

The Eloquence of Mercury and the Enchantments of Venus: *Humanitas* in Botticelli and Cervantes's *Don Quijote*, II.10

Frederick A. de Armas

[The Pennsylvania State University](#)

Although in our century the term "Humanism" has been the subject of 1
so many broad definitions that it has lost much of its specificity and
positivity, such was not the case in early modern Europe. In its inception,
the term carried with it the excitement and fascination of discovering,
editing and coming to an understanding of recently re-discovered works
from classical antiquity. The term *umanista* "was used, in fifteenth century
Italian academic jargon, to describe a teacher or student of classical
literature and the arts associated with it" (Mann 1996, 1).¹ While Kristeller
argues "against the repeated attempts to identify Renaissance humanism
with the philosophy, science, or the learning of the period as a whole"
(1979, 23), more recent studies strive to cautiously broaden the term in its
original context, without losing specificity. Countering the view "that
Renaissance humanism was a narrowly philological enterprise," Jill Kraye
has assembled a collection of essays that shows that it was "a broad
intellectual and cultural movement, which contributed to, or at any rate
engaged with, disciplines such as biblical studies, political thought, art,
science and all branches of philosophy" (1996, xv). As for the value of
humanistic endeavors, Petrarch was quite clear in his pronouncement that
studia humanitatis, "the study of literature, and in particular classical
literature, makes a man good" (Mann 1996, 14).

Since the "goodness" and "humane values" of humanistic endeavors are 2
being questioned and even rejected by many today, this study seeks to
show how such questioning was already present in early modern Europe --
and how a study of the problematics of humanism yielded a more modern,
yet at the same time a strikingly positive assessment in Cervantes' *Don
Quijote*, where in the tenth chapter of Part Two, the complexity of
humanitas is brought to light through an *ekphrasis*² based on Botticelli's
Primavera [FIGURE #1]. Some may argue that the leap from humanism to
art is too great.³ Others might add that a literary text that is said to imitate
the chivalric rather than the classical may place us at too far a distance
from humanism to be able to consider it as part of the textuality of *Don
Quijote*. However, Charles Hope and Elizabeth McGrath have shown that
although humanism "was principally concerned with texts which few if

any artists would have read" (1996, 161) there are a number of ways in which the two groups (humanists and artists) came together, the most important being through their interaction in iconographic schemes and particularly "the devising of attributes for mythological figures and especially for personifications" (1996, 173). Indeed, Hope and McGrath point to Botticelli's *Primavera* as one of the most noted examples of humanist involvement: Botticelli must have sought advice from humanists for his depiction of the transformation of Chloris into Flora after being ravished by the wind-god Zephyr. His depiction of these figures "seems to correspond to a passage in Ovid's *Fasti*" (V.195-222).⁴

Although some have seen Cervantes' imitation of the novels of chivalry in *Don Quijote* as a barrier for understanding his humanistic pursuits, at least one modern critic has argued that "the parody of the novels of chivalry was in reality only a smoke screen intended to mask Cervantes' primary intention in *Don Quijote*, which was to imitate and improve upon Virgil's *Aeneid*" (McGaha 1980, 34). Indeed, Luis Murillo has asserted that *Don Quijote* must be studied within the tradition of the Renaissance epic. Showing how Cervantes was influenced by theoreticians of the epic and humanist scholars, Murillo argues that he was not bound by them since as a story teller he "subordinates all elements and influences from either learned or popular traditions into one fabric of narrative" (1980, 68). Finally, the humanist concern with *imitatio* of classical literature (Mann 1996, 13) can be found in the cervantine text not only in the uses of Virgil, the Renaissance epic and Botticelli's own humanistic program, but also in his rather complex utilization of Plato, Herodotus, Apuleius and many other classical authors.⁵

At the beginning of the tenth chapter of *Don Quijote Part Two*, the narrator confesses to the reader that he would almost prefer to "pasarle en silencio, temeroso de que no había de ser creído, porque las locuras de don Quijote llegaron aquí al término y raya de las mayores que pueden imaginarse, y aun pasaron dos tiros de ballesta más allá de las mayores" (2.102-3). Not only does the chapter include one of don Quijote's greatest *locuras* but it also represents the climactic point in the development of Sancho's imagination. This chapter also changes the nature of don Quijote's quest. The knight has traveled to El Toboso to visit Dulcinea. Sancho, who had mendaciously told don Quijote that he had delivered a letter to the fictional Dulcinea, is now in a very awkward position since Don Quijote wants him to find the princess to whom he delivered the letter, warning him "que no volviese a su presencia sin haber primero hablado de su parte a su señora, pidiéndola fuese servida de dejarse ver de su cautivo caballero" (1978, 2.104). Not knowing what to do, Sancho sits under a tree and tries to determine his future course. Reasoning that his master believes that windmills are giants, he figures it would not be too difficult to persuade him that any woman is in reality Dulcinea.⁶

Returning late in the afternoon to where don Quijote awaits, Sancho sees three peasant women riding on donkeys. He tells his master to emerge from the *selva* where he had been waiting so that he can see his beloved Dulcinea and two of her ladies.⁷ Eric Auerbach, who has devoted considerable attention to this chapter, explains the transformation that

takes place at this point: "...for the first time roles are exchanged. Until now it had been Don Quixote who, encountering everyday phenomena, spontaneously saw and transformed them in terms of the romances of chivalry, while Sancho was generally in doubt and often tried to contradict and prevent his master's absurdities. Now it is the other way around. Sancho improvises a scene after the fashion of the romances of chivalry, while Don Quijote's ability to transform events to harmonize with his illusion breaks down before the crude vulgarity of the sight of the peasant women" (1968, 339). Indeed, don Quijote responds to Sancho's imaginings by saying "Yo no veo, Sancho...sino a tres labradoras sobre tres borricos" (1978, 2.109). He insists that is all they are. His vision is no longer one of giants and princesses. He does not see these women riding *hacaneas* (hackneys) but mere donkeys: "que es tan verdad que son borricos, o borricas, como yo soy don Quijote y tú Sancho Panza" (1978, 2.109). Don Quijote makes quite an effort to perceive the homely peasant woman, "no de muy buen rostro" (1978, 2.110) as the beautiful princess Dulcinea. Although he fails to transform his vision, the knight does kneel in her presence. Auerbach adds: "He finds a solution which prevents him both from falling into despair and from recovering sanity: Dulcinea is enchanted" (1968, 340). This ideal will carry through the second part of the novel, becoming its central motif according to both Auerbach and El Saffar.⁸

Auerbach adds that on recovering from shock, don Quijote pronounces a perfect speech. It begins with an *invocatio* which has three parts "extremo, término y único" (1978, 2.110) thus emphasizing "an absolute perfection, then a perfection in human terms and finally the special personal devotion of the speaker" (1968, 341). Before beginning the central section, the *supplicatio*, a complex sentence creates rhythm and suspense. It is also composed of three parts, the first beginning with *ya que*, the second with three "y's" and the third with *si ya*. Finally, the *supplicatio* is also divided into three parts. Thus we have a speech with three sections, each having three parts. For Auerbach, the important point here is its technical perfection. But the emphasis on the number three has further significance. Indeed, it parallels the appearance of three peasant women rather than just one Dulcinea. 6

I would argue that by foregrounding the number three throughout this chapter,⁹ the narrator alerts the reader that there is a mystery here that needs to be deciphered. After all, the Renaissance Neoplatonists saw "vestiges of the Trinity" (Wind 1968, 41) in pagan triads and particularly in the three Graces. Cervantes seems to acknowledge this "pagan mystery" in the *prólogo* to the first part of *Don Quijote*. Here, a friend advises the author on how to adorn his narrative, parodying the ways in which some writers feign knowledge of humanism and classical learning. Among these adornments are two sets of three classical women, which can serve to parody the pagan trinities: one set is composed of wanton lovers (Lamia, Laida, Flora) and a second of enchantresses (Medea, Calipso, Circe).¹⁰ Shortly thereafter the friend argues that when dealing with love, references to a particular Renaissance Neoplatonic writer should be made: "Si tratáredes de amores, con dos onzas que sepáis de la lengua toscana, toparéis con León Hebreo" (1978, 1.56). It should come as no surprise that 7

in Hebreo's *Diálogos de amor*, one of the mythological allegories described is that of the three Graces. Indeed, these figures, as Edgar Wind has pointed out, were utilized by Neoplatonists in order to define Platonic love: Love is a Desire for Beauty. Each one of the Graces represents one of these three terms, and for this reason they are seen as Venus's companions. It may well be that the three *labradoras* in Part Two of *Don Quijote* reflect in grotesque fashion this definition of love. At a time when don Quijote struggles to understand what love is, Dulcinea/Venus is rendered as a homely peasant, exhibiting yet another key pagan mystery, the *discordia concors* where mighty opposites come together to create beauty and harmony.

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During the Renaissance, the best known representation of the three graces is found in Botticelli's *Primavera*. This painting, although located in Florence, seems to have been known either through prints or descriptions in Spain during the Spanish Golden Age. There is a scene in Calderón's play *Apolo y Climene* which clearly demonstrates his knowledge of the painting (de Armas 1986). As for Cervantes, his travels to Italy starting in 1569 allowed him to study many of the images and programs of Renaissance art, which he later incorporated in his works (de Armas 1996b). Indeed, George Camamis has shown that Cervantes was acquainted with the *Primavera* and "left us clear proof of his knowledge of this and other Venus paintings by Botticelli in two of his least read novels: *La Galatea* and *La Gitanilla*" (1988, 183). Given Calderón's and Cervantes' knowledge of the *Primavera*, I think it is entirely possible that the tenth chapter of part two of *Don Quijote* is also inspired by the painting. As Helena Percas de Ponsetti states, "Cervantes can be seen to develop his fiction along two levels simultaneously: a narrative level... and a visual, *pictorial* level in which objects, form, textures, and colors sustain, refute, qualify, or transform what is said or intimated" (1988, 12). This is precisely what happens in chapter ten. A pictorial level which points to Botticelli's *Primavera* transforms the parodic narrative level and vice versa. By problematizing a painting with an underlying humanistic program, Cervantes takes on questions of *imitatio*, *ekphrasis* and the uses of humanism in the arts.

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Although most modern readings of the *Primavera* teach us to view the development of the *favola* by reading it from right to left (Dempsey 1992, 62), the Cervantine chapter unfolds the figures from left to right. On the extreme left hand side of the painting stands Mercury. As Wind asserts: "The crux of any interpretation of the *Primavera* is to explain the part played by Mercury. By tradition he is 'the leader of the Graces'; but while that would seem to explain his place next to them, it is hard to reconcile with his disengaged -- not to say, indifferent, attitude" (1968, 121).¹¹

When don Quijote sends Sancho to find and talk to Dulcinea in the village of El Toboso, he counsels him to look carefully at her actions and movements, since these will reveal her amorous attitude towards don Quijote: "son certísimos correos que traen las nuevas de lo que allá en lo interior del alma pasa" (1978, 2.104). Gestures thus become messages or mail from the soul revealing its inner movements. This is the message that Sancho is to bring back to don Quijote. Acknowledging his role as messenger, Sancho cites a *romance* of Bernardo del Carpio which begins:

"Mensajero sois, amigo" (1978, 2.106). Mercury's most obvious role is that of messenger of the gods. He is also a *psychopompos* or leader of the souls to the beyond. In this Cervantine interpretation of Botticelli's program, Sancho/Mercury is just that messenger, who is to mediate between Dulcinea's soul and don Quijote's passion. Clearly, the image of Mercury in the painting, young and slender, pointing to the heavens with his caduceus is very much the opposite of a portly Sancho, seated under a tree, conversing with himself (1978, 2.105). But just as we are about to conclude that Sancho as messenger is a grotesque parody of the god, we begin to see in him a newly acquired perception and inventiveness. With his caduceus, Botticelli's Mercury turns away the clouds. Wind takes this to mean that this deity has the "power to dispel mental clouds" (1968, 213). The repeated questioning of his role as messenger represents Sancho's mental clouds. But these he eventually dispels with a new insight. As "patron of lettered inquiry" (Wind 1968, 122) Mercury provides his earthly counterpart with the means to resolve his dilemma. Sancho will create his greatest invention and deceive don Quijote into believing that whatever peasant woman arrives is actually the princess Dulcinea, hoping in this manner to shed his role as messenger ("que no me envíe otra vez a semejantes mensajerías" [1978, 2.107]).

It is then that Sancho encounters the three peasant women riding their donkeys. Continuing in his role as Mercury, god of eloquence, the squire describes the recent arrivals to don Quijote in poetic terms: "Sus doncellas y ella toda son una ascua de oro, todo mazorcas de perlas, todas son diamantes, todas rubíes, todas telas de brocado" (1978, 2.108). This brocade or rich design woven into the cloth of the imagined ladies is also found in the dresses of the dancing Graces of Botticelli. As for the pearls, diamonds and rubies, they may be discovered in the jewels worn by the two Graces that face the spectator. The mercurial eloquence of Sancho goes on to describe their hair: "los cabellos sueltos por las espaldas, que son otros tantos rayos de sol que andan jugando con el viento" (1978, 2.108). The golden hair of the three imagined ladies derives from Botticelli's three Graces. As for the wind, it blows from the extreme right of the painting, where Zephyrus, the god of the west wind touches Chloris, thus recalling Sancho's eloquent comparison of the golden hair with the rays of the sun playing with the wind. 10

One of the many levels of the humanistic program of the painting may be astrological. For Gombrich, Botticelli follows Marsilio Ficino who conceives of three benefic planets (which he often refers to as the three Graces) with gifts to bestow on the initiate: Venus, Apollo and Mercury (1972, 59). While Venus stands at the center and Mercury at the extreme left of the painting, the influence of Sol is pervasive. Having shown how Mercury's influence has transformed Sancho, granting him the power of eloquence and invention, Cervantes' *Don Quijote* goes on to point to the luminescence of Sol/Apollo through the golden hair/rays of the Graces. When don Quijote fails to believe Sancho's argument that the peasant women are Dulcinea and her maids the squire asks: "que no vea que son éstas, las que aquí vienen, resplandecientes como el mismo sol del mediodía" (1978, 2.109). This resplendence is certainly one of the 11

attributes of the Graces. According to Pico della Mirandola: "The Poets say that Venus has as companions and as her maids, the Graces, whose names in the vulgar tongue are Verdure, Gladness and Splendour. These three Graces are nothing but the three properties appertaining to the Ideal Beauty" (Gombrich 1972, 56). These names given to the Graces in the *Orphic Hymns* (LX, 3) and included by Ficino in his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, can be considered both as representing Ideal Beauty and as impulses that become lively during the *primavera*. It is the vivifying sun that provides Spring its qualities of *Viriditas*, *Laetitia* and *Splendor*. Indeed the third Grace or quality can be associated with the brightness of sunlight which comes about as Sol becomes more brilliant following the Spring equinox.

Since Sol's benefic rays and warmth help to stimulate the growth of vegetation, it is surprising to observe the predominance of shadow in Botticelli's painting. Similar shadows appear in the Cervantine episode since don Quijote has been waiting in a "floresta, encinar o selva" (1978, 2.104) for Sancho's return. The squire, on the other hand, has waited under the shadows of a tree until late to search for the would-be Dulcinea, since he wants his master to believe that he has been to El Toboso and back. Both painting and prose text invoke the solar rays of spring but depict an action that takes place in the cool shadows at the edge of a forest. 12

In the *Primavera*, the light that defines the aureole of myrtle surrounding Venus' head can be regarded as the solar energies that are harnessed by the goddess. Astrologically, Venus is viewed as a humid planet "con mucha humedad" (Nájera 1632, 5). This quality combines with Sol's warmth to produce the spring described by Nájera as "calido y humedo templado" (1632, 20). But the presence of Venus surrounded by light is not merely a representation of the forces that bring about spring. She is also the Ideal Beauty spoken of by Pico della Mirandola (Gombrich 1972, 56) and together with the three Graces, she embodies the definition of love, found in Plato's *Symposium* (Wind 1968, 46), in Ficino's *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (1985, 40), in León Hebreo and in other Neoplatonic writers who states that *Amor* is a desire for beauty.¹² 13

In his search for the ideal conception of beauty as embodied in Dulcinea, don Quijote is not prepared to transform the vision of three peasant women into Dulcinea and her maids. Nor is he prepared to follow the humanistic program which has been set out for him through Botticelli's *Primavera*. Instead of Venus and the three Graces, the knight sees only three peasant women riding their asses or donkeys. In addition to confronting don Quijote with the definition of love, the absence of Dulcinea/Venus may well reflect his refusal to follow humanistic teachings. According to E. H. Gombrich, the initial impulse for the *Primavera* stems from a letter sent by Ficino to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de Medici who lived at the Villa di Castello where the painting was housed (1972, 33). Although recently Dempsey has shown that the painting was made for the *case vecchie de' Medici* in the Via Larga, this does not negate the possible importance of Ficino's letter as one of the possible models for the painting. The letter "culminates in an appeal to the young man that he should fix his eyes on Venus who stood for *Humanitas*" (1972, 33). It 14

would be most appropriate that the *Primavera* should be interpreted, on one level, as a description of Venus-Humanitas. Describing Botticelli's frescoes in the Villa Lemni outside of Florence Gombrich explains that one shows "Venus with the three Graces appearing to a young woman," [\[FIGURE #2\]](#) while a second shows Venus leading a young man "towards the personifications of Philosophy and the Liberal Arts" (1972, 75) [\[FIGURE #3\]](#). Thus, these paintings would corroborate Botticelli's interest in Venus-*Humanitas* and in *Amor* as "teacher of all the arts" (1972, 75).¹³

It is curious to note that the virtue of *Humanitas*, "which Ficino commends so passionately to the young man Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, may have been precisely a virtue he conspicuously lacked. Throughout his life the younger Lorenzo was an irascible person... How desirable it was to tame him and to teach him the value of *Humanitas*, which means not only culture but also affability" (Gombrich 33-4). Irascibility, the excess of a choleric disposition, is also a key trait in don Quijote. Throughout the novel, the would-be knight lets this choleric disposition propel him into inappropriate actions, which is one of the main aspects that lend humor to the work. It may be that the humanistic program of Botticelli's *Primavera* is inserted at this point in the novel to transform his character. His previous invention of Dulcinea has been based on romances of chivalry, a type of reading that led to his choleric and humorous behavior. By presenting an alternative model, Sancho, through the eloquence of Mercury, may be attempting to have the knight re-invent Dulcinea as Venus-*Humanitas*. After all, such a transformation in her representation would allow him to turn away from the chivalric, medieval and choleric and move towards humanistic readings which would lead to affability, beauty and goodness.

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But don Quijote fails to view the peasant women in a painterly fashion. His invention resists this metamorphosis. He will argue instead that Dulcinea has been enchanted. This enchantment works through his perception of her: "el maligno encantador que me persigue... ha puesto nubes y cataratas en mis ojos, y para sólo ellos y no para otros ha mudado y transformado tu sin igual hermosura" (1978, 2.110). Let us recall that in Botticelli's painting, Mercury with his caduceus is attempting to remove the clouds from the sky. In *Don Quijote*, Sancho's mercurial ruse could have dispelled the clouds that blind the knight, but don Quijote admits instead that the clouds make him unable to properly see Dulcinea/Venus.

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But Sancho's eloquence is not at an end. When the peasant woman, who has fallen from the donkey regains her seat, and rapidly departs along with her companions, the squire uses figurative language to describe their flight: "Y no le van en zaga sus doncellas; que todas corren como el viento" (1978, 2.111). The mention of the wind brings us again to the last section of the painting. At the extreme right three figures recall Ovid's *Fasti* since Zephyr, the west wind, impregnates Chloris. "However, he made amends by making her Queen of flowers." As Dempsey notes, "the meaning of the Ovidian model is transformed, for Ovid does not literally describe a transformation in the *Fasti*, but Botticelli has nevertheless imagined the event as an Ovidian metamorphosis and thereby rendered, in true Ovidian fashion, the meaning of the event in the actions themselves" (1992, 32-33). Cervantes had mentioned Flora in the prologue to Part One,

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where she formed part of one of two unholy trinitities. Only one hint of her presence in chapter ten is given by don Quijote. He bemoans the fact that the village maid is nothing like Dulcinea, since the enchanters: "le quitaron lo que es tan suyo en las buenas señoras, que es el buen olor, por siempre entre ámbares y flores" (1978, 2.112).

Now that the full painting is accounted for, with Sancho as Mercury, the three peasant women as the three graces, the absent Dulcinea as Venus, Zephyrus as the wind associated with the *labradoras*, and Chloris as Flora queen of flowers, it may be pertinent to discuss why the cervantine text debases the idealized images in Botticelli's painting to present a rustic atmosphere where don Quijote fails to perceive his Dulcinea. Such a rustification is actually in keeping with one level of the humanistic program followed by Botticelli. Dempsey explains that the gods depicted in the painting are, on one level, not the traditional roman gods, but "archaic deities of nature's fertility" (1992, 49). The Zephyr-Chloris-Flora story is nothing more than "Ovid's account of the primitive origins of the feast of the Floralia" (Dempsey 1992, 49); while Venus is the archaic goddess of the garden, "an old-fashioned rustic deity" (Dempsey 1992, 44); and Mercury is "an archaic god of the springtime" (Dempsey 1992, 43). By infusing his text with rusticity, Cervantes reflects this primal era, before the gods were moved to the Roman pantheon. 18

In spite of the arguments presented above, there are at least three elements that further problematize the representation of the *Primavera* within Cervantes' text. First, the rusticity of the deities depicted by Botticelli is by no means sufficient to account for the grotesque manner in which the would-be gods are portrayed in chapter ten. Second, the absence of Venus (the "enchantment" of Dulcinea), removes the central figure from the cervantine representation of the painting. And third, the chapter "reads" the painting backwards -- instead of proceeding from right to left, it begins with Mercury and ends with the Zephyr-Cloris-Flora triad. 19

Let us begin with this third problem. The two most contradictory readings of Botticelli's painting emphasize a narrative sequence that unfolds from right to left. The "rustic" reading shows the Zephyr-Chloris-Flora triad as the first flowering of spring; Venus as the "goddess of April," the fullness of *primavera*; and finally Mercury as May, the end of springtime (Dempsey 1992, 62). The Neoplatonic reading, on the other hand, ¹⁴ follows a similar pattern. From Proclus' *Elements of Theology* to Ficino's *Theologia Platonica*, there is a constant perception that "the bounty bestowed by the gods upon lower beings" began "as a kind of overflowing (*emanatio*) which produced a vivifying rapture or conversion (called by Ficino *conversio*, *raptio* or *vivificatio*) whereby the lower beings were drawn back to heaven and rejoined the gods (*remeatio*)" (Wind 1968, 37). The *Primavera* exhibits this Neoplatonic movement. Starting at the right hand side of the painting, Zephyr's downward flight is the *emanatio*, the overflowing from the heavens. Venus or ideal beauty leads to *raptio* or the conversion of the lower beings, while Mercury as "mediator between mortals and gods bridging the distance between earth and heaven" (Wind 1968, 122) represents the process of *remeatio*. Why then does the Cervantine *ekphrasis* transgress against prevalent interpretations, reading the painting backwards (from left to right)? 20

This backward reading may represent the knight's inability to read the signs of the world (or of the painting) correctly. Throughout Part One, don Quijote had chosen to read the world according to the chivalric authorities but was defeated in the end. In Part Two, he no longer has the will to impose his vision on the world. Here, others will provide the chivalric backdrop in which he becomes merely an actor. In terms of the painting the backward reading may well refer to the fact that he no longer has a vision of a Golden Age (the rustic gods of spring) and that he no longer has the Neoplatonic vision that leads to *raptio*. This allows us to comprehend the other two problems. 21

Venus "who is the manifestation of the love and beauty that stirs the world to renewal" (Dempsey 1992, 62) cannot be envisioned by the knight. His idealized love, based on the romances of chivalry, cannot allow for a humanistic reading of his beloved as Venus, as the force that will lead him to harmony, affability and culture. The knight will only accept a princess that will lead him into war and conflict. Her absence must mean that she has been enchanted. And yet, this absence may point to the knight's struggle to metamorphose his own vision. Seldom in Part Two will he be the agent of warfare. Others, knowing his propensities, will create theatrical pieces in which the knight will act out his part. Venus-Humanitas has penetrated his being and is in the process of transforming don Quijote. As Henry Sullivan has noted, Part Two of the novel is very different. Here, "the theme of cruelty, the sufferings of Knight and Squire seemed invested with an arbitrary, even sadistic, dimension of excess" (Sullivan 1996, 2). For Sullivan, it connotes a desire for purification, which he relates to the notion of Purgatory in this life. 22

I would argue that this desire for purification has to do with his encounter with Venus-Humanitas. As Petrarch has noted, humanism makes a man good. In abandoning his novels of chivalry and returning to civilization, don Quijote metamorphoses himself into Alonso Quijano "el bueno." In Botticelli's painting, both the rustic Venus and Flora abide in a land of eternal spring. This is don Quijote's goal from the start. His speech on the Golden Age shows his motivation -- to bring back the perfection of beginnings. The novel's humanistic program emphasizes classical civilization's desire for this return to origins. Don Quijote's adventures in Part Two take him from an encounter with Venus, which he denies, through a series of purgatorial purifications so that he may become the ideal of the humanists. Sancho, under the influence of Mercury or eloquence will also grow in stature becoming an ideal governor of the island of Barataria. Both knight and squire fulfill their destinies -- the first in his vision of eternity which is a return to origins and the latter in the wisdom granted him by the god of speech. 23

Transformation, as Gombrich has noted, comes from the spell of the visual arts, leading to "lasting psychological effects" (1972, 34). Images were said to affect one's character in the same way as planets influenced those born under them: "If this belief existed it is natural that those who commissioned the painting of the Goddess would also be concerned with her authentic appearance. For just as an amulet is only effective if it has the right image so the picture destined to exert its beneficent spell would only work if it was correct" (Gombrich 1972, 34). Although the effect of 24

humanism in general was that of creating goodness, that of specific images, would have limited effects: Venus would make one affable and harmonious while Mercury's gift would be eloquence and wisdom. Such magical thinking may be at odds with modern conceptions, and may marginalize humanism.¹⁵ And yet, some modern readers are coming to realize the power of literature, the worth of the image. If not "magical" it has a certain aura which rises beyond culture.

In a recent forum containing thirty two letters on the relationship of cultural studies to the literary, Alan Powers spoke for the "bliss of reading" and of the humanist or literary scholar as a "teacher of pleasure" (Powers 1997, 264). For Renaissance Neoplatonists such as Ficino, *raptio* was key to the power of humanism. And it is represented as such in Botticelli's *Primavera* where, through Zephyr's emanations, the human spirit comes to envision the rapture of beauty (Venus). The power, the pleasure and the rapture of reading is not merely a Renaissance phenomenon. In our time, Roland Barthes has conceived of *jouissance*, or the pleasure of the text, the "body of bliss" (1975, 62) which appeals "to a natural substratum beyond the transient forces of culture" (Haney 1993, 95). In Haney's interpretation, it is a "widening of consciousness" that serves to "peel away our sense of separateness and makes us participate in the process of History" (Haney 1993, 99). In addition, Frank Lentricchia has called for a return of the reader as rhapsode: "As Plato says in the *Ion*, rhapsodes are enthusiasts... I tell my students that in true recitation, we're possessed, we are the medium for the writer's voice" (1996, 65-6).

As rhapsodes or witnesses to the "primal numinous awe" (Otto 1973, 126) of "deep aesthetic experience,"¹⁶ as believers that the word and the image can change our consciousness, we must also realize the complexities of these texts and images, their contradictions, which mirror the contradictions of humanity. Don Quijote's transformation is one based on *discordia concors*: when faced with Venus his choleric disposition begins to change. As in Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* [FIGURE #4], the goddess can transform the warrior. So let us in our readings seek these metamorphoses and harness their transformative power. Literature and art can indeed lead to goodness when this concept is understood as the amazing harmony that can emerge from contrariety, as that self or consciousness that lies beyond the many political and theoretical controversies of our century. This is not to say that we ought to abandon the political and cultural contextualization of texts and images. There is no question that certain works weave in and out of the canon due to political imperatives (de Armas 1996a). We must continue to probe the limits of gender, power and sexuality in the works of the early modern period. However, we may also want to foreground the forgotten *humanitas*. We may want to remember that aesthetic beauty and the rapture it produces can be one of the most subversive forces in the verbal and visual arts. After all, the possible laudatory or political program of the *Primavera* is momentarily forgotten when the viewer is enraptured by the mysterious beauty of the work.¹⁷

A move to the twenty first century is a move to *terra incognita* where knowledge becomes intimately associated with the knower, where the

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consciousness of the individual exposed to the *raptio* of "deep aesthetic experience" expands so as to understand the multiplicity and diversity of humanity as a union of contraries. It is this *raptio* that don Quijote first denies in viewing a rustic version of the *Primavera*. But Alonso Quijano "el bueno" learns in the end to go beyond oppositions, to subvert hierarchical thinking, transforming the Other, the *labradora*, into an image of Venus-*Humanitas*, into a vision of goodness.

Endnotes

1 On this subject see also Kristeller 1979, 22.

2 On *ekphrasis* during the Spanish Golden Age see Bergmann (1979).

3 And yet, Edward Dudley has shown intriguing parallels between Raphael's and Cervantes' *Galatea*. Both the painting at the Farnesina and the eponymous heroine of Cervantes' pastoral novel partake of deep humanistic learning. Very much like Raphael, Cervantes understood this figure as key to the "Galatea agenda which established her both as an ideal of chaste and inspiring beauty and as a symbol of artistic power and beauty threatened by violence" (1995, 42).

4 Dempsey has shown that the humanist program here is even more complex, based on both Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, Ovid's *Fasti*, Horace's *Odes*, Seneca's *De beneficiis* and Hesiod's *Georgics* (1992, 36-7). Each is re-thought and transformed. For example: "Botticelli has altered Lucretius's simple description of a rustic parade of springtime deities into his own invention, one that changes Lucretius's sequential listing into a manifestation of the growth and development of the season" (1992, 32).

5 For the imitation of these classical authors see de Armas 1992. E. C. Riley fully develops the Renaissance practice of *imitatio* in Cervantes' depiction of madness in *Don Quijote* (especially in chapters 25 and 26 of part one (1966, 107-116).

6 "no será muy difícil hacerle creer que una labradora, la primera que me topare por aquí, es la señora Dulcinea" (1978, 2.107).

7 "a la señora Dulcinea del Toboso, que con otras dos doncellas suyas viene a ver a vuesa merced" (1978, 2.108).

8 "The search for Dulcinea with which Don Quixote begins the action of Part II forms the underlying motive for all he does throughout the rest of the work" (El Saffar 1984, 86).

9 In addition to the tripartite speech with three sub-sections within each part, the chapter includes three peasant women, three donkeys and the colts that will be born from don Quijote's three "yeguas." Indeed the number three is often repeated in the chapter: "tres yeguas," "tres aldeanas," "tres labradoras," "tres labradoras," "tres borricos," "tres hacaneas" (1978, 2.108-9).

10 For an analysis of the women cited in the prologue to *Don Quijote* and the way in which they are later incorporated into the first part of the work see Nadeau (1994).

11 Both Panofsky (1960, 193) Dempsey (1992, 37) agree with this assessment, but for very different reasons.

12 This definition became quite popular and can be found, for example in Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* where, to Mengo's question "¿Qué es amor?" Laurencia replies: "Es un desseo de hermosura" (1990, vv. 409-10).

13 Citing these frescoes, Camamis relates Venus-Humanitas to Cervantes' Galatea (1988, 187-88).

14 Dempsey reluctantly acknowledges that: "it is obvious that the means exist to reintroduce a Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Primavera*..." (1992, 65).

15 And yet, one of the most influential Hispanic writers of this century has stressed the relationship between textuality and the magical nature of reality which calls into question what is "real." In his essay on *Don Quijote*, Jorge Luis Borges states: "Nosotros, sus lectores o espectadores, podemos ser ficticios. En 1833, Carlyle observó que la historia universal es un infinito libro sagrado que todos los hombres escriben y leen y tratan de entender, y en el que también los escriben" (1960, 69).

16 Etlin agrees with Otto in that the "primal numinous awe" is "analogous to deep aesthetic experience": "The nature and meaning of both experiences merit our utmost consideration if we wish to understand the question of value in art" (1996, 154).

17 Studying Sanskrit poetics, William S. Haney II offers a critique of modern and postmodern poetics whose "emphasis on ambiguity and indeterminacy reflects the futile attempt on the part of the intellect to account for experiences that will always be enigmatic until grasped on the unifying level of consciousness" (1993, 60). He goes on to show how Sanskrit poetics opens texts "to the pure possibility of meaning, a function of the coexistence of opposites" (1993, 60).

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