



Fighting Melancholia: Don Quixote's Teaching

Francoise Davoine

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Françoise Davoine has been investigating psychotic phenomena and trauma for over thirty years, in collaboration with Jean-Max Gaudillière. In this book, she draws on her literary background to take the reader on a fascinating voyage with an unexpected but most helpful guide: Don Quixote.

In her work, Davoine approaches madness not as a symptom, but rather as a place, the place where the symbolic order and the social link have ruptured. She sees the psychotic as a seeker, engaged in a form of exploration into the nature and history of this place. This brings us to the seeker Don Quixote. Davoine takes the reader into the world of the knight-errant, to describe his adventures in a fascinating new light.

Cervantes, the survivor of war trauma, captivity, and all manner of misfortunes, created this hero, first and foremost, so that the tale be told. Moreover, he created a necessary dyad: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Davoine sees the latter as a “therapon”, a second in combat and ritual double, Don Quixote’s therapist. Like Sancho, the therapist is a comrade-in-arms, confronting trauma with the patient. Through transference, a significant relational bond develops. In *Don Quixote: Fighting Melancholia*, Françoise Davoine offers a reading of Cervantes’ novel from this perspective. Scene after scene, battle after battle, the epic tale is retold as a story of healing.

We live in times of world-wide violence, disruption, and disaster. Trauma is unavoidable. But Davoine points to a way out, through the healing power of symbolic exchange within a human relationship. Aside from being of great interest to all therapists working with psychosis and trauma, this book constitutes a brilliant reminder that all human beings, like knights-errant, aspire to “become valiant, generous, magnanimous, courteous, dauntless, gentle, patient”, as Cervantes says.

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