Theme Of Don Quixote And Where It's Found In Real Life

One of the main themes in Don Quixote by Miguel Cervantes is that you shouldn't act on everything you read. In Don Quixote, a Senor Quixada reads so many books about chivalry that he gathers a set of armor, a lance, and a shield and leaves home to go on an adventure as a "knight-errant" despite living past the time of knights. It is perceived by most of the surrounding people, that he only goes on this adventure because of the books he read, and thus, they burn his books and seal up his library.

While on his adventure, Don Quixote gets into fights where his enemy is imagined by him and based on enemies he's read about. For example, he had read some books about knights slaying giants and tried jousting a windmill he thought was a giant. After seeing the windmill, he charged it on his horse and shattered his lance trying to kill it. He challenged a local barber to a duel thinking he was an enemy knight, with the barber barely escaping with his life. He also tried claiming the property of a priest after "besting him in a duel." The thing that got him in most trouble was that in his reading, he read that it is the duty of a knight to free the oppressed wherever they may be; he, therefore, freed known criminals from reaching their sentence of being galley slaves in the King's galleys. While he did this with good intentions, he was soon beaten and almost robbed by the men he freed.

Accompanying Don Quixote on his journey is an impoverished peasant man named Sancho Panza. Sancho is serving as Don Quixote's squire and follows him because Don Quixote promised Sancho an island where he can rule on the completion of their journey. Sancho leaves behind a wife and family and follows Don Quixote on his illogical quest for glory. Don Quixote is only credible to Sancho because of his extensive reading and Sancho believes that the fantasy books that Don Quixote reads are the truth. Don Quixote convinced him and tried convincing others by saying: "Books that have been printed with the King's license, and with the approbation of those to whom they have been submitted, and read with universal delight… that they should be lies! ...Hush, sir; utter not such blasphemy;" (Cervantes, p.390). The concept of purposeful fiction for the purpose of enjoyment never occurs to Don Quixote who believes that the King of Spain wouldn't allow the publishing of anything fictitious.

Although Don Quixote is fiction, there are very famous real-life examples of people who read something and act on it as if it were a mandate. One example of this is the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia. Vladimir Lenin, the head of the Bolshevik party, believed what he'd read in the Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and seized the government buildings in St. Petersburg, crippling the czarist government and eventually appointing himself dictator of Russia. He was convinced to do this by reading the Communist Manifesto. This manifesto includes lines: "Let the working classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries, unite!", and "the meaning of peace is the absence of opposition to socialism." While Marx was calling for the kind of revolution that Lenin provided, the call was found only in a book and by no means should have been answered. During Lenin's rise to power, it is estimated that he had executed over 10,000 people who were "Whites" or anti-socialist in order to strive for Marx's peace.

Another instance where people act based off of a book where they shouldn't is Radical Islamic

Terrorism. Terrorists such as those in ISIS and Al Qaeda justify their violence using a line from the Quran that says: “Slay the idolaters wherever you find them”. According to The National, a magazine in the UAE, this line is taken out of context and describes a specific historical event, and is not a mandate for the killing of non-Muslims, and there are many other lines that refute the line stated above such as the line “Pardon and be forgiving until God brings his command”. The slaying of idolaters has led to many terrorist attacks including those on the twin towers, Benghazi, Camp Speicher, Curtis Culwell Center, Paris, Pulse Nightclub, and countless other places.

Shameful action based on religious texts is not just confined to Islam. In the book of Leviticus, it says: “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.” (Leviticus 20:13). Many Christians interpret this to believe that the Bible is commanding them to put homosexuals to death. This is totally against the general message of the bible and Jesus’ golden commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). Despite this, people like former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee call for the discrimination of homosexuals with quotes similar to Governor Huckabee’s “I don't think a lot of pastors and Christian schools are going to have a choice [but to resist marriage equality]. They either are going to follow God, their conscience and what they truly believe is what the scripture teaches them, or they will follow civil law.”

Although these real-life examples are a bit more extreme than a story about a Spaniard in his grandfather’s armor challenging all the wrong people, the theme still holds true: you shouldn’t act on everything you read. The books that Don Quixote read to make him leave on his adventure were made for amusement but were acted upon as if they were a call to arms. Similarly, most of Marx’s works were social commentaries and his imagined “revolution” was probably peaceful like the Glorious Revolution of England. Lenin however, massacred many people to institute his socialist goal. The Quran was recalling a specific historical event, but extremists interpreted it to call for the death of all non-Muslims. Similarly, people believe that Leviticus 20:13 is calling for the execution of homosexuals whereas some now believe it was calling for the end of pagan traditions that involved prostitution. All of these misinterpretations of authors’ intents, led to the killing and maiming of both real people and Cervantes’ fictional Spaniards.