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Shakespeare and Cervantes Are Dead: The Construction of Fiction and Reality in Hamlet and Don Quixote

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Shakespeare and Cervantes Are Dead:

The Construction of Fiction and Reality in *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote*

A Thesis

Presented to the Departments of English and Spanish

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and

The Honors Program

of

Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

Joanna Parypinski

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Introduction

Shakespeare and Cervantes Are Dead:

The Construction of Fiction and Reality in *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote*

Both written in the early 1600s, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote* share common themes that cross the cultural boundaries of their respective countries. While these two renowned works have been widely studied in the last few hundred years, they pose a question that has not been cohesively addressed: how is reality created in literature, and how does literature influence reality? Furthermore, if the two are so entwined in both the structure of books and the structure of our perceived world, how can we distinguish between fiction and reality? A study of *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote* will show that in both works, a fictionalized reality is created by the eponymous character through his own madness and the author's use of metafiction. This broken barrier between appearance and reality in Shakespeare's and Cervantes' worlds demonstrates that literature is created through the same narrative structures as reality, which is itself a shared fiction.

The reason that *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote* can be studied so thoroughly on the poststructuralist notion of a false or constructed reality is because they were both works far ahead of their time, often reflecting extremely postmodernist ideas. Don Quixote is generally considered the first modern novel, and Hamlet is also identified with the beginning of the modern age (Oort 319). Yet beyond this, these authors play games with the reader and with the structure of the fiction itself, which would fit sensibly in a 20th or 21st century novel rather than an early 17th century work. These new methods of literary

criticism can place such texts in a context not yet visible to the 17th century eye. Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that studies the nature of reality; more specifically, post-structuralism explores the chaotic yet socially constructed nature of reality. These critical theories, anachronistic as they may be, are extremely pertinent to both *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote* in how they define, narrate, and construct reality.

The theme that reality and fiction are created through the same narrative structures appears first in the use of fiction within the two texts and how this fiction, be it a novel or play, affects the reality of the character; metafiction is the term for this type of literature that self-consciously explores the devices of creating fiction. This appears when Don Quixote creates his reality based on the chivalric knight stories over which he has obsessed. In transforming his reality into the fiction of a chivalric novel, and thereby bringing to life the literature he has read, he demonstrates how reality can be constructed in the same manner as one would write a novel. Following Don Quixote's transformation of his life into a novel, he acts out the heroic deeds of a knight even when they are not required, and transforms mundane and everyday things into mortal enemies. Like Don Quixote, Hamlet also uses fiction to influence his reality through the "play within a play." The events in the play that Hamlet plans for his family to see deliberately mirror the deception and betrayal that Hamlet perceives to be occurring in his own life, and he acts out the desired result of these real events through the resolution of the play, rather than taking any action in his life. In this way, he attempts to construct his own reality through the fiction of the play.

The characters' madness is another tool for constructing their reality. Don Quixote's madness is brought about by his obsession with *caballerías*—chivalric knight

novels—and this fiction creates his new reality through madness. The characters all see Don Quixote as mad because he believes in the existence of things that aren't there. Yet this madness allows him to see the unfolding of his own narrative through these exciting events, without which he would not be able to construct his reality in the form of a *caballería*. In the same way, Hamlet's madness becomes the subject of reality and appearances. His pretense is convoluted in the play, leaving the reader unsure if Hamlet is truly mad or has simply been pretending the entire time. Appearance and reality become a main focus of Hamlet's games while he is affecting madness, and Hamlet uses this madness to create his reality in the same way that he manipulated the events of the play. This consciousness of how he can use his madness to influence reality also leaves the veracity of his madness ambiguous—so how do we define madness? Madness has deep cultural ties that make its definition arbitrary. Society's view of madness has changed throughout history and is the determining factor for how it is defined, and both Don Quixote and Hamlet represent one such social definition. Yet their madness suggests that there is not one correct reality but instead a social construct centered around the communal acceptance of a shared fiction, and society labels them "mad" to ensure the continued pressure to maintain the fiction of one true reality.

The following novella follows the protagonist, Prince X, who embarks on a quest to find the author of his biography, studying madness and metafiction in *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote* along the way to better understand his own narrative. The focus of the novella will be how these themes inform an investigation of how fiction and reality are created. Once we understand the narrative structures that shape fiction, we might then be able to see past society's constructed reality and have a greater awareness of our own.

The Continuing Quest of Prince X

The Author of this book to Prince X

A sonnet

And here we start the tale of our great hero,
A prince of mighty sword and noble deeds
Which into crooked hearts doth strike fear! O,
This character's mere gaze can shrivel weeds.
And yet, a man of thought as well as action,
He gobbles books in scholarly pursuit;
From stale reality, it gives distraction,
Until the fiction started to pollute
His life, for with the king his father dead,
There only was one man that he could blame:
The Author of the play, his life, whose head
Did spawn th' unrav'ling fiction of this game.
And thus begins his existential quest,
Which he at present will disclose the rest.

Chapter 1

Which describes the curious circumstances of the amnesia and reading habits of Prince X

Somewhere in Western Europe, in a place whose name you don't really need to know, we shall commence my tale. My father recently murdered in a most frightful and mysterious fashion, I found myself a lost and wandering shadow in my family's desolate castle. My duties as the next in the royal line fell to someone else as, by a peculiar turn of events, I found my memory wiped clean like a blank sheet of parchment not two months after my father fell dead of a poisoned pen. With no knowledge of myself or my past, I took to referring to myself as X, and rather than entreating my servants, old school chums, and mother to share the details of my history with a new and infant-minded me, I decided to fill the vast void of my forgotten life with the stories of others.

My reading fare spanned a wide variety of history, culture, language, and geography, but perhaps no books so intrigued me as Miguel de Cervantes' *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* and William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Don Quixote, a scrawny, weathered, fifty-year-old madman who believed he was a knight errant, rode his sad horse Rocinante through La Mancha in search of wrongs to be righted and adventures to be had. The books and books of chivalry that took the place of lentils and squab fed his imagination better than the hardiest beef stew could feed his concave stomach. I couldn't decide whether he was a true hero or a false one—either way, I couldn't put his story down, and two days and two nights I did not move from my chamber until finally I reached the conclusion.

The next day I acquired a copy of *Hamlet*, and in a few short hours had already lived the play twice, hungrily returning to the first page as soon as my eyes touched Fortinbras' final command. Here was another new friend for me: a young man obliged to seek revenge against his murderous uncle but morally unable to act, and trapped inside the dark world of his twisted mind from which death seemed to be the only escape. Wild and pensive and funny, I liked him just as much as I liked the zany and stubborn Don Quixote. I had found my Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, though I did not plan to kill them but rather hold the pages of their lives close to me to make up for the nothingness that was my own life.

It was my friend Hamlet, I suppose, who prompted me to question certain aspects of my reality. Firstly, my father—how does one drop dead of no account? Who is to blame? The next, myself—how could I exist if I were only a ghost of a person? For whoever I was became lost once my memories of myself were wiped clean. Finally, my life—how was I to know what was real if I could not recall the past reality of my existence? The books which became my life were more real to me than my own history.

It was in the third month since my father died, after four weeks of nonstop reading, that I received the message I was looking for. I had just been arguing with my mother, who was trying to convince me to "cast off your perpetual look of distraction and return to the real world! Put your books back in the library where they belong, or better—burn them all so that they can no longer infect your already weakened and highly susceptible mind!" I knew I could not exist without my books, so I threatened to run her through with a dagger and left the castle, wandering the nearby forest like a common peasant. I do not know how long I traversed the rocky terrain, cutting a path for myself

through the low-hanging branches and foliage, when I came upon a clearing beside a narrow river and paused to get a drink and wash my hands.

There on the bank of the river was a large rock with a flat surface suitable for sitting and observing the serenity of nature. But the seat was already occupied by a rectangular object that, upon further inspection, proved to be a thick leather-bound book. Curious, I retrieved the book which sat waiting for me, almost as if it had been placed there on purpose, and read the gold-embossed title with amazement: *The Curious Life of Prince X*.

These were the only words on the cover; the author remained unknown. Intrigued, I flipped open the book and began to read about the circumstances of my birth in the castle where I had always lived. Could this book be an accurate depiction of my life? Had I finally stumbled upon something that would give me all the details of my former life, which as of yet still remained a complete mystery to my green mind? Would this book reveal to me the answers to everything?

So I sat on the rock by the river with the water whispering like book pages and the birds twittering overhead, and I began to read my life story.

Chapter 2

In which Prince X reads his own life story and begins his quest to find The Author

The tale was long, and a reddish twilight had fallen over the forest as I came to the last page. Remarkably, those final paragraphs described just what had happened to me in the last few weeks. It told of how I had become absorbed by my books so that they nearly withered my brain, and how I ran off to the forest and sat down to read my biography…and how I set out on a quest to find my father's murderer: the Author of my life.

There could be no doubt that some omniscient Author was observing, or engineering, my every move; how else could my life be in that book, even moments such as this one, where I was alone? My mission was clear. I had to find this Author and demand to know the reason for my father's death.

I had learned from the book that there were two people who might be able to help me in my quest. The first was my old school chum, Sergio Compinche, with whom I had shared many adventures prior to my amnesia. From what I'd read of him, I had no doubt that he would want to come along. The second was my lady, Olphinea, who lived in the next town over and to whom I had promised my heart. I hadn't seen or spoken to either of these people in the time that I had spent reading, as I had not remembered their existence.

Darkness fell on the forest and on that misshapen gray pedestal of the large rock upon which had lain the book of my life. I carefully placed the volume into my knapsack and wove back through the thicket of trees, the air tinged navy around me like the sea at night. Ahead loomed my family's castle.

I gave no thought to sleep, my mind still whirring with all I had discovered and all I had yet to find, and instead I set to planning my departure. I packed bread and wine, some extra clothing, and my two favorite books along with the mysterious biography. I could not leave *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote* behind, the two greatest treasures of my library—not the least because I sensed certain similarities between their predicaments and mine. It seemed to me that the Author of my life must be either William Shakespeare or Miguel de Cervantes, and I had to determine which it was.

When the sun rose and the servants began bustling about, I went to find my old friend, who had taken up residence in the castle these last few weeks. My mother had requested he come to try and return my memory to me, but I had refused all visitors.

I found him in the garden. Sergio Compinche was a thickset man with a rather silly black mustache. He had a jovial face and when he saw me, he raced forward to embrace me.

"My old friend! You've come out of your self-imposed confinement, I see?" he hailed. "Still no memory? No, you look as though you hardly recognize me."

I recognized him only from the description I had read in my biography, which had called him an "obsequious twit" and a "mustachioed buffoon." Freeing myself from his zealous hold, I explained to him my plans for immediate departure and requested his company.

Sergio stroked his goatee thoughtfully, then grinned and slapped my back. "Marvelous! An adventure! Do you mind if I see this book?"

And so I showed my strange find to Sergio, whose eyes lit on the pages wonderingly. Though we had studied together, I had read that he was only mildly literate, and it didn't take long before he lost interest in the book and handed it back to me.

"Prince X is what you call yourself now?" he asked. "Well, Prince X, I suppose we must get ourselves some horses and set off! I can show you the way to Olphinea."

My things already gathered into my sack, I followed Sergio to the stable where we collected two fine equine specimens, one black and one steely gray. It seemed to me that this adventure was coming along too smoothly My poor friend Don Quixote had suffered many trials even at the outset of his quest to have knightly adventures, and he'd done so much on a horse that was old and scrawny, to boot! My black horse was far too able-bodied, so I thought I should make him into a *rocín*, so as not to put myself too far above the noble and downtrodden knight-errant. It is for this reason that I decided to call the horse Corcelante. Thusly named, the horse was transformed into a sorry nag.[1]

And so, mounted upon our horses and armed with books, we set off across the kingdom to find my lady love, Olphinea.

We rode through the forests surrounding my castle and through several towns, the sun beating upon our backs at midday, until we came upon a bookshop called *The Real Word*, and we decided to enter to see if we might find another copy of my biography, or perhaps a sequel that detailed the events following my discovery of the biography—a sequel that I was, perhaps, living right now?

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[1] "[Don Quixote] finally decided to call the horse *Rocinante*, a name, in his opinion, that was noble, sonorous, and reflective of what it had been when it was a nag, before it was what it was now, which was the foremost nag in all the world" (Cervantes 22). *Rocín* means "nag." *Ante* means "before." *Corcel* means "steed."

As a man of letters rather than arms, I found myself in paradise upon entering the cramped little bookshop tottering with tall, crooked bookshelves whose trappings were bulging haphazardly from their spaces. I spied some of my favorite works of literature and some titles which now elude my memory, but nowhere did I find anything titled *The Curious Life of Prince X* or *The Continuing Quest of Prince X*. Weaving my way through the bookshelves, I found the owner of the store, a short man with round spectacles, showed him my book, and asked if he knew who the author might be.

"Yes, I've read this. One of my favorites," he said, flipping through the book as he squinted through his glasses. "'Fraid I don't have a copy left in stock, all sold out. You wouldn't be willing to sell this, would you? It's a popular book. This here Prince X sounds like a curious fellow. If he weren't a fictional character, I'd certainly like to meet him."

"What do you mean, *fictional*?" Sergio shouted as he rounded the corner to join us. I grabbed him by the arm to quiet his loose tongue.

I thanked the man and took back my book, which he begrudgingly handed over after one more plea to buy it from me. "Sad to see it go," he murmured. "Some fine adventures that poor, forgetful prince had. I did hear there's a sequel in the works, though."

Excited again, I asked what he knew of the sequel.

"Nothing much. I don't know who wrote it, anyhow. I've just been hearing rumors that there's another one being written, or compiled, or translated, or however it is this book came into being.[2]"

"Translated?" asked Sergio as he brushed my hand from his shoulder.

"Yes, I think the original might have been in Spanish," said the bookman.

I thanked him again as we took our leave, and I suggested to Sergio that the Author might be Miguel de Cervantes, if the story was first created in Spanish, and we should travel to Spain at once.

"Yes, but that doddering old fool didn't know what he was talking about—he was just going on hearsay! He doesn't even know who wrote it, much less how, when, or why the book came into being. First we go to Olphinea."

I asked Sergio—my Rosencrantz, my Guildenstern, my Sancho Panza—if he was questioning my authority on *my* quest. He immediately retracted his impudence, but I agreed with his initial statement nonetheless, so we continued on to where Olphinea lived.

As we rode (I slowing my horse's spritely trot with the reins, as it was far too lively and strong for a nag), I began to wonder what I might do when I found the Author, and I shared these thoughts with Sergio: "Shall I seek revenge upon the Author, who, in writing my life story, carelessly allowed my father to die? Is that my moral obligation? Shall I write my own book in which the Author dies? Would that make me a murderer? God, I shall be a scoundrel, but I must seek revenge, mustn't I?"

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[2] Cervantes would have us believe that *Don Quixote* was written originally in Arabic and then translated into Spanish, even though the original characters live in Spain and speak Spanish—thus, it is a translation of a translation. This is one of the many levels of authorship and narrative games present in the novel.

I found myself falling into a deep depression as my mind labored over these thoughts. There seemed to be no proper solution. I had to avenge my father, but in doing so, I might damn myself.

Sergio didn't seem to be listening to me. He was slugging wine as he tipped this way and that on his horse.

"Perhaps I should have asked my mother before we left. Do you think she might be having an affair with the Author?"

"What!" Sergio nearly tipped all the way over and righted himself just before he could fall off the saddle. "Well, I don't know. Does she even know the Author?" He took another drink. "You'll have to kill the Author, of course, when we find him. It's the only way. He has no business playing with your life, I say. There's no room for Authors in this world."

We arrived at the town by nightfall, and Sergio led me up to the cottage where Olphinea lived with her father and brother. My heart leapt: I was soon to see the beauty I had read about in my biography! I was soon to behold her golden tresses and alabaster skin.

A man of similar age to myself came to the door on our arrival. "My sister Olphinea isn't here," he informed us. "She's traveling. For her health, you see. Ever since our father died, and you took ill, she's not been herself. Been writing poetry and saying so much nonsense. I thought it would do her good to go south, live for a bit in the warm Mediterranean sun."

"To Spain, then!" Sergio shouted enthusiastically, his face ruddy, as he took another swig of wine.

“But first she went up to London. She’s been missing you something terrible and thought she might find some books there to bring you, since you so love reading.”

“To London, then!” Sergio shouted with a hiccup.

I consented, thinking perhaps I might learn more about Shakespeare while there so that I could decide whether or not the famous playwright was the Author. We decided to start for London in the morning, though, as Sergio was quite impressively drunk by now and had begun singing folksongs terribly out of key. Olphinea’s brother offered us lodging for the night, to which I reluctantly agreed.

The whole thing was far too easy, unfortunately. What a dull adventure I was proving to have! Poor Don Quixote had been physically and verbally abused at the inn where he’d stayed, and had suffered much conflict. So I told Olphinea’s brother that we would stay at his cottage for the night if he would be so kind as to throw a rock at my head.

He threw one at Sergio, too, but I suspect that was to stop his singing.

Chapter 3

In which Prince X travels to London to learn about Shakespeare and to find the elusive Olphinea

The next morning we set off for London, a long journey which I will not bore you by recounting detail by detail. Suffice to say, we rode and ate and slept, occasionally stopping a fellow traveler to ask if they knew anything of the biography of Prince X. All had either heard of or read the book, some claiming that Prince X was a fool for refusing to acknowledge his life after the amnesia and instead burying himself in books, some praising Prince X for his amusing tales. None seemed to have any idea who penned the work, but some agreed that it was quite possibly a translation, or a compilation of gathered scraps of writing from an unknown source.

All was still a mystery as we arrived in London. My thoughts of finding Olphinea had been taken over by thoughts of Shakespeare—specifically, the play *Hamlet*. I found myself identifying more and more with the tragic prince and the way his tale was written. I began to think of his reality, and my reality, and how on earth one was to tell which was real, for I knew that Hamlet was a dream of fiction. Yet to others, Prince X, too, was merely a character in a story.

When Sergio asked for my thoughts, probably assuming that I was lost in some raunchy fantasies about my lady love, I explained to him how the fluid nature of reality is addressed in *Hamlet*, both in the way that the eponymous character views reality and in the way that he can change reality for those around him. And throughout the play, we the audience are left to wonder what might be reality, what might be fiction, and how to reconcile the two. We experience this existential crisis through Hamlet's journey towards

a better understanding of the world. Hamlet's discovery of the disparity between appearance and reality leads to his acceptance of the subjectivity of reality—which is to say that reality is not one truth that is the same for all people, but rather is perceived differently by everyone. There is not one "truth," or factual reality, but many. Hamlet's reality is a projection of his own perceptions, and he thereby learns how to shape reality through his affected madness and the play within the play.

"Yes, of course, of course. That all makes perfect sense," said Sergio, his flummoxed look betraying the surety of his words. "Right. Let's find Olphinea."

I admit I was a little worried to actually find the lady. What if the reality did not live up to the stories I had heard of her sweetness and beauty? It might shatter my image of her. So while Sergio put his efforts into asking around after her, I directed our travels to the Globe Theater, where I might acquire more information about Shakespeare.

The theatergoers I met did not disappoint. Standing outside the round, white building trimmed with a spider-web of brown, I learned a great deal about my possible author. Shakespeare was baptized on 26 April, 1564, and died 23 April, 1616. *Hamlet* was written in the first few years of the 1600s. I decided that I needed to learn more about *Hamlet* to know for sure if Shakespeare was The Author. Luckily, the play was to be performed that evening at The Globe, so I convinced Sergio to remain there for the day so that we might attend.

Sergio, however, had discovered the inn where Olphinea was staying, so we decided to make a detour there before we returned to the theater that evening. I dearly hoped that the real Olphinea would not destroy the fictional one, but I need not have worried. When we arrived, the innkeeper informed us that Olphinea had already departed.

“Said she was headin’ down ter Paris fer a week, then Spain fer her health. But she left ‘most a week ago, so if you wanna ketch ‘er afore she hits the Mediterranean, you’ll have to leave here anon.”

I thanked the man and asked for a room for the night.

“What!” shouted Sergio, “but what about Olphinea? We should leave today!”

I told him that I was not done here; something nagged me yet to remain in London until I had satisfied all my questions about *Hamlet*. So, grudgingly, Sergio complied, and that evening we set out for The Globe once more to view the play.

Chapter 4

Which recounts Prince X's exploration of the language of appearance and reality in Hamlet

We settled into our seats as the play was about to begin, and the actors took their places. Prince Hamlet came onto the stage—or rather, the player playing the prince—and I took mental notes as I carefully observed the action. My suspicions were supported: the noted disparities between appearance and reality in *Hamlet* suggest that reality is subjective—for instance, Hamlet's perception of reality is filtered through his active imagination and is therefore different from the reality that others in the play experience.

At first, Hamlet cannot distinguish between appearance and reality; for him, they reflect the same ultimate truth and must correspond to each other. His interactions with his mother and King Claudius reflect this attitude, for they tell him that he should not continue to wear black as a show of perpetual mourning for his father. Here I could not help but sympathize with the poor prince, as my own father's death was currently driving my whole quest. In any case, Gertrude asks why his father's death seems to be affecting him so greatly, and Hamlet responds, "Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not 'seems'" (1.2.76). To him, what "seems" to be, is true. His black clothing is a reflection of his very real feelings of mourning, for as he says, "I have that within which passes show; / These but the trappings and the suits of woe" (1.2.85-6). Hamlet's appearance of mourning reflects his true feelings. He believes that the appearance of something must necessarily correspond with reality, and thus he cannot understand why his mother creates a separation between what appears to be and what is. Of course, Hamlet learns that this is

an incorrect way to view the world, for what "seems" to be might be false, merely deceiving the perceiver into believing it is true.

Perhaps, I thought, appearances are often all that people have to understand anything deeper in the world, and if these appearances are false, then how are we to know what is true and what is false—what is reality, and what is fiction? The thought unnerved me, but I realized that I knew very little about the actual character of Sergio, or Olphinea for that matter, but rather judged them on their appearances in my biography. I so wished that these appearances would tell all; I was like Hamlet, whose "mind worries the problem of acting in a world full of surfaces" (Mack 199). Indeed, my own actions existed in this world of appearance into which I had stepped, fully-formed and without any memory of a deeper truth.

Indeed, the reality of Hamlet's world was subjective, colored by his perceptions and emotions. In his first soliloquy he calls the world "an unweeded garden / That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely" (1.2.135-7). He sees the world as diseased because his perception is tainted by his own dark thoughts. Indeed, he declares, "How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!" (1.2.133-4). Imagination affects how we see the world as a whole; if our imaginations are dark and twisted as Hamlet's is, then the world itself becomes a nightmare. I also noticed that in his mourning, time is confused by his perceptions. At first he says that his father is "But two months dead" (1.2.138), but later he laments the "most wicked speed" (1.2.156) with which his mother remarried, which he said happened after "A little month" (1.2.147). Because he is disgusted by how quickly his mother's wedding to his uncle followed his father's death, time seems to have sped up and made it

seem all the quicker, and all the more terrible, which reflects his negative worldview. As an audience member, I did not know if it had been one month or two, and so the reality that Hamlet creates for us is also altered and confused in the way that we view the play. Hamlet's thoughts play a large role in creating this dark reality, for he spends much of the play ruminating over and over again on his mission to kill his traitorous uncle. Trapped in these thoughts, he calls Denmark a prison. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern dispute this claim, Hamlet replies, "Why, then 'tis none to you, for there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison" (2.2.253-5). Here Hamlet is beginning to understand our power to control reality, for he confesses that it is only his dark thoughts that make Denmark seem like such a terrible place; to an optimist, Denmark might seem like a palace, but it is neither of these things until one's perception turns it into one.

Was my thinking and perception changing my own world? What if there truly was a difference between the appearance of Sergio sitting beside me, eyes glazed over and looking as if the dramatic arts were an incomprehensible bore, and the reality of his inward being?

In the course of the play, Hamlet learns that there is a difference between appearance and reality, which reshapes how he views and reacts to the world. We might define "appearance" as that which we perceive with our senses—the external aspect of an object, person, location, etc. Hamlet's understanding of appearances begins with the arrival of his father's ghost. The very existence of the ghost presents "the problematic nature of reality and the relation of reality to appearance. The play begins with an appearance, an 'apparition,' … the ghost. And the ghost is somehow real, indeed the

vehicle of realities" (Mack 196). The appearance here is the reality, or rather the "vehicle of realities," as it is the thing that drives the action of the rest of the play. Yet there is also a possibility that the ghost is, in fact, merely an apparition—a devil assuming the shape of Hamlet's father—rather than his real father. The problematic nature of this is that one can never know which appearances are reflecting reality, and which are diverging from it. "Reality," or perhaps "objective reality," is a term that we use to define what we believe is the permanent and true state of existence. After his father's ghost tells Hamlet that he must seek revenge against Claudius, Hamlet begins to see the possibility of appearances and this objective reality conflicting with one another. He sees his Claudius as a malignant force, and he says of him, "O villain, villain, smiling damned villain! / My tables—meet it is I set it down / That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain" (1.5.106-8). Hamlet would much rather have appearance reflect reality than contradict it, yet he now understands that something may appear good but be rotten and evil on the inside. He understands that "the devil hath power / T' assume a pleasing shape" (2.2.611-2). Yet this split between appearance and reality is never absolute, and encourages us to redefine reality as something that is not, in fact, fixed or solid. These instances of appearance diverging from reality often signify that there exist many different versions of reality that people create through their perceptions, and that there is no one reality that is more "true" than any other. This would be defined as a subjective reality rather than an objective one.

Sergio was beginning to drool. I would be hanged if the appearance of Sergio as a fool did not reflect the reality. Yet the idea still unsettled me because I found I could so

well identify with this matter. I was like a newborn babe, discovering the world for the first time in the wake of my amnesia: how was I to know what was real? *Could* I know?

Ah, here was one of my favorite scenes of the play. The actors rearranged themselves, and here were Hamlet and Polonius left to themselves, Hamlet reading a book and Polonius under the impression that Hamlet is mad in his love for Ophelia. Hamlet looks up into the sky, and—here, I shall transcribe below the dialogue of their conversation:

> *Hamlet*. Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?
> *Polonius*. By th' mass and 'tis, like a camel indeed.
> *Hamlet*. Methinks it is like a weasel.
> *Polonius*. It is backed like a weasel.
> *Hamlet*. Or like a whale
> *Polonius*. Very like a whale (3.2.384-90).

Hamlet's changing perceptions alter how the cloud appears—perhaps even what the cloud innately is in the reality of the play. I decided to think more on this conversation later, for it is a very curious bit of dialogue that Shakespeare crafted. Hamlet plays a similar game of convincing someone to change his perception of reality later on when he is talking to Osric about the weather. He tries to give Osric a hat to wear to keep his head warm, which Osric initially rejects:

> *Osric*. I thank your lordship, it is very hot.
> *Hamlet*. No, believe me, 'tis very cold; the wind is northerly.
> *Osric*. It is indifferent cold, my lord, indeed.
> *Hamlet*. But yet methinks it is very sultry and hot for my complexion.
> *Osric*. Exceedingly, my lord; it is very sultry (5.2.95-101).

Though we in the audience are led to believe it is quite warm out, Hamlet decides to convince Osric that it is cold. Whether or not he succeeds in making Osric question his own reality is left ambiguous, but he does at the very least convince Osric to agree with

him, thereby creating a new shared reality between them in which it is at first cold, then hot, much as Hamlet creates a shared reality between himself and Polonius when the cloud becomes a camel, weasel, and whale. As I thought on these matters, it seemed to me that a shared reality could be created simply when more than one person agreed with the truth of a particular appearance.

The play came to an end, and the audience erupted in applause as the actors returned to the stage to give their bows. Sergio had by this time fallen quite asleep, and I took the moment, as the theatergoers around me rose to leave, to continue pondering all that I had learned from watching the written play come to life before me.

I had been building my own world ever since I awoke with no memory of my life or myself. I had been reading and constructing my life around those books, my thoughts driving all of my actions and beliefs about the world. In this way, I truly identified with Hamlet, who "was forever unmasking his world and rebuilding it in thought, dissolving what to others were solid facts, and discovering what to others were old truths" (Bradley 184). There were several possibilities, then, for what effect Hamlet's imagination actually had on his world. He pretends with both Polonius and Osric that reality is not really as it appears to these men, and this "may be a pretense that is also the first foothold of a new reality, as when we assume a virtue though we have it not. Or it may be a pretense that is actually a mirroring of reality, like the play within the play, or the tragedy of *Hamlet*" (Mack 202). In some cases, as Hamlet would like to believe, appearances mirror reality. The very play of *Hamlet* mirrored my reality quite well, which was also disconcerting to me but gave me hope that perhaps I might find my author in Shakespeare. But what of the appearances that diverged from reality? Perhaps they created a new reality.

The theater was emptying out, so I roused Sergio from his slumber. He woke with a snort and looked around blearily. “Wonderful play, I was riveted by every moment.” He yawned widely and stood. “Well, I could do with a glass of wine.”

We exited the theater. My mind remained absorbed in the questions that the play had provoked, and back at the inn I found myself tossing and turning, unable to sleep for my whirring mind. Doubts about myself were surfacing. I thought perhaps I should just forget about the quest and seek out Olphinea, but something drove me on to continue searching for answers, however unsettling they may be.

As I lay in my cot, I couldn’t help but think to myself, “We all see the difference between appearance and reality, but who can give a convincing answer as to which is which?” (Spencer 277).

Chapter 5

Which tells of Prince X and Sergio's discussion of words and deeds, and the encounter with the shadow in the mist

When we awoke the next morning, the sky was the hoary gray of old bones, and the fierce deluge of rain which had spilled down the night before had faded to a misty drizzle. The sodden London weather had lowered Sergio's spirits considerably, so I agreed to his suggestion of leaving for Spain as quickly as was prudent.

Though I had the money to pay for the inn, it did not seem right to leave without some conflict to spice up my adventure, so I told the innkeeper that I would not be paying for our stay.

"Like hell you won't," he growled.

"I am a prince," I explained. "And my father just died, so rightfully I must now be a king, but as fortune would have it, I don't recall a single moment of my life."

"Prince, eh?" He frowned and squinted an eye at me. "I s'pose that's fair."

"What?" I blurted, confounded by his capitulation and expecting a brawl. "Of course it isn't fair. How else will you receive an income with which to buy food for your family?"

"Don't have a family," he said with a shrug. "Long as I'm able to tell people my inn's good enough fer a prince, that's good enough fer me." The innkeeper smiled. He was missing several teeth. "Happy travels."

"Right, then," said Sergio, who was tapping his foot behind me, arms crossed.

I wanted to argue—to have to struggle for my pride, as my dear friend Don Quixote did—but I relented, and even slipped the innkeeper a handful of gold before

following Sergio out to our horses. Everything seemed to be going contrary to how I had imagined.

As we rode along through the chilly mist, Corcelante at too brisk a trot for a decrepit nag, I considered that my problem might be my natural disposition. If I was more of a man of action, perhaps my adventure would be more exciting. But while I considered myself a man of letters, having pursued my studies in literature after my mind was wiped clean and my life began anew, I had read in my biography that I had once been a brave soldier who had accomplished many daring feats.

I posed this question to Sergio:

"What do you think I am, in the matter of words and deeds—a man of letters or of arms? My good friend Prince Hamlet, as a scholar, is a man of words. He spends the entirety of his play ruminating, weighing the pros and cons, rather than taking the action that he has decided upon. Yet, there are moments when he becomes a man of action. Consider the scene where he is talking to his mother and senses a rat in the room; he takes his dagger and runs it through the curtain, stabbing Polonius dead. This is a rash action. And later, when he returns to Denmark from England, he ends up in a duel with Laertes and finally succeeds in killing his uncle, King Claudius. Indeed, Hamlet 'is a man of words and actions, but he cannot bring them together. He can plan things in words but never translate them into being through action' (Norford 562). His only actions are unplanned, spontaneous, and ultimately destructive.

"Now consider my other good friend, Don Quixote. He is most certainly a man of action. As a knight-errant, he spends his time traveling in search of adventure, and he finds himself enmeshed in many skirmishes along the way. 'The knight's defense of

soldados (soldiers) over *letrados* (scholars) recurs throughout the novel' (Good 62). However, is he not, too, a man of words? For before he becomes a knight, he spends his days reading voraciously, reading until literature infects his mind. It is the words that bring him to action. Thus, Don Quixote, like Hamlet, is a man of both words and actions.

"And what of myself? What am I?"

The mist obscured the countryside around us, veiling it in gray to match the dreary sky. I had to flex my fingers to warm them up. Sergio did not seem bothered by the cold, but I noticed that he was drinking wine as he rode.

"You're both," he said. "You acted rashly in your past. Then you read a great many books, and took new actions based on what you read. Your life is composed of words, in that biography of yours. Somehow the actions influenced that story, which once again influences the actions of your life."

I was astounded by the insight with which Sergio spoke. It seemed he could, on occasion, speak intelligently, rather than acting only as my eager sidekick. I decided that he was correct: words create actions. So perhaps words create reality as well. Words were infinitely important. During my studies of Hamlet, I had read an article which said that "If 'truth' is subjectively determined, then the mind becomes the place where the mystery must be confronted. And if this is so, then words may be more important than deeds in the quest for meaning" (Norford 563). The meaning infused into our actions comes directly from thought, from words, from narrative. In this way, words and deeds build upon one another.

As we rode through the mist at a leisurely jaunt, there appeared in the distance a shadow whose form was quite blurred by the thick weather. I squinted, trying to

determine if it was stationary or coming towards us, and what it might be. I said to my companion, “Do you see yonder shadow that’s almost in shape of a horse?”

Sergio lowered his wine to peer down the path and tilted his head. “Why yes, that does look like a horse, indeed. I suspect it is a fellow traveler.”

Thinking back on my favorite conversation between Hamlet and Polonius, I decided to change my mind. “Methinks it is like a tree.”

Sergio tilted his head in the other direction, then looked at me, and then back at the shadow. “The top of it looks like branches. Yes, it must be a tree.”

“Or like a giraffe.”

Sergio nodded. “Yes, very like a giraffe. *Díos mío*, what do you suppose a giraffe is doing in England?”

How extraordinary! My speech had changed the shape in the distance into a horse, a tree, and a giraffe in minute, and even the most preposterous thing I picked that shadow to be, Sergio believed! His reality had been altered every time my words changed. How wonderful and frightening to have such authority over the truth of existence! Perhaps words and deeds did work together, words being the vehicle by which deeds might be done. It seemed to me that “The word has a dynamic power that transcends distinctions between truth and falsehood, reality and appearance.” (Norford 565). Words are quite a powerful thing.

As we drew nearer, the shape of the shadow became more pronounced. It was tall and slender. Finally our horses trotted up right next to it, and lo and behold, we stood beside the gangly legs of a giraffe munching on some foliage at the top of a tree. It

paused its chewing to look down at us, as though we were the most absurd creatures to encounter on a deserted road in the English countryside.

Bemused, we continued on our way.

Chapter 6

In which Prince X worries over his sanity, and considers the madness of Hamlet

As we took the ferry back to the continent, my thoughts drifted ceaselessly back to what I had seen. The day after the encounter with the shadow, I had asked Sergio what he could make of the giraffe.

"What giraffe?" he'd asked me as we rode on through the unending mist.

I had ceased my questioning at once, confused by his response. Hadn't he seen the giraffe as well? Had it been an hallucination? Was I going mad? All was inconclusive, and I began to worry that my sanity was slipping away from me in my absurd quest to find The Author.

These thoughts consumed my being as we drifted on the gentle current of the sea, our sorry horses locked away in an enclosure. I thought poor Corcelante, enduring so much in our difficult journey, could use this time to rest. Looking out to the line where the steely sky met the whitish ripples of the waves, I asked myself whether or not Hamlet was truly mad. Those around him thought him so, and certainly he seemed to be, but pretense and reality confuse each other when we do not know if his madness is merely for show. It all seemed to revolve around that idea I had previously pondered of appearance and perception in the play. Hamlet's perception is skewed by his thoughts, and as primarily a man of words, "Thought is the element of his life" (Bradley 188). Hamlet was a thinking creature, like myself. He did not even seem terribly interested in the external world until all the things in it "were reflected in the mirror of his mind. Hamlet beheld external things in the same way that a man of vivid imagination, who shuts his eyes, sees

what has previously made an impression on his organs" (Coleridge 171-2). Hamlet's imagination informs his reality; thus, he seems to live his life entirely through his mind, his thoughts and feelings coloring the way he sees the world. Hamlet is a creative soul who, in Horatio's words, "waxes desperate with imagination" (1.4.87). He perceives a diseased world and puts on an antic disposition in order to deal with this world, and in the process, he descends into insanity.

Perceptions that are extremely skewed in comparison to those of others are often attributed to madness, according to the norms of society which are dictated by the agreement of the majority. Madness is a perception of reality that differs from what society takes as objective reality. In this case, madness would have a subjective role in *Hamlet*. Throughout the play, Hamlet's real or false madness shapes his reality—and that of others, as well. Of course, part of the game of Hamlet's madness is tricking others into agreeing with him, even when his logic is unsound. Again I returned to my favorite conversation between Hamlet and Polonius, when he convinces him the cloud is a camel, a weasel, and then a whale. Certainly some of this must be Hamlet exercising his princely authority over others, forcing them to agree with him; yet it is also a demonstration of how perception informs one's experience of reality. In this case, the way one views the cloud determines the shape of the cloud.

I wondered to myself, "Was it really a horse, a tree, or a giraffe?"

And I answered myself, "It was all three, depending on the moment!"

Madness is a vehicle for this idea, as madness is a state of altered consciousness. We might define madness as "a state of mind that prevents normal perception, behavior, or social interaction" (The New Oxford American Dictionary). If a mad person is unable

to experience normal perception, then they must have an *ab*normal perception of the world, and thus the reality that they perceive is different from what which the majority agrees upon as the one true or objective reality. Their altered perception affects how they experience reality. As such, I had changed the shadow with my words.

Finally feeling as though I understood my world, I raced down the length of the boat, past several irked passengers, to find Sergio. My body hummed with the fire of knowledge—but halfway to the stern, I slowed. If I was, indeed, mad, then was this great epiphany mere madness, or true understanding of reality?

Why, I wondered, did Polonius and Osric allow themselves to be pulled along by a madman?

"Because they detect something meaningful behind the games," I murmured as I began to pace, the boat rocking gently beneath my restless feet. When Polonius is talking to a seemingly deranged Hamlet, he says to himself, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (2.2.207-8). He sees some purpose behind the perceived insanity, and this questions the very nature of madness for it suggests a rationality behind the inherently irrational—a paradox that makes us question our definition of rationality, which lies in how well something conforms with the agreed-upon idea of reality. The more something makes sense in terms of the majority's idea of reality, the more "rational" it must be. Yet something that seems entirely irrational to someone subscribing to this notion of reality might be perfectly rational to one who experiences reality differently. This scene was quite similar to the one in which Ophelia goes mad after the death of her father, and Laertes, observing her strange behavior, remarks, "This nothing's more than matter" (4.5.173). It is not only Hamlet's madness, but rather madness in general, which seems to

have more meaning than coherent thought. This is perhaps because what others define as "madness" may actually be an ability to see through to a truer reality. But because the person in question perceives a different reality from others, they are believed to be mad.

I was seeing clearly now, but if I told my insights to Sergio, would he not think me mad?

It was entirely possible that I had hallucinated the giraffe, just as Hamlet might have hallucinated his father's ghost at the beginning of the play… yet "the ghost can hardly be a figment of Hamlet's imagination because it has also been seen by Marcellus, Barnardo, and Horatio" (Oort 332). The giraffe was seen by Sergio… was it not? The giraffe was my reality and had been for the last several days of my journey on that bleak island.

The ghost, however, is not seen by Queen Gertrude, who, when Hamlet tries to point out the apparition, believes that Hamlet is conversing with thin air. She even tells Claudius later that Hamlet is "Mad as the sea and wind when both contend / Which is the mightier" (4.1.7-8). Yet is he truly mad? It is possible that Hamlet's father's ghost is the "supreme reality … witnessing from beyond the grave against this hollow world. Yet the man who is capable of seeing through to this reality, the queen thinks is mad" (Mack 198). Hamlet's ability to see a different reality makes him appear mad to his mother and others. Madness, then, may not be a matter of a defective perception of the world, but rather a more radically different one than most, for each person already experiences a different reality. And the reality that I experienced contained a giraffe.

A giraffe in England.

A giraffe which had more meaning than any number of the realities around me at that moment: the salty spray of the sea, the fishy scent of the clammy air, the obese man who had just strolled past me, smoking a pipe and reading a book about mermaids. My thoughts, mad or not, were far more brilliant than any I'd had since I awoke in this strange new world.

Even Polonius, the old windbag, agrees that a mad Hamlet is still a wise Hamlet. He wonders after conversing with the prince, "How pregnant sometimes his replies are! A happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of" (2.2.210-3). These wondrous thoughts o'ertaking my brain would not have occurred had my brain not taken on some semblance of madness. Or perhaps, like Hamlet, "I essentially am not in madness, / But mad in craft" (3.4.188-9). The way in which I am going about this adventure may seem something only a madman could do, but the reality of my quest is not at all mad.

I was developing something of a headache.

At last I came upon Sergio retching over the side of the boat. When he wobbled back upright, he asked me where I had been.

"At the front of the boat," I said, "thinking of ghosts and giraffes. I'm surprised you suffer from seasickness."

"Why's that?" he asked, clutching his stomach.

"Because you are a fishmonger."

He shook his head, steadying himself against the side of the boat. "Are you mad? Don't you know me? I'm your *amigo*, Sergio! I've never sold fish in my life!"

I laughed, and Sergio looked appalled (and quite green about the gills).

“Come,” I said, “We’ll be docking soon. And no, I am not entirely mad. ‘I am but mad north-northwest: when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw’” (2.2.387-8).

“And yet you don’t seem to know—”

Whatever Sergio was about to say, I never discovered: his words were cut short by the boat tilting abruptly to the right, shortly followed by an enthusiastic bout of vomiting. As Sergio caught his breath, I rounded up our pitiful nags and we again were on our way.

Chapter 7

In which Prince X travels to Alcalá de Henares to see Cervantes' birthplace

It was a long distance to travel, but we made our way south by various means, and after a long and somewhat uneventful trip, we finally set foot onto Spanish soil—rocky and sun-baked as it was. Here the sun shone brightly, a big golden hotplate on our backs. Sergio complained of the heat that blazed straight through the cloudless sky and down to the brown, dry land. I ignored him.

We arrived in Alcalá de Henares in the late afternoon, just as siesta was coming to an end and society was yawning itself awake. I guided Corcelante to Plaza de Cervantes, the main square of the town. Lush trees lined the paved square, and columns of red, pink, and white flowers formed long gardens. Ornate iron lampposts raised their still-unlighted glass encasements to the sky. At one end of the plaza were pastel buildings with salmon-colored roofs, and at the other I could see the peaked towers of a church and the buildings of la Universidad de Alcalá. In the center of the plaza, standing majestically on his great stone pedestal, was the statue of Miguel de Cervantes, a quill in his right hand, a sword in his left, and a cape on his back cutting blackly against the blue sky. The huge stone base depicted the scene from *Don Quixote* where he is thrown from his horse by the arm of a windmill.

Eagerly, I nudged Corcelante on to the cobbled street of Calle Mayor, observing the stone columns that held up the overhanging buildings, the windows each with their own iron balcony. Beneath the overhangs on either side of the street were many shops.

Then, wonder of wonders, I beheld the house of Cervantes! It was a quaint brick building with a shingled roof, and before it, on the side of Calle Mayor, was a bench with two figures. The rotund, grumpy-looking one had his arms crossed, and the gangly, armored fellow warmly embraced the air with the hand not upon his lance. Indeed, it was the trusty Sancho Panza and my dear friend, Don Quixote! Leaping off my horse, I ran to the figures, Sergio shouting behind me. But, alas! I discovered they were bronzy and immobile. More statues.

Two young women were walking down the street, chatting amiably. I stopped them and said, "*¿Hola, señoritas. Sabéis algo de Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra?*"[3]

The girls exchanged an amused look. The shorter one brushed dark hair from her face and said, "*¡Por supuesto! Nació el 29 de septiembre, 1547. Fue El Príncipe de los Ingenios. Fue miembro de la Infantería de Marina, y los argelinos lo capturaron—pero eso no es muy importante. Lo importante es que escribió el Quijote. Se murió el 23 de abril, 1616*."[4]

It was only the last part that I did not know. "*¿Verdad? El mismo día de la muerte de Shakespeare. Gracias, señoritas*,"[5] I said, expecting them to pass. But the taller, silent one, cast frigid eyes upon me, crossing her arms.

"*¿Y quién eres tú?*" she demanded rudely. "*No eres castellano.*"[6]

"*Soy un príncipe*," I told them as Sergio came up behind me and dismounted his own horse.

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[3] "Hello, ladies. Do you know anything about Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra?"
[4] "Of course! He was born on September 29, 1547. He was the Prince of Wits. He was a member of the Spanish Navy Marines, and the Algerians captured him—but that's not very important. What's important is that he wrote *Don Quixote*. He died on April 23, 1616."
[5] "Really? The same day as the death of Shakespeare. Thank you, ladies."
[6] "And who are you?" she demanded rudely. "You're not Castilian."

"*¿Príncipe de qué?*" she asked, still suspicious but sounding more intrigued now.

If my story had really been translated from Spanish, then these ladies might know it—especially if it had been written by Cervantes. I had to tread carefully. "*Príncipe de la Pluma Absurda*."[7]

"*Y yo soy Sergio Compinche de Tucama*,"[8] my friend butted in, giving the ladies a little bow and a lascivious smirk.

"*¿Tucama?*" asked the kind, knowledgeable one. "*No conozco este lugar. ¿Está en la Mancha?*"[9]

Sergio waggled his eyebrows. "*Está en tu dormitorio, mi cerecita*."[10]

The tall one appeared scandalized and opened her mouth to speak, but I jumped in front of my friend and gave the ladies a deep bow. "*Perdón, señoritas. Mi amigo es muy maleducado y yo tengo amnesia. Estamos en una gran aventura en busca de El Autor y necesitamos continuar nuestra investigación. Que tengáis un buen día*."[11]

The tall one snorted, staring at me. "*Tú estás loco*." Then she spat at Sergio's feet. "*Y tú eres un chorizo*."[12]

"*Sí, es posible*," I agreed, pulling Sergio away from the ladies as they hurried off down Calle Mayor. He reluctantly remained by my side, watching their backsides as they retreated. "That one has a fine ass, and the other a nice long pair of legs. We should have asked them to accompany us."

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[7] "Prince of the Absurd Pen."
[8] "And I'm Sergio Compinche of Yourbed."
[9] "Yourbed?" asked the kind, knowledgeable one. "I don't know that place. Is it in la Mancha?"
[10] "It's in your bedroom, my little cherry."
[11] "Forgive me, ladies. My friend is ill-mannered and I have amnesia. We're on a grand adventure in search of The Author and we need to continue our investigation. Have a good day."
[12] "You're crazy." Then she spat at Sergio's feet. "And you're a chorizo." Chorizo: 1. highly-seasoned pork sausage 2. thief 3. (vulg) turd

"You are a pig, Sergio," I remarked offhandedly to my vulgar friend. My mind was abuzz with thoughts of Cervantes as I observed the statues, wishing they would come to life. I wished this wondrous work of fiction could become a living human, as he so seemed to be in my mind. I had read that Don Quixote "is a walking hybrid of antitheses: both a man and a literary invention, a living character and an imaginary character, a book-man and a man-book" (Rasula 128). I seemed to be a book-man myself, and somehow, because of this biography of mine, a man-book as well.

We walked with our horses down Calle Mayor as the shopkeepers began opening their doors and setting tables outside their restaurants. I seemed to follow the "Quixotic Principe," which "concerns the adoption of an identity in accordance with literary characters. (Pérez-Álvarez 22). It was quite possible that Cervantes was The Author, since I bore so many similarities to the knight-errant.

"Do you think The Author is Shakespeare or Cervantes?" I asked Sergio.

"Neither," he grumbled, still seeming put-off by my thwarting of his romantic conquest. "They're both dead."

"Well, of course they're both dead," I replied. "They might have written it before I was born. And possibly it has only recently been translated."

Sergio shook his head as we reached the end of Calle Mayor and gazed upon a beautiful white church behind Plaza de los Santos Niños. "But how could someone write the biography of your life before you've lived it?"

"I believe that is the question we're trying to answer, *mi payaso*," I said.

Chapter 8

Regarding the discovery of Cervantes' Quill and how it illuminates appearance and reality in Don Quixote

Since it had been established that my potential authors were both dead, I decided I needed to get into their heads to determine if they might have written my story. The problem was that I didn't know how I might do that. We wandered Calle Mayor as the shops' doors swung open like the petals of blooming flowers. The trinkets they sold held no interest for me, though Sergio seemed easily distracted.

As we walked beside our horses, enjoying the pleasant warmth and sideways-slanting light of the early evening, I saw an unshaven man in tattered rags picking things off the ground. As we passed him, I noticed him lifting something small and thin, look at it, and prepare to discard it where he had found it.

"Are you mad?" I shouted. "Do you know how much that is worth?"

The man stared at me, looking baffled. I amended: *"¿Estás loco? Sabes el valor de ese objeto?*"

The poor man looked at the object again, then back at me. "*Es una ramita con una hoja. No vale nada.*"[13]

Sergio now joined in on the man's confusion. Though he looked a little uneasy to stand so close to the stranger's filth, he stepped up next to him to examine the object. I decided that they must both be feigning ignorance, or else they were perhaps as stupid as they looked.

[13] "It's a twig with a leaf. It's not worth anything."

"*Ése es la Pluma de Cervantes. Tiene toda la inteligencia del Príncipe de los Ingenios porque escribió su obra maestra, el Quijote. Es un artefacto valiosísimo para los escritores y los eruditos. La oca que dio esta pluma fue la gallina de los huevos de oro. Entonces, es la Pluma de Oro famosa de Cervantes*."[14]

Sergio clearly did not believe me, and asked if I was playing some sort of trick on them. The poor man was looking at me as though *I* were the one covered in dirt and clothed in the barest of threadbare clothing. I dashed forward and made to snatch the quill from his hand, but he drew it back at the last moment.

"*¿Si esta ramita es tan valioso, por qué debo darla a ti?*"[15] he asked suspiciously.

It seemed I had managed to convince him of the truth, but now I wanted him to believe that what he held really was a simple twig with a single leaf hanging off of it, so he would give it to me without argument. I knew that if I had Cervantes' Quill, answers would come swiftly to me.

I could see that he wasn't going to listen to a word I said, so I made a grab for the quill and received a hearty punch in the nose. Eyes running, face stinging, I blindly lashed out and caught the man round the belly, swinging him to the ground. Sergio gave a shout from behind me and leapt out of the way as we rolled together in our struggle, me reaching for the quill, and he holding it away even as my knee crushed into his groin. At last my hand reached his that held the quill, and I delivered a blow to the poor man's stomach. As the air in his lungs was released in a sharp exhale, his fingers loosened, and I

[14] "That is the Quill of Cervantes. It has all of the Prince of Wits' intelligence because it wrote his masterpiece, *Don Quixote*. It is an extremely valuable artifact for writers and scholars. The goose that gave this quill was the golden goose. Therefore, it is the famous Golden Quill of Cervantes."
[15] "If this twig is so valuable, why should I give it to you?"

grabbed the quill and staggered to my feet. The man did the same, running away in the opposite direction.

"All that for a twig?" Sergio asked as I spun round to face him, my face throbbing and warm wetness spilling from my wounded nose. My fingers came away from my face bloody.

"I told you, it's Cervantes' Quill," I panted.

"It looks like a twig to me."

It occurred to me that the quill might well look like a twig to Sergio, just as the shadow in the mist had appeared to take different shapes. I thought of the Helmet of Mambrino in *Don Quixote*: Sancho Panza thinks that it is a cheap washbasin, but Don Quixote sees the ancient golden Helmet of Mambrino and tells the others that the evil wizard Frestón is enchanting them to see the washbasin. I thought perhaps it would be good if, from now on, I allowed everyone to believe Cervantes' Quill was a simple twig. Don Quixote saw the benefits of such deception, saying:

> It was rare foresight on the part of the wise man who favors me to make what is really and truly the helmet of Mambrino seem a basin to everyone else, because it is held in such high esteem that everyone would pursue me in order to take it from me; but since they see it as only a barber's basin, they do not attempt to obtain it (Cervantes 195).

There was much I could learn from my friend, Don Quixote, but it unnerved me to think that what I saw differed from what Sergio saw, and what anyone else might see as we made our way through Alcalá in search of an inn. I had a flash of horror as I wondered which of us saw the true reality of the object. The argument in *Don Quixote* over the

Hemlet of Mambrino "is more unsettling than it appears because it questions the very possibility of truth in a world where the presence of truth is no longer assured" (Good 64). I was again on a slippery slope into a state of mind in which truth was entirely subjective and reality could exist in many different incarnations simultaneously, according to the person perceiving it.

We found an inn with a stable for our horses, where I led Corcelante immediately so that the poor nag could rest. Unburdened of our creatures, Sergio and I indulged in an early supper. I had hidden away the Quill of Cervantes in my pocket to keep it safe, and I could feel it pricking my chest through the cloth of my shirt. It seemed to prick me with the question of reality. Don Quixote had the problem of confusing the appearances of his perceptions with the objective reality of everyone around him, and this caused him a great deal of trouble. He often took things that were fiction and made them real. His whole existence as a knight-errant was "an imitation of life taking as models fictional characters (which he believed to be real). It is of little matter in this context whether the model comes from fiction or from history. Hamlet is probably more influential than the majority of real English people" (Pérez-Álvarez 21). I might well have been becoming a fictional character myself, considering I did not know the way in which I originally lived my life, save from reading my biography. And while I was studying Shakespeare and Cervantes to see which was The Author, the more important people I was examining were Hamlet and Don Quixote. The fiction transcended the reality.

I took Cervantes' Quill from my pocket. Sergio watched me askance, taking a long drink of wine. It was indeed a golden quill. I would swear on my life that I held in my hand a magnificent golden quill. But then again, "in the imagination of Don Quixote

the saddle remained a harness until Judgment Day, and the basin a helmet, and the inn a castle" (Cervantes 395). The quill would remain thus. I returned it to my pocket.

Chapter 9

Concerning the king's ghostly apparition and the scuffle between Prince X and the sorceress

The next day, as we walked through the neighborhood familiarizing ourselves with Alcalá and asking around for Olphinea, I noticed a white figure standing before a nearby house. Redirecting my route, I moved closer to the figure and let out a cry of shock.

"What is it?" Sergio asked, hurrying up beside me.

I pointed to the white figure, which swayed slightly as the breeze blew past. "There! It is the ghost of my father! I recognize him well."

Sergio took hold of my shoulder before I could approach the ghost. "But—"

"You would have to be blind not to see that this is my father standing before us! That is his very image. I must go to him!"

But he held me back still, and I began to struggle against my companion. "It might be the devil impersonating your father,"[16] he suggested, "and you don't want to be led astray."

I drove my elbow back into his neck, and Sergio relinquished his hold. I stepped forward. "Father. It is I. Speak, I beg you."

But the ghost merely continued to sway ethereally in the air. At that moment, a woman appeared around the side of the house and went towards my father's ghost with

[16] When Hamlet's father's ghost appears to him, he, Horatio, and Marcellus question if he is the true apparition of the dead king or if he is a demon taking his form. But Hamlet decides to speak to the ghost, "Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned, / Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell" (1.4.40-1).

her hands outstretched. I feared she was some sorceress preparing to do some harm to him, or perhaps attempting to banish him back to the underworld before he could tell me who my Author and his murderer was.

"Stop!" I commanded, dashing up to meet the sorceress disguised as a wholesome woman. She looked up at me, and I could see daggers in her eyes.

"*¿Qué quiere usted?*"[17] she asked, perfect innocence in her deceptive voice.

"*Éste es el fantasma de mi padre, y tú eres una bruja mala. ¡Prepárate para la muerte!*"[18] I shouted, wishing I had a lance to swing out heroically against my foe. All I had was Cervantes' Quill, which I pulled out and pointed menacingly at the sorceress. She looked at the object and burst into laughter.

"Why are you waving that stick in her face?" Sergio asked, having caught his breath and arrived at my side. "Look, it's just a white sheet hanging to dry! She's merely doing her laundry!"

"No," I said, "It is my father's ghost." And with that, I attacked the sorceress with my magical quill, poking the tip at her in hopes that its ancient ink might blot her from my story. After all, the pen is mightier than the sword. But the witch only lifted her arms to protect herself from the poking, and she kicked out at my shin with her foot.

"*¡Loco!*"[19] she cried, her hair coming free from its bun and falling in frazzled wisps about her aging face.

She was a scrappy old broad, and as we tussled, we fell together into the white shape of my father, which enveloped us like a piece of cloth and fell with us to the ground. The witch was slapping me across the back something fierce, while I attempted

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[17] "What do you want?"
[18] "This is the ghost of my father, and you are an evil witch. Prepare for death!"
[19] "Madman!"

to jab the quill into her eyes. It was all confusion in that tangled mess of white, and when we finally rolled apart and freed ourselves, I found myself lying in the dirt beside what was now a soiled white bed sheet, which now had a long tear down the middle.

The woman stood up and began throwing clumps of dirt at me and shouting incoherently.

"Do you see?" Sergio said over the witch's yelling. "It's nothing more than a white sheet!"

I shook my head as I gained my feet. "Do *you* see? The sorceress transformed my father's ghost into a sheet to confuse us and to deter me from finding The Author!"

"Why would she do that?" Sergio asked. "She is a simple woman. You are chasing windmills, my friend."

This made me recall Don Quixote's adventures. One of them involved a puppet show which he believed to be real. When the female puppet was in danger, Don Quixote "unsheathed his sword, leaped next to the stage, and with swift and never before seen fury began to rain down blows on the crowd of Moorish puppets, knocking down some, beheading others, ruining this one, destroying that one" (Cervantes 632). The theater of objects was transformed into his reality, but it was still just a puppet show. What I had seen was real and true, I was sure of it. My father had tried to tell me something, but the sorceress had stepped in too soon.

Still spitting and throwing dirt, the witch gathered up the ruined sheet and stomped back inside the house. I placed Cervantes' Quill carefully back into my breast pocket, and Sergio and I continued down the street.

Chapter 10

In which Prince X explores the madness of Don Quixote

Having now been called mad by several different people, I began to consider my own madness, which I had accepted after thinking about Hamlet. I now turned my thoughts to Don Quixote and the way in which he completely altered his world by imitating chivalric tales. He seemed to truly believe that he was a knight-errant; this was a part of his perceived reality. However, according to the norms of his society, he wasn't really a knight: "his madness being stronger than any other faculty, he resolved to have himself dubbed a knight by the first person he met, in imitation of many others who had done the same, as he had read in the books that had brought him to this state" (Cervantes 24). He did not become an official knight but decided to imitate the books he had read.

In this way, Don Quixote suffered what we may call literary madness; "Naturally, literary madness implies believing in everything one reads and hears (and sees on the screen), and is even more complete if one turns it into a way of life" (Pérez-Álvarez 22). Not only does Don Quixote believe that the books he reads are true histories, but he also lives his own life as a work of art by transforming his world into one of these books of fiction. Things that do not correspond with the social contract that is society's accepted reality often appear in literature, but here they are considered fantasy, and the reader suspends disbelief in order to enjoy the work. When something considered fantastic in literature emerges from within the confines of art into reality, it becomes madness, which is what happens when Don Quixote brings to life his books. Consider this:

> the chimeras are transmitted from author [novels of chivalry] to reader [don Quijote], but what was fantasy on one side becomes hallucination on the other; the writer's stratagem is quite naively accepted as an image of reality. In appearance, this is nothing but the simple-minded critique of novels of fantasy, but just under the surface lies an enormous anxiety concerning the relationships, in a work of art, between the real and the imaginary, and perhaps also concerning the confused communication between fantastic invention and the fascinations of delirium (Good 61).

Don Quixote's madness lies in not being able to distinguish between the fictions that he reads and the reality of his world. It is a strange and frustrating kind of madness which is entangled in literature—not unlike my own story—which is what makes literary madness, or a person's experience of a break from reality due to the influence of literature, so difficult to comprehend.

Hamlet's madness, for instance, is not literary madness. His madness is rumination; it is an altered perception of reality, and perhaps even hallucination. Somehow, this sort of madness is easier to identify with. Don Quixote's "madness, though of a different kind, is as complex and interesting as Hamlet's; it might be, in a sense, *more mad* than Hamlet's" (Good 54). I considered this possibility. It did seem as if Don Quixote were more insane than Hamlet, for he seemed to exist in an entirely different reality from those around him in which windmills were giants, whereas Hamlet existed in the same reality as everyone else—i.e., his mind was not transforming one object into another—though it was still colored by his imagination. Yet it seemed to me that Don Quixote was not always completely mad: he had clear bouts of sanity as well.

Indeed, when in conversation with others in the novel, he transitions smoothly between madness and sanity (Good 57). When he is discussing letters and arms with Sancho, for instance, he speaks very eloquently and intelligently on the topic. These moments of lucidity put doubt into the minds of even those entirely convinced of Don Quixote's madness, for in this discussion, "with these rational arguments, Don Quixote continued his discourse, and no one listening to him at that moment could think of him as a madman" (Cervantes 329). Clearly Don Quixote, like Hamlet, is a very intelligent and learned man, and, also like Hamlet, this wit comes out even though he is thought to be insane. The alternation between these bouts of wisdom and utter insanity is a special kind of madness, like literary madness, and "The word often used to describe him is 'loco-cuerdo': 'crazy-sane'" (Krabbenhoft 221). Rather than being more mad than Hamlet, Don Quixote is on the same seesaw of madness and sanity that Hamlet experiences. I concluded that "The Knight too is mad only north-northwest, and when the wind blows from the south he is as canny as Hamlet, Shakespeare, and Cervantes" (Bloom xxxii). Both Hamlet and Don Quixote are clever, intellectual men, but they both also perceive reality differently from those around them, leading others to believe they are mad. Perhaps it is their very madness that allows them to understand certain things so clearly and to see certain truths that others cannot.

So lost in thought, I paid little attention to the direction of our walk. Sergio was adamantly ignoring me after my attack of the witch and the white sheet, but I did not mind the sulky silence; it was better than his inane chatter. Still, I wished I had a scholarly pair of ears with which to share my ideas. Though I had gone to school with Sergio, he was not a very good candidate for an academic discussion.

I was intelligent—no doubt about that. And perhaps I was only mad north-northwest. Unfortunately, this realization did not help me in the last, for it still meant that The Author could be either Shakespeare or Cervantes, both having created complex, witty, and mad characters which resembled me. I wondered how I might find out more about the authors and their works that would further help me decide. I needed a man who was well-read and well-educated, with a wealth of information at his disposal.

"Sergio," I said as the idea came to me. "We must go to the university."

"I don't think we'll find Olphinea there," he replied. I had forgotten all about her. Clearly I needed to do better by my lady. After all, Don Quixote dedicated all of his battles to her and thought of her constantly, declaring her unmatched beauty to all those he met. I thought perhaps I should do the same, but it did seem like such a bother. And I still didn't know if the real woman would live up to my expectations of her.

"I must speak to a professor who knows both *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote*. He might be able to help me understand which tale more resembles my own, and thus which author wrote my biography."

Sergio sighed, looking terribly put-out. "All right."

So we made our way in the direction of la Universidad de Alcalá. Sergio seemed less and less inclined to play along with my game. Perhaps he thought I was too mad a companion. But I, like Don Quixote, was truly "a sane man gone mad and a madman edging toward sanity" (Cervantes 565). I had decided that I was mad after thinking too much about madness—did that make me truly mad, or had I merely chosen to label myself as mad? Perhaps thinking about this too much would make me madder than mad.

As we walked towards the university, I thought of what Tomé Cecial says to Bachelor Sansón Carrasco when they plan to trick Don Quixote into returning home: “So tell me now, who’s crazier: the man who’s crazy because he can’t help it or the man who chooses to be crazy?” (Cervantes 549).

Chapter 11

Which tells of the story-thief and Prince X's meeting with the professor

Though I expected not to encounter any more adventures before we reached the university, I was much mistaken. As we walked, I removed my biography from my bag and began leafing through the pages, considering what sorts of questions to ask the professor. Whilst we traveled thus, a man dashed up to me, snatched the book from my unsuspecting hands, and ran off down the street.

"What, ho!" I shouted, and Sergio and I immediately hastened after him, sprinting to our full capacity. We gained on the story-thief, who looked a trifle out of shape and had a protruding belly at the fore of his person. Closing in behind him, I noticed that his hair was thinning on top, and his arms were hairy as a gorilla's. I pulled ahead of Sergio, who was panting heavily, and with both arms tackled the miscreant to the ground, now falling to the dirt mid-tussle for the second time that day.

I landed atop his swollen belly and pinned him with my knees. "*¡Ladrón!*" I cried, "*¡Ése es mi historia que robas!*"[20]

He struggled against me, but I held him firm. "*Pero es mi historia que estabas leyendo*," he said. "*¡Yo soy Príncipe X!*"[21]

"*Tonterías*," I snapped, observing the man properly. "*Príncipe X solo tiene tres décadas. Tú ya te estás quedando calvo y tienes el estómago de un hombre que tiene más que cincuenta años*."[22]

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[20] "Thief!" I cried, "That is my story you are stealing!"
[21] "But it is my story that you were reading," he said. "I am Prince X!"

The man shook his head emphatically. "*Te digo, yo soy Príncipe X. Esto es mi historia*."[23]

"*Si tú eres Príncipe X*," I said, "*¿quién es el autor de tu biografía?*"[24]

"Eh…" He stuttered. "Avellaneda?"

"*Falso*," said I. "*¿No eres Príncipe X porque* yo *soy Príncipe X. ¿Dónde está tu Sergio? ¿Dónde está tu Corcelante? ¿Cómo está tu Olphinea? ¿Cómo se murió tu padre?*"[25]

He had no answer, his face a picture of bafflement. If I had not been so outraged, I might have felt pity for the poor man, who was clearly too old, too out of shape, and too lacking in brains to be me, though he very much wanted to be. I did not know if it was my fame, my royal heritage, or my ability to forget an entire life's worth of hardships that appealed to him, but I would not stand for imposters besmirching my chosen name.

"*No robes mi historia, o la historia de cualquier otra persona*," I explained to him, not unkindly. "*Cree tu propia historia. Yo soy la única persona que posiblemente puede ser yo. Y por favor no vayas haciéndose pasar por mí en el futuro, o te forzaré firmar un documento legal reconociendo que yo soy Príncipe X y tú no*."[26]

That last part came to me as I recalled the instance where Don Quixote runs into a character from the false Part II. The writer Avellaneda wrote a sequel to *Don Quixote* before Cervantes could publish his, so Cervantes proceeded to denounce this false

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[22] "Nonsense," I snapped, observing the man properly. "Prince X is but three decades. You are already balding and have the stomach of a man upwards of fifty."
[23] "I tell you, I am Prince X. This is my story."
[24] "If you are Prince X," I said, "who is the author of your biography?"
[25] "False," said I. "You are not Prince X, for *I* am Prince X. Where is your Sergio? Where is your Corcelante? How goes your Olphinea? How did your father die?"
[26] "You must not steal my story, or anyone else's," I explained to him, not unkindly. "Create your own. I am the only one who can possibly be me. And please do not go about impersonating me in the future, or I will force you to sign a legal document conceding that I am Prince X and you are not."

version within his own official sequel, creating a thread of intertextuality and a break in the fourth wall of the novel in which characters acknowledge that others in the book are fictional characters. The story thus refers to itself as a work of fiction. This was an interesting concept I decided to ask the professor about, since I was little knowledgeable in this area of murky narrative structures. In any case, Don Quixote meets Don Álvaro Tarfe, who says that he did everything that he does in the false sequel by Avellaneda. He says that "Don Quixote, the principle subject of this history, was a great friend of mine … and the truth of the matter is that I became very friendly with him and saved him more than once from tasting a whip on his back because of his insolence" (Cervantes 935). This, of course, had never happened in the canonical works, and thus Don Quixote wished to make it known that this other Don Quixote was an imposter, just as Avellaneda acted falsely in taking over Cervantes' world. Don Quixote then makes Don Álvaro Tarfe sign a legal statement saying that he does not know Don Quixote, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between the two Don Quixotes and Sancho Panzas. I believed he was the first to craft a story in this manner; surely Cervantes was "the inventor of a new mode now common enough, in which figures, within a novel, read prior fictions concerning their own earlier adventures and have to sustain a consequent loss in the sense of reality" (Bloom xxxii). In acknowledging the fictional structures in which they existed by referring to the false fictional construct of Avellaneda's book as part of their reality, these characters acknowledge their own existence as fictional characters.

Storing these thoughts away for later, I returned to the matter at hand.

The false Prince X nodded beneath me and held up my book, which I took and placed back in my bag. "*No soy Príncipe X*," he agreed. "*Lo siento que tratara de robar tu historia*."[27]

I helped the man to his feet and shook his hand. "*Entonces vámonos y vivamos nuestras propias vidas*."[28]

Thus we parted ways. After all of this excitement, Sergio and I finally arrived at the university and asked around until we found a professor who was an expert in the area of literature. He was a tall, stringy man like a spaghetti noodle, with a pencil mustache and a head of wild gray hair.

As we were about to engage in a long, intellectual discussion, I asked if he spoke English.

"Fluently," he replied with minimal accent.

So I explained to him my situation, my journey to London and subsequently here, and my recent thoughts on Don Quixote's meeting with another fictional character who exists outside of his own work of fiction.

"What you are referring to, I believe, is metafiction," said the professor. "Metafiction can be defined as fiction that self-consciously refers to itself as fiction. This can be done in a few ways: through interpolated pieces of writing within the fiction itself, through characters acknowledging their own existence as fictional characters, or through the discussion of how we compose fictional narratives within the fictional narrative itself. It is an especially important concept to understand while studying *El Quijote*, which is considered a metanovel. Here—" The professor bustled around his cluttered office,

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[27] "I am not Prince X," he agreed. "I am sorry that I tried to steal your story."
[28] "Then let us go our separate ways and live the lives that belong to us."

searching through books and scattered papers until he came across a page from which he read:

> A METANOVEL is a work in which an inner fiction, narrated by an inner persona, is intercalated in an outer one. The inner novelist perceives while he is perceived, creates while he is created, and has free will while he is determined. The epistemological innovation implied by this technical intrusion of an inner fiction is that the central conflict between fiction and reality is reproduced within the structure of the novel itself (Lowenkron 343).

"So you see," said the professor, "*El Quijote* is very much a work of metafiction, for it fulfills this definition quite well."

"As is my life," I murmured, thinking it very likely that Cervantes was playing games with me. "What about *Hamlet*? Does that have any elements of metafiction in it?"

"Ah," said the professor, "that we might refer to as metatheater, since it is a play rather than prose. You are correct, however, that there are some of these same elements present: the play within a play is the substitute for the fiction within a fiction, and there is much discussion on the subject of acting and pretense. We can see that '*Hamlet*'s postmodern status as "metatheater"—theater about theater—is obvious enough. We might suspect a personal self-reflexiveness in it. Was not Shakespeare himself an actor? Shakespeare was a theater man, fascinated by the problems of his craft' (Bell 312). Where *El Quijote* is a work of metafiction, *Hamlet* can quite conceivably be defined as a work of metatheater."

I glanced at Sergio as this information assaulted me, for unfortunately I still seemed caught between Shakespeare and Cervantes in my quest to find The Author. Sergio was staring out the window, his eyes glazed and unfocused. Clearly none of this interested the fool. I allowed him to remain lost within his vapid thoughts and returned to the professor.

"Postmodern?"

"Postmodernism can be related to both of these works. It is an interesting lens with which to view them because this term did not exist at the time of their writing. In fact, depending on what year we are currently in, the term may still not exist yet, but that is neither here nor there. For the sake of my argument, I'll look to the future. But, to define it for you:

"Postmodernism questions the idea of an objective truth and is characterized by an inherent suspicion of global cultural narrative or meta-narrative. Postmodernists believe that many apparent realities are only social constructs, which are subject to change. Language is important in the composition of these relative realities. Everything is a construct."

"So, in a sense," I said, working through these concepts as I spoke, "It is all about representation and theatricality, and how we perceive these representations of reality, whether fiction or theater. Correct?"

"Yes!" shouted the professor as he began to tear through his office again, yanking books off shelves and flipping through papers; his wild gray hair became even wilder above his mad, bulbous eyes. "*El Quijote* is a fictional representation of a fiction—I'm getting lost in my own words! Words are everything though: words are what create these

representations. There are layers and layers in *El Quijote* because of the fictional authors and translators—but I'm getting ahead of myself. And indeed, *Hamlet* is the best equivalent of *El Quijote* here, for they both confuse us with representations upon representations. Here!" he shouted, pulling out a book and reading from it:

> from the entrance of the players in act II through the close of the performance of *The Mousetrap* in act III, all the rules of normative representation are tossed away, and everything is theatricality. Part II of *Don Quixote* is similarly and bewilderingly advanced, since the Knight, Sancho, and everyone they encounter are acutely conscious that fiction has disrupted the order of reality (Bloom xxiii-xxiv).

That last sentence echoed in my mind—the characters are conscious of the fiction disrupting reality. Fiction seemed to be disrupting my reality. I was becoming lost in words and language, in my biography. I thought of the false Prince X who accosted me not an hour ago. I knew that I had to learn more, so I decided that it was time for an in-depth look at metafiction in *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote*.

Chapter 12

In which Prince X learns about metafiction in Hamlet

"Let's start with Hamlet," I suggested, "and the play within the play."

The professor pulled out a copy of the Shakespeare play, and I hurried closer to see it; as I went, my elbow knocked into Sergio, who had been staring off into space. He blinked and looked around as if only now discovering where he was. I told him he could go for a walk if he liked.

"I think I'll get some wine—I've got a splitting headache," he said. "*Dios mío*, I've had enough of school," and he hastened from the room.

The professor began: "Hamlet's life is quite affected by pretense—this I assume you know. Acting and pretense amaze Hamlet in their ability to create appearances counter to reality. When the players first arrive, Hamlet is impressed by their talent at putting on the appearance of an emotion without ever having to truly feel it. He asks, 'Is it not monstrous that this player here, / But in a fiction, in a dream of passion, / Could force his soul so to his own conceit' (2.2.561-3). In contrast to the player's false tears, Hamlet feels profound emotions over his father's murder and his own task to kill his uncle. However, he is morally unable to commit murder, despite having 'the motive and the cue for passion' (2.2.571) that the player does not.

"The actor's ability to bring fiction to life is a useful tool. Because the actions of *The Murder of Gonzago* are similar to the murder of Hamlet's father, he decides to use the play, altered to more greatly mirror Claudius's betrayal, to capture his uncle's guilty conscience. He will use the imagined world of a play to reflect reality, and the combined

emotion created by imagination and reality working together will bring Claudius such guilt that he might confess his crime, or at least give some outward reaction that proves to Hamlet he is guilty. In this way, Hamlet plans to use the fiction of the play to reflect reality, and in doing so, influence the events of his own life. By now Hamlet knows that 'the devil hath power / T' assume a pleasing shape' (2.2.611-2), but despite his realizations that appearance and reality can diverge, in the play he is going to layer them in such a way that imagination makes reality seem all the more real."

I was not an actor myself, nor did I experience much acting, barring the play I had seen at The Globe Theater in London. Perhaps this meant that Shakespeare was not my author? Still, my story, according to the professor's definition, was quite postmodern, much like he said *Hamlet* was. "Can you explain to me how this fits into the postmodernism of the play?"

"Speech!" he shouted. Though a brilliant man, I suspected the professor might be a bit mad. "Speech and acting! Language!" He found another paper of writing. "Postmodernism is associated with textuality and language—writing, words, speech. Our very postmodern existence is defined by language, don't you know! As for *Hamlet*:

> textuality and legibility clearly define the condition of existence in the play. Thus Horatio finds it "writ down in our duty" to tell Hamlet of the Ghost's appearance (1.2.222); Polonius instructs Reynaldo to put "forgeries" upon Laertes in his conversation (2.1.20); to the king he describes himself as being more than a mere "table-book" (2.2.135); and Laertes speaks of the distracted Ophelia as a "document in madness" (4.5.179) (Ayers 423).

Not only is the language of the play infused with words that refer to writing, but the reality created within the play is also made with words and speech. Hamlet himself uses "Words, words, words" (2.2.194) to paint the picture of his reality and to play the role that he believes has been set down for him. For Hamlet, "speech—the word—is associated with acting, both on stage and in reality … Hamlet seems to conceive of life as a play in which he is compelled to play the role of revenger, a part for which he is not suited. Thus for Hamlet to act is to play a part, that is to speak" (Norford 561). Speech, acting, language, writing—they all connect here in the transformation of life into a play and vice versa, and they all point to the very postmodern aspects of a play far ahead of its time!"

I let my brain soak in this information for a moment. "And it is this discussion of acting and language that makes *Hamlet* a play of metafiction?" I asked.

"Indeed," said the professor. "The play is very much concerned with its own self-generation. Consider Hamlet's dying request that Horatio tell his story: in a sense, he is catalyzing the creation of his own play (Ayers 436). We can see here and in the play within the play that '*Hamlet* is largely a play about playing, a work often self-conscious of its own theatricality and of the essentially theatrical nature of human experience' (Schwartz 40). Life is theater, or, as Jacques says in *As You Like It*, 'All the world's a stage.' And just as there is a play within a play, there are also many situations where the actors become audiences, such as the spectators of the Danish court watching the players' performance, which are mirrored by the audience watching *Hamlet*. This mirroring of the reality of the theater in the fictional theater suggests that even in reality, there are not easy demarcations between actor and audience, suggesting that 'We who watch *Hamlet*

are not only spectators but actors in parts prescribed—some larger cosmic theater enclosing us' (Bell 313). The blurring of this boundary brings up the issue of framing and the boundary between the 'inside' and 'outside' of the play.

"The dramatic frames of the play consist of the outer play surrounding the inner play of *The Mousetrap*. Hamlet acts as a mediator between this outer world of Shakespeare's play and the inner world of the play within the play, shaping the latter through his running commentary during the silences. He is both inside and outside of *The Mousetrap*, acting as both the chorus of the play, according to Ophelia, as well as 'audience to the spectacle—a particularly intrusive audience, heckling the Players as an obnoxious member of the Globe audience might heckle the players of *Hamlet*' (Malone 58). The framing used here creates a double of the real world of the theater, making it difficult to distinguish between this 'inside' and 'outside' world not only in the theatrical performance, but also between the theatrical performance and our own reality. The play within the play attempts to deal with the difficulties of this distinction by showing us how 'the boundaries between framing play and framed play, between elements inside and outside the spectacle, become pointedly blurred' and by introducing us to Hamlet's role as the mediator, inhabiting 'the boundary between the dramatic world and this "world-within-a-world"' (Malone 57). I propose that we, like Hamlet, are both actor and spectator in this great theater we call reality, playing our roles through the creative wonder of language!"

The professor was quite out of breath by this point, his speech having become more rapid as his ideas flowed directly from his brain to his mouth. His gray hair stood

on end, and he held sheets of paper crumpled in both fists, which were raised to the ceiling in an ecstasy of academic orgasm.

My brain's response to this burst of metaphysical euphoria, as it caught up with all that the professor had said, was a quote directly from Hamlet's lips: "the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature" (3.2.21-3). *The Mousetrap* held a mirror up to Hamlet's story; *Hamlet* held a mirror up to our reality. And my biography—was it, too, holding up a mirror to my life? Not only metatheater, but metafiction as well seemed to serve this purpose. And what about *Don Quixote*? For it was our favorite knight-errant himself who said that plays are always "holding up a mirror to every step we take and allowing us to see a vivid image of the actions of human life; there is no comparison that indicates what we are and what we should be more clearly than plays and players" (Cervantes 527). How strange it seemed to me that both of these works, seemingly independent of one another, remarked on the way that plays hold up a mirror to life! I had to know more about the fictions of *Don Quixote* and how they explored this idea.

In my eagerness to learn, I extracted Cervantes' Quill from my pocket, admiring the wonderful golden feather and then holding it out for the professor to see. "We must now discuss *Don Quixote*, with which this famous quill might help." I placed it on the professor's desk for him to examine. "It belonged to Cervantes and was plucked from the backside of a golden goose. Surely it will lend our brains great thinking power."

The professor scratched his head, picking up the quill and turning it over in his free hand. "*Me parece que es una ramita*," he mumbled with a shrug. Then, speaking to me: "Well, if you say so. Come, let's discuss *El Quijote*."

Chapter 13

In which Prince X and the professor discuss metafiction in Don Quixote

"The first metafictional feature of *El Quijote* would be the layers of narration—the multiple authors collaborating to create the final product. These are, of course, mostly fictional authors, since the only true author would be Cervantes himself. Again we return to the idea of postmodernism in the plurality of creation that we see in the text: there is not a unified reality constructed by one author, but rather a layered reality composed by many. We have 'a historical author, an inferred author, a dramatized author, an editor persona or supernarrator, a fictive historical author, the autonomous author narrator of "El curioso impertinente," an archival historian, a translator, Cide Hamete (primarily a "presence"), a dramatized reader and second author, and finally the pen' (Ramírez 423). Cide Hamete Benengeli is referred to most often as the creator of the *Quijote* manuscript, yet we can clearly see that the idea of authorship is fluid," explained the professor.

I grabbed Cervantes' Quill from the desk and held it up like a beacon. "The pen, too, is part of this structure of authorship? Then this very quill might be responsible for my biography," I said. Then something else occurred to me: "Let's discuss translation. Taking into account this hierarchy of authorship, 'we presume the protagonists speak in Spanish, which Cide Hamete translates into Arabic, and a questionable translator subsequently translates this version back into Spanish' (Ramírez 425). It seems a great deal of translation is occurring in the creation of this text, which would mirror my own story if it was, indeed, penned by Cervantes. I live in a place where primarily English is spoken, so Cervantes would have had to translate everything I and my companions said

into Spanish, which was then translated back into English for the biography which made its way back to me. I wonder if anything was lost in translation, and if we can then take anything from the story at face-value?"

"The narrating process is a tricky one," confirmed the professor. "Quite often it makes us question the nature of fiction and reality, and what we can accept as truth. *El Quijote* is concerned with how it was created, an idea which is dealt with mainly in works of metafiction. We find places where we are consciously aware of a story being unraveled, such as when the author of the history leaves a battle unfinished, saying that he cannot continue because he has not found the rest of the story yet, and then, lo and behold, the next part of the story is found exactly where the first part left off. All of this 'metacommentary' allows us to learn 'how the Quijote story came to be written, and its function is to highlight the narrating process, making us aware of the conventionality of all story-telling and the problematic relationship between truth and fiction' (Sánchez 32). We are thus presented with a work of metafiction which exposes the conventions of its own creation, opening up a 'veritable Pandora's box' of issues regarding the nature of fiction and narrative (Sánchez 28-29)."

The professor paused here, taking out a pipe and sitting down with his feet up on his desk. Puffs of smoke drifted ghost-like from his parted lips, enveloping him in a fog. "But listen to me ramble. Do you have any questions?"

I paced the small office, Cervantes' Quill still clutched in one hand, my biography in the other. I looked from one to the other, recalling that the professor, too, had mentioned that the quill looked like a twig. "What of the Helmet of Mambrino?" I asked.

"Why is it that Don Quixote is able to accept that he sees something different from what the others see, i.e., a barber's basin?"

"Yes, don Quijote's acknowledgement that the others are perceiving a different reality than he, is quite a compelling moment in the story. It is 'one of those moments when the characters inside the book talk about the book itself, as though they actually are antecedent to it and independent' (Doody 208). In discussing the nature of perception, or how they see something different in the Helmet of Mambrino, the characters are discussing something outside of themselves, something that only Cervantes should be aware of—the fabric of the narrative's reality. This becomes even more apparent when Sancho first calls don Quijote the Knight of the Sorrowful Face, suggesting that the idea came to him because the knight is missing teeth and looking generally beat-up. But don Quijote corrects him, saying that it is because 'the wise man whose task it will be to write the history of my deeds must have thought it would be a good idea if I took some appellative title as did the knights of the past' (Cervantes 139). The characters are discussing the author of their story and the way in which the author is able to put ideas into their heads for the sake of the narrative."

What I had said to the señorita earlier came back to me—I had called myself, on a whim, the Prince of the Absurd Pen. Why had I given myself such a title? The name had seemed to be placed into my head as thought it were meant to be there, as though someone had decided that I was to be the Prince of the Absurd Pen now and forevermore. Was the author of my biography playing games with me? I thought again about the levels of authorship in *Don Quixote* and considered the possibility that there was not one author

of my narrative, but several, and a translator, and an editor, and all manner of people involved in the creation of my story, right down to the pen that wrote it.

I worried for a moment that I was not real—that my story was not true. This came to me as I considered how "Cervantes turns his text back on itself, making the reader aware that it, too, is a product of the manipulation of literary conventions and not a 'true story' in the literal sense of the term" (Sánchez 29). My own story was being turned back on itself in my quest to understand the creation of my story—was it a true story? Was I a mere fiction of a fiction? Was everything occurring in my life mere theater?

I proposed this topic of theatricality to the professor, who seemed pleased by this turn in the conversation. "Here again we might connect *El Quijote* to *Hamlet*," he said. "There is much theatricality in both. For instance, at the Duke's palace when Sancho is made to be a fool by the tricks played upon him—the Duke making him a false ruler and watching the folly that ensues—this pretense is reminiscent of the play within the play in *Hamlet*, where the characters become actors and audience (Durán 398). There is also the famous puppet show scene, where the puppet-damsel is in need of saving, and don Quijote believes that he must do so. He attacks the puppets, 'transforming the illusion of metatheater into reality. This scene involves the play-within-the-novel convention and counterpoints Don Quixote's general tendency to turn reality into fiction' (Lowenkron 349). For here, instead, he turns fiction into reality, like Hamlet.

"We can also see a similarity between the roles of Hamlet and don Quijote as mediators between inner and outer worlds. We have already discussed Hamlet's existence in the space between the play within the play and the outer play; don Quijote, too, inhabits this space; the Knight of the Sorrowful Face, by 'commenting upon the first part

of Don Quixote, is simultaneously within and outside the novel, and Cervantes converts his hero into a reader, just like us, just as real—or, conversely, just as fictitious—as we ourselves are' (Durán 398). Again, the character's place as both actor and reader-spectator begs us to question our own place in our reality—or in the fiction of our lives, which we perceive as real."

The professor puffed serenely on his pipe, the tiny room becoming engulfed by a fog not unlike the gray mist we had come across in England. "In the second part of the novel," I said, "the characters have already read the first part; 'therefore, Part I metamorphoses from putative reality to a book within Part II' (Lowenkron 348-9). In the same way, my biography has transformed from reality to a book, for I am here discussing not only *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote*, but also *The Curious Life of Prince X*."

"Indeed," said the professor, disappearing behind the smoke from his pipe. "So you are either real, or you are a literary character who happens to be autonomous, which 'is usually defined as one which by virtue of its awareness of its own fictionality projects the illusion of independence from authorial control' (Sánchez 34-5). In your consciousness of your narrative, you are undermining the authority of your author, thereby freeing yourself from your author—much how Cervantes undermines his own authority by delegating the creation of the novel to the multiple authors he has created. An undermined author is a dead author."

I already knew that both Shakespeare and Cervantes had died, but the idea of the dead author came to me anew. What did it mean? "My author is dead," I murmured, trying to wrap my head around what the professor was telling me. I had to find Sergio

and explain to him all that I had learned; maybe, despite his birdbrain, he could help me unravel what all of this meant in the discovery of The Author.

"Thank you, Professor," I said as I gathered up my things to go find my companion.

I could no longer see him at all through the smoke, but I heard his voice drift to me, bodiless on the air, as I departed: "Good luck, Prince X."

Chapter 14

Which describes Prince X's valiant efforts to explain the nature of fiction and reality in Hamlet to Sergio

A distracted journey brought me to the Plaza de Cervantes, where a scattering of people were milling about, sitting on benches, or playing with their children. The statue loomed in the center, observing the plaza with its imposing metal eyes. I thought of Cervantes' Quill in my pocket, and then of my title, Prince of the Absurd Pen.

Sergio was seated on a bench, drinking from his wineskin. I sat down beside him, eager to explain what I had learned and to hear his thoughts. But the glaze over his eyes and the goofiness of his smile indicated that Sergio was quite certainly drunk.

I decided to plunge into the conversation anyway, telling him that I'd just come from the professor's office and would first like to discuss *Hamlet*.

Sergio hiccupped in response.

"It's all about the play within the play, you see," I told him, his eyes already wandering away. "Through the interplay between appearance and reality, Hamlet can use the play *The Murder of Gonzago*, or, as he renames it, *The Mousetrap*, to shape reality—but in doing so, he confuses it with its counterpart: fiction. We must ask ourselves how this might happen, and in what way the fiction relates to reality. And we might answer ourselves that 'it may be a pretense that is also the first foothold of a new reality, as when we assume a virtue though we have it not. Or it may be a pretense that is actually a mirroring of reality, like the play within the play' (Mack 202). And we must ask what the role of *The Mousetrap* is: does it create a new reality, or does it merely reflect an already-existing reality, i.e., the reality of *Hamlet*? I believe that it does both, for the pretense

generates a new world inside of Hamlet's word. Even now I see my words becoming tangled, creating confusion over what is fiction and what is reality—much as one deemed to be 'mad' might experience a different reality that others call fiction. *The Mousetrap* is a particularly complex look at the interwoven nature of fiction and reality, for it is a situation that dissolves 'the normal barriers between the fictive and the real. For here on the stage before us is a play of false appearances in which an actor called the player-king is playing. But there is also on the stage, Claudius, another player-king, who is a spectator of this player' (Mack 203). *Hamlet* itself is a fiction in our world, and in Hamlet's reality, the play put on for Claudius is a fiction, so we begin to uncover fictions within fictions. In considering these fictions that make up our reality, 'Where, it may suddenly occur to us to ask, does the playing end?' (Mack 203). Indeed, Hamlet's reality is, to us, a fiction, and one that addresses the influence of fiction. Perhaps we ourselves are players within a play—in which case, who is to say that our reality is not itself a fiction?"

"What on *earth* are you on about?" Sergio slurred, fumbling with his wineskin. "Are you saying we're not *real*?" His eyes widened, sliding drunkenly across the plaza as if checking how real the world appeared. I wasn't sure what conclusion he came to, but he looked highly disconcerted and started patting his torso and legs and arms. "But I'm real. I think I'm real. I'm real, right?"

This was not exactly the response I was hoping to get. I shook my head. "Drink your wine, you useless lout," I told him. He continued to feel himself for a few moments, at one point exclaiming that he couldn't feel his legs and thus his legs must not be real,

but I assured him that his legs were still quite attached and very much there, and he seemed satisfied.

Sergio continued mumbling nonsense to himself as he stared warily about the plaza like a paranoid schizophrenic. I did not bother to try and make sense out of his drunken mutterings. Perhaps my attempt to comprehend him would fail anyway, and I would come to some false conclusion about what he was saying, leaving me trapped in a different reality than his because of my interpretation. This notion is presented in *Hamlet*. I realized that "The idea that personal reality is something shaped or 'carved,' not inherent in character, may be implied even when Hamlet facetiously ponders with Polonius over the shapes of clouds. He seems to have in mind the arbitrariness of all our interpretations which impose form and meaning on the meaningless" (Bell 316). Perhaps it did not matter what shape the cloud truly resembled, but the only thing that gave its shifting mass a form was Hamlet's interpretation. It wasn't that he was wrong, it was that he was creating meaning with his words, turning the absurd and nonsensical into a tangible idea.

That, in essence, was the role of art: to bring order to the world. How meaningless life must seem "until transmuted by the human imagination: we have art in order not to die of the truth. Thus our need and love for fiction testifies to the fact that 'there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.' Art masks the chaos of life by interpreting it" (Norford 573). Hamlet lives in the world of his imagination, and his imagination is what brings meaning to his reality by filtering the world. Taking it one step further by transforming this filtered reality into art furthers the illusion of order, which is perhaps why Hamlet so prefers the stage and the players to the reality of his

task. Hamlet often confuses this pretense with his life. He "is impotent in the real world of events at Elsinore, and it is on an unreal plane, removed from actuality, that he seeks to attack Claudius." (Latham 199). Hamlet tends to dramatize everything: his madness exists partly because of his dramatization and theatricality, and he even seems to believe himself to be in a play in becoming the chorus of *The Mousetrap*. Hamlet, like Shakespeare, is an actor. In this, we see more mirrors of art reflecting reality. Hamlet is even an actor in his own life.

These thoughts were interrupted by Sergio, who was holding his wineskin upside-down over his head and squinting up into it. "Empty," he grumbled as a drop of red plopped onto his eye. He dropped the wineskin and rubbed vigorously at his face, which was ruddy with alcohol. "Le's go to a bar! ¡*Vámonos*!"

Evening had not quite fallen, but Sergio seemed to have no restraint. I made a wager with myself that he would be passed out by supper. It was clearly no use having an intellectual conversation with him any longer, but I thought I might give it one last try. "All right," I said, "we shall go to a bar if you agree to listen to me the whole way there."

Like a child, he nodded eagerly and staggered to his feet. I had to amend my previous thought then that he was like a child… perhaps a large, drunken child who had accidentally gotten into the spiked punch….

As we began our walk, I said, "Now let's think about *Don Quixote*'s reality."

Chapter 15

Regarding Prince X's futile attempts to discuss fiction and reality in Don Quixote with Sergio, who is too drunk and uninterested to pay attention

Sergio stumbled a few times on our way to the bar, catching himself in midair with outthrust arms. I deliberately led him in the opposite direction of the bar, hoping to have more time to sort out my thoughts. He did not seem to notice my deception.

"What about madness?" I said.

"Whattaboutit?" asked Sergio.

"I mean I think Don Quixote's madness, like Hamlet's, relates to the question of how we define reality. Don Quixote believes lies so avidly that they become true for him, and Cervantes makes sure that we readers never forget it. He tells us several times that Don Quixote 'became so convinced in his imagination of the truth of all the countless grandiloquent and false inventions he read that for him no history in the world was truer' (Cervantes 21). He not only believes that the stories he reads are history rather than fiction, but he also regards all of the fantasies 'which he had invented, as solid and true' (Cervantes 113). He is mad because he lives in an alternate reality of sorts—but does that make it false? For he finds books to be truer than what we are led to believe is the objective reality of his world, asking, 'can they possibly be a lie, especially when they bear so close a resemblance to the truth and tell us about the father, the mother, the nation, the family, the age, the birthplace, and the great deeds, point by point and day by day, of the knight, or knights, in question?' (Cervantes 428). Fiction becomes truth for him, and, on a larger scale, worms its way into our own reality."

As I pondered this aloud, I led Sergio around in circles. At one point, he paused to examine a peculiar shrub we had passed previously but merely shook his head as if accepting the oddity of nature and déjà-vu. I continued:

"Looking at the novel, we do find a good deal of realism in it; there is nothing fantastical happening outside of Don Quixote's imagination. Yet the world of the novel is still a fiction to us. We must consider, then, that fiction is created using realities. On the other hand, we have a man who takes literary principles as legitimate rules, telling us that life is constructed with fictions (Pérez-Álvarez 22). One inherently feeds into the other, making us question the nature of both. I believe that 'The realism of the novel is a criticism of reality and even a suspicion that reality may be as unreal as Don Quixote's dreams and fantasies' (Rasula 128). The way in which we perceive this reality—or fiction—is through language. Text is a key component of Don Quixote, both the book and the man. He is a man of arms who is peculiarly invested in letters, and transforming himself into a walking work of literature, he makes language the 'workless depth of being' (Rasula 140). He becomes language himself, and weaves his world with words. It is through language that we shape reality, constructing it with narrative—the same narratives we use to create fiction.

"Language is a social construct: letters and sound with an agreed-upon meaning by the masses. The words alone, without any social indicators, would be meaningless signifiers, but they mean something because we all agree that they mean something. The same can be said of reality. It is understood through language, and is also based on social agreement that X is real and Y is false. We find this to be natural and true, even though it has been constructed by humans, and 'Any attempts to counterdefine reality are deemed

as falling into irreality or madness' (Ramírez 418). By 'counterdefine,' I mean to have a different definition of reality than the agreed-upon social construct. This is why we believe that Don Quixote is mad—because he counterdefines his world, and in disagreeing with the majority on the definition of reality, he is cast out and believed to have mental problems. In truth, we have seen that he is an intelligent being who can make rational arguments and then immediately slip into a fantasy: he is loco-cuerdo. But it might be simply that his perception of the world differs from ours but is no less true, and we can understand this best through fiction, which utilizes the same narrative structures that compose reality. *Don Quixote* is indeed a revolutionary work, perhaps 'the first important work of prose fiction to view reality as a kind of fiction, and fiction as a kind of reality' (Krabbenhoft 217). And now, as I look to my own book and consider my reality, I find that my story follows in the footsteps of our brave knight-errant."

Sergio was contentedly humming to himself, nodding at intervals as if to pretend that he was listening, and agreeing with, what I said. Out of spite, I added, "Strange how the moon is made of cheese, isn't it? The giant mice that live on Mars have been trying to steal it for centuries, I'm told. When I was a child, I had a goat's head and the body of a donkey; it was a rare medical condition that I've since grown out of. I believe that one day we will all become butterflies. What do you think of that?"

Nodding the whole time as though his head were a ball on a bendy stick, Sergio mumbled, "Brillian', brillian', couldn'ta said it better meself."

I relented and finally led my obtuse sidekick in the direction of the nearest bar, thinking about The Author the rest of the way there. Fiction organized reality and created meaning out of chaos; in this way, I agreed with Don Quixote, who said that "art does not

surpass nature but perfects it; therefore, when nature is mixed with art, and art with nature, the result is a perfect poet" (Cervantes 557). Fiction and reality seemed to need one another in order to ensure their mutual survival.

These conclusions, however, still gave me no final decision as to who my author was, for both *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote* had together led me to this new understanding, and both works infected the heart of my biography. However, I wasn't sure any longer that I could blame The Author for murdering my father; rather, I wanted to have a long, intellectual discussion with The Author about all I had learned in my quest.

We came to a small, dingy bar called *El Molino Roto* and stepped inside. The pungent odor of tobacco floated on the smoky air, and the floor was made of dirt. It was mostly empty, rickety wooden chairs scattered, unused, around equally rotted round tables. The barman had a lazy eye and was staring at us with a dark, brooding expression as he cleaned a glass with perhaps the dirtiest rag I had ever seen. I was about to suggest to Sergio that we look for a nicer establishment, but he was already at the bar ordering a lager.

Only two other patrons were there, seated together at a table in the corner, slightly obscured in the smoke and shadows. I felt compelled to draw closer to them and get a better look—perhaps they were better companions than my inebriated cohort—but when their appearances became clear, I let out a cry.

"It *can't* be!"

Chapter 16

In which Prince X walks into a bar and finally discovers the identity of The Author

The two men in question pierced me with two pairs of shrewd eyes. One had a rather round face with a colossal forehead, brown hair flowing down from an extremely receding line atop his head. The other had a long and pointy face, made all the sharper by the upside-down triangle of his beard. Both men sported mustaches and elaborate white collars about their necks that might well have been holding up their heads, which I assumed must be heavy with an excess of brains.

"Shakespeare and Cervantes!" I shouted, unable to suppress my giddy shock. "In a bar! Here!"

"We come here every Tuesday," said Shakespeare, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, and then returned to their game, picking up a playing card from the deck.

Sergio tottered back to me with a full tankard, raising it to the two gentlemen in the corner. "*¡Hola, amigos!*" he cried before taking a long drink. Amber liquid spilled around the edges of his mouth, dripping frothily to his chin, where the lines of beer converged in a strange sort of alcoholic beard.

"Aren't you supposed to be dead?" I asked.

Cervantes shrugged. Shakespeare considered the playing cards thoughtfully. Finally, Cervantes leveled his gaze at me and said, "*No tengo propiedad de mi libro, y no*

tengo el control sobre el destino de don Quijote después de la publicación de su historia. Estoy esperando la idea moderna de 'la muerte del autor'"[29] (Bayliss).

"The death of the author," I mused. "So you are dead?"

"Oh, I should think so," said Shakespeare.

Sergio leaned over their table, blinking at the cards and slopping some beer onto the floor. "We're here to find a glorious and most excruciating lady of unmatched booty—beauty—and most ample bosom, by th' name Olphinea," slurred Sergio rather grandiloquently.

"I believe you mean 'exquisite,'" I remarked.

"Yes, ex-cuisine. Is there any food 'ere?" Sergio looked around at the barman, who stared solemnly back, and Sergio shrugged. "Have either o' you gents seen 'er? She's th' mistress o' *mi amigo*, Prince X!" He slapped me on the back.

"Thou art Prince X?" said Shakespeare in the same amazed tone I had used upon meeting them. "We have both read of your extraordinary life."

Cervantes nodded his agreement. "*Tu historia*, La vida curiosa de Príncipe X, *es una obra de ficción excelentísima*."[30]

"But it isn't fiction," I corrected him. "It is all true. I think. Though I don't remember a great deal of it. I only know what I've read."

"*¿Has leído tu propia historia?*" said Cervantes. "*Te parezco a don Quijote. Sancho dice al caballero andante sobre el libro de sus hechos*."[31]

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[29] "I don't have ownership of my book, and I don't have control over the fate of Don Quixote after the publication of his story. I'm anticipating the modern idea of 'the death of the author'"
[30] "Your story, *The Curios Life of Prince X*, is a most excellent work of fiction."
[31] "You've read your own story?" said Cervantes. "You remind me of Don Quixote. Sancho tells the knight-errant about the book of his deeds."

I recalled this part of *Don Quixote* well. Sancho is amazed by the discovery that a book has already been written about them and that "in it they mention me, Sancho Panza, by name, and my lady Dulcinea of Toboso, and other things that happened when we were alone, so that I crossed myself in fear at how the historian who wrote them could have known about them" (Cervantes 472). It was much like I had seen in my own biography of the events that had transpired solely to me, or to me and my friends, and I wondered again at the omniscience of The Author and his ability to write such a detailed and complete manuscript of my life.

"So which of you is The Author of my story?" I asked, nearly shaking with the anticipation of, at last, arriving at the climax of my quest.

"'Twas not I that penned thy wondrous script," said the English Bard as he dealt them both new cards.

"*Ni yo*,"[32] added Cervantes.

My heart deflated. "But… I was positive that it was one of you geniuses—you, who wrote the most monumental works of literature that so closely resemble the inner workings of my own story! If neither of you is The Author, then who is?" I demanded.

Sergio raised his hand as he cavorted about the bar, most of his drink ending up on the floor or his shirt, with some finding its way to his greedy tongue. "Oh, I know!"

I ignored him, waiting for one of the writers to respond.

"Dost thou recall when Hamlet journeys to England, and King Claudius makes that intriguing comment to Queen Gertrude? He says, 'your son gone, and he most violent author / Of his own just remove' (4.5.80-1)," said Shakespeare. "Claudius indeed wants Gertrude to believe that Hamlet is responsible for his own leaving, though it was

[32] "Nor I,"

truly Claudius who made him go. Yet this is beside the point. Hamlet does decide what course of action he takes, however influenced by those around him."

I shook my head as Sergio danced around us, waving his empty tankard in the air. "I know! I know!"

"I don't understand," I told them.

Here Cervantes offered his own question: "*¿Recuerdas Ginés de Pasamonte, quien está escribiendo su autobiografía?*"[33] I did indeed recall this character in *Don Quixote*. The man explains to the knight and his squire that his "life has been written by these very fingers" (Cervantes 168). Don Quixote, naturally, asks him if the book has been finished. Ginés de Pasamonte replies, "How can it be finished … if my life isn't finished yet?" (Cervantes 169). He is writing his own life as he lives it.

An idea began to dawn on me, frightening and wonderful all at once. Sergio frolicked over to me and entwined one of his arms in mine, spinning me round as he skipped in a circle. "I know! You!"

A terrible embarrassment and awe came over me that Sergio seemed to have figured it out before me, and also while stinking drunk. Perhaps I had simply been too blinded by my preconceived notions of the world. "Are you telling me that… there *is* no author? Or, rather, that *I* am my own author?"

The men continued their game of cards. Sergio let go of my arm and wandered back to the surly barman.

"I am the one writing my own life," I mused aloud, epiphany falling over me like heavenly light.

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[33] "Do you remember Ginés de Pasamonte, who is writing his autobiography?"

"I hear there's a sequel soon to be circulating about," said Shakespeare. "*The Continuing Quest of Prince X*."

"Yes," I said, "Something put that into my head already."

My life was a work of art, and I the architect: an independent man free to shape my own destiny, to see reality the way I would—mad or not—and not to rely on an author (Pérez-Álvarez 21). The knowledge was unnerving, as I was cast into this chaotic abyss, but also liberating. I suddenly felt far too modern for my world. It seemed to me that in such a futuristic world, "Life becomes a work of literature … but, as a result, man becomes the author of his own life and at the same time the observer of that life as a created work of art" (Rasula quoting Lukacs 146). I was Don Quixote, and Hamlet, and Prince X.

"Here!" shouted Sergio, interrupting my thoughts. He was holding onto the bar for support, the barman staring grimly at him with folded arms. "He says Olphinea was in 'ere few days ago, talkin' how she heard you were out o' your room an' having aventures an' all, so she decided t'go home early an's on 'er way now! We must go!"

I turned back to my new friends—I had so many things to ask them, and yet it seemed I had figured out the answers to many of my questions on my own. "Shakespeare—Cervantes—" I said, trying to come up with the perfect parting words though I was not yet ready to leave them behind.

Cervantes brought his pipe up to his mouth, and he nodded to me. Shakespeare gave a flourish of his hand as he rearranged his cards. Then Sergio grabbed my arm and began dragging me from the dingy bar, out into the starlight, the two figures at the table receding, as did the giraffe and the professor, behind a veil of smoke.

As it was growing late into the evening, we decided to sleep at the inn one more night and leave for home before dawn. Sergio passed out instantly, sprawled upon his cot, snoring lightly. I lay awake for some minutes, considering sneaking back to the bar to see if Shakespeare and Cervantes were still there. Before I could make a decision, sleep claimed me.

As we rose the next morning and gathered our things, Sergio mostly grunted in response to my queries and suggestions, his eyes glazed and half-lidded. Twice he wanted to go back to bed, but I reminded him that we were going home this morning, and he stared at me as if his hangover-befuddled mind could not grasp the concept.

"Do you not remember last night?" I asked as I mounted Corcelante. "Olphinea has gone home, and we're going to follow her. I've learned what I needed here."

"Huh," Sergio grunted as he clumsily hopped onto his horse. "No, I recall very little of last night. I remember drinking in the Plaza de Cervantes… and then I suppose I blacked out."

We rode to the outskirts of Alcalá, heading north. "Not a thing? Surely you remember meeting Shakespeare and Cervantes," I said.

"Who and who?"

"William Shakespeare and Miguel de Cervantes! They were in the bar! I had an enlightening conversation with them."

Sergio grunted again, looking at me as if I had become now twice as mad as before. "Shakespeare and Cervantes are dead. You could not have met them in a bar. Were you drunk too, or merely hallucinating?"

“I was not hallucinating!” I argued hotly. “You saw them, too! You spoke to them! Didn’t you?”

Sergio shrugged. “I do not recall. I must have been terribly drunk.”

“Tell me you believe me,” I ordered. “Tell me that what I saw in the bar was real and true, and all will be well.”

He was silent for a moment. “I suppose… if you say so…”

I could tell he still did not believe me, but I decided to let it go. Mad or not, I had come to an epiphany in *El Molino Roto*, and it had changed my entire outlook on life.

The journey home was long and tedious. Several hours into our initial ride, Sergio had to stop to vomit profusely. We stayed the night at a shack of horrors wherein a witch had been cannibalizing her guests, though Sergio swore to me that it was really a very nice inn. I thought it was the witch from the incident with the sheet, but she must have changed her appearance with magic to fool me. I eventually told Sergio that he was quite right and I was mistaken, but I remain convinced of this witch’s evil, and I know that when we meet again, I shall best her.

At long last, we arrived back home, exhausted from our journey but in high spirits. My mother was most pleased to welcome me back to the castle. The first thing I did upon arriving was go to the bookshelf in my room and clear a special place for my biography, where it could be seen and celebrated. I even thought that pieces of my life were coming back to me and that I was recovering from my amnesia, but it is impossible to tell whether these are true memories or merely theatrical scenes I created in my mind after immersing myself so in my biography.

My good Sergio has returned to his life of drinking and merrymaking, and he plans to begin traveling again soon after so enjoying our quest. I send him my best wishes, for the stupid lout will certainly need a miracle to survive without someone of my intelligence to guide him.

Since returning, I've now visited my father's grave and have found peace and closure in his death. There is no one to blame for his sudden demise, and I shall always have his memory stored neatly in the pages of my story to peruse at my will. In that he shall live on.

And now, I am about to go meet my lady, Olphinea. I do hope that she is as lovely as the Olphinea of my imagination—but I won't spoil that surprise for you. Instead, I leave you here.

My dear golden quill, I thank you for traveling with me on this enchanting literary journey of so many pages and adventures. For the moment, I put you to rest, knowing that someday soon you shall return to my hand to continue helping me create my own life.

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