

## *Don Quijote* Turned 400. Did Anybody Notice?

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WELL, THE SHORT ANSWER to my rhetorical question, did anybody notice the quadricentennial of the publication of *Don Quijote*, Part I, in 1605, is something like “Oh boy, did they ever!”<sup>1</sup> I have filled a total of twenty-five, count ‘em, twenty-five 3½ inch floppy disks with announcements and descriptions of quixotic celebrations all around the world that began in 2004 and are sputtering to an end in this room tonight.

Many of these celebrations were pro-forma affairs in which small towns all over Spain paid homage to what everybody knew was a national treasure but nobody was quite sure why.

As early as 2003, the mayor of El Toboso complained to the press that Dulcinea’s hometown was being left out of the planning process.

In 2004, two enterprising young men formed a company specialized in the repair of windmills and made a great deal with the regional government of Castilla-La Mancha, in anticipation of the fourth centennial.

One of the most productive local events was one that didn’t happen. A tiny town in Aragón called Alcalá de Ebro decided **not** to participate in the national celebration, and the newspaper report of that decision revived a very useful hypothesis concerning the origin of Sancho’s *ínsula*, the island Don Quijote promises him at the beginning of their association, and which he finally receives in Part II.

There were marathon readings of the text literally all over the world, from Spain to East Asia.

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<sup>1</sup> The following were remarks for the Harvard-Radcliffe Club of Southern California from May 16, 2006.

There were art exhibits and musical performances.

There was a glut of academic conferences and symposia. Every major university in this country and Latin America and Europe, as well as some in Japan and China and South Korea, got into the act. While I was at a conference at the Sorbonne at the beginning of July (2005), I heard about a guy who had already participated in forty-three of these affairs.

There were special commemorative editions of the *Quijote*, including one published by the Real Academia Española in collaboration with the academies of every Spanish-speaking country, and made available at a very attractive price everywhere Spanish is spoken, so that every Spanish speaker in the world could experience this book. I picked up a copy at Barnes and Noble in Pasadena. There was an excellent new translation into English by Edith Grossman, which is the version I recommend, if you're looking for one to read.

Here at UCLA we declared April 2005 "month of La Mancha," and threw ourselves into a round of celebratory and self-congratulatory activities. We had an academic conference, with scholars from all around the United States and France and Spain. By a serendipitous coincidence, I was selected to give the UCLA Faculty Research Lecture for 2005, and naturally I chose *Don Quijote* as my topic. We had a one-day *Quijote* extravaganza organized by University Extension, where I had the good fortune to meet Araceli Espinosa, who is responsible for bringing us together tonight. We had an impressive exhibition of books in the Young Research Library. Our graduate students organized a marathon reading in the rotunda of Powell Library. They also put together a mini film festival provocatively titled "A Complete Night of Incomplete Films: Don Quijote and the Curse of the Silver Screen." And finally, my colleague Enrique Rodríguez Cepeda mounted a display of his amazing collection of *Quijote* memorabilia, which included everything from decorative tiles to matchbook covers featuring scenes from the book.

So yes, the quadricentennial of the publication did not go unnoticed. The question is: why was it worth celebrating? What is it about this book that continues to engage people after four hundred years? I think the answer, or answers, depend on who is being engaged.

No one can fail to be moved by the fact that *Don Quijote* is the second best seller of all time, with receipts exceeded only by the Bible.

While we're in commercial mode I should point out that the Business School of Stanford University produced a DVD called "Passion and Discipline: Don Quixote's Lessons for Leadership." I quote from the jacket blurb: "This program creatively examines how Quixote's kind of self-knowledge might serve modern leadership. Narrated by Professor March [Professor Emeritus James G. March], the program parallels episodes from Quixote's adventures with illustrative examples in the modern world, from former President Richard Nixon and Martin Luther King Jr. to Bill Gates and Hewlett-Packard. Engaging interviews with contemporary leaders drawn from business, government and education are interwoven with archival footage of *historic* leaders who demonstrate imagination, perseverance in the face of adversity, and joy in work."

Academic critics who are also professional Hispanists are constantly discovering new meanings and new relevancies through historical and contextual research into the specifics of life in Cervantes' Spain. Some of this work can turn up astonishing food for thought. It seems the society that Don Quijote and Cervantes belonged to faced many of the same social questions we are called upon to deal with here in Southern California at the beginning of the twenty-first century, especially those resulting from the fact of an ethnically, religiously and linguistically diverse population. These questions boil down to one: Do we celebrate our diversity, or do we insist on purity, with its corollary of exclusion? Spain chose the latter course, with the disastrous results we all know, beginning with the expulsion of the Jews in 1492. With particular relevance for our own situation, in 1609 the Spanish government decreed the expulsion of the Moriscos, that is, the descendants of Muslims forcibly converted to Christianity about a century before. This large group, which constituted the majority in places like Granada, had always resisted assimilation; they refused to learn Spanish, they continued to practice Islam in secret, they continued to wear their distinctive traditional costume, to sing and dance and get married and to bury their dead, as they always had. Although they had been on the land for almost eight hundred years, and the ruling Christian majority had in fact taken their country away

from them, they were widely resented, especially by the great mass of uneducated people, but their cheap labor was essential to the economy, which of course was controlled by aristocrats. Sound familiar? Cervantes dramatizes the effect of the expulsion on the lives of individual Spaniards when in chapter 54 of Part II Sancho happens to run into his old friend and neighbor, Ricote the Morisco, who had been expelled along with all the rest but who had sneaked back into the country under pain of death to recover some property and to try to reunite his family.

Academic literary critics and intellectuals of all stripes, not just Hispanists, have observed how the *Quijote* engages the theories of literature extant in Cervantes' time, and also anticipates all the theories and strategies of literary criticism that have come along since. Every generation of intellectuals has seen its own preoccupations and its own most cherished discoveries anticipated in Cervantes' text. The rationalists of the eighteenth century discovered that Cervantes had anticipated them by writing the epic of good sense and social integration. The romantics of the next century discovered the opposite, that Cervantes had anticipated their own preoccupation with the tragic situation of the eccentric genius in a hostile society. The theoreticians of literary realism discovered that he had unlocked the secret of capturing the essence of physical reality in words. In the twentieth century, we saw that Cervantes had anticipated the existentialism of Dilthey, Heidegger, Ortega, and Sartre. And it has become clear to us most recently that Cervantes had discovered, or intuited, that reality is never a given, just out there, existing independently of us, but is always constructed by humans through socio-linguistic practice. All the concerns of the trendiest contemporary theorizing about literature and discourse, referentiality and signification, authorial voices and presences, structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstruction can be effortlessly observed in Cervantes' pages. What is interesting is not so much the fact that the *Quijote* can be and has been profitably read and studied from each new critical perspective. That is a hallmark of any literary masterpiece: to be ahead of its time, to lend itself to new and different critical approaches, to speak to each new generation. What is truly remarkable is not that the current preoccupations are present in the text, but that Cervantes makes them themes of the work. He brings them for-

ward consciously, as objects of inquiry, to be discussed by the characters and acted out in their lives.

Freud once observed that the great writers and artists are great because they are able to intuit profound truths about human nature and human life, and to present their intuitions in a way that engages the reader's own humanity and tells him or her something significant about him- or herself. In this, Freud continues, the artists and writers are way ahead of the scientists, who come to discover by rational and experimental processes what the artists already knew. Scientific discoveries form a progression in which the most recent depends on what went before. This kind of progression doesn't exist in art. The intuitions of a Cervantes, or a Shakespeare, or a Rabelais are as valid for us, and as productive in our lives, as those of the most perceptive chroniclers of the high-tech, high-anxiety world we live in.

And what about writers, who are not necessarily philosophers or professional literary critics, but actual practitioners? Lionel Trilling once observed that the whole history of the novel could justifiably be thought of as "a variation on the theme of *Don Quixote*." And indeed, ever since the eighteenth century writers have been creating characters who conceive some project that will give meaning to their lives, and set out to make the project, and themselves, come true. From Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1821-29), to Stendhal's *Le rouge et le noir* (1830), to *Moby Dick* (1851), *Madame Bovary* (1857), to *Huckleberry Finn* (1885), to Philip Roth, John Irving, and Kurt Vonnegut, to Elias Canetti and Milan Kundera, novelists have been exploring and experimenting with the possibilities inherent in what has been called the "*Cervantine principle*." Many writers have confessed their debt to Cervantes. Perhaps the most eloquent such confession is Flaubert's only apparent hyperbolic claim that he discovered his own origins in the *Quijote*, that book, he says, that he "knew by heart before he learned to read." Finally, in a survey which I believe was conducted by PEN in the late 1990s, one hundred of the most prominent novelists writing in the world today were asked to list the works that had had the most influence on their own. The title that came up most often was *Don Quijote*.

At this point I'd like to get myself into this talk, from my perspective as an academic literary critic. In 1983, I published a book that considered Don Quijote's madness through the insights provided by psychoanalysis. I advanced the hypothesis that the etiology of the character's psychosis lay in his conflicted relations with women, a housekeeper past forty and a niece under twenty years of age. The precipitating factor, according to my hypothesis, was the emergence of his niece as a desirable young woman at precisely that time in his own life when he was experiencing the typical mid-life replay of the psychosexual upheavals of adolescence. I proposed that unconscious incestuous impulses aroused by the niece propel her uncle first into manic reading of sex and violence escapist fiction—that is, the famous novels of chivalry, and when that first line of defense proves inadequate to the task of getting her off his mind, he retreats into psychosis, the most desperate, last-ditch defense we humans are capable of mounting against intolerable environmental stress. Psychosis, or madness, effects a psychic separation of the individual from his environment. The crazy project of a new identity as knight-errant has the added advantage of getting Don Quijote physically out of the house and away from his niece as well. It seemed clear, to me at any rate, that Dulcinea del Toboso is a transmutation of the inaccessible niece into a fictional princess inaccessible by definition.

I then studied Don Quijote's relations with the real women he meets in the course of his adventures. What I found was a man with powerful erotic impulses who was terrified of physical intimacy with women. I call this his "conflicted intimacy." The case of Maritornes, the chambermaid in Part I chapter 16, is a case in point. Don Quijote has been pretty badly beaten up. He and Sancho stop for the night at an inn. The innkeeper's daughter, not incidentally a young woman the same age as Don Quijote's niece, exerts a powerful attraction on him. He, of course, doesn't understand that this is an inn; he thinks he's in a castle, and as he's lying awake in the room he shares with Sancho and a mule driver, he is hard at work on an erotic fantasy in which the beautiful daughter of the lord of the castle has fallen for him and as soon as the place is quiet enough, plans to slip into his room and his bed. As soon as he reaches this point in his fantasy, he begins to fear for his chastity, and to protect himself, he invokes

his unswerving fidelity to Dulcinea. Well, at precisely this moment, who should slip into the room in fact but Maritornes the chambermaid, who has a date with the mule driver two beds down. Don Quijote thinks she's the daughter, pulls her close and thanks her profusely for offering herself, but declines because he cannot betray Dulcinea. Meanwhile, the mule driver has overheard our hero's little speech, thinks Maritornes is standing him up, and comes after her. She gets into bed with Sancho to hide from him, and we're in full-blown bedroom farce mode.

This episode has its counterpart in Part II, in the palace of the duke and duchess who make such cruel sport of Don Quijote and Sancho. This time there is a closer fit between the women in the palace and the women in Don Quijote's household. The duke and duchess, incidentally, are superb readers of Part I. I say superb because they picked up on Don Quijote's conflicted sexuality just as I did. They re-stage the Maritornes episode, by arranging for a young lady-in-waiting named Altisidora, again the same age as Don Quijote's niece, to pretend to have fallen in love with him and come on to him, so they can enjoy watching his excitement turn into uneasiness and then into panic. Altisidora throws herself into the part, and Don Quijote is taken in. After a nocturnal encounter in which Don Quijote is pretty badly scratched up by some cats, he is alone in his room at night, thinking about Altisidora and mentally calling on Dulcinea for help. He hears the door being opened, and assumes that Altisidora has come to offer herself. He is surprised to find that, instead of a girl his own niece's age, the intruder is a certain Doña Rodríguez, a middle-aged *dueña* in the duchess' service. She has already been introduced, in an altercation with Sancho, as a middle-aged woman who is very concerned for her fading beauty and dwindling sex appeal. In Don Quijote's terms, she is the same age as his housekeeper back home, and her rank and status make her his social equal as well. She is, in short, a perfect match for him. She is not in his room to seduce him, however, but to enlist his assistance in the recuperation of her daughter's lost honor. All Don Quijote knows, however, is that he is alone in a room in the middle of the night with a real woman who is actually appropriate for him, with whom he might actually become intimate if he only dared. Both characters are keenly aware of the erotically charged situation in

which the find themselves. Don Quijote wraps himself up in his blanket and stands up in his bed, and each of them demands a pledge of chastity from the other. This to me is the most pathetic episode, in the etymological sense, in the entire novel. Although the text plays it for laughs, this is Don Quijote's best shot, in fact his only shot, at a normal relationship with a real woman, and it doesn't happen.

Alas, my book was not well received, at least not at first. For openers, it almost succeeded in forestalling any further advancement up the ladder of academic success here at UCLA. It was taken seriously in some quarters, however, mostly by women academics, and it made possible the study of Don Quijote as a fictional being whose character is defined at least in part by his sexuality. And you'll be happy to hear that I even got promoted at UCLA. But while I was chafing at my colleagues' shall we say lukewarm reception of my ideas and attempting to vindicate myself, I began to search for examples of other readers, serious readers who had read the book as I had. I began to search for what I call "Don Quijote re-writes," works that recreate the interpersonal and psychosexual dynamic of Don Quijote's household and work through the themes I thought I had discovered: the character's middle-aged sexuality, the unacceptable incestuous impulses, the presence in the household of a woman of the character's own age, and the evolution of the middle-aged male character's relationship with the forbidden younger woman or the appropriate older one.

I turned up some fascinating instances, and I'd like to share some of them with you in the time we have left.

The first "Don Quijote re-write" is the work of Cervantes himself, manifested in the duke and duchess in the second part of his own novel. As I remarked a moment ago, these characters are superb readers of Part I, and they stage a number of adventures designed to expose Don Quijote to ridicule by making public aspects of his character, such as his conflicted sexuality, they have observed in their attentive reading of the first part. Maritornes is restaged as Altisidora, for example. Since they are Cervantes' creatures, this suggests to me that Cervantes himself was aware of the psychosexual dimension of the character he had created.

The next such rewrite is by an anonymous author who signed himself "Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda" and who published a continuation of

*Don Quijote* in 1614, a year before Cervantes brought out his own second part.

Avellaneda is keenly aware of Don Quijote as a sexual being. His revision of the character consists largely in depriving him of the paradoxical combination of powerful libido and terror of women, with its rich possibilities of character and narrative development, and replacing it with a kind of oblivious *naïveté*.

The first change Avellaneda makes in Don Quijote's household is to get rid of the niece. In chapter 1, she is stricken with a sudden twenty-four-hour fever, during the brief course of which she dies, "leaving the good hidalgo alone and disconsolate," as the text reports (59). The hero's reaction to her death suggests that Avellaneda understood that Don Quijote was emotionally attached to his niece, and the narrative tactic of killing her off suggests that he intuited the darker potential of that attachment as well.

Don Quijote's housekeeper recedes into the background. His friend the priest brings him in a woman the text calls a "very devout and Christian old lady, to take care of him at home, prepare his meals and make his bed and do whatever else was required for his care, and finally to inform the priest or the barber of everything he did and said inside or outside his house, that might give any sign that he was returning to his foolish pursuit of knight-errantry" (59).

So the dynamic of the home situation is fundamentally altered. The threat of incest is removed by the niece's opportune death, and the potential for a normal relationship with the housekeeper is also undone by the presence of the domestic spy the priest introduces into Don Quijote's *ménage*.

The niece is out, and within a few pages Dulcinea is also kicked out. As Don Quijote prepares to leave home, he decides to "forget the ungrateful princess Dulcinea del Toboso and find himself another lady who would reward his services more appropriately" (86).

Later on, he decides to abandon love altogether, and takes the new name of "el Caballero Desamorado" the Not-in-Love Knight (94).

In Avellaneda's vulgar rewrite of the Maritornes episode, which highlights and revolves around Don Quijote's conflicted sexuality, a chamber-

maid at an inn offers herself to Don Quijote for two *reales*, but our hero remains oblivious to her charms and to her offer. The expression the text uses is “Don Quijote didn’t understand the music” (104).

Later on Don Quijote is joined by a former prostitute, now well along in years and *way* past her prime, named Bárbara de Villatobos. She is a grotesque deformation of the ideal of Dulcinea fleshed out with a similarly deformed version of Aldonza Lorenzo. Don Quijote thinks she is a princess out of a novel of chivalry. Her main function, beyond providing this grotesque counterpoint, is to offer herself sexually to Don Quijote (and once to Sancho) so that they can remain oblivious to her suggestion. And indeed neither Don Quijote nor Sancho “understands the music” when she comes on to them (306, 344).

Avellaneda was the first writer besides Cervantes himself who read *Don Quijote* more or less the way I do, as a tragedy of conflicted sexuality. But instead of sympathizing with the hero, Avellaneda felt threatened, I suppose by his potential for the disruption of order, and he did everything he could to neutralize and trivialize Don Quijote’s sexuality, and ultimately to transform the tragedy into farce.

I want now to jump to Benito Pérez Galdós’ *Tristana*, from 1892. From the opening paragraphs Galdós invokes the *Quijote*, in a series of allusions and reminiscences that no Spaniard could fail to recognize, as he introduces and describes the middle-aged male protagonist. He is known as Don Lope Garrido, but his real name is in doubt, exactly as Don Quijote’s is. He looks like a sixteenth-century *hidalgo*. He lives, as Don Quijote does, in genteel poverty with two women: a housekeeper of about his own age, and a mysterious younger woman whose status and relationship to him are unclear. This is *Tristana*, the title character. She is not Don Lope’s daughter, she is not exactly a servant, but what becomes clear as the novel progresses is that she is Don Lope’s mistress. And in fact Don Lope is a veritable Don Juan who has made a career out of seducing women. In this he is the exact polar opposite of Don Quijote. Galdós understood that an erotic volcano was bottled up underneath Don Quijote’s timid exterior. He understood that Don Quijote was attracted to his own niece in particular, and he inverted the two aspects of our hero’s character. He seemed to have asked something like: Suppose

Don Quijote had been able to do what he really always wanted to, to engage in an incestuous relationship with his niece, what would happen to the two of them? How would their story play out? And whose story would it be? In Galdós' hands, it turns out to be Tristana's story. She is the one who attempts to get out of the erotically charged atmosphere of the house and (if you'll pardon me) out from under Don Lope. She is the one who sallies forth as Don Quijote does, and like him, she is ultimately brought back home and rendered incapable of any further sallies.

A few years later, Miguel de Unamuno wrote a wonderful little story called *El sencillo don Rafael, cazador y tresillista*. Like Don Quijote, Don Rafael is a middle-aged bachelor who lives with a housekeeper who clearly wants him to marry her. A foundling who appears on his doorstep gets a wetnurse into the story. She is a young woman who had just given birth to a stillborn illegitimate child. The household begins to look more like Don Quijote's, but with a ready-made family. Don Rafael is attracted to the young wetnurse as Don Quijote is to his niece, but Unamuno makes her simultaneously a substitute daughter and, through repeated reference to her swollen breasts, a substitute mother as well as an erotic object. They get married and live happily ever after. Unamuno's feel-good version of the *Quijote* eliminates all the impediments to Don Quijote's successful union with his niece, and transforms conflicted sexuality into parenthood and social respectability.

Both Galdós and Unamuno retain the domestic triangle as the basic situation. Both are clearly thinking of Don Quijote and imagining what might have happened if his character had been either drastically or just a little bit different.

I'd like to now move out of the Spanish orbit and conclude with some authors perhaps better known to this group. The first of these is Elias Canetti, who as a Sephardic Jew is actually a kind of honorary Spaniard. I read *Die Blendung* because its title in English is *Auto de fe*, and I've always been a sucker for the Inquisition. Imagine my surprise when I find a story about a celibate middle-aged bachelor who lives with a whole lot of books and a housekeeper just about his own age. The psychosexual conflict plays itself out between the character and the housekeeper, who exercises a svengali-like hold over him. My colleague Efraín Kristal has

written on *Auto de fe* as a “Sephardic rewriting of *Don Quixote*.” He elucidates the general indebtedness of Canetti to Cervantes, but does not treat the relationship between the character and the housekeeper, which I modestly believe strengthens my hypothesis.

Arthur Miller’s 1955 play, *A View from the Bridge*, comes almost too close for comfort to the *Don Quijote* pattern. We get the threat of the uncle-niece incest right up front. A longshoresman named Eddie Carbone is devoted to his wife, and to his niece, who lives with them. When some of the wife’s impoverished Sicilian relatives enter the US illegally, Carbone puts them up and tries to help them find work. One of them falls in love with the teen-aged niece. When this happens, Carbone (“flammable substance,” get it?) has to try to confront, or better, try to avoid confronting his unacceptable incestuous impulses.

And how could we leave Texas out? The final novel in Larry McMurtry’s trilogy about Duane Moore, that begins with *The Last Picture Show*, is called *Duane’s Depressed* (1999). Here we meet Duane in middle age. He might be described as an inverted Don Quijote. Instead of a celibate bachelor we have a *paterfamilias*, with a sexy wife, and adult children and grandchildren all over the place. At the beginning of the book, and for reasons unknown, Duane suddenly can’t take it anymore. He leaves home, as Don Quijote does, and goes off to live by himself. He devotes himself to futile do-good projects such as cleaning up trash beside roads. He is diagnosed with depression, a twentieth-century term for something very like what ailed Don Quijote. When his wife is opportunely killed in an automobile accident (cf. Charlotte Haze) Duane throws himself into the pursuit of an inaccessible, much younger woman, his lesbian psychotherapist.

I hope to have amassed enough examples to suggest that many writers, from different ages, different linguistic and cultural traditions, have absorbed, consciously or not, and repeated the basic plot and underlying psychosexual dynamic that Cervantes offers in *Don Quijote*. But I’ve saved the best for last, or at least I hope I’ve saved the best for last.

You come to a Harvard event; you deserve a little Harvard. Vladimir Nabokov taught *Don Quijote* at Harvard in the early fifties, and while he was there he was also working on the most notorious Don Quijote

rewrite of all. Before he landed at Harvard, Nabokov taught at Wellesley and at Cornell. Michael Karpovich invited him to Harvard for the spring semester of 1952, to teach a course called "Hum 2," high spots of western literature. Among the required texts was *Don Quijote*. Nabokov announced that he refused to teach the *Quijote*, that it was a terrible book, technically crude and psychologically sadistic. Harry Levin, who was in charge of Hum 2, famously replied "Harvard thinks otherwise," and Nabokov was compelled to include the *Quijote* in his syllabus. His lectures on Cervantes' book were subsequently published separately in a volume that has earned him the undying enmity, not to say contempt, of most professional Cervantes scholars.

What has principally raised my colleagues' collective hackles is Nabokov's assertion that Cervantes is cruel to his hero. For example: "The author seems to plan it thus: 'Come with me, ungentle reader, who enjoys seeing a live dog inflated and kicked around like a soccer football, who likes, of a Sunday morning, on his way to or from church, to poke his stick or direct his spittle at a poor rogue in the stocks'; come,... I hope you will be amused at what I have to offer." Don Quijote, on the other hand, "is chaste, enamored, with a veiled dream, persecuted by enchanters; and above all he is a gallant gentleman, a man of infinite courage, a hero in the truest sense of the word. [...] he is, among knights, the bravest, the most lovelorn of any in this world" (16). For now, I'd just like to call attention to the references to Don Quijote's love life: He is "chaste," "enamored," and "lovelorn." That is, Nabokov seems oblivious to the powerful erotic impulses I have been belaboring here.

Now, at the same time Nabokov was lecturing on the *Quijote*, he was also writing *Lolita*, which I just called the most notorious Don Quijote rewrite of all. It would be really neat if we could conclude that *Lolita* is simply the result of Nabokov's Harvard experience with *Don Quijote*, but as Nixon used to say, that would be the easy thing to do, and furthermore it would be untrue. There is no question that the *Quijote* engaged Nabokov while he was at Harvard, and that a substantial part of *Lolita* has to have been conceived specifically and consciously as a Don Quijote

rewrite. For example: In Part II, the Bachelor Sansón Carrasco sets out on a therapeutic mission to bring Don Quijote back home where he can be cared for. To do this, Sansón dresses up in full knight-errant regalia, complete with armor, weapons, horse and squire, and, calling himself the Knight of the Mirrors (a mirror-image of Don Quijote), seeks Don Quijote out with the idea of challenging him to single combat, from which of course Sansón will emerge victorious, and the defeated Don Quijote will be sent home. Sounds good, but it doesn't work out that way. Don Quijote defeats Sansón on a fluke (Sansón can't get his horse started), whereupon Sansón vows to continue his search for Don Quijote until he finds him and really whips him, with all therapeutic intention now replaced by pure revenge. He finally catches up with Don Quijote on the beach in Barcelona, defeats him and sends him home, to his death. Nabokov studies this episode in the context of Avellaneda's 1614 continuation. He considers that Cervantes missed a bet: instead of Sansón Carrasco, it should have been Avellaneda's Don Quijote who comes after the real Don Quijote and engages him in a fight to the finish.

Nabokov says: "How splendid it would have been if instead of that hasty and vague encounter with the disguised Carrasco... the real Don Quijote had fought his crucial battle with the false Don Quijote! In that imagined battle, who would have been the victor—the fantastic, loveable madman of genius, or the fraud, the symbol of robust mediocrity? My money is on Avellaneda's man, because the beauty of it is that, in life, mediocrity is more fortunate than genius" (81). As we recall, in *Lolita* Humbert and Lo are pursued by Clare Quilty, who is a kind of alternative Humbert, just as Don Quijote and Sancho are pursued by Sansón, who has a similar reaction to Don Quijote. Humbert and Quilty meet for a final showdown, as Don Quijote and Sansón do. Nabokov had to have been thinking of the *Quijote* here; there are too many sly allusions for it to be otherwise. Quilty is referred to as "Cue," written as in "pool cue," but pronounced "Q," for Quixote, of course. One of the aliases Cue assumes is "Donald Quicks, from Sierra Morena." In view of what Nabokov says about the final encounter between Don Quijote and Sansón, it seems clear that the final showdown between Humbert and

Quilty is a conscious attempt to rewrite the *Quijote*, to do correctly what Cervantes had botched.

Nabokov does not allude directly to the uncle-niece erotic dynamic, but he does have some things to say about the niece's counterfigure, Altisidora. He never fails to call her "little Altisidora." He introduces her as "a young girl, a child, who... poses as a lovelorn maiden passionately attached to La Mancha's greatest knight" (70). And he evokes "fifty-year-old Quixote,... melancholy, miserable, excited by little Altisidora's musical moans" (70). I think Nabokov "understood the music" here.

I am going to propose that Nabokov read the *Quijote* more or less as I do, that is, that he was not oblivious to the unsettling attraction of the uncle to the niece, and that the Harvard experience was crucial to the completion of *Lolita*, but his interest in the thematics of middle-aged men's erotic attraction to forbidden teen-aged girls goes way back. I want to make a quick detour and look at the evolution of *Lolita* in Nabokov's life and works.

In fact, Nabokov was obsessed with the pre-history of *Lolita*, but it had to be his version. He writes: "The first little throb of *Lolita* went through me late in 1939 or early in 1940, in Paris" (*Annotated Lolita* 311).<sup>2</sup> He says the "initial shiver of inspiration" for *Lolita* was a novella called *The Enchanter (Volshebnik)*, written in Russian. "The man was a Central European, the anonymous nymphet was French, and the loci were Paris and Provence. I had him marry the little girl's sick mother who soon died, and after a thwarted attempt to take advantage of the orphan in a hotel room, Arthur (for that was his name) threw himself under the wheels of a truck. [...] but I was not pleased with the thing and destroyed it sometime after moving to America in 1940" (312). The last sentence is obviously untrue, as Nabokov's son Dmitri published the translation in 1986. I am fascinated by Nabokov's phrases: "first little throb" and "initial shiver of inspiration."

Nabokov's history of the Ur-*Lolita* then jumps to his Cornell University period, which he does not identify as such. "Around 1949, in Ithaca, upstate New York, the throbbing, which had never quite ceased,

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2 See "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*," afterword to the text, in *Annotated Lolita*, ed. Alfred Appel (New York: Vintage Books, 1991) 311-17.

began to plague me again. Combination joined inspiration with fresh zest and involved me in a new treatment of the theme, this time in English the language of my first governess in St. Petersburg, circa 1903, a Miss Rachel Home. The nymph, now with a dash of Irish blood, was really much the same lass, and the basic-marrying-her-mother idea also subsisted; but otherwise the thing was new and had grown in secret the claws and wings of a novel" (312). Nabokov continues: "The book developed slowly, with many interruptions and asides. [...] Once or twice I was on the point of burning the unfinished draft and had carried my *Juanita Dark* as far as the shadow of the leaning incinerator on the innocent lawn, when I was stopped by the thought that the ghost of the destroyed book would haunt my files for the rest of my life" (312).

According to Nabokov, the final impetus for *Lolita* was provided by the summer butterfly hunts, which took him and his wife to the American west and acquainted Nabokov with the locales that Humbert and Lolita visit. "Every summer my wife and I go butterfly hunting.... It was at such of our headquarters as Telluride, Colorado; Afton, Wyoming; and Ashland, Oregon, that *Lolita* was energetically resumed in the evenings or on cloudy days. I finished copying the thing out in longhand in the spring of 1954, and at once began casting around for a publisher" (312).

But Nabokov silences some crucial episodes.

In the mid-1920s in Berlin he was engaged to a girl named Svetlana Zivert he met when she was only thirteen. They were to have been married as soon as she turned seventeen, but the engagement was broken off. One version is that Vladimir had made a suggestion to her about "a strange kind of kiss." Svetlana mentioned it to her aunt, who immediately branded him a pervert and cancelled the engagement (Field 90).

In 1928, Nabokov wrote a poem called "Lilith," in which a man is killed, has intercourse with a ravishing child who is very much like a memory from his own childhood, and then discovers he is in hell when the child disappears just as he is about to reach climax with her (Field 140).

He never mentions that his mother's nickname was "Lolya" (Field 140).

He never mentions that when he lived in Berlin, from 1922 to 1937, one of his neighbors was a journalist named Heinz von Eschwege, who wrote under the name Heinz von Lichtberg. This von Lichtberg is chiefly remembered for a vivid account of Hitler's torch-lit procession to the Reichstag in 1933, but he also wrote a story, published in 1916, called "Lolita." It is a first-person narration told by a man who has an affair with the daughter of the proprietor of the inn where he stays in Alicante (Spain), and who works there as a chambermaid. Her name is Lolita Ancošta. Von Lichtberg's Lolita seems to telescope the two young women Don Quijote meets at the inn in Part I chapter 16, the innkeeper's beautiful but chaste daughter and the squat and ugly but sexually active chambermaid Maritornes. I would therefore propose von Lichtberg's story as another Don Quijote rewrite. In 2000, the German scholar Michael Maar brought this little known work to light and suggested that Nabokov had read it. He stops short of accusing him of plagiarism however. Dieter Zimmer, writing in *Der Zeit* (18/2004), falls all over himself proclaiming Nabokov's independence from von Lichtberg. For one thing, who wants to be indebted to a Nazi? And Von Lichtberg's Lolita is not a little girl of eleven, but a "sexually aware young woman between fifteen and eighteen." And so on.

Nabokov also forgot his own work, *Laughter in the Dark* (1932), until an interviewer reminded him of it. This book anticipates the loss of Lolita to Quilty. The protagonist sacrifices everything, including his eyesight, for a girl he then loses to a hack artist named Alex Rex. Nabokov did allow that "some affinities between Rex and Quilty exist" (apparently in an interview with Appel. Intro *AL*, xxxvi).

And Nabokov neglects to mention *The Gift*, which he also wrote in his Berlin period, between 1935 and 1937. A character fantasizes about the novel he could write: "Ah, if only I had a tick or two, what a novel I'd whip off! From real life. Imagine this kind of thing: an old dogbut still in his prime, fiery, thirsting for happiness gets to know a widow, and she has a daughter, still quite a little girlyou know what I meanwhen nothing is formed yet but already she has a way of walking that drives you out of your mindA slip of a girl, very pale, with blue under the eyesand of course she doesn't even look at the old goat. What to do? Well, not

long thinking, he ups and marries the widow. Okay. They settle down the three of them. Here you can go on indefinitely the temptation, the eternal torment, the itch, the mad hopes. And the upshot a miscalculation. Time flies, he gets older, she blossoms out and not a sausage. Just walks by and scorches you with a look of contempt. Eh? D'you feel here a kind of Dostoevskian tragedy? That story, you see, happened to a great friend of mine, once upon a time in fairyland when Old King Cole was a merry old soul..." (176-77. Quoted by Alfred Appel in Intro to *AL*, xxxv-xxxvi).

Nabokov's own version of literary history is selective, to say the least. He begins in Paris in 1939 or 1940, where he wrote *The Enchanter*, which he claims he threw away when he moved to America a few months later, but which he must have in fact retained. Then, in Ithaca, NY, he begins a second version around 1949. He works sporadically on this one until it emerges in 1954 as *Lolita*, after some butterfly expeditions out west. He omits the entire Berlin period, his courtship of young Svetlana Zivert, and the poem "Lilith." He silences *Laughter in the Dark* (1932) and *The Gift* (1935-1937). He also eliminates references to his teaching at Cornell (which is why he was in Ithaca NY in 1949), at Wellesley and at Harvard. That is, he silences those experiences in his own life that enabled the creation of Humbert Humbert and of Pnin, the European *émigré* who finds himself teaching literature at an unnamed college in the northeastern United States. And needless to say, he eliminates all references to his abrasive engagement with *Don Quixote* at Harvard in spring 1952. My provisional conclusion is that Nabokov was obsessed from about age 30 with the theme of the middle-aged man sexually attracted to the pre- or just-pubescent girl. He wrote two versions before he emigrated to America in 1940. His academic experience at Cornell, Wellesley, and Harvard gave him the material for Humbert Humbert and Pnin. My modest concluding hypothesis is that it was his conflicted experience with *Don Quijote* at Harvard in 1952 that provided the final impetus for *Lolita*.

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