Structure and Theme
Don Quixote as Prototype

"The Intrinsic Sociology in Fiction," by Brent Harold, is an effort to reconcile adherents of two divisive elements in literary criticism, intrinsic and extrinsic modes. Harold makes the point that there is no real conflict between the experience of reading outlined in Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* and the view of literature as social or political in intent. Harold writes: "The structure and structuring elements in the work are words, the very quality of which is to evoke life outside the work."¹

If this be true of social and political matters, it can be proved true also of psychological or philosophical bases that undergird many works of fiction. It is one purpose of this book to indicate, in some detail, that the experience of the work of art must involve both matters intrinsic to the work itself and matters extrinsic, references and allusions to other phenomena. The insistence of certain formalist criticism on literature as a "closed system" (an art for the sake of art) is partly responsible, in the view of this author, for the current enrollment figures of courses in literature in our universities. The student is too often asked to spend time developing skills aimed at a complicated sort of gamesmanship. The self-referential nature of some formalist criticism can lead to a Nietzschean "ewige Wiederkehr." As Nietzsche himself remarked, "Who can bear the thought?" "Literary art is not the whole of poetry," writes Ortega y Gasset,* "but only a secondary activity."²

My plan is to examine the structural elements underlying thirteen various novels from various eras. I hope to

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¹Because of the many languages involved in this book, I have quoted from translations when they were available. When they were not, translations are my own.
show thereby how each work results not only in an art form but also in a closely connected statement—sociological, psychological, philosophical, or sometimes political in nature. It will be noted that in different novels form relates to its subject matter in different ways, sometimes complementing it, sometimes contrasting with it, or sometimes imitating it. The structures of *Joseph Andrews*, *Madame Bovary*, and *The Magic Mountain* relate to matters exterior to the consciousness of the protagonists whereas structures of the other books discussed relate closely to the inner worlds of their leading figures. A stress on inner or a stress on outer reality may be a characteristic of an era. On the other hand, common factors in novels of different eras often abrogate time altogether so that Leopold Bloom or Settembrini or Emma Bovary may be seen to precede or to “influence” *Don Quixote*, which we would do well, perhaps, to attribute to Flaubert (see Chapter Seven, Part One, below). A neat metaphysical, perhaps even psychological, point is thereby established.

In *Don Quixote*, the ancestor, so to speak, of all fictions and of all metafictions, we find close and complex correlations between the structure of the book, the psychological development of the hero, and consequently, psychological theory, both Renaissance and modern. In fact, it is impossible to separate in *Don Quixote* intrinsic matters from extrinsic. On the one hand, *Don Quixote* is a statement about human behavior, psychology if you will, about the relationship of the individual to his society and to himself. On the other, it is a novel fully responsive to literary history, and it may be experienced simply as fiction. Yet as Brent Harold writes, “To experience the structure of a non-literary product such as a table is to experience its implied relationship to the social system in which it was made”3 (p. 594). With this point in mind, I intend to explore the literary structures of *Don Quixote* and of twelve other novels, showing how structure and theme are interpenetrative and how awareness of literary structure leads inevitably to a statement about the environment which produced that structure.
The naturalness of Cervantes' art has been noted again and again by critics; in following chapters in this book, statements to this effect by Flaubert, Thomas Mann, and Virginia Woolf are cited. Cervantes' craftsmanship is perhaps more intuitive than consciously designed, and it is surely not the intention of this study to impose a Procrustean bed of form upon his work or upon that of any other author. Although it seems to be clear in general that he uses the digressions in the 1605 Quixote as complements to the main action in developing the psychological patterns of his hero and that they are rather regularly spaced, providing a contrapuntal effect with the main plot, there is no proof that Cervantes himself was consciously aware of such a structure. The fact is that it is a structure that is inherent in the subject matter, designating, as Erich Kahler points out, Don Quixote as "the first modern novel."4 By this he means that Don Quixote was the first novel to employ a symbolism that rises "from a purely human natural world."5 "The whole symbolic structure," says Kahler, "is built up by the artist; it is entirely integrated."6 Don Quixote is guided not by the planets but by himself, and he, as he himself makes clear, is author of his own book and has no hesitation in pointing out errors made by various pseudo-authors who could not possibly have been present to witness the action. It is this so-called complete fiction that Don Quixote introduced, and the various structures discussed for Don Quixote and for novels in other chapters of this book should be seen in this light. They are not imposed from outside, like the divine cosmos of Dante, but spring naturally from the subject matter and characters presented. That literary art has become more self-conscious since the time of Cervantes is due to causes outside the pale of this book, but, although more self-conscious, all the structures following that of Don Quixote remain closely related to their contexts, as subsequent chapters of this book will bear out. This study, in a sense, then, begins where Erich Kahler left off and explores various turns the "inward turn of narrative" took after Cervantes.

In the 1605 Quixote, each part of the book describes a
phase of the central theme—Don Quixote’s relation to other people and to his society—and each part concludes with a digressive tale that highlights the particular psychological state of the hero at that point in the narrative. The first unit of the 1605 book (chapters 1–14) describes episodes in which Don Quixote is attempting to impose his vision of reality on all those he meets. Thus he insists that the innkeeper knight him, that the farmer free the worthless Andrew, that the merchants declare Dulcinea the most beautiful sight unseen, and even after the destruction of his library that Sancho accept the windmills as thirty monstrous giants. It is at the end of this section that we meet Marcela and listen to the tale of her life with its curious parallels to Don Quixote’s own. Both feel they were “born free”; neither recognizes the unrelenting nature of the social contract or a constructive and realistic means for carrying out idealisms within the social frame. And yet Marcela also acts as a foil for Don Quixote; her retirement springs from fear and negation whereas Don Quixote’s retirement at this point, among the goatherds, contains a positive note of peace, is a return to nature in order to gather strength for the next sally into combat with the world of material values.

The second part of the 1605 Quixote (chapters 15–27) deepens the psychological tension between Don Quixote and others whom he meets; no longer does he merely demand blind faith in his own inner world from other people. He often resorts to force, as in the slaying of the sheep; in the attack on the Master of Arts, whose leg he fractures; in the adventure with the corpse; in the assault on the barber to steal his basin; or in the freeing of the galley slaves. Instead of insisting on his beliefs, he now enforces them, thus becoming separated even more severely from the social structure than he had been in part one. He becomes, in fact, a fugitive from justice and is forced to flee into the Sierra Morena.

Here he meets Cardenio, and the tale of Cardenio is a digression, like that of Marcela, paralleling Don Quixote’s
current state of mind. Cardenio, also unable to cope with reality, has withdrawn from society. As Don Quixote in his penance has now substituted a bookish role, the role of Amadis of Gaul, for action in the real world, so Cardenio's penance for his lost love is wasteful and meaningless as he weeps futilely in the Sierra Morena. Both situations require rescue initiated from without. Yet Don Quixote does penance not for a Lucinda but for the human race, which mocks and cheats him. Cardenio's grief, on the other hand, does not reach beyond himself and Lucinda. The whole world has jilted Don Quixote, yet it is this world he wishes to save. The digressions thus serve as foils and parallels to the main plot and highlight the multiangularity of the novel's hero, the nobility of his inner world in contrast to the futility of his acts.

The pattern of sallying into the world and withdrawing from it is continued in the third part of the 1605 *Quixote* (chapters 28-52). Here, however, a new element appears. Don Quixote instead of acting is acted upon, becoming the passive victim of others' aggressions at the inn. First, he is rescued by Dorothea in parody of the conventional knight bent upon rescuing maidens in distress. Now it is the maiden who rescues a knight in distress. When he fights in this part, he fights wineskins in his bedroom, not people. Later his arm or his power is shackled by two prostitutes, or, as Cervantes calls them, "demi-virgins." All of these calamities culminate in his imprisonment in a cage and his return to his village drawn on a cart. This third part is punctuated by five digressions, illustrating the central polarity of the book: involvement with others and withdrawal from others. The final digression describing two jilted lovers in wasteful retirement from life parallels Don Quixote's final retirement to his home. In the melee in the inn over Mambrino's helmet, where ironically Don Quixote establishes peace in a fray he has been the cause of, or in the attack on the rainmakers, Don Quixote's activity creates only chaos. He is now manipulated by the very fantasies that have inspired his active quest to rees-
tablish the world of chivalry. The participation-withdrawal pattern outlines the progression of Don Quixote's madness as well as the structure of the book. From one who would save the world through the idealisms of the chivalric code, who would manipulate others, he has become in the final part one who because of his chivalric fantasy becomes the responsibility of others as well as the butt of their jokes. The scenes in the inn represent his gradual withdrawal from the active role, leading to his total withdrawal in the final chapters. Thus it may be seen that the three parts of the 1605 book are closely tied in with the pattern of Don Quixote's psychological syndrome, each part representing one distinct stage in the progress of his dementia.

The 1615 Quixote can be outlined in a similar fashion. Briefly, instead of a participant-withdrawal pattern in his relation to society, the latter book stresses Don Quixote's search for himself, effected by a series of episodes and images using a mirror technique. Many of the characters act as mirrors reflecting the hero from different angles, such as the Knight of the Mirrors, who actually has pieces of reflecting glass sewed to his costume. Furthermore, the episodes in this book are often paired to reflect one another (replacing the function served by the digressions in the 1605 Quixote). Thus the episodes dealing with the Knight of the Mirrors and the wagon of players are set side by side to contrast two kinds of actors and to comment on Don Quixote's own sense of role. Or Camacho's wedding and the vision in Montesinos's cave involve two love affairs that parallel and contrast with one another as well as with Don Quixote's relation to Dulcinea. In fact, the play of mirrors becomes so complicated, the confusion between reality and illusion, between life and books, so complete, that the reader, like Don Quixote, tends to lose himself. The confusion is compounded by the fact that not only do the episodes comment on each other but the 1615 book comments on the 1605 book. Also, a third Quixote, that of the imposter Avellaneda, is introduced to mirror the other two. It is through this losing of self in a complicated series
of self-images that Don Quixote is to find himself. The progression of the 1615 *Quixote* is thus a descent into the darkness of the earth (symbolized by descents into caves, by tramplings by hogs and by bulls). In the same way Thomas Mann's Joseph descends into the pit only to be reborn, or Hans Castorp ascends so that he may descend or vice versa, meeting Satana (Settembrini) in the Hades of Haus Berghof at the summit of the magic mountain. The mechanical structure of *Don Quixote* and the psychological development of its hero are thus interdependent. The reflexive imagery of the 1615 *Quixote* stands at the core of this book just as the wavelike fluctuation of participation and withdrawal had established the pattern of its predecessor.

This brief outline of the two central structures of *Don Quixote* may be followed in more detail by consulting the introduction to my volume *Don Quixote: The Knight of La Mancha* (pp. xviii–xxxvi). What should, however, emerge clearly is that such matters as the arranging of episodes and of digressions, the use of symbols and metaphors, or the art of foiling are not simply self-reflexive devices throwing light on the art of fiction. In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes uses these devices to produce psychological context so that, for instance, the mirror image developed in the 1615 *Quixote* makes a direct statement about narcissism (a modern term, in this instance, relating to the Knight of the Mirrors, Sampson Carrasco) or about discovering and knowing oneself (relating here to Quixote, who sees himself in these mirrors and finds himself, the characteristic quest of Renaissance man). The imagery of withdrawal in the 1605 *Quixote* may be seen as a symbolic statement of that *atra bilis*, or melancholy, that plagued seventeenth-century man from Hamlet to John Donne. Nor is it reaching outside the novel to use the term *schizophrenic* to describe Quixote's early adjustments to society in the 1605 volume.

To relate to something verbally is to relate not only to that object as such but to the many allusions it may contain for any particular listener or reader. To a twentieth-century
reader of *Don Quixote*, schizophrenia is an unavoidable association, springing from the hero's clear loss of contact with his environment and the disintegration of his personality as Alonso Quixano. It is the dialectical unity of the structure of the novel (itself "schizophrenic" in setting passages dealing with the hero's misguided participation against passages dealing with his hermetic withdrawals) and of its theme, the hero's loss of contact with reality, that forms the full experience of reading the book. Other novels examined in the same way will further exemplify the point.

Ortega y Gasset writes: "There is need of a book showing in detail that every novel bears *Quixote* within it like an inner filigree, in the same way as every epic poem contains the *Iliad* within it like the fruit its core." Another purpose of my book, then, is just this, at least to the extent that Cervantes' general concepts of structure and of order can be shown to persist in the great novels that have followed *Don Quixote* in Western culture.

5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., pp. 57–58.
7. Ortega y Gasset, p. 162.