



Don Quixote, The Ingenious Gentleman of La Mancha

By Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547 - 1616)

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Perhaps it is a function of age, but, after a goodly number of years during which a person must accommodate himself or herself to the rapid and unending change attendant to current styles and the pace and values of modern life, the desire to call forth a simpler, purer, better past can be overwhelming. The issue becomes just how far is one willing to go to recapture and reestablish that golden past in a modern setting. Cervantes's *Don Quixote* gives all of himself to the effort of reviving the age of chivalry in seventeenth century Spain. The book is in two volumes, the first published in 1605 and the second published in 1615. *Don Quixote* is regarded as literature's high point in Spain's Golden Age. It is a foundational work of Western Literature, one of the greatest books ever written. The first part is comedic and farcical,

while the second part takes on a more serious tone dealing with the theme of deception. *Don Quixote* is well known to modern audiences by way of Broadway's *Man of La Mancha* and several movie adaptations. As entertaining as these efforts were, the real man of La Mancha resides in the pages of Cervantes's work, and one will be surprised at the humor and the poignant misadventures of one possessed of pure intent in a reality all his own. (Summary by Michael Hogan)

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (September 29, 1547 – 22 April 22, 1616) was a Spanish novelist, poet, and playwright. His magnum opus, *Don Quixote*, considered to be the first modern European novel, is a classic of Western literature, and is regarded amongst the best works of fiction ever written. His influence on the Spanish language has been so great that the language is often called la lengua de Cervantes ("the language of Cervantes"). He was dubbed El Príncipe de los Ingenios ("The Prince of Wits").

In 1569, Cervantes moved to Rome where he worked as chamber assistant of a wealthy priest. Cervantes then enlisted as a soldier in a Spanish Navy infantry regiment and continued his military life until 1575, when he was captured by Algerian corsairs. After 5 years of slavery he was released on ransom from his captors by his parents and the Trinitarians, a Catholic religious order. He subsequently returned to his family in Madrid.

In 1585, Cervantes published a pastoral novel named *La Galatea*. Because of financial problems, he worked as a purveyor for the Spanish Armada, and later as a tax collector. In 1597, discrepancies in his accounts of three years previous landed him in the Crown Jail of Seville. In 1605, he was in Valladolid when the immediate success of the first part of his *Don Quixote*, published in Madrid, signaled his return to the literary world. In 1607, he settled in Madrid, where he lived and worked until his death. During the last 9 years of his life, Cervantes solidified his reputation as a writer; he published the *Novelas ejemplares* (*Exemplary Novels*) in 1613, the *Journey to Parnassus* (*Viaje al Parnaso*) in 1614, and in 1615, the *Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses* and the 2nd part of *Don Quixote*.