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## What Don Quixote Means (Today)

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## WHAT *DON QUIXOTE* MEANS (TODAY)

*Robert Bayliss*

[H]e who has had the luck to be born a character can laugh even at death. He cannot die. The man, the writer, the instrument of the creation will die, but his creation will not die.

—Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

What does the figure of Don Quixote represent today? What cultural value and function are assigned to the novel *Don Quixote* today? As we look back upon the 2005 “Quixote World Tour” of conferences, symposia, and special issues of scholarly periodicals commemorating the four-hundredth anniversary of the publication of the novel’s first installment, the answers to these two different but equally pertinent questions remain dynamic and in play. Definitive answers elude us, but considering the two questions in tandem may help us better understand the cultural afterlife of both the novel and its title character. More specifically, the different ways in which the figure of Don Quixote has been (and continues to be) appropriated in various modes of cultural discourse may be explained in terms of Cervantes’s method of making the interpretation of his work problematical, or of resisting a definitive or facile answer to “what *Don Quixote* means.” At the extra-textual level, the novel has taken on a cultural value, both as a commodity for mass consumption and as a symbol for political appropriation, that further reflects on the open-endedness of Cervantes’s original text. As we reflect on the presence and function of both Don Quixote and *Don Quixote* in our own postmodern culture (itself a quixotically daunting enterprise), we would do well to consider the degree to which Cervantes himself is responsible—

if not for what his literary creation means today, then for how it has been capable of acquiring so many different meanings in such disparate contexts.

Without doubt, Don Quixote's life has continued long since Cervantes's death in 1616 and is still to this day the object of both interpretation and adaptation, reincarnated on the printed page and the artist's canvas, as a national monument, on the stages of both classical ballet and Broadway musical, and as the subject of both popular song and cinema—and now, as I explain below, as the namesake of an extraterrestrial venture. And yet, the Don Quixote that results from each reinterpretation appears to be altogether different from its predecessors, serving altogether different aesthetic, cultural, and ideological ends. Don Quixote has survived independently of Cervantes and has been reenlisted through the centuries, each time to fight new and very different battles. Through a re-casting of his glorious acts of heroism (or his comic misadventures), such as battling enchanted giants and entire armies (or windmills and flocks of sheep), he has been employed both as a Romantic hero and as a foolish, anachronistic madman, for the purposes of representing either high idealism or utter insanity, and sometimes both. He has battled both Spanish fascism and American imperialism; he has defended and shaped national identities and cultures on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, the paradox of Don Quixote at four hundred years old is that despite his supposedly anachronistic nature (a seventeenth-century character who aims to revive medieval institutions of chivalry), he has proven to be truly protean and adaptable to modern and postmodern circumstances.

One recent reincarnation of the (mock-)heroic knight demonstrates how his cultural ubiquity extends well beyond the realm of artistic expression: the European Space Agency (ESA) announced in September 2005 the development of a "Near Earth Object deflecting mission," a new program for targeting asteroids that threaten our planet. The project's name is

Don Quijote, and it will involve a pair of unmanned spacecraft. The first, named *Sancho*, would approach the targeted object and collect data on its size, orbit, and trajectory. The second, named *Hidalgo*, would then collide with the object at high speed in an effort to alter the giant/object's trajectory, whereupon *Sancho* would record and transmit any changes to its structure or orbit. The press release announcing the program on the ESA's website presents its narrative with headings such as "Don Quijote—the Knight Errant Rides Again," thereby framing the project in archetypal and epic terms. The project is still in its earliest stages of design, but "once the results are available, ESA will select the final design to be implemented, and then Don Quijote will be ready to take on an asteroid!"<sup>1</sup>

Surely the nomenclature and narrative presentation of this multi-billion-dollar project was selected with good and opportunistic humor, in the midst of the quadricentennial fanfare surrounding the novel. Beyond a mere rhetorical flourish, it was also an astute maneuver in the realm of public relations that reflects how appealing a commodity Don Quixote continues to be. What better way to win public support for an enormously expensive and ambitious expedition than to invoke the name most frequently associated with courageous idealism, especially when publishers of innumerable editions and translations of *Don Quixote* were enjoying a banner year? Since its Cold War origins, human space exploration has presented itself with a "quixotic" ethos, but this latest endeavor capitalized on a cultural perfect storm. Throughout the world but particularly in Spain, Don Quixote had sallied forth in 2005 from the customary confines of the proverbial academic ivory tower (in course syllabi and graduate reading lists, for example) to appear on more private reading lists for individual consumption than ever, and the ESA's packaging and marketing strategy targeted the public sentiment behind the novel's improbable success as a product of mass consumption. I call this success "improbable" because, as a Spanish

colleague noted upon his return from Spain to the United States in January 2005, everyone was buying a novel that they knew they would never actually read in its entirety. Apart from any ostensible pleasure or profit that one could gain from reading it, *owning* the novel was important and constituted its own form of consumption. Included in the implications of this postmodern iconoclasm is the notion that possession of the material object, *Don Quixote*, signifies status and cultural prestige.

"What *Don Quixote* means" is a more problematic question in this context of the novel-as-commodity, for any such "meaning" may be as dependent upon its visual appearance on the bookshelf or coffee table as it is upon the actual words printed on its pages, should one actually open the book. Aesthetic value in this context is no longer dependent on the novel's traditionally esteemed literary merit, but rather on the meanings that it has acquired over the centuries by those "readers" (regardless of whether they actually read the book) who have assigned a meaning to the character and novel. This situation echoes the comments of E. C. Riley: "The surprising thing is that not only do people who know the novel recognize [the image of Don Quixote and Sancho], but so apparently do a very much larger number of people who never have and never will read the book."<sup>2</sup> Riley denies that the *Quixote*'s being widely known but little read is due to recent developments in our postmodern culture of consumerism, for he describes the appearance of visual imagery of Don Quixote in popular culture as early as 1605, at Carnival festivities celebrated not by a learned and literate elite but by people from all socioeconomic levels, most of them presumably illiterate. What is most noteworthy about this nonliterate, nonliterary, and thus nonliteral meaning of Cervantes's novel is its peaceful coexistence over the centuries with the variety of meanings constructed by those who have read and even meticulously studied it—in

particular, those nineteenth- and twentieth-century champions of the so-called Romantic approach to the *Quixote*.<sup>3</sup> Somehow, Cervantes has made room for this diversity of meanings.

If *Don Quixote* is a pliable and viable consumer product in the capitalist marketplace, it is perhaps even more potent as political capital. A recent collection of essays entitled *Cervantes and his Postmodern Constituencies* demonstrates the problematic nature of Cervantes's applicability to our current political reality, at least as far as the academic field of Hispanism is concerned.<sup>4</sup> While James Iffland laments the failure by American university *cervantistas* to extend their political engagement of Cervantes studies from theory to practice, the quadricentennial celebration beyond the academy has inspired a more assertive political appropriation of *Don Quixote*. In Venezuela, the controversial president Hugo Chavez implemented a program entitled Operation Dulcinea, which included the distribution of one million copies of the novel free of charge. Venezuelan minister of culture Francisco Sesto explained to the BBC that the campaign was designed according to the government's opportunistic interpretation of the novel: "We're still oppressed by giants . . . so we want the Venezuelan people to get to know better Don Quixote, who we see as a symbol of the struggle for justice and the righting of wrongs."<sup>5</sup> Chavez's invocation of the literary figure of Don Quixote is in fact a page taken from the book of his political role model Fidel Castro, who mounted a similar campaign almost fifty years ago after emerging triumphant from Cuba's civil war. In both cases, the emphasis appears to be on what Don Quixote (rather than *Don Quixote*) means—a metaphor for the fledgling government and people of a nation struggling to resist the windmill of hegemonic America, whose economic and political power would crush the lofty ideals of socialism.

This conception of the literary figure and its implicit reading of the novel reflect the geographical breadth of *Don Quixote*'s cultural patrimony.<sup>6</sup> In terms of the novel's point of origin, Spain has occasionally engaged this romantic reading of the novel for the purposes of national identity for over a century. In the aftermath of the so-called Crisis of 1898, Spain recognized that its colonial wealth, power, and glory had waned and receded into history; it found clear parallels with Don Quixote, himself an older member of a waning social institution bent on reviving a lost Golden Age. Among other members of the so-called Generation of 1898, Azorín and Miguel de Unamuno appropriated the originally foreign (especially German) "Romantic" interpretation of the novel as a foundation for a renewed sense of nationalism.<sup>7</sup> This mode of reading the novel as a kind of national allegory would persist well into the twentieth century with Spanish intellectuals such as José Ortega y Gasset. Don Quixote became an icon of national identity especially for Unamuno, whose rhetorical intensity exceeds that of his contemporaries—to the point of describing his proposed revival of the hero, or *quijotismo*, as a kind of secular religion or even a holy crusade. A collection of his writings, titled *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, interprets the novel through the filter of Romantic readings while focusing on the relationship between the hero and his country: "The philosophy in the soul of my people seems to me the expression of an inner tragedy analogous to the tragedy in the soul of Don Quixote, the expression of a conflict between what the world appears scientifically to be and what we want the world to be in accord with the faith of our religion."<sup>8</sup> In other words, turn-of-the-century Spain was experiencing a disillusionment, or *desengaño*, that mirrored Don Quixote's own disillusionment in Part II of Cervantes's novel.

Clearly, Unamuno felt entitled as a Spaniard to appropriate and revive the figure of Don Quixote so that he might come to the aid of his nation, his *patria*, in a time of crisis. The full title

of his book-length gloss on the *Quixote* suggests that he would deny anyone, even Cervantes, exclusive ownership of his national icon: *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho según Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra explicada y comentada por Miguel de Unamuno* [*The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho According to Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra Expounded with Comment by Miguel de Unamuno*] (my emphasis).<sup>9</sup> His commentary on the life of Don Quixote is filtered through Cervantes but does not stop with him, thus echoing Pirandello's words cited at the beginning of this essay by suggesting a life for the hero beyond the pages of the original novel. Unamuno's gesture puts himself on equal footing with Cervantes in determining "what Don Quixote means." Again, in *The Tragic Sense of Life*, he employs the knight as a model for Spain to follow as it attempts to forge a new sense of post-imperial national identity: "Don Quixote traveled alone, alone with Sancho, alone with his solitude. And shall not we, his fond admirers, also travel alone as we forge a quixotic Spain from out of our imagination?" (352). A culminating moment in this cultural canonization of Don Quixote came in 1916, when to commemorate the three-hundredth anniversary of Cervantes's death, a monument was erected at the Plaza de España in downtown Madrid featuring Don Quixote on horseback, his hand raised high, accompanied by Sancho on his mule. Behind and above his two characters sits Cervantes. As Fernández explains, Cervantes and his hero were chosen as symbols of the diffusion of the Spanish language in the New World. Captured for posterity in the center of the national capital, the freshly interpreted and reinvented Don Quixote, hero of Spain, was engaged in a battle for twentieth-century national identity.

In light of this appropriation of Don Quixote to combat the Crisis of 1898, it is no wonder that outside his national borders, Cervantes's hero has become a symbol of Spain and Spanish culture. A mainstay of the twentieth-century Spanish tourism industry was guided excursions through rural La Mancha of "la ruta de Don Quijote" [the route of Don Quixote], which



highlights the physical places that supposedly inspired Cervantes's fictional representation of the region, complete with windmills and inns. James Michener, the late twentieth-century American author of popular travel narratives, exemplifies in his *Iberia* the facility with which non-Spaniards have adopted the notion that Don Quixote equals Spain: "During the passage from Mallorca to the mainland I memorized the shipping instructions contained in *Pilot for the East Coast of Spain* and prepared myself spiritually for my entrance to the country by rereading the best passages of *Don Quixote*."<sup>10</sup> We are left to speculate what those "best passages" are, but Michener's reading is not unique in being selective and predetermined. His search for the "soul" or "essence" of Spain is but one example of a larger trend within twentieth-century Western popular culture to define Spain in essentialist terms that invariably involve Don Quixote. Hemingway undoubtedly exercised great influence over the construction of Spain in the foreign imagination, as did the political isolationism of the Franco regime, especially in its earliest years. As Spain withdrew from the international scene, its absence invited a romanticized speculation of its uniqueness from without that found inspiration in *Don Quixote* and its Romantic interpretation. Long after Franco's demise, the association has stuck, both within and without Spain. As E. C. Riley explains, one immediately observable consequence is the Spanish tourism industry's exploitation of the visual image of Don Quixote and Sancho on souvenirs for sale: "Cervantes has achieved the dream of every advertising man: a widely recognized symbol for his product."<sup>11</sup> What we have seen, however, is that the highly recognizable symbol has been an expedient means of selling many products, a label that can be custom-tailored to new and unforeseen cultural and political circumstances.

The point of this overview of Don Quixote and *Don Quixote* as political and economic commodities is to demonstrate their contextual elasticity. The wide variety of divergent

interpretations produced and appropriations made in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, to be sure, have less to do with an explicit ideological stance taken by the novel's author and more to do with the circumstances under which his hero has been revived. Unamuno is judiciously self-aware in this regard: "What do I care what Cervantes did or did not mean to put into that book or what he actually did put into it? The living part of it for me is whatever I discover in it—whether Cervantes put it there or not—and it is whatever I myself put into or under or over it, and whatever we all put into it. And I sought to track down our philosophy in it" (335–36). These comments suggest that *Don Quixote* has served as an open ideological canvas for its readers—many of whom have been writers, sculptors, painters, directors, songwriters, philosophers, politicians, scientists, and literary scholars. In the latter instance, fierce debates have resulted from multiple attempts to definitively establish this or that particular reading of the novel (see, for example, *Cervantes and His Postmodern Constituencies*). But what makes a literary structure so conducive to multiple, often contradictory readings by academics and to such widely varied extra-literary adaptations and appropriations?

My own tentative (and by no means exclusionary) reading of *Don Quixote* highlights its use of and response to the literary discourses that preceded it, in all their variety. Included in Cervantes's assessment and fusion of the literary traditions that form his source material is the critical assessment of those sources made by Renaissance humanist scholars contemporary to him.<sup>12</sup> A wide variety of literary forms are brought into contact with one another, each through its own distinctive mode of discourse; the manipulation and combination of these discursive models undermines the ethical and ideological orientation implicit in each one, contaminating them, as it were, through mutual exposure. The upshot of this discursive hybridity is that the

*Quixote* subverts authorial claims to guide interpretation along predetermined ideological lines; Cervantes refuses to explicitly prescribe how his work is to be read.

Replacing the implied authorial message is the privilege granted to the aesthetic pleasure of the reading experience.<sup>13</sup> The prologue to the first part of the *Quixote* tells the *desocupado lector* [idle reader] as much:

It can happen that a man has an ugly, charmless son, and his love blindfolds him to prevent him from seeing his child's defects: on the contrary, he regards them as gifts and graces, and describes them to his friends as examples of wit and cleverness. But although I seem like Don Quixote's father, I am his step-father, and I don't want to drift with the current of custom, or beg you almost with tears in my eyes, as others do, dearest reader, to forgive or excuse the defects that you see in this my son; and you are neither his relative nor his friend, you have your own soul in your own body, and your own free will like anybody else, and you are sitting in your own home, where you are the lord and master just as much as the king is of his taxes. . . . All of which exempts and frees you from every respect and obligation, and so you can say whatever you like about this history, without fear of being attacked for a hostile judgement or rewarded for a favorable one.<sup>14</sup>

According to my reading of the novel and its history since 1615, what may well have been a rhetorical gesture in parody of chivalric fiction—the claims to historical veracity that included the lost-manuscript trope that the author would employ eight chapters after the above citation—

would become the guiding principle for readers worldwide and through the centuries. Whether intended as such or not, it has served as an open invitation to free and creative interpretation.

My quoting Cervantes's prologue raises, for experienced readers of *Quixote* criticism, the question of whose narrative voice posits such a disclaimer. I will not pretend here to posit any answer not already exhaustively explored by such eminent scholars as Edward Friedman, Howard Mancing, or James Parr, among many others, but the effects of *Don Quixote*'s narratorial and narratological problem on its readers is absolutely pertinent to the issue of the novel's interpretive elasticity.<sup>15</sup> On one level, by grounding the work in the appearance of history, Cervantes pokes playfully at the conventions of chivalric fiction; on another level, however, by disclaiming any personal responsibility or ownership of what we would call today the "intellectual property" that is *Don Quixote*, Cervantes acknowledges how little control he has over the fate of his hero once his deeds are published.<sup>16</sup> Of course modern literary theory and especially hermeneutics tell us that such control is a fiction, but the voluntary act of surrender is itself a significant anticipation of the twentieth-century "death of the author" ahead of its time. What is presented in the absence of a clear, stable, and ethically consistent narrative voice is a dizzying narrative hall of mirrors that pretends to resemble historical record. In other words, Cervantes substitutes one kind of mediation for a more complex and unsettling one: the traditionally "paternal" authorial voice (that presumably would have a direct and personal interest in how the text should be interpreted) is replaced by that of the prologuist's "stepfather," whose own role is far from clear beyond its denial of being the source for Don Quixote's (hi)story.<sup>17</sup> The net result of this "subversive discourse" is, as Peter Russell has argued, a dramatic shift in the author-reader relationship: "Cervantes's treatment of authorship in *Don Quixote* subverts both the traditional authority of an author *vis-à-vis* his readers and the former's

claim that an exclusive relationship exists between him and his works."<sup>18</sup> Beyond this subversion, I would argue, *Don Quixote* demonstrates a predisposition to free interpretation that has much to do with both its canonical status and its protean character in the appropriations and adaptations discussed earlier in this study.

Paradoxically, the yield of the novel's narrative complexity and hyperactivity is an absence, a lack of authorial adjudication in Cervantes's text, or a refusal on the author's part to prescribe how his work is to be read. If we are to believe the narrator's friend and interlocutor in the prologue to Part I, the author's goal is to "destroy the authority and influence that books of chivalry enjoy in the world and among the general public" (16). Don Quixote would therefore be a character originally employed as a negative example, a cautionary figure meant to "set the reader straight." If we were to believe this, his future employment as an idealistic and heroic figure would seem to fly in the face of logic. But we learn soon enough not to trust the words of this narrator's friend, nor the words of the prologue's narrator himself, nor those of any other narrator involved in the perspectival slew of discursive levels for which the novel is so famous; critics have written of principal narrators, intra- and extra-diegetic narrators, editors, and supernarrators, to name a few of the many terms that have appeared in *Quixote* criticism. The latter term is coined by James Parr in his book-length study of this problem, but by no means does it solve the riddle: "Cervantes's text is slippery. He shifts masks on us without warning."<sup>19</sup> The most prominent of these narrators, translators, and historians, Cide Hamete Beningeli, is of course the least reliable of all, especially since (as Cervantes warns us) he is a Moor and therefore by nature a liar.

But even if we were to accept him as a reliable transmitter of truth, the fixed signification of language is further destabilized by Don Quixote himself, who filters life through his

particular, romance-tinted perspective. Such "linguistic perspectivism" has fascinated literary critics since Leo Spitzer coined the term, and especially since the rise of poststructuralism. What is for Sancho a windmill is for Don Quixote a giant; a barber's shaving basin is the knight's golden helmet of Mambrino (and Sancho's *baciyelmo*, or "basin-helmet").<sup>20</sup> Critics have pointed out that this relativism extends into issues of the novel's ethical stance, employing such descriptors as "moral perspectivism," "fideistic skepticism," and "subversive discourse."<sup>21</sup> In short, Cervantes's combination of literary genres and their implicit worldviews leaves the reader without the guiding voice and ideological orientation that traditional genres supply; in the absence of a controlling authorial ethos with which the reader may identify, no single interpretation is privileged. Donald Wehrs's term "fideistic skepticism" is employed to argue that the novel's "generic equipollence" is in fact grounded in the philosophical tradition of Renaissance humanism and especially Erasmus, who converted the arguments of the classical Greek Skeptics into a defense of religious faith. We may certainly agree that if Cervantes is "slippery" and noncommittal, it is in ideological and not religious terms. But a consequence of *not* providing prescriptive guidelines for interpretation is that Cervantes's hero would be open to that particular species of interpretation known as adaptation. Moreover, the variety of interpretations of the novel implicit in these adaptations makes it clear that there is no single way of reading the novel that may claim exclusive interpretive authority. In short, *Don Quixote* is the New Criticism's worst nightmare.

Traditionally, though, critics *have* argued for a "correct reading" of the novel. Anthony Close's seminal study of the *Quixote*'s critical history, *The Romantic Approach to "Don Quixote,"* explains that prior to Romanticism, Cervantes's novel had been received as above all else a satire that aims to do just as the prologue narrator's friend claims—to debunk an outdated

mode of imaginative fiction and to demonstrate the dangers that reading such romances might cause. This interpretation privileges the conclusion of Part II, in which Don Quixote renounces his misguided behavior and even his chivalric name, instead calling himself "Alonso Quijano *the good*." The nineteenth-century "Romantic approach" to the novel, however, embraces the knight as a heroic idealist and noble visionary intent upon improving the world by reviving a lost Golden Age. It is this line of interpretation that has been the most influential in how Don Quixote has reappeared in the last several decades, perhaps best exemplified in the Broadway musical *The Man of La Mancha*: "the greatest madness of all is to see life as it is and not as it should be."<sup>22</sup> While this attractive and inspirational approach has remained decisively influential in Don Quixote's broadest cultural meaning (especially for those who have not actually read the novel), Peter E. Russell's seminal article "*Don Quixote* as 'Funny Book'" ushered in a wave of studies that have been characterized as taking a "hard" (vs. the Romantic "soft") approach to the novel, which is more sympathetic to the pre-Romantic satirical line of interpretation, albeit through the various lenses of poststructuralist literary theory.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the polarity of "hard" and "soft" readings of the novel, they do share the tactic of reducing Cervantes's ideologically ambiguous and open-ended project into a univocal, essentialist, and prescriptive agenda. Hence, the title of John Jay Allen's seminal study asks the question *Don Quixote: Hero or Fool?* (my emphasis). In other words, Don Quixote is often treated as one or the other, and the interpretation of Cervantes's novel until recently has been an either-or proposition. Perhaps more than any other canonical work, the *Quixote* has proven capable of yielding widely divergent and often contradictory readings. The explanation that I would offer is that the *Quixote* privileges reception and interpretation in and of themselves above all else, the consequence of which is that Cervantes must refuse to prescribe a "correct reading"

of his own work. It is no wonder that today, in an age where the traditional "master narratives" of history and culture are challenged and subverted like never before, critical interest has only intensified regarding *Don Quixote*, a novel that denies the reader a stable and fixed perspective—indeed, a novel bent on defeating the reader's desire for such a master narrative.

This open-endedness explains his hero's propensity for fighting battles of which Cervantes could never have possibly dreamed. Could he have imagined that the Spanish state, which in Cervantes's own lifetime had slighted the *manco de Lepanto* despite his heroic military sacrifice, would erect a national monument representing him, Don Quixote, and Sancho Panza in Madrid's Plaza de España? Could he have conceived of socialism, or of Fidel Castro, who would assume political control over Cuba and promptly order the printing and free distribution of *Don Quixote*? Or of Hugo Chavez, who did the same thing only last year in Venezuela, in an effort to rally the citizenry around his politics and policies? Could he have imagined fascism, the sworn enemy of Pablo Picasso's *Don Quixote*? Or that the term "quixotic" would become a mainstay of the English lexicon? Could he have dreamed of Broadway or Hollywood, where his hero would be reappropriated for far greater profit than he himself ever earned? Or that the English-language musical *The Man of La Mancha* would eventually be translated into Spanish and performed on the Gran Vía of Madrid, in a theatrical venue bearing the name of his most bitter literary rival?<sup>24</sup> Could he have possibly imagined that in an episode of the twentieth-century Spanish television game show *Flechazo* ("Cupid's Arrow," comparable to *The Dating Game* in the United States), a contestant would state that his favorite *historical* figure was Don Quixote?

But Cervantes surely did understand that his hero could be misappropriated and even stolen from him. The surprising success of the 1605 edition led to a false sequel published under the name of Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda. Critics have generally agreed that this apocryphal



Don Quixote privileged the foolish and ridiculous nature of the knight's quest, and that several remarks (some cryptic, some explicit) made by Cervantes in his own sequel in 1615 express indignation that his hero has been unflatteringly misrepresented by the pen of another.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the clearest indication of his displeasure is in the contrast between the narrator's comments in the prologue of Part I, already cited above, and the authorial commentary that closes Part II—in effect, two “bookends” that frame the entire novel. It is a contrast between a narrator who invites autonomous interpretation and an author who wishes to claim exclusive authority over his subject. In the 1605 passage, the narrator in fact distances himself from Don Quixote, identifying himself not as his father but as his stepfather, an open invitation that the reader interpret as he pleases. This stands in stark contrast to the words that close Part II with an admonition aimed at Avellaneda:

For me alone was Don Quixote born, and I for him; it was for him to act, for me to write; we two are as one, in spite of that false writer from Tordesillas who has had and may even again have the effrontery to write with a coarse and clumsy ostrich quill about my valiant knight's deeds, because this is not a burden for his shoulders or a subject for his torpid wit. And you can warn him, if you do happen to meet him, to leave Don Quixote's weary mouldering bones at rest in his tomb. (981)

While these comments may have silenced Avellaneda, Don Quixote's bones have nonetheless been repeatedly exhumed and his character appropriated by others for almost four hundred years. Clearly, the prologue's inclusive invitation to interpret according to one's judgment has been taken at its word, while the conclusion's exclusive claims to authority have been ignored. If, as

Parr and others have posited, the news of the apocryphal *Quixote* sequel appeared relatively late in the writing process of Cervantes's own sequel (the most common estimate is at the point in which chapter 59 was being written), it makes sense that any late adjustments made to Part II could not effectively close the open-ended novel that had been crafted to that point.

A final instance of a twentieth-century appropriation of Don Quixote will summarize the effects of this Cervantine ideological and interpretive palimpsest, both artistically and politically. For most of his adult life, Pablo Picasso was forced to view Spain from without, exiled as a political consequence of his enmity with Franco. While Picasso's relationship with Spain was of course substantially different from that of any foreigner, Don Quixote was still very much involved in Picasso's artistic representations of Spain and of its subjugation under fascist power. His most famous expression of resistance to Franco is of course *Guernica*, a representation of the bombing that destroyed a defenseless Basque town, but his earliest work of protest (a series of plates titled *The Dream and Lie of Franco*) explicitly employs the figure of Don Quixote as an essentialist symbol of Spain. General Franco's betrayal of this national character, of the people of Spain represented by the republican government that he had overthrown, is represented as a perversion of the Don Quixote figure, a grotesque distortion of a national symbol, as Timothy Hilton describes it:

Further, there are clear references to a Spanish national myth, the story of Don Quixote. Franco is depicted as a repellent louse or bug, a "polyp," fat, bristling with short coarse hairs, his nose like a snout. He rides forth in false pomp, a sword in one hand and a Catholic banner in the other; he walks on a tightrope with that banner attached to a monstrous penis; he attacks a classical statue with

a pickaxe, dresses up in traditional women's clothes yet still cannot conceal his nature; he straddles a pig, worships money at a shrine surrounded by barbed wire; he slaughters women and animals.<sup>26</sup>

Don Quixote here is employed as an antiheroic inversion, reenlisted to fight a political battle by representing all that Spain was and Franco was not. Almost twenty years later Picasso would produce his more famous portrait of the knight for an edition of a French newspaper dedicated to Cervantes, the funds from which were reportedly used to support the Communist party.

Although in exile, Picasso clearly felt the same sense of entitlement as Unamuno and his generation to appropriate, as Spaniards, Spain's most enduring national symbol. If we place *The Dream and Lie of Franco* in dialogue with his later representation of Don Quixote, it becomes clear that Picasso's political statement is expressed through the national hero: Don Quixote is Spain, while Franco is the antithesis of Don Quixote, and therefore antithetical to the very nature of the nation he has violently captured. In light of the Generation of 1898's establishment of Don Quixote as a central and essentialist national icon, Picasso could not have chosen a more powerful or political symbolic figure. In Paris, Picasso could only make his statement from the periphery, in an effort to work against the centrist political forces of the Fascist regime. His strategy involved appropriating Don Quixote to work *against* the center of political power in Spain, even though he was integral to the efforts of Unamuno's generation to reconstruct a central national identity. In the span of the four decades from Unamuno's commentary to Picasso's antiheroic statement, Don Quixote's role had shifted from appropriating the center to working from the margins of exile to undermine the center.

Over the course of this transformation, as Pirandello suggests in the citation at the beginning of this article, our hero ceased to be the exclusive possession of Cervantes. If Unamuno's use of him is largely due to a Romantic interpretation of the novel, then Picasso's recycling is in fact an interpretation of an interpretation, a telling prelude to postmodernism. Given his position on how the public should interpret his own work and any possible symbolism therein, perhaps Picasso *was* more entitled than any other adaptor of Don Quixote. In response to one critic's analysis of the symbolism of *Guernica*, Picasso refuses to recognize a "correct reading" of the work: "Sure, they're symbols. But it isn't up to the painter to create the symbols. . . . The public who look at the picture must see in the horse and the bull symbols which they interpret as they understand them."<sup>27</sup> Three centuries earlier, we will recall, Cervantes urged the reader of his prologue that "you have your own soul in your own body, and your own free will like anybody else, and you are sitting in your own home, where you are the lord and master just as much as the king is of his taxes" (11). Like the Cervantine original, Picasso's Don Quixote must do battle with the quintessential giant of literary interpretation, the intentional fallacy. The artist's representation of a faceless Don Quixote and Sancho, without color or physical detail, has been described by Rachel Schmidt as "abstractions desperately seeking significance."<sup>28</sup> Picasso avoids the monolithic and essentialist interpretation of the novel that others have practiced. Picasso may have been explicit in expressing what Don Quixote is *not*, but exactly what *his* Don Quixote means is, just as Cervantes left the original, open to interpretation.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> "ESA Selects Targets for Asteroid-Deflecting Mission Don Quijote," *ESA Portal*, 26

September 2005, European Space Agency,

[http://www.esa.int/SPECIALS/NEO/SEM3P4OVGJE\\_0.html](http://www.esa.int/SPECIALS/NEO/SEM3P4OVGJE_0.html) (accessed 8 October 2005).

<sup>2</sup> E. C. Riley, "Don Quixote: From Text to Icon," *Cervantes* 8 (1988): 106.

<sup>3</sup> The seminal study of the Romantic approach remains Anthony Close's *The Romantic Approach to "Don Quixote"* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> See *Cervantes and His Postmodern Constituencies*, ed. Carroll B. Johnson and Anne J. Cruz (New York: Garland, 1999), particularly the contributions of George Mariscal, Alison Weber, and James Iffland.

<sup>5</sup> "Free *Quixotes* Big Pull in Caracas," *BBC News*, 24 April 2005, The British Broadcasting Company, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4478007.stm> (accessed 8 October 2005).

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent treatment of the question of Cervantes's "cultural patrimony" in the Americas, see James Fernández, "The Bonds of Patrimony: Cervantes and the New World," *PMLA* 109.5 (1994): 969–81.

<sup>7</sup> For a solid overview of this phenomenon, see Paul Descouzis, *Cervantes y la generación del 98* (Madrid: Ediciones Iberoamericanas, 1970).

<sup>8</sup> Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, trans. Anthony Kerrigan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1967), 348. All translations of Unamuno are from this edition.

<sup>9</sup> Miguel de Unamuno, *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1988). *The life of Don Quixote and Sancho according to Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra expounded with comment by Miguel de Unamuno*, trans. Homer P. Earle (New York: Knopf, 1927).

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<sup>10</sup> James Michener, *Iberia: Spanish Travels and Reflections* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1969), 14.

<sup>11</sup> Riley, "Don Quixote," 105.

<sup>12</sup> For a thorough treatment of how Cervantes includes the voices and arguments of critics roughly contemporary to him, see especially Alban K. Forcione, *Cervantes, Aristotle, and the Persiles* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1970); and E. C. Riley, *Cervantes' Theory of the Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

<sup>13</sup> While the present study does not allow for an extensive treatment of Cervantes's other works, it is well worth noting that critics have argued a similar point about the *Novelas ejemplares*: "The notion of exemplarity inscribed (and gathered) by the reader in Cervantes's *novelas* would seem to be tied to two interrelated factors: a new way of writing fiction in the Castilian language and the idea that meaning ultimately depends on the role assumed by the reader in its construction. . . . The burden of shaping or harvesting the "provecho" is placed on the discerning eye ("bien mirar") of the receiver whose imagination becomes the very instrument for turning an activity—reading—that was traditionally associated with idleness, leisure and passivity into a productive enterprise connected to an exploration of the self in the world." Nicholas Spadaccini and Jenaro Talens, "Cervantes and the Dialogic World," in *Cervantes's "Exemplary Novels" and the Adventure of Writing* (Minneapolis, MN: Prisma, 1989), 220. See also Ruth El Saffar, *Novel to Romance: A Study of Cervantes's "Novelas ejemplares"* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974).

<sup>14</sup> Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quijote*, trans. John Rutherford (New York: Penguin, 2000), 11–12. All subsequent citations from *Don Quixote* are from this translation.

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<sup>15</sup> See Edward H. Friedman, "The Muses of the Knight: Don Quixote and Revisionist History," in *"Never-ending Adventure": Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Spanish Literature in Honor of Peter N. Dunn* (Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 2002), 175–92; and Howard Mancing, *The Chivalric World of Don Quijote: Style, Structure, and Narrative Technique* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1982). James A. Parr has pioneered the narratological approach to the *Quixote*. In addition to his several valuable articles, see *"Don Quixote": An Anatomy of Subversive Discourse* (Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 1988). An interesting response to this seminal study is offered by Alan Burch, "Don Quijote and Narratology: The *Segundo Autor* as Extradiegetic Narrator," in *Brave New Words: Studies in Spanish Golden Age Literature*, ed. Edward H. Friedman and Catherine Larson (New Orleans: UP of the South, 1996), 113–24.

<sup>16</sup> See James A. Parr, "The Janus-like Discourse of the Renaissance Storyteller: Fact and Fiction in *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Don Quijote*," in *Brave New Words*, ed. Friedman and Larson, where Parr writes: "While the naive mock hero would likely have been deceived by these assertions, the discreet and distanced reader of today sees through such transparent ruses and, indeed, tires of their repetition after a time" (107).

<sup>17</sup> Friedman, "The Muses of the Knight," 177.

<sup>18</sup> Peter E. Russell, *Cervantes* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 53.

<sup>19</sup> Parr, *"Don Quixote": An Anatomy*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> See Leo Spitzer, "Linguistic Perspectivism in the *Quijote*," in *Linguistics and Literary History: Essays in Stylistics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1948), 225–71.

<sup>21</sup> Oscar Kenshur discusses moral perspectivism throughout "Skepticism and the Form of the *Quijote*," *Dispositio* 2 (1977): 254–61. Similarly, Donald Wehrs employs the term "fideistic skepticism" in his article "Sterne, Cervantes, Montaigne: Fideistic Skepticism and the Rhetoric

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of Desire," *Comparative Literature Studies* 25.2 (1988): 127–51. See Parr's "*Don Quixote*": *An Anatomy* for an analysis of the novel as a subversive discourse.

<sup>22</sup> *Man of La Mancha*, film directed and produced by Arthur Hiller, written by Dale Wasserman (Century City, CA: MGM, 1972).

<sup>23</sup> See Peter E. Russell, "*Don Quixote* as 'Funny Book,'" *Modern Language Review* 64 (1969): 312–26.

<sup>24</sup> *El hombre de la Mancha* debuted in the Teatro Lope de Vega in 1999.

<sup>25</sup> For a thorough discussion of the impact of the false sequel on Cervantes's composition of his own 1615 sequel, see Edward H. Friedman, "Executing the Will: The End of the Road in *Don Quixote*," *Indiana Journal of Hispanic Literatures* 5 (1994):105–26.

<sup>26</sup> Timothy Hilton, *Picasso* (New York: Oxford UP, 1975), 230.

<sup>27</sup> Dore Ashton, *Picasso on Art: A Selection of Views* (New York: Viking, 1972), 155.

<sup>28</sup> Rachel Schmidt, *Critical Images: The Canonization of "Don Quixote" Through Illustrated Editions of the Eighteenth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1999), ix.