

# READING DON QUIXOTE AS POLITICAL AGENT: A SPANISH KNIGHT IN BRITISH IDEOLOGICAL AND LITERARY WARS

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It was said by Fletcher of Saltoun, 'Let me make the ballads of a nation, and I care not who makes the laws.' Might it not be said with as much propriety, let me make the novels of a country, and let who will make the system?

(Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Essay on the Origin and Progress of Novel Writing* (1810):I, 61-62.)

## *Abstract*

In the midst of a political and literary battle, radical and anti-radical authors employed Cervantes' Don Quixote to serve their ideological purposes. In particular, anti-Jacobin novelists used quixotism to identify the illusions of the Quixote with revolutionary ideas, to condemn them as foolishness or sedition, and to use the unavoidable cure of their characters' quixotism as a call for political conservatism and for the preservation of British traditional values. The present paper will focus on three novels which were published at this time and which have at their core a political Quixote: *The History of Sir George Warrington; or the Political Quixote* (1797), *The Infernal Quixote* (1801), *The Heroine, or the Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader* (1813). It

## *Resumen*

En medio de una batalla política y literaria tanto los autores radicales como los anti-radicales usaron el Don Quijote de Cervantes como herramienta ideológica. En concreto, los novelistas anti-Jacobinos usaron el quijotismo para identificar las ilusiones del Quijote con los ideales revolucionarios, para condenarlos por su absurdidad o traición, y para usar la irrevocable cura de sus Quijotes como una llamada al conservatismo político y a la preservación de los valores tradicionales británicos. Este artículo analizará tres novelas publicadas en esta época y que tienen como protagonista a un Quijote político: *The History of Sir George Warrington; or the Political Quixote* (1797), *The Infernal Quixote* (1801), *The Heroine, or the Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader* (1813). El artículo

will highlight how quixotism becomes a foundation for the anti-radical discourse, how these novels adapt quixotism and how they contribute to the relevant and rich tradition of the reception of Don Quixote in Britain.

*Keywords:* quixotism, literary adaptation, intertextuality, war of ideas, radical fiction, anti-radical fiction.

enfaticará cómo el quijotismo se convierte en una de las bases del discurso anti-radical, cómo estas novelas adaptan el quijotismo y cómo contribuyen, por tanto, a la relevante y rica tradición quijotesca en Gran Bretaña.

*Palabras clave:* quijotismo, adaptación literaria, intertextualidad, guerra de ideas, narrativa radical, narrativa anti-radical.

It is a widely acknowledged fact that the long eighteenth century is characterised by the existence of an ever-widening and heterogeneous reading public. As Jacqueline Pearson (1999) has thoroughly asserted, parallel to the incorporation of large numbers of the lower orders and women to those who were able to read, the idea of the gullibility of this uninformed mass recurrently appeared in those numerous treatises that dealt with the enlarged British public. If literature was, in words of contemporary critics, that “great engine” which “well or ill-conducted” could support or overthrow any civilized state by its influence on its readers (Mathias 1800:141), it seemed essential to provide the latter with an appealing imaginative form in which history could be marshalled to instruct and guide them. This form became the novel, which soon was regarded as the perfect “means of inculcating correct ideas” (Harvey 1977:290). The didactic novel, with its myriad of exemplary heroes and heroines, was present throughout the eighteenth century but became almost an obsession in the last twenty years of the century, as historical events unfolded and new ideologies threatened to *ill-conduct* the genre. If, paraphrasing Barbauld, those who make the novels supersede those who make the system, it is important for literary history to pay attention, first, to who was writing in the convulsed period between 1793 and 1820, and, secondly, to how the novels that appeared at that stage built a discourse that at the same time reflected and modelled the ideas of the reading public.

For the creation of that discourse several authors turned to what was already the work with greater influence on the British literary panorama of this age: Cervantes’ *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605, 1615). Within the context of the assimilation of a Spanish novel by British culture, the present article aims to comment on the political adaptation that Cervantes’ novel had in Britain at this time and how this adaptation is framed in the British appropriation of quixotism and the development of its innumerable potentials. In order to illustrate some of these possibilities, it intends to offer an insight into three different works which have in

common the original use done of the Quixote as a political agent. These novels are *The History of Sir George Warrington, or the Political Quixote* (1797), attributed to Jane and Elisabeth Purbeck (c. 1789-1802); *The Infernal Quixote. A Tale of the Day* (1801), by Charles Lucas (1769-1854); and *The Heroine, or Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader* (1813), by Eaton Stannard Barrett (1786-1820). As they are placed into context, the ways in which they contributed to shaping the social and political consciousness of the British reading nation in an effectual way will be discussed. More importantly, it will be highlighted how they became part of the growing and increasingly rich tradition of the reception of *Don Quixote* in Britain, especially buoyant in the long eighteenth century, and how they contributed to this tradition with original adaptations of the quixotic motif.

## QUIXOTISM AND POLITICS

Undoubtedly, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* constituted the "single most important literary influence on the eighteenth-century English novel" (Britton 1993:22),<sup>1</sup> with the novel and its author becoming acknowledged models of skill in the production of satirical fiction and a confessed influence on authors such as Henry Fielding or Laurence Sterne.<sup>2</sup> However, in the last quarter of the century part of the fiction that drew upon *Don Quixote* was rather a superficial kind of *imitation*, an appropriation of the model of the character of Don Quixote, without any attention being paid to Cervantes or his narrative method.<sup>3</sup> For a great number of authors the most significant contribution of Cervantes' book was "a comic character whose unique blend of madness, naivety and idealism could be adapted to provide often crude vehicles of satirical humour or social comment" (Britton 1993:22). Many novelists, then, would subscribe to this superficial reading of quixotism and would choose an "ideological Quixote" (Staves 1972:201) –an enthusiast misled by the perusal of

<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive study of the reception and influence of *Don Quixote* in Britain see Pardo (2007), Ardila (2009) or Barrett (1813)[1909].

<sup>2</sup> Much, and well, has been written on the influence of Cervantes on both authors. For a revealing and concise comment on the imitation of *Don Quixote* in both *Joseph Andrews* and *Tristram Shandy*, as well as in other relevant coeval novels, see Pardo (2006).

<sup>3</sup> *Imitation* here is used as opposed to *emulation*, the terms coined by Henry Levin (1970:47) as he phrased what would be known as the *quixotic principle*. Subsequent authors would distinguish between Cervantes' *method* and his *hero* (Welsh 2002:80) and *Quixotism* and *Cervantism* (Britton 1993:23). Later in the article *quixotic fiction* will also be employed as different from *Cervantine fiction*.

non-fiction publications who came to embody certain political ideals— as the vehicle for their satirical portrayal of opposed ideologies to their own and for the conveyance of a message of moral, social, or political reform. Moreover, whether explicitly or implicitly acknowledging Cervantes' influence, authors would expect most eighteenth-century readers to be familiar with the popular quixotic figure, hence allowing the recognition of Cervantes' novel as their hypotext and the identification of their quixotic character with his *mad* knight, with the added ideological implications such a parallelism brought to the hypertexts and their readers.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, the instances of *quixotic fiction* that one finds at the turn of the century are very naturally inscribed in the well-known *war of ideas* fought by two fractions which came to be known as the Jacobins and the anti-Jacobins.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the resulting fictions of this war, in fact, would ascribe to an anti-Jacobin or conservative reading of society. Although very different in tone and answering to different moments in the reaction against radicalism or the effects of the French Revolution, these fictions would all share their message of the condemnation of any assault on the British *status quo*. Many of these writings were actually novels. The conservatives, who prior to the 1790s had been the greater critics of the genre, once they realized the potential it had in advertising their cause and counter-arguing the radicals fictions of the time, were content to cease attacking it, and even to endorse it (Grenby 2001:24). This endorsement led to an overflow of anti-Jacobin novels, all of them with one most crucial aim; that is, to use the novel *well* and to counteract the *ill* use that the radicals had done of the genre through their pernicious works of fiction. Conservative discourse then built a series of metaphors to describe the differences between both kinds of novels, for instance, the contrast between novelistic poison and antidote, between foul and nurturing literary food. These rhetoric devices emphasize that the vehicle is the same, and that the novel is a malleable container. Moreover, it highlights the intertextual play which took place between these works of fiction, with the anti-Jacobin novels responding to, or more often paroding, radical texts. April London, for example, identifies this intertextuality as the most poignant characteristic of anti-Jacobin fiction. Defining the relationship between both radical and anti-radical novels as “symbiotic to the point of parasitism”, she considers intertextuality as “ubiquitous

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<sup>4</sup> The concepts of *hypertext* and *hypotext*, and the later *intertextuality* and *metatextuality*, are here employed as developed by Genette in his seminal *Palimpsestes. La littérature de second degré* (1982).

<sup>5</sup> This *war* and its participants have been amply described by critics such as Butler (1975) or Grenby (2001). On the ambiguity inherent in the terms “Jacobin” and “anti-Jacobin” see Kelly (1976).

in relation both to form and meaning” as it ranges from “satire through characterization; [...] through quotation; [...] through place; [...] and through plot” (2000:77). However, anti-Jacobins moved beyond intertextuality understood as the quotation or even plagiarism of Jacobin texts, and would also provide a satirical metatextual comment on them. Moreover, they relied on their readers’ knowledge of the fraught ideological and literary context and employed what Kristeva (1980) would term the absorption of social texts, the preconceived ideas of the Jacobin discourse, to criticise it without the need of quoting it. Anti-radical novels then establish a Bakhtinian dialogue with previous works, integrating their discourse even if only to aim to subordinate it to a monological ideological voice by their use of parody and satire. This dialogism could be seen, of course, as also learnt from Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*.<sup>6</sup> Don Quixote sustained his illusions through the use of quotations extracted from his readings that could sanction the propriety of his behaviour and beliefs, allowing Cervantes to parody chivalric romances. Eighteenth-century anti-radical Quixotes also provide the ground for an appropriation of the readership of “political romances” in order to criticize that same genre, “combining an attack on the public domain of radical politics with censure of the various narrative forms through which radical principles are expressed” (London 2000:73), even suggesting that radical writers themselves are “unable to grasp the distinction between the real and the illusory” (2000:74). This quixotic parody is thus employed so as to oppose the cankerous origin of the unattainable and dangerous ideals anti-radicals were to satirize for the reader’s benefit.

And when taken as a whole body, anti-Jacobin novels did share a common and coherent strategy for their shaping of the reader’s mind, in which satire would become their predominant mode of discourse. More relevantly, they would employ the “satirical methods of Sterne and Smollett” (Wilson 2007:39), and would then turn to quixotic satire in particular. As a result, they filled the novel with a “cast of victims and quixotes, rakes and manipulators, [who] could not have been better suited” for their political purposes (Grenby 2001:11). These satirical novels had their clearest antecedents first in Samuel Butler’s attack on Puritans in *Hudibras* (I, 1663; II, 1664; III, 1678), where he developed the conception of the quixotic character and his aspirations as a butt for the author’s satire, and then in Richard Graves’ development of the quixotic satirical plot in the *The Spiritual Quixote* (1773), in which his quixotic “victim of temporary insanity” reinforces “the traditional notion that enthusiasts are fundamentally sick or mad” (Staves 1972:199, 200), while still allowing for the possibility of their superior moral nature. Butler’s

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<sup>6</sup> On the importance of dialogism, and its different manifestations in Cervantes’ novel, see Pardo (2005).

interpretation of the Quixote co-existed as well throughout the century with Henry Fielding's vision of the quixotic Adams in *Joseph Andrews* (1742) as a morally superior fool who serves as an instrument in the hands of his creator to criticise the surrounding world; or even with Laurence Sterne's conception of quixotism as an innocuous *mania* or *hobby-horse*, as portrayed in his *Tristram Shandy* (1759-69). The subsequent Romantic age, in which the dialectical and literary battle takes place, carries this dichotomy one step further with the radicalization of both the "hard school" and its satire against human enthusiasm, and the benevolent or "soft school" that praised quixotic idealism (Mandel 1958:154-5). That is, in the Romantic period the quixotic tradition would display the coeval portrayal of the ridiculous Quixote of Cervantes' first part, usually in anti-radical fiction, and the heroic idealist of the second, mainly in radical novels. Therefore, the deeply-rooted tradition of quixotism in British literature, with the ambiguous role of the Quixote developed particularly in this last part of the century as both *butt of* and *instrument for satire* (Staves 1972:194), provides an excellent context in which to frame the critique, on the one hand, of a series of dupes of the new political or philosophical movements and what are seen as their unattainable, when not utterly absurd, aspirations and, on the other hand, of the unscrupulous manipulators who embody the dangers posed by the radicals' ideas. Consequently, readers would be presented with two perfectly distinguishable types of characters. The first are those credulous Quixotes who "accept the radical programme of perfectibility and innate goodness" and who, nevertheless, can appear motivated as well by a quixotic "desire for heroic status" and "self-aggrandizement" (London 2000:75). Therefore, appropriating the radical and Romantic notion of the Quixote as "an idealistic young man pursuing virtue in a society corrupted by court government and culture" who moreover required a revolution to change the world (Kelly 2001:146), anti-radical authors subvert the unquestioned positive reading or sanctification of quixotism and present the quixotic figures as fools and as a danger for their own country. Anti-radical authors then respond to idealistic radical characters shaped by William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, Charlotte Smith, Mary Hays or Mary Wollstonecraft, and even include these novelists themselves among their ridiculous and deluded creations. The second group is that of the "self-interested and often criminal" radicals who manipulate the Quixotes and who "write themselves into positions of authority" but are never deluded into reading the world any differently than it actually is (London 2000:75-6). In this sense, anti-Jacobin novelists again return to Cervantes, rewriting characters such as his scheming Duke and Duchess, who represent a social and moral order that falls short of Don Quixote's superiority; a supremacy given by his innocence and good intentions even if he is still immersed in his erred vision of reality. Therefore, the abovementioned radical novelists or philosophers could not only appear as deluded fools, but as deluding dangers for innocent citizens, depending on the more or less comic intent of the novel in question. In addition,

because of this portrayal of radicals as a group of “intriguers, conspirators, and seducers” which aim to dupe the innocent Quixote to gain some benefit, anti-radical novelists recurrently portray their Quixote as a young member of the landed gentry and, moreover, they repeatedly gender it female, “since ‘woman’ had long been a figure for the subvertible, seducible element in a social class and since the villain [...] aims to subvert the state by subverting ‘domestic woman’ and domesticity” (Kelly 2001:146). Youth and women, the most uncritical readers of literature or life, then epitomise the innocence of Britain and the danger of corruption it was exposed to by the *artful seduction* of radicalism, whether expressed in fiction or non-fiction, in written texts or in characters that also required reading.

In this line, the anti-Jacobin novels analysed here present a similar employment of the Quixote in order to develop their didactic conservative message. Nevertheless, the degree in which these anti-Jacobin authors ascribed to the “hard school”, that is, the degree in which their critique was expressed either towards the Quixote’s foolishness or the cruelty and absurdity of the radical principles, would vary according to the moment in which their novel appeared and to how negatively the abovementioned *self-aggrandizement* affected the established social conventions. Hence, there would be a change in tone as the narratives attach or detach themselves from the decisive political events of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and as the quixotic figure shifted from a positive to a negative interpretation and *vice versa*. Consequently, anti-Jacobin quixotic fiction provides a more relevant contribution to the tradition of quixotism in Britain than might be expected owing to its assumed ideological homogeneity.

### *THE HISTORY OF SIR GEORGE WARRINGTON, OR THE POLITICAL QUIXOTE: THE AWAKENING OF A NAÏVE BRITISH KNIGHT*

With the subtitle of their novel, Jane and Elisabeth Purbeck clearly state their intention of employing their Quixote as a political agent. Moreover, they seem to express a desire to differentiate this novel from their prior instance of quixotic fiction, *William Thornborough, the Benevolent Quixote* (1791).<sup>7</sup> Both novels offer a perfect example of the change experienced in the tradition of quixotism after the

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<sup>7</sup> Attributed to the “author of the Female Quixote” in its first page and believed to be by Charlotte Lennox by several critics –for example, Miriam R. Small (1969)–, *Sir George* is now thought to have been written either by Jane Purbeck or by both the sisters.

events which took place in France in 1793 and the publication of such works as Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) or William Godwin's *Enquire concerning Political Justice* (1793). While their first novel illustrates the conception of quixotism as a benevolent and enthusiastic philanthropy, as a highly sentimental will to do good to others, in their second attempt at the creation of quixotic fiction the delusion of the protagonist has become political idealism. This transformation in the notion of quixotism is highlighted by the change in the literary source of the protagonist's delusion: from the sentimental novels William reads, such as *Sir Charles Grandison*, the later Quixote shifts to radical propaganda. Sir George Warrington, the political Quixote alluded to in the subtitle and a probable reference to George Washington, is a well-meant young man who is forced by an accident to remain confined for several weeks, a time he spends devouring political treatises such as the *History of the French Revolution* and the *Rights of Man*. From these readings he acquires a utopian vision of the world, rendered possible by his limited experience in society:

From a total want of knowledge of the world, and of the general character of men, and from a guileless mind, whose first principle was benevolence, he had such an idea of equality corresponding with the manners of the golden age. [...] in the wildness and vivacity of his imagination, he formed pictures of bliss that never really existed, and only in Arcadia ever ideally: he fancied all vice would be banished from society; and that every man [...] would cultivate those virtues alone which distinguished our first parents before the fall. (Purbeck and Purberck 1797:I, 187-8)

Sir George therefore fits the description of the uncritical dupe deluded by the utopianism taught by radical writing. He gives the finishing touch to his quixotism by a desire to wander through the country, helping those in need and liberating the "oppressed nation" (Purbeck and Purberck 1797:I, 33), wishing to "render his own name equally famous to posterity" as those heroes who had emancipated their countries from "slavery and subjection" (*ibid.*:I, 31), therefore fulfilling the aspirations to a certain *heroism* which is intrinsic as well to Cervantes' knight. In another parallelism with Cervantes, the Purbecks parody the language of radicalism with the use of such grand words as "slavery and subjection" or "oppression", also present in the American revolutionary discourse Sir George's name alludes to. This discourse is so discordant with the reality of the almost idyllic Britain that the authors present that it can become nothing but ludicrous to the reader, in the same manner Don Quixote's old-fashioned chivalric language was the source of wonder and mirth. Language shapes identity, and Sir George's construction as a Quixote, different from his fellow Englishmen, is recurrently stressed by this use of radical rhetoric. Sir George can thereby be seen as a clear descendent from Graves' novel and its critique of extreme enthusiasm, although transferring its attack from exalted religiousness to political enthusiasm. In this sense, Sir George will hence become a



philanthropic Quixote more disruptive than his benevolent sibling in his social aspirations, and will be used as a more obvious butt of the authors' satire to prove how ridiculous and even dangerous the radical principles are.

Following anti-Jacobin conventions, Sir George will have to learn that the Revolution is only a source for death and destruction, rather than for social improvement. In this sense, Sir George also walks the path of the Spanish knight for, as happened with Don Quixote, his main lesson will be to distinguish literature from life, illusions from reality. The account of the extremely beautiful and virtuous Louisa Moreland, an orphan and the heroine of the novel, of her escape from the Reign of Terror and the atrocities she witnessed –the destruction of nunneries, or the bloody massacres taking place under Robespierre–; the objective descriptions found in the newspapers of the day; and the widespread knowledge of all British citizens of the horrors of the Revolution, permeate the text and finally enlighten the hero's mind, while they remind the readers of what they have already heard on a daily basis.

On the way to enlightenment, Sir George will encounter many unprincipled characters that define themselves as radicals and will furthermore need to discover how the new ideas threaten wealth and status, as he faces the negative consequences of the revolutionary principles of liberty and equality. Throughout the novel, several characters use them as excuse to steal or climb in the social ladder by unlawful means. In two episodes that vaguely resemble Don Quixote's adventure with the galley slaves, readers are presented with Mr Goldney, whose exalted and liberal discourse with the hero inspires his butler to steal from him on a "principle of equality" (Purbeck and Purberck 1797:II, 17-19), or Mr Thornton's footman, who runs away with his master's eldest daughter because he has heard him say all men are "equal" (*ibid.*:I, 104). Through these ridiculous examples, the authors highlight how implausible the revolutionary notions are and how they may turn against those who preach them. More importantly, they emphasize the idea that what lies behind the liberal principles is mere personal gain. In order to stress this idea further, they present an example of what would become a stereotypical "vaurien" or rascal, Mr Davenport, an unprincipled character that dupes the hero so as to obtain some financial advantage. Instead of aiming to cure Sir George from his folly, as the wise Mr Thompson does, Davenport echoes Cervantes' scheming characters, employing the Quixote's own heroic and idealistic discourse to manipulate him. Once again, language is employed to mould reality, to represent Davenport's self-interest as generosity, and by analogy Sir George's financial contribution to his cause not as sedition, but as philanthropy. As had happened with Don Quixote, the nature of Sir George's delusion is again intertwined with the ambiguity of language and its power to relate to very different systems of reference, hence its danger for uncritical or unsuspecting characters. The Quixote will then have to make an effort of critical

reading and judgment, not only of literary texts, but also of textual bodies and of the ideology and moral they represent.

Confronted in the end with irrefutable evidence of all these instances of selfishness and even cruelty, Sir George follows the quixotic pattern of disclosure and increased awareness as he faces the implausibility of his noble aspirations and he encounters the true nature of the characters around him. In the end, he is cured from his delusion and starts acting like a rational –or in the anti-Jacobin interpretation, conservative– man again, deciding to return to the care of his property and to the perpetuation of his family’s name and estate through a sound marriage with the worthy Louisa, protecting hence the two bastions of the *status quo*: wealth and status. Although he does not literally die as Don Quixote did, his quixotic persona metaphorically expires once he abandons his ramblings and he returns to reason, following the model of a much more romantic and benevolent Quixote established by novels such as Charlotte Lennox’s *The Female Quixote* (1752), in which the heterosexual romantic plot contributes to mark the final cure and the return to the foundation of British stability, the family, either in the role of *pater familias* or wife and mother, depending on the Quixote’s gender.<sup>8</sup>

### *THE INFERNAL QUIXOTE. A TALE OF THE DAY: A GALLERY OF DANGEROUS QUIXOTES*

Indeed a tale of its days, *The Infernal Quixote*, by Charles Lucas, is inscribed in what are considered the peak years of reaction (1798-1801) and, therefore, is even more overtly political than *Sir George*. From 1797, the war with France and its financial consequences, the attempts of French invasions in England and the Irish rebellion increase the conservative fictional production as well as its radicalism. If before 1798 the political or philosophical Quixotes were rather circumscribed to the role of benevolent dupes or fools, one may encounter at this time very different characters. *The Infernal Quixote* portrays a whole gallery of what have been identified as ideological Quixotes; its pages are “peopled with a host of fanatics and radicals” of which “some are philosophical sceptics, some militant atheists, others

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<sup>8</sup> As Pardo (2004) has stated, Lennox provides a model for these novels as she offered a romantic plot which runs parallel to the quixotic one, and a highly moral and romantic heroine who is admirable *despite* her quixotism. On the cure and *death* of the female quixotic persona see, for instance, Levin (1995).

masons, and still others radical democrats” (Staves 1972:201). Despite their differences, they have in common their obsessive and unrelenting ascription to their ideals, mostly in order to obtain some kind of profit. This obsession or wrongly understood enthusiasm will come to be identified with quixotism; hence, quixotic madness becomes a more universal experience, almost a mania or one of Sterne’s hobby-horses, rather than an idealistic delusion. The relentlessness in the prosecution of personal aspiration –of *self-aggrandizement*, using once again London’s terminology, in this case with obvious negative connotations– is shown by Lucas’s main character, Lord James Marauder, a scheming and cruel nobleman, compared throughout the novel with Milton’s Prince of Hell, and an ardent defender of the principles that inspired the French Revolution. His ideals, as those of the Francophile philosophers, will be described by Lucas as “diabolism”, hence the epithet of *infernal* (Lucas 1801:II, 224). With this definition of quixotism, more emphatically negative than the Purbecks’, Lucas’s novel stresses his political message and conforms to its nature as anti-Jacobin propaganda. In this regard, the horrors occurred in France are mirrored in the novel by the Irish Revolution of 1798, the event around which most of the plot revolves. Lucas depicts in minute detail every preparation, every battle, every assault, every death, therefore bringing to the closer setting of Ireland the full horror of the actions of the radicals.

The name *Quixote* applied to these “diabolists” or radicals is explained by Lucas thus:

Some people, without Judge or Jury, condemn them at once as CACODÆMONS; perhaps the salving term of INFERNAL QUIXOTES may fruit them, as it seems the fashion of the present day to rank all assassins and self-murderers under the general name of MADMEN. (Lucas 1801:II, 224)

Lucas hence connects the lack of scruples of his political characters with that ideological madness that was a recurrent presence in eighteenth-century fiction under the name of *quixotism*. However, despite the harsh satire of his novel, Lucas still distinguishes between the soft and the hard types of quixotism. In the line of Graves or the Purbecks, Lucas portrays the example of a true Quixote who believes in idealistic principles owing to an excessive amount of enthusiasm: Philip Harrety, a youth described as moral and philanthropic, who, in the train of the Spanish knight, confines himself to exhaustively read religious treatises. Consequently, he erects himself in a moral champion who arduously fights against all forms of vice, which leads people to consider him a “madman” (Lucas 1801:II, 343). Harrety also proves morally superior to his environment, especially in the midst of imported radical debauchery; his quixotism is indeed a “salving term” for it implies not only delusion but good-will, and hence eases the Quixote’s condemnation. In contrast with this benign idealism, Marauder’s radical friends will be described as those *mad* “self-murderers” and “assassins”, who will very consciously manipulate radical

principles and use it against others, once again creating a dichotomy between deluded and deluding characters. Interestingly, Lucas also implies a reference to Godwin and Wollstonecraft as a mixture of both, with their obvious caricature in Mr and Mrs Cloudley –a surname that refers to their clouded judgement– and with the role their texts play in the creation of the infernal Marauder and in the seduction and fall of young women.

The ridiculous characterization of British radicals, usually with a reference to real-life characters, is then exemplified in Lucas's novel by the tragicomic story of Mr and Mrs Cloudley and their children –Lucretia, Amazonia, Brutus, Voltaire and Tom Pain (sic). Exalted defenders of radical ideas and two examples of foolish Quixotes that try to live up to their revolutionary principles, the couple inhabit the most unbearable chaos. Moreover, Mr Cloudley is driven mad in the end when he discovers that none of his numerous children are his, whereas Mrs Cloudley elopes with a younger man. All principles of domestic economy, honour, Christian values, are forgotten and the consequences must be paid. Finally, in this example, as in all others throughout the novel, the reader has been encouraged to perceive Jacobinism as a delusion which becomes dangerous for those traditional values that serve as basis for England's stability, thus fulfilling the conventions of anti-Jacobin fiction, even if, at the same time, it may be presented as a ridiculous enthusiasm or quixotic mania.

In this line, Lucas also depicts the Irish peasants as unknowing and deceived people, led by their superiors into a meaningless Revolution. One of those leaders will be Marauder, who, well-read in radical texts which include Godwin's and Paine's treatises, will adopt an Irish identity, Patrick McGinnis, to foster and take an active part in the upheaval, leading a malleable mob, only to promote his political and financial interests in the country. Once more, the radicals are portrayed as manipulators, "out for only individual gain, simply exploiting any fool thoughtless enough to fall into the ambit of the new philosophy" (Grenby 2001:11). And if Marauder's part as instigator of the death of many innocent people is not enough to prove this point, his seduction of the coquettish Emily –helped by the appeal of the literary work of many French novelists or British radicals, such as Wollstonecraft and Godwin, or by the promise of female freedom brought by the Revolution– evidences how Marauder is the epitome of that same "villanous vaurien" found in *Sir George*. In this sense, Lucas again proclaims the inappropriateness of terming him a Quixote like others in the novel; his is "not the usual relationship of a quixote figure", for while "other characters are taken in by what they read; he knows better" (Staves 1972:201). Although he may appear a Quixote in his construction of a revolutionary *persona*, all the elements characteristic of other quixotic figures are absent in Marauder: there is no confusion between life and literature, between truth and fiction, there is not even the presence of some higher moral or romantic

idealism through which to interpret reality. The epistemological problem which lies at the core of quixotism has disappeared, and Marauder is left not a deluded Quixote, but a mere villain with the *obsession* of doing as much harm as possible. Lucas' attempt to use satire as a weapon is so blatant that it is transformed into mere libel,<sup>9</sup> while quixotism blurs and almost disappears in the midst of the threat of radicalism leaving but a feeble trick rather than a true quixotic plot. This is confirmed by its very unusual ending. After recurrently stressing the lack of conscience of his so-called Quixote, Marauder is destined to die a violent death to put a stop to his inexorable ambition and obsession with evil-doing. In the end, Lucas grants no comic relief, no cure, and no possible absolution. The author emphasises his condemnation of the radicals by granting them dishonourable and untimely deaths: they either commit suicide or are killed for their crimes. In addition, female radical Quixotes are not spared either. In a very different plot from what Lennox, or even the later Barrett, contrived for their heroines, Lucas allows Mrs Cloudley or Emily to fall into disgrace by their loss of virtue. While they do not literally die, it is the core of female identity in eighteenth-century Britain, virtue, which is sacrificed and which transforms them into outcasts to society, as good as dead in extreme anti-Jacobin thought. Satire then aimed only at the true Quixotes or at the so-called ones, and not at the world around them, is a sign of Lucas's detachment from the tradition of British quixotism in the line of Fielding or Lennox and his ascription to the *hard* reading or the plainly satirical interpretation of radical quixotic delusion.

### *THE HEROINE, OR HOW TO LAUGH AWAY QUIXOTISM*

Although 1802 brought the Peace of Amiens, the fears raised by the Revolution did not subside and the financial instability triggered by the Napoleonic wars gave new strength to the conservative attack on anything imported from France, especially its ideas. This context explains why in 1813 conservative authors such as Barrett are still employing quixotic narratives to highlight the dangers of radical ideologies. However, with the greater representatives of radical thought retracting from their original statements –as is the case of Godwin and the tamed re- editions of his *Political Justice* (1796, 1798)–, Jacobinism becomes an archaism, a

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<sup>9</sup> According to London, in anti-Jacobin fiction “the embodiment of ideal possibility to which satire aspires finally declines into little more than vituperative attacks on those radicals who question them” (2000:78).

matter of laughter rather than of political consequence. Therefore, Barrett's novel rejects a serious approach to his Quixote's political notions and offers a highly amusing tableau of characters and situations. The Quixote is in this case a young girl, Cherry, daughter of a farmer, who has read too many novels and who believes herself a heroine. She names herself Cherubina de Willoughby and decides to roam around the country in search of adventures and noble parents, while she also escapes the suitor chosen by her father. In her wandering she lives real and imagined adventures and is exposed to the dealings of many unprincipled characters. In the end, she will be cured from her delusion and brought back to her proper place in the world by her marriage with Robert Stuart, the formerly rejected suitor.

With his novel Barrett returns to *literary quixotism*, that is, to the use of works of fiction as the source of his character's quixotism (Staves 1972:193). *The Heroine* is hence placed at the margins of the aforementioned *ideological quixotism* and of anti-Jacobin fiction. As it becomes detached from its ideological antecedents, the novel reverts to Cervantes' original parodic intent and abandons the flagrant satire of Lucas. While the later fictionalised the Irish Revolution in all its cruelty, Barrett, with the distance given by time, decides to undermine it by ridiculing the reasons behind the peasants' uprising. In words of Jerry Sullivan, a former revolutionary now reconverted in Cherry's Sancho-like companion, he was convinced to rebel by gentlemen who pronounced "the longest words in the world" and who persuaded him "that old Ireland was going to ruin" (1909:217). From this it must be derived that the danger in 1798, as it is in 1813, lies in the power of "the longest words in the world", because it will be the novels Cherry reads that will fill her head with notions of social climbing and revolution. Moreover, significantly enough, it will be in French novels, which have become "dissolute" and try to "win the heart" so as to subsequently "corrupt it" (1909:293), where Barrett places the origin of Cherry's quixotism. In this sense, Barrett does conform to the anti-Jacobin view of British radicals as dupes and fools, and even more so as he chooses those two groups that were believed to be the more "susceptible readers": the lower orders and women (Grenby 2001:13). The latter is especially relevant, as, by placing a woman deluded by fiction as the main character of his novel, Barrett gives new life to the conservatives' "negative associations of gender, genre, and the novel" (Kelly 1990:226), present at the core of what may be termed *female quixotism*, with its cornerstone in the abovementioned novel by Lennox, who transforms the old Quixote into a young, beautiful and accomplished girl, deluded by her reading of French romances. Female quixotism is a recurrent presence in anti-Jacobin works because it allows emphasising the seducing nature of the villain or the text, as stated above and as seen in all three novels. In the Purbecks' novel, Mr Thornton's footman elopes with Miss Charlotte Thornton, a romantic and sentimental female

Quixote who reads reality through the lens of her favourite French novels and who is deluded by her footman's knowledge of the rhetoric employed by French authors. In the end, she is rescued and returns home before her virtue is further compromised. Lucas's stance is less benevolent: Emily Bellaire is rendered unchaste and then abandoned by Marauder, who employs works by Rousseau or Voltaire in his plan of seduction. Maria Cloudley is described as a woman who reads and writes, and who has one of the largest libraries of female authors in England. She is also seduced and deluded by radical philosophy into abandoning virtue and ruining herself and her family. Although Barrett's attachment to a tradition of *literary* and *soft-school* quixotism represented by Lennox bears witness to how he moves beyond the use of his Quixote as a mere satirical puppet, it is nevertheless true that he does not omit the necessary moral warning to his young female readers, which also found expression in other quixotic novels now considered canonical works of a conservative tradition of female quixotism.<sup>10</sup> Cherry's disruptive quixotism is then based on the anti-Jacobin notion that women who read in an uncontrolled way represent a danger for themselves and for society. In the same way the footman, Mr Davenport or Marauder employed the language of revolution to fool the innocent and quixotic figures, so do two other characters, Betterton and Grundy, use the language and conventions of romance to delude Cherry, to the point of dressing up as knights or minstrels and paroding the plot and style of her favourite works. In the end, she almost falls prey to their machinations, which were destined to gain possession of her body and her money, and which would have defiled once again the domestic woman as representative of the core values of virtue and class. Although Barrett never loses his comic treatment of the ridiculous villains and their less than subtle attempts at deceiving the heroine, so obvious for the reader, the critique to the effects of novel reading on the mind of young girls is still implicit. This effect moves beyond a mere loss of virtue: the economic and social consequences are several. First of all, echoing Don Quixote, Cherry assumes greater social significance becoming a lady, Cherubina de Willoughby, or even acting like a man, whether as a knight, leading an army and defending the feudal system, or as a revolutionary leader, promising "every thing" to the mob (1909:248). Secondly, her rambling causes great disruption and material damage –for example, she blows up a house and storms into another– and makes people incur in great expenses –as a heroine she believes it is her duty not to pay for anything she needs, thereby leaving it for others to reimburse her numerous debts. Finally, the threat of her marriage to a fortune-hunter and the loss of her dowry and estate announce the dangers which radicalism hides for wealth and status, both

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<sup>10</sup> One could mention, for example, Jane West's *A Gossip's Story* (1796) or Elisabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), which also responds to Mary Hays's radical Quixote in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796).

bases of the conservative discourse. Therefore, though more subtly achieved than by the Purbecks or Lucas, Barrett conforms to the pattern of anti-Jacobin fiction through a satiric plot that criticises the materialism and baseness of Grundy and Betterton as well as the danger they represent for the *status quo*. What is more, he also presents his Quixote as a valid *butt of satire*, as he punishes her social aspirations with a great amount of ridicule, with slaps, falls, or pranks, much more in Cervantes' style than in Lennox's. Finally, again in the recurrent quixotic sequence of disclosure and awakening to reality, Cherry discovers the true intentions and characters of other people: kidnapped by Grundy and Betterton she will overhear them abuse her heroic aspirations and express their wish to obtain her money. In a pattern learnt once again from Lennox, Barrett can then execute the cure of his Quixote and re-establish Cherry in her proper role through her marriage with the representative of the *status quo*, Stuart.

Barrett's political message, then, is that, whether novels or ideas, all import from France is dangerous for Britain; however, the humorous treatment of that danger and of his Quixote's rather diluted and fantastical political aspirations detach him from the anti-Jacobin reading of the Quixote as political agent and render him closer to that interpretation of quixotism as a romantic colouring of the world found in the tradition of female quixotism established by Lennox.

## THE POLITICAL USE OF THE QUIXOTIC PLOT: ANOTHER LINK IN THE BRITISH CERVANTEAN HERITAGE

In conclusion, these novels, though different in their approach to the effects of radicalism in Britain, are nevertheless unified in their condemnation of it. The three novels are political in their intention, portraying the dangers of the abandonment of traditional values and hence helping to shape the collective reading mind so as to foster a reaction against those liberal ideals in vogue in the late eighteenth century. Their reaction is articulated through the use of the quixotic formula, however distinct it becomes in the hands of each author. Despite its condemnation of radicalism, *Sir George* is indebted to Graves' quixotic benevolent characterization and satirical plot, and presents the Quixote as an innocent and morally superior dupe. Lucas radicalises his use of quixotism in his more serious answer to those historical circumstances key to understand the conservative reaction. In this sense, he creates foolishly deluded Quixotes or employs the name *Quixote* only to trigger in the mind of the reader the consciousness of a certain radical formula that



Marauder uses to his own advantage. Finally, as time and the political events in Britain allow a certain detachment from the early anti-Jacobin reaction, Barrett returns to a much more comic and parodic plot, as he chooses, once again, a romance reader as his Quixote, rather than an ideological enthusiast. In doing so, he clearly moves back to the use of that formula learnt from Lennox. Nevertheless, although subordinated to his parodic intentions, Barrett preserves the satirical plot borrowed from Graves and adapted to the current political situation of the Napoleonic wars.

These novels therefore constituted a remarkable trend in the reception of the Cervantes' novel in Britain, as they stretched the satirical interpretation of *Don Quixote* from the seventeenth century well into the later Romantic era, in which their anti-Romantic vision would coexist with the emerging and influential spiritual vision of the Quixote. In this sense, they provided the link between both centuries and between works as distant in time as Butler's *Hudibras* and Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), and evidenced the richness and complexity of the quixotic motif even at the service of a political agenda.

Moreover, with these ideological and satiric quixotic fictions, conservative authors aimed at establishing what would become the standard of *Britishness* readers should recognise and support, thereby, in a way, even laying the foundations for the image of the British self so characteristic of subsequent Victorian literature. It is interesting to note how a Spanish literary character, Don Quixote, or rather the plot or formula it spawned, played a substantial part in this process, in this case a negative one, through his association with the French foreign ideas that were to be condemned. This political use of the Quixotic plot, or, in other words, this reading of Don Quixote as political agent, is therefore one of the most surprising and original turns in the history of the reception of Cervantes' masterpiece in the British long eighteenth century.

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