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## **The Editor's Column**

### **The Chivalric University**

by **Daniel Eisenberg**

If truck drivers are the *arrieros* of today's world, and truckstops the *ventas*, university professors are surely the *caballeros andantes*. No other profession is as mobile: like the knights-errant, we are constantly running off to this or that corner of the country, or the world, to pursue research, to meet with each other, or I suspect, for no other reason than that we enjoy it and society sanctions it.

The means by which a scholar enters the profession, which, like the chivalric world, runs on *honra, fama*, and oral exchange of information, resemble to a surprising degree the medieval world as portrayed in the Spanish *libros de caballerías*. In the chivalric books, the knight seeks to be dubbed by the person of highest status he can convince to do it, because some of the honor of the person conferring knighthood "rubs off" on the acolyte. Is not the same true of our doctoral-granting institutions? There is a historical parallel between the "thesis" which new scholars must defend against all comers (and still do, in some

countries), and the challenge Don Quixote issues in I, 4.

The same prestige factor, as in the chivalric world, works in the other direction as well. A university which wants to gain prestige will try to attract the most prestigious professors, and, like a king in the *libros*, will do everything within its resources to motivate them to stay. In its social function, and organization, a university is like a court.

The modern equivalent of the abundant, even monotonous tournaments of the *libros*, which brought together knights from far and near, are academic conventions, and professors engage in scholarly combat with each other either at such gatherings or in the pages of scholarly journals, marshaling their facts and planning their strategy just as did a military leader of old. There are tacit but very real rules governing this academic combat as well, and they are chivalric in spirit as well. Scholars should engage in combat only when it is unavoidable, and not frivolously, one should not humiliate one's enemy, one should put principle above personality. Scholars, like knights, should be unselfish and helpful, assume responsibilities as well as enjoy privileges, and be useful to society. Their ideals are not that different from those of Don Quixote.

Su. s. s.