



The Performance and Hermeneutics of Death in the Last Chapter of *Don Quijote*

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“Señores, dijo don Quijote, vámonos poco a poco, pues ya en los nidos de antaño no hay pájaros hogaño: yo fui loco, y ya soy cuerdo; fui don Quijote de la Mancha, y soy agora, como he dicho, Alonso Quijano el Bueno. Pueda con vuestras mercedes mi arrepentimiento y mi

verdad volverme a la estimación que de mí se tenía” (II, 74; 1220). With these apparently straightforward words, Alonso Quijano admonishes Sancho Panza and Sansón Carrasco to refrain from their talk of undertaking the pastoral life as they gather around the reformed knight-errant’s deathbed. These words have reverberated throughout the centuries to many saddened readers as the dying man’s renunciation of his deeds and persona as Don Quijote. Whereas many have disagreed as to the relative craziness and/or nobility of the deluded knight-errant’s life, few have disagreed as to the sanity and/or sincerity of his dying words, the most notable exception being Leland Chambers. Chambers sums up the protagonist’s state of mind upon death, “the most ironic result of Alonso Quijano’s new clarity of mind is a rash gesture of a piece with all his actions as a knight” (20). In this study I will return to the problem of irony in the last chapter of this outrageously ironic novel in order to

underline Alonso Quijano's undying concern for his worldly fame, to highlight the perversion of the rite of confession the dying protagonist performs, and to explore the hermeneutic difficulties inherent in the interpretation of his or any death.

Cervantes' *Don Quijote* presents an apparently simple narrative, linear and progressive, from the pseudo-birth of the title character to his renunciation of his deeds as a knight-errant and his death. These two acts of transformation frame and limit the following series of follies, misadventures, jokes and cruelties that the protagonist originates in his desire to be a chivalric hero and that the other characters instigate in their desires to cure, manipulate, or make fun of him. In fact, the limiting qualities of these two transformations seem to be almost overdetermined, that is to say the first and last chapters of the novel seem to offer no other explanation than that the central character, Alonso Quijano, both creates and kills his fictional persona, Don Quijote. In addition, the author Cervantes appears to close off completely the fiction from future elaboration by insisting on Don Quijote's demise, presumably as an angry response to Avellaneda's unauthorized usurpation of the literary character (Lo Ré 28). Of singular curiosity, given the carefully delimited boundaries of this fiction, is the tale's openness to reinterpretation and reelaboration, as shown by even a quick perusal of the history of this novel's reception. How does this doubly executed demise, in which the protagonist announces the death of his persona and the narrator recounts the death of the protagonist, leave the story so open? Randolph Pope, upon observing that the narrator continues to call the dying protagonist Don Quijote, notes that the existence of Don Quijote continues in Sancho's projects and the readers' minds, and so leaves the text open in the continued existence of one of the protagonist's personae (173). Gonzalo Torrente Ballester maintains that Alonso Quijano, upon stating that he is no longer ("ya no es") Don Quijote, allows the literary character to continue living in spite of his own death (211). My intent is to plumb this continued existence as Cervantes figures it in the various narrative versions of the death. I will also propose that Alonso Quijano's death as performed by the protagonist, and its interpretation by the others, as indicated by the various narrators, highlight the speculative way in which death provides meaning for a life. In other words, Don Quijote's life only has meaning through an interpretation of his death, and so all readers must double back to reinterpret his life upon finishing the novel. Nonetheless, this very specularity operates a projection of the inter-

preter's desires onto the remains of the protagonist, which are, of course, the novel.

When we focus upon the first act of transformation, that of Alonso Quijano into Don Quijote, the scene appears washed in comic delight. A grown man plays make-believe. It is no wonder, then, that readers enthuse upon these chapters. The second act of transformation, that of Don Quijote into Alonso Quijano, is far more sobering, and Sancho Panza's and Sansón Carrasco's invitation to return to an imaginative world far more enticing. In order to appreciate both the protagonist's intentions and the structure of the novel, however, it is necessary to read the two scenes against one another. In the first chapter, the narrator informs us that Don Quijote's intentions upon reviving knight-errantry are two-fold: to serve others, including the distressed and the citizens of the republic, and to win honor and fame for himself ("así para el aumento de su honra como para el servicio de su república," I, 1; 40). When read in a dispassionate, perhaps even ironic manner, Don Quijote's intention is as much to serve himself as others, as indicated by the "así . . . como" construction. In addition, the result of his adventures, although they will be based on the undoing of injustices, will be to earn eternal fame and renown for himself ("acabándolos, cobrase eterno nombre y fama," I, 1; 41). Unamuno expands on this passage by attributing to Don Quijote the madness he coined as *erostratismo* in his novel *Amor y pedagogía*: "el ansia loca de inmortalidad, que, si dudamos de persistir en espíritu, nos hace anhelar dejar siquiera *eterno nombre*" (725–26). In fact, Cervantes' narrator indicates that it is not Don Quijote's vision of the righting of wrongs that leads him to finally take action, but rather the vision of his own glory. "Imaginábase el pobre ya coronado por el valor de su brazo, por lo menos del imperio de Trapisonada; y así, con estos tan agradables pensamientos, llevado del extraño gusto que en ellos sentía, se dio prisa a poner en efeto lo que deseaba" (41). In short, the desire that finally fuels the active transformation of Alonso Quijano into Don Quijote is his desire for fame. Further evidence for the centrality of fame to the protagonist's undertaking is to be found in the very frequency with which the concept appears in the novel. Mancing lists 22 references to fame in Don Quijote's speech (220), and Descouzis lists 43 total references to fame in the first book of *Don Quijote* and 63 in the second book (94–97).

The protagonist's death reveals that the same desire for worldly fame survives and even underlies his final transformation back

into Alonso Quijano. After six weeks of fever and melancholy, Don Quijote falls into a deep sleep for more than six hours, which makes his niece and housekeeper fear for his life. The cause of his death has been the focus of much criticism, with the general consensus being that, in the words of the doctor, “melancolías y desabrimientos le acababan” (II, 74; 1216).¹ What has largely escaped the attention of critics is that the dying man conceives of and enacts his death as a performance. As he declares to his niece upon awaking,

Yo me siento, sobrina, a punto de muerte; *querría hacerla de tal modo*, que diese a entender que no había sido mi vida tan mala, que dejase renombre de loco; que puesto que lo he sido, no querría confirmar esta verdad en mi muerte. Llámame, amiga, a mis buenos amigos: al cura, al bachiller Sansón Carrasco y a maese Nicolás el barbero, que quiero confesarme y hacer mi testamento (II, 74; 1217, my emphasis).

Don Quijote will “hacer,” that is to say *make* his death, just as he has made himself in life; of course, the objective of this performance will be to counteract his reputation as a “loco.” The protagonist conceives of his dying, then, as an undoing of his life: the spectacle of his death will establish his sanity, contradict his life as Don Quijote, and erase from his reputation the stain of madness. Ironically, his death will be a sort of lie; although he was crazy, as he himself admits, he does not want to confirm that fact in his final moments. The vehicle by which he will perform this undoing is his final confession and testament, and his audience must include his friends, who will presumably then publicize his dying sanity.

If we consider the entire trajectory of Don Quijote’s self-creation, adventures, and death in Cervantes’ novel as a performance, then the change that occurs in the last chapter is merely one of form and not of substance. The intention that propels the character’s words and actions remains the same: the desire to perform good works in order to publicize his own good name. The dying protagonist, upon uttering his first waking words to his niece, invokes another discourse within which to perform—that of religion: “(¡Bendito sea el poderoso Dios, que tanto bien me ha hecho! En fin, sus misericordias no tienen límite, ni las abrevian ni impiden los pecados de los hombres” (II, 74; 1216). His death will be a witness to God’s mercy in

¹ See, for example, Green. For discussions of the function of melancholy in the character’s psyche throughout the novel, see Johnson 16–26 and Redondo 121–46.

overcoming Don Quijote's sins, the ignorance inculcated in him by the constant reading of the despicable books of knight-errantry. Paul Descouzis has demonstrated how this waking confession conforms to the four prerequisite steps the sinner must undertake for confession: 1) believing in God's redemption of sinners; 2) considering God's mercy and the salvation of sinners through the free gift of his grace; 3) rejecting his sins; and 4) purifying the soul through confession (24–25). Alonso Quijano is clearly in complete control of the conventions for confession, and executes them in accordance with Tridentine doctrine. He must, however, complete this confession through a change in behavior. According to the dying protagonist, this "desengaño" has arrived too late for him to make some recompense by reading books that would be beneficial for his soul. Nonetheless, another recompense remains to him: the performance of an edifying spectacle of Christian death.

When J. L. Austin wrote of "misfired" utterances, he referred specifically and correctly to Don Quijote.² Rule A.1 for the successful performance of speech acts reads that there "must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, the procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances" (26). The failure of Don Quijote's performance during his life has been precisely that he did not act or speak according to an accepted conventional procedure; that is to say, others do not accept his procedures as valid. Perhaps the story takes a happy turn when the protagonist finally changes to a code of procedure that *is* accepted by his contemporaries and his subsequent readers, the confession and last testament, since very few have challenged the content or sincerity of his dying transformation into Alonso Quijano. It is worthwhile here to reiterate the inconsistencies highlighted by Chambers in this final moment of supposed lucidity: Alonso Quijano is unaware of any moral values he might have learned from the chivalric code; he lacks the coolheadedness to appreciate any aesthetic or moral worth in the literature of knight-errantry; he condemns his niece to a life of spinsterhood by insisting

² For a defence of the application of speech-act theory to Cervantine texts, see Oriel 105–08. Soufas, in his attack on the application of speech-act theory to the *comedia*, comments that the approach would be more suitable for the study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works given the historical acceptance of "the idea of a self-referential world—one that does not refer to a macrocosm" (116). I would submit that Cervantes has already indicated such an ideological aperture in the self-referentiality of *Don Quijote*, and even the protagonist's concern for his reputation in *this* world.

that her future spouse have no knowledge of this literature in a society obviously steeped in it; and he does not recognize that he is the only one spurred to madness by the chivalric romances (20). Given the fact that so many intelligent readers over the course of centuries have overlooked these inconsistencies, one can only conclude that Alonso Quijano's performance has been spectacularly successful.³

In order to examine carefully this dying performance, it is necessary to contextualize Alonso Quijano's last will and testament within Catholic practice of the time. The will was so important that the Church required one of all its members, even though many, if not most in sixteenth-century Spain, died without a will (Eire 20). The historian Carlos M. N. Eire attributes the urgency of Don Quijote's command to bring a scribe as well as a priest to this fact: "Dying without a testament would be as risky as dying without confession and the last rites. Consider, for instance, the rule laid down by the Synod of Zaragoza in 1357 forbidding the burial of anyone who died without a will, *ab intesto*" (20). The writing of the will was a "quasi-sacramental" act, since it "was considered a penitential act and a rehearsal for death, an exercise that could help the faithful accept death and detach themselves from the things of this world" (22). Although the confession that Alonso Quijano makes to the priest is private, the testament that he dictates and his spoken asides during the dictation attest to its content. We can assume that the gist of his confession is the same as that of his public confession stated first to his niece and then repeated twice to his friends, namely that the reading of chivalric romances caused him to sin, and that he now renounces that sin. In fact, the testament opens up for the reader the more intimate details of his private confession.

In his treatise on counseling the dying, the *Arte de ayudar y disponer a bien morir a todo género de personas* (1608), Fr. Joan de Salazar sets out for the clergy guidelines for advising the dying person on the writing of the will. The Benedictine, himself a parish priest to the Spanish congregation in Rome before he was elected abbot of Santa María de Obarenes, presents death as a spectacle to be orchestrated for the benefit of those present. The moment of death is for Salazar the climax of the Christian's life; all struggles prior to death are a mere prelude to the final moment when the mortal's salvation or damnation is decided. For this reason, the devil concentrates all his

³ For an overview of recent interpretations of the death scene, see Friedman 105–11.

powers upon the dying, and even the most devout run the risk of perishing in sin. Within Catholic dogma the moment of death is, of course, not a mere transition from one state to another, but rather the dangerous passage to heaven, purgatory or hell: “cuando un caminante quiere pasar de un reino a otro, y llega a los límites de él, entonces es el tiempo, en que las guardas de los puertos y puentes hacen al pobre pasajero dos mil vexaciones y molestias, desvalijando y viéndole muy por menudo cuánto lleva y sobre si va o no va registrado, le dan dos mil enfados” (14). Since death is not the end of the mortal’s path, but rather a bridge to another realm, it provides the focus for the life-long spiritual struggle between good and evil.

Given the central importance of the moment of death for the Christian, it is not surprising that Salazar deems the care of the dying one of the highest honors and responsibilities of the Catholic clergy. According to Salazar, this service is not only of use to the dying, but also to the priest and the other witnesses because it confuses their common enemy Satan, and because it serves as an example for the edification of those present at the “espectáculo” (24).⁴ The use of the word spectacle by Salazar grants us insight into the performative aspect of death, performative in at least two uses of the term. On the one hand, the death involves certain speech acts, concretely in the case of early-modern Spain, the confession and the testament that the dying person performs. On the other hand, the death is a performance usually staged by the priest for the instruction of the audience. The dying mortal’s life serves as an exemplary narrative in which the turning point is reached at death, the climax being the soul’s eternal salvation or damnation (24). The priest takes on the role of stage master, an *autor* in its sixteenth-century Spanish usage, who directs the narrative’s development toward its desired ending (salvation) and orchestrates a desired reaction in the audience (fear of and eternity spent in hell, will to reform life, etc.). Nor is it heretical to consider the moments prior to death as a staged performance, for it accords with the Christian notion of the relation between this world and the hereafter. According to James P. Carse, the doctrine of the resurrection makes “worldly time theatrical—not fictional, not unreal, not evil, merely provisional. It is a time that will be set aside

⁴ Casaldueiro also notes the spectacle of Alonso Quijano’s death, and considers it typical of death in the Baroque period as opposed to in medieval times. “El hecho ordinario y general—la muerte—se está transformando en un hecho extraordinario y particular—la muerte individual—, gran espectáculo que todos los vivos contemplan” (399).

like so much costumes and scenery" (250). Death for the Christian is, then, the moment in which the theatrical falls away to reveal the real.

This representation of the plot of temptation, sin, repentance and salvation common to all Christians' lives should be particularly effective in the moment of death, "por estar más dispuestos los presentes a este acto, viendo al ojo la muerte" (24). Nothing can replace in its efficacy the shock value of death seen face to face. A difficulty in the staging of the death, however, is the publicizing of the central moment prior to the actual death, the private confession. Family and friends are to leave the room if their presence will impede the dying person from letting go of earthly things and preparing his soul for the next world (35). The last will and testament takes on two functions, then, within this performance. Not only does it enact the dying person's wishes for the disposition of worldly goods, but it also lays forth the matter discussed in the confession in its disposition of matters of *honra*. The testament fills the gaps in the performance by relating on stage the off-stage examination of the sinner's life and also enacts the contrition and repentance necessary for salvation in the afterlife.

It is now clear that a careful, detailed reading of Alonso Quijano's testament is necessary for any evaluation of his death. This analysis will illuminate two, at times conflicting, performances taking place at the character's death: the official spectacle directed by the priest and transcribed for posterity by the scribe, and the alternative spectacle orchestrated by the dying protagonist as he interrupts and amends his official dying words. We have already seen how Alonso Quijano sets the stage for his death upon awakening from his six-hour sleep by declaring the mercy of God, renouncing his madness, and calling for the priest and his friends. The priest, barber and Sansón Carrasco all enter at this point, effectively freeing the niece from her task of summoning them. Upon seeing them, the narrator reports that Don Quijote says: "Dadme albricias, buenos señores, de que ya yo no soy don Quijote de la Mancha, sino Alonso Quijano, a quien mis costumbres me dieron renombre de 'bueno'" (II, 74; 1217). If the protagonist's self-appellation "Don Quijote" marks his first transformation, then this second naming marks another. It is perhaps disingenuous for him to suggest that he can return to his former self, Alonso Quijano el Bueno, and yet this is the final task for the dying protagonist. If he is to perform this last self-transformation, Alonso Quijano must overcome several considerable obstacles, particularly the immediacy and attraction of his madness. In short, he must somehow surpass his previous win-

ning performance as Don Quijote to recreate his persona as Alonso Quijano el Bueno. He repeats, then, what he has stated to the niece: namely, that the literature of knight-errantry led him into that folly and that God has led him out again. His general rhetorical strategy appears to be repetition, for if he repeats this assertion enough, people might believe him.

The key word in this new self-representation is the epithet "el Bueno." The protagonist refers to himself only twice as Alonso Quijano, and in both instances he insists upon this as an essential part of his identity. Pope suggests that Cervantes must claim the goodness of Alonso Quijano's life prior to the Don Quijote episodes in order to make his serene death appear justified according to a growing Catholic discomfort with deathbed conversions (171). Juan Fernández Jiménez states, however, that Don Quijote's behavior has always been kind, and thus he needs no deathbed conversion (84). Neither does Pope notice that Alonso Quijano's goodness as narrated in the last chapter of the novel has nothing to do with Catholic faith, and much to do with his worldly reputation. Using a curious personification of his own actions, Alonso Quijano reminds his friends that his "costumbres" gave him the "renombre" Bueno. The reference to customs is important here, for the dying protagonist appeals to his own history as a person who did act according to the agreed standards and codes of his time. This statement indicates that he recognizes his failure to act according to convention when in his persona of the knight-errant. It is his rhetorical intention in his dying that his customs as Alonso Quijano will overshadow his deeds as Don Quijote. Nonetheless, the word "costumbres" entails a tension between character and actions that undercuts the protagonist's intention to erase from memory his deeds. According to the *Diccionario de autoridades*, the first meaning of the term refers to habitual actions ("hábito adquirido a executar una misma cosa continuamente"), whereas other connotations refer to character ("genio o natural;" "moralmente se toma por inclinación y calidad que reside en algún sugeto"). If one understands *costumbres* as habits, then the specter of Don Quijote's habits as a knight-errant springs back to mind. If one understands them as an expression of his character, then the protagonist's actions as Don Quijote, as presented by Alonso Quijano upon his deathbed, are not only foolish but evil, evidence of a bad change of character. Either way, Alonso Quijano has a large task ahead of him in the rhetorical reassertion of his *buenas costumbres*.

Consequently, his last testament is doubly important as a representation of his return to the practice of good customs. Salazar reminds priests that it is their duty to advise the dying person to dispose of his goods to his financial dependents. Alonso Quijano is quite scrupulous in this task, remembering not only his niece and his housekeeper, but also Sancho Panza in his will. Underlining his seignorial relation to the squire, he repays the money he owes Sancho and states that, if he could, he would grant him a kingdom because his servant's loyalty and simplicity merit it. Evidencing fluency in the customs of his time, Alonso Quijano, as the *hidalgo* he is, financially cares for those stationed beneath him. As the narrator wryly notes, this beneficence does much to soothe the sorrow of his subalterns, "que esto del heredar algo borra o templa en el heredero la memoria de la pena que es razón que deje el muerto" (II, 74; 1221). Seen from the perspective of speech-act theory, the distribution of goods is a commissive act, promising the future granting of money, property, and livestock, and thus ensuring the corresponding good will of the others. Yet within the context of speech-act theory, a last will and testament is a very curious case of the commissive, for it depends on institutional structure and authority to be enacted after the speaker's death. Alonso Quijano's declaration of sanity is necessary, then, so that this promise will in fact be carried out by others. If those to whom he is responsible are to receive their due and thus hold him in esteem after his death, he must declare his will in sound mind. The priest's declaration of Alonso Quijano's sanity makes possible the successful, that is to say completed, performance of the speech-act of the will.

The testament also casts light on Alonso Quijano's private confessions in ways that allow us to perceive the sins he confessed not only against the rules of God, but more importantly against his society's codes of procedure. Upon examination of this testament against Salazar's template for the confession of the dying, it becomes evident that the sins Alonso Quijano committed were against the honor or reputation of others. According to the Benedictine, the dying should humble themselves before God, and examine their lives in minute detail since the last confession. The sinner should first consider thoughts, then words, deeds, and sins of omission, in that order. All of these thoughts, words and actions are to be judged against the dictates of the Ten Commandments. If a person owes a debt to another, either of goods or "honra," then he should attempt to make restitution before death. The testament serves as a means for so doing, since it is not only a repartition of worldly goods, but also of things deal-

ing with the conscience and the soul. It is to be expected, then, that Alonso Quijano's last will and testament reveals the sins he has confessed. These appear to be primarily sins against the Fifth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." Given the many battles and physical entanglements the protagonist entered into as Don Quijote, it is perhaps surprising for a twentieth-century reader that he expresses no remorse for any physical harm done others. Salazar, however, admonishes that the Fifth Commandment extends to almost all one's dealing with others in any way that would lead another to sin, including setting a bad example: "ítem si ha dado mal exemplo, con que ha sido causa de dañar al próximo en el alma" (177).

Alonso Quijano singles out two persons whom he has harmed by setting a bad example: Avellaneda and Sancho Panza. Avellaneda was the pseudonym for the unknown author of a spurious continuation of *Don Quijote*, whose unlicensed appropriation of Sancho Panza and Don Quijote seems to have particularly irked Cervantes. In the second book of his novel, Cervantes directs many little barbs in the usurper's direction: Don Quijote decides not to go to Zaragoza because Avellaneda's protagonist traveled there; Altisidora in her feigned death claims to see demons battling the book around hell; Don Quijote meets a character from the continuation from whom he demands and receives a notarized statement that the other Don Quijote was in fact a fake. Nonetheless, Alonso Quijano advises his executors, Bachiller Sansón Carrasco and the priest, that if they should ever meet Avellaneda they are to ask his forgiveness: "perdone la ocasión que sin yo pensarlo le di de escribir tantos y tan grandes disparates como en ella escribe, porque parto desta vida con escrúpulo de haberle dado motivo para escribirlos" (II, 74; 1221). This statement, of course, provides Cervantes with yet another opportunity to insult the "disparates," that is to say foolish writings of his enemy. Yet, from the point of view of Alonso Quijano, it indicates that he holds himself morally culpable for having led another into sin. Salazar relates ten special circumstances of sin toward another on which the dying person should meditate in confession, the fourth of which is to provoke another to sin (183). Alonso Quijano implies, then, that his escapades as Don Quijote were not merely foolish, but sinful, for they incited Avellaneda to write foolishness. Following this line of confession, Alonso Quijano owes apologies to all those who ever joined in his folly and created more scenarios of knight-errantry, from Sancho Panza and all his other friends to the duke and duchess.

The protagonist's apology to Sancho is even more revealing of his inner state of mind. Alonso Quijano provides for Sancho's

well-being as a faithful servant in the official will, but he also apologizes in an aside to his squire for having led him into the error of believing that there are and were knights errant in the world. In this oral, unofficial addition to his testament, the dying man asks for forgiveness for only one wrong he has done Sancho Panza—making him appear crazy: “Perdóname, amigo, de la ocasión que te he dado de parecer loco como yo, haciéndote caer en el error en que yo he caído de que hubo y hay caballeros andantes en el mundo” (II, 74; 1219). The dying Alonso Quijano analyzes his sin in two parts: he led Sancho into his own error, that of false belief, and by so doing, made his squire appear foolish. Although the erroneous thinking is in itself a sin, its most important consequence, as indicated by Quijano’s ordering of the clauses, is harming Sancho Panza’s reputation rather than his soul. Once again, Alonso Quijano el Bueno reveals himself to be more concerned about appearances and their effect on worldly fame than about either his own or his servant’s eternal salvation.

In fact, Alonso Quijano’s entire deathbed performance, as narrated by Cide Hamete, is remarkable for its lack of concern for the other world. A large portion of the standard will was dedicated to the expression of faith and penitence by the dying person. In his study on wills in sixteenth-century Madrid, Eire offers an outline the scribes used to organize the document from which they never varied. The first section of the will, what the narrator calls “la cabeza del testamento,” offers the dying person’s invocation of God, declaration of faith, confession of sins, discourse on death and judgment, and a plea for mercy (36). Subsequently the person arranges for the disposition of the body, the funeral arrangements, and pious bequests, all designed to ease the soul’s time in purgatory or entry into heaven (36). This portion of the will was of particular importance, since it arranged for the almsgiving, funerary rites and masses to be performed after death that would aid the soul through purgatory, a fate that only the particularly holy could hope to avoid. Although Cervantes’ narrator remarks that the will was performed “con todas aquellas circunstancias cristianas que se requieren” (II, 74; 1219), in the text all mention of God or of the destiny awaiting Alonso Quijano after death is omitted. Apparently, Alonso Quijano’s destination in the afterlife is of little concern to Cide Hamete.⁵ The devil’s advocate could argue that this lack of attention to the Catholic con-

⁵Various authors have suggested that Don Quijote’s trials and suffering in Book II represent a passage of sorts through purgation and/or purgatory in this world (see Parker, Descouzis, and Sullivan).

fession of faith and repentance is merely due to the Moorish narrator's distaste for such ritual.

Nonetheless, Alonso Quijano does not reveal a state of mind any more preoccupied with the next life than that of his narrator. The doctor and humanist Blas Antonio Alvarez Miraval, writing on the health of the Christian soul, observed that death and the fear of the afterlife should serve as a curb against sin: "Teme el que tiene memoria de la muerte dos cosas, el no ofender a Dios haciendo mal, y teme lo segundo que ofendiendo a Dios no sea condenado a penas eternas, y privado de la gloria" (436). To the contrary, the loss of glory that Alonso Quijano fears is the loss of his worldly reputation. In another spoken aside, the dying man protests Sancho Panza's plea that he not die and that they continue looking for Dulcinea by declaring that he is no longer Don Quijote. Alonso Quijano continues his reassertion of his transformation by insisting once again on his worldly fame: "Pueda con vuestras mercedes mi arrepentimiento y mi verdad volverme a la estimación que de mí se tenía, y prosiga adelante el señor escribano" (II, 74; 1220). No other statement in these scenes clarifies so completely the protagonist's state of mind. His repentance has little to do with his salvation, but much to do with the clearing of his name and the reestablishment of the esteem in which others held him. The scribe must proceed so that the performance of his return to correct procedure and convention can be completed.

The enormity of Alonso Quijano's task in overshadowing his own performance as Don Quijote and renewing his reputation as a sane and good man is signalled again and again in the reactions of those around him. Sancho Panza and Sansón Carrasco, in particular, resist giving up the fictional delights of Don Quijote's creative madness, and both refer to their previous plans to become shepherds. In Austin's terms, Don Quijote's performance has had a tremendous perlocutionary success in its transformation of the lives around him, particularly in the case of Sancho Panza, as Alonso Quijano himself confesses when he pleads for forgiveness for having made him appear crazy. What is not so easily ascertained is the perlocutionary effect of his deathbed performance. The priest does come out of the private confession claiming: "Verdaderamente se muere y verdaderamente está cuerdo Alonso Quijano el Bueno" (II, 74; 1218). In this case, Alonso Quijano's illocutionary force, that is to say his attempt to convince the others of his sanity, has enjoyed perlocutionary effect. The effect on the others is less certain. Although impressed by Alonso Quijano's enactment of the Catholic rites, the unnamed scribe seems impervious to the deathbed confession of sanity.

"Hallóse el escribano presente y dijo que nunca había leído en ningún libro de caballerías que algún caballero andante hubiese muerto en su lecho tan sosegadamente y tan cristiano como don Quijote" (II, 74; 1221). Ironically, the scribe, the very man to whom the fixing of the official record of Alonso Quijano's sanity is entrusted, still views the dying man according to the template of knight-errantry. It would seem that once the protagonist took on the role of knight-errant, he could not easily discard it.

Whereas the confession and the reading of the last testament are in the most complete sense of the term speech-acts, Alonso Quijano's death is most certainly not. In spite of the absence of a speaking I after death, the will or testament does have illocutionary force granted the social conventions from which all speech-acts, according to Sandy Petrey, derive their power (79). But death is beyond the realm of either a speaking subject or the society that imbues the word with form and force. Nonetheless, those who survive face the challenge of imbuing with meaning what might seem to be the most meaningless and certainly the most silent of states. It is necessary to turn now from linguistics to philosophy to consider further the function of death as a hermeneutical problem for any interpreters of Don Quijote's life and/or Cervantes' text. José Ferrater Mora, attempting to explore a dialectical position between Sartre's and Heidegger's conceptions of death, remarks on the dramatic nature of both life and death:

En tanto que específicamente humana, la muerte no "acontece" o "sobreviene"; es como un "acto" que tiene lugar dentro de un "drama." El vocablo "acto" debe entenderse aquí, por descontado, en un sentido distinto del literal; no se trata de una "acción" que el hombre ejecutaría al fallecer, pero sí de un "juego" en el que pueden intervenir muchos elementos—la lucha, la indiferencia, la esperanza—entre el hombre y su morir (189).

Even though Ferrater Mora states that the individual is his/her living (*el vivir*), that is to say that one appropriates and creates his/her own life (174), the human being does not create or make death (*el morir*), but does enter into play with it. Unlike life, which belongs to the individual as *mismidad* (being oneself), death is somehow Other. The philosopher continues by highlighting several paradoxes inherent in death that are important for our analysis: 1) although death is somehow more central to human existence than to that of other creatures, people dream of transcending it in immortality; 2) although death occurs to all people and has the same meaning, or lack thereof, it is a strictly personal and individual event; 3) although

death is exterior to life as its cessation, it also gives life meaning (189–90). We have already seen how Alonso Quijano's desire for the survival of his good name indicates his desire to transcend death through fame in this world, if not through salvation in the great beyond. We have seen how the protagonist personalizes the speech-acts and rites surrounding death to appropriate it, make it his, and how he seeks to change his life's meaning through his death. There is, indeed, much to say about, and to say during, the play between the individual and death.

And yet of Alonso Quijano's death itself, there is nothing to say. As Ferrater Mora notes, the witnesses can speak nothing directly of the death: "Ante la muerte vista como algo puramente exterior a la vida no cabe, empero, sino la completa mudez" (190). Derrida's recent work on death throws light on how we struggle to think and speak about something that is ultimately unthinkable. To conceive of one's own death, the death of the I, is to conceive of something indeterminate and indeterminable (Derrida 46–47). To think of one's own death is an aporia, because there is no experience of it. We conceive of death as a figure, then, as an Other, although in the moment of death we may, in fact, hope to find ourselves, or glimpse death as the Other, or even behold ourselves in relation to the other in the impossible simultaneity of death (108–09). From Derrida's remarks, we can cull the observation that we know death as a figure, that is to say a representation of something only experienced by another. The thinking, living I cannot experience death directly, but only attempt to infer from it. Hence arises a serious hermeneutical problem, the problem that all the other persons present at Alonso Quijano's death, even the readers, experience: how do we interpret the death of someone else? We cannot know it directly, for that would involve our own death. We cannot know it indirectly through the words of another, for that person is beyond language. We can only witness it. Let me, then, state the obvious: at the point of his death, Alonso Quijano's/Don Quijote's performance ends, and it is left to the living to give it meaning.

Despite Alonso Quijano's efforts to control the meaning of his death through his enactment of the confession and the final testament, after his death, his figure (his good name) remains only in the interpretations of others. Alonso Quijano cannot speak his own death, for upon dying he loses the agency of voice. Sartre, writing of *Histoire*, notes that to accept death is the greatest generosity, since it means the end of the agent's control over the story: "Impossible de corriger son oeuvre, l'impression qu'elle fait" (54). In other words,

Alonso Quijano loses the power to correct his lifework and to undo the impression he made as Don Quijote. This loss of power over one's own project entails alienation: "Donc on s'en remet aux autres." It is extremely important, then, that Cervantes narrates in the moment of his protagonist's death the struggle undertaken by the others for the control of his life story. We have already analyzed the scribe's interpretation of the death, who sees it according to the paradigm of knight-errantry and reads it as Don Quijote would have wished—he died as a valorous knight-errant. Yet the priest responds immediately to this interpretation by asserting yet another interpretation of the death:

Viendo lo cual [the death] el cura, pidió al escribano le diese por testimonio como Alonso Quijano el Bueno, llamado comúnmente "don Quijote de la Mancha," había pasado desta presente vida y muerto naturalmente; y que el tal testimonio pedía para quitar la ocasión de que algún otro autor que Cide Hamete Benengeli le resucitase falsamente, y hiciese inacabables historias de sus hazañas (II, 74; 1221).

It is impossible to say who desires that Alonso Quijano's death be an end to all continuations of the story, since it could perhaps have been spoken to the priest during Alonso Quijano's confession. Regardless of its original attribution, the priest is clearly attempting to authorize his version of the death, both by ordering the scribe to write it down and thus make it official, and by inferring that it corresponds to the dead man's wishes. This pattern of claiming authority over the protagonist's story by telling one's own version is repeated several times in the last chapter of *Don Quijote*, and constitutes the process by which the protagonist's project of reestablishing his good name cedes before the appropriation of his figure by others.

Sansón Carrasco, never one to stand on the sidelines and merely watch, also vies for the supremacy of his interpretation of the protagonist's death. He writes an epitaph for Alonso Quijano's tomb, thus ensuring that his story is placed at the very head of the dead man.

Yace aquí el hidalgo fuerte
que a tanto extremo llegó
de valiente, que se advierte
que la muerte no triunfó
de su vida con su muerte (II, 74; 1222).

This poem deserves the description of allusive and elusive irony that Avalle-Arce attributes to Cervantes' work in general (80), since the

writer alludes to the dead protagonist as the "hidalgo fuerte" while simultaneously refusing to identify him as either Don Quijote or Alonso Quijano. Similarly, the allusion to death as both "la muerte" and "su muerte" eludes any clear analysis. The word play seems to signify that death, personified as exterior and hostile, did not triumph over the protagonist's life at the moment of his death. This is, of course, ridiculous, since the character did die, and his death was, in a sense, the victory over his life.

What does this doubling of death, as both a figure and an individual event, mean? On the one hand, if we choose to view Don Quijote's life as foolish, we can read this statement as an affirmation of the dying protagonist's assertion of his sanity and his final transformation back to Alonso Quijano el Bueno. In other words, death can figuratively signify madness or the loss of worldly fame, in which case death did not triumph, since Alonso Quijano, by dying a sane man, ensured the survival of his reputation as "el Bueno." On the other hand, if we choose to view Don Quijote's life as, if not exactly exemplary, at least entertaining and instructive, we can read this statement as an affirmation of the continuity of the protagonist's life in some form. That is to say, Don Quijote's life, and not Alonso Quijano's death, will continue to survive in the form of his story. In other words, death did not triumph because Don Quijote's life story will continue to be repeated and related into perpetuity. Given the poet's own ambivalent relation to Don Quijote, this ambiguity is not surprising. After all, Sansón Carrasco most completely represents a character who both claims to revile Don Quijote's madness and yet loses himself in it. It is he who, under the guise of the Caballero de la Blanca Luna, actually vanquished Don Quijote, both physically and psychologically, sending the defeated knight into his final tail-spin of melancholy.

To the victor belongs the story, or at least so it must have appeared to Sansón Carrasco as he inscribed his version of the tale over the dead body of the protagonist. The epitaph finishes thus:

Tuvo a todo el mundo en poco,
fue el espantajo y el coco
del mundo, en tal coyuntura,
que acreditó su ventura
morir cuerdo y vivir loco (II, 74; 1222).

Carrasco omits Alonso Quijano's original identity, the fifty years he lived as "el Bueno," with the phrase "vivir loco." He conflates the protagonist's life story into the period of Don Quijote, and yet

Carrasco knew his neighbor from years before. Likewise, the poet simplifies Alonso Quijano's death into the moment of sanity, and by so doing erases the irony and play around the deathbed in which Carrasco himself participated. Carrasco's version of the story is then the simplest and most reductive: Don Quijote alive was crazy, but he died a sane man. Alonso Quijano's concerted attempt to affirm his sanity, reappropriate his identity as "el Bueno," and erase the memory of his deeds as Don Quijote has failed, at least in Sansón Carrasco's version of his death. It is Don Quijote's life as a crazy man that will determine his earthly fame or infamy.

Cide Hamete Benengeli also attempts to seize control of the story, this time by claiming as his own and only his own the very pen with which he wrote. This passage has been read as an admonition from Cervantes to other writers such as Avellaneda who would pirate his literary creation, and there certainly exists such a level of meaning in it. But a close consideration of its many ironies can lead us more deeply into the complexities of this most curious passage. The Moorish narrator speaks directly to his pen as he hangs it up, addressing it as "tú" and advising it to defend itself from being touched by other writers. This admonition to other would-be writers to leave Don Quijote alone is folded into various layers of voices. First, an anonymous narrator speaks of Cide in the third person, reporting his words and action. Second, Cide personifies the pen as feminine, a gendered attribution according to the grammatical gender of the word *pluma*, and then puts words in her mouth, so to speak. The pen is to warn any presumptuous and troublesome writers of the future not to touch it or profane it. Both the admonition that the pen not be touched (*tocada*) by others and that statement that the *empresa* is kept (*guardada*) for him echo with overtones of the honor code, according to which the female must be kept untouched and pure for the one who will possess her. The pen "herself" suggests this sexualized relationship when she seems to speak: "Para mí sola nació don Quijote, y yo para él: él supo obrar y yo escribir, solos los dos somos para en uno, a despecho y pesar del escritor fingido y tordesillesco que se atrevió, o se ha de atrever a escribir con pluma de avestruz grosera y mal deliñada las hazañas de mi valeroso caballero" (II, 74; 1223). This passage echoes the biblical bond of two persons united in one flesh in marriage, a bond that is threatened but not broken by the intrusion of Avellaneda's ugly ostrich quill. The pen and Don Quijote are then bound in their mutual undertaking; he acted and she recorded. The pen, in fact, would be the more passive, effeminate partner, since she writes what he does,

and must thus be protected from usurpers who would dishonor Don Quijote by unearthing his remains.

Cide also uses the derogative word *folloncicos* to refer to the laziness and vacuity of those other interloping writers. This term repeats the image of blowing hot air Cervantes employed in the prologue to the second book of *Don Quijote*, where the *loco de Sevilla* illustrated the difficulty of writing a book through the image of blowing up a dog like a balloon with a hollow tube inserted in its anus. The image of blowing air as a metaphor for writing is recycled here through the word *folloncico*, since Covarrubias defines the *follón* as “el holgazán que está papando viento como el fuelle floxo, que cada cuarto se le cae por su parte” (604). Cide Hamete’s propriety over the pen rests, then, both on the gendered relation between pen and writer and the writer’s claim to have already expended creative energy on the story.

Cide’s claim to Don Quijote’s story depends, finally, on his claim to the dead body. It is unclear whether the pen or Cide speaks at this point, but one of them orders the others to let Don Quijote rest in peace: “que deje reposar en la sepultura los cansados y ya podridos huesos de don Quijote, y no le quiera llevar, contra todos los fueros de la muerte, a Castilla la Vieja, haciéndole salir de la fuesa donde real y verdaderamente yace tendido de largo a largo, imposibilitado de hacer tercera jornada y salida nueva” (II, 74; 1223). Just as Cide asserts that his Don Quijote was the true one, so must he assert that his literary creation is truly dead, and that his remains really rot away. If, at this point, Cide Hamete were to violate the stance he has maintained throughout the entire book that Don Quijote is not a fictional character, but truly his creation, then the tomb would lie empty, and the character would be available for resurrection. This insistence upon the character’s flesh-and-blood existence or bony remains entails, nonetheless, a loss of authority for Cide, one he can overcome only by personifying the pen and partnering it with the protagonist. Significantly, he closes the book by subsuming Alonso Quijano’s dying intention to seek pardon from Avellaneda to his own assertion of primacy over the usurper: “Y con esto cumplirás con tu cristiana profesión, aconsejando bien a quien mal te quiere, y yo quedaré satisfecho y ufano de haber sido el primero que gozó el fruto de sus escritos enteramente, como deseaba, pues no ha sido otro mi deseo que poner en aborrecimiento de los hombres las fingidas y disparatadas historias de los libros de caballerías” (II, 74; 1223).

Another narrator undercuts Cide’s authority by simply declaring prior to this long assertion: “y el prudentísimo Cide Hamete dijo a su pluma” (II, 74; 1222). Don Quijote’s would-be owner himself

remains relegated to be a character of someone else's story, and so the struggle for the story spirals on. Yet this question remains: if Don Quijote had not died, would his story have escaped this open ending? That is to say, would the story, and its "true interpretation" have belonged to someone rather than becoming itself a *baciyelmo* open for interpretation? Is Don Quijote's death the beginning of the stories about him rather than the end of his story? It would be fallacious, I believe, to consider *Don Quijote* an open work according to Umberto Eco's conception of the term. Whereas Cervantes' novel, like any work of art, invites the reader to integrate and interpret it in accordance with what Eco terms "openness of the first degree," it does not emphasize its fragmentation and discontinuity in the same way as do modern works, such as Cortázar's *Rayuela*, that could be considered works of "openness of the second degree" (42). To the contrary, the final chapter in many levels seems to close completely the work's interpretation by the repeated insistence on Alonso Quijano's new-found sanity and subsequent death, as well as the authorial intention to burlesque the literature of knight-errantry. Nonetheless, we must consider it open to a wide spectrum of interpretation given the enormous variety of historical and contemporary readings it has generated.

This sort of openness, what I will call a "specular openness," springs, ironically enough, from the death of the main character. We have seen how the struggle to spin Don Quijote's story becomes a struggle for his dead body. Sansón Carrasco claims his head by writing the epitaph; Cide Hamete claims his bones. This struggle to appropriate the other's dead body, to make it one's own, results from the curious abandonment of the body by the person who died. The dying person abandons his bones, or his story, as Sartre would have it, to those of this world. Heidegger comments that the dead person has left our world and given it back ("*Der Verstorbene hat unsere Welt verlassen und zurückgelassen,*" 238). Don Quijote's body, the figure for his story, is given over to the living, and so becomes the stuff of their "worlds." The death of the other is specular, then, insofar as the living view themselves in it. The other's body, if one will, becomes a mere screen upon which to project our own images and imaginings.

Significantly, the two versions of the protagonist's death most developed in this last chapter reveal just such a mirrored reflection of their tellers. Sansón Carrasco, in his first incarnation as the *Caballero de los Espejos*, is the only character in the novel who actually imitates, albeit burlesquely, Don Quijote by himself donning the

identity of a knight-errant. The arrogance and audacity he attributes to Don Quijote (“tuvo a todo el mundo en poco, fue el espantajo y el coco del mundo,” II, 74; 1222) characterizes, in fact, his own behavior. Cide Hamete Benengeli, whose only desire was to defeat the stories of knight-errantry, enjoys the victory over his enemy that his protagonist so desired over his own enemies. In this version, Don Quijote’s story enacts Cide’s triumph (“que por las [historias] van ya tropezando [las fingidas y disparatadas historias de los libros de caballerías], y han de caer del todo sin duda alguna,” II, 74; 1223), and Don Quijote’s corpse embodies Cide’s authority over the story. Cide goes one step further in asserting his own version of the death over that of his protagonist by continually referring to the dying man not as Alonso Quijano, but rather as Don Quijote. We can conclude, therefore, that in the cases of Sansón Carrasco and Cide Hamete, the act of interpreting Alonso Quijano’s death amounts to a specular activity in which they see and represent their own intentions toward the protagonist reflected. If these versions of the death included in Cervantes’ telling of the story effectively reflect their narrator’s preoccupations with the protagonist, the question follows, then, whether every reader’s engagement with the episode will constitute a reflection of their own.

The second phase in this specular activity constitutes a reading backwards from the protagonist’s death into his life. All three versions of the death presented by Cervantes, including Alonso Quijano’s, read meaning back into the life based on the character of the dying man’s death. The protagonist’s performance of his death as a second transformation into sanity illustrates well the projection that the dying person undertakes upon the consideration of one’s own death. Ferrater Mora, writing of this movement, states that it is not a projection of “algo,” but rather of “alguien”: “Al proyectarse hacia sí, el hombre busca—sin encontrarlo las más de las veces—su ‘auténtico ser,’ su ‘destino’” (184). Georg Simmel, upon whom Ferrater Mora bases much of his thought on the interiority of death, notes in his essay, “Zur Metaphysik des Todes,” that death separates our concept of life from the process of living by positing the possibility of alternative lives. If we were immortal, all life courses would be possible, but since we are not, we conceive of life as something peculiar and unique to the individual (34). It is for this reason that Simmel, again figuring death, calls it the *Gestalter* of life (32). It grants form to a life through a doubled movement: first, it causes humans to fill their lives with activity and undertaking in an attempt to flee their own undertaking (32); secondly, it leads humanity to conceive of an “I”

that will somehow represent values beyond the mere life of this world, whether they be those of an afterlife (35), or, as in the case of Don Quijote, those of an ideal code. Thus, Don Quijote's entire enterprise as a knight-errant has borne the imprint of death, as both a flight from the arbitrary and senseless nature of death into activity, and as a representation of values somehow beyond those of this world. The protagonist's desire for fame, although perhaps a cheapened version of a desire for otherworldly existence, represents an attempt on his part to project meaning to his life beyond death: he will be remembered. The fact that Alonso Quijano, upon nearing death, decides to change his life story to improve his *post-mortem* reputation is no real conversion, merely an ironic change of *modus operandi*.

The reading backwards undertaken by those who witness the death of another finds its fullest exploration in Ferrater's work. Reflecting upon his own two encounters with death as an eyewitness to war, the philosopher remarks that the overwhelming meaning of death was a question: "¿para qué?" (205). This simple question requires the witness to look for meaning, situating the death, in even the smallest details such as surrounding objects, "como un complejo de significaciones" (203). Although the Spanish philosopher concedes that there can be no direct experience of death by the survivors and that death is not necessarily meaningful, he does insist that the death of others grants us one lesson: "que la muerte humana aparece como algo injustificable y totalmente sin sentido si no ejecutamos un esfuerzo por verla desde el punto de vista de la vida, si no la contemplamos como algo que la vida de algún modo 'contiene'" (207). Perforce, then, the witness must turn his/her gaze back upon the dead person's life to find meaning. It is in this sense, then, that death can be said to reveal some truth about the dead person, for it is seen as a "cumplimiento," a completing of the life, and subsequently confers upon the dead a sense of nobility (213). The implications of Ferrater's musings upon the experience of witnessing death are obvious for our problem. Those who witness Alonso Quijano's demise, including the readers, turn their gaze back upon his life to grant his death a meaning. For Sansón Carrasco, Don Quijote's life was a triumph over death, albeit a burlesque triumph. For Cide Hamete, his life was a triumph over the literature of knight-errantry, culminating necessarily in his death. For those who admire Alonso Quijano's death as an act of sanity, his revisited life reads as the misadventures of a fool. For those who rue his death as a sad renunciation of Don Quijote, his revisited life takes on a tinge of nobility. In any case, this interpreting backwards from the protagonist's death to his life

hinges upon a consideration of meaning beyond the character's life, either as an expression of literary satire or idealistic nobility.

Cervantes has not closed his novel with the protagonist's death, but rather closed it in on itself in a doubling and redoubling circuit of specularity. Don Quijote's death is necessary, not to do away finally with the literature of knight-errantry, or to vanquish any future Avellanedas, or even to replace the memory of *el Caballero de la triste figura* with Alonso Quijano *el Bueno*. Certainly the protagonist's death has not brought about any of these endings. The genre of chivalric romance still flourishes, albeit transferred to the new media of film and television; many have chosen to take up the pen and continue the wanderings of Cervantes' protagonist, be it in prose, poetry, theater or film; and the figure of the knight Don Quijote still dominates our collective image of the protagonist, as seen in such diverse images as the Man of La Mancha and Picasso's pen and ink rendering of his sketchy figure. The death is necessary, then, for very different reasons. It is necessary to open the novel inwards, into an exploration of the very process of finding and giving meaning in the face of death, the figure of meaninglessness. When viewed from this vantage point, the death of Don Quijote participates in the same play with hermeneutics and epistemology seen in so many other facets of the novel, such as the narrative levels and the disputes over interpretation. This play is simultaneously deadly serious and creatively funny. Faced with the death of Don Quijote, the reader must perforce return to his life to give it meaning. In the re-creation of the protagonist that the reader must then perform through the act of interpretation, Cervantes has achieved Don Quijote's desire: the survival of his name and his fame after death.

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