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# The Importance of Quixotism in the Philosophy of Miguel de Unamuno

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The Importance of Quixotism in the Philosophy of Miguel de Unamuno

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Senior Honors Thesis

Chancellor's Honors Program

The University of Tennessee Knoxville

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## An Introduction to Quixotism

*Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes is a vast story that contains many contrasting ideas, and thus it lends itself to interpretation. One of the most interesting and thorough interpretations is *Our Lord Don Quixote* by Miguel de Unamuno, an analysis and commentary of Cervantes's text. The product of this interpretation is quixotism, a philosophy that Unamuno develops based upon the beliefs and actions of Don Quixote.

Given that Unamuno despised fixed ideologies and rigid belief systems, it initially seems ironic that he is the creator of quixotism, a philosophy he applied frequently to his own life. However, quixotism is a surprising form of intellectualism because it rejects the traditional emphasis on observable knowledge and sound logic in favor of curiosity and abstract thought. While most intellectuals who rely heavily upon reason often base their beliefs and actions upon what is commonly thought to be possible or impossible, quixotism emphasizes the role of the individual in defining what is possible and shaping reality. Quixotism is best described as passionate idealism, or the pursuit of an ideal which may not even be attainable. While traditional wisdom frequently clashes with spirituality, quixotism and spirituality coexist because of quixotism's ever-present preoccupation with generosity and humility. Because quixotism is not a rigid ideology, its greatest strength is its ability to respond to the present moment; thus, it is always relevant. Instead of remaining objective or impartial, quixotists are the passionate and willful creators of their own destinies. Their childlike ability to marvel at the world, desperation to experience a full life, and willingness to pursue goodness and beauty through an adventurous process of trial and error set them apart from all who depend upon common sense. Thus, quixotism has the potential to serve as a mechanism of social change, stretching the limits of the possible.

Given that quixotism stands in stark contrast to the more cautious, conventional notion of reason, it initially appears to be nothing more than madness and is often summarily dismissed as such. However, one of quixotism's most important principles is its recognition of ambiguity and uncertainty. This philosophy thrives in the space between the known and the unknown. Quixotism represents the most profound expression of genius: joyful curiosity about the world and a willingness to explore. As thought and action are inseparable, it is both a belief system and a way of life. While the practice of quixotism leads to a greater number of mistakes than more restrained forms of intellectualism, it also yields more successes as a result of its extreme nature. In *Our Lord Don Quixote*, Miguel de Unamuno not only analyzes a great work of literature but also demonstrates how quixotism, or the passionate idealism of Don Quixote, can and should be applied to life.

### The Wisdom of Don Quixote

Although Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* originally became famous as a parody of the chivalric stories that were popular in Spain in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, it has since played an important role in the thought of many Spanish intellectuals, most notably Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936), who viewed *Don Quixote* from a perspective that differed even from the perspective of Cervantes. By telling the story of Don Quixote from the perspective of a third-person omniscient narrator, Cervantes never directly states what the protagonist sees. Because Don Quixote does not tell his story from his own point of view, he merely "suggests interpretations without confirming them" according to literary critic Brian Phillips. This structure causes Don Quixote to take on a transcendent, symbolic value (Phillips 378). For Unamuno, Don Quixote is much more than a comedic figure; he is the embodiment of heroism. In *Our Lord Don Quixote*, Unamuno's lengthy analysis of Cervantes's text, Unamuno contrasts quixotism, the idealism of Don Quixote, with conventional beliefs about wisdom to create a criticism of both the intellectuals of his own time period and traditional beliefs about intellectualism, reason, and sanity as concepts in general. Unamuno himself best illustrates how radically different his own view of Don Quixote is from that of the character's creator:

My faith in Don Quixote teaches me that these were his most personal feelings, and if Cervantes does not reveal this to us, it is because he did not have the capacity to penetrate so deeply. We must not suppose that because he was Don Quixote's evangelist he was the person who most profoundly understood his spirit (Unamuno 105-106).

In *Our Lord Don Quixote*, madness is not the sign of a defective mind but rather the highest form of wisdom. Don Quixote's madness is an expression of his creativity and courage,

as well as a method for inciting change in the world. For Unamuno, intelligence and morality are inseparable, and an individual who is truly intellectual is also generous, humble, and faithful. This is apparent throughout Don Quixote's story in his extremely idealistic attempt to right all of the wrongs he discovers during his travels. Although many readers view him as naïve, Unamuno believes that his childlike determination to better the world is one of his most admirable qualities. Quixotism also seeks to upset all traditions that are ineffective or dangerous. Like Don Quixote, anyone who wishes to change society for the better must question conventional ideologies and often publically endure ridicule. While traditional wisdom frequently follows an established course, quixotic wisdom is practical in the sense that it responds to the demands of the present moment. Ironically, another essential characteristic of quixotism is its disavowal of perfection. Endeavors such as those of Don Quixote, however noble they may be, are never entirely free from ambition and a desire for glory. Such adventures are very often prone to failure, as well. Thus, quixotism paradoxically recognizes the flaws inherent in human nature while still maintaining that human beings can and should strive to be morally good. Ultimately, Unamuno rejects impartial intellectualism in favor of his very own form of wisdom which focuses exclusively on what Spanish intellectual Salvador de Madariaga calls "the one and only passion which obsesses Unamuno, the hunger for life, a full life, here and after" (Sobosan 141).

*Our Lord Don Quixote*, like many of Unamuno's works, is profoundly spiritual in nature. Unamuno briefly compares the knight errant to Christ in his analysis. Although Don Quixote is mocked for his idealism by both the ignorant and the educated, he functions as a misunderstood savior, as Christ does in Christian Bible. This can be seen many times in *Don Quixote* when the protagonist attempts something with noble intentions but is mocked by others. Detractors of quixotism, in Unamuno's view, are a more modern version of the Pharisees, an ultraconservative

sect of Christianity who condemned Christ. Unamuno speculates that if Christ were to return, the critics of quixotism “would take him for a madman or a dangerous agitator and would seek to give him an equally ignominious death” (Unamuno 209-210). One of Don Quixote’s best traits is his “spiritual generosity” (Unamuno 28). Unamuno also suggests that the intention and the outcome of any act are equally valuable in evaluating the moral worth of the act in this statement: “Strike to the innermost sense and comprehend the profundity of feeling, of thought and of love, contained in the truth that pain inflicted with a holy intention is better than benefit imparted with a perverse intention (Unamuno 75). Although the results of Don Quixote’s actions may be disastrous, such as his confrontation with Juan Haldudo, which results in the rich landowner’s servant getting an additional whipping and being left for dead, his intentions are always good, and thus his conduct is always morally acceptable because it reflects these generous intentions, and deserves to be taken seriously. Unamuno not only applies this concept to his interpretation of *Don Quixote* but also generalizes to formulate a new theory of mad justice:

The guards who were bearing away the galley slaves did so coldly, professionally, by virtue of an order issued by someone who perhaps did not even know the prisoners...The Scriptures speak to us of God’s wrath, and of the terrible and immediate punishments hurled against those who break His Covenant, but an eternal captivity, an endless punishment based on cold theological arguments...is a principle repugnant to quixotic Christianity (Unamuno 103-104).

According to Unamuno, justice influenced by intellectualism might be a respected tradition, but it often verges on coldness and cruelty. Although knights errant often engage in violence, they



do so only as a passionate and immediate reaction to an observed act of wrongdoing, thus avoiding any prolonged meditation of doing harm to another person (Unamuno 104-105).

In the philosophy of quixotism, intellect and creativity depend upon each other. Creativity is essential in the formation of identity. Don Quixote exemplifies this concept because he does not merely accept his family history, shortcomings, and assigned place in society. Instead, he chooses to forge another, better role for himself. While Don Quixote's view of personal identity is unconventional, it is preferable to the more traditional methods used by society to assess the worth of the individual. In Unamuno's interpretation of *Don Quixote*, "it is not intelligence, but will, which imposes this truth" (Unamuno 142). The importance of will applies to Alonso Quixano because he willfully transforms himself into Don Quixote although he is much older and much poorer than the famous knights errant who are featured in the books of chivalry that he spends the majority of his fortune to collect. Unamuno discusses this transformation throughout *Our Lord Don Quixote*, most notably in this part of his analysis:

We should pay more attention to being fathers of our future than to being sons of our past...As regards lineage, we are all the grandsons of dethroned kings (Unamuno 99)...Thus Don Quixote, a descendant of himself, was born in spirit when he decided to set out in search of adventures, and he gave himself a new name on account of the deeds he intended to do (Unamuno 31)...Don Quixote was of that lineage which is, rather than was (Unamuno 24).

What is most important to Unamuno is the potential for greatness. He views tradition as dangerous because it restrains individuals and denies society as a whole the possibility of improvement. Quixotic madness is necessary because it is a mechanism of change. For Unamuno, conventional beliefs that serve no purpose are intolerable. Thus Alonso Quixano is to

be admired because he does not adhere to traditions that do not serve his purpose in the formation of his new identity, Don Quixote.

Although changing society for the better is a goal that almost all would agree with in the abstract, it often encounters resistance when put into practice, as *Don Quixote* demonstrates. The principal reason why most individuals hesitate is the fear of ridicule that is inherent in all people. Thus, ridicule is largest obstacle to intellectualism. Don Quixote is unusual because he lacks this fear, but his story proves that ridicule is a frequent result of sincerity and boldness. Unamuno's extreme distaste for mockery is one of the principal themes in his development of the philosophy of quixotism. The following quotations from *Our Lord Don Quixote* express perfectly the detriment of mockery with regard to intellectualism and morality:

For in nothing as much as in mockery is human badness evident (Unamuno 198)...Abstaining from action so as to avoid exposure to criticism is a form of pride, refined pride...Don Quixote hurtled into action and exposed himself to the mockery of mankind; he was thus one of the purest examples of true humility (Unamuno 55-56)...We will never recover our ancient spirit until we turn the mockery into truth and until we play the Quixote in dead earnest, not in a routine and unbelieving way (Unamuno 244).

The causes of creativity and the catalysts for change are necessity, ambition, and time for uninterrupted thought. Alonso Quixano's transformation into Don Quixote was a consequence of his need to marvel at the world. He could not be content with simply tending to his estate for the remainder of his life. Instead of spending his time worrying about the obligations of daily life, he spent his fortune and his time contemplating and participating in chivalry. Although this quixotic effort produces no observable results, it is not wasteful. In Unamuno's interpretation of

the philosophy of Don Quixote, the contemplation of beauty and goodness is always valuable because of the joy it yields to those who, like Don Quixote, take the time to marvel at the world around them. Thus quixotism, the most profound expression of genius, was born of “leisurely poverty” (Unamuno 27). This unfulfilled desire for the love of Aldonza Lorenzo and lack of material success is what first led Alonso Quixano to dream and ultimately transformed him into Don Quixote, a knight errant famous in his own right. In Unamuno’s view, greatness is a result of extreme need. Satiety is never conducive to quixotism, as Unamuno concludes from his interpretation of *Don Quixote*:

There are mean spirits who maintain that a satisfied hog is better than a wretched man; and then there are those who laud holy ignorance. But whoever has acquired a taste for mankind prefers man, even in the depths of his own wretchedness to the satiety of the hog (Unamuno 168)...What is all this about holy ignorance? Ignorance neither is nor can be holy (Unamuno 169).

Quixotism is not only a surprising form of intellectualism because of its roots in spirituality, unconventionality, and poverty but also because of the childlike mentality that is one of the most important principles of this philosophy. In describing the heroism of Don Quixote, Unamuno says, “The hero is always a child inside himself, his heart is ever infantile. The hero is no more than a grown-up child” (Unamuno 182). Although many readers would suggest that Don Quixote’s childlike view of the world is unsophisticated and thus a sign of mental inferiority, Unamuno embraces this characteristic as a sign of genius. A childlike mentality allows Don Quixote to marvel at the world, appreciate beauty, and attempt the impossible. While his attempts often fail, they demonstrate his courage. A willingness to battle giants and lions for the ideals of goodness may not always seem logical, but the intent is noble all the same.

Another benefit of viewing life from the perspective of a child is the infinite possibility for discovery and intellectual development. Quixotism is preferable to realism, which demands that an individual attempt only what is possible and thus focus entirely on traditional notions of practicality. Although realism often does serve a practical purpose, it frequently negates the possibility of improvement, creativity, and ingenuity. While knowledge is important, it is inferior to wisdom because wisdom also encompasses imagination. A desire to seek wisdom is central to intellectualism, thus many of the best intellectuals are childlike in the sense that their view of the world is much less rigid than the perspective of the realists. As *Our Lord Don Quixote* suggests, innocence, an important part of idealism, is often crucial to intellectual and moral development.

Another important quality of quixotism that distinguishes it from the traditional intellectualism of “university graduates, curates, and barbers” (Unamuno 10), is its emphasis on passion as an acceptable part of intellectualism along with, and sometimes in place of, reason. Reason alone is too calculated and lacks enthusiasm and joy, two of the greatest characteristics of Don Quixote’s view of the world. In order to be more like the knight errant, Unamuno suggests that “one must think with one’s entire body, with one’s whole soul” (Unamuno 156). Unlike many intellectuals, Unamuno suggests that wisdom is transcendent, and individuals cannot claim full responsibility for their own genius. Unamuno’s description of intellectualism is very personal in the sense that he frequently draws on his own experiences to illustrate this concept. In responding to questions about his vision of *Don Quixote*, in his essay “The Sepulcher of Don Quixote”, Unamuno describes his own thought processes by saying:

The meaning of many of the ideas that occur to me and that I confide to you is not clear even to me; at least, I don’t know what they mean. There is someone within

me who dictates them to me, who utters them to me. I obey and do not delve into myself to search out his face nor ask his name. I only know that if I were to see his face and he were to tell me his name, I would die so that he might live on (Unamuno 13-14).

This quote illustrates a very different view of creativity and thought, which artists often use as an explanation for the discovery of a new idea. It is not always a conscious process, and individuals do not have complete control over their own minds. Rather, ideas often overtake a person suddenly and without warning, as if they had come from some outside source. The passion of quixotism is evident in its frequent application to life. It is more than just a belief system; it must be put into practice, as Don Quixote demonstrates. While thought is essential, it is useless unless it is applied. Given that objectivity and distance have played an important role in the history of intellectualism, critics of quixotism might argue that the passion of this philosophy is actually a sign of its inferiority. In contrast, Unamuno considers passionate idealism to be a “maturity of spirit” that is not inherent but achieved by an individual. Alonso Quixano does not become Don Quixote until he is nearly fifty. Although Cervantes does not recount the story of Alonso Quixano’s youth, Unamuno theorizes that he lived with his own sanity, or traditional form of wisdom, for approximately forty years before this transformation occurred (Unamuno 27).

One final distinction between quixotism and common intellectualism is the former’s admission of imperfection. While the philosophy that Unamuno argues so fervently against represents moderation, quixotism is a surprising mixture of passionate idealism and very human failure. What makes Don Quixote unique and allows readers to feel empathy for him is his experience of failure in pursuit of perfection. At several points in his journey, Don Quixote is beaten in a fight or charges his adversary only to be thrown to the ground. As Unamuno

observes, his most redeeming trait is his imperfection, which although it is not evident to the protagonist, can be seen by readers. Unamuno expresses this thought by suggesting that “superhuman perfection borders on inhumanity and drowns in it” (Unamuno 34). In this paradoxical view of idealism, quixotism acknowledges that perfection is not only impossible but also undesirable because it eliminates not only error but also the very passion that characterizes quixotism and makes life worthwhile. Ultimately, it is not perfection itself but the pursuit of perfection that is ideal.

At its conclusion, *Don Quixote* successfully demonstrates that idealism as a form of wisdom leads to happiness not only by chronicling the adventures of Don Quixote and his squire Sancho Panza but also by giving the reader a glimpse of Don Quixote’s life once he has regained his sanity. As master and squire begin to resemble each other, Don Quixote becomes in part a realist. It is important to note that he dies shortly thereafter. This suggests that the essence of life is passionate idealism, or quixotism. Without this, human beings do not live; they merely exist. The end of Don Quixote’s life is ironic. He is surrounded not only by his loyal squire but also by the curate, the barber, and Samson Carrasco, the university graduate from Salamanca (Unamuno 307). The most tragic moment of *Don Quixote* is the protagonist’s renunciation of chivalry and thus, of quixotism and madness. Although Don Quixote dies a sane man, surprisingly his beliefs do not die with him because he has bequixotized Sancho, who has been transformed from a peasant who believed in only practical realism and common sense into an individual with the potential for intellectualism and the ability to marvel at the world.

## Sancho Panza: Common Sense Converted into Idealism

The relationship between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza is a theme from Cervantes's *Don Quixote* that Miguel de Unamuno discusses at great length in his analysis and interpretation, *Our Lord Don Quixote*. Sancho, Don Quixote's peasant squire, serves three purposes. First, he is a foil to his master. While the Don Quixote represents idealism, his squire is grounded in reality and has little imagination, as is evident throughout the story. In commenting upon the scene in which Don Quixote and Sancho have stopped to rest for the night following the adventure of the windmills, Unamuno summarizes this important difference between the two characters with the following description: "Night fell and Don Quixote passed it thinking of his Lady Dulcinea; Sancho meanwhile slept the sleep of the blessed, without a dream" (Unamuno 59). Second, Sancho is his master's only true link to the rest of humanity. As a consequence of his madness, Don Quixote cannot relate to others. Nor can he successfully embark upon the life of adventure that he wishes to experience. Only through his friendship with Sancho can he escape the isolation of his own madness. Also, Sancho's pragmatism allows Don Quixote to travel in pursuit of glory without concerning himself with the routine aspects and necessities of daily life. Third, Sancho represents all ordinary people, who rely almost exclusively on common sense and are neither idealists nor intellectuals by nature or education. Rather, such people can only gain faith and wisdom by associating with those who already possess these qualities.

As Sancho's evolution from sanchopanzism to quixotism demonstrates, the process of intellectual development is never simple. Throughout his journey, Sancho's faith often wavers. He frequently adopts the idealistic beliefs of Don Quixote, only to revert to his own "sanchopanzesque" manner of thinking when faced with an obstacle. As Don Quixote and his squire each come to resemble the initial version presented of the other character, the course of

their journey together, they represent not merely two contrasting characters but two distinct facets of the same personality.

When Sancho is first introduced in *Don Quixote*, he agrees to become Don Quixote's squire only because he has been promised the governorship of an island that the two are supposed to discover during their adventures together. Sancho's decision to participate in knight errantry has nothing to do with heroism. While Don Quixote intends to win the love of Dulcinea del Toboso by performing heroic acts, Sancho simply wants to become wealthy. Several of Sancho's deeds that demonstrate his need to accumulate wealth include his intention to sell the Balsam of Fierabras, a fictional substance imagined by Don Quixote that is supposed to have healing powers, for personal profit and his defrocking of the friars who Don Quixote has beaten in a fight. Although Don Quixote is not averse to fighting in pursuit of his own ideal of justice, Sancho disapproves of this brand of vigilantism simply because he does not want to be captured by the Holy Brotherhood. Unamuno expresses the contrasting ambitions of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza perfectly when he says:

It will be said that Sancho was drawn out of his house by cupidity, just as ambition for glory drew Don Quixote, and that thus we have, in the master and his squire separately, examples of the two impulses which, when joined in one man, have led the Spaniard to abandon his hearth (Unamuno 54).

Another important contrast between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza is the extent to which imagination influences each man's perspective of the world. Don Quixote's excess of imagination is evident in his idealistic view of the world. His perspective is not only distorted within the confines of his own mind, but also in his physical and visual perception of the world. In place of ordinary objects such as windmills and a barber's basin, Don Quixote sees giants and



Mambrino's helmet. Sancho, in contrast, is the voice of sanity to Don Quixote's madness. Sancho's sanity is not entirely negative, as he often tries to warn his master of danger, but sanchopanzism, in Unamuno's interpretation of Cervantes's text, represents the excess of common sense from which most ordinary people suffer. Although some measure of common sense or practicality is necessary in life, an excess can take away the sense of beauty and infinite possibility experience by those, who like Don Quixote, have an imagination. While Sancho's simple thoughts do not cause him the pain his master often feels, he also lacks the profundity of thought that Don Quixote possesses.

Rather than causing conflict to occur, these differences between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza lead master and squire to rely upon each other. Don Quixote's second sally into the world in search of adventure and glory is much more successful than his first because of Sancho's presence. Don Quixote's first sally, which he undertakes alone, is short-lived, whereas his second sally, in which Sancho accompanies him, is the most profound and lengthy part of his story and encompasses many of his greatest adventures. There are two ways in which Don Quixote relies upon Sancho. First, Sancho's pragmatism in attending to all of the basic necessities of daily life that his master neglects compensates for Don Quixote's complete lack of common sense. This is most evident when Sancho helps his master recover from injuries sustained during fights and attempts to warn him of danger.

The second and most important way in which Don Quixote depends upon his squire is apparent in the friendship that exists between the two characters. Although Don Quixote's madness isolates him from the rest of humanity, he and Sancho are often able to understand each other. With regard to the relationship between the two, Unamuno says the following:

“Love your neighbor as yourself,” we were told and not “Love humanity”; for

humanity is an abstraction which every man concretizes in himself alone...

He learned to love all his neighbors by loving them in Sancho, for it is in the person of a neighbor and not in the community that one loves all men; a love that does not settle on an individual is not truly love (Unamuno 54).

Don Quixote's idealism is very similar to the intellectualism of "university graduates, curates, and barbers" as exemplified by Samson Carrasco and the curate and barber of La Mancha in *Don Quixote*, that Unamuno criticizes (Unamuno 10). What both have in common is a very general focus. While a devotion to the common good of all people often benefits no one in particular, a friendship like that of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza almost always benefits a particular individual. When one person promotes the well-being of a specific person, the former individual often has to make sacrifices. These sacrifices can be something specific that one has to give up, or they can merely encompass time and effort. In contrast, an individual includes himself or herself as part of humanity. Thus, self-interest is closely connected with the interests of humanity. When a person decides to improve the situation of humanity as a whole, he or she is actually only attempting to better his or her own world. Thus, the only reason for pursuing such a broad goal is obtaining the personal benefits it encompasses.

Throughout *Our Lord Don Quixote*, Unamuno often utilizes a didactic tone. Rather than addressing his readers directly, the didactic portions of the text are directed at Sancho. Unamuno's view of the Sancho Panzas of the world differs from his view of the "university graduates, barbers, and curates" because he suggests through the use of this didactic tone that Sancho is capable of change. When an ideology is based upon self-interest and a vague, general concept such as "Love humanity," it negates the possibility of other perspectives. In this critique of intellectualism, Unamuno suggests that Sancho is capable of gaining wisdom because he is

capable of considering the world from another perspective, that of his master Don Quixote. In order to recognize the truth of another perspective, an individual must be able to consider this other perspective. This is the basis of Sancho Panza's evolution throughout *Don Quixote*, which represents the progression of individuals from realism to idealism, or more specifically quixotism, the extreme idealism of Don Quixote.

Sancho Panza's increasing knowledge in *Don Quixote* first becomes evident in Part II of the story. As Sancho interacts with the Duke and Duchess and governs the fictional isle of Barataria, his speech and behavior reflect his capacity for wit, ability to reflect upon his own actions, and development of personal integrity. As Sancho evolves intellectually, qualities such as idleness, self-interest, and ignorance are mitigated as he gradually begins to resemble his master. The peasant Sancho who sets out with Don Quixote on his second sally is markedly different from the bequixotized squire who returns to La Mancha with Don Quixote at the end of the story.

At the start of his journey, Sancho is motivated by the promise of riches. In this respect, he is a representation of the Spanish peasantry of his era (Moore 73-74). Sancho is a poor farmer with a family to support, and he spends his days engaged in physical labor while his mind remains idle. Because such a great deal of his time is spent in the daily struggle to survive, Sancho has no opportunity to pursue interests such as knight errantry. Although Don Quixote is far from wealthy, his life is much easier than that of his impoverished neighbor, and he is thus able to spend his leisure time reading and contemplating chivalry, which encompasses many philosophical themes. Don Quixote's social status also signifies that he is literate, while Sancho, like all peasants, can neither read nor write. Increased education and socioeconomic status allow individuals to participate in intellectualism, which is an idealistic endeavor because it goes

beyond the day to day concerns of life. In contrast, Sancho begins his journey as a staunch realist, as opposed to a quixotist, because he has no time for intellectualism as a result of his struggle to survive. Sancho's preoccupation with wealth is a result of his constant exposure to the realities of harsh peasant life, such as poverty. Another consequence of Sancho's perpetual struggle is his desire to rest (Moore 73-74).

Sancho, like many individuals, does not begin his intellectual journey because of some noble purpose; rather he views his chance to become a squire as an opportunity for adventure, personal enrichment, and escape. His ignorance at times makes him a target of ridicule and criticism, from both other characters within the story and as Unamuno's interpretation suggests, from readers, as well. Thus, Sancho functions as a type of "court jester" throughout much of the story, according to literary critic A.J. Close, as he is often the victim of cruel jokes (Close 344-350). Examples of this include the blanket-tossing, his imagined ride upon the back of the flying horse Clavileño, and his appointment to the governorship of an island that actually does not exist. Although both Don Quixote and Sancho are ridiculed, Unamuno's interpretation suggests that the former should not be ridiculed because of his noble intentions, whereas the latter often does deserve ridicule because of his own ignorance.

However, there are two important types of court jesters, and Sancho represents both at different stages of his intellectual development. At first, he is merely used for comedic purposes, but later in the story, Sancho represents the second type of court jester: the wise fool. This is evident in his manner of stating profound truths about life without fully recognizing his own insightfulness. According to Close, this fool's wisdom is one of Sancho's principal redeeming qualities, which transforms him from a simple comedic figure into a "holy innocent" or a "saintly fool" (Close 353-357).

Another redeeming quality that lessens the harshness of Sancho's role of fool is his devotion to his master. In *Our Lord Don Quixote*, this devotion serves as a religious analogy. Unamuno describes Sancho's allegiance to Don Quixote as a metaphor for an individual's trust in divinity, or a higher power, in the following words:

Touched with devotion, Sancho responded that his master would know how to give him everything that would suit him and which he could well bear. Oh good Sancho, simple Sancho, pious Sancho! You no longer ask for an island, or a kingdom, or a country, but only for what the love of your master will know how to give you (Unamuno 57).

This same trust is the catalyst for Sancho's transformation. Because of his respect and love for his master, Sancho is able to consider the world from a perspective very different from the perspective assigned to him by society. This trust in Don Quixote and his idealistic beliefs allows Sancho to surpass his realistic, survivalist view of the world. This suggests that open-mindedness and respect for the views of others are essential in learning, a concept which Unamuno expresses perfectly in the following passage:

Behold here the most comprehensive, the most all-encompassing formula for tolerance: if you want me to believe you, you believe me. The society of man is centered with mutual credit. Your neighbor's vision is as true for him as your own vision is true for you. Provided, of course, that it is true vision, and not a lie or a hoax (Unamuno 220).

Although Don Quixote's vision may or may not be true, what is important is his lack of intent to deceive, which stands in contrast to Sancho's description of his own visions. Rather than simply serving self-interest or a need to be right, intellectualism functions best when

balanced with tolerance. What sets Sancho apart from the curate, the barber, and the Salamanca graduate Samson Carrasco is his ability to doubt himself. Only when he is able to exceed his specific, individualistic view of the world, can Sancho achieve any measure of intellectualism. Thus, for Unamuno, true intellectualism is transcendental because it is not limited to an individual or a specific time.

Once he becomes aware of his own intellectual potential, Sancho cannot return to his previous way of life, which suggests that the process of intellectual evolution is irrevocable for him because he has been bequixotized. Although idealism can be diminished, as is evident in Don Quixote's renunciation of madness and return to sanity, an individual cannot undo the effects of education, as Sancho's transformation proves. While Sancho does momentarily revert to his own "sanchopanzasque" way of thinking, the process of enlightenment as a whole is inevitable once he comes into contact with the quixotism of his master.

Unamuno's ironic critique of intellectualism in *Our Lord Don Quixote* is evident not only in his analysis of Don Quixote's character, but also in his analysis of Sancho's intellectual development. This critique is surprising, considering Unamuno was one of Spain's most prominent intellectuals during his lifetime. Like his criticism of Samson Carrasco, his emphasis of Sancho's progress suggests that Unamuno's view of intellectualism is not exclusive and elitist. Rather, all people, with the proper education, have the potential for wisdom.

Another unexpected aspect of Unamuno's quixotic intellectualism is his interest in philosophical and moral questions. Unamuno frequently rejects objective reasoning in favor of quixotism, the passionate idealism of Don Quixote. In his essay, "The Sepulcher of Don Quixote," Unamuno writes: "I believe we might undertake a holy crusade to redeem the Sepulcher of the Knight of Madness from the power of the champions of Reason" (Unamuno 12-

13). Not only is Sancho's inclusion in Unamuno's analysis of intellectualism surprising because Sancho is an illiterate peasant, it is also unexpected because Unamuno concerns himself with Sancho's moral character, which can be seen during the squire's governorship, suggesting that morality and wisdom are inextricably linked. This link is demonstrated in his portrayal of quixotism as a sort of crusade. Sancho's intelligence is one point on which Unamuno disagrees with Cervantes, interpreting the characters of Don Quixote from a perspective distinct from that of their creator. Unamuno's initial description of Sancho is one of the passages from *Our Lord Don Quixote* in which his divergent point of view is most apparent.

He made overtures to a neighboring peasant, a man of good will, but without much salt in his brainpan – a gratuitous affirmation by Cervantes, later given the lie by the history of Sancho's clever and witty sharpness. In all truth and strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a man of good will, really good will, without salt in his brainpan, for no dolt is ever really a good man (Unamuno 53).

For Unamuno, knowledge is not sufficient. To be truly wise, an individual must also be a good person. In *Don Quixote*, Sancho's wisdom is most noticeable during his governorship of the fictitious island of Barataria. Sancho is a just governor because of his personal integrity (National Federation of Modern Language Teachers Association 247), as well as his sense of moral and religious responsibility (Close 353). It is important to note that Sancho learns all of these qualities from Don Quixote. In one of the didactic passages of *Our Lord Don Quixote*, Unamuno says to Sancho: "And the truth is, Sancho, that heroism is contagious when one approaches is with a pure heart" (Unamuno 238). Sancho's improved perspective is more than an increase in the amount of knowledge he possesses; he becomes wise as he learns unselfishness and as his affection for his master increases (National Federation of Modern

Language Teachers Association 245). Several hallmarks of Sancho's government are his "Constitution," which is simple but effective, and his pardon of the man sentenced to be hanged. Sancho also demonstrates humility, a selfless quality in that it demonstrates his ability to relinquish power, when he renounces his governorship to return to a life of normalcy.

In conclusion, part of Sancho's role of foil to Don Quixote is to reflect the effects of idealism and quixotic intellectual development, which are closely intertwined in Miguel de Unamuno's interpretation of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. As the two characters travel together in search of adventure, each is greatly influenced by the other. For Sancho, an illiterate peasant who is often selfish and unimaginative, this transition is a positive change. However, for Don Quixote, the conversion from insanity and quixotism, which for Unamuno represent an important form of wisdom, is a difficult process, at the end of which Don Quixote becomes disillusioned and dies.



### Quixotism and the Life of Miguel de Unamuno

Quixotism's link between belief and action are not only demonstrated in both Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and in Miguel de Unamuno's interpretation *Our Lord Don Quixote* but also in the life of Miguel de Unamuno. Although he often rebelled against traditional intellectualism, Unamuno was nevertheless one of the most influential intellectuals of his time. His ideas on Spanish religion and politics are especially important. Unamuno's influence can be seen in his criticism of conventional Catholicism, as well as in his attempts to create a less oppressive, secular faith by synthesizing elements of various belief systems. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Spain, which is the setting of Unamuno's career as a writer, professor, and philosopher, is characterized by a great deal of political instability and repression. Thus, Unamuno's outspoken criticism of the Spanish government and defense of individual intellectual freedom demonstrate his courage and have often lead to comparisons between Unamuno and Don Quixote, the literary figure he most admired as a model for the regeneration of Spain.

One of the principal themes of Unamuno's writing, including *Our Lord Don Quixote*, is spirituality. Although his philosophy of quixotism proves that an individual can blend elements of both reason and faith to create a very personalized form of religion, the nature of spirituality itself remains problematic when viewed in the context of empirical reason. While spirituality has been debated in many diverse settings throughout the course of history, the existence of a higher power or deity still can be neither proved nor disproved; thus, spirituality continues to be mysterious because unlike conventional intellectualism, it often focuses upon the unknown. As a result of this uncertainty, the philosophy of Miguel de Unamuno is often characterized by paradoxes. Of all the paradoxical aspects of Unamuno's belief system, the most debated is the classification of his spirituality (Baker 39). Two of the contradictory religious affiliations that

have been ascribed to him are atheist and Catholic. Although the principles of spirituality Unamuno describes in *Our Lord Don Quixote* are sound in the sense that they can be understood as representing a belief system, quixotism as a religion defies categorization because of its lack of an explicit dogma and its reliance upon existing but contrasting belief systems, as well as its frequent opposition of Catholicism (Baker 39).

Unamuno's preoccupation with spirituality is not merely the result of intellectual curiosity but rather, of a very personal need for both meaningfulness in life and an experience of the divine. Death and reason are the two major obstacles to spirituality that Unamuno encountered and that quixotism seeks to overcome. Unamuno, who was Catholic during his childhood, began to question his religious beliefs at around the age of sixteen. During this time, he was unable to reconcile his need for spirituality with his love for reason and knowledge. Also, just before he left for the University of Madrid in 1880, he was present at the death of his grandmother, which caused Unamuno to profoundly consider human mortality (Institute of World Culture 2). This crisis of faith reached its height in 1897. At this point in his life, Unamuno feared his own death, thinking that he might die of a heart attack (Baker 40). Even more pressing was his son Raimundo's imminent death. Unamuno's third child had been born with meningitis and was physically and mentally disabled for the duration of his short life (Institute of World Culture 3). As a result of these personal crises, Unamuno became depressed and was on the verge of madness (Baker 40). In an attempt to alleviate his own suffering, Unamuno began his quest to reconcile faith and reason.

Because Unamuno no longer possessed an unquestioning faith in the Catholic notion of God, as he had very early in his life, his concept of spirituality can be defined as a journey or a quest in place of a status or an affiliation. In quixotic spirituality, as in the transformation of

Alonso Quixano into Don Quixote, the individual's formation of his or her own identity is essential. For Unamuno, the human condition is characterized by both the craving for knowledge and the craving for eternity, or perpetual existence, and this craving is the catalyst for the journey of spirituality. The specific piece of knowledge that human beings are searching for is the assurance that death is not the complete cessation of consciousness and thus of existence (Benitez 336). In quixotic spirituality, knowledge is not an intrinsic goal but rather a means of achieving a connection with the eternal, which is represented by God in Western religion. Mario Benitez, who analyzes Unamuno's need for faith in his article "Miguel de Unamuno's Quest for Fulfillment," summarizes this need for reassurance by stating:

But knowing the truth for the sake of knowing the truth is simply inhuman to Unamuno. Man does not live so that he can philosophize. He rather philosophizes in order to live. Man craves to know so that he will have a fighting chance in front of the only real problematic of his existence (Benitez 336).

Dread and agony are the causes of Unamuno's search for the divine. Without a purpose and without a transcendental or eternal quality, human life is merely a "second-by-second dying" (Benitez 336), in which death is complete nothingness. This perception of human life as ephemeral and futile causes a great deal of suffering, which results in a search for faith. This quixotic search differs from dogmatic belief in that it is an active rather than passive form of spirituality (Benitez 336-338).

Given that the dogmatic beliefs of the Catholic Church, or of any particular religious denomination, were no longer sufficient in reassuring an individual of Unamuno's intellectual capacity of the existence of God, Unamuno had to redefine his concept of the reality of God, which implies the creation of a distinct outlook on reality in general. Rather than relying solely

upon empiricism, which he depreciatingly referred to as “factology” (Ferrater Mora 515), Unamuno also included subjective interpretation and the potential for change in his perspective of reality. The reality of a particular individual, object, or fact is not the result of “what something is” (Ferrater Mora 515) but a combination of “what it means,” “what it is worth,” and “what it wants to be” (Ferrater Mora 515). Because people interpret reality individually through human perception, reality is not something inherent that exists independently. Instead, reality is the synthesized result of human interpretation. Given that human beings have to experience reality for themselves, the experience of the reality of the divine is a very personal experience, not a passive acceptance of church dogma. In describing this experience of the presence of the divine, quixotic spirituality takes into account the “weight” of ideas (Ferrater Mora 518). The weight of an idea consists of both the soundness of the idea and its visceral palpability as experienced by the individual (Ferrater Mora 518). This subjectivity of reality allows the existence of paradoxes, and for Unamuno, paradoxical ideas are no less real than those that are straightforward (Ferrater Mora 519). In this light, Unamuno’s ability to simultaneously question and believe with regard to spirituality appears more plausible.

In addition to Unamuno’s own personal crisis of faith as a result his awareness of human mortality, social change also contributes to his development of quixotic spirituality. While progress, or modernization, often produces many benefits for society as a whole, sometimes change occurs so abruptly that it challenges those spiritual beliefs which attempt to offer explanations about the world. This conflict between modernity and belief represents the difficulty of reconciling reason and faith and often results in the secularization of society. As advances in science and technology render the world less mysterious over time, many individuals who realize the importance of both spirituality and the intellect find themselves torn between the

two. As a result of this struggle, the spiritual intellectual must either renounce his or her faith or find a newer, more inclusive notion of the divine (Weinstein 40).

In his article “Unamuno and the Agonies of Modernization,” Michael A. Weinstein accurately summarizes these societal obstacles to spirituality that Unamuno was forced to confront, however, he attempts to categorize Unamuno’s defense of personal faith in the following description:

Unamuno lost his Catholic faith, embraced socialism, flirted with anarchism, was an exponent of modernization, embraced nationalism, created his own existential personalism, and finally attempted to reinsert himself into Christian civilization. Unamuno is an example of an intellectual ceaselessly attempting to find an expression for his will in the public situation, but continually failing to do so because of his unwillingness or inability to believe in historical reason (Weinstein 41-42).

While Unamuno’s political beliefs did undergo a great deal of change in response to the turbulent political situation of Spain during his lifetime, his quixotic efforts to reconcile modernity and spirituality are not a failed attempt to “reinsert himself into Christian civilization,” but rather an attempt to create a form of secular faith that transcends any particular time period and is accessible to all. Although Unamuno does break with the strict belief system of the Catholic Church, he does not cease to believe. Instead, his new belief system of quixotic spirituality presents a view of God that is free from the strict Catholic dogma that no longer made sense to him.

Rather than representing a distorted version of Catholicism, Unamuno’s spirituality more closely resembles Universalist Christianity with elements of Eastern religion. Instead of

identifying with God through historical or dogmatic texts and beliefs, Unamuno suggests that God is experienced by individuals on a very personal level. His insistence that love of God precedes belief in God (Baker 50) is very similar to the mystical belief found in many religious traditions that God is the embodiment of love. For Unamuno, love and compassion are the same, and in order to experience this facet of the divine, the individual must recognize not only his or her own consciousness, but also the consciousness of other human beings and subsequently, the consciousness of the universe (Baker 50). The universal, transcendent God presented in quixotism can also be described as a “totality of consciousness” (Baker 51), in that divinity and humanity are not entirely separate.

Given that Unamuno’s concept of God is completely dependent upon love and compassion, his faith is inherently active rather than passive and goes beyond belief in the divine to include action or participation as an ethical requirement of spirituality. The quixotic believer cannot merely believe in the existence of love and compassion, but also has to act to alleviate suffering and promote dignity. Thus, in quixotism, religious principles are not merely pieces of knowledge, but guidelines to be put into practice in life. In “Unamuno and the Religion of Uncertainty,” Armand F. Baker expresses this idea very well by stating:

...To have faith in God is to awaken the divine essence that is inherent in our being. In an even more important sense, since God is love, for us to act with love is to “create” God within ourselves...Therefore, not only do we create God through our faith in Him, but He also creates Himself in us through our love. For Unamuno, then, to act with love is a way in which belief is strengthened, since God responds to our love by showing us the reality of His existence (Baker 52).

This quixotic emphasis on love and compassion, and thus on the alleviation of suffering and the promotion of human dignity, is evident not only in the writing and the philosophy of Miguel de Unamuno but also in his life. During his literary career, Unamuno suffered the consequences of unequivocal criticism of the Spanish monarchy of Alfonso XIII, the military dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera, and the movement which would eventually give rise to the subsequent military dictatorship of Francisco Franco, all of which caused a great deal of misery in Spain. Unamuno, who was appointed to serve as rector of the University of Salamanca in 1901, was dismissed from the university and exiled to the Canary Islands at the insistence of Primo de Rivera in 1924 after publicly criticizing the government. These critical comments about Alfonso XIII and Primo de Rivera, many of which were related to the unpopular war in Morocco, were both published in articles written by Unamuno and also quoted in newspaper headlines during the early 1920s and earned him the title of the “pedagogue who braved a King” (Beardsley 353). Unamuno was also famously referred to in the New York Times as the “modern Don Quixote” (Beardsley 353). In a 1925 article titled “Don Miguel,” W.A. Beardsley describes Unamuno’s offenses against the government:

He is reported to have dubbed the King “a rogue and the ruin of his country,” Primo de Rivera “a frivolous and brutal bandit,” and Martínez Anido [Spanish Minister of the Interior] “an assassin and a lunatic.”...He also gave King Alfonso the sobriquet of the “Deauville King,” which bids fair to cling to Hispania’s sporting sovereign.”...Whatever may happen, it seems at least evident that Primo de Rivera can not hold on much longer, and there is always a bare possibility that King Alfonso may go with him...In any case Primo de Rivera has gone through the traditional fire and has come out severely burned. Incidentally,

Unamuno did much of the burning (Beardsley 354).

Although he was initially exiled to the Canary Islands, Unamuno later escaped to France, where he remained until the end of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship. In 1930, Unamuno returned to Spain and resumed his position as rector of the University of Salamanca.

Despite the fall of Primo de Rivera and Alfonso XIII, the newly formed republic was plagued by instability, and a group of military generals, which included future dictator Francisco Franco, became prominent political figures in Spain. Although Unamuno initially supported this movement, hoping that it might bring with it some measure of stability, he eventually grew to oppose the repressive tactics used by these military men (Jensen 425). This opposition culminated in Unamuno's famous 1936 confrontation with General José Millán-Astray at the University of Salamanca, which historian R. Geoffrey Jensen describes by stating:

Although the details of the event remain somewhat obscure, most accounts agree that only the intervention of General Francisco Franco's wife prevented the one-eyed, one-armed Millán-Astray – who was shouting 'Long Live Death!' and 'Death to Intellectuals!' – from striking the elderly poet (Jensen 425).

Jensen continues to describe the confrontation in the following manner:

The rebels, Unamuno said, would need to learn to convince (*convencer*) as well as conquer (*vencer*). His assertion prompted the legionnaire's violent outburst, and it also brought about the poet's immediate dismissal as rector. Two months later, living under virtual house arrest, Unamuno died (Jensen 426).

Although Unamuno ultimately did not triumph during his lifetime against the repressive rulers of Spain and the Catholic Church, which often joined with the harsh governmental regimes, he remains one of the most influential Spanish thinkers because of his quixotic



commitment to intellectual freedom and the ethical treatment of human beings. In opposing oppression, Unamuno quixotically defended personal freedom and the quality of life of Spain's citizens, as well as the rights of the intellectual elite of Spain. Thus quixotism, Unamuno's personal religion, is a very socially conscious belief system. In embracing quixotism, Miguel de Unamuno did not negate the importance of spirituality. Instead, he defended faith as a general concept from the repressive bureaucracy of the Catholic Church in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Spain, thus promoting individual religious freedom in place of strict dogma.

### Quixotism Evaluated

Although the advantages of quixotism include intellectual freedom and the potential for creativity, the extent of emphasis placed upon the individual versus society as a whole brings to light a possible negative consequence of quixotism: chaos. If everyone, or even a great number of people, were to behave as Don Quixote does, the world would become much less stable and predictable. Also, the extremist pursuit of individualistic goals might seem selfish to many.

However, quixotism is very different from egoism. Quixotism is a very socially conscious philosophy that promotes justice, humility, and the ethical treatment of all people. In *Our Lord Don Quixote*, Miguel de Unamuno does not advocate the elimination of all sense of limit and proportion. Instead, in quixotism, he proposes a restructuring of limits and a reevaluation of conventional beliefs in order to promote a practical philosophical system that attempts to better the world. Although a personal code of belief and conduct based upon Don Quixote is inherently volatile at times, such a philosophy is still viable because the world itself is volatile as well. Quixotism's practical response to the present moment is thus very appropriate.

Rather than classifying quixotism as dangerous and unstable, it is better to view it as versatile and open to new ideas. While strict dogma and perfectly consistent logic are often easier to understand and follow, they rarely solve problems and often lead to conflict and the sort of ideophobia that Unamuno believed to be a great difficulty faced by society. Emphasis on the individual, along with a lack of explicit rules, demonstrates quixotism's passionate idealism and optimism. Rather than seeking to control the thoughts and actions of the quixotist, the belief system instead emphasizes the importance of personal intellectual development. Although quixotism stands in contrast with more concrete, traditional beliefs, its adaptability and insistence on individual thought and action give it a transcendent quality. While conventional belief

systems are at times ill-adapted to their time and place, quixotism, very much like Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, is relevant in many settings because concepts such as intellectual freedom and the compassionate treatment of others are universal themes.

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