



PROJECT MUSE®

---

Modernity, Madness, Disenchantment: Don Quixote's Hunger

Rebecca Gould

symploke  
Volume 19, Number 1, Spring 2011

symploke, Volume 19, Numbers 1-2, 2011, pp. 35-53 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press



► For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/463484>

# **MODERNITY, MADNESS, DISENCHANTMENT: DON QUIXOTE'S HUNGER**

REBECCA GOULD

In one of the more paradoxical passages of modern poetry, the Polish poet Alexander Wat (1900-1967), dwelt on his post-Holocaust desire to become a stone:

Disgusted by everything alive I withdrew into the stone world: here I thought, liberated, I would observe from above, but without pride, those things tangled in chaos. With the eyes of a stone, myself a stone among stones, and like them sensitive, pulsating to the turning of the sun. Retreating into the depth of myself, a stone, motionless, silent; growing cold; present through a waning of presence-in the cold attractions of the moon. Like sand diminishing in an hourglass, evenly, ceaselessly, uniformly, grain by grain. (47)

The desire for petrification is Wat's only response to the circumstances of what we now call the Holocaust, the event which canceled out the very existence of the Polish community into which Wat was born at the turn of the twentieth century. The impulse to merge body and spirit with the material, stony, world seemed to the poet the only humane response to a tragedy of unhuman proportions. Wat reacted to the dehumanization of life by subjecting his selfhood to a material imperative, by becoming a stone among stones, "sensitive, / pulsating to the turning of the sun," and yet unpolluted by the human that once conferred sanctity on creation. Wat reflects further in his poem that stones contain one great advantage over humans: "They do not become, they are. Nothing else. Nothing / else, I thought, loathing all that becomes" (47). Immune to the dialectic of being and non-being, stones inhabit a position of ontic superiority to the poet who identifies with them. Their capacity for deflecting hunger guarantees their purity:

To be in the heart of a stone –  
 how much I desired this!  
 In the heart of a stone, without the flaw which  
 through our tainted veins  
 slushes deep into our hearts and grows, making them  
 totally putrid matter,  
 subjected to all decay. (48)

Only a few years before the onset of the war that changed the meaning of the twentieth century and which precipitated Wat's stony and inhuman hunger, the Hegelian exegete and philosopher Alexandre Kojève argued on the basis of his reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Sprit* (1807) that the difference between human and non-human desire is that humans desire recognition during the act of consummation, whereas animals are indifferent to recognition by their others. Whereas recognition is not a condition for the attainment of animal satiation, human desire relates to recognition as to a condition of possibility for its experience of need. "The human being is formed only in terms of a Desire directed toward another Desire," writes Kojève: "Desire is human only if...one desires, not the body, but the Desire of the other" (1980, 6). The desire for desire is arguably the most rudimentary yet still human form of hunger.

The human development (*Ausbildung*) eulogized by Kojève and his followers is grounded in hunger. It is consolidated through the progressive satiation of the desire for recognition. There is no way of wanting something in a human way without simultaneously wanting it to be wanted by another; indeed, our hungers are premised less on what we want than on what we perceive to be wanted by others. As René Girard has clarified in a slightly different idiom, the mimesis that structures artistic representation equally determines the artifices of human relations. According to the human animal/distinction promoted by Hegel and Kojève, the Polish poet's desire to be "a stone among / stones" is situated at the extreme end of the animal-human spectrum: this desire posits a human condition utterly devoid of the need for recognition. In the post-Holocaust world, the poet's most profound desire is not for recognition, but rather for its negation, for the permanent annulment of human relations. The poet's hunger for petrification parallels the debasement of human desire performed by the preceding decades.

By contrast with Wat's late-modernist rejection of the human hunger, the text this essay is primarily concerned to elucidate, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605), occupies a very different moment in the history of human desire. In this paradigmatic text of early modernity, the protagonist's most profound desire is to be recognized, and not as another, but precisely as himself, as a knight-errant who has transcended the disenchantment of his age and learned to see beyond temporal parameters.

## Hunger and Futurity

According to Walter Benjamin, great art works determine the conditions of their reception-history together with the genres through which they will be received. In Benjamin's phraseology, "Every fundamentally new, pioneering creation of demand will overshoot its target" (266). Benjamin reinforced his statement with an equally revealing passage from André Breton: "The artwork has value only insofar as it is alive to reverberations of the future" (280). Both Benjamin and Breton were deeply concerned with the relation between genre affiliation and historical horizons. Their words could not be more applicable to *Don Quixote*, a text that inscribed its afterlife into its revision of narrative conventions. Here I propose to follow Benjamin's lead and read *Don Quixote*, arguably the first and certainly the most influential novel of the early modern era, through the lens, not of its past, as is most commonly done in acts of literary interpretation, but of its future.<sup>1</sup>

Don Quixote's journey may be characterized in many ways, but one of the most persistent motifs is the hero's steady progression towards madness. Although the narrator emphasizes the duality of Don Quixote's consciousness – pointing out that his hero is "sometimes intelligent and sometimes foolish" (*ya discretas y ya disparatadas*; 426/575) and characterizing his speech as "reasoned nonsense" (*concertados disparates*; 322/431), his speeches generally produce an impression of insanity (the Quixotian inflection to this term is discussed below). That Don Quixote's readerly identity is largely responsible for his insanity is reinforced by linguistic happenstance: *locura*, "insanity," is a near homonym to *lectura*, "reading." Always the brilliant reader, Don Quixote is convinced of his singularity. "I am a new knight in the world [*yo soy nuevo caballero en el mundo*]," our hero declares when already in captivity, "the first to resuscitate the now forgotten practice of errant chivalry and to invent new kinds of enchantments and new ways of transporting the enchanted [*se hayan inventado otros modos de encantamientos, y otros modos de llevar á los encantados*]'" (302/406).<sup>2</sup>

Don Quixote's insanity justifies his confinement in a cage by his fellow villagers, a condition he acknowledges by saying, "I see myself caged," but which he also denies by saying defiantly to his companion Sancho: "You, Sancho, will see how you are mistaken in your understanding of my

<sup>1</sup>For an index of *Don Quixote*'s anticipation of its own futurity in the terms outlined by Benjamin and Breton, see the remarks of Anthony J. Cascardi: "During the four centuries since the publication of *Don Quixote* there has been no doubt that to write a major work of fiction was to write a novel. And while Cervantes could not possibly have known that in writing *Don Quixote* he was about to initiate the most important literary genre of the modern age, it can retrospectively be said that, among novels, *Don Quixote* was the first" (2003, 58).

<sup>2</sup>Citations from *Don Quixote* follow the recent translation of Edith Grossman (Cervantes 2003). In certain instances, modifications have been made with reference to the Spanish text. Where two page numbers are cited, the first refers to the 1882 New York edition, the second to the corresponding passage in Grossman's translation. Other remaining translations from German and Spanish are my own except where otherwise stated.

misfortune" (314/422). Don Quixote does not accept that outside observers can correctly interpret his condition, notwithstanding the volume of evidence they assemble against him; instead, he reserves for himself the prerogative of epistemic adjudication when confronted by contrary sense-data.<sup>3</sup> After Don Quixote's mental deviance has been recognized by the barber, the canon, the priest, and, in slightly modified terms, by Sancho, Cervantes inscribes his hero into a distinctively modern narrative of incarceration. We read, "Don Quixote sat in the cage [*jaula*], his hands tied, his legs extended, his back leaning against the bars, and with so much silence and patience that he seemed not a man of flesh and blood [*hombre de carne*], but a statue made of stone [*estatua de piedra*]" (304/408). Thus is Don Quixote's glorious quest reduced to the contours of a sordid reality.

### *Hunger beyond Recognition*

Three centuries after Cervantes, another modern theorist of hunger, Franz Kafka, fashioned his own knight-errant who goes to even greater extremes than Don Quixote to achieve fame through self-mutilation. Although the most famous instance of the Kafkan quest for ontic transformation is Gregor Samsa's transformation into a insect in *The Metamorphosis* (1912), Kafka's "Hungerkünstler" (hunger artist) most immediately speaks to the problematic of hunger and closure that structures Cervantes' novel. Kafka's hunger artist passes decades facing onlookers from his cage.<sup>4</sup> Having within Wat entirely abandoned the quest for recognition and embraced a creed with a non-human teleology, the hunger artist refuses to eat between fasts because "the honor of his art forbade it" (*die Ehre seiner Kunst verbot dies*; 33). In this late-modernist text, art has become the autotelic substitute for Quixotian recognition. And yet both Cervantes' and Kafka's heroes strive for glory by embracing a regime of hunger that exceeds all prior instances of literary sacrifice. This is why the hunger artist is so disturbed when he is deprived

<sup>3</sup>Another example of Don Quixote's principled refusal to subject his interpretation to empirical evidence is his response to Sancho's view of Dulcinea, the knight-errant's mysterious beloved. Don Quixote acknowledges that the real Dulcinea is in fact the inelegant peasant Aldonzo Lorenzo. Whereas Sancho finds it humorous that Don Quixote conflates a peasant with a princess, Don Quixote declares with full knowledge of her peasant origins that Aldonzo is as "worthy as the most elegant princess in the world" (*que asla mas alta princesa del mundo*; 142/201).

<sup>4</sup>A note on the terminology of the hunger artist's above seems in order, given the focus on incarcerated space in *Don Quixote*. The hunger artist's abode is most frequently referred to as *Käfig* (cage), occasionally through metonymic associations as *Saal* (hall) and *Gitter* (lattice, here the bars of the cage). Just before the hunger artist's death, his abode is referred to as a "good and useful cage" (*gut brauchbaren Käfig* 49) by the management. The cage does not metamorphose into a prison, as it does for Don Quixote, who refers to his *jaula* (cage) as a *prisión* (303, 304, 313, 321; Spanish text). Both the Kafkan and Cervantean renditions of their hero's incarcerated space bear comparison with Weber's concept of the "iron cage" (*stahlhartes Gehäuse*) as the habitation of modernity.

the opportunity to fast; “Why do they want to rob him of the fame of fasting longer?” (*Warum wollte man ihn des Ruhmes berauben, weiter zu hunger*; 37), he wonders to himself in frustration, longing for immortality. For both the hunger artist and Don Quixote, the path to purity is paved with starvation. Unlike the knight-errant, the hunger artist denies his greatness; he resists all attempts at sanctification and scorns the admiration of passers-by. Such denials are only in keeping with the role assigned to him in the text as an “unfortunate martyr” (*bedauernswerten Märtyrer*; 38).<sup>5</sup>

Kafka opens his narrative with the announcement that times have changed; his story transpires in “other times” (*andere Zeiten*; 31). As we learn at the end, by the time that the narrative’s present converges with its past, the masses no longer grasp hunger’s *raison d’être*. Like the medieval romance, the religious injunction to fast has entered the realm of banality and shed its former glory. The hunger artist is compelled to join a circus in order to continue his anachronistic way of life. Whereas possess a modicum of fame in former times, and used to be loved and honored by the public (*das Publikum*), the hunger artist’s popularity in the last chapter of his life is displaced by the popularity of the menagerie. Soon, he is visited only by the random tourist, and more rarely, by old men who remember an age when fasting used to be regarded as a noble occupation.

On one occasion, one such old man pauses in front of the hunger artist’s cage. The old man explains to his son the role the hunger artist used to fulfill in society. He talks of “earlier years, when he had been present at similar but incomparably [ähnlichen, aber unvergleichlich] more magnificent performances” (46). Then the child, narratively focalized in the third-person mode, asks a heartbreak question. The question implies that the old man’s narration has not been, *and perhaps cannot be*, understood by the new generation: “what was fasting to them?” (*was war ihnen Hungern?*; 46). Tragically, but appropriately, the hunger artist after he dies is replaced by a virile panther. In stark contrast to the starving martyr’s love of fasting, we are told that the animal’s love of food is congruent with its love of freedom, “located in the vicinity of its teeth” (*irgendwo im Gebiß*; 51).

The as-yet-unanswered question of the uncomprehending child in “A Hunger Artist” (*Ein Hungerkünstler*) is, “What is fasting?” Viewed from the lens of the medieval romance from which the modern novel descends genealogically, fasting is a striving for self-purification. It is enabled by a temporally specific nostalgia for “golden ages” (*siglos dorados*) in Don Quixote’s case (46-47/76) and by a theology of self-denial for Kafka’s hunger artist. Equally aesthetic and ethical, the capacity to fast signifies the nobility of

---

<sup>5</sup>Consider, for example, the paradoxical conversation that proceeds the hunger artist’s death, wherein he confesses to the overseer that he always wished to be admired (*Immerfort wollte ich, daß ihr mein Hungern bewundert*). When the overseer says in response that he *does* admire him for his fasting, the hunger artist explains that his sacrifice does not merit admiration (49). Echoing Martin Luther, the hunger artist explains that he allowed himself to starve because he could not act otherwise (*ich kann nicht anders*; 50).

human nature, its propensity for sacrifice and for acts of greatness worthy of mention in heroic pantheons, a space defined by the literary imagination outside space and time. Thus far, the attractions of fasting from the perspectives of Don Quixote and Kafka's *Hungerkünstler* have been described. But Kafka and Cervantes perceived that "the way in which human perception is organized...is conditioned not only by nature but by history" (Benjamin 255). Far from being insensible of the epistemic shifts effected by history, these two authors, whose works are situated like bookends at the onset and conclusion to modernity, have respectively defined modernity's frame of reference.<sup>6</sup> Their accounts of hunger's disappearance—and more broadly, of the disappearance of any act directed at posterity and aiming at future glory—from the moral-aesthetic universe of literary narrative bear comparison with the account of modernization offered by a theorist who was at once skeptical of the concept of progress and singularly responsible for the social science discipline through which this concept is sustained: Max Weber.

## *Hunger and Disenchantment*

Over the course of many works and with torturous persistence, Weber anatomized the modern condition with reference to *Entzauberung*, the condition of disenchantment, an imprecise if less dramatic corollary to Nietzsche's *Götzendämmerung* (death of the gods). Weberian disenchantment has much to offer for an attempt to come to terms with what Cervantes and Kafka meant by burdening their protagonists with insatiable hunger.<sup>7</sup> Reading *Don Quixote* in light of Weberian disenchantment allows us not only to better understand the novel; it also deepens the Weberian account of modernization.

Scholars of modernization often assume that disenchantment—a condition Talal Asad considers "a salient feature of the modern epoch"—is, to cite Asad again, "a product of nineteenth-century romanticism" (13). Citing and supplementing Benedict Anderson's linkage of "print-capitalism" (1983) to serialized time, Asad links disenchantment with transformations in literary forms, such as the serialized novel, and its "enormous expansion in the market for imaginative 'literature'...that mediated people's understanding of 'real' and 'imagined'" (14). Curiously, Asad does not mention *Don Quixote* or

---

<sup>6</sup>See Mancing (1982) and Cascardi (1992).

<sup>7</sup>Of the best accounts of disenchantment in *Don Quixote* known to me, Predmore (1955) does not take up the issue conceptually, though he usefully tabulates its morphologies throughout the novel. Kallendorf (2002) provides an etymological account of the *encantador*'s (enchanter's) migration across the early modern Spanish lexicon (esp. 206-07). Creel (1992), though he discusses enchantment—not disenchantment—as a philosophical problem, does not link this concept to the modernization process. Fuentes (1988) by contrast provides a compelling account of *Don Quixote* as a text framed by early modern historical transformations, without focusing substantively on the theme of enchantment. Adorno by contrast perceives that *Don Quixote* embodies early modern disenchantment, but does not pursue this observation (1991, 30).

refer the vastly influential serial versions this novel generated, most famously Avellaneda's pirated continuation of the text. Nor does he allude to the many translations made of *Don Quixote* during Cervantes' lifetime, all of which register key moments in the institutionalization of literature through the capitalist system to a no lesser extant than the nineteenth-century serializations Asad has in mind. Reading *Don Quixote* through a Weberian lens suggests that disenchantment possesses a much longer genealogy than Asad and other theorists of the modern condition have proposed.<sup>8</sup>

"Science as a Vocation," Weber's inaugural address delivered at Munich University in 1918, is the *locus classicus* for his modernization thesis. Addressing future social scientists, Weber famously proclaimed, "The world is disenchanted. No longer, as in the wilderness, do we have recourse to magic" (1985, 594). Later in the same speech, Weber deepened his acknowledgement of Cervantes' archaeology of disenchantment; our times, he laments, are marked by "rationalizations and intellectualizations and, above all, by the disenchantment of the world [*Entzauberung der Welt*]. Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations" (612). *Don Quixote* would seem to have followed the former path; his sublime values are transmuted into mystic idealism. The modern decline of values pertains foremost to the relation between ethics and aesthetics, for monumental art is no longer possible. Modern art in Weber's account is "intimate and not monumental"; it is received "only within the smallest and intimate circles, in personal human situations, in pianissimo" (612).

In both the Weberian and the Cervantean account, albeit in dramatically different ways and degrees, art lacks persuasive value under the conditions of modernity. This truism frames Weber's critique of modernization, although he most frequently locates the losses effected by modernity at the axis of the secularization of religion.<sup>9</sup> Although Weber signals decline in religion's authority whereas Cervantes signals decline in the authority of literary forms such as the romance and epic, both writers share a common concern with, and critique of, the historical process of modernization. Américo Castro has specified the point of contention. In his path-breaking study of Cervantes' "*pensamiento*" (thought) — one of the first works to track the novelist's predecessors — Castro argued that Cervantes, though not a philosopher,

---

<sup>8</sup>If the serialization effected by literary forms is indeed an aspect of modernity, then Carlos Fuentes' commentary of the contrast between part one of *Don Quixote*, a singular event, and part two, written after Avellaneda's fraudulent continuation of the text, cannot be ignored. Fuentes notes that in part one of the novel, only God "was the final knower and judge of what went on in the recesses of our conscience. Now any reader who can pay the cover price for a copy of *Don Quixote* can also find out: the reader thus becomes akin to God" (58). We might go even further and argue that, in *Don Quixote* and the genre it generated, the reader is not so much "akin" to God as God's replacement. Literature as a social institution contributed to the rise in a concept of a democratic modern readership.

<sup>9</sup>See, for example, Weber (1946).

“dramatized in his works, especially in the *Quixote*, one of the central problems that caused unrest in modern thought in the dawn of the formation of the great systems” (89). The “great systems” to which Castro refers derive equally from technology and philosophy. Like Cervantes, Weber was deeply concerned with the implications of systematization for the human condition. Both the Spanish novelist and the German sociologist perceived disenchantment as one of the most profound consequences of the rise of systems newly inflected with universalist ambitions that marked a break between medieval and modern temporalities.

The transformations effected by the new scientific knowledge were also registered by Ortega y Gasset, who, in a footnote to his essay on *Don Quixote*, argued for an epistemic demarcation between the modern and the premodern: “For Aristotle and the Middle Ages, all things are possible that do not contain an inner contradiction.... For Aristotle, the centaur is possible; for us it is impossible, because biology, natural science, will not tolerate it” (138). Suddenly, within Don Quixote’s newly historicizing and historicized horizons, a system of unprecedented scope and power posited inner contradiction as the negation of validity; a new science argued against the collaboration of the material with the ideal. Mambrino’s helmet could either be an element in a soldier’s armory or a barber’s basin; to lay claim to both realities would mean violating the law of non-contradiction. When the either/or of proto-positivist science entered literary history (ultimately resulting in the aesthetic we now call “realism”), Don Quixote had to choose between the empirically real and the imaginatively possible. The Cervantean-Quixotean theory of enchantment is grounded in the latter.<sup>10</sup>

The losses inflicted by the modernization process from the point of view of Cervantes’ novel are most palpably registered in the aesthetic domain. Not coincidentally, an empirical critique of the romance genre is offered at the very moment of Don Quixote’s incarceration. The canon from Don Quixote’s village, La Mancha, who has come with the priest and barber to bring the knight-errant home, opens the disquisition, presumably out of hearing range of Don Quixote but nonetheless in painfully close proximity. “Novels of chivalry,” the canon complains, “are prejudicial to the nation” (*perjudiciales en la república* 306/411). The canon follows this criticism with a learned discourse on the fine points of the romance genre, focusing on the lack of proportion and rhetorical excesses which characterize these texts and concluding with an empiricist platitude both prophesying and, notably for a novel wherein the protagonist rejects modern realism, critiquing the aesthetic to come: “the more truthful the fiction, the better it is, and the more probable and possible, the more pleasing” (*tanto la mentira es mejor, cuanto más parece verdadera,*

---

<sup>10</sup>Other characters in the novel respond to early modernity’s epistemic transformations, as evidenced by the narrative application of the verbs “conjecture” (*conjeturan*), “collect” (*coligen*), “collect from a thousand signals” (*por mil señales coligen*), and “infer” (*infieren*) to their mental activities, but Don Quixote is unique in translating his interpretative activities into action (see Predmore 1953, 493).

*y tanto más agrada, cuanto tiene más de dudoso y posible; 307/412).*<sup>11</sup> Yet, the novel and the romance were never wholly discrete genres for Cervantes. As Riley noted half a century ago in his classic study of Cervantes theory of the novel, *Don Quixote* could never have been written without a temperamental dualism broadly characteristic of the Spanish Golden Age and of Cervantes particularly that encompassed genres and discourses commonly placed in opposition today (21).

From an historical perspective—taking seriously the relation between *Don Quixote* and its futurity—the reader cannot but be struck by the possibility that the aesthetic failure of the romance from the vantage point of early modern readers corresponds to an ethical, and not only aesthetic, transformation. It is at this juncture, when the romance's aesthetic lapses are seen through an ethical lens, that Weber's modernization thesis most deeply informs this reading, for Weber, as Windelband has noted, argued for a “dialectics of disenchantment and reenchantment” along the lines of aesthetic judgments (*Geschmacksurteile*) rather than value judgments (*Werturteile*). Like Nietzsche, Weber theorized the modernization process as the replacement of ethics by politics. *Don Quixote*, who resists modernity, aims to assimilate the aesthetic to the ethical, and vice-versa. The hero's chivalric escapades and polemics on behalf of idealist literature are stimulated by a desire to connect “the aesthetic vision with the seriousness of the ethical struggle” (Hartmann 328)—an ambition that has, with greater or lesser success, informed most philosophical interventions in the “secular age.”<sup>12</sup> *Don Quixote's* failure is written into the romance genre itself, and testifies to the literary form's ever-increasing distance from reality.

The problem with the romance is not merely, as the canon suggests, that the genre fails to conform to classical aesthetic criteria of unity and harmony. More crucially, romances fail to induce “wonder” (*admiración*; 307/411). That romances induce wonder, *Don Quixote*, who is arguably the greatest reader in world literary history, suggests how severely our hero has failed to assimilate aesthetic to ethics. The disjunction between the world of fantasy and of empirical reality, commonly believed to represent the conceptual core of Cervantes' narrative, is enshrined in the replacement of the romance by the novel as the preferred reading material for those characters who are best adjusted to their contemporary reality.

Where does *Don Quixote* (or for that matter Kafka's *Hungerkünstler*) fit into the Weberian typology of aesthetic forms? An idealist without a cause,

---

<sup>11</sup>As already noted by Clemencín in his commentary on *Don Quixote* (3, 410), the canon's view on literature may have been suggested to Cervantes by his reading of two treatise on poetics influential in his time: Lopez Pinciano's *Filosofía antigua poetica* (Madrid, 1596) and Francisco Cascales' *Tablas poéticas* (Murcia, 1617).

<sup>12</sup>I use the term “secular age” in the sense of Taylor (2007). Taylor is explicitly indebted to Weber's writings on modernity (see esp. 118, 156, 266, 307) and, like Asad, perceives disenchantment to be characteristic of the modern condition (27, 79, 98, 131, 233, 517). Like most theorists of modernity, Taylor does not in this particular text extend his investigation back further than the nineteenth century.

enchanted by a dream of resurrecting the courtly ethos in a world which has long ago forsaken it, Don Quixote is the exact inverse of the class of bureaucrats manufactured by the Protestant work ethic that Weber famously lamented as “specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart” (*Fachmenschen ohne Geist, Genussmenschen ohne Herz*; 2006, 201). The hunger artist, Don Quixote, and Weber’s bureaucratic citizens do however inhabit a common space; they are all, to a greater or lesser extent, incarcerated. But does the hero’s unique combination of spirit and heart generate art that is intimate or monumental, personal or public, fantastical or real? The answer to this query is contingent on our valuation of our hero’s insanity, our ability to sympathize with it, and on the view we take of the relationship between the hero’s insanity and the novel’s broader social goals.

Although it has not garnered the reflection it merits, enchantment occurs in various morphologies with even greater frequency in Cervantes’ novel than *Entzauberung* in Weber’s oeuvre.<sup>13</sup> Predmore calculates that *encantamiento* (enchantment) is discussed by Don Quixote and Sancho over a hundred times in the course of the novel (1955, 75). Not fortuitously, *Entzauberung* is the term used to translate *encantamiento* by L.G. Förster, the German translator of Cervantes’ *Sämtliche Werke* (1825).<sup>14</sup> Onto this disenchanted terrain, our knight-errant arrives as “the first to resuscitate the now forgotten practice of errant chivalry, and to invent new kinds of enchantments and new ways of transporting” the reader outside the crude psychopathology of everyday life. Don Quixote enters the world with a mission as impossible to fulfill as it is necessary for his spiritual salvation: the restoration of knight-errancy to its formerly sacralized position in the aesthetic and moral economies of medieval European culture.

We should not forget Don Quixote’s epithet, appropriately italicized when it appears in conversation as if to underscore the hero’s fictional status, *el Caballero de la Triste figura*, Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance. (This is also the epithet by which Don Quixote signs his name in his chivalric correspondence.) Don Quixote’s sorrow derives from his slow progress towards an awareness of his own insanity. As if in illustration of this growing awareness, Don Quixote says to his squire, “Well Sancho, it seems you are no saner than I [no estas tú más cuerdo que Yo]” (144/203). “I am not as crazy [*loco*] as you,” Sancho responds, emphasizing *loco*, the word omitted from

<sup>13</sup>According to Creel’s overview of Cervantes scholarship, critics such as Ortega y Gasset and Leo Spitzer, who have essayed the subject of enchantment in *Don Quixote*, have approached it through a descriptive rather than interpretive lens, not relating it “to theories of perception or knowledge.... The enchantment motif has not been the subject of serious analysis or interpretation on a philosophical plane” (21-22). Creel does not record two other commentaries that may be seen as subsets of the enchantment problematic in *Don Quixote*. First, Lionel Trilling’s remark that “All prose fiction is a variation on the theme of *Don Quixote*...the problem of appearance and reality” (207-09). Second, Harry Levin’s insight that *Don Quixote* is the prototype of all realistic novels because it deals with the “literary technique of systematic disillusionment” (48).

<sup>14</sup>See for example 187. I have not had access to the first German translation of *Don Quixote*, published in 1648 (as reported by Esquivel-Heinemann 46).

Don Quixote's admission, "just more temperamental [*estoy más colérico*]." Although he does not use the word *loco* (or to its variant, *locura*) with reference to himself, Don Quixote's admission is striking. The hero's acknowledgement of his own insanity is perhaps the saddest line in the entire novel. These words mark the moment when the idealist hero confronts reality, or rather when he acknowledges that, in some recess of his consciousness, he has been confronting reality all along, with exceedingly inglorious results. As sad as Don Quixote's admission is, it does at least demonstrate his lucidity that characterize his insanity. Far from being mutually exclusive, madness and brilliance occur together in the Cervantean and Kafkan, as well as the Weberian, world. The complex conjunction of lucidity and insanity in these texts drives the authors' critiques of modernity.

Don Quixote later compares himself to his squire, suggesting an unbridgeable divide between the knight and his servant, rather than a convergence (as in the above example). After an escapade into a "counterfeit Arcadia" (621/842), Sancho glances with desire at their provisions, but refrains from eating for fear of upsetting his master. Noticing Don Quixote in a distracted state, his attention characteristically directed away from the material world, Sancho decides to eat without regard for the protocol that the servant must wait for his master to eat first. Don Quixote notices Sancho in the heat of consumption and instructs him to continue eating (although, the narrator implies, Sancho would not have ceased eating even if Don Quixote has insisted on it). "Eat, Sancho, my friend," Don Quixote declaims, "sustain life, which matters to you more than to me, and let me die at the hands of my thoughts [*mis pensamientos*] and by means of my misfortunes [*mis desgracias*]. I, Sancho, was born to live by dying, and you to die by eating [*Yo, Sancho, nací para vivir moriendo, y tú para morir comiendo*]" (620/842). Don Quixote then stages a scene highlighting his persecution as well as his figural status:

Consider me, printed in histories, famous in the practice of arms,  
courteous in my actions, respected by princes, wooed by maidens.  
When I expected the palms, triumphs, and crowns that were earned  
and deserved by my valorous deeds, I have seen myself...trampled  
and kicked and bruised by the feet of filthy and unclean animals.  
This thought dulls my teeth, blunts my molars, numbs my hands,  
and completely takes away my desire for food. I think I shall let  
myself die of hunger, the cruelest of all deaths. (620/842-43)

Most transparently, Don Quixote's speech to Sancho encodes a contrast between the ideal world of the imagination and the tawdry imperfection of everyday actualization. But Don Quixote's polarities are more paradoxical than this transparent opposition suggests. Don Quixote's speech illuminates the hero's own metaphysical horizons as well as the readerly and authorial position with respect to the hero. By invoking the printed page as the context through which his knightly deeds transpire, our hero draws attention to his own physical existence as an assembly of pages. And yet, this particular

assembly of pages possesses the capacity to suffer, to sacrifice, and die for what he believes to be true. From this metafictive perspective, the displacement of hunger by the imagination is not at all surprising and indeed is precisely what the novel and reader require. That Don Quixote's hunger is textual, that his sorrows are fictional, and therefore in a certain sense unreal, guarantees their independence from the indignity of material verification. Just as Don Quixote wishes, the reader who sympathizes with him is temporally freed from hunger. Don Quixote's image of himself as a persecuted knight effaces his desire to eat, and supplements that lack with the desire for everlasting glory.

### *Vizualizing Hunger*

The contrast that the novel draws between the anemic, starving hero and his voracious and gluttonous companion is repeated in the popular reception of the *Don Quixote* story in other artistic mediums, especially visual art. Consider the contrast Honoré Daumier draws between Spain's luminous landscape and Don Quixote's emaciated body, matching his wizened horse Rocinante (figure 1). Consider Gustave Doré's illustration for a French translation of *Don Quixote*, which juxtaposes the short and stubby Sancho to the magnificently gaunt horseman, who seems more dead than alive as he prances under the sun (figure 2). Consider, finally, Pablo Picasso's *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza* (1955): the painter's minimalism lends itself to the sparse outlines of Don Quixote's body (figure 3). In Picasso's sketch, described by Fuentes as "a black ink question mark" (1988, 60), Don Quixote is a stick figure, like his tall horse, withering under a blazing sun. In all three visual representations, Don Quixote emerges as one of the hungriest characters in all world literature, whose heroism prevents him from seeking satiation.

In rereading *Don Quixote*, the reader is struck less by the Don Quixote-Sancho Panza duality so beloved to Kafka, Borges, and other epigrammatists of Cervantes' epic tragedy, as by Don Quixote's solitude, his mental and spiritual hunger, the incommensurability of his soulful longing with his environs, his resistance to repetition, his fear of reproduction, his love for creative mimesis (always at variance with the original), and his hatred for banality. These characteristics collectively implant Don Quixote on our memory. They also make him a subject and object for seemingly limitless suffering. Don Quixote's insanity is a consequence of his modernity. At the risk of anachronism, Don Quixote's madness may be described as clinical insanity, as the following story, told by the barber of La Mancha mid-way through the novel, during a brief respite from chivalric tourneys and damsels in distress, illustrates.



**Figure 1:** Honoré Daumier, *Don Quixote*, 1868, oil on canvas.

The barber tells of a student, a specialist in canon law, who is confined to an insane asylum (*casa de los locos*) in Seville on the grounds of insanity.<sup>15</sup> Once he is convinced of his sanity, the student petitions the archbishop to set him free. The archbishop sends a chaplain to visit the madhouse to assess the situation. The chaplain converses with the inmate for an entire hour, during the course of which the student never utters a foolish statement, and everything he says radiates intelligence. Convinced that the inmate had been the victim of a conspiracy by his family to deprive him of his estate, the chaplain orders the asylum overseer to return his clothes to the student and set him free. Before he leaves the asylum, the student asks permission to say goodbye to his fellow inmates. He goes to visit a friend confined to a cage and asks if he can do anything for him once he released.

The friend naturally wishes to know why the student is being released. The student begins to tell his story. He concludes his account of the causes for his release with a brief reflection on the origin of insanity: "I believe, as one who has experienced it himself, that all our madness comes from having empty stomachs and heads full of air" (*todos nuestras locuras proceden de tener los estómagos vacíos y los celebros llenos de aire*; 344/463). This explanation captures the attention of another caged inmate (*otro loco*), who stands up

---

<sup>15</sup>For an analysis of this story which locates it within the context of early modern philosophy, see Cascardi (2005).

naked and asks who is being released. The student explains his situation a second time. The second caged inmate responds with skepticism. This *loco* does not believe that madness is curable, whether through food or medicine. A true citizen of Weberian modernity, biology, in his view, is destiny. There is no escape from the iron cage. Calling himself Jupiter Tonante (Jupiter the Thunderer), the inmate threatens to withhold all rain from the world for a period of three years. The unstated irony is of course that the *loco* has no power to effect such a catastrophe; like Don Quixote, he can threaten, but he cannot deliver on his promises. The main motive for his proposed brutality seems to be jealousy: he wants the freedom that the student anticipates. The *loco* exclaims, "You free and healthy, and sane [*libre, fano, cuerdo*], while I am mad, and sick, and confined [*loco, infermo, y atado*]? I would just as soon rain as hang myself" (344/463).



**Figure 2:** Gustave Doré, *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza*, 1863, engraving.



**Figure 3:** Pablo Picasso, *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza*, 1955, ink on paper.  
© 2011 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The upshot of this second conversation is to reverse the trend of the student's luck. Whether he is playacting or has truly lost his grip on reality, the student responds to the *loco*'s threat by calling himself, in imitation of Don Quixote's penchant for elevated epithets, *Señor Neptuno, el padre y el Dios de las aguas* (Neptune, the father and God of the waters). Unlike Jupiter Tonante, Señor Neptuno announces that he will rain wherever he pleases and wherever it is necessary. Now that he assigned this title to himself, and like Don Quixote aligned himself with a world-order long gone, the student is denied the freedom that has been promised him only a few minutes prior. The chaplain decides it is better to keep the student confined in the *casa de los locos*, even though he had demonstrated his sanity. Partly participating in the charade, the chaplain says to the student, now suddenly transformed into Señor Neptuno, "It would not be a good idea to anger Señor Jupiter; your grace should stay in your house, and another day, when it is more convenient and there is more time, we shall come back for your grace" (344/464). The story ends there, with the morbid, mocking laughter of the asylum overseer and bystanders, who know perfectly well that the chaplain will not keep his word. The student who had almost tasted freedom is now, due to a mere slip of the tongue, doomed to die in the *casa de los locos*. We do not even know that the student had really lost his mind; perhaps he was simply joking in order to accommodate the other *loco*.

The story's dénouement takes place outside the narrative, in the time-space of Don Quixote's bedroom. Just as Don Quixote had earlier acknowledged to Sancho that he was not quite *cuerdo* (sane), so now the knight-errant recognizes the meaning and the intention behind the barber's tale. Don Quixote denies the unstated implication that Señor Neptuno is an allegory for him: "I, Señor Barber, am not Neptune, God of the waters" (345/464). Don Quixote adds by way of self-justification, "I do not attempt to persuade

anyone that I am clever when I am not. I only devote myself to making the world understand its error in not restoring that happiest of times when the order of knight errantry was in flower" (345/464). The hero's noble mission is his tragedy. It is at once entirely rational, entirely justified, and entirely absurd. Hence Don Quixote's melancholic recognition of the impossibility of reviving ancient values in a disenchanted age: "Our decadent age does not deserve to enjoy the good that was enjoyed when knights errant took it as their responsibility to bear on their own shoulders the defense of kingdoms, the protection of damsels, the safeguarding of orphans and wards, the punishment of the proud, and the rewarding of the humble" (345/465).

In *Don Quixote's* post-disenchantment landscape, ethical values are as relative as aesthetic standards; there is no longer any valid, sustaining, distinction between greatness and banality, no longer any singular path to perfection of the sort that hunger used to sustain. The metaphysical grandeur of the epic, driven by absolute convictions and unwavering contrasts, is reduced in Cervantes' novel to a pragmatic and flexible distinction between hunger and satiety, whereby insanity is simply the biological symptom of an empty stomach, curable by eating and exercise. As soon as this prognosis is offered, of course, it requires a correction; whereas *Don Quixote's* characters *proclaim* their belief in the perfectibility of the human through reliance on new scientific information, the novel does not necessarily bear out their optimism. Common sense, practical belief, and, above all, food may help to resolve the problems intrinsic to the human condition. Alternately, they may be as fantastical as medieval romances, and no more efficacious than knight-errants' dreams. This distinction cannot be made within the space of the novel, and any effort to achieve clarification in this domain is necessarily in vain.

### *Hunger, Commensurability, Closure*

The story of the *casa de los locos* is told by the barber, one of the first to recognize the knight-errant's insanity. The barber aims with his narration to restore Don Quixote to his formerly sane self. Although Don Quixote is displeased by the story, it seems to have motivated an internal transformation in his conduct. The knight-errant criticizes the barber's storytelling technique and advises him not to engage in comparisons of *ingenio*, *valor*, *hermosura*, *linage*—cunning, valor, beauty, and lineage—because such values exceed comparability. Later, he objects to a comparison ventured by Señor Don Montesinos, enchanted by Merlin, between his beloved Dulcinea of Toboso and a certain Señora Belerma, asserting dogmatically, "all comparison is odious" (*toda comparación es odiosa*; 450/609). There is no need, Don Quixote explains, to compare, when one already inhabits a world suffused with incommensurability: all beloveds are beautiful, all knights-errant courageous, all lineages are pure, and all poetic creations are radiant with ingenuity.

The world of enchantment cannot admit of any other reality. Deriving from and substantiating the code of knight-errantry itself, Don Quixote's fourfold value-system is based on a specifically early modern mode of incommensurability: the impossibility of reducing one thing to another.

Cervantes draws on many devices to intensify the metaphysical dimensions of Don Quixote's hunger. One such device—the hallmark of Cervantes' particular brand of magic realism *avant la lettre*—is the juxtaposition of the mundane with the transcendental. It is a peculiarly Kafkan move, and also, as I have sought to demonstrate, a Weberian one. Consider the narrator's description of the aftermath of an meal between Don Quixote and Sancho while they are still in the early stages of their journey:

Having pacified their hunger and tempered their melancholy, they remounted and with no fixed destination, since it was in the tradition of knights errant not to follow a specific route [*sin tomar determinado camino*] they rode wherever Rocinante's will took them; behind his will came his master's, and even the donkey's, who always followed wherever the horse led, in virtuous love and companionship [*en buen amor y compañía*]. They returned to the king's highway and followed it with no set plan or purpose in mind. (108/157)

The words seem simple. The conventions of knight-errantry require that the knight and his companion engage in endless and aimless wandering. If Don Quixote had a destination, this would spell the end of his story. If he had an agenda, the novel never would have been written. Don Quixote's lack of destination reverberates over the course of their long journey, and places our early modern hero in direct opposition to his ancient epic predecessors: Achilles, Aeneas, and even Rolando. By contrast with both the epic and the romance, the novel's lack of teleology is inscribed in the knight-errant's mission. When Sancho later reproaches his master for traveling "on roads that have no destination [*caminos sin camino*], and byways and highways that lead nowhere" (475/644), we are not surprised. Don Quixote has no destination because a knight-errant can have no destination in modernity. To have a goal, to have an intention, to have a design capable of being fulfilled, would violate the chivalric ethics to which our hero's life is consecrated. Satiation would make it impossible for our hero to know hunger. The absence of hunger would make it impossible for Don Quixote's quest could to culminate in posthumous fame. With no destination, the knight-errant and his companion are compelled to place themselves at the mercy of a ragged horse, whose guides the two vagrants, if not with wisdom or even foresight, then at least with love.

Endings do not sit well with modern literature. One spokesperson for the undesirability of endings is a master artist whose creativity takes second place only to Don Quixote himself: Ginés de Pasamonte. When Don Quixote learns that this former prisoner is writing a book, *La vida de Ginés de Pasamonte*

(*The Life of Ginés de Pasamonte*), Don Quixote wants to know whether the book is finished, to which Ginés replies quite sensibly, “How can it be finished... if my life isn’t?” (“*Cómo puede estar acabado...si aún no está acabada mi vida*”; 116/169). Like life, the book of modern literature has neither a destination nor a scripted ending.

Among Cervantes scholars, Creel has described Don Quixote’s condition most perspicaciously. The hero is, in Creel’s reading, “a fictional character who has been aberrantly displaced into the world of historico-empirical actuality and whose very existence is a function of the principle of poetic imagination” (38). Don Quixote’s figural persona is itself an argument in favor of the hunger one must experience in order to preserve the integrity of the literary imagination. By definition, even by design, Don Quixote is an anachronism. His belatedness is paradoxically his blessing, for surely not everything outdated can never be reborn. If Don Quixote had a destination, he could not have pursued the glory he indisputably attained for himself through his author. If Don Quixote had not been permanently, congenitally, and fatally hungry, Cervantes never could have enchanted us with his disenchanted world.

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

## References

- Adorno, Theodor W. *Notes to Literature*. Vol. 1. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen. New York: Columbia UP, 1991.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1983.
- Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford, NY: Stanford UP, 2003.
- Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility: Third Version.” *Walter Benjamin – Selected Writings, 1938-1940*. Eds. Marcus Paul Bullock and Michael William Jennings. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003.
- Cascardi, Anthony J. “*Don Quijote* and the Invention of the Novel.” *The Cambridge Companion to Cervantes*. Ed. Anthony J. Cascardi. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Subject of Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “Image and Iconoclasm in *Don Quijote*.” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 82.5 (2005): 599-614.
- Castro, Américo. *El pensamiento de Cervantes*. Madrid: Revista de filología española, 1925.
- Cervantes, Miguel de. *Don Quixote*. Trans. Edith Grossman. New York: Ecco, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha. Comentado por D. Diego Clemencín*. Part 1. Vol. 3. Madrid: La Oficina de D. E. Aguado, 1833.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*. Zaragoza: Hermanos, 1885.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sämmtliche Werke*. Vol. 5. Trans. L.G. Forster. Quedlinburg and Leipzig: n.p., 1825.
- Clemencín, Diego. *Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Ed. Diego Clemencin. 6 vols. Madrid: de Aguado, 1833-39.
- Creel, Bryant L. "Theoretical Implications in Don Quijote's Idea of Enchantment." *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* 12.1 (1992): 19-44.
- Esquivel-Heinemann, Barbara P. "Some Forgotten Don Quijote(s)." *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* 12.1 (1992): 45-57.
- Fuentes, Carlos. "Cervantes, or the Critique of Reading." *Myself with Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.
- Girard, René. *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*. Paris: Grasset, 1961.
- Hartmann, Nicolai. *Ethics*. Vol. 2. Trans. Stanton Coit. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932.
- Kafka, Franz. *Ein Hungerkünstler: Vier Geschichten*. Berlin: Verlag Die Schmiede, 1924.
- Kallendorf, Hilaire. "The Diabolical Adventures of Don Quixote, or Self-Exorcism and the Rise of the Novel." *Renaissance Quarterly* 55.1 (2002): 192-223.
- Kojève, Alexandre. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Eds. Raymond Queneau and Allan Bloom. Trans. James Nichols. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980.
- Levin, Harry. *The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.
- Mancing, Howard. *The Chivalric World of Don Quijote: Style, Structure and Narrative Technique*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1982.
- Ortega y Gasset, José. *Meditations on Quixote*. Ed. Julián Marías. Trans. Evelyn Rugg and Diego Marín. Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 2000.
- Predmore, Richard L. "La función del encantamiento en el mundo del Quijote." *Anales cervantinos* 5 (1955): 63-78.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "El problema de la realidad en el Quijote." *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, 7.3/4 (1953): 489-98.
- Riley, E.C. *Cervante's Theory of the Novel*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1962.
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007.
- Trilling, Lionel. *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*. New York: Viking P, 1950.
- Wat, Alexander. *With the Skin: Poems of Aleksander Wat*. Trans. and eds. Czesław Miłosz and Leonard Nathan. New York: Ecco P, 1990.
- Weber, Max. "Wissenschaft als Beruf." *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Die protestantische Ethik und der "Geist" des Kapitalismus*. Ed. Dirk Käsler. Berlin: C.H. Beck, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions (1915)." *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Trans. and eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1946.
- Windelband, Wilhelm. "Max Weber." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2007. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/weber>. 3 Mar. 2011.