What else after Cervantes and Shakespeare?

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Shakespeare and Cervantes are the global genius of modern Western literature. They are omnipresent in different cultures through a variety of representations and enactments. Their appropriation to different contexts and situations has facilitated new interpretations of them. Their works are characterised by continuing popular appeal which allows them to be our contemporaries. Shakespeare, like Cervantes, ‘is part of our common culture.’1 Their language is, somehow, our language. English and Spanish, two of the leading languages in our world, are so rich and varied because of Cervantes and Shakespeare’s dynamic imagination in making and coining new words. Their relevance today provides a productive field for learning more about each one of them that will help us to understand their significance in the future. But, are they mere transcendental incarnations of literary art and merit? Are they just cultural icons that stand for fame and prestige? What else now, and after, Cervantes and Shakespeare?

Apart from considerations, like Bloom’s, of Cervantes and Shakespeare as ‘masters of wisdom’ and shareholders of ‘literary supremacy among all Western writers’2 up to present, our understanding of them needs to be anchored in a knowledge of the pressures of the present that shape the understanding of the future. Without such a historical perspective, the meaning of their texts would remain incomplete and their present meaning would be lost. It is true that recent criticism has been devoted to

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repudiating the view that Shakespeare’s works can speak directly to us or have any metahistorical significance. But it is also true that ‘interpretation responds to the moment of representation, the moment of reading or of the onstage enactment’. The vision of Shakespeare and Cervantes cannot be confined to their own time. We cannot bury them in the past and reduce both to nothing more than mirrors of days gone by. It does not mean that we ascribe to them ‘ideas and attitudes that belong to our world’ which of course is very different from theirs. It is rather that their works have the potential of bringing about and showing modern ways of being and representing man and the world.

Thus we can see Shakespeare and Cervantes’s works in relation to our own age and perceptions as there is always more of Shakespeare and Cervantes than we can imagine at a particular moment. They advance the troubles and expectations of modern times. As Shelley puts it the writer ‘not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present’. Like Shakespeare ‘Cervantes is always out ahead of us, and we never quite can catch him up.’ They anticipate and represent the burdens and contradictions of today and tomorrow. We find ideas and attitudes that belong to our world in their works. In their characters we recognise ourselves.

However there is a previous question to be answered in this comparative approach. Can we compare Shakespeare with Cervantes? Can we establish particular links between their literary masterpieces? Is there, possibly, a literary exchange in a global context? Shakespeare’s drama was not written in uncontaminated isolation but in

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6 Harold Bloom, op. cit., p. 93.
full knowledge of the traditions and cultures of Renaissance Europe. Thus ‘a dialogue with other…writers on an equal basis’\(^7\), like Cervantes, will be of help in understanding the full potential of Shakespeare’s drama. Besides, Cervantes—like the other Spanish contemporaries of Shakespeare—will facilitate our contemporary understanding of the bard. Although Shakespearean criticism has paid little attention to it, Shakespeare also had his Spanish contemporaries. Shakespeare not only had English contemporaries who rewrote and reproduced Shakespeare’s dramatic patterns and themes but also Spanish ones like Cervantes. To restrict Shakespeare’s contemporaries to Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists deprives Shakespeare of valuable comparisons with other cultures and traditions which ‘can illuminate and animate his plays’\(^8\).

The treaty of London in 1604 created new cultural and literary relations between early modern England and Spain, or, if you prefer, between Shakespeare and Cervantes. Since then they have stood as national icons that represent and characterise two different nations and cultures though Cervantes has been spared from use as a commodity in the world market. He has not suffered from ‘bardicide’\(^9\). He has not had his ‘big time’ as he has not become a highly successful business yet. The Almagro Festival—held every summer since 1977—is a good example of their cultural and literary coexistence. Every year Shakespeare is a staple of the festival together with Cervantes and Spanish Golden Age dramatists. Once again Shakespearean and Spanish classical productions formed the basis of the 2005 programme which gave particular emphasis to Cervantes. It included four productions of *Richard III* and one of *Richard II*, but 22 productions based on Cervantes’s writings to commemorate the centenary of the edition of the first part of *Don Quixote* in 1605.

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 57.
Their contemporaneity—then and now—can reveal common ground that needs exploration if one is to explain fully the potential and possibilities contained in their paradigmatic creations. In Cervantes and Shakespeare’s texts we discover the ways in which both writers challenge, and in some cases outstrip, the insights of the modern world. Rather than striving quixotically to retrieve the past, we, as readers and spectators, should try to catch up with those whose writing and thinking frequently run far ahead of our own. The transcendence of their writings demonstrates the importance of their literary achievement. Rather than look at them only as writers situated in the distant past of an unfamiliar culture, Cervantes and Shakespeare’s works today anticipate the anxieties and expectations of tomorrow.

They are deeply concerned with the problems, questions and preoccupations that worry us today. In them we acknowledge ourselves. They are concerned with our dilemmas. Their works involve central questions related to our being here today. Their greatness is not only due to artistic considerations but also to the questioning of their discourse as both writers could ‘reach deep into the wells of human consciousness’\(^\text{10}\). They came to know ‘the human question’ described by Unamuno as the knowledge of ‘El hombre de carne y hueso, el que nace, sufre y muere —sobre todo muere—, el que come y bebe y juega y duerme y piensa y quiere; el hombre que se ve y a quien se oye.’ (‘man, the man of flesh and blood, the man who is born, suffers, and dies —above all, who dies; the man who eats and drinks and plays and sleeps and thinks and loves; the man who is seen and heard…’\(^\text{11}\)). In this way they give a literary response to man and the world around him.

\(^{10}\) S. Wells, “Millennium Masterworks: Shakespeare”, Sunday Times, Cultural Section, 15.08.1999, p. 6.
They had a particular instinct that shaped their literary genius and helped them to write about human contradictions. The fundamental problems that worry us prompted their art. They acted as a precondition of their creativity in an exploration of human life that was never closer in literature than in their challenge of the readers and spectators’s conceptions. Their writings make possible an exploration of problems and questions that urge an immediate answer. Shakespeare and Cervantes, or Cervantes and Shakespeare, have found ways of showing man’s limits, expectations, and possibilities. They have provided us with a deeper understanding of man’s heart. Shakespeare and Cervantes write about contemporary worries as they turn up in life. They present a different way of contemplating reality, of seeing things. Their works contain a seminal representation of the contradictions of human existence where uncertainty and ambiguity prevail over definitive conclusions.

Both manifest an unusual interest in radical questions that dwell inside us. Thus Cervantes and Shakespeare’s works illuminate the tensions and contradictions of our time. Hamlet and Don Quixote reveal our fears and doubts. They alike give voice to our sea of troubles as they look for an immediate solution to their state of confusion and despair. Hamlet and Don Quixote manifest our existential complaint as they cannot find a way out of the tragic adventure that they must confront. Their alienation produces their existential maladjustment. They are forced to be who they are not. This is why to be or not to be becomes the key question for them. However it is Lear who best expresses this state of nonsense and confusion

Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?
I am mightily abus’d. I should e’n die with pity
To see another thus. I know not what to say.
I will not swear these are my hands: let’s see;

I feel this pin prick. Would I were assur’d

Of my condition.

(4.7.51-57)

Lear’s tragedy lies in the fact that he has lost consciousness of his identity. He is nobody. His crisis of identity is Lear’s most destructive and painful experience. He has no words even to verify his loss of identity in the wilderness. Life does not make sense for him. Lear’s self—like Don Quixote’s—is divided and torn between illusion and reality. As he needs evidence of his being there, he moves from the interrogative attitude of asking himself about what he sees to a position of acceptance. It is in the very act of questioning where the proof of his existence as a person who thinks lies. However the discovery of who he really is intensifies Lear’s mental and emotional conflict making him angry, frustrated, and confused in his perceptions of the world. He can’t find a convincing solution to his tragedy as he has unexpected perceptions that confuse him time after time when he tries to discover his identity. Lear’s imagination is precisely the source of his confusion that has been transformed into uncritical acceptance. And this becomes his most rewarding perception of certainty.

The dichotomy reality-appearance is a major concern in Shakespeare and Cervantes. In them there is a certain reserve and a sceptical attitude about the possibility of the knowledge of reality and truth since fiction and illusion coexist in life and we can be misled by our perceptions. Cervantes’s dramatic works, both interludes and plays, show ‘his awareness that while all story, including the dramatic kind, is illusion and deception, the boundaries between fact and fiction are permeable.’

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characters also experience the twofold nature of human life. They put into question the reality of the senses since they create confusion and contradiction between what they see and what they imagine producing a state of suspicion and deception as they experience as real what seems to be illusory. Christopher Sly is the new Don Quixote who suffers from confusion as a result of a mockery devised by a group of noblemen who treat him as a lord. Sly, once woken, is told that he has been sleeping for fifteen years. To be ‘a mighty man of such descent, Of such possessions, and so high esteem’ shocks and confuses him. He needs to acknowledge who is he and have answers to his questions:

What, would you make me mad? Am not I Christopher Sly, old Sly’s son of Burton-heath, by birth a pedlar, by education a cardmaker, by transmutation a beard-herd, and now by present profession a tinker? Ask Marian Hacket, the fat ale-wife of Wincot, if she know me not. If she say I am not fourteen pence on the score for sheer ale, score me up for the lying’st knave in Christendom.

(Ind. 2. 17-24)

The experience of appearance and reality whose dividing line shifts constantly in a dynamic interplay becomes another ground of interest for him. He needs to investigate why he seems to be who he is. He needs to know who he has been and what he has done. Like Don Quixote he appears to be somebody who he is not.

In the prologue Cervantes speaks of Don Quixote as his ‘hijo seco, avellando, antojadizo y lleno de pensamientos varios y nunca imaginados de otro alguno…’ (‘dry, shrivelled child, whimsical and full of extravagant fancies that nobody else has ever
imagined…’\textsuperscript{13} And chapter one is a blunt description of an hidalgo of modest means who, due to his addiction to romances follows the nonsense of his fiction:

En resolución, el se enfrascó tanto en su lectura, que se le pasaban las noches leyendo de claro en claro, y los días de turbio en turbio; y así, del poco dormir y del mucho leer, se le secó el celebro de manera que vino a perder el juicio. Llenósele la fantasía de todo aquello que leía en los libros…(29-30).

[In short, our hidalgo was soon so absorbed in these books that his nights were spent reading from dusk till dawn, and his days from dawn till dusk, until the lack of sleep and the excess of reading withered his brain, and he went mad. Everything he read in his books took possession of his imagination…(27)]

From the beginning Don Quixote’s invention of an archaic chivalric world populated by giants and his pursuit of a nonexistent lover make him one of the most famous madmen together with Lear. However the knight is not the only one driven by such a state in Cervantes’s works. Tomás Rodaja in \textit{El licenciado Vidriera} (The Glass Graduate), Cardenio in \textit{Don Quixote} and Anselmo in \textit{El curioso impertinente} (The Tale of Foolish Curiosity) also go strangely mad.

Madness creates confusion and contradiction between what they see and what they imagine. It produces a state of illusion as they experience as real what seems to be illusory. From now on for him the world is nothing more than certain things which appear to us differently according to our personal perceptions. All of Don Quixote’s senses participate in distortions transforming peasant girls into beautiful maidens,

windmills into giants, and inns into castles. There is a great distance between the world as it is and the world as D. Quixote sees it. Cervantes reminds us time after time that the incongruity is due to the hero’s lunacy.

It is interesting to notice how many of the characters do not attempt to correct the knight. Rather they take pleasure and amusement in his errors. Even his family exploits his delusions when they attribute the disappearances of his library to evil enchanterers. Sancho gets confused and lost when he tries to correct and restrain his master. Don Quixote realizes very soon that not everyone sees things just as he does. Sancho for example sees windmills where Don Quixote sees giants, and in the episode of the flocks, the squire hears the bleating of sheep where the knight hears the noise of drums.

The adventure of the helmet of Mambrino is a key moment as again appearances seem to fail Don Quixote who attempts to explain what the helmet is:

—¿Sabes que imagino, Sancho? Que esta famosa pieza de este encantado yelmo por algún extraño accidente debió de venir a manos de quien no supo conocer ni estimar su valor y, sin saber lo que hacía, viéndola de oro purísimo, debió de fundir la mitad para aprovecharse del precio, y de la otra mitad hizo esta que parecía bacía de barbero, como tú dices. (190).

[Do you know what I think Sancho? I think that this famous piece of this enchanted helmet must, by some strange accident, have fallen into the hands of a person who did not understand or appreciate its value, and, not knowing what he was doing, he must, on seeing that it is made of the purest gold, have melted
down the other half to sell it, and with the remaining half made this, which
seems, as you say, like a barber’s basin. (168)]

The episode of the Helmet of Mambrino shows the variety and multiplicity of uncertainty. Don Quixote is not like Lear who must admit what he sees. Don Quixote realizes that reality is characterised by complexity and ambiguity. In his uncertainty there is not only one existing but many others according to particular apprehensions. It is ‘the dubious ambiguity’\textsuperscript{14} which results from the many different perceptions of truth that we have. However it is in part two when D. Quixote suffer the attacks of those appearances that physically assault him. He is trampled by bulls and pigs, scratched by cats and stunned by strange processions, light, and music. Appearances beat him. He is at their mercy. He must accept them and have a passive role. They are so overwhelming and powerful that they become self-determining and take control of the situation. Don Quixote is another Lear who suffers from them. He would like them to be real. However uncertainty and deception prevail as appearances prove to be resistant to interpretation and control. Don Quixote like Lear needs somebody who accompanies him in his journey to the gradual recognition of his limitations. It is in Dulcinea and Cordelia where Don Quixote and Lear find the comfort and relief to be certain of their uncertainties. Though ‘In Shakespeare or Cervantes, madness still occupies an extreme place’, it does not only lead ‘to laceration and thence to death’\textsuperscript{15} but also makes sense, as Unamuno in \textit{Del sentimiento trágico de la vida} (The Tragic Sense of Life) suggests:

\textsuperscript{14} Milan Kundera, \textit{El arte de la novela} (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1987), p. 16.
Y el otro, el que se convirtió para morir, pudo haberse convertido porque fue loco y fue su locura, y no su muerte ni su conversión, lo que le inmortalizó, mereciéndole el perdón del delito de haber nacido. (280)

[The Don Quixote who converted and reformed in order to die may have reformed because he was mad, and it was his madness, in any case, and not his reformation or his death, which made him immortal, earning him a pardon for the crime of having been born. (351)]

Cervantes and Shakespeare are also concerned with the power and influence of dreams on human life as a source of illusion, fancy, and fiction. They seem to take us to a different reality and provide a different experience which shows truths that are beyond reason. The fictional dimension of dreams makes them deceptive because it provides the dreamer with expectations that are never realised. Final failure is the only possible reward of dreams given their fictional nature from which the confusion that permeates Don Quixote and The Tempest originates. ‘The dispersion of illusion’16 is the cause of that chaos and disorder in both cases. Don Quixote relates his mysterious experience in the Cave of Montesinos where he had a ‘a dream or some kind of visionary experience’17. He dreamt about redeeming those who live in the cave, including Dulcinea, from the enchantment imposed on them by Merlin. Prospero and Don Quixote are victims of dreams that are finally not true and produce a state of confusion. Prospero must face final deception. His farewell to his art has negative connotations as he is aware of the limits of magic. It is not only the end of his colonial adventure on the

16 Everett W. Hesse, Theology, Sex and the Comedia and Other Essays (Potomac, MA: Studia Humanitatis, 1982), p. 70.
island but also his public acknowledgment of the relativity of his illusion and magic powers:

Graves at my command
Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let’em forth
By my potent art. But this rough magic
I here abjure; and when I have required
Some heavenly music –which even now I do–
To work my end upon their senses that
This airy charm is for, I’ll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I’ll drown my book.

(5.1.48-57)

Prospero announces that illusion comes to an end. His art can no longer enact it as he gives up his magic powers. However, the reason for taking this decision is not only that there is no purpose in using magic on the island any longer but also that Prospero must accept that illusion is not a permanent state. It does not last for ever. Don Quixote goes home giving up his fantastic adventures. Illusion must end as it begins. But the question remains: is it really the end or just an episode. Neither can live without illusion. Don Quixote dies as he cannot be without it, and for Prospero to live in Milan without his magic robe and book is going to be hard. Besides the experience of illusion also has positive connotations since the characters undergo a personal change through it. It is a way of self-discovery. They are not the same after the experience of illusion which
provides them with a deeper knowledge of themselves. At the end Don Quixote and Prospero are not the same.

Shakespeare and Cervantes also explore the complexity of the tragic aspects of modern man. They dramatise the anguish and despair in which man is forced to live with no expectation of being able to get rid of his wretched condition. The tragic sense of life is present in Don Quixote and Lear who—like Estragon and Vladimir—are shaken by tragic fate and driven to existential nonsense. ‘And nothing is, but what is not’ (1.3.142), as Macbeth says. They are broken men whose reward is final defeat as ‘Fortune, that arrant whore,/Ne’er turns the key to th’poor’ (King Lear 2.4.50-1).

Violence and cruelty frequently appear in Cervantes and Shakespeare. Their works are concerned with them which are a form of man’s destruction and an attack on personal integrity. Both troubled Cervantes and Shakespeare’s times as much as they do our own world.

Violence, as manifested in different forms, is deeply troubling at the present time, and it is an awareness of this that we can see in Shakespeare’s tragedies and in Don Quixote though ‘Perhaps our twenty-first-century understanding of the term incorporates too much under the name of violence, including an excessively negative moral loading which it did not have in this particular novel’ 18. Vladimir Nabokov’s famous assertion that Don Quixote is ‘A veritable encyclopedia of cruelty’ 19 makes explicit the many episodes of cruelty and violence of the novel. In Cervantes’s time violence was part of everyday life as Don Quixote shows. For example, in 1.4 the young boy Andres is whipped by his master for supposedly stealing sheep. Whipping was not only a method of public punishment but also a Counter-Reformation act of penitence.

Redondo rightly refers to it as ‘the pedagogy of fear’\textsuperscript{20}. The episodes of beating and stoning are omnipresent throughout Cervantes’s novel. Even Don Quixote himself takes part in them as in the episode of the Toledan merchants. Here Don Quixote arrogantly demands that the merchants confess that Dulcinea is the most beautiful lady in the world. When they answer that they would certainly do so if he were to show them a portrait of her, Don Quixote becomes enraged and charges the merchants. The knight’s subsequent fall and beating by the mule drivers demonstrates how violence only produces violence. Rape or violent sex is a major interest in \textit{La fuerza de la sangre} (The Force of Blood) as it is indeed in \textit{Titus Andronicus} showing the horror of bodily assault and mutilation.

Violence develops in Shakespeare’s plays from being a sensational element to being part of daily life. Violence in Shakespeare is associated ‘mostly with killings, humiliations and tortures that determine the shape of the play’s action and the fate of his characters.’\textsuperscript{21} Lear knows how to be violent. He assumes his right to use violence. Once he hands power to his elder daughters, they use it in sophisticated and horrific ways. ‘The play makes us acutely aware of the horror of gratuitous violence, and offers no consolatory prospect that humans might act differently.’\textsuperscript{22} It is indeed an ‘inverted world’\textsuperscript{23} as it is our own world where violence can affect us in subtle and different ways. Today television is perhaps the greatest source of visual violence which these days is louder, bloodier and more explicit than ever before. Television and mass media make us blind. They reinvent a violent world for us as Edgar does when he tries to show Gloucester a world that he does not see:

\textsuperscript{20}Agustín Redondo, \textit{Otra manera de leer el Quijote} (Madrid: Castalia, 1997), p. 175.
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 148.
Gloucester. When shall I come to the top of that same hill?

Edgar. You climb up it now. Look how we labour.

Gloucester. Methinks the ground is even.

Edgar. Horrible steep

    Hark, do you hear the sea?

Gloucester. No, truly.

Edgar. Why then, your other senses grow imperfect

    By your eyes’ anguish.

Gloucester. So it may be indeed

    Methinks the voice is altered and thou speak’st

    In better phrase and manner than thou didst

Edgar. You’re much deceived; in nothing am I changed

    But my garments.

Gloucester. Methinks you’re better spoken.

(4.6.1-10)

Edgar is trying hard to disconnect Gloucester from reality, placing him in a world of his own invention. Edgar ‘is being cruel only to be kind’24, frustrating Gloucester’s suicide.

But modern violence works in a different manner. It is cruel not to be kind.

The most intriguing and compelling act of violence at present is terrorism which appears to be an extreme manifestation of human violence, occurring when men identify with a political or religious cause to carry out killings for the cause, and die for it.

Terrorism is a burning issue in our world after the terrorist attacks of New York, Madrid, and London though we are ‘baffled by the use and abuse of terrorism in many

24 Ibid., p. 165.
subtle ways. But terrorism is not something new. It has deep roots in history. The violence against innocents for political purposes can be traced back to the origins of western civilization. The word terrorism dates back to the French Revolution. It was coined in 1794 to refer to the use of terror by governments against their own people.

However my particular concern is with Shakespeare, who must have been aware of the most spectacular terrorist attack in early modern history, the Gunpowder Plot, the attempt by a group of Catholic fundamentalists to blow up the House of Lords and King James I in 1605. A plot of such extreme and violent audacity to bring England back to the true Catholic faith that can be considered the first act of terrorism on English soil. According to a report of the Centre for Explosion Studies at Aberystwyth, Wales, in 2003, ‘Had it succeeded, it would have killed most of the royal family and the aristocracy; and hundreds of the leading men of most counties and major towns…It would have completely destroyed the Palace of Westminster, Westminster Hall, Westminster Abbey and St.Margaret’s, and many more people would probably have perished in the fire…’

Shakespeare’s Macbeth was influenced by this. It was his dramatic reaction to it. Equivocation seems to be the key link between the event and the play. It appears in the trials of the Gunpowder Plot. Francis Tresham, one of the conspirators, had in his possession A Treatise of Equivocation, the book where it was suggested that Catholics should equivocate to make Protestant prosecutors hear what they wanted to hear so as to avoid prosecution. The Jesuits involved in the Plot were also accused of using the philosophy of equivocation to further their cause.

26 Times Literary Supplement, 28.10.2003, p. 36.
It is in 2.3.8-12 when the Porter, after the discovery of Duncan’s murder, may refer to it. His allusions to equivocation were written after the trial of Father Garnet for complicity in the Gunpowder Plot:

Faith, here’s
an equivocator, that could swear in both the scales
against either scale; who committed treason enough
for God’s sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven:
O, come in, equivocator.

Undoubtedly the play makes us—readers and spectators—feel the fear and terror of that act of conspiracy against the legitimate king. Shakespeare’s Macbeth finishes what was attempted by the Gunpowder Plot. Macbeth signifies something. It is full of sound and fury as hosts murder guests and kinsmen kill kinsmen. Shakespeare creates a cosmos in which distorted political ambition rips apart all that holds society together. As in Macbeth, spectacle plays a fundamental role in today’s terrorism through the use of mass media that have also contributed to ‘the dumbing down and debasement of Shakespeare’27. In capturing their attention ‘terrorists are able to generate awareness of themselves...Terrorism, in short, is a media spectacle calculated for a specific political end.’28. We can say that “the success of a terrorist operation, therefore, depends almost entirely on the amount of publicity it receives’29.

Macbeth’s worries and anxieties about terrorism are enacted in Frank McGuinness’s Speaking Like Magpies (2005) where he stresses the need for vigilance in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot which has come to be a kind of myth for the

foundation of the British state. The Plot is central to the play though it is not what the play is about as it is passed over very quickly. The idea of equivocation, taken from Macbeth, haunts the whole play. And the Equivocator, a satyr-like figure, appears as a kind of chorus commenting on what is happening and as a kind of supernatural character leading those he speaks to in the direction he wants them to go like Macbeth’s witches. The themes of equivocation, language and belief become central to the play and the prophetic words of King James to his court could have been spoken today after the terrorist attacks.

In Don Quixote The world of organized crime centered on Monipodio’s headquarters was a potential source of violence as was Roque Guimart, the bandit whom Don Quixote met on his way to Barcelona. Don Quixote himself acted as a terrorist though he used that terrorismo magnánimo\(^{30}\) (fair terrorism) to help others. It is in the episode of the galley slaves where Don Quixote not only voices his protest but also fights against the king, the law and the Holy Brotherhood. He acts as an outlaw using force to free those who had been condemned for their crimes to serve in the king’s galleys. Don Quixote sees the opportunity to show that he is the knight who helps those in trouble. He is resolved to exercise his office, but first he wants to learn from each one of them the reason for his misfortune. Finally he comes to the conclusion that although the convicts have been rightly condemned for their faults, it is only God who has the right to punish. So he asks the commissary to free them all. If not his lance and sword will speak for him. When the commissary refused, Don Quixote reacted immediately: ‘Y, diciendo y haciendo, arremetió con él tan presto, que, sin que tuviese lugar de ponerse en defensa, dio con él en el suelo malherido de una lanzada.’ (208) (‘He matched his deeds to his words and his attack was such a sudden one that he tumbled

the man to the ground with a pike-wound before he had a chance to defend himself.’ (184). However it is in the *Siege of Numancia* (El cerco de Numancia) that the atmosphere surrounding terrorism is better dramatised by terror and fear. Beyond its patriotic fervour, the play squeezes out every drop of horror and despair as we see how the Numantian men put their wives and children to the sword.

In this way, Shakespeare and Cervantes write about what we experience in our time when we witness the growth of uncertainty and scepticism, and the disturbing progress of intolerance, violence, and terrorism. But is this their legacy? Is it what they have left us? Is silence the only possible answer? Besides, considering that globalisation is a complex phenomenon that can lead to marginalisation as well as to integration, it is worth asking how it relates to Shakespeare and Cervantes, how globalisation can affect them and us in our readings of them in the information age when computers, satellites, television, and video open up new possibilities and ways of communication and interaction. There are more questions than answers when we talk about the future but we should bear in mind that Shakespeare’s works, like those of Cervantes, ‘do magnificently what all literature seeks to do: they create a richly patterned, resonant, engaging structure of words that evokes for the reader and audience alike, an experience, that, while true to the complexity of the world it reflects, seems at once greatly significant and profoundly satisfying’ 31.

It explains why people bother with Cervantes and Shakespeare when there are exciting modern and postmodern writers. They still make sense. There are great expectations about their future though the history of Cervantes and Shakespeare in the twenty-first-century is yet to be written. New productions of Shakespeare, traditional and experimental, are being performed worldwide to audiences old and new.

31 Michael J.Collins, Why we talk Shakespeare, in Deborah Cartmell and Michael Scott (eds.), op. cit., p. 212
Shakespeare’s plays are being reassessed on the page and on the stage. New editions of Don Quixote appear and the output of Cervantian criticism during the centenary year is unprecedented. Besides both have become an important presence on the web. Their work is more accessible, and more relevant, than ever as they go digital.

Shakespeare and Cervantes are doing well in our present tragic situation in spite of violence and terrorism. Although we cannot say that this historical moment is qualitatively different from previous ones, we should be aware that we are entering a new stage of history that has not come to end; rather it continues to inscribe itself upon our daily lives. When old ideologies are crumbling while new ones are struggling to emerge, when new values appear as the old order breaks down, Cervantes and Shakespeare represent our challenge for a better future. They share our quixotic fantasies of reaching out a world of freedom and peace for all. Although the road it is a long-winding one ‘such a world is possible, and it is worth while to live with a view to bringing it nearer’. Cervantes and Shakespeare show us how to regain our hope in mankind. They kept on writing in spite of human nonsense and suffering then, and now they continue engaged with the most pressing problems of the present. Their writings hold a mirror up to nature to warn us about how to avoid such destructive experiences in the future. For this reason it is a good idea to read Don Quixote ‘… in this time of mechanized certitudes, of threatening dogmatisms and of dehumanization, of forced immersion of the goals of the individual into the collective…of calculated devaluation of each man’s inherent necessity to be a person.

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Shakespeare and Cervantes will continue to attract us when violence, war, and terrorism conspire to persuade us against them. They will still be a good antidote against human failure and frustration. Only a genius like Cervantes and Shakespeare will have the power of transforming us, of improving ourselves. Their literary heritage will certainly prevail over human nonsense and disaster because the inexhaustible human voice of the writer will be talking through them. They will speak to us in their writings, in Don Quixote and Lear. And today they tell us that present tragedy and nonsense can make sense in years to come.