
How to Raise a Dead Man and Win Fame: On Don Quixote, Part II

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Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote of La Mancha* first appeared in 1605. Ten years later, a second part came out. This essay explores why Part II is so important to a novel that radically reshaped our understanding of the modern self precisely because it is a sequel, and as such, it illuminates how the modern self can also be viewed as a sequel that needs to surpass the earlier self. The continuation ties Cervantes' own anxieties about the enduring fame of his book with that of the protagonist himself, placing both in scenarios of competitiveness, namely knight errantry and story-telling itself.

To begin with, Cervantes and his character must contend with a false Quixote penned by another writer. The sequel also invites us to consider why an ordinary individual becomes so obsessed with being perceived as extraordinary, how ordinary gives rise to extraordinary, and what it means to be ordinary in the first place, given that rivalry appears to be related to the very notion of a lasting selfhood in the book. Don Quixote's pursuit of fame, moreover, is a very modern one, beset by uncertainty, delusion, and doubt—the ground of verifiable experience beneath his feet having opened up and shaken all convictions about our understanding of the world.

At the end of Part I, readers left the Knight of the Sorrowful Face back home and in bed, bewildered and under the watchful care of his housekeeper and niece. The author, Cervantes tells us, can find no further record of Don Quixote's adventures, save oral tradition and poetic

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fragments honoring his memory. What reader then would have expected a sequel? Part I had been a success, and no doubt people hungered for more, but Cervantes had structured the 1605 volume in four parts, following the model of the first Spanish novel of chivalry, the *Amadís of Gaul*, which suggests he had not contemplated a continuation. Nor does the 1605 title contain the words “Part I.”

Cervantes’s own writing trajectory was also somewhat hit-or-miss. When Part I appeared, it had been twenty years since his last publication, and another eight years would pass before the *Exemplary Novels* came out. So, who knew if he was ever going to produce anything else? Evidently, that same thought occurred to an enterprising writer, the pseudonymous Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, because he jumped on it and published his own sequel in 1614. This infuriated Cervantes, who was by this time busy composing a second part to the novel, disregarding the old maxim that “sequels were never any good” (482), as Sansón Carrasco remarks in Chapter IV of the continuation.¹ It is widely believed that Cervantes learned of Avellaneda’s false Quixote in the middle of devising Chapter LIX (to which I will return), but it is just as likely that he came across it earlier and was simply plotting, in both senses of the word, how he was going to deal with the theft of his work.

Why dwell on these details of a rival sequel to Cervantes’ masterpiece? Because the whole idea of a second part, like second acts in life, is crucial to the conception, development, and meaning of *Don Quixote*. The sequel does not simply follow in the footsteps of Part I, but enriches, deepens, and interacts with it, creating yet another narrative layer to the already intricate storytelling of the first volume. Part II is both a continuation and a reflection of and on Part I, but it is also Don Quixote’s comeback, in his knightly quest for fame. Indeed, the second part transforms Cervantes’ protagonist into a celebrity by harking back to the adventures of the first volume and, later, responding to Avellaneda’s version of things. Along parallel lines, Don Quixote’s originality as a character, demonstrated (and parodied) in his exploits, allows Cervantes to illustrate the originality of the book itself.

In Part I, he had already equated the life of a character to a book when Don Quixote asked Ginés de Pasamonte if the life history that he was writing was finished. “‘How can it be finished,’ [Ginés] responded, ‘if my life isn’t finished yet?’” (169). Many pages later, in Chapter II of

¹ All quotations are taken from Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*. Translated by Edith Grossman. Introduction by Harold Bloom (New York: HarperCollins, 2003). In this one instance, I have diverged from the translation, which reads “second parts were never very good.”

Part II, a discussion on slandering the famous becomes the lead-in to the revelation that a history titled *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* has appeared. This is Part I for us, but not necessarily for the characters in Part II, which is seemingly still being written even as we are reading it. In other words, they do not know that they are inhabiting Part II. In this passage, Don Quixote remarks that “wherever extraordinary virtue resides, there it is persecuted. Very few, if any, of the famous men of the past escaped the slanders of the wicked” (472). That prompts Sancho to refer to “all the slander they’re saying about you,” which apparently includes the history alluded to above.

The protagonist is also attached to an exalted coterie of personages, real and unreal, among them Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Don Galaor (the knight errant and brother of Amadís), and Hercules—all noted by Don Quixote. References to fame run throughout Cervantes’s novel, but only in Part II does fame become the book itself, an expression of how the protagonist’s celebrity is wrapped up in the very existence of a book, whether Part I or Avellaneda’s. In this sense, fame itself is a kind of sequel. Cervantes need not have fretted over Avellaneda’s rival text grabbing the spotlight. *Don Quixote* has never been out of print, with a multitude of editions, while poor Avellaneda had to wait 118 years for a second edition of his novel to appear.

Continuations of the *Quixote* also came in other forms, above all in translations, which carry on the life of a text in another language. In one of the most energetic and comic, if at times inaccurate versions, Tobias Smollett wrote in 1755 that his aims as a translator were modest, among them: “to maintain that ludicrous solemnity and self-importance by which the inimitable Cervantes has distinguished the character of Don Quixote, without raising him to the insipid rank of a dry philosopher or debasing him to the melancholy circumstances and unentertaining caprice of an ordinary madman.”² It was in the eighteenth century when Cervantes was for the first time taken seriously as a writer. What drew my attention to Smollett’s remarks is his idea of not debasing the character “to the melancholy circumstances and unentertaining caprice of an ordinary madman.” (Avellaneda, by the way, throws Don Quixote into an insane asylum at the end of his book.)

What is an ordinary madman? Evidently not Don Quixote. At once exemplary and aberrant (having wandered off from the confines of

² Tobias Smollett, “Translator’s Note,” in Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. Translated by Tobias Smollett. Introduction by Carlos Fuentes (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986), 19.

reality), Don Quixote possesses an inherent aesthetic sense of himself. He takes the stuff of his ordinary life and makes it into something else, largely through failure. He becomes his own story; in a word, he becomes art, not simply because Cervantes wrote him into existence, but because the character himself acts out a new script that plays upon a most peculiar stage. That stage is so-called reality, though what a strange, unfamiliar one it appears to us readers. Don Quixote himself doesn't always see the strangeness his creator has made. To the gentleman from La Mancha, those windmills really are giants that happen to look like windmills. Enchantment is the norm. Only by working through his illusions (and his failures) does he acquire self-knowledge in the end.

Smollett's observation indirectly points to one of the great themes of this novel: the imaginative use of delusion as the simultaneous basis for greatness and absurdity. Stitched together, they define the extraordinary character of Don Quixote. However we judge Cervantes's protagonist, Don Quixote holds himself to the highest of standards, that of knight errantry as he understands it, and only near the end of the book does he revert, as he says, to the status of "an ordinary gentleman," when he returns home in defeat (894). The original word used is "pedestre," which means pedestrian or commonplace. Tellingly, at this point, the protagonist is no longer wearing his armor. Reflecting the persistence of the Renaissance during the Counter Reformation, *Don Quixote* embodies the value of the individual in the form of the invented self, in which invention arises from pre-existing models like chivalry. But extraordinary cannot exist without ordinary. What does ordinary look like in Don Quixote's day? Ordinary people can be uneducated or dull, but also regular folk, the salt of the earth, such as Sancho Panza, whose comic use of proverbs emerges from custom, and it is custom that placed people within the ordinary.

The paintings of Vermeer, for example, are full of such quotidian tasks as sewing, preparing meals, and sweeping.³ *The Lacemaker*, his smallest work, shows the hunched figure of a woman whose hands form an exquisite architecture of fingers and bobbins. Vermeer focuses on the woman's utter absorption, sets her against a blank wall with a blurred foreground, and draws us into her tiny, intimate world. The contemplative expression on her face suggests a rich and wordless inner life that is bound to the threads, lace pillow, pins, and bobbins with which she

³ The paragraphs on Vermeer and one paragraph on *Don Quixote* are taken, with permission, from my essay, "An Ordinary Life," published in *First Things* No. 301 (March 2020), 29-34, which initially prompted me to thinking further about Cervantes' novel.

works. In the larger sense, the attention and care she devotes to the task at hand tie her to the world she inhabits. Custom situates her, just as Vermeer's painterly arrangement does. Yet there is nothing ordinary, in the pejorative sense, about this painting. What Vermeer reveals is how the extraordinary issues out of the ordinary.

The painting gives no hint as to whether the lacemaker thought of herself or her life as ordinary. We don't know what she thought about herself at all. Would she even be bothered to be thought ordinary? Her competence with the tools of lacemaking is presented without commentary, as a matter of course. She was probably taught by her mother. I doubt she consulted a book in order to master the skill by which we remember her, because her life did not depend on distinguishing herself from others, or on making something of herself through self-improvement. Quite possibly, the only book that mattered to her was the Bible, where glory comes from being loved by God. Significantly, Vermeer has placed either a small Bible or prayer book beside her.

What we do not see here is the idea of exalting personality as something special in itself, driven by the need to liberate one's originality. It would be difficult to place the lacemaker within the modern obsession with singularizing the self. A member of a painters' guild, even Vermeer, whose pictorial virtuosity is unquestioned, was still considered to a significant degree an artisan in the seventeenth century. Lacemaker and artist alike were apprenticed, acquiring their skills, as was the custom, in the family or the workshop.

By contrast, Don Quixote, the model for untold numbers of future characters in world literature, reinvents himself; he retells his personal history, bending and even breaking custom to suit his purposes. The lacemaker makes a home. Don Quixote leaves his behind, only returning out of necessity. In Part II, however, he also hears his personal history as retold by others, which underscores the importance of invention, completing the trajectory of Cervantes' protagonist from ordinary to extraordinary. We tend to forget that the ingenious gentleman from La Mancha did not start out that way. His life was most ordinary until he was driven crazy by reading too many books about chivalry. You might say he used the antiquated, if popular, chivalric romances as early seventeenth-century self-help books, guiding his conduct and perspective on life through one misadventure after another. The genius of Cervantes was to turn his character's life into something extraordinary in the moment it became a walking disaster, as soon as it strayed from the straight and narrow of his previous life into knight errantry.

This is an astonishing and new form of self-improvement indeed, based on an outdated model of behavior that Cervantes' character must constantly defend to demonstrate its relevance in his own time. While hurling himself forward into adventure, Don Quixote also looks backward to an unusable past, one defined by a code of chivalry, thus illustrating how the modern world is always at the same time on the verge of anachronism. When knight errantry is no longer an option, Don Quixote turns to the equally obsolete idealized fiction of the shepherd's life as found in pastoral romances before death puts an end to his plans. In its complicated dance with discarded values and things, the modern is always trying to keep up, while continually running behind as change flows all around.

Part II deepens this sense of the permuting instability of the universe. The confusion between reality and illusion is only one reason why the novel seems as tilted as Don Quixote charging at windmills. Equally disorienting, one alternative world spawns another, suggesting the possibility of multiple worlds. In the second volume, for example, the Cave of Montesinos is the scenario for a vision so fantastic and improbable that Cide Hamete, a fictional creation of Cervantes to whom authorship of *Don Quixote* is attributed, can scarcely believe it. In turn, the duke and duchess, key players in Part II, devise tricks that seem like adventures, "basing their plan on what Don Quixote had already told them about the Cave of Montesinos" (683), fabricating a fiction from another fiction. These deceptions are spectacles, theatrical realms that also further the notion of the *theatrum mundi* expressed in Plato, Augustine, and others.

Many chapters later, Sancho falls into "a deep and very dark pit" (817), an experience he compares to Don Quixote's in the cave. When the knight hears his cries for help, he thinks his squire is now in the underworld, a possibility that has also occurred to Sancho himself. The episode is comic, and yet there is an underlying gravity to both descents, in their anticipation of Don Quixote's "real" death at the end of the novel. From cave to pit, worlds within worlds, Cervantes's universe only stops spinning when he kills off his hero.

Don Quixote's presumed death at the end of the first volume is briefly memorialized in poetic homages, whereas one of the important themes of Part II is the arrival of death itself, with signposts such as "The Assembly of Death" in Chapter XI pointing the way. In the last chapter, after Don Quixote awakes from a six-hour sleep, he claims his judgment "is restored, free and clear of the dark shadows of ignorance" produced by reading romances of chivalry (935). The moment evokes

not only his experience in the Cave of Montesinos, during which he is apparently dreaming, but Plato's cave as well. The message, however, seems to be: lose your illusions, lose your life. But there is more to Don Quixote's last breaths than this, given the importance ceded to fame and Cervantes's obsession in Part II with the fate of the book itself.

Significantly, Don Quixote links together death and fame in Chapter VIII of Part II. He says to Sancho, "the desire to achieve fame is extraordinarily active," citing multiple legendary and historical examples to make his point. Reflecting traditional religious values, no small matter in the novel, he goes on to declare that "we as Christians, Catholics, and knights errant must care more for future glory, eternal in the ethereal and celestial spheres, than for the vanity of the fame achieved in this present and transitory world: this fame, no matter how long it may last, must finally come to an end with the world itself, whose end has been determined." But he also wants to have it both ways, seeking knightly fame *and* spiritual grace. Thus, he says, "we must slay pride by slaying giants" (506). This leads Sancho to ask, "which is the greater deed, raising a dead man or killing a giant?" to which Don Quixote replies, "it is greater to raise a dead man."

Well then, Sancho concludes, that is "a better fame, in this world and the next, than the fame left behind by all the gentile emperors and knights errant who ever lived" (507). Following his logic to its comic end, he reaches the conclusion that they must become saints "and then we'll win the fame we want in a much shorter time." Don Quixote agrees but defends his position by melding Sancho's point of view with his own, saying: "chivalry is a religion, and there are sainted knights in Glory" (508). The dialogue form of these wonderful, ironically devised absurdities draws from the Platonic and Augustinian tradition, but also departs from it by undermining the credibility of both speakers, who hopelessly confuse spiritual and profane realms and end up casting a skeptical cloud of doubt over fame and religion alike.

Another way of looking at this: the entire second volume of *Don Quixote* could be called "How to Raise a Dead Man and Win Fame." Recall that Cervantes had put his character to bed at the end of the first volume—more, he had buried him. But here he is telling the Count of Lemos in the dedication to the sequel: "I have been urged on every side to send him forth in order to alleviate the loathing and disgust caused by another Don Quixote who has traveled the world in the disguise of a second part" (453). This is a clear allusion to Avellaneda's false Quixote, who was also a dead man walking. Cervantes, however, has only just

begun.

In the "Prologue to the Reader," he writes, "Lord save me, how impatiently you must be waiting for this prologue, illustrious or perhaps plebeian reader, believing you will find in it reprisals, quarrels, and vituperations hurled at the author of the second *Don Quixote*. I mean the one sired in Tordesillas, they say, and born in Tarragona! . . . You would like me to call him an ass, a fool, an insolent dolt, but the thought has not even entered my mind: let his sin be his punishment, let him eat it with his bread, and let that be an end to it. What I do mind, however, is that he accuses me of being old and one-handed, as if it had been in my power to stop time and halt its passage, or as if I had been wounded in some tavern" (455). After deftly skewering his rival, Cervantes reminds his readers that he fought in glorious battle (Lepanto in 1571), unlike this pseudonymous pipsqueak who dare not show his face. He goes one step further; in an interactive mode, he marshals the support of his readers, drawing them into Don Quixote's world by asking them to tell Avellaneda, if they should run into him, that "one of the greatest [temptations] is to give a man the idea that he can compose and publish a book and thereby win as much fame as fortune, as much fortune as fame" (456).

In a word, Cervantes gives his rival the middle finger, crushing the competition, and then in a preemptive move, he kills off his protagonist, burying him a second time, "so that no one will dare tell more tales about him, for the ones told in the past are enough" (458). The metafictional frame, which also played out in Part I, not only self-consciously embeds author, reader, and book in the prologue, but prepares us to make the connection between Cervantes's obsession with rivalry and fame and that of Don Quixote himself. Competitiveness is naturally built into the chivalric code (seen also in courtly love poetry). And fame, whether military or literary-artistic glory, is a ubiquitous theme, from Achilles' Homeric immortality and the *Aeneid* to Ovid, Augustine, Petrarch's laurels, and elsewhere, including Christ's radical promise of an afterlife. It is also linked to the nobility of blood and spirit expressed in the concept of arms and letters (*armas y letras*), which is of singular importance to the *Quixote*. Informed by all these traditions, Cervantes appears at once to endorse and subvert the desirability of fame.

One of the first things Don Quixote eagerly asks Sancho when they meet up again in Chapter II of the second part is this: "what are people saying about me in the village? What opinion of me do the commoners have, and the gentlefolk, and the knights? What do they say about my valor, my deeds, and my courtesy? What is the talk with regard to my

undertaking to revive and bring back to the world the forgotten order of chivalry?" (471). In the same passage, and before his squire can reply, he says, "I want you to know, Sancho, that if the naked truth, bare of flattery, were to reach the ears of princes, the times would be different and other ages would be deemed to be of iron when compared to our own" (471). In other words, Don Quixote already knows the answer to his questions because he has molded his delusions upon reality. Not even Sancho's frankness in reporting the village criticisms can budge his preconceptions, an early modern example of how the mind maps the world according to its conceits rather than the reverse, akin to the way the distorting power of ideologies works in later periods. Only here they're called enchanters. Twenty-first century readers can decide which delusions they prefer.

When Don Quixote learns right after this that his adventures have already been published, in record time, doubt creeps in. Quite possibly, he thinks, the enchanters are responsible for this quick turn of events but to what end? And what if the author didn't get his story straight? Following his reflections, a conversation ensues between Don Quixote, Sancho, and Sansón Carrasco, on the appearance of the book. Once more, the protagonist is most concerned about his reputation and the praiseful telling of his deeds, which prompts Sansón not only to critique the history but to applaud its pleasures and popularity, observing that "as soon as people see a skinny old nag they say: 'There goes Rocinante'" (478). Which is more real, the skinny old nag or Don Quixote's Rocinante; or conversely, less real? One wonders how many Don Quixotes are needed to make one real Don Quixote.

For the protagonist, it is more important that the history be truthful, which skirts around the dubious issue of whether he or anyone else in the book actually exists. "Historians," he says with inquisitorial assurance, "who make use of lies ought to be burned." Referring to the embedded tales in Part I, Don Quixote remarks, "I do not know what moved the author to resort to other people's novels and stories when there was so much to write about mine" (478). The protagonist does not doubt his own existence, though he does hedge his bets on other occasions. In Chapter I of Part II, when the priest questions whether knights errant were ever real, Don Quixote replies that "this truth is so certain I can almost say I have seen Amadís of Gaul with my own eyes" (466).

That slide from a truth "so certain" to "I can almost say" and "with my own eyes" is like seeing the apparently solid spans of a bridge buckle under a chimerical infrastructure. The subtle transition from

truth to individual perception makes truth a wobbly internal matter of belief resting on flawed human judgment. Descartes is looming on the horizon. It is worth recalling that Cervantes never calls his book a novel but, rather, a history, or *historia* (standing for both history and story in Spanish, with similar dual meanings in other Romance languages). That is, it is a chronicle of imaginary events. (His *Exemplary Novels*, or *Novelas ejemplares*, were *novellas*, or short stories in the Italian manner.) The Aristotelian distinction between poetry and history, to which Sansón alludes two chapters later, is in many ways ultimately ignored and made irrelevant in the *Quixote*, in a blurring of both, leading to the uncertainty of truth, as this passage and the whole thrust of the book suggest.

“It is one thing to write as a poet,” says Sansón, “and another to write as a historian: the poet can recount or sing about things not as they were, but as they should have been, and the historian must write about them not as they should have been, but as they were, without adding or subtracting anything from the truth” (476). Don Quixote wants it both ways; he wants his *historia* to be truthful historically and poetically. The phrase “with my own eyes” points to empirical proof of knights errant (historical reality), but that statement is a qualified one (“I can almost say”), based on unfounded assertion, because the only Amadís of Gaul he really sees is the one he read about in books of chivalric romance (poetical fancy), as he tacitly admits a few lines later.

After this exchange, however, Don Quixote returns to his obsession with fame, saying, “it often happens that those who had deservedly won and achieved great fame because of their writings lost their fame, or saw it diminished, when they had their works printed” (479). It is not hard to see Cervantes’s own anxiety in these words, another instance in which character and author mutually self-identify, while the book itself—take your pick which one—produces a subtle kind of existential unease. For what does one’s life mean if it is bound to the ephemeral fame of printed words subject to the vagaries of public opinion? Words will not save you. I see Hamlet peeking behind the curtain.

And then, a few pages later, comes the brilliant turn in Chapter IV when we read this:

“And by any chance,” said Don Quixote, “does the author promise a second part?”

“Yes, he does,” responded Sansón, “but he says he hasn’t found it and doesn’t know who has it, and so we don’t know if it will be published or not; for this reason, and because some people say: ‘Second parts were never very good,’ and others say: ‘What’s been written about Don Quixote

is enough,' there is some doubt there will be a second part; but certain people who are more jovial than saturnine say: 'Let's have more quixoties: let Don Quixote go charging and Sancho Panza keep talking, and whatever else happens, that will make us happy" (482).

If the author is still busy searching for the second part, then what is this we are reading? It is of course possible that Cide Hamete has been put off by the various corrections and criticisms of Part I offered by the characters of *this* Part II. Even more disconcerting is an author who appears to be looking for his own work, as though it were somebody else's. As this author seems more interested in profit than fame, Sancho reacts sharply, saying, "Let this Moorish gentleman, or whatever he is, pay attention to what he's doing; my master and I will give him such an abundance of adventures and so many different deeds that he'll be able to write not just a second part, but a hundred more parts" (482). Time to go back on the road, he urges. When Rocinante's neighing appears to signal he is game too, Don Quixote determines to do just that. It could be said that the mere idea of the second part has incited both Don Quixote and Sancho to renew their adventures, which is to say that a potential fiction within a fiction is driving the narrative forward into producing further potential adventures.

At the same time, this notional second part, which appears in the actual second volume of the *Quixote*, is made dubious by the very nature of second parts, or sequels, as Sansón observes. By contrast, Sancho pledges enough additional exploits to fill a hundred more parts. The squire's response to what he perceives as a challenge underscores not only the inherently competitive nature of the knightly enterprise but that of the narrative itself. Writing second parts requires dealing with first parts, which is a way of saying that Part I of *Don Quixote* hangs over the second volume. Sancho is promising not simply deeds but stories. Moreover, in some ways, this second part is a correction to the first one, given the characters' critique of the initial volume. Thus, the do-over for both characters and author also means not being outdone. Chivalric prowess is inseparable from narrative mastery. What is more, the book's success—its fame—is its own challenge, a success quixotically founded on the protagonist's repeated failures.

This marvelous sense of rivalry, which is such a driving narrative and characterological force in the novel, comes to a head in Chapter LIX, when Don Quixote discovers there is an apocryphal version of himself. Meanwhile, he keeps running into people who have read about him from Part I, as for instance happens in the chapter preceding LIX. The

protagonist encounters a group of well-born people role-playing as shepherds and shepherdesses, who are ecstatic to find him in their midst. "What good fortune for us!" exclaims a shepherdess. "[L]et me tell you that he is the most valiant, and most enamored, and most courteous knight in the world, if a history of his deeds which is in print, and which I have read, does not lie to us and deceive us" (838).

Beholden to their flattery and many attentions, Don Quixote feels obliged to reciprocate and vows to proclaim the incomparable beauty of these ladies (save Dulcinea), while standing for two days straight in the middle of the road and challenging anyone who disagrees with him. Seeing him agitated after Sancho declares this proves his master's sanity, however, the onlookers look to dissuade him, noting that "there was no need for further proofs of his valiant spirit since the ones alluded to in the history of his deeds were more than enough" (840). Clearly, they are not more than enough, as Don Quixote is responding not only to the charge of madness but to his own previous self in the first volume. In other words, he is competing against himself, the sequel having produced *his* own sequel. This rivalry with himself, which issues in part from his obsession with fame (and his desire to do good), propels Don Quixote forward psychologically in the narrative. Who that self is, of course, is remarkably elusive, inhabiting a fluid space between reason and madness, reality and illusion, spirit and matter.

Then comes the episode at the inn in Chapter LIX, a stopping point along the way to the jousts in Zaragoza. Whereas before an inn was a castle in the eyes of Cervantes's protagonist, this time he names it properly. Through a thin partition between rooms, Don Quixote overhears a conversation between two gentlemen, one of whom proposes they read "another chapter of the second part of *Don Quixote of La Mancha*," a reference to Avellaneda's book. "Señor Don Juan," says the other gentleman, "why does your grace want us to read this nonsense? Whoever has read the first part of the history of Don Quixote of La Mancha cannot possibly derive any pleasure from reading this second part" (845). Here, Cervantes repeats, with nearly the same wording, an idea that had already appeared in Chapter III, when Don Juan replies, "it would be nice to read it because there's no book so bad that it doesn't have something good in it" (845). The bad thing is, he continues, Don Quixote no longer loves Dulcinea. Don Quixote is infuriated. How could he possibly forget the *raison d'être* of his chivalric constancy?

Once Don Quixote has the book in his hands, he merely peruses it and then hands it back, pointing out his objections, which are personal,

linguistic, and historical in nature. Does anyone think that Cervantes himself only glanced at Avellaneda's sequel? His character's dismissive gesture speaks volumes (in more than one sense). Avellaneda's false Quixote serves at the very least a dual purpose in this chapter. First, his book proves by ironic negation who the *real* Don Quixote is. Cervantes's character is not only aware of himself as a protagonist. He also goes a step further, establishing his historical truth in a history that is never anything but spurious. And so does Sancho Panza, who says to the two gentlemen, "Believe me, your graces . . . the Sancho and the Don Quixote in that history are not the ones who appear in the history composed by Cide Hamete Benengeli, the ones who are us: my master is valiant, intelligent, and in love, and I'm simple, amusing, and not a glutton or a drunkard" (848).

In distinguishing themselves from Avellaneda's characters and identifying with Cide Hamete's, however, Don Quixote and Sancho also reaffirm their fictional status, illustrating the paradoxical nature of the reality-illusion pairing, which is not simply a duality but an endless feedback loop. In this passage, Don Quixote and Sancho want words to coincide with their presumed reality—we are who we say we are, because you can find us in Cide Hamete's book. This idea could only emerge from the sequel itself, but it also points to an underlying dilemma for Cervantes's characters (and for the period): the absence of a solid basis from which to judge and experience the world. Paper reality continually undermines its assumed connection with material reality.

In refusing to read more of Avellaneda's book, Don Quixote aims to vanquish the rival version of himself, but he also chooses how much he wants to know in this instance. That is, as elsewhere in the novel, he selects what aspects of reality (or the story) to ignore and what not to ignore, just as he carefully refrains from further testing of his flimsy pasteboard helmet in Part I after the armor fell apart the first time. In other cases, he swerves to alternative explanations when his own understanding is proved to be flawed, attributing unexpected consequences to the unpredictable actions of the enchanters. Selective ignorance has the benefit of overlooking anything that does not affirm one's preconceptions of the world; it protects our delusions.

Thus, he replies in this passage that "he considered that he had read [Avellaneda's book], and confirmed that all of it was foolish, and if it happened to come to the attention of the author that he had held it in his hands, he did not want him to celebrate the idea that Don Quixote had read it, for one's thoughts must eschew obscene and indecent things,

as must one's eyes" (848). What, after all, if Don Quixote actually read the book and it did not correspond to the knight's opinion of it? The book might contradict the knight's most dearly held beliefs. Or, heaven forbid, take over the storyline preemptively, forcing Don Quixote to re-route himself. And that is exactly what happened. Avellaneda followed Cervantes' prompt at the end of Part I, sending his protagonist off to Zaragoza to the tourneys. In response, Don Quixote says, "For this very reason . . . I shall not set foot in Zaragoza, and in this way I shall proclaim the lies of this modern historian to the world, and then people will see that I am not the Don Quixote he says I am" (849).

This is an extraordinarily rich statement. Avellaneda had rewritten the trajectory of the *Quixote* with his own novel, but here, he does it a second time from within Cervantes's very narration! Avellaneda has changed Cervantes's storyline, as the protagonist ends up going to Barcelona instead of Zaragoza. Cervantes must have thought long and hard how to respond to the false Quixote, and he came up with a very clever solution. He turns the tables on the real-life Avellaneda, transforming his character and, by implication, the author himself, into Cervantes's creatures. He beats them into literary submission, or at least it seems he has, demonstrating once more how writing and competitiveness are intertwined. Don Quixote himself makes the point in an aggressive turn by asserting he will expose "the lies of this modern historian to the world" (849). If Avellaneda appears to be driving the narration at this point, it is because Cervantes is in the driver's seat.

Don Quixote, however, is not playing the same game as his creator. In fact, he does not seem to be playing in any game at all here, despite modeling himself on the fictions and codes of knight errantry. If Cervantes fictionalizes Avellaneda, Don Quixote insists on his status as a real person, because if Avellaneda is real, so is he, as though existence was a matter of proof by association. But did we not already know that Avellaneda was real? Games and game-playing in the *Quixote* exist on different levels, and on some levels, characters know they are in a game, while on other levels, not necessarily. The duke and duchess are the supreme gamesters, feigning belief in Don Quixote's fantasies on the one hand, as though they were not in a game, and devising, on the other hand, one deceit after another. But even they can get caught up in Don Quixote's belief system. Unanswered is whether a delusional person can even be in a game when self-awareness is a necessary prerequisite. Here, we are clearly entering Kafka territory.

Don Quixote, then, seems unaware of any self-conscious artifice at

play here, in this affirmation of self through negation: "I am not the Don Quixote he [Avellaneda] says I am" (849). That raises the question who Cervantes's character really is. Don Quixote knows who he is, but do we? Much earlier, in Chapter V of Part I, he had declared, "I know who I am," and then went on to claim he could be the Twelve Peers of France and the nine paragons of Fame (43). Yet in this passage from Part II, he whittles himself down merely to what he is not, perhaps in anticipation of his end. In Barcelona, more tricks are played on him, including one in which some gentlemen give him "a cassock to put on, and on the back, which he did not see, they had attached a sign that read, in large letters: *This is Don Quixote of La Mancha*" (866-67).

Naturally, everyone notices him, which Don Quixote totally misinterprets as recognition of his fame. "[E]ven the boys in this city, who have never seen me before," he says, "know who I am." But they do not. They only see the *sign*, its literal and non-literal manifestation, of a character called Don Quixote of La Mancha. This episode reminds us of what Michel Foucault said about the knight errant: that everything he does is "an attempt to transform reality into a sign. Into a sign that the signs of language really are in conformity with things themselves. Don Quixote reads the world in order to prove his books."⁴ Here, it seems to me, the reverse is true: the world has read *him* as a sign, anticipating the fusion of character and book that, Foucault argued, he becomes. His sharply observed remarks aside, none of this makes it at all transparent who Cervantes's character is, which is ironic, given Don Quixote's continual protestations of autonomy and the desire to distinguish himself by acquiring fame.

And indeed, in Barcelona, even the protagonist runs into signs of his existence, namely, in the print shop where they are correcting a book "called the *Second Part of the Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*, written by somebody from Tordesillas" (874). "[B]y my conscience," remarks Don Quixote, "the truth is I thought [the book] had already been burned and turned to ashes for its insolence; but its day of reckoning will come" (875). Evidently, Avellaneda has still not had his comeuppance. This issue comes into view again in Chapter LXXII when, in an inspired move, Cervantes has a character from Avellaneda's book, Don Álvaro Tarfe, appear at the same inn as Don Quixote and Sancho. Don Álvaro is astonished to learn that *his* Don Quixote is a fraud, or as the protagonist puts it, "I am Don Quixote of La Mancha, the same one who is on the lips of Fame, and not that unfortunate man who has wanted to usurp my name and bring honor to himself with my thoughts" (926).

⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 47.

And then Don Quixote requests a favor of Don Álvaro: “to please make a statement to the magistrate of this village, saying that your grace has not seen me all the days of your life until now, and that I am not the Don Quixote published in the second part, nor is this Sancho Panza, my squire, the one known by your grace” (926-27). Avellaneda’s character agrees, though with a wonderful twist, as he at once swears and does not swear to a contradictory reality, presaging Orwellian doublethink. “I say again and affirm again,” he says, “that I have not seen what I have seen or experienced what I have experienced” (927). It should be noted that this is, I believe, the only moment when Avellaneda is explicitly acknowledged by name, having been disparaged in all previous instances as “some guy from Tordesillas” (my phrasing).

The statement, says the narrator, really was not necessary. But it is to Don Quixote, who once more defines himself through negation. This act, which seemingly affirms his real existence, also represents a repudiation of Avellaneda’s character and book, demonstrating how inextricably Cervantes has tied rivalry to the understanding of selfhood. Significantly, at the end of this same chapter, as Don Quixote and his squire set eyes once more on their village, Sancho says that though his master “returns conquered by another, [he] returns the conqueror of himself” (928). Whether Don Quixote has learned such self-restraint remains to be answered, but Sancho’s observation resonates in an age of empire when the exploits of the conquistadores were more than a distant memory. The notion of self-control also reflects a long classical and biblical tradition, with Seneca foremost by way of influence in Spanish letters. It could be said that the competitive spirit has turned inward-looking, toward the self, in the end.

Only two chapters before, Don Quixote reminded us “there is no other I in the world” (916). This assertion comes after another character tells a comic story of hell in which devils pulverize Avellaneda’s book in a game of pelota. Don Quixote’s originality, his uniqueness, is sharply etched against the guy from Tordesilla’s poor imitation. The irony is that Cervantes’s own character is also based upon a form of imitation, for this is, above all, an invented self, shaped by literature. And while reading incites desire to become Don Quixote of La Mancha, he has to leave home to seek and actualize that invented self. Don Quixote looks for his “self” by wandering through Castille’s vast expanse while words proliferate at the same time. But how deceitful is the analogy between physical and verbal expansion, for the world, as Don Quixote learns, is not at all like the books he reads.

Likewise, he must return home to give up that invented self, reas-

suming the ordinary life he left behind and accepting his death as Alonso Quijano, “once called *the Good*.” It could be said that words, not Cervantes, kill Don Quixote. For one thing, the priest makes sure he stays dead, at least as a literary character, by having a document drawn up to that effect. There will be no more second acts. In Part II, Cervantes has raised his dead man, won fame, and his hero has gone home. Is that all there is? Not quite. In his final moments, Don Quixote, as he lies dying, puts his house in order. First, he sends for a priest and makes confession. Then he dictates to a notary his last will and testament. Thus his soul is made aright, and things are placed in proper perspective. The immaterial (his soul) and the material (his possessions) recuperate a measure of harmony between them.

This is what was known as a good death and, as such, it invites us to consider what a good life looks like as well. What defines a life? Don Quixote’s code of conduct shapes his relations with others, and while his allegiances and loyalties may appear uniquely as expressions of knight errantry and rivalry, arguably they also issue out of deeper, earlier strata rooted in custom and nurtured in character, the gentleness and kindness that Sancho attributes to his master, the very qualities that dictate his behavior as a knight errant. His return home, recalling innumerable such returns beginning with Homer’s Odysseus, also joins him to Vermeer’s lacemaker, to the beauty of the ordinary, to its transformative properties, capable of turning ordinary Alonso Quijano the Good into the extraordinary Don Quixote of La Mancha. In his classic essay on Cervantes’s novel, Erich Auerbach wrote: “From the very beginning—although more in part 2 than in part 1—the kindly, intelligent, and amiable figure, Alonso Quijano el bueno, whose most distinguishing characteristic is his naturally superior dignity, coexists with the mad adventurer.”⁵ And that’s because Don Quixote of La Mancha was already there in Alonso Quijano, which is to say that we contain in ourselves other possible lives, the lives of others, and the lives we imagine. That is the dead man Cervantes has raised, the sequel to ordinary: the invented modern man, insecure yet competitive, every man and every woman, whom Walt Whitman, in a sublimely quixotic gesture, once advised to “Leap from your seats and contend for your lives!” “Produce great Persons,” he said, “the rest follows.”⁶

⁵ Erich Auerbach, “The Enchanted Dulcinea,” *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Translated by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 349.

⁶ Walt Whitman, “By Blue Ontario’s Shore,” *The Complete Poems*. Edited by Francis Murphy (London: Penguin, 2004), 363.