

Analysis of Miguel de Cervantes' Works

Various

Contents

A Lecture on 'don Quixote' by Samuel Taylor Coleridge	3
Cervantes by William Dean Howells	12
An Extract From 'the Body of the Nation' by Mark Twain	15
An Extract From 'humour' by G. K. Chesterton	16
An Extract From 'reading' by Virginia Woolf	18

A Lecture on 'don Quixote' by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Born at Madrid, 1547;-Shakspeare, 1564; both put off mortality on the same day, the 23rd of April, 1616, — the one in the sixty-ninth, the other in the fifty-second, year of his life. The resemblance in their physiognomies is striking, but with a predominance of acuteness in Cervantes, and of reflection in Shakspeare, which is the specific difference between the Spanish and English characters of mind.

I. The nature and eminence of Symbolical writing; —

II. Madness, and its different sorts, (considered without pretension to medical science); —

To each of these, or at least to my own notions respecting them, I must devote a few words of explanation, in order to render the after critique on Don Quixote, the master work of Cervantes' and his country's genius easily and throughout intelligible. This is not the least valuable, though it may most often be felt by us both as the heaviest and least entertaining portion of these critical disquisitions: for without it, I must have foregone one at least of the two appropriate objects of a Lecture, that of interesting you during its delivery, and of leaving behind in your minds the germs of after-thought, and the materials for future enjoyment. To have been assured by several of my intelligent auditors that they have reperused Hamlet or Othello with increased satisfaction in consequence of the new points of view in which I had placed those characters — is the highest compliment I could receive or desire; and should the address of this evening open out a new source of pleasure, or enlarge the former in your perusal of Don Quixote, it will compensate for the failure of any personal or temporary object.

I. The Symbolical cannot, perhaps, be better defined in distinction from the Allegorical, than that it is always itself a part of that, of the whole of which it is the representative.— "Here comes a sail," — (that is, a ship) is a symbolical expression. "Behold our lion!" when we speak of some gallant soldier, is allegorical. Of most importance to our present subject is this point, that the latter (the allegory) cannot be other than spoken consciously; — whereas in the former (the symbol) it is very possible that the general truth represented may be working unconsciously in the writer's mind during the construction of the symbol; — and it proves itself by being produced out of his own mind, — as the Don Quixote out of the perfectly sane mind of Cervantes, and not by outward observation, or historically. The advantage of symbolical writing over allegory is, that it presumes no disjunction of faculties, but simple predominance.

II. Madness may be divided as —

1. hypochondriasis; or, the man is out of his senses.
2. derangement of the understanding; or, the man is out of his wits.
3. loss of reason.
4. frenzy, or derangement of the sensations.

Cervantes's own preface to *Don Quixote* is a perfect model of the gentle, every where intelligible, irony in the best essays of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. Equally natural and easy, Cervantes is more spirited than Addison; whilst he blends with the terseness of Swift, an exquisite flow and music of style, and above all, contrasts with the latter by the sweet temper of a superior mind, which saw the follies of mankind, and was even at the moment suffering severely under hard mistreatment; and yet seems every where to have but one thought as the undersong— “Brethren! with all your faults I love you still!” — or as a mother that chides the child she loves, with one hand holds up the rod, and with the other wipes off each tear as it drops!

Don Quixote was neither fettered to the earth by want, nor holden in its embraces by wealth; — of which, with the temperance natural to his country, as a Spaniard, he had both far too little, and somewhat too much, to be under any necessity of thinking about it. His age too, fifty, may be well supposed to prevent his mind from being tempted out of itself by any of the lower passions; — while his habits, as a very early riser and a keen sportsman, were such as kept his spare body in serviceable subjection to his will, and yet by the play of hope that accompanies pursuit, not only permitted, but assisted, his fancy in shaping what it would. Nor must we omit his meagerness and entire featureliness, face and frame, which Cervantes gives us at once: “It is said that his surname was ‘Quixada’ or ‘Quesada,’” &c. — even in this trifle showing an exquisite judgment; — just once insinuating the association of ‘lantern-jaws’ into the reader’s mind, yet not retaining it obtrusively like the names in old farces and in the *Pilgrim’s Progress*, — but taking for the regular appellative one which had the no meaning of a proper name in real life, and which yet was capable of recalling a number of very different, but all pertinent, recollections, as old armour, the precious metals hidden in the ore, &c. *Don Quixote*’s leanness and featureliness are happy exponents of the excess of the formative or imaginative in him, contrasted with *Sancho*’s plump rotundity, and recipiency of external impression.

He has no knowledge of the sciences or scientific arts which give to the meanest portions of matter an intellectual interest, and which enable the mind to decypher in the world of the senses the invisible agency — that alone, of which the world’s phenomena are the effects and manifestations, — and thus, as in a mirror, to contemplate its own reflex, its life in the powers, its imagination in the symbolic forms, its moral instincts in the final causes, and its reason in the laws of material nature: but — estranged from all the motives to observation from self-interest — the persons that surround him too few and too familiar to enter into any connection with his thoughts, or to require any adaptation of his conduct to their particular characters or relations to himself — his judgment lies fallow, with nothing to excite, nothing to employ it. Yet, — and here is

the point, where genius even of the most perfect kind, allotted but to few in the course of many ages, does not preclude the necessity in part, and in part counterbalance the craving by sanity of judgment, without which genius either cannot be, or cannot at least manifest itself, — the dependency of our nature asks for some confirmation from without, though it be only from the shadows of other men's fictions.

Too uninformed, and with too narrow a sphere of power and opportunity to rise into the scientific artist, or to be himself a patron of art, and with too deep a principle and too much innocence to become a mere projector, Don Quixote has recourse to romances: —

His curiosity and extravagant fondness herein arrived at that pitch, that he sold many acres of arable land to purchase books of knight-errantry, and carried home all he could lay hands on of that kind! (C.I.)

The more remote these romances were from the language of common life, the more akin on that very account were they to the shapeless dreams and strivings of his own mind; — a mind, which possessed not the highest order of genius which lives in an atmosphere of power over mankind, but that minor kind which, in its restlessness, seeks for a vivid representative of its own wishes, and substitutes the movements of that objective puppet for an exercise of actual power in and by itself. The more wild and improbable these romances were, the more were they akin to his will, which had been in the habit of acting as an unlimited monarch over the creations of his fancy! Hence observe how the startling of the remaining common sense, like a glimmering before its death, in the notice of the impossible-improbable of Don Belianis, is dismissed by Don Quixote as impertinent: —

'He had some doubt' as to the dreadful wounds which Don Belianis gave and received: for he imagined, that notwithstanding the most expert surgeons had cured him, his face and whole body must still be full of seams and scars. 'Nevertheless' he commended in his author the concluding his book with a promise of that unfinishable adventure! C. 1.

Hence also his first intention to turn author; but who, with such a restless struggle within him, could content himself with writing in a remote village among apathists and ignorants? During his colloquies with the village priest and the barber surgeon, in which the fervour of critical controversy feeds the passion and gives reality to its object — what more natural than that the mental striving should become an eddy? — madness may perhaps be denned as the circling in a stream which should be progressive and adaptive: Don Quixote grows at length to be a man out of his wits; his understanding is deranged; and hence without the least deviation from the truth of nature, without losing the least trait of personal individuality, he becomes a substantial living allegory, or personification of the reason and the moral sense, divested of the judgment and the understanding. Sancho is the converse. He is the common sense without reason or imagination; and Cervantes not only shows the excellence and power of reason in, Don Quixote, but in both him and Sancho the mischiefs resulting from a severance of the two main constituents of sound intellectual and moral action. Put him and his

master together, and they form a perfect intellect; but they are separated and without cement; and hence each having a need of the other for its own completeness, each has at times a mastery over the other. For the common sense, although it may see the practical inapplicability of the dictates of the imagination or abstract reason, yet cannot help submitting to them. These two characters possess the world, alternately and interchangeably the cheater and the cheated. To impersonate them, and to combine the permanent with the individual, is one of the highest creations of genius, and has been achieved by Cervantes and Shakspeare, almost alone.

Observations on particular passages,

(B. I. c. 1.)

But not altogether approving of his having broken it to pieces with so much ease, to secure himself from the like danger for the future, he made it over again, fencing it with small bars of iron within, in such a manner, 'that he rested satisfied of its strength; and without caring to make a fresh experiment on it, he approved and looked upon it as a most excellent helmet.'

His not trying his improved scull-cap is an exquisite trait of human character, founded on the oppugnancy of the soul in such a state to any disturbance by doubt of its own broodings. Even the long deliberation about his horse's name is full of meaning; — for in these day-dreams the greater part of the history passes and is carried on in words, which look forward to other words as what will be said of them.

(Ib.)

Near the place where he lived, there dwelt a very comely country lass, with whom he had formerly been in love; though, as it is supposed, she never knew it, nor troubled herself about it.

The nascent love for the country lass, but without any attempt at utterance, or an opportunity of knowing her, except as the hint — the [Greek (transliterated): *oti esti*] — of the inward imagination, is happily conceived in both parts; — first, as confirmative of the shrinking back of the mind on itself, and its dread of having a cherished image destroyed by its own judgment; and secondly, as showing how necessarily love is the passion of novels. Novels are to love as fairy tales to dreams. I never knew but two men of taste and feeling who could not understand why I was delighted with the Arabian Nights' Tales, and they were likewise the only persons in my knowledge who scarcely remembered having ever dreamed. Magic and war — itself a magic — are the day-dreams of childhood; love is the day-dream of youth and early manhood.

(C. 2.)

"Scarcely had ruddy Phoebus spread the golden tresses of his beauteous hair over the face of the wide and spacious earth; and scarcely had the little painted birds, with the sweet and mellifluous harmony of their forked tongues, saluted the approach of rosy Aurora, who, quitting the soft couch of her jealous husband, disclosed herself to mortals through the gates of the Mauchegan horizon; when the renowned

Don Quixote," &c.

How happily already is the abstraction from the senses, from observation, and the consequent confusion of the judgment, marked in this description! The knight is describing objects immediate to his senses and sensations without borrowing a single trait from either. Would it be difficult to find parallel descriptions in Dryden's plays and in those of his successors?

(C. 3.) The host is here happily conceived as one who from his past life as a sharper, was capable of entering into and humouring the knight, and so perfectly in character, that he precludes a considerable source of improbability in the future narrative, by enforcing upon Don Quixote the necessity of taking money with him.

(C. 3.)

"Ho, there, whoever thou art, rash knight, that approachest to touch the arms of the most valorous adventurer that ever girded sword," &c.

Don Quixote's high eulogiums on himself— "the most valorous adventurer!" — but it is not himself that he has before him, but the idol of his imagination, the imaginary being whom he is acting. And this, that it is entirely a third person, excuses his heart from the otherwise inevitable charge of selfish vanity; and so by madness itself he preserves our esteem, and renders those actions natural by which he, the first person, deserves it.

(C. 4.) Andres and his master. The manner in which Don Quixote redressed this wrong, is a picture of the true revolutionary passion in its first honest state, while it is yet only a bewilderment of the understanding. You have a benevolence limitless in its prayers, which are in fact aspirations towards omnipotence; but between it and beneficence the bridge of judgment — that is, of measurement of personal power — intervenes, and must be passed. Otherwise you will be bruised by the leap into the chasm, or be drowned in the revolutionary river, and drag others with you to the same fate.

(C. 4.)

Merchants of Toledo.

When they were come so near as to be seen and heard, Don Quixote raised his voice, and with arrogant air cried out: "Let the whole world stand; if the whole world does not confess that there is not in the whole world a damsel more beautiful than," &c.

Now mark the presumption which follows the self-complacency of the last act! That was an honest attempt to redress a real wrong; this is an arbitrary determination to enforce a Brissotine or Rousseau's ideal on all his fellow creatures.

Let the whole world stand!

'If there had been any experience in proof of the excellence of our code, where would be our superiority in this enlightened age?'

"No! the business is that without seeing her, you believe, confess, affirm, swear, and maintain it; and if not, I challenge you all to battle."

Next see the persecution and fury excited by opposition however moderate! The only words listened to are those, that without their context and their conditionals,

and transformed into positive assertions, might give some shadow of excuse for the violence shown! This rich story ends, to the compassion of the men in their senses, in a sound rib-roasting of the idealist by the muleteer, the mob. And happy for thee, poor knight! that the mob were against thee! For had they been with thee, by the change of the moon and of them, thy head would have been off.

(C. 5.) first part — The idealist recollects the causes that had been accessory to the reverse and attempts to remove them — too late. He is beaten and disgraced.

(C. 6.) This chapter on Don Quixote's library proves that the author did not wish to destroy the romances, but to cause them to be read as romances — that is, for their merits as poetry.

(C. 7.)

Among other things, Don Quixote told him, he should dispose himself to go with him willingly; — for some time or other such an adventure might present, that an island might be won, in the turn of a hand, and he be left governor thereof.

At length the promises of the imaginative reason begin to act on the plump, sensual, honest common sense accomplice, — but unhappily not in the same person, and without the 'copula' of the judgment, — in hopes of the substantial good things, of which the former contemplated only the glory and the colours.

(C. 7.)

Sancho Panza went riding upon his ass, like any patriarch, with his wallet and leathern bottle, and with a vehement desire to find himself governor of the island which his master had promised him.

The first relief from regular labour is so pleasant to poor Sancho!

(C. 8.)

"I no gentleman! I swear by the great God, thou liest, as I am a Christian. Biscainer by land, gentleman by sea, gentleman for the devil, and thou liest: look then if thou hast any thing else to say."

This Biscainer is an excellent image of the prejudices and bigotry provoked by the idealism of a speculator. This story happily detects the trick which our imagination plays in the description of single combats: only change the preconception of the magnificence of the combatants, and all is gone.

(B. II. c. 2.)

"Be pleased, my lord Don Quixote, to bestow upon me the government of that island," &c.

Sancho's eagerness for his government, the nascent lust of actual democracy, or isocracy!

(C. 2.)

"But tell me, on your life, have you ever seen a more valorous knight than I, upon the whole face of the known earth? Have you read in story of any other, who has, or ever had, more bravery in assailing, more breath in holding out, more dexterity in wounding, or more address in

giving a fall?"— "The truth is," answered Sancho, "that I never read any history at all; for I can neither read nor write; but what I dare affirm is, that I never served a bolder master," &c.

This appeal to Sancho, and Sancho's answer are exquisitely humorous. It is impossible not to think of the French bulletins and proclamations. Remark the necessity under which we are of being sympathized with, fly as high into abstraction as we may, and how constantly the imagination is recalled to the ground of our common humanity! And note a little further on, the knight's easy vaunting of his balsam, and his quietly deferring the making and application of it.

(C. 3.) The speech before the goatherds:

"Happy times and happy ages," &c.

Note the rhythm of this, and the admirable beauty and wisdom of the thoughts in themselves, but the total want of judgment in Don Quixote's addressing them to such an audience.

(B. III. c. 3.) Don Quixote's balsam, and the vomiting and consequent relief; an excellent hit at 'panacea nostrums', which cure the patient by his being himself cured of the medicine by revolting nature.

(C. 4.)

"Peace! and have patience; the day will come," &c.

The perpetual promises of the imagination!

(Ib.)

"Your Worship," said Sancho, "would make a better preacher than knight errant!"

Exactly so. This is the true moral.

(C. 6.) The uncommon beauty of the description in the commencement of this chapter. In truth, the whole of it seems to put all nature in its heights and its humiliations, before us.

(Ib.) Sancho's story of the goats:

"Make account, he carried them all over," said Don Quixote, "and do not be going and coming in this manner; for at this rate, you will not have done carrying them over in a twelvemonth." "How many are passed already?" said Sancho, &c.

Observe the happy contrast between the all-generalizing mind of the mad knight, and Sancho's all-particularizing memory. How admirable a symbol of the dependence of all 'copula' on the higher powers of the mind, with the single exception of the succession in time and the accidental relations of space. Men of mere common sense have no theory or means of making one fact more important or prominent than the rest; if they lose one link, all is lost. Compare Mrs. Quickly and the Tapster. And note also Sancho's good heart, when his master is about to leave him. Don Quixote's conduct upon discovering the fulling-hammers, proves he was meant to be in his senses. Nothing can be better conceived than his fit of passion at Sancho's laughing, and his sophism of self-justification by the courage he had shown.

Sancho is by this time cured, through experience, as far as his own errors are concerned; yet still is he lured on by the unconquerable awe of his master's superiority, even when he is cheating him.

(C. 8.) The adventure of the Galley-slaves. I think this is the only passage of moment in which Cervantes slips the mask of his hero, and speaks for himself.

(C. 9.)

Don Quixote desired to have it, and bade him take the money, and keep it for himself. Sancho kissed his hands for the favour, &c.

Observe Sancho's eagerness to avail himself of the permission of his master, who, in the war sports of knight-errantry, had, without any selfish dishonesty, overlooked the 'meum' and 'tuum.' Sancho's selfishness is modified by his involuntary goodness of heart, and Don Quixote's flighty goodness is debased by the involuntary or unconscious selfishness of his vanity and self-applause.

(C. 10.) Cardenio is the madman of passion, who meets and easily overthrows for the moment the madman of imagination. And note the contagion of madness of any kind, upon Don Quixote's interruption of Cardenio's story.

(C. 11.)

Perhaps the best specimen of Sancho's proverbializing is this:

"And I (Don Q.) say again, they lie, and will lie two hundred times more, all who say, or think her so." "I neither say, nor think so," answered Sancho: "let those who say it, eat the lie, and swallow it with their bread: whether they were guilty or no, they have given an account to God before now: I come from my vineyard, I know nothing; I am no friend to inquiring into other men's lives; 'for' he that buys and lies shall find the lie left in his purse behind; 'besides,' naked was I born, and naked I remain; I neither win nor lose; if they were guilty, what is that to me? Many think to find bacon, where there is not so much as a pin to hang it on: 'but' who can hedge in the cuckoo? 'Especially,' do they spare God himself?"

(Ib.)

"And it is no great matter, if it be in another hand; for by what I remember, Dulcinea can neither write nor read," &c.

The wonderful twilight of the mind! and mark Cervantes's courage in daring to present it, and trust to a distant posterity for an appreciation of its truth to nature.

(P. II. B. III. c. 9.) Sancho's account of what he had seen on Clavileno is a counterpart in his style to Don Quixote's adventures in the cave of Montesinos. This last is the only impeachment of the knight's moral character; Cervantes just gives one instance of the veracity failing before the strong cravings of the imagination for something real and external; the picture would not have been complete without this; and yet it is so well managed, that the reader has no unpleasant sense of Don Quixote having told a lie. It is evident that he hardly knows whether it was a dream or not; and goes to the enchanter to inquire the real nature of the adventure.

SUMMARY ON CERVANTES.

A Castilian of refined manners; a gentleman, true to religion, and true to honour.

A scholar and a soldier, and fought under the banners of Don John of Austria, at Lepanto, lost his arm and was captured.

Endured slavery not only with fortitude, but with mirth; and by the superiority of nature, mastered and overawed his barbarian owner.

Finally ransomed, he resumed his native destiny, the awful task of achieving fame; and for that reason died poor and a prisoner, while nobles and kings over their goblets of gold gave relish to their pleasures by the charms of his divine genius. He was the inventor of novels for the Spaniards, and in his *Persilis* and *Sigismunda*, the English may find the germ of their *Robinson Crusoe*.

The world was a drama to him. His own thoughts, in spite of poverty and sickness, perpetuated for him the feelings of youth. He painted only what he knew and had looked into, but he knew and had looked into much indeed; and his imagination was ever at hand to adapt and modify the world of his experience. Of delicious love he fabled, yet with stainless virtue.

Cervantes by William Dean Howells

I recall very fully the moment and the place when I first heard of 'Don Quixote,' while as yet I could not connect it very distinctly with anybody's authorship. I was still too young to conceive of authorship, even in my own case, and wrote my miserable verses without any notion of literature, or of anything but the pleasure of seeing them actually come out rightly rhymed and measured. The moment was at the close of a summer's day just before supper, which, in our house, we had lawlessly late, and the place was the kitchen where my mother was going about her work, and listening as she could to what my father was telling my brother and me and an apprentice of ours, who was like a brother to us both, of a book that he had once read. We boys were all shelling peas, but the story, as it went on, rapt us from the poor employ, and whatever our fingers were doing, our spirits were away in that strange land of adventures and mishaps, where the fevered life of the knight truly without fear and without reproach burned itself out. I dare say that my father tried to make us understand the satirical purpose of the book. I vaguely remember his speaking of the books of chivalry it was meant to ridicule; but a boy could not care for this, and what I longed to do at once was to get that book and plunge into its story. He told us at random of the attack on the windmills and the flocks of sheep, of the night in the valley of the fulling-mills with their trip-hammers, of the inn and the muleteers, of the tossing of Sancho in the blanket, of the island that was given him to govern, and of all the merry pranks at the duke's and duchess's, of the liberation of the galley-slaves, of the capture of Mambrino's helmet, and of Sancho's invention of the enchanted Dulcinea, and whatever else there was wonderful and delightful in the most wonderful and delightful book in the world. I do not know when or where my father got it for me, and I am aware of an appreciable time that passed between my hearing of it and my having it. The event must have been most important to me, and it is strange I cannot fix the moment when the precious story came into my hands; though for the matter of that there is nothing more capricious than a child's memory, what it will hold and what it will lose.

It is certain my Don Quixote was in two small, stout volumes not much bigger each than my Goldsmith's 'Greece', bound in a sort of law-calf, well fitted to withstand the wear they were destined to undergo. The translation was, of course, the old-fashioned version of Jervas, which, whether it was a closely faithful version or not, was honest eighteenth-century English, and reported faithfully enough the spirit of the original. If it had any literary influence with me the influence must have been good. But I cannot make out that I was sensible of the literature; it was the forever enchanting story that I enjoyed. I exulted in the boundless freedom of the design; the open air of that immense

scene, where adventure followed adventure with the natural sequence of life, and the days and the nights were not long enough for the events that thronged them, amidst the fields and woods, the streams and hills, the highways and byways, hostelryes and hovels, prisons and palaces, which were the setting of that matchless history. I took it as simply as I took everything else in the world about me. It was full of meaning that I could not grasp, and there were significances of the kind that literature unhappily abounds in, but they were lost upon my innocence. I did not know whether it was well written or not; I never thought about that; it was simply there in its vast entirety, its inexhaustible opulence, and I was rich in it beyond the dreams of avarice.

My father must have told us that night about Cervantes as well as about his 'Don Quixote', for I seem to have known from the beginning that he was once a slave in Algiers, and that he had lost a hand in battle, and I loved him with a sort of personal affection, as if he were still living and he could somehow return my love. His name and nature endeared the Spanish name and nature to me, so that they were always my romance, and to this day I cannot meet a Spanish man without clothing him in something of the honor and worship I lavished upon Cervantes when I was a child. While I was in the full flush of this ardor there came to see our school, one day, a Mexican gentleman who was studying the American system of education; a mild, fat, saffron man, whom I could almost have died to please for Cervantes' and Don Quixote's sake, because I knew he spoke their tongue. But he smiled upon us all, and I had no chance to distinguish myself from the rest by any act of devotion before the blessed vision faded, though for long afterwards, in impassioned reveries, I accosted him and claimed him kindred because of my fealty, and because I would have been Spanish if I could.

I would not have had the boy-world about me know anything of these fond dreams; but it was my tastes alone, my passions, which were alien there; in everything else I was as much a citizen as any boy who had never heard of Don Quixote. But I believe that I carried the book about with me most of the time, so as not to lose any chance moment of reading it. Even in the blank of certain years, when I added little other reading to my store, I must still have been reading it. This was after we had removed from the town where the earlier years of my boyhood were passed, and I had barely adjusted myself to the strange environment when one of my uncles asked me to come with him and learn the drug business, in the place, forty miles away, where he practised medicine. We made the long journey, longer than any I have made since, in the stage-coach of those days, and we arrived at his house about twilight, he glad to get home, and I sick to death with yearning for the home I had left. I do not know how it was that in this state, when all the world was one hopeless blackness around me, I should have got my 'Don Quixote' out of my bag; I seem to have had it with me as an essential part of my equipment for my new career. Perhaps I had been asked to show it, with the notion of beguiling me from my misery; perhaps I was myself trying to drown my sorrows in it. But anyhow I have before me now the vision of my sweet young aunt and her young sister looking over her shoulder, as they stood together on the lawn in the summer

evening light. My aunt held my Don Quixote open in one hand, while she clasped with the other the child she carried on her arm. She looked at the book, and then from time to time she looked at me, very kindly but very curiously, with a faint smile, so that as I stood there, inwardly writhing in my bashfulness, I had the sense that in her eyes I was a queer boy. She returned the book without comment, after some questions, and I took it off to my room, where the confidential friend of Cervantes cried himself to sleep.

In the morning I rose up and told them I could not stand it, and I was going home. Nothing they could say availed, and my uncle went down to the stage-office with me and took my passage back.

The horror of cholera was then in the land; and we heard in the stage-office that a man lay dead of it in the hotel overhead. But my uncle led me to his drugstore, where the stage was to call for me, and made me taste a little camphor; with this prophylactic, Cervantes and I somehow got home together alive.

The reading of 'Don Quixote' went on throughout my boyhood, so that I cannot recall any distinctive period of it when I was not, more or less, reading that book. In a boy's way I knew it well when I was ten, and a few years ago, when I was fifty, I took it up in the admirable new version of Ormsby, and found it so full of myself and of my own irrevocable past that I did not find it very gay. But I made a great many discoveries in it; things I had not dreamt of were there, and must always have been there, and other things wore a new face, and made a new effect upon me. I had my doubts, my reserves, where once I had given it my whole heart without question, and yet in what formed the greatness of the book it seemed to me greater than ever. I believe that its free and simple design, where event follows event without the fettering control of intrigue, but where all grows naturally out of character and conditions, is the supreme form of fiction; and I cannot help thinking that if we ever have a great American novel it must be built upon some such large and noble lines. As for the central figure, Don Quixote himself, in his dignity and generosity, his unselfish ideals, and his fearless devotion to them, he is always heroic and beautiful; and I was glad to find in my latest look at his history that I had truly conceived of him at first, and had felt the sublimity of his nature. I did not want to laugh at him so much, and I could not laugh at all any more at some of the things done to him. Once they seemed funny, but now only cruel, and even stupid, so that it was strange to realize his qualities and indignities as both flowing from the same mind. But in my mature experience, which threw a broader light on the fable, I was happy to keep my old love of an author who had been almost personally, dear to me.

An Extract From 'the Body of the Nation' by Mark Twain

A curious exemplification of the power of a single book for good or harm is shown in the effects wrought by 'Don Quixote' and those wrought by 'Ivanhoe.' The first swept the world's admiration for the medieval chivalry-silliness out of existence; and the other restored it. As far as our South is concerned, the good work done by Cervantes is pretty nearly a dead letter, so effectually has Scott's pernicious work undermined it.

An Extract From 'humour' by G. K. Chesterton

Thirdly, there appeared with the great Cervantes an element new in its explicit expression; that grand and very Christian quality of the man who laughs at himself. Cervantes was himself more chivalrous than most men when he began to mock at chivalry. Since his time, humour in this purely humorous sense, the confession of complexity and weakness already remarked upon, has been a sort of secret of the high culture of the West. The influence of Cervantes and Rabelais, and the rest runs through all modern letters, especially our own; taking on a shrewd and acid tang in Swift, a more delicate and perhaps more dubious taste in Sterne, passing on through every sort of experiment of essay or comedy, pausing upon the pastoral gaiety of Goldsmith or going on finally to bring forth, like a great birth of giants, the walking caricatures of Dickens. Nor is it altogether a national accident that the tradition has here been followed in our own nation. For it is true that humour, in the special and even limited sense here given to it, humour as distinct from wit, from satire, from irony or from many things that may legitimately produce amusement, has been a thing strongly and specially present in English life and letters. That we may not in turn depreciate the wit and logic of the rest of the world, it will be well to remember that humour does originate in the half-conscious eccentric, that it is in part a confession of inconsistency, but, when all is said, it has added a new beauty to human life. It may even be noted that there has appeared especially in England a new variety of humour, more properly to be called Nonsense. Nonsense may be described as humour which has for the moment renounced all connection with wit. It is humour that abandons all attempt at intellectual justification; and does not merely jest at the incongruity of some accident or practical joke, as a by-product of real life, but extracts and enjoys it for its own sake. Jabberwocky is not a parody on anything; the Jumblies are not a satire on anybody; they are folly for folly's sake on the same lines as art for art's sake, or more properly beauty for beauty's sake; and they do not serve any social purpose except perhaps the purpose of a holiday. Here again it will be well to remember that even the work of humour should not consist entirely of holidays. But this art of nonsense is a valuable contribution to culture; and it is very largely, or almost entirely, an English contribution. So cultivated and competent a foreign observer as M. Emile Cammaerts has remarked that it is so native as to be at first quite unmeaning to foreigners. This is perhaps the latest phase in the history of humour; but it will be well even in this case to preserve what is so essential a virtue of humour; the virtue of proportion. Hu-

mour, like wit, is related however indirectly, to truth and the eternal virtues; as it is the greatest incongruity of all to be serious about humour, so it is the worst sort of pomposity to be monotonously proud of humour; for it is itself the chief antidote to pride; and has been, ever since the time of the Book of Proverbs, the hammer of fools.

An Extract From ‘reading’ by Virginia Woolf

Don Quixote is very dull too. But his dullness, instead of having that lethargy as of a somnolent beast which is characteristic of great people’s dullness— “After my enormous labours, I’m asleep and intend to snore if I like,” they seem to say — instead of this dullness Don Quixote has another variety. He is telling stories to children. There they sit round the fire on a winter’s night, grown up children, women at their spinning, men relaxed and sleepy after the day’s sport, “Tell us a story — something to make us laugh — something gallant, too — about people like ourselves only more unhappy and a great deal happier.” Obedient to this demand, Cervantes, a kind accommodating man, spun them stories, about princesses lost and amorous knights, much to their taste, very tedious to ours. Let him but get back to Don Quixote and Sancho Panza and all is well, for him, we cannot help thinking, as for us. Yet what with our natural reverence and inevitable servility, we seldom make our position, as modern readers of old writers, plain. Undoubtedly all writers are immensely influenced by the people who read them. Thus, take Cervantes and his audience — we, coming four centuries later, have a sense of breaking into a happy family party. Compare that group with the group (only there are no groups now since we have become educated and isolated and read our books by our own firesides in our own copies) but compare the readers of Cera Cervantes with the readers of Thomas Hardy. Hardy whiles away no firelit hour with tales of lost princesses and amorous knights — refuses more and more sternly to make things up for our entertainment. As we read him separately so he speaks to us separately, as if we were individual men and women, rather than groups sharing the same tastes. That, too, must be taken into account. The reader of to-day accustomed to find himself in direct communication with the writer, is constantly out of touch with Cervantes. How far did he himself know what he was about — how far again do we over-interpret, mis-interpret, read into Don Quixote a meaning compounded of our own experience, as an elder person might read a meaning into a child’s story and doubt whether the child himself was aware of it? If Cervantes had felt the tragedy and the satire as we feel them, could he have foreborne as he does to stress them — could he have been as callous as he seems? Yet Shakespeare dismissed Falstaff callously enough. The great writers have this large way with them, nature’s way; which we who are further from nature call cruel, since we suffer more from the effects of cruelty, or at any rate judge our suffering of greater importance, than they did. None of this, however, impairs the main pleasure of the jolly, delightful, plain spoken book built up, foaming up, round

the magnificent conception of the Knight and the world which, however people may change, must remain for ever an unassailable statement of man and the world. That will always be in existence. And as for knowing himself what he was about — perhaps great writers never do. Perhaps that is why later ages find what they seek.

But to return to the dullest book in the world. To this volume Sir Thomas has added certainly one or two pages. Yet should one desire a loophole to escape it is always possible to find one in the chance that the book is difficult, not dull. Accustomed as we are to strip a whole page of its sentences and crush their meaning out in one grasp, the obstinate resistance which a page of *Urne Burial* offers at first trips us and blinds us. “Though if Adam were made out of an extract of the Earth, all parts might challenge a restitution, yet few have returned their bones farre lower than they might receive them” — We must stop, go back, try out this way and that, and proceed at a foot’s pace. Reading has been made so easy in our days that to go back to these crabbed sentences is like mounting only a solemn and obstinate donkey instead of going up to town by an electric train. Dilatory, capricious, governed by no consideration save his own wish, Sir Thomas seems scarcely to be writing in the sense that Froude wrote or Matthew Arnold. A page of print now fulfils a different office. Is it not almost servile in the assiduity with which it helps us on our way, making only the standard charge on our attention and in return for that giving us the full measure, but not an ounce over or under our due? In Sir Thomas Browne’s days weights and measures were in a primitive condition, if they had any existence at all. One is conscious all the time that Sir Thomas was never paid a penny for his prose. He is free since it is the offering of his own bounty to give us as little or as much as he chooses. He is an amateur; it is the work of his leisure and pleasure; he makes no bargain with us. Therefore, as Sir Thomas has no call to conciliate his reader, these short books of his are dull if he chooses, difficult if he likes, beautiful beyond measure if he has a mind that way. Here we approach the doubtful region — the region of beauty. Are we not already lost or sunk or enticed with the very first words? “When the Funeral pyre was out, and the last valediction over, men took a lasting adieu to their interred Friends.” But why beauty should have the effect upon us that it does, the strange serene confidence that it inspires in us, none can say. Most people have tried and perhaps one of the invariable properties of beauty is that it leaves in the mind a desire to impart. Some offering we must make; some act we must dedicate, if only to move across the room and turn the rose in the jar, which, by the way, has dropped its petals.

The Ted K Archive

Various
Analysis of Miguel de Cervantes' Works

www.thetedkarchive.com