
Seeing Windmills Everywhere: Delusion and Reality in Salman Rushdie's *Quichotte*

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Paper Received on 28-02-2024, Accepted on 17-03-2024,
Published on 19-03-24; DOI: 10.36993/ RJOE.2024.9.1.568

Abstract

Salman Rushdie's "Quichotte" intricately weaves a narrative that delves into the complexities of modern existence, particularly the challenge of distinguishing between delusion and reality in the age of social media. Drawing inspiration from Miguel de Cervantes' "Don Quixote," Rushdie employs the metaphor of windmills to illustrate protagonist Quichotte's relentless pursuit of an impossible dream - the heart of Miss Salma R. This paper explores how Rushdie's narrative reflects our generation's struggle to discern between what is real and what is fabricated in the digital landscape. Through an analysis of Quichotte's distorted perception of reality and the broader theme of delusion prevalent in society, this paper examines the implications of living in a world where perception often diverges from truth. By critically examining our relationship with social media and the power of imagination to shape our understanding of the world, this paper highlights the importance of cultivating discernment in navigating the complexities of modern existence. Ultimately, "Seeing Windmills Everywhere: Delusion and Reality in Rushdie's Quichotte" prompts readers to confront their own

delusions and strive for clarity amidst the whirlwind of social media.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Intertextuality, Hyperreality, Windmill, Social Media

Introduction

Postmodern theory, emerging in the latter half of the 20th century, represents a critical departure from the modernist ideologies that dominated Western thought for much of the preceding century. At its core, postmodernism rejects the notion of universal truths and overarching narratives, instead embracing the fragmented, the contingent, and the pluralistic. This philosophical movement challenges established norms and conventions, seeking to dismantle hierarchical structures of power and privilege while celebrating the diversity of human experience. One prominent feature of postmodern theory is intertextuality, a concept that emphasizes the interconnectedness of texts and the continuous dialogue between literary works. Coined by literary theorist Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, intertextuality posits that every text is a product of its cultural milieu, shaped by the myriad influences and references that precede it. In essence, intertextuality suggests that no text exists in isolation; rather, each text is inextricably linked to a network of other texts, both past and present.

Intertextuality manifests in various forms, ranging from direct references and quotations to more subtle allusions and

echoes. In the context of postmodern literature, intertextuality serves as a potent tool for deconstructing dominant narratives and challenging established conventions. By drawing upon a diverse array of literary sources, authors can subvert traditional tropes, disrupt linear narratives, and destabilize fixed meanings. In Salman Rushdie's "Quichotte," intertextuality plays a central role in the novel's narrative structure and thematic development. Drawing inspiration from Miguel de Cervantes' "Don Quixote," Rushdie engages in a playful dialogue with the literary canon, reimagining classic characters and motifs within a contemporary context. Through intertextual references to Cervantes' work, Rushdie not only pays homage to his literary predecessor but also invites readers to reconsider the enduring relevance of timeless themes such as love, madness, and the quest for meaning.

At the heart of Miguel de Cervantes' masterpiece, "Don Quixote," lies the poignant journey of its protagonist, Alonso Quixano, who adopts the persona of the idealistic knight-errant, Don Quixote. Quixote's quest is multifaceted, intertwining themes of love, madness, and the search for meaning. Driven by a romanticized vision of chivalry and honor, Quixote embarks on a series of fantastical adventures in pursuit of his beloved lady, Dulcinea del Toboso, whom he envisions as the epitome of beauty and virtue. His love for Dulcinea serves as a guiding light, inspiring acts of heroism and self-sacrifice, even as his idealized perception of her remains divorced from reality. However, Quixote's quest for love is complicated by his descent into madness, a madness fueled by his fervent belief in the chivalric code and his rejection of the mundane realities of the

world. Throughout the novel, Quixote's madness is both tragic and comedic, blurring the lines between fantasy and reality as he tilts at windmills, battles imaginary foes, and espouses grandiose ideals of knightly honor. Yet, beneath the surface of Quixote's madness lies a profound existential quest for meaning, as he grapples with questions of identity, purpose, and the nature of truth in a world that seems increasingly absurd and indifferent. Ultimately, Quixote's journey of love, madness, and the quest for meaning serves as a timeless exploration of the human condition, resonating with readers across centuries and continents as they navigate their own quests for love, understanding, and fulfillment.

In Miguel de Cervantes' "Don Quixote," the windmill stands as a potent metaphor symbolizing the protagonist's inability to distinguish between delusion and reality. Don Quixote, driven by his romanticized vision of knighthood and chivalry, mistakes ordinary windmills for fearsome giants, charging at them with his lance raised high. This iconic scene encapsulates the tragicomic essence of Quixote's character, highlighting his profound disconnect from the world as he perceives it and his steadfast refusal to acknowledge the limitations of his own imagination. The windmill, a commonplace object of rural life, becomes transformed in Quixote's mind into a monstrous adversary, embodying the fantastical illusions that govern his perception of reality. Through this metaphor, Cervantes invites readers to ponder the precariousness of human understanding and the thin line between fantasy and truth. The windmill serves as a poignant reminder of the dangers of unchecked idealism and the

consequences of living in a world shaped by one's own delusions. As such, it resonates beyond the pages of the novel, speaking to the universal human experience of grappling with the complexities of perception and the eternal quest for meaning amidst the shifting sands of reality.

Textual Analysis

"Quichotte" follows the journey of Ismail Smile, an aging traveling salesman who becomes infatuated with the television star Salma R. Inspired by the chivalric tales of Don Quixote, Ismail adopts the persona of Quichotte, the delusional knight-errant, and sets out on a quest across America to win Salma R's heart.

The novel commences with the journey of Ismail Smile, an elderly pharmaceutical salesman, as he embarks on a quest inspired by Don Quixote to win the affections of a television personality named Miss Salma R. This narrative is intertwined with the metafictional tale of Sam DuChamp, who crafts Smile's story within his own narrative. Ismail Smile, a seventy-year-old man without a spouse or children, hails from contemporary Bombay. Employed as a traveling salesman for Smile Pharmaceuticals, a company owned by his cousin, Dr. R.K. Smile, Ismail finds himself captivated by daytime television and develops an unconscious infatuation with Miss Salma R, a former Bollywood actress turned talk show host in New York. Ismail's pursuit of Salma leads him to approach the television show "The Dating Game," which she hosts on ABC in the 1960s. He starts sending letters to Miss Salma, by the name 'Quichotte':

My dear Miss Salma R, With this note I introduce myself to you. With this hand I declare my love. In time to come

as I move ever closer you will come to see that I am true
and that you must be mine. You are my Grail and this is
my quest. I bow my head before your beauty. I am and
will ever remain your knight.

Sent by a Smile, Quichotte.

After renaming himself Quichotte, Ismail embarks on his quest to win the heart of Miss Salma R. Along the way, he encounters a falling star and wishes for a son, envisioning and naming him Sancho. However, the narrative takes a surprising turn when it is revealed that Quichotte is merely a character created by Indian-American novelist Sam DuChamp, also known as "Brother," who seeks to tell the fantastical story of Quichotte's pursuit of Miss Salma R. DuChamp plans to infuse the novel with elements of fantasy, romance, stream of consciousness, and pastiche.

The perspective shifts to provide insight into Miss Salma R's background, unveiling her success as a television producer and host in America. However, her triumphs are juxtaposed with the disillusionment experienced by DuChamp's sister, a legislator who is disheartened by the state of America and the struggles faced by immigrants. Similarly, Dr. R.K. Smile, founder of Smile Pharmaceuticals, attains wealth through ethically questionable means, contributing to the opioid epidemic in America. As the story progresses, Quichotte and Sancho's relationship evolves, with Sancho expressing a desire for independence while remaining mysteriously connected to Quichotte. Miss Salma R's traumatic past, including childhood sexual abuse, contributes to her battles with bipolar disorder and opioid addiction.

The narrative also delves into DuChamp's personal journey, including his reconciliation with his estranged family and the revelation of his son's involvement with the CIA. However, tragedy strikes when DuChamp's sister succumbs to cancer. The novel concludes with Quichotte and Salma embarking on a journey to a parallel Earth, where they meet their demise due to inhospitable conditions. In essence, the novel explores themes of shattered dreams, disillusionment, and the elusive nature of the American Dream, shedding light on the struggles faced by marginalized individuals in their quest for happiness and fulfillment.

"There are two parallels between Cervantes' Don Quixote as a hypertext and Rushdie's Quichotte, which generates hyperreality akin to a virtual realm molded by information and technology, sustained by the fusion of previously disparate elements (Baudrillard). Each era employs its unique methods to foster hyperreality. For Rushdie's character, the conduit is television. He mindlessly absorbs the media's information flow, leading to 'that increasingly prevalent psychological disorder in which the boundary between truth and lies became smudged and indistinct' (3). With time, he finds himself unable to discern reality from its simulated counterpart, eventually perceiving himself as a natural denizen, perhaps even a prospective inhabitant, of the fictional world beyond the screen (3). Conversely, in Cervantes' Don Quixote, hyperreality emerges through the chivalric romances he avidly consumed, eventually becoming confounded by 'words and phrases [where] the poor gentleman lost his mind' (Cervantes 32)."

In Salman Rushdie's "Quichotte," the protagonist's perception of reality is deeply colored by his romanticized ideals and fantasies, mirroring the thematic essence of Miguel de Cervantes' "Don Quixote." Quichotte's character, much like Don Quixote, tends to see the world through a lens of idealism, often distorting ordinary occurrences and objects to fit his fantastical narrative. Just as Don Quixote famously mistook windmills for giants, Quichotte similarly misinterprets the world around him, projecting his desires and fears onto ordinary objects and situations. For Quichotte, the line between reality and imagination is blurred, leading to a series of misadventures and misunderstandings.

Throughout the novel, Quichotte's interactions with various characters and situations highlight his struggle to distinguish between illusion and truth. His pursuit of love, particularly his infatuation with Miss Salma R, serves as a prime example of this struggle. Quichotte romanticizes his relationship with Salma R, envisioning her as the embodiment of beauty, virtue, and fulfillment. However, his idealized perception of her is far removed from the complexities of reality, leading to disappointment and disillusionment. Moreover, Quichotte's encounters with other characters and situations further underscore his distorted perception of the world. Whether it's his interactions with fellow travelers, his encounters with societal norms, or his interpretation of everyday events, Quichotte consistently sees what he wants to see, rather than what is actually there. In "Quichotte," the quest of the protagonist, Quichotte, to win the heart of Miss Salma R serves as a metaphorical windmill, representing an impossible dream that

he relentlessly pursues despite the futility of his efforts. This metaphor draws a striking parallel to Miguel de Cervantes' "Don Quixote," where the protagonist's pursuit of impossible dreams, such as slaying giants and rescuing damsels in distress, leads him into a realm of delusion. Quichotte's infatuation with Miss Salma R blinds him to the realities of their disparate lives and social statuses. She is a glamorous television personality, while he is an aging pharmaceutical salesman. Despite the obvious barriers separating them, Quichotte refuses to acknowledge the improbability of his romantic aspirations. Instead, he allows his romanticized ideals and fantasies to dictate his actions, perpetuating his delusions and leading him further into a realm of unreality. Quichotte's pursuit of Miss Salma R becomes an obsession, consuming his thoughts and actions as he endeavors to win her affection at any cost. His infatuation blinds him to the potential consequences of his actions and the inherent impossibility of his dream. Like Don Quixote tilting at windmills, Quichotte charges forward with unwavering determination, unaware of the futility of his endeavors.

Through Quichotte's quest for love, Salman Rushdie invites readers to reflect on the nature of desire, the consequences of delusion, and the human capacity for resilience in the face of adversity. It serves as a poignant reminder of the fragility of the human psyche and the complexities of navigating the blurred boundaries between illusion and reality. This distortion of reality as a central theme in the novel, reflects Quichotte's internal struggle to reconcile his idealized fantasies with the harsh realities of life. Through Quichotte's journey, Salman Rushdie invites readers to reflect on the nature of

perception and the power of imagination to shape our understanding of the world. It serves as a poignant commentary on the human condition, highlighting the universal struggle to distinguish between illusion and truth in a world filled with uncertainty and ambiguity. Rushdie writes;

...the surreal, or even the absurd, now offer the most accurate descriptors of real life” (Rushdie 222)

In our contemporary era dominated by social media, the windmill metaphor from Miguel de Cervantes' "Don Quixote" remains profoundly relevant, illustrating our generation's struggle to discern between reality and illusion. Just as Don Quixote mistook windmills for giants, our generation often finds itself grappling with the challenge of distinguishing between what is genuine and what is fabricated in the digital landscape. Social media platforms act as modern-day windmills, perpetually spinning narratives and images that can deceive and distort our perceptions of reality. Individuals curate carefully crafted online personas, presenting idealized versions of themselves that may not accurately reflect their true identities. Like the giants conjured by Don Quixote's imagination, these constructed identities can appear imposing and larger-than-life, obscuring the truth beneath the surface. Moreover, the sheer volume and velocity of information on social media can overwhelm our capacity to discern between fact and fiction. In our quest for validation and affirmation, we may be lured into believing exaggerated or outright false narratives, further blurring the line between reality and fantasy. The windmill metaphor serves as a poignant reminder of the pitfalls of our digital age, where perception often diverges from reality. Just as

Don Quixote's delusions led him astray, our generation's inability to distinguish between real and fake on social media can have profound consequences, leading to feelings of inadequacy, comparison, and disillusionment.

Furthermore, the prevalence of fake news and misinformation exacerbates our generation's struggle to discern truth from fiction. With the click of a button, false narratives can spread rapidly across social media platforms, undermining trust in traditional sources of information and eroding the foundation of a shared reality. In essence, the windmill metaphor from "Don Quixote" offers a sobering reflection on our generation's relationship with social media and its impact on our ability to distinguish between authenticity and artifice. It serves as a cautionary tale, urging us to approach the digital realm with critical thinking and discernment, lest we become ensnared in the illusions spun by the modern-day windmills of social media.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, Salman Rushdie's "Quichotte" offers a profound exploration of the blurred lines between delusion and reality in the modern age, encapsulated by the metaphor of windmills borrowed from Miguel de Cervantes' "Don Quixote." Through the protagonist Quichotte's quest to win the heart of Miss Salma R, Rushdie adeptly portrays the complexities of our generation's struggle to distinguish between what is real and what is fabricated in the age of social media. The windmill metaphor serves as a poignant reminder of the dangers of living in a world where perception often diverges from reality. Much like Don Quixote's delusions led him into folly, Quichotte's relentless pursuit of an impossible dream reflects our own

tendency to become ensnared in the illusions spun by the modern-day windmills of social media. Furthermore, Rushdie's exploration of Quichotte's distorted perception of reality underscores the broader theme of delusion prevalent in our society. In the pursuit of validation and affirmation on social media, individuals may unwittingly succumb to false narratives and constructed identities, further blurring the line between truth and fiction.

The windmill metaphor challenges us to critically examine our relationship with social media and to cultivate discernment in navigating the digital landscape. It serves as a cautionary tale, urging us to approach online interactions with skepticism and to seek truth and authenticity amidst the illusions of the virtual world. Ultimately, "Quichotte" invites readers to reflect on the nature of perception and the power of imagination to shape our understanding of the world. It calls attention to the fragility of human consciousness and the importance of maintaining a firm grasp on reality in an age where truth is often obscured by the whirlwind of social media. Through Quichotte's journey, Rushdie prompts us to confront our own delusions and to strive for clarity in a world where seeing windmills everywhere can lead us astray.

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