

## UNIT TWO

### Questions for discussion:

Both *Don Quixote* and *The Matrix* have a common theme: that the everyday world of reality is an illusion. The protagonist in each narrative is differently situated with regard to this theme, however. In *Don Quixote*, the idea that the everyday world is an illusion is a falsehood, and Don Quixote would be perhaps less amusing but more himself if he would reject the idea. In *The Matrix*, the idea is true and Neo must come to accept it. In both cases, however, what the text presents as the reality to which the protagonist must be reconciled is a fiction replete with outlandish unrealities, and the reader of the book or the viewer of the film is expected to know this. What effect does the audience's accommodation to this knowledge have upon its response to the narrative in each case?

Neo says that he took the red pill because he wanted to be in control of his own life. Is one not in control of one's own life within the Matrix? What is meant by "being in control of one's own life"? Is it connected with knowledge? The villain of the piece, Ciphher, wants to forget what he knows. He knows a great deal; in fact, he has an ability that philosophy used to assign only to God—he can look directly at a numerical description of events as a computer encodes it and see the reality that the numbers describe without an appropriate linguistic or visual interface. Neo acquires this ability only at the end of the film. What is the function of this ability in the moral system of the story?

Don Quixote is a reader of bad literature—he is also a bad reader of literature. Or rather: a bad reader of literature is drawn to trashy books and likes the good ones only when he or she reads them badly. Does bad literature injure your sense of reality? Is the book adequate to this theme? Alternatively, drawing upon specific episodes, examine some of the ways in which Don Quixote is a bad reader and show how this moves him to act in comic or foolish ways.

As a comic figure, Don Quixote is obliged to suffer innumerable indignities in the book. Yet subsequent generations of readers have found in him admirable qualities that survive this treatment—perhaps despite his author's intention—and regarded him as something more than just a figure of fun. Were they right or wrong and why? Discuss in connection with one or two episodes in the text, for example, the episode of the fulling-mills or the episode of freeing the convicts.