

LANDMARKS
OF WORLD LITERATURE

CERVANTES

Don
Quixote

A.J. CLOSE

MIGUEL DE CERVANTES

Don Quixote

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Preface

References to the text of *Don Quixote* are based on the edition by Luis Andrés Murillo, 2 vols., Madrid, 1978. References to Part and Chapter are given as: *DQ* I (or I), 28; references to volume and page have the form: i, 344. References to modern critical works appear thus in the text: ([author's name] [date]), or in some readily intelligible variant on that pattern. Full bibliographical details are supplied in the 'Guide to further reading' at the end of the book. Translations into English of Cervantes's text are my own. For that reason, and because the published English translations are numerous and readily available, I have not considered it useful to give page references to any one of them in particular. I trust that the citation of Part and Chapter numbers will be sufficient help to non-Hispanists in locating quotations. I should like to express my thanks to Professor J. P. Stern, the general editor of this series, for his meticulous and incisive comments on my manuscript for this book.

Chronology

Cervantes's life and works

1547 Born at Alcalá de Henares to Rodrigo de Cervantes, a surgeon, and Leonor de Cortinas

Contemporary events

Death of François I and Henry VIII; Charles V's victory over Protestant princes at Mühlberg; Rabelais, *Fourth Book*; Michelangelo directs work at St Peter's, Rome; end of first session Council of Trent

1548 Robortello's commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*

1550 Ronsard's *Odes*; Palladio, Villa Rotunda, Venice

1553 Accession of Catholic Queen Mary of England, who marries Philip of Spain (1554) and repeals Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy

1554 *Lazarillo de Tormes*; Titian, *Danae with Nursemaid*; Bandello, *Novelle*

1555 Smithfield Fires, burning of English Protestants

1556 Abdication of Charles V; accession of Philip II

1557 Spanish forces defeat French at battle of St Quentin

- 1558 Accession of Elizabeth I of England, who reinstates Act of Supremacy; discovery of Protestant cells at Valladolid and Seville
- 1559 Montemayor, *La Diana*; first Spanish Index; Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
- 1561 Scaliger, *Poetics*
- 1562 St Teresa founds Convent of St Joseph in Avila; outbreak of Civil War in France between Huguenots and Catholic Guise faction, continuing intermittently until 1598
- 1563 Close of Council of Trent; construction of palace of El Escorial begins
- 1565 Malta withstands Turkish siege; *Life* of Benvenuto Cellini completed
- 1567 Palestrina, *Missa Papae Marcelli*
- 1568 Having studied at López de Hoyos's academy in Madrid, writes verses on death of Philip II's wife, Isabel de Valois

- 1569 Wounds Antonio de Sigura in a duel? Goes to Rome, enters service of Cardinal Acquaviva
 Revolt of *moriscos* in province of Granada
- 1571 Aboard the galley *Marquesa*, fights valiantly in sea battle of Lepanto against Turks, 'the most glorious occasion seen by centuries past or present or to be seen in those to come'; is wounded and maimed in the left hand
- 1572 Involved in naval expeditions to Navarino and (1573) Tunis
 Luis de León's trial by the Inquisition; massacre of French Huguenots on eve of St Bartholomew's Day
- 1573 Tasso, *Aminta*
- 1575 Returning from Naples to Spain by sea, is captured by Berber corsairs and taken to Algiers; during captivity (until 1580) makes four escape attempts; his resolution recorded in Diego de Haedo's *History of Algiers* (1612), which corroborates the Captive's story in *DQ* I, 39-42; King Hassan Pasha's clemency towards him has prompted speculation about a possible homosexual liaison
 Tasso, *Jerusalem Liberated*
- 1576 Sack of Antwerp by Spanish troops; Titian, *Pietà*; Bodin, *Six Books of the Republic*

- 1577 St Teresa writes *The Abodes*; El Greco begins activity in Toledo; Sir Francis Drake circumnavigates globe
- 1578 King Sebastian of Portugal killed at Battle of Alcazarquivir; St John of the Cross writes his *Spiritual Song of Love*; Ronsard, Sonnets for Helene
- 1579 Formation of United Provinces in Netherlands
- 1580 Philip II annexes Portugal
- 1581 Ransomed by a Trinitarian friar; returns to Madrid; literary activity as poet and dramatist until 1587; according to the prologue of his *Eight Comedies and Eight Farces* (1615), he wrote some twenty to thirty plays in this period, of which only two survive
- 1581 In Portugal at court of Philip II; is entrusted with secret commission to Oran
- 1582 (to 1584 approx.) Liaison with Ana Franca de Rojas; birth of Isabel de Saavedra; friendships with well-known poets in Madrid and composition of laudatory sonnets for their works
- 1583 Fernando de Herrera's poems published
- Luis de León's *Name of Christ*

- 1584 Marries Catalina de Salazar
Giordano Bruno, *On The Infinite Universe*;
completion of El Escorial
- 1585 Publishes his pastoral romance *La Galatea*; lives with
Catalina in Esquivias (province of Toledo),
commuting to Madrid
Queen Elizabeth sends troops to aid Dutch rebels;
outbreak of war of succession in France; Veronese,
The Triumph of Venice
- 1586
El Greco, *The Burial of Count Orgaz*
- 1587 Departs for Seville; begins activity as commissioner
of supplies for Armada expedition; end of first phase
of literary career
- 1588
Defeat of Spanish Armada; Montaigne, *Essays*
- 1589
Assassination of Henry III of France; accession of
Henry of Navarre; Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*
- 1590 Applies to Council of the Indies for employment in
America in recognition of his military services;
request refused: 'let him seek preferment over here'
Revolt in Aragon; Christopher Marlowe,
Tamburlaine the Great; Sir Philip Sidney, *Arcadia*;
translation into Spanish of León Hebreo's *Dialogues
of Love*; Guarini, *The Devoted Shepherd*
- 1592 Briefly imprisoned in Castro del Río on order of
magistrate of Écija, alleging illegal sale of wheat;
released on appeal; contract with Rodrigo Osorio to
write six plays
Tintoretto, *Last Supper*

- 1593 Marlowe, *Edward II*
- 1594 Obtains commission to collect tax-arrears in province of Granada
Satyre Ménippée; Henry IV enters Paris; 'Paris is well worth a mass'
- 1595 Bankruptcy of Sevillian banker with whom he had deposited tax revenues
Sidney, *Apology for Poetry*
- 1596 Writes burlesque ode on belated liberation of Cádiz
Sack of Cádiz by Earl of Essex; López Pinciano, *Ancient Poetic Philosophy*
- 1597 Due to auditors' error, imprisoned in Seville for shortfall in tax-moneys due to the Treasury; in this internment *DQ* was supposedly engendered
Third bankruptcy of Philip II
- 1598 Writes burlesque ode on Philip II's funeral monument in Seville, later citing it as 'principal honour of my writings'
Death of Philip II; accession of Philip III; rise to power of Duke of Lerma; peace of Vervins with France; restoration of French monarchical authority and economy under Henry IV; Caravaggio, *Cycle of Life of St Matthew* (to 1601)
- 1599 Outbreak of plague in Spain; Mateo Alemán, *Guzmán de Alfarache* Part I; (to 1608) period of composition of Shakespeare's major tragedies
Edition of Victoria's music; Charron, *Concerning Wisdom*; Malherbe, Ode to Marie de Médicis; Giordano Bruno burnt in Rome
- 1600 About this time, departure from Seville and beginning of second phase of literary career

- 1601 Transfer of Spanish court to Valladolid
- 1602 Tangles with Treasury over missing tax-moneys; busy in composition of *DQ*
- 1603 Death of Elizabeth I; accession of James I; Barclay, *Euphormio*
- 1604 In Valladolid; pre-publication references to *DQ* by Lope de Vega (slighting) and López de Ubeda (laudatory)
- 1605 Publishes *DQ* I; re-edition in Madrid; pirate editions in Lisbon and Valencia; Don Gaspar de Ezpeleta wounded outside his house in Valladolid, and he and his family accused of sexual immorality; Don Quixote and Sancho appear as carnival figures in popular festivities
- 1606 About this time, composition of *The Dog's Colloquy*, *The Illustrious Scullery Maid*, *Licentiate Glass* (novelas), and appearance of two earlier novelas, *Rinconete and Cortadillo* and *The Jealous Extremaduran*, in a miscellany compiled for the Archbishop of Seville; (to 1607) moves back to Madrid
- Court returns to Madrid
- Gunpowder plot by English Catholics to blow up Houses of Parliament; (to 1608) Quevedo writes the first of his *Visions*; Vauquelin, *Art of Poetry*
- Campanella, *The City of the Sun*
- Guzmán de Alfarache* Part II; First Part of Comedies of Lope de Vega; approximate date of composition of Quevedo's *The Sharper*

- 1607 Thomas Shelton translates *DQ* 'in the space of forty days'
- 1608 Third edition of *DQ* from press of Juan de la Cuesta in Madrid
- 1609 Joins Congregation of Slaves of Blessed Sacrament, along with other men-of-letters; attendance at literary academies in Madrid; estrangement from his daughter Isabel after her marriage to Luis de Molina; Richer's French version of excerpts from *DQ*
- 1610 Disappointed in hopes of accompanying retinue of Count of Lemos to Naples; composes *The Little Gipsy Girl* (*novela*); (about now) at work on *DQ* II and *Persiles*
- 1611
- 1612 European diffusion of *DQ* I marked by Shelton's English translation
- Monteverdi, *Orfeo*; landings at Jamestown, Virginia
- D'Urfé, *Astraea*; Champlain founds Quebec
- Twelve Years truce between Spain and United Provinces; decree of expulsion of Spanish *moriscos*; Lope de Vega reads his *New Art of Making Comedies* to a Madrid academy; François de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*
- Galileo publishes first major astronomical observations; Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, which mentions *DQ* in Act IV
- Authorised Version of Bible in English; Donne, *Anniversaries*
- Góngora's major poems circulate in Madrid

- 1613 Publication of *Exemplary Novels*; dedication refers to Count of Lemos's patronage; becomes novice of Franciscan Tertiaries
(to 1615) Rubens, *The Toilet of Venus*
- 1614 *Voyage to Parnassus*; Avellaneda's *El Quijote*; Oudin's French translation of *DQ I*
Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*
- 1615 Publishes *DQ II* and *Eight Comedies and Farces*; moral approbation preceding *DQ II* by licentiate Márquez Torres contrasts Cervantes's poverty and low status in Spain with his high reputation in France: 'Does Spain not enrich such a man and maintain him from the public purse?'
Harvey's discovery of circulation of blood
- 1616 Dedicates *Persiles* to Count of Lemos; mentions works unfinished at death, including *La Galatea* Part II and *Weeks in the Garden* (probably a collection of *novelas*). 'Farewell jests, farewell witticisms, farewell merry friends, for I am dying and hoping soon to see you happy in the life to come.' Dies on 22 April.
Death of Shakespeare; rise to power of Cardinal Richelieu; Aubigné, *Tragiques*
- 1617 Posthumous publication of *Persiles y Sigismunda*; French translation of *Exemplary Novels*
- 1618 Start of Thirty Years War in Europe; fall of Duke of Lerma; Vanini, *De admirandis*

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Don Quixote's premises, structure and major themes

Critical approaches; Background; Cervantes's motives

Don Quixote, in basic conception, is a parody of Spanish romances of chivalry. It concerns an *hidalgo*, a member of the minor gentry, from a village somewhere in La Mancha. His life-style, described on the memorable opening page, conforms to that of a familiar type, associated with threadbare frugality, hunting, the relics of honourable ancestry, parochial seclusion. In short, a very prosaic backdrop for the delusions of grandeur about to fill the stage. La Mancha is the vast, featureless plain, scorchingly hot in summer, which occupies the plateau of south-eastern Castile. This *hidalgo* was an addictive reader of chivalric romances; and they took such a grip on his fantasy that he came to believe that they were historically true and that he could become a knight errant such as they depict, with all the ensuing glory and perquisites. With Sancho Panza as his squire, he rides through the countryside in search of adventure, interpreting each commonplace encounter that befalls him as one of the marvellous adventures in chivalry books. From the resulting merry confusions Cervantes has built not just a great work of comedy – parody is too narrow a term – but a novel which would appear a quasi-sacred precursor to the German Romantics and the leading nineteenth-century novelists. For Spanish intellectuals since the mid-nineteenth century it has enshrined the essence of the national culture.

The modern era has tended to convert *Don Quixote* into myth, appropriating the myth's meaning to its immediate concerns (Close 1978). This has been as true of academic critics, despite

their commitment to the recovery of historical context, as of novelists, poets, aestheticians, and philosophers, who feel that commitment less. The two most influential interpretations of *Don Quixote* in this century, by Ortega y Gasset (1914) and Américo Castro (1925), treat it as a supremely lucid and poised masterpiece, which anticipates the secularism, ambiguity, and relativity of the modern era, reflected in the modern novel. This approach was motivated by the tacit urge to salvage from the seemingly hidebound culture of Counter-Reformation Spain an outlook and set of values prophetic of a new Spain destined to emancipate itself from the traditions of the old. The approach continued a custom, established by the German Romantics, of regarding Cervantes as an artistic colossus, who serves as a bridge between one historic era and another. This notion has not lost its grip in recent times. Thus, for Foucault (1970), *Don Quixote* symbolises the collapse of the Renaissance world-order and its replacement by that of the Classical age. Spitzer, in a seminal essay clearly influenced by Romantic concepts of irony (1948), takes the novel as a glorification of the artist, who surveys the interplay of human 'perspectives' with God-like detachment. On the threshold of the modern era, it achieves a never-to-be-repeated balance of scepticism and faith. A long line of Spanish critics, from Menéndez Pelayo (1905) onwards, treats Cervantes as a sympathetic mediator between Spain's chivalric ethos and the modern age, mocking the former's excesses but finding a form in which to perpetuate its essence.

In attributing this forward-looking attitude to Cervantes, the critics have found difficulty in reconciling it with Cervantes's explicit ideology, which accords with the intellectual premises of his age. The lack of alignment tends to be explained away, with unsatisfactory circularity, as a symptom of his congenital ambiguity or 'perspectivist' cast of mind. The reverential attitude to Cervantes is responsible for a related falsification: it tends to veil *Don Quixote's* essential nature as a work of comedy; and this results in a lessening of understanding and, even more unfortunately, of enjoyment. Those who have resisted the tendency to

update *Don Quixote's* meaning (e.g. Russell 1969; Close 1978) have tended to do so from the viewpoint of literary or intellectual history. There is thus a gap in Cervantine criticism waiting to be filled. To do so adequately in a brief book aimed at the general reader is beyond my aspirations; I simply intend to offer a succinct interpretation of some central features of Cervantes's narrative art in *Don Quixote*, which takes account of their complexity while avoiding the above-mentioned misalignment. In the two main chapters of this book I consider, first, the novel's organising themes and principles in general, and secondly, the development of *Don Quixote's* and Sancho's personalities.

Amadís de Gaula, published in 1508, is a late, sophisticated offshoot of the corpus of Medieval prose romances – most notably, the monumental *Lancelot* (France, early thirteenth century) – celebrating the deeds of King Arthur and his Round Table. Deservedly popular in Spain for over two centuries, it generated a wave of sequels and imitations. The addicts of this literature comprised all classes: illiterate reapers at harvest time (see *DQ* I, 32), hard-bitten *conquistadores* who remembered the romances when naming parts of America, the adolescent Teresa of Avila, the great dramatist Lope de Vega. It dressed up the medieval code and practice of chivalry in fabulous garb: unremittingly marvellous adventures in a largely legendary setting of forests, palaces, castles, tourneys, with a cast of giants, enchanters, damsels-in-distress, dwarfs, princesses, and knights whose qualities of beauty, bloodthirstiness, chivalry and so forth are invariably superlative. The moral/religious symbolism which gave serious purpose to the *Lancelot* is largely lost. Supporters of the Spanish romances could claim that they offered a mirror of true chivalry; yet, as the innkeeper's family artlessly testifies (*DQ* I, 32), the escapist inducements of violence, sentimentality, and consummated passion were more potent reasons for their success.

Throughout the sixteenth century, moralists and divines condemned the romances for their immorality, implausibility, lack of elegance and learning; and in the second half of it, the combined