

IN HIS LIKENESS



When Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra died in Madrid at the age of sixty-eight on the evening of April 22, 1616, and his remains were buried in an unmarked grave at the Convent of the Barefoot Trinitarians (Trinitarias Descalzas), few—not even Cervantes himself, in spite of his reputation as the “Prince of Wits”—predicted that his work would have a secure place on the bookshelf of classics. It is true that the First Part of his magnum opus, *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*—in English *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of la Mancha*—had achieved a *succès d’estime* that reached far and wide. But in early-seventeenth-century Spain, the novel wasn’t considered as prestigious as other literary genres, such as the *comedia*, a favorite of theater-goers, or the sonnet, a poetic form that elicited obsessive devotion among lovers of prosody.

This novel in particular was a spoof; that is, it was not con-

sidered a serious work of artistic expression. Plus, Cervantes was known as a playwright of modest talent, not as celebrated as Félix Arturo Lope de Vega y Carpio, who was known as the “Phoenix of Wits” and author of nearly eighteen hundred *comedias* and three thousand sonnets, few of which survive today. Nor did Cervantes’s sonnets or other poetic exercises, also seen as tame in comparison to those by such figures as Francisco de Quevedo and Luis de Góngora, grant him a secure place among his literary peers. Though today the Spanish government offers the annual Premio Cervantes to honor the lifetime achievement of an outstanding writer in the Spanish language, an award that frequently goes to figures whose work coheres with the intellectual status quo, it is unlikely that Cervantes himself would have been the recipient of such an award. It was Lope de Vega, in fact, who, commenting on the writers on whose oeuvre readers needed to keep an eye on the upcoming year (1604, though the date is debatable), mercilessly stated, “None is as bad as Cervantes.”

The overall plot of *El Quijote* is rather easy to summarize, although any summary of it inevitably feels reductive, even stilted. A fiftyish hidalgo by the name of Alonso Quijano (also known as Quijana, Quijada, and Quesada), living in a hacienda in an unknown place in the region of La Mancha in central Spain, has been spending his days reading novels of chivalry, marvel-filled cycles of narratives, extremely popular among aristocratic readers, written in prose or verse and based on fantastic legends that featured a masculine hero, a knight-errant who embarks on a quest while usually declaring Platonic love for his dame. The word *hidalgo* comes from *fidalgo*. According to lore, it means *hijo de algo*, child of someone. In truth, it refers to a member of the lower nobility. It might also refer to someone

whose ancestry was defined by purity of blood, that is, one who came from a family of old Christians.

In Spain at the time, there were different kinds of *hidalgos*, as listed in the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española (DRAE)*, including the *hidalgo de ejecutoria*, someone whose blood lineage makes him such, and the *hidalgo de privilegio*, a person whose position is acquired through money or privilege. The novel's narrator doesn't offer any further detail. The reader is simply told that the protagonist is a *hidalgo* who lives with his niece, who is under twenty; a female housekeeper, who is past forty; and a lad who does the field work. That this *hidalgo* is on good terms with the town's priest and barber. And that he doesn't attend to the affairs of his *hacienda* because he spends all his time reading. Indeed, such is his habit that, in John Ormsby's English translation (hereafter used, unless stated otherwise), published in London in 1885, we are told:

He became so absorbed in his books that he spent his nights from sunset to sunrise, and his days from dawn to dark, poring over them; and what with little sleep and much reading his brains got so dry that he lost his wits.

Having "lost his wits," Alonso Quijano suddenly convinces himself he is a knight-errant like Palmerin of England and Amadis of Gaul. Persuading himself that his mission in life is to correct all of the world's ills, he comes up with the heroic name of Don Quixote of La Mancha, turns the beautiful village girl Aldonza Lorenzo into his lady Dulcinea del Toboso, and identifies a commoner known as Sancho Panza as his squire and loyal companion.

All these events are conveyed in just a few early pages. The

rest of the plot is composed of Don Quixote's serendipitous adventures. He travels as far as Barcelona on the Mediterranean Sea. In total, he has three expeditions, from which he invariably comes back to his hacienda beaten up and in questionable health. In a famous episode, he fights against windmills, thinking they are giants. In another, he frees some prisoners, only to be beaten up by them. In another episode, he faces a fierce African lion being transported in a cage. In yet another, he enters a mysterious cave and watches a puppet show, only to destroy the whole set in a rage because one of the characters in the show is being abused and he wants to correct that wrong. Then, in reward for Sancho's services, Don Quixote promises him the governorship of the fictional island Barataria, which becomes real toward the conclusion of the novel. And, in the longest episode in the Second Part, the knight-errant and his squire are hosted in a castle by the Duke and the Duchess, where, in carnivalesque fashion, they are ridiculed by everyone.

There is no better way to describe *El Quijote* than as an intermittent, discontinuous series of adventures unified—at times rather tenuously—by the presence of Don Quixote and Sancho. I say tenuously because Cervantes's novel is interrupted by small, novella-length subplots, some of which are told by secondary characters to the knight-errant and his squire, who become mere spectators, as disengaged as the book's reader. Throughout the narrative, the tension between what is real and what is imagined, what the actual world presents and what Don Quixote sees, is the engine moving the action forward. In his desire to bring justice to a society marked by inequality, immorality, and corruption, the knight-errant is convinced that the world, his as well as ours, is controlled by enchanters, especially Friston the Magician, the most sneaky of them all.

These magicians mean to undermine Don Quixote's quest for justice. As the storyline progresses, various supporting characters, in order to subdue Don Quixote and appease his desire to subvert the status quo, pretend they too exist in his imaginary universe, being knights themselves, as well as princesses and other mythical types. In the end, Alonso Quijano surrenders his identity as Don Quixote and, on his deathbed, apologizes for the endless sequence of mishaps he put others through.

In spite of its flaws, *El Quijote*, a parody of chivalry novels—those very novels that led Don Quixote to madness—gained popularity because it announced the dawn of a new era in which the hero was no longer superhuman. Instead, he was portrayed as vulnerable, imperfect, and, therefore, human in all his frailties. Novels of chivalry were to early modern Europe of the sixteenth century what thrillers are to our age. The Italian *Espejo de caballerías*, translated into Spanish by Pedro López de Santa Catalina, the Portuguese *Palmerín de Inglaterra* by Moraes, the native Iberian *Belianís de Grecia* by Fernández, and countless other chivalry titles, either imported or made for national consumption, fed an insatiable hunger. Cervantes opened his book with spin-off poems dedicated to some of these favorites, such as this sonnet supposedly written by Amadis of Gaul to Don Quixote:

Thou that didst imitate that life of mine
 When I in lonely sadness on the great
 Rock Pena Pobre sat disconsolate,
 In self-imposed penance there to pine;

Thou, whose sole beverage was the bitter brine
 Of thine own tears, and who withouten plate

Of silver, copper, tin, in lowly state
 Off the bare earth and on earth's fruits didst dine;

Live thou, of thine eternal glory sure.
 So long as on the round of the fourth sphere
 The bright Apollo shall his coursers steer,

In thy renown thou shalt remain secure,
 Thy country's name in story shall endure,
 And thy sage author stand without a peer.

Novels of chivalry adhere to a basic five-step formula: one, an open-ended structure, whereby a hero's adventures are prolonged in book after book, similar to the Sherlock Holmes or James Bond series; two, the devotion to an idealized woman to whom the hero declares his Platonic love, expressed through his actions on the battlefield; three, a Christian concept of pride and honor against the infidels, who depend on enchantment to succeed in their treacherous tasks; four, the lost manuscript, through which the story of the extraordinary hero could be accessed directly, and without which the narrative resorts to an accumulation of indirect accounts; and five, the setting in an imaginary geography filled with enchanted castles, dragons, monsters, and other chimeras.

Spanish civilization itself is built on the myth of a knight, Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, alias *El Cid Campeador*, an eleventh-century Christian crusader and emblem of valor on which the knight-errant tradition is based. El Cid is said to have fought against the Moors, his former allies, advancing a process that ultimately resulted in an attempt at the unification of Spain

under the Catholic monarchs Isabella and Ferdinand in 1492. Though El Cid's odyssey is rooted in historical fact, he and the other knights of chivalry literature are invariably fictitious.

Lord Byron said that *El Quijote* "smiled Spain's chivalry away." Parody was Cervantes's way of giving new life to archetypal characters that had become stilted from overuse. The protagonists, the knight-errant and his squire, aren't cartoonish; instead they are made of flesh and bone. Alonso Quijano lives with a niece and a housekeeper. At first he is portrayed as reclusive, with little interest in social interactions. His horse, Rocinante, is frail. Sancho Panza has a wife and children and is an uneducated villager who dreams of becoming the governor of an island. Neither he nor Don Quixote is fit for the road, let alone for battle. Unlike the characters created by Amadis of Gaul and other chivalry authors, Don Quixote and Sancho suffer inner doubts. *El Quijote*, after all, is a forerunner of the nineteenth-century *bildungsroman*, a novel of education, a novel about the quest for self-definition.

Such comedic depiction of social affairs quickly became a favorite of readers worldwide because they saw in it a vivid assessment of human folly. In the first decade of the seventeenth century, the nation had just entered a new political era. Philip II, also called Philip the Prudent, a member of the House of Habsburg, died in 1598. He was an autocrat who negotiated the nation's *morisco* (e.g., Christians of Moorish descent) problem by forcing the remaining Muslim population to convert to Christianity, which sometimes resulted in revolt. He further burdened the empire with debt and brought about astronomical inflation. The Armada had been magisterially defeated more than a couple of decades prior. The Spanish Empire was

in disarray, and there was a general mistrust of the nation, its political quagmire, its economic gambles, in European circles. The roots of anti-Hispanism, a negative response to all things Iberian from Spain's American colonies, were also established in this period.

The person in charge of sending the manuscript to the printer was Francisco de Robles. The publisher was Juan de la Cuesta. The first printing of *El Quijote*, also known as the *princeps*, considered by *Cervantistas* to be the official publication of the First Part of Cervantes's novel, was of eighteen hundred copies in 1605. The printing took years to sell out. Still, it seems to have caught on because pirated editions quickly showed up in Valencia and Aragón in Spain, as well as in Lisbon, Portugal. It is known that copies of the novel also made it as a kind of *samizdat* to the New World, where the Holy Office of the Inquisition had banned novels—fiction in general—for dangerously promoting paganism. The knight and his squire soon became fixtures of festivals as costumed figures, effigies, and wooden sculptures paraded through the streets of Mexico and Peru. Yet Cervantes's contract, in retrospect at least, appears to have been rather lousy. When he died, not long after the publication of the Second Part, his assets and those of his family were almost nonexistent.

Likewise, neither the manuscript of *El Quijote* nor the proofs survived. This is unnerving to *Cervantistas* eager to understand the method the author used to compose the novel. Did he have a preconceived plan? Was there a journal he found helpful during the composition? Were there numerous drafts? Did he cross out words, lines, entire paragraphs? We don't have manuscripts of any of his other books either, among them *La Galatea* (1585)

and *Voyage to Parnassus* (1614), or his *entremeses*, his brief one-act theater pieces, often performed before a play.

About a hundred typos were corrected in the *princeps*. But other problems weren't as easily solvable since they relate to the novel's structure and the author's disposition. For instance, at several points the novel includes entire subplots—actually, autonomous novellas, such as *The Ill-Conceived Curiosity* and *The Captive's Tale*—which, as readers frequently point out, have little connection to the novel's central theme. The author, in a moment of laziness, seems to have taken these manuscripts out of a drawer and inserted them. Scholars do not take these to be full-fledged mistakes. They are more like detours, typical of premodern literature, where storytelling was not understood as a straight line between point A and point Z. These novellas have their charm. If pushed to find meaning in them, a savvy reader will intuitively link them to something in the overall narrative arc.

As for what one might describe as glaring mistakes, the most often discussed is the impossibility of Sancho's donkey being stolen in one scene (First Part, chapter XXV) and reappearing soon thereafter, without explanation. Another one relates to the various names of Sancho in the First Part (e.g., Sancho Zancas) as well as his wife's different names (standardized, finally, as Teresa Panza). Obvious mistakes aside, the most unwieldy problem in *El Quijote*, aside from its length, is its stylistic carelessness. Cervantes was not a meticulous craftsman. His sentences go on and on and on and on, and so on. An idea that might be summarized is expanded without reason.

Some of these inconsistencies might be owed to the fact that Cervantes didn't have a copy-editor or editor responsible for

overseeing the entire manuscript. In the early seventeenth century, there were *correctores*, typographers in charge of spotting obvious printing errors, but they weren't in charge of streamlining the manuscript. We might guess his mistakes are the result of haste, that he was impatient, even impulsive. But these are only guesses.

IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT, barring the existence of *El Quijote*, Cervantes would not be remembered today. Centuries after his death, he remains an enigma. As in the case of Shakespeare, his contemporary (under the Julian calendar, they died the same day), material related to Cervantes's life is extraordinarily scarce. What we do know is recorded in a handful of useful, recent biographies, such as the ones by William Byron (1978) and Jean Canavaggio (1991), and also gleaned from the unreadable, multivolume "life" written by Luis Astrana Marín during the early period of the Francisco Franco regime, between 1948 and 1958. There is speculation about Cervantes's exact birthday, but it is known that he was born in Alcalá de Henares, some twenty miles from Madrid, in 1547. A certificate of baptism and another one of death are available. There is discussion about his having been a *converso*, that is, a recent convert to Christianity or a member of a recently converted family, although there is a statement dated in 1569 in which he claims *limpieza de sangre e hidalguía*, purity of blood, meaning he was not, at least on paper, a so-called New Christian. Still, suspicions remain, since Jewish converts and their descendants often swore, out of fear, to be *cristianos viejos*. A scatter-

ing of other legal documents has survived, among them one detailing a fistfight in which he was involved on the doorstep of his home. But there is little else. No correspondence survives, nor does any other type of record describing his personal or artistic habits.

Although people connect Cervantes with the seventeenth century, in which he published and died, he was in fact a citizen of the sixteenth. He spent most of his adult years living under the rule of Philip II, the king of Castile, whose abuse of power pushed Spain to its disastrous defeat against England in 1588 and whose unstable, almost paranoid views brought along a series of near bankruptcies, the first in 1557, the last in 1596. In spite of its trans-Atlantic military enterprises, which the king consolidated, the nation under him existed in an atmosphere of instability. King Philip III, his successor, named monarch in 1598, was even worse. His diplomatic reputation was mediocre at best. In fact, it is often repeated that Spain's sharp decline took place under the leadership of his corrupt chief, Francisco Gómez de Sandoval, Duque de Lema, during the early years of Philip III's reign, which lasted until 1621.

Cervantes lived at different times in Seville, Valladolid, and Madrid. We know very little about his early years. Perhaps he was a student, maybe even a rowdy one. In 1569, he left Spain for Italy after he wounded a certain Antonio de Segura in a duel. Italy, an artistic and cultural hub in the late sixteenth century, was an obligatory stop for anyone dreaming of making a career in literature. Italian authors play a significant role in *El Quijote*, as in Cervantes's references to Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and the inspiration he took from Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

In Italy, Cervantes enlisted in the *Infantería de Marina*, the

Spanish Navy Marines, which was stationed in Naples. After a year, he boarded the *Marquesa*, part of a fleet that was controlled by the coalition of the Holy League, which included, along with Spain, the Republic of Venice, the Republic of Genoa, the Duchy of Savoy, and the Knights Hospitaller, who were based in Malta. The mission was to confront expansion of the Ottoman power. In the Battle of Lepanto, on October 7, 1571, he was injured, permanently losing the use of his left arm.

On his way back from Italy, the boat he was sailing on from Naples to Barcelona, the *Sol*, was assaulted by pirates. He and his brother were taken to Algiers, where he was held captive for five years. He tried to escape four times, and on the next attempt he was finally able to flee. *El Quijote* includes a novella, *The Captive's Tale* (First Part, chapters XXXVIII to XLV), possibly inspired by these incidents.

After writing *La Galatea*, to which he promised but never delivered a sequel, Cervantes seemed to have trouble getting his work published. Then, when the First Part of *El Quijote* appeared, the enthusiastic response from readers opened opportunities for him. Between then and the publication of the Second Part a decade later, three other works were printed: a series of mid-size narratives called *Exemplary Novellas* (1613), the satirical poem *Journey to Parnassus* (1614), and his *Comedies*, the latter a volume that included an assortment of *entremeses*.

Thus, Cervantes, in his last phase of life, experienced an outburst of creativity. But nothing he wrote came remotely close to earning the accolades lavished upon *El Quijote*. Indeed, the knight-errant's adventures became so popular that people clamored to read a sequel. As in the case of *La Galatea*, Cervantes promised one but once again was slow in delivering

it. Taking advantage of Cervantes's procrastination, another author, using the pseudonymous name Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, whose full identity remains a secret, came out with a fraudulent Second Part in 1614. (I will discuss this *pseudo-Quijote* in chapter 4, "A Modern Novel.") Cervantes was rightfully incensed. He quickly completed his own Second Part. Fate was generous to him, for he had just enough time to complete and publish it before he died, a few months after its release.

When asked about himself, he glorified his career as a soldier. In one of the most celebrated passages of *El Quijote* (First Part, chapters XXXVII and XXXVIII), about the opposition between arms and letters, Don Quixote, perhaps acting as the author's surrogate, endorses the former in an eloquent speech. "Away with those who assert that letters have the preeminence over arms; I will tell them, whosoever they may be, that they know not what they say," he states. Later on, he adds:

To attain to eminence in letters costs a man time, watching, hunger, nakedness, headaches, indigestions, and other things of the sort. . . . But for a man to come in the ordinary course of things to be a good soldier costs him all the student suffers, and in an incomparably higher degree, for at every step he runs the risk of losing his life. For what dread of want or poverty that can reach or harass the student can compare with what the soldier feels, who finds himself beleaguered in some stronghold mounting guard in some ravelin or cavalier, knows that the enemy is pushing a mine towards the post where he is stationed, and cannot under any circumstances retire or fly from the imminent danger that threatens him?

In other words, only reluctantly did the most enduring Spanish writer of all time perceive himself as a writer. He probably would have liked to be remembered for his patriotic participation (“the greatest day in history”) in Spain’s glorious defeat of the Ottomans.

The meager sampling of documents related to Cervantes’s life doesn’t offer many clues about his looks. No portraits survive, which, again, hasn’t stopped people from picturing him in vivid terms. In the collective imagination, the author of *El Quijote* is of average height, slim, and bearded. These qualities are connected to a narrative self-portrait in the prologue to his *Exemplary Novellas*. Nowhere else in his oeuvre is he as candid as he is in this paragraph. He starts by dreaming that the most famous Spanish portraitist of the time, Juan de Jáuregui y Aguilar, had agreed to do his portrait. Then he proceeds to describe his own face. The following quote, rendered into English by Walter K. Kelly in 1952, is from that preface:

This person whom you see here, with an oval visage, chestnut hair, smooth open forehead, lively eyes, a hooked but well-proportioned nose, & silvery beard that twenty years ago was golden, large moustaches, a small mouth, teeth not much to speak of, for he has but six, in bad condition and worse placed, no two of them corresponding to each other, a figure midway between the two extremes, neither tall nor short, a vivid complexion, rather fair than dark, somewhat stooped in the shoulders, and not very light-footed.

The reference to his dental condition is intriguing. Some find in it evidence that the knight-errant is Cervantes’s alter ego,

since early on in Don Quixote's exploits (First Part, chapter XVIII) he loses some of his teeth in a fight. Soon thereafter, in an exchange with Sancho in which the pair counts the number of lost teeth, the knight-errant says that "never in my life have I had tooth or grinder drawn, nor has any fallen out or been destroyed by any decay or rheum."

THIS "LIKENESS" OF CERVANTES, as presented in *Exemplary Novellas*, is important because, in the pictorial representations that have been created of the two over time, Cervantes is indeed made to look like Don Quixote and vice versa: they are, in some way, doppelgängers. Needless to say, in a narrative where doubles play an important role, this is no coincidence. In the First Part, chapter I, the knight-errant is described thus: "The age of this gentleman of ours was bordering on fifty; he was of a hardy habit, spare, gaunt-featured, a very early riser and a great sportsman." Cervantes was pushing fifty-eight when the First Part was released, and given his past military adventures, it is easy to imagine him a hardy, early-rising sportsman.

Juan de Jáuregui y Aguilar never produced a portrait of Cervantes, though two forgeries were initially attributed to him. The first one says "Cervantes c. 1600." The second was owned for years by Marqués viudo de Casa Torres. The first portrait of the author, a rather stilted one, depicts him with his mouth closed (i.e., hiding his denture), as is usual in the images of those days, and appeared in the front matter of the French translation of *Exemplary Novellas*, published as *Nouvelles de Michel de Cervantes* in 1705, approximately ninety years after the author's



Cervantes (c. 1600), attributed to Juan de Jauregui y Aguilar.

death. The anonymous lithograph presents him sitting at his desk, with a pile of books on the floor. An angelic child floating in the background, an inspiration of genius, offers him a pen, which he intends to hold with his right hand. Cervantes wears a mustache and beard and is dressed in Renaissance attire. But his facial features are dull.

Is this what he looked like? Was his demeanor that of a valiant caballero? A more focused portrayal was produced in 1738 at the London printer J. and R. Tonson, under the auspices of Baron de Carteret. The face has a suspiciously Shakespearean look. Again, Cervantes is sitting at his desk, the right hand writing with a feathered pen, the left hand hidden. Behind him is a small theatrical window in which a knight—it might be Don Quixote himself—makes an appearance. The identity of the artist remains a mystery.



*Portrait of Cervantes (1768),
engraved by Jacob Folkema.*

These two images have been reproduced multiple times throughout the centuries, defining the way we imagine Cervantes. Another engraving, this one done by an artist known as Hulett in London in 1742, portrays Cervantes as a *mestizo*. This may have to do with the fact that Spain, in the eyes of eighteenth-century England, was an awkward, semi-barbaric country close to Africa (known originally as Barbary). But it also prompts the question, to what extent is it accurate to visualize Cervantes through a Caucasian prism? Given the discussion that has taken place over several centuries of his having Jewish blood, and based on his intense interest in things Muslim in his oeuvre, it is possible that the novelist wasn't white. Curiously, there is another portrait by Achille Devéria, done in Paris in 1825, that portrays Cervantes as black.

As mentioned before, Spain in the late sixteenth century was awash in ethnic hullabaloo. *La Convivencia*, a term referring to



*Portrait of Cervantes (1868),
artist unknown.*

the cohabitation in the Iberian Peninsula of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, was coming to an end in 1492, the year of the *Reconquista*, during which the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella attempted to unify Spain under a single faith. First they expelled the Jews and then, later the same year, the Arabs. But the previous centuries of cohabitation, brought on by the fall of the Roman Empire and the dissemination of its population across Europe, the Mediterranean Basin, and northern Africa, produced a society marked by racial cross-fertilization, despite the religious tensions and even violence that defined the period.

There is an 1868 portrait, released by the publisher J. B. Lippincott in Philadelphia, its artist unknown, that emphasizes the histrionic, as if Cervantes belonged to a theater troupe. One engraving by C. A. Leslie and Danforth of 1876, published by Porter and Coates, also in Philadelphia, makes him look almost uncomfortable, as if disdaining the attention granted to him. And an oil painting by C. A. Machado, done around 1900, in which Cervantes is holding *El Quijote* with his maimed left arm and has a feather pen in his right hand, casts him in stately terms. Among my favorite portraits of Cervantes is the first pictorial interpretation commissioned by the *Real Academia Española (RAE)*, the federally funded institution in Madrid charged with safeguarding Spain's cultural heritage. This portrait, by J. del Castillo and Salvador Carmona, based on an image falsely attributed to Alonso del Arco, might be the one most frequently reprinted inside Spain. It was used as the frontispiece in the official *RAE* edition of *Don Quijote de la Mancha* released in 1780. It presents Cervantes as a bearded, fashionable twentieth-century intellectual. The commission

came at a time when the Spanish government started to look at Cervantes as an author who could represent the nation's patrimony. (More on this in chapter 6, "*Quijotismo* and *Menardismo*.") That RAE edition, by the way, also includes an engraving featuring Don Quixote and Aldonza Lorenzo surrounded by an assortment of characters and motifs, from an African slave to a castle, a lion, and a bonfire of burning books, while an angel descends from heaven with a laurel in hand. Behind all of them is a pedestal in which the title of Cervantes's novel is proudly displayed—*Quixote* spelled with an *x*, not a *j*.

A counterfeited portrait attributed to Diego Velázquez, known as *Velazquez pinx. Dessiné e gravé par Bouvier. Cervantè d'après le tableau original du Cabinet de M. Brière*, appeared in Geneva in 1825. Born in 1599, Velázquez, the baroque court artist, was Cervantes's junior by more than fifty years. When the First Part of *El Quijote* was released, Velázquez was six years old. There is no record of the two having met.



Cervantes (1825), by Charles Bouvier, falsely attributed to Diego Velázquez.

This isn't the only Cervantes portrait falsely attributed to a famous Spanish artist. There are images purportedly painted by El Greco, who was indeed Cervantes's contemporary. Born in Crete, then part of the Republic of Venice, El Greco lived some of his life in Toledo, about forty-five miles from Madrid, where Cervantes died. Another portrait was supposedly made by El Greco's son, Jorge Manuel Theotocópuli.

All these images make Cervantes look like Don Quixote, who, in the First Part, chapter I, is described as "one of those gentlemen that keep a lance in the lance-rack, an old buckler, a lean hack, and a greyhound for coursing." The number of Don Quixote look-alikes and forgeries emphasizes where Cervantes is situated in the Spanish imagination. Fiction begets reality, not the other way around. He is the national author par excellence, whose oeuvre represents the country's idealism as well as its humor.

None of the portraits ever depict Cervantes as anything but an adult. Nor do they present him as a soldier in Lepanto. Or as a captive in Algiers. Instead, they represent a scrapbook of knights. But did Cervantes imagine himself as his knight-errant?

Other sources offer us a hint of how Cervantes perceived himself. In his preface to *El Quijote*, Cervantes describes himself as the owner of a "sterile, ill-titled wit." (He might have preferred the other epithet awarded him by critics: *el genio lego*, the ignorant genius.) Early in the novel (First Part, chapter VI), we get another perspective when the protagonist, Alonso Quijano, by then already known as Don Quixote, has his personal library inspected by two village censors and the hidalgo's good

QUIXOTE friends, the priest and the barber. While browsing through the titles, the barber comes across Cervantes's *La Galatea*, which he mentions to the priest. In turn, the priest replies:

“That Cervantes has been for many years a great friend of mine, and to my knowledge he has had more experience in reverses than in verses. His book has some good invention in it, it presents us with something but brings nothing to a conclusion: we must wait for the Second Part it promises: perhaps with amendment it may succeed in winning the full measure of grace that is now denied it; and in the mean time do you, senor gossip, keep it shut up in your own quarters.”

Also in the preface, Cervantes opts to portray himself not as Don Quixote's double, or even as his sibling, but as his father—or better, as his stepfather. He writes in the preface to the First Part:

Sometimes when a father has an ugly, loutish son, the love he bears him so blindfolds his eyes that he does not see his defects, or, rather, takes them for gifts and charms of mind and body, and talks of them to his friends as wit and grace. I, however—for though I pass for the father, I am but the stepfather to *Don Quixote*—have no desire to go with the current of custom, or to implore thee, dearest reader, almost with tears in my eyes, as others do, to pardon or excuse the defects thou wilt perceive in this child of mine.

Yet while Cervantes's oeuvre at times overshadows him, he doesn't suffer from an "authorship problem" the way Shakespeare does. (Theories abound that the "real" author of Shakespeare's work was someone else, such as Christopher Marlowe; Francis Bacon; William Stanley, the sixth Earl of Derby; Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford; or even Queen Elizabeth I.) In the Bard's case, the inquiries revolve around a number of issues, among them the mystery of how a provincial actor with a limited education in Stratford-upon-Avon could compose such an erudite, astonishingly diverse body of work. There's no such disassociation with Cervantes. His known journeys through Spain, Italy, northern Africa, and the Mediterranean Sea are present, although tangentially at times, in the pages of *El Quijote*. And the style of the novel is consistent with that of his other works. Plus, in the preface and within his magnum opus there are references to *La Galatea*, Avellaneda, and other aspects of his own career.

In sum, Cervantes might not have left us many clues about his life, but no one believes he was a deceiver, a charlatan, a fraud. What about Don Quixote, though?

