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The Magnificent Madmen

Our Lord Don Quixote; The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho with Related Essays, by Miguel de Unamuno, Translated by Anthony Kerrigan; introduction by Walter Starkie. *Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series, LXXXV (Vol. 3 of Unamuno's works), 1967. xxv + 553 pp. $6.50.*

I REMEMBER reading once that a sophisticated American leader had said that what the American lawyer needed most of all was a good course in the French novel. I venture the suggestion that today what the American liberal intellectual needs is a well-grounded knowledge of Don Quixote and Sancho. He needs to know about the visions of Cervantes and Unamuno and thus about Latin liberals. Literary figures like Hamlet, Faust, Oedipus, Don Juan, and especially Don Quixote seem to become greater than their creators. As Unamuno said, Cervantes was born to write *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Unamuno was greatest when he was weaving the course of the lives of Don Quixote and Sancho through Spanish tradition. But he does not weave them with pedantry—like some of the endlessly edited and footnoted texts of Cervantes—but through imagination, vision, and symbol, through a sense of tragedy, through understanding and love for Sancho, and through humor. Yet when Unamuno speaks of the weaknesses of Spain, it is with the voice of irony and sarcasm.

Anthony Kerrigan's translation is based on a thorough knowledge of Spanish; it is smooth-flowing and of a high literary quality. He is to be congratulated on a notable achievement in the art of translation. Professor Walter Starkie's introduction is rich, not only in the scholarship of Spanish literature, but in personal recollections of Unamuno. Count Keyserling once said of Unamuno that he was "probably the most important Spaniard that has ever lived since Goya." No doubt *The Tragic Sense of Life* is Unamuno's best known work (it is to be Vol. 4 of the Bollingen Unamuno Series), but the present work strikes to the heart of all those who have loved Spanish literature and Spanish intellectual achievement. The book itself is a series of essays on most of the chapters of the original Cervantine work.

Time and again Unamuno is sarcastic about the intellectuals who would destroy Don Quixote by ridicule, by practical jokes, or by sending him back to his village in La Mancha—the name of which as a literary device Cervantes forgets. But our petulant scholars, mockers such as the Duke and his household, and "this crowd of stupid university graduates, curates, and barbers of today think only of asking themselves: why does he do it?" So Unamuno says: Let us leave to the savants the useful task of investigating the meaning *Don Quixote* might have had in its time. The rest of us then are free to see the work as eternal, outside of any epoch, "and to expound whatever its reading suggests to us."

To Unamuno, no doubt, one of the most poignant moments is in Chapter XI when Don Quixote gave his discourse to the goatherds on the golden age—"Fortunate age and centuries of fortune on which the ancients bestowed the name of golden. . . ." Barbers and curates might say the future is to be beautiful, but Don Quixote knew that only the past is beautiful, and it is a vision of the past which impels us to a conquest of the future. The goatherds did not understand a word of it, but they entertained him with the singing of one of their number. In no case should Don Quixote's discourse have been reduced to the goatherds' level of understanding. But the Sancho's of today seek for "concrete and practical solutions, and when they listen to anyone it is to hear what remedies are offered for the ills of the country or for any other set of ills. . . . Thus it is with Sanchopanzism, now called positivism, now nat-

uralism, now empircism; once cured of fright, it mocks the quixotic ideal."

It has been proposed that the American movie industry make a film of *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. But Spanish critics have said it is quite impossible because we could tolerate neither an ugly Don Quixote nor a fat Sancho Panza. Could we stand a hero who is rich in spirit and often mad? Or, could we stand heroes who, like Don Quixote, seek another golden age, as when he proposed to Sancho that they become shepherds? Don Quixote has, indeed, a range of social symbols that stand outside the pragmatic and engineering imagination. Unamuno compares his heroes (including Sancho who is a hero in his madness at the end of the chronicle) with Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Teresa, and with Don Juan. He makes comparison also with quite contrary German figures, such as the sentimental and romantic Werther, or with Goethe's Faust and Margaret. Unlike Margaret, however, "When did Dona Inés ever ask Don Juan if he believed in God, or inquire into the nature of his faith?" But in all possible literary comparisons, please remember that the madness of Don Quixote is not the madness of the rampaging mass men in our summer streets.

If our intellectuals can look at themselves in the light of the knightly vision of Don Quixote, they may say with him after one of his adventures, "I know who I am," which is one of the central statements of the Spanish drama of the Golden Century. But as Unamuno plays the changes of understanding, he says "Only the hero can say 'I know who I am' because for him being is aspiring to be."

Unamuno was himself a remarkable and complicated genius, whose image time has softened and bitter event has endeared. But here more must be said about Don Quixote and Sancho than about the universal writer who created this book—about the book Cervantes was born to write.

Reviewed by FRANCIS G. WILSON