Don Quixote for (Real) Seniors

Edward H. Friedman
(Vanderbilt University)

The Osher Institute of Lifelong Learning (OLLI) has developed programs throughout the country for participants over fifty years of age. I have taught in the program, giving courses on the short story, the one-act play, and Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. There is always something special about the group of participants, who come from varied backgrounds and careers. The mixture promotes unique engagements and spirited and perceptive dialogue. In this essay, I would like to focus on "A *Don Quixote* Sampler," offering materials that I have used in the course. Many of the Osher classes use a lecture format, with questions and comments at the end of each session. I have opted for readings to be completed before the sessions and for a format of discussion and dialogue. As in the case of the course itself, I hope that the essay will serve as a starting point and guide to Cervantes's novel (published in two parts, in 1605 and 1615) and that it will inspire readers to confront the text itself. I am including a selection of materials from the course.

This is the course syllabus:

A *Don Quixote* Sampler

Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, published in two parts (1605, 1615), is a complex narrative that speaks to its time and place as it points forward to the development of what has been called the modern novel.

In conceiving *Don Quixote*, which starts out as parody, Cervantes obviously saw multiple creative possibilities. His knight errant (or errant knight) suffers from a literature-induced malady, or madness, that brings readers, writers, and fiction-making into the frame. Don Quixote, accompanied by his somewhat reluctant squire, the illiterate Sancho Panza, has the best of intentions, if not the most practical of agendas. His anachronistic plan and his eccentricities give the exploits a special cast. Don Quixote ultimately shares the stage with the author himself, who undertakes adventures of his own.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the novel was not only new but was in the process of inventing itself. Cervantes breaks away from the idealism of chivalric, pastoral, and sentimental romance, as he helps to develop narrative realism. At the same time, he moves in an entirely different direction, by calling attention to the process of composition. *Don Quixote* announces itself as a "true history," but its fictional devices clearly show through. Spanish society is on display, but so are the literary forms of the day, to be acknowledged and often satirized. *Don Quixote* is, thus, a novel and a theory of the novel, brilliantly comic but profound, as well. It serves as a type of template for future works and, accordingly, for future experiments, as texts engage with other texts and challenge tradition. The term *metafiction* is often used to classify this type of self-conscious or self-referential writing.

The six-week course will consist of the reading and discussion of sample chapters of *Don Quixote*, with emphasis on Part 1, and commentary on the text as a whole, so that participants will have a vision of the comprehensive narrative. We will use the translation by Edith Grossman, available through amazon.com in Kindle and paperback. The reading for each week will be under 40 pages.

The goal of the course will be to give the participants a sense of the scope, the parameters, the artistic and conceptual brilliance, and the well-merited classic status of *Don Quixote*.
Topics to be considered include

- The content and structure of *Don Quixote*
- The contexts of *Don Quixote*
- The past, present, and future of literature
- Human nature and psychology
- History: objectivity and subjectivity
- Truth: absolute and relative
- Perceptions of reality; multiperspectivism
- Early modern Spain
- Humor
- Irony
- Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547-1616): life and works
- The legacy of *Don Quixote*

Session 1	Introduction to *Don Quixote* (file)
Session 2	*Don Quixote*, Part 1: Prologue – Chapter 3 (pp. 3-35)
Session 3	*Don Quixote*, Part 1: Chapters 4-9 (pp. 35-71)
Session 4	*Don Quixote*, Part 1: Chapter 14 (pp. 94-102), Chapter 22 (pp. 163-172), Chapter 23 (pp.172-182)
Session 5	*Don Quixote*, Part 1: Chapters 47-48 (pp. 405-421), Chapter 52 (ending, pp. 445-446); summary of Avellaneda "false sequel" (file)
Session 6	*Don Quixote*, Part 2: Prologue – Chapter 5 (pp. 455-490); outline of Part 2 (file); closing synthesis

I give participants the option of reading an essay that I wrote as the introduction to the Signet translation of *Don Quixote* by Walter Starkie. I was asked to write the introduction for "the educated non-specialist."

I send the participants a file titled "Getting Started," which includes general comments and examples:

***Don Quixote*: Getting Started**

The Basics

1. *Don Quixote* was published in two parts, ten years apart, in 1605 and 1615.
2. Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616) was 58 years old when Part 1 was published. He had not had a successful literary career to that point. There are significant gaps in Cervantes's biography. We know that he was the son of an itinerant surgeon, that he pursued "humanist" studies, that he spent time in Italy (where he took part in the famous Battle of Lepanto in 1571, in which he was wounded and lost the use of his left hand), that following his recovery he was bound for Spain with letters of recommendation, that his ship was overtaken, and that, as a result, he spent five years in captivity, primarily in Algiers. After being ransomed, he

returned to Spain, where the letters were no longer valid and where he struggled both in defining a career path and as a writer.

3. Spain was the most powerful country in the world at this time. It was a Catholic country ruled by the Habsburg monarchs, with strict hierarchies and no separation of Church and State. There was a great flourishing of the arts in Spain, and the early modern period (1550-1700) is sometimes labeled "the Golden Age." This was a period of censorship—a product of the Inquisition—which affected the production of literature, theater, and other artistic forms.
4. Cervantes was a contemporary of William Shakespeare and of the Spanish playwright Lope de Vega, who was Shakespeare's counterpart in Spain, the most successful dramatist of his time.
5. What we now think of as the novel did not exist as such at the time of the publication of *Don Quixote*. The Spanish word *novela* was used in the sense of what we now call novella.
6. The dominant forms of narrative in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were associated with what is classified as *idealistic* fiction: pastoral romance (with shepherds and shepherdesses who at times speak like neo-Platonic poets), sentimental romance (visions of courtly love), and chivalric romance (tales of brave knights who dedicate themselves to the service of ladies). The archetypal romance of chivalry is titled *Amadís of Gaul*.
7. Certain forms of fiction in Europe (especially in Italy) were breaking away from idealism and moving toward *realism*. One such subgenre in Spain was *picaresque* narrative, often taking the form of a pseudo-autobiographical narration by a *pícaro* (or, in the feminine variations, a *pícara*), a character from the lowest rung of the social ladder. Here, the antihero replaces the hero.
8. Part 1 of *Don Quixote* was an immediate hit, a best-seller, finally bringing recognition to Cervantes, who claims that his publisher, rather than he, became rich. The success was tempered, to a degree, by the appearance—in the fall of 1614—of a continuation written by an author (still unidentified) who used the pseudonym of Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda. This unauthorized second part is known as "the false (or spurious) sequel." Avellaneda may have spurred Cervantes to complete the "legitimate" second part.
9. Early modern Spanish literature is often linked to the term *baroque*, used to signal a departure from the Renaissance emphasis on equilibrium, symmetry, and moderation. The baroque implies hyperbole (exaggeration), radical contrasts, and extremes in language and content (for example, an abundance of rhetorical figures in poetry or phrases with multiple meanings and intended ambiguity). The term *baroque*, which originated in the plastic arts, can be applied to art, architecture, and other media.
10. The term *intertextuality* relates to interrelationships among texts. An operating premise is that no text exists in a vacuum, but that all texts enter into a type of dialogue with preceding texts, codes, and systems, and implicitly with future texts. One could note that *Amadís of Gaul* serves as an *intertext* of *Don Quixote*, given that Don Quixote acknowledges the influence of the romance on his knightly undertakings.
11. The concept of *meta-*, a prefix used to indicate self-referentiality or self-consciousness. For example, a play-within-a-play or a dramatic character who becomes a type of playwright with the scenario can illustrate *metatheater*. A poem about poetic creation is a *metapoem*. *Metafiction* shows its awareness of its fictional identity. Building from Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, I send the participants a file of illustrations that show re-creations of *Las Meninas* by artists such as Pablo Picasso and Richard Hamilton. I send them, as well, Lope de Vega's "Soneto de repente" (Sudden or Instant Sonnet) and its translation:

Soneto de repente

Un soneto me manda hacer Violante,
que en mi vida me he visto en tanto aprieto;
catorce versos dicen que es soneto,
burla burlando van los tres delante.
Yo pensé que no hallara consonante
y estoy a la mitad de otro cuarteto,
mas si me veo en el primer terceto,
no hay cosa en los cuartetos que me espante.
Por el primer terceto voy entrando,
y parece que entré con pie derecho
pues fin con este verso le voy dando.
Ya estoy en el segundo y aun sospecho
que voy los trece versos acabando:
contad si son catorce y está hecho.

Instant Sonnet

A sonnet Violante bids me write,
such grief I hope never again to see;
they say a sonnet's made of fourteen lines:
lo and behold, before this line go three.
I thought that I could never get this far,
and now I'm halfway into quatrain two;
but if at the first tercet I arrive,
I'll have no fear: there's nothing I can't do!
The tercets I have just begun to pen;
I know I must be headed the right way,
for with this line I finish number one.
Now I am in the second, and suspect
that I have written nearly thirteen lines:
count them, that makes fourteen, and look -- it's done. (trans. Alix Ingber*)*

The participants receive a list of points to consider as the course progresses:

What is *Don Quixote* about?
What determines the particular movement of the narrative?
How does Cervantes treat the characterization of the protagonist?
How does Don Quixote's noted squire, Sancho Panza, come into the narrative?
Is there a significant feminine presence in *Don Quixote*?
Are there discernible changes of rhythm and tone in the narrative?
How is *Don Quixote* narrated?
What are its principal themes?

How does the Avellaneda "false" (or spurious) sequel of 1614 affect the "true" second part of 1615?
How does Cervantes's Part 2 differ from Part 1?
How does *Don Quixote* relate to the dichotomy idealism versus realism?
How does *Don Quixote* make an impact on the development of the novel?
How has *Don Quixote* inspired artists of various stripes and time periods?

The following is a list of questions that review the content of Part 1 of *Don Quixote*:

1. To what extent is *Don Quixote* a satire?
2. What questions does Cervantes pose in the prologue to Part 1?
3. How does Cervantes treat the theme of history?
4. How can one describe the particular madness of Don Quixote?
5. How is Dulcinea del Toboso a presence in *Don Quixote* even though she does not appear in the narrative?
6. What are key aspects of the scrutiny of Don Quixote's library?
7. What is the role of Sancho Panza?
8. How does the long Sierra Morena sequence change the rhythm of the narrative?
9. How do the interpolations—the story of Camila, Anselmo, and Lotario, and the captive's oral history—fit into the scheme of *Don Quixote*, Part 1?
10. What is the role of the canon from Toledo?
11. What parallel plot lines accompany the adventures of Don Quixote on the road?
12. What are the bases of humor in *Don Quixote*, Part 1?

Before considering Part 2, I send the participants a summary of the Avellaneda sequel:

In the fall of 1614, a second part of *Don Quixote* was published by an author who used the pseudonym of Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda. The definitive identity of Avellaneda remains a mystery, although there have been a number of conjectures. In general, scholars feel that the writer was motivated by Cervantes's allusions to Lope de Vega, whose dramatic formula was roundly criticized by the priest and the canon in Chapter 48 of Part 1. In a strong defense of Lope, Avellaneda hurls insults at Cervantes, calling him "old, crippled, and jealous." The Avellaneda sequel was a commercial success, quite possibly due to the success of Part 1. Many scholars have denounced the literary quality of the tome—they especially see no magic in the characterization of the protagonists—but others have found some redeeming features in the narrative. In the end, Avellaneda may have prompted Cervantes to complete his own second part, which arguably is made stronger (and more ingenious) by Cervantes's treatment, in his own Part 2, of the intrusive continuation.

In his Part 2, Cervantes refers to the Avellaneda sequel in the prologue (read first but written last), and there is no further reference until Chapter 59. It is commonly presumed—but, of course, this cannot be verified—that at this point in his writing, Cervantes "discovered" the existence of the "false" continuation and that he did not go back to edit the chapters that he has previously written.

Two ironic elements:

1. The "legitimate" second part of *Don Quixote* is stronger by virtue of the presence of Avellaneda. (That is, Cervantes's headache was a boon to the narrative.)
2. No one today would know of Avellaneda had Cervantes not chosen to bring him and his spurious sequel into the "real" second part. (That is, Cervantes "immortalizes" Avellaneda.)

The Plot of the Avellaneda Sequel

Some gentlemen from Granada (in southern Spain) arrive at Don Quixote's village. They are on their way to the city of Zaragoza (in northeastern Spain) to participate in jousting tournaments. One of the men, Don Álvaro Tarfe, stays at the home of Don Quixote, who seems to have recovered from his madness and who has resumed his former identity as "Martín Quijada." The dialogues between the two men reveal that Don Quixote's madness has recurred, and he determines to set out for further adventures. Don Quixote renounces Dulcinea del Toboso and now calls himself the Loveless Knight. He sets out with Sancho Panza toward Zaragoza to join in the tournaments. He is delayed by scrapes on the road and arrives in Zaragoza after the tournaments have been completed. He meets up with Don Álvaro Tarfe and his friends, and they make him the object of mockery and of a series of tricks. Don Quixote sets out for Madrid, poised to fight a particular giant, and he has further adventures on the road. He and Sancho meet a woman named Bárbara, whom the knight associates with Zenobia, queen of the Amazons, and she travels with them. In Madrid, the three are victims of deceptions by aristocratic friends of Don Álvaro Tarfe, who ultimately has Don Quixote committed to a sanitarium in the city of Toledo. Bárbara joins a group of repentant women, and Sancho is engaged to serve a nobleman in Madrid. As had Cervantes in Part 1, Avellaneda interpolates two stories, "The Desperate Rich Man" and "The Happy Lovers."

I have prepared a summary of the "legitimate" Part 2:

1614: publication of the "false" second part of *Don Quixote* by the pseudonymous Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda

1615: publication of the "real" second part by Cervantes

Prologue: comments by Cervantes, who responds to the insults made against him by Avellaneda and who offers some anecdotes on the theme of madness; revelation of the ending of Part 2: Don Quixote will die, so that there will be no more false continuations. Avellaneda does not come up again until chapter 59.

Don Quixote has been at home for a month. He seems sane, except when the topic of knight errantry is raised.

Sancho Panza tells Don Quixote that people have been talking about him as if he were crazy. Don Quixote notes that all famous people must suffer abuse of this type. A university graduate—and trickster—by the name of *Sansón Carrasco* visits Don Quixote. He informs him of the publication of a book about his adventures. Don Quixote is a bit upset to learn that the chronicler is an Arab historian, Don Quixote asks if a sequel is planned. Compare this section to the scrutiny of Don Quixote's library in Part 1. Literary criticism is now aimed at the published book, which replaces the romances of chivalry as the primary intertext. Sansón mentions that different readers have interpreted the text in different ways. He mentions that the most criticized element is the tale of the man who was too curious for his own good, not because it is told badly but because it is unrelated to the main story line.

In chapter 5, the dialogue between Sancho and his wife Teresa inverts the roles of Don Quixote and Sancho. Sancho is speaking with more authority. This sets up chapter 10, in which Sancho, fearing that he will be caught up in a lie about his professed visit to Dulcinea, creates an "enchanted" Dulcinea.

Sansón Carrasco encourages Don Quixote and Sancho to set out. He plans to "defeat" Don Quixote and send him back home. Carrasco's plan backfires; Don Quixote defeats the Knight of the Wood (or of the Mirrors). Carrasco has a squire, Tomé Cecial, a neighbor of Sancho, disguised. Both pairs converse prior to the combat. Carrasco's joking nature disappears. He now wants vengeance.

Don Quixote and Sancho meet up with a troupe of actors, whom the knight recognizes as actors.

The knight and the squire meet *Don Diego de Miranda*, a figure of contrast. He is of the general age and rank of Don Quixote, but he is anything but eccentric, and his library contains no books of chivalry. Don Quixote enters a lion cage. The beast is lethargic and does not attack. Don Quixote gives himself the epithet of the Knight of the Lions. Invited to Don Diego's house, the knight and squire meet his son, Don Lorenzo, a poet.

In the episode of Camacho's wedding, Don Quixote and Sancho are spectators to an act of metatheater, in which the clever and industrious *Basilio* wins Quiteria, the woman he loves, over her wealthy suitor.

Don Quixote enters *the cave of Montesinos*. He reports his adventure, which some see as a reading of the character's mind. Among those present in the cave is the "enchanted" Dulcinea.
Don Quixote and Sancho meet *Master Pedro* at an inn. He has a divining monkey and a puppet show. Don Quixote confuses the puppets with people and attacks and destroys the puppets and the props. He pays Master Pedro, who turns out to be the galley slave Ginés de Pasamonte of Part 1. In the following chapter, Don Quixote destroys a boat and also pays the damages.
Much of Part 2 is dedicated to adventures at the palace of a *duke and duchess*, wealthy aristocrats with time on their hands. They have read Part 1, and they create dual stages: their palace for episodes related to Don Quixote and *the insula Barataria* for the governorship of Sancho. The knight and squire become jesters of sorts. A number of female characters present their problems to Don Quixote, and Sancho must become a judge and arbiter. Sancho makes surprisingly wise decisions, but the metadramatists scheme against him. He leaves the governorship and, on the road, meets *Ricote*, a former neighbor and Morisco (a convert from the Muslim faith), who brings contemporary Spanish history into the narrative. Sancho falls into an abyss and is rescued by Don Quixote; some see the abyss as a nod to the cave of Montesinos. After many chapters, Don Quixote and Sancho take their leave of the duke and duchess.

In Chapter 59, at an inn, Don Quixote meets two gentleman who have a copy of the Avellaneda book, which they malign. Don Quixote leafs through the text and agrees that this Don Quixote is not the true one. Cervantes has a number of examples of showing the inferiority of the false sequel. One is the appearance, in chapter 72, of *Don Álvaro Tarfe*, a character from the Avellaneda book, who certifies before a notary that the Don Quixote who stands before him is the real Don Quixote.

When Don Quixote learns that Avellaneda has taken the knight and the squire to the city of Zaragoza, as promised in the last chapter of Part 1, he refuses to enter that city. He will go instead to *Barcelona*. En route, he meets the highwayman Roque Guinart, who treats him kindly, but who regularly kills people. Don Quixote hears the story of Claudia Jerónima, a woman who has killed her lover out of jealously; he is innocent. This is a case of role reversal.
Roque's friend Don Antonio Moreno receives Don Quixote and Sancho in Barcelona and subjects them to some tricks. Ricote reappears, along with his daughter, Ana Félix, whose experiences more resemble byzantine romance than historical events.

Sansón Carrasco reappears as a knight, and this time he defeats Don Quixote, sending him home for a year as punishment. On the way home, Don Quixote and Sancho consider a year's trajectory as shepherds.

At home, and in the last chapter, the name of the character, *Alonso Quijano the Good*, is revealed. Don Quixote is sick, sleeps, and awakens to reject his delusions of knight errantry. He is cured, and he prepares his will, which also rejects chivalric romance. The final words of the narrative belong to *the pen* of the Arab historian Cide Hamete Benengeli, and this metonym (figure of evocation) brings together the various authors of the text.
One may consider the following: Is it Alonso Quijano who dies? Does Don Quixote live on?

The following is a closing summary:

Directions of the text

1. The chivalric plot: the adventures of the knight errant and his squire
2. The composition of the chronicle
   The narrator figures, Cide Hamete Benengeli, the Morisco translator, the narrator/editor
3. Critique on multiple levels throughout (comments, reactions, responses, literary criticism (including of Part 1 and of the Avellaneda sequel)
4. Questions of perception and perspective (multiperspectivism); the changing views on what constitutes reality
5. The interplay of realism and metafiction
6. The literary tradition
   Past works → refashionings → Part 1 as intertext to Part 2 → Avellaneda → Avellaneda in the "real" Part 2
7. History: objective vs. subjective
   Truth: absolute vs. relative
8. Type of humor
9. The presence of irony
10. Reading and writing; the reader and the writer; the implied reader and the implied author

Topics

What is *Don Quixote* about? (List in order of importance.)
How does Cervantes insert himself into the narrative?
How can one approach the issue of the madness of Don Quixote?
What are key points of contact and differences between Parts 1 and 2?
How can one describe the characterization of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza?
How does Cervantes present female characters in *Don Quixote*?
How does *Don Quixote* portray early modern Spain?
In what ways is *Don Quixote* a "national" text, and in what ways is it a "universal" text?
What are your favorite "*meta-"* works? Do any of these works have a *Quixote* connection?
Are you inclined to read the full *Don Quixote*?

I have studied *Don Quixote* for decades, and Cervantes has occupied a major portion of my research. have taught *Don Quixote*,, in Spanish and in English, to students at all levels. The Osher program has given me the opportunity to reach a special—in multiple senses—audience. I

have endeavored to provide a solid introduction, with key chapters of the text and guidance for a comprehensive vision of the narrative. What pervades my motives is the "romantic" notion that *Don Quixote* is more than a novel. It is, rather, a presentation of the elevation of art, of the juxtaposition of fiction and reality, and of the realm(s) of metafiction. Its play of signifiers and signifieds reaches new heights and offers models for the future. *Don Quixote* has animated readers, scholars, critics, and metacritics for over four hundred years, with no signs of waning. Looking at *Don Quixote* at an early age can help one face literature and life. Looking at *Don Quixote* as a senior can foster a consideration of new perspectives and new frames, which are always welcome. I have used *Don Quixote* with several Osher groups, ranging in size and style. The groups have differed. My respect for them has remained constant. I have, so to speak, cast *Don Quixote* upon them. The Osher participants have responded with enthusiasm and creativity to the survey of *Don Quixote*, a text that—I would submit—one never outgrows. Don Quixote and Cervantes were senior citizens who made their mark on the world. The death of Alonso Quijano the Good brings a sense of closure that is repudiated by the afterlife of the novel and its protagonist. Likewise, a class has closeure that is disavowed by the participants' continued involvement with the text. Don Quixote, it may be argued, is like fine wine; it gets better with age, and it would be nice to think that maybe the same is true of its readers.

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