CODA: CHARLES LUCAS’ THE INFERNAL QUIXOTE, RADICALISM AND THE COMIC SENSE OF MORAL REFORM

The Quixot who is a sort of Enthusiast in Honour ... never meddles with any but military Men, and tho’ he may do some Injury to a good Name, among the unthinking, yet he cannot entirely blast it, his notions being too romantick and chimerical.1

The main types of eighteenth-century English Quixotes portrayed in this book may be seen, as I hope to have shown, as both ethical and socio-economic tools used to redress and, most significantly, to reform the status quo. Without losing their gentlemanly or gentlewomanly decorum, the Quixotic protagonists use these tools in a politicized manner, since their agenda always clashes with an empirical reality that views their conduct as outlandish, eccentric, absurd or anachronistic. More specifically, their tools are politically laden because, at loggerheads with rational authority, Quixotism appraises it as a mere hobby-horse or, in the words of Motooka, “as a political fiction only as rational as the authority of Don Quixote’s lance”.2 This is what I call embattled reason.

I would like, however, to draw a conclusion by taking into account a fully political and reasonable Quixote who “meddles with any but military Men”, as the motto suggests, in order to initiate an Irish rebellion modelled on the Jacobin ideals and principles that sent shivers over Britain in the 1790s and early 1800s. This is a hero whose anarchist beliefs turn him into an “infernal” Quixote at the start of the

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2 Motooka, The Age of Reasons, 2.
nineteenth century, when the Romantic idealization of Don Quixote foreshadowed in 1740 was more than obvious.

Published in 1801, *The Infernal Quixote: A Tale of the Day* is Charles Lucas' second novel “avowedly written against the modern principles of atheism and licentiousness, disguised as philosophy and liberty”. Without having any direct connection with the Spanish model, Lucas’ Quixote is associated, ironically and oxymoronically, with Marauder, the central hero and replica of Milton’s Satan, whose doctrine is “Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven” (125). Admittedly, Marauder’s personality obviates the display of good nature as well as disinterested or sentimental benevolence specific to most eighteenth-century English Quixotes. Yet the infernal, egoistic, ruthless and deceiving Marauder is Quixotic when it comes to his unwavering rebellious and revolutionary spirit marked by a perfect match between diabolic calculation, arms and discursive adroitness. As M.O. Grenby makes clear in the Introduction to the novel, “the title’s designation of Marauder as a ‘Quixote’ becomes ironic … Marauder certainly was not [a Quixote], for his adoption of Jacobinism was deliberate, cynical, and misanthropic. The novel might, with less irony, have been called ‘The Infernal Machiavel’”.

Although I readily agree with Grenby’s alternative label attached to Marauder, I insist that the anti-hero – as he is the very opposite of Don Quixote in terms of exemplary moral worth – bears traces of self-imposed Quixotic rebelliousness. This is evident when he adopts the identity of Captain M’Ginnis, who raises a small army in the Irish county of Tipperary in an effort to implement Jacobinism, the “new philosophy” underlying the French Revolution. This is the gist of Lucas’ novel, in which Marauder, “the Prince of Hell” (344), or the

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5 M.O. Grenby, Introduction to *The Infernal Quixote*, 17.