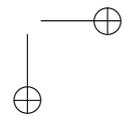
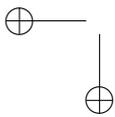


Don Quixote's Profession



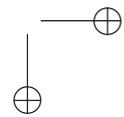
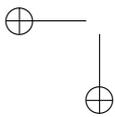




Don Quixote's Profession

Mark Van Doren

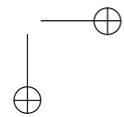
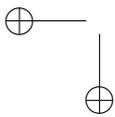
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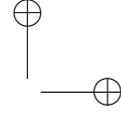
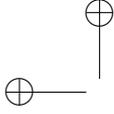




2021
First published in 1958

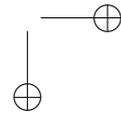
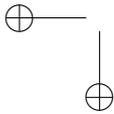
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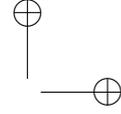
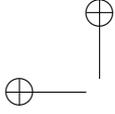




These three lectures were given at Emory University in November, 1956. Professor Joseph M. Conant, formerly my colleague at Columbia, had written to ask me whether I had a subject I wished to discuss in the field of the humanities, and I replied that there was one great book in that field – possibly the greatest of them all – which I almost feared to discuss formally because I loved it so much and had perhaps too many ideas about it. For ten years I had been teaching it at Columbia, both in an undergraduate course called *The Narrative Art* and in a graduate course, *The Art of Poetry*, whose annual topic was tragedy and comedy. The result of this experience was a suspicion that I would never be able either to begin or to end a piece of writing on the subject of *Don Quixote*. I even doubted that it was a subject. If anything, it was a world. Yet I would make the attempt. I made it, with Professor Conant's consent, and now am happy that I did so. This is not all I have to say about *Don Quixote*, but for me it is the central thing and I am willing to let it go at that. I am grateful to Professor Conant for the opportunity he gave me, and to the audiences at Emory for their intelligent, warm interest in what they heard.

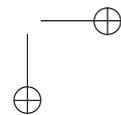
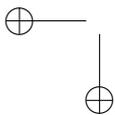
It will be apparent to any student of *Don Quixote* that my quotations from it are in the English of

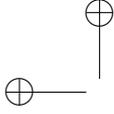




Peter Motteux, the Frenchman who crossed the Channel after 1685 and made himself immortal by translating (with others) both Cervantes and Rabelais. His version of the Spanish masterpiece is sometimes dismissed as too free, but it is itself a work of comic genius, always joyful and often very beautiful, and this in my view makes up for any demerit it may have. I follow Prescott, Ticknor, and Lockhart in believing that it is remarkably faithful to the genius of Cervantes. Also, I happen to like it better than any other version I know; and I find it in many places the most accurate. At any rate it never commits the unpardonable sin of being lifeless.

M.V.D.
New York City
1957

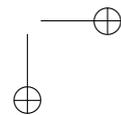
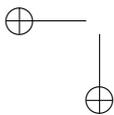


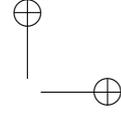
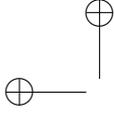


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A gentleman of fifty, with nothing to do, once invented for himself an occupation. Those about him, in his house hold and his village, were of the opinion that no such desperate step was necessary. He had an estate, and he was fond of hunting; these, they said, were occupation enough, and he should be content with the uneventful routines it imposed. But the gentleman was not content. And when he set out in earnest to live an altogether different life he was thought by everybody, first at home and then abroad, to be either strange or mad, He went away three times, returning once of his own accord but in the second and third cases being brought back by persons of the village who had pursued him for this purpose. He returned each time in an exhausted state, for the occupation he embraced was strenuous; and soon after his third homecoming he took to bed, made his

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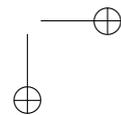
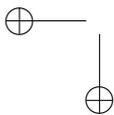




will, confessed his sins, admitted that the whole enterprise had been an error, and died.

The gentleman who did these things would have its remained utterly obscure had he not done them; and even then he would be unknown to fame had no history of him and them been written. But one was written, and it enjoys the reputation of being perhaps the best novel in the world. Not that its author ever speaks of it as fiction. He says it is history, or if you like biography; and he does not even claim credit for its composition. He merely translated it into Spanish from the Arabic original of one Cid Hamet. He assumes it to be true, but he made up none of its details, just as he had nothing to do with the grand conception – either the historian’s conception of his subject or the subject’s conception of himself. This last, of course, could never have been invented by another, least of all by any novelist. No, the truth about this gentleman is stranger than fiction can permit itself to be. If he had not lived he would never have been imagined. He did live, though, and here is his history.

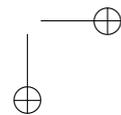
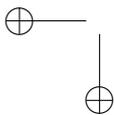
The tale thus rescued from oblivion by Cervantes is both simple and mysterious. The sign of its simplicity is that it can be summarized in a few sentences. The sign of its mysteriousness is that it can be talked about forever. It has indeed been





talked about as no other story ever was. For a strange thing happens to its readers. They do not read the same book. Or if they do, they have different theories about it. There were never so many theories about anything, one is tempted to say, as there are about *Don Quixote*. Yet it survives them all, as any masterpiece must do if it would live. A classic in the end must elude even its subtlest commentator. And so *Don Quixote* remains truer than anything that has been said or can be said about it. Nor is this doubted by those who know it best and love it most, though they may have their theories too. They are the most reluctant, because of their love, to discourse upon the essence of the book at the expense of its being, upon its idea rather than its life. It lives, they say, and has its being in all of the many words that make it up. They are beautiful words, and they have their own excuse for occurring where they do. Listen to them and you will have the life, at least the life; and after this it may turn out that nothing else will matter.

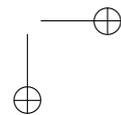
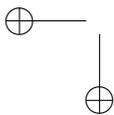
Let us do no less than that, and certainly no more, with the beginning of *Don Quixote*. Let us see what the words say, and let us try to have no theory about them. Sooner or later we may fail, but at the start it should be easy. And what do we hear Cervantes telling us? Not, for instance,





that his hero thought himself to be something or someone other than the man he was. He suffered from no delusion as to his identity. It was merely that he had been reading many books, and out of them he formed a conception of life as he would henceforth live it if he could. He would live, that is to say, as knights once did in the romances of chivalry. His error, if error it was, consisted in taking these romances as history rather than as fiction; in believing, for example, that Amadis of Gaul himself had ever lived in the same sense that Julius Caesar did, or Charlemagne. Everybody in Spain read the romances, but nobody else believed them as this gentleman believed them. They had been written for fun, and they were to be read for fun. You finished one and you began another, and then you finished that; but there was no change in you except that you had been amused. But the logic of our gentleman, having a different premise, went on to a different conclusion. The life of a knight could be lived again. It even *should* be lived again, since the world now was in as bad a way as it had been in the time of Amadis.

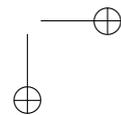
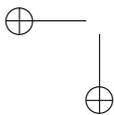
And still he did not think he *was* a knight. He merely thought he could become one if he took the trouble. And he took much trouble, deliberately, step by conscious step. He changed his name to Don Quixote; it had been something like that

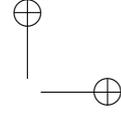




before, but the new form struck him as better. He got together a suit of armor; he gave his old horse a name, Rozinante, that seemed fitting; and he decided upon a mistress. He had no mistress, but he took one in his mind and called her Dulcinea. Nor was she wholly imaginary. A neighbor girl, Aldonza Lorenzo, had been of interest to him once, without her knowing or caring that this was so. In any case she would do, as his bony horse would do, as his great-grandfather's rusty armor would do, and as his own new name would do. He was ready now to imitate the knights of old. It is well to observe that imitation was his aim. Not impersonation, and not deception. Least of all would it be self-deception. He knew very well who he was. The only question was whether he would be able to act the part he had chosen. He was lean and strong, and so he might endure the necessary hardships. But could he think, feel, and above all talk like a knight? If he could not, then his self-education had been imperfect.

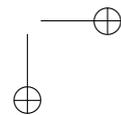
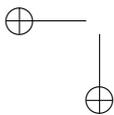
It had been good, however, in many branches of learning. He could just as well have decided to live the life of a hermit or a saint, since he was proficient in the literature of devotion; or of a scholar, since his erudition was immense; or of a shepherd, since he had read and absorbed many pastorals. Indeed his niece, when he returned





home the first time and it was deemed necessary to burn the romances that she, like the barber and the curate, supposed had made him mad, insisted that the pastorals in his library should be fed to the same flames, lest in the event of his being cured of his desire to be a knight he should “turn shepherd, and so wander through the woods and fields.” She knew her uncle well. Perhaps she was not aware that he had once played with the idea of writing a romance of chivalry, or at any rate of completing one that had been left without an end. This was before the idea seized him of imitating in action the heroes of all such works. And if she had known she would scarcely have objected, since writing is a quiet occupation, done at a desk. But she did surely see the intensity inside the man: an intensity that might lead only God knew where, and maybe to the woods and fields.

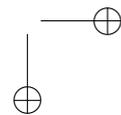
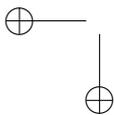
His decision in favor of the knightly role was determined, we may think, by the very learning it entailed. The discipline of knighthood was to him the sum of all the arts and sciences; was wisdom itself; was a liberal education. Even before he became obsessed by the romances – an obsession so extreme that he sold pieces of his land to buy more books – he must have been distinguished for his erudition. His eloquence at all times, his acuteness as a critic, his marvelous memory for





details out of the remotest authors mark him as a scholar, a man of intellect and sensibility. His power to fascinate others with his conversation is never questioned, least of all by the reader of the book whose hero he is. But he is most learned in the subject of romance. It has become his specialty; it has even grown into a pedantry. No other knight was ever so deeply versed in the philosophy of the game.

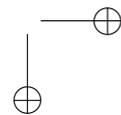
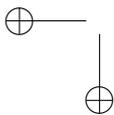
Amadis of Gaul, for instance, was no scholar. He was a great gentleman: "A man of few words, slowly provoked, and quickly pacified." And his romance still deserves its fame. It is simple, clear, and exciting, not to say excellently moral. We cannot disagree with the barber and the curate when they exempt it from the burning, nor can we think it too quaint that our own gentleman insists upon its hero's having lived and moved and had his being. "I dare almost say, I have seen Amadis of Gaul with these very eyes." We may have said the same thing about Hamlet, Falstaff, Achilles, Odysseus, Squire Western, and Pickwick; and may have wondered why others protested, though we refrained from calling them mad as Don Quixote did the Canon of Toledo because the Canon refused to believe in the existence of Amadis. Amadis was both courageous and gentle; his deportment at the court of the Emperor in Constantinople is the





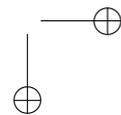
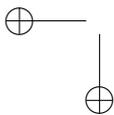
deportment of a man so witty and sweet of tongue that he can make us think of Dulcinea's lover. And as he went by several names – Beltenebros, the Knight of the on Green Sword, the Greek Knight – so Don Quixote could become in turn the Knight of the Woeful Figure and the Knight of the Lions. Yet Amadis was no scholar. For one thing, he was “a man of few words.” Don Quixote is Nestor by comparison. And one could scarcely say of Don Quixote that he was “slowly provoked” or “quickly pacified.” Amadis was a beautiful animal, and as such he had the temperance for which we envy beasts. He did not have to talk about being a knight because he was a knight. Don Quixote, being at best an imitation knight, had of course to talk like one, but then he had – or he thought he had – to talk about the importance and virtue of doing so. And of acting the part so vehemently, on a stage containing no others of his kind, that the nature of his role could never be mistaken, even though this meant that he would have to be extravagant and rash.

And now a theory about him does emerge. It is that he was first and last an actor, a skillful and conscious actor, who wrote his own play as he proceeded and of course kept the center of its stage. “In my very childhood,” he said once, “I loved shows, and have been a great admirer of





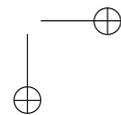
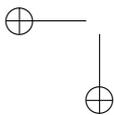
dramatic presentations from my youthful days.” “Plays,” he told Sancho, are “the resemblance of realities,” and deserve to be loved because “they are all instrumental to the good of the commonwealth, and set before our eyes those looking-glasses that reflect a lively representation of human life; nothing being able to give us a more just idea of nature, and what we are or ought to be, than comedians and comedies.” This can remind us of Hamlet, his contemporary, who spoke of a mirror held up to nature, who had a weakness for theatricals, who himself is the best actor in his play, and who may or may not have been mad. We shall never know what Shakespeare thought about him on the last point, and we shall never know whether Cervantes held the theory held by every other person in his book, namely that the Don was mad: had forgotten who he was, did not know what he did, was literally deluded. Upon acquaintance, to be sure, he strikes everyone as sane on every other subject than knighthood; on arms, on art, on politics, on religion, on manners, on food and sleep. But on knighthood he is cracked. And even if there are those who might grant, if the question were raised, that he is only acting like a knight, they would still think it madness to do that. In a theater, yes; but this man does it on the highways of Spain, he makes the world his stage.





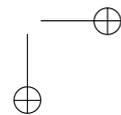
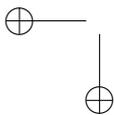
And right there is the crucial question. Supposing Don Quixote to have been in his initial conception of himself an actor and nothing but an actor, did he in fact forget that this was so, did he confuse the actor with the man, the stage with life, the pretense with reality? It is something like the question we ask about Hamlet: having decided to put on an “antic disposition” in order to deceive or reassure others, did he end by becoming infected with the germ of madness thus nursed in his imagination; or, to put it another way, is there any difference finally between the madman some think him and the intense, passionate, perilously overwrought, and extremely perplexed person of genius whom anyone can recognize him as being? Either question is difficult to answer. But in Don Quixote’s case it is not impossible to say that he does always know what he is doing; that he has his own reasons for what he does; and that if these would be nobody else’s reasons, that is only because there is and was nobody quite like him in the world. He is that rare thing in literature, a completely created character. He is so real that we cannot be sure we understand him.

It is said of him on one occasion that he must be mad because he cannot help doing what he does. Carrasco and Cecial, who have gone after him to bring him home, and for their purpose have





dressed as he is dressed, in the accouterments of knighthood, suddenly look to themselves as mad as he. Or so it seems to Cecial, though Carrasco, having been educated at Salamanca, can say: “He that only plays the fool for his fancy may give over when he pleases,” whereas the Don is condemned by insanity to play the fool forever. But that very Don will give over in the end, and until then it simply does not please him to do so. When the ploughman who has rescued him from the tangle of his armor – he is on the way home, shortly after his first leaving it, to provide himself with money, clean shirts, and a squire (this will be Sancho) – when the ploughman, his near neighbor, hears him calling himself Baldwin and Abindarez, he says to him that he is only “Senior Quexada”; and Don Quixote answers him with seven famous words. “I know very well who I am.” This could mean, of course, that he knows he is Baldwin or Abindarez and therefore is mad. But it could also mean just what it says. It could mean in addition: “Very well, my man, I am doing what to your poor wit may seem a crazy thing, but I have my own reason and my own method, and your part is to pick me up without further argument or ado.” Whatever it means, it is worthy of being remembered throughout the long book which in a sense it introduces. Halfway through that book its

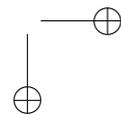
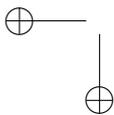




hero will an say in exasperation: “Heaven knows my meaning.” Perhaps only heaven does.

“All I aim at,” he tells the barber midway in his career, “is only to make the world sensible how much the they are to blame in not laboring to revive those most he happy times in which the order of knight-errantry was in its full glory.” This is after the barber has been telling him of a madman who thought himself Neptune. Don Quixote, rejecting the parallel, announces his actor’s, his propagandist’s, aim; just as in the house of Don Diego he will implore young Don Lorenzo to consider “the vast advantages that would result” in the present age from the assistance of knights like those of old. Why shouldn’t the thing be tried? He is always asking that question, even of those who doubt the actuality of knights in former ages. He is certain that they were actual, but even if they were not, the very idea of them, available now as then, is the idea that best expresses itself in the phrase “greatness of mind.” Greatness of mind can exist again in those who cultivate it. His project is to cultivate a set of manners and actions that will make him look to outsiders like one who has the thing within him. The thing itself, however, is all that is ultimately important.

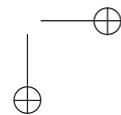
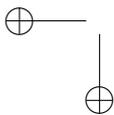
Seen in this aspect, Don Quixote has analogues at any time: the teacher who assumes maturity





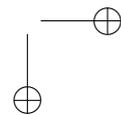
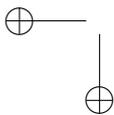
in his students and so gives them every thought he has; the gentleman whose manners consist in supposing that all other men are gentlemen too, and all women ladies; the statesman who takes it for granted that the people he rules are serious and can understand the best thing he can say; the poet who writes in the faith that his audience is no less subtle and profound, and no less wise, than himself. Such persons are often called, if not precisely mad, then foolish for believing that the best can ever be. Or be again, in a world grown cynical and degenerate. Such a world doubts its own history: its Founding Fathers, say, were never what some sanguine people think they were. Yet one who can believe in them can imitate them now; and in so doing may become a statesman, and in that capacity restore the temper of a better time.

To speak like this is to put the best face on our hero, to make the most that can be made of his madness, if mad he was. He has a worst face, too, and it is high time to speak of that. He wears it when he does violence to harmless creatures who get in his way. We wince when he assaults the sheep, exclaiming that they are armies, and kills a number of them before he can be stopped. So with the funeral at night, with its strange torches which Cervantes deliberately makes beautiful so that we shall wince the more when Don Quixote, riding





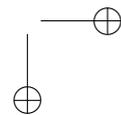
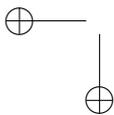
against them, works havoc among the mourners, one of whom even suffers a broken leg. We do not mind so much that he risks his own skin against windmills, that is his business, amusing to us or otherwise; but we do find him painful when he hurts people who in no sense deserve it. His acting now becomes extravagant with a vengeance; his role grows ruthless; he behaves more like a lunatic than like a knight; he is fanatical, as if he thought himself, like Providence, privileged to seem cruel. He lives by his own law, and does not disarm our criticism by doing great good in the end. He does no good to the boy whom the farmer is whipping; indeed, he only gets him whipped further as soon as his own back is turned. He does no good by freeing the galley slaves, or by beating monks and muleteers. And while we smile at the brilliant way he takes of saying he is above law and custom, we do not forget that in so far as he acts out such a part he is a maniac on the loose. As a knight, of course, he pays no bills for lodging or food. His motto is Pistol's: "Base is the slave that pays." Nor does he think he should ever be brought before a judge. "We are exempt from courts of judicature," he informs an officer of the Holy Brotherhood whose members are devoted to the task of ridding Spain's roads of its highwaymen, and indeed all Spain of its troublemakers. To the Brotherhood





Don Quixote is himself a troublemaker, whatever claims he may make for himself as one who would rid the same country of its numerous evils. Here in other words is a rivalry between the law and one who says he is the law; and this rivalry, in the nature of things, never comes to an end. It cannot do so as long as Don Quixote keeps his faith and maintains his role.

He maintains it with astonishing ability. Sancho, for instance, thinking at the inn to escape without paying as his master had, is caught at the gate and tossed in a blanket. Sancho cannot carry the thing off; he is worse than a poor actor, he is no actor at all. He speaks what is on his mind, in accents that are native to him. And he feels sympathy when to do so is out of order. The knight he serves rarely demeans himself by making apologies for distressful things he has done. He may not be aware that he has caused distress; but even when it is called to his attention he keeps his head high, he is too lofty to ask people's pardons. His errors – for he does commit errors – have a way of coming home to his horizon; but he has a way of not seeing them there, or if he does, of explaining them away. He would give his attention to the whipped boy except for the fact that he is busy with a knight's duties: he must save the Princess Micomicona; so it is left to Sancho to comfort

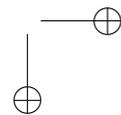
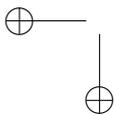




the poor lad. And it is customary with him to insist that even though he has injured somebody by mistake – which is to say, has mistaken him for something other than what he is – still, it was a good mistake, an honorable mistake, since it consisted only of misinterpreting appearances, and if the appearances had been in fact the reality he supposed them he was altogether to be praised for his forthright manner of attack.

He has succeeded at any rate in becoming at home in his role. The hostess of the inn who sees him as “a man of another world” is paying him the compliment that most would please him. He really does act and talk like an old-world man, with connections running clear back to the Age of Gold which he can so handsomely apostrophize. He has the language of this age at all times on his tongue, as he has its logic. It is no less essential, he tells Vivaldo, for knights to have ladies than for skies to have stars. Heine was to say the same thing centuries later, and in the same fashion or to enjoy the figure:

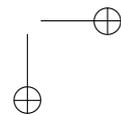
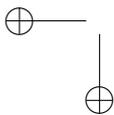
For with love there must be ladies,
And the lady was as needful
To the tuneful minnesinger
As, to bread and butter, butter.





Who can doubt, hearing Don Quixote in his most eloquent harangues, that he knew he was eloquent and relished eloquence as an art? No knight in any romance ever talked more perfectly about his lady than this knight talks about Dulcinea, “lovely enemy of my repose.” To imitate eloquence one must somehow share its inspiration. The Don can turn off his rhetoric when he has no need for it; he can sound like Sancho when he will. But when he would sound like Amadis of Gaul he can do that too.

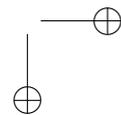
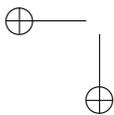
Nor can we doubt the relish he takes in this. He is having a good time. So good a time that he develops a rich humor in himself. Notoriously he is laughed at, but he laughs too, and by no means always at others. On a certain morning when the sun shows him that it was fulling mills, not giants, which he had heard the night before and summoned his courage to oppose, he laughs almost as heartily as Sancho does at the memory of the tall words he had cast upon the wind. Not quite as heartily, for Sancho overdoes it on his part, going even so far as to parody those words. “Am I, who am a Knight,” thunders his master, “bound to know the meaning of every mechanic noise, and distinguish between sound and sound?” The question itself is delicious, and its asker knows it; just as he knows in Part II how to pull Sancho’s





leg by reciting the marvels he had met in the Cave of Montesinos – the marvels, mixed with such items as that he had blown his nose in the darksome cavern in order to make sure he was awake. His insistence in the Enchanted Bark that they have sailed thousands of miles is an answer to Sancho's statement that it is twenty years since they left La Mancha. His excellent relation with Sancho all along has rested upon a mutual understanding in which humor played its part. Did he expect Sancho to believe that an enchanter immobilized him so that he could do no more than gaze over the innyard wall as the squire got tossed in a blanket? Does he expect to be taken seriously when he speculates aloud that the voice under the ground – we know it is Sancho, fallen into a pit – is the voice of a soul in purgatory? So much humor, so easily and so naturally expressed, is not the mark of a madman. It is not demonic humor; it is pleasantry, it is power and wisdom at play; and probably it is what makes Sancho love him so much that he can never leave him.

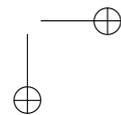
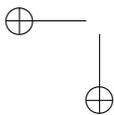
No reader forgets the Don's habit, formed early in the book, of explaining awkward occurrences by saying that enchanters have been busy: they have altered people's faces, they have caused objects to appear and disappear. It is a convenient device, and one's memory may not reach back





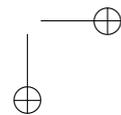
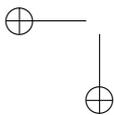
to the moment of its conception. This seems to have been the moment when Don Quixote's housekeeper, asked where his study is, says, as she has been instructed: "What study?" For while he was in bed recovering from his first sally the door to the room where he kept his books had been removed and the wall plastered over. And the niece remarks that a conjurer or enchanter must be to blame. Why may it not be supposed that Don Quixote, always, like a good actor, alert to clues, saw at once the advantage of such a dodge, and determined to use it whenever it should come in handy? If so, it must have delighted him, when he called the windmills giants, to hear Sancho say: "What giants?" The trick would last him as long as he cared to use it – of course, with variations.

He will often find himself in the presence of other persons who are acting parts, either to compete with him or to humor him into going home; or, as is sometimes the case, out of sheer roguery, for the sake of deceiving and cheating others. He will come through such competition with the highest honors; there is no actor in the book who is half as fine as he. The theatricals of Cardenio's friends are amateur by any just comparison – either, that is to say, the theatricals they habitually enact as ladies and gentlemen of fashion, or those they stage for what they suppose to be the benefit of the old





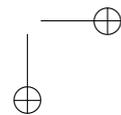
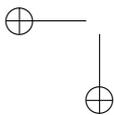
madman they would hoodwink. There are many interesting ironies in the scene where Dorothea, claiming to be a damsel in distress, kneels before the mounted Knight and implores his help. One of these ironies is that she is distressed, as we have just learned by hearing her tell her tale of broken love; though of course we know that she is not the Princess Micomicona, in danger from a devilish giant. Another irony is there for her to measure when the Knight makes his first response. We do not know what she had expected to hear; certainly not these words that surpass in beauty the best she has ever read in any romance. Don Quixote had doubtless been represented to her by the barber and the curate as some sort of ancient fool who scarcely knows what he is babbling; but out of him comes a stream of words such as only great gentlemen can speak; and in his very manner there is "an awful grace and civility." She might well repent her decision to deceive so distinguished a person, mad or no, And here a third irony could lurk. For the Don may have labored toward just this result: her repentance, and beyond that her admiration at the skill with which he speaks his lines. How is one to know for sure that he believes her tale? It is well told, for she has read the romances and absorbed their style, and naturally he likes the way she tells it; but does he believe





it? We shall never know, any more than we shall know whether the moving thanks he offers to the innkeeper's wife and her daughter and her maid when he leaves them to go home in the wooden cart are intended to strike them dumb with a sense of the injustice they have done him; or any more than we shall know, when he hangs by his hands outside the inn window, whether he wishes he had never got himself into such a pickle; or any more than we shall know in Part II whether he believes the Duke and the Duchess. More of them later; yet it is worth while to consider their castle as the best appointed stage on which he ever acts; it contains his largest and most varied audience, and is the most opulent in its costumes and its lighting.

Don Quixote is rarely alone with us so that we may see what he would be like had he not an audience. If nobody else is with him, Sancho is. Yet Sancho does leave him once in the Black Mountain, when he goes off with the letter to Dulcinea, and we are not surprised to discover a conspicuous quiet in our hero's behavior. He no longer acts the madman. Left to himself, he is controlled and serene. In his own soul he may be always self-contained. As a private individual he does have his proper secrets – for example, he is modest, and will let none of the Duchess's

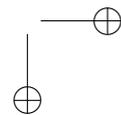
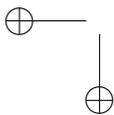




maids undress him. Only Sancho may do that; and when Sancho goes off to govern his island he must do it by himself. Somehow this tells us volumes concerning a sanity he spends most of his days disguising.

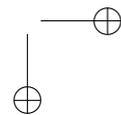
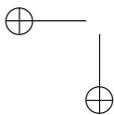
And all the while there is that other role of shepherd ready to be assumed. He meets many goatherds, one of whom converses with his goats; he meets the beautiful Marcella, a girl of station who finds it convenient to dress like a shepherdess and roam the mountains about her home until the day arrives when she shall know which one of her many suitors she would marry; he is regularly reminded of the pastoral romances whose lovesick heroes he could imitate if it ever struck his fancy to do so. He holds the temptation off until the end, and even then it comes to nothing. The role of shepherd is less rich than that of knight. There is less learning in it, less depth, less morality, less metaphysic. He prefers the grand role that implies all other roles. He continues acting like a knight.

Nor does this need to mean that he merely pretends. To act as he acts is more than to ape; to imitate as he does is finally to understand. What is the difference between acting like a great man and being one? To act like a poet is to write poems; to act like a statesman is to ponder the nature of goodness and justice; to act like a knight





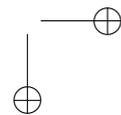
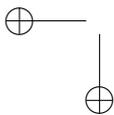
is to think and feel like one. When we tell a boy to act like a man we are not advising him to be dishonest. "Act well your part; there all the honor lies" – no one has ever detected cynicism in Pope's line. We even urge people to act natural, as if to be themselves required the exercise of art. And it does, as those unsure of themselves well know. All they have to do is to become sure; and then we shall say in praise of them that they are acting like themselves. A mysterious region, this, and Don Quixote knows it to its utmost boundaries. If he did not – if he were nothing but a pretender, which is to say a poor actor – we should not be talking of him now. We are talking of him because we suspect that in the end he did become a knight. He thought his part through. Otherwise how could he have stunned the prostrate Dorothea with such words as these? "Rise, Lady, I beseech you; I grant you the boon which your singular beauty demands." And later on, how could he have stunned her again when he replied thus to her egregious flatteries? "No more, Madam, I beseech you. Spare me the trouble of hearing myself praised, for I mortally hate whatever may look like adulation; and though your all compliments may deserve a better name, my ears are too modest to be pleased with any such discourse; 'tis my study to deserve and to avoid applause. All I will venture to say is, that,





whether I have any valor or not, I am wholly at your service, even at the expense of the last drop of my blood.” We can assume that Don Quixote spoke these lines as if he understood them, and spoke them with a corresponding beauty. But we must also remember that he composed them on the spot. He had no script. He was actor and playwright both. He was a hero made real as only the finest art achieves reality. And this in a book whose very problem is reality, a book which calls in question the existence of knights and the sanity of an obscure man who insisted that he could be one.

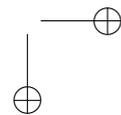
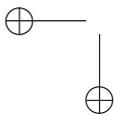
The world he walked and spoke in was a wonderful copy of the world that everybody knows, the world we think of every day as real. It has been justly said that no novel is more real than *Don Quixote*, and this is true even if we consider it without its hero. Cervantes placed him where all possible light could shine on the figure he cut. We tend to forget the author as we read, but we should pause occasionally to take note of the remarkable, the daring, thing he has done. He has set a knight riding down Main Street, and of all merciless places, in Spain. It had been relatively easy for the authors of the romances to make their knights attractive. Given a willingness in their readers to find the spectacle pleasing, all they had





to do was to fill the landscape with armored men who had no other occupation than that of fighting for their ladies – who, waiting in their castles, had no other need than to be beautiful and anxious day by day. Chivalry by this account was a daydream, shared in a conspiracy of pretense by author and reader alike, and the world it took place in was not required to contain such gritty essences as peasants on their mules, artisans at their lathes, traders at their desks, or thieves and beggars in the back streets of cities. It was not expected that dust or wind should be present, or money, or charity, or filth, or such kinds of food as crusts of bread, lumps of cheese, and slices of raw onion. And the result even then was a charming literature, as Cervantes knows as well as his hero, and as well as every other person in the story. Even the hardheaded housekeeper, at home in La Mancha, wants to sprinkle her master's books with holy water to exorcise the sorcery in them. Yet it had not been a real literature as Cervantes, starting to write his masterpiece, comprehended the term. Into this masterpiece he would put everything he knew, all that he smelled as well as all that he thought and imagined.

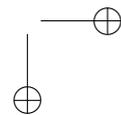
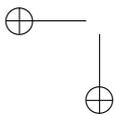
And upon every item of his account he bestowed the dignity of an incomparable style. The stream of his words is beautiful and strong, nor does it object





to any article it is called upon to float toward its natural destination. All things, all persons, ride the current of this world as if they had a right to do so. Cervantes once calls the work he pretends to be translating a “grave, high-sounding, minute, soft, and humorous history.” Grave and humorous: it is comedy at its best, with everything remembered out of life, and with all things in it weighted equally, justly. And because of that equal and just weight, nothing feels heavier than it should, neither the fine knight on Rozinante nor the plain people who stare at him and doubt that he is as fine as he says he is. There is a lightness in the book that makes every reader love it as he loves his own mind. It is both vast and delicate, both formidable and buoyant. The writer of it – we can never doubt this – was happy as he wrote.

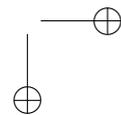
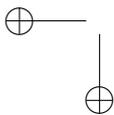
He must have been happiest when his hero, come home to provide himself with a squire, thought of his neighbor Sancho and persuaded him to go along. There has never been a better device for fiction than this of two men who see the same things but consider them differently. And so just is Cervantes, so equal in his love, that neither of them is ever at a disadvantage in our view. Each is a created individual, with a world of his own which the other must accept – not approve, but certainly accept, as if it had as much right to exist

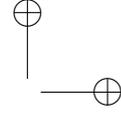




and be believed in as his own. Each calls the other names; each accuses the other of being mad; they quarrel, they fall out and are silent for long stretches; they insist they do not understand each other. Yet their mutual love increases until at last they are, as others say, one man.

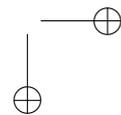
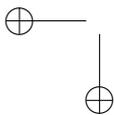
“Do you know where you are?” cries Don Quixote in the castle of the Duke when Sancho has disturbed decorum by insisting that Dapple, his ass, be suitably stabled and fed. “Every man,” says Sancho, “must tell his wants, be he where he will. Here I bethought myself of Dapple, and here I spoke of him. Had I called him to mind in the stable, I would have spoken of him there.” He has only one language, the language of the Panzas, and he uses it as language was intended to be used, to make known the thought within. Don Quixote is master of many languages, just as he is master of many thoughts, and he inhabits as it were a variety of worlds, though all of them may be one world, his world, in the end. But Sancho inhabits *this* world and no other; and he inhabits it so simply that he becomes, both for Cervantes and for us who are looking on, its perfect symbol. Don Quixote does not merely ride through this world; he takes it with him, he looks at it and listens to it every day, he sleeps and feeds with it, he argues with it, he fights with it and makes up,

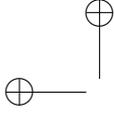




he accepts it always as being there. Nor does it ever change. Stubbornly, it is what it is, as he is too. The Don and the Squire never convince each other, even though they take a greater and greater pleasure in adventuring side by side.

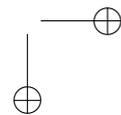
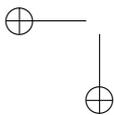
Each of them, too, has a household out of which he comes; the reality of both is documented. Don Quixote has no wife and children, but we shall never forget his niece, his housekeeper, and his neighbors, for they go with him even though he thinks he has left them behind; unique as he is among them, he still cannot be separated from them any more than the heart can be removed from the body, or the sting from the bee. Sancho Panza has of course his own family, nor does he ever want to forget the wife and daughter he has been persuaded to abandon. They are not really abandoned. They are constantly, and sometimes guiltily, in his thoughts. The sense of guilt is not perhaps complete in Sancho; if it were, he would make good his frequent threats of going home. It is often no more than an excuse for blaming his master. "See," says the squire, "how you plucked me out of the bosom of my family, and all for this" – a tossing in a blanket, a beating by a rogue. Yet he does miss his little house and the people in it who are so much like him. Twice they rejoice to see him coming home over the hill outside the





village, and twice he rejoices with them. And when he is governing his island nothing gives him more satisfaction than such a letter as this from Teresa his wife, with news in it of Sanchica his daughter:

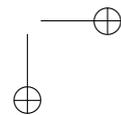
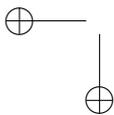
“The news here is, that Berrueca has married her daughter to a sorry painter that came hither, pretending to paint anything. The township set him to paint the King’s arms over the Town Hall. He asked ’em two ducats for the job, which they paid him. So he fell to work, and was eight days a-daubing, but could make nothing of it at last; and said he could not hit upon such piddling kind of work, and so gave ’em their money again. . . Pedro de Lobo’s son has taken orders, and shaved his crown, meaning to be a priest. Minguilla, Mingo Silvato’s grand-daughter, heard of it, and sues him upon a promise of marriage; ill tongues do not stick to say she has been with child by him, but he stiffly denies it. We have no olives this year, nor is there a drop of vinegar to be got for love or money. A company of soldiers went through this place, and carried along with them three wenches out of the town. I don’t tell thee their names, for mayhaps they will come back, and there will not want some that will marry ’em, for better for worse. Sanchica makes bone-lace, and gets her three half-pence a day clear, which she saves in a box with a slit, to go towards buying household stuff. The fountain





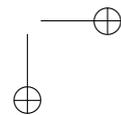
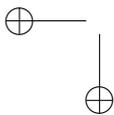
in the market is dried up. A thunderbolt lately fell upon the pillory – there may they all light. I expect thy answer to this. Heaven send thee long to live, longer than myself, or rather, as long; for I would not willingly leave thee behind me in this world. Thy wife, Teresa Panza.”

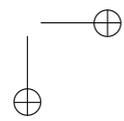
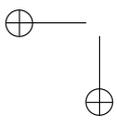
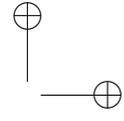
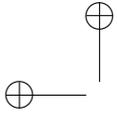
The reality of this is not the only reality in *Don Quixote*, but it is perhaps the basic one; it is the ground on which all other realities stand. And it is firm ground, built there by hands that know of what minerals the earth was originally composed. Nor is it laid down with condescension or disgust. Cervantes respects the world his people walk on, however high or low they hold their heads. Not the least of his triumphs is that he manages neither to satirize nor to idealize his so-called common people. They seem to be exactly what they ought to be: the people of this world, for better or for worse, with no doubt in their heads that they should exist and respect themselves. Merely to hear them talking makes one happier, more reassured, than one knows how to say. As when, for a final instance, the innkeeper’s wife and daughter are attending to Don Quixote’s bruises. The bruises were inflicted by cudgels, but Sancho, to save his master’s dignity, not to speak of his own, since he was cudged too, has told the women they were the result of a fall from the top of a high rock. “And by the

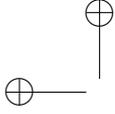




way," says he, "I beseech you save a little of that same tow and ointment for me too, for I don't know what's the matter with my back, but I fancy I stand mainly in want of a little greasing too. What, I suppose you fell too," says the landlady. "Not I," says Sancho, "but the very fright that I took to see my master tumble down the rock has so wrought upon my body that I'm as sore as if I had been sadly mauled." "It may well be as you say," puts in the daughter; "for I have dreamed several times that I have been falling from the top of a high tower without ever coming to the ground; and when I have waked, I have found myself as out of order, and as bruised, as if I had fallen in good earnest." Meanwhile Maritornes, the entirely illiterate maid of the inn, has been holding a candle so that her mistress could see the Don. "How do you call this same gentleman?" she asks the squire. "He's Don Quixote de la Mancha," replies Sancho, "and he is a knight-errant, and one of the primest and stoutest that ever the sun shined on." "A knight-errant," cries the wench. "Pray, what's that?"



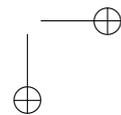
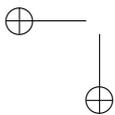


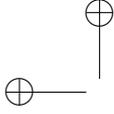


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“A knight-errant,” cried Maritornes. “Pray, what’s that?” If Don Quixote, groaning under his bruises, had heard her put the question he might have had more reason to despair than normally he had. Not that he was subject to despair; he was indeed well armed against it; but here was a worse thing than the incredulity he had so far found. Here was pure ignorance: Maritornes, judging by her words, had never even heard of the profession he was trying to restore. Later it turned out not to be quite so bad as that: the wench had read some of the romances, or had had them read to her, and she was eager to testify that they pleased her. “For my part,” she said, “I think there are mighty pretty stories in those books, especially that one about the young lady who is hugged under the orange tree, when the damsel watches lest somebody comes, and stands with her mouth

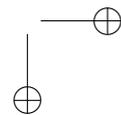
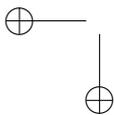
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watering all the while; and a thousand such stories, which I would often forego my dinner and supper to hear." But now not so. "Pray, what is a knight-errant?" It could have appeared to Don Quixote that his duty henceforth was not only to bring back knighthood but to create it out of nothing, to make something be that never was. He might not mind so much that someone thought him mad for dressing the part in this late day and age, for such a person at least recognized the part; and subsequently, when he heard the Gentleman in the Green Coat exclaim, staring at his armor, that he would never have believed a knight could exist in the present world had he not seen this one now, the Don, however much he doubted the sobriety of the remark, would be able to take comfort in the knowledge it implied. Here, though, was the stone wall of illiteracy, to charge which might seem even to Don Quixote, weary on the innkeeper's bed, a project so hopeless of success that the mere idea of undertaking it must certainly be mad.

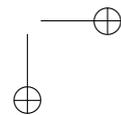
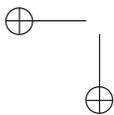
But there is no suggestion that he heard Martines. And in any case he was halfway through a series of encounters with madness which Cervantes, his creator, could not have wished to terminate; and happily so, for the series is most edifying, and manages, like several other series of adventures in the book, to throw a fascinating light upon the





identity, the character, and the inward thinking of the Don.

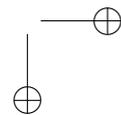
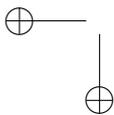
Not long before this the knight and his squire, fleeing into a mountain wilderness to escape the Holy Brotherhood, had come upon “a man that skipped from rock to rock, over briars and bushes, with wonderful agility. He seemed naked from the waist upwards, with a thick black beard, his hair long and strangely tangled, his head, legs, and feet bare; on his hips a pair of breeches that appeared to be of sad-colored velvet, but so tattered and torn that they discovered his skin in many places.” The fellow, in short, gave every appearance of being deranged; though a goatherd came by to say that a few months ago he was not at all like this. He was handsome and well dressed. But he had penetrated these mountains with the intention, as it were, of deranging himself. And soon enough he emerged from his fastness to caper and rage and beat whatever men he came upon; also, he moaned from time to time about a certain Ferdinand who had betrayed him. Clearly it was a love madness, complicated to be sure by some sense of guilt which induced him to do penance for a great sin of his own commission. Now Don Quixote could not but be vastly interested in a phenomenon so reminiscent of the romances, where many a knight had gone through just such trials of

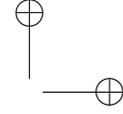




the spirit, usually in despair over some misunderstanding between him and his mistress, or perhaps some act of infidelity on her part. Amadis of Gaul, soon to change his name to Beltenebros, had so suffered on account of Oriana; and Orlando's famous madness had been so motivated by Angelica. It was necessary, therefore, to meet this man, who to be sure was not in the costume of a knight but who did one of the things all knights had done. Perhaps he needed help in his distress, and would particularly appreciate the help of one schooled in his condition.

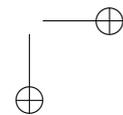
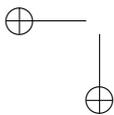
The strange fellow, whom we hear called the Knight of the Mountain and the Knight of the Wood, though we shall learn that he is Cardenio, a young man of fashion, of course puts in his appearance almost at once, and after a moment of amazement over what he sees in the person of our hero does to be sure commence a sequence of strange acts. He consents to tell his story on the promise of Don Quixote not to interrupt it. It concerns Don Ferdinand, as we might have expected, but it also concerns his own mistress, Lucinda, and another lady whom we are eventually to know, when we see all these persons in the flesh, as Dorothea. The story proceeds without interruption until it reaches the remark that "Lucinda, who took great delight in reading books of knight-

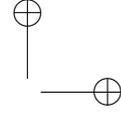
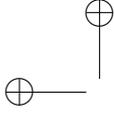




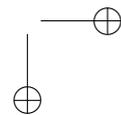
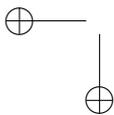
errantry, desired me to lend her the romance of *Amadis de Gaul*." Now Don Quixote can restrain himself no longer; he breaks into a eulogy of his favorite literature, and thereby brings the tale to a close; though the stranger who was telling it trails off with the cryptic observation: "I am positively convinced, nor shall any man in the world persuade me to the contrary, and he is a blockhead who says, that great villain Elisabet never lay with Queen Madasima." Those two persons in *Amadis of Gaul* have not been mentioned heretofore, nor are they relevant now; but the Don is so sure that Madasima has been maligned that he defends her "as if she were his true and lawful princess," and is struck for this by a great stone which the madman picks up and throws at him. A fracas follows, and even Sancho is involved; but then the madman runs away and it is some time before we know the rest of his story, not to say before we meet the characters in it.

Is he a veritable madman, as by contrast Don Quixote suddenly seems not to be? He is not a knight, nor does he pretend to be one. He does, we can think, pretend to be out of his head. And for all we know, Don Quixote thinks this too, though of that we cannot be altogether certain. He may suspect as we do that or Cardenio, unhappy in love, has resorted to an extreme expression of the state:



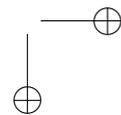
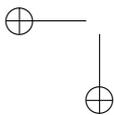


extreme either because he is actually all but crazy with grief or because for some odd reason he wishes to appear so – possibly because he too has read the romances and now seeks an artist’s satisfaction in the imitation of their heroes. The only difference between Don Quixote and ourselves would be that the spectacle gives him pleasure: again, an artist’s pleasure, not merely in a pretty good performance but in the cue it offers for a better performance by himself. For as he and Sancho ride on he announces that he will do penance in these same mountains, here and now, for Dulcinea. He will imitate the imitator of Beltenebros and Orlando. He will put on a show that would not shame Orlando if he were present to behold it. He has done many things the knights did, but not this one; through an oversight he has neglected to stage their best, their sure-fire, scene. Not that he speaks in terms of shows and scenes; he urges an inner necessity, and in doing so bewilders Sancho, who is not aware of anything that Dulcinea could have done to pain her lover or of anything that her lover has failed to do for her honor and glory. As for Cardenio, says Sancho, “Who but a madman would have minded what a madman said,” about Madasima or anything? As for Dulcinea, the very thought of penance is preposterous. There is nothing to go mad *about*. “What lady has sent you





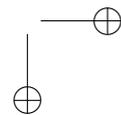
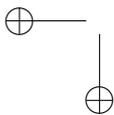
a-packing, or so much as slighted you? When did you ever find that my lady Dulcinea del Toboso did otherwise than she should do, with either Moor or Christian?" "Why," cries Don Quixote, "there's the point. In this consists the singular perfection of my undertaking; for, mark me, Sancho, for a knight-errant to run mad upon any just occasion is neither strange nor meritorious; no, the rarity is to run mad without a cause, without the least constraint or necessity." He will, in other words, go ritually mad; he will do it in cold blood – or, to use his own words, in the dry rather than the wet; and then Dulcinea will know what he could have done had she given him sufficient reason. Oh, he will not do what Orlando did: tear up trees by the roots, slay shepherds, destroy flocks, burn houses, and all of that. It is more likely that he will take Beltenebros for his model, and merely lament in verse. But first he unsaddles his steed and sends him off, for he must do his penance in the extremity of want. "Go, Rozinante," he intones with his usual felicity, "he that hath lost his freedom gives thee thine." And then he announces precisely what his program is. He will tear off his clothes, knock his head against the rocks, and do other things too which Sancho must stay to see. But Sancho cannot bear the thought, particularly of the rocks. Find something softer, he suggests:





water, or cotton. Don Quixote thanks him for his concern, but assures him that “these seeming extravagancies are no jests. Far from it, they must be performed seriously and solemnly; for otherwise we should transgress the laws of chivalry, that forbid us to tell lies upon the pain of degradation. Now to pretend to do one thing, and effect another, is an evasion which I esteem to be as bad as lying. Therefore the blows which I must give myself on the head ought to be real, substantial, sound ones, without any trick or mental reservation, for which reason I would have thee leave me some lint and salve.” The upshot of it all is that Sancho only sees his master stripped upward to the waist and turning two cartwheels; then he is off, and Don Quixote proceeds to the relatively quiet occupation of composing a melancholy poem on the subject of his grief.

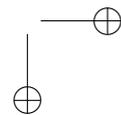
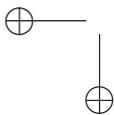
How mad is he to insist on acting such a part? For now he is clearly acting; he says so, and even Sancho believes it, though Sancho wonders why anyone should want to punish himself this way. Our wonder is perhaps less strong, for we know Don Quixote better. Yet what is it that we know? And what is the result in our minds of the more or less unconscious comparison we make of Don Quixote with Cardenio, not to speak of Anselmo in the tale of *The Curious Impertinent* which the host

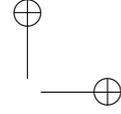




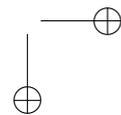
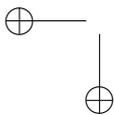
of the next inn will read from a manuscript left with him by its author? Anselmo is really mad; any psychologist would say so; but he is only in a story. The story was written by Cervantes, as all of *Don Quixote* was; and through all of *Don Quixote* the question will be asked, or perhaps only suggested, whether its hero is more mad or less mad than somebody else. The final answer may be that he seems somehow more intelligible than most of his companions in the narrative, and somehow more natural. But it will remain a question to which Cervantes will appear to say he has no answer. It will simply continue to be asked, in a series of situations that, considered as a series, will run through the entire work like a thread – or better yet, like an artery conducting life to its remotest parts.

A second such series runs its course among incidents whose bearing is upon the great, central question of the book: What is reality? It is the most famous question in the world, though here it takes many forms. How real were the knights in the old books; and if they were not real, what does it mean to say that the books seem real as we read them? This is something like the question of what we mean when we say of a play that it is real. We know it is not; we have gone into a dark building to see it acted out in circumstances that no one



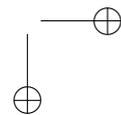
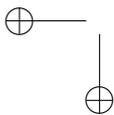


needs to tell us are artificial; and the actors are artists, are imitators – no question of that. But when we like what they do we call it real; we even call it natural, though we have not forgotten that it is art. A set of persons brought in off the street and asked to live their lives on that same stage would seem by comparison unreal; or at the best, sub-real. And so as to the hero of this book. How real is his belief that he either is or can become a knight? He never appears to expect that anybody will mistake him for Amadis of Gaul. He is only Amadis in modern times. Or *like* Amadis – which? And for that matter, what of the numerous persons in the story who are masked or disguised, or if not literally that, then playing parts for another kind of purpose than the Don's? What is the reality in their case? And how real, too, are the tales of love and adventure which Cervantes interpolates from time to time? At the beginning of Part II he will permit the opinion to be expressed, by certain readers of Part I, that there were too many such narratives in it; too much fiction diluted the pure history which it would otherwise have been. An equivalent question would be this: how real, which is to say how lifelike and convincing, are those tales? And how do they compare with the novel that contains them? For the comparison is more than suggested; it is inevitable. We have





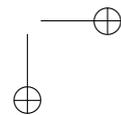
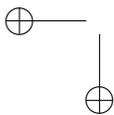
not only the tales, but in one case, Cardenio's, we have the persons of it appear so that we can listen to them talking like themselves, which is to say like the conventional lovers of romance – not old but new romance, not the romance of ladies and knights but that of ladies and gentlemen. The tales are told by a master of narrative – nobody ever told stories better than Cervantes – but is he not still more a master in the whole? And does not his battered old hero look and sound more real when he reappears upon the scene, even in his outlandish metal clothes, than the mannikins who do not recognize his humanity and would dismiss him from the species if they could? The question keeps putting itself; and never more sharply perhaps than it is put on one occasion by the Don himself, when, seated at the inn table with Dorothea and the rest, he exclaims: “What mortal in the world, at this time entering within this castle, and seeing us sit together as we do, will imagine and believe us to be the same persons which in reality we are?” He means by reality in his own case the knight hood he has assumed, just as he thinks the inn to be a castle. But as for the inn, has it not begun to look more like a castle than an inn, seeing that the most marvelous meetings have taken place within its halls? It has become a crossroads of recognition, a citadel of romance; at least the four lovers think

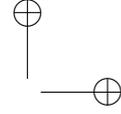




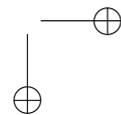
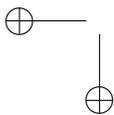
of it that way, as well as does our eminently happy Don, who will have less reason henceforth to insist that inns are castles; they are castles anyhow.

The series is as long as the book; indeed it makes the book; but it may be worth while to remove a segment of it and consider what we find among its members. The best segment for the purpose is in Part II, and begins with Sancho. The knight and the squire have left home again, and their first destination is Toboso, of which Dulcinea is lady and queen. As they approach the village, each makes it clear to the other that he has never seen the peerless dame; but no matter, now they will; though when they are indeed there Don Quixote finds out a retreat in a neighboring grove where he can wait with dignity while Sancho goes with a message and – hopefully – brings back one. But Sancho conceives a stratagem. “Now then,” he tells himself, “my master being so very mad as to mistake sometimes one thing for another, black for white and white for black, I guess ’twill be no hard matter to pass upon him the first country wench I shall meet with for the Lady Dulcinea. If he won’t believe it, I’ll swear it; so that when he finds I won’t flinch he’ll either resolve never to send me on more of his sleeveless errands, or he’ll think some one of those wicked wizards has transmogrified her into some other shape out of spite.” And so it





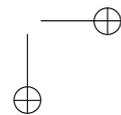
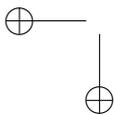
goes. Having discovered three ill-favored wenches riding out from town on three young asses, he hurries to make his master meet them, promising that one of them is Dulcinea, peerless in grace and beauty, and that the other two are damsels who attend her. But Don Quixote, gazing at them with the best will in the world, sees “nothing but three wenches upon as many asses.” Sancho had supposed he would believe anything. But he does not believe this; except that he goes on to say that base enchanters must have labored to deprive him of the happiness of seeing the object of his wishes “in her natural shape and glory,” with the result that he is now “the most unfortunate man in the universe.” Sancho, who will pay heavily for the deception he has practiced, at the moment is overjoyed by the way his predictions have worked out. He does not seem to feel the change that we as readers now feel to be coming over the world he traverses with his master. The Don’s senses, supposing that they ever have deceived him, will deceive him less and less; which means that his mind will have more and more to do, either in the hypothecation of necromancers or in the puzzling out of identities which at first blush are hard to see; or, beyond either of those exercises for his wit, in the devising of mysteries with which to confound the sensible Sancho. More and more, that is to

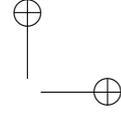
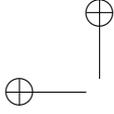




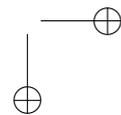
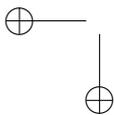
say, Don Quixote's humor will appear. Henceforth he is less the violent than the ingenious knight, set down in subtler circumstances and called upon to solve complexer problems.

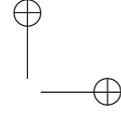
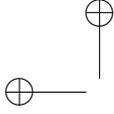
The two men ride on, and what should cross the road ahead of them but a cart driven by the Devil, who has for fellow-passengers an angel, an emperor, a knight, and several other remarkable personages? Don Quixote, who in Part I might have charged them, merely challenges them to state their business in the world; and upon being told that they are strolling players who perform a piece called "The Parliament of Death," relaxes and smiles. "Now by the faith of my function," he says, "I find we ought not to give credit to appearances before we have made the experiment of feeling them." Again, that is to say, his senses do not deceive him; or if they have done so, he accepts the ready explanation: these are paid actors who because of their costumes look like other persons than those they are. There is a little trouble with the troupe, but soon enough he goes on with Sancho, saying: "Let us leave these idle apparitions, and proceed in search of more substantial and honorable adventures." He has shuffled his lenses; he is playing games with optics; he is even juggling mirrors.





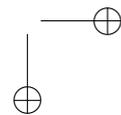
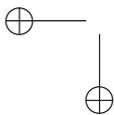
And then he meets the *Knight* of the Mirrors. That evening, as he dozes with Sancho in the open air, he is awakened by the voice of a man in armor who dismounts from his horse and addresses another man who is certainly, judging by appearances, his squire. Here in the very world which hitherto has known no other knight than Don Quixote is one who furthermore will profess to be his enemy; for when the four men talk, knight with knight and squire with squire, the stranger is impertinent enough to claim that he has vanquished in battle no less a hero than Don Quixote de la Mancha. That cannot be, roars the true Don Quixote; it must have been someone like him, though few living men are like him; it could not have been Don Quixote, he at last declaims, for I am he. So the next morning there must be an encounter between them, with both agreeing that the winner may impose his will upon the loser. The strange knight dresses for the fray in armor decorated with little looking-glasses in the shape of half-moons; they ride, they meet; and the stranger falls. As he falls he discloses the face of the Bachelor Sampson Carrasco; and the squire soon confesses that he is Cecial. We learn from a subsequent conversation between the two that they have followed Don Quixote and Sancho in this guise with the expectation of securing their

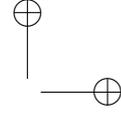
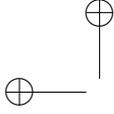




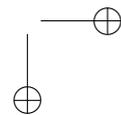
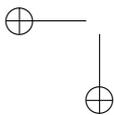
return home; Carrasco of course would win the encounter and then announce his will: that Don Quixote should go back to his village. As for Don Quixote himself, has he not had a very complicated adventure? Instead of needing to pretend that some gentleman he met was a knight, he has met what seemed to be a veritable knight, and one furthermore who had heard of *him*. And if in our view the stranger is interesting because he is not like one of the strolling players, an actor by profession, yet nevertheless is one man acting as if he were another – a man, shall we say, who is acting like an actor – Don Quixote entertains no such view, or at any rate he acts as if he didn't. He insists as usual that an enchanter has been busy. He says to the warrior on the ground: "I do confess and believe, that though you seem to be the Bachelor Sampson Carrasco, you are not he, but some other whom my enemies have transformed into his resemblance, to assuage the violence of my wrath and make me entertain with moderation the glory of my victory."

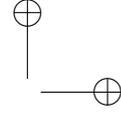
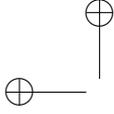
No sooner do we confess that we are staggered by the complexity which the series has attained than we are called upon to witness the episode of the lions. Don Quixote, who formerly saw A as B (windmills as giants), in time saw A as A (wenches as wenches) in spite of Sancho's directions that he





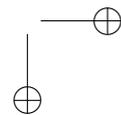
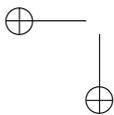
see them otherwise. Then, seeing A once more as B (the players as devil and angel), he was quickly persuaded that the one impersonated the other; though it was more difficult to see behind the disguise of Carrasco the Carrasco who was really there, so that Don Quixote could assert that B was B even though wizards made it appear that B was A. Now, traveling with the Gentleman in the Green Coat, he encounters a wagon bearing two lions in cages who not only look fierce but are certified by their keeper to be fierce. The Don forthwith resolves to prove his courage by standing before the door of the male lion's cage, which he commands the keeper to open, and taking whatever comes. It is not his fault that the male lion, a truly formidable beast, "after he had looked about him a while, turned his tail, and having showed Don Quixote his posteriors, very contentedly lay down again in his compartment." Don Quixote orders the keeper to prod him with his pole, but the keeper has had enough proof of the old man's courage, which he promises forever to extol. "Well, Sancho," says the Don, "what dost thou think of this? Can enchantment prevail over true fortitude? No, these magicians may perhaps rob me of success, but never of my invincible greatness of mind." Not only has he demonstrated his lack of fear; he has undergone a further refinement in

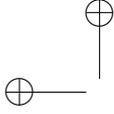




the series we are witnessing. He has seen A as A (lions as lions, and dangerous beyond a doubt), only to discover that they have been changed inside their skins; though he has not been changed inside of his, where he was and is more courageous than the lookers-on supposed, since they had seen him only as a man, and could not foresee that he would have, hidden within him, the heart of a lion. Small wonder that he goes henceforth by the title, Knight of the Lions.

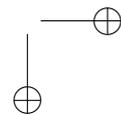
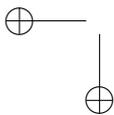
And then there is the business of Basil and Quiteria, two lovers who are not permitted to marry. But Basil at the wedding plays a clever trick and gets his Quiteria after all. Pretending to resign her to the rich Camacho who has spread a feast for the many guests who have come (they include Sancho, who for once fills his belly to bursting), he falls on his sword and welters on the ground in what appears to be his own blood. With what sounds like his last breath he asks the curate in charge to marry him and Quiteria; and Camacho is willing enough to assume that he shall have her a few minutes hence as a widow in name only. But as soon as the ceremony is performed, "up starts Basil briskly from the ground, and with an unexpected activity whips the sword out of his body, and catches his dear Quiteria close in his arms." A miracle, cries the multitude; but it was

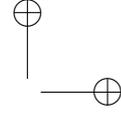
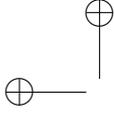




only a stratagem. “The curate came with both his hands to feel the wound, and discovered that the sword had nowhere passed through the cunning Basil’s body, but only through a tin pipe full of blood artfully fitted.”

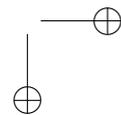
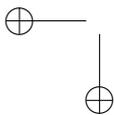
Here is another actor, playing in real life a part which gets for him the thing he wants. Carrasco failed, but Basil has succeeded – with simpler means, too, for all he had to supply was a tin tube full of blood. There is a battle, of course, and of course Don Quixote, who has been a fascinated observer, enters it on the side of the ingenious contriver. Perhaps he would have done so in any case, since love is his prime concern; yet he would have every admiration for so fine an actor as Basil. He will enjoy other encounters with mimes, notably that with Master Peter’s puppet show. But enough of the series has been seen to make it seem indeed a series, searching in its conception and bewildering in its variety. It should not seem strange that as our hero experiences it in all of its involutions he grows steadily more abstracted, and even sad. He has much to think about. The world is full of actors, and he must study his role as he has never studied it before. A third series, and the last to be examined, is longer than either of the first two and perhaps more famous; yet it is so closely interwoven with them both, and particularly with

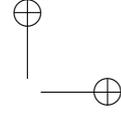
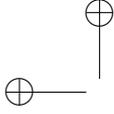




the second, that it is difficult to isolate and discuss alone. It is the series of hoaxes, or pretended agreements on the part of others that Don Quixote is what he says he is, which comes to a climax in the grand deception by the Duke and the Duchess. It complicates the career of the hero and at the same time prolongs it. Again and again he might have returned home by his own choice had not success appeared to attend his efforts. It was, alas, an illusory success; he never was able to deceive or convince anybody; but the illusion gave him courage to go on.

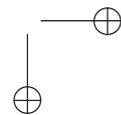
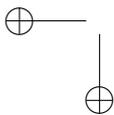
His very first success was a little one, scarcely recognizable as such. He got away from home without anyone's stopping him, by "the private door of his backyard," whence he rode into the fields "wonderfully pleased to see with how much ease he had succeeded in the beginning of his enterprise," which of course must be a secret from the women who till now had run his life. His next success was greater because it solved a pressing need; he must be dubbed a knight, and the keeper of the first inn he stopped at humored him by going through the necessary motions. Also, he won out there against the muleteers who would throw his armor out of the horse-trough while he was holding vigil over it. Now he felt truly successful, so that his unhorsing of the monk and his triumph over the Biscayan,

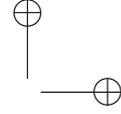
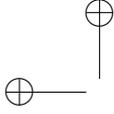




not to say his undisputed championship of Marcella against those who would pursue her, and his managing to get out of the second inn without paying for food or lodging, could seem to fall in with a pattern already established. Nothing would stop him now. Even Vivaldo, the gentleman who became interested in him at the funeral of Marcella's unhappy lover, indulged him by consenting to discuss with him the philosophy of knighthood; he actually paid him the compliment of arguing with him concerning the relative merits of knights and friars.

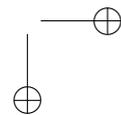
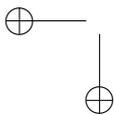
There is scarcely a moment from this point on when someone is not humoring, indulging, or hoaxing the Knight of the Woeful Figure. The motives may be many – to make him seem more foolish than ever, to escape from his uplifted arm, to create amusement in a world which has too little of that, to maneuver him back home – but the technique tends not to vary. His primary premise or assumption is accepted: he is what he says he is, and the world is what he seems to think it. Men discourse with him as if they believed his own remarks made sense, and maidens who consider him an old fool serenade him as if they really hoped to steal his affections away from Dulcinea. Perhaps there is no time when somebody could not have got him home quite simply, by the use

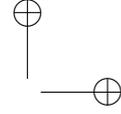




of force. He is strong and clever, but he is not a giant, and enough stout arms could have subdued him, surely. But such is not the way of the world in which Cervantes has placed him. It is possible to suppose that he interests the inhabitants of that world more deeply than they admit or even know. And their hoaxes may tell us at least as much about themselves as about the intended victim. It is almost as if they wanted him to keep the fiction up. Certainly their devices strengthen his desire to do so. The success he seems to have makes him more sanguine still; pours oil, not water, on the flame.

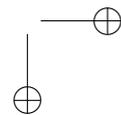
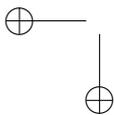
And the trouble they take to fool him! The barber and the curate spend as much time away from home as he does, and make themselves far more uncomfortable. Their effort balances in the first part the all but incredible effort in Part II of the Duke and the Duchess. They give as much thought to Don Quixote as they would have given to a genuine knight, and furthermore, by enlisting the aid of Dorothea and her friends, they recruit as it were the entire population of the book into the service of proving that he should have done what he did in the first place. Nor can they and the Holy Brotherhood get him home at last without “enchanting” him into the wooden cart that takes him there. It is a curious spectacle: the

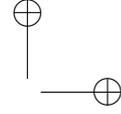
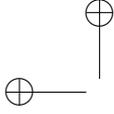




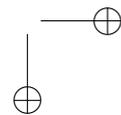
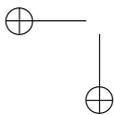
savior of the world in a country vehicle. And Don Quixote makes much of this, musing aloud so that Sancho may hear: "Among all the volumes of chivalry that I have turned over, I never read before of knights-errant drawn in carts, or tugged along so leisurely, by such slothful animals as oxen. For they used to be hurried along with prodigious speed, enveloped in some dark and dusky cloud, or in some fiery chariot drawn by winged griffins, or some such expeditious creatures. But I must confess, to be drawn thus by a team of oxen, staggers my understanding not a little; though perhaps the enchanters of our times take a different method from those in former ages." But a spectacle no less curious is the escort he has with him somewhat as whales have schools of little fishes in their wake. Men ride up and down, before and after the cart, as if it contained a very important person. And if Don Quixote, knowing who he is, knows also who they are, though he maintains that he does not, he is having his own huge joke at their expense, however comfortless the journey is.

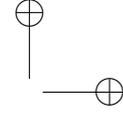
The time comes in Part II, after the diverting incident of Basil and Quiteria, when Don Quixote conceives a hoax of his own. There is no other plausible explanation of what happens at the Cave of Montesinos, which our hero, who is quite as inquisitive as Odysseus, has heard about and is





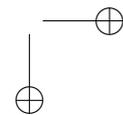
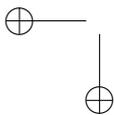
delighted to find in his path. Nothing will do but that he shall descend into it as Odysseus himself went down to Hades, or as Dante went through Hell. He and Sancho have picked up a wandering scholar who waits above ground with the terrified squire while his master explores the recesses of the earth. The preparations are deliberate and delightful. The Don is to be let down on a rope by which Sancho and the scholar will at a signal pull him up when his investigations are done. One thing, however, disturbs the Don. "We did ill," he says, "not to provide ourselves of a little bell, that I could have carried down with me, to ring for more or less rope as I may have occasion for, and inform you of my being alive." This does not reassure Sancho, nor is it intended to. But after prayers to the absent Dulcinea, down goes her intrepid lover, talking as he goes, until his voice is drowned in the windings of the cave and all the cordage is run out. "That done, they began to consider whether they should hoist him up again immediately or no. However, they resolved to stay half an hour, and then they began to draw up the rope; but were strangely surprised to find no weight upon it; which made them conclude, the poor gentleman was lost. Sancho, bursting out in tears, made a heavy lamentation, and fell a-hauling up the rope as fast as he could, to be thoroughly satisfied. But

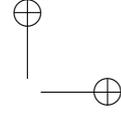
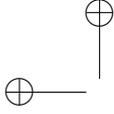




after they had drawn up about fourscore fathoms, they felt a weight again, which made them take heart; and at last they plainly saw Don Quixote.” Yet when they get him up he is in a trance, and time must pass before he can tell what he has seen in the lateral passage he explored, abandoning the rope till he returned and needed it again. What he says he saw – undoubtedly the trance has given him leisure to invent details – astounds Sancho not merely because it contains so many wonders out of old romance but chiefly because it involves a vision of Dulcinea; and not the Dulcinea of Don Quixote’s customary description but the very wench whom Sancho showed him near Toboso. She is enchanted, of course, as Sancho had known his master would think. Sancho’s idea has come home to roost, and he will have to live with it. He does, throughout the rest of the book, with pain and much chagrin. But was she really down there? He will keep asking, and will never find out; or at least for a long time he won’t. Now *he* has been hoaxed, and by a man who if he is as mad as most people think him would hardly be capable of the jest. And Sancho will be hoaxed again in the Enchanted Bark. But the hoax of all hoaxes will be awaiting them both as they approach the domain of the Duke.

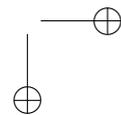
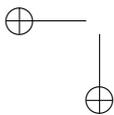
First they meet the Duchess as she hunts with her company in an open field: “A very fine lady

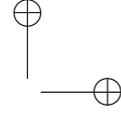




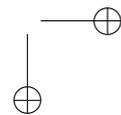
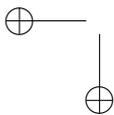
upon a white pacing mare, in green trappings, and a saddle of cloth of silver. The lady herself was dressed in green, so rich and gay that nothing could be finer." Don Quixote sends Sancho forward to convey his respects, and Sancho is not too much surprised to learn that both the Duchess and her husband, who is hunting in another field, know very well who these men are; they have read about them in Part I, and in fact the Duchess recognizes them both without difficulty. She will send for the Duke while the Don comes up. This happens; the most exquisite courtesies are exchanged; and the famous knight is invited to the castle. For its owners have had time to confer, and Cervantes tells us that they were "resolved, as long as he stayed with them, to give him his own way, and humor him in all things, treating him still with all the forms essential to the entertainment of a knight-errant; which they were the better able to do, having been much conversant with books of that kind." They embark, that is to say, upon a program of pretense which will consume all of their time and much of their wealth for weeks to come, and which will inspire before it is ended the remark that they must be madder than the gentleman they hoax.

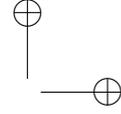
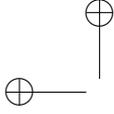
However that may be, the Duke sees to it on this first day that when Don Quixote arrives at



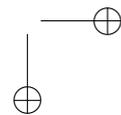
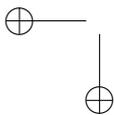


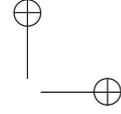
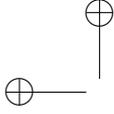
the castle he is met “by two lackeys or grooms in long vests, like nightgowns, of fine crimson satin.” They hail him as “Great and mighty Sir,” and a moment later two beautiful damsels throw over his shoulders “a long mantle of fine scarlet.” Not only this, but the courtyard is soon crowded with domestics who by the Duke’s order, sent ahead, cry out: “Welcome, welcome, the Flower and Cream of Knight-Errantry!” “All which,” says Cervantes, “agreeably surprised the Don, and this was indeed the first day he knew and firmly believed himself to be a real knight-errant, and that his knighthood was more than fancy; finding himself treated just as he had read the brothers of the order were entertained in former ages.” We can have our own opinions as to this last, even though it is Cervantes who has spoken. If his tongue is not in his cheek, ours may be in ours, and for that matter the Don’s in his, though certainly an immense hospitality still awaits him. There is, for instance, the first dinner, soon to be announced. Dressed in a magnificent cloak and cap – by Sancho, remember, and not by the mischievous maids assigned for the purpose – he enters a room of state where damsels and pages, arranged in rows, in turn conduct him to another room where a table is sumptuously set for him, the Duke, the Duchess, and a grave ecclesiastic who will have his own view of our hero.





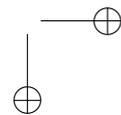
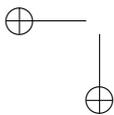
The whole of this episode is a novel by itself, and needs to be read in order to be known in its full beauty. It has its own form and contains its own characters. The Duke, for instance, seems to be less malicious than his wife, though to be sure it is he who conceives the great hoax of the island where Sancho is sent to govern. Sancho had been about to desert his master when the Duchess came in sight. Don Quixote had promised him an island, and no island had appeared. Now by an irony it was within his reach at the very moment he contemplated his treason – or pretended to contemplate it, for it was impossible that he should ever leave Don Quixote’s side. Well, Sancho will have his island, and will govern it so much better than the Duke supposes that the Duke in turn will be confounded. But throughout that first dinner and the evening which follows it the Duke is a gentleman of Don Quixote’s own sort. When four damsels, bent upon a prank of their own, enter the dining room with water, towels, and soap, and lather the knight’s beard so that he looks funny enough to kill them with laughter, though of course they do not laugh, the Duke orders them to give him the same treatment, they do so, and leave the room well paid for their frolic. They had exceeded their duty, and perhaps it occurs to the Duke that they have insulted the knight

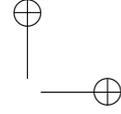
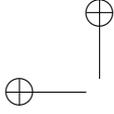




in a fashion not conformable to the tenor of the hoax. Also, there is the moment after dinner when the Duchess interrupts Don Quixote's panegyric on the theme of Dulcinea's beauty. He has been saying that only "Ciceronian and Demosthenian eloquence" could do justice to such beauty. "Pray, Sir," asks the Duchess, "what do you mean by that word Demosthenian?" Perhaps she thinks it a mad coinage, or a mere nonsense word spoken by an irresponsible person. "Demosthenian eloquence, Madam," says the Don, "is as much as to say, the eloquence of Demosthenes, and the Ciceronian that of Cicero, the two greatest orators that ever were in the world." "Tis true," says the Duke; "and you but showed your ignorance, my dear, in asking such a question."

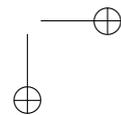
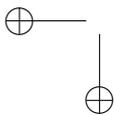
The hoax turns out to be not only immense but multiple. There are hoaxes within hoaxes, as if the whole were a Chinese box for some philosopher's diversion. And that is true; and the philosopher is Cervantes. There is, for instance, the Disenchantment of Dulcinea, which ends with Sancho's paying Don Quixote for the way his leg had been pulled at the Cave of Montesinos. At first, however, it seems a triumph for the master. The Duchess, having wormed out of Sancho the story of the Cave, sees a chance to have fun by putting on an elaborate masque or pageant in the course of which it will

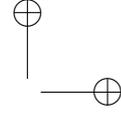
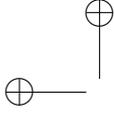




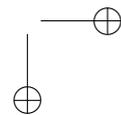
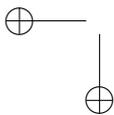
be manifested by the powers of darkness that they are willing to free Dulcinea of her enchantment if Sancho will contract to give himself three thousand lashes. There will be no end to the story of these lashes, which if one likes are the Don's revenge for Sancho's intended deception of him at Toboso. Sancho, naturally, has no liking for them, and imposes conditions at the very start: none of them shall draw blood, and any of them that misses its mark may be counted just the same. But even then, and with the additional understanding that he can take as long as he pleases to complete the count, he delays and delays, so that the last lash is delivered long after he and his master have left the Duke. At one time he is so far behind that Don Quixote, who says he is impatient for Dulcinea to be free, offers to pay him to go faster. He will finally fool Don Quixote by retiring into a forest and whipping trees, groaning dismally the while.

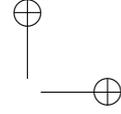
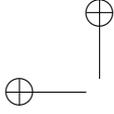
Sancho gets even on the Wooden Horse, which he and Don Quixote must ride in connection with still another hoax that does not matter here. They ride the horse blindfolded, so as not to see the universe they travel through. The horse of course does not move, though bellows are blown to simulate wind. When the adventure is over, nevertheless, Sancho has a confession to make. He had cheated; he had lifted the blindfold a little and looked out.





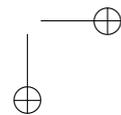
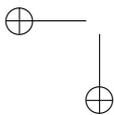
And what had he seen? Oh, wonders! “I spied the earth a hugeous way afar off below me, heaven bless us, no bigger than a mustard seed; and the men walking to and fro upon it, not much larger than hazel nuts.” The Duchess finds some failure of proportion here, but Sancho dismisses her objection and soars on. “I saw myself so near heaven that between the top of my cap and the main sky there was not a span and a half. And forsooth, what a hugeous place it is! And we happened to travel that road where the seven she-goatstars were; and faith and troth, I had such a mind to play with them, having once been a goatherd myself, that I fancy I’d have cried myself to death if I had not done it. I sneaked down very soberly from behind my master, without telling any living soul, and played and leaped about for three quarters of an hour by the clock with the pretty nanny-goats, who are as sweet and fine as so many marigolds or gilly-flowers.” Don Quixote has prepared his own tale of what he saw, but it cannot match this, and he takes refuge in the higher criticism. “It was impossible,” he says, “for us to reach that part where are the Pleiades, or the Seven Goats as Sancho calls them, without being consumed in the elemental fire; and therefore Sancho either lies or dreams.” When Sancho protests that it was no dream, Don Quixote has only one card left to

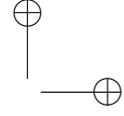
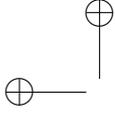




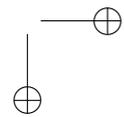
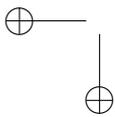
play. “Sancho,” he whispers a little later, “since thou wouldst have us believe what thou hast seen in heaven, I desire thee to believe what I saw in Montesino’s cave. Not a word more.” Nor is it necessary. The two men’s legs are now of equal length.

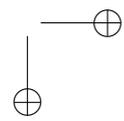
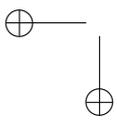
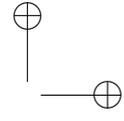
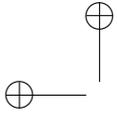
When the great hoax is over and our heroes are at liberty to move on, they are happy in the same way that we are happy. For the jest has run its course and even become a little stale, just as the two noble hosts have dwindled in our estimation. Not only have they gone to absurd lengths to prove our hero mad; they have helped, without ever knowing it, to prove him sane. If nothing else, the remark whispered to Sancho makes it clear that Don Quixote knows where he is and what he is doing. He knows where he is, and he does not think it is heaven. Were he simply mad, he might suppose it was. But he is glad to get away from a part that has been both exhausting and humiliating to perform. The Duke and the Duchess, who took it for granted that he thought himself in heaven, had not made good their assumption by being equal in courtesy to him. He was acting and they were acting; but they did not know the part to its depth. He knew it as deep as the mind and the soul can go. There was no difference between his courtesy and the courtesy of any true knight

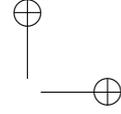
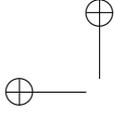




you please. Theirs was but the exaggerated gesture of pretenders who feel themselves superior to the virtue they copy. Don Quixote, hailing liberty regained, rides back into the simpler world of earth where his imagination is at home. It had accommodated itself with skill to the hocus-pocus that surrounded him in a house whose inmates were dishonest. Now for the great world where honor and dishonor fight with each other every day.

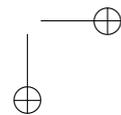
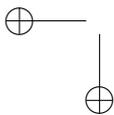


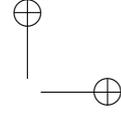
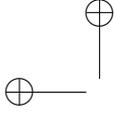




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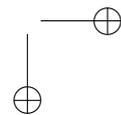
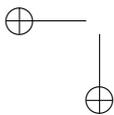
The whole of *Don Quixote* is either a series of adventures or a series of conversations. More properly, since many of the conversations are about the adventures, before as well as after they take place, it is both series intertwined. The book, that is to say, is neither all action nor all talk. It is not a yarn, and it is not a philosophical dialogue. Its events are of deep interest to the intellect, and its discussions advance the plot. So it is dangerous to emphasize the one thing at the expense of the other, though more will be lost by ignoring the speeches than will be lost by overlooking the overt, the visible, deeds. The deeds, in fact, are less likely to be overlooked than the commentaries upon them, and sometimes it appears that they are the only items a reader remembers: *Don Quixote*, by the common account, is nothing but a story of a foolish, fond old man who began by making a

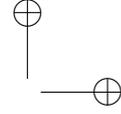
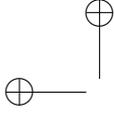




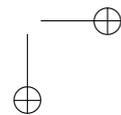
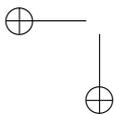
mistake about windmills and went on to make innumerable other mistakes of the same description. But this is not what one finds if one reads the book with loving and continuous care. For then it turns out that the hero is quite as much a talking as a doing man. And the final memory may be of a voice, magnificent not merely for itself but for the mind that inspires it, which one will not expect to hear again in any book. The eloquence of Don Quixote is in a class all by itself. No other hero ever talked as richly or as well. And this may seem strange if what he wanted to be, or to seem to be, was a knight at arms. The knights of the romances spoke handsomely upon occasion, but for the most part they rode and fought. If Palmerin of England, whom the barber and the curate ranked second to Amadis of Gaul, is an outstanding exception to this rule, he is also an outstanding bore. Don Quixote, who talks ten times as much, is anything you please but he is never a bore. He is busier talking about knights than being one; he contemplates rather than fulfills the role; but precisely there is where his charm comes in.

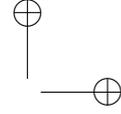
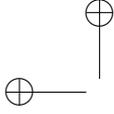
“A man that talks well,” remarks the Duke, “can never talk too much.” He is speaking of Sancho, and he does not mean the compliment, though indeed he should; but any good reader will accept it for Sancho’s master, whose resonant tones,





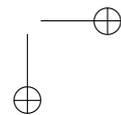
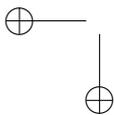
matching so perfectly his resonant thoughts, make of the entire book a musical work distinguished for the depth and variety of its sound. The style of Don Quixote is perhaps the most delicious style in any literature. This man can say anything, short or long; he knows his way as genius does through the labyrinth of intellect and language; and there is endless learning at his command. He is never out of touch with his erudition, which certain of his interlocutors consider excessive but which all of them recognize as native to a mind both spacious and subtle, both full to overflowing and free to overflow. The slightest object can remind him of vast subjects for discourse: an acorn of the Golden Age, a millpond of the seven seas. And often he is wise. Men who see him coming and think him simply crazy remain in his path so that they may exchange words with him and extract amusement from the poor mad things he will say. But most of the things he says do not strike them as poor or mad, and they are puzzled. There is a soundness in his views that moves them almost to complain. Such a man has no right to be so interesting or so true. Of course he is false with respect to knighthood; he is clearly insane when it comes to that; yet of any other matter he has a gentleman's, a scholar's, understanding. He is acute and humane; and he evidently knows

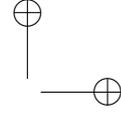
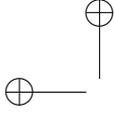




his Aristotle. It never occurs to these men that because he is right about so many other things he may be right about knight-errantry too. Nor may it occur to us who have listened to him night and day since the book began. But the reason in our case is a little different. His wisdom has long since ceased to seem inconsistent with the rest of him, whatever the rest of him is. We have fallen so deeply in love with his manner that we have forgotten how to judge his matter; we have lost in large part our interest in the question of his madness. Would that all men could talk as he talks. He is king of his world, and he is perhaps the king of any world we can imagine. When we see him dressing for dinner, whether at the Duke's house or at the meanest inn, we know that he will descend to dominate a dinner table where others tolerantly await him. He will determine the topics to be discussed, and he will not only lead but ornament the discussion.

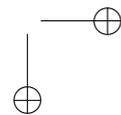
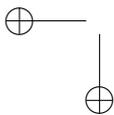
The topic he likes best is his beloved books of chivalry – *were* they true and *are* they true? And if they seem so real that we delight to read them, what is the meaning of our delight? Is it entertainment or instruction, is it belief or make-belief? He will pursue this theme with anybody: the barber and the curate, Don Vivaldo, the Canon of Toledo, Don Diego and his son, or the Duke's priest who

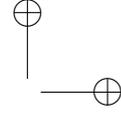
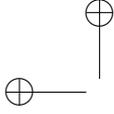




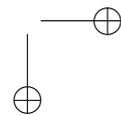
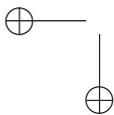
is so sure that he himself is right. With the Canon of Toledo the discussion branches out until it takes in such subsidiary topics as the difference between poetry and history, and the difference too between learned and unlearned readers; for both have their claims, and the greatest writers condescend to neither. With Don Lorenzo, Don Diego's son, the talk is all of poetry, an art which the young man has practiced with but small success to date. He is encouraged by Don Quixote, whom he considers mad on every other subject, to believe himself a good poet; for the old stranger seems to know a great deal about the art, and who is to say whether he flatters or not the author of the specimens placed before him?

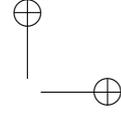
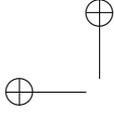
But there is no finer disquisition on the reality of knights than one which runs its course at the inn while Don Quixote sleeps. He takes no part in it, of course; and yet his very presence, snoring in another room, lifts the speakers to a height they would not otherwise attain. He is not only eloquent in himself, but the cause that eloquence is in other men – or as it chances now, in men and girls, for the innkeeper's daughter and Maritornes have their own testimony to give. The barber has proposed that the innkeeper's books of chivalry be burned as Don Quixote's were; though the curate votes that some of them be saved because they are





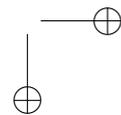
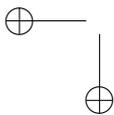
true histories. Both critics mystify their host, who has never thought very much about either poetry or history. He is willing to believe whatever he sees in print; but mainly the books in question give him pleasure and keep him alive. And others, too. “In harvest-time, a great many of the reapers come to drink here in the heat of the day, and he that can read best among us takes up one of these books; and all the rest of us, sometimes thirty or more, sit round about him, and listen with such pleasure that we think neither of sorrow nor care; as for my own part, when I hear the mighty blows and dreadful battles of these knights-errant, I have half a mind to be one myself, and am raised to such a life and briskness that I frighten away old age; I could sit and hear them from morning till night.” He is in truth another Don Quixote, though he will never take to the road. If he did, observes his wife, he might lose some of the ill humor that makes him hard to live with. His daughter confesses that it is not so much the fighting as the love that interests her. And yet it is a painful interest, since so much of the love is what you could call unhappy. “Indeed the sad lamentations of the poor knights, for the loss of their mistresses, sometimes make me cry like anything. . . . I will never give anybody reason to call me tigress and lioness, and I don’t know how many other ugly names, as those ladies are often

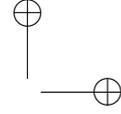
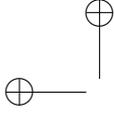




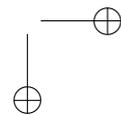
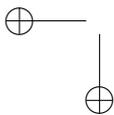
called, and I think they deserve yet worse, so they do; for they can neither have soul nor conscience to let such fine gentlemen die or run mad for a sight of them. What signifies all their fiddling and coyness? If they are civil women, why don't they marry 'em, for that's all their knights would be at?" Her father, however, brings the conversation back to the prowess, true or false, of such heroes as Cirongilio of Thrace, "who, as you may read there, going by water one day, was assaulted by a fiery serpent in the middle of the river; he presently leaped nimbly upon her back, and hanging by her scaly neck, grasped her throat fast with both his arms, so that the serpent, finding herself almost strangled, was forced to dive into the water to save herself, and carried the knight, who would not quit his hold, to the very bottom, where he found a stately palace, and such pleasant gardens that 'twas a wonder; and straight the serpent turned into a very old man, and told him such things as were never heard nor spoken." Here, hundreds of pages before the Don descends into its depths, is the Cave of Montesinos. But the Don is sound asleep and must have that adventure by himself.

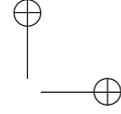
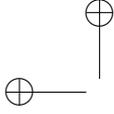
He has it, rather, with Sancho. And with Sancho he has the most as well as the best of his conversations. Perhaps he had not expected this when he picked his fat little neighbor to go along with him





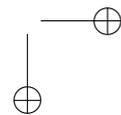
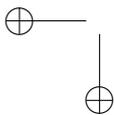
as squire. He could think as he pleased about the horse he would call his steed and the rustic maiden he would apostrophize as his lady, just as he could pretend without difficulty that the armor he wore was brilliant and new. None of those could speak up and refute him. But now this squire would talk. And what would he say? Certainly he did not look and could not be made to look like the fair young fellows who went forth with Amadis and their kind, dreaming appropriate dreams of the day when they themselves would kneel before a king and be received into the order they adored; dreaming too in their delicate hearts of slender princesses whose names they were ambitious to carry about the world on loving lips. Sancho was not like that, nor was the peasant woman he had married. Doubtless he would be a failure when it came to words; the problem would be to keep him silent; or if not that, to educate him in the rudiments of his role. For he would have to know that he played a part in the same way, though not with the same success, that his master did. The only question was, could he be induced to learn it? Could he become serious about it, as good actors do about their lines? The innkeeper who had knighted Don Quixote was no longer present to embarrass him. He was not a king, but one could say he was and not be contradicted. Sancho

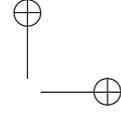
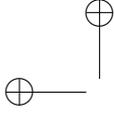




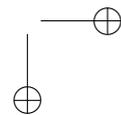
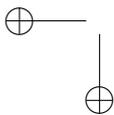
might confound his lord at every turn; he might keep on being himself. And that, as we all know, is exactly what Sancho did. And that, as we know too, is why his master loved him in the end. But there were moments of panic before this end was reached. Sancho was always a burden and a care. He had perpetually to be reminded and instructed. And much of the conversation between the two has that for its purpose. Nor do we always notice that Don Quixote's talk concerns the role that Sancho plays rather than some delusion that they are respectively knight and squire. The Don never assumes that Sancho does not know who his master is. He knows he knows it as well as he knows the name of Dapple. There is no pretense between the two, no mutual deception. Or if there is, they both have fun with the fact. And the fun they have is the clearest proof that Sancho is not stupid nor the Don insane.

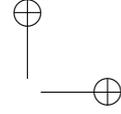
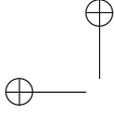
An early example is their discourse concerning food. They have just left the Biscayan who, though vanquished, had cut away half of Don Quixote's ear; and the knight is both hurt and hungry. "At this time," as he says, "I'd have thee see whether thou hast anything to eat in thy wallet, that we may afterward seek for some castle where we may lodge this night and make the balsam I told thee; for I protest my ear smarts extremely." "I have





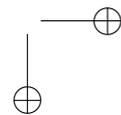
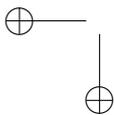
here an onion," replies Sancho, "a piece of cheese, and a few stale crusts of bread; but sure such coarse fare is not for such a brave knight as your worship." "Thou art grossly mistaken, friend Sancho. Know, that 'tis the glory of knights-errant to be whole months without eating; and when they do, they fall upon the first thing they meet with, though it be never so homely. Hadst thou but read as many books as I have done, thou hadst been better informed as to that point; for though I think I have read as many histories of chivalry in my time as any other man, I never could find that the knights-errant ever ate, unless it was by mere accident, or when they were invited to great feasts or royal banquets; at other times they indulged themselves with little other food besides their thoughts. Though it is not to be imagined they could live without supplying the exigencies of human nature, as being after all no more than mortal men, yet 'tis likewise to be supposed, that as they spent the greatest part of their lives in forests and deserts, and always destitute of a cook, consequently their usual food was but such coarse country fare as thou now offerest me. Never then make thyself uneasy about what pleases me, friend Sancho, nor pretend to make a new world, nor to unhinge the very constitution and ancient customs of knight-errantry." "I beg your worship's pardon;

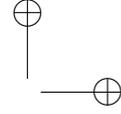
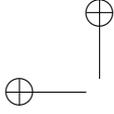




for as I was never bred scholar, I may chance to have missed in some main point of your laws of knighthood; but from this time forward I'll be sure to stock my wallet with all sorts of dry fruits for you, because your worship's a knight; as for myself, who am none, I'll provide poultry and other substantial victuals." "I don't say, Sancho, that a knight-errant is obliged to feed altogether upon fruit; I only mean, that this was their common food, together with some roots and herbs which they found up and down the fields, of all which they had a perfect knowledge, as I myself have." "Tis a good thing," agrees Sancho, "to know those herbs; for I am much mistaken, or that kind of knowledge will stand us in good stead ere long. In the meantime here's what good Heaven has sent us." And they fall to heartily together.

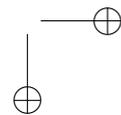
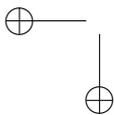
Nor is the subject finished there, for soon they join some goatherds at their evening meal and the question arises as to whether the two of them shall eat together in the company of others. The Don is certain that they should. "Tis my pleasure," he insists, "that thou sit thee down by me, in the company of these good people; and that there be no difference now observed between thee and me, thy natural lord and master; that thou eat in the same dish and drink in the same cup; for it may be said of knight-errantry, as of love, that it makes all

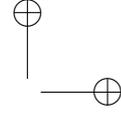
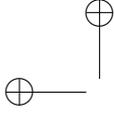




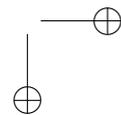
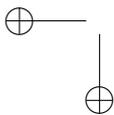
things equal.” “I thank your worship, but to deal plainly and truly with you, I had rather munch a crust of brown bread and an onion in a corner, without any more ado or ceremony, than feed upon turkey at another man’s table, where one is fain to sit mincing and chewing his meat an hour together, drink little, be always wiping his fingers and his chops, and never dare to cough nor sneeze, though he had never so much a mind to it, nor do a many things which a body may do freely by one’s self. Therefore, good Sir, change those tokens of your kindness, which I have a right to by being your worship’s squire, into something that may do me more good. As for these honors, I heartily thank you as much as if I had accepted ’em, but yet I give up my right to ’em from this time to the world’s end.” “Talk no more,” replies Don Quixote, “but sit thee down, for the humble shall be exalted.” So Sancho loses that argument, just as he loses many an argument on the sister subject, sleep. “Sleep, Sancho, for thou wert born to sleep.” And Sancho, willingly confuted, sleeps; while his master, who might not mind a wink himself, sits or paces and composes madrigals which he has proved to be more precious than the sweet closing of eyelids even when one is tired almost to death.

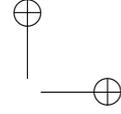
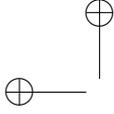
“Talk no more, for the humble shall be exalted.” The time comes, however, when Sancho is sen-





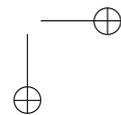
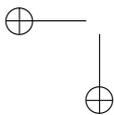
tenced to silence for the Opposite reason. The abortive adventure with the fulling mills is under discussion as every adventure will henceforth be; and Sancho has mocked his master's bravery of the night before – mocked it so merrily that the Don has struck him. "I did but joke a little," says Sancho, rubbing his shoulders and asking pardon. It is then the knight's turn to be magnanimous; yet he has one further thing to say. "Sancho, I prithee think no more of my severity; thou knowest a man cannot always command the first impulse of his passions. On the other side, let me advise thee not to be so saucy for the future, and not to assume that strange familiarity with me which is so unbecoming in a servant. I protest, in such a vast number of books of knighthood as I have read, I never found that any squire was ever allowed so great a freedom of speech with his master as thou takest with me; and truly I look upon it to be a great fault in us both; in thee for disrespecting me, and in me for not making myself more respected. Gandalin, Amadis of Gaul's squire, though he was earl of the Firm Island, yet never spoke to his master but with cap in hand, his head bowed, and his body half bent, after the Turkish manner. But what shall we say of Gasabal, Don Galaor's squire, who was such a strict observer of silence that, to the honor of his marvellous taciturnity,

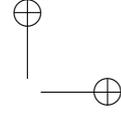
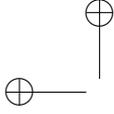




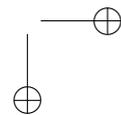
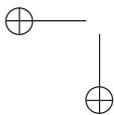
he gave the author occasion to mention his name but once in that voluminous authentic history? From all this, Sancho, I would have thee make this observation, that there ought to be a distance kept between the master and the man, the knight and the squire. Therefore, once more I tell thee, let's live together for the future more according to the due decorum of our respective degrees, without giving one another any further vexation on this account; for after all, 'twill always be the worse for you on whatsoever occasion we happen to disagree." "You may be sure," says Sancho after a while, "I'll not so much as offer to open my lips to jibe or joke at your doings, but always stand in awe of you, and honor you as my lord and master." "By doing so," replies the Don, "thy days shall be long on the face of the earth; for next to our parents we ought to respect our masters, as if they were our fathers."

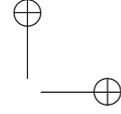
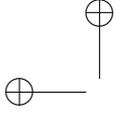
They ride on, and Sancho never speaks unless he is spoken to – never, that is, until the middle of the morning, when he suddenly says: "Pray, Sir, will you give me leave to talk to you a little? For since you have laid that bitter command upon me, to hold my tongue, I've had four or five quaint conceits that have rotted in my gizzard, and now I've another at my tongue's end that I would not for anything should miscarry." "Say it!" cries Don



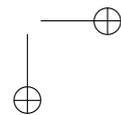
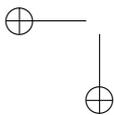


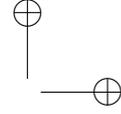
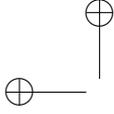
Quixote; “but be short, for no discourse can please when too long.” The discourse concerns the disadvantages to them both of the obscurity in which they travel; nobody knows what they are doing, no author is taking notes that might blossom into a romance. Perhaps they should go and serve some emperor or prince who has minstrels and scribes at his command. Don Quixote, alert to this cue, indulges in marvelous daydreams of such a consummation to his career; he anticipates, in fact, the reception they will have at the Duke’s house in Part II. But at this moment he must be glad that Sancho has broken the silence imposed upon him. He had never meant it anyway, or expected that Sancho would do as he was told. For even so soon his fat companion has shown himself to be a wonder among the talkers of the world. The Don has infinite resources within himself; yet how much better it is to have one by his side whose every remark, however ignorant it may be, is stimulating to the brain and tongue. But he maintains the fiction a little longer, if only that he may relish the truth more. The end of the experiment comes as the two of them ride into the Black Mountain. “Thus they travelled for a while,” Cervantes tells us, “without speaking a word to each other. Sancho, almost dead, and ready to burst for want of a little chat, waited with great impatience to begin, not





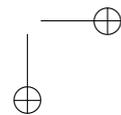
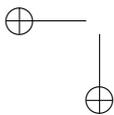
daring to speak first, since his strict injunction of silence. But at last, not being able to keep his word any longer: ‘Good your worship,’ quoth he, ‘give me your blessing and leave to be gone, I beseech you, that I may go home to my wife and children, where I may talk till I am weary, and nobody can hinder me; for I must needs tell you, that for you to think to lead me a jaunt through hedge and ditch, over hills and dales, by night and by day, without daring to open my lips, is to bury me alive. Could beasts speak, as they did in Aesop’s time, ’twould not have been half so bad with me; for then might I have communed with my ass as I pleased, and have forgot my ill fortune. But to trot on in this fashion, all the days of my life, after adventures, and to light on nothing but thumps, kicks, cuffs, and be tossed in a blanket, and after all, forsooth, to have a man’s mouth sewed up, without daring to speak one’s mind, I say it again, no living soul can endure it.’ ‘I understand thee, Sancho,’ answered Don Quixote, ‘thou lingerest with impatience to exercise thy talking faculty. Well, I am willing to free thy tongue from this restraint that so cruelly pains thee, upon condition that the time of this license shall not extend beyond that of our continuance in these mountains.’” But we hear no more of the condition. Don Quixote never muzzles his best

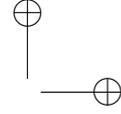
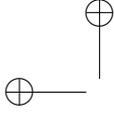




friend again. They will have quarrels, and Sancho will be reminded that he is insolent beyond endurance, and illiterate to boot; but his master does not repeat the mistake he knows he has made. Nor has Sancho been unaware that he knows it. The two of them have been fencing for position, and here now the position is: They will talk to the end of the world, on every subject under the sun, and it will never be true that one of them enjoys it less than the other.

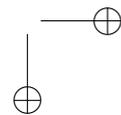
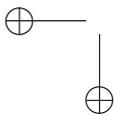
Sancho's enjoyment is such that when he strikes for wages at the beginning of Part II he cannot strike to the bitter end: the losing of his job. Don Quixote, preparing for his third sally from home, seems to know this very well; and to know, furthermore, how Sancho can be brought around. Carrasco has offered to be squire, and Sancho has heard the offer. "Well, Sancho," says his employer, "did not I tell thee I should not want squires? Behold who offers me his service, the most excellent bachelor of arts Sampson Carrasco, the perpetual darling of the Muses and glory of the Salamanca schools, sound and active of body, patient of labor, inured to abstinence, silent in misfortune, and in short, endowed with all the accomplishments that constitute a squire. But forbid it, Heaven, that to indulge my private inclinations I should presume to weaken the whole body of learning by

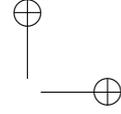
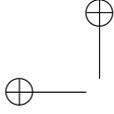




removing from it so substantial a pillar, so vast a repository of sciences, and so eminent a branch of the liberal arts. No, my friend, remain thou another Sampson in thy country, be the honor of Spain, and the delight of thy ancient parents; I shall content myself with any squire, since Sancho does not vouchsafe to go with me." "I do, I do, I do vouchsafe!" cries Sancho, with tears in his eyes. Of course he vouchsafes. Where else would he hear a voice like that, saying such absurd, such sublime, such beautiful things? He will live with that voice till it finds its own silence, as to his grief and ours it eventually does.

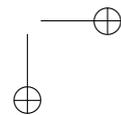
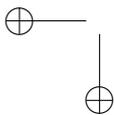
So the conversation of this pair flows on. And one sign of its excellence is that each listens to and learns from the other. Don Quixote, for example, learns how to respect proverbs. He began by despising Sancho's addiction to the vulgar vice of letting others say for him what he should say himself. A proverb has been defined as the wisdom of many and the wit of one; but the one is long since dead, and we are his slaves if we can do no better than take what he has tossed us out of old time. The Don is too proud of his own rhetoric to exchange it for that of some country wit whose lineage he does not know. What he gradually realizes is that Sancho's scholarship in the field of proverbs is immense. The little man

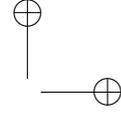
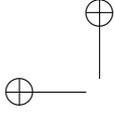




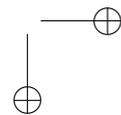
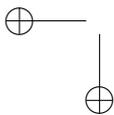
knows millions of them; they dribble from him, they pop out of him like peas out of a pod, they pepper his entire discourse until it is in fact too highly seasoned – the wood of his subject is lost among the multitude of waving trees. Sancho is a true son of Spain, a country notoriously rich in popular sayings; but the thing has become in him, says his master, worse even than a vice. It is a disease, a sickness of the mind. Yet Don Quixote feels the fascination too, and at last he is infected. He begins to match the apothegms of Sancho with dozens of his own. He will never catch up with the virtuoso at his side; he has read too many books for that, and been lost in too many abstractions. Still, he does his best; and Sancho is much pleased.

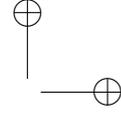
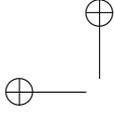
And soon enough the servant shows that some at least of his master's style has rubbed off on him. They are riding away from those strolling players whom Don Quixote has extolled as the looking-glasses of human life. "Prithee tell me," he continues, "hast thou never seen a play acted, where kings, emperors, prelates, knights, ladies, and other characters are introduced on the stage? One acts a ruffian, another a soldier; this man a cheat, and that a merchant; one plays a designing fool, and another a foolish lover; but the play done, and the actors undressed, they are all equal, and as they were before. Just such a comedy is acted





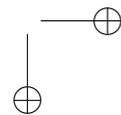
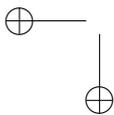
on the great stage of the world, where some play the emperors, others the prelates, and in short, all the parts that can be brought into a dramatic piece; till death, which is the catastrophe and end of the action, strips the actors of all their marks of distinction, and levels their quality in the grave.” “A rare comparison,” says Sancho, “but not so new but that I have heard it over and over. Just such another is that of a game at chess, where while the play lasts, every piece has its particular office; but when the game’s over, they are all mingled and huddled together, and clapped into a bag, just as when life’s ended we are laid up in the grave.” To which Don Quixote, nobly overlooking the palpable hit at his cliché, returns a handsome compliment. “Truly, Sancho, thy simplicity lessens, and thy sense improves every day.” “And good reason why,” says Sancho who is not to be outdone in courtesy. “Some of your worship’s wit must needs stick to me; for your dry unkindly land, with good dunging and tilling, will in time yield a good crop. I mean, Sir, that the dung and muck of your conversation being thrown on the barren ground of my wit, together with the time I have served your worship and kept you company; which is, as a body may say, the tillage; I must needs bring forth blessed fruit at last, so as not to shame my master, but keep in

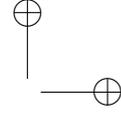
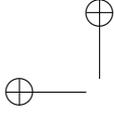




the paths of good manners, which you have beaten into my sodden understanding.”

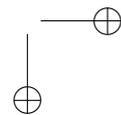
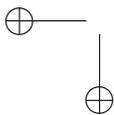
The compliment is not without its jest, but so of all compliments that equals pay each other. The knight and the squire are well on their way to an equality more warm and living than that of undressed actors or that of chessmen clapped into a bag; or even that of masters and servants who eat at the same table. They are finally, as it were, one flesh. And if Don Quixote, granting this, says that he is the head and Sancho the body, that is only his way of keeping decorum. He would never deny what Sancho says to the Duke’s clergyman: “I have stuck close to my good master, and kept him company this month; and now he and I are all one, and I must be as he is, if it be Heaven’s blessed will.” He might not like so well the beginning of a similar speech made to the Duchess, but he would clap at the conclusion. “I am a fool, that’s certain,” confides Sancho to that noble lady, “for if I’d been wise I had left my master many a fair day since. But I must follow him through thick and thin. I have eaten his bread, I love him well, and nothing but death can part us.” When Don Quixote trembles and blushes at the Duke’s table because Sancho is talking out of turn, and talking as always much too long, it is as if he felt a portion of his own

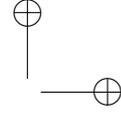
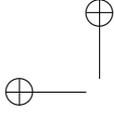




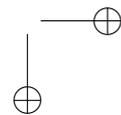
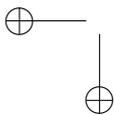
wit to have gone astray. The brother has escaped the keeper, though of course he can be brought back. Equality in these men has reached that height which only the greatest comedy exposes. Don Quixote had been right when he particularly praised comedians and comedies for their power to give “a just idea of Nature.” If it be true that only God can understand how men are equal, then comedy deserves all praise for its attempt to be divine. The human comedy God writes would seem to be the thing great artists copy. Cervantes copies it in every page of his all but inhumanly charitable book. In that book even Rozinante and Dapple, the noble horse and the lowly ass, are lost without each other. And Sancho is as close to Dapple as he is to the Don. Losing him once and finding him again, he runs to embrace him and kiss him, and call him his darling and treasure, the delight of his eyes, his dearest companion, “as if,” says Cervantes, “the beast had been a rational creature.” The beast, Cervantes goes on to say, accepts the kisses without a word. No matter, though. Don Quixote will have words, and words to waste.

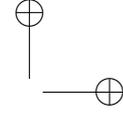
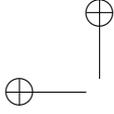
His words of instruction as Sancho goes off to govern his “island” – a dry little town with walls and a thousand inhabitants, a dependency of the Duke which his steward has rehearsed in its part –



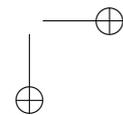
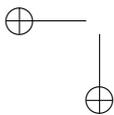


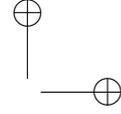
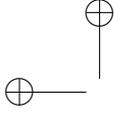
are doubtless all wasted. They are out of Aristotle, Plato, and one does not know how many other political philosophers; and they are wise words of course; but Sancho does not need them. Don Quixote supposed he did, and hence a lecture that went even so far as to caution the new dignitary against excesses of eating and sleeping, either excess being as bad for the brain as a plethora of proverbs. The two men part with tears, since by this time they have really become inseparable, and Sancho proceeds to astonish everybody by his wisdom. It is the wisdom of Solomon rather than of Aristotle, as three cases brought before him prove even to those who stand about in the expectation that he will make a fool of himself. The tailor and his five caps, the debtor and his cane, and the powerful doxy whom Sancho maneuvers into showing a strength she should have used in defense of the virtue she pretends she has lost by force – the truth about no one of these is missed by a man who, however deficient his academic education, is a perfect judge of character. Sancho's knowledge of others begins, one may think, in the knowledge he has of himself. It is a plainer brand of self-knowledge than manifests itself in his master, who indeed has more to know, since of the two he is the more complicated person. Sancho, to be sure, does not see through the fiction of a court physician





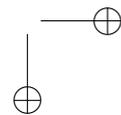
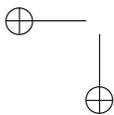
who in the guise of one who would watch his diet starves him almost to death. He complains of this in one of his charming letters to the Don, who meanwhile is having troubles of his own in the madhouse of the Duke, and who reports them too in loving letters which the governor is delighted to receive; the separated friends cannot after all break off communication with each other. But Sancho is on the whole as surprising to those who watch him conduct affairs as Don Quixote ever was to those who heard him conduct conversations. The same mistake is made about both men: one cannot be wise because he is mad, and the other must be a fool because he is illiterate. So far as the reader is concerned, there is no sweeter evidence of Sancho's sanity, not to say his maturity, than is provided in the speech he makes to the young brother and sister whom the town watchmen bring before him as he makes his nightly rounds. What started as a prank has ended in arrest. But Sancho has straightened things out, and now he speaks: "Truly, gentlefolks, here's a little piece of childish folly; and to give an account of this wild frolic, and slip of youth, there needed not all these sighs and tears, nor these hems and haws and long excuses. Could not you, without any more ado, have said, our names are so and so, and we stole out of our father's house for an hour or two, only to ramble

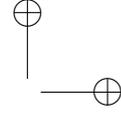
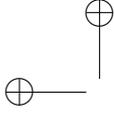




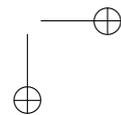
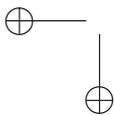
about the town and satisfy a little curiosity, and there had been an end of the story, without all this weeping and wailing.” “You say very well,” the damsel protests, “but you may imagine that in the trouble and fright I was in, I could not behave myself as I should have done.” “Well,” says Sancho, “there’s no harm done; go along with us, and we’ll see you home to your father’s; perhaps you mayn’t yet be missed. But have a care how you gad abroad to see fashions another time. Don’t be too venturesome. An honest maid should be still at home, as if she had one leg broken. A hen and a woman are lost by rambling; and she that longs to see, longs also to be seen. I need say no more.” And now for the sequel as Cervantes tells it. “The young gentleman thanked the Governor for his civility, and then went home under his conduct. Being come to the house, the young spark threw a little stone against one of the iron-barred windows; and presently a maid servant, who sat up for them, came down, opened the door, and let him and his sister in. The Governor with his company then continued his rounds, talking all the way they went of the genteel carriage and beauty of the brother and sister, and the great desire these poor children had to see the world by night.”

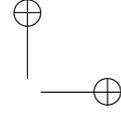
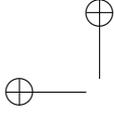
Sancho in the end resigns as governor and rejoins his master – falling first, however, into a pit out of





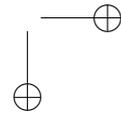
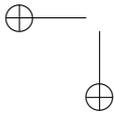
which Don Quixote has to pull him as he himself had been pulled up out of the Cave of Montesinos – and soon enough the two great friends leave the castle of the Duke behind them, bent on further adventures. But the further adventures are all downhill. Their enthusiasm is somehow spent, as in a sense the vigor of Cervantes is. Some of the best and deepest things are still to happen; the narrative means most at its very end; yet so far as the spirits of the heroes are concerned there can be no true recovery from the hell of hoax through which both men have passed. And if a kind of quiet has descended upon the heart of Don Quixote, so that he is free to meditate upon a simpler role that he might play, the role of shepherd which we know has always competed in his mind with that of knight, Cervantes does not permit him to enjoy this quiet. Twice he dreams the pastoral dream, and twice – upon the instant, too, of his indulgence – peace for him is shattered. The great musician who constructs the work twice introduces the new theme, but each time murders it with thunder, with a burst of kettledrums. Don Quixote, stumbling upon some youths and maidens who have dressed as shepherds so that they may call themselves Arcadians, is inspired to make a suitable speech in honor of the beauty of the girls; and then here comes a herd of bulls to ride him

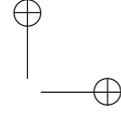
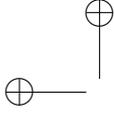




down. It is a terrible humiliation, painful to both his body and his mind; but it will be matched by another one not too many pages on, when, musing with Sancho on the pastoral existence they may some time lead together – he gets so far as to imagine the names they will take, Quixotis in his case, Pansino in Sancho's, though Sancho rather favors Teresona as a tribute to his wife – here comes a herd of boars to ride him down again. And if with his last breath he is tempted a third time to consider the role of amorous shepherd, the punishment is then as final as it is swift: he dies, and never dreams again.

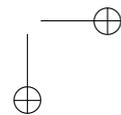
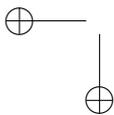
The time comes, in other words, when Don Quixote decides to stop acting altogether. The role of knight has never pleased; and heaven itself would seem to be saying that the pastoral part is not so much as to be imagined. There is nothing to do but to go home where some have said he should have stayed in the first place. He can scarcely agree with this, nor can we agree who would never have known him had he obeyed his niece; yet he does go, and the story is soon over. He goes, for one thing, because he must keep his word. Carrasco has caught up with him again, and this time he makes sure that when they ride against each other it will be Don Quixote who is unhorsed. That happens, and then Don Quixote is obliged to remember the

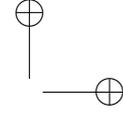
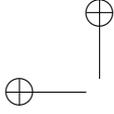




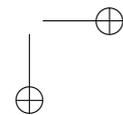
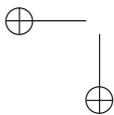
condition he accepted: if defeated, to return to his village and live peaceably there for the whole of one year. He remembers, and he consents. It never occurs to him to do otherwise, nor has Carrasco doubted that he would keep his word. A madman might have forgotten ever giving such a word; a maniac would almost certainly demolish it now. But Don Quixote turns the head of Rozinante home – sadly, to be sure, yet resolutely. His last act as a knight is possibly his truest. He is faithful to his vow.

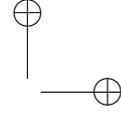
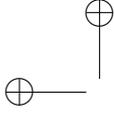
At home in bed, for he is very tired, he shows no disposition to discuss either knights or shepherds further. He announces to his niece that he is dying, and asks her to bring the barber, the curate, and Carrasco so that they may hear his recantation. They are coming anyway, for they are concerned about their friend. But their concern grows into consternation when they hear what he has to say. He has never seemed madder than he does now. “My good friends,” he says, “I have happy news to tell you. I am no longer Don Quixote de la Mancha. I declare myself an enemy to Amadis of Gaul and his whole generation; all profane stories of knight-errantry, all romances I detest. I have a true sense of the danger of reading them, and of all my past follies, and through Heaven’s mercy, and my own experience, I abhor them.” This sounds





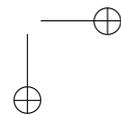
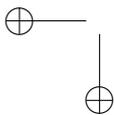
to the three men standing at his bedside so much like a new frenzy of some sort that their instinct is to humor him in it as drunkards are placated with more drink. Carrasco says he has heard that Dulcinea is at last disenchanted. To which her one-time lover supplies an answer as soft as it is decisive, as sweet as it is bitter. "No more of that, I beseech you. Pray, gentlemen, let us be serious. I want a priest to receive my confession, and a scrivener to draw up my will. There is no trifling at a time like this. I must take care of my soul." It is like the answer given to Sancho when he rushes in a few minutes later and accuses his master of the extreme folly: he plans to die while he is still alive. Sancho, weeping between his brave words, does all that eloquence can do to recommend the shepherd's life they have thought of living, and to explain away the recent disaster in the field that has brought his master home; it was his fault, he suggested, for not having tightened Rozinante's girth; and anyway it was but one of many misfortunes that a true knight must expect. "Soft and fair," cuts in the voice of Don Quixote. "Never look for birds of this year in the nests of the last." Properly for the friend addressed, it is a proverb: the last that either one of them will deliver. And the gentleman who speaks it does

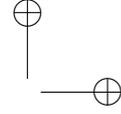
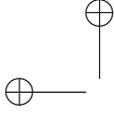




not stay for an answer. Out of the book and out of the world he goes.

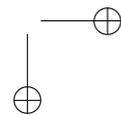
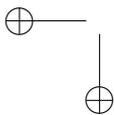
What had he been in the book, and what is he now in the world? In the world he is as many things as there are theories about him; and in the book too, no matter how carefully it is read, he may appear to be many men, or if he is one man, to have many minds and motives. His reality makes him indeed one man; there is none other like him in the world; but that same reality makes it impossible to know his thoughts. Had he merely been seeking diversion: a bored old man with nothing to do? If so, he had had his diversion; choosing late in life, as Achilles had chosen in his youth, a life of glory over a life of peace and quiet, he had even had his glory; his life, such as it was, had come to an exciting end. This on the theory that he had been playing games; but they amused him no longer, so that now he could say, "let us be serious." Had it all, on the other hand, been more than a diversion? Had he really believed in the utility of acting like a knight? The utility, and more than that, the duty in these degenerate times? And had it been borne in upon him at last that nobody cared how well he played such a part, or whether he played it at all? There seemed to be no audience; or if one collected, it was the opposite of sympathetic; it assisted him only in scorn, with

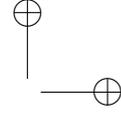
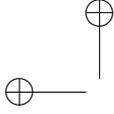




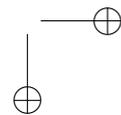
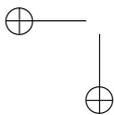
its tongue well hidden in its cheek; it hoaxed rather than upheld him, and he was weary of the hoax – of pretending he did not know it for what it was. The world refused to be entertained, or the earth edified; it remained just what it was, with him alone in it and quite absurd, a strolling player whom no one paid admission to see. Or worse yet, what if he had fallen victim to his part? What if it had got into his blood and infected his brain? Not, surely, to the point of his thinking he was someone other than he was; but, just as bad, to the point of his believing that heaven could be built on earth, that ideas could take on physical form and have careers of flesh and blood – and cease, therefore, to be ideal. For a man of his faith, that would be no better than blasphemy; which may be why he at last rejected the romances as “profane,” and why he addressed himself to the business of his soul. The soul does not put on armor, ride horses, and strike innocent people down. It contemplates perfection in the silence of eternity; it does not do, but be.

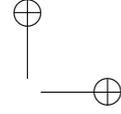
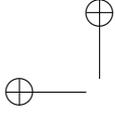
By the time Cervantes was finished with his book he was willing, no doubt, that we should think any or all of these things about its hero. And what shall we think about its author, what shall we assume his understanding was? It is likely that his own thought developed as he wrote,





though we cannot see this happening, and it may be that his idea was simple and complete from the beginning. But what was his idea? If we say it was one that absorbs all of the ironies we find in *Don Quixote*, the very statement sounds absurd because it sounds so serious. Cervantes never seems to be serious. He is funny, he is superficial, he is queer, like life itself; but he never writes with the long face his critics put on. His hero is the loneliest man in literature, and the most abused; but Cervantes does not seem to want to save him. He lets every criticism be leveled at him, every epithet be heaped upon his head, without growing sentimental in his defense. We may grow sentimental about the Knight of the Woeful Figure, but we are not made of iron, of comedy's iron, as Cervantes was. The stuff of the book must have been the stuff of his very heart – which he did not wear on his sleeve. We may conclude, and most of us do, that Don Quixote is the most perfect knight that ever lived; the only one, in fact, we can believe; but Cervantes never asks us to arrive at that conclusion. We may insist that instead of destroying the literature of knight-errantry Cervantes saved it by producing the one treatment of the subject that can be read forever; and that he did this by permitting his satire to ripen into comedy, his ridicule to deepen into love;





yet over the centuries we still see his smile, and we can wonder how much of it is pity for us because we cannot leave his book alone. We may say that we honor and adore no man in literature or in life more than we honor and adore the stately friend of Sancho Panza. Cervantes, however, gives him no such honor; and, at least in our hearing, no such adoration. He merely gives him life. Perhaps it is the life that we should honor, looking at it plainly and looking then at one another; and grinning as we do.

