

Episode of don quixote's encounter with the duke and duchess

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Don's Dolorous Demise

It is easy to understand why many see Don Quixote's encounter with the Duke and Duchess as an episode of aristocrats oppressing innocents. After all, both the Duke and Duchess use their knowledge of Don Quixote's past to manipulate him for their entertainment. Although events in the novel lend tremendous support to this view, those same events also point to a different interpretation. The ability of the Duke and the Duchess to manipulate Don Quixote partially depends on their knowledge of the first part of his story, which he shaped with his own imagination, fantasies, and delusions. In other words, Don Quixote is a party to his own manipulation; he is partially responsible for it. By focusing on Don Quixote and Sancho's present suffering and linking it to their past actions, Cervantes uses the Duke and the Duchess to show that the duo is ultimately responsible for its own suffering.

Cervantes first holds the wandering pair responsible for their suffering in his description of their first encounter with the Duchess. Don Quixote and Sancho first meet the Duchess riding in the woods. Cervantes describes the Duchess as dressed "so elegantly and richly that she seemed the very embodiment of elegance" (653). By commenting on her ornate clothing, Cervantes creates the image of a refined aristocrat in both the reader and Don Quixote's eyes. Based on her clothing, Don Quixote presumes that she belongs to the upper class and treats her as his superior. His deference is so extreme that he tells Sancho to "kiss the hands of her great beauty, and if her highness gives me permission to do so, I shall kiss her hands myself and serve her to the best of my ability and to the extent her highness

commands" (654). In this passage, Don Quixote views the Duchess as such a superior to him that he does not approach her himself. Particularly revealing is Don Quixote's commitment to serve the Duchess "to the extent her highness commands." This unconditional devotion to a stranger initially seems absurd. Don Quixote assumes that she is someone worth serving based on her clothing, drawing the false conclusion that the price of a person's clothing reflects her worth. And by committing to fulfill her every command before accurately assessing her character, Don Quixote sets himself up for any abuse she might wish to inflict upon him. In this way, Cervantes holds Don Quixote and Sancho responsible for the abuse they will suffer by highlighting their foolish decision to unconditionally obey a stranger whose intentions remain unknown to them.

Indeed, the Duchess exploits this unfounded optimism when she convinces Sancho to believe his own lie about Dulcinea. When talking with the duennas of the castle, Sancho emphasizes Don Quixote's delusional tendencies, saying "I can dare to make him believe anything, even if it makes no sense ... I mean the enchantment of Senora Dona Dulcinea, because I've made him think she's enchanted, and that's as true as a fairy tale" (678). This passage shows that Sancho initially recognizes that the story of Dulcinea's enchantment is a lie. Then, the Duchess exclaims, "our good Sancho, thinking he was the deceiver, is the deceived ... let Sancho believe me when I say that the leaping peasant girl was and is Dulcinea of Toboso ... and when we least expect it we shall see her in her true form, and then Sancho will be free of the self-deception in which he lives" (681). This passage comes after

she tells Sancho that he is crazier than Don Quixote for continuing to follow him despite knowing that he is insane. After making him question his own sanity, the Duchess convinces Sancho that her analysis is correct. Accepting her proposal, Sancho notes “ that in only an instant my poor wits could make up so clever a lie” (681). In this exchange, the juxtaposition of Sancho mocking Don Quixote for believing in Dulcinea's enchantment with his subsequent belief in his own lie indicates a just, if ironic, punishment for lying. By punishing Sancho with the same crime he committed, Cervantes reinforces the notion that Sancho is responsible for his own suffering: had he not lied to Don Quixote he would never have been deceived into believing it at all.

What began as harmless deceptions turns into concrete harm, however, when Sancho faces a wagon allegedly carrying Dulcinea. While still in the woods from a hunting venture, Sancho, Don Quixote, the Duke and the Duchess come across a wagon driven by a man who claims to be Merlin. Merlin informs the knight and his squire that if they wish to disenchant Dulcinea, “ Sancho needs to give himself three thousand and three hundred blows upon both of his broad buttocks ... struck in such a way that they turn red, and smart, and give him pain” (692). After Sancho points out the missing connection between his backside and the enchantment, the Duke cruelly informs him, “ that if you don't become softer than a ripe fig, you won't lay hands on [your] governorship” (695). In other words, the Duke uses his position of privilege to coerce Sancho into accepting Merlin's cruel offer. At this point, it should be clear to Sancho and Don Quixote that the Duke and

Duchess have conspired with the wagon-driver to humiliate them for their pleasure.

This realization might prompt one to interpret this incident as one of a master abusing a servant. At this point, the Duke and Duchess both seem to be cruel manipulators, using their knowledge of Don Quixote Part 1 and Sancho's lie about Dulcinea's enchantment to deceive these well-meaning men for their pleasure. After witnessing the abusive relationship between the wealthy aristocrats and the poor knights-errant, one could infer that Cervantes is criticizing the aristocracy. For instance, the Duke and Duchess seem to do little other than eat, drink, and hunt. Cervantes never mentions the Duke presiding over any body of government or the Duchess. As such, it is easy to believe that the Duke and Duchess are little more than cruel humans who by chance occupy a social position that allows them to control others. The hard work, honesty, and integrity of Don Quixote and Sancho met with cruelty, on the other hand, contrasts sharply with their aristocratic counterparts. This can cause one to say that Cervantes believes the lower class is unjustly oppressed by a cruel and bored upper class.

Although it would be too much of a stretch to say that this interpretation is wrong, one certainly can make it more nuanced. Sancho is paying the price for the lie about which he was boasting earlier. His decision to deceive Don Quixote about Dulcinea's enchantment and, more importantly, his decision to tell the Duchess about his lie led to him being deceived. Because he was deceived, he put himself in a position where the Duke and Duchess could coerce him into humiliation by threatening to deprive him of his

governorship. For instance, Sancho asks Merlin if he can have two days to decide whether to lash himself, to which Merlin replies “ Absolutely not. Here in this instant and in this place the matter must be settled” (695). This reply creates added pressure on Sancho, who ultimately caves to Merlin’s request and consciously says, “ I consent to my bad fortune; I say that I accept the penance, with the conditions that have been stated” (696). At this point, Cervantes uses Sancho’s reply to reintroduce the notion that Sancho is, at the heart, responsible for what happens to him. 3, 300 lashes to disenchant a fake princess that is not enchanted in the first place hardly seems fair, but rather than attempting to escape or renegotiate, Sancho accepts his fate and “ consents to [his] bad fortune” because, at heart, he knows that he is responsible for this suffering.

The question remains, however: why does it matter that Don Quixote and Sancho are indirectly responsible for their suffering? The aforementioned example pits Don Quixote against Sancho; Don Quixote wishes Sancho to undergo the lashings for the sake of Dulcinea while Sancho initially moans that Dulcinea “ can go to her grave enchanted!” (692). While Don Quixote and Sancho suffer at the hands of the watching aristocrats and by their own hands, the Duke and Duchess escape unscathed. Cervantes’ message here might be that the lower classes spend too much time idolizing the upper classes, as Don Quixote did when he first saw the Duchess in the woods, and fighting among themselves to achieve anything. If this is the case, then Cervantes would also be suggesting that the lower class is responsible for its own suffering. This warrants further investigation into Cervantes’ Don

Quixote, beyond merely its commentary on literature. The idea that Don Quixote and Sancho are indirectly responsible for what happens to them as a result of their willful or accidental delusions should prompt us to investigate the economic criticism Cervantes included in an age of burgeoning capitalism. More specifically, a further analysis of how economic status informs the interactions between characters might reveal that the lower class orchestrates its own dolorous demise by staying captive to the upper class and fighting among itself, thereby suffering the consequences of its own misdeeds.