

Chapter 6

Regarding the beguiling and careful examination carried out by the priest and the barber of the library of our ingenious gentleman

who was still asleep. The priest asked the niece for the keys to the room that contained the books responsible for the harm that had been done, and she gladly gave them to him. All of them went in, including the housekeeper, and they found more than a hundred large volumes, very nicely bound, and many other smaller ones; and as soon as the housekeeper saw them, she hurried out of the room and quickly returned with a basin of holy water and a hyssop and said to the priest:

“Take this, Señor Licentiate, and sprinkle this room, so that no enchanter, of the many in these books, can put a spell on us as punishment for wanting to drive them off the face of the earth.”

The licentiate had to laugh at the housekeeper’s simple mindedness, and he told the barber to hand him the books one by one so that he could see what they contained, for he might find a few that did not deserve to be punished in the flames.

“No,” said the niece, “there’s no reason to pardon any of them, because they all have been harmful; we ought to toss them out the windows into the courtyard, and make a pile of them and set them on fire; or better yet, take them to the corral and light the fire there, where the smoke won’t bother anybody.”

The housekeeper agreed, so great was the desire of the two women to see the death of those innocents; but the priest was not in favor of doing that without even reading the titles first. And the first one that Master Nicolás handed him was *The Four Books of Amadís of Gaul*,¹ and the priest said:

“This one seems to be a mystery, because I have heard that this was the first book of chivalry printed in Spain,² and all the rest found their origin and inspiration here, and so it seems to me that as the proponent of the doctrine of so harmful a sect, we should, without any excuses, condemn it to the flames.”

“No, Señor,” said the barber, “for I’ve also heard that it is the best of

all the books of this kind ever written, and as a unique example of the art, it should be pardoned.” “That’s true,” said the priest, “and so we’ll spare its life for now. Let’s see the one next to it.”

“It is,” said the barber, “the *Exploits of Esplandián*,³ who was the legitimate son of Amadís of Gaul.”

“In truth,” said the priest, “the mercy shown the father will not help the son. Take it, Señora Housekeeper, open that window, throw it into the corral, and let it be the beginning of the pile that will fuel the fire we shall set.”

The housekeeper was very happy to do as he asked, and the good Esplandian went flying into the corral, waiting with all the patience in the world for the fire that threatened him.

“Next,” said the priest.

“This one,” said the barber, “is *Amadís of Greece*,⁴ and I believe that all these over here come from the line of Amadís.”

“Well, let them all go into the corral,” said the priest. “For the sake of burning Queen Pintiquinestra, and the shepherd Darinel and all his eclogues, and the perverse and complicated language of their author, I would bum along with them the father who sired me if he were to appear in the form of a knight errant.”

“I’m of the same opinion,” said the barber.

“And so am I,” added the niece.

“Well, then,” said the housekeeper, “hand them over and into the corral with them.”

They handed them to her, and there were a good many of them, and she saved herself a trip down the stairs and tossed them all out the window.

“Who’s that big fellow?” asked the priest.

“This,” replied the barber, “is *Don Olivante of Laura*.⁵”

“The author of that book,” said the priest, “was the same one who

1. Published in their complete version in 1508, these are the first in the long series of novels of chivalry devoted to the exploits of Amadís, a prototypical knight, and his descendants.

2. The Catalan novel *Tirant lo Blanc* was published in 1490; Cervantes probably knew only the translation into Castilian, which was not published until 1511.

3. This is the fifth book of the Amadís series and was published in 1521.

4. Published by Feliciano de Silva in 1535, it is the ninth book of the Amadís series.

5. Published by Antonio de Torquemada in 1564. In 1600, his *Jarín de flores* (*Garden of Flowers*) was translated into English as *The Spanish Mandeville*.

composed *Garden of Flowers*, and the truth is I can't decide which of the two is more true or, I should say, less false; all I can say is that this one goes to the corral, because it is silly and arrogant." "This next one is *Felixmarte of Hyrcania*,"⁶ said the barber.

"Is Sir Felixmarte there?" the priest responded. "Well, by my faith, into the corral with him quickly, despite his strange birth and resounding adventures, for the harshness and dryness of his style allow no other course of action. Into the corral with him and this other one, Señora Housekeeper."

"With pleasure, Señor," she replied, and with great joy she carried out her orders.

"This one is *The Knight Platir*,"⁷ said the barber.

"That's an old book," said the priest, "and I don't find anything in it that would warrant forgiveness. Let it join the others, with no defense."

And that is what happened. Another book was opened and they saw that its title was *The Knight of the Cross*.⁸

"Because of the holy name this book bears one might pardon its stupidity, but as the saying goes, 'The devil can hide behind the cross.' Into the fire."

Picking up another book, the barber said:

"This is *The Mirror of Chivalry*."⁹

"I already know his grace," said the priest. "There you'll find Reinaldos de Montalbán and his friends and companions, greater thieves than Cacus, and the Twelve Peers along with that true historian Turpín,¹⁰ and the truth is I'm inclined to condemn them to no more than perpetual exile, if only because they contain part of the invention of the famous Matteo Boiardo, from which the cloth was woven by the Christian poet Ludovico Ariosto,¹¹ who, if I find him here, speaking in some language not

his own, I will have no respect for him at all; but if he speaks in his own language, I bow down to him."

"Well, I have him in Italian," said the barber, "but I don't understand it."

"There's no reason you should," replied the priest, "and here we would pardon the captain if he had not brought it to Spain and translated it into Castilian, for he took away a good deal of its original value, which is what all who attempt to translate books of poetry into another language will do

as well: no matter the care they use and the skill they show, they will never achieve the quality the verses had in their first birth. In fact, I say that this book, and all those you find that deal with the matter of France, should be thrown into a dry well and kept there until we can agree on what should be done with them, except for a *Bernardo del Carpio* that's out there, and another called *Roncesvalles*,¹² for these, on reaching my hands, will pass into the housekeeper's and then into the fire, with no chance of a pardon."

All this the barber seconded, and thought it right and proper, for he understood that the priest was so good a Christian and so loved the truth that he would not speak a falsehood for anything in the world. And opening another book, he saw that it was *Palmerin of the Olive*,¹³ and with it was another called *Palmerin of England*, and seeing this, the priest said:

"The olive branch should be cut up immediately and burned until there's nothing left but ashes, but the palm branch of England should be kept and preserved as something unique; a chest should be made for it like the one Alexander found among the spoils of Darius and which he designated for preserving the works of the poet Homer. This book, my friend, has authority for two reasons: one, because it is very good in and of itself, and two, because it is well-known that it was composed by a wise and prudent king of Portugal. All the adventures in the castle of Miraguarda are excellent and very artful; the language is courtly and clear, for it takes into account and respects the decorum of the person speaking with a good deal of exactness and understanding. I say, therefore, that unless you are of another mind, Master Nicolás, this one and *Amadís of Gaul* should escape the fire, and all the rest, without further investigation

12. The references are to two poems, the first by Agustín Alonso (1585) and the second by Francisco Garrido Vicena (1555)

13. The first of the Palmerin novels, published in 1511, is of uncertain authorship. *The Palmerin of England* was the third novel in the series; it was written in Portuguese by Francisco Moraes Cabral and translated into Castilian by Luis Hurtado (1547).

6. Published by Lenchor Ortega de Ubeda in 1556.

7. Published anonymously in 1533, this is the fourth book of the series about Palmerin, another fictional knight.

8. Published anonymously, it has two parts, which appeared in 1521 and 1526, respectively.

9. An unfaithful prose translation of Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato* (*Roland in Love*), it was published in three parts in 1533, 1536, and 1550, respectively. The first two are attributed to López de Santa Catalina and the third to Pedro do Reynosa.

10. The archbishop of Reims, whose *Fables* (1527) are a fictional Carolingian chronicle. He is constantly cited for his veracity in *The Mirror of Chivalry*.

11. Matteo Boiardo was the author of *Orlando innamorato*; Ludovico Ariosto, who wrote *Orlando furioso*, referred only to the Christian God in his work. Cervantes disliked the Spanish translations of Ariosto, including the one by Captain Jerónimo do Urrea (1549), which he refers to in the next paragraph.

or inquiry, should perish.” “No, my friend,” the barber responded, “for the one I have here is the renowned *Don Belianís*.”¹⁴

“Well, that one,” replied the priest, “and its second, third, and fourth parts need a little dose of rhubarb to purge their excess of choler, and it would be necessary to remove everything about the castle of Fame and other, more serious impertinences, and therefore they are given a delayed sentence, and the degree to which they are emended will determine if mercy or justice are shown to them; in the meantime, my friend, keep them in your house, but permit no one to read them.”

“It will be my pleasure,” replied the barber.

And not wishing to tire himself further with the perusal of books of chivalry, he ordered the housekeeper to take all the large ones to the corral. This was not said to a foolish woman or a deaf one, but to a person who would rather burn the books than weave a piece of cloth, no matter how large or fine it might be, and she seized almost eight at a time and threw them out the window. Because she took so many together, one of them fell at the feet of the barber, who wanted to see which one it was and saw that it said: *History of the Famous Knight Tirant lo Blanc*.¹⁵

“God help me!” said the priest with a great shout. “Here is Tirant lo Blanc. Let me have it, friend, for I state here and now that in it I have found a wealth of pleasure and a gold mine of amusement. Here is Don Quirieleisón of Montalbán, that valiant knight, and his brother Tomás of Montalbán, and the knight Fonseca, not to mention the battle that the brave Tirant waged against the Alani, and the witticisms of the damsel Placerdemivida, and the loves and lies of the widow Reposada, and the lady Emperatriz, beloved of Hipólito, her squire. I tell you the truth, my friend, when I say that because of its style, this is the best book in the world: in it knights eat, and sleep, and die in their beds, and make a will before they die, and do everything else that all the other books of this sort leave out. For these reasons, since the author who composed this book did not deliberately write foolish things but intended to entertain and satirize, it deserves to be reprinted in an edition that would stay in print for a long time.¹⁶ Take it home and read it, and you’ll say that everything

14. Written by Jeroninso Fernández and published in 1547.

15. As indicated earlier, this was first published in 1490; composed in Catalan by Johanot Martorell and continued by Martí Johan de Galba, the anonymous Castilian translation was published in 1511.

16. In the translation of this sentence, which has been called the most obscure in the entire novel, I have followed the interpretation offered by Martín de Riquer. One of the problematic issues in Spanish is the word *galeras*, or “galleys,” which can mean either ships or publisher’s proofs.

I’ve said about it is true.”

“I’ll do that,” answered the barber. “But what shall we do with these small books that remain?”

“These,” said the priest, “are probably not about chivalry; they must be poetry.”

And opening one, he saw that it was *Diana*, by Jorge de Montemayor,¹⁷ and he said, believing that all the others were of the same genre:

“These do not deserve to be burned like the rest, because they do not and will not cause the harm that books of chivalry have, for they are books of the understanding and do no injury to anyone.”

“Oh, Señor!” said the niece. “Your grace should send them to be burned, just like all the rest, because it’s very likely that my dear uncle, having been cured of the chivalric disease, will read these and want to become a shepherd and wander through the woods and meadows singing and playing, and, what would be even worse, become a poet, and that, they say, is an incurable and contagious disease.”

“What the girl says is true,” said the priest, “and it would be a good idea to remove from the path of our friend this obstacle and danger. And, to begin with Montemayor’s *Diana*, I am of the opinion that it should not be burned, but that everything having to do with the wise Felicia and the enchanted water, and almost all the long verses, should be excised, and let it happily keep all the prose and the honor of being the first of such books.”

“This next one,” said the barber, “is called *Diana the Second*, by the Salamancan, and here’s another one with the same name, whose author is Gil Polo.”¹⁸

“The one by the Salamancan,” replied the priest, “should join and add to the number of those condemned in the corral, and the one by Gil Polo should be preserved as if it were by Apollo himself; and move on, my friend, and let’s hurry; it’s growing late.”

“This book,” said the barber, opening another one, “is *The Ten Books of Fortune in Love*, composed by Antonio de Lofraso, a Sardinian poet.”¹⁹

“By the orders I received,” said the priest, “since Apollo was Apollo, and the muses muses, and poets poets, no book as amusing or nonsensical

17. As indicated earlier, this was the first pastoral novel in Spanish.

18. A very poor continuation by Alonso Pérez, a Salamancan physician, printed in 1564; also published in 1564 is the highly esteemed *Diana enamorada* (*Diana in Love*) by Gil Polo.

19. Published in 1573, according to Martín de Riquer. Cervantes’s praise is ironic, since he mocked the book in his *Viaje del Parnaso* (*Voyage from Parnassus*).

has ever been written, and since, in its way, it is the best and most unusual book of its kind that has seen the light of day, anyone who has not read it can assume that he has never read anything entertaining. Give it to me, friend, for I value finding it more than if I were given a cassock of rich Florentine cloth.”

He set it aside with great delight, and the barber continued, saying:

“These next ones are *The Shepherd of Iberia*, *Nymphs of Henares*, and *Deceptions of Jealousy*.”²⁰

“Well, there’s nothing else to do,” said the priest, “but turn them over to the secular arm of the housekeeper; and don’t ask me why, for I’d never finish.”

“This one is *The Shepherd of Filida*.”²¹

“He isn’t a shepherd,” said the priest, “but a very prudent courtier; keep that as if it were a precious jewel.”

“This large one here,” said the barber, “is called *Treasury of Various Poems*.”²²

“If there weren’t so many,” said the priest, “they would be more highly esteemed; this book needs a weeding and clearing out of certain base things contained among all its grandeurs. Keep it, because its author

is a friend of mine, and out of respect for other, more heroic and elevated works that he has written.”

“This,” said the barber, “is *The Songbook* by López Maldonado.”²³

“The author of that book,” replied the priest, “is also a great friend of mine, and when he recites his verses they amaze anyone who hears them, and the delicacy of his voice when he sings them is enchanting. He’s somewhat long-winded in the eclogues, but you can’t have too much of a good thing; keep it with the chosen ones. But what’s that book next to it?”

“*La Galatea*, by Miguel de Cervantes,”²⁴ said the barber.

“This Cervantes has been a good friend of mine for many years, and I know that he is better versed in misfortunes than in verses. His book has a certain creativity; it proposes something and concludes nothing. We

have to wait for the second part he has promised; perhaps with that addition it will achieve the mercy denied to it now; in the meantime, keep it locked away in your house, my friend.”

“Gladly,” the barber responded. “And here are three all together: *La Araucana*, by Don Alonso de Ercilla, *La Austriada*, by Juan Rub, a magistrate of Córdoba, and *El Monserrate*, by Cristóbal de Virués, a Valencian poet.”²⁵

“All three of them,” said the priest, “are the best books written in heroic verse in the Castilian language, and they can compete with the most famous from Italy: keep them as the richest gems of poetry that Spain has.”

The priest wearied of seeing more books, and so, without further reflection, he wanted all the rest to be burned; but the barber already had one open, and it was called *The Tears of Angelica*.²⁶

“I would shed them myself,” said the priest when he heard the name, “if I had sent such a book to be burned, because its author was one of the famous poets not only of Spain but of the world, and he had great success translating some fables by Ovid.”

25. Epic poems of the Spanish Renaissance, they were published in 1569, 1584, and 1588, respectively.

26. Published in 1586 by Luis Barahona de Sow.

20. The first, by Bernardo de la Vega was published in 1591; the second, by Bernardo González de Bohadilla, was published in 1587; the third, by Bartolomé López de Encino, was published in 1586.

21. Published in 1582 by Luis Gálvez de Montalvo.

22. Published in 1580 by Pedro de Padilla.

23. Published in 1586 by Gabriel López Maldonado and his collaborator, Miguel de Cervantes.

24. This pastoral novel was the first work published by Cervantes, in 1585; the often promised second part was never published and has been lost.