Carolyn Nadeau, Illinois Wesleyan University, interviewed by Charlie Schlenker, WGLT
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A new wrinkle on the story of an old geezer who likes to charge at windmills brandishing a pointy stick. WGLT's Charlie Schlenker interviews a Central Illinois scholar about her new book on Don Quixote...

Charlie Schlenker: Carolyn Nadeau is an Associate Professor of Spanish at Illinois Wesleyan University. Her new book is *Women of the Prologue: Imitation, Myth, and Magic in Don Quixote*. She writes that the author, Miguel de Cervantes, treats women differently than previous authors.

Carolyn Nadeau: Cervantes in *Don Quixote* offers the women a sense of freedom that is not found in a lot of the literature at the time. One of my favorite characters in particular, Marcela, decides she doesn't want to get married and goes out and lives on her own, and that's basically unheard of, and then when Don Quixote and other characters in the text encounter her, Don Quixote ends up defending that sense of freedom because it's exactly the type of freedom he's looking for as well, so…

Charlie Schlenker: What was the response to that sort of role-breaking for women in the—

Carolyn Nadeau: And—

Charlie Schlenker: In the 17th century?

Carolyn Nadeau: I think that the response of the characters in the text might have been reflective of the response of the people at the time and they basically reject Marcela and say, "You go live alone if you want but we're going to have nothing to do with you."

Charlie Schlenker: What makes Cervantes revolutionary in form compared to his predecessors?

Carolyn Nadeau: When he's writing, the sort of current trend of the day is to imitate past writers, sort of take the styles of what other people are doing and use them and that in itself makes you a good writer, and that's something he's trying to turn away from. That's one of the main gestures in the book, is to examine that imitation theory that he's using and chooses, of course, to not use. He is more interested not in that dialogue with the past but in a dialogue with his readers and sort of more contemporary issues that are more pressing for his readers and for him, so it's that sort of change from dialoguing with the past to dialoguing with the present.

Charlie Schlenker: In emphasizing greater freedoms and responsibilities for women in 17th century Spain, how does Cervantes connect with today's culture?

Carolyn Nadeau: In classes when I—when we begin reading this and they're looking at these women, students generally are amazed at what kind of things women are allowed to do that—not allowed to do but actually do in his text—pursue their own honor, pursue—they've been

somehow mistreated and they want to rectify that, so that kind of strength from those type of female characters that he paints in his novel really resound in students today, both men and women.

Charlie Schlenker: Another thing you do in your class is compare the music of iconoclastic pop music anti-star Moby with Don Quixote, how does that work?

Carolyn Nadeau: Yeah, yeah. I was actually amazed myself. I've been listening to Moby for a couple of years and this spring I saw this *New York Times* article with him where he talks about how he, of course like any pop star, sort of takes in past traditions of gospel and funk and that kind of thing and remixes and recreates to make it uniquely his own. Well *that* is one thing that Cervantes does very well. He takes a lot of these past traditional prose types, the chivalric tradition, the pastoral tradition, sentimental novel and brings them all together to make them something that is uniquely his and that people identify with Don Quixote and not with these past traditions. But the other thing that really rang home to me was when they were interviewing Moby he said, "I don't really—I'm not so interested in whether it's unique or authentic." He said, "As long as it provides an emotional response in my listener, that's when I know I've been successful." And that was clearly what Cervantes was thinking in his dialogue with the reader and not dialogue with past writers. He's more interested in how his reader is going to respond to his material and not whether he's, you know, appropriating the correct way or something like that.

Charlie Schlenker: They both make a virtue out of being rejected too, don't they?

Carolyn Nadeau: Oh, that could be as well, yeah. He's a parody of these chivalric traditions and everyone he comes into contact with rejects him as a knight.

Charlie Schlenker: And Moby is a very anti-music establishment.

Carolyn Nadeau: Right, right, right. I don't know. It's kind of debatable. This summer he's kind of, you know, doing this big tour with David Bowie and…

Charlie Schlenker: Oh.

Carolyn Nadeau: But that's a whole other—

Charlie Schlenker: It was a try, alright? [laughs]

Carolyn Nadeau: Yeah.

Charlie Schlenker: Illinois Wesleyan University Professor Carolyn Nadeau's book on Don Quixote is published by Bucknell University Press. I'm Charlie Schlenker, WGLT News.