

THE HISTORICAL DON QUIXOTE

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“There is no great ingenuity
without an admixture of madness”

—Seneca

“Let anyone portray me who will,
but let him not abuse me”

—*Don Quixote* (II, 59)

Everyone knows the general story of Don Quixote, but few have actually read Cervantes' masterpiece, and of those latter, many if not most of us come away from the book smiling but also scratching our heads. *Was I supposed to like him?* we naturally wonder to ourselves. Indeed, of the scenes in the story that bear on this uncertainty, none is more perplexing than the heartbreaking ending. There the knight, having returned from defeat at the hands of the Knight of the White Moon (his friend Sampson Carrasco in disguise), has taken ill with a fever brought on by melancholy. This illness suddenly becomes mortal, and, after what appears to be a sort of epiphany, Don Quixote repudiates both his claims to knight-hood and all the undertakings to which this led. He then dies cursing “all profane histories of knight errantry” (II, 74)¹ for

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¹ Parenthetical citations will give the book and chapter numbers. All quotations will be from the translation by J. M. Cohen published by Penguin.

what they put him, his family, and his loyal squire Sancho Panza through. This final disillusionment underscored in the knight's final moments casts a pall over the entire story—if he rejected what he had done, should not we also?

Nor is the ending the only reason for saying that Cervantes intends Don Quixote's chivalrous undertaking to be pitied, not praised. Many scenes make us think that the knight is simply being ridiculed and mocked, for it seems that every one of his attempts at upholding justice and succoring the distressed fails miserably. For instance, Don Quixote's first attempt at rescuing someone in distress, a young muleteer named Andrew being whipped by his master, tragically backfires; after the knight rebukes and shames Andrew's master, who then promises not to hurt the boy, he reneges on the promise, beating Andrew within an inch of his life. Cervantes concludes the scene with "thus did the valorous Don Quixote redress that wrong" (I, 4). Later in the story Andrew comes upon the Don and curses him and his knighthood, asking him never again to try to aid him when in danger (I, 31).

Examples abound of scenes in which the reader finds himself cringing at the knight's follies: the knight frees legitimately convicted criminals—who then turn on him and Sancho, beating them and stealing Sancho's ass (I, 22)—the absurd excuse for this being, the Don says, that "it is no concern or duty of knights errant to investigate whether the distressed, chained, and oppressed . . . [are being punished] for their crimes" (I, 30); the Don assaults a pair of traveling monks (I, 8); without provocation or reason he attacks and destroys a puppet show (II, 26); he demands to be allowed to fight a hungry lion (II, 17); he charges, but is unhorsed and injured by, a herd of swine (II, 68); in a gag concocted by the idle Duke and Duchess, he rides upon the "enchanted" hobbyhorse Clavileño (II, 41). Can we look at these scenes and see anything other than foolishness?

This conclusion appears to be explicit in the words of the author and the characters themselves. When the author ad-

dresses the reader, he directly states that his work is "an invective against books of chivalry" (I, prol.), which books he calls "unholy" (I, 24) and "liars" (I, 18). This invective, the author explains, proceeds by way of parody, and so the book's proximate aim is to amuse and entertain the reader (I, 6; I, 9), and therefore the only honor we should give the Don should be either amazement or laughter (II, 44). Something similar is said by characters who argue about two possible views of the knight's condition: Carrasco says that we should pity his madness and try to cure him, while Don Antonio rejects this, saying that we should encourage his insanity so that we may always be amused by him (II, 65); they consider no other attitude toward the knight to be reasonable. Toward the end of the story, even before his defeat at the hands of the Knight of the White Moon, Don Quixote himself looks back on his exploits with a sense of futility: "up till now I do not know what I am conquering by the force of my labors" (II, 58), and later still he notes that "the treasures of knight errantry are illusory and false as fairy gold" (II, 67).

Thus, it seems difficult to avoid either giving *Don Quixote* a cynical reading—namely, that this is the story of a megalomaniac whose compulsive reading of books of chivalry drive him to violent and dangerous conduct²—or the milder, trivializing reading perhaps best expressed by the title of an essay: "*Don Quixote* as a Funny Book."³ The only other reasonable alternative seems to be that the story be interpreted as the

² An influential article by Alexander A. Parker ("*Don Quixote* and the Relativity of Truth," *Dublin Review* 220 [1947]: 28–37) first proposed this view, arguing further that Don Quixote is ultimately moved only by vanity.

³ Peter E. Russell, "*Don Quixote* as a Funny Book," *Modern Language Review* 64 (1969): 312–326. Russell says that "Cervantes simply wanted to give his readers something to laugh at," and there are "no grounds for asserting" that he ever saw this "as anything other than a funny book" (*ibid.*, 313 and 324). See also Jose Ortega y Gasset, *Meditaciones del Quixote* (Madrid, 1914), and Anthony Close, "Don Quixote's Love for Dulcinea: A Study of Cervantine Irony," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 50

misadventures of a sublime hero that end in his tragic renunciation of all that is good, but this reading flies in the face of the facts that the story is obviously and brilliantly funny and that we do in fact find ourselves a little ashamed, and even disgusted, by some of the knight's actions. At the very least we must admit that even those willing to view all the Don's actions in light of his good intentions, dubbing him an imprudent idealist, still tend to be stumped by the gloom of the knight's deathbed rejection of all that he once was.

In spite of the difficulty in offering a consistent reading of the story, however, I think most of us find ourselves charmed by, and even loving the old knight, and not merely the way we might love the village idiot or a dumb animal that repeatedly does something futile or ridiculous; nor do I think most of us moved (to more than laughter) by the Don are inclined to reduce our impression to merely an admiration of his good intentions and persistence in trying to "change the world." So, then, *why* do we find ourselves in this apparently irrational position of feeling a great love for a character who seems to be more pitiable and pathetic than noble? In the following I am going to follow an approach to *Don Quixote* that suggests a foundation for this love based upon certain peculiarities about the way the author tells the tale: Cervantes' ubiquitous device of referring to his story throughout as a "history" is a subtle element that casts certain events, indeed the entire tale, in a light quite different from the surface reading. This new light, I will argue, shows that Don Quixote is indeed to be esteemed and that he is, without qualification, the hero of the book.

Before I explain this interpretation, allow me to set the stage for a reading of *Don Quixote* that argues against the charge that Cervantes does not want us to delve any deeper than the surface-level satire of books of chivalry. Let me first point out

(1973): 237-253. For whatever reason and to whatever degree, over the last forty years the majority view among Cervantes scholars has come to have this cynical or anti-Romantic cast.

that Cervantes is strangely ambiguous about the proposal that this is an invective against the popular chivalrous romances of his day. While the line from the prologue, quoted above, cannot be denied, keep in mind that this account of the aim of the book is offered not by Cervantes himself but by some unnamed but "lively and very intelligent friend" (I, prol.).⁴ While this might seem to be mere quibbling until one finds this "purpose" iterated at the end of the work and again not coming from the mouth of Cervantes, but from that of the Moorish "historian" Cide Hamete Benengeli (II, 74). Is this a coincidence? Why has Cervantes taken pains never to let *himself* say that his aim in writing is to mock and ultimately to destroy the books of chivalry? And why does he himself in this same prologue refer to Don Quixote as "the chastest lover and most valiant knight"? Indeed, the complete title of the book, *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha* (*The Ingenious Gentleman . . .*) seems inappropriate if the author wishes us to disdain the namesake's delusion, i.e., if the knight is the butt of Cervantes' mockery. The Hamletesque aspect of our knight is perhaps relevant here. The wonder and astonishment each character expresses at the knight's madness—for he speaks not only with sanity but even with striking wisdom on all matters not pertaining to chivalry and the books of chivalry⁵—suggests that there is something more going on here: Is the knight's madness *really* madness? The fact that Cervantes gives us repeated occasion to ask this question might be telling.

Curious and ambiguous scenes are one thing, direct evidence that Cervantes wishes us to be proud of the Don an-

⁴ It is true that at the end of the prologue Cervantes makes a general claim that he "accepted as good" his friend's many arguments to encourage him to publish the book, which would be an implicit endorsement of the friend's account of the book's aim. This, however, only makes more peculiar Cervantes' avoidance of explicitly saying that critiquing books of chivalry is his aim.

⁵ Cf. I, 30; I, 37; I, 38; I, 49; I, 50; II, 1; II, 16; II, 17; II, 18; II, 24; II, 43; II, 59.

other. Sometimes our author is not merely suggestive, as when he tells us that this knight is

the light and mirror of Manchegan chivalry, and the first man of our times, of these calamitous times of ours, to devote himself to the toils and exercise of knight errantry; to redress wrongs, aid widows and protect maidens. . . . Now I say that for this, and for many other reasons our gallant Quixote deserves continuous and immemorial praise (I, 9).

Further, in an amusing but thought-provoking way Cervantes all but tells us the value of his story and characters in the closing lines of the first part. Here he asks that his reader be a fair judge of the book and "accord it such credit as intelligent men usually give to those books of chivalry which are so highly valued in the world" (I, 52)—which, if we are to believe his earlier claim that chivalrous books deserve no credit, is asking only for disdain.

Now, perhaps this is merely Cervantine irony; perhaps it is all part of the joke. And no doubt the first reason Cervantes does these things is because they are funny; certainly this is a gut-busting saga of misadventures, and intentionally so. But is that *all* it is? Is the surface as deep as we should go? Or is Don Quixote himself, after considering the painting of a cock that was so poorly executed that it needed a label saying *This is a cock*, perhaps right to say that "so it must be with my history, which will need a commentary to be understood" (II, 3)?

Whether it be through Cervantes' passing comments about the book, or through his interruption of the tale to discourse on the nature of literature, or through arguments between the characters (one of whom is usually Don Quixote), we are constantly forced to meditate on the importance of the distinction between history and the events described in the books of chivalry. Not only have these books unhinged our knight's mind, but also much if not all of his "problem" is attributed to his insistence that his books are true stories, or histories, whereas the Priest, Nicholas the Barber, the Bach-

elor Sampson Carrasco, *et al.* insist that they are not. The serpents, dragons, giants, spells, battles, etc. that populate the books of chivalry are, in the words of the Canon, "monstrous absurdities," and their authors "liars and impostors . . . for causing the ignorant crowd to accept all the nonsense they contain as gospel truth. They have the audacity to confuse the minds [even] of intelligent and well-born gentlemen" (I, 49).⁶ Books of chivalry, then, are not only fictitious, but they also pretend not to be so; they masquerade as histories. The merit of historical tomes over chivalrous romances is discussed by the characters time and again, from the "massacre of innocents," i.e., the Priest and Nicholas' inquisition and subsequent burning of the Don's personal library (I, 6), to their argument with the Innkeeper about the latter's own collection of books of chivalry (I, 32). None of these, however, is as striking as Cervantes' comments about history in relation to *Don Quixote* itself.

Speaking through the man whom he and Don Quixote refer to as the "Knight of the Green Coat" (whose name is really Don Diego de Miranda, a "sensible gentleman of La Mancha"), Cervantes says about the first part of *Don Quixote*,

Heavens be praised, for that history of noble and authentic chivalries, which your worship [Don Quixote] says is printed, will consign all the innumerable stories of imaginary knights errant, of which the world is full, to oblivion, such harm they do to good manners, and such damage and discredit to genuine history (II, 16).

In a single breath one book about a knight errant is praised because it is true while the others are condemned because they are false. Earlier in the story, after the lovelorn Cardenio hears about Don Quixote's exploits, he remarks that they are "so strange that I do not know whether anyone trying to invent such a character in fiction would have the genius to

⁶ The former claim is borne out by the Innkeeper, the latter by Don Quixote, both of whom love and believe the books of chivalry.

succeed" (I, 30); the story of Don Quixote is too good to be false. Indeed, both at the beginning and at the end of part one, Cervantes, speaking in his own persona this time, tells us that he is concerned only "not to depart by so much as an inch from the truth" (I, 1), and that "No story is bad if it is truthful . . . [and that we] historians are bound by right to be exact, truthful, and absolutely unprejudiced" (I, 9); this history, likewise, is "authentic and true" (I, 52).

But the author doth protest too much. Insistence that this is history can only result in the reader's perplexity: Since "we know" that we are reading a work of fiction, if we take Cervantes seriously, then not even *Don Quixote* itself is worth reading. It is comparable to the books of chivalry, for it is *not* a true story—it is *not*, in fact, history. This perhaps ironical device has a bearing on the alleged purpose of *Don Quixote* as serving as a burlesque of chivalrous romances; if such romances are to be rejected, this cannot be for the reason that the Priest, the Barber, the Canon, Don Diego, and Carrasco give—it cannot be because they are fictions that pretend to be history, for so does Cervantes' work. Indeed, examples abound of the characters ridiculing books of chivalry, which critiques are followed by Cervantes' undermining them by implying that the same criticism, if legitimate, would apply to *this* book as well, so this book too should be tossed into the fire—not a likely reading of Cervantes' goal. The Canon, the most articulate critic of these books and of Don Quixote himself, in contrasting the "fictitious and the historical" tales being told now, says that if a story is told "in a pleasant style and with an ingenious plot, as close as possible to the truth," the story will be beautiful and will "instruct and delight at the same time" (I, 47); however, in a humorous book "based on a fictitious story, how can they [the authors] introduce historical events into it? . . . [A]ll this is prejudicial to truth, and to the detriment of history" (I, 48). If the reader judges *Don Quixote* according to this, he will be tempted to put the book down.

The importance of the historical device is all the more striking when one considers that Cervantes is no doubt aware that his readers may believe him when he insists that this is a true story. Although such a consideration is not generally entertained by modern-day readers of *Don Quixote*, who always find this book in the fiction/literature part of the bookstore, nevertheless an "idle reader" of the early seventeenth century might be uncertain about the historicity of what he is reading. Knights errant did roam the Spanish countryside barely more than a century before Cervantes wrote, and there were armored knights serving kings in their courts in Cervantes' day, as is clearly stated in the tale itself.⁷ Our unhinged Hidalgo is traveling very real roads in the very real land of La Mancha;⁸ he is a possible if bizarre creature, unlike (apparently) the characters in the books of chivalry. This potential for confusion probably begins in the inquisition in Don Quixote's library, where the Priest finds a copy of Cervantes' *La Galatea*; Cervantes himself becomes a character in the story, and as a result the reader might find this a little unsettling (I, 9). Similarly, Gines de Pasamonte, one of the thankless galley slaves whom the Don frees (and who later steals Sancho's ass, and still later turns up as Master Peter the Puppeteer) is a real historical figure; fact has become a part of fiction (I, 22). In the second part Don Quixote encounters various people who have read the first, and each reacts differently as to its historicity: Roque the valorous thief, for example, did not think

⁷ See, for example, II, 2; II, 6; and II, 17. On the historicity of knights and knight errantry, see Martin de Riquer, "Cervantes and the Romances of Chivalry," in *Don Quixote* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 898–99.

⁸ A biography of Cervantes that I once read stated that a tourist could follow the paths Don Quixote took from town to town, and there are inns that claim to be the inn in which Don Quixote was dubbed knight and Sancho received his blanket-tossing; there is even a home in one town—Cervantes, recall, does not tell us the name of the Don's hometown—that claims to have been that of our hero.

the adventures of the mad knight were supposed to be true and so is shocked at meeting him on the road (II, 60), while the Duke and Duchess are merely excited to have a chance to speak to and play pranks upon the celebrity knight. All of this adds to the reader's disorientation, for he is in the same boat; he too has read the first part, which claims to be the historical chronicle of our knight's exploits, and now finds that he too might actually meet him in the flesh on the road to Barcelona. It is not hard to imagine how a reader might begin to feel that in some way he too is, or at least can be, a part of the adventures of Don Quixote.

But perhaps there is a way of reading this historical device in light of what Cervantes' characters say about truth in poetry and fiction. Don Quixote argues that Homer's depiction of Odysseus as prudent and patient, or Virgil's portrayal of Aeneas as virtuous and wise may not be entirely accurate, since these authors "do not paint them or describe them as they were, but as they should have been, to serve as examples of their virtues for future generations. In the same way was Amadis the pole-star, the morning star, the sun of all valiant knights and lovers . . ." (I, 25). This last admission is striking: Amadis of Gaul is Don Quixote's hero—even at the inquisition and burning of Don Quixote's library the Priest decides to preserve the copy of the tales of Amadis—yet here the Don is willing to admit that Amadis may not have been as good a knight as his chroniclers portray him to be. In the same passage our knight presents a similar credo about his Lady Dulcinea, concluding that

I imagine all I say [about Dulcinea] to be true, neither more nor less, and in my imagination I draw her as I would have her be, both as to her beauty and her rank; unequaled by Helen, unrivalled by Lucretia, or any other famous woman of antiquity, Greek, Barbarian, or Roman. Let anyone say what he likes, for though the ignorant may reproach me for it, men of judgment will not condemn me.

Later the Duchess wonders to Don Quixote whether perhaps "this same lady does not exist on earth, but is a fantastic mistress, whom your worship engendered and bore in your mind, and painted with every grace and perfection you desired." Don Quixote replies:

There is much to say on that score. . . . God knows whether Dulcinea exists on earth or no, or whether she is fantastic or not fantastic. These are not matters whose verification can be carried out to the full. I neither engendered nor bore my lady, though I contemplate her in her ideal form, as a lady with all the qualities needed to win her fame in all quarters of the world. These are: spotless beauty, dignity without pride, love with modesty, politeness springing from courtesy, courtesy from good breeding and, lastly, high lineage . . . (II, 32).

So he admits that his Lady may not be in reality exactly how he speaks of her; there is a sort of license being taken, it seems. When Don Quixote later iterates his belief about how Virgil and Homer portray their heroes, Sampson Carrasco agrees, with certain qualifications: "That is true . . . but it is one thing to write as a poet, and another as a historian. The poet can relate and sing things, not as they were but as they should have been, without in any way affecting the truth of the matter" (II, 3). According to Carrasco, then, Virgil, Homer, Amadis' chronicler, and Don Quixote himself are not really recording history when they tell their stories; they are writing poetry. Although Don Quixote never seems to make the distinction between Virgil *qua* historian and Virgil *qua* poet, he does not appear to disagree with Carrasco's analysis.⁹ So if Carrasco is correct,¹⁰ then the truth of poetry is not the same as that

⁹ Indeed, elsewhere Don Quixote sings the praises of poetry as being that toward which the other sciences are ordered, though the "science" of knight errantry is "as good as poetry, and even two inches better;" see II, 16, and 18.

¹⁰ This is, perhaps, a big *if*, given what I will later propose about Carrasco's role in the book.

of history; a poetic tale (e.g., a parable or fable), if treated historically, will contain both falsity and truth, but its truth will be somehow more significant and essential to it. If we apply this principle to *Don Quixote*, we must say that this tale will be a mixture of truth and falsity, but to the discerning eye the latter will not taint the former; what is fictitious here will not eclipse the brilliance of its veracity. And further, if we are to regard this book as a source of poetical truth, its truth must somehow pertain to being a model of moral action to be imitated. So to the list of those serving as “examples of virtues for future generations”—namely, Odysseus, Aeneas, and Amadis—we must add Dulcinea and Don Quixote himself.

With this possible understanding in mind, then, let us turn to a particular mechanism or aspect of the historical device, namely, the historian Cide Hamete Benengeli. Cervantes stresses the fact that our record of the adventures of Don Quixote is mediated—he himself is not the author of the story he is retelling. Rather, a Moor named Cide Hamete was the first to record the knight’s exploits, while Cervantes is merely the editor of a translation from the Arabic original—the translator being a *morisco*, a Portuguese Moor, whom he met in Toledo (cf. I, 9). Thus, there are times when we must distinguish between the commentary of Cide Hamete, that of the translator, and of course that of our “editor,” Cervantes himself. This hodgepodge of storytellers obviously adds to the historical joke, for it allows Cervantes to put himself into the world of Don Quixote by describing himself as a researcher. Thus he can tell of the burdens of sifting through incomplete manuscripts, comparing variant readings, discriminating between apocryphal and genuine records, etc. However, the mediation of the narrative may not be gratuitous; it may be relevant for discerning the perspectives and possible prejudices of the media, since how a scene is described may depend on who does the describing. At present I will focus on Cide Hamete,

on his thoughts and personality, returning later to Cervantes the editor and compiler.

Cide Hamete, in spite of being a Moor—a race (according to Cervantes) known for its liars—is repeatedly praised by Cervantes for his veracity and accuracy as a “wise and judicious historian,” the “flower of historians” (I, 9; I, 22; I, 26; II, 47). For example, early in the story when the Don and Sancho arrive at an inn and are given beds in a barn, our historian describes in great detail the layout of the barn, the horses in it, the income of the horses’ owners, etc. Cervantes pauses to comment:

Cide Hamete Benengeli was a very exact historian and very precise in all his details, as can be seen by his not passing over these various points, trivial and petty though they may be. He should be an example to those grave historians who give us so short and skimmed an account of events that we scarcely taste them, and so the most substantial part of their work, out of carelessness, malice, or ignorance, remains in their ink-horns (I, 16).

Certainly Cide Hamete leaves nothing in his ink-horn. At another point, when our knight and Sancho are about to embark upon one of the Duke and Duchess’ concocted adventures, Cervantes bursts forth in panegyric:

In very truth, all who enjoy stories like this should show their gratitude to Cide Hamete, its first author, for his meticulousness in recording its minutest details, leaving nothing, however trivial, which he does not bring clearly to light. He depicts thoughts, reveals intentions, answers unspoken questions, clears up doubts, resolves objections; in fact elucidates the slightest points the most captious critic could raise. O most renowned author! O fortunate Don Quixote! (II, 40)

We are tempted to think this hyperbole or at the very least a misplaced tribute, since this particular scene is not as excessively detailed as are others in *Don Quixote*. Indeed, some of it

is untrue; for, as we will see shortly, Cide Hamete conjures, at least implicitly, more questions than answers.

But there is an even stronger reason for questioning Cervantes' grounds for (or even his seriousness in) admiring Cide Hamete: In spite of Cide Hamete's protestations that he has written "without adding or subtracting one atom of truth from the history" (II, 10), there is ample evidence that he has tampered with, or at least is inconsistent in relating to us, the facts of Don Quixote's exploits. Some instances are insignificant details and frequently have to do with Sancho: e.g., he reports Sancho's last name as "Panza," but also admits that it must in fact have been "Zancas" (I, 9); he calls Sancho's wife first "Juana" (I, 7; I, 52) and then "Teresa" (II, 5; II, 36); and Sancho's ass is stolen by Gines de Pasamonte (I, 23), but suddenly Sancho is again riding it (I, 24), and then just as suddenly it is missing again (I, 25).¹¹ And these inconsistencies extend to Don Quixote as well: When the Don takes the magical Balsam of Fierabras which he has made to cure his numerous injuries, he is said to "feel very much soothed in his body and so much the better from his beating that he thought himself cured. . . . Sancho Panza, who also took his master's recovery for a miracle, begged him for what remained in the pot," but then two pages later the Don is prevented from rescuing Sancho, because our hero was "so bruised and battered that he could not even dismount" from his horse, Rocinante (I, 17). Now, each of these instances might be taken merely as Cide's or Cervantes' nodding, were it not for Cide Hamete's more explicit admissions that he is not giving us "just the facts." For, in the course of complaining about the aridity of Don Quixote's tale, he admits that he invented and added the digressing "Tale of Foolish Curiosity," supposedly discovered and told by the Innkeeper in part one (I, 32-35; II, 3), as well as the Captive's recounting of his misadventures

¹¹ In part two Cide Hamete tries to explain away his inconsistency about Sancho's ass, but his resolution is patently unsuccessful (II, 27).

in rescuing the soon-to-be baptized Moorish maiden Zoraida (I, 38-41; II, 44). The falsity of the latter tale is particularly problematic, because the "historical" details of that story are the foundation for the subsequent events at the inn that bring about the reunion of the Captive and his brother the Judge (I, 42); are we to assume that none of this "really" happened at the inn where Don Quixote was staying? The number of absurd coincidences that happen that night—by chance Lucinda and Don Ferdinand end up at the same inn as Cardenio and Dorothea and are reunited with their respective beaux; by chance the Captive and his brother the Judge end up at the same place and are reunited; by chance the mule lad Don Louis and his Clara are united; by chance the Barber from whom Don Quixote stole Mambrino's helmet arrives and attacks Don Quixote and Sancho—suggest that this would not be an unreasonable assumption.

A similar inconsistency manifests itself if we try to discern Cide Hamete's personal opinion of our knight. While he occasionally interrupts the story to offer lengthy encomia for Don Quixote's virtues and moral rectitude (II, 17; II, 24), in other contexts he seems rather hard on the knight. For whatever the Don's shortcomings, we are not inclined to call him a coward; if anything, he seems to err in the opposite direction of being precipitous. As Don Quixote explains to a witness of his adventure with the lions, "it is better for the brave man to rise to the height of rashness than to sink into the depths of cowardice . . . for *such a knight is rash and foolhardy* sounds better in the hearer's ears than *such a knight is timid and cowardly*" (II, 17). Yet Cide Hamete seems to accuse our knight of this very vice on a number of occasions. In Don Quixote's flight from the stone-throwing villagers, Cide Hamete says that Don Quixote is terrified for his life (II, 27). Again, in spite of the Don's protestations to the contrary at the incident with the noisy fulling-hammers, Cide Hamete insists that the knight is quaking in his boots (I, 20). Yet again, in one of the last events in the story, Don Quixote and Sancho are sub-

jected to a galley-initiation ceremony in which the inductee is held overhead and handed from crewman to crewman; Cide Hamete reports that, upon witnessing Sancho's initiation, our fearless knight "began to tremble, hunching his shoulders and visibly blanching" at the prospect of the same happening to himself (II, 63)—fortunately for him, he is spared the ordeal but not without a little saber-rattling.

Now, perhaps this sort of weakness in the Don is forgivable, and perhaps Cide Hamete is not dwelling on any serious moral flaw in him. However, Cide Hamete describes our knight as something worse than a man with a reasonable fear of death. For instance, toward the end of the second part he describes Don Quixote as not only observing without preventing a highway robbery conducted by the brigand Roque Guinart, but also as admiring Roque for being a "man of understanding" (II, 60). Cide Hamete further gives a striking assessment of Don Quixote's state of mind as he leaves the vanquished Knight of the Mirrors: "Extremely joyful, proud, and vainglorious Don Quixote was at having subdued so valiant a knight" (II, 15; he repeats this in II, 16)—although the Don gives no sign of such vainglory. Rather, he calmly converses with his squire Sancho about whether the defeated knight might truly be Sampson Carrasco. Cide Hamete attributes this same superciliousness to the Don when he is finally treated as a true knight: "he was puffed up with vainglory and could not contain himself for pleasure" (II, 62), though there is nothing in the knight's words or actions to suggest such haughtiness.

A more grievous flaw is charged by Cide Hamete in another situation in which the Don is treated as a true knight. When Don Quixote and Sancho are welcomed into the Castle of the Duke and Duchess, whose subjects hail our *hidalgo* as the "flower and cream of knights errant," Cide Hamete says that "this was the first time that he was positively certain of being a true and no imaginary knight errant" (II, 31). Again, Don Quixote neither says nor does anything that implies a new-found conviction about his vocation or that he

had had any doubts before. Worse, Cide Hamete's suggested understanding of what is going on in the Don's head implies that our knight may have been play-acting all along; and if the historian is right, the reader should be shocked and scandalized by the knight's conduct. While we might forgive a madman for some of the antics, tauntings, thefts, and often near-fatal injuries through which the Don and Sancho put perfect strangers, we would be considerably less lenient with an eccentric and melodramatic but nonetheless quite sane gentleman doing the same things. One tends not to think the Don is guilty of the excesses of which Hamlet is accused, but Cide Hamete is in fact close to making such an accusation: The Don is not quite convinced that he is a knight—rather, he is merely feigning madness. He is faking it.

A final and related example of Cide Hamete's implicit slandering of Don Quixote can be found in a chapter that says it records events "necessary to the True Understanding of this great History." After recounting what Don Quixote says happened in the Cave of Montesinos—a mystical experience in which the knight finds the enchanted king Montesinos and his court (II, 24)—Cide Hamete gives his opinion about the knight's words:

I cannot persuade myself that all that is written in the previous chapter literally happened to the valorous Don Quixote, . . . for it exceeds all reasonable bounds. But I cannot possibly suppose that Don Quixote, who was the most truthful gentleman and the noblest knight of his age, could be lying; for even if he were riddled with arrows he would not tell a lie. . . . One thing, however, is certain, that finally he retracted it on his death-bed and confessed that he had invented it, since it seemed to him to fit in with the adventures he had read of in his histories (II, 24).

In the same breath that Cide Hamete praises our Don's inability to lie, he also declares that he later, in fact, admitted to doing just that! We might be prone to shrug our shoulders and say that these are "just the facts," if not for the reader's famil-

ilarity with the ending of the book: Don Quixote never mentions having made up his vision in the Cave of Montesinos. Indeed, since our knight betrays some sign of doubt whether his vision was real when he questions Antonio Moreno's magical head (II, 62), it seems that he recounts the vision in good faith and with some reservations. Hence, why Cide Hamete insists on saying Don Quixote was lying—he refuses to entertain the plausible interpretation that the knight fell asleep in the Cave and dreamt the whole thing—is mysterious.¹²

Perhaps, then, one should take another look at Cide Hamete's protestations of good will toward our knight; perhaps he is being sarcastic or tongue-in-cheek when he sings the Don's praises. One can almost detect this irony when, for example, Cide Hamete praises Don Quixote when he insists upon proving his worth in mortal combat with a starved lion:

O brave and incomparably courageous Don Quixote de la Mancha! True mirror to all valiant knights in the world! . . . What praises can there be unfitting and unmeet for you, hyperbole upon hyperbole though they be? . . . Let your deeds themselves praise you, valorous Manchegan, for here I leave them in all their glory . . . (II, 17).

In one of our knight's most foolhardy engagements—Don Quixote survives thanks only to Providence, as the lion turns out not to be hungry after all—Cide Hamete tells us that the former's "glorious" actions speak for themselves better than any commentary he could give. Note that later in the same chapter Cide Hamete refers to the knight's actions as "wild, rash, and foolish." The sarcasm seems still more evident when in a later incident, as he begins to reveal the identity of Mas-

¹² For further examples of Cide Hamete's unreliability, see Howard Mancing, "Cide Hamete Benengeli vs. Miguel de Cervantes: The Metafictional Dialectic of *Don Quixote*," *Cervantes* 1.1-2 (1981): 63-81. As Mancing puts it, "Cide Hamete Benengeli seems to be a better historian than psychologist: his narration of events is generally quite acceptable but his interpretation of these events or of the characters' motives or psychological states is frequently questionable" (*ibid.*, 70).

ter Peter the puppeteer, Cide Hamete "swear[s] as a Catholic Christian" that he speaks the truth. Cervantes' unnamed translator (who, we should recall, is also a Moor) takes this oath to mean that "as a Catholic Christian, when he swears, swears, or should swear the truth, and observe it in all he says, so he [Cide Hamete] would tell the truth, as if he had sworn like a Christian Catholic, in writing of Don Quixote" (II, 27). However, this interpretation is convoluted and unlikely, as Cide Hamete is a believing Muslim—consider his numerous prayers to Allah and his swearing by Mohammed (II, 8; II, 48)—and would not say anything to implicitly dishonor Islam, such as making an oath to the Christian God. A more plausible interpretation is that Cide's oath is facetious; a Muslim's oath as a Christian is no oath at all. Indeed, this implies that Cide Hamete feels no religious obligation to tell the truth about Don Quixote. The alternatives, then, are that Cide Hamete, in praising the knight and then calling attention to his faults, is either simply being inconsistent, or we must take the praise as sarcasm and understand him implicitly to think the Don a fool, or worse. And in both cases he seems to be willing to tamper with the facts about Don Quixote, so in either case he is being a poor historian.

Many other voices make us second-guess Cide Hamete's reliability as an objective and evenhanded historian. The *morisco* translator, in one of his few comments on the story, considers an entire chapter of the Arabic original to be apocryphal because in it Sancho's way of speaking is unlike his earlier droll manner (II, 5). Further, Don Quixote himself, upon hearing from Sampson Carrasco that the first part of Cide Hamete's history records the countless beatings which he received, is suspicious about the historian's disposition toward him, saying that he "might in fairness have kept quiet about them, . . . for there is no reason to record those actions which do not change or affect the truth of the story, if they redound to the discredit of the hero" (II, 3). He also worries when he hears that his historian is a Moor, "For he could hope

for no truth of the Moors, since they are all cheats, forgers and schemers" (ibid.). In a similar passage, when first introducing the historian to us, Cervantes himself, in spite of his aforementioned praise of Cide Hamete's meticulousness (also tongue-in-cheek?), plants seeds of doubt about him:

Now, if any objection can be made against the truth of this history, it can only be that its narrator was an Arab—men of that nation being ready liars, though as they are so much our enemies he might be thought rather to have fallen short of the truth than to have exaggerated. So it seems to me; for when he could and should have let himself go in praise of so worthy a knight he seems deliberately to have passed on in silence; an ill deed and malicious, since historians are bound by right to be exact, truthful, and absolutely unprejudiced, so that neither interest nor fear, dislike nor affection, should make them turn from the path of truth, whose mother is history. . . . [So] if any good quality is missing, I am certain that it is the fault of its dog of an author rather than any default in the subject (I, 9).

Cervantes is claiming that the window through which we are observing the knight is tinted, and not with a rose-colored cast; Cide Hamete makes the knight look not better but worse than he is. Cervantes is both warning us about Cide Hamete—out of his hatred for Christians, the Moor might intentionally misrepresent or understate Don Quixote's virtuous deeds—and at the same time washing his hands of responsibility for those who do not heed this warning.

A final confirmation of the disagreement between Cervantes and Cide Hamete about the knight lies in their respective titles of the book. As was said above, the actual title under which the first part was published was *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha*.¹³ However, the title Cide Hamete gives his work is simply *History of Don Quixote de la*

¹³ In a facsimile of the title page of the first edition the words *El Ingenioso* are much larger than *Hidalgo Don Quixote de La Mancha*. On this same title page the Latin inscription encircling the image of a lion and a bird

Mancha (I, 9). Cervantes seems to back away from calling this a history and at the same time indicates an apparently genuine admiration of, or at least good will toward, the knight by attributing to him some kind of cleverness or sagacity.

Cervantes frequently calls our attention to Cide Hamete's role as the historian simply by mentioning his name or by using the formula "dice la historia que . . ." (the history says that . . .). He wants us to remember who is telling the story we are reading. This narration within a narration can be found in the books of chivalry that Don Quixote reads, but without the explicit acknowledgment that every medium placed between us and the facts makes us less certain about the latter; we wonder *what really happened?* Making Cide Hamete more than just an observer—indeed, making him a character in the tale—Cervantes seems to want his readers to be moderately skeptical about the presentation of the facts, as though Cide Hamete's presence in and manipulation of what really happened is somehow part of the story itself.

Thus far our position about how to read *Don Quixote* is simply curious and unilluminating. Can anything more be said as to why Cide Hamete may bear ill-will toward our knight's endeavors? I believe some light may be shed on an answer if we look more closely at the apparently unrelated aspect of the story that Don Quixote calls "enchantment." For the right understanding of magic here not only bears on the nature of our knight's insanity, but it also, I think, discloses an aspect of the story that is easy to miss and which reveals the motivations and even the identity of the historian Cide Hamete Benengeli.

is *Spero Lucem Post Tenebras*; note also that Don Quixote is many times called or compared to a Manchegan lion (e.g., he takes the title Knight of the Lions toward the beginning of the second part). For the facsimile, see D. B. Wyndham Lewis, *The Shadow of Cervantes* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962), 134.

Enchantment, of course, is Don Quixote's answer for everything. Does something appear to be an inn to Sancho? Well, then, it must be an enchanted castle, for it is obviously a castle. Does Sancho say that the Don is attacking two herds of sheep? That is because, of course, these two armies of famous knights have been enchanted so as to appear as, or even to become, sheep. Likewise, Mambrino's golden helmet appears to everyone other than Don Quixote as an old brass shaving basin simply because a spell has been cast upon them or it, and the giants appear to be windmills to Sancho, and even to the Don himself after he is struck down by them, because the squire and knight have been enchanted. In his more cautious moments, our knight withholds judgment about what or whom is enchanted, for when asked about Mambrino's helmet he responds,

By God, sirs, . . . so many strange things have befallen me in this castle on the two occasions I have lodged here that I dare not give any positive answer to any question asked me concerning anything in it; for I imagine that whatever goes on here is by way of enchantment. . . . So to interfere now in so perplexed a matter and to give my opinion would be to make a rash judgment. . . . Perhaps, since none of you are knights, as I am, the spells in this place will have no effect on you, your understanding will be free, and you will be able to judge of the affairs of this castle as they really and truly are, and not as they appear to me (I, 45).

Don Quixote's claim here that enchantments may affect only knights errant is thought-provoking. But even so he holds fast to the notion that the inn is an enchanted castle and that *someone*—either himself or those around him—has been enchanted. In the second part, our ingenious *hidalgo* says that one of the results of his enchantment and subsequent imprisonment in the ox cart at the end of part one—a device dreamt up by the Priest and Nicholas the Barber to bring him back home to be cured of his madness—is that, since he has bro-

ken free and has embarked upon his third sally, he is now immune from the enchantments of the wizards that persecute him (II, 32). This, however, does not remove the enchantment panacea from the knight's explanations of his misadventures; for the entirety of the second part, when his companions do not see what Don Quixote does, he declares that *they* must be enchanted now! Thus, when Sancho, all but caught in the lie about having delivered a love message to Dulcinea, finds himself saying that a garlic-reeking, foul-speaking peasant girl is Dulcinea, our knight sees things as they are, and his first thought is that Sancho has been enchanted; but when his squire insists that this is his Lady and then kneels before her, the Don decides that it must be *she* who is enchanted (II, 10). As a result much of the rest of the story of part two revolves around disenchanting Dulcinea. Likewise, the Don's experience tells him that critics of books of chivalry are in fact enchanted and that these people cannot be convinced of their error except by Revelation (I, 49; II, 18; II, 31-32).

Enchantment, however, is not merely something that just happens. It is the work of sage enchanters that torment the knight. As our knight puts it before the adventure with the lions, "I know by experience that I have enemies visible and invisible, and I do not know when or where, nor at what time or in what shape they will attack me" (II, 17); later, after he has dismembered Master Peter's puppet show, having been deluded that the puppet heroine needed rescuing and the puppet villains vanquishing, he says that "these enchanters who persecute me are always placing before my eyes shapes like these, and then changing and transforming them to look like whatever they please" (II, 26). Don Quixote also identifies the enchanters' motive: They intend to erase all memory of the great knight from history.

That accursed race, born into the world to obscure and obliterate the exploits of the good, and to light up and exalt the deeds of the wicked. Persecuted I have been by enchanters.

Enchanters persecute me, and enchanters will persecute me till they sink me and my high chivalries into the profound abyss of oblivion (II, 32).

By reducing him to absurdity, they wish his name to fade from the archives of the great. Note, however, that this conviction about the enchanters' end seems to be the result of experience, since earlier in the story the knight puts the matter more tentatively. When explaining to his loyal but doubtful squire one of their many mishaps, he says,

Is it possible that all this while you have been with me you have not discovered that everything to do with knights errant appears to be chimaera, folly and nonsense, and to go all contrariwise? This is not really the case, but there is a crew of enchanters always among us who change and alter all our deeds, and transform them according to their pleasure and their desire either to favor or injure us (I, 25).

It becomes clear, however, that these enchanters seek only to injure Don Quixote. This is confirmed in Don Quixote's mind shortly thereafter, when the mischievous Innkeeper's daughter and Maritornes, her maid, leave him hanging by his arm from a hole in a hayloft. Helpless and in agony, Don Quixote calls upon the good sage enchanters for succor, and only silence answers him (I, 43). This unanswered prayer leaves no doubt in Don Quixote's mind regarding the character of these sages that operate from the shadows.

Our knight, however, is still more specific in identifying his tormentors: While they are many, there is one particular evil enchanter who is his sworn enemy. Early on in the book, the Don first names this enchanter when his niece tries to explain away the wall that the Priest and Barber have used to block entry to the Don's library full of books of chivalry (one of their many attempts at curing him); she says that an enchanter somehow erased all trace of the library. Don Quixote smells the handiwork of "Freston," a "learned enchanter, and great enemy of mine. He bears me malice, for he knows that in

the fullness of time I shall engage a favorite knight of his in single combat, and that I shall conquer him, and he will not be able to prevent it" (I, 7);¹⁴ this same Freston Don Quixote accuses of turning the giants he was fighting into windmills, "to cheat me of the glory of conquering them" (I, 8). But after this point in the story, the name of Don Quixote's arch nemesis becomes unimportant—he is never again named—though the knight insists that this evil enchanter is somehow still watching him and changing the appearances of things whenever it appears that the Don will attain fame and honor through his actions (I, 18; II, 8; II, 14; II, 16). However, he does tell us more about the evil enchanter:

[This enchanter, and all enchanters,] never allow themselves to be seen by anyone. . . . [B]ut there's no point in taking any notice of matters of enchantment, nor in getting angry and enraged about them. For, as these magicians are invisible and supernatural, we shall find no one to take vengeance on, however hard we try (I, 17).

The malicious enchanter and his cohorts are somehow outside of creation and therefore cannot directly be fought against; the squire and knight are somehow subject to the whims of an almost Cartesian evil genius. In addition, Don Quixote makes a final revelation about the enchanter's identity: He is Moorish (I, 17).

So there is an enchanter that to some degree reigns over the world of Don Quixote and seeks to use this power to make him look the fool, thereby dishonoring and destroying him, apparently for the sole reason that the enchanter is a Moor and the knight a Christian. Is it just a coincidence that this description fits the first author of the life of Don Quixote, the flower of historians, Cide Hamete Benengeli? Has Cervantes inadvertently given us puzzle pieces that, when assembled, identify the enchanter as the Moorish historian telling the story? It is, of course, unlikely that a master craftsman like

¹⁴ This prophecy is significant; I will return to it shortly.

Cervantes, who has managed to weave an apparently consistent narrative within a narrative for 900 pages, would make such a profound implication without intending to. Further, the tale gives other evidence that is still more explicit in identifying our Moorish author with the evil Moorish enchanter.

Some of this evidence is fairly simple and implies that Cide Hamete is indeed a sage enchanter, but not that he bears malice toward Don Quixote. Our author, for instance, is in passing sometimes referred to as a "Mohammedan philosopher" or "the sage Cide Hamete" (I, 15; I, 21; II, 3; II, 53), but "sage" here does not simply mean "wise man"; rather, it means someone who has supernatural powers that enable him to know the actions, motivations, and most hidden thoughts of those he watches over. Cervantes himself, in one of his few unequivocal appearances in the story, makes this point:

It appeared to my mind impossible, and contrary to all sound custom, that so good a knight should have lacked a sage to undertake the writing of his unparalleled achievements, since there never was one of those knights errant who—as the people say—go out on their adventures, that ever lacked one. For every one of them had two¹⁵ sages ready at hand, not only to record their deeds, but to describe their minutest thoughts and most trivial actions, however much concealed (I, 9).

So Cervantes implies that Cide Hamete's manuscripts, which begin with the conclusion of the knight's battle with the Basque, are written by Don Quixote's personal sage. Later, in almost identical words Cervantes demands that we be grateful to the historian Cide Hamete "for his meticulousness in recording [the history's] minutest details, leaving nothing, however trivial, which he does not bring to light. He depicts thoughts, reveals intentions, answers unspoken ques-

¹⁵ The fact that Cervantes says a knight has two sages writing his history will be significant later on.

tions, clears up doubts, resolves objections" (II, 40). This historian, by unfathomable and wonderful means, is omniscient.

In addition, this sage not only reads but even *controls* the thoughts of the knight and squire. Don Quixote, after Sancho has whimsically dubbed him "The Knight of the Sad Countenance," declares: "[You have said this] because the sage whose task it is to write the history of my deeds must have thought it right for me to take some title. . . . That is why the sage I mentioned has put it into your thoughts and into your mouth to call me now *The Knight of the Sad Countenance*" (I, 19). So Sancho has been inspired! Later in the story, while Don Quixote in private removes an old pair of stockings whose stitching bursts, the editor says that Cide Hamete interrupts the tale with a page-long lament about the wretchedness of poverty, at the end of which, it is said that "All these reflections were revived in Don Quixote by the breaking of his stitches" (II, 44); it is almost as though our knight could hear Cide Hamete's jeremiad, as though Cide Hamete made his own thoughts those of the knight. Our author, then, is almost a demiurge.

While this aspect of Cide Hamete's magic seems harmless enough, when combined with the aforementioned evidence that the author is ill-disposed toward our knight, the conclusion that Cide Hamete the enchanter is malicious is inescapable. Indeed, Don Quixote implies this himself when he declares that his biographer may also be the sage enchanter that is seeking his destruction. For, in explaining Dulcinea's appearance to Sancho as a ill-born woman winnowing corn (recall that Sancho has fabricated this meeting), Don Quixote says that

[You would have seen her as she is,] were it not for the envy some evil enchanter seems to display towards my affairs, in changing and turning everything which might give me pleasure into shapes other than their true ones. And so I am afraid that if the author of that history of my exploits, which they say is now in print, chanced to be some en-

chanter hostile to me, he had probably changed one thing into another, mingling a thousand lies with one truth, and digressed to narrate actions out of the sequence proper to a faithful history (II, 8).

At this point the Bachelor Sampson Carrasco has told the knight and squire about the publication of the first part of the knight's history, and we have already seen that Cide Hamete mingles truth and falsity in it. Don Quixote's line of reasoning here is straightforward: If this newly published account of his exploits is bad history—e.g., if it does not portray Dulcinea as she is, making her out to be a poor woman who winnows corn—then its author must be the envious evil enchanter. He reaches the same conclusion again when, shortly thereafter, he and Sancho encounter the enchanted "Dulcinea" outside the city of Toboso: "what a spite the evil enchanters have against me. . . . In truth, I was born a very pattern for the unfortunate, and to be a target and mark for the arrows of adversity" (II, 10). The knight's argument here bears further reflection.

It is tempting to try to read this as merely another funny scene among the misadventures of our mad knight. That is, one might recall that Sancho lied about having seen Dulcinea winnowing corn and fabricated her "enchantment" so that his master would not catch him in the lie; thus, Cide Hamete has not represented things other than they are, and so Don Quixote is wrong to think him the envious enchanter. The enchantment and the enchanters are all in Don Quixote's amusingly unhinged mind. This is one approach to the theme of enchantment. Yet there is another: The enchantment and the enchanter(s) may be a part of the tale itself. That is, what we are reading is not in fact an objective history of a man gone mad, but a wicked enchanter's prejudiced and slanderous portrayal of a great knight whom he hates, a knight whose exploits have been manipulated and sometimes altogether recast to make him appear mad, foolhardy, pusillanimous, and in general not the stuff of which heroes are made. In con-

sidering seriously this approach, we should recall what the knight tells us about the nature of enchantment in the seventeenth century. As he says to Sancho after being put in the "enchanted" ox cart,

[P]erhaps chivalry and magic in our day must follow a different course from that pursued by the men of old; and it may be, too, that as I am a new knight in the world, and the first to resuscitate the long-forgotten profession of knight errantry, they have invented fresh kinds of enchantment and other methods of carrying the enchanted as well (I, 47).

The Don soon distills this thought after Sancho tries to convince him that he is not enchanted at all: "I have told you already that there are many kinds of enchantments; and time may have changed the fashion from one kind to another" (I, 49). For the new mode of knight errantry there is a new mode of enchantment: the enchantment brought about through the plume of a less-than-evenhanded historian who subtly forms the reader's opinion of the subject matter through insinuation, withholding information, selective representation, and outright lying.¹⁶

But there is a still more decisive piece of evidence indicating that Cervantes wants us to see Cide Hamete as the evil enchanter in the tale, a piece of evidence that we touched upon only briefly above: the publication of part one. When, at the beginning of part two, the Bachelor Sampson Carrasco (a significant character in himself, to whom we will return shortly) tells Sancho about the promulgation of part one, and the latter reports the same to the Don, the two are struck with a sort of vertigo:

¹⁶ The Norton Critical Edition of *Don Quixote* (p. 56) notes that in the late sixteenth century chivalric romance *Belianis de Grecia*, the magician Freston—whom Don Quixote identified earlier as the evil enchanter tormenting him—is the narrator, the supposed author of the tale. Enchantment via historical biography does seem to be the mode of the day.

[Sancho said.] "It made me cross myself in wonder to think of how the story-writer could have learnt all that [is recorded in part one]."

"You may be certain, Sancho," said Don Quixote, "that the author of our history is some sage enchanter. . . . I am alarmed at what you have told me, and I shall not eat a mouthful that will do me good until I am informed on the whole subject" (II, 2).

As Sancho then fetches Sampson Carrasco to tell them more about the newly published part one—"more than twelve thousand copies" of which are circulating about Portugal, Barcelona, and Valencia—Don Quixote ruminates for some time on this development:

Don Quixote was very thoughtful as he waited for the Bachelor Carrasco, from whom he expected to hear how he had been put into a book, as Sancho had told him. He could not persuade himself that such a history existed, for the blood of the enemies he had slain was scarcely dry on his own sword-blade. Yet they would have it that his noble deeds of chivalry are already about in print. Nevertheless he imagined that some sage, either friendly or hostile, had given them to the Press by magic art; if a friend, to magnify and extol them above the most renowned actions of any knight errant; and if an enemy, to annihilate them and place them below the basest ever written of any mean squire. . . . But if it were true that there was such a history, since it was about a knight errant it must perforce be grandiloquent, lofty, remarkable, magnificent and true. With this he was somewhat consoled; but it disturbed him to think that its author was a Moor, as that name of Cide suggested. For he could hope for no truth of the Moors, since they are all cheats, forgers and schemers (II, 3).

In this passage it is easy to be distracted by the line about whether Cervantes (and/or Cide Hamete) is a friend or enemy to the Don—obviously one of the most important questions one could ask about the book—but I wish to focus on the general fact of part one's publication and its relation to

the question of the existence of enchanters. One should keep in mind that although part two was published ten years after part one, the events portrayed here at the beginning of part two occur about thirty days after those ending part one, when the enchanted Don is brought back in an ox cart to his home town. There is literally no way that some historian could have gathered all the information about the exploits of Don Quixote and Sancho and published a polished retelling of them in so short of time—unless that historian were an omniscient sage enchanter.

There is no other explanation; the enchanter has proven to Don Quixote and Sancho (and even to the readers) that he exists. This single fact's implications for how we are to take Don Quixote's insistence that there are enchanters who tamper with the appearances of things—while almost everyone else insists just as vociferously that there is no such thing as enchantment or knights errant—are alarming and portentous; the Don has been vindicated, the others refuted.¹⁷ What this means, in short, is that the people who meet Don Quixote and have read part one, if they consider the evidence, *should* believe in the sage enchanter (be he Don Quixote's friend or foe), for his knowledge about the Don's labors recorded in part one—recall that these include exact words and even hidden thoughts—proves his existence. For us to believe otherwise is to put ourselves in the logically self-contradictory position of denying that there is such a thing as magic and seeing firsthand the truth of a history that could only have been composed via magical arts! Cervantes has forced us to see our knight from a certain perspective: This is not a story about a

¹⁷ John Allen makes this point in passing, but then adds that although this "means that chivalreque enchanters do exist outside the Knight's fancy, [this is] a point which Cervantes wisely refrains from pursuing" (John J. Allen, "Levels of Fiction in Don Quixote," in the Norton Critical edition of *Don Quixote*, 925). I think Allen gives up too soon; Cervantes *is* pursuing—and wants the reader to pursue—this theme throughout the book, especially in part two.

madman who fancies that he is followed by invisible and malicious enchanters; rather, it is a story about a true knight and the torment he suffers at the hands of his archenemy. When Sancho asks, "Can there be enchanters and enchantments so strong as to have changed my master's sound wits into this raving madness?" (II, 23), Cervantes' implicit answer is, Yes—only magic could have made the hero look the fool. We've been reading not a satire of the books of chivalry, but one of the greatest books of chivalry ever written.

The truth about enchanters and Cide Hamete Benengeli's identity gives a whole new meaning to the final passage in part two in which Cide Hamete (not Cervantes, as is sometimes surmised)¹⁸ says, "For me alone Don Quixote was born and I for him" (II, 74). The hero and his arch nemesis are sworn enemies, somehow born to combat each other, and thus the one is as real as the other. Further, in the same breath Cide Hamete gives away his true aim in recording and publishing this history: He seeks not only "to cause mankind to abhor the false and foolish tales of the books of chivalry," but also "to ridicule all those [sallies] made by the whole of the knights-errant" (ibid.).¹⁹ Cide Hamete seeks the complete oblivion not only of the books of knight errantry but also of knights errant themselves. This brings us back to take a second look at the only "historical event" recorded in this final chapter, Don Quixote's death, the most emotional and least amusing scene in the book. But to do this well, we must back up to the critical event that leads to the Don's death.

Sancho blames Don Quixote's death on the melancholy induced by his defeat at the hands of the Knight of the White Moon, the disguised Sampson Carrasco (II, 74). This defeat, in which the Don is unhorsed in a joust, according to Carrasco's explanation to Antonio Moreno, was for the Don's

¹⁸ See, for example, Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

¹⁹ Here I use the Ormsby translation in the Norton Critical Edition because it is more faithful to the original Spanish.

own good; the terms of the joust were that if Don Quixote lost, he would return home and give up knight errantry for a year—upon which, Carrasco says, "his understanding might be restored to him; for he has an excellent brain, if he can only be freed from the follies of chivalry" (II, 65). It is perhaps noteworthy that Carrasco, like Cide Hamete, does not seem to distinguish between the books of chivalry and chivalry itself; both are equally abhorrent. In any case, Carrasco may not be giving us his real motivations for wishing to beat Don Quixote in single combat. These come out in an earlier scene in part two: Under the alias of the "Knight of the Mirrors," Carrasco himself is unhorsed by the Don, at which point he tells his "squire" Thomas Cecial that "it would be folly to suppose that I shall go back home till I have thrashed Don Quixote. And it will not be the desire to restore him to his senses that will drive me after him, but the desire for revenge" (II, 15). Three months later he tracks down our knight and defeats him on the field as Don Antonio Moreno and his friends look on.

When combined with the thesis concerning Cide Hamete the evil enchanter, this first link in the chain of events which ultimately destroys our knight becomes important. Recall Don Quixote's aforementioned prophecy in part one, after the evil Moorish enchanter Freston (i.e., Cide Hamete) erases the Don's library from existence:

[The evil enchanter] bears me malice, for through his arts and spells he knows that in the fullness of time I shall engage a favorite knight of his in single combat, and that I shall conquer him, and he will not be able to prevent it. That is why he tries to serve me every ill-turn he can. But I tell him that he cannot gainsay or avert what Heaven has decreed (I, 7).

Is Carrasco Cide Hamete's favored knight whom Don Quixote was destined to defeat, and through whom, out of enduring malice and to wreak vengeance for this defeat, the evil enchanter hunts down, conquers, and indirectly kills our knight

errant? If so, then Carrasco is not just one of the hundreds of characters in this tale who meet and are amused by the Ingenious Hidalgo; rather, Carrasco is Cide Hamete's chosen instrument of wrath, his attack-dog. The Don himself might be saying as much when, upon finding the Knight of the Mirrors defeated, he declares that the latter is under the influence of the evil enchanter (II, 14); Sancho too sees Carrasco's later victory as serving only one purpose: that "the glorious light of his [master's] exploits . . . be darkened" (II, 64). Numerous minute details confirm this interpretation, some more formidable than others: Surveying the citations above, we see that Cide Hamete's malice toward Don Quixote becomes far more evident in part two, which is when Carrasco enters the story; Carrasco is a great defender of Cide Hamete's historical prowess, specifically declaring that it was wise of him to include Don Quixote's most embarrassing exploits in history (II, 3); here he also insists that Arabic is an elegant language while Castilian is vulgar, and that *Don Quixote* is worth reading primarily for its entertainment value; Carrasco, when he is defeated by the Don, is named the Knight of the Mirrors—a (perhaps warped or inverted) reflection of Don Quixote, who is often called the "Mirror of Chivalry," a knight who is constantly defeated in attempting chivalrous feats—and, when he defeats the Don, he takes as his namesake the White Moon—a sign of Islam, the religion of the Moorish enchanter.

Perhaps still more striking is Carrasco's manner of witnessing Don Quixote's death. For in these last pages, when the knight finally passes after having regained his sanity, Sancho, the Don's niece, and his housekeeper are all said to weep, though Carrasco apparently does not; rather, his final words are a poetic epitaph for the knight's tombstone, which is immediately followed by another poem, one composed by Cide Hamete, who then ends the book with the aforementioned soliloquy proclaiming his monogamous bond with the vanquished knight. Besides this curious conjunction of Carrasco and Cide Hamete, one is struck also by this final speech, for in

it Cide Hamete seems proud of the fact that he has recorded the knight's death; hence, he says, no one will be able to "bring him out of the tomb, where he most certainly lies, stretched at full length and powerless to make a third journey" (II, 74).²⁰ It is as though he were saying "Don Quixote is dead and will stay dead, for I have killed him."

Further, in Carrasco's epitaph it is said that the knight, suddenly being referred to now as "Alonso Quixano the Good," "had the luck, with much ado, to live a fool, and yet die wise." But it is a strange wisdom that apparently consists, according to Alonso in his final words to his teary-eyed Sancho, in not believing "that there were and still are knights errant in the world" (II, 74), and which leads the supposedly sober and sane man to demand that it be written in his will that if his niece marries a man who has even heard of books of chivalry, "she shall lose all I have bequeathed to her" (*ibid.*). Is our knight really in his right mind, to deny that there ever were knights errant—a historically absurd claim—and to threaten to disinherit his niece for such an absurd offense? Has Don Quixote finally acquiesced to what the Priest, Nicholas the Barber, the Canon, the Duke's ecclesiastic, and the Bachelor Sampson Carrasco have insisted upon all along, that Don Quixote is a fool to have believed that there ever were knights errant? Given that none of these characters is very likable, it seems implausible that this would be Cervantes' aim—but perhaps it is *Cide Hamete's* aim in presenting Don Quixote's death in this manner. In other words, true to his desire to destroy Don Quixote's nobility and to keep us from emulating him, Cide Hamete may have tampered with the way the story of Don Quixote ends.

As bizarre as this suggestion may seem, it is not without

²⁰ The author here seems to have nodded, as our knight's sally in part two was in fact his third. Perhaps this is a sign that Cide Hamete is unaware of the distinction between Don Quixote's first and second sallies in part one (I, 2; I, 7), as Cide Hamete's manuscripts begin after the second sally has begun (I, 9).

foundation. There are two other references to Don Quixote's death in the story, and they bear little resemblance to the one Cide Hamete finally recounts. First, at the end of part one we have Don Quixote's tombstone epitaph that differs from the one Cide Hamete says Carrasco wrote at the end of part two; while it pokes fun at the knight, there is no indication that he was cured of his "madness" or rejected knight errantry before he died (I, 52). Further, in an earlier cited passage Cide Hamete speaks of Don Quixote's vision in the Cave of Montesinos and says that on his deathbed the knight admitted to having made up the whole thing because he thought that a knight errant should have this sort of adventure (II, 24); again, there is no hint there that the Don regains his sanity—indeed, Cide Hamete implies that he was never really insane at all.²¹

Lastly, when the Priest burns Don Quixote's books on chivalry, he says that the only good books of chivalry are true ones in which there are no monsters or giants, enchantments or wizards, but where "the knights eat and sleep and die in their beds, and make their wills before they die, and other things as well that are left out of all the other books of the kind" (I, 6). The fit with Cide Hamete's account of Don Quixote's end (in II, 74) is too perfect to be a coincidence. Could it be that the enchanter has crafted the death of our knight in order to make it conform to the opinions of those who think that chivalry is nonsense and a waste of time, and our knight a pathetic and pitiable fool? We have already accumulated evidence that Cide Hamete lies about and defames Don Quixote and is in fact the evil enchanter whose sole aim is to destroy the knight's good name—and if he cannot do this, then at least to make him die, or appear to die, in shame and ignominy. It seems likely that Cide Hamete

²¹ A somewhat different approach to the distinct portrayals of the ending of *Don Quixote* can be found in A. G. Lo Re, "The Three Deaths of Don Quixote: Comments in Favor of the Romantic Critical Approach," *Cervantes* 9.2 (1989): 21-41.

would have done this sort of thing if he had the chance, and only a sage enchanter of his caliber could have pulled it off. And there is a further motivation, a religious one, for the enchanter/historian Cide Hamete to attempt such a rewriting of history: Don Quixote is a Christian.

Both Cide Hamete and Don Quixote seem to connect knight errantry to the endeavors of a Christian aspiring to sainthood. Frequently the Don declares that knights errant "are God's ministers on earth, and the arms by which His justice is executed here," though he admits, "Far be it from me to say, or even to think, that the state of a knight errant is as good as a cloistered monk's" (I, 13; I, 18). Thus, on their way to El Toboso to find Dulcinea, knight and squire debate the value of their vocation:

"I mean to say," replied Sancho, "that we should set about turning saints [rather than knights errant]. . . . So, dear master, it's better to be a humble little friar, of any order you like, than a valiant and errant knight. A couple dozen lashings have more effect with God than a couple of thousand lance-thrusts, even against giants, or hobgoblins, or dragons."

"All that is so," replied Don Quixote, "but we cannot all be friars, and many are the ways by which God bears His chosen to heaven. Chivalry is a religion, and there are sainted knights in glory." (II, 8)

Knighthood, too, leads to sainthood, and the Don is simply the latest in a long line of knights errant, beginning with the Apostles (*lit.*, "those sent forth") and enduring through the lives and works of the Church's missionaries: St. Paul, St. George, St. Martin, and St. James are all knights errant, "for these saints and knights professed, even as I do, the calling of arms" (II, 58). Our knight emphasizes the apostolic character of his vocation by saying that since his desire to revive and embody knight errantry is an inspiration of Divine origin, Providence will protect him in his endeavors: "For God, who

has put it into my heart to embark on this unparalleled adventure, will take care to watch over my safety" (I, 20; II, 1). The Don explains that chivalrous conduct, when in the hands of the Christian, is the path to true virtue:

[W]e, Christians, Catholics and knights errant, have more to expect from future and everlasting glory enjoyed in the ethereal and celestial regions than from the vanity of fame achieved in this present transient life. . . . So, Sancho, our works must not transgress the bounds set us by the Christian religion which we profess. It is for us to slay pride by slaying giants; to slay envy by our generosity and nobility; anger by calmness of mind, and serenity of disposition; gluttony, and drowsiness by eating little and watching late into the night; indulgence and lust by preserving our loyalty to those whom we have made ladies of our hearts; and sloth by traveling through all parts of the world in quest of opportunities of becoming famous knights as well as Christians (II, 8; cf. II, 6; I, 50).

In what might be a cipher for understanding his exploits, Don Quixote almost identifies his vocation and his Christianity. Note the comment about a knight's loyalty to his lady; more than one author has pointed out the similarity between Don Quixote's chaste love for Dulcinea and that of a Christian for the Church and the Blessed Virgin. Criticism of Dulcinea is compared to blasphemy and she is an object not of sight but of faith, not quite being a creature of this world (I, 4; II, 32); she and Christ are the ones to whom the Don always commends himself as he enters battle (I, 13; I, 20); and when he and Sancho come upon her palace in El Toboso, it is a church (II, 9). The name Dulcinea itself, translating as "Sweet One," has its origin in the cult of the Virgin Mary.²² Dulcinea is literally his Lady, a heavenly creature that in some way has an existence

²² During the Middle Ages *dulcis* and the Spanish *dulzura* were applied almost exclusively to Christ and the Blessed Mother; further, they retained their religious meaning well into the Renaissance; see Javier Hertero, "Dulcinea and Her Critics," *Cervantes* 2.1 (1982): 23-42.

both in this world and the next, appearing to those lacking the insight and zeal of the Christian knight to be merely an ordinary woman named Aldonza Lorenzo, a poor but "very good-looking farm girl" (I, 1).²³

Thus, like the vocation of a monk devoted to prayer, fasting, poverty, and chastity, or that of a martyr in the Coliseum who had only to give up his Christianity, the calling of a knight errant would appear tragic, reprehensible, even madness, to those outside the Church—and certainly to members of Islam, who over the centuries have fought the Christians for lands from Spain to Palestine. Thus, Cide Hamete Benengeli, our Moorish historian and enchanter—apparently writing for his fellow Muslims, for he writes in Arabic—satirizes the Christian faith in its most enthusiastic and formidable form as incarnated in the knight errant Don Quixote de la

²³ The devotion to Dulcinea is essential to Don Quixote's character, so much so that when the apocryphal second part is written by Alonso Avellanada, it is shocking that Don Quixote is portrayed there as having lost interest in her—the knight even adopts the title "the Knight Without Love" (*El Caballero Desamorado*). When the true Don Quixote hears of this, he exclaims in protest, "Whoever says that Don Quixote de la Mancha has forgotten, or can forget, Dulcinea del Toboso, I will teach him with equal arms that he is a long way from the truth; for the peerless Dulcinea del Toboso can never be forgotten, nor is Don Quixote capable of forgetting" (II, 59). Is Avellanada's part two another assault of the evil enchanters upon our knight's good name, by implying that he is inconstant? Note that Avellanada is accused by many characters of trying to "usurp [the Don's] name and annihilate [his] exploits" (II, 59; cf. II, 61; II, 72); Avellanada also admits to having Cervantes himself as a target, an object of ridicule (II, prol.). Related to this is the fact that throughout the second part there is a running theme that Don Quixote may have an "evil-twin" whose entire *raison d'être* is to impugn the true Don; this evil Don Quixote is not only the one about which Avellanada writes—note that Don Quixote does not deny his *existence*, but only denies that *that* Don Quixote is the same person as himself—but also the one whom the Knight of the Mirrors (Carrasco) claims to have fought and vanquished (cf. II, 72; II, 70; II, 14). Might Avellanada, then, as part of the story, be Cide Hamete's successor, attacking not only the knight, but even his defender, Cervantes?

Mancha; and he does this either because he does not understand it, or because he understands it too well. His triumph over the Christian knight, then, is complete when he can force Don Quixote to reject his faith on his deathbed and to do this so thoroughly that he denies even that there have ever been Christian knights, and refuses to allow his niece to marry anyone who has even heard of the books that make reference to chivalrous exploits. This is why the Moorish enchanter, in a last attempt to destroy the Christian order of knighthood, the bane of the Crusades, must change the way the greatest knight of his age leaves this life, and present him passing away in physical defeat and religious despair. Rather than reciting the knight St. Paul's *Cursum perficio*, the Don Quixote of Cide Hamete repudiates the very nature of knight errantry as a fantasy of fools. There could be no more perfect finishing stroke, as he claims victory over the Don and any other that might be inspired to follow in his footsteps.

While this exposition of the ending has its coherency, two related objections naturally present themselves against it, one sentimental and another structural. First, if Cide Hamete has changed the ending in order to complete his annihilation of our knight, then we should be upset by this book—evil has triumphed gloriously; why would Cervantes write such a horrible story? Second—and this objection applies to the entire foregoing interpretation of this tale as being told by an evil enchanter—if Cide Hamete has changed the ending to dilute or eliminate any admiration we may have for the knight, why does he fail? Why do we still love the Ingenious Hidalgo, his ideals, and his knight errantry, in spite of his errant ways and misadventures? Why are we willing to disagree with his deathbed renunciation? These two objections have the same answer: There is another enchanter at work in the story.

Earlier, in a passage quoted above, the Don tells Sancho that there is no point in their fighting or avenging themselves against the evil enchanter, for he is somehow not a part of

their universe (I, 17). The squire and the knight, however, are not without succor. Just as he notes that his model, Amadis of Gaul, had both an enchanter that was his mortal enemy and a sage friend who aided him (I, 15), so when the Don speaks of the evil enchanter that beleaguers him, he often adds that there is also a good enchanter who will always champion his cause. As he says in a letter to Sancho, "if there are enchanters who persecute me, there are also some who defend me" (II, 51). In another instance, remarking about the speed with which Sancho returned from delivering the Don's message to Dulcinea, he concludes,

the sage necromancer, who is my friend and looks after my affairs—for I certainly have such a friend, or I should not be a true knight errant—I say that this necromancer must have assisted you on your journey without your knowing it . . . [A]ll this is effected by the skill and wisdom of these sage enchanters who watch over valorous knights (I, 31).

Just as it is a given that the Don is a knight, so it is a given that he has a friendly enchanter who keeps watch over him—indeed, having such a friend is part of what makes one a knight errant, apparently more so than having a mortal enemy. Speaking of Mambrino's helmet appearing as a shaving basin, the knight says that

there is a crew of enchanters always among us who change and alter all our deeds, and transform them according to their pleasure and their desire either to favor us or injure us. . . . It shows a rare foresight in the sage who is on my side to make what is really and truly Mambrino's helmet seem to everyone a basin (I, 25; cf. I, 5; I, 19; I, 25; II, 29).

These two kinds of enchanters clash at times in Don Quixote's adventures.²⁴ For instance, in one of their more memorable disasters, he and Sancho fall out of an enchanted boat and

²⁴ Earlier we suggested that the evil enchanter had Sampson Carrasco as a principal instrument who in some measure speaks for him; might not the good enchanter have an instrument as well? There is some rea-

into a stream as a group of millers try to prevent the boat's being dragged under by the mill-stream of a water-mill. As they are dragged to shore by the millers, the Don declares that "Two powerful enchanters must have met in opposition in this adventure, the one frustrating the other's designs. One provided me with the boat, and the other threw me out. God help us, but this whole world is tricks and devices, one against the other" (II, 19). Nevertheless, Providence will protect the knight errant, and the good enchanter will overcome the evil: "Yet I trust in our Lord God that one malicious enchanter may not be so powerful that another better-intentioned enchanter may not prevail over him" (I, 52). As was said before, Don Quixote has been called to do God's work, and therefore is under Divine protection, so although the evil enchanter may have or appear to have the upper hand at times, in the end the good enchanter will help the knight to prevail.

Thus, the knight himself seems to suggest that underlying his story is a battle between two enchanters, or visions of the knight—the knight as a pitiable and delusional fool and the knight as a noble Christian. Recall that the mediation of Cide Hamete lies in writing the mocking history of the knight; likewise, then, the good enchanter will aid our knight by altering or retelling this same history. The two enchanters do battle by telling opposing stories, recording conflicting histo-

son to give Sancho this role—I will return to this later—but another possible candidate is the Knight of the Green Coat, Don Diego de Miranda. What is striking about him is not only his obvious generosity and the respect with which he treats Don Quixote, but also his rumination, upon seeing the knight errant approaching, that the Don's "was a shape and figure not seen for many a long year in that country" (II, 16); Don Diego, apparently, has seen knights errant in the flesh—though not in a long time. His name itself is suggestive, as it translates as "Sir James of the Miracles," for when it is combined with the fact that he carries a Moorish scimitar, one finds oneself thinking of the "knight" St. James the Moorslayer, the patron of Spain (II, 58). A Moorslayer is evidently what the good enchanter must be or have in order to overcome Cide Hamete.

ries. Thus, while for the most part Don Quixote says the sage enchanter who will write his history will ridicule and slander him (as we have shown above), sometimes the Don entertains the possibility that his biographer will seek to praise him, writing what he calls "the authentic history" of his sallies (I, 2; I, 19). The Don gives us an intimation about the existence of the dueling enchanters as he contemplates the news that a book (i.e., our part one) is in print that records his adventures with Sancho, for he worries about which enchanter was its author, the good one or the bad one:

[H]e imagined that some sage, either friendly or hostile, had given [the manuscript] to the Press by magic art; if a friend, to magnify and extol them above the most renowned actions of any knight errant; and if an enemy, to annihilate them and place them below the basest ever written of any mean squire. . . . But if it were true that there was such a history, since it was about a knight errant it must perforce be grandiloquent, lofty, remarkable, magnificent and true. With this he was somewhat consoled; but it disturbed him to think that its author was a Moor. . . . For he could hope for no truth of the Moors, since they are all cheats, forgers and schemers (II, 3).

The history of Don Quixote, insofar as it is told by the "lying dog of a Moor" Cide Hamete, is designed "to obscure and obliterate the exploits of the good, and to light up and exalt the deeds of the wicked. . . . [E]nchanters will persecute me till they sink me and my chivalries into the profound abyss of oblivion" (II, 32). Yet our knight's sallies have not been forgotten. Cide Hamete has somehow failed to cause us to hate or even to dislike the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance.

Cide Hamete's impious aim might have been reached had not another enchanter, a Christian one, found the Moorish enchanter's manuscripts and recast them in another form. So we find Miguel de Cervantes, explicitly identified as a Christian (II, 3), telling us of his discovery of the Arabic original that he has translated by a *morisco*, which translation he then

“edits” and publishes (I, 9). There are only a few hints that Cervantes’ editing has sometimes been more than dotting i’s and crossing t’s: He has dropped entire sections where he says Cide Hamete had somehow been prejudicial to the truth (I, 9; II, 18), and, as we have seen above, many times he explicitly and implicitly accuses the Moorish author of having been untruthful. At any rate, his opposition to Cide Hamete is unquestionable. Still, it is difficult to confirm from his own words that Cervantes sees himself as the good enchanter seeking to succor and hold up Don Quixote, since there are only a few instances when it is clear that we are reading our editor’s words and not those of the author Cide Hamete. There is, however, one instance where the speaker can only be Cervantes, and this extended soliloquy sings our knight’s praises and even suggests how we are to read this book. For, toward the beginning of part one, as he bemoans the fact that he had not yet found the continuation of Don Quixote’s adventure fighting the Basque—which the soon-to-be-discovered manuscript of Cide Hamete contains—Cervantes says:

[I became] anxious and eager for the real and authentic knowledge of the whole life and marvels of our famous Spaniard, Don Quixote de la Mancha, the light and mirror of Manchegan chivalry, and the first of our times, of these calamitous times of ours, to devote himself to the toils and exercise of knight errantry; to redress wrongs, aid widows and protect maidens . . . Now I say that for this, and for many other reasons our gallant Quixote deserves continuous and immemorial praise; and even I should have my share, for my toil and pains in searching for the end of this delightful history. Though well I know that if Heaven, chance, and good fortune had not aided me, the world would have remained without the amusement and pleasure which an attentive reader may now enjoy for as much as two hours on end (I, 9).

Although the last line might dispose us to take this praise of the knight (and of Cervantes himself) as tongue-in-cheek, it

could also be taken as a qualification of how much we should laugh at this knight. Since it takes far more than two hours to read this tome, some of it must be serious, i.e., there must be something more than humor, something sublime in the chronicles of Don Quixote. We must at all times bear in mind that, in spite of the fact that Cervantes aims only to be an editor—he does not intend to change radically the story’s content, for he intends to preserve a history—nevertheless, Cervantes is the ultimate arbiter of how the Don is portrayed; Cervantes gets, in some sense, the last word.

This takes us some way toward seeing why we leave the tale of the Christian knight—a tale told by someone trying to destroy his good name and to erase him from memory—with an esteem for an unforgettable and unique man, almost a saint. Cervantes the Christian enchanter is not a historian—like us, he does not know what exactly happened to Don Quixote—and so he must study the work of the Moorish enchanter, distinguishing the facts from the fiction, what happened from what Cide Hamete wants you to think of what happened. This good enchanter, moreover, is a poet, and “it is one thing to write as a poet, and another as a historian. The poet can relate and sing things, not as they were but as they should have been, without in any way affecting the truth of the matter” (II, 3). Thus, Cervantes, as enchanter, is the ultimate demiurge or craftsman of *Don Quixote*—poetry, recall, being only one step below knight errantry itself (II, 16; II, 18). For the poet knows how to tell or retell a story such that the reader is drawn to the hero, even when the matter the poet has been given has been tainted by the animus of someone who hates this same hero. And the poet can do this somehow without making the tale mendacious; the truth Cervantes discerns, and helps the reader to discern, about Don Quixote is more important than the details of how this or that mishap fell out. Cervantes, not Cide Hamete—Don Quixote’s friend, not his enemy—is the one who most directly influences the reader’s opinions of all

the characters and thus draws our attention to the vices of the author Cide Hamete (for he too is a character in the story); at the same time, Cervantes seems to stand with the protagonist, Don Quixote, in spite of calamities and catastrophes into which (Cide Hamete claims) he stumbles. Thus, while Cervantes the enchanter feels that he could not change the way Cide Hamete has the knight passing into the next world—for he himself would become thereby another lying historian—still, as a “necromancer” (I, 31), he can sense the spirit of the dead knight, the truth that the ingenious gentleman discovered, and can allow it to shine forth. Thereby we are able to come away from the book inspired and not depressed, for we have in some vague way seen that Don Quixote was not the butt of mockery, a merely burlesque character, but a heroic saint.

Perhaps this is why Cervantes, through the mouthpieces of various characters, often asks the reader to decide for himself whether Don Quixote’s claims about enchantment are true: “You, judicious reader, must judge for yourself, for I cannot and should not do more” (II, 24; II, 32; II, 50; I, 32). We the readers are being asked to discern, but Cervantes does not leave us without a guide or model reader. The proper response to Cervantes’ suggestion, the response of a docile reader, someone willing to follow Don Quixote through these (mis)adventures for 900 pages, is given by Sancho: After hearing one such challenge—the Priest has just angrily told the Innkeeper, “Take your books [of chivalry], and decide for yourself whether they are truth or lies, and much good may they do you!”—the childlike squire makes a decision:

Sancho had entered in the middle of this conversation and was much astonished and depressed to hear that knights errant were now out of fashion, and that all books of chivalry were nonsense and lies. And so he decided in his own mind to wait and see how this expedition of his master’s turned out; and if the result was not up to his expectations, he re-

solved to leave Don Quixote and go back to his wife and children and to his usual occupation (I, 32).

In spite of his many doubts—and he waffles many times about the Don, often drawing opposite conclusions about his master’s errantry within pages (cf. II, 32 and II, 33)—Sancho never leaves his master’s side. He is the Don’s most faithful friend; and at the end of the book he is the character most upset at the Don’s “recovery” that leads to or accompanies his death, tearfully begging his master to give up “this new madness” and sally forth again (II, 74). Even with Cide Hamete telling the story, the Don dies with at least one conversion to the ideals of knight errantry to his credit. In short, Sancho is the only one who in simplicity and honesty looks in the eye the fact of part one’s publication and sees it for what it is: a complete vindication of everything his master has been saying about magic and enchanters who seek to make him look the part of the fool. Don Quixote addresses this point when explaining poetic and historical truth to Sancho and the Bachelor Sampson Carrasco, the latter who has just said that the Don’s history (our part one) “is the most delightful and least harmful entertainment ever seen to this day, for nowhere in it is to be found anything even resembling an indelicate expression or an uncatholic thought.” The Don responds,

To write in any other way would be to write not the truth, but lies; and historians who resort to lies ought to be burnt like coiners of false money. . . . [T]o compose histories or books of any sort at all you need good judgment and ripe understanding. To be witty and write humorously requires great genius. The cunningest part in a play is the fool’s, for a man who wants to be taken for a simpleton must never be one. History is like a sacred writing, for it has to be truthful; and where the truth is, insofar as it is the truth, there God is (II, 3).

The sentences in this remark almost seem unconnected to each other, but the point is simple: The one who appears to

be a fool, especially in a story that aims at the truth, a history, is not one. Thus, any tale that aims at truth and portrays its clown as no more than a clown is not only poorly crafted, it is also fallacious. Applied to the Don and his tale, the point is obvious.

This may also be why Sancho Panza, who until now has played a fairly limited role in our interpretation of *Don Quixote*, is crucial to the story. Cervantes may want us to identify with the uncertain but loyal squire. Within the same breath Sancho can say of his master that "I know he's more of a madman than a knight," and also that "His soul is as clean as a pitcher. He can do no harm to anyone, only good to everybody. . . . And for that simplicity I love him as dearly as my heart-strings, and can't take to the idea of leaving him for all his wild tricks" (II, 13). For as he prepares to lie to his master about Dulcinea's enchantment, Sancho thinks to himself: "I have seen from countless signs that this master of mine is a raving lunatic who ought to be tied up—and me, I can't be much better, for since I follow him and serve him, I'm more a fool than he" (II, 10). Sancho is rationalizing his planned deception—as Cervantes says, "With these thoughts Sancho quieted his conscience"—by trying to convince himself that his master really is insane; nevertheless, he knows this can only mean that somehow he too has contracted this madness, for in his heart of hearts he believes the knight.

Sancho can never truly lose faith in the Don and his knight-hood, for he knows now that his master is correct, that his master is the only sane man in an insane age that refuses to accept the ideals of knight errantry, the standard of Christianity itself. We are like Sancho, the "epitome of squirely humors" (I, prol.)—his ambivalence is ours—for the Christian's faith, though it be difficult to live out, is certain. He knows the truth, and when the burden, the responsibility seems too much for him, he can only pretend that he does not by rationalizing away his faith. But, like Sancho, we would see that this burden of Christian sainthood is light, if only the world were not

too much with us. Regarding one of the many enchantments upon which they had stumbled, Don Quixote tells Sancho that "It is fear which prevents your seeing or hearing aright, for one of the effects of fright is to disturb the senses and make things appear as they are not" (I, 18). Perhaps the Ingenious Gentleman is speaking to us as well.