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*Don Quixote*

Miguel de Cervantes

Translated by Tom Lathrop



ALMA CLASSICS

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FIRST PART

*Prologue*

**I** DLE READER, you can believe me when I say that I'd like this book, as a child of my intellect, to be the most beautiful, the most gallant and the most ingenious one that could ever be imagined. But I haven't been able to violate the laws of nature, which state that each one begets his like. So what could a sterile and ill-cultivated talent such as mine engender, if not the story of a dry, shrivelled-up, unpredictable child, who was filled with thoughts never before imagined by anyone else – such a book as one might dream up while in jail, where all discomfort is to be found, and where all lugubrious sounds dwell? Tranquillity, a pleasant place, the amenity of the countryside, the serenity of the heavens, the murmuring of fountains, the stillness of the soul, make even the most sterile muses appear fertile, and allow them to bear fruit that fills the world with wonder and content.

It happens that if a father has an ugly and clumsy child, love puts blinders on his eyes so that he'll see his defects as cleverness and charm, and he describes them to his friends as if they were subtleties and witticisms. But, although I seem to be Don Quixote's father, I am just his stepfather, and I don't beg you, as others do, almost with tears in their eyes, to forgive or overlook the defects that you see in this child of mine. You aren't his relative, or even his friend, and you have a soul in your body, you have free will like anyone else, and you're in your home, where you're lord and master – as the king is of his taxes – and you know the common proverb: “under my cloak I kill the King”.<sup>\*</sup> All this exempts and frees you from any obligation, and you can say whatever you want about the story, without fearing reprisal for anything bad you might say about the work, nor expecting a reward for anything good you might say.

I only wanted to offer it to you plain and simple, without the embellishment of a prologue or the countless sonnets, epigrams and eulogies that are customarily added to the beginning of books. I can tell you that, although it required enormous effort to write the book, the hardest part was writing this prologue you're reading. Time after time I took up the pen to write, and then I put it down, not knowing what I'd say. But at one of those times when I was uninspired – paper in front of me, the quill behind my ear, my elbow on the desk and my cheek on my hand, thinking about what to say – a witty and wise friend of mine came in unexpectedly, and when he saw me so pensive, he asked me why. I told him that I was thinking about the prologue I had to write for the history of Don Quixote, and not only had it got me in such a state that I

didn't want to do it, but I was also on the verge of abandoning all the deeds of the noble knight himself.

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“How can you expect me not to be fearful of the opinion of that ancient judge they call the public, when they see that after so many years of sleeping in the silence of oblivion, I’m coming out now – at this late age – with a tale as dry as mat weed, devoid of artifice, diminished in style, poor in conceits, lacking in all erudition and doctrine, and without marginal citations and annotations at the end that I see in other books, even in the novelistic and secular ones, filled with maxims of Aristotle, Plato and the whole multitude of philosophers, that amaze the readers and make their authors appear well-read, erudite and eloquent? And when they cite the holy scripture, they’re thought to be St Thomases\* and other Doctors of the Church, and they maintain such a resourceful decorum that in one line they describe an absent-minded lover, and in the next, they give a Christian homily that’s a pleasure to hear or read. My book will be lacking in all of this because I have no citations for the margins, nor any notes to put at the end, and I know even less which authors to put at the beginning in alphabetical order, like everyone else does, starting with Aristotle and ending with Xenophon\* and Zoilus\* or Zeuxis,\* although the second one was a slanderer and the last one was a painter. My book will also lack sonnets at the beginning, at least by authors who are dukes, marquises, counts, bishops, ladies or celebrated poets; although if I’d asked two or three friends who are poets, I know they would have written sonnets for me, and such that the most renowned poets in this Spain of ours couldn’t equal.

“In short, *señor* and friend,” I continued, “I think that *señor* Don Quixote will remain buried in his archives in La Mancha until Heaven furnishes someone who can adorn him with all those things that are lacking, because I’m not capable of providing them owing to my deficiencies and lack of learning, and because I’m too lazy by nature to seek authorities to say what I can say without them. So that’s where the predicament in which you found me comes from, my friend – a sufficient cause for the quandary I told you about.”

When my friend heard this, he slapped his forehead, gave a hearty laugh and said: “By God, brother, I now realize how mistaken I’ve been about you all the time we’ve known each other, because I’ve always considered you to be enlightened and judicious in everything you did, but now I see that you’re as far from being so as heaven is from earth. How is it possible that things of so little consequence, and so easy to remedy, can baffle and absorb such a mature mind as yours, which is able to break through and overcome other, more difficult things? I swear it’s not that you’re incapable, but rather that you’re excessively lazy and poverty-stricken in your thought. Would you like to see if what I’m saying is true? Well, listen to me and you’ll see in the twinkling of an eye how I can overcome all your problems, and how I can fix all the defects that you say confound and intimidate you so much that you don’t

feel like publishing the history of your celebrated Don Quixote, the light and mirror of all knight errantry.”

“Tell me,” I replied, when I heard what he was saying to me, “how do you envision filling the vacuum of my fear, and converting the chaos of my confusion into light?”

To which he said: “First, with respect to the sonnets, epigrams and eulogies written by important persons of rank missing from the front of the book, you can fix that if you write them yourself, and afterwards you can baptize them with whatever name you want, attributing them to Prester John of the Indies or the Emperor of Trebizond,\* who I’ve heard were famous poets, and even if they weren’t, and if pedants and university graduates come forth to challenge and complain about it behind your back, you shouldn’t care two *maravedis*\* about it, because even if they discover your deception, no one is going to cut off your hand because of it.

“With regard to citing books and authorities in the margins from where you got the maxims and sayings you put in your history, all you have to do is find some aphorisms and Latin phrases that fit, and that you already know by heart, or that at least won’t be hard to find. For example, when you’re dealing with freedom and captivity, use: *Non bene pro toto libertas venditur auro*,\* and then in the margin cite Horace, or whoever said it. If you’re talking about the power of death, use: *Pallida Mors æquo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas regumque turres*.\* If it’s friendship and the love that God commands you to have for your enemy, just go into holy scripture, which you can do with minimal research, and say the words used by God himself: *Ego autem dico vobis, diligite inimicos vestros*.\* If you’re dealing with evil thoughts, go to the New Testament: *De corde exeunt cogitationes malæ*.\* If it’s the inconstancy of friends, there’s Cato, who can give you this couplet: *Donec eris felix, multos numerabis amicos, tempora si fuerint nubila, solus eris*.\* And with these Latin phrases, and others like them, you’ll at least be taken for a professor of grammar, and being that nowadays is of no little honour and worth.

“As far as putting notes at the end of the book goes, surely you can do it this way – if you mention some giant in your book, make sure it’s Goliath, and with this, which won’t take any work at all, you can say: ‘The giant Goliath, a Philistine whom the shepherd David slew with a large stone in the valley of Terebinth, as cited in the Book of Kings’ in the chapter where you’ll identify it’s written. After this, to show that you’re a scholar in human letters and geography, arrange it so that you name the Tajo River in your history, and you’ll have another great citation by writing: ‘The River Tajo, which was so named by a King of Spain, starting in such and such a place and flowing into the Ocean Sea, kissing the walls of the celebrated City of Lisbon, and it is held that it has golden sands’, &c., &c. If you speak about thieves, I’ll tell you the story of Cacus,\* which I know by heart; if prostitutes, there’s the Bishop of

Mondoñedo,\* who'll lend you Lamia, Laida and Flora, the note for which will increase your reputation; if cruel people, Ovid will hand over Medea;\* and if it's about enchanters and witches, Homer has Calypso,\* and Virgil Circe;\* if brave captains, Julius Caesar will lend himself to you in his *Commentaries*,\* and Plutarch will give you a thousand Alexanders.\* If you speak of love, with the two ounces you know of Italian, you'll come upon León Hebreo,\* who will satisfy you completely. And if you don't want to go into other countries, you have Fonseca right here, in his *Of the Love of God*,\* where you'll find everything you and the most fastidious person could possibly desire on that subject. So you only have to try to list these people or use these histories I've mentioned in your own story, and by Jove, you'll fill your margins and use up thirty-two pages at the end of the book.

“Now, let's come to the bibliography that other books have and yours doesn't. The cure is very simple – all you have to do is look for a book that lists references from A to Z, as you say. You can put this list in your book as it is, and even though the deception can be clearly seen, since you really didn't need it in the first place, it doesn't make any difference. And maybe some simpleton will think that you actually used those sources in your simple book. And if it serves for nothing else, that catalogue of authorities will give instant credibility to the book. And what's more, no one will set out to prove whether you used them or not, since they'll have nothing to gain by doing so, and moreover, if I understand it correctly, this book of yours doesn't need any of the things you say are lacking, because it's all a censure of the books of chivalry, and Aristotle\* had nothing to say about them, nor did St Basil,\* and Cicero\* equally said nothing. The exactness of truth is not connected to the fictional nonsense found in those books, nor are the observations of astrology, nor are geometric calculations important to them, nor the confutation used by rhetoricians, nor do they have a reason to preach to anyone, since they mix the human with the divine, which is something in which no Christian intellect should be clad.

“You only have to imitate the style of what you're writing – the more perfect the imitation is, the better your writing will be. And since the intention of your writing is to destroy the favour and influence the books of chivalry have in the world and hold over the common folk, you have no reason to go around begging for maxims by philosophers, counsel from the holy scripture, fables by poets, orations of rhetoricians or miracles of saints, but rather you need to try to make sure that your writing is plain, clear and witty, using pure and well-put-together words charged with meaning. Declare your thoughts without complications and without muddling them. Try also to make the melancholy person who reads your history laugh, and the mirthful to laugh even more, and be sure you don't vex the simpleton. Move the wise person to marvel at your invention, the grave not to scorn it, and the prudent not to cease in their praise of it. So fix your attention on bringing down the ill-founded framework

of these chivalresque books, despised by many, and praised by many more – for if you achieve this, you won't have achieved little.”

In profound silence I listened to what my friend was telling me, and I was so impressed by his words that, without disputing them, I deemed them to be correct, and decided to use them for this prologue, in which you'll see, gentle reader, the wisdom of my friend, and my good fortune in finding such a good counsellor in my time of need, and your own relief in finding the sincere and uncomplicated history of the famous Don Quixote de La Mancha, whom all the dwellers around the Plains of Montiel believe to be the purest lover and the most valiant knight seen around there for many a year. I don't want to overrate the service I'm doing you by in introducing you to such a noble and honoured knight,

but I do want you to thank me for the acquaintance you'll make of the remarkable Sancho Panza, his squire, in whom, I believe, I have exemplified all the squirely graces that are scattered throughout the books of chivalry. And with this, may God give you health – and may He not forget me.

*Vale.\**

*To the book about Don Quixote de La Mancha*

URGANDA THE UNKNOWN\*

If to be welcomed by the good,\*  
Oh, book! you make your steady aim,  
No empty chatterer will dare  
To question or dispute your claim.  
But if perchance you had a mind  
To win of idiots approbation,  
Lost labour will be your reward,  
Though they'll pretend appreciation.

They say a goodly shade he finds  
Who shelters 'neath a goodly tree,  
And such a one your kindly star  
In Béjar hath provided thee:  
A royal tree whose spreading boughs  
A show of princely fruit display;  
A tree that bears a noble Duke,  
The Alexander of his day.

Of a Manchegan gentleman  
Thy purpose is to tell the story,  
Relating how he lost his wits  
O'er idle tales of love and glory,  
Of ladies, arms and cavaliers:  
A new Orlando Furioso –  
Innamorato,\* rather – who  
Won Dulcinea del Toboso.

Put no vain emblems on your shield;  
All figures – that is bragging play.  
A modest dedication make,  
And give no scoffer room to say,  
“What! Álvaro de Luna here?  
Or is it Hannibal again?  
Or does King Francis at Madrid  
Once more of destiny complain?”

Since Heaven it hath not pleased on thee  
Deep erudition to bestow,  
Or black Latino's gift of tongues,  
No Latin let your pages show.

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Ape not philosophy or wit,  
 Lest one who can comprehend,  
 Make a wry face at thee and ask,  
 "Why offer flowers to me, my friend?"  
 Be not a meddler; no affair  
 Of thine the life your neighbours lead:  
 Be prudent; oft the random jest  
 Recoils upon the jester's head.  
 Your constant labour let it be  
 To earn yourself an honest name,  
 For fooleries preserved in print  
 Are perpetuity of shame.  
 A further counsel bear in mind:  
 If that your roof be made of glass,  
 It shows small wit to pick up stones  
 To pelt the people as they pass.  
 Win the attention of the wise,  
 And give the thinker food for thought;  
 Whoso indites frivolities,  
 Will but by simpletons be sought.

*AMADIS DE GAULA\**

*To Don Quixote de La Mancha*

*SONNET*

You that did imitate that life of mine  
 When I in lonely sadness on the great  
 Rock Peña Pobre sat disconsolate,  
 In self-imposed penance there to pine;  
 Thou, whose sole beverage was the bitter brine  
 Of thine own tears, and who without a plate  
 Of silver, copper, tin, in lowly state  
 Off the bare earth and on earth's fruits did 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 your renown you shalt remain secure,  
 your country's name in story shall endure,  
 And your sage author stand without a peer.

SONNET

In slashing, hewing, cleaving, word and deed,  
 I was the foremost knight of chivalry,  
 Stout, bold, expert, as e'er the world did see;  
 Thousands from the oppressor's wrong I freed;  
 Great were my feats, eternal fame their meed;  
 In love I proved my truth and loyalty;  
 The hugest giant was a dwarf to me;  
 Ever to knighthood's laws gave I good heed.  
 My mastery the Fickle Goddess owned,  
 And even Chance, submitting to control,  
 Grasped by the forelock, yielded to my will.  
 Yet – though above yon horned moon enthroned  
 My fortune seems to sit – great Quixote, still  
 Envy of your achievements fills my soul.

*THE LADY ORIANA*  
*To Dulcinea del Toboso\**

SONNET

Oh, fairest Dulcinea, could it be!  
 It were a pleasant fancy to suppose so –  
 Could Miraflores change to El Toboso,  
 And London's town to that which shelters thee!  
 Oh, could mine but acquire that livery  
 Of countless charms your mind and body show so!  
 Or him, now famous grown – you made him grow so –  
 Your knight, in some dread combat could I see!  
 Oh, could I be released from Amadís  
 By exercise of such coy chastity  
 As led thee gentle Quixote to dismiss!  
 Then would my heavy sorrow turn to joy;  
 None would I envy, all would envy me,  
 And happiness be mine without alloy.

## SONNET

All hail, illustrious man! Fortune, when she  
 Bound thee apprentice to the esquire trade,  
 Her care and tenderness of thee displayed,  
 Shaping your course from misadventure free.  
 No longer now doth proud knight errantry  
 Regard with scorn the sickle and the spade;  
 Of towering arrogance less count is made  
 Than of plain squire-like simplicity.  
 I envy thee your Dapple, and your name,  
 And those saddlebags you were wont to stuff  
 With comforts that your providence proclaim.  
 Excellent Sancho! Hail to thee again!  
 To thee alone the Ovid of our Spain  
 Does homage with the rustic kiss and cuff.

*From EL DONOSO, THE MOTLEY POET  
 To Sancho Panza and Rocinante\**

I am the esquire Sancho Pan—\*  
 Who served Don Quixote de La Man—;  
 But from his service I retreat—,  
 Resolved to pass my life discreet—;  
 For Villadiego, called the Si—,  
 Maintained that only in reti—  
 Was found the secret of well-be—,  
 According to the Celesti—:  
 A book divine, except for sin—  
 By speech too plain, in my opin—

To Rocinante

I am that Rocinante fa—,  
 Great-grandson of great Babie—,\*  
 Who, all for being lean and bon—,  
 Had one Don Quixote for an own—;  
 But if I matched him well in weak—,  
 I never took short feedings meek—,

But kept myself in corn by steal—, We know  
 A trick I learnt from Lazari—, books  
 When with a piece of straw so neat—  
 The blind man of his wine he cheat—.

## ORLANDO FURIOSO\*

*To Don Quixote de La Mancha*

## SONNET

If you are not a Peer, peer you have none;  
 Among a thousand Peers you are a peer;  
 Nor is there room for one when you are near,  
 Unvanquished victor, great unconquered one!  
 Orlando, by Angelica undone,  
 Am I; o'er distant seas condemned to steer,  
 And to Fame's altars as an offering bear  
 Valour respected by Oblivion.  
 I cannot be your rival, for your fame  
 And prowess rise above all rivalry,  
 Albeit both bereft of wits we go.  
 But, though the Scythian or the Moor to tame  
 Was not your lot, still you do rival me:  
 Love binds us in a fellowship of woe.

## EL CABALLERO DEL FEBO\*

*To Don Quixote de La Mancha*

## SONNET

My sword was not to be compared with thine  
 Phoebus of Spain, marvel of courtesy,  
 Nor with your famous arm this hand of mine  
 That smote from east to west as lightning flies.  
 I scorned all empire, and that monarchy  
 The rosy east held out did I resign  
 For one glance of Claridiana's eye,  
 The bright Aurora for whose love I pine.  
 A miracle of constancy my love,  
 And banished by her ruthless cruelty,  
 This arm had might the rage of hell to tame.  
 But, Gothic Quixote, happier you do prove,