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MIGUEL CERVANTES

1547-1616

DON QUIXOTE DE LA MANCHA

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... the straightforward and uncomplicated nature of the history of the famous Don Quixote de la Mancha; who, in the opinion of all the inhabitants of the district around the plain of Motiel, was the chastest lover and the most valiant knight seen in those parts for many a year. I do not want to exaggerate the service I am doing you by introducing to you so notable and honoured a knight. But I do want your thanks for making you acquainted with the famous Sancho Panza, his squire, in whom I think I present to you an epitome of all those squirely humours scattered through the swarm of vain books of chivalry.

*from the Prologue to DON QUIXOTE*

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Miguel Cervantes, 1547-1616, born at Alcalá, lost his left hand at the battle of Lepanto (1571), was seized by pirates (1575), spent next 5 years as prisoner in Algiers. DON QUIXOTE DE LA MANCHA published in 2 parts, first in 1605, second in 1615.

DON QUIXOTE DE LA MANCHA is spoof of romances of chivalry, but also deepens into a philosophical spoof of life itself. Don Quixote is misled by too many tales of chivalry, imagines that he is called to service, takes his old horse Rosinante, dresses in old rusty armor, charges his squire Sancho Panza to accompany him. Don Quixote chooses Dulcinea del Toboso as his Lady, goes off on adventures to prove his knighthood, battles with windmills, endows common objects with extraordinary meaning. Finally Samson Carrasco assumes disguise of a knight, fights with Don Quixote, forces him to go home and abstain from adventures for one year. Don Quixote returns home and dies.

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In a certain village in La Mancha, which I do not wish to name, there lived not long ago a gentleman -- one of those who have always a lance in the rack, an ancient shield, a lean hack and a greyhound for coursing...

The reader must know, then, that this gentleman, in the times when he had nothing to do -- as was the case for most of the year -- gave himself up to the reading of books of knight errantry, which he loved and enjoyed so much that he almost entirely forgot his hunting, and even the care of his estate. So odd and foolish, indeed, did he grow on this subject that he sold many acres of cornland to buy these books on chivalry to read, and in this way brought home every one he could get...

These writings drove the poor knight out of his wits; and he passed sleepless nights trying to understand them and disentangle their meaning ...

*Don Quixote*