

# MARCELA'S JUSTIFICATION AND PLEA FOR FREEDOM IN DON QUIXOTE

## Marcela'nın Don Kişot'ta Özgürlük Hakkı ve Gerekçesi

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### ABSTRACT

Being associated with a strong sense of individualism in the novel, the shepherdess Marcela is also identified with the autonomous, free-willed protagonist, Don Quixote. Including intriguing series of interpolated tales epitomizing the modern life the novel has received the most critical attention with the episode of Marcela and Grisóstomo. Deeply involved in an interplay of art and life with the aim to alter reality like Don Quixote, Marcela experiences both textual and contextual imprisonment as a feminist figure in a male-authored text and male-driven narrative. The objective of this study is to make a feminist reappraisal of the Grisóstomo-Marcela episode and to demonstrate that Marcela breaks with conformity to prescriptive female characterization in quest of finding her feminine narrative self. Teresa De Lauretis points out that traditional narrative does not enable women to "speak, desire, or produce meanings "for themselves" (160). That's why Marcela counteracts the effects of male discourse thanks to her unconventionality that thwarts the traditional image of woman. She reverses the male narrative discourse to make her own voice heard and achieves female emancipation in defiance of patriarchal constructs and narrative structure.

**Key Words:** freedom, Cervantes, Don Quixote, Marcela, pastoral, love, chivalry

### ÖZET

Romanda güçlü bir bireysellik duygusu ile ilişkilendirilen çoban Marcela, özerk, özgür iradeli kahraman Don Kişot ile özdeşleşmektedir. Modern yaşamın özünü oluşturan ilginç, aralara sıkıştırılmış masallar dizisini içeren roman, Marcela ve Grisóstomo bölümüyle en önemli ilgiyi almıştır. Don Kişot gibi gerçeği değiştirmek amacıyla sanat ve yaşam etkileşimi içinde aktif bir şekilde yer alan Marcela, hem yazılı hem de metin odaklı bir anlatımda feminist bir figür olarak hem metinsel hem de bağlamsal anlamda mahkumiyet yaşamaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Grisóstomo-Marcela bölümünün feminist açıdan yeniden bir değerlendirmesini yapmak ve Marcela'nın kadınsı anlatımsal benliğini bulma arayışında kurallı kadın karakterizasyonuna uymadığını göstermektir. Teresa De Lauretis, geleneksel anlatının kadınların 'kendileri için' "konuşma, arzu etme veya anlamlar üretmesine olanak sağlamadığına dikkat çekiyor" (160). Bu yüzden Marcela, kadının geleneksel imajını baltalayan sıradışılığı sayesinde erkek söyleminin etkilerine karşı koyar. Kendi sesini duyurmak için erkek anlatı söylemini tersine çevirir ve ataerkil yapılara ve anlatı yapısına meydan okuyarak kadının özgürlüğe kavuşmasını sağlar.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** özgürlük, Cervantes, Don Kişot, Marcela, aşk, pastoral, şövalyelik

## 1. MARCELA'S JUSTIFICATION AND PLEA FOR FREEDOM IN *DON QUIXOTE*

Freedom constitutes the main theme of *Don Quixote*, explored in a parallelism to the real life experiences of Cervantes, who was captured and kept as a slave for a specific time period. Illuminating the world into which Cervantes, was born in 1547, *Don Quixote* partially reflects the lifestory of Cervantes who was "captured by privateers, and taken to Algiers"<sup>1</sup> despite his accomplishments as an ardent soldier. The account of chivalric events based on two main themes of slavery and freedom in the novel is related to the background information about Cervantes as well as the social and cultural conditions of Spain in his period. The tales of captives and oppressed people and Don Quixote's struggle to free these oppressed people throughout the novel make references to Cervantes' life of exile. Based on women's quest for social and cultural freedom as an oppressed group in society, "like Cervantes's novel as a whole, the Grisóstomo-Marcela episode is reflective of changes in canons and hierarchies, both human and literary, so prominently associated with the modern era, known for its demystification and deconstruction of traditionally held myths and beliefs"(Gabriele 2003: 521).

In Chapters 11-14 of *Don Quixote*, which was published in 1605, Cervantes introduces the pastoral episode of Marcela and Grisóstomo. Their episode is exemplary for women who strive to justify their plea for

<sup>1</sup> Roberto A. Veguez, "Don Quixote"and 9-11:The Clash of Civilizations and the Birth of the Modern Novel", *Hispania*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (Mar., 2005), p. 103.

freedom against a patriarchal system, granting that recent studies regard Marcela as the emodiment of the “ideals of female liberty” (Laffey 1997: 553) and the subversion of “the male view of her as textual object” (Jehenson 1990: 29). A wealthy orphan, Marcela prefers staving off marriage for a while. Dressed in pastoral garb, Marcela appears as a shepherdess and lives happily in the forest with other shepherdesses. She looks after the flock her father has left her as inheritance. Out of love for Marcela, the student Grisóstomo also dresses as a shepherd and pursues her. Realizing that Marcela is not interested in getting married, he chooses to kill himself. The episode focuses on the traditional *topos* of the scornful mistress who has led to the shepherd's death and on both Marcela's unconventional defense of a woman's right to choose her own life style, and the author's unconventional handling of the episode. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to make a feminist reappraisal of the Marcela-Grisóstomo episode. It will also demonstrate that Cervantes subverts the conventions of the pastoral genre and traditional literary codes through the extraordinary female character, Marcela.

Marcela rebuts both Grisóstomo's encoding her as the scornful mistress of courtly love and the pastoral tradition, and Don Quixote's inscribing her into the chivalric mode of damsel in distress. By not maintaining the tradition of woman as central *object* of the males' pastoral lament, Cervantes undermines the genre and marginalizes Marcela, which elevates her position as a strong woman throughout the episode, despite the critical interpretations of Marcela which are often framed in binary oppositions. In his article entitled “Competing Narrative Discourses: (Fe)Male Fabulation in the Episode of Grisóstomo and Marcela” John P. Gabriele says:

The shepherdess Marcela's character embodies a strong sense of individualism, a feature that sets her apart from the other female characters in Cervantes's novel and in other works of the same period...Curiously, though not surprisingly, what sets Marcela apart from other female characters makes her more like Don Quijote. Marcela is the one character who most closely mirrors the novel's strong-minded and free-willed protagonist (Gabriele 2003: 507-8).

Identified with Don Quixote characteristically, Marcela is illustrated to be unfairly conceited by Peter. However, she gives us the impression that she will lead others around her to suffer due to her obsessions. As regards her character, she is intelligent enough to defend herself articulately, unlike Grisóstomo turning out to be the fool and being the victim of his romantic ideal by killing himself. Marcela deduces that it's men's fault if they suffer for her beauty. In fact, this reasoning makes an implication to Cervantes's critique of characters who are obsessed with out-of-date concept of chivalry. Marcela is a rebellious and extraordinary character as she does not accept some certain traditions of her period. She knows how to disregard outdated customs and traditions cunningly. In fact, Cervantes does not just make fun of the empty nonsense of chivalry, he makes a critique of a multitude of social norms and social roles by means of Marcela's rhetorical speech as the mirror of his inner self in this episode. The morality based on the story of Marcela and Grisóstomo also refers to a change in the structure of the novel. Generally, Don Quixote plays the role of a mere observer rather than an active participant throughout the novel. In this story, Cervantes draws our attention to the social setting and context in which the novel is fictionalized. Unlike the character we come across in the former parts, such as the prostitutes, the farm boy and his master and the keeper, the characters we meet in this section are significant as they appear as fully developed characters in their own right that can show their reactions to Don Quixote aptly.

In this part Cervantes also makes a criticism of the custom of oral storytelling through the story about Marcela and Grisóstomo narrated by Peter. We learn about Marcela first from Peter, and then from Ambrosio and from Grisóstomo's poem. The striking difference between her character in reality and her character in the story underlines a problem that Cervantes analyses throughout the novel; while a story is repeated and passed on, it is highly possible for it to diverge from the truth. John P. Gabriele stresses that “as a female character in a male-authored text (Don Quijote) and within a male-generated interpolated tale (the pastoral), Marcela suffers from double enclosure, first at the level of narration, then at the level of experience” (Gabriele 2003: 522). That's why we cannot assume that all stories are true. This realistic criticism applies to both Cervantes's novel itself and the chivalric tales that Don Quixote is obsessed with madly. The goatherd called Peter announces that the love-sick Grisóstomo has died from his love for Marcela. Despite being modest and kind, Marcela seems to be cruel in affairs of the heart and refuses to marry. “By refusing to marry, Marcela rebels against the essentialist notion of gender. Adopting a feminist perspective, she casts the female body into a new light by converting what patriarchal discourse promotes as a means of oppression into a means of escape” (Gabriele 2003: 513), and a “point of view (a site of

*difference*) from which phallogocentric concepts and controls can be seen through and taken apart, not only in theory but in practice” (Jones 1985: 362).

According to the perspective in the tale the goatherd Pedro tells Don Quixote in Chapter 12, Part I of *Don Quixote* the famous student-shepherd Grisóstomo is victimized by his love for cruel, fiendish Marcela and he announces Grisóstomo died of love and he is going to be buried in the place where he first met Marcela, as Grisóstomo willed it. Interested in this love story, Don Quixote urges Pedro to tell him the whole story. In Chapter 12 Part I of *Don Quixote*, well-educated, well-read, and wealthy Grisóstomo turns into a shepherd as he falls in love with the shepherdess Marcela and intends to follow her in the wild places she inhabits. Marcela’s mother is known as the most honorable woman and housewife whom many people admire, but she dies while giving birth to Marcela and this saddening event causes Marcela’s father Guillermo to die of affliction for his excellent wife. On the other hand, young and rich Marcela is transformed into such a beautiful girl that most men fall in love with her hopelessly. She refuses to marry despite all the insistent marriage proposals, including Grisóstomo’s, until she becomes more mature and finds a suitable companion for her taste. At this point, as Thomas R. Hart and Steven Rendall indicate in “Rhetoric and Persuasion in Marcela’s Address to the Shepherds”, it can be claimed that “Marcela rejects not merely Grisóstomo’s suit but the very institution of marriage”, choosing instead of a free and reserved lifestyle in the wilderness. Furthermore, they point out that “she believes that freedom is incompatible with marriage because marriage implies the subordination of wife to husband. But to reject marriage also means rejecting society itself: seventeenth-century Spain made no real provision for a single woman [...] one who refuses either to marry or to become a nun”<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, Marcela is exposed to unfair treatment and undeserved censure while she is suffering from the lack of a suitable position for a single woman like her. This repressive and restrictive social environment causes her to assume a rebellious manner against her own society by preferring her freedom in natural places to the institution of marriage and constraints of social life.

For if his patience and rash desire killed Grisóstomo, why should my virtuous behavior and reserve be blamed? If I preserve my purity in the company of trees, why should a man want me to lose it if he wants me to keep it in the company of men? As you know, I have wealth of my own and do not desire anyone else’s; I am free and do not care to submit to another; I do not love or despise anyone. I do not deceive this one or solicit that one; I do not mock one or amuse myself with another. The honest conversation of the shepherdesses from these hamlets, and tending to my goats, are my entertainment. The limits of my desires are these mountains, and if they go beyond here, it is to contemplate the beauty of heaven and the steps whereby the soul travels to its first home (Cervantes 2003:157).

Although Marcela’s guardian is her priest uncle after the death of Marcela’s parents, he never forces Marcela to marry but respects her ideas and choices for marriage. At this point the writer agrees with the uncle: “parents shouldn’t force their children into marriage against their will” (Cervantes 2003: 138). An opposite behavior would mean restricting the freedom of choice and imprisoning people in unhappiness and helplessness. Marcela prefers joining the other shepherdesses and her fascinating beauty spreads far and wide by attracting all rich and famous men to the wilderness in the guise of a shepherd, like Grisóstomo. However, Marcela doesn’t do anything to taint her chastity or honour. In this free lifestyle she avoids giving any hope to her suitors and does her best to discourage them. When her suitors cannot find reciprocity for their love, they are driven to suicide. Hence Marcela assumes that “she is guilty neither of creating her own dangerous beauty nor of encouraging others to expose themselves to that danger.”<sup>3</sup>

If I had kept him by me, I would have been false; if I’d gratified him, I would have gone against my own best intentions and purposes. He persisted though I discouraged him, he despaired though I did not despise him: tell me now if it is reasonable to blame me for his grief! Let the one I deceived complain, let the man despair to whom I did not grant a hope I had promised, or speak if I called to him, or boast if I accepted him; but no man can call me cruel or a murderer if I do not promise, deceive, call to, or accept him (Cervantes 2003: 157).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Hart and Steven Rendall, “Rhetoric and Persuasion in Marcela’s Address to the Shepherds, *Hispanic Review*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Summer, 1978), p. 296.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Hart and Steven Rendall, “Rhetoric and Persuasion in Marcela’s Address to the Shepherds, p. 291.



Marcela is portrayed as cruel and arrogant by her hopeless suitors who suffer from despair. In one of the poems Grisóstomo wrote for Marcela, he complains about jealousy and this arouses suspicion about Marcela's virtue, modesty, and good reputation. This poem is created only from male perspective. Moreover, a misogynistic perspective is dominant in the narration of this tale. In the face of unfair descriptions of herself, Marcela appears at the moment of burial to defend herself and to show how people think wrongly of her by accusing her of Grisóstomo's death. Marcela tries to explain to the people around her that she doesn't have to love her suitors in return for the love they show her. She understands her suitors cannot resist her beauty, but she cannot perceive why a woman has to love whoever loves her for her beauty. Marcela puts forward very rational remarks about the irrational manners and words of her suitors. Furthermore, she claims that it is not logical for an ugly lover to ask a beautiful woman to love him because he adores her for her beauty. Another important point Marcela makes is that attraction might not be mutual even though the lover and the loved are well-matched as far as beauty is concerned. She expresses that all beauty does not lead to love. If all kinds of beauty inspired love in people, their affections would not be focused. They would experience infinite attractions all their life, she implies.

In one of her arguments Marcela points out: "heaven made me, as all of you say, so beautiful that you cannot resist my beauty and are compelled to love me, and because of the love you show me, you claim that I am obliged to love you in return" (Cervantes 2003: 155). Marcela also questions whether she wouldn't have had any right to complain about somebody for not loving her if she had been created as ugly. She thinks that heaven made her beautiful. It didn't stem from her own free will. Therefore she cannot be blamed for being beautiful just as a viper cannot be accused of its poison, because it is given by nature. She defends herself: "I was born free, and in order to live free, I chose the solitude of the countryside. The trees of these mountains are my companions, the clear waters of these streams my mirrors; I communicate my thoughts and my beauty to the trees and to the waters. I am a distant fire and a far-off sword. Those whose eyes forced them to fall in love with me, I have discouraged with my words" (Cervantes 2003: 156). According to Marcela her suitors are the victims of their own desires and obstinacy because she didn't give any hope to them so she cannot be called cruel or murderous. As she didn't encourage Grisóstomo, she does not deserve to be blamed for his death. On the other hand, Marcela's persistent avoidance of the idea of marriage and aloofness from her suitors may be attributed to her concern with selfhood and self-obsession. As Thomas R. Hart and Steven Rendall confirm, "Marcela's proud assertion that she neither loves nor hates anyone betrays a terrible self-centeredness that renders her incapable of feeling any real concern for others."<sup>4</sup> This kind of a manner drives her away from any restrictive bonds and makes her keen on her freedom. She does not like being restricted and she prefers living a secluded life in forests without deceiving any man or abusing their emotions. She is satisfied among her shepherd friends.

Until now heaven has not ordained that I love, and to think that I shall love of my own accord is to think the impossible. Let this general discouragement serve for each of those who solicit me for his own advantage; let it be understood from this day forth that if anyone dies because of me, he does not die of jealousy or misfortune, because she who loves no one cannot make anyone jealous, and discouragement should not be taken for disdain. Let him who calls me savage basilisk avoid me as he would something harmful and evil; let him who calls me ungrateful, not serve me, unapproachable, not approach me, cruel, not follow me; let him not seek out, serve, approach, or follow in any way this savage, ungrateful, cruel, unapproachable basilisk (Cervantes 2003: 157).

On the other side, Don Quixote commands shepherds not to follow the beautiful Marcela in distress. Marcela justifies herself with strong and convincing reasons. She protects her honour and esteem by living a chaste life. Marcela's story is the struggle for freedom. Acting against her real emotions doesn't mean freedom but containment for her. Her target is to reach real love. Reciprocating the feelings of her suitors would make her false and harm her honour. Even if Grisóstomo adored her, she didn't share the same emotions with him and she was right not to show any tendency toward Grisóstomo to satisfy his desires. Just because she is beautiful, she does not want her suitors to restrict her freedom.

Honor and virtue are adornments of the soul, without which the body is not truly beautiful, even if it seems to be so. And if chastity is one of the virtues that most adorn and beautify both

<sup>4</sup> Thomas R. Hart and Steven Rendall, "Rhetoric and Persuasion in Marcela's Address to the Shepherds, *Hispanic Review*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Summer, 1978), p. 297.





body and soul, why should a woman, loved for being beautiful, lose that virtue in order to satisfy the desire of a man who, for the sake of his pleasure, attempts with all his might and main to have her lose it? (Cervantes 2003:156)

During his travels Don Quixote and his squire Sancho Panza hear the tale of the shepherd Grisóstomo: allegedly, he has died of a broken heart, because the beautiful Marcela has rejected his suit. That's why Marcela is accused of cruelty both by Grisóstomo and his friends. Suddenly Marcela herself appears to state her case both to the dead man's friends and to Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Marcela accepts that Heaven has made her beautiful; but she argues, forcefully and eloquently, that she is by no means to blame for the shepherd's death:

I know, with the natural understanding that God has given me that, everything beautiful is lovable, but I cannot grasp why, simply because it is loved, the thing loved for its beauty is obliged to love the one who loves it. Further, the lover of the beautiful thing might be ugly, and since ugliness is worthy of being avoided, it is absurd for anyone to say: 'I love you because you are beautiful; you must love me even though I am ugly.' But in the event the two are equally beautiful, it does not mean that their desires are necessarily equal, for not all beauties fall in love; some are a pleasure to the eye but do not surrender their will, because if all beauties loved and surrendered, there would be a whirl of confused and misled wills not knowing where they should stop, for since beautiful subjects are infinite, desires would have to be infinite, too" (Cervantes 2003:155-56).

Furthermore, Marcela reminds her listeners that the real beauty underlies in inner purity and that matters. She stresses that she values her own freedom above all. Marcela's arguments are solid and persuasive; hence Don Quixote himself is persuaded. Don Quixote decided to defend and protect Marcela's freedom by challenging all patriarchal descriptions of her, which chivalry requires as his main duty. He declares:

Let no person whatever his circumstance or condition, dare to follow the beautiful Marcela lest he fall victim to my fury and outrage. She has shown with clear and sufficient reasons that she bears little or no blame in the death of Grisóstomo, and she has also shown how far she is from acquiescing to the desires of any who love her, and therefore it is just that rather than being followed and persecuted, she should be honored and esteemed by all good people in the world, for she has shown herself to be the only woman in it who lives with so virtuous a desire (Cervantes 2003: 158).

He died because his love for the beautiful Marcela had not been reciprocated. In the eyes of most of the young men mourning his death, Marcela was a cruel and heartless woman using her beauty to torment men. But later the woman in question Marcela appears at the funeral to give her side of the story. Marcela's quest, Lanser would say, "is implicitly a quest for discursive authority; a quest to be heard, respected and believed" (Lanser 1992: 7). In the first few lines she explains: Just because a woman is loved for her beauty, that doesn't mean she has to return the love. There's nothing wrong with her if she doesn't. Marcela's logic is so powerful:

If desires feed on hopes, and since I have given no hope to Grisóstomo or to any other man regarding those desires, it is correct to say that his obstinacy, not my cruelty, is what killed him. And if you claim that his thoughts were virtuous, and for this reason I was obliged to respond to them, I say that when he revealed to me the virtue of his desire, on the very spot where his grave is now being dug, I told him that mine was to live perpetually alone and have only the earth enjoy the fruit of my seclusion and the spoils of my beauty; and if he, despite that discouragement, wished to persist against all hope and sail into the wind, why be surprised if he drowned in the middle of the gulf of his folly? (Cervantes 2003:156-57)

Marcela is not interested in tradition or courtly love. The men in *Don Quixote* have created their own image of an 'ideal woman' - one not based on any fact or reality - their 'ideal woman' has become another fictional construct in a book full of fictional constructs. "Like Don Quixote, Marcela confuses art and life and is driven by an innate desire to alter reality in order to achieve her personal objective. Like the idealistic knight, she is also deaf to those who offer her practical advice in an attempt to thwart her efforts"(Gabriele 2003: 508). Marcela is very different from the other female figures overwhelmed by social constraints in

the episode in that she tries to narrate the female self through persuasive argumentative skills by defying the conventional expectations of the pastoral genre. As Gabriele puts it, “Marcela is atypical because she does not conform to the traditional image of woman as the object of male desire” (Gabriele 2003: 508). Considering her own intentions are also honorable, Marcela counters the charges made against her although she is portrayed to be the disdainful mistress of the pastoral tradition and courtly love by the other shepherdesses and Grisóstomo’s friends. Marcela is atypical since she resists inscription and objectification as a character eager to proclaim female subjectivity by establishing her autonomy (El Saffar 159). To grapple with her textual and contextual confinement Marcela is forced to defend her liberal ideals which are to remain free and independent by postponing marriage. This refusal of marriage actually recapitulates Marcela’s opposition against the essentialist notion of gender. The social importance of her decision to live freely in disguise of a shepherdess reflects her resolution to rebel the social-cultural patriarchal norms of seventeenth-century Spain. In fact she opposes subjugation through marriage and decides to assume a public voice and takes the ownership of her freedom against the men who intend to reintegrate her into the established patriarchal social hierarchy. While Don Quixote’s knight-errantry is associated with an old-fashioned literary model, Marcela’s ideal of liberty and gender equality heralds a democratic order of society in which subjection and hierarchy will be unknown. It is obvious in the episode that Cervantes tries to reconcile the inherent pagan versus Christian dichotomy. This reconciliation is related to the transfiguration of Don Quixote from a faithful follower of the ideals of the books of chivalry into an authentic Christian knight. On the other hand, Marcela As two independent, strong-minded characters living in their world of dreams, Marcela and Don Quixote are identified with each other with their role as the mouthpiece of the lost utopia of a previous Golden age, while they diverge in that Marcela inclines towards a strictly pagan lifestyle with a spiritual aspiration versus Don Quixote representative of a strictly Christian representation of the lost utopia based on the biblical lost Eden through spiritual transcendence.

In his essay entitled “Cervantes’ Flight of ‘Post-Modernistic’ Fancy in Don Quixote de la Mancha (1605-2005): Feminist Perspective in the Marcela- Grisóstomo Episode”, in which he argues that Cervantes’ core artistic purpose throughout the Marcela-Grisostomo episode is to force a debate between pagan versus Christian ideals within the socio-cultural and ideological framework of Counter-Reformation Spain, Salvatore Poeta indicates: “from the authorial or meta-fictional perspective Grisóstomo’s true ailment is not primarily his love sickness, rather he suffers from the more serious absence of Christian faith. He rejects God’s promise of spiritual salvation by overtly placing human love—Marcela’s—above divine love” (Poeta 2006: 70). Some of Cervantes’ characters are humanized and reach a Christian spiritual salvation like Don Quixote transfigured into a true Christian knight, while some of them are not humanized like Marcela having a pagan tendency or like Grisóstomo by placing human love above divine love, by worshipping Marcela in the religious sense. In a sense Grisóstomo’s idolatry is an act of heresy that makes him lose spiritual salvation. Moreover, “Cervantes, in all probability, had no premeditated far-reaching agenda or vision for Marcela beyond her “starring role” in the Marcela-Grisóstomo episode and even less so as a spokesperson for gender equality from a strictly ‘political’ perspective and whose words would have an echoing effect well into our twenty-first century” (Poeta 2006: 67). Marcela’s challenging speech refers to gender inequality, one of the major social ills in seventeenth-century Spain, and mirrors Cervantes’ effort to rectify the disparity between men’s and women’s rights in a modern sense.

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