Thomas R. Hart's death in Eugene, Oregon, on January 17th of 2010, came as a surprise and shock to his friends and colleagues near and far; he had been active in his study and on the campus until the first of the new year. I was probably his oldest professional friend; we first met in a Spanish class as juniors at Yale in 1946. We both at that time had wives and had transferred to Yale as G. I. Bill students. During military service he had studied Japanese and I had studied Chinese. He came from a more academic background in North Carolina, and I from a more rural one in South Carolina. He was better oriented culturally and more adventurous intellectually than I was; he introduced me to Bloomfield’s Language, for example, and to Wellek & Warren’s Theory of Literature. He persuaded me to take advantage of a language teacher who spoke fluent Carioca Portuguese. He also led me to appreciate the humor of James Thurber and the company of his first dog, named Snorri Sturluson. And he did not do his dissertation in the Spanish department, as I did, but in comparative literature with René Wellek, on the early historians of Spanish literature: Bouterwek, Sismondi, Ticknor. In 1950-51 we both went to Europe on pre-doctoral fellowships, he to Montpellier and I to Madrid. The two couples met in Valencia and drove around Spain. I particularly remember one snowy twilight in the Sierra Nevada near Guadix when Tom and the two wives had to get out and push the tiny Morris Minor up a hill while I was trying to drive; we did make it to the next town. Upon our return the two of us stayed on at Yale until 1952, when we got our Ph.D.’s. And we kept in touch personally from then until the end of 2009.
Tom began full-time teaching as an instructor at Amherst, and I at Dartmouth. He moved around more frequently in the beginning than I did, finally becoming a full professor at the University of Oregon in 1964. There, as assistant editor and editor of *Comparative Literature* for almost thirty years, he set high standards for the journal while teaching and publishing, helping many students generously, and writing with scholarly precision on a wide range of literary and linguistic topics in the Romance languages. I will not here attempt to compete with the excellent survey of his work, with a complete list of his publications, that is the introduction to “Writers as Readers: Essays in Honor of Thomas R. Hart” (*Comparative Literature*, 60.1, winter 2008). For the journal *Cervantes* I will concentrate on his major Cervantes study: *Cervantes and Ariosto: Renewing Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

*Cervantes and Ariosto* is a beautiful little book of not much more than a hundred pages; it is a comprehensive and definitive study of the similarities and differences between *Orlando furioso* and *Don Quixote*, leading to a deeper understanding of both fictions. These two major works, each in its way a parody of the romances of chivalry, bridge chronologically the center of the vernacular Renaissance in Europe; they were best sellers in their own languages and countries, and in translations abroad. Cervantes’s works themselves leave us with no doubt about the Spanish author’s thorough familiarity with the Italian work, whether he read it in the original or in Spanish translation.

Hart, who dedicates the volume to the memory of the great Romance philologist Erich Auerbach, starts with this author’s “Die verzauberte Dulcinea,” the chapter added to a later edition of his celebrated *Mimesis*. Many Hispanists, still influenced by Romantic readings of *Don Quixote* as tragic suffering hero, were indignant that Auerbach found Cervantes’s masterpiece to be essentially comic, “a funny book” as P. E. Russell would call it later on. Hart concludes that Auerbach is right to find the key tone of both the Italian poem and the Spanish novel to be one of “merry play,” “unproblematic gaiety.” In his book Auerbach was tracing the roots of the 19th-century realistic novel, which treated seriously the everyday problems of ordinary life; he found nothing of this in *Don Quixote*.

Hart devotes two of his chapters to Cervantes’s debts, in forms and in themes, to Ariosto. Maxime Chevalier, in his *L’Arioste en Espagne* of 1966, had studied the popularity of the *Orlando* in 16th-century Spain, where the code of chivalry was generally taken with ethical seriousness. The poem seems to have
been read in various ways: as heroic, as comic, even as allegorical. It has three leading characters, all taken from chivalric romances, while *Don Quixote* has only one, an hidalgo taken from a Spanish village but trying to be an Amadís. Ariosto juxtaposes his main characters with one another for moral contrast while Cervantes juxtaposes, for example, the Don Quixote-Doña Rodríguez nocturnal encounter with the Aeneas-Dido affair, with roles reversed. In neither work do we find Aristotelian unity of epic plot. Both authors achieve suspense and diversity with interruption of action and with authorial intervention. But Cervantes’s more frequent use of dialogue makes the action less continuous; in fact Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are less involved in the episodes of a loose plot than in a prolonged dialogue discussing and commenting recurrently on the episodes as they remember them. The main theme that is common to both works is the contrast between ordinary behavior in contemporary life and the world of medieval chivalry, as read about and even revived at the Spanish court by Charles V. The later crisis in Spain’s imperial economy provoked ingenious authors, known as *arbitristas*, to suggest more or less quixotic solutions for the nation’s problems. The Spanish cult of chivalric honor stood in the way of productive manual labor; the useless class of hidalgos dreams of, and even engages in, useless acts of chivalry.

Chapter IV deals with the question of imitation. Ariosto follows the serious Renaissance tradition of emulating the classics; he overtly alludes to texts by Virgil and Dante, for example, as he tries to surpass them. Cervantes’s imitation is entirely different in his fleeting loose echoes of Garcilaso and the romances of chivalry. It is the characters of *Don Quixote*, unlike those of the *Orlando*, who are readers and capricious imitators, deliberate role-players. There is a general awareness of different social classes in Cervantes’s work; Marcela, belonging to a wealthy farmer family, boldly defends her rights to a free pseudo-pastoral life, regardless of the suicide of the lovelorn Grisóstomo. This leads into the pastoral interludes studied in Chapter V. Playing her literary role of shepherdess, Marcela rejects all machoista hierarchy. Don Quixote admires Marcela as a model *mujer esquiva*, and is disgusted with Angelica, who finally succumbs to her love for Medoro. And Orlando, like Garcilaso’s Albanio, goes completely mad because of his love. Group enactments of Garcilaso’s eclogues give rise in *Don Quixote* to middleclass make-believe in rustic settings.

Not far from Virgil’s pastoral oasis is the Horatian *otium* of the city-dwell-
er who takes a refreshing vacation on his farm in the country; in his leisure he is a beatus ille who escapes temporarily from the urban center of power and wealth, with the ambitions of negotium. These ideas had been absorbed into the Spanish literary tradition of menosprecio de la corte y alabanza de aldea. Sancho Panza makes a roundtrip in reverse: beginning as an unambitious peasant, Don Quixote inspires him with the desire to govern an insula; but after his experiences in Barataria he suffers a desengaño and is happy to forsake his ambitions. Similarly, Don Quixote in the court of the duke and duchess finds himself treated at last like a knight errant, but after a long stay suffers from his own desengaño and asks for permission to head out again for his own adventures on the open road.

Finally, and most important, we have Chapter VII, “Don Quixote’s Readers, Don Quixote as Reader.” The Orlando furioso was frequently reedited, often with annotations to instruct an elite readership. Cervantes’s book was also a best-seller, a popular success, but never had annotations: it was read with pleasure by, or read out loud with mirth to, a wide range of public that often laughed with uninhibited guffaws. Reading in early modern Europe was seen by Erasmus as an educational process, a source of commonplaces, words and ideas for future use, whether written or oral. As Castiglione shows us, the princely court provides a setting for imitating literature in life. When read out loud in public, long books were necessarily fragmented; fragments of Ariosto and of Cervantes were sometimes published independently or formed parts of miscellanies. More important, the Spanish author through his characters drew on traditional oral jokes and popular wisdom, especially refranes, as models for speech and behavior. There is little occasion to mention Ariosto in this chapter, which leads up to the conclusion that “Cervantes’s true subject is the interaction between books and their readers.” And great works, like Don Quixote, are not only what they meant to their contemporary readers but also what they will mean potentially to future readers.

Hart’s small book is a major achievement, a contribution to both Hispanism and comparative literature. Among his primary sources, in addition to Dante, Petrarch, Castiglione, Erasmus, Montaigne, and Sir Philip Sidney, we find lesser known authors such as Fray Miguel de Salinas (1541), Simon Fornari (1549), and Vicente Mexía (1566). And his wide-ranging secondary sources, published more recently, constitute the basis for a modern survey of Renaissance thought
and narrative fiction. My attempt above to summarize the book is only a poor reflection of its precise scholarship and its rich literary suggestiveness. With the death of Thomas Hart a post-war generation of American Hispanists is drawing to a close.

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