

Mimetic Desire in Miguel Cervantes' *Don Quixote*: an Anthropological Study

Farhat Ben Amor
University of Kairouan, Tunisia

Abstract

This paper sets out to unearth the underlying reasons behind the spectacular success that the seventeenth-century Spanish novelist, Cervantes, achieved in his humoristic work, Don Quixote which has been translated into many languages, including English. In this respect, I work to demonstrate the centrality of what the anthropologist René Girard called in his book Deceit, Desire and the Novel (1961) 'mimetic desire' in sustaining the lightness of the novel's humor. A desire that is built on imitating others does define Don Quixote, the protagonist of the novel. Yet, what is special about him is that this desire leads him to generate a whole imagined narrative about knight-errantry and, more importantly, to live it out in a time in which medieval chivalric codes of behaviour become outmoded and just part of the fictional world. So, Don Quixote's plight becomes comic, for he places what he read about the knight Amadis of Gaul and other stories of chivalry as models he irresistibly strives to cult and copy from. Certainly, the sharp chasm separating reality from fiction is enough to set the protagonist in a state of confusion whereby he is made to appear to other characters and even to the reader as veritably mad. Meanwhile, our laughable protagonist keeps clinging to such a desire that helps him considerably overcome the heavy hazardous adventures he comes across in his ludicrous and, at the same time, an absurd journey of what we may call 'search for knighthood.' It is precisely the waxing and waning of this mimetic desire, galvanizing his courage, that this paper seeks to chart and examine anthropologically.

Keywords: anthropology, mimetic desire, humor, knight-errantry, mediation, parody, rivalry.

Introduction

Miguel Cervantes' publication of *Don Quixote* in 1605 achieved "immediate popularity" (Rutherford 8) and has become subsequently a canonical masterpiece in the literature of humor worldwide. Its appeal to the audience seems to have encouraged the author to add a second part to it to complete the whole work in 1615, one year before his death. The central role it plays in literature, as a whole, could be shown in René Girard's contention that "all the ideas of the Western novel are present in germ in *Don Quixote*." (63) Indeed, the novelistic aspect of Cervantes' work could be evidenced, for example, in its well-delineated plot that never stops retrenching the elements of suspense and surprise despite its length. Schematically, the whole plot of *Don Quixote* traces the ridiculous adventures undertaken by its hero who acts seriously to retrieve in his own person the ideals of knighthood in a time when medieval "chivalric rhetoric" became "so hopelessly outdated that it can express itself merely as stories unconnected to everyday life, except as entertainment." (Quint 234) It is suggested, then, that Don Quixote's inability to detect the 'rhetoricity' of chivalry in his own time keeps nourishing the reader's suspense and surprise and, also, cornering the hero to a set of repeated ironies levelled constantly at him, contributing thus to the air of humor suffusing the whole texture of the plot.

Another 'germ' that Cervantes' work offers to the Western novel pertains to his elaboration of a well-drawn method of characterization. Don Quixote is indeed a consistent character whose misplaced faith in the possibility of living out chivalric ideals remains strong and relentless despite the many failures he experiences across the narrative. To some extent, he can be grasped as a flat character who maintains just a one-faceted view of knightly life to which he clings fervently. Only in the conclusion is he pushed to renounce chivalry to become, ultimately, a rounded character. Nevertheless, such a prevailing consistency and flatness mapping out most of Don Quixote's characterization does not impede him from emerging as the sole agent who animates action and confers on it the lightness and vivacity which are certainly essential in making Cervantes' work "the world's most esteemed comic masterpiece." (Montgomery 193-4) Besides, the author's narrative techniques may help provide the burgeoning 'germ' of the Western novel. Chiefly, the alternation between first and third person point of view, omniscience and authorial intrusiveness, and narration and dramatization are markedly deployed in *Don Quixote*. All of these narrative forms are, equally, auxiliary in foregrounding the general effect of humor that is produced out of the hero's uncurbed desire to be a knight who resembles (and even outweighs) the miraculous deeds of the legendary figure, Amadis of Gaul, of whom Don Quixote has read much.

Research Objectives

This paper aims to cover the following points:

- To study the specificities of Don Quixote's desire to be a knight errant anthropologically, applying René Girard's notion of 'mimetic desire' whose chief theoretical significances need to be elucidated in this process.
- To examine the manifestation of 'mimetic desire' in the text of *Don Quixote*. While citing examples proving how much such a desire overwhelms the whole being of Don Quixote, there needs to be highlighted the centrality of the chivalric discourse as a mine from which he imbibes both power and stoic endurance of the series of pains he comes across in his 'knightly' journey. Collateral with that aim is to underline the humoristic thrust Cervantes works to envisage.

- To gauge the efficaciousness of such an all-encompassing 'mimetic desire' transporting Don Quixote from within in generating the identity he yearned to construct for himself as a knight-errant. In this respect, my basic purpose is to underline the pattern of duality that ironically keeps presenting Don Quixote's identity to be enmeshed in a duel between his own subjective conception of himself as a knight 'rivaling' even with the best models of knights from whom he originally copies and his being designated as a sheer 'mad' person in the objective world he inhabits.
- To explore the implications of Quixote's ultimate renunciation of chivalry in the conclusion, concerning both the fate of 'mimetic desire' and the author's verbalization of his own 'desire' to counteract his hero.

Research Questions

The study will concentrate on the following questions:

- How does Don Quixote exhibit his 'mimetic desire' to be a knight-errant?
- What are the causes and effects of such a 'mimetic desire' that Don Quixote holds towards knight-errantry and what are the anthropological implications of his eventual resignation from its practice in the concluding chapter?

Research Methodology

This study will make use of analysis and inference drawn from some scenes in *Don Quixote* that are taken from the first part of the work and the conclusion which seals the whole book. My choice of the first part, rather than the second one, is accounted for the marked presence of the hero's manic desire of imitating what he has read about knight-errantry which pushes him to undergo several ridiculous adventures. The concluding scene is important in my study, as well, for it dramatizes Don Quixote's eventual renouncement of chivalric ideals altogether in a highly-emotive context of confession which remains laden with humor despite its taking place in his deathbed scene. All the while, I am going to foreground the relevance of anthropological insights into the course of Don Quixote's adventures, basing my arguments on such concepts René Girard propounds in his work *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1965) as 'mimetic desire,' 'mediation' and 'rivalry.' The list of cited sources is given under the heading of References at the end of this paper.

Literature Review

Much has been written on *Don Quixote* and different approaches have been employed in this critical process. Since 1981 there has been issued a biannual journal publishing articles both in Spanish and English on Cervantes, called *Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America*. In the journal's volume 34, No. 2, Fall 2014, there is a historicist reading of the book carried out by Alvar Ezquerra (translated by Fabien Montcher) in his article "Miguel Cervantes and the Political Turn of History (c 1507 – 1615)" and a romantic interpretation of it by Perojo Arronte (translated by Maria Eugenia) in his article "Samuel Coleridge on *Don Quixote*." Whereas, the journal's volume 32, No. 2, Fall 2012 includes a nuanced reading of the book adopted by Jay John Allen in his article "Proscript to *Don Quixote*: Hero or Fool? Remixed." There is equally a study of emotion in relation to the pathetic fallacy done by Steven Hutchinson in his article "Affective Dimension in *Don Quixote*" which emerged in the journal's volume 24, No. 2, Fall 2004. The same issue involves a metafictional study of *Don Quixote* undertaken by Shannon M. Polchow's "Authors and Readers in the 1605 *Don Quixote*" and James A. Parr's "On Narration and Theory."

Apart from these various approaches exhibited in this journal, there has been a sociological reading of *Don Quixote* in Steven Wagschal's *The Literature of Jealousy in the Age of Cervantes* (2007) and a historiographic approach done by Susan Bryne's *Law and History in Cervantes' Don Quixote* (2012). In addition, there is a discourse analysis method adopted by Anthony J. Cascadi's *Cervantes, Literature, and the Discourse of Politics* (2006). There is also an intertextual reading of *Don Quixote* in such works as Charles D. Presberg's *Adventures in Paradox: Don Quixote and the Western Tradition* (2001) and Bruce R. Burningham's *Tilting Cervantes: Baroque Reflections on Postmodern Culture* (2008). Last but not least, the attempt to provide a psychoanalytical study of *Don Quixote* could be touched on in David R. Castillo's *Awry View: Anamorphosis, Cervantes, and the Early Picaresque* (2001).

Certainly, all these approaches, in their variegated paths, are important in enhancing a fair apprehension of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* both thematically and stylistically. Still, an anthropological study of *Don Quixote* could be very illuminating, given the nature of the discipline of anthropology as involving "the study of human societies from physical, cultural, and social perspectives." (Quinn 19) An anthropological study of *Don Quixote* may best serve to highlight the fate of those who elaborate misplaced 'physical, cultural, and social' norms, whether spatially or temporally, in the way its hero actually does. Strangeness to the members of their societies and they are being ridiculed and even taken as 'mad' may represent the governing 'fate' facing those who are stricken by such 'misplacement.' Therefore, the anthropologist René Girard cites in his book *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1965) works done by, in addition to Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust and Dostoyevsky which, all, include laughable heroes resembling Don Quixote in his assumption of knight-errantry in a time that is no longer fit to it. In this paper, I am going to expound on the Girardian anthropological investigation of 'mimetic desire,' focusing on *Don Quixote*.

I. Method and Analysis

1- Mimetic Desire: a Theoretical study

While trying to trace the genealogy of 'desire,' René Girard maintains that "at the origin of a desire, there is always the spectacle of another real or illusory desire." (116) Inferably, the structure of desire is suggested to constitute a palimpsest made up of several layers, with each new layer hiding the previous ones. As a result, the external shape of desire would remain incomplete unless it was considered as a continuum to other forms of desire that are often unpaid attention to, albeit their 'real' or 'illusory' aspect. A scrutiny into desire, in pathological terms, seems to lead Girard to attach to it specific qualifications, including mainly the imitative thrust of it: mimesis. In fact, 'mimetic desire' becomes a key concept in the Girardian anthropological enterprise as a whole and is coined specifically to highlight its emanation not from the 'self' but from the 'other.' Inevitably, the hierarchical pyramid this sort of desire is implied to construct in relation to its holder whereby the 'other' is made to control the 'self' and imprisons it in a whirl of emulations has to engender, sooner or later, an *absentized* 'self' based on "whimsical depictions of reality, rather than the convincing background." (De Armas 89)

What is at stake about 'mimetic desire' is not so much the object of imitation as the imitator who is likely to be baffled by unintelligibility and even nonsense. In his book *The Girardian Origin of Generative Anthropology*, Eric Evans ascertains that "mimetic desire is mediated not simply by the mediator's acquisitive behaviour but by his implicit or explicit *representation* of the object of his

desire.” (38, italics mine) There comes to the forefront, then, both ‘mediation’ and ‘representation’ with respect to the operation of ‘mimetic desire.’ For Girard, the question of ‘mediation’ is connected to the process whereby the subject of desire takes what the ‘other’ desires as a reference from which to derive one’s own desire – a process that makes up ultimately the foundation of ‘mimetic desire.’ Girard elucidates ‘mediation’ while referring to Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*:

Quixote has surrendered to Amadis the individual’s fundamental prerogative. He no longer chooses, Amadis must choose for him. The disciple (Quixote) pursues objects which are determined for him, or at least seem to be determined for him, by the model of chivalry. We shall call this model ‘the mediator of desire.’ (12 – 13)

To set what Amadis (the ‘other’) desires as a parameter of what Quixote (the ‘self’) should desire defines the very locus of the mediating process which is once enshrined acquires a ‘deterministic’ quality. Ironically, this almost metaphysical determinism imposed on the ‘self’ is just, as Girard implies, a matter of ‘seeming’ and, therefore, is subjectively anchored in the ‘self’ which generates it, rather than imposed on it by the ‘other’ being imitated.

So, when it comes to the ‘representation’ of ‘mimetic desire,’ it is prone to be fallaciously constructed and elaborated, given its springing from a parochial subjective spectrum of desire. Even the ‘acquisitive behaviour’ developed by a Quixote-like ‘self’ that is animated by ‘mimetic desire’ to emulate an Amadis-like ‘other’ is suggested to be much colored by the confinements of such a self’s subjective methods of ‘representing’ this ‘other.’ The potential of misrepresentation helps, also, nourish the ironic impulse underlying those who are stricken by ‘mimetic desire.’ Just as it can be linked to spatial and temporal misplacement (in the way Quixote desires to live out the ideals of medieval knight-errantry in a time no longer suitable for it), this misrepresentation can be translated in the short-comings of results achieved by the ‘self’ while seeking to arrive at, and even to outweigh, the feats the emulated Amadis-like ‘other’ is said to reach. Disproportionality between the attempt and its result can provide enough space to humor done at the expense of a Quixote-like ‘self’ whose ‘mimetic desire’ of an Amadis-like ‘other’ leads it to be covered, ironically in a self-willed process, under the shades of abnormality within the established scales of the appropriateness of its own society.

Girard’s qualification of holders of ‘mimetic desire’ per se is telling of that measure of disequilibrium which makes them the object of humor and irony. He opts for the French word *vaniteux*, whom he defines as “a vain person who cannot draw his desires from his own resources; he must borrow them from others. A *vaniteux* will desire any object as long as he is convinced that it is already desired by another person whom he admires.” (17) Being the monopoly of ‘another person,’ the mechanism underlying ‘mimetic desire’ is inferred to be built on the projection of desire onto the ‘other,’ rather than the ‘self.’ The result is to stress the illusion in which the ‘self’ is caught in this projective exercise since the ‘mimetic’ nature of the desire being held is not generated by it. In Girard’s terms, “there would be no illusion if Quixote were not imitating Amadis. Desire projects a dream universe around the hero.” (29) Despite the illusory implications of that projective kind of desire and its relegation to providing its indwellers just ‘a dream universe,’ it is still very difficult for it to be corroded on confronting reality. This means that ‘mimetic desire’ possesses an estimable power allowing its holder to withstand, though for a while, what Eric Evans calls “antagonists” (76) who represent but vain dissuading forces working to separate the ‘self’ from the ‘other’ being imitated. Therefore, the ‘self,’ the ‘other’ and ‘projection’ are suggested to found a

trio delineating the structure of ‘mimetic desire,’ which leads Girard to derive “the triangular theory of mimetic desire.” (19)

2- Mimetic Desire in *Don Quixote*

The marked presence of ‘mimetic desire’ in *Don Quixote* is so noticeable that the term ‘quixotic’ has been introduced to the English language ever since Cervantes publicized the book as a key notion associated with humor. It is no surprise, accordingly, to find critics such as Trevor Gribben Merrill maintain that “desire is quixotic, that is to say, it leads to a wish-fulfilling transfiguration of the world, making things appear otherwise than they really are.” (69) More than that, the same critic continues to read ‘quixotism’ in conjunction with ‘mimetic desire’: “to designate desire as ‘quixotic’ is also to say that it is triangular, mediated, *mimetic* in the Girardian sense.” (70, italics mine) To substantiate our talk, we need to show what makes the hero Don Quixote quixotic in *Don Quixote*. For this task to be done, there is certainly to be much focus on the operation of ‘mimetic desire’ – with all its components of ‘wish-fulfilling transfiguration of the world,’ ‘triangular projection,’ and ‘mediation’ – about his actions as a character in the story.

Right from the opening pages of the novel, we begin to detect the numerous set of paradoxes besieging the hero from every corner. The latter is introduced as “a country gentleman in a village in La Mancha” who is “nearly fifty.” (Chapter I. 29) Nevertheless, his gentlemanship can hardly be apprehended, for there soon comes to the forefront several indices telling how much the hitherto unnamed hero is far from it. The omniscient narrator, whose intrusiveness in his story-telling allows for the ironic impulse cast against his character, continues his presentation of the so-called ‘gentleman’ as follows:

During his idle moments (which accounted for most of the year), this gentleman took to reading books of chivalry with such relish and enthusiasm that he almost forgot about his hunting and even running his property. Everything he read in his books took possession of his imagination: enchantments, fights, battles, challenges, wounds, sweet nothings, love affairs, storms and impossible absurdities. (Chapter I. 29-30)

Up to this stage, what is ironic and gentlemanly unconventional pertains mostly to the surfeit of ‘idleness’ whose temporal magnitude is emphasized by the narrator between brackets in the quote above. Besides, the hyperbolic thrust on the narrator’s part to instill his irony is envisaged in emphasizing his character’s avidity in ‘reading books of chivalry’ with such excess that leads to his forsaking of his ‘hunting’ and ‘property.’ The further irony could be derived from the narrator’s enumeration of the whole stuff these books include – an enumeration that bespeaks the narrator’s belittling of their importance. This belittling urge can be noticed in fronting the list of enumeration with ‘enchantment’ and rounding it off with ‘impossible absurdities.’ This causes the deeds placed within this list, including ‘fights,’ ‘challenges,’ ‘love affairs’, etc, to be relegated to a chimerical composite, implicitly understood not to be worth reading.

As we read on, we discover how that divergence between the narrator’s conviction of the unworthiness of ‘books of chivalry’ and his character’s ‘relish and enthusiasm while reading them keeps intensifying. Soon the culminating point is reached when the omniscient narrator announces the *madness* of his character:

And so, by now quite insane, he conceived the strangest notion that ever took shape in a madman’s head, considering it desirable and necessary, both for the increase of his

honour and the common good, to become a knight errant, and to travel about the world with his armours and his arms and his horse in search of adventures, and to practise all those activities that he knew from his books were practised by knights errant, redressing all kinds of grievances, exposing himself to perils and dangers that he would overcome and thus gain eternal fame. The poor man could already see himself being crowned Emperor of Trebizond. (Chapter I. 30)

Now, the character's 'desire,' though ironically presented, is deciphered in terms of its composition, thanks to the omniscient point of view the narrator adopts. His desire consists in 'becoming a knight errant,' with all that this entails of assuming such responsibilities as 'redressing all kinds of grievances,' brave facing 'perils and dangers, etc. The mimetic inscription of that desire is explicitly indicated to be derived from the 'knowledge' he has gleaned 'from his books' about 'knights errant.' As M. Brett Gaffney puts it, then, "his simple story is an obsession with chivalric romances which spur him into the insane notion of sallying forth into the world as a practising knight." (9)

In reality, the character's 'seeing himself being crowned Emperor of Trebizond' sets him from the very onset in a subjective front which, though presaged to be decoded as a sign of 'madness' by the characters he is going to meet, is suggested to be immune enough to personal hesitation on his part. There exists a short-circuiting of the whole process of the wish-fulfilling dream, for the man starts to grasp the reward he desires to achieve as a 'crowned emperor' after serving as a knight-errant for a period which he has not embarked on yet. Certainly, this anachronism helps buttress his courage to disregard the difficulties he is going to face in his journey of knight-errantry. However, his short-circuiting of the process that leads him to become an 'emperor' does not impede him from following the knightly codes in its minutest details, including his being dubbed a knight, staying vigil for a night and exhibiting the knightly etiquettes with all their respects. Even, the naming process takes its time, for the man spends "eight days" searching for an appropriate name for himself as 'Don Quixote' and 'Rocinante' for his horse. (Chapter I. 31) Again, the narrator's omniscience helps decipher what is going on in Quixote's mind during this naming process:

Remembering that brave Amadis had not been content to call himself 'Amadis' alone, but had added the name of his kingdom and homeland, to make it famous, and had styled himself Amadis of Gaul, so Don Quixote, as a worthy knight, decided to add his own country to his name and call himself Don Quixote de la Mancha. (Chapter I. 31)

In choosing to follow the same procedure done by Amadis of Gaul, the operation of 'mimetic desire' from within Don Quixote is instigated right from his search for 'styling himself' as a knight which is, ironically, but a conscious staging of himself as a mere copy of Amadis.

Interestingly, Amadis, who is self-willingly placed as the 'mediator' between Don Quixote and his desire to become a knight-errant, is but a part of the fictional background of medieval legends about chivalry. Actually, the 'mediation' which is built between Amadis and Quixote is indicated explicitly to be relegated to the connection that binds a character of a story to the reader – a connection that is, by its metaphysical nature, distant. Indeed, Girard refers to Amadis as "Quixote's distant mediator who sheds a diffused light over a vast surface." (95) Due to that 'distant mediation,' Girard adds that Amadis becomes "the solitary mediator of Don Quixote, atemporal and legendary." (103) Yet, this 'vast surface,' on which Amadis 'sheds a diffused light' over Quixote, in addition to its nourishment of Quixote's 'mimetic desire,' ends up blurring the

boundaries separating fiction from reality on the latter's part. We are told by the omniscient narrator how "whatever our adventurer thought, saw, or imagined seemed to him to be as it was in the books he had read." (Chapter II. 33) By implication, Quixote is made to subvert the 'metaphysical distance' that ought to exist between him, as a reader of medieval stories of chivalry, and Amadis, as a mere fictional product of these stories.

It is Quixote's blind undoing of such a 'metaphysical distance' that engenders the knot of the plot of the story in this novel and accentuates the humoristic undertone surrounding all the scenes it dramatizes. His actual sallying forth into searching for 'knightly' adventures represents a key twist in the plot, for it marks his entry to a performative stage of his 'mimetic desire.' In the words of Charles Oriel, this zone of the application indicates that now "Quixote performs as much as he constates." (71) This means that Quixote's 'mimetic desire' transports him to act it out in reality and to concoct around it his own "fictional excuses." (Gaffney 11) Now, the turn the plot of the novel takes follows a series of scenographically rich rounds of adventures, linked commonly with a pattern of Quixote's falsification of himself, whether in apprehending people, objects, or even the real course of events. Ironically and expectingly, too, this falsification pertains mostly to the confusion befallen Quixote while tenaciously trying to connect what he apprehends in reality to what he read about in books. A leitmotif recurring in the plot, then, consists in Quixote's frequent measuring of every course of the event he undergoes in his 'knightly adventures' with stories stocked in his mind about other knights-errant. As he rode out in the fields, we are told how "he decided to have himself knighted by the first person he chanced upon, in imitation of many others who had done the same, as he had read in the books." (Chapter II. 32)

Besides, it is out of Quixote's staunch faith in these 'books' that he transforms them into his sole guide in the labyrinthine journey he self-willingly undertakes. In this way, these books help to buoy up his morale throughout the different hazards he comes across as if they were the Gospel for him. Indeed, Quixote is presented as "wishing to *imitate in every way* he believed he could the passages of arms he had read about in his books." (Chapter IV. 42, italics mine) This sense of exhaustiveness of such an 'imitative wish' indicates the potency of the 'mimetic desire' transporting the whole being of Quixote so that he is made ultimately what we may call the 'disciple of books.' Expounding on the Girardian implications of 'mimetic desire,' Eric Evans notices that "Girard's most powerful conclusion concerning mimetic desire, that what we really desire is the Being of mediator, that we assimilate the latter to a false God, are indications that we are reacting to our sense of having been deprived of being." (38) This is very applicable to the case of Quixote. His 'mimetic desire' to strictly follow the etiquettes he acquires from books of chivalry leads him to such an extent that he develops that 'sense of having been deprived of his own being' in favour of 'the Being of mediator,' translated in his deification of what these books contain.

Explaining to Sancho (an old man from de la Mancha who is duped into becoming Quixote's squire) the relentless spirit he entertains, Quixote underlines such an almost sacred obligation he bears towards his minute conformity to the order of knighthood. Stoically he says, "I do not utter any complaint about the pain. It is because knights-errant are not permitted to complain about wounds, even if their entrails are spilling out of them." Meanwhile, he allows his squire Sancho to moan whenever he wants, simply because he "had not read anything to the contrary in the order of chivalry." (Chapter VIII. 55) Quixote even would not sense any sort of danger if there were not to be any correspondence to it in the stories of chivalry he knows about. Thus, he does not show any sign of fear of being captivated by the Basque as a retaliation of the latter's defeat by him,

during an adventure Quixote has with the Basque who is mistakenly accused of abducting a lady in the coach. As he and Sancho depart, Quixote turns a deaf ear to his companion's fear of being sued, saying "not at all, Sancho, where have you ever seen or read of a knight errant standing trial, whatever outrages he is accused of?" (Chapter XX. 63) Gradually, the religious fervor with which he is suggested to read the stories of knights seems to succeed considerably in turning Quixote into what we might call a fanatic demagogue' who is blindly devoted to causes solely intelligible to him.

This measure of fanaticism can be grasped in his eventual use of the pronoun 'we,' while speaking on behalf of all knights. Trying to highlight the eminent position of knights to two gentlemen who are bewildered by the strangeness of his habit as they come across him in a forest, , Quixote says: "monks, in peace and tranquility, pray to heaven for the well-being of the world; but we soldiers and knights put into practice what they pray for, defending the world with the prowess of our arms and the blades of our swords. So we are ministers of God on earth." (Chapter XXIII. 75) Quixote's 'mimetic desire,' then, is directed, ultimately, to become a minister of God on earth.' So, it is no surprise to find him eventually capable of developing an allegorical reading of the sequence of events, including even all sorts of mishaps in his 'lofty' journey of knight-errantry. As he enlists himself to knights, Quixote now attaches his desire solely to God and, therefore, carries out and 'performs' his own symbolic transformation into a 'mediator' between God and his fellow beings, no matter how much irony or violence that may be directed at him not only by other characters but also by his author Cervantes. The common denominator linking all of them together, in Quixote's *divinely inspired* eyes, is their relegation to mere sources of 'enchancements' trying vainly to veil his sight from apprehending truths as they really are. The series of the remaining adventures are true, unlike the one undertaken against the Basque, fruitless and dismaying, given their inclusion of much violence and damage to him and his squire, Sancho. Yet, Quixote keeps providing the latter with allegorical interpretations to them, which, ironically, escape Sancho's limited perceptualization.

Pathetically sensing himself worn out with fatigue, Sancho's proposition to give in is met with utter objection on Quixote's part. While Sancho reduces these so-called 'knightly adventures' to be "nothing but beatings and more beatings, punches and more punches," Quixote keeps holding that all their defeats have been due to 'enchancements' that need to be exorcised. (Chapter XXIII. 101) Thus, he quickly traverses his companion's discouragement by revealing his total commitment to the project of possessing Amadis' arms which, according to him, cannot be enchanted and, therefore, has to be searched in order to replace these defeats with gains. Enthusiastically, he shouts at Sancho, "it could even be that fortune brings my way the sword that belonged to Amadis when he was known as 'The Knight of the Burning Sword,' which was one of the best that any knight ever possessed." (Chapter XXIII. 101) Now, the import of Quixote's 'mimetic desire' is suggested to center around sharing Amadis this 'best' sword, which includes within it even a vying undertone. Quixote has already exhibited to Sancho his penchant for being singularized as an incomparable knight. Right after his defeat of the Basque (which is, ironically, the first and the only adventure in which he succeeds in gaining the battle), Quixote starts to implore Sancho in these terms: "tell me, pray, have you ever seen a knight more valiant than I on the face of the earth? Have you ever read in histories of any knight who is or has been more spirited in the attack, more preserving in the pursuit, more dexterous in the wounding and more skillful in the unhorsing?" (Chapter XX. 63)

In front of this untoward series of defeats he has undergone subsequently, reconnoitering Amadis' 'Burning Sword' becomes an urgent need 'mediating' between him and his desire to

become an exceptional knight. Underlying this context of the search for distinctiveness, Quixote's 'mimetic desire' is implied to develop into a latent desire to compete with his model, Amadis, because, now, he seeks to own Amadis' mythologized 'sword,' not just to be like Amadis himself. In his seminar on *René Girard, the Meaning of Life and the End of History*, Dr. Scott Codwell tries to provide an anthropological explanation of the potential of 'mimetic desire' to be developed into rivalry with the model of mimesis initiates such a form of desire within the subject. He notices how "unfocussed desire finds an object thanks to a model, who in circumstances of close proximity can become a rival. On the cusp of humanity's evolutionary emergence, mimesis appeared as a valuable innovation, but so quickly did it lead to rivalry and violence." (2) The eventual dissipation of Quixote's 'mimetic desire' into 'rivalry' with Amadis to possess his 'Burning Sword' is not spare of 'violence.' In his mistaken belief that any looked-for gain in any battle requires finding that sword which cannot be enchanted whatsoever, Quixote makes of it a symbolic holy mission resembling a large extent the quest for the Holy Grail which is "the plate or cup used by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper, in which one of his followers is said to receive drops of his blood at the Crucifixion." (OALD) Indeed, Quixote never seems to read the big amount of 'drops of blood he paid in his fights as acts of violence, but, rather, 'holy' rites for obtaining what he poignantly expresses it as "tomorrow, what I do desire shall be accomplished." (Chapter III. 36)

Results and Discussion

To his misfortunate luck, Quixote's 'desired tomorrow' does not come. In the concluding chapter, he abruptly renounces knight errantry altogether, in a moment of surprise both to his own community and to his readers. He comes to acknowledge his previous "obsessive reading those detestable books of chivalry" and, in a dramatically important moment of recognition, he says "now I can confirm their absurdity and their deceitfulness." (Chapter LXXIV. 636) With that sudden shift, Quixote's 'mimetic desire,' which has so far provided him with the impetus to emulate and even vie with the knight's errant he read about, is suggested to be thwarted and to be transformed even into a regret. Ironically, Quixote's expression of his regret introduces him as still the slave of 'mimetic desire,' though in perverted terms. As he asserts, "my only regret is that this discovery has come so late that it leaves me no time to make amends by reading other books that might be a light for my soul." (Chapter LXXIV. 636) The term perversion of 'mimetic desire' consists in the way Quixote still presents himself in need of books as a light to his soul.' This entails that the function of books (other than those 'of chivalry') continues to entertain the same symbolic 'mediating' function as books of chivalry used to represent Quixote's Gospel. By implication, Quixote's regret is reduced to his sense of deprivation of further temporal scope to get acquainted with 'reading other books,' for he comes to discern the end of his life, which actually seals the novel.

The whole body of books other than those on chivalry is suggested, then, to stir Quixote's desire and the mimetic thrust of that desire is implied from his wish to decipher them all in order to find ones that answer his need for a light for his soul.' Yet, the operation of 'mimetic desire' now is blocked since the likelihood of its execution is made what we may call a will-o'-the-wisp,' given anthropologically physical facts related to tempo-spatial confinements imposed on him as a human being. Quixote seems to be well aware of the impossibility of implementing such a novel 'mimetic desire' directed at other books. Symbolically, he acts out his mild subjection to these confinements before dying, by reasserting his true identity: "I am no longer Don Quixote de la Mancha but Alonso Quixano. I am now the enemy of Amadis of Gaul and the whole infinite horde of his

descendants; now all those profane histories of knight errantry are odious to me.” (Chapter LXXIV. 638) Ironically, through coupling the reassertion of his original identity with emphasizing again his disaffiliation from Amadis of Gaul and the whole ‘profane’ panoply of ‘knight errantry,’ Quixote’s whole life is implicitly being reduced to a bout of madness that is, now, on the verge of being calmed down forever and hushed.

Rather than allowing Quixote’s desire to be oriented to another source of mimesis, then, the narrator seems to opt for transforming his character’s whole life (animated by mimetic desire to be a knight errant) into a parable to his readers. As Eric Evans reads it in more generalized terms:

Understood in the framework of a common culture, the schematic desires of the characters in a novel reflects a moral purpose akin to that of religious parable. We are more open to moral lessons when we are able to identify with others’ lived experience, sharing their illusions before experiencing their liberation from them. (30)

When he asks the forgiveness of Sancho for duping him into becoming his squire, Quixote translates that sense of ‘religious parable’ by placing his friend as a victim of his evil company. Addressing him in a highly emotive diction, Quixote says: “Forgive me, friend, for making you seem mad, like me, and for making you fall into my own error of believing that knights-errant ever have existed and do exist.” (Chapter LXXIV. 638) If ever the narrator were to allow for ‘forgiveness’ to take place, he would suffuse it all the time with a high measure of humor underlying even the gloomy atmosphere surrounding his character’s death. The narrator derides the unknightly death of Quixote which runs in sheer opposition to what the latter desires it to be throughout the novel; that is to die in a battle. In fact, the narrator puts to the forefront the contrasts between dying in a battle and in bed: “the notary was present, and said that he had never read in any book of chivalry of any knight errant dying in his bed in such a calm and Christian manner as Don Quixote, who amidst the tears and lamentations of everybody present, gave up the ghost; by which I mean he died.” (Chapter LXXIV. 639)

It is worth mentioning, here, that the very nature of humorism allows for the mingling of irony and empathy with the character, which certainly offers space for forgiveness after all. As Adrienne Martin puts it:

While satirists refuse to forgive or to see in themselves the ‘vices’ they castigate and instead remain at a critical distance, humorists use ironical distance to allow them to include themselves in the collective object of their humor. This is one of *Don Quixote’s* most important lessons to the reader: the recognition that all of us are to an extent quixotic. (165)

By virtue of the humor maintained throughout the novel, Quixote’s ‘mimetic desire,’ then, is dealt with pathologically in relation to such an ‘error’ that human beings may commit as that of Quixote’s ‘belief that knights-errant have existed and do exist.’ In reality, the association of belief in myths of knight-errantry with the perpetration of ‘errors’ pertains to what we might call the ‘authorial subjectivity’ of the narrator himself. The intrusiveness the narrator allows himself to entertain in the corpus of the novel presents him to a large extent moved by the desire to counteract his character. The narrator sums up outright his desire, after, castigating his character to an unknightly death, in the following terms: “My only desire has been to make men hate those false, absurd histories in books of chivalry, which thanks to the exploits of my real Don Quixote are even

now tottering, and without any doubt will soon tumble to the ground.” (Chapter LXXIV. 639) Implicitly, the whole import of the novel is but to offer a parable to ‘men,’ in terms of which is to shun such an experience as that of his character’s ‘mimetic desire’ of becoming a knight errant which ferociously eats his life and shows its claws to him only in his death-bed.

In order to accentuate the effect of the parable he ‘desires’ to inculcate in men’s minds, the narrator is suggested to have been making use of parody throughout the novel. Parody, which consists in ‘the imitative use of the words, styles, attitude, tone and ideas of an author in such a way as to make them ridiculous’ (Cuddon 531), is deployed by the narrator who lets his character ‘authorize’ his ‘mimetic desire’ through voicing it all the over the novel. Yet while symbolically granting his character the privilege of the author, the narrator’s explicitly stated desire to displace his character’s own ‘mimetic desire’ to become a knight errant and deracinate it from its roots remains lurking in the narrative. Ironically, both Quixote and the narrator share a common denominator of desire, which concerns the ‘mediating’ process: the story of Quixote for the narrator and the medieval discourse of chivalry for Quixote. However, the shape of the ‘triangular desire’ in both cases runs in inverted terms. While the imitative thrust of Quixote’s ‘mimetic desire’ leads him to commit himself wholeheartedly to following the ‘mediator’ (de Gaul, the imitating object), the narrator’s imitation of Quixote’s discourse which is carried out through parody is meant just to ridicule it and to make it but an object of humor. So, mimesis on the narrator’s part is a playful exercise he indulges in order to convey ultimately his parable which aims at drawing a moral lesson derived from Quixote as being a ‘mediator’ of it. Nevertheless, the ‘mediation’ of Quixote in the process of sustaining the parable serves, ironically, to cast him as an anti-model to be copied from. Certainly, this moral lesson finds more stamina when Quixote discovers the ‘error’ he has been in throughout his life for desiring to emulate what he comes to grasp as a chimerical discourse of chivalry.

When read in connection to the humoristic undertone of the novel, the use of parody is envisaged mostly in the clear-cut simplistic nature of Quixote’s discourse (prior to his disillusionment) which lends itself to weak-groundedness even at the immediate perceptual level. In the words of David Quint, “Quixote mobilizes a frankly psychotic unconscious mechanism called distortion, which involves grossly reshaping external reality in order to make it conform to inner reality.” (238) For example, Quixote names a peasant woman in a nearby village as his lady to whom he decides to dedicate all his victories and renames her Dulcinea del Toboso, rather than Aldonza Lorenzo. This comes out of his realization that “a knight errant without a lady is a tree without leaves or fruits, a body without a soul.” (Chapter I. 31) When his journey of ‘kighthood’ takes him to an inn, Quixote holds that “he was indeed in some famous castle.” (Chapter II. 35) Equally, he believes the discourse of the priest and Quixote’s niece who invent the myth of the ‘enchanter’ who is behind burning his books and other misdeeds, while, in reality, they are the very ones who burn them. Even windmills are apt to be seen by him as giants with whom to fight. When he realizes in full eyes that these giants are but windmills, he still attributes it to the enchanter: “Freston who stole my library and my books have just turned these giants into windmills, to deprive me of the glory of my victory.” (Chapter VIII. 54)

Ironically, the myth of the ‘enchanter,’ which Quixote adopts to provide supernatural explanations for perceptually undeniable phenomena, finds its real counterpart in the ‘mimetic desire’ transporting him from within. Even at the behaviouristic level, this sort of desire leads him to be the puppet of what he read about knights so that his daily routines become reduced to the simplistic formula of ‘copy and paste.’ Therefore, the reader has certainly to laugh at him on

grasping the extent of artificiality Quixote reaches: “he did not sleep in all the night, thinking about his lady Dulcinea, to conform with what he had read in his books, where knights-errant spent many sleepless nights in glades and deserts, engrossed in the recollection of their ladies.” (Chapter VIII. 55) Perhaps, Sancho – Quixote’s squire – does well in defining ‘knight errantry’ within its simplistic framework elaborated by his master’s ‘mimetic desire.’ When asked by the ladies at the inn what is meant by ‘knight errantry,’ Sancho says: “a knight adventurer, to cut a long story short, is someone who is being beaten up one moment and being crowned emperor the next. Today he is the unhappiest creature in the world, and the poorest, too; and tomorrow, he will have two or three kingdoms to hand over to his squire.” (Chapter XVI. 92) Of course, Sancho says that out of his desperate situation not just waiting for the prize his master Quixote promises him, but also in the aftermath of several defeats, including that by the wicked men from Yanguas who cause severe injuries to the ladies, at the inn, are trying to heal.

Certainly, the stark illogicality that the reader can easily touch in Quixote’s discourse helps provide the narrator with enough space to launch his desire to elaborate a counter-discourse to his character. In this context, the narrator’s use of parody to flagrantly expose the subjection of Quixote’s discourse to inner-contradictions, in addition to enhancing the light atmosphere of the novel and furnishing the grounds for humor in it, implements the desire the narrator states explicitly ‘to make men hate those false, absurd histories in books of chivalry’ and cause them ‘to totter’ and ‘tumble to the ground.’ In the words of René Girard, “Cervantes schematizes and magnifies the contrasts to create an extremely farcical effect.” (231) For sure, this ‘extremely farcical effect’ produced out of parodying his character’s so-far made effete discourse contributes a great deal in sustaining the element of humor delineating the whole texture of the novel. By virtue of that humor, the narrator succeeds in mating his declared ‘hatred of books of chivalry’ with an affable character whose ‘mimetic desire’ to conform to these books in his own person is introduced in such a simplistic context of mimicry that *softens* the rigidity of the authorial ‘hatred’ to such a desire. I recollect, here, Peter Childs’ comment on the specificity of ‘parody’ as an exercise of mimicry: “Although it is often deflationary and comic, the distinguishing characteristic of parody is not deflation, but analytic mimicry.” (167) For such an ‘analytic mimicry’ to take place, there must be a desire on the reader’s part to see what is behind the lines, that is to say, not to be contented with laughing at Quixote’s ‘mimetic desire’ but to stand on its nature, its course of development and its diverse implications.

Conclusion

The study is geared towards analyzing ‘mimetic desire’ in Cervantes’ novel *Don Quixote*, applying René Girard’s anthropological views delineated in his book *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. A schematic presentation of the operation of ‘mimetic desire’ from within the novel’s hero was followed throughout this paper, after elucidating its workings and ramifications at the theoretical level. All the while, there was set a special focus on the importance of medieval knight-errantry in shaping the hero’s desire and determining his life as a whole. Equally, the hero’s ultimate renunciation of chivalric discourse altogether before his death was dealt with in relation to the narrator’s voicing of his own desire as a substitute counter-discourse aimed at displacing his character’s ‘mimetic desire.’ In this respect, this paper foregrounded the marked presence of parody in the novel and its vital role in enhancing the high measure of humor suffusing it.

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