



EL QUIJOTE  
Study Guide  
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2010

## Study Guide on Cervantes, Knighthood, and the History of Don Quijote By Christina Lydy Mills

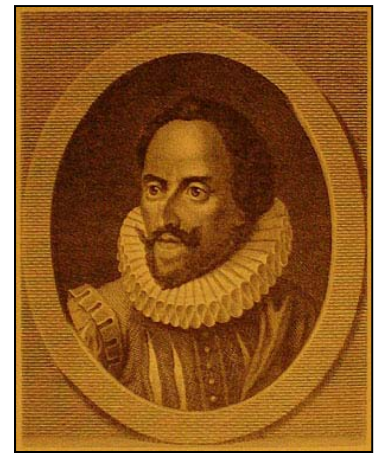
### Cervantes's Childhood and Life in the Military

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (better known to the world as Cervantes) was born in Spain in 1547.<sup>1</sup> He was the fourth child of a barber-surgeon, Rodrigo Cervantes and Leonor de Cortinas out of

#### **Did You Know?**

...that in medieval Europe, surgery was not performed by doctors but by barber-surgeons, whose profession was represented by the red and white pole now used today by regular barbers.

seven surviving children. Little is known for certain about his childhood, other than the family moved around a lot and when Cervantes was young, his father Rodrigo was imprisoned and all of the family's possessions were confiscated. He was eventually released from jail but continued moving



Miguel de Cervantes  
Saavedra

the family around in search of better fortunes. In 1569, Cervantes moved to Italy to work as a personal attendant to a Catholic priest and also enlisted in the Spanish navy in an infantry unit. He participated in both the Tunisia Expedition of 1573 and the battle of Lepanto in 1575. He was said to have fought heroically from the bow of his ship while battling malaria at the same time. The Battle of Lepanto left its mark on Cervantes: two gunshot wounds to the chest and another gunshot wound that left his left hand useless. Despite this, he was commended for his work in the navy and became a highly-respected and paid soldier.

### **Kidnapped by Pirates!**

After the end of his military campaign, Cervantes, while en route from Naples, Italy to Barcelona, Spain, was captured off the Catalan coast by Algerian pirates. Everyone on Cervantes's ship was



Spain and Algeria (where Cervantes was held captive for five years)

<sup>1</sup> Jean Canavaggio, "Miguel de Cervantes: Life and Portrait," *The Cervantes Project*, March 2004 <<http://cervantes.tamu.edu/V2/CPI/index.html>> (19 Jan 2010).

taken prisoner and sent to Algiers, in North Africa, to be held for ransom. Cervantes's ransom, set at 500 gold ducats, was too costly for his family to pay. He tried to escape not once or twice but four different times over the five years that he was held captive. One of his punishments for trying to escape was receiving 2,000 lashes (similar to Sancho Panza's punishment of self-inflicting 3,300 lashes). In 1580, just as the pirates, with prisoners in tow, were about to set sail to Constantinople, members of the Order of the Holy Trinity paid the 500 ducats for Cervantes's ransom. Finally free after a little over five years of captivity, Cervantes was allowed to return home to Spain.

Study Question #1: Based on what you've read about Cervantes so far, what five words would you use to describe him? In your opinion, do these traits better describe Don Quijote or Sancho Panza? Why?

### Life Before *Don Quijote*

Upon his return to Spain, Cervantes balanced out his literary career with odd jobs such as working as an army greengrocer and a tax collector simultaneously. He had an affair with Ana Franca de Rojas, a lady at the Spanish court, who gave birth to his only child, Isabel de Saavedra, in 1584. In December of that same year, he met and married 19-year-old Catalina de Salazar y Palacios. At this time he was 37 years old. The couple settled in Madrid as Cervantes continued working his day jobs while moonlighting as a playwright and author. The next few years brought troubled times for Cervantes: he began working as a wandering businessman and ended up in jail for embezzlement and was excommunicated from the Catholic Church by local vicars. He was soon released.



*Don Quixote* by Octavio Campo

During this time, Cervantes wrote and published both plays and some sonnets. It is often speculated that Cervantes began writing the epic story of Don Quijote while in jail.



Title page of the first edition of *Don Quixote*

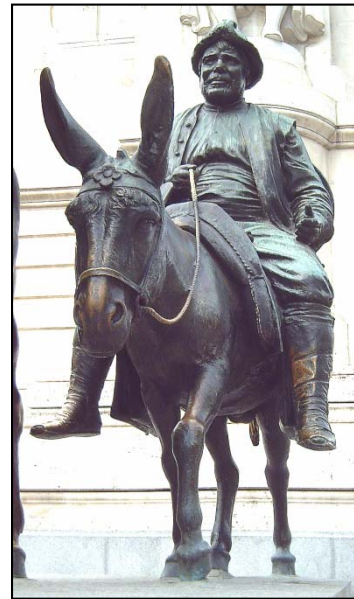
### Literary Success and Death

Though he published the pastoral novel *La Galatea* in 1585, it was not until the last nine years of Cervantes's life that his literary career took off. In 1605, *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* was published in Madrid. It was an immediate success in the Western world. Bootleg editions were issued, orders were shipped to America, and a second edition was published. For a while, life seemed to be working out for Cervantes: the popularity gained from the publication of his novel had granted him access to all the fashionable academies and literary circles at court, his daughter Isabel married and had a daughter, and

soon *Don Quijote* was being translated into English by Thomas Shelton. However, his good fortune did not last long. The deaths of his sister, Andrea de Cervantes, son-in-law, Diego Sanz, and granddaughter, Isabel Sanz, scared him into joining the Third Order of Saint Francis in 1613 after worrying about his own salvation. In the years before his death, Cervantes published *Viaje del Parnaso*, a book of poetry, a volume of plays titled *Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses nuevos nunca representados* (*Eight Comedies and Eight Interludes Never Before Acted*), and the second volume to his epic story of Don Quijote: *Segunda parte del ingenioso caballero don Quijote de la Mancha*. In 1616, Cervantes took his final vows in the Third Order, received his last rites, and died soon after of edema. His final work, *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda, historia setentrional*, was published posthumously.

### **Cervantes's Literary Works**

- *El Trato de Argel* and *La Numancia* (1582)
- *La Galatea* (1585)
- *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1605)
- *Novelas Ejemplares* (1613): Twelve short stories including:
  - *La Gitanilla* (*The Gypsy Girl*)
  - *El Amante Liberal* (*The Generous Lover*)
  - *Rinconete y Cortadillo*
  - *La Española Inglesa* (*The Spanish-Englishwoman*)
  - *El Licenciado Vidriera* (*The Glass Lawyer*)
  - *La Fuerza de la Sangre* (*The Power of Blood*)
  - *El Celoso Extremeño* (*The Jealous Extremeñian*)
  - *La Ilustre Fregona* (*The Illustrious Maid*)
  - *Novela de las Dos Doncellas* (*The Story of the Two Damsels*)
  - *Novela de la Señora Cornelia* (*The Story of Lady Cornelia*)
  - *Novela del Casamiento Engañoso* (*The Story of the Adulterous Marriage*)
  - *El Coloquio de los Perros* (*The Dialogue of the Dogs*)
- *Viaje del Parnasso* (*Journey to Parnassus*) (1614)
- *Segunda Parte del Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1615)
- *Ocho Comedias y Ocho Entremeses Nuevos, Nunca Representados* (*Eight Comedies and Eight New Interludes, Never Before Acted*) (1615)
- *Los Trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda* (1617)



Sancho Panza statue in Madrid, Spain

### **The History of Knighthood and the Famous Code of Chivalry**

Shining armor, giant war-horses, and weapons such as swords and lances are a few images that come to mind when thinking about knighthood. Legends of such characters as King Arthur, Sir Lancelot and the Knights of the Round Table, and Sir Gawain serve as the protagonists of stories that have been passed down through the centuries that illustrate both the perks and perils of being a knight. We hear these stories, but what did knights do? How did they do it? What is it about them

that capture our imagination? The roots of knighthood appear to stem back to 6<sup>th</sup> century Europe during the time of Charlemagne.<sup>2</sup> After feudalism became established as the main political structure of the day, kings and village heads began requiring the use of mounted cavalry to fight their wars. The difference between these knights and current soldiers is that these mounted knights had



Statue of King Arthur  
from the 1520s

something to keep them in line: the code of chivalry.

The code of chivalry was an honor code that knights were required to adhere to once they were knighted. This code reminded the knights that they were no longer responsible to themselves but to the king and country they had sworn to protect. The legends of Camelot and the story of Sir Gawain provide excellent examples of the different kinds of chivalry that knights (and Don Quijote) followed. The first of these ideas was that a knight's chief duty was to his king, exemplified by how the Knights of the Round Table followed King Arthur blindly. Secondly, was the idea that a knight was to protect the innocent and serve God, illustrated by the Knights of the Round Table striving to find the Holy Grail. Finally, was the chivalric code of courtly love, wherein a knight's duty was to his own lady whom he had to serve, protect, and love from afar. To love a lady from afar was a great and virtuous honor for a knight, especially if the lady was already married. This fit in with Don Quijote's agenda, which was to perform tasks in the name of Dulcinea, but not lust after her. To actually consummate a relationship was seen as an affront; this is another reason for why the relationship between Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere was frowned upon, the obvious reason being the adultery committed against Guinevere's husband and Lancelot's ruler, King Arthur.

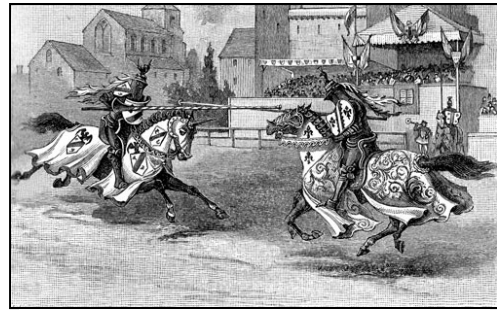
Before taking the vows of knighthood, the sons of noblemen would first begin training at a young age as pages (servants who performed tasks such as serving dishes at banquets and other duties) while learning how to read and write. As they approached their teenage years and, after they had demonstrated satisfactory progress in their studies, pages were then picked by knights to be squires. A squire can be seen as akin to being an apprentice or intern to a knight. He would serve as his personal servant and bore the knight's weapon and shield, took the knight's mount back to the stables and fed and cared for it, dressed the knight in his armor, and other related duties. At the same time, squires were expected to keep up with their studies, which now included battle tactics and strategies, history, etiquette, training in the elements of chivalry, and learning how to behave in social situations such as how to bow, how to address a duke versus a count, and how to dance. In *Don Quijote*, Sancho Panza serves as Quijote's squire. Once a squire approached the age of manhood and had proven his loyalty and readiness in battle, he would undergo a ceremony called a dubbing and, from then on, he would be recognized as a knight.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Coss, "Knights, Esquires and the Origins of Social Gradation in England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, Vol. 5, (1995): 155-178.

The code of chivalry became less pronounced during the Elizabethan age when knighthood began to evolve from the standard method of fighting battles into a form of courtly entertainment.<sup>3</sup> While Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth were in power, jousts (or tilting, as it was called) were fought between knights, and this became a huge sporting event among the English court. These tournaments were a way for a ruler to show off the prowess of their knights for the benefit of foreign visitors and ambassadors.

Jousts, for a time, also became a form of entertainment at noble weddings that were held at court. Knighthood began to lose its popularity as the Renaissance took Europe by storm and men, instead of focusing on their duties to one's ruler and to God, began to focus on the duty to oneself. Feudalism gave way to the Reformation and the age of humanism, and both knights and the idea of knighthood were seen as archaic and no longer necessary.<sup>4</sup>



Jousting knights

Study Question #2: Compare the code of chivalry and the concepts of humanism that were introduced during the Renaissance. How do they differ? Do they have anything in common? Which concept do you agree with more and why?

Study Question #3: How do the knights of legend compare with the soldiers of today? Does the concept of honor and chivalry still extend to how we fight our wars today?

### **The Harsh Realities of Spanish Knighthood**

Meanwhile, in Spain, knighthood was not the glorious occupation it was cracked up to be in England. Knights in Spain did not find knighthood to be a life of riding high on white warhorses, fully-armored, engaged in jousting competitions. During Cervantes's lifetime, the Spanish crown was fighting off a rebellion in southern Spain known as the War of the Alpujarras<sup>5</sup> in which Spanish knights, who hadn't been summoned to battle in years, were suddenly ordered to go to war. Although they had been ordered to maintain a horse, armor, and weapons for such a case, most of them had not kept up with this and literally begged, borrowed, and stole these items from their village. The knights also earned no salary for their services; it was seen as a divine and royal privilege to defend the king and fight in his name.

However, there were reports of lawsuits being filed against whole towns and villages as the knights sued for payment for their services. One lawsuit in particular went on for over twenty years before it was resolved. One reason for the holdup was the revelation that most of the knights, after riding gallantly off to war, served only for a few days or weeks, and then sent someone else to take their place. Further evidence also showed that a few did not even go to war, period. These men,

<sup>3</sup> Ivan L. Schulze, "Notes on Elizabethan Chivalry and 'The Faerie Queene,'" *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (April 1933): 148-159.

<sup>4</sup> Reta A. Terry, "Vows to the Blackest Devil: Hamlet and the Evolving Code of Honor in Early Modern England," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Winter, 1999): 1070-1086.

<sup>5</sup> William Childers, "'Don Quixote' and the War of the Alpujarras: The Historical Debasement of Chivalry as a Correlative to Its Literary Parody," *Hispania*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (March 2005): 11-19.

unlike Don Quijote, a strict follower of the code of chivalry, behaved as if chivalry no longer had any use as a military function and thus rebelled against the ruling classes and their issued orders. As a result, the knights showed a lack of discipline and began to plunder towns for their horses and goods. They also captured women and children of the opposing faction and sold them into slavery.

Evidence such as the knights' behavior during the War of the Alpujarras supported arguments that Cervantes wrote *Don Quijote* as a comment on the cheapening of chivalry and the rise of self-importance among men.<sup>6</sup> Cervantes's novel painted a contradictory picture between what we believed knighthood was and what knighthood turned out to be in some cases. It also provided commentary on what could be seen as a turning point away from archaic, chivalric thinking to the individualistic ideas of the Renaissance, which set the stage for the next couple of hundred years in Europe.

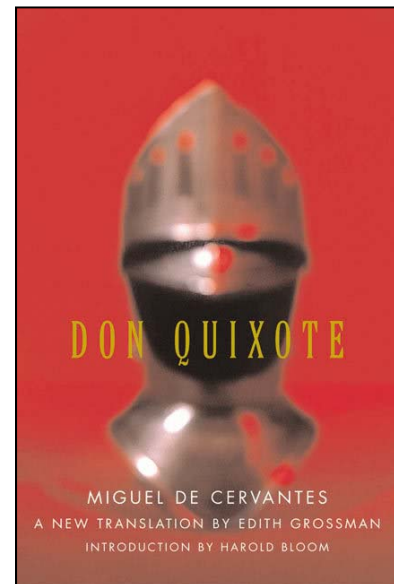
Study Question #4: What do you perceive the ideals of knighthood to be? Do you believe that they are attainable or are they only meant to be legends?

Study Question #5: What are other examples of "knighthood gone wrong"? Think of events that occurred that included war crimes, ill treatment of prisoners, etc. How do they relate to the War of the Alpujarras?

### Don Quixote: The Novel<sup>7</sup>

Don Quixote is a middle-aged gentleman from the region of La Mancha in central Spain. Obsessed with the chivalrous ideals touted in books he had read, he decided to take up his lance and sword to defend the helpless and destroy the wicked. After a first, failed adventure, he set out on a second one with a somewhat befuddled laborer named Sancho Panza, whom he had persuaded to accompany him as his faithful squire. In return for Sancho's services, Don Quixote promised to make Sancho the wealthy governor of an isle. On his horse, Rocinante, a barn nag well past his prime, Don Quixote rode the roads of Spain in search of glory and grand adventure. He gave up food, shelter, and comfort, all in the name of a peasant woman he named Dulcinea del Toboso, whom he envisioned as a princess.

On his second expedition, Don Quixote became more of a bandit than a savior, stealing from and hurting baffled and, justifiably, angry citizens while acting out against what he perceived as threats to his knighthood or to the world. Don Quixote abandoned a boy, leaving him in the hands of an evil farmer simply because the farmer swore an oath that he would not harm the boy. He stole a barber's basin that he believed to



<sup>6</sup> Fernando Cervantes, "Cervantes in Italy: Christian Humanism and the Visual Impact of Renaissance Rome," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (July 2005): 325-350.

<sup>7</sup> 1 SparkNotes Editors. "SparkNote on Don Quixote." SparkNotes LLC. 2003. <<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/donquixote/>> (19 Jan 2010).

be the mythic Mambrino's helmet, and he became convinced of the healing powers of the Balsam of Fierbras, an elixir that made him so ill that, by comparison, he later felt healed. Sancho stood by Don Quixote, often bearing the brunt of the punishments that arose from Don Quixote's behavior.

Don Quixote's deeds included the tales of those he met on his journey. Don Quixote witnessed the funeral of a student who died as a result of his love for a disdainful lady turned shepherdess. He freed a wicked and devious galley slave, Gines de Pasamonte, and unwittingly reunited two bereaved couples, Cardenio and Lucinda, and Ferdinand and Dorothea. Torn apart by Ferdinand's treachery, the four lovers finally came together at an inn where Don Quixote slept, dreaming that he was battling a giant.

Along the way, the simple Sancho played the straight man to Don Quixote who tried his best to correct his master's outlandish fantasies. Two of Don Quixote's friends, the priest and the barber, came to drag him home. Believing that he was under the force of an enchantment, he accompanied them, thus ending his second expedition and the First Part of the novel.

The Second Part of the novel began with a passionate invective against a phony sequel of *Don Quixote* that was published in the interim between Cervantes's two parts. Everywhere Don Quixote went, his reputation—gleaned by others from both the real and the false versions of the story—preceded him.

As the two embarked on their journey, Sancho lied to Don Quixote, telling him that an evil enchanter had transformed Dulcinea into a peasant girl. Undoing this enchantment, in which even Sancho comes to believe, becomes Don Quixote's chief goal.



Don Quixote met a Duke and Duchess who conspired to play tricks on him. They made a servant dress up as Merlin, for example, and tell Don Quixote that Dulcinea's enchantment—which they know to be a hoax—can be undone only if Sancho whips himself 3,300 times on his naked backside. Under the watch of the Duke and Duchess, Don Quixote and Sancho undertook several adventures. They set out on a flying wooden horse, hoping to slay a giant who had turned a princess and her lover into metal figurines and bearded the princess's female servants.

During his stay with the Duke, Sancho became governor of a fictitious isle. He ruled for ten days until he was wounded in an onslaught the Duke and Duchess sponsored for their entertainment. Sancho reasoned that it was better to be a happy laborer than a miserable governor.

A young maid at the Duchess's home fell in love with Don Quixote, but he remained a staunch worshipper of Dulcinea. Their never-consummated affair amused the court to no end. Finally, Don Quixote set out again on his journey, but his demise came quickly. Shortly after his arrival in Barcelona, the Knight of the White Moon—actually an old friend in disguise—vanquished him.

Cervantes related the story of Don Quixote as a history, which he claimed he had translated from a manuscript written by a Moor named Cide Hamete Benengeli. Cervantes became a party to his own fiction, even allowing Sancho and Don Quixote to modify their own histories and comment negatively upon the false history published in their names.

In the end, the beaten and battered Don Quixote forswore all the chivalric truths he followed so fervently and died from a fever. With his death, knights-errant became extinct. Benengeli returned at the end of the novel to tell us that illustrating the demise of chivalry was his main purpose in writing the history of Don Quixote.

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