

## Research Article

Esther Sánchez-Pardo\*

# Outshining Aura: How Modernist Film Refashions the Myth of Don Quixote

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**Abstract:** This paper aims at examining the first *Don Quixote* sound film *The Adventures of Don Quixote*, directed by G.W. Pabst in 1933, as well as the songs and musical themes that two great French composers, Ravel and Ibert composed for the Russian baritone Feodor Chaliapin, the protagonist of this first feature film. It was originally planned as a multilingual project for a European and a larger world audience (English, French and German) that might understand *Don Quixote* as a classic-cum-modernist cultural product of the incipient technological era. In an attempt to disentangle the complex sociohistorical, intellectual and economic forces at play in the crystallisation of a myth for modern times (20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond), I approach Pabst's film version with recourse to the Frankfurt School's valuable critique and insights on notions such as the aura, instrumental reason, myth, and the culture industry.

**Keywords:** *Don Quixote* (film), G.W. Pabst, instrumental reason, myth, culture industry.

The cinema is the mirror of our epoch in which everything must be reflected and imprinted forever.  
G.W. Pabst (1933)

## Introduction

*The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605-1615), the founding text that inaugurated the novel as a major genre, deploys a masterful treatment of Spanish bourgeois social reality at a transitional moment between a feudal and a capitalist market economy. We can certainly place the novel between what Michael McKeon, from a historical materialist perspective, announces as this liminal but still Europe-centred model of transformation from feudalism to capitalism (176-77), and Ning Ma, from a transnational perspective, identifies as a moment of profound transformations—reflecting Habsburg's Spain imperial rise—in the circuit of exchange and exploitation between West and East. As it is amply known, for Georg Lukács, the “age of the novel” begins by the time Don Quixote makes his first journey (103).

*Don Quixote*, this “totemic ancestor of the novel,” in Fredric Jameson's dictum, “emblematically comes to demonstrate that processing narrative operation variously called narrative mimesis or realistic representation has as its historic function the systematic undermining and demystification, the secular *decoding* of this pre-existing inherited traditional or sacred narrative paradigms which are its initial givens” (*Political Unconscious* 152). In other words, *Don Quixote* is probably the first modern novel since it is the first full-length desacralized narrative whose protagonist is a conventional antiheroic figure.

Cervantes's novel is clearly a product of the undogmatic world of the pre-Reformation and, first and foremost, of the pre-Counter Reformation. The endless debates on the dogma that characterised the religious quarrels of the latter part of his, and of the coming century, were not of interest to him. Certainly,

\*Corresponding author: Esther Sánchez-Pardo, Departamento de Filología Inglesa II, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 28040 Madrid, Spain. E-mail: [esanchez\\_pardo@filol.ucm.es](mailto:esanchez_pardo@filol.ucm.es)

his moderate stance in social attitudes and matters alienated him from the strictures of a more disciplined era in the horizon.

In Spain, Unamuno saw Don Quixote as pure spirit (*Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* [*Life of Don Quixote and Sancho*]), Americo Castro traced his connection to Renaissance humanism, Erasmus and Montaigne (*El pensamiento de Cervantes* [*Cervantes's Thought*]) and to the North African sources and influences (*Hacia Cervantes* [*Towards Cervantes*]), Ortega y Gasset in his *Meditations on Don Quixote*, considered our hero as an essential circumstance of Spain, and Salvador de Madariaga wrote about the transformation of its two protagonists becoming its opposite, Quixote becoming Sancho and vice versa (*Guía del lector del Quijote* [*Reader's Guide to Quixote*]).

It is my contention that with *Don Quixote* Cervantes envisioned, *avant la lettre*, the upcoming mode of Enlightenment humanity by metafictionally showing, in comic fashion, the opposite of Enlightenment rationality. Thus, along this essay, with recourse to *Don Quixote*'s 1933 film version and to the Frankfurt school theorization, I will approach a critique of the global prominence of reason to free the human being from nature's constraints through science, logic and rationality, questioned first in *Don Quixote*, and later on in modern times.

Throughout this essay, it is my view that Benjamin, Horkheimer and Adorno's solid critique of cultural processes, intertwined with the material, introduces an intriguing perspective and a body of ideas very relevant even to our 21st-century cultural analysis. The Enlightenment project's failure, framed within the German thinkers' criticism of instrumental rationality, resides in the ease of universalisation of human identity and behaviour, and thus, of domination and power over the whole. With the notions of "aura," and the "culture industry," Benjamin, Horkheimer and Adorno expose the unconscious dynamics of power that the purported emancipation of the Enlightenment continues to pose in society. What appears as truly innovative in Cervantes's account and in the realm of the novel, is his systematic criticism of such principles ahead of his time in an unprecedented way.

Cinema, the modernist technological apparatus *par excellence*, was no doubt the medium through which the original text of Cervantes reached mass audiences worldwide. After the silent early adaptations of *Don Quixote* to cinema—very early in the 20th century, in 1902, Ferdinand Zecca and Lucien Noguier were the first in bringing *Don Quixote* to the screen in a 16-second film; another French, George Méliès, did it again in his film *Les Aventures de don Quichotte* (1908). Quixote was first brought to the screen in a soundtrack version in 1933 by Austro-German director Georg Wilhelm Pabst (1885-1967). Pabst made a new *Don Quixote* film with Russian singer Feodor Chaliapin as a protagonist. This film crowns the exceptional career of the Russian bass singer, and it is at the turning point of Pabst's veering towards musical cinema and the filming of operas.

G. W. Pabst had already a long trajectory as a film director with a good number of acclaimed movies, such as the Bertolt Brecht-Kurt Weill *The Threepenny Opera* (1931), and *L'Atlantide* (1932) based on Pierre Benoit's novel, the latter being the first multilingual project in German, English and French. Once again, in 1933 with *Don Quixote*, Pabst will end up completing another multilingual film using the aforementioned languages. To all those readers of Cervantes and followers of Don Quixote's chivalric adventures, Pabst's film is a crucial modernist version that comes to re-imagine and re-invent the figure of a Renaissance hero that will become a hero of mythical stature for years to come.

Like those earlier attempts at measuring the sensitivity of its times, Pabst's *Adventures of Don Quixote* can also be watched as a film with political implications. From Cervantes's pen comes a frank sympathy for the humble and poor, and Don Quixote comes out in defence, he tells us, of the helpless, oppressed and exploited. As far as the Nazi threat all over Europe is concerned, there are clear allusions to that. It was in May 1933 that the Nazi book burnings started, precisely when Pabst and his team began working on this project. The film opening shows a close-up of the first page of Cervantes's novel—the French version is slightly different, namely, in browsing the first pages of the book, cartoons of knights in armour among other figures, appear moving on top—and closes with a disturbing image of the burning of Don Quixote's library. Off-screen after our hidalgo's passing away, Chaliapin sings a plaintive lament. The last image shows the burning pages running in the opposite direction, in a certain way as if paying tribute and restoring Cervantes's magnum opus to its well-deserved immortality.

It is crucial to situate *Don Quixote* from the vantage point of current analyses that speak to us from the turning point of an epochal change, the transition, in Fredric Jameson's words, to market capitalism that brings about major social changes,

here, for the moment, we witness that familiar process long generally associated with the Enlightenment, namely, the desacralization of the world, the decoding and secularization of the older forms of the sacred or the transcendent, the slow colonization of use value by exchange value, the "realistic" demystification of the older kinds of transcendent narratives in novels like *Don Quixote*, the standardization of both subject and object, the denaturalization of desire and its ultimate displacement by commodification or, in other words, "success," and so on. ("Cognitive Mapping" 349)

We stand now at the turning point between two eras, behind us is a past which Cervantes is going to problematize in a series of self-reflective ruses, undermining narrative mimesis to envisage new creative possibilities. Further ahead lies a world shaken by indeterminacies and uncertainties, where fiction will keep exploring hybrid territories paving the ground for film, opera, and ballet, among other iconographies of modernity.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, after the end of the silent movie era, it was a relatively frequent practice for film companies to produce a multilingual film (Atwell 110). This type of filming basically involved the simultaneous production of several films in which two or more different groups of actors were used to film the same story—the underlying idea was to guarantee a profitable international distribution. During the production of such films, it became the standard practice to shoot each scene several times, each with a different linguistic cast, a time-consuming and costly procedure which often took its toll on the final product.

In 1932 Pabst was asked to direct what was to become the first sound version of the film, *Don Quixote*. This motion picture was shot on location in the south of France. The protagonist of this project was the internationally renowned Russian bass, Feodor Chaliapin (1873-1938). Chaliapin, best known for his incomparable stage presence, but unfortunately in the last years of his singing career, was eager to work on this project.

Paul Morand (1888-1976)—a writer with a long trajectory as well as a widely-travelled diplomat (Orenstein 279)—was in charge to adapt the dialogue from Cervantes's novel for the film. He worked in tandem with Alexandre Arnoux, George Pabst's scenarist. Their joint effort proved very successful for the film, "[it] reduced the rambling structure of the novel to a few key episodes that drew on the essential comic nobility of Don's misplaced idealism and gave Pabst an opportunity to expand on the theme of social hypocrisy" (Atwell 110).

Morand also provided composer Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) with three short texts for the film to be set to music. He was one of the leading French composers at the time and enjoyed an international reputation. Ravel created several songs that would become the song cycle *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*. Due to Ravel's slow method of composition, and to the film company pressing concerns to engage in the actual production and filming of the story, the assignment to compose the music was finally awarded to Jacques Ibert (1890-1962). In addition to several songs, Ibert provided the background music which is heard throughout the film. Four of the songs composed for the character Don Quixote became known as the song cycle *Chanson de Don Quichotte*. The text used by Ibert for the first song was written by the French poet Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585). Alexandre Arnoux (1884-1973) wrote the remaining three poems. In addition to these "Chansons de Don Quichotte," the aria "Sierra Nevada," composed by Dargomijsky, was included in the film, and a fifth song, composed by Ibert, was written for the character, Sancho Panza.

## Pabst and *Adventures of Don Quixote*

Pabst began his career as an actor in Vienna in 1901. After spending several fruitful formative years in the theatre, he joined the Deutsche Volkstheater in New York in 1911 as an actor and director, remaining in the U.S. for several years. Pabst returned to Europe in 1919 and focused mostly on film directing. His career spanned more than thirty years, from 1922 to 1956. Films such as *The Love of Jeanne Ney* (1927), *Pandora's*

*Box* (1929) and *The Threepenny Opera* (1931), secured him a solid, even if modest, international reputation.

At the beginning of 1932, in order to escape censorship and the rise of Nazism, Pabst emigrated to France where he had hoped to find the artistic freedom he desired. In Germany, many of his films were censored and severely edited under the auspices of the “Filmprüfstelle” (Censor board). Precisely his film *Pandora’s Box* was taken out of circulation in 1929 at the command of the Prussian government (higher film Censor board). According to Lee Atwell, many of his major films were “for years unavailable or circulated only in censorial or mutilated versions” (19). All this certainly had a very unfavourable effect on the impact of his films.

During the fall of 1932 Pabst began working on *Don Quixote*. Producing and shooting any multilingual film presented many inconveniences, it was expensive, and the whole process was permanently an almost impossible test of resistance for any team of professionals. As Atwell stated, “after about seventy percent of the shooting was done, the budget was depleted” (110).

The completion of the musical score was also another important concern. Paul Morand and Alexandre Arnoux adapted excerpts of Cervantes’s novel into French, and John Farrow translated into English their texts. Whereas Feodor Chaliapin played Don Quixote in both versions, the role of Sancho Panza was shared by two actors, the British music hall comedian George Robey, and French actor Dorville (Georges Henri Dodane). Renée Valliers acted in the role of Dulcinea in both versions.

As the story goes, in a hamlet of La Mancha lives Don Quixote, a hidalgo in decline, totally absorbed by the reading of chivalric novels. Immersed in delirium, in the fantasy of a world gone, he decides to become a wandering knight to increase his fame and to honour the country that gave birth to him. He chooses his lady (Dulcinea is, in fact, a poor peasant) and a squire, Sancho Panza. He swaps flocks for armies, subtracts a barber a basin that, in the height of his madness, is transformed into the magical helmet of Mambrino, frees galeots believing them oppressed by fierce enemies, and fights against giant windmills that become frightening giants from whose threat he is called to liberate the world.

Between countless adventures, Cervantes’s romance (written between 1605 and 1615) closes with a providential repentance *in extremis* that prepares the reader for the pathetic departure of the Knight of the Mournful Countenance. The script by Morand and Arnoux provides Pabst with a text that is totally faithful to the literary work. Only the poetic symbolism of closing the film with the burning of chivalric novels introduces a unique note by hypothesizing, in the death of writing, the end of an era and the advent of new times.

Here the characters of ancient romances, literary obsessions of the Knight of the Mournful Countenance, regain life as in a game of Chinese shadows. From the manuscript that Chaliapin leaves through, the illustrations rise to glow a moment in front of his eyes, absorbed as he is in contemplating them while unconsciously calling them back to life. Pabst draws his inspiration from the epic. Forced to secure the viability of a film with insufficient budget (in the original project the direction of the film was to be entrusted to Chaplin and the soundtrack to Maurice Ravel), forced to work along the lines of a pre-existing screenplay (he was not allowed to modify a large part of the anticipated material), and assisted by a few loyal colleagues (including Lotte Reiniger, to whom the visualization of animated drawings at the beginning and end is due), the director condenses in the vividness of *vision* the idea around which the whole film revolves.

## ***Don Quixote*, Film and Music Come Together on the Screen**

*Don Quixote*’s opening sequence shows several pages of Cervantes’s novel. As pages turn, animated figures of knights dressed in suits of armour, riding on horseback, and wielding lances appear as words give rise to moving images. When the animation fades, the spectator sees Don Quixote in his library, reading passages from several ancient chivalry novels. He praises the virtues of knighthood and daydreams of a beautiful maiden he calls, Dulcinea. This dreamlike legendary opening produces an important visual impact on audiences, “Already in its purely animated introduction, the film takes us into the realm of fairy tales” (Rentschler 863).

Don Quixote has sold nearly all of his possessions in order to acquire books. Inspired by the stories he has read, he decides that he must depart, and to become from then on a Knight Errant who will devote his efforts to combat evil and to defend the honour of the disenfranchised. As he prepares for his journey, he sings the song “Sierra Nevada” describing how he will travel the region to fulfil his destiny of being a heroic knight. Along his journey, Don Quixote gallantly declares that all of his victories will be dedicated to honouring his lady Dulcinea. He represents “the classic concept of the knight as a man who worships woman as an ideal and a specific woman as representing this ideal” (Tyler 81).

Don Quixote convinces his servant Sancho Panza to depart with him, and before leaving the village, the knight sings the first song of the Ibert song cycle, “Chanson du Départ” (“Song of Departure”). The first two heroic adventures depicted in the film occur when Quixote attacks a flock of sheep, thinking them to be an army of giants; and when he demands the release of a group of prisoners, convinced that they had been falsely arrested. The fleeing prisoners laugh scornfully and throw stones at him until he faints.

In pain, bruised and battered, Don Quixote and Sancho find shelter at an inn. While Don Quixote rests, Sancho spends time in the dining area and sings his song, “Knights never eat, knights never sleep.” Jacques Ibert composed a total of five songs for the film. The four songs for the cycle *Chansons de Don Quichotte*, composed for the character Don Quixote, are on texts written by Ronsard and Arnoux. This fifth song composed for Sancho Panza is written on a text by Paul Morand, who wrote texts for the cycle *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*, by Maurice Ravel.

Meanwhile, the duke has been informed of Quixote’s strange behaviour and pretensions. The messenger invites Knight and squire to attend a ducal banquet in their honour. During the banquet, the duke questions Quixote about his adventures and gets to know about Dulcinea, to whom the don’s chivalric deeds are dedicated. Quixote argues he can only describe his lady in song and sings his “Chanson du Duc” (“Song for the Duke”), the third song in the song cycle *Chansons de don Quichotte*. His performance is dedicated to the eternal beauty of Dulcinea.

On one of the best-known episodes of his exploits, Quixote charges against the windmills and becomes entangled in one of their blades. After the windmill gradually stops, the duke’s guards remove him from the blade. At this point, as Atwell has remarked, the confused Knight of the Mournful Countenance, “is beaten by a reality against which all his rebellion in powerless” (112). Finally, Don Quixote is conducted to his native village caged in an animal cart. Upon his arrival, he witnesses the burning of his many books which are to blame as the major cause of his corruption. The film closes with the scene of the don’s passing away in the arms of Sancho, his faithful squire and companion.

The camera stops and lingers on the flames of the burning books, and we listen to the “Chanson de la mort de don Quichotte” (“Song of the Death of Don Quixote”), the final song of the cycle, sung by Quixote. Tyler has suggested that the burning of Don Quixote’s library, signifies the destruction of illusion (82). The closing images of the film show the flames of one burning book in reverse, reconstructing the title page of Cervantes’s novel.

What kind of image of Don Quixote do we get from the lyrics and the music composed by Jacques Ibert? The text of the “Chanson du Départ” (Song of Departure) comes from a collection of sonnets by French Renaissance poet Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585), entitled *Le Premier Livre des Amours* (*The First Book of Loves* 1552). Also known by the title “Ce château neuf,” (“This new castle”) as an allusion to a new castle, where Ronsard allegorically situates mistress Virtue, and invokes spiritual values, arguing, “That nothing can approach the door./ Except for great kings it preserved the race./ Victorious, valiant, and loving” (352).

The second song, “Chanson à Dulcinée” (“Song for Dulcinea”) is sung by Quixote as he and Sancho depart from the village on their mission. They stop in front of a stable where members of a travelling theatre troupe are sleeping. He sings of a castle, where his lady abides. Actually, this castle is a wooden stable, and the virtuous lady he refers to, his Dulcinea, is a common milkmaid. The song’s refrain repeats, “Ah. A day lasts a year to me / If I do not see my Dulcinea.”

The following song of the cycle, “Chanson du Duc” (“Song for the Duke”), is sung when the duke and duchess are hosting a banquet to honour Don Quixote and Sancho. The duke shows interest in hearing more about the fair maiden Dulcinea, and Quixote responds that words alone cannot do justice to her beauty. As the ancient knights of the old days, the only chivalrous way to depict his Lady is in song. The last

stanza speaks of the dilemma of appearances and argues for the unparalleled beauty of his Lady: “Lady for whose sake I go alone upon this earth. / Who would not be prisoner of the false appearance./ I stand against all, daring cavalier. / Her brilliance has no equal and all that fate allows.”

Finally, the “Chanson de la mort de don Quichotte” (“Song of the Death of Don Quixote”) closes the film. This is the only occasion when the performance of the song is merely heard, not seen. At this point, Don Quixote dies, in the arms of Sancho, upon the hideous vision of the books in his library burning. Prior to dying, Don Quixote, the Knight of the Mournful Countenance, is clearly mourning the disappearance of chivalry books and of a way of life that is lost forever. His profound melancholy is epitomised upon the burning pages of one particular book, *Don Quixote de la Mancha* by Cervantes. On an interesting and visually self-reflective metafilmic and metapoetic exercise, we are reminded that we are watching the retelling of a story, which appeals to a new beginning.

## How Modernist Critics Read a Classic

Pabst’s movie was originally well received as an artistic endeavour to meet the standards of a highly formalistic modernist time. In the magazine *The Film Daily*, critic Matty Radin underlined that Pabst had missed the spirit and purpose of Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*. In his view, “The figure [of Don Quixote] becomes tragic and pathetic, instead of a gentle, romantic, old soul whose doughty deeds constitute one of the greatest comedy satires ever written. Chaliapin simply was not fitted for such a light part” (6). Conversely, comic actor George Robey, as Sancho Panza, “has caught the jesting spirit of the classic perfectly” (6). In any event, the excellence of Pabst as a director is much praised: “The camera work is superb, the composition and lighting is beautiful, and some of the exteriors seem like etchings” (6).

Prestigious film critic and director Kenneth Macpherson wrote in his review, of the many virtues that Pabst demonstrated in directing the film:

Pabst, the indefatigable, works with all his force. His task is incredible. We who watch and have watched before, are silent, recognising his magic . . . one cannot help but feel there is something of the dauntless quality of chivalry itself—no tilting at windmills, but deep-rooted in original source of inspirational courage. (230)

On another front, Max Pretzfelder was responsible for the design of all the costumes appearing in all films of Pabst’s. His work, inspired by the spirit of Cervantes’s romance, and by his direct knowledge of life (temporarily) in Spain. Pretzfelder, a fine observer with a sociological penchant for capturing reality, constructed the appearance of his characters as if they were not “dressed up.” The result was that he created the atmosphere of a seventeenth century Spanish village, “Hence there pervaded a sense of the living quality, of people about their daily life” (277).

Carl van Vechten who wrote extensively on Chaliapin, while recognizing his many virtues as a bass singer, reports, “Exuberant is the Word which best describes Chaliapine off the stage” (99). Chaliapin calls himself “the enemy of tradition” (108), and quoting his words, “When I sing a character, I am that character; I am no longer Chaliapine” (109): For all those familiar with the Russian bass’ musical and performance style, it comes as no surprise that, “He depends to an unsafe degree on inspiration to carry him through, on inspiration, once he begins to sing” (109).

Finally, Parker Tyler, in his book on foreign film classics, remarked, “like Don Quixote, like Cervantes himself, Chaliapin was an old man, an old man in whom a magnificently expressive voice survived in a way the ideal of chivalry had survived in *Don Quixote de la Mancha*” (80). Feodor Chaliapin’s reputation as an actor was established on the operatic stage, and he generally received disapproval for his film experiences. Chaliapin enjoyed success with many of his operatic roles including Boris Godunov, King Philip, Mephistopheles and Don Basilio, as cases in point. However, it was with the role of Don Quixote in Massenet’s opera *Don Quichotte*, that he left “a particularly deep impression” (Borovsky 495). In 1915, Chaliapin had been the star of another film, *Ivan the Terrible*. Critically observing his performance, one reads harsh critiques as the following, “F. I. Chaliapin’s acting is reminiscent of the technique of the old-time tragedy actors, too much pose, over-emphasized mimicry, calculated slowness of gesture” (Froud and

Hanley 295).

On the negative side, occasionally throughout the novel, Don Quixote is seen as a comic character (Nugent 17), but the episodic material found in the film, was criticized as being “heavy-handed and definitely on the tragic side” (17).

Lee Atwell, the author of the first English language study on the films of G. W. Pabst, noted that *Don Quixote* is, “ultimately unsatisfying, for all its brilliant moments, because it is incomplete” (112). As Atwell, among other critics felt, character development was insufficient, and the scenes in which this should have taken place, were all too brief for any attempt at character solid construction and completion.

It was also suggested that the film *Don Quixote*, containing Ibert’s musical score with lyrics by Paul Morand was totally in line with Pabst’s previous film, *The Threepenny Opera* (1931), a collaboration between playwright Bertolt Brecht and composer Kurt Weill. Such film was an acclaimed play and a successful film. As critic Edgardo Cozarinsky suggested, “the epic theatre treatment of a selection of episodes from Cervantes suggests a possible reading of the classic that is as unexpected as it is engaging” (qtd. in Bandy 140). As William Troy had written in *The Nation*, Pabst wanted his film to be “an allegory of social injustice” (28). Clearly, we can discuss to what extent the allegory present in *Don Quixote* is of an ethical-political nature or of a psychological-psychiatric nature (Bueno 2010), and we should also be aware of the philosophical, anthropological, economic and historical dimension that it puts forward.

## ***Don Quixote’s Aura and the Critique of the Culture Industry***

In Walter Benjamin’s reflections on “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935), film and photography, in their novelty, entail a “decline of the aura” and disclose new possibilities for art. The mechanical reproduction of the work of art brings about the loss of the aura, defined as, “the unique phenomenon of a distance, however, close it may be, whether a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you” (222-23). The proximity of the distance is what gives aura its quantum of emotion. In any event, what is shocking for audiences is not the loss, but rather the physicality of the distance from the reality, the object or element to which the aura is “attached.” Film and photography undermine the aura, and in Benjamin’s view, they undermine its effects. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, film epitomises this crisis of the aura in its reproducibility at the core of its *tekné*, as a cinematic apparatus prepared for rapid and widespread dissemination. Benjamin clearly argued that “Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art” (234), and that film specifically presents “an object for simultaneous collective experience.” (234)

Modernist audiences at this time experience culture in everyday life as a mass-produced phenomenon. Industrial production has done away with the sense of everyday objects such as clothes or furniture, at a time hand-made and unique, and now produced for general and quick consumption and substitution.

It is also crucial to realise that the transformation of different cultural products into moving images on a screen, provides them with a certain mechanical aura that features prominently in the history of film reception and criticism. Along this line, we can certainly argue that *Don Quixote* gained an aura for modern times precisely out of its filmic representations—both the early silent and the sound films we are familiar with, such as Pabst’s, Gil’s (1947, Spanish), Kosintsev’s (1957, Russian), Hiller’s (1972, English UK), Peter Yates’ (2000, TV film, English UK), and Gilliam’s (upcoming—started 2000, English UK). This auratic quality of the *hidalgo* has been progressively associated with Spain and the Spanish character and ethos.

In any event, throughout the history of its reception, *Don Quixote* has not often been invoked as an icon in the process of nation formation. Cervantes constructed his allegory as the story moved forward—Miguel de Unamuno (1905), Americo Castro (1925), José María Maravall (1976), Anthony Close (1978), Félix Martínez Bonati (1995) and J. M. Marinas (2005) have all devoted efforts to theorize about Cervantes’s allegory in *Don Quixote*. To what extent can we hold that *Don Quixote* stands for the Spanish nation? We could argue that his foolish ideas and extravagant reveries are also part of what was going on at this transitional moment in Spain early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, we just have to, “substitute broken lances for cannons, starving horses for armed light boats, knights-errant for companies or battalions . . . , windmills for giant Englishmen or

Frenchmen who are attacking us . . .” (Bueno 2010). Quixote progressively took up the function of critically attacking those courtesan or village knights, dukes and graduates who Cervantes knew so well, and who were always quick to ridicule Don Quixote’s initiatives in *Don Quixote* part 2.

As Gustavo Bueno has acutely argued:

The important thing is that Cervantes saw such an allegory, because only then can his disposition be understood to lead Don Quixote, at a given moment in his career, to hang up his arms and so decree his death. For it cannot be forgotten that the final and most profound lesson of *Don Quixote* that Cervantes seems to want to offer us is this: that although the projects undertaken by Don Quixote and the armed knights he represents seem follies, the only alternative is death. One must hang up one’s arms in order to renounce these follies, to be cured of them after a great fever—but with this comes death (which is what the dimwitted pacifist does not see). After hanging up his arms and entering seclusion, Don Quixote physically dies in the body of Alonso Quijano, and so symbolises Spain’s death, for hanging up her own arms. (Bueno 2010)

On another line, the popular ethos in Cervantes’s hero gives us a Quixote who is loyal to his ideals, committed to social justice, tolerant, a supporter of the weakest and disenfranchised, a man of his Word, devoted to his lady, and a Romantic idealist. Don Quixote would probably be completely out of place in the 1930s, when the spiritual and the material must, at least, go together.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Horkheimer and Adorno put forward some very valuable insights in line with Benjamin’s previous ideas on film, photography, and the instrumentalisation of art for political ends. The German philosophers find fault at the core of Enlightenment thinking. As its main founding premise, installing reason as the basis of human action, Enlightenment philosophy dismisses anything lying beyond the boundaries of instrumental or *subjective* reason. Horkheimer and Adorno address their critique to Kant’s philosophy of reason. One of the main supporters of the Enlightenment project, Kant held the belief that only enlightened thought, based on formal reason, could hope to liberate the individual from any authority and imposed constraints upon the human. The Frankfurt School, however, challenges this concept—for the critical theorists, Enlightenment’s attempts to diverge from myth and remove overarching constraints on the individual actually concludes by enslaving them even more within structures of domination. This is what sets the framework for reason’s reversion to myth, for myths attempted to control the world as the primacy of instrumentality does in modern society, according to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Berendzen)—their well-known interpretation of Odysseus, whose denial of his identity becomes the only way for him to survive his exile, is a case in point. With the end of attaining the self-preservation of humankind as the only motivator, formalistic rationality, equivalent to instrumental reason, is in itself constraining of further human agency (Ingram 63).

Horkheimer and Adorno describe their reading of book 12 of the *Odyssey* as “a prescient allegory for the dialectic of enlightenment” (27). If we go back specifically to Odysseus’ episode with the Sirens, we come across the Greek hero, listening to Circe, and being told of the obstacles that he will face on his voyage home and how to cope with them. As he sets sail, Odysseus instructs his men of the perils to come. Approaching the island of the Sirens, Odysseus, forewarned by Circe, has his men plug their ears with beeswax while he remains bound to the mast. Hearing the seductive song of the Sirens in the distance, Odysseus begs his men to release him, but his loyal crew only bind him tighter.

In Horkheimer and Adorno’s reading, the Sirens’ song alludes to the “natural” instinctual forces and pre-rational connections between humans and the potentially dangerous external world. The wild and unrestrained nature of these forces puts to test human resistance to adversities. The first measure certainly alludes to disciplined labour, led by instrumental reason. The modern worker must disengage from the distractions—sirens’ songs—brought by commodities, entertainment and unproductive action. The second measure, derived also from the suppression of pleasure—approaching the sirens and listening to their song—makes modern man aware of the rationalised, disciplined and dehumanised constrictions imposed by modern industrial society. In Book 12 of *The Odyssey*, the Sirens are dangerous and lure men to death with their voices. Odysseus becomes the first mortal to live to tell the tale.

One of the great epics of the ancient world, *The Odyssey*, is a travel narrative in which a hero deals with gods and supernatural beings, on his way home after the Trojan war. This mythic atmosphere permeates



one of the founding narratives of the West. In Roland Barthes' words, within the "general semiology of our bourgeois world" (11), myth is "a language" (11), a "type of speech" (109). In his view, myth presents an ideology, a set of values, as if it were a "natural" condition of the world, when in fact, myth expresses the intentions of the "mythologist" —artist, writer, politician, journalist. Myth always "transform[s] a meaning into form" (131), and Literature —*The Odyssey*, *Don Quixote*—"is an undoubted mythical system" (134).

Barthes argued that myth is pervasive and entrenched in our culture, and also in the media, advertising and entertainment. What this modern definition has in common with the old definition is that, in both, belief is inherent in myth. But whereas in the old definition myth generally is associated with gods or foundational stories, the new definition includes any cultural activity that points to an ideology as the focus of belief, be that secular or religious. The effectiveness of myth goes hand in hand with the credibility accorded by its audience. Barthes' views come finally to join the Frankfurt School analysis, "The bourgeois class has precisely built its power on technical, scientific progress, on an unlimited transformation of nature: bourgeois ideology yields in return an unchangeable nature" (141-42)

From the Enlightenment's scientific, rational ideals stems its largely unitary understanding of the world around us. One of the realms in which this can be thoroughly appreciated is within the "culture industry"—its unitary vision of social processes leads to a standardised mass identity. Even what is considered by the individuals to be most personal and dear to them, their own personality traits and characteristics shaping their taste in art and entertainment, depends on the industry's "classifying, organising and labelling consumers" (Horkheimer and Adorno 123). In its entry into the capitalist market and the domain of economic exchange, art lost its distinctive identity and individuality and became reproducible—Benjamin's loss of the aura—functional commodity appealing to banal desires. This embodies the cultural degeneration that Horkheimer and Adorno speak of, where the illusion of consumer autonomy is pervasive, yet merely an illusion, manipulated by higher forces and small groups of domination (Ingram 63-64).

To conclude, we can certainly hold that in Pabst's *Adventures of Don Quixote*, the object, Don Quixote, becomes auratic through its capacity to remind us of situations or phenomena belonging to the past—a "glorious past" in this case, a certain repository of nobility, status and manners—brought back to mind through a filmic historical recreation. In this case, film, even if it is selective and fragmentary, and does not do justice to the original novel by Cervantes, still contributes to the expansion and aggrandizement of Don Quixote.

Don Quixote is not only larger than life, but, probably, he is not even a literary character. Fredric Jameson, wisely and provocatively argues, "Don Quixote is not really a character at all, but rather an organizational device that allows Cervantes to write his book, serving as a thread that holds a number of different anecdotes together in a single form" (*Ideologies of Theory* 7). And with recourse to the Frankfurt School and to Roland Barthes, we can argue that "both reading and writing are placed in a relation of equivalence by transforming the reading [or filming, *my comment*] into re-writing," which in turn leads to an "eternal present" (Barthes 11-12).

Pabst's modernist *Don Quixote*, on its quest for meaning at a difficult historical conjuncture, keeps being an inexhaustible source of inspiration for its time, a reminder of the power of sound and visual effects upon stories, and a valuable lesson of bourgeois history on the difficult transit from disorder, chaos and poor governance to the spirit of reform in a timid passage to Spain's modernity. As in Borges' postmodern fable, "Pierre Menard Author of the *Quixote*," Menard's project functions as a metaphor for the modern impulse to construct meaning when moral, ontological, psychological and spiritual signposts seem to have vanished. In the original Latin maxim, "Give credit to the works and not to words"—"Operibus credite et non verbis," (*Don Quixote*, Part II, chapters 25 and 50)—*Don Quixote* invites us, once again, to problematize language and deeds.

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