



Miguel de Cervantes

Don Quixote

A New Translation by Edith

Grossman

Introduction by Harold Bloom

 HarperCollins e-books

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[Translator's Note to the Reader](#)

In the author's prologue to what is now called part I of *Don Quixote* (part II appeared ten years later, in 1615, following the publication of a continuation of the knight's adventures written by someone using the pseudonym "Avellaneda"), Cervantes said this about his book and the need to write a preface for it:

I wanted only to offer it to you plain and bare, unadorned by a prologue or the endless catalogue of sonnets, epigrams, and laudatory poems that are usually placed at the beginning of books. For I can tell you that although it cost me some effort to compose, none seemed greater than creating the preface you are now reading. I picked up my pen many times to write it, and many times I put it down again because I did not know what to write; and once, when I was baffled, with the paper in front of me, my pen behind my ear, my elbow propped on the writing table and my cheek resting in my hand, pondering what I would say, a friend of mine...came in, and seeing me so perplexed he asked the reason, and I...said I was thinking

about the prologue I had to write for the history of Don Quixote....

Cervantes's fictional difficulty was certainly my factual one as I contemplated the prospect of writing even a few lines about the wonderfully utopian task of translating the first—and probably the greatest—modern novel. Substitute keyboard and monitor for pen and paper, and my dilemma and posture were the same; the dear friend who helped me solve the problem was really Cervantes himself, an embodied spirit who emerged out of the shadows and off the pages when I realized I could begin this note by quoting a few sentences from his prologue.

I call the undertaking utopian in the sense intended by Ortega y Gasset when he deemed translations utopian but then went on to say that all human efforts to communicate—even in the same language—are equally utopian, equally luminous with value, and equally worth the doing. Endeavoring to translate artful writing, particularly an indispensable work like *Don Quixote*, grows out of infinite optimism as the translator valiantly, perhaps quixotically, attempts to enter the mind of the first writer through the gateway of the text. It is a daunting and inspiring enterprise.

I have never kept a translating journal, though I admire those I have read. Keeping records of any kind is not something I do easily, and after six or seven hours of translating at the computer, the idea of writing about what

I have written looms insurmountably, as does the kind of self-scrutiny required: the actuality of the translation is in the translation, and having to articulate how and why I have just articulated the text seems cruelly redundant. Yet there are some general considerations that may be of interest to you. I hesitated over the spelling of the protagonist's name, for instance, and finally opted for an *x*, not a *j*, in Quixote (I wanted the connection to the English "quixotic" to be immediately apparent); I debated the question of footnotes with myself and decided I was obliged to put some in, though I had never used them before in a translation (I did not want the reader to be put off by references that may now be obscure, or to miss the layers of intention and meaning those allusions create); I wondered about consulting other translations and vowed not to—at least in the beginning—in order to keep my ear clear and the voice of the translation free of outside influences (I kept the vow for the first year, and then, from time to time, I glanced at other people's work); I chose to use Martín de Riquer's edition of *Don Quixote*, which is based on the first printing of the book (with all its historic slips and errors) and has useful notes that include discussions of problematic words and phrases based on Riquer's comparisons of the earliest seventeenth-century translations into English, French, and Italian. Finally, I assure you that I felt an ongoing, unstoppable rush of exhilaration

and terror, for perfectly predictable and transparent reasons, at undertaking so huge and so important a project.

Every translator has to live with the kind of pedantic critic who is always ready to pounce at an infelicitous phrase or misinterpreted word in a book that can be hundreds of pages long. I had two or three soul-searing nightmares about rampaging hordes laying waste to my translation of the work that is not only the great monument of literature in Spanish but a pillar of the entire Western literary tradition. The extraordinary significance and influence of this novel were reaffirmed, once again, in 2002, when one hundred major writers from fifty-four countries voted *Don Quixote* the best work of fiction in the world. One reason for the exalted position it occupies is that Cervantes's book contains within itself, in germ or full-blown, practically every imaginative technique and device used by subsequent fiction writers to engage their readers and construct their works. The prospect of translating it was stupefying.

Shortly before I began work, while I was wrestling with the question of what kind of voice would be most appropriate for the translation of a book written some four hundred years ago, I mentioned my fears to Julián Ríos, the Spanish novelist. His reply was simple and profound and immensely liberating. He told me not to be afraid; Cervantes, he said, was

our most modern writer, and what I had to do was to translate him the way I translated everyone else—that is, the contemporary authors whose works I have brought over into English. Julián's characterization was a revelation; it desacralized the project and allowed me, finally, to confront the text and find the voice in English. For me this is the essential challenge in translation: hearing, in the most profound way I can, the text in Spanish and discovering the voice to say (I mean, to write) the text again in English.

Compared to that, lexical difficulties shrink and wither away.

I believe that my primary obligation as a literary translator is to recreate for the reader in English the experience of the reader in Spanish.

When Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote*, it was not yet a seminal masterpiece of European literature, the book that crystallized forever the making of literature out of life *and* literature, that explored in typically ironic fashion, and for the first time, the blurred and shifting frontiers between fact and fiction, imagination and history, perception and physical reality, or that set the stage for all Hispanic studies and all serious discussions of the history and nature of the novel. When Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote*, his language was not archaic or quaint. He wrote in a crackling, up-to-date Spanish that was an intrinsic part of his time (this is instantly apparent when he has Don Quixote, in transports of knightly madness, speak in the old-fashioned

idiom of the novels of chivalry), a modern language that both reflected and helped to shape the way people experienced the world. This meant that I did not need to find a special, anachronistic, somehow-seventeenth-century voice but could translate his astonishingly fine writing into contemporary English.

And his writing is a marvel: it gives off sparks and flows like honey.

Cervantes's style is so artful it seems absolutely natural and inevitable; his irony is sweet-natured, his sensibility sophisticated, compassionate, and humorous. If my translation works at all, the reader should keep turning the pages, smiling a good deal, periodically bursting into laughter, and impatiently waiting for the next synonym (Cervantes delighted in accumulating synonyms, especially descriptive ones, within the same phrase), the next mind-bending coincidence, the next variation on the structure of Don Quixote's adventures, the next incomparable conversation between the knight and his squire. To quote again from Cervantes's prologue: "I do not want to charge you too much for the service I have performed in introducing you to so noble and honorable a knight; but I do want you to thank me for allowing you to make the acquaintance of the famous Sancho Panza, his squire...."

I began the work in February 2001 and completed it two years later,

but it is important for you to know that “final” versions are determined more by a publisher’s due date than by any sense on my part that the work is actually finished. Even so, I hope you find it deeply amusing and truly compelling. If not, you can be certain the fault is mine.

EDITH GROSSMAN

March 2003

New York

Introduction:

Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, and Miguel de

Cervantes Saavedra

BY HAROLD BLOOM

1

What is the true object of Don Quixote’s quest? I find that unanswerable.

What are Hamlet’s authentic motives? We are not permitted to know. Since

Cervantes’s magnificent Knight’s quest has cosmological scope and

reverberation, no object seems beyond reach. Hamlet’s frustration is that he

is allowed only Elsinore and revenge tragedy. Shakespeare composed a

poem unlimited, in which only the protagonist is beyond all limits.

Cervantes and Shakespeare, who died almost simultaneously, are the

central Western authors, at least since Dante, and no writer since has

matched them, not Tolstoi or Goethe, Dickens, Proust, Joyce. Context cannot hold Cervantes and Shakespeare: the Spanish Golden Age and the Elizabethan-Jacobean era are secondary when we attempt a full appreciation of what we are given.

W. H. Auden found in Don Quixote a portrait of the Christian saint, as opposed to Hamlet, who “lacks faith in God and in himself.” Though Auden *sounds* perversely ironic, he was quite serious and, I think, wrong-headed. Against Auden I set Miguel de Unamuno, my favorite critic of *Don Quixote*. For Unamuno, Alonso Quixano is the Christian saint, while Don Quixote is the originator of the actual Spanish religion, Quixotism.

Herman Melville blended Don Quixote and Hamlet in Captain Ahab (with a touch of Milton’s Satan added for seasoning). Ahab desires to avenge himself upon the white whale, while Satan would destroy God, if only he could. Hamlet is death’s ambassador to us, according to G. Wilson Knight. Don Quixote says that his quest is to destroy injustice. The final injustice is death, the ultimate bondage. To set captives free is the knight’s pragmatic way of battling against death.

Though there have been many valuable English translations of *Don Quixote*, I would commend Edith Grossman’s version for the extraordinarily high quality of her prose. The Knight and Sancho are so

eloquently rendered by Grossman that the vitality of their characterization is more clearly conveyed than ever before. There is also an astonishing contextualization of Don Quixote and Sancho in Grossman's translation that I believe has not been achieved before. The spiritual atmosphere of a Spain already in steep decline can be felt throughout, thanks to the heightened quality of her diction.

Grossman might be called the Glenn Gould of translators, because she, too, articulates every note. Reading her amazing mode of finding equivalents in English for Cervantes's darkening vision is an entrance into a further understanding of why this great book contains within itself all the novels that have followed in its sublime wake. Like Shakespeare, Cervantes is inescapable for all writers who have come after him. Dickens and Flaubert, Joyce and Proust reflect the narrative procedures of Cervantes, and their glories of characterization mingle strains of Shakespeare and Cervantes.

2

You cannot locate Shakespeare in his own works, not even in the sonnets. It is this near invisibility that encourages the zealots who believe that almost anyone wrote Shakespeare, except Shakespeare himself. As far as I know, the Hispanic world does not harbor covens who labor to prove that Lope de

Vega or Calderón de la Barca composed *Don Quixote*. Cervantes inhabits his great book so pervasively that we need to see that it has three unique personalities: the Knight, Sancho, and Cervantes himself.

Yet how sly and subtle is the presence of Cervantes! At its most hilarious, *Don Quixote* is immensely somber. Shakespeare again is the illuminating analogue: Hamlet at his most melancholic will not cease his punning or his gallows humor, and Falstaff's boundless wit is tormented by intimations of rejection. Just as Shakespeare wrote in no genre, *Don Quixote* is tragedy as well as comedy. Though it stands forever as the birth of the novel out of the prose romance, and is still the best of all novels, I find its sadness augments each time I reread it and does make it "the Spanish Bible," as Unamuno termed this greatest of all narratives. Novels are written by George Eliot and Henry James, by Balzac and Flaubert, or by the Tolstois of *Anna Karenina*. *Don Quixote* may not be a scripture, but it so contains us that, as with Shakespeare, we cannot get out of it, in order to achieve perspectivism. We are inside the vast book, privileged to hear the superb conversations between the Knight and his squire, Sancho Panza. Sometimes we are fused with Cervantes, but more often we are invisible wanderers who accompany the sublime pair in their adventures and debacles.

If there is a third Western author with universal appeal from the Renaissance on, it could only be Dickens. Yet Dickens purposely does not give us “man’s final lore,” which Melville found in Shakespeare and presumably in Cervantes also. *King Lear*’s first performance took place as part I of *Don Quixote* was published. Contra Auden, Cervantes, like Shakespeare, gives us a secular transcendence. Don Quixote does regard himself as God’s knight, but he continuously follows his own capricious will, which is gloriously idiosyncratic. King Lear appeals to the skyey heavens for aid, but on the personal grounds that they and he are old. Battered by realities that are even more violent than he is, Don Quixote resists yielding to the authority of church and state. When he ceases to assert his autonomy, there is nothing left except to be Alonso Quixano the Good again, and no action remaining except to die.

I return to my initial question: the Sorrowful Knight’s object. He is at war with Freud’s reality principle, which accepts the necessity of dying. But he is neither a fool nor a madman, and his vision always is at least double: he sees what we see, yet he sees something else also, a possible glory that he desires to appropriate or at least share. Unamuno names this transcendence as literary fame, the immortality of Cervantes and Shakespeare. Certainly that is part of the Knight’s quest; much of part II

turns upon his and Sancho's delightful apprehension that their adventures in part I are recognized everywhere. Perhaps Unamuno underestimated the complexities involved in so grand a disruption in the aesthetics of representation. *Hamlet* again is the best analogue: from the entrance of the players in act II through the close of the performance of *The Mousetrap* in act III, all the rules of normative representation are tossed away, and everything is theatricality. Part II of *Don Quixote* is similarly and bewilderingly advanced, since the Knight, Sancho, and everyone they encounter are acutely conscious that fiction has disrupted the order of reality.

3

We need to hold in mind as we read *Don Quixote* that we cannot condescend to the Knight and Sancho, since together they know more than we do, just as we never can catch up to the amazing speed of Hamlet's cognitions. Do we know exactly who we are? The more urgently we quest for our authentic selves, the more they tend to recede. The Knight and Sancho, as the great work closes, know exactly who they are, not so much by their adventures as through their marvelous conversations, be they quarrels or exchanges of insights.

Poetry, particularly Shakespeare's, teaches us how to talk to ourselves,

but not to others. Shakespeare's great figures are gorgeous solipsists: Shylock, Falstaff, Hamlet, Iago, Lear, Cleopatra, with Rosalind the brilliant exception. Don Quixote and Sancho really listen to each other and change through this receptivity. Neither of them *overhears* himself, which is the Shakespearean mode. Cervantes or Shakespeare: they are rival teachers of how we change and why. Friendship in Shakespeare is ironic at best, treacherous more commonly. The friendship between Sancho Panza and his Knight surpasses any other in literary representation.

We do not have *Cardenio*, the play Shakespeare wrote, with John Fletcher, after reading Thomas Shelton's contemporaneous translation of *Don Quixote*. Therefore we cannot know what Shakespeare thought of Cervantes, though we can surmise his delight. Cervantes, an unsuccessful dramatist, presumably never heard of Shakespeare, but I doubt that he would have valued Falstaff and Hamlet, both of whom chose the self's freedom over obligations of any kind. Sancho, as Kafka remarked, is a free man, but Don Quixote is metaphysically and psychologically bound by his dedication to knight errantry. We can celebrate the Knight's endless valor, but not his literalization of the romance of chivalry.

4

But does Don Quixote altogether believe in the reality of his own vision?

Evidently he does not, particularly when he (and Sancho) is surrendered by Cervantes to the sadomasochistic practical jokes—indeed, the vicious and humiliating cruelties—that afflict the Knight and squire in part II. Nabokov is very illuminating on this in his *Lectures on Don Quixote*, published posthumously in 1983:

Both parts of *Don Quixote* form a veritable encyclopedia of cruelty.

From that viewpoint it is one of the most bitter and barbarous books ever penned. And its cruelty is artistic.

To find a Shakespearean equivalent to this aspect of *Don Quixote*, you would have to fuse *Titus Andronicus* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* into one work, a grim prospect because they are, to me, Shakespeare's weakest plays. Falstaff's dreadful humiliation by the merry wives is unacceptable enough (even if it formed the basis for Verdi's sublime *Falstaff*). Why does Cervantes subject Don Quixote to the physical abuse of part I and the psychic tortures of part II? Nabokov's answer is aesthetic: The cruelty is vitalized by Cervantes's characteristic artistry. That seems to me something of an evasion. *Twelfth Night* is comedy unsurpassable, and on the stage we are consumed by hilarity at Malvolio's terrible humiliations. When we reread the play, we become uneasy, because Malvolio's socioerotic fantasies echo in virtually all of us. Why are we not made at least a little dubious by

the torments, bodily and socially, suffered by Don Quixote and Sancho Panza?

Cervantes himself, as a constant if disguised presence in the text, is the answer. He was the most battered of eminent writers. At the great naval battle of Lepanto, he was wounded and so at twenty-four permanently lost the use of his left hand. In 1575, he was captured by Barbary pirates and spent five years as a slave in Algiers. Ransomed in 1580, he served Spain as a spy in Portugal and Oran and then returned to Madrid, where he attempted a career as a dramatist, almost invariably failing after writing at least twenty plays. Somewhat desperately, he became a tax collector, only to be indicted and imprisoned for supposed malfeasance in 1597. A fresh imprisonment came in 1605; there is a tradition that he began to compose *Don Quixote* in jail. Part I, written at incredible speed, was published in 1605. Part II, spurred by a false continuation of *Don Quixote* by one Avellaneda, was published in 1615.

Fleeced of all royalties of part I by the publisher, Cervantes would have died in poverty except for the belated patronage of a discerning nobleman, in the last three years of his life. Though Shakespeare died at just fifty-two (why, we do not know), he was an immensely successful dramatist and became quite prosperous by shareholding in the actors' company that

played at the Globe Theater. Circumspect, and only too aware of the government-inspired murder of Christopher Marlowe, and their torture of Thomas Kyd, and branding of Ben Jonson, Shakespeare kept himself nearly anonymous, in spite of being the reigning dramatist of London. Violence, slavery, and imprisonment were the staples of Cervantes's life.

Shakespeare, wary to the end, had an existence almost without a memorable incident, as far as we can tell.

The physical and mental torments suffered by Don Quixote and Sancho Panza had been central to Cervantes's endless struggle to stay alive and free. Yet Nabokov's observations are accurate: cruelty is extreme throughout *Don Quixote*. The aesthetic wonder is that this enormity fades when we stand back from the huge book and ponder its shape and endless range of meaning. No critic's account of Cervantes's masterpiece agrees with, or even resembles, any other critic's impressions. *Don Quixote* is a mirror held up not to nature, but to the reader. How can this bashed and mocked knight errant be, as he is, a universal paradigm?

5

Hamlet does not need or want our admiration and affection, but Don Quixote does, and he receives it, as Hamlet generally does also. Sancho, like Falstaff, is replete with self-delight, though Sancho does not rouse

moralizing critics to wrath and disapproval, as the sublime Falstaff does. Much more has been written about the Hamlet/Don Quixote contrast than about Sancho/Falstaff, two vitalists in aesthetic contention as masters of reality. But no critic has called Don Quixote a murderer or Sancho an immoralist. Hamlet is responsible for eight deaths, his own included, and Falstaff is a highwayman, a warrior averse to battle, and a fleecer of everyone he encounters. Yet Hamlet and Falstaff are victimizers, not victims, even if Hamlet dies properly fearing a wounded name and Falstaff is destroyed by Hal/Henry V's rejection. It does not matter. The fascination of Hamlet's intellect and of Falstaff's wit is what endures. Don Quixote and Sancho are victims, but both are extraordinarily resilient, until the Knight's final defeat and dying into the identity of Quixano the Good, whom Sancho vainly implores to take to the road again. The fascination of Don Quixote's endurance and of Sancho's loyal wisdom always remains.

Cervantes plays upon the human need to withstand suffering, which is one reason the Knight awes us. However good a Catholic he may (or may not) have been, Cervantes is interested in heroism and not in sainthood.

Shakespeare, I think, was not interested in either, since none of his heroes can endure close scrutiny: Hamlet, Othello, Antony, Coriolanus. Only Edgar, the recalcitrant survivor who inherits the nation, most unwillingly, in

King Lear, abides our skepticism, and at least one prominent Shakespeare critic weirdly has called Edgar “weak and murderous.” The heroism of Don Quixote is by no means constant: he is perfectly capable of flight, abandoning poor Sancho to be beaten up by an entire village. Cervantes, a hero at Lepanto, wants Don Quixote to be a new kind of hero, neither ironic nor mindless, but one who wills to be himself, as José Ortega y Gasset accurately phrased it.

Hamlet subverts the will, while Falstaff satirizes it. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza both exalt the will, though the Knight transcendentalizes it, and Sancho, the first postpragmatic, wants to keep it within limits. It is the transcendent element in Don Quixote that ultimately persuades us of his greatness, partly because it is set against the deliberately coarse, frequently sordid context of the panoramic book. And again it is important to note that this transcendence is secular and literary, and not Catholic. The Quixotic quest is erotic, yet even the eros is literary. Crazed by reading (as so many of us still are), the Knight is in quest of a new self, one that can overgo the erotic madness of Orlando (Roland) in Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* or of the mythic Amadís of Gaul. Unlike Orlando’s or Amadís’s, Don Quixote’s madness is deliberate, self-inflicted, a traditional poetic strategy. Still, there is a clear sublimation of the sexual drive in the Knight’s desperate courage.

Lucidity keeps breaking in, reminding him that Dulcinea is his own supreme fiction, transcending an honest lust for the peasant girl Aldonza Lorenzo. A fiction, believed in even though you know it is a fiction, can be validated only by sheer will.

Erich Auerbach argued for the book's "continuous gaiety," which is not at all my own experience as a reader. But *Don Quixote*, like the best of Shakespeare, will sustain any theory you bring to it, as well or as badly as any other. The Sorrowful Knight is more than an enigma: he seeks an undying name, literary immortality, and finds it, but only through being all but dismantled in part I and all but teased into real madness in part II:

Cervantes performs the miracle, nobly Dante-like, of presiding over his creation like a Providence, but also subjecting himself to the subtle changes brought about both in the Knight and in Sancho Panza by their wonderful conversations, in which a shared love manifests itself by equality and grumpy disputes. They are brothers, rather than father and son. To describe the precise way that Cervantes regards them, whether with ironic love or loving irony, is an impossible critical task.

6

Harry Levin shrewdly phrased what he called "Cervantes' formula":

This is nothing more nor less than a recognition of the difference

between verses and reverses, between words and deeds, *palabras* and *hechos*—in short, between literary artifice and that real thing which is life itself. But literary artifice is the only means that a writer has at his disposal. How else can he convey his impression of life? Precisely by discrediting those means, by repudiating that air of bookishness in which any book is inevitably wrapped. When Pascal observed that the true eloquence makes fun of eloquence, he succinctly formulated the principle that could look to Cervantes as its recent and striking exemplar. It remained for La Rochefoucauld to restate the other side of the paradox: some people would never have loved if they had not heard of love.

It is true that I cannot think of any other work in which the relations between words and deeds are as ambiguous as in *Don Quixote*, except (once again) for *Hamlet*. Cervantes's formula is also Shakespeare's, though in Cervantes we feel the burden of the experiential, whereas Shakespeare is uncanny, since nearly all of his experience was theatrical. Still, the ironizing of eloquence characterizes the speeches of both Hamlet and Don Quixote. One might at first think that Hamlet is more word-conscious than is the Knight, but part II of Cervantes's dark book manifests a growth in the Sorrowful Face's awareness of his own rhetoricity.

I want to illustrate Don Quixote's development by setting him against the wonderful trickster Ginés de Pasamonte, whose first appearance is as a galley-bound prisoner in part I, chapter XXII, and who pops up again in part II, chapters XXV–XXVII, as Master Pedro, the divinator and puppeteer. Ginés is a sublime scamp and picaroon confidence man, but also a picaresque romance writer in the model of *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1533), the anonymous masterpiece of its mode (see W. S. Merwin's beautiful translation, in 1962). When Ginés reappears as Master Pedro in part II, he has become a satire upon Cervantes's hugely successful rival, Lope de Vega, the “monster of literature” who turned out a hit play nearly every week (whereas Cervantes had failed hopelessly as a dramatist).

Every reader has her or his favorite episodes in *Don Quixote*; mine are the two misadventures the Knight inaugurates in regard to Ginés/Master Pedro. In the first, Don Quixote gallantly frees Ginés and his fellow prisoners, only to be beaten nearly to death (with poor Sancho) by the ungrateful convicts. In the second, the Knight is so taken in by Master Pedro's illusionism that he charges at the puppet show and cuts the puppets to pieces, in what can be regarded as Cervantes's critique of Lope de Vega. Here first is Ginés, in the admirable new translation by Edith Grossman: “He's telling the truth,” said the commissary. “He wrote his own

history himself, as fine as you please, and he pawned the book for two hundred *reales* and left it in prison.”

“And I intend to redeem it,” said Ginés, “even for two hundred *ducados*. ”

“Is it that good?” said Don Quixote.

“It is so good,” responded Ginés, “that it’s too bad for *Lazarillo de Tormes* and all the other books of that genre that have been written or will be written. What I can tell your grace is that it deals with truths, and they are truths so appealing and entertaining that no lies can equal them.”

“And what is the title of the book?” asked Don Quixote.

“*The Life of Ginés de Pasamonte*, ” he replied.

“And is it finished?” asked Don Quixote.

“How can it be finished,” he responded, “if my life isn’t finished yet? What I’ve written goes from my birth to the moment when they sentenced me to the galleys this last time.”

“Then you have been there before?” said Don Quixote.

“To serve God and the king, I’ve already spent four years on the galleys, and I know the taste of the hardtack and the overseer’s whip,” responded Ginés. “And I’m not too sorry to go there, because

I'll have time to finish my book, for I still have lots of things to say, and on the galleys of Spain there's more leisure than I'll need, though I don't need much for what I have to write because I know it by heart."

Ginés, admirable miscreant, is a demonic parody of Cervantes himself, who had served five years in Algerian slavery and whose total *Don Quixote* became nearly unfinishable. The death of Cervantes came only a year after the publication of the second part of the great saga. Doubtless, Cervantes regarded Lope de Vega as his own demonic shadow, which is made clearer in the magnificent assault upon Master Pedro's puppet show. The picaroon Ginés follows the general law of part II, which is that everyone of consequence either has read part I or is aware that he was a character in it. Master Pedro evades identity with Ginés, but at the high cost of witnessing another furious assault by the Knight of the Woeful Face. But this comes just after Master Pedro is strongly identified with Lope de Vega:

The interpreter said nothing in reply but went on, saying:

"There was no lack of curious eyes, the kind that tend to see everything, to see Melisendra descend from the balcony and mount the horse, and they informed King Marsilio, who immediately gave orders to sound the call to arms; and see how soon this is done, and

how the city is flooded with the sound of the bells that ring from all the towers of the mosques.”

“No, that is wrong!” said Don Quixote. “Master Pedro is incorrect in the matter of the bells, for the Moors do not use bells but drums and a kind of flute that resembles our flageolet, and there is no doubt that ringing bells in Sansueña is a great piece of nonsense.”

This was heard by Master Pedro, who stopped the ringing and said:

“Your grace should not concern yourself with trifles, Señor Don Quixote, or try to carry things so far that you never reach the end of them. Aren’t a thousand plays performed almost every day that are full of a thousand errors and pieces of nonsense, and yet are successful productions that are greeted not only with applause but with admiration? Go on, boy, and let them say what they will, for as long as I fill my purse, there can be more errors than atoms in the sun.”

“That is true,” replied Don Quixote.

When Don Quixote assaults the puppet show, Cervantes assaults the popular taste that had preferred the theater of Lope de Vega to his own: And Don Quixote, seeing and hearing so many Moors and so much

clamor, thought it would be a good idea to assist those who were fleeing; and rising to his feet, in a loud voice he said:

“I shall not consent, in my lifetime and in my presence, to any such offense against an enamored knight so famous and bold as Don Gaiferos. Halt, you lowborn rabble; do not follow and do not pursue him unless you wish to do battle with me!”

And speaking and taking action, he unsheathed his sword, leaped next to the stage, and with swift and never before seen fury began to rain down blows on the crowd of Moorish puppets, knocking down some, beheading others, ruining this one, destroying that one, and among many other blows he delivered so powerful a downstroke that if Master Pedro had not stooped, crouched down, and hunched over, he would have cut off his head more easily than if it had been so much marzipan. Master Pedro cried out, saying:

“Your grace must stop, Señor Don Quixote, and realize that the ones you are overthrowing, destroying, and killing are not real Moors but only pasteboard figures. Sinner that I am, you are destroying and ruining everything I own!”

But this did not keep Don Quixote from raining down slashes, two-handed blows, thrusts, and backstrokes. In short, in less time

than it takes to tell about it, he knocked the puppet theater to the floor, all its scenery and figures cut and broken to pieces: King Marsilio was badly wounded, and Emperor Charlemagne's head and crown were split in two. The audience of spectators was in a tumult, the monkey ran out the window and onto the roof, the cousin was fearful, the page was frightened, and even Sancho Panza was terrified, because, as he swore when the storm was over, he had never seen his master in so wild a fury. When the general destruction of the puppet theater was complete, Don Quixote calmed down somewhat and said:

“At this moment I should like to have here in front of me all those who do not believe, and do not wish to believe, how much good knights errant do in the world: if I had not been here, just think what would have happened to the worthy Don Gaiferos and the beautiful Melisendra; most certainly, by this time those dogs would have overtaken them and committed some outrage against them. In brief, long live knight errantry, over and above everything in the world today!”

This gorgeous, mad intervention is also a parable of the triumph of Cervantes over the picaresque and of the triumph of the novel over the

romance. The downward stroke that nearly decapitates Ginés/Master Pedro is a metaphor for the aesthetic power of *Don Quixote*. So subtle is Cervantes that he needs to be read at as many levels as Dante. Perhaps the Quixotic can be accurately defined as the literary mode of an absolute reality, not as impossible dream but rather as a persuasive awakening into mortality.

7

The aesthetic truth of *Don Quixote* is that, again like Dante and Shakespeare, it makes us confront greatness directly. If we have difficulty fully understanding Don Quixote's quest, its motives and desired ends, that is because we confront a reflecting mirror that awes us even while we yield to delight. Cervantes is always out ahead of us, and we can never quite catch up. Fielding and Sterne, Goethe and Thomas Mann, Flaubert and Stendhal, Melville and Mark Twain, Dostoevsky: these are among Cervantes's admirers and pupils. *Don Quixote* is the only book that Dr. Johnson desired to be even longer than it already was.

Yet Cervantes, although a universal pleasure, is in some respects even more difficult than are Dante and Shakespeare upon their heights. Are we to believe everything that Don Quixote says to us? Does *he* believe it? He (or Cervantes) is the inventor of a mode now common enough, in which

figures, within a novel, read prior fictions concerning their own earlier adventures and have to sustain a consequent loss in the sense of reality. This is one of the beautiful enigmas of *Don Quixote*: it is simultaneously a work whose authentic subject is literature and a chronicle of a hard, sordid actuality, the declining Spain of 1605–1615. The Knight is Cervantes's subtle critique of a realm that had given him only harsh measures in return for his own patriotic heroism at Lepanto. Don Quixote cannot be said to have a double consciousness; his is rather the multiple consciousness of Cervantes himself, a writer who knows the cost of confirmation. I do not believe that the Knight can be said to tell lies, except in the Nietzschean sense of lying against time and time's grim "It was." To ask what it is that Don Quixote himself believes is to enter the visionary center of his story. It is the superb descent of the Knight into the Cave of Montesinos (part II, chapters XXII–XXIII) that constitutes Cervantes's longest reach toward hinting that the Sorrowful Face is aware of its self-enchancement. Yet we never will know if Hamlet ever touched clinical madness, or if Don Quixote was himself persuaded of the absurd wonders he beheld in the Cave of Enchantment. The Knight too is mad only north-northwest, and when the wind blows from the south he is as canny as Hamlet, Shakespeare, and Cervantes.

By descending to the cave, Don Quixote parodies the journey to the underworld of Odysseus and Aeneas. Having been lowered by a rope tied around him, the Knight is hauled up less than an hour later, apparently in deep slumber. He insists that he has sojourned below for several days and describes a surrealistic world, for which the wicked enchanter Merlin is responsible. In a crystal palace, the celebrated knight Durandarte lies in a rather vociferous state of death, while his beloved, Belerma, marches by in tears, with his heart in her hands. We scarcely can apprehend this before it turns into outrageous comedy. The enchanted Dulcinea, supposedly the glory sought by Don Quixote's quest, manifests as a peasant girl, accompanied by two other girls, her friends. Seeing the Knight, the immortal Dulcinea runs off yet sends an emissary to her lover, requesting immediate financial aid:

but of all the grievous things I saw and noted, the one that caused me most sorrow was that as Montesinos was saying these words to me, one of the companions of the unfortunate Dulcinea approached me from the side, without my seeing her, and with her eyes full of tears, in a low, troubled voice, she said to me:

“My lady Dulcinea of Toboso kisses the hands of your grace, and implores your grace to let her know how you are; and, because