most destruction without giving way to pity and resignation. "*I assess the power of a will by how much resistance, pain, torture it endures and knows how to turn to its advantage*" (*WP* 382). Like Don Quixote, the best pessimists have a strength of character and a sense of humor—for this world, both are needed.

Chapter Six

CERVANTES AS EDUCATOR

DON QUIXOTE AND THE PRACTICE OF PESSIMISM

Don Quixote . . . is an allegory of the life of every man who, unlike others, will not be careful merely for his own personal welfare, but pursues an objective, ideal end that has taken possession of his thinking and willing; and then, of course, in this world he looks queer and odd.
—ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

Today we read *Don Quixote* with a bitter taste in our mouths, almost with a feeling of torment, and would thus seem very strange and incomprehensible to its author and his contemporaries: they read it with the clearest conscience in the world as the most cheerful of books, they laughed themselves almost to death over it.
—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

IN THE last chapter, I depicted Nietzsche's Dionysian pessimism as an ethic of radical possibility linked to radical insecurity. The lack of natural boundaries both between and within humans permits, simultaneously, our capacity for novelty and distinctiveness as well as our capacity for enormous cruelty. We cannot, on this account, have one without the other. But if Dostoevsky provides a horrible image of what such a world would look like, he does not offer the only one. As the quotations above indicate, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer before him, felt a profound affinity between the worlds they describe in philosophy and the one Cervantes created in *Don Quixote*. Nor are they the only pessimists to have done so. Both Miguel de Unamuno and José Ortega y Gasset devoted entire books to this text.[1] Leopardi praised Cervantes and spoke of his desire to

[1] Miguel de Unamuno, *Our Lord Don Quixote* (orig. 1905); José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote* (orig. 1914); Unamuno's is a page-by-page commentary, Ortega y Gasset's, as his title suggests, is a more thematic reflection. As the remainder of the chapter will make clear, my interpretation of Quixote owes a great deal to their efforts. Since I have discussed Unamuno at some length in chapter 4, more attention is given here to Ortega y Gasset's interpretation as a way to expand the reader's understanding of the pessimistic tradi-

imitate him (*P* 17). Cioran called the Knight of the Mournful Countenance "the most truthful image ever created of man" (*SHD* 83). And given his other references to Cervantes, Camus may well have had the book in mind when he wrote: "The novel is born at the same time as the spirit of rebellion and expresses, on the aesthetic plane, the same ambition" (*R* 259; cf. 276). That *Don Quixote* has attracted and continues to inspire pessimistic readers and readings would be enough reason to probe it further in this context. But the main benefit of such an investigation will be the ability of this fiction to aid in generating a picture of what it might mean to lead a pessimistic life, as well as to understand the relation between such a life and pessimistic writing.

Of course, as the quotations above indicate, different pessimists have read *Don Quixote* in different ways and it will not be my concern here to reconcile these various readings. But the uniform praise of this novel by the pessimists should cause us to wonder at the source of the commonplace understanding of its protagonist as an enemy of pessimism. Though the reader may reflexively think of Don Quixote as an inveterate optimist, charging at windmills and the like, I would suggest that this has more to do with the popularity of the musical *Man of La Mancha* than with Cervantes's actual text. Whatever merits this lachrymose bit of theater may possess, fidelity to the spirit of *Don Quixote* is not actually one of them. If anything, *Man of La Mancha* resembles the heavy-handed, Wagnerian operatic romanticism that Nietzsche so feared being associated with. Though I am not concerned here with cultural analysis, the reworking that *Don Quixote* receives in *Man of La Mancha* is an interesting example of the kind of imperialism of optimism that has succeeded in making pessimism invisible today. As Nietzsche reminds us, however, Cervantes's book was received by its first readers as a bright comedy and was, indeed, internationally successful on that basis.[2] While we cannot read too much into this success, I want to at least suggest that the popularity and influence of *Don Quixote* are at least an interesting piece of evidence against the oft-repeated canard that pessimism must somehow be an elite or minority perspective. Though it is never really stated why this should be so, one suspects that, in an American public culture that is both optimistic and democratic, there is a tendency to assume that these two traits have some kind of elective affinity. But *Don Quixote* in its time was far more

tion. I regret that I cannot, otherwise, give Ortega y Gasset's writing the attention it deserves in this volume.

[2] Published in 1605, *Don Quixote* was an immediate bestseller. The first edition sold out almost instantaneously and it was then reprinted several times and very quickly translated into other European languages; Cervantes became a kind of literary celebrity. So successful was the book that it inspired several very modern phenomena, namely, pirated editions and at least one unauthorized sequel (which Cervantes lampoons and derides in his own sequel).

successful than *Man of La Mancha* has been in ours, so we should at least consider the possibility that this assumption is wrong.

The purpose of this chapter, however, is to use Cervantes to further illuminate the Dionysian pessimism described in the previous chapter and, in the process, to give some substance to the idea of a "pessimistic ethic"—a term that I have used but that might, on its face, strike some as an oxymoron. An "ethic," after all, suggests a way of living and pessimism has often been taken to suggest a withdrawal from life as such. It is the latter characterization, of course, that this book means to question. While pessimism does indeed suggest to us that we must lower, indeed abandon, many of our expectations about what is possible, it need not, I have claimed, prescribe an attitude of resignation. As I argued in the last chapter, Nietzsche's pessimism issues in a "quest for the fearful and questionable." Quixote's journey, I maintain here, can serve as a useful exemplification of that idea. His is a quest motivated neither by an anthropological curiosity to explore the alien nor by an imperial desire to conquer it, but rather by something else. Quixote, to give a preliminary formulation, having transformed himself into something new, can be understood as seeking to bring the example of himself into an encounter with those who have not heard of him and, in doing so, to make it possible for others to transform themselves in a similar fashion. And in this he is, in a strictly limited way, successful—even if by every conventional standard his quest is a failure. One of the most remarkable things about the text, as I discuss below, is the way in which many characters, having initially described Don Quixote as "mad," eventually choose to adopt his way of looking at the world or, at least, desist from attempting to dissuade him of it. Even when they do not adopt his goals, they come to admire his example, as does the reader. His presence has (often literally) a liberating effect on those with whom he comes into contact, even if after being liberated they do not follow him.

"Become who you are," a phrase adopted from Pindar, was Nietzsche's strange counsel to his readers in the fourth book of *The Gay Science*. He describes those who follow this path as "human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves" (*GS* 335). This depiction of the sort of human Nietzsche's philosophy aims at is also, I would contend, perfectly apt for Don Quixote, for Quixote can be said to deserve each one of these adjectives and phrases. That he is unique and incomparable is something the novel remarks upon hundreds of times: there is simply no one else like him, no one crazy enough to act as he acts and speak as he speaks. That he gives himself laws cannot be questioned either: it is the defining act of Quixote's character that he adopts a code of chivalry that is currently in force nowhere—and in so doing, renames and transforms himself. "Quixote" (literally, the piece of

armor that protects the thigh) is a name that Cervantes's character gives himself in the first pages of the book, abandoning his given name of Quijada (or Quesada or Quejana—Cervantes is purposely vague on this point, presumably to thwart us from referring to it as his character's "real" name).

Though Quixote himself does not believe his code to be "new" (he claims to have adopted it from the past), this is the one area in which he is gravely mistaken. The narratives that he takes to be the records of past heroism are in fact poetic fabulations. Although there were actual knights-errant in Spain, and records of their deeds, these were not the "books of chivalry" that Quixote is said to have read. Quixote's books were popular fictions with as much resemblance to history (and with a parallel place in the literary culture of the time) as modern romance novels. If Quixote followed a code of knight-errantry, he was the first to do so in this fashion. At first glance then, Nietzsche's formulation finds a rough instantiation in Don Quixote.[3] As to what it *means* to say that Quixote has "created himself," that is obviously the crucial question to which we shall return.

We can say immediately, however, that at all times Cervantes keeps us focused on the costs of such a self-transformation. He does not depict it as a joyous or undifficult process—most of the time, Quixote is neither happy nor "gay," though he often expresses a kind of pacific satisfaction with his quest and its results. Not only does Quixote suffer the physical costs of his many unsuccessful adventures, he also suffers from the separation from the rest of humanity that his new practice of self inevitably brings. That Quixote does not always consciously register these costs (sometimes he does, other times not) does not mean that the reader is meant to ignore them. The "real Quixotism," as Ortega y Gasset put it, "is that of Cervantes, not that of Don Quixote" (1961, 52).[4] But neither

[3] There are further parallels one could pursue. As many commentators have noted, Nietzsche's "Gay Science" derives from the literary culture of the Provençal troubadors (on his title page, in the second edition, the German *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* is followed by the Latinate "*la gaya scienza*") and refers, loosely, to their art of poetry (*la gai saber*). It was this same culture, of course, that produced the books of chivalry that are Quixote's initial inspiration. One could press the point still further (if more speculatively): *The Gay Science* is the only one of Nietzsche's books to be both preceded and followed by verses, which is also the case with *Don Quixote*—and this is *also* the case with the books of chivalry that both Cervantes and Nietzsche mean to mock and imitate, in varying degrees.

[4] This puts Ortega y Gasset at odds with Unamuno, who proclaimed his desire to "free Don Quixote from Cervantes" (*OLDQ* xxix). Unamuno's ecstatic interpretation thus reflects, and is intended to reflect, more Unamuno then Cervantes.

It should be noted that this "Quixotism of Cervantes" is not at all the same thing as Cervantes's politics, which, as far as can be determined, seem to have been quite conventional for his time—royalist, Catholic, and, to some extent, militaristic (Cervantes had been a soldier at Lepanto) and aristocratic (though perhaps it could be said that he favored an aristocracy of the spirit rather than one of blood or custom). Nonetheless, in this work, he created an outlook that was much greater than the sum of these parts.

does Cervantes suggest that his protagonist is simply a fool. Even more so than Nietzsche, Cervantes has no particular hope of reforming the dismal and corrupt world into which he was born; he seeks only to resist and survive it, and to do so with a modicum of dignity and self-respect. In Quixote, he offers an example of how to do so and, what is more, to have an experience of freedom in the process. Quixote's quest is an art of living, not in the sense that it produces anything beautiful, but in the sense that it is a means of coping with a world that is chaotic, unpredictable, "fearful and questionable," and, therefore, incapable of preserving anything good.

If Quixote hopes, at first, to right wrongs with a wave of his noble sword, the sad truth about the world eventually destroys that expectation, both in him and in the reader. But if the narratives of chivalry that Cervantes mocks have been a dubious education for Quixote, *that is not at all the case for Quixote's own narrative of chivalry*, which is an education for Sancho Panza and, through him, for the rest of us. And, as certain episodes in the novel suggest (particularly those in which Sancho is called upon to govern), it is even a useful *political* education. For Sancho, the unlettered peasant, to the surprise of everyone, governs wisely when given the opportunity. The justice that the insane Quixote is unable to effect with the sword, Sancho brings about through a sane and brave administration inspired by Quixote's example. Sancho's success is limited (indeed, ultimately it is destroyed), but it is (temporarily) genuine. For a time, Sancho organizes a small portion of the universe under something like a decent political regime. And all the characters in the novel, except Quixote, find this astounding.

Though Cervantes, of course, was not a Nietzschean, it is fair, I believe, to characterize the universe he created as a pessimistic vision and to say that his book aims at a goal that pessimists would recognize (and have recognized)—a mode of action that acknowledges the insuperable barriers that time-bound existence throws up against justice and happiness, but which does not respond to this situation with resignation. *Don Quixote* represents what I am terming a "practice of pessimism," a mode of conduct and action founded on an absence of expectation and hope. Cervantes is not a Nietzschean; can we understand Nietzsche as a *cervantista*?

. . . . . .

Political theorists concerned to articulate a radical alternative to the status quo have often embarked on historical expeditions, most frequently

to ancient Greece, but also to such places as the republican city-states of early modern Italy. Though wisely hedged round with caveats, there can be little doubt that the aim of such writers is, in some sense, to reintroduce premodern values into the modern world. This attempt is exactly what Cervantes lampoons in the figure of Don Quixote. Quixote has a headful of faux-medieval "values" that he has learned only from the study of old books, which themselves turn out to be full of lies. When he attempts to act on these values in the modern world, which knows nothing about them and cares little when informed, the effects are regularly comic. This is Cervantes's initial point: he believes the "detestable books of chivalry" then popular in Spain (such as the *Amadis of Gaul*) to be a pernicious influence on the public. Yet, miraculously, by the end of the book, Don Quixote, for all his craziness, has come to seem one of the saner people in the jaded, unsentimental, early modern Spain that the novel depicts. What, then, is admirable or worthy of imitation in Don Quixote, if not his attempt to import premodern values into the modern world? If Cervantes means, through the figure of Don Quixote, to educate us, what is it he means for us to learn?

Don Quixote is thoroughly modern in its acknowledgment of and reliance on linear time. It is for this reason that some literary critics have referred to it as the first true novel.[5] As with the texts discussed in the earlier chapters, however, it is unusual in rejecting both progressive and eschatological versions of such time. If pessimism consists in accepting the burdens of linear time, without being broken by them or seeking to escape them, then *Don Quixote* is a book that seeks to exemplify what a pessimistic ethic might look like. In what follows, I will lay out several ways in which Quixote embodies the attitude toward life that emerges from this perspective, a practice of pessimism that is active rather than resigned, one that contains "joy in what is coming and lies in the future, which triumphs over existing things, however good" (*WP* 417).

Don Quixote, of course, is an immense book, dense in allusions, references, and meanings, most of which I will not even touch on in this short chapter. My intention is not to offer a complete interpretation of this

[5] This characterization was perhaps more common a generation ago than today. Debates about what would constitute the "first" novel have become more complicated and admit of no clear answer, especially since there is no agreed-upon list of characteristics for a "novel." However, *Don Quixote* is still accurately characterized as the first extended prose narrative in a European language shorn of mythical or supernatural elements and roughly respecting modern novelistic conventions, especially those of linear time. Carlos Fuentes has recently reaffirmed the "first-novel" characterization with the argument that the book "really inaugurates what we understand modern fiction to be—a reflection of our presence in the world as problematic beings in an unending history" (2003, 15b).

work, but rather to demonstrate how it can be usefully and not incorrectly understood as an illuminating instance of the sort of pessimistic perspective I described in the previous chapter. It will thus help us to fill out a description of what pessimism can mean as a lived philosophy.

Don Quixote's Struggle with Time

By several devices, Cervantes indicates to us that Don Quixote's true enemy is not anyone he meets up with on the road, or the dragons or giants that he imagines confront him, or even the modern world as a whole, but rather, as with Nietzsche, time itself. "Human affairs are not eternal," he writes, "but all tend ever downwards from their beginning to end, above all man's life" (*DQ* 2:74).[6] Don Quixote's adventures take place, not in the timeless arena of myth like that of the premodern books of chivalry he has read, but in a very real world where the passage of time takes its toll on the characters. Beyond the accumulating injuries and ultimate death that beset Don Quixote, this threat manifests itself most frequently as a disruption of narrative. In addition to the main plot, *Don Quixote* is a book full of other, subsidiary stories (which often go on for several chapters), some related by characters in the main plot, others presented as whole texts that have been found by chance and read out. One of the most remarkable things about these various stories is that they are regularly threatened with noncontinuance. That is, circumstances conspire to break off the tales and end them prematurely, before they can be properly concluded. Most are then resumed later, but not without some effort or sheer luck. Thus, for example, in part I the story of Cardenio is broken off in chapter 24 when its speaker is rudely interrupted by Don Quixote, even though the latter has been explicitly warned that such an interruption may lead to a fit of madness on the part of the teller and thus halt the story. The reader is thus left hanging for several chapters until

[6] *Don Quixote* is notorious for the different levels of narration that exist side-by-side in the text, making it very difficult to say when, if ever, Cervantes is speaking directly. I cannot, at each instance of citation, discuss my reasons for believing the quotation in question to reflect an authentic concern of the author—that, in any case, is not my main concern. I can only say that, as in any circumstance with this sort of hermeneutic barrier, it is my understanding of the meaning of the whole that has, in turn, shaped my choice, and analysis, of the various portions of the text I discuss directly. I would thus ask the reader to suspend the question of the status of any particular passage until they can assess the larger understanding that is laid out in this entire chapter. Note that throughout this chapter I use the italicized title *Don Quixote* to refer to the text as a whole and the unitalicized name Don Quixote to refer to its protagonist.

Cardenio (who runs off) can be tracked down and persuaded to continue in chapter 27. Similarly, in chapter 35, the reading of a manuscript is interrupted by "the heroic and prodigious battle Don Quixote had with certain skins of red wine" while sleepwalking. Only when the hero is awakened, calmed down, and some claims against him settled is the reading concluded. With each of these embedded narratives, then, the reader has the experience of wondering, not merely *what* the dénouement will be, but *whether* she will even see the end of the tale.

From these examples, it might be thought that Cervantes is merely pointing to the fragility of narratives and using this device to heighten suspense and, indeed, both are doubtless part of his concern. But the point is deepened when we consider that Don Quixote's *own story*, the main plot of the book, is similarly threatened with disruption. Book 1 of the novel ends at a particularly dramatic moment.[7] Don Quixote and another man are charging at one another, swords raised. On the first pages of book 2, however, the unnamed narrator does not complete the episode but instead tells us of his problems in continuing. He admits that he has been working from a manuscript, but the manuscript has broken off and he has been unable to locate the succeeding chapters. He does not for a moment doubt that the story exists somewhere, but perhaps it has fallen a victim to time: "I could not bring myself to believe that such a gallant tale had been left maimed and mutilated. I laid the blame on Time, devourer and destroyer of all things, which had either concealed or consumed it" (*DQ* 1:9). Eventually, he runs across the rest of the manuscript, by chance, in the bazaar in Toledo, buys it, and then the story can continue. But a crucial point has been made: what can really bring Don Quixote to a halt (even in the midst of a battle where he is apparently threatened with death by another character) is no corporeal enemy but time itself. Don Quixote's struggle is to have his story continue; his success is that he lives from day to day (or page to page) until his natural death arrives.[8]

As if to underline the point, Cervantes gives us an example of a story that does *not* get finished—and this story is one told early on by Sancho Panza, one who is in need of Don Quixote's instruction. Sancho begins to tell a story in which a goatherd is ferrying a pack of goats across a river,

[7] Part 1 of the novel is composed of four books, perhaps in imitation of *Amadis of Gaul*; Part 2 is undivided.

[8] The resumption of the story is even more complicated than my summary can convey. The found manuscript is said to be in Arabic, which the narrator must pay to have translated. Between the unknown Arabic author, the translator, and the narrator (all of whom, at various points, speak directly and none of whom are in the least objective), the reader is at least triply removed from the "events" of Don Quixote's life, a distance Cervantes seems very concerned to emphasize.

one at a time. For some reason it is necessary to mention the passage of each goat individually, "he came back and carried another one; he came back again, and again brought over another—let your worship keep count of the goats the fisherman is taking across, for if one escapes my memory there will be an end of the story" (*DQ* 1:20). Sure enough, when Don Quixote loses count of these goats, Sancho *forgets* the rest of story. "So then," asks Don Quixote, "the story has come to an end?" Sancho's plain answer is: "As much as my mother has." It does not take too much imagination to postulate that these goats, ferried across a river, represent the days of our lives, where one passes each day from the bank of the future to the bank of the past over the flowing water that is the present—with the whole held together only by memory. And Sancho directly likens the abrupt ending of the story to death. In contrast to Don Quixote, Sancho is unable to finish his story, and this disruption is compared to the real end of our lives brought on by time.

Time is the true enemy of the knight and the end of narrative symbolizes its power. The problem is not just that narratives end—all narratives end as all lives must end. The threat is that they will do so abruptly or prematurely; the destruction and turmoil caused by time are not just problems that we face at the end of our life but on a daily basis, even when we are busy with other things. Don Quixote succeeds where Sancho fails in staving off the demise of his narrative and in giving his narrative a coherence that the abruptly terminated story lacks. From this perspective, Don Quixote's charge at the windmills, the first of his adventures, and the one that has become emblematic for the entirety of his endeavor, takes on another meaning. Though the phrase "charging at windmills" is now synonymous with an act of futility, that is not the only way to view what happens. The windmills themselves are an apt metaphor for time—turning slowly in the wind at a steady pace, they grind nature into powder between two enormous stones, and from this powder we make the staff of life. When Quixote tilts at this "giant," it picks him up by his lance and flings him to the ground, severely injuring him in the process. But Quixote survives and he is not discouraged; he goes on to his next encounter. This, in itself, is a victory of sorts. In struggling with time, any day you continue to live is a battle won. The lesson need not be the futility of Quixote's efforts (only from an optimistic perspective is he a failure), but his success in avoiding being ground to bits and his further success in having his story survive "the devourer and destroyer of all things" to reach us. Quixote fails in his efforts to bring peace and justice to the world, but he succeeds in remaking himself and in living by his own lights for the natural span of his existence. The novel ends with Quixote's death, but only after he has chosen to bring his travels to a conclusion.

Fixed Values, Narrative Exemplars, and Techniques of the Self

In the opening chapter of part 2,[9] Don Quixote and his friends (who are hoping that he has "recovered" from his earlier behavior) have, we are told, a long philosophical conversation in which everyone agrees he speaks sanely and wisely about politics and in which he and his interlocutors "remodel the state" (we are not told how). Cervantes then has Quixote return to the subject of knight-errantry, which his friends have avoided, and deride the contemporary valuation of "theory over practice" in political matters (*DQ* 2:1). His complaint is not particularly elaborated, but from what follows it appears that he is not concerned with degrees of particularity and abstraction, but rather with something more fundamental, namely, the way in which we come to identify and act on our central values. Instead of looking to works that purport to give timeless rules of political behavior, we would be better off, he maintains, attending to the records of actual participants in politics, like those of the knights-errant that Quixote steadfastly believes to be genuine.

If Don Quixote's death is threatened in the demise of his narrative, the meaning of his life is likewise contained in narrative form. His "values," such as they are, are neither arrived at deductively nor systematically expounded, but rather come to light largely through stories. Despite Quixote's constant repetition of his fidelity to the norms of chivalry, an extended discussion, or even description of those norms, is strangely absent throughout the entire book. Indeed, it would be better to say that Don Quixote does not really have a "theory" or "code" of chivalry at all; what he has are narrative exemplars. When, for example, he is asked directly to describe his system of beliefs, he responds, remarkably, by recounting the history of King Arthur in considerable detail, concluding, "That, sirs, is what it means to be a knight-errant, and that is the order of chivalry I have spoken of. . . . What the aforesaid knights professed that same do I profess" (*DQ* 1:13). But in fact he has said practically *nothing* about what those knights "profess"; he has instead recounted who they were and what they did. For him, that seems to be enough.

If our temporal existence is to be not just a burden to us, but also a structure to which we can both express our fidelity while simultaneously experiencing freedom, as I have been maintaining, then the narrative-based identity that Quixote performs here is helpful in describing how we might go about this. Cervantes's pessimistic ethic is contained in the quest that forms the substance of the novel and this relationship is metonymically related to Quixote's finding his own orientation in relation to the quests which have inspired his. These relationships help us to understand the Nietzschean idea that values have a different form, and not just content, in light of the time-bound character of existence. Insofar as Quixote has created himself and created new values, he has done so out of narratives that preceded him. Even if the books he settled upon were, unfortunately, wildly untrue, his act of self-definition sets him apart from his contemporaries (who never question the values they inherit) and marks him out as a "unique, incomparable" individual. He is unique, no doubt, because his values are not the common ones—but he is "incomparable" because his values and character do not even have the *form* that those of others do. This is perhaps one of the reasons why his adherence to the books of chivalry is so disturbing to his friends, who are otherwise happy to speculate wildly about remodeling the state (Cervantes seems to go out of his way to emphasize this). While Ortega y Gasset attributes the focus on narrative to the book's conformity to the rules of the epic genre (1961, 130), this reading needs, at the least, to be supplemented by reference to the temporal, or protopessimistic, stance toward character and values in which Cervantes's approach is rooted. If time is the fundamental obstacle, then addressing it in narrative form has a power that no systematic philosophy, however moral, can obtain. The book as a whole, of course, is just such a narrative, but, at a further level, Don Quixote is a character whose identity has been shaped by the narratives he encounters, rather than by the laws or rules that he obeyed as Quijada.

Narrative is the form of speech that starts from linear time, and is bound by it; but narrative is also that which preserves what time destroys (that is, the past) and, in that sense, frustrates the destructiveness of time.[10] Certainly, this is the sense of narrative that Camus had in mind when he claimed that a novel like that of Proust can both "reconstruct creation itself, in the form that it is imposed on us" and yet at that same time reject that form and work "against the powers of death and oblivion" (*R* 267–68). It is thus particularly apt that a pessimistic perspective takes its inspiration from narrative exemplars and decries synchronic "theory." Cervantes's approach here anticipates that of Nietzsche in proceeding as if the narrative unity of the self, rather than the consistency of one's beliefs, is the proper goal of human life. Thus Zarathustra can say, "The time is gone when mere accidents could still happen to me" and "I

[9] That is, at the beginning of the sequel to the original novel, published ten years after the first part and now routinely reprinted alongside it.

[10] The sense in which I use "narrative" here is, obviously, a restrictive one. A cycle of events can, of course, be narrated—but in that case, I think it makes more sense to speak of "mythic" discourse rather than narrative per se. I rely here on Hayden White's account of the three levels of narrative utilized by historians, of which the most mature—narrative proper—is strictly bound by modern linear time-conventions. See White 1987, chap. 1.

taught them . . . to create and carry together into one what in human beings is fragment, riddle and dreadful accident" (*Z* 3:1:12).[11] But even beyond Zarathustra's particular declarations, the very idea of Nietzsche depicting his philosophy through a narrative representation, the story of Zarathustra's quest, indicates the broad affinity in approach at work here. When Don Quixote is asked what he believes, he replies with the name of King Arthur; when Nietzsche asks himself the question, he answers with Zarathustra.[12]

In a discussion concerning the best sort of painters, Don Quixote is more explicit about the way in which one should go about learning from the past. Again, it is not a theory or a doctrine that one attempts to glean from history; one simply seeks to imitate what is worthy of imitation: "I say, too, that when a painter desires to become famous in his art, he endeavors to copy the originals of the finest painters that he knows. The same rule holds good for all the most important crafts and callings that serve to adorn a state" (*DQ* 1:25).[13] Foremost among the latter, of course, is the calling of chivalry itself. Little wonder, then, that, when asked to explain himself, Don Quixote will simply invoke some episode or character from *Amadis of Gaul* or *Orlando Furioso*. These two epic narratives are, for him, the equivalent of a visual masterpiece worthy of a student's imitation. Since they are *narratives*, however, and not static images, the imitation of them is not something that can be carried out standing in one place, as it were. Rather, Quixote's art of living simply consists in imitating, that is *living out*, the narrative art that describes previous lives he finds admirable. And what is admirable about such lives are not the fixed values of their subjects but their *activity*, their attempts to change the world.

The greatest change that comes over Don Quixote when he decides to take up knight-errantry is *not* that he becomes more virtuous. Indeed, we are told that in his original persona, he was already known as "Alonso the Good" (*DQ* 2:74). The transformation is from a man who quietly sat at home and read books to one who felt it necessary to travel the world, seeking out injustice and correcting it: "Churchmen in peace and quiet pray heaven for the world's welfare, but we soldiers and knights put into effect what they pray for" (*DQ* 1:13). If these efforts largely come to nothing, it is as much because "our depraved age does not deserve to enjoy such a blessing" (*DQ* 2:1). What Don Quixote learned from these narratives was *not* what to believe, but how to act and, more importantly, *that* he must act. As Alonso, we might say, his ideas were correct and just but his narrative was empty. In becoming Quixote, he transforms himself, not just by leaving his home, but by coming into contact with others and acting both with and against them. His constant encounters with the unfamiliar make his transformation a continuous one, in the fashion, as Ortega y Gasset rightly observes, of epic narrative: "The good is, like nature, an immense landscape in which man advances through centuries of exploration" (1961, 37). But before he became Quixote, Alonso did not explore this landscape at all, something Cervantes emphasizes by recording next to nothing of his life in this earlier condition. It was only when he became Quixote that his life reached the level of narrativisability (exploring not just the "good," as Ortega y Gasset has it, but the "fearful and questionable" as well). Before this, he was just another *hidalgo*, literally, a "son of somebody," which is to say, a nobody. In parallel fashion, when, at the end of the book, he renounces his status as Quixote, now against the wishes of his friends (and the narrator, who will only refer to him as Quixote), he promptly dies.

[11] See Nehamas 1985, chap. 5, esp. 160–69.

[12] The better parallel, perhaps, is with Cervantes himself. In the penultimate paragraph of the novel in the voice of the narrator we read, "For me alone was Don Quixote born, and I for him; it was his to act, mine to write; we two together make but one" (*DQ* 2; 74).

[13] I take the second sentence to indicate that Cervantes means for this idea to have application in the political sphere as well. In fact, the examples Quixote goes on to offer are Homer's depiction of Odysseus and Virgil's of Aeneas.

Quixote as Political Educator

As we would expect from the above discussion, Quixote himself serves as an inspiration to others not as a purveyor of ideas, but as the author of his own actions. Almost all the other characters in the novel determine to "play along" with Don Quixote for one reason or another—that is, to join his plot. At first this strikes the reader as comic happenstance as when, in his first excursion, two prostitutes he meets at an inn take up the role of court maidens, which Quixote has assigned them (*DQ* 1:2). As the novel progresses, however, it becomes clear that this is, in fact, his principal effect on the world. Some play along with Don Quixote because it is in their interest to do so, as with the criminals that he frees on questionable grounds (*DQ* 1:22). Others do so strictly for comic effect, like the Duke who arranges for Don Quixote to encounter the wizard Merlin who will tell him how to disenchant Dulcinea (Sancho must beat himself senseless) (*DQ* 2:35). Still others do so out of concern for Quixote, thinking that, by means of such deceptions they will be able to bring him home.

While this play-acting is the source of much of the novel's comedy, its repetition also suggests another purpose. Ultimately, Don Quixote is an exemplar to the other characters, and if they do not take on the profession of knight-errant, they set about imitating Don Quixote in other ways. Don Fernando, for example, becomes courtly and generous, for once, in Don Quixote's enchanted inn (*DQ* 1:36). Indeed, so enamored does Fer-

nando become with Quixote's perspective that, when others doubt it, he stages a vote among those present in which a clear majority endorse it (*DQ* 1:45). When Cervantes has characters vote and take up arms to defend Don Quixote's view of the world, we have clearly passed beyond the limits of simple satire. The others, it seems, gradually begin to understand how Don Quixote's story is truly a better one than their own, such that, when he renounces knight-errantry on his death-bed, they beg him to recant.

Another way of putting this is to say that Quixote does not persuade anyone of the validity of his ideas, but rather inspires their imitation of his example. The clearest example of this phenomenon is Sancho Panza. Sancho agrees to travel with Quixote because he believes that the journey will make him rich and powerful, but he remains with Quixote long after he has come to realize that he will never attain these goals and indeed, when he no longer has these goals at all. When it is suggested to Sancho that he has been seduced by Don Quixote's ravings, he responds quite sharply: "I have not been seduced by anyone, nor am I a man to let myself be seduced, if it was by the king himself. . . . Each of us is the son of his own works" (*DQ* 1:47). Sancho has *chosen* to follow Quixote, initially perhaps, out of greed, but finally out of admiration and loyalty. Indeed, this very capacity of Sancho's (loyalty) is something new, something he has learned from Quixote himself. And, as we shall see, the kind of protoexistentialism that Sancho now espouses ("each of us is the son of his own works") is also part of Quixote's "code" of knight-errantry that has rubbed off on him.

Sancho's entire journey with Quixote is, of course, a form of education, but there are a few particular episodes that call attention to the nature of this education. Only rarely does Quixote explicitly attempt to "instruct" Sancho (usually he lets his own behavior stand for instruction) but one of these attempts occurs before Sancho takes up the "governorship" to which he has been appointed by the obliging Duke as a joke. The first counsel is, predictably, to fear God, but the next one is more surprising: "Secondly, you must keep in view that you are striving to know yourself, the most difficult thing to know that the mind can imagine" (*DQ* 2:42). Why this Delphic counsel when the challenges that face Sancho are explicitly material and political? Though Quixote goes on to counsel fairness, mercy, modesty, and the like, for him these all follow from self-knowledge. Why? Because for Quixote, knowledge of self is knowledge of one's own limitations—and knowing one's own limitations, one is apt to be more tolerant of the limitations of others. But self-knowledge is not *merely* knowledge of one's limitations. If it were, it would be easy, rather than difficult, to acquire.

Given the narrative conception of identity that we have discussed above, the command that Quixote issues to Sancho is to acquire knowledge that is, at least in part, narrative in character: "Glory in your humble birth, Sancho; and be not ashamed of saying you are peasant-born" (*DQ* 2:42). Although Sancho does not (yet) have much about his person that is worth narrating, we can get some sense of what is involved from Quixote's own self-description. When Quixote proudly proclaims "I know who I am," he follows this statement with the words, "and I know that I may be not only those [several knights] I have named but all the twelve Peers of France and even all the Nine Worthies" (*DQ* 1:5). While it is easy to see how such statements create the impression that Quixote is mad, his identification with the heroes of earlier legends is not senseless if identity itself is something that takes a fundamentally narrative form. Quixote is not delusional; he is not claiming to be a reincarnation of these figures.[14] Rather, he is claiming that his identity is in some sense continuous with theirs. What does this mean? When, in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche claimed to continue the figure of Zarathustra in himself, he did so not because his views were the same as Zarathustra's or because he was a second coming of Zarathustra, but because Zarathustra represented "the self-overcoming of morality, into his opposite—into me," (*EH*, "Destiny" 3). Nietzsche did not seek to impersonate the old Zarathustra. Rather, he contended that he could *redeem* that narrative (that is, in a sense, liberate it) by making it a necessary past to a desirable future, that is, to himself. Similarly, Quixote takes up these old figures, not to lose himself in them, but rather to find himself in them by adding to them, as one adds to a narrative one has inherited.

If Quixote has come to know who he is through his contact with chivalric romances of dubious quality, Sancho, in turn, comes to know who he is through his contact with Quixote, his narrative, and the various other narratives embedded in the text. And, as I mentioned above, the episode of Sancho's governorship suggests that this has been a surprisingly useful political education. When he takes up his post and is confronted with liars and tricksters, Sancho sees through them. When legal cases are brought before him, he is a shrewd judge of the motives and wiles of others. Several of these cases involve, essentially, two lowlifes who accuse one another of having cheated them. Sancho always finds a way to punish both while doing justice to both (*DQ* 2:45, 47, 49). The townspeople, who both present and observe these cases, have not been let in on the Duke's joke and come to have great admiration for Sancho: "In a word, he made so many good rules that to this day they are preserved there, and are called

[14] That would mean that he had previously been Joshua, David, Judas Maccabee, Hector, Alexander, Caesar, Arthur, Charlemagne, and Geoffrey of Bouillon—the traditional "Nine Worthies" (Geoffrey led the First Crusade).

The ordinances of the great governor Sancho Panza" (*DQ* 2:51). Since, up to this point, the reader has been told repeatedly of Sancho's intellectual shortcomings, this is a remarkable transformation.

On Sancho's part, while he first sought a governorship in order to get rich, he later has cause to boast that "without a cent I came into this government, and without a cent I go out of it" (*DQ* 2:53). Once his common sense has been unburdened of greed and ambitions, it is more than adequate to the task at hand. The justice that Quixote is repeatedly unable to effect by force, Sancho brings about through a sensible administration inspired by Quixote's ideals and Sancho's embrace of his own humble background. One of Sancho's "advisers" (planted by the Duke to observe and report on what are expected to be hilarious blunders), is amazed at what he has seen and reports, "Every day we see something new in this world; jokes become realities, and the jokers find the tables turned on them" (*DQ* 2:49). But the lesson is not just that the Duke's mildly sadistic plan has backfired. Quixote's quest for justice, which everyone considers mad and impossible, has shown itself to bear fruit indirectly and in the most unlikely of places. In Don Quixote, quixotism is a joke; in Sancho, it becomes real.

Why is Sancho more successful than Quixote? Perhaps because he knows himself better than Quixote. Quixote claims to continue the personality of the Nine Worthies, but Sancho knows himself only as Sancho, Quixote's squire. Without Quixote's example, he would, perhaps, never have been able to see the value of this. While at the start, Sancho wanted nothing else than to be a governor, by the time he actually takes on the role, he has changed. The Duke suggests that he pick out a new wardrobe when assuming office, but he replies, "Let them dress me as they like. However I'm dressed I'll be Sancho Panza" (*DQ* 2:42). Sancho reassures Quixote that the position will not distort him by saying, "I'd rather go to heaven as Sancho than to hell as a governor." And this draws a rare compliment out of Quixote: "For those last words you uttered alone, I consider you deserve to be governor of a thousand islands" (*DQ* 2:43). In learning from Quixote, Sancho has not become another Quixote, but the first and only Sancho Panza. Following a knight with delusions of grandeur, Sancho has lost his own delusions and become who he is. What success he has in politics stems from this. Sancho's policies are not, perhaps, what we might expect from a pessimist, but the entire episode may perhaps be taken to indicate that the best governor is one with a pessimistic education. Having dismantled his extravagant plans for the future, Sancho is better at seeing each case that comes before him for what it is. In knowing himself, he also knows what justice is.

But the success that Sancho meets with is limited, in more ways than one. First of all, there is the inability of Sancho's state to withstand a violent attack staged by the Duke who put him in power. More importantly, despite Sancho's fitness to govern, he finds the process itself agonizing. An "advisor" concerned with his health refuses to let him eat anything and this symbolizes the lack of reward involved in governing: "I am dying of discouragement, because when I thought I was coming to this government to get hot food and cold drinks, and take my ease between holland sheets on feather beds, I find I have come to do penance as if I was a hermit" (*DQ* 2:51). Sancho has forsworn the acceptance of bribes or any such similar material rewards, so his post is no more rewarding financially than nutritionally. It might be expected, though, that his successful government might give him some feeling of satisfaction. It does not. Sancho, in coming to know himself, learns that the task of government is more than he can bear, nor does Cervantes suggest that another would find it any easier. Sancho leaves his governorship even more hastily than he accepted it.

Finally, Cervantes warns us, in his usual comic fashion, not to become too enamored of Sancho's new-found "wisdom." When Quixote remarks on his improvement, Sancho replies, "It must be that some of your worship's discretion sticks to me. Land that, of itself, is barren and dry, will yield good fruit if you fertilize it and till it. What I mean is that your worship's conversation is the fertilizer [!] that has fallen on the barren soil of my dry wit, and the time I have spent in your service and company has been the tillage" (*DQ* 2:12). This way of putting things sets them in proper perspective. Though Sancho has improved, he has not improved much. At best, he repeats garbled versions of old maxims whose meaning he only half-understands. In imitating Quixote, he has unlearned a few of his worst habits and acquired some better ones. If Sancho is successful at governing, it is as much because an honest half-wit is already a great improvement on the greedy, corrupt, and conniving men who ordinarily hold such posts. Quixote had suggested to Sancho that knowing who he is would be enough for him to govern, and, as Cervantes lets the events unfold, this turns out to be the case. At some level, the joke, which appeared to become real, remains a joke—what more, Cervantes seems to say, could one expect from a chaotic world such as this one? But this attitude too is perfectly consonant with a pessimistic perspective. What we learn from Sancho's government is not how to bring order and justice to the world in any permanent way, but that the attempt to do so is worthwhile.

Quixote's Madness, Narrative, Dionysus

Those who want to help Don Quixote attempt to convince him to return to a common, contemporary narrative, to a world he could more readily

share with others. He simultaneously tempts them to join his plot. The difference is that they, largely, make rational appeals, while he provides an exemplar for them to follow. The actions of each side must appear to the other as madness. What is surprising is not so much the failure of those who attempt to reclaim Quixote, but rather his success in claiming them for his own story.

The one character that attempts to persuade Quixote on his own terms is Sanson Carrasco, who dresses up as a knight in order to best Quixote in a contest of arms and thereby force him to return home. The result, however, is that Carrasco is one of the few who actually loses a physical contest to the aged, weak Quixote. Afterwards, Carrasco's squire remarks, "Don Quixote a madman, and we sane; yet he goes off laughing, safe and sound, and you are left sore and sorry. I'd like to know now which is the madder, the man who is mad because he cannot help it, or the man mad of his own free will?" (*DQ* 2:16). Carrasco, whom we are told is a learned university graduate, is no match for Quixote on the latter's own terms. And the squire pinpoints the reason: the true madness is to pretend to beliefs insincerely. Quixote's outlook is at least his own genuine way of looking at the world, and it is just as (in)effective, in its own way, as Carrasco's. Although Carrasco does ultimately succeed in forcing Quixote home (and is denounced for it: "May God forgive you the wrong you have done the whole world" [*DQ* 2:65]), he too, in the end, becomes an admirer and, on the last pages of the book, gives one of the most fervent pleas for Quixote to take up his role again when the latter renounces it.

Quixote is well aware that he projects an appearance of madness, but he has a simple explanation of how what appears to be madness is largely a matter of perspective. After he has captured the "legendary helmet of Mambrino" from a passing barber, Sancho attempts to convince him that it is, after all, only a barber's basin. Don Quixote denies this, but he is ready to explain Sancho's confusion:

> Is it possible that all this time you have been going about with me you have never found out that all things concerning knights-errant seem to be illusions and nonsense and ravings, and to be done topsy-turvy? And not because it really is so, but because there is always a swarm of enchanters around us who change and alter everything with us and turn things as they please. . . . Thus what seems to you a barber's basin seems to me Mambrino's helmet, and to another it will seem something else. (*DQ* 1:25)

Quixote does not expect the world to appear to others as it appears to him, and not because he is crazy but because such conflict of perspectives is the normal course of things. Thus Quixote does not bridle at the charge of being "mad"; it is only when it is suggested that he has a genuine mental illness that he gets annoyed (*DQ* 2:1). While it would perhaps be going too far to say that Quixote is a "perspectivist" in the Nietzschean sense of this term, it is easy to see how Nietzsche could have perceived in Quixote a kindred spirit. The "swarm of enchanters" that Quixote says surround him produce an effect not unlike the Dionysian world view: things are unpredictable, magical, always changing, "topsy-turvy" (*hechas al revés*, lit. "made into their reverse or opposite"). If Cervantes does not, at this point in the text, attribute these things to the effects of time as Nietzsche might, the picture of a turbulent, chaotic world produced by the first Western fiction to adopt the conventions of modern linear time is still a striking one.

Cervantes emphasizes, as does Nietzsche, that to model one's life on a quest is to isolate oneself. Even when Quixote is in physical contact with other people, as he often is, the fact that they do not share his perspective leads them to consider him mad. This is the ordinary course of things. Yet there is also the possibility that the others, in agreeing to join Quixote's plot, will join him in his madness. Most of the characters that do so only do so temporarily. In a topsy-turvy, Dionysian world, it cannot be otherwise. But in joining forces with Quixote this way, each of them has the opportunity to learn something from him as he does from them. Though isolated in one sense, in another Don Quixote spends his time in contact with the panoply of human possibility through his wide travels in the varied landscape of La Mancha, just as Nietzsche suggests his Dionysian pessimist will be both lonely and constantly changed by being viscerally exposed to the most "fearful and questionable" elements of the species.

The Practice of Pessimism

There is another way, however, in which Quixote can more properly be called "mad." The quest that he exemplifies has no prospect of success in the corrupt, declining world in which he finds himself. Cervantes's outlook is pessimistic in the sense that there is no chance for Quixote (or, so far as we can tell, anyone else) to defeat injustice and corruption. Indeed, he is bound to suffer in the attempt to do so. If it is madness to persevere in such an effort, then Quixote may justly be labeled mad. But that is not, I think, the conclusion we are meant to draw. As if to highlight the special quality of Quixote's perseverance, Cervantes gives us a contrasting figure, a truly discouraged fatalist, in the character of an unnamed canon who has "sanely" abandoned his own plans to write theatrical works of moral instruction in the face of an unappreciative world:

> If the plays that are now in vogue . . . are, all or most of them, downright nonsense, having neither head nor tail, and yet the public listens to them with delight, and regards and approves them as perfection when they are far from it, and if the authors who write them and the players who act them say that this is the way they must be, because the public wants them that way and will have nothing else, . . . and that for themselves it is better to earn a living from the many than praise from the few; then my book will fare the same way, after I have burned the midnight oil trying to observe the principles I have spoken of, and I would end up like "the tailor on the corner" [that is, practicing a useless, unrewarded trade]. (*DQ* 1:48)

The canon's position is of course the sensible one, well-reasoned and well-justified—it is very nearly that of Rousseau in the *Letter to M. D'Alembert*. But Quixote takes the opposite view, knowing full well the consequences of it. Though he often tells Sancho that a kingdom to rule is right around the corner, when he is more candid, he knows that he will not meet with any success: "This adventure and those like it are not adventures for winning but are merely crossroads encounters. Nothing is to be won except a broken head or an ear the less" (*DQ* 1:10). But Quixote is not discouraged. He does not measure his efforts by the metrics of happiness or worldly success. It is only in terms of his consistency in producing the person he aims to be that Quixote takes stock of the quest he has enacted. And unlike the canon, he does not require an audience to appreciate him.

When at last Don Quixote heads home for the final time, he does not claim victory but he admits to self-respect: "In a word, I took a chance, I did my best, I was knocked off, but though I lost my honor, I did not lose nor can I lose the virtue of keeping my word" (*DQ* 2:66). Far from mocking Quixote's cheerfulness, Cervantes depicts it as a superior response consistent with a pessimistic outlook. The only thing that truly depresses Quixote is not losing battles or being knocked off of his horse, but being constrained to go back to his village and end his quest. Only the end of his narrative, that is, rather than its low moments, threatens his posture. As Michael Oakeshott put it: "Cervantes created a character in whom the disaster of each encounter with the world was powerless to impugn it as a self-enactment." (Oakeshott 1975, 241). The quixotic life is not thwarted by a lack of results; its value lies in the experience of freedom that it enacts. That is why it is possible for the pessimistic ethic to persevere in the most adverse circumstances, when optimism has nothing to offer except an unfounded hope that is little more than wishful thinking.

All narratives, as all lives, must end ("human affairs are not eternal but all tend ever downwards")—this is the pessimistic knowledge that grounds Cervantes's perspective. But if we all face destruction at the hands

of time, this need not convince us to resign ourselves prematurely. Although in one sense, nothing about the world has been changed for the better by Quixote's actions, his success consists in having led a life consistent with who he is. Like Sisyphus with his stone, he has achieved dignity by accomplishing nothing. Or rather, what he has accomplished is to have enacted the value of pessimism in the form of a quest. He has made his life unpredictable, memorable, and narrativisable by bringing his life-practice into contact with the world. And a small portion of the world responds by allowing itself to be inspired by this practice.

Camus went wrong, perhaps, in concluding his early essay with the sentence, "We must imagine Sisyphus happy." Certainly we must *not* imagine Quixote "happy." He is simply in too much pain for that word to be the apt one. If we are to speak of a success in Quixote's story, it cannot be in terms of his effects in the world or in terms of his personal happiness. While it is true, as I have argued, that Quixote has converted others to his outlook, they are not likely to be any more successful than he in changing human prospects, except perhaps in the limited, temporary way that Sancho Panza succeeds. We can, however, imagine Quixote, like Sisyphus, taking a certain amount of satisfaction in having created and enacted a "new, unique, incomparable," law-bound identity.

What *Don Quixote* offers is not any moral program, then, but no more (and no less) than a certain kind of pessimistic wisdom. Quixote may believe, at first, that he can make the world safe for Dulcinea; but Cervantes certainly does not, nor, in the end, do Quixote or the reader. And beyond Quixote's human enemies, there is time itself, monstrous and implacable, grinding one slowly to bits, like the windmills that are his first foe. In his wanderings, however, and his encounters with multifarious humanity, there is a kind of facing up to reality in Quixote that most humans never experience. Most remain in blissful (or willed) ignorance of this world's terrors as well as its possibilities. Yet as Quixote comes to grips with the forces that thwart his will and ultimately defeat him, he never doubts his task. And in continuing his quest in the face of overwhelming odds, he creates a narrative that inspires those around him—even if the narratives *he* follows are themselves deceptive fictions.

We can also think of his quest for the "fearful and questionable," as Ortega y Gasset does, as simultaneously an intellectual exploration. Knights-errant, Quixote tells Sancho, "ought to know everything" (*DQ* 1:19). And in another conversation that precedes Sancho's government, Cervantes suggests that what Quixote possesses is a knowledge akin to philosophy. He has Quixote argue that knight-errantry is, after all, a science, even the master science: "It is a science that comprehends in itself all or most of the sciences in the world" (*DQ* 2:18). He then goes on to list the roles that are comprised in that of a knight: jurist, theologian, physician,

astronomer, mathematician, and a host of others. To truly carry out a knight's task, one would have to master all these different sorts of knowledge and doing so would constitute a full education in knight-errantry. This account simultaneously emphasizes the heroism and futility of those like Quixote whose purpose is good but whose task is hopeless. To take up this role in a sane fashion would be to admit, from the start, that one's goal was unreachable. But this is really no argument against doing the best we can. Cervantes depicts his ideal knight-errantry as Nietzsche depicts his ideal philosophy: as an open-ended quest for understanding whose destination is unknown and must always appear unreachable. Here we return to the "*la gai saber*" as a point of contact between Cervantes and Nietzsche. The gay science is a questing logic at once mental and existential. Where Socrates took the Delphic command, "Know thyself" to propose a life of internal reflection, Cervantes takes it to suggest instead a perpetual examination of oneself through one's encounters with the world. Cervantes maintains that an education of the kind Quixote offers to his squire is the best sort of education one could have, both as a human, and as a potential governor of others. Likewise, Nietzsche claims that his pessimistic quest is the (gay) science of living best suited to our universe and our age.

. . . . .

"To become what one is," Nietzsche wrote, "one must not have the faintest notion *what* one is" (*EH*, "Clever" 9). As with the list of adjectives from *The Gay Science*, one does not need to stretch the text very far to find in Quixote the sort of character, and personal transformation, that Nietzsche has in mind. In one sense, of course, Quixote "knows" who he is very well—he "is" the knights of the Round Table, the Nine Worthies, and so on. At another level, of course, he does not seem to know himself at all—at least he seems to be constantly astonished at how he appears to others. While in one sense, then, Quixote radically overestimates himself, and what he has accomplished, in another sense, as Nietzsche suggests, he radically "underestimated his own courage because his head was filled with the miraculous deeds of the heroes of chivalric romances" (*HH* 133). Believing that what he does is little different from what has been done before, he does not realize how "new, unique, [and] incomparable" he is. Believing in fictions, he becomes a fact that is stranger than fiction.

The sum of this is that Quixote can truly be said to have created himself—not out of whole cloth, to be sure. Before he was Quixote, he was Alonso Quisano the Good. And without the chivalric romances, Quisano would never have become Quixote. But this neither lessens Quixote's achievement nor does it contradict the idea that in becoming Quixote,

Quisano has become who he is—that is, in making himself over anew, he has become more himself, *become more that which is uniquely him* and less that which is common and contemporary. He claims that knowing yourself is the key to sound government, and yet he does not engage in prolonged introspection but in a quest that defines him as a character. Quixote says to Sancho that "one man is no more than another unless he does more than another" (*DQ* 1:19). Quixote's transformation, though symbolized by his adoption of a new name, is certainly not *contained* in the renaming. That only marks the beginning of the quest. It is Quixote's *doings* that make him who he is and not another. It is his acts that set him apart from other people. All humans act; but not all "give themselves laws." Ortega y Gasset put it thus: "A hero, I have said, is one who wants to be himself. . . . Don Quixote . . . is a hero" (1961, 152).

What kind of hero is it, though, who loses nearly every battle? I think the best reply is: a pessimistic exemplar. If we too are tempted to join Quixote's plot, we will not do so by putting on armor and mounting an old horse, or by reading books of chivalry. But we might do as Quixote did in taking his quest for himself to the most fearful and questionable aspects of existence, however we define them, and seeing what happens.

Cervantes, as I have said, describes the suffering, as well as the satisfaction, that accompanies this self-transformation. Though Quixote is, very occasionally, joyful as he wanders the plains of La Mancha, he is not immune to the pain of his many injuries or the embarrassment that comes with his many rebuffs and humiliations. To be unique is to be different from all the rest, and to follow one's own law is necessarily to run afoul of the laws of the community. One episode in *Don Quixote* encapsulates this problem in the most efficient possible way. In the nineteenth chapter of part 1, Quixote (famously) adopts the epithet "Knight of the Mournful Countenance" (*Caballero de la Triste Figura*) at the suggestion of Sancho. The moment he resolves to do so—*the moment he puts on a pessimistic face*—a priest appears and, without ceremony, pronounces him excommunicated (*DQ* 1:19). This episode, at the very least, ought to underscore just how far Cervantes understood his hero to have traveled from his comfortable life in his ancestral home.

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If we consider *Don Quixote* an educative parody of a literature of moral education (the books of chivalry), then we might regard *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as its successor in this genre, with its relation to the Bible paralleling *Don Quixote*'s relation to the books of chivalry. Though there are doubtless limits to this comparison, one is naturally tempted to look for echoes of Quixote in Nietzsche's narrative exemplar Zarathustra: Both

leave their homes at a middling age and roam about in the countryside, dispensing wisdom. Both are ignored, perceived as comic, or, occasionally, listened to in such a way that they would rather be ignored. Both suffer from and complain of the loneliness of being misunderstood. Both find an enemy in contemporary values, especially contemporary religious values.[15] And both respond, in effect, by exemplifying a set of values that, while couched in terms that appear old, is in fact radically new, in form as well as content. Both books, in effect, offer to replace a fixed set of judgments with a narrated quest of a fortified self—an art of living, but more specifically, a practice of pessimism.

Zarathustra, of course, has been compared to many other figures, both of literature and of real life, and I do not want to privilege this connection above all others. However, it seems clear enough that Nietzsche, like Cervantes before him, wrote a book that very nearly escaped the categories of genre that preceded their work. In doing so, each sought to create a character adequate to the modern conception of time that structured each of their narratives and created the fundamental problematic for their characters' lives. Nietzsche, of course, is more explicit about this. But, at the very least, Cervantes's attention to temporal disorder and chaos in the "first" Western novel gives some indication that the problem Nietzsche identifies is not idiosyncratic to him.

In the practices of both Quixote and Zarathustra, there is no suggestion of resignation or suicide. Rather, each takes up the burden of time by furthering the narratives they have inherited, by redeeming what has been handed down to them as well as they can. Each attempts to give their lives meaning through a self-renovation and self-fortification, a living out of a unique set of values, with no expectation that their acts will leave any permanent mark on the world. Their lives must be their only reward, along with a greater-than-ordinary portion of human suffering. To us, they hand down, not any doctrine, but techniques and narratives that can be reexampled, but not copied—continued, but not repeated.

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[15] The second book of *Don Quixote* did receive the approval of the royal censors with the statement that "it contains nothing against our holy Catholic faith or good morals" (no approval was required at the time the first book was published)—but though the censors were very far from credulous, this does not mean that they were not, in some sense, fooled. Quixote's excommunication (and death-bed return to the faith) may well have been the means by which Cervantes legitimized his characters' exploration of a world view that was far from orthodox. Though the censors accepted the novel (not entirely without reason) as an example of "moral reproof," it is hard to imagine that it was on this basis that the book became an international bestseller.

In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche, while reporting all he had learned from that philosopher, did not say that he wanted to become another Schopenhauer, or that he wanted others to do so. He instead suggested that his encounter with Schopenhauer had enabled him to become who he was. Similarly, being educated by Cervantes does not mean that the result is a desire to become another Don Quixote. Ortega y Gasset, in his best formulation, described the effect of *Don Quixote* as the liberation that comes with news of a world ruled by certain gods "under which the impossible is possible:"

> The normal does not exist where they reign: all-embracing disorder emanates from their thrones. The constitution they have sworn to obey has one single article: adventure is permitted. . . . Adventure shatters the oppressive, insistent reality as if it were a piece of glass. It is the unforeseen, the unthought-of, the new. Each adventure is a new birth of the world, a unique process. How can it fail to be interesting? (1961, 129, 132)

Here Ortega y Gasset finds a thought in Quixote that we can properly call Dionysian: the disorder of the world can be viewed as a horizon of opportunity so long as we do not cling insistently to what exists at any one time. *Quixotic disorder is the antidote to the ruling power of normality*. The fundamental chaos of the universe is the ultimate source of freedom, even if it also guarantees us a dangerous existence. An impossible desire to preserve the present can be put aside more easily when life is viewed as a quest where the encounter with the new is the ordinary course of things. Quixote's adventures, properly understood, should not trigger a desire that they be *repeated*, but could prod us to *continue* them in the sense Quixote continues, by radically transforming, the narratives that have shaped him. Static norms demand to be affirmed; narrative values ask only to be extended.

This freedom toward the future, or better, *constant tending to the rebirth of novelty in human affairs*, is something that Nietzsche too is concerned with (and which he handed down to his pessimistic inheritors like Camus, Hannah Arendt, and Michel Foucault). From Schopenhauer, he learned that the world was a place of constant change, flux, and transformation. For Schopenhauer, as we have seen, this was a reason to reject existence and find it meaningless. Nietzsche, perhaps because he encountered books like that of Cervantes (or, as the epigraphs to this chapter indicate, encountered such books in a way that Schopenhauer was not capable of), suggested instead that we view the chaos as a landscape of constant adventure, often painful, but never boring, worth traversing and continuing.

Apart from varying degrees of suicide, to the pessimist, this is our only real choice.