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DON QUIXOTE ON DETECTING MODE: A MATTER OF MEMORY

Keywords: Don Quixote; detection; memory; doubt; mystery; puzzle; justice. Abstract: Inspired by Jorge Luis Borges's statement according to which, with the invention of (modern) detective fiction, Edgar Allan Poe has also created a new type of more alert reader, one that would address the first modern novel with a sceptical - even paranoid - attitude, the present article is a reading of Don Quixote as a narative of detection and discovery, with a focus on memory, as activated throughout a problematic reconfiguration of reality and a concern with the notion of truth and identity. Thus, the return of Don Quixotede la Mancha in narratives such as crime fiction is likely to have occured earlier than Chesterton's invocation and under more implicit circumstances that are worth investigating. The main directions of this retrospective reading of the Spanish novel, intersecting one at a time the theme of memory, are: the notion of doubt ranging from scepticism to paranoia, the puzzlelike and fragmentary narrative structure, and representations of kindred justice figures as myths of (post)modern individualism. The study articulates around an anxiety of the age towards temporal distances and fading past heroism, as expressed in fictional quests that merge memory and imagination in a superior form of active and ever-changing truth, of the (still intriguing) kind represented by the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance. The analysis exemplifies, with a magnifying gesture aimed at an already caricatured figure, the fictional potential of doubt, the alluring puzzlelike imagery of literature and its re-ordering claims, by setting the

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discussion to a suspicious – that is, radically hermeneutical – mode.

A certain Argentinian writer's challenge of reading Don Quixote as detective fiction, launched as an aside, must be approached with the argumentative cautiousness of not forcibly ticking a conventional set of rules upon a work that, in its universality, generously allows such a compulsive gesture. A well-anchored point of departure for the exploration of the common territory between Don Quixote and crime prose is the fictional potential of doubt, a matter interwoven with reflections on the narrator or on the character's reliability and implicitly on his mental faculties, among which memory will be treated more indepthly for the present purpose. This will occur under indications of a case of mind clutter that requires selective interrogation of an interferent literary past.

First of all, there is therefore the doubt on sanity. The question whether Don Quixote was mad or misunderstood is an ever divisive one, roughly opposing neurological arguments and explicit characterization to admirative comments on the

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character's persistence in pursuing his ideals, which might have been wrongly interpreted as pathological due to a compulsive manifestation and a defensive tendency. It is worth exploring the distorting effects on memory along an appreciation of Cervantes' nosographic incursions, although with the due reserved view on the clinical treatment of a literary character. The earliest and most explicit medical reference is probably the theory of the humors, contained in Huarte de San Juan's Examen de ingenios, along which Quixote has been qualified as choleric and as melancholic. Supporting the former characterizing term, Miguel de Unamuno's observation in "The Essence of Quixotism" would refer to a certain 'herostratism', defining it as a condition of "the mad craving for immortality which, should we doubt of living in spirit, makes us long to leave behind at least our eternal name and fame." (Unamuno 356) This state of mind speaks of a longing of memory preservation as a form of coping with the uncertainty of a spiritual afterlife. In other words, it is a defense mechanism derived from an anxious doubt and that aquires a pathological quality, an obsessive concern with individual perpetuation which can be treated under the metafictional lens of the theory of the death of the author. Jorge Aladro, on the other hand, would advocate for a melancholic Quixote, while admitting that "it is thus difficult to explain the melancholy of Don Quixote because it is inscribed into a mock ritual and a parody of the myth". Aladro notices that the melancholy emerging in the character of the second part is simultaneous with an awareness of death (Aladro 177) and he reminds us that the first instances of death, those of Marcella's father and of Grisostomo, are caused by melancholy (Aladro 179). Furthermore, Aurora Egido would base her study on Don Quixote's memory on a modern melancholy affiliated to the medical and philosophical conception (Egido 3-4).

Last but not least, after reviewing the various diagnoses given to Don Quixote from monomania to paranoia to delusional disorder, Gracia Guillén will point out a telling distinction between a type of good madness and a bad madness, between being crazy and being mad, pleading for the former as a more accurate estimation, under the influence of Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (Gracia Guillen 105). Whichever the case, the difficulty of reaching a final diagnosis adds to the work's literary value and to the history of madness, tracing yet another aura around the main character, highlighted by the Romantics with their tragic association between madness and geniality, which would interfere with the originary comic effect in an irreversible way.

In the same spirit of vagueness, if a measure of sanity is self-doubt, that is an openness to the possibility of being wrong, Quixote's resistance against all physical proof widens the gap between mind and body, the latter gaining along the narrated events the marks of poorly estimated strength, revealing a self-defensive resourcefulness in entertaining the illusion of a heroic self, one that monopolizes all justice, all truth, but also supports a moral and physical verticality. For Don Quixote, who holds tight to his creed, such sudden and forced openness that occurs with the defeat in battle, more of a crack into his fictional edifice, turns out to be a disintegrating blow towards the end of the novel, as it interferes with an archaic notion of order and self-consistency, which is at the very base of any artistic enterprise with claims of verisimilitude, and implicitly of any literary construction.

The knight's response to Sancho's endeavours to show him things as they are had been a vital denial, a shutdown mechanism constitutive of the lingering instinct of self-preservation. Once taken the task of living to the ideals of a golden past, there is no turning back, however retrospective the process, no hesitation allowed, especially as it occurs in a later stage of life, when beliefs are hardened and bending of principles is likely to cause – as it eventually does – permanent damage. Under this threat, memory aquires a regulatory function, a return on a familiar ground, as it frequently occurs with elderly people who seem caught in a temporal loop and manifest a tendency of repeatedly telling their lives. Connor Swietlicki explains "how Don Quixote's visual perception defaults to his memory system, weakening his ability to recognize sheep that are not armies, the brain that is not a helmet, and so forth" (Swietlicki 61). Memory is a fictionalized space of retreat and sensemaking that overlaps immediate perception, at the slightest sign of contradiction.

What is more, Don Quixote is a self-made character by means of re-naming the background elements needed for a functional chivalric romance, thus projecting upon the reader a horizon of expectations with regard to his ability of mimetic livresque memorisation and reactualization in the present (Fine 817). The naming act, otherwise an affirmation of separateness from the rest of the world, is a break with the past, for instance in the case of Rocinante, a horse that used to be ordinary but not anymore. The superposition of an alternative anachronic universe is an ongoing process that requires revisiting certain aspects (personal hygiene or financial management) which are taken for granted by the author of romances, but are to be dealt with in real life. Mancing would pin down the exact moment in which Quixote's fantasy starts unwinding, namely the experience of physical pain ocurring when his ear is wounded (Mancing 41-2). The undeniable sensation is more acute as it is not only a physical blow, but a forceful acknowledgement of imposture, a coming to terms with the vulnerability of flesh and the first step towards lucidity.

The sense of becoming – say, fluctuations of lucidity - experienced along the character's journey leads to a concern with his awareness of being mad, as one cannot help wondering about Don Quixote's more explicit and self-oriented take on madness. In Ian Watt's view, he has a "sophisticated awareness of the problem of madness" (Watt 70). There are instances of doubling in which he seems to be reflecting upon his own insanity. Thus, in trying to explain his mission, a certain intentional theatricality and mimetism of insane behaviour comes to the surface, arousing suspicions of malingering: "Have I not already told thee...that I intend to copy Amadis in his madness, despair, and fury?" (Cervantes 157). Moreover, Quixote makes clear that there is no merit in a type of insanity with a clearly defined cause, advocating for the gratuitousness of losing one's reason, feeding the lady's fantasies around a alternate causal scenario, as well as her expectations on a purely hypothetical level: "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" (Cervantes 158). Apparently, there is a certain nobility in the gratuitousness of becoming mad, reminiscent of ancient beliefs of divine insanity. Nonetheless, later on, Don Quixote sets forth the question of madness as a matter of choice and of circumstance, an escapist and benumbing reaction to unmanageable/painful news: "I am mad, and will be mad" (158)," "either

entertaining the welcome news of her reviving pity with demonstrations of sense, or else showing my insensibility of her cruelty by the height of my distraction" (Cervantes 158). The explicit demonstrations of mad love do not contradict the possibility of him being genuinely deranged though, but rather contribute to the modernity of his condition, fostering the possibility of a return to sanity: "the idea of a partial or incomplete madness is essential to a desacralized and compassionate view of the madman, a view fundamentally interested in the possibility of saving him from his madness - a view, that is, fostered by the desacralizing process that rescues the social victim from his immemorial fate" (Bandera 97). This redemptive shift of paradigm turns madness from a condition of detachment that favours the intended comical register to a call for empathy and hope of recovery, of cathartic denouement. A reintegration into the community is made possible, reversing the self-imposed literary confinement, that does not necessarily have to be an individualistic process, as is shown by the character's encounters with people more familiar with the conventions of the chivalric genre and willing to follow his lead. Nonetheless, the feeling of solitude experienced within the crowd remains, confirming a situation in which: "Emergent madness is a collective event lived in solitude" (Grivois 120).

An Imagery of Mystery: Fragments, Puzzles, Twists and Turns

Don Quixote has been scrutinized more than once for its inconsistencies and non-linear development, making its narrative structure and textual complexity representable in mystery-inducing patterns and topoi such as puzzles, codes, clipping techniques, labyrinths, tapestries, etc. This structural aspect heavily supports an interpretation as a narrative of detection.

As "the great inventor of labyrinths" (Horacio Chiong Rivero), Cervantes achieves an intricate web of stories having the inn as "a space that encapsulates an entire world of carnivalesque follies and a topsy-turvy world of misadventures, chaos and chance encounters" (Rivero 627). This synthesizing and eclectic locus, charged with a centripetal and archetipal force, might as well be considered a potential crime scene, given the often bloody encounters and the characters of dubious reputation it shelters. On the other hand, this space of transition serves a defensive purpose against the hardships of a nomad lifestyle. Through the fleeting nature of its use, the choice of such a chronotope is a comment on the efemerity of experience and the difficulty of settling down, an instinct quite contrary to the knight's perpetual search of adventures. However, the fact that it addresses basic needs of rest, food, shelter, does not qualify it so as to fit in the knight's epic, prefering the image of the castle. A knot of sorts in a tapestry-like narrative worthy of Henry James's figural theories, it instigates to a change of course, a thought the more tempting for those without a clear destination such as the blurry image of a woman worshipped from a distance. The imagery of the labyrinth branches out over the Sierra Morena as well. This representation has favoured a parallel with historical events and interpreted in the context of Spanish imperialism: "The thread represents the interlaced web of the Furioso, whereas the labyrinth, much as was the case in La Diana, parallels the festivities of the imperial court at Binche" (Farmer 111).

An informative research done by Massimiliano Giorgini on the origins of Don Ouixote reveals Cervantes's taste for mystery and codes, thus requiring an investigative effort from the reader of a work that needs a commentary in order to be understood, as it resembles a painting of "a rooster in such a fashion and so unrealistically that he had to write next to it in Gothic letters 'This is a rooster'" (Giorgini 240). According to Giorgini, Cervantes's environment of religious intolerance might have led to a necessity of encoding the literary message through an ekphratic strategy (Giorgini 8). The verbalization of visual details made connections more difficult to be drawn and eluded the censorship of the Inquisition. The researcher's findings revolve around a controversial symbol of resistance against religious oppresion, namely the Ichthys, as a possible etymological source of the name of 'Quixote'. This is a fruitful instance, one in a long series, reflecting the cryptic, as well as subversive, nature of Cervantes' novel and is to be given serious consideration. The starting point for this hermeneutical investigation is the Dedication page, defined as a "patchwork", which might stand as a comment upon previous texts and the notion of authenticity.

Moreover, as far as structure is concerned, there is a sense of improvisation characterizing the work. It is "primitive, archaic, typical of many long works of fiction until the late eighteenth century" (Close 36). However, there is method in madness, that is order in a seeming chaos, a condition described by Anthony Close as improvisation "within regulatory pattern" (Close 36). Close would launch the hypothesis that Cervantes might have considered "the open-ended repetition of the same cycle of events" (40), and that the novel might have originally been a novella (Close 77), namely a piece of literature, of the kind destined to be read in one sitting. Along this compositional point of view, it is interesting to notice how Cervantes narratizes issues such as "the location or even the inclusion of interpolated stories in part 1" (Dudley 12). Moreover, turning the question of the truthfulness of Cide Hamete's source texts into the reader's dilemma further increases the latter's hermeneutical role as a puzzle-solver and pseudoarchivist, a scrutinizer of a text that turns upon itself with a wink over the shoulder: "In this way the interpretative act becomes a self-conscious genre-linked feature of Romance, one that goes all the way back to Chretien and to the Irish tales" (Dudley 13). Dudley borrows from biblical studies the term hermeneutics of unbelief as a mode imposed upon the reader by a text containing a series of contradictions and deviations: the disappearance and reappearance of Sancho's donkey, the errors inserted in the Micomicona story of Dorotea, a change in Sancho's wife's name, etc., mistakes that leave us wondering about the control that the author has over his text, marked as it is by frequent departures from the main plot.

Another loose acceptation of 'inconsistency' is 'error'. The creator of a knight errant is an author errant himself. Tom Lathrop in his article entitled "Don Quixote and Its Errant Author" provides a reason for the inconsistencies present in the story, namely the extension of imitative intentions past the content and in a stylistic direction as well, through a certain intentional carelessness (Lathorp 10). These errors are unlikely to be made by a person of such vast erudition and memory as Cervantes.

Don Quijote's perception of the world is founded on a reconstructive principle, that is on a clipping technique that combines portraits of the most noble descendance, addressed with the highest regard and emulating instinct. The result is a dysfunctional anachronic hybrid, whose very decomposing appearance indicates fragmentation and gains him the name of the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance. He is holding on through the sheer centripetal force of a mighty cause and therefore, falls apart, as soon as this idea dissipates. Which brings us to the fundaments upon which the characters is built, among which the principle of justice.

From the Quixote to a quijote: Positionings of a Flawed Legislator

The seemingly unrelated heroic figures of the knight and the detective bring forth unexpected common origins. John M. Reilly states that "a strong case can be made for associating crime and mystery fiction with such venerable forms as heroic romance" (Reilly 203). He further explains the opacity of the association due to temporal factors:

Because detective fiction typically presents itself in the dress of the immediate present rather than garbed in a romantic past, its relationship to the tales of old in opaque; but writers like Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie have known that, for all of their excentric ways, fictional detectives serve as exemplars of social virtue, just as heroes always must, and writers like Raymon Chandler and Joseph Wambaugh have even risked explicit reference to heroism by seriously terming the private eye and police officer of their fiction knights. What the writers have known, readers sense: that a detective story may be an essay in triumphing over the dragons (Reilly 204)

Nonetheless, the two versions of legislators, namely the knight and the detective, stand as alternative heroic figures bridging different societies and sharing a certain artistic perceptiveness that builds either castles in the air or memory pallaces, an urge of safeguarding ladies "in distress" and of setting accounts with the past, addressed with a perpetual nostalgia. They interest the reader less in terms of character development and more in their take on reality, as 'homini interpretans' par excellence, summed up in one distinctive feature that has even favoured the shift from proper name to common noun.

If Quixote's archetypal power as a character has led to a decapitalization of the term, there are small details that make Don Quixote's portrait more believable, through their apparent irrelevance and descriptive minuteness. Thus, the knight considers himself potentially skillful in the most unusual crafts, such as that of making bird cages out of toothpicks and of matches. It is the kind of alternate project that individualizes him, that gains the character flesh and consistency and that makes him relatable. Moreover, it is an example of an interest that would require minuteness and that adds to his not particularly practical nature, but it suggests a need of enclosure and isolation. However, his crafty projects are absorbed by higher ambitions and therefore remain purely hypothetical, while indicating however a latent side of his personality that would engage in punctilious practicalities, a more embodied, functional Quixote. There are certain moments that facillitate this

perception such as the descriptions in the beginning of the novel or the fight scene, paused and retaken with detailed focus on the opponents, a scene resulting in Don Quixote injuring his ear. His autonomy is reflected in an autopoietic act such as the taking of the path of arms, an autobiographical episode in which Cervantes has the opportunity of capitalizing in writing his experience from the battle of Lepanto.

Nonetheless, in more general terms, a quixote is "a general and metaphorical term denoting any daydreamer, fantast and noble-minded idealist that disregards reality", "a fighter for a noble cause who, however, being out of touch with reality, comes across as ridiculous; a maniac, an oddball; sometimes also a strikingly lanky man" (Barbaruk 25). He is so present in collective memory that it serves as descriptive shortcut available to popular voice, although not quite definite in terms of it being a negative or positive label, roughly ranging from hopelessly delusional to inspiringly idealistic. His four-hundred-year-long rambling between the two poles has sharpened a silhouette against the light of reason, shaping it into yet another question mark, to fit an interrogative mode set throughout individual and collective identitary quests. Watt includes him in his series of myths of modern individualism due to the author's interest in individual psychology, even more so given his debatable pathology. But his mythical powers are at present put to trial more than ever by the contemporary man with whom he shares an addiction to virtual reality and whose violent behaviour is influenced by it. Myth-making is after all a way of coping with the changing world. This is only one sense in which Don Quixote is still relevant and shares the fate of all classics of being cast into the mentalities of different ages. Quixote's escapism combined with Dupin's solitude in an overpopulated world, converging in a need of meaningfulness, add to the portrait, or at least the sketch, of the postmodern man.

Don Quixote fulfills a double role of agent and study case, by acting upon the world animated by tales of a glorious past and being acted upon sometimes with indulgence, other times with a violence that costs him his teeth and an ear and that brings to the surface the flimsiness hidden under a hard shield, made of sheer fictional memories of acts of valiance and of a guiding vision of his Dulcinea. His agency is at times ridiculed through the contrary effects of his actions, while his harmful exposure to forces that he cannot control is deemed a work of witchcraft and therefore resistant to rational explanations. Moreover, Foucault would point out a certain alertness towards the world that Don Quixote manifests, defining the madman as "the man of primitive resemblances" (Foucault 54), one under continuous impression of interpreting signs, a compulsive hermeneut forcing a reassuring sense of consistency upon the world, by recurring to supernatural explanations when his theories are under threat of falling apart. The French philosopher places the madman against the figure of the poet, thus representing Don Quixote as a mixture of madness and wisdom, which grants him the possibility of acceeding to a higher truth, beyond the register of accuracy (Foucault 55). His halfclosed eyes, adjusted to the reading distance, has to fill in the blanks in a discontinuous reality and he borrows patterns from the romances of chivalry to do

A particularly connecting figure standing between Quixote and the detective is the picaro. It is worth observing how differences between the knight and the

picaro are blurred in the Quixote, whose fate is marked by a disparity between intentions and actions that places him on the border of criminality. The due admiration a knight deserves for its high ideals and bravery turns into a contemplation of an unusual portrait, set against a picaresque background that makes him stand out as a grotesque misfit. As Echevarria notices, "For Cervantes and for literature the most compelling aspect of picaresque life was the individualizing detail, the originality of the deviant, his bizarre behaviour first captured in the fine net of legal writing, where his story would have first been told" (Gonzales Echevarria 57). The thin line between the remarkable and the deviant is crossed with legal consequences, as old versions of heroism are put to the test and placed on display on a legislating grid that is permeable to delinquent elements or to those generally considered of a low condition. The condescendent laughter and comments thus resulting reveal a tragic dimension to the more empathetic reader, of Romantic lineage, drawn along with Sancho in the mighty cause. The seduction of the excentric's case is as pervasive as ever before, fueling the myth in a jaded age that draws entertainment from a good old mystery and the story of a charismatic misfit. Pedro Javier Pardo Garcia, in "Romantic and Quixotic Heroes in Detective Fiction". analyzes the presence of the Romantic and the Quixotic hero in detective fiction, explaining "how these two traditions have been used as formal or generic patterns to give shape to opposite attitudes in the assessment of man's competence or abilities as an individual - corresponding in general terms to different worldviews and narrative modes, those of romance and realism – and of a prevailing or past culture – in the romantic tradition to assert its validity and continuity, in the quixotic one to undermine it and to advocate change" (Pardo Garcia 117). These two opposing modes would later converge in a character such as Auguste Dupin, characterized as both creative and resolvent, encapsulating Quixotic elements in his dual personality.

Quixote's story is articulated as a suspension and a reconsideration of a mundane identity, around past principles of knighthood, to be paralleled with the heroic feats of the detective's mind, though ending by tellingly blurring the lines between criminal and legislator. However, Quixote's portrait will be sharpened by a complementary companionship with a more rational Sancho, a companionship that will be echoed in other archetypal male partners such as Dupin and his kindred narrator, Sherlock and Watson, which are as well convincing instances of a double nature of humanity. The male pair bond reflects life's great dualities throughout the endeavours of making sense, or at least a case, of the surrounding world.

According to Rodrigo Gonzales Echevarria, Don Quixote qualifies as a legal case, which might benefit retrospectively from the insanity plea, though transgressing worldly laws by having an obsolete system of reference:

With his creation of Don Quixote, the first hero-fugitive from justice in the Western tradition—a "highway robber," as the officer of the Holy Brotherhood calls him—Cervantes has created the first important novelistic protagonist drawn from the legal archives. His is the case of the insane hidalgo who set out to act out chivalric fantasies and in the process committed a series of crimes. And yet, he is the agent of Providence. (Gonzales: *Echevarria* 150)

This double status makes the judgement of his case more difficult as madness makes him amoral and therefore not liable to punishment.

Quixote's immunity towards punishment resides not in his noble lineage but in his mental condition, which places him next to children or amnesiacs. These categories belong to a different protected zone of society, which, however peripheral, cannot be held responsible for their deeds. Amnesty for amnesia is not a solution for Don Quixote.

It is worth mentioning that, apart from the main character, there are other character that can stand as representatives of crime in the novel. Thus, the first innkeeper is a clear example of picaro, managing to disguise his acts into a series of events worthy of a chivalric romance. Andres, the boy being flogged by his master, reappears in the story on his way to Sevile, a place of picaros. But arguably the most illustrative episode in the novel, as far as Don Quijote's legislative role and wrong-doers are concerned, is the one in which he frees the galley slaves, a major transgression that reflects his lack of understanding of the legal system of the time and even a departure from the knight's role as articulated around royal power. Following the incident, Don Quixote and Sancho are forced to hide in the mountains. As Frederick A. de Armas would notice: "As they go deeper into this realm, yet another genre (one that was not to be named until the nineteenth century) supplants the sentimental, albeit briefly. The pair becomes more like the detective pair of Sherlock Holmes and Watson who follow clues" (Armas 98).

All in all, Borges's suggestion has openned an enriching angle upon the story of Don Quixote, directing the conventions of a genre in ways that add to the novel's concern with the nature of reality and of the mind's possibilities and limitations in exploring it, guided by an active doubt that instigates the otherwise jaded reader of our times and by a need of both structural and legislative order, pervasive in an age of such liberal literary habits.

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