

Courtly love vs. real love in don quijote: cervantes' view



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

One recurring motif in Don Quijote is love relationships that develop between males and females and the many different consequences these relationships can have. In fact, most of the “ stories” found within the text of the novel are driven in some way by the force of love. The actions of Don Quijote himself are all supposedly spurred on by his love for his lady Dulcinea del Toboso, a woman whom he incidentally has never physically met. Throughout the course of the work, Cervantes seems to be criticizing the notions of courtly love and how it would function in real society, saying that the idealistic belief in courtly love does not translate well into the real world.

Love, to Cervantes, cannot exist under false pretenses and phony emotions; it should be based on genuine feelings of compassion and exist only between two individuals who share an equal bond of respect and understanding. The first significant story where love plays a major role is the tale involving the shepherdess Marcela and how her incredible beauty inflames the desires of those around her. The former student Grisostomo falls in love with this lady due to her other-worldly beauty; a physical attraction that stems only from the desire of sexual gratification and is not rooted in any type of actual human love between two people. Eventually, Grisostomo’s feelings grow so strong that they induce him into a state of extreme despair that he eventually perishes from. While such a situation may seem far-fetched today, Cervantes is perhaps over-dramatizing events so as to effectively satirize some of the concepts and ideas about love that might have been prevalent in his time. It is made clear in the telling of the story that Marcela tried in no way to lure the desires of men onto her heavenly body or cause them to fall hopelessly in love with her. In telling the story to Don Quijote, Pedro says, “ No, she was so careful about her honor that, of all those who

<https://assignbuster.com/courtly-love-vs-real-love-in-don-quijote-cervantes-view/>

wooded and courted her, not one ever boasted, and in truth not one of them could have boasted, that she'd given him even the tiniest, smallest prospect of getting what she wanted." (66). The acknowledgment of this statement should automatically render all complaints against Marcela's coyness as absurd; she does not entice the men to love her so thus she should not be blamed for any of the consequences of their physical attractions. Those who pine for Marcela become so consumed by their obsessions that they fail to see where the blame lies for their anguish and falsely place it on Marcela's shoulders. Just a few sentences after his previous statement of how Marcela never leads her suitors on, Pedro adds, " And yet, living this way, she does more damage, here on this earth, than if she carried the plague, because her pleasantness and her beauty draw the hearts of those who deal with her, and then they court her, and they love her, but her scorn and honesty drives them to despair, and they don't know what to say to her, except to call her cruel and ungrateful, and other things like that, which is in truth how she acts." (66). Because of this attitude towards her, many of the people place guilt on Marcela for the death of Grisostomo, sometimes even acting as if what she did to him was tantamount to murder. On pg. 67, one of the men refers to her as " the murderous shepherd", while Grisostomo's best friend Ambrosio does not hesitate to pin the burden of responsibility on Marcela's shoulder. He says, " It was here...where Marcela that last time so scornfully, so bluntly put an end to it, and drove him to finish off the tragedy of his miserable life" (72). Though many would blame Marcela for the death of Grisostomo, Cervantes subtly criticizes the actions of her suitors by portraying them as irrational and sometimes pathetic. Clearly he does not try to evoke pity from us over Grisostomo's fate; instead he uses his death as an <https://assignbuster.com/courtly-love-vs-real-love-in-don-quijote-cervantes-view/>

instrument for which to illustrate the pit-falls and ridiculous consequences that can result from courtly love or love based merely on physical desire. The words of Marcela herself seem to speak most reasonably and illustrate plainly Cervantes view on the matter. Marcela defends herself, exclaiming, “Heaven...has made me beautiful—so very beautiful that you are moved...but I do not understand how, because it is loved, that which is loved for its beauty is obliged to love whoever loves it” (77). Marcela then goes on to define the difference, in her eyes and probably Cervantes, between love and desire. She says, “...for everything beautiful does not inspire love...Some beauty is good to see, but does not give rise to affection...And according to what I have heard, true love is not divisible, and must be voluntary, not forced.” (77). Marcela clearly does not love those who love her, nor does she attempt to augment the desires of those who love her. She therefore can not be blamed for the demise of Grisostomo; the man was a victim to his own false view of love. The love between Cardenio and Luscinda is perhaps the best example in the novel of what Cervantes thinks true love should be. The affection between these two people is mutual, as Cardenio says when relating his story to Don Quijote and Sancho: “ I loved, longed for, and adored this Luscinda almost from the moment I was born, and she loved me, with all the innocence and simple good will of childhood.” (144). When Don Fernando treacherously steals Luscinda from Cardenio, Cardenio goes crazy and becomes a tormented soul who lives his shattered existence in the Sierra Morena mountains. His afflictions parallel those of Grisostomo, who also suffered much when he was denied the one he adored. However, Cardenio’s situation is different because Luscinda actually loves Cardenio back. Because of this, Cervantes does not let Cardenio endure a similar fate

<https://assignbuster.com/courtly-love-vs-real-love-in-don-quijote-cervantes-view/>

as Grisostomo and instead allows him to get his beloved Luscinda back. The character of Don Fernando serves to show the destructive power that false love can have, as it is his inability to control his desire that leads to such anguish for Cardenio, Luscinda and Dorotea. At first, Don Fernando much desires Dorotea, telling her that he is in love with her and asking her to give in to his desires. His feelings of love for her cannot be genuine though, for as Dorotea explains, “ And he had barely so much as seen me when, as he told me afterwards, he fell every bit as madly in love with me...” (181). These feelings Don Fernando had were of lust, and it was these desires that drove him to trick Dorotea to sleep with him if he promised his hand to her in marriage. Don Fernando’s desire is next turned towards Luscinda, whom he treacherously steals from the clutches of his friend Cardenio and marries. This marriage is not destined to survive either because true love is not involved; the feelings Don Fernando has for Luscinda, great as they may be, are based more on lust than love, and Luscinda cannot return the affection because her love goes out to Cardenio. Things work out in the end between all these characters because Dorotea convinces Don Fernando that she is the one who should belong to him. She makes the claim that love must exist between two people who share equal affections for each other: “ And if you think about it, how much easier it will be to bend to your will someone who adores you, rather than trying to guide someone who hates you to love you instead.” (250). So in the end, Luscinda ends up with Cardenio and Dorotea ends up with Don Fernando; pairings that satisfy the course of what true love demands. Though it does not function within the actual events of Don Quijote, the priest’s reading of “ The Story of the Man Who Couldn’t Keep from Prying” is crucial in analyzing the novel in terms of Cervantes view on <https://assignbuster.com/courtly-love-vs-real-love-in-don-quijote-cervantes-view/>

love. This is a rather tragic story that clearly illuminates the danger of wanting a woman to match one's vision of courtly love as a true, perfect lover. Anselmo asks his best friend Lothario to make passes on his wife Camila in an attempt to test her faithfulness and loyalty. Anselmo has no reason to suspect Camila of being dishonest, he simply wants to satisfy his own vision of a flawless woman. The consequences of this are disastrous; Lothario inadvertently falls in love with Camila and becomes her lover. When Camila suspects that Anselmo might find out about the affair, she and Lothario run away, leaving Anselmo with the ashes of the love he once had. He, just like Grisostomo, dies from the anguish that he bears, though he does in the end realize the folly of his ways. The last words he writes are: " A stubborn, stupid wish has taken my life. Should Camila happen to hear of my death, let her know that I forgive her, because there was no need for her to perform miracles..." Anselmo's realization that people do not need to be perfect to be capable of sharing a meaningful bond of love is the message that Cervantes is trying to get across. Stories of love and desire abound within the context of Don Quijote. All these tales are united by the common theme that true romantic love can only flourish in relationships of equality and with genuine feelings of affection and compassion. All characters who confuse love with desire or become blinded by a vision of an old-fashioned courtly love wind up suffering. Characters who base their romantic love on genuine feelings of affection and care are the ones that find happiness. Cervantes is attacking the antiquated notions of courtly love in which people can say they love each other without truly knowing one another and in which women are expected to adhere to rigid and impossible standards. He favors

a warmer vision of romance where true love can exist only when it is imbued with the qualities of real human emotions and feelings.