

THOMAS R. HART

# Cervantes and Ariosto

*Renewing Fiction*



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CERVANTES AND ARIOSTO

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# Cervantes and Ariosto

RENEWING FICTION

*By Thomas R. Hart*



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*In memory of Erich Auerbach*



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## PREFACE

I began thinking about the subject of this book more than thirty years ago when I first read Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, which had just appeared in English translation. As a graduate student at Yale, I had attended Auerbach's classes on Dante and on the medieval romance lyric; he had served as one of the readers of my dissertation. I liked him and admired his book, though just how much there is to admire in it became clear to me only years later as I became better acquainted with his other writings and with more of the works he discusses in *Mimesis*. From the beginning, however, I was troubled by Auerbach's insistence that *Don Quixote* is not a serious, much less a tragic work, but a comedy. His claim went counter to much of the little I had then read about it.

I began by thinking that Auerbach had misunderstood Cervantes' masterpiece and then began to wonder why he had misunderstood it in this particular way. I finally came to see that he read *Don Quixote* in much the same way he read *Orlando furioso*. Repeated readings of *Don Quixote* in preparation for my classes on it over the next thirty years, together with greater familiarity with Ariosto's poem, finally convinced me that Auerbach came closer to defining the essence of *Don Quixote* than any other writer I know. This book is a wholly inadequate expression of my debt to him.

My own view of *Don Quixote* nevertheless differs from Auerbach's in many ways. I do not believe that it is really as free from political intention as Auerbach suggests. I think, too, that Cervantes' attack on the romances of chivalry is combined with an attack on a way of reading that he thought potentially dangerous whatever the precise nature of the

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books read. I see *Don Quixote* as a more serious work than Auerbach thought it was. Perhaps it would be better to say that I think its seriousness is not of the kind Auerbach saw in it. But I could hardly have written this book without the stimulus provided by his magnificent essay.

IN writing this book I have tried to keep in mind not only students of Spanish literature but also students of English and of comparative literature, for whom *Don Quixote* usually provides their first and often only contact with the literature of Spain. For this reason, I have not hesitated to repeat some things that will be familiar to Hispanists and have been generous in providing bibliographical references that will lead the reader to fuller treatments of many points touched on in passing. Since readers whose primary interest is in the development of modern fiction are unlikely to be familiar with *Orlando furioso*, I have tried to give some idea of its content and of its place in literary history.

Quotations from primary sources are given both in the original Spanish or Italian and in English; in a few cases where the sense is clear from the immediate context, only the original is given. Quotations from secondary sources are given only in English. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted. I have, however, consulted John Ormsby's translation of *Don Quixote* in the revised version by Joseph R. Jones and Kenneth Douglas and have often found there an elegant and accurate solution to problems I had found intractable. Guido Waldman's prose translation of *Orlando furioso* has helped me to see the exact sense of many passages, as have the excellent notes in Lanfranco Caretti's edition of the Italian text and those in the still more fully annotated edition by Emilio Bigi. Since no prose version can give even a faint idea of the grace and movement of Ariosto's ottava rima, I occasionally cite passages from Barbara Reynolds's superb verse

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translation in the Penguin Classics, which often succeeds in catching both the sense and the spirit of Ariosto's stanzas.

References to *Don Quixote* are to part, chapter, and page number in L. A. Murillo's edition; references to part 2 are to Murillo's second volume. References to *Orlando furioso* are to Lanfranco Caretti's edition and are to canto and stanza; if less than a stanza is quoted, line numbers within the stanza are added. References to Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* are to book, chapter, and page number in Bruno Maier's edition of the Italian text. The bibliography lists all the works cited together with a few others, mostly primary sources, that I found useful but had no occasion to mention in the text.



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