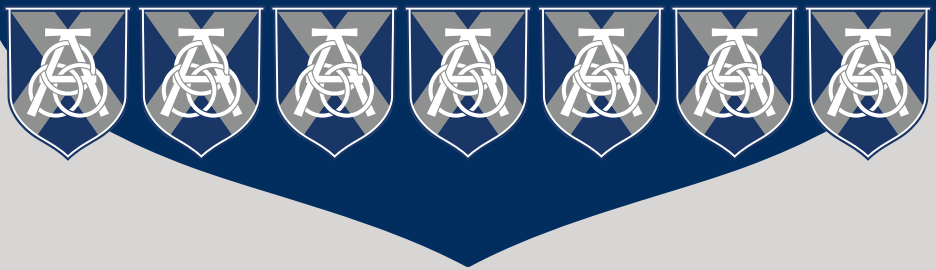
SHIELD WALL

A JOURNAL OF THEOLOGICAL POETICS



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from the COMMUNITY OF STUDENTS *at* NEW SAINT ANDREWS COLLEGE

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EXPLANATIO

This quarterly journal is an exercise in theological poetics. Because this is an odd undertaking, even for an academic journal, we thought a word of explanation was in order. The word *poetics* refers to the philosophy of making or creating, so a theological poetics is an approach to making and creating that is theologically informed and expressive. We want to publish theological topics that are rigorous enough to make you think, and winsome enough to make you want to. We want to publish creative and literary efforts that are theologically orthodox, and which therefore retain and grow into a truly human shape. We thank you for reading.

The Joker and the Fool

Miguel de Cervantes and G.K. Chesterton

by **JOSH CLEMANS**

Headwaters

IN 1900, during the early months of the Second Boer war, *The Speaker,* a young liberal weekly, carried several articles and reviews denouncing the popularity of English imperialism. The articles were signed simply, "G.K.C."[1] Earlier the same year, a short collection of poems entitled *The Wild Knight* had also been released under the same three initials.[2] Soon everyone was asking, "Who is this G.K.C.?" One reviewer of *The Wild Knight* claimed "G.K.C" was actually the famous poet John Davidson writing under a pseudonym.[3] As the articles in *The Speaker* spread, the full name came to the surface: G.K. Chesterton. In a few months the name was well known in literary circles, in a few years it was famous across the country. One reviewer observed, "I do not know any example in the last fifty years of so dizzy a rise from obscurity to fame."[4] Chesterton came into the literary world like a comet. To men of his own day he was an anomaly: a man outside his time. Where did he come from? What led him to develop a perspective so alien to the celebrated thinkers of the time?

Chesterton understood that every writer, no matter how original, begins by imitating others.[5] He saw that not much is truly original. New ideas can be tacky and boring, old ideas almost never are. Chesterton had a deep-seated love for old Christendom. He loved the courage, he

1 Cecil Chesterton and G. K. Chesterton, *G. K. Chesterton, a Criticism,* (London: Alston Rivers, 1908). 49.
2 Ibid. 30.
3 Ibid. 31.
4 Ibid. 30.
5 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton* Vol. XVIII (Ignatius Press, 1991). 96

loved the nobility, he even loved the crusades. Unlike some of his enlightened contemporaries, Chesterton was more than willing to take up old tomes and dip into the treasure-troves of the "dark-ages." Descartes compared this kind of reading to traveling in different countries.[6] Interacting with past authors is like visiting other times. When you come home from your travels, you might see some things about your homeland that you never noticed: beautiful things—and blind spots. Chesterton witnessed the same phenomena as he turned his attention back to twentieth-century England.

One book in particular had a shaping impact on Chesterton's work: Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. At the center of *Don Quixote*, Quixote gives a simple distillation of his mission. He says, "My only endeavor is to convince the world of the mistake it makes in not reviving in itself the happy time when the order of knight-errantry was in the field."[7] This is the manifesto of the knight Don Quixote. But it could just as easily be the manifesto of G.K. Chesterton. In the man that has often been viewed as a hapless idiot, Chesterton saw a glorious Christian hero. Don Quixote embodied the traits that Chesterton saw were necessary in his own time: a courageous madman willing to defy the norm and bring back the beauty of the olden times. Cervantes' influence is pervasive throughout Chesterton's work.

Don Quixote impacted Chesterton in a number of ways. First, many of Chesterton's novels are direct imitations of *Don Quixote*. Chesterton tried to take Quixote's story and tell it from a new angle. Like Quixote, Chesterton's heroes are considered insane by society. Like Quixote, they make it their goal to restore the lost virtues. Madness and revival are bedrock themes in Chesterton's writing. Both are heavily inspired by Cervantes. The second place we see the fingerprints of *Don Quixote* is in Chesterton's own life. In many ways he came to embody the same heroic traits that he saw played out in *Don Quixote*. Chesterton's heroes are often Quixote-types and Chesterton himself fell into the same category.

6 Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy, 4th Ed.,* trans. Donald A. Cress, 4th edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999). 4.

7 Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote* (S.l.: Simon & Brown, 2011). 508.

The Christian Quixote

Before we jump into Chesterton's writing, we need to take a quick review of Quixote's story and its conflicting interpretations. In order to fully appreciate the story's impact on Chesterton, we'll need a comprehensive understanding of a soft reading of *Don Quixote*.

Common interpretations of Cervantes paint him as the anti-Chesterton: a man who wanted to end the shabby ideals of the Middle Ages and bury romance in a casket six feet deep. After a casual reading of *Don Quixote* and Chesterton, we might assume that the two are opposites. Chesterton is a lover; Cervantes is a hater. Where one man tried to abolish medieval ideals, the other tried to save them. In order to understand how Chesterton could have been so fascinated by a writer so seemingly opposed to his own philosophy, we need to recognize that there are two conflicting interpretations of *Don Quixote:* the soft reading and the hard reading. The hard reading says that *Don Quixote* is a joke. Cervantes is just mocking chivalric tales, showing the world how ridiculous it would be if someone actually took them seriously. Hard critic P.E. Russell calls *Don Quixote*, "…a comedy in which well-founded reality holds madness up to ridicule."[8] Cervantes himself declares at the end of the novel, "...my desire has been no other than to deliver over to detestation of mankind the false and foolish takes of the books of chivalry." Many readers find this interpretation plausible, it certainly falls in line with the plain meaning of the text.

In 1914, Spanish philosopher Miguel Unamuno introduced a new reading. The so-called soft reading sees Don Quixote as the unlikely hero of the tale. From this perspective, Quixote is the protagonist, the one man who understands how the world truly is. He sets out on a glorious mission: to bring back the old virtues to save his own time from its malaise.

As we look into Part I of *Don Quixote*, the case seems fairly cut and dried in favor of the hard reading: Quixote exhibits the qualities of an arrogant fool. His efforts only bring trouble on the people around

8 Howard Mancing, *Don Quixote: A Reference Guide* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006). 194.

him. His library of chivalric tales has driven his addled brain off a cliff. Now he spends his days troubling others with his pathetic belief that the stories are real.

Complications ensue. As Part I progresses, Cervantes goes off on massive narrative excursions that have little or nothing to do with Don Quixote himself. Each new character that Quixote meets has a story to tell: one man recounts how he braved imprisonment and shipwreck to save (and Christianize of course) a beautiful Muslim princess. Quixote runs across two separated lovers; each wandered the world alone only to be reunited by chance at the inn where Quixote is staying. Shepherds turn out to be noblemen, and almost every girl he meets happens to be beautiful beyond compare—a fair lady in disguise. Cervantes clearly enjoys telling these fantastic tales, and, for the reader, they're even more entertaining than the blunderings of Quixote and Sancho. By the end of Part I, Don Quixote is barely in the picture; the story has become dominated by our newfound romantic friends.

Rescued princesses? Angsty lovers? Aren't these the very type of tales that Quixote is so taken with? The ones that garner him so much contempt? Yet, here they are, taking place in real life. Cervantes encourages us to laugh at Quixote's obsession with chivalric tales, then turns around and entertains us with his own. Clearly there's more to *Don Quixote* than pure satire. Part I is threaded with a strong undercurrent of irony as Cervantes masterfully feeds us the very types of stories we were invited to ridicule.

Still, in Part I, the secular reading remains strong: Quixote is an unlikable, selfish fool. After Cervantes wrote Part I of *Don Quixote,* he went on to write more of his little romantic tales in a collection called *Novelas ejemplares*. But what the people really wanted was more of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Ten years after writing Part I of *Don Quixote*, Cervantes finally relented and penned *Don Quixote* Part II. Given the enormous time gap between the writings, the tone of the second part is drastically different from the first. Cervantes completely reinvents the characters of Quixote and Sancho. Now, they have a new aura: a complex combination of wisdom and folly. Everyone who comes into contact with Quixote is left asking the question, "How could a man be so mad and so intelligent at the same time?" Don Diego captures the enigma: "I have seen him act the acts of the greatest madman in the world, and heard him make observations so sensible that they efface and undo all he does."[9] The new Quixote is a riddle to those around him. In Part I, Don Quixote is a menace to the community and a hazard to everyone he meets. In Part II, he emerges in a different light, as the "glorious madman."[10]

The new Quixote is also strangely self-aware. He *knows* that people think he's crazy. When the barber tells him a pertinent parable, Don Quixote easily catches his meaning and affirms his decision to remain "mad." In Part I Quixote continually harps upon his desire to win personal glory through his endeavors.[11] In Part II, his purpose has changed radically. Quixote proclaims, "...the chief object of my profession is to spare the humble and chastise the proud; I mean, to help the distressed and destroy the oppressor." Unlike the Quixote of Part I, the new Quixote displays the motives of a true hero.

Not only does the Don Quixote of Part II have a new purpose, he also has a new, concrete grasp of reality around him. When Sancho tries to trick him about Dulcinea being one of the peasant girls in the road, Quixote's answer astonishes Sancho and the reader: "I see nothing, Sancho, but three country girls on three jackasses."[12] The old oblivious Don Quixote is gone from the script and a new, savvier Quixote takes his place. At one point, Quixote even plays his own little joke on Sancho, baiting him into making vocabulary mistakes.[13]

As Don Quixote and Sancho are being welcomed by the Duke and Duchess, Cervantes pens an unassuming line that retroactively impacts the entire novel: "Don Quixote was greatly astonished, *and this was the first time that he thoroughly felt and believed himself to be a knight-errant in reality and not merely in fancy*"[14] (emphasis mine). For seven hundred pages, Don Quixote has been telling every living thing

9 Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote* (S.l.: Simon & Brown, 2011). 617.
10 Ibid. 619.
11 Saavedra, *Don Quixote*. 68.
12 Ibid. 564
13 Saavedra, *Don Quixote*. 544.
14 Saavedra, *Don Quixote*. 705.

that he is a knight-errant. Now we learn that he never truly believed it until this moment. In one line, Cervantes reshapes how we view Don Quixote's persona. In the court of the Duke, Quixote rebukes Sancho for being crude: "Dost thou not see… that if they perceive thee to be a coarse clown or a dull blockhead, they will suspect me to be some impostor or swindler?" Don Quixote is nervous that he will be revealed as an impostor because he *knows* that he is one.

In chapter forty-nine of Part II, a steward makes an offhand comment that encapsulates Quixote's game plan and lies at the core of Chesterton's perspective on the novel. The steward remarks to Sancho, "Every day we see something new in this world; jokes become realities, and jokers find the tables turned upon them." Jokes become realities. This is Don Quixote's strategy: to play the part of the knight well enough to be accepted as genuine. Once recognized as a true knight, he's sure others will be inspired to follow his example.

In chapters fifty-one and fifty-two, for a brief, fleeting moment, it seems that Don Quixote has succeeded. Sancho has his government just as Quixote promised. Dona Rodriguez, a genuine and sincere supplicant, asks Don Quixote for his help. Sancho is truly a good governor; Quixote is actually able to bring Dona Rodriguez' plight to a happy conclusion.

The joke becomes reality.

After this summit, Cervantes sends Quixote down the long trail of defeats that will lead to his grave. In a medley of Palm Sunday and crucifixion imagery, Quixote is led through the streets on a horse that is not his own with a sign stitched to his back: "This is Don Quixote of La Mancha."[15] Cervantes is pointing us to the inevitable: Don Quixote will soon meet his death at the hands of those who mock him. As Quixote is paraded down the street, one man shouts, "Get thee home, blockhead!" The jeer sours the mood. From this point on, it's clear: the emperor has no clothes. As the tale nears its end, Quixote no longer inspires laughter, only pity.

One by one, all Don Quixote's successes crumble to ash. First, the knight of the white moon shatters his prestige. Next, he meets the lacquey, Tosilos, who tells him that his one true success (helping Dona Rodriguez) was undone the moment he left. Yet, Quixote still has one comfort left to him. Cervantes writes, "His sadness arose from his defeat, and his satisfaction from the thought of the virtue that lay in Sancho."[16] However, in this very chapter, even that one comfort is taken from Quixote. Sancho, whose loyalty he swears by, begins tricking Quixote out of his money, taking reels for fake lashings.

In the end, we find Quixote alone and undone, cheated by his own companion. A boy of the village captures the scene: "Come here, boys, and see Sancho Panza's ass figged out finer than Mingo and Don Quixote's beast leaner than ever."[17] Sancho has gone out empty and come back full. Quixote has gone out empty and come back broken. He is, for all his bravery, worse off than he started. On his deathbed, Don Quixote finally breaks.

This is the tale that the soft reading gives us: *Don Quixote* as tragedy, the story of a madman who tried to change the world for the better and was crushed for his troubles. On his deathbed, Don Quixote faces a reality that every man fears: everything you did was a waste, you were lying to yourself the entire time. You can't change things. This is what Dostoevsky was referring to when he claimed *Don Quixote* as "the greatest expression of human thought" and the "saddest book" ever written.[18] Reading with this soft interpretation in mind, the tale of *Don Quixote* serves as testament to the fear that suffering for good will only be mocked in the end; that when all is said and done, your work will be nothing, and you will be broken.

Keep in mind, this soft reading is the minority report. Also take into account that we've just highlighted the major passages in the one thousand plus pages of *Don Quixote* that support it—one side seems right till the other presents his case. There are also strong passages that support the hard reading and send conceptions of Quixote as tragic hero amuck. For instance, at one point Quixote destroys an entire puppet show because he believes that the puppets are real and

15 Ibid. 912.

16 Saavedra, *Don Quixote*. 964.
17 Ibid. 976.
18 K. A. Lantz, *The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 51.

the princess puppet is in danger. Quixote sincerely believes that enchanters are out to get him. He kills sheep, he charges windmills, and, at times, his antics cause serious harm to those around him.

At the end of the day, Cervantes keeps his cards close to the chest; he's the original master of intentional ambiguity. As *Quixote* scholar Edith Grossman remarks, "as soon as you think you understand something, Cervantes introduces something that contradicts your premise."[19] So which is right? The hard reading or the soft reading? That's not the point here. The point is that the soft reading and the hard reading both have legitimate foundation in the text. Whether he meant to or not, Cervantes crafted a piece that can be interpreted a number of different ways, and, in doing so, he scattered fistfuls of creative seeds that would later shoot off in directions he may never have planned.

Chesterton's First Quixote

In the secular reading, *Don Quixote* is mockery. In the Christian reading, it is tragedy. One can see how Chesterton would not leap to embrace either of these readings. To understand how *Quixote* molded Chesterton's outlook we need to return to that moment in the story when everything was going right: when Quixote was a good knight and Sancho a good governor—when the joke became reality. For Cervantes, this point marks the peak of Quixote's journey. Afterwards Quixote will spiral down into despair and death. For Chesterton, this point marks the beginning of a glorious revolution. He takes the mad heroic spirit of rebellion that he sees in Quixote and sits down to tell the story with a new ending—the right one this time. *The Napoleon of Notting Hill, The Ball and the Cross,* and *The Return of Don Quixote* represent Chesterton's most blatant attempts to rewrite the story of *Don Quixote*.

Starting with his first novel, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill,* Chesterton takes the fertile concepts of *Don Quixote* in his own wild new directions. In Chesterton's tales, the Quixote figure actually succeeds in effecting a full-scale revival of medieval ways. In this version, the quixotic character is a man named Adam Wayne. Wayne is living in London in the year 1984. But nothing in London has changed. Chesterton writes that the city is still, "…very like it was in those enviable days when I was still alive."[20] The reason is this: people have lost faith in revolutions. Conflict has become completely extinct. Adam Wayne becomes obsessed with the old nobility and valor of chivalry. He runs around trying to convince people to make a full-fledged return to medievalism. At first, his efforts are wasted. No one buys his ridiculous plan; everyone shuts the door in his face. Then Chesterton changes the script. Wayne starts to gain traction and eventually rallies the people of Pump Street to embrace the old chivalric customs. United, they crusade against the might of modern businessmen who are trying to destroy Pump Street. By the end, the whole city is converted by Wayne's vision. The men walk about in full robes and tunics and the women in flowing dresses. Men wear their swords at their hips and everyone goes about addressing each other with elaborate chivalric courtesy just like Quixote dreamed they would. Chesterton triumphantly pens his first "how it should have ended" to Don Quixote: this time Quixote and Sancho are the heroes. This time, the courageous efforts of the madman are rewarded and society is saved from the brink and brought back to the virtues of old.

The Madman

Adam Wayne exhibits one of Chesterton's favorite quixotic traits: madness. Nearly all of his heroes are considered insane by the society surrounding them. *The Napoleon of Notting Hill, The Poet and the Lunatics, Manalive, The Ball and the Cross, The Return of Don Quixote*—each story has a madman for its protagonist. As with Quixote, the insanity of Chesterton's characters is initially puzzling to those around them. Are the madmen really insane? Or are they right? Are they self-aware? Don Quixote certainly seems to be. Folk in Chesterton's tales are left asking the same question as Tom Cecil in *Quixote*, "I'd like to know

19 Edith Grossman, (2009, March 3). Edith Grossman on Don Quixote as Tragedy and Comedy [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muOZ6WdAg3o.

20 Gilbert Keith Chesterton and Walford Graham Robertson, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (Bodley Head, 1904). 21.

now which is the madder, he who is so because he cannot help it, or he who is so of his own choice?"[21] Chesterton's entire book *The Poet and the Lunatics* is based on this muddled line between intentional and unintentional madness.

The Poet and the Lunatics is a set of short mystery stories following the adventures of a poet named Gabriel Gale. People who meet him generally assume that he's insane, eccentric, or both. Yet, at the end of every story, the mad poet Gabriel Gale is able to solve the problems that no one else could. His "madness" allows him to see the world and others in a way that sane people have lost or forgotten. Characters react to Gabriel Gale in the same way that Don Larenzo reacts to Quixote: "Our guest has broken out on our hands, but, for all that, he is a glorious madman, and I should be a dull blockhead to doubt it."[22] Quixote is mad. Everyone who knows him admits this. Yet, it's almost a beautiful madness. Who ever heard of a man who went mad with the desire to help people? Mad with the idea of defending the weak and beating back the proud? Quixote is mad with the idea of restoring lost virtues, mad with the idea of rousing the populace out of their stagnate lives. The man has a healthy mania. A sane insanity. People that meet characters like Quixote and Gale can't wrap their minds around the contradiction, but they do understand that there's something noble going on. Don Larenzo slaps a name to the type: the "glorious madman."

The hero of *Manalive* falls into the same category. The protagonist, Innocent Smith, comes bounding into a boarding house shooting off his pistol and performing a variety of antics to rouse the people from their un-romantic stupor. At first, the boarders are shocked by Smith's colorful entry, but as the story progresses they come to understand Smith's role. Mr. Moon remarks, "'You expect a Don Juan to dress up as a solemn and solid Spanish merchant; you're not prepared when he dresses up as Don Quixote.'"[23] Smith is also a Quixote figure, the glorious madman, leaping in to convince the people, by example, of the value of nobility and wonder. At the start of the story, the boarders of Beacon House have high opinions of their own dignity and intellect, yet, by the end, all see that Smith is the wisest of them all. Here Chesterton is keying off another Cervantean concept. In *Don Quixote,* Quixote remarks, "The cleverest character in the comedy is the clown, for he who would make people take him for a fool, must not be one."[24] The cleverest character is the clown. The boarders of Beacon House have assumed Smith has rats in his attic only to discover that he's been holding the reins the whole time, carefully guiding them to a new joyful perspective on the world. The joy is momentarily spoiled when Dr. Warner accuses Smith of insanity and attempts to remove him to an asylum. But Chesterton's Quixotes never fail in the long run. At the end of the day, they receive the glorious vindication that Quixote never did. Smith is acquitted and the people are saved from their monotonous ways.

Chesterton often writes two lunatics into his tales: one to represent Quixote and the other to represent Sancho. *The Ball and the Cross* tells the same quixotic tale of two madmen, MacIan and Turnbull, who roam the countryside dueling one another with antique swords in an attempt to rouse people from their apathy. They also live in a time when men are no longer willing to take a stand. No one sees any virtue in the old ways of heroism, conflict, and nobility. In *Don Quixote*, Quixote's steps are constantly dogged by his own friend Sampson and others as they attempt to take him home and cure his madness. Likewise, MacIan and Turnbull are pursued by the entire population of England. Eventually they are caught and placed in the care of an asylum. Still, in the end, the tables are turned and the madmen are justified.

In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* there are also two madmen, Adam Wayne and a fool named Auberon Quin. People call Wayne "the red-haired madman" due to his mad Scottish efforts to restore conflict and medieval culture.[25] Auberon Quin is described this way, "…he never opens his mouth without saying something so indescribably half-witted that to call him a fool seems the very feeblest attempt at characterization. But there's another thing about him that's rather funny… Have you ever seen his books? All Greek poets and mediæval

21 Saavedra, *Don Quixote*. 598.
22 Ibid. 619.
23 G. K. Chesterton, *Manalive* (Arc Manor LLC, 2008). 50.
24 Saavedra, *Don Quixote*. 523.
25 Chesterton and Robertson, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. 219.

French and that sort of thing."[26] Quin, the madman, has an extensive library of romantic medieval literature. Similar quixotic breadcrumbs are scattered throughout Chesterton's stories. Even Syme in *The Man Who Was Thursday* recognizes he is mad to some extent. He remarks, "Well, if I am not drunk, I am mad, but I trust I can behave like a gentleman in either condition."[27]

At some point in Chesterton's stories the characters come to realize that the lunacy of the protagonists is actually sanity. The madmen (Quixote and Sancho) are not mad, they are the only two people who grasp the true reality of the world. In *Manalive*, Mr. Moon suddenly comes to this realization:

> "Sakes alive!" said the American gentleman, almost in an awed tone. Then he added, "Are there two maniacs here?"
>
> "No; there are five," thundered Moon. "Smith and I are the only sane people left."[28]

In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, Quin concludes, "...the whole world is mad, but Adam Wayne and me." Later Wayne remarks to Quin, "...let us start our wanderings over the world. For we are its two essentials."[29] The world views them as irrelevant kooks but, in the end, they are the only ones who are relevant, the only two who are necessary.

MacIan makes the same assessment in *The Ball and the Cross*. He says to Turnbull, "This whole civilization is only a dream. You and I are the realities."[30] Throughout the book, everyone has relentlessly pursued MacIan and Turnbull in an attempt to lock them up. Everyone told them they were lunatics. Everyone will always tell the two fools that they are living in a dream-world, yet, for Chesterton, they are the only ones who are truly awake. The madmen are the reality.

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26 Ibid. 28.

27 G. K. Chesterton and Jonathan Lethem, *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* (New York: Modern Library, 2001).

28 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *On Lying in Bed and Other Essays by G.K. Chesterton* (Bayeux Arts, 2000). 56.

29 Chesterton and Robertson, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. 301.

30 G. K. Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross* (1st World Publishing, Incorporated, 2008). 49.

They are the ones who can see through the blinders of their own time and pursue true virtue.

The Farce

Don Quixote has another virtue that Chesterton covets. The foolish knight has the ability to see the world with a renewed sense of wonder and imagination. To Quixote, every object, every person, no matter how frumpy or insignificant, is a colorful character in his romantic conception of reality. Quixote's been cooped up with his books so long that he sees everything in the world with new eyes: the shabby old inn is a mighty stronghold, the wenches loafing outside are beautiful ladies, the windmills are menacing giants, a beat-up barber's basin is the perfect helmet for a wandering knight. Innocent Smith in *Manalive* displays that same romantic naivety. Where others see inconvenience, Smith sees adventure. Where others see a tattered old umbrella, Smith sees a magnificent coronation canopy. The eyes of the people have been dulled by everyday association. Quixote and Smith invite them to look again with the eye of joy and imagination.

To those around them, this imaginative wonder seems like childish nonsense. The friends and acquaintances of Quixote see his mad romanticism as a massive claptrap charade. Often that is exactly what his actions amount to: silly poems, verbacious speeches, and irrational knightly customs. Quixote is not only a kook, he is a fool. He and Sancho are the butt of the jokes, the jesters of the story, whether they know it or not. This farcical aspect is largely what drove *Don Quixote*'s popularity with original audiences. Naturally, we take these comic failings and ridiculous antics as support for a secular reading. Who could respect heroes that are so farcical? Their nonsensical folly disqualifies them.

Not for Chesterton. What we see as symptoms of insanity, Chesterton claims as heroic virtues. In his essay, *On Humor,* Chesterton gives us his own definition of nonsense:

> Nonsense may be described as humour which has for the moment renounced all connection with wit. It is humour that abandons all attempt at intellectual justification; and does not merely

> jest at the incongruity of some accident or practical joke, as a by-product of real life, but extracts and enjoys it for its own sake.[31]

Nonsense is just humor minus pretension. Chesterton continues, "Humour always has in it some idea of the humorist himself being at a disadvantage and caught in the entanglements and contradictions of human life."[32] For Chesterton, humor and nonsense are, in and of themselves, forms of admitted weakness. We all see something admirable in the man who doesn't take himself too seriously. Cervantes certainly didn't. *Don Quixote* contains a trove of internal inconsistencies that the man just never bothered to fix. John Ormsby remarks, "Never was a great work so neglected by its author. …it seems clear he never read what he sent to the press."[33] Lack of artistic pretension was something that Chesterton loved about Cervantes and his work, he writes, "...there appeared with the great Cervantes an element new in its explicit expression; that grand and very Christian quality of the man who laughs at himself."[34] Chesterton scoffed at the "serious" thinkers of his day and of every age who could not understand the real value and affluence of the comedic. He writes, "All the most brilliant men of the day when they set about the writing of comic literature do it under one destructive fallacy and disadvantage: the notion that comic literature is in some sort of way superficial."[35] Comedy does not equate to frivolity and the mere fact that Quixote inspires laughter does not disqualify him as a hero. In his introduction to a theatrical rendition of *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Chesterton deals with readers who have misinterpreted his novel as pro-anarchist: "Probably they thought that being able to see that a policeman is funny means thinking that a policeman is futile. Probably they would say that thinking Don Quixote funny means thinking chivalry futile; in other words, they are barbarians and have not learnt how to laugh."[36]

31 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *On Lying in Bed and Other Essays by G.K. Chesterton* (Bayeux Arts, 2000). 139.
32 Chesterton, *On Lying in Bed and Other Essays by G.K. Chesterton*. 134.
33 Saavedra, *Don Quixote*. 34.
34 Chesterton, *On Lying in Bed and Other Essays by G.K. Chesterton*. 138.
35 Ibid. 341.
36 Chesterton and Lethem, *The Man Who Was Thursday*. 193.

Basically, people who write off Don Quixote because he's funny are fools. Farcical antics do not bar Quixote from heroism.

The Revivalist

Remember Quixote's mission: to convince the world of the mistake it makes in not reviving the happy times of chivalry. Don Quixote's countrymen may see themselves as moving forward into a new era of renaissance, but Quixote sees them regressing into a dull, unvirtuous status-quo. He mourns the loss of nobility and the looming malaise of his own time. To the barber Quixote rants, "…now sloth triumphs over energy, indolence over exertion, vice over virtue, arrogance over courage, and theory over practice in arms, which flourished and shone only in the golden ages and in knights-errant."[37] If he had only a handful of the knights of old, Quixote muses, he could reverse this denigration—the king would find himself well-served and "the Turk would be left tearing at his beard."[38] Unfortunately, Quixote stands alone—one man trying to save a world that just won't take him seriously.

Quixote's acquaintances see him as an anomaly: a curious contradiction of folly and wisdom. When Quixote speaks up on matters other than chivalry the people are shocked by the good sense of his opinions. More and more, we come to see that Quixote is actually a judicious gentleman—as long as the conversation steers clear of knights and princesses. When placed in their desired roles, Quixote and Sancho perform magnificently. Quixote is a wise man and Sancho is a shrewd governor. So why does Quixote's mission fail? Part of the reason is this: Quixote can never seem to gain enough traction. He can never keep together a core group of people who actually believe that he's a knight. Quixote never succeeds, in part, because no one ever really thinks he can. Pessimism restricts the characters from believing a return to the old virtues is possible.

This is how Chesterton paints the story in *The Return of Don Quixote*. The book tells the tale of a librarian named Herne who takes

37 Saavedra, *Don Quixote*. 509.
38 Saavedra, *Don Quixote*. 509.

part in a medieval play. Once the production is over, he refuses to relinquish his costume. After brooding several days, Herne announces his intent to revive chivalry and medievalism. Initially everyone takes him for a fool. The characters around him are impeded by a "subconscious pessimism;" a festering belief that the dead things will never return.[39] Pessimism is the force that threatens to foil revival. Chesterton calls it "the unpardonable sin" and rightly so: in Chesterton's mind, Quixote is not defeated by beatings and hardship, he's defeated by cynicism.[40]

Here, once again, Chesterton takes the story in a new direction. Herne gains a follower, then another. The movement snowballs and a new "fashionable" medievalism sweeps the country. The entire English government is reformatted to medieval standards and Herne is made king. But all this upheaval does not come without a struggle, the men of the factories rise up in opposition to the new medievalism. The country is divided into two factions: the medievals and the moderns. While the medievals hold their high court in the country, the factory workers are meeting back in the town. Chesterton's bent against modernity is clear as he describes the lay of the land: "Beyond the park, beyond the gates of their chivalric paradise, the modern monster, the great black factory town, lay snorting up its smoke in defiance and derision."[41] For Chesterton's Quixote, the fuming factories and the face-erasing forces of modernism are the new giants that must be fought. In this respect, Don Quixote was not mistaken in tilting the windmills. The Sancho figure of the story, a man named Murrel, argues that the windmills that Cervantes' Don Quixote fought "were the beginning of all the mills and manufacturers that have darkened and degraded modern life."[42] According to Murrel, Quixote saw the same "dark satanic mills" that William Blake did.[43] Thus Quixote's attack on the mills was justified. In Chesterton's

39 G. K. Chesterton, *The Return Of Don Quixote* (Interactive Media, 2014). 126.
40 G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, Reprint edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995). 91.
41 Chesterton, *The Return Of Don Quixote*. 141.
42 Ibid. 169.
43 William Blake, "And did those feet in ancient time" *English Romantic Poetry: An Anthology,* ed. Stanley Appelbaum, First Edition edition (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 1996). 22

mind, the assault was not madness but foresight. Chesterton takes a similar stance in his poem *In Memoriam P.D.*:

> Heed not if half-wits mock your broken blade;
> Mammon our master doeth all things ill.
> You are the Fool you charged a windmill. Still,
> The Miller is a knave; and was afraid.[44]

Quixote's action may seem like madness but, in the end, the miller is the real villain. Quixote is the man who sees past the facade, the only man of his age who can recognize and challenge the true dangers menacing society.

Chesterton's other heroes follow a similar path. In *the Napoleon of Notting Hill*, everyone sees Adam Wayne as mad for trying to defend Pump Street and fight for medieval freedom. Then Wayne meets Turnbull the toymaker. Turnbull has spent his whole life building models of old battles and joyfully embraces Wayne's mission. Only with the aid of Turnbull does Wayne convert and organize the rest of their neighbors. Like Quixote, Wayne and Turnbull are tired of the malaise grown up in their day. They seek a return to the conflict and glory of the knights. Wayne remarks, "It is of the new things that men tire—of fashions and proposals and improvements and change. It is the old things that startle and intoxicate."[45] The revivalist recognizes: the people do not need anymore "progress"; what they need is a return to the old virtues.

In *The Ball and the Cross*, MacIan and Turnbull are striving after the same mission: to rouse the people out of their apathy and wake them to the glory of conflict and rebellion. They are trying to bring back distinct lines to a society that has become nothing but blurs of grey. They run about on a series of mad adventures trying to show the people by example that a return to conviction and knightly valor is good and necessary.

Smith in *Manalive*, oddly enough, is also trying to revive medieval customs at Beacon House. Early on, he suggests that the members of

44 G. K. Chesterton, *Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton: Collected Poetry : Part 1*, ed. Aidan Mackey (San Francisco: Ignatius Pr, 1994). 545.
45 Chesterton and Robertson, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. 292.

the boarding house split from modern government and create a new chair of justice modeled on the medievals, called "The High Court of Beacon." Smith receives support for his endeavors from his Sancho-character, Mr. Moon. What the others take as a joke, Smith and Moon soon make a reality.

Likewise in *The Return of Don Quixote*, Herne attempts to fully restore a medieval social construct. He sees that there was good in the old ways that modernity has lost. Arguing with his nemesis, Herne says:

> "I mean that the old society was truthful and that you are in a tangle of lies. I don't mean that it was perfect or painless. I mean that it called pain and imperfection by their names. You talk about despots and vassals and all the rest; well, you also have coercion and inequality; but you dare not call anything by its own Christian name. You defend every single thing by saying it is something else. You have a King and then explain that he is not allowed to be a King."[46]

The old ways were truthful simplicity. Modernity is nothing but false intricacy. Like the others, Herne is the rebel revivalist; working to tear down the new and bring back the old. As the man himself said, "It is always easy to let the age have its head; the difficult thing is to keep one's own."[47] Everyone is almost inevitably swept away by the thinking of their own time, regardless of its validity in a larger context. Like Quixote, Chesterton's heroes are able to take stock of the current cultural situation and work to reverse it. In *The Return of Don Quixote*, referring to the Quixote character, Lord Eden remarks, "The man is mad. It is dangerous for unbalanced men when their dreams come true. But the madness of a man may be the sanity of a society."[48] This is the picture of the Chestertonian hero: the man who stands up against the "madness of the majority" to bring sanity back to society. Quixotic heroes recognize the big picture unfolding and spend their lives fighting the tide of false ideas in their own day.

46 Chesterton, *The Return Of Don Quixote*. 100.
47 Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*. 107.
48 Chesterton, *The Return Of Don Quixote*. 122.

The ending of *The Return of Don Quixote* gives us some insight into how Chesterton saw himself in relation to the story of *Don Quixote*. Near the closing of *The Return of Don Quixote* the Quixote figure, Herne, and the Sancho figure, Murrel, ride off in a hansom cab to do good deeds throughout the countryside just as Don Quixote had done. But Chesterton notes that their exploits are not really appreciated by the people, "From the standpoint of the cold and satiric populace the story was rather that of the progress of the hansom cab, through scenes where hansom cabs very rarely figure."[49] The populace takes the hard reading of Herne's endeavors. Still, the narrator holds out hope that someone will come along and tell their story from a truer perspective: "But some riotously romantic chronicler may yet give some account of how they attempted in various ways to use the vehicle for the defense and consolation of the oppressed."[50] The tale needs someone to retell it. For *Don Quixote,* Chesterton worked to do just that. His Quixotes are not mere fools, they are the defenders of the oppressed; revivalists of the old ways. Through his fiction, Chesterton plays the part of the riotous chronicler come along to tell the story how it really happened.

Will the Real Don Quixote Please Stand Up

Quixote figures are most prevalent in Chesterton's novels but they also crop up in his non-fiction. In *Orthodoxy* the Quixote figure turns out to be Chesterton himself. He writes, "I am the fool of this story, and no rebel shall hurl me from my throne."[51] Chesterton really was the Don Quixote of his day. In many ways he saw his own time as parallel to the foolish knight's. In a world awash with enthusiasm for science and modernism, Chesterton was the fool calling for a return to the dark ages. He took Quixote's mission and made it his own.

At the turn of the century, society was confident humanity could pull itself up by the bootstraps; eugenics and other movements were picking up steam. Chesterton made himself into a tire chock against

49 Ibid. 168.
50 Chesterton, *The Return Of Don Quixote*. 168.
51 Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*. 16.

this rolling advance of modernity. He was one of the only Christian intellectuals of his time willing to stand up against the giants of his day, men like George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells. Where others applauded forced sterilization, abortion, and euthanasia as progress, Chesterton denounced them as pure evil.[52] Intellectuals shunned the glories of old Christendom as fantasy and clove to modernism. Chesterton worked to convince the world to turn back from the deadening effects of this new order and return to the virtues of the medieval church. Just as Don Quixote sought to reverse the faithless regress of his day, Chesterton sought to fight modern malaise and restore the noble and exuberant Christianity of the middle ages.

In *G.K. Chesterton: A Criticism*, Cecil Chesterton, GKC's younger brother, gives us a well-informed take on Chesterton's work and focus. He writes,

> [Chesterton] has a certain vision of a normal human life, and in his view reforms and revolutions must be undertaken not for the purpose of helping mankind on its march to an unattained ideal, but in helping it back to a sanity and health away from which it is constantly tending to fall. This sanity and health… he finds, for example, in the best period of the Middle Ages, a period which he eulogizes to an extent which must startle and shock the ordinary modern man, especially when coming from a professed liberal.[53]

Cecil Chesterton confirms our assessment. Chesterton was the man attempting a return to medieval values; the fool charging the windmills. Chesterton had no delusions of utopia, he merely recognized a dystopia unfolding and worked to reverse the damage.

Chesterton was also a shameless propagandist. He latched on to basic truths and relentlessly pushed them throughout his life. He tended to use blunt-force trauma in his battle against the age. Subtlety was not his strength. As Cecil remarks, "He wants to give every idea a feather and a sword, and a trumpet to blow and a good ringing voice to speak."[54] Chesterton tends to dress philosophies up as characters rather than give his characters philosophy.

Blatant proselytization didn't embarrass Quixote, neither did it embarrass Chesterton. Like Quixote, Chesterton was committed to one central mission that became ingrained into everything he wrote or said. Quixote never stops expounding the glory of the old knights and Chesterton never stops pushing his love of wonder and loathing of modernity. As the Nicaraguan president in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* notes, "Every man is dangerous who cares only for one thing."[55] This was certainly true for Chesterton. He was not ashamed to say the same thing twice, or even five times or twenty times. He was an open opponent of modernity. Cecil remarks, "Mr. Chesterton stands for… Catholicism with its back against the wall, the hunger of a perplexed age for the more lucid life of the Ages of Faith, for the revolt against Modernity."[56] In Chesterton's mind, much of man's so called progress is only decay in disguise.

Chesterton recognized that the world does not move happily forward on its own. It will deteriorate unless men choose to change it.[57] Because of this fallenness in nature, the need for revolt is constant. Chesterton expounds this point in *Orthodoxy*, "If you leave a white post alone it will soon be a black post. If you particularly want it to be white you must always be painting it again; that is, you must be always having a revolution."[58] Every time has its own madness. The Christian hero must constantly be in rebellion to reinstitute the old truths. For Chesterton, Quixote was that hero, the man trying to repaint the world white with the virtues of medieval times. But attempts to repaint the fence will always garner some degree of public contempt. The people in Quixote's world don't see the benefit of returning to the fanciful ways of knight errantry. Likewise modern men could not understand Chesterton. Even today his opponents denounce him as

52 G. K. Chesterton and Michael W. Perry, *Eugenics and Other Evils : An Argument Against the Scientifically Organized State,* 1st edition (Seattle: Inkling Books, 2000).
53 Cecil Chesterton, *G.K. Chesterton: A Criticism* (London: Alston Rivers, 1908). 175.
54 Ibid. 199.
55 Chesterton and Robertson, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. 47.
56 Chesterton, *G.K. Chesterton: A Criticism.* xi-xii.
57 Ibid.
58 Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*. 122.

foolish and flippant. Christopher Hitchens called him "unserious and frivolous" at times and "sinister" at others.[59]

Like Quixote, Chesterton was branded as a fool. Like Quixote, he saw the knights of old as heroes and denounced the derision they received from his contemporaries. In his essay *The New Jerusalem* he writes:

> I heard the local legend, which says it is here that some of the Christian knights made their last stand after they lost Jerusalem and which names this height The Mountain of the Latins… They fell, and the ages rolled on them the rocks of scorn; they were buried in jests and buffooneries. As the Renascence expanded into the rationalism of recent centuries, nothing seemed so ridiculous as to butcher and bleed in a distant desert not only for a tomb, but an empty tomb. The last legend of them withered under the wit of Cervantes, though he himself had fought in the last Crusade at Lepanto...
>
> ...Great men and small have agreed to contemn them; they were renounced by their children and refuted by their biographers; they were exposed, they were exploded, they were ridiculed and they were right.
>
> ...Centuries after their fall the full experience and development of political discovery has shown beyond question that they were right. For there is a very simple test of the truth; that the very thing which was dismissed, as a dream of the ages of faith, we have been forced to turn into a fact in the ages of fact.[60]

The old Christian knights fought and died for the kingdom. Modern times have tarnished their memory. But those knights were right, they knew what was worth fighting for. Chesterton's claim is clear: we must return to the strength and nobility of the knights of old.

59 Christopher Hitchens, "The Reactionary," The *Atlantic*, March 2012, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/03/the-reactionary/308889/.

60 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *The New Jerusalem* (George H. Doran Company, 1921). 265.

Quixote bases his entire life and mission on the "chivalric tales" he read in his library. Throughout his adventures, Quixote butts up against people who don't believe that those knights ever existed. They mock him for believing what they consider to be thoughtless old tales of vanity from a more credulous time. Don Quixote is constantly dealing with a population that has lost faith. Quixote based his core beliefs on a collection of stories; stories that everyone else told him were just myths. Chesterton found himself in the same boat. As new secular biblical scholarship scoffed and derided biblical historicity, Chesterton was constantly called on to defend what others told him were just tall tales.

Quixote tried to fight his accusers with bloated eloquence. Chesterton chose to battle biblical skepticism with a few shots of satire. Describing the activities of an atheist character in *The Ball and the Cross,* Chesterton writes, "He read how the Mesopotamians had a god named Sho (sometimes pronounced Ji), and that he was described as being very powerful, a striking similarity to some expressions about Jahveh, who is also described as having power."[61] He makes a similar jab in *The Return of Don Quixote*,

> But as the Bible said somewhere that somebody drove away forty-seven camels, Professor Elk was able to spread the great and glad news that in the Hittite account of what was evidently the same incident, the researches of the learned Herne had already deciphered a distinct allusion to only forty camels; a discovery which gravely affected the foundations of Christian cosmology and seemed to many to open alarming and promising vistas in the matter of the institution of marriage.[62]

Chesterton mocked the smug academics who claimed to stand above the tales of various "primitive" religions. He battled the same naysayers as Quixote, men who saw the old tales as a bunch of stories made up for fun a long time ago. Men like Hitchens saw the mission of Chesterton and Quixote as charming but ultimately irrelevant—

61 Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross*. 85.

62 Chesterton, *The Return Of Don Quixote*. 20.

the old tales are just myth, the fantasies of man's infancy. But for Chesterton, the dull monotony of contemporary thought is the shadow. The romantic chivalry of old Christendom is the vibrant reality.

Critics accuse both Quixote and Chesterton of turning to wonder and romanticism merely because they have been steeped in it. Chesterton addresses this issue in his autobiography.

> If some laborious reader of little books on child-psychology cries out to me in glee and cunning, "You only like romantic things like toy-theatres because your father showed you a toy-theatre in your childhood," I shall reply with gentle and Christian patience, "Yes, fool, yes. Undoubtedly your explanation is, in that sense, the true one. But what you are saying, in your witty way, is simply that I associate these things with happiness because I was so happy. It does not even begin to consider the question of why I was so happy. Why should looking through a square hole, at yellow pasteboard, lift anybody into the seventh heaven of happiness at any time of life? Why should it specially do so at that time of life? That is the psychological fact that you have to explain; and I have never seen any sort of rational explanation.[63]

Chesterton does not love romantic chivalry because of "early childhood exposure." He clings to the stories of the knights because there is a strong aspect in which they are true. In his commentary on Chaucer, Chesterton writes, "But there is more in it than that; for man lives by his devouring appetite for morality. The chivalric romance does really represent the Christian conception of life, which is at once a Quest, a Test and an Adventure. And the decorative allegories, that seem so dead to us, were once alive like a dance with the balanced morality of the Middle Ages."[64] Chivalric romance is the Christian life. The Christian hero stands up to challenge the dragon. As foolish as he may be, Don Quixote never shirks this responsibility; whether it's lions or bandits or duels, Quixote steps straight into the fray. Even his critics recognize his courage. Quixote's tombstone reads, "a doughty gentleman lies here; / a stranger all his life to fear."[65] Like Quixote, Chesterton saw a deficit of this sort of courage. In a world where thinkers were edging away from absolute truth, Chesterton recognized the need for people who are willing to take a stand, even if it means taking a beating. He understood that the heroic aspects of Don Quixote really are heroic aspects of an ideal Christian hero and sought to embody the same attributes. He recognized that being a Christian often means playing the fool—standing against tide and enduring the mockery of the majority.

63 G. K. Chesterton and Randall Paine, *The Autobiography of G.K. Chesterton* (San Francisco, Calif: Ignatius Pr, 2006). 42.

64 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Chaucer* (Faber & Faber, 1959). 157.

A Challenge

So far we've seen how Chesterton's characters and Chesterton himself embodied the virtues found in the soft reading of *Don Quixote*. Still, we might raise the question, "Are Chesterton's characters *intentional* types of Don Quixote or did Chesterton simply come up with the same themes on his own?" Newton and Leibniz each independently invented calculus —this stuff happens. Chesterton himself warns us against playing little "free association" games with themes and authors, creating imaginary connections. It may be fun to play connect-the-dots and draw our own picture, but what we end up with may not always be the reality.

This is not the case with Chesterton and Cervantes. Chesterton makes numerous direct references that openly acknowledge Cervantes' presence in his work. His heroes often reach a point where they find themselves overcome with a vague sensation that, perhaps, they represent Don Quixote. In *The Ball and the Cross*, Chesterton writes "MacIan could not rid himself of the fancy of bestriding a steed; the long, grey coping of the wall shot out in front of him, like the long, grey neck of some nightmare Rosinante. He had the quaint thought that he and Turnbull were two knights on one steed on the old shield of the Templars."[66] At other times, Chesterton's allusions are more subtle. In *The Man Who Was Thursday*, he writes, "The sword-stick became almost the sword of chivalry, and the brandy the wine of the stirrup-cup.

65 Saavedra, *Don Quixote*. 984.

66 Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross*. 258.

For even the most dehumanized modern fantasies depend on some older and simpler figure."[67] Chesterton also drops direct references to Quixote in his poetry, most notably in *Lepanto*. One of Chesterton's poems referencing "knight-errantry" dates back to ca. 1890-1892—Chesterton easily could have had exposure to Don Quixote by the age of sixteen.[68] Even in his biographies of Aquinas and Francis of Assisi, he compares the two monks to *Don Quixote* and Sancho Panza. It's nearly impossible to read through one of Chesterton's novels without running across an allusion to *Don Quixote* in some form or another.

Clearly, Chesterton's imitation was intentional. But what did he write about *Don Quixote* itself? Chesterton rarely wrote commentary on *Quixote* directly. To find Chesterton's explicit opinion, we need to go back to 1901. At that time, the only books Chesterton had published were two small collections of poetry, *Greybeards at Play* and *The White Knight*. It would still be years before he began writing his fiction and apologetic works. It was at this point that Chesterton wrote a piece for the *Daily News* entitled "The Divine Parody of *Don Quixote*."[69] In it, we get a candid look at Chesterton's perspective on *Don Quixote* as he stood on the verge of his literary career.

Chesterton begins his review by acknowledging the inherent ironic aspect of *Don Quixote*. He notes the same paradoxical tendency that Grossman saw: at times, both Quixote and his persecutors seem to be in the right. He writes, "Deep underneath all the superficial wit and palpable gaiety of the story there runs a far deeper kind of irony—an irony that is older than the world. It is the irony that tells us that we live in a maddening and perplexing world…"[70] There is a sense in which Cervantes crafted a somewhat balanced literary paradox, a story where both sides could be right.

Chesterton goes on to give us his creed on *Don Quixote*:

> For the core of the truth is that we have the follies of Don Quixote in our very blood; we are by irrevocable generation children of the Middle Ages. Adventure and ceremonial, chivalry and idolatry, fantastic pride and a fantastic humility lie at the very root of our institutions and in the inmost chamber of our imagination.[71]

Quixotism is in our veins. Everyone's perspective is ultimately tied to the medieval culture that we came out of. Chesterton continues,

> Cervantes with a fearless realism, led his hero almost a dance of degradation through the man-traps and cross-purposes of the coarse world, rolled him in ditches and beat him with cudgels. But the fact remains that we all read *Don Quixote* because we are all knights-errant; we read it for the sake of Don Quixote's dream, and without that dream the whole story would be as flat and common as the chronicles of Camden Town.[72]

Don Quixote isn't just satire, and it shouldn't be dismissed as such. Chesterton sees the reality behind Quixote's persecution. For the sake of his mission, Quixote endures beatings, floggings, stonings, imprisonment.[73] It all sounds vaguely familiar. Chesterton reads Don Quixote as the Christian hero: the man who makes it his mission to fight the evil of his day regardless of consequence. He concludes,

> Don Quixote then, is a part of all of us, and a part which will always remain and give a great deal of trouble to any persons who wish to tie us up finally in any political constitution or synthetic philosophy. The knight figures in Cervantes' romance as the foe of that civilization which thinks that everything is best trusted to an institution. In the story, he is the last individual.[74]

Everyone worth their salt has a little Don Quixote in them and that quixotic spirit is what keeps us free from mad systems and domineering institutions.

Chesterton ingrained the themes of *Don Quixote* in every aspect of his work because he saw that ultimately, they were the themes

67 Chesterton and Lethem, *The Man Who Was Thursday*. 48.
68 Chesterton, *Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton.* 28.
69 G. K. Chesterton, *A Handful of Authors* (London, England ; New York, N.Y., USA: Sheed and Ward, 1969).
70 G. K. Chesterton, *A Handful of Authors*. 25.
71 Ibid. 27.
72 Ibid.
73 Edwin Iverson, "Don Quixote" (lecture, New Saint Andrews College, Moscow, ID, September 1, 2014).
74 Ibid.

of the Christian life. Men will persecute, mock, and beat you. They will call you a mad fool. But the madness of the Christian is not folly, it is sanity and health. Human "progress" will always fall flat and the need for the fool's revolution will always be present. This is why Chesterton's heroes are madmen. This is why they are revivalists. Through his fiction, Chesterton sought to retell the story from the madman's perspective. Through his life, he sought to lead society back to the virtues it had lost: to convince the world of the mistake it made in abandoning old Christendom.

The Joke Becomes Reality

Hard critics of *Don Quixote* like Erich Auerbach or P.E. Russell might wring their hands. In their view, Chesterton got Cervantes all wrong. From the perspective of the hard critics, Chesterton molded his writing on a mistake, a simple misreading of the authorial intent in *Don Quixote*.

Through the lens of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and *The Return of Don Quixote*, we learn how Chesterton saw his own relationship with Cervantes. In *The Return of Don Quixote*, Herne remarks,

> They say I am behind the times, and living in the days that Don Quixote dreamed of. They seem to forget that they themselves are at least three hundred years behind the times and living in the days when Cervantes dreamed of Don Quixote. They are still living in the Renaissance; in what Cervantes naturally regarded as the New Birth… Cervantes thought that Romance was dying and that Reason might reasonably take its place. But I say that in our time Reason is dying.[75]

Chesterton does not actually believe that Cervantes intended the soft reading in *Don Quixote*. In his mockery, Cervantes was merely following the ideas of his own day—ideas that are now obsolete. Again in his essay, *On Humor*, Chesterton notes that Cervantes meant to mock chivalry, in fact, he says Cervantes' mockery was the final nail in its coffin.[76] Chesterton freely acknowledges his apostasy from Cervantes' original goal. The times have changed, he says, now modernity is the outdated code that must be put to rest.

The plot of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* gives us additional insight into Chesterton's relationship with Cervantes. In it, Auberon Quin, the acting King of England, creates a nationwide joke. In mockery of the "arrogance" of medieval ways, he decrees that all the people of London must don medieval apparel and heraldry.[77] Quin is only making a joke; a mockery of chivalric stupidity. As I noted earlier, a young man named Adam Wayne takes the facade seriously. Instead of seeing the medieval flags as a mockery he sees them as a return to nobility and rallies the people to reclaim the glory of past ages. Through his sincerity and enthusiasm, Wayne succeeds in starting a mass revival of chivalry. Adam Wayne, the fool, takes Quin's satire as genuine and brings the mockery to fruition. The joke becomes reality.

Don Quixote was Cervantes' joke. In it he mocks the fool who tried to foil progress and bring back the dark ages. He told a tall tale about a madman's revival and Chesterton was the fool who believed him. Where one man saw futility, the other saw glory. Cervantes' joke became Chesterton's reality.

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75 Chesterton, *The Return Of Don Quixote*. 169.

76 Chesterton, *On Lying in Bed and Other Essays by G.K. Chesterton*. 138.

77 Chesterton and Robertson, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. 72.

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