

RESEARCH OUTPUTS / RÉSULTATS DE RECHERCHE

Nietzsche's Don Quixote between Zarathustra and Christ

Slama, Paul

Published in:
Nietzsche-Studien

DOI:
[10.1515/nietzstu-2021-0054](https://doi.org/10.1515/nietzstu-2021-0054)

Publication date:
2022

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (HARVARD):

Slama, P 2022, 'Nietzsche's Don Quixote between Zarathustra and Christ: Laughter, Ressentiment, and Transcendental Pain', *Nietzsche-Studien*, vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 218-250. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nietzstu-2021-0054>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Paul Slama

Nietzsche's Don Quixote between Zarathustra and Christ: Laughter, Ressentiment, and Transcendental Pain

Abstract: This article describes the role Don Quixote plays as a character and as a novel in Nietzsche's work. Against the background of German romanticism's reception of the novel, and by identifying the status of the novel, its characters, its author (in his duplicity) and its reader, I argue that Don Quixote plays a problematic role in Nietzsche's writings: his character is at once the paradigm of the metaphysical individual caught in metaphysical illusions, the mocked receptacle of the *ressentiment* of readers and of Cervantes himself, but Don Quixote also represents the experience of a deep suffering (which I call "transcendental"), revealing the world outside the simulacra of metaphysics. This investigation leads us to draw parallels between Don Quixote and Christ, but also Zarathustra, and to rehabilitate a certain form of suffering, inherited from a certain understanding of Christ, in the work of Nietzsche.

Keywords: Metaphysics, Theology, Phenomenology, Literature

It is well known that laughter plays a positive role in Nietzsche's work; it allows the liberation of instincts in the service of the expression of the will to power and it is, in short, the best antidote to *ressentiment*. Whilst acknowledging this dimension, I would like to consider the figure of Don Quixote in order to demonstrate that there is also a darker dimension to laughter in Nietzsche: laughter as the expression of *ressentiment*. This article has three goals: 1) I will examine the presence of Don Quixote in Nietzsche's published and unpublished work from three perspectives: firstly, the character of Don Quixote, the novel and Cervantes himself; secondly the laughter experienced by the reader; and thirdly, the cruelty and degradation from which Don Quixote suffers as the expression of an extreme form of *ressentiment*. 2) I am going to consider the possible genealogical function of Cervantes's novel in the sense that the suffering that Don Quixote and his empathetic reader experience can be understood as "transcendental pain," as a pain that reveals the ideal world for what it is. 3) Finally, I shall compare the figure of Don Quixote with that of Christ (who both have great similarities in the work of Nietzsche) by understanding Don Quixote as an ambivalent character who is, on the one hand, a man plunged into the metaphysical illusion of an enchanted world, and on the other, a man capable of understanding his illusions at the end of a long journey.

Dr. Paul Slama, Université de Namur, Département de Philosophie, Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, Rue Grafé 1, 5000 Namur, Belgien, E-Mail: paul.slama@hotmail.fr

The philosophical problem underlying this article is twofold: 1) on the one hand, laughter is essentially understood as the cruel expression of *ressentiment*; 2) on the other, in comparing Don Quixote to Christ, both of whom were mocked and both of whom arouse laughter as well as fear, I argue that fear is hidden behind all laughter. Finally, a methodological remark: for the most part this study does not take into account the way in which Cervantes himself understood his character. Whilst some of my arguments will draw on the novel, my focus is on the way in which Nietzsche understands Cervantes's novel and uses it philosophically.

I) Ludwig Tieck's Translation and Laughter as Irony

Nietzsche was an early reader of *Don Quixote* (1605–15): as early as 1859, in a letter to his mother, we find a request for Ludwig Tieck's famous translation of the novel as a birthday present (August 15, 1859, no. 87, KSB 1.72), which Nietzsche was reading already a few days later, as he confirmed.¹ Tieck's understanding of Cervantes is representative of the way in which German romanticism appreciated *Don Quixote* as a purely syncretic artwork which mixed many genres and writing styles. In his *Briefe über Shakespeare* (1800), Tieck makes a comparison between Shakespeare and Cervantes in these terms:

In einer Zeit, wo noch seine moralische Ängstlichkeit für Tugend galt, wo sich ein reines Gemüth an den glänzenden Bildern der Poesie ergötzte, ohne das schiefziehende Glas der Prüderie und schlechtverstandener Sittlichkeit über jedes lustige Gemälde zu halten, wo grosse Thaten und Helden noch redeten, und man alles Grosse und Schöne noch als ein natürliches und nothwendiges Produkt der Menschheit ansah, – wie wäre es denn wohl möglich, dass ein grosser Geist in einem solchen Zeitalter ein Hinderniss für seinen Kunstsinn hätte antreffen können?²

High morality, illustrious actions, greatness, nobility, purity, heroism, beauty, but also comedy are to be found in both Shakespearean drama and *Don Quixote*, but they have been lost in European modernity. The real hero is a complex hero, caught between the tragic and the comic, without meanness, without smallness, but with boldness and brilliance. Shakespeare and Cervantes were able to infuse their works with “*die Kraft des Handelns*,” the power of action.³ Though Tieck does not explicitly establish the link, I suggest that *Don Quixote* constitutes this kind of hero: comedy is indeed

1 On the material reception of Tieck's translation of Nietzsche, see Francisco Arenas-Dolz, “Nietzsche, Don Quijote und Sancho Pansas ‘tiefsinnige Logik’,” in Ralph Häfner / Sebastian Kaufmann / Andreas Urs Sommer (eds.), *Nietzsches Literaturen*, Berlin 2019, 189–217.

2 Ludwig Tieck, “Briefe über Shakespeare” [1800], in *Kritische Schriften*, vol. I, Leipzig 1848, 153–4. On this text, and more broadly on Tieck's relationship to Shakespeare, see Simon Williams, *Shakespeare on the German Stage*, vol. I, Cambridge 1990, 173 ff.

3 Tieck, “Briefe über Shakespeare”, 154.

a form of heroism, or rather it is compatible with the purest heroism insofar as both the sublime and the grotesque constitute the character of the hero in the very core of his or her actions. Indeed, Tieck repeatedly describes the hero of Shakespeare and Cervantes in terms of action: “Heldenthaten,” “Helden und grossen Thaten,” “grosse Thaten und Helden,” “Kraft des Handelns,” “herrliche Wollen,” “gewöhnlichen Thätigkeit” etc. In an article on Tieck’s translation, Henrik S. Wilberg shows how Tieck uses Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s vocabulary to express the importance of “Handlung” in *Don Quixote*. He quotes this extract from Tieck’s translation:

Schweig! Sag ich dir abermal, rief Don Quixote, wisse, daß ich nicht bloß aus Begier, den Verrückten zu finden, durch diese Berge schweife, sondern ich will hier vielmehr eine Thathandlung unternehmen, wodurch ich mir ewigen Namen und Ruhm auf dem ganzen Umkreise der entdeckten Erde zu erwerben gedenke: diese soll so beschaffen sein, daß ich dadurch allem, was einen irrenden Ritter vollendet und berühmt machen kann, die Krone aufsetzen will. Und ist sie sehr gefährlich, diese Thathandlung? fragte Sancho Pansa. Nein, erwiderte der von der traurigen Gestalt, denn der Würfel mag wohl so fallen, daß wir uns bald wieder antreffen.⁴

This text, from the eleventh chapter of the first book, shows Don Quixote exhorting Sancho Panza to action rather than renunciation. As Wilberg writes:

On each of these occasions, Tieck is translating the Spanish *hazaña* (or *fazaña* in modern Spanish), usually rendered as “heroic deed,” “feat,” or “exploit,” and is contiguous with the lexicon of chivalry employed throughout Cervantes’ novel. Within this lexicon, *hazaña* nonetheless emerges as a technical term: while its use in the novel is not limited to Don Quixote himself – as we saw above, Sancho also uses it – *hazaña* exclusively signifies Don Quixote’s (planned or projected) actions.⁵

As Wilberg reminds us, *Tathandlung* is one of the most important concepts of Fichte’s *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794/95). Here, Fichte describes the most original dimension of the “I” as the unconditioned one which poses the non-“I”: in the moment of positing itself as the “I,” the “I” becomes an intellectual object for itself, which separates the *Tathandlung* of the “I” from the *Tatsachen* of the external world. In the *Tathandlung*, the “I” awaits a *praxis* that will realize its own foundation, a spontaneous *praxis* of freedom itself, opening up a space through which the relationship between consciousness and the world might be realized. Now, Tieck’s translation of the passage quoted by Wilberg indeed seems very Fichtean: *Tathandlung* is used by Don Quixote to defend the idea that if he acts as he does, it is not for a certain practical purpose, but rather to express his excellence and greatness, that is (if *Tathandlung* does indeed come from Fichte), his pure freedom to be free, a

⁴ Henrik S. Wilberg, “Translation as Subversion: Ludwig Tieck’s *Don Quixote* and the Poetic Logic of Jena Romanticism,” *Monatshefte* 108 (2016), 42–68. The quote is from Miguel de Cervantes, *Leben und Thaten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von La Mancha*, trans. Ludwig Tieck, vol. I, Berlin 1799, 369–70.

⁵ Wilberg, “Translation as Subversion”, 44.

freedom grappling with the “dice” of fate in which Don Quixote believes he plays a significant role. From this point of view, at the heart of his sickly illusion Don Quixote authentically deploys the heroism of freedom, the Fichtean *Tathandlung* which is the basis of existence before the world. This profound presence of the self to itself occurs only in a fundamental practice of freedom, an act that puts the subject at grips with itself, Don Quixote at grips with himself, his freedom expressing itself as it wishes, no matter what the reality is. This, moreover, is in keeping with the Fichtean impossibility of founding the *Tathandlung* in something other than itself: the *Tathandlung* is founded in the impossibility of being founded, in the very act constantly to be done. It is embodied in Don Quixote, who is incapable of giving reasons for his actions other than their greatness, independent of the empirical reality with which they are confronted. As with Fichte, the *Tathandlung* is not the empirical *Tatsache*. It is transcendental, it justifies itself, and that is why Don Quixote does not need to justify his actions according to reality. It is not Sancho Panza who has the deepest relation to the real; he is therefore not the one who recalls the real, the referent of the real, in the midst of the madness of Don Quixote's illusion. Rather, Sancho Panza is the one who does not have the courage of *Tathandlung*, who remains stuck in the *Tatsache*, in an empirical and therefore naïve and simplistic understanding of reality. The struggle between the two is not one between Sancho Panza's common sense and Don Quixote's madness, but it is the tension that the reader experiences in the face of Don Quixote's greatness and ridiculousness, on the one hand, and Sancho Panza's lack of naïve questioning, on the other. The sublime and the grotesque, together, constitute the reflexivity of the reader's subjectivity.

And it is indeed the contradictory dimension of Don Quixote's action that Tieck emphasizes. Making Don Quixote a romantic and transcendental hero is too naïve. Tieck, in *Die altdeutschen Minnelieder* (1803), develops the parodic dimension of Don Quixote in terms of romantic irony. Let us quote a first passage:

Der italienische Vers war nach Spanien gekommen und hatte den einheimischen fast verdrängt, als einer der grössten Dichter, Cervantes, der es schmerzlich fühlte, wie weit sich die Poesie vom Leben, in den epischen Wundererzählungen vom Amadis und seinen Nachfolgern, entfernt hatte, aus Liebe zur Poesie und zum Wunder den kühnsten Schmerz ersann, um Poesie und Leben, selbst im Bewusstsein ihrer Disharmonie, wieder zu verknüpfen. Sein Don Quixote, der bewusst und unbewusst das ganze Zeitalter nach dem Cervantes gestimmt hat, spiegelt einen unergründlichen Geist ab, dem Parodie beständig echte Poesie ist, so wie man nicht bestimmen kann, ob die Poesie dieses Werkes nicht ganz als Parodie zu nehmen sei, denn es scheint, möchte man sagen, ein so heller Witz durch das ganze Werk, dass man fast nirgend mit Sicherheit angeben kann, ob man deutlich sieht, oder nur geblendet ist.⁶

⁶ Ludwig Tieck, “Die altdeutschen Minnelieder” [1803], in *Kritische Schriften*, vol. I, Leipzig 1848, 207–8.

Tieck's idea is that Cervantes, through the parody of the novel of chivalry, paradoxically reconciles poetry and life, making use of joy and laughter. In what sense? By showing the "disharmony" between poetry and life in the same way that Don Quixote makes the reader aware of the link between the two in his disharmony: "*selbst im Bewusstsein ihrer Disharmonie.*" Poetry is life to the extent that it manifests a parodic disharmony, where one never really knows whether to believe Cervantes, whether or not he shows life or hides it. It is the "*Witz,*" an ambiguous way of using language in which it is unclear whether or not it adheres to reality. The hesitation of this adherence is then a linguistic tremor that trembles in the measure of the world. In other words, Cervantes' writing reconciles poetry and life because it trembles within the *Witz*, in the parody of chivalry even though it sometimes seems that Don Quixote behaves like a true knight. The *Witz* is thus the place of paradox par excellence, the linguistic translation of the contradiction embodied in Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote*: knight and not knight, hero and anti-hero, lover and not lover, friend and not friend, fool and sage, illusionary and clairvoyant. Just as Cervantes translates freedom by mixing literary genres, he uses the *Witz* to translate a freedom that only manifests itself at the heart of contradiction. Cervantes's joke is profound, because it gives the reader a reflection (in the technical sense) on the discordance between poetry and life, between writing and reality (between novels of chivalry and real chivalry!), it is a reflexive tool that allows the subject to enter into resonance with the world. It makes the subject doubt whether he is clairvoyant or blind ("*dass man fast nirgend mit Sicherheit angeben kann, ob man deutlich sieht, oder nur geblendet ist*"); he is caught in the trap of the *Witz* that animates his consciousness, that awakens it to the world or, more precisely, to the contradiction between consciousness and the world.

Such a use of language implies a psychological reaction, as Tieck later says in the same text: "*Eben so räthselhaft, als Cervantes, ergreift uns in seiner Gegenwart eine Bangigkeit, weil wir ein Geheimniss spüren, welches uns die frische Heiterkeit des südlichen Dichters in jedem Augenblick wieder vergessen lässt.*"⁷ Cervantes, like Shakespeare, is enigmatic, he creates a mystery (*Geheimnis*) behind the lightness of the parody, an anomaly, an oddity that makes us feel anguish (*Bangigkeit*). An excerpt from Novalis' *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* (1788–99) shows how early German romanticism understood this word: "*Der Lehrling hört mit Bangigkeit die sich kreuzenden Stimmen. Es scheint ihm jede recht zu haben, und eine sonderbare Verwirrung bemächtigt sich seines Gemüts.*" The apprentice, at this point in the story, is lost before the contradictory definitions of nature by the poet and by the thinker. The voices (*Stimmen*) have made themselves heard in their intense, irreconcilable contradiction: for the apprentice to find some appeasement, one must wait for the "*muntere Gespiele*" who possesses the "*Geist des Friedens.*" Attempts to think about nature become entangled in insoluble contradictions, which stir the mind (*Gemüt*) of the apprentice in such a way that he experiences

⁷ Tieck, "Die altdeutschen Minnelieder", 208.

a deep inner uneasiness in the face of the inability of reason to hear nature.⁸ *Bangigkeit* is anxiety in the face of contradiction, in the face of the insoluble contradiction. Such is the role that is played by Don Quixote in the reader's mind. He is the mystery of the contradiction that awakens both freedom and anxiety. This romantic interpretation of Don Quixote identifies him as the embodiment of transcendental freedom and, for his readers, also the revelation of the complexity of their relationship to the world: the opening, in short, of reflexivity in the reader's soul. Illusion is revealing, it opens the subject to a metaphysical knowledge of the world. This is precisely the understanding of *Don Quixote* that Nietzsche would oppose: far from revealing anything about metaphysical illusions, Don Quixote endorses, accentuates and enhances them; moreover, he gives rise to the mockery of slaves who convince themselves that they are free from illusion. But there is also, in the midst of Nietzsche's attacks on Cervantes, a more pacified relationship with Don Quixote, in which the latter allows for a certain understanding of illusions.

II) Cervantes' Cruelty

Nietzsche's relationship to *Don Quixote* is increasingly critical, first in somewhat simplistic terms. Let us observe, for example, the harshness of this fragment from summer 1875: "*Eins der schädlichsten Bücher ist der Don Quixote*" (Nachlass 1875, 8[7], KSA 8.130). The word "*schädlich*" means harmful (in an almost moral sense) and designates the book insofar as it can be read. It can corrupt the reader, but in what sense? What is the harmfulness of a book which German romanticism first held up as one of the birth places of free subjectivity? We find another remark, in the summer of 1880, which gives more precision: "*Der Verrückte der Lahme als Lustigmacher. Don Quixote schauderhaftes Beispiel. Hephäst im Olymp*" (Nachlass 1880, 4[19], KSA 9.106). Here, Nietzsche describes a lame and mad buffoon, associated with Don Quixote and Hephaistos, and thus combines buffoonery and tragedy, since Hephaistos – as the *Iliad* tells us (I, 590–4) – is thrown by Zeus from the top of Olympus and thus loses the correct use of his legs.⁹ So, the lame man makes Nietzsche laugh, he is a *Lustigmacher*, but this camouflages the immense suffering which led the lame man to be lame and which thus made people laugh. Laughter contains the suffering that makes

⁸ On this passage of Novalis, see Reinhard Leusing, *Die Stimme als Erkenntnisform: Zu Novalis' Roman "Die Lehrlinge zu Sais"*, Stuttgart 1993, 147 ff.

⁹ Just after Hephaistos recounts his misadventure to his mother in this part of the *Iliad*, he tries to serve all the gods of Olympus who mock him: ἄσβεστος δ' ἄρ' ἐνώρτο γέλως μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν/ ὡς ἴδον Ἥφαιστον διὰ δώματα πομπύοντα (I, 599–600). Even though he has just narrated a terrible event, a fall that lasted one day, without being able to breathe (592–3: ἅμα δ' ἤελίψα καταδύνη/ κάππεσον ἐν Λήμνῳ), the gods laugh, make fun; but maybe it is because he is that unfortunate that they laugh.

it possible. Don Quixote is thus a “horrible” (*schauderhaft*) example, since he contains the greatest suffering within the most clownish laughter. In other words, Don Quixote is a detestable example because he makes one laugh at his own expense, he arouses mockery which draws its resources from suffering. From then on, it seems that Nietzsche wants to unveil the dark suffering hidden behind the object of laughter, behind the *Lustigmacher*. Don Quixote is not anymore a reflexive tool that reveals the structure of the world to the reader; on the contrary, he is the object of an irresistible mockery coupled with an indifference to the suffering of others. This is, indeed, the meaning of the following passage from a letter to Erwin Rohde of December 8, 1875:

Aber vielleicht liestest Du jetzt noch einmal den Don Quixote — nicht weil es die heiterste, sondern weil es die herbste Lektüre ist, die ich kenne, ich nahm sie in den Sommerferien vor, und alles Persönliche Leid kam mir sehr verkleinert vor, ja als würdig, daß man darüber ganz unbefangene lache und selbst nicht einmal Grimassen dabei mache. Aller Ernst und alle Leidenschaft und alles, was den Menschen an's Herz geht ist Don Quixoterie, es ist gut dies zu wissen, für einige Fälle; sonst ist es für gewöhnlich besser es nicht zu wissen (no. 494, KSB 5.126).

First of all, Nietzsche points out that, far from being cheerful, the reading of *Don Quixote* is “bitter,” or even “harsh,” in the sense that it makes the reader feel uncomfortable or indisposed (that is the meaning of the word “*herb*” here). His demonstration seems to be the following: Don Quixote’s suffering is such that Nietzsche’s personal suffering seems derisory to him. And he generalizes this observation to all humanity: all suffering is nothing but “*Don Quixoterie*,” it appears grotesque, and this can be understood in two ways: on the one hand, precisely because Don Quixote makes suffering a light object, an object of laughter; on the other hand, because all suffering appears derisory in comparison to that of Don Quixote. Nietzsche does not detail these sufferings here – he does so elsewhere, as we will see. There is, moreover, a danger in this approach, implicitly emphasized at the end of the above excerpt from Nietzsche’s letter to Rohde: if Cervantes’s book allows us to distance ourselves from our own suffering and to relativize suffering, it also opens up the abyss of indifference in the face of the suffering of others, and even – but perhaps the text is overinterpreted in this way – of mockery in the face of the suffering of others. There is, in the character of Don Quixote, something disturbing about human suffering.

If Don Quixote provokes such an almost “moral” uneasiness in Nietzsche, what is comical, to say the least, is that Cervantes has produced a novel full of nastiness. But how can such wickedness be understood? How can Nietzsche, who very early on endeavors to destroy the foundations of a morality of good and evil, lead Cervantes’ novel back to cruelty? A fragment from 1876/77 gives a great deal of information on this issue:

Die Dichter, gemäß ihrer Natur, welche eben die von Künstlern d. h. seltsamen Ausnahmefällen ist, verherrlichen nicht immer das, was von allen Menschen verherrlicht zu werden verdient, sondern ziehen das vor, was gerade ihnen als Künstlern gut erscheint. Ebenso greifen sie selten mit Glück an, wenn sie Satiriker sind. Cervantes hätte die Inquisition bekämpfen können,

aber er zog es vor, ihre Opfer d. h. die Ketzer und Idealisten aller Art auch noch lächerlich zu machen. Nach einem Leben voller Unfälle und Mißwenden hatte er doch noch Lust zu einem literarischen Hauptangriff auf eine falsche Geschmacksrichtung der spanischen Leser; er kämpfte gegen die Ritterromane. Unvermerkt wurde dieser Angriff unter seinen Händen zur allgemeinsten Ironisierung aller höheren Bestrebungen: er machte ganz Spanien, alle Tröpfe eingeschlossen, lachen und sich selber weise dünken: es ist eine Thatsache daß über kein Buch so gelacht wurde wie über den Don Quixote. Mit einem solchen Erfolge gehört er in die Decadence der spanischen Cultur, er ist ein nationales Unglück. Ich meine daß er die Menschen verachtete und sich nicht ausnahm; oder macht er sich nicht nur lustig wenn er erzählt wie man am Hofe des Herzogs mit dem Kranken Possen trieb? Sollte er wirklich nicht über den Ketzer auf dem Scheiterhaufen noch gelacht haben? Ja, er erspart seinem Helden nicht einmal jenes fürchterliche Hellwerden über seinen Zustand, am Schlusse des Lebens: wenn es nicht Grausamkeit ist, so ist es Kälte, Hartherzigkeit, welche ihn eine solche letzte Scene schaffen heiß, Verachtung gegen die Leser, welche wie er wußte auch durch diesen Schluß nicht in ihrem Gelächter gestört wurden (Nachlass 1876/77, 23[140], KSA 8.453–4).

What appears first is the cowardice of Cervantes in his fight: instead of the Inquisition, he attacks the idealists, the melancholic (and therefore sick people) who cannot defend themselves, and even the heretics. Secondly, Nietzsche implicitly points out that Cervantes mocks his readers by making fun of the novel of chivalry, because his readers are also readers of novels of chivalry; and he does so without his readers' knowledge, since the latter laugh and do not realize that they are laughing about themselves and their own imagination. The whole text reveals Cervantes' pettiness toward his readers, who laugh all the more as they are secretly mistreated by *Don Quixote* – after all, are the readers not also Don Quixote? Cervantes's book despises (*verachten*) its readers. Nietzsche takes three examples from the novel, which are useful to explore in order to deepen the Nietzschean criticism of Cervantes's mockery of his readers:

1) The first example comes from chapter XLVI of the second book and tells of a trick played by the Duke and Duchess who host Don Quixote. In Tieck's translation: it is a trick "*der mehr lächerlich als schädlich ausfallen sollte,*" which makes them await nightfall with great "*Zufriedenheit.*"¹⁰ This sentence is not said explicitly by those who carry out the trick; rather, it is the narrator who endorses it, but it can be understood in a free indirect style. The Duke and Duchess are aware of the darkness of their trick, but they see more fun than tears in it – "*schädlich*" designating the harm that can be done to Don Quixote, who believes he is trying to turn away a woman in love when he falls into a trap involving noisy bells and aggressive cats. The cruelest thing is not so much the "terror" that Don Quixote feels at the time (I will come back to this later) than the way he stands up against the cats and tries to fight them, sword in hand ("*Don Quichotte stellte sich aufrecht und griff nach seinem Degen*"¹¹), which is

¹⁰ Miguel de Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, trans. Ludwig Tieck, vol. II, Berlin 1908, 252.

¹¹ Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, vol. II, 253.

a pathetic posture aggravated by the wounds inflicted by one of the cats and the chivalrous attitude of Quixote, who nevertheless hastens to thank the Duke and Duchess for having rescued him. But perhaps what motivates Nietzsche's commentary more is how the narrator intervenes in the story with cruel flippancy. Indeed: "*in welcher Zeit ihm indes ein anderes angenehmeres Abenteuer als das vorige zustieß, welches aber sein Geschichtschreiber jetzt nicht erzählen will.*"¹² Cervantes's (or more broadly the narrator's) intervention may indeed seem cruel to say the least: he distances himself from the suffering of his hero, which he nevertheless caused! He tells us: it was entertaining, but wait, reader, I have a better, more ridiculous, more pathetic story for later ...

2) The second example is the auto-da-fé of chapter VI of book I. Toward the end of the barber's and priest's long inquisition into the books of Don Quixote's library, there is a homodiegetic presence of the narrator (to use Gérard Genette's terminology),¹³ in a manner somewhat analogous to the way the narrator intervened in his own narrative in the previous episode (what Genette calls the communication function).¹⁴ In Tieck's translation:

Dieser Cervantes ist seit vielen Jahren mein guter Freund, und ich weiss, dass er geübter in Leiden als in Reimen ist. In seinem Buche ist manches gut erfunden, manches wird vorbereitet und nichts zu Ende geführt: man muss den versprochenen zweiten Theil erwarten, vielleicht verdient er sich durch diesen die Gnade für das Ganze, die man ihm jetzt noch verweigern muss.¹⁵

In this passage, the parish priest and barber examine the first part of *La Galatea* (1585) by Cervantes himself. Even if the narrator of *Don Quixote* is not quite Cervantes himself (but Cide Hamete, as I explain below), readers can see that Cervantes is playing a trick on them. Certainly he obeys conventions, presenting himself in a rather modest light, but he also uses a strange irony, since Cervantes exempts himself from the auto-da-fé he is about to stage. Also, the reader cannot help thinking that the "correction" made by Cervantes himself to *La Galatea* is not the second volume, never published, but *Don Quixote* and its parody of the novels of chivalry. Cervantes certainly plays with his readers, but – if we follow Nietzsche's interpretation – he also despises them since he makes *La Galatea*, a pastoral novel, an almost harmful if not naïve work that he nevertheless intended for his readers. This irony, far from the depth of romantic irony, is a form of mockery, contempt, wickedness.

3) The third example, the last chapter to which I will also return, describes how Don Quixote receives a divine revelation in his sleep, which renders him lucid again: "*Mein Verstand ist frei und klar,*" as translated by Tieck. Then comes the moment of

¹² Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, vol. II, 254.

¹³ Gérard Genette, *Figures III*, Paris 1972, 252.

¹⁴ Genette, *Figures III*, 261.

¹⁵ Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, vol. I, 32.

confession, but in an atmosphere of bitterness: “*es kränkt mich nur, dass diese Enttäuschung zu spät gekommen ist,*”¹⁶ a regret which, according to Nietzsche, attests to Cervantes's cruelty toward his character. Even more cruel, but subtle, is the fact that the priest, the barber and Samson Carrasco do not believe Don Quixote; they think that a new madness is taking hold of Don Quixote, that of appearing rational. But Don Quixote cannot defend himself, because if he now were to appear cured it would be the symptom of a new madness: “*wollt Ihr Euch gar zu einem Einsiedler machen? Schweigt doch um Gottes willen, besinnt Euch und lasst dergleichen Grillen fahren.*”¹⁷ They will believe it eventually, but at that moment Don Quixote is stuck in his madness: because he was once recognized as mad, he will always appear so in the eyes of the social world. Moreover, Sancho Panza reveals another dimension of Don Quixote's lucid madness: “*denn die grösste Torheit, die ein Mensch in diesem Leben begehen kann, ist, dass er mir nichts, dir nichts stirbt, ohne dass ihn einer umbringt, oder eine andere Hand, als die der Melancholie sein Ende herbeiführt.*”¹⁸ In other words, Don Quixote's lucidity, lucidity in the moment of death, so to speak, is yet another form of madness. Finally, like the other two passages, Cervantes lets the narrator (Cide Hamete, his double introduced in the chapter IX of book I) intervene and, by giving him the final word, Cervantes puts even more distance between himself and the tale that has been told.

Here, of course, I am interpreting Cervantes's text on the basis of the rare indications given by Nietzsche of these three passages in the fragment I was quoting. Far from making irony a tool of depth like Tieck, Nietzsche turns it into a tool of the author's contempt for his characters as well as for his readers. This contempt appears as meanness, inasmuch as irony is always looking down on what it refers to. As a fragment from 1883 states: “*Der Scherz und Übermuth an anderen Personen trug ehemals einen für uns schauderhaften Charakter: namentlich an Kriegsgefangenen. An Verrückten: noch der Don Quixote! Das Lachen ist ursprünglich die Äußerung der Grausamkeit*” (Nachlass 1883, 8[7], KSA 10.329). Nietzsche compares Don Quixote to a prisoner of war, the madman who is assailed by the laughter of others, i. e., by the “horrible” cruelty (Nietzsche again uses the word “*schauderhaft*” here) of the one who laughs. For Nietzsche, the origin of laughter (and we must insist on the word “originally” (*ursprünglich*)) is thus to be found in wickedness, and Nietzsche develops this idea at much greater length in a passage of the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887). Thus, we will come to understand how Nietzsche can criticize Cervantes's cruelty without falling back into morality.

16 Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, vol. II, 340.

17 Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, vol. II, 341.

18 Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, vol. II, 342.

III) Laughter and Terror

Indeed:

— man erinnere sich etwa Don Quixote's am Hofe der Herzogin: wir lesen heute den ganzen Don Quixote mit einem bitteren Geschmack auf der Zunge, fast mit einer Tortur und würden damit seinem Urheber und dessen Zeitgenossen sehr fremd, sehr dunkel sein, — sie lasen ihn mit allerbestem Gewissen als das heiterste der Bücher, sie lachten sich an ihm fast zu Tod). Leiden-sehn thut wohl, Leiden-machen noch wohler — das ist ein harter Satz, aber ein alter mächtiger menschlich-allzumenschlicher Hauptsatz, den übrigens vielleicht auch schon die Affen unterschreiben würden: denn man erzählt, dass sie im Ausdenken von bizarren Grausamkeiten den Menschen bereits reichlich ankündigen und gleichsam „vorspielen“. Ohne Grausamkeit kein Fest: so lehrt es die älteste, längste Geschichte des Menschen — und auch an der Strafe ist so viel Festliches! — (GM II 6)

Here, Nietzsche shows how the promise implies a consciousness that remembers, a consciousness-memory, looking forward and chained to the past through suffering, for “*nur was nicht aufhört, weh zu tun, bleibt im Gedächtniss.*” Asceticism is nothing but the mastery through suffering of anything that might resist conditioning and that is incorporated by memory into the history of the human being to produce *Vernunft* within moral conscience (*Gewissen*). This genealogy of moral conscience is thus by the same token a genealogy of suffering, of the “debt” (*Schuld*) which, unless it is constituted by the human being, constitutes the “*Rechtssubjekt.*” The subject of law can only be guilty, because he is always already guilty, because he has always already committed a fault, because he has always been in debt even before he has acted and, above all, because he is fully aware of having always been guilty. As a result, suffering is a fundamental anthropological constant, a submission to others that is constitutive of human existence. Laughter is the characteristic of man (Rabelais's phrase “*Mieulx est de ris que de larmes escripre, / Pour ce que rire est le propre de l'homme*”), because even more characteristic is the need to make people suffer. The phenomenon of laughter singularly reveals this. In the passage quoted above, Nietzsche explains what he has already made explicit in other texts: the feeling of bitterness (“*bitteren Geschmack*”) in front of a fundamentally dark book. In the episode of the cats, it is mockery until death (“*sie lachten sich an ihm fast zu Tod*”): it is the most cheerful of books because it is the meanest, without hiding anything.

Let us reread this episode in the translation of Tieck. The trick is to drop bells and cats with bells on Don Quixote singing for the court. Here is what happens at this very moment: “*Das Getöse der Schellen und das Miauen der Katzen war so gross, dass die Herzoge, ob sie gleich die Erfinder des Spasses waren, dennoch erschranken, und Don Quixote sich entsetzte.*”¹⁹ The very people who instigated the trick are scared, just like

¹⁹ Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, vol. II, 253.

Don Quixote, in a very deep sense: “*erschrecken*.” The trick is so successful that it goes beyond laughter and causes terror, as if it reveals what is at the bottom of every joke. As Tieck translates it again, the spectators “*waren voll Verwunderung und Erstaunen*,” while Don Quixote gets his bravery back and valiantly tries to fight the cats, which makes him even more pathetic. Worse, the cats attack him in the face and hurt him badly, making him cry out in pain (“*Don Quixote vor Schmerzen so laut zu schreien anfang*”). And Don Quixote thanks the kindness of those who trapped him for rescuing him. Is this episode funny? It is maybe for the readers, but not so for Nietzsche, that is, for the genealogist who sees in Cervantes's novel the unveiling of a fundamental anthropological condition, laughter as the enjoyment of making and seeing people suffer – the enjoyment of interacting with others in the mode of making them suffer. What the episode of the cats reveals is that behind something as innocent as play and laughter, there is suffering, but also more deeply the secret *anxiety* of the one who laughs, as we will see.

How is it possible that Cervantes's vocabulary moves so far from farce to drama? If I understand Nietzsche correctly, Don Quixote lives a *punishment*, a punishment without reason, an absurd, gratuitous (almost Kafkaesque) punishment that reveals the anthropological structure of the suffering that history has brought into the world. Moreover, Don Quixote, who is nevertheless suffering, almost seems, in his profound kindness, to be the willing martyr of his suffering. Indeed, just before mentioning Don Quixote in this second essay, Nietzsche evokes some passages from *Dawn* (1881), in which he describes precisely how morality needs voluntary martyrdom, for example, in D 18: “*Folglich denkt man sich auch die Götter erquickt und festlich gestimmt, wenn man ihnen den Anblick der Grausamkeit anbietet, – und so schleicht sich die Vorstellung in die Welt, dass das freiwillige Leiden, die selbsterwählte Marter einen guten Sinn und Werth habe.*” If Nietzsche makes this passage explicit in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, then we must understand Don Quixote's suffering as a suffering based on consent, which is attested by the recognition Don Quixote feels for his executioners after the episode of the cats, but also by his submission to God in the moment of his death. Even more, and this becomes clear in D 77, this consenting martyr is indeed the Christian martyr, which is a spiritual pain and which provokes laughter *par excellence*: “*Seelen-Martern*,” “*geistigen Feuertod, die geistigen Foltern und Folterwerkzeuge.*” Laughter provokes a spiritual torture on the one it laughs at (the *Feuertod* could be reminiscent of the auto-da-fé in *Don Quixote*). From this point of view, Nietzsche's focus on the episode of Don Quixote's death, in which the latter recovers his reason through God (I will return to this below), makes it possible to reconcile the mental torture of laughter with Christianity.

IV) Crawl to the Cross

D 114 constructs a striking link between Don Quixote and Christ:

(Es ist möglich, dass diess dem Stifter des Christenthums am Kreuze begegnete: denn die bittersten aller Worte „mein Gott, warum hast du mich verlassen!“ enthalten, in aller Tiefe verstanden, wie sie verstanden werden dürfen, das Zeugniß einer allgemeinen Enttäuschung und Aufklärung über den Wahn seines Lebens; er wurde in dem Augenblicke der höchsten Qual hell-sichtig über sich selber, so wie der Dichter es von dem armen sterbenden Don Quixote erzählt.)

This link between Don Quixote and Christ is not unique and it illustrates the role of the Christian figure in the development of the illusions of which Don Quixote is the victim, but of which Cervantes's novel is also, despite its cruelty, the revelator. Nietzsche stresses that, like Don Quixote, Christ experienced a final epiphany before dying on the cross – in the dramatic sentence that Christ pronounces: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (“Eloï, Eloï, lama sabachthani?” (Psalm 22)). First of all, Nietzsche speaks of the “most bitter” words, an extreme bitterness (“bittersten”; he used the same word for describing *Don Quixote* reading – see above). It is pathetic but opens up to a clear-sightedness (*Aufklärung*) that comes from a process of disillusionment (*Enttäuschung*). It is a clear-sighted look at oneself (as the very reflexive expression “*er wurde in dem Augenblicke der höchsten Qual hell-sichtig über sich selber*” indicates) – a clear-sighted reflection provoked by the extreme suffering of the crucifixion. But this disillusionment remains immersed in a Christian illusion, because of the abandonment of the father, and in the biological and social weakness of Christianity, which already in its founder is incapable of fighting against the social decision. Rather, the clear-sighted disillusionment continues to submit to suffering – for example: “*Das Leiden selbst wird durch das Mitleiden ansteckend; unter Umständen kann mit ihm eine Gesamt-Einbusse an Leben und Lebens-Energie erreicht werden, die in einem absurden Verhältniss zum Quantum der Ursache steht (– der Fall vom Tode des Nazareners)*” (A 7). Or:

Die Praktik ist es, welche er der Menschheit hinterliess: sein Verhalten vor den Richtern, vor den Häschern, vor den Anklägern und aller Art Verleumdung und Hohn, – sein Verhalten am Kreuz. Er widersteht nicht, er vertheidigt nicht sein Recht, er thut keinen Schritt, der das Äusserste von ihm abwehrt, mehr noch, er fordert es heraus ... Und er bittet, er leidet, er liebt mit denen, in denen, die ihm Böses thun ... Die Worte zum Schächer am Kreuz enthalten das ganze Evangelium. Das ist wahrlich ein göttlicher Mensch gewesen, ein „Kind Gottes“ sagt der Schächer. „Wenn du dies fühlst – antwortet der Erlöser – so bist du im Paradiese, so bist auch du ein Kind Gottes ...“ Nicht sich wehren, nicht zürnen, nicht verantwortlich machen ... Sondern auch nicht dem Bösen widerstehen, – ihn lieben (A 35).

Christ's suffering is the product of his pity (however derisory) for humanity, which tortures him; the result of a weak spirit of submission to the point of collaborating in his own death. Worse still, the cross is indeed the last of the renunciations of life

itself, and for Nietzsche it is what brings Don Quixote closer to Christ, as affirmed in a fragment from 1880:

Wenn die Don Quixoterie unseres Gefühls von Macht einmal uns zum Bewußtsein kommt und wir aufwachen — dann kriechen wir zu Kreuze wie Don Quixote, — entsetzliches Ende! Die Menschheit ist immer bedroht von dieser schmähhlichen Sich-selbst-Verleugnung am Ende ihres Strebens (Nachlass 1880, 4[222], KSA 9.156).

It is indisputable that the agony and healing of Don Quixote takes place in a divine revelation which Don Quixote himself expresses with explicit clarity. But here, his death is not even the moment of an epiphany, but the moment of a second illusion, the one that comes to crown all the others; it is “crawling toward the cross,” consenting to his suffering without any rebellion. Don Quixote is also the paradigm of weakness, of submissive consent, of the cross as the only answer when (as we have seen) clear-sightedness finally became possible. Indeed, as Tieck translates, after six hours of sleep Don Quixote claims: “*Gelobt sei der allmächtige Gott, der mir so grosse Wohltat erzeigt! Ja, seine Barmherzigkeit hat keine Grenzen, und die Sünden der Menschen können sie weder beschränken noch verhindern.*”²⁰ God forgave him in his sleep, so he received grace in the evening of his life. However, as I have already mentioned, his companions do not believe him and they speculate about a new madness: “*Als die drei dies hörten, glaubten sie, er sei ohne Zweifel wieder von einer neuen Torheit befallen.*”²¹ In short, one madness replaces another. Given that Don Quixote showed only madness in his life (at least since he plunged into the novels of chivalry), then it is logical to think that any change in his behavior is the expression of another, as yet unknown, dimension of the same madness. The madman who says something reasonable (because for his companions, grace is something reasonable) does not become sane because of it. Something reasonable in the mouth of the fool may as well be the manifestation of a madness of which one does not understand the reasons, i. e., an involuntary lucidity. Don Quixote's lucidity, here, is the recognition of the free grace of God who, in spite of the illusion that was Don Quixote's life, provides him with a justification in the twilight of his life. Don Quixote identifies such a gratuitous grace with a certain theological talent: “*Die Barmherzigkeit meine ich, liebe Nichte, welche Gott mir in diesem Augenblicke erwiesen hat, und welche, wie gesagt, meine Sünden nicht haben verhindern können. Mein Verstand ist frei und klar.*”²² From then on, Don Quixote is constrained by a double bind. On the one hand, he is not immediately believed, his good theology of grace is taken for the manifestation of a madness of reason; the madness of the madman who begins to be reasonable – as if the very act of becoming reasonable were, in one who has been mad all his life, an unreasonable

²⁰ Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, vol. II, 339.

²¹ Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, vol. II, 340.

²² Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, vol. II, 340.

act. On the other hand, he passes from submitting to the novels of chivalry, which have coated him with the deepest illusion, to submitting to the grace of God, which produces in him a second illusion. In the fragment I was quoting above, Nietzsche adopts the posture of Don Quixote's companions: he does not believe him, he takes the grace that is pressed upon him like a second illusion, like a second madness, all the more painful as it is the last one, this time without the possibility of redemption, since Don Quixote is dying.

But should we not go further and understand that Cervantes plunges the reader into an even greater illusion than the one he thought he was getting rid of when he saw the lamentable example of Don Quixote? Pushing the illusion further, to the extreme, Cervantes exposes the reader to an almost pure and condensed *ressentiment* since, believing he is getting rid of his illusions, the reader becomes the accomplice of the cruelties that Cervantes inflicts on Don Quixote. The reader's imagination prolongs them, the reader laughs at them, and becomes the slave of *ressentiment*, plunged into an illusion much more metaphysical than that of Don Quixote. The reader is thus imprisoned, or enslaved, by his reading: the reader mocks and believes in God at the same time.²³ It is possible to consider that this is where Cervantes's betrayal of his reader lies: promising his reader madness as valid as reason, thus making the reader renounce holy rationality and holy truth, Cervantes, in the last pages of the book, reverses the whole perspective and makes Don Quixote (and with him, his reader) fall back into the truth of Christianity.

V) Transcendental Pain

Nietzsche sometimes has a tendency to make Don Quixote the pejorative paradigm of the human being immersed in illusion. In HL 5, for example, Nietzsche criticizes the objectivist, academic, political and bourgeois historians who distance history from instincts and he contrasts them with the true ("bloody"!) serious man. He writes: "*Es soll nicht mehr jeder Ernsthafte von Geblüt zu einem Don Quixote werden, da er Besseres zu thun hat, als sich mit solchen vermeintlichen Realitäten herumzuschlagen*" (HL 5, KSA 1.281). Here, Don Quixote is the man who takes refuge in the lands of the ideal,

²³ In HH I 133, Nietzsche compares the illusion and the power of the idea of God with the illusion in which Don Quixote is stuck: "Weiter: die Vorstellung eines Gottes beunruhigt und demüthigt so lange, als sie geglaubt wird, aber wie sie e n t s t a n d e n ist, darüber kann bei dem jetzigen Stande der völkervergleichenden Wissenschaft kein Zweifel mehr sein; und mit der Einsicht in jene Entstehung fällt jener Glaube dahin. Es geht dem Christen, welcher sein Wesen mit dem Gotte vergleicht, so, wie dem Don Quixote, der seine eigne Tapferkeit unterschätzt, weil er die Wunderthaten der Helden aus den Ritterromanen im Kopfe hat; der Maassstab, mit welchem in beiden Fällen gemessen wird, gehört in's Reich der Fabel. Fällt aber die Vorstellung des Gottes weg, so auch das Gefühl der „Sünde“ als eines Vergehens gegen göttliche Vorschriften, als eines Fleckens an einem gottgeweihten Geschöpfe."

far from the authenticity of instincts – the paradigm of the man in a world in which everything is backward, a man who dresses reality in “masks” (*Masken*). Agreeing with the romantics only about his idealism, Nietzsche makes Don Quixote the paradigm of a “concrete abstraction,” of human beings without character who intellectualize history, who make it ideal. Don Quixote is indeed a machine of idealism. But – according to Nietzsche – Don Quixote’s idealism is precisely what it is worth unveiling, overcoming, in order to reach an authentic relationship with history. In a fragment from 1880, Nietzsche points out that Don Quixote’s idealism is the real enemy of thought: “*Kampf nicht gegen die Dummheiten, sondern gegen die Einbildungen: Beseitigung der eingebildeten Dinge aus den Köpfen: Don Quixote Cervantes*” (Nachlass 1880, 5[16], KSA 9.184). It is imagination, or rather imaginations, that must be fought. Two interpretations are possible here: either Nietzsche presents Cervantes’s novel favorably insofar as it shows the danger of illusions and thereby reveals the illusory structure of the mind; or he makes the novel precisely the paradigm of what must be fought. This fragment is certainly sibylline, but an excerpt from *Dawn* allows us to see more clearly. Indeed, in D 114, which I have already quoted in the previous section, Nietzsche identifies a positive dimension of Cervantes’s novel in the pain felt by his character that allows for a more authentic relationship to the world:

Der Schwerleidende sieht aus seinem Zustande mit einer entsetzlichen Kälte hinaus auf die Dinge: alle jene kleinen lügnerischen Zaubereien, in denen für gewöhnlich die Dinge schwimmen, wenn das Auge des Gesunden auf sie blickt, sind ihm verschwunden: ja, er selber liegt vor sich da ohne Flaum und Farbe. Gesetzt, dass er bisher in irgend einer gefährlichen Phantasterei lebte: diese höchste Ernüchterung durch Schmerzen ist das Mittel, ihn herauszureissen: und vielleicht das einzige Mittel. (Es ist möglich, dass diess dem Stifter des Christenthums am Kreuze begegnete: denn die bittersten aller Worte „mein Gott, warum hast du mich verlassen!“ enthalten, in aller Tiefe verstanden, wie sie verstanden werden dürfen, das Zeugniß einer allgemeinen Enttäuschung und Aufklärung über den Wahn seines Lebens; er wurde in dem Augenblicke der höchsten Qual hellsichtig über sich selber, so wie der Dichter es von dem armen sterbenden Don Quixote erzählt) (D 114).

Here, suffering plays the role of a reduction of the world (to borrow a term from phenomenology) in the sense that, in suffering, the human being who suffers becomes clear-sighted, because the human being is no longer entrenched in the blissful illusion of the world, in its “little false enchantments.” The world is neutralized for this human being, and even more, it reveals itself in its neutrality for what it is. Suffering is a basis for the unveiling of the world as illusion, of illusion as illusion – and Cervantes’s novel, at the end, is the occasion for such a “reduction.” Indeed, Don Quixote is taken by a high fever, but also by a great sadness (*Traurigkeit*), and the doctor suspects that this sadness is the hidden cause of his agony: “*Der Arzt war der Meinung, dass Melancholie und Verdruss sein Ende herbeiführten.*”²⁴ Melancholia, the

24 Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, vol. II, 339.

illness from which Don Quixote undoubtedly suffers, but also a deep boredom (*Verdruss*), open his eyes and make him see his life as an illusion. The illusion is thus visible as such. It is not so much the truth of the world that is perceived in this way, for everything is neutralized by and in the suffering gaze, but what appears is the illusion as illusion. It is known that in the same years Nietzsche placed great emphasis on the fact that pain is the product of a mechanism that finds its seat in the brain and has a specific biological function. As a fragment (among many others) from the beginning of 1881 underlines, “*der Schmerz ist Gehirnprodukt*” (Nachlass 1881, 11[319], KSA 9.565); moreover, against the German romantics, Nietzsche stresses that pain is silly, since it is only a biologically protective mechanism.²⁵ In *Dawn*, pain is of a very different nature: it becomes almost romantic again, it is unveiling, it provides a certain sharpened insight into illusions as such, and this conception of pain is directed against Schopenhauer’s negative understanding of pain. Nietzsche deepens the clear-sightedness provoked by suffering: the suffering subject is tyrannized by pain, which makes the subject rise above suffering and life to look at both with clarity. Far from Schopenhauerian “pessimism,” suffering, for Nietzsche, pushes the subject to fight it and to see life with the clear-sightedness of the fighter who refuses pessimism as defeat. Pain pushes us to pessimism, while the suffering subject tries in his resistance to adopt a neutral point of view, “*gerade das Leben gegen den Tyrannen zu vertreten*” (D 114). Representing life or, more precisely, defending it by adopting the perspective of neutrality against pain, “*wir als Leidende die Dinge und durch die Dinge hindurch sahen.*” This seeing through things is what Nietzsche calls “justice,” or what he still describes in terms of desubjectivation, that is, how we make ourselves foreign to the world and also to ourselves: “*wir wollen uns entfremdet und entpersönlicht werden.*” To make oneself foreign to oneself, but also depersonalized – which may just as well mean that we adopt the point of view of someone other than ourselves – is this not the Nietzschean ideal par excellence? After all, Nietzsche never ceased to accuse the history of metaphysics of having unduly constituted the substance of personality. It is also the positive dimension of the disease that strikes Nietzsche hard, as Marco Brusotti rightly points out:

erst die Krankheit klärt ihn über das von ihm Geliebte auf – über Wagner, die “edelsten und geliebtesten Illusionen” – und über sich selbst und seine Unredlichkeit gegen sich. Erst in der

²⁵ Nachlass 1881, 11[319], KSA 9.565: “Intellektuell gemessen, wie irthumvoll ist Lust und Schmerz! Wie falsch wäre geurtheilt, wenn man nach dem Grade von Lust oder Schmerz auf den Werth für das Leben schließen wollte! Im Schmerz ist so viel Dummheit wie in den blinden Affekten, ja es ist Zorn Rache Flucht Ekel Haß Überfüllung der Phantasie (Übertreibung) selber, der Schmerz ist die ungeschieden zusammengeflossene Masse von Affekten, ohne Intellekt giebt es keinen Schmerz, aber die niedrigste Form des Intellekts tritt da zu Tage; der Intellekt der „Materie“, der „Atome“. – Es giebt eine Art, von einer Verletzung überrascht zu werden (wie jener der auf dem Kirschbaum sitzend eine Flintenkugel durch die Backe bekam), daß man gar nicht den Schmerz fühlt. Der Schmerz ist Gehirnprodukt.”

Krankheit wird er – wie Jesus und Don Quijote – “hellsichtig über sich selber.” Die Krankheit ist also die Konstellation, in der die Redlichkeit sich durchsetzt. Der Schwerleidende wird gerecht gegen die Dinge und redlich gegen sich. Er beseitigt die eingebildeten Dinge, aber er beschränkt sich nicht darauf: Er entkleidet alle Dinge ihres Flaums. Seine lieblose Gerechtigkeit entblößt, entzaubert sie alle. Die Erkenntnis muss nun den Verlust der Täuschungen über ihn selbst und die Dinge ausgleichen und das physische Leiden erträglich machen.²⁶

Illness disenchants the world. It is a kind of transcendental attitude, one could say, an attitude of phenomenological reduction with the difference being that it is not the objective structures of the world that appear to the sick person, but rather the illusory nature of the illusions without a true world appearing beyond. Don Quixote who is ill perceives the nature of the illusions that have deceived him; the illness disenchants him and thus disenchants his world. Illness takes him out of himself: “*Ich sehe jetzt ihren Unsinn*,”²⁷ it makes him a spectator of his condition and of his other illness, madness. It took a disease to counter a disease.

The main question here is whether such an illusion can be revealed without the substance of the real world. Should we not then assume, in contrast to Nietzsche, the existence of a stable world behind the instability of illusions, that is, the existence of a true world beyond illusion? Now, *Dawn* says nothing of this sort; but how can illusion reveal itself without the substance of a stable truth? Perhaps illusion can reveal itself in the discomfort of illness, that is, in the quality of the subject's perceptive states, insofar as discomfort is projected onto the world, thus neutralizing itself. In illness, there is no need to know a true world, since the contrast between being healthy and being sick is sufficient. The intensity of the effect of the disease is in a way *sui generis*, without any point of reference other than itself as its own norm. It may very well be that this would be strong enough to produce the depersonalization we mentioned, namely, the unsubjective (neutral) perspective over the world.

VI) On Another Laugh, the Self-Laugh

But before delving further into the quixotic figure of laughter as *ressentiment*, I would like to briefly present the well-known Nietzschean figure of positive laughter, that of great health and superior human beings, which can be found everywhere in *Zarathustra* (1883–85).²⁸ This light laughter, that of dancing thought, is the opposite of the

²⁶ Marco Brusotti, *Die Leidenschaft der Erkenntnis: Philosophie und ästhetische Lebensgestaltung bei Nietzsche von “Morgenröthe” bis “Also sprach Zarathustra”*, Berlin 1997, 299.

²⁷ Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, vol. II, 340.

²⁸ On this laughter as opposed to the superficial laughter of *ressentiment*, see John Lippitt, “Nietzsche, Zarathustra and the Status of Laughter,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 32 (1992), 39–49; Mark Weeks, “Beyond a Joke: Nietzsche and the Birth of ‘Super-Laughter’,” *Journal of Nietzsche*

laughter aimed at Don Quixote and thus the opposite of laughter as a physiological expression of *ressentiment*. Let us start from the figure of Christ who, as we have just shown, is like Don Quixote in that he also reveals a transcendent pain which was the promise of greatness. However, taken negatively this pain is also a guilty absence of laughter, as a fragment from the beginning of 1880 teaches: “*Es ist zu bedauern, daß Jesus Christus nicht länger gelebt hat, er wäre vielleicht der erste Renegat seiner Lehre geworden, vielleicht hätte er dann auch noch das Lachen gelernt und weniger oft geweint*” (Nachlass 1880, 3[73], KSA 9.66). Christianity is therefore the place of the absence of laughter, the place of moral sorrow – and from this point of view, not only does pain no longer play a positive role (needless to say, the history of Christianity is dominated by such pain), but laughter no longer plays a negative role at all. But what laughter is it then, and how can we distinguish it, in Nietzsche, from laughter that is the expression of *ressentiment*? In fact, he describes a deep ambiguity of laughter, a “double postulation” to use Baudelaire’s expression, and therefore a deep variability of what it is the expression of.²⁹ It is the physiological expression of laughter, in itself, that has this ambiguity. Many texts indicate this. For example, another fragment of 1880: “*Das Lächerliche ist in Deutschland nicht furchtbar für den, der Geist hat. Denn es ist nicht das Lachen der geistreichen Leute sondern der jungen Esel, welches hier den Begriff des Lächerlichen macht*” (Nachlass 1880, 6[337], KSA 9.282). Here, laughter depends on the psychological type that laughs. It is faithful to the genealogical method, applied to psychology, since Nietzsche does not stop at the physical expression. Rather, for the same physical expression, he identifies its various possible psychological causes. D 210 explains the reasons for such a method:

Das „an sich“. — Ehemals fragte man: was ist das Lächerliche? wie als ob es ausser uns Dinge gebe, welchen das Lächerliche als Eigenschaft anhafte, und man erschöpfte sich in Einfällen [...]. Jetzt fragt man: was ist das Lachen? Wie entsteht das Lachen? Man hat sich besonnen und endlich festgestellt, dass es nichts Gutes, nichts Schönes, nichts Erhabenes, nichts Böses an sich giebt, wohl aber Seelenzustände, in denen wir die Dinge ausser und in uns mit solchen Worten belegen. Wir haben die Prädicate der Dinge wieder zurückgenommen, oder wenigstens uns daran erinnert, dass wir sie ihnen geliehen haben.

This text rejects the idea that laughter is a psychological reaction to an external object which would in itself be laughable. Indeed, it transforms the question: “What makes

Studies 27 (2004), 1–17; Olivier Ponton, *Nietzsche: Philosophie de la légèreté*, Berlin 2007; Lawrence J. Hatab, “Laughter in Nietzsche’s Thought: A Philosophical Tragicomedy,” *International Studies in Philosophy* 20/2 (1988), 67–79; and Tarmo Kunnas, *Nietzsches Lachen: Eine Studie über das Komische bei Nietzsche*, Munich 1982.

²⁹ See Charles Baudelaire, *Mon cœur mis à nu*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichon, Paris 1975–76, I, 682–3: “Il y a dans tout homme, à toute heure, deux postulations simultanées, l’une vers Dieu, l’autre vers Satan. L’invocation à Dieu, ou spiritualité, est un désir de monter en grade; celle de Satan, ou animalité, est une joie de descendre.”

laughter?" – which searches for the properties of the laughable in the external object – into the question: "How does laughter occur?" Now, the Nietzschean attempt to deontologize the world, as it were, prevents us from attributing to things themselves what is in fact in thought, what is psychological. Laughter is no exception to this method and must refer, in good methodology, to that which produces laughter, the psychological dispositions as they happened throughout history. Laughter is fundamentally ambiguous, not according to its external expression, but according to the causes of this expression. It is therefore a question of discriminating between the upper laughter and the lower laughter, so to speak. But discriminating between a good laugh and a bad one is falling back into morality. Nietzsche therefore prefers to distinguish between a laugh that intensifies the will to power and a laugh that decreases it. In GS 1, Nietzsche points out that even bad laughter ("*Schadenfreude*") is good for the human species, since (just like hatred or the desire for domination) it strengthens the hardening and the activity of those instincts that preserve the species. From this point of view, if laughter is malicious and hurts the individual, it still protects the species because it provokes the instincts through its action and plays a role of instinctive intensification favorable to the species. Consequently, the individual does not count, only the species counts, at least from the point of view of the will to power. More precisely, and as a fragment from 1883 indicates: "*im Lachen nämlich werden alle bösen Triebe heilig: daß aber alles Schwere leicht werde –*" (Nachlass 1883, 19[6], KSA 10.584). Laughter frees instincts, transforms them, by overturning the values attached to these instincts. By its strength, it makes the laughter that is condemned by morality a good laugh, because it is a strong, powerful and subversive laugh. There is, in Nietzsche, a methodology of laughter in the sense that laughter opens the possibility of the reversal of all values.

And there is, indeed, a passage in *Don Quixote* (II, 15) that can be interpreted from the point of view of this conception of a laughter which has enough energy to reverse values.³⁰ The context is the following: the bachelor Carrasco has devised a plan to disillusion Don Quixote; he will play another knight, the aptly named Knight of the Mirrors, and challenge him to a fight in order to defeat him and thus remove his illusions. To do this, he meets Don Quixote, pretending not to recognize him, and tells him that he has defeated Don Quixote in single combat, while continuously hiding his face in the dark of the night so as not to be recognized. Don Quixote first responds by concealing his identity, thus playing the same game (while ignoring it) as his opponent, then dramatically reveals himself, and responds favorably to the challenge: they will fight. Everything in this scene is baroque, acting, pretending, right down to the nose of the Knight of Mirrors' squire, a disproportionate and hideous nose that causes Sancho Panza's and even Don Quixote's fright. The play within the play here is complicated in such a way that Don Quixote is fooled while hiding himself; there is

³⁰ I am grateful to one of the anonymous referees for having mentioned this passage to me.

something frightening about this game, like the squire's nose. However, Don Quixote defeats the false knight and, revealing his face, recognizes the bachelor Carrasco, but thinks that it is a spell cast by his enemies. Thus, when the truth is revealed, Don Quixote remains in the fable, does not come out of it, and the truth is revealed in another way. But then another laugh is heard, if we are to believe the words of the false squire to Carrasco, after this misadventure: "*Don Quixote närrisch, wir gescheit; aber er macht sich gesund und lachend davon. Ihr seid zerschlagen und traurig. Sagt mir doch nun, wer ist der grösste Narr? Der es ist, weil er es sein muss, oder der, der sich freiwillig dazu macht?*"³¹ Don Quixote is fooled by Carrasco, but the deception fails. Not only has Carrasco not succeeded in disillusioning Don Quixote, but he has even reinforced Don Quixote's illusion, since Don Quixote does not even recognize Carrasco, although he does recognize his face: he thinks that it is a spell cast by his adversaries. Moreover, when Carrasco plays his role and provokes Don Quixote, the latter also plays a role and does not reveal his identity, that is, he plays a role in his already fictitious identity of Don Quixote. His identity as a knight errant is constantly reinforced by this performance within a performance, and he emerges as Don Quixote with power, with a laugh that his vanquished self lend him. Perhaps Don Quixote's madness is less than the madness of those who tried to trick him, at least at this point in the book, for we know that Carrasco will eventually succeed at the end of the novel. In other words, laughter can be reversed in Cervantes, in a reversal of the values of reality and truth; it can become the laughter of the mocked at the mockers, the laughter of powerful and self-confident honesty, the laughter of what Nietzsche calls the will to power, powerful enough to overthrow fundamental values. In Nietzschean terms, laughter is the expression of the intensity of non-reactive power par excellence: Don Quixote not only does not react to the trick played on him, but he is even unaware that it was a trick, which at the same time increases his own power. The existence of such laughter, crucial to Nietzsche, but also in Cervantes' novel, should not be denied.

But another type of laughter plays a more important role in the expression of the will to power. Nietzsche describes this in GS 1: "*Ueber sich selber lachen, wie man lachen müsste, um aus der ganzen Wahrheit heraus zu lachen, — dazu hatten bisher die Besten nicht genug Wahrheitssinn und die Begabtesten viel zu wenig Genie!*" What Nietzsche is aiming for is a laughter that must reach me deeply, that must destroy my individuality in order to give rise to the feeling of belonging to the species; a laughter that is powerful enough to destroy my certainties and my blind belief in the power of my individuality and the moral richness of my life. This laughter can in fact only come *from myself at myself*, which ironically subverts the traditional call of consciousness ("as if the truth comes from the heart"!). Moreover, just as ironically (he uses quotes, parodying Hegel), Nietzsche opposes this laughter to the comedy of

31 Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, vol. II, 593.

existence which has not yet “become conscious” (*bewusst geworden*). We therefore understand that laughter at ourselves is the methodological tool of the will to power insofar as it reveals the illusion of individuality and its power. This “self-laughter,” as it were, is a form of “self-awareness” (with all the necessary quotation marks) of the will to power. Zarathustra teaches such laughter. In fact, in the fourth part, Zarathustra teaches “higher men” what true superiority should be. The heart of his teaching, I will come back to it below, is the death of God which opens the birth of the superhuman, but which at the same time opens an abyss in the hearts of the higher men who are “afraid.” They must rise to the superhuman, and listen to the words of Zarathustra, who claims that the “higher men” begin to laugh at themselves: “*Sie beissen an, mein Köder wirkt, es weicht auch ihnen ihr Feind, der Geist der Schwere. Schon lernen sie über sich selber lachen: höre ich recht?*” (Z IV, Awakening 1) The spirit of heaviness gradually abandons higher men, and it is then that Zarathustra recognizes them as “*convalescents*.” Earlier in the same chapter, Zarathustra was already delighted that his guests made fun of him: he saw in it a beginning of openness to lightness. But it is the laughter about oneself that ultimately marks the definitive abandonment of the spirit of heaviness and an openness to joy.

Previously, Nietzsche taught precisely such a self-laughter:

Seid guten Muths, was liegt daran! Wie Vieles ist noch möglich! Lernt über euch selber lachen, wie man lachen muss!

Was Wunders auch, dass ihr missriethet und halb geriethet, ihr Halb-Zerbrochenen! Drängt und stösst sich nicht in euch — des Menschen Zukunft? [...]

Was Wunders, dass mancher Topf zerbricht! Lernt über euch lachen, wie man lachen muss! Ihr höheren Menschen, oh wie Vieles ist noch möglich! (Z IV, Higher Man 15)

“*Wie man lachen muss*”: laughing at myself here is the condition of the passage from the “higher man” to the superhuman. This passage is that of the “lack,” even of the failure (which the verb “*missraten*” contains) for the higher men to access the superhuman, and this failure lies in the conversion of the higher man into the promise of the superhuman, his “possibility,” and therefore his power for the future. Self-laughing is the very act of making this possibility possible, it is engaging in the possibility of the superhuman and therefore opening up to such a possibility, leaving behind any past *ressentiment*. In fact, no *ressentiment* can coexist with self-laughing: good laughter is the one that comes from laughing at myself. Laughter that both comes from me and targets me is the foundation of all healthy laughter in the world, because by being “self-laughter,” it gets rid of all unhealthy laughter, of all laughter aimed at mocking a soul that is too powerful or the will to power. Self-laughter is the laughter of the will to power itself, which sweeps away the weakness of discouragement in the face of the superhuman, but which also laughs at the subject who believes himself to be solitary and voluntary. Self-laughter relates the individual to the species, reminds me that I am first acted on by the species and that it is to my will to power that I must be devoted, not to the *ressentiment* that motivates me unwittingly.

At the same time, we can see here how Nietzsche to some extent moves away from the way he understood the self-laughter of Cervantes's reader. Indeed, in the fragment from 1876/77 that I quoted earlier, Nietzsche was implicitly considering Cervantes's mocking of his readers by making them laugh at themselves as being just as deluded as Don Quixote. Therein lies the difference between the two kinds of laughter: the self-laughing of the will to power is highly conscious, it is a powerful mastery of laughter by itself, so that the self-laughing of Cervantes's reader ignores itself. It is self-laughing at the expense of the reader, so to speak, without the reader realizing this – and is it not the most notable manifestation of weakness to laugh at myself without even noticing it? On the contrary, the self-laughing of the will to power deploys a form of self-consciousness. It is not self-consciousness in the metaphysical sense of an individual consciousness seized within a kind of intellectual intuition. Rather, it is the very act of grasping myself in an act as an act, laughter being reflected in the very act of laughing, laughter laughing at itself. The will to power, thus, finds a sort of self-attestation, not in the contemplative reflection of self-consciousness, but in the very act of the will to power. It is laughter laughing at itself, in a practical duplication which constitutes the very deployment of the will to power toward the superhuman. Let us come back now to the superficial laughter of the *ressentiment* in a comparison between Zarathustra and Don Quixote, which might also reveal another positive dimension of this laughter.

VII) Portrait of Zarathustra in inverted Don Quixote

a) Zarathustra Mocked

It seems to me that it is possible to draw a parallel between the character of Don Quixote as interpreted by Nietzsche and the character of Zarathustra. What follows are mainly hypotheses that would merit further examination. The prologue to *Zarathustra* is very valuable for a comparison between both figures. Indeed, this prologue reveals a Zarathustra mocked for his words and behavior by a crowd that does not understand him. But it is first of all a man, “*der Heilige*,” the religious hermit, who laughs at him. Indeed, the old man ironically suggests to give alms to Zarathustra, who is lonely and sparsely dressed. Then: “*Nein, antwortete Zarathustra, ich gebe kein Almosen. Dazu bin ich nicht arm genug./ Der Heilige lachte über Zarathustra*” (Z I, Prologue 2). Zarathustra's answer, highly ironic or at least polysemic, is not understood by the hermit, who seems to take it at face value and mock it. More broadly, the mockery of the ascetic who has withdrawn from the company of men is striking, whereas Zarathustra only wishes to meet men. But this mockery (“*lachen über*”) is not the mockery of somebody, like the hermit, who reveals the illusions to the one caught up in these illusions, like Zarathustra. On the contrary, Zarathustra understands, at

the end of the discussion, that the hermit is a prisoner of religious illusions and that he “*hat in seinem Walde noch Nichts davon gehört, dass Gott todt ist.*” The death of God hovers discreetly over these opening lines of the book. It is therefore (in a completely Nietzschean spirit) the one who is enclosed in his illusions who laughs at Zarathustra and who mocks him. The one who does not know that God is dead laughs at the one who knows that God is dead and wants to announce it to others. While the conversation seems friendly, Zarathustra is already dealing with a deep resistance that will mark his development. (One should not underestimate the irony that Zarathustra uses toward the hermit. When the latter explains to him how he prays to his god, Zarathustra answers: “Let me leave in haste, so that I don’t take anything from you!” Zarathustra too is mocking.)

When Zarathustra speaks to the crowd for the first time, the laughter becomes even more powerful. It must be said that his speech is forceful, without warning, beginning with the famous sentence: “*Ich lehre euch den Übermenschen*” (Z I, Prologue 3).³² At this moment, the crowd is waiting for a ropedancer (*Seiltänzer*) and it is Zarathustra who speaks. Zarathustra is also a ropedancer, as the following ironic passage shows:

Als Zarathustra so gesprochen hatte, schrie Einer aus dem Volke: „Wir hörten nun genug von dem Seiltänzer; nun lasst uns ihn auch sehen!“ Und alles Volk lachte über Zarathustra. Der Seiltänzer aber, welcher glaubte, dass das Wort ihm gälte, machte sich an sein Werk.

This passage articulates a triple irony. i) On the one hand, there is the ruthless irony of the crowd, which claims to have understood Zarathustra’s speech as the speech introducing the *Seiltänzer*. This is the crowd’s way of mocking Zarathustra, even though the latter abruptly presents the teaching of the superhuman, but also, with this teaching, the death of God! But we also notice ii) the irony of the writer who suggests that Zarathustra could well be this ropedancer, which is attested by the following speech, at the fourth moment of this prologue: “*Der Mensch ist ein Seil, geknüpft zwischen Thier und Übermensch, – ein Seil über einem Abgrunde.*” Zarathustra is indeed this dancer over the abyss, this tightrope walker, who walks above the whole of the Western Christian tradition, but who also opens human beings to the chaos that inhabits them. It seems as though Nietzsche is mocking the crowd that mocks Zarathustra, overthrowing one wickedness with another. Here, we certainly recognize the mockery endured by Christ before and during the Passion, where Christ’s status as King of the Jews, or as Son of God, becomes the object of sneering as he is summoned, ironically, to prove his divine quality when he needs it most. iii) But there is also a third level of irony:

³² The biblical parody of Zarathustra’s announcement has been examined in much detail in Duncan Large, “Nietzsche’s Use of Biblical Language,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 22 (2001), 88–115. See also Jörg Salaquarda, “Friedrich Nietzsche und die Bibel unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von *Also sprach Zarathustra*,” *Nietzscheforschung* 7 (2000), 323–34.

the rope dancer takes the mockery of the crowd at face value, he does not understand the irony and therefore prepares all the more for his performance, which we know will lead to his downfall. At the intersection among these different kinds, or levels, of irony, the abyss Zarathustra has to face becomes all the more acute: when the death of the ropedancer is announced, it is all the more difficult to walk over an abyss that has just been announced.

b) Giants and Devil

The fact that Zarathustra is the victim of mockery is not sufficient to bring him closer to Don Quixote. Thomas Mann certainly made the connection in a dream, allusively:

Mir träumte von Don Quijote, er war es selbst, und ich sprach mit ihm. Wie wohl die Wirklichkeit, wenn sie einem entgegentritt, sich unterscheidet von der Vorstellung, die man sich von ihr gemacht, so sah er etwas anders aus als auf Abbildungen: er hatte einen dicken, buschigen Schnurrbart, eine hohe, fliehende Stirn und unter ebenfalls buschigen Brauen graue, fast blinde Augen. Er nannte sich nicht den Ritter von den Löwen, sondern Zarathustra.³³

What is interesting here is that Don Quixote appears in the flesh, albeit in a dream, to Thomas Mann, but whereas Mann had imagined him otherwise in his book, he appears as Nietzsche and presents himself as Zarathustra. In other words, the post-literary reversal of Don Quixote in Thomas Mann's dream is his reversal into the Zarathustra he has always been. Indeed, there are a number of elements that thwart this rapprochement. i) First of all, it is clear that, unlike Don Quixote, Zarathustra knows how to use the mockery of his opponents to his advantage. In the rest of his discourse, he incorporates mockery into his narrative, making it a fundamental characteristic of the last man, who never ceases to wink – for example, at that crucial point in the fifth part of the same prologue, when Zarathustra presents us with the last man: “*Ehemals war alle Welt irre’ – sagen die Feinsten und blinzeln./ Man ist klug und weiss Alles, was geschehn ist: so hat man kein Ende zu spotten*” (Z I, Prologue 5). First comes the wink, then the mockery of the last man who thinks he knows and yet is unwittingly plunged into illusion – in this case the illusion of equality. In producing such a speech, however, Zarathustra uses the mockery of the crowd (of the last man!) to his advantage; he turns it against the crowd, which will be conquered in this way. Zarathustra is then a conscious, or inverted, Don Quixote, who is aware that he is Don Quixote and plays with it. ii) But a passage, which is perhaps an allusion to Don Quixote, helps to clarify even further the connection between these two figures. This is the last moment of the first part:

³³ Thomas Mann, *Meerfahrt mit Don Quijote: Ein Tagebuch aus der Zeit der Luxusliner*, Frankfurt a.M. 2002.

Hundertfältig versuchte und verirrt sich bisher so Geist wie Tugend. Ja, ein Versuch war der Mensch. Ach, viel Unwissen und Irrthum ist an uns Leib geworden!

Nicht nur die Vernunft von Jahrtausenden — auch ihr Wahnsinn bricht an uns aus. Gefährlich ist es, Erbe zu sein.

Noch kämpfen wir Schritt um Schritt mit dem Riesen Zufall, und über der ganzen Menschheit waltete bisher noch der Unsinn, der Ohne-Sinn. (ZI, Bestowing Virtue 2)

Of course, I cannot prove that the “giant contingency,” or “chance,” is an allusion to *Don Quixote's* windmills. However, let us start from this hypothesis: Zarathustra enjoins his disciples to remain the spirit on earth, not to give in to the temptation of the back-worlds, of the “craziness” “incorporated” into us for millennia of rationality. Zarathustra thus warns us against metaphysical illusions that distance us from the earth, and that push us to fight against the giant chance; that is to say, to fight that which limits our illusions of will and ends – as the other text where the same metaphor of the giant appears to designate chance teaches us: D 130.³⁴ This is an absurd struggle, a struggle like that of Don Quixote against windmills, a struggle of will and imagined ends, produced by the last man, against what is conceptually opposed to it, perhaps also imagined: chance. This struggle is senseless, crazy, and it is this madness, Don Quixote's madness, so to speak, that is the danger that lies in wait for the last men in search of the superhuman. If my interpretation is correct, then it must be understood that Don Quixote is precisely the counterfigure of the superhuman. At the same time, the last man behaves with himself like the mockers of Don Quixote: he thinks he is wise and his predecessors mad, he winks and mocks his predecessors, he blinds himself to his own madness in his disdain for the madmen who preceded him. From this perspective, Zarathustra, like Don Quixote, fights against giants, the idols, but as idols. In other words, and this is the difference with *Don Quixote*, it is a fight against idols understood as such, and this is perhaps what brings Nietzsche closer to Cervantes than to Don Quixote, staging the idols as such, not without cruelty to the victims of these idols: Don Quixote, on the one hand, and the last men, on the other. For Nietzsche too, as I have shown, uses a terrible irony to overcome the last man, to surpass him. How else to read, in Zarathustra's prologue, the death of the ropedancer, a grotesque death in two ways? On the one hand, he dies when he wants to impress the crowd; on the other hand, he dies because of the pressures of a jester (*Possenreisser*) who jealously observes his performance. Indeed, in the sixth part of the prologue we read:

34 D 130: “Dieser Glaube an die zwei Reiche ist eine uralte Romantik und Fabel: wir klugen Zwerge, mit unserem Willen und unseren Zwecken, werden durch die dummen, erzdummen Riesen, die Zufälle, belästigt, über den Haufen gerannt, oft todt getreten, — aber trotz alledem möchten wir nicht ohne die schauerliche Poesie dieser Nachbarschaft sein, denn jene Unthiere kommen oft, wenn uns das Leben im Spinnennetze der Zwecke zu langweilig oder zu ängstlich geworden ist und geben eine erhabene Diversion, dadurch dass ihre Hand einmal das ganze Netz zerreißt, — nicht dass sie es gewollt hätten, diese Unvernünftigen! Nicht dass sie es nur merkten! Aber ihre groben Knochenhände greifen durch unser Netz hindurch, wie als ob es Luft wäre.”

Nach einer Weile kam dem Zerschmetterten das Bewusstsein zurück, und er sah Zarathustra neben sich knien. „Was machst du da? sagte er endlich, ich wusste es lange, dass mir der Teufel ein Bein stellen werde. Nun schleppt er mich zur Hölle: willst du's ihm wehren?“

„Bei meiner Ehre, Freund, antwortete Zarathustra, das giebt es Alles nicht, wovon du sprichst: es giebt keinen Teufel und keine Hölle.“ (Z I, Prologue 6)

This passage is Don Quixote's death in reverse: the *Seiltänzer* does not discover, at the moment of his death, god and the devil, but rather experiences Zarathustra's lesson that neither God nor the devil exists. By plunging into the abyss, he encounters neither God nor the devil, but rather the risk of the absence of meaning. Without the superhuman, Zarathustra can say in the next section of the prologue: “*Unheimlich ist das menschliche Dasein und immer noch ohne Sinn: ein Possenreisser kann ihm zum Verhängniss werden*” (Z I, Prologue 7). To dance over the abyss is to take “Don Quixote's risk” of the absurd, of nothingness, of chaos, to take the risk of failing in front of the superhuman. In this respect, the falling *Seiltänzer* is a reflection of the risk taken by Zarathustra, therefore of Zarathustra himself. Also, perhaps there is an implicit reference to *Don Quixote*. Again, this is only a hypothesis. But let us read a passage from chapter XXII of book II of Cervantes's novel, which mocks the humanists. Sancho Panza asks a humanist the following question and gives the following answer: “*Aber sagt mir doch nun, wer war der erste in der Welt, der einen Purzelbaum schoss? [...] Denn der erste, der in der Welt einen Purzelbaum schoss, war Lucifer, als sie ihn aus dem Himmel schmissen oder schleuderten; denn damals purzelte er bis in den Abgrund hinunter.*”³⁵ It is not about tightrope walkers, but about acrobats who do somersaults; it is about jumping into the abyss, and it is also, with the figure of Lucifer the acrobat, a pedantic and humanistic fiction, an illusion of knowledge that Sancho Panza repeats like a parrot to imitate humanists who are not much better. Perhaps Nietzsche, in his description of the fall of the *Seiltänzer*, drew on this curious passage in Tieck's translation, in which the acrobat is the one who plunges into the abyss (*Abgrund*) like the devil? If this is the case, then Zarathustra would be a Don Quixote aware not only of his madness, but also of the effects of this madness on others. Even more, a Don Quixote who would use his “Quixotry” to achieve his ends, to teach the superhuman with even more mockery than those who mock him.

c) Positive Use of Laughter: Christ, Quixote and Zarathustra

In the fifth part of this paper, I argued that Nietzsche linked Quixote and Christ in the apocalypse of the cross that they both experience at the moment when all illusions finally, but cruelly, appear as illusions. I would like to show how such a link

³⁵ Cervantes, *Leben und Taten des scharfsinnigen Edlen Don Quixote von la Mancha*, vol. II, 128–9.

also allows us to highlight a more positive dimension of laughter, or more precisely: a more positive dimension of the suffering experienced in the face of laughter. Let us come back to the cruel laughter that Christ experiences on the cross in Mark 15:18: Christ is delivered by Pilate to the crowd that greets him by saying: “Hail, King of the Jews [Χαῖρε, ὁ βασιλεὺς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων].” Mark names this mockery in 15:20: “and after they made fun of him Καὶ [ὅτε ἐνέπαιξαν αὐτῷ],” which quotes Judges, 16:25. ἐμπαίζω³⁶ generally means “to make fun of, to mock, to ridicule,” but it can have another sense that we find in Maccabees, 2, 7: to physically torture, when the verb is used euphemistically. As Jan Willem van Henten notes: “In the Passion Narratives, we find a similar use of physical punishment during the trial scenes, which goes hand in hand with the mocking of Jesus.”³⁷ Moreover, the Greek verse marks by its brutal sound the brutality of this superior laughter before the inferior god. In this case, laughter is torturing with words, dominating. It is very well known that this mockery recurs again and again during the crucifixion episode: in 15:31, Mark uses the same verb, ἐμπαίζω, to describe how the executioners laugh at the “savior’s” inability to save himself. The laughter is also a play on words. The terrible sentence that Christ pronounces (and that Nietzsche quotes, as we have seen): “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”, Mark quotes in a strange language: “Eloï, Eloï, lama sabachthani?”, which is a mixed Hebrew and Aramaic sentence and a transformed quotation of Psalms, 22, 1. “Eloï” seems to reflect an Aramaic form, but it is also very close to the Hebrew word “Eli” (Matthew will use, after Mark, the word “Eli,” so he will change the text of Mark). This mysterious word is not understood by witnesses – transcendence is expressed by this misunderstanding, by the unreachable nature of Christ’s words. Because they do not understand, they laugh: they pretend to hear “Elijah” (elaija), who is the prophet whose eschatological return is awaited by some Jewish traditions, and others indicate that he can return to save men from distress.³⁸ Witnesses mock Christ with a pun. It is not what is said in itself that is mocking, for what is said is, from a Christian point of view, the truth: Christ is actually the King of Jews according to Christian tradition. It is the tone, the context, and the political and social norms that constitute such humor: Christ’s maladjustment to human law and the pun play on words that imply a historical tradition (the prophetic one) and a human grammar that is always in context. This laughter is radically subjective and does not reach the object he wants to target: it qualifies those who laugh, not the one who is mocked. This is why the famous Alexamenos graffito, possibly the oldest representation of Christ (c. 200), is rigorously and theologically accurate: Christ is mocked and crucified with the head of a donkey (an infamous mark at the begin-

³⁶ See also Matt. 27:29, 31, 41, Luke 22:63, 23:11, 36.

³⁷ Jan Willem van Henten, “Martyrdom, Jesus’ Passion and Barbarism,” in Ra’anan S. Boustán / Alex P. Jassen / Calvin J. Roetzel (eds.), *Violence, Scripture, and Textual Practice in Early Judaism and Christianity*, Leiden 2010, 239–64: 247.

³⁸ Cf. Mark 6:15, 8:28, 9:11–3.

ning of the Christian era):³⁹ the graffito represents a Christ on the cross, the head of a donkey turned toward his worshipper, the buttocks clearly visible as well as the wounds all over his body, with the inscription: ΑΛΕ ΞΑΜΕΝΟC CEBETE ΘΕΟΝ, which can be read as: Αλεξαμενος σέβεται θεόν (“Alexamenos worships [his? a?] God”). This is an accurate representation from a theological perspective, even if the artist probably wanted to mock a Christian friend with this picture.

It seems that in A 40, Christ on the cross has the attitude of radical superiority with regard to all *ressentiment*, which was not understood by the first Christian community: “*Offenbar hat die kleine Gemeinde gerade die Hauptsache nicht verstanden, das Vorbildliche in dieser Art zu sterben, die Freiheit, die Überlegenheit über jedes Gefühl von ressentiment*” (A 40).⁴⁰ We know that (according to Nietzsche) it is Paul who will radicalize the interpretation of Christ’s life through *ressentiment*. But however weak and abandoned by the will to power, Christ belonged to the heights, free from *ressentiment*, and the cruelty of which he is the victim is both caused by this height and provokes this height. Thus, it is the object of laughter itself, Christ, who assumes in Nietzsche a positive character, a figure beyond *ressentiment*. Zarathustra, like Don Quixote, knows how to rise through the mockery of others. This appears clearly in the prologue after the episode of the ropedancer when the “buffoon in the tower” speaks wisely to Zarathustra, warning him of the dangers that lie ahead, but also of the positive things he has to learn from his experience of the day: “*Dein Glück war es, dass man über dich lachte: und wahrlich, du redetest gleich einem Possenreisser. Dein Glück war es, dass du dich dem todtten Hund geselltest; als du dich erniedrigtest, hast du dich selber für heute errettet*” (ZI, Prologue 8). If we push this prevention to the limit, it can mean that, far from destroying Zarathustra, mockery elevates him to his true mission. So, far from being devalued by the laughter aimed at him, he needs it to rise above the social world and *ressentiment*. Indeed, it is perhaps in the test for the heroic blow of mockery that Zarathustra fulfills his superhumanity and manages to describe most precisely what drives this laughter, *ressentiment*.

d) Transcendental Pain and Will to Power

A final, more positive point must be added to understand the possible rapprochement between Zarathustra and Don Quixote. Indeed, it is suffering that makes Don Quixote’s clear-sightedness possible throughout his journey toward the superhuman. In the second part, Zarathustra says: “*Schaffen – das ist die grosse Erlösung vom Leiden,*

³⁹ For a precise description and contextualization of the graffito, see Oliver Larry Yarbrough, “The Shadow of an Ass: On Reading the Alexamenos Graffito,” in Aliou Cissé Niang / Carolyn Osiek (eds.), *Text, Image, and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World: A Festschrift in Honor of David Lee Balch*, Eugene, OR 2012, 239–54.

⁴⁰ I thank Manon Gérard for pointing out the importance of this passage to me.

und des Lebens Leichtwerden. Aber dass der Schaffende sei, dazu selber thut Leid noth und viel Verwandlung" (Z II, Happy Isles). Creation needs suffering for its beginning and its fulfillment: to create, i. e., to get out of the repetition of the ghostly discourses of metaphysics, is to embrace one's suffering and produce from it the annihilation of idols. But in the face of this suffering, only the "will" can break the possible annihilation: "*Wollen befreit: das ist die wahre Lehre von Wille und Freiheit – so lehrt sie euch Zarathustra.*" Here is the key to our entire investigation: in the face of the unleashing of idols, of the gods who never cease to create in my place, I must oppose an ever more powerful, ever more active and ever less reactive will, a will that can only find its power (will to power) in the fundamental, transcendental suffering that is mine, and which risks annihilating the world at any moment. One would be tempted to rediscover the figure of Don Quixote presented by Tieck; a Don Quixote certainly suffering (something Nietzsche emphasizes), but also a Don Quixote of will, of decision, of doing – of a pure and simple Fichtean *Tathandlung*, not reactive but active, the self positing itself in reality through its action in the transcendental sense. From this point of view, suffering is transcendental only insofar as it opens the individual to his will to power, i. e., to his creative action in the world. Don Quixote is perhaps, in the light of the preceding analyses, the sublimated figure of such a will to power that Zarathustra nevertheless replaces, because he is mocked and is mad only inasmuch as he is aware of it and uses this configuration to deploy this will to power.

This is what I have called "transcendental pain," the type of pain presented by Nietzsche in D 114, when the human being that suffers possesses clear-sightedness in his struggle with the tyranny of pain. Resisting the pessimism imposed by his tyrant, the suffering human being neutralizes the world in its usual colors, that is to say, with the values by which it is usually experienced. The human being thus becomes able to identify the illusions from which he suffers as illusions, and his pain reveals to him the more serious pathology from which he suffers, the metaphysical pathology. In neutralizing the world, pain plays a transcendental role: from Kant onward, the transcendental is an ideal region where the world loses its ordinarily experienced structure, where it is somehow reconfigured by the transcendental neutralization resulting from the subject's struggle with her/his tyrant. Nietzschean pain is certainly not ideal, but it is what Hölderlin called a "transcendental sensation" that allows for a transcendental reduction. This transcendental reduction passes through the vital will of a subject capable of fighting the pessimism that is the result of illness, a subject willing enough to neutralize this pessimism and thus to neutralize the world in order to let it appear as an ordinarily illusory world. Husserl will deepen this process of transcendental neutralization: the *Umwelt* is a world of goods, of material practices, to which we attribute certain values spontaneously under the influence of the social norms that we incorporate. To access a theoretical knowledge of the same world, it is necessary to put it in parentheses, to neutralize it, in order to reveal its eidetic essences from the consciousness that receives them. For Nietzsche, pain is a question of gaining insight into the metaphysical mantle that covers the practical world: pain,

undoubtedly that of Nietzsche when he wrote these lines, leads to a reduction of the world, allows non-metaphysical, even anti-metaphysical writing. Pain disenchanters the world, interrupts the enchanting glitter of metaphysical illusions, and liberates the will to power. “*Wollen befreit*”: this liberation in suffering provoked by the cruel laughter of *ressentiment* is, from Nietzsche’s point of view, the liberation of Christ on the cross from the illusions of his preaching, the liberation of Don Quixote at the time of his death, and that of Zarathustra throughout his continuously mocked preaching. Each time, this laughter releases from *ressentiment* and intensifies, in a non-reactive way, the will to power that Tieck already identified in Don Quixote’s *Tathandlung*.

Conclusions

The figure that has been described here is Don Quixote according to Nietzsche, or more exactly the Nietzschean possibilities of Don Quixote. It would be necessary to truly study the validity of this Nietzschean character with regard to Cervantes’s novel taken in its own specificity. Throughout this paper, I have identified various possible figures of such a character in Nietzsche: i) First of all, there is the source of Tieck’s translation, in which Don Quixote is an idealistic hero who by his courage deploys the Fichtean *Tathandlung*. ii) Then, Nietzsche’s opposition to this figure, Nietzsche for whom *Don Quixote* is first of all Cervantes’s novel, and more precisely the way in which the latter ridicules his character with a perversion which is the first resource of *ressentiment*. iii) Don Quixote is mocked so much that he suffers from it and that this suffering reveals the abyss of the wickedness of *ressentiment* insofar as it is the heart of the punishment, a fundamental motor in the history of the constitution of morality, and from this point of view, the martyr of Don Quixote is a Christian martyr. iv) Nietzsche reveals the closeness between Christ on the cross and Don Quixote dying, Don Quixote passing from illusions of chivalry to illusions of the cross at the moment of dying: locked up all his life, he locks himself up even more, believing himself to be liberated in the final moments of his existence. v) All this suffering, however, can also claim a deeper positivity, that of the lucidity of pain which then becomes “transcendental,” neutralizing the world and thereby freeing it from metaphysical illusions. Don Quixote’s illness disenchanters the world, frees it from its substantiality and thus intensifies lucidity about the nature of the illusions that constitute the world. vi) Another positive dimension is the laughter at oneself, practiced by Zarathustra, insofar as this laughter also contributes to the desubjectification of existence and opens existence to lightness by freeing it from *ressentiment*. vii) It is Zarathustra who is behind the Nietzschean interpretation of Don Quixote: a Zarathustra who has more than one point in common with Don Quixote in the fact of being mocked. Precisely, it is this positivity that I sought to emphasize in the last part of this paper: to be mocked is not only to be the victim of *ressentiment*, it is also to be liberated from it by great-

ness. Thus, what unites Christ, Don Quixote and Zarathustra is, from a Nietzschean point of view, the constitution of their superhumanity in and through mockery, this surge of *ressentiment*, which at the same time places them elsewhere, on an overhanging, risky and difficult *praxis*, without the stable supports of metaphysics, in the “transcendental suffering” which opens the world of the will to power. Seen from this perspective, there is indeed a Nietzschean theology, a return to the Lutheran theme of suffering. Through Don Quixote, Christianity penetrates Nietzsche in another way, but not without his knowledge, so much was he aware of the Christian dimension of his superhuman.

The question remains which “subject” is practicing such a will to power. Certainly not a Kantian transcendental subject in any case, if we remember this crucial sentence of D 114: “*wir wollen uns entfremdet und entpersönlicht werden.*” This de-subjectification, depersonalization of the subject – not incompatible, moreover, with the transcendental Kantian subject in the variety of its historical manifestations – is produced by the activity of the subject in pain, who by annihilating the tyranny of pain also annihilates a reactive and weak substance. The suffering subject transcends herself through activity, she is beyond herself through and in her very action, she makes herself a stranger to herself (*entfremdet*), other than herself and perhaps even unknown to her; it also depersonalizes her, undresses her of her moral personality which was her metaphysical personality as well, that is to say, fixed by her largely Christian moral beliefs. The suffering subject is rather an interpreting and fighting subject who refuses to be imprisoned by pain and who constitutes herself in her struggle with pain. Or again, a subject who constitutes herself in her activity, acting in front of the world, a rebellious subject, insubordinate both to her pain and to the illusions of the world that pain reveals to her. If there is transcendental reduction, then it is rather a vital amplification, an overcoming of norms, metaphysical constraints, a *praxis* of neutralization rather than a passage to a theoretical attitude. At the end, two points need to be made: i) perhaps Nietzsche is more of an heir to Luther than he claims: if it is not anguish that stands at the basis of subjectivity freed from error as in Luther, it is indeed a form of suffering, an annihilation that leads the subject to occur, so to speak; ii) the heir of Nietzsche, from this point of view, is not so much Husserl (in whom the neutralization of the world is a theoretical neutralization) as it is Heidegger, in whose writings transcendental reduction passes through a *praxis* of the anguished subject, beyond the theoretical/practical couple. In Nietzsche, the neutralization of the world is a way for the subject to live in a non-metaphysical way and in accordance with her will to power. This may be a form of appeal to authenticity according to the criterion of the will to power – but it calls for a discussion that goes beyond the scope of this article. The Nietzschean subject would perhaps be an empirical-transcendental subject, but also practical-transcendental because it is constituted by its own activity.

Bibliography

- Arenas-Dolz, Francisco: "Nietzsche, Don Quijote und Sancho Pansas 'tiefsinnige Logik'," in Ralph Häfner / Sebastian Kaufmann / Andreas Urs Sommer (eds.), *Nietzsches Literaturen*, Berlin 2019, 189–217
- Brusotti, Marco: *Die Leidenschaft der Erkenntnis: Philosophie und ästhetische Lebensgestaltung bei Nietzsche von "Morgenröthe" bis "Also sprach Zarathustra"*, Berlin 1997
- Genette, Gérard: *Figures III*, Paris 1972
- Hatab, Lawrence J.: "Laughter in Nietzsche's Thought: A Philosophical Tragicomedy," *International Studies in Philosophy* 20/2 (1988), 67–79
- Henten, Jan Willem van: "Martyrdom, Jesus' Passion and Barbarism," in Ra'anana S. Boustana / Alex P. Jassen / Calvin J. Roetzel (eds.), *Violence, Scripture, and Textual Practice in Early Judaism and Christianity*, Leiden 2010, 239–64
- Large, Duncan: "Nietzsche's Use of Biblical Language," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 22 (2001), 88–115
- Leusing, Reinhard: *Die Stimme als Erkenntnisform: Zu Novalis' Roman "Die Lehrlinge zu Sais"*, Stuttgart 1993
- Lippitt, John: "Nietzsche, Zarathustra and the Status of Laughter," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 32 (1992), 39–49
- Mann, Thomas: *Meerfahrt mit Don Quijote: Ein Tagebuch aus der Zeit der Luxusliner*, Frankfurt a.M. 2002
- Ponton, Olivier: *Nietzsche: Philosophie de la légèreté*, Berlin 2007
- Salaquarda, Jörg: "Friedrich Nietzsche und die Bibel unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von *Also sprach Zarathustra*," *Nietzscheforschung* 7 (2000), 323–34
- Weeks, Mark: "Beyond a Joke: Nietzsche and the Birth of 'Super-Laughter,'" *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 27 (2004), 1–17
- Wilberg, Henrik S.: "Translation as Subversion: Ludwig Tieck's *Don Quixote* and the Poetic Logic of Jena Romanticism," *Monatshefte* 108 (2016), 42–68
- Williams, Simon: *Shakespeare on the German Stage*, vol. 1, Cambridge 1990
- Yarbrough, Oliver Larry: "The Shadow of an Ass: On Reading the Alexamenos Graffito," in Aliou Cissé Niang / Carolyn Osiek (eds.), *Text, Image, and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World: A Festschrift in Honor of David Lee Balch*, Eugene, OR 2012, 239–54