

## Ortega, Quixote, and the Dream of Europe -- Robert McClintock

"I am I and my circumstances!"--the starting point of the enterprise Ortega pursued in Meditations on Quixote. Circumstances include all the mundane realities of life, but much more, as well; they also include the emotional tonalities that every thing has for us, the hopes and fears, the ideas and dreams that motivate us, that direct our attention and action. Cervantes and Quixote were, for Ortega, part of the Spaniard's circumstances, a resource for the living of life, but one that needed to be vivified, activated, brought to fulfillment through what Ortega called a "salvation." Ortega sought a salvation of Quixotism, of Cervantism, and consequently in Meditations on Quixote Ortega said little about the book, the character, or the author.

In Meditations on Quixote, Ortega's first book, he characteristically spoke about many things; this ever-changing flow of ostensible subject is itself circumstantial: the book is the author and his circumstances, the reader and his circumstances, among which is the sequence of subjects at hand. Quixote, the book, and Cervantes, the author, are, as circumstances, intimations of potential way of living life, one that the Spaniard, critical of the everyday, given Spanish realities, is invited to take up, to realize in the face of his world. Through such an effort, the Spaniard can realize his Cervantian potential, that of living life heroically. Ortega's purpose is to facilitate the achievement of heroism, of being one's self in the midst of circumstances: that is Cervantism, for which Cervantes and Quixote are not alone sufficient.

Criticism, for Ortega, is an effort to give power to a chosen work, to impart to its readers the qualities requisite for the fullest experience of the work. Meditations on Quixote concerns what the Spaniard needs in order to bring Quixote to fulfillment in the course of living. Cervantes invites the Spaniard, not to emulation of himself or of Quixote, but to reflection; to accept this invitation, the Spaniard needs to perfect in himself his reflective capacities; and to do this, to perfect his capacity for living reflectively, the Spaniard needs to search out, not the quintessential Spain, but the quintessential Europe, to learn to live within its traditions of systematic learning. To grasp well what Ortega meant let us attend explicitly to Ortega's own youthful relation to his circumstances.

Ortega's alienation from "vieja Espana"

Ortega's initiation into European "science"

Ortega's dream of "nueva Espana" as the dream of participating in the dream of Europe

Conclusion: Did Ortega achieve his standard of heroism? Does his effort to be himself in the midst of his circumstances help us be ourselves in the midst of our circumstances? The problem of dreaming for oneself in circumstances filled with prepackaged dreams: giving power to our capacity to say reflectively and passionately--"This isn't it! This isn't it!"--may be a task put to us by our circumstances, but let us stop there, for as Ortega observed, "he who would teach us a truth should merely situate us so that we can find it for ourselves."