cazenave, *Encyclopedie des symboles* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2007), p. 372.

[14] Don Quixote knows his mission quite well, but he does not know the other character's lines; anyway, all the unpredictable lines play a very important role here.

spectators, see, guess and understand better the feelings, thoughts and plans of the character: "But listen with attention, whilst I give you an account of the principal knights of both the armies [...] seeing in his imagination that he neither, nor could see, he began with a loud voice to say: 'That knight you see yonder with the gilded armour, who bears in his shield a lion crowned couchant at a damsel's feet, is the valorous Laurcalco, Lord of the Silver Bridge: the other with the armour flowered with gold, who bears three crowns argent in a field azure, is the formidable Micocolembo, Grand Duke of Quirocia; the third with gigantic limbs, who marches on his right is the undaunted Brandabarbaran de Boliche, Lord of the three Arabias; he is armed with a serpent's skin, and bears, instead of a shield, a gate, which, fame says, is one of those belonging to the temple which Samson pulled down, when with his death he avenged himself upon his enemies."[15]

What if Sancho had not been near the knight, how would have everything happened? All the stories and the descriptions told to the squire are nothing but a false excuse so that the viewer-reader could understand. In all his madness, Quixote knows how to arrange and manage his baroque theatre in which he also performs and he is also careful about the details. From the outside, from the position of those watching this madness, Quixote is seen outside society; the *Dictionary of Symbols* says that "the madman has no number. Thus, he is outside the game, meaning outside the human walled city."[16]

Another important symbol in this world of chivalry in which Quixote invites us is *the inn*. This is the meeting place of those who come from all social levels, the place where one is told or tells stories. The inn is the symbol of food and rest, but also the symbol of corruption and greed, as many of the innkeepers from the novel are far from being the most honest people in the world. Don Quixote does not want to stay in an inn during his adventures, he would rather sleep outside in the open sky, but Sancho pines for a good rest at the inn as he follows his instinct for comfort: "but if Sancho was grieved that they could not reach some habitation, his master was so much rejoiced to lie in the open air, making account that every time this befell him, he was doing an act possessive, or such an act as gave a fresh evidence of his title to chivalry."[17] Quixote is far from this wish of being close to society; as he feels much more comfortable outside this world and its rules. Food and rest are not important, but Sancho warns him, because he is the one who can feel the hunger or tiredness. "Sancho put him in mine that it was time to dine. His master answered that at present he had no need; but that he might eat whenever he thought fit. With this licence, Sancho adjusted himself the best he could upon his beast; and taking out what he carried in his wallet, he jogged on eating, behind his master, very leisurely, and

[15] Cervantes, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
[16] Jean Chevalier, Alain Cheerbrant, *op. cit.*, II, p. 333.
[17] Cervantes, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

now and then lifted the bottle to his mouth with so much relish, that the best fed victualler of Malaga might have envied him."[18]

Quixote keeps the rhythm of his chivalry life and nothing seems to stop him. It is not an easy target, as the ascetic characteristic of the game plays an important role: "Everywhere where the ideal of chivalry is served in the most pure way possible, the emphasis is on the ascetic element. [...] the wandering knight is just as the Templar, with no earthly connections and poor."[19] As we saw in the discussion of the symbol of the inn, food and rest are not important and neither the wounds made by the imaginary creatures (but in the real life there are cruel experiences, as we can see from the battle with the ewes and sheep for example); they are not difficult to endure: "I want your help and assistance; come hither to me, and see how many grinders I want, for it seems to me that I have not one left in my head."[20] The knight does not mind all these sufferings, allowing his body try many other pains, such as the one with Fierabras balm, the cure Quixote thought (according to what he had read) was suitable for the wounded knights, a cure which produced an even greater pain: "This done, he resolved immediately to make trial of the virtue of that precious balsam, as he imagined it to be; and so he drank about a pint and a half of what the cruse could not contain, and which remained in the pot it was infused and boiled in; and scarcely had he done drinking, when he began to vomit so violently, that nothing was left in his stomach; and through the convulsive reachings and agitation of the vomit, he fell into a most copious sweat: wherefore he ordered them to cover him and to leave him alone."[21]

I read therefore I am

Edward Dudley is the key in the following interpretation of Don Quixote, so we can trace the origins of this Romance. "No han leido vuestras mercedes – respondio Don Quijote – los anales e historias de Inglaterra donde se tratan las

[18] *Ibidem*, p. 61: "In fine they passed that night among some trees, and from one of them Don Quixote tore a withered branch, that might serve him in some sort for a lance, and fixed it to the iron head of spear of what which was broken. All that night Don Quixote slept not a wink, ruminating of his lady Dulcinea, in conformity to what he had read in his books, where the knights are wont to pass many nights many nights together, without closing their eyes, in forests entertaining themselves with the remembrance of their mistresses. Not so did Sancho pass the night, whose stomach being full (and not of dandelion-water) he made but one sleep of it, and, if his master had not roused him, neither the beams of the sun that darted full in his face, nor all the melody of the birds which in great numbers most cheerfully saluted the approach of the new day, could have awaked him."

[19] Johan Huizinga, *op. cit.*, p. 105: "This ideal of the noble warrior, having no goods, says William James still governs sentimentally, if not practically, the military and aristocratic view of life. We glorify the soldier as the man absolutely unencumbered. Owning nothing but his bare life, and willing to toss that up at any moment when the cause commands him, he is the representative of unhampered freedom in ideal directions."

[20] Cervantes, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 120.

famosas fazanas del rey Arturo...?" (1.13)[22] "Have you not read, Sir," replied Don Quixote, "the annals and histories of England wherein are recorded the famous exploits of King Arthur...?"[23] The answer of the knight when asked about what being such a knight meant frames perfectly the problem of reading. *Don Quixote* (the book) is about the problematic of reading and generally about the history of reading. This Romance was often named the story of the stories, a great metatext in which there were narrated questions about the nature of the language and the nature of the knowledge. Don Quixote becomes the symbol of the dilemma "how to be" in a world in which new ways of knowledge broke the traditional systems used so far. The appearance of the Romance as a new type of story can be seen as an answer to a certain challenge, and Don Quixote becomes the answer about the possibilities of knowing in the world. For the contemporary reader, remembering the old Romances is an even greater challenge, as the task is more difficult. For this new reader (as we are now when we read Don Quixote), the ability of reading has been influenced by a long tradition where the realistic stories are privileged. Even more than that, the critics tends to classify these Romances as a type of primitive narration, forgotten now because of the appearance of the realistic stories. Thus, this negative hermeneutics can be seen at work in *Don Quixote* – the work where the hero is classified as a madman. If the old chivalry books were not seen as critics had named them, false and deceiving and certainly not real, then the idea that the hero was mad would not be taken into consideration. It is not just a coincidence the fact that, this novel appears now in the seventeenth century "because its publication coincides with the development of the belief that the new scientific methodologies were the only reliable measure of an external reality."[24] We respect the same rules today, knowing about chivalry books that are not to be taken into consideration, as they were found on the women's reading shelves. In conclusion, in the seventeenth century, the Romance is not seen as a "serious" work, mainly because it belonged to the distorted view of women. The masculine critical view – also called the "serious" critical voices would deny such works. So, Cervantes himself replaces the fashion for Romance with the fashion of realistic novels.

The source of the narrative and the cause of Quixote's adventures always find their start in the manner in which the novels should be read. First, we might find that everything happens because of Quixote's wrong interpretation of the old chivalry books, and the madness of the hero is seen as a hermeneutic dislocation. However, it would be a mistake not to notice that the author's interpretation of the madness is also part of this Romance and not an objective interpretation that the

[22] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, edited by Martin Alonso (Madrid: Edaf, 2009), p. 86.

[23] Cervantes, *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (English edition), p. 89.

[24] Edward Dudley, *The Endless Text: Don Quixote and the Hermeneutics of Romance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 3.

reader must accept. This type of confusion can be cleared if the problems related to the hermeneutics are not extended from the theme of madness. One should also take into consideration the writing strategies and the narration itself. The "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."[25] So, because the author knows the old documents and the old Romances, he cannot write his work with a detached objectivity. This précis problem of writing and narrative authority make us look for a close analysis of the hermeneutics of the Romance, either by observing the Celtic tales, in the Medieval Matter of Britain or in *Don Quixote*. Some of these Romances are built on a historical basis together with information from legends. Actually, the historical contributions have dethroned these Romances because history does not mention them. Thus, it is certain that Arthur's tales have nothing to do with history. In conclusion, we must search some place else the reason of the force of chivalry tales. "We now know 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."[26] There were two genres of Celtic tales, which Dillon Myles and Nora Chadwick mention in *The Celtic Realms*: "*echtra* – the Gaelic word that Myles Dillon has shown to be the ultimate source for the romance term adventure with its Otherworld connotations, a meaning that survives in Chrétien and later writers, including Cervantes"[27] and *immrama* (voyages). More that in any other Gaelic tales, these mentioned ones describe situations in which the main characters meet with creatures of the Otherworld. The fated and fatal meeting of the main characters with the gods and goddesses works in such ways that they can never go back to their original identity. So, the everyday world of the hero changes and becomes forever inaccessible. Dillon and Chadwick mention that in the tales gathered around Arthur's name, the hero spends a little time fighting historical forces. They are rather involved in individual fights, involving forces of the Otherworld (giants or enemy enchanters). Actually, many of the Knights of the Round Table "are in themselves disguised deities who take the form of euhumerized heroes like Lancelot and Galahad"[28].

We should also mention that in the original versions, Lancelot had nothing to do with Arthur or those from his court. He was the hero of another cycle of stories, just like Tristan was; only later there were made some connections with the Arthurian tales. The fact that Lancelot, unlike Arthur, was actually a god, tells us something about Don Quixote's choice of a role model.

[25] *Ibidem*, p. 4.
[26] *Ibidem*, p. 5.
[27] *Ibidem*.
[28] See also John Darrah, *The Real Camelot: Paganism and the Arthurian Romances* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p. 56.

In the case of Romance, freedom is the creation of the law, and the law is a reason in action. Where there was no law, the reason appeared. The one who was outside the law, driven by his will or by another person's will, was forced into slavery.

As for women and their place in society – both in a theological view and a chivalry view of the time, she was either under or above reason. There were two symbols according to which the woman was seen: first it was Eve – the person who brought sin in the world, and the Virgin – the person who brought Salvation and hope. Still, the man is the one who plays the most important role, as freedom is the product of the male quality of reason – expressed through law.

The appearance of the new science brings new challenges for the old order of the old chivalry codes and emphasizes what belongs to the masculine and to reason. Those "rational" men are the only true men of the society, and the mad together with the knights belong to the vanishing order of Arthur's world. The old wisdom was concerned with "irrational love" and with enchantment, which are unaccepted now, in the new society. "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 concerned 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."[29] So, there is no wonder that in the seventeenth century the suspicious voice of the fiction is even more serious in some of Cide Hamete's comments. Thus, Don Quixote is *mad*, because of the way he sees the literary genres; he does not agree to what his narrator wants to show and neither to the values of the time in which he is trapped.

This narrative space created by Cervantes has become a literary genre which started to be popular later as the modern novel. This would not have been possible if it had not been for the influence of the Romance and if the Celtic tales had not been discovered and analyzed. There it starts the narrative flow.

[29] E. Dudley, *op. cit.*, p. 7.