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Unamuno's Engagement of *Don Quijote* in *Mist*

Biographies of Miguel de Unamuno present him as a humorous, saddened man, infatuated with literature and with ideas in general. Based on this brief description alone, his attraction to *Don Quijote* seems entirely natural. In the "prologue" to his short novel *Mist*, the first slight indication of *Don Quijote*'s presence as an intertext appears in the form of a direct allusion to the work and its author. Bearing this reference in mind, the narrative that follows can hardly fail to strike the reader with its quixotic semblance. With Cervantes's master work as muse, Unamuno emulates many of the techniques and themes of his much-admired forbearer; though replacing the traditions and context of the Golden Age with contemporary, Realistic tones.

Even superficially, the initial profiles of the two works' protagonists are exceedingly similar. Both Alonso Quijano and Augusto Perez are solitary bachelors, accustomed to the care of assertive female housekeepers, and limited to the mellow company of a few other adult men. They are essentially among the 'idle rich,' their only concerns seeming to be to stay healthy and to occupy themselves, as the responsibilities involved in overseeing their estates are negligible. Finally, most significantly, Augusto is unmistakably quixotic: cerebral; seeking meaning in his mundane existence; and hungering for the idyllic romances, trials, victories, and tragedies to be found only in books.

In both works, an intriguing separation of the physiological from the psychological (as Unamuno calls it) constitutes a major motif, reflecting the protagonists' insensitivity to reality.

The lack of physical definition that Unamuno gives to Augusto's figure recalls the sparse

impressions Cervantes gives of don Quijote's appearance. Instead of appearance, both characters are constantly described in terms of their thoughts and aspirations, which after all seems a more fitting treatment of these particular kinds of heroes. In both novels, a consequence of this authorial decision is that the protagonists' deaths are received rather lightly and playfully. Not to say that the deaths of Augusto and don Quijote are not tragic, the conclusions are '*tragicomic*' because the protagonists' physical bodies are communicated to be inconsequential. The frequent and hyperbolic beatings administered to don Quijote and the ridiculous, precipitative quality of Augusto's death ensure that the reader cannot develop any serious sense of concern for the corporeal.

The physiological/psychological disjunction also figures in the protagonists' carefully dreamed-up romances. The love Don Quijote and Augusto hold is not love of the real Aldonza and Eugenia, respectively, but rather love of woman and love of lovesickness. Insistence upon his lady as the pinnacle of beauty is vital for each Augusto and Quijote, even whilst these men have no actual concept of their ladies' appearance. In fact, for both, the actual presence of the object of their affections is unnecessary, and even deleterious, to their happiness.

Unamuno emulates another of the dichotomies central to Cervantes's work: the Aristotelian dichotomy of truth and history. Unamuno, like Cervantes, desires to confound this distinction by claiming the status of his fictitious and often fantastical novel as the true chronicle of a life. This assertion, tied indissolubly into the story of how the work was composed, forms a frame around the central narrative; just as the equivalent assertion does in *Don Quijote*.

This frame performs the second function of introducing the concept of life as literature and literature as life. The authors both make their presences eminently visible during the openings and closings of the major sections of their novels. In his prologue, particularly,

Unamuno follows Cervantes's model by sharing thoughts about his relationship to his creations, the writing process, and critical responses to his work. However, both authors additionally integrate dialogues with prototypical readers concerning their personal literary tastes and philosophies throughout the entirety of their texts. As creators, they are completely unconcerned with crafting the conventional, 'seamless' reading experience, where one becomes absorbed in the action as though it were actually occurring.

Unamuno, like Cervantes, garners the support of his characters in making literary creation a thematic node of his novel. Many of the characters attempt to be, and even succeed in being, metaplaywrights within *Mist*. Augusto, like Quijote, feels the need to write a plot into his rather empty life; and challenges fate to bring him plot material by literally taking to the street as Quijote does. Mirroring Quijote's baroque meditations on his adventures, his love, his life, and the world; Augusto is constantly stopping to make very conscious monologues or apostrophes to himself or Orfeo. He, like Quijote, seems to feel as though he were on stage or to intuit that he has an audience. And, once again directly paralleling Cervantes's technique, in *Mist* Unamuno presents his reasons for needing to kill off his protagonist, who is immediately cognizant that he has been destined for death and surrenders himself to the external will of his creator.

Unamuno admired what he called the "evidence of genius" in Cervantes, and admired it so much that he admitted Don Quijote as a tremendously important intertext to his novel *Niebla*. Though he puts some additional, perplexingly mind-bending twists into his plot (such as having the protagonist meet the author and question the author's existence), his combination of plot, characters, themes, motifs, and tragicomic tone cannot be called original. Thus, the genius that might be attributed to Unamuno owing to this particular creation is diminished by considering how much he owes to Cervantes. Certainly, the fresh manner in which Unamuno rerepresents

these striking elements is impressive; but, in a way, what *Niebla* does is to help the reader reconsider the original quixotic text with a new wonder for its endurance.