

Study Guide on Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (Part I)

What view of chivalry emerges from the first part of *Don Quixote*? How is chivalry portrayed by the narrator, and is this convincing? Is it as a noble ideal, utter foolishness, or something else?

In light of the first part of *Don Quixote*, do you admire the Knight of the Sorry Face, or do you pity him?

- Is Don Quixote truly “worthy of continuous and memorable praise” (74¹)?
- “If we leave aside the absurdities that the good hidalgo comes out with concerning his mania, in conversations on other subjects he talks with great good sense, and shows himself to have a clear and balanced judgment” (279). Is this correct?
- “Those who’d been listening to him were again moved to pity on seeing that a man who seemed to have a good brain, and could argue clearly about everything he discussed, so totally lost his senses as soon as the talk turned to his detestable and damnable chivalry” (359). Is this a fair assessment of Don Quixote?

Is Don Quixote a better or a worse man by the end of Part I? Give evidence for this moral trajectory, and explain what causes were promoting it.

How does the Moor portray Don Quixote? What do you believe he thinks of the knight? As manifested in the first part, is the author of *Don Quixote* a friendly or a hostile sage?

What role does Dulcinea del Toboso play in this story? To what extent does Don Quixote’s love for her have a real effect on his actions, and what is the nature of this effect?

Don Quixote seems to act honorably, yet at the same time he does not appear to act rationally. How is this possible—can one do one without the other? Is it possible to commend Don Quixote, given his insanity? Can there be true virtue where there is insanity?

What role do women play in this story? Consider the different “types” of women that appear—what does each bring to the narrative? Why might Cervantes the author include so many women of astonishing beauty, wit, and virtue?

¹ De Cervantes, Miguel. *Don Quixote*. Translated by John Rutherford. London: Penguin Books, 2000. (All page numbers refer to this edition.)



Examine the place that love has in the adventures of Don Quixote. Are the various love stories similar in any ways? By what means are the amorous struggles resolved? Can Don Quixote be credited for the happy endings?

“In my opinion this kind of writing [books of chivalry] comes under the heading of Milesian tales, which are absurd stories, concerned only to amuse and not to instruct, unlike apologues, which amuse and instruct at the same time” (437). From what you have read thus far, does *Don Quixote* seem more like a Milesian tale or an apologue? Explain why.



Study Guide on Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (Part II)

"It did occur to him that some sage, friendly or hostile, must have published his deeds by way of enchantment. . . . but then he lost heart again when he remembered that the name Cide suggested that the author was a Moor, and not a word of truth was to be expected from any of those, since the whole lot of them are deceivers, liars and story-tellers" (502). Consider the role of the historian, Cide Hamete Benengeli, in this work.

- How is the work affected by the fact that he is the historian? Do we have to view things differently because of this layer of narration?
 - Does Hamete's hatred of chivalrous romances influence his narration?
 - Does the fact that he is not a Christian influence the narrative?
- Consider Part I, Chapter IX (especially page 76). What kind of attitude does Cervantes (as a voice in the book) have towards the Moor?
- Why does Don Quixote claim that his history "[needs] a commentary to make it intelligible" (507)? Is this true?

What is the relation between madness or foolishness and wisdom in Don Quixote and Sancho Panza? Is their craziness real, or is it feigned? To what extent do knight and squire each appear wise in spite of their oddities? Is there any way in which they seem wise or virtuous *because* of their oddities?

Consider Don Quixote's final repentance (975 ff.).

- What reaction did you have to it? Did it come as a relief, a disappointment, or in some other way?
- How does Cide Hamete intend the repentance to come across?
- How does Cervantes intend it to come across?
- Is it a fitting ending to the history of the Ingenious Hidalgo?

"Look here, Sancho . . . wherever virtue is found to a high degree it is persecuted" (500). In light of your analysis of Benegali's credibility and intentions, to what extent could this maxim apply to Don Quixote himself? In the knight-errant's own eyes, is he persecuted by the narration of the Moorish historian? Does Cervantes want his readers to see things in this way?

How do you as a reader react toward those who use Don Quixote as an object of amusement (the Duke and Duchess, Don Antonio Moreno, etc.)? Is this different from or similar to your reactions to characters who did the same in Part One?

Explain the role of Dulcinea del Toboso in the second part of *Don Quixote*.



- In what ways is she an influence and guide to Don Quixote?
- What impact does her failure to appear have on Don Quixote? (See Chapter 73.)

Was Don Quixote lying when he told what had happened in the Cave of Montesinos? According to your answer, what does this fact show about Don Quixote's mental trajectory in Part II? Consider the side-note written by Cide Hamete about the incident (648), as well Don Quixote's whisper to Sancho at 765.

Why is Book II, Chapter VI "one of the important chapters in this history" (520)?

What view of chivalry emerges from *Don Quixote* as a whole? Compare impressions from the first part with the different views offered in the second: from "These saintly knights professed, as I myself profess, the exercise of arms; but the difference between them and me is that they were saints," (875) to Don Quixote's death.

When and by what means is Don Quixote disenchanted? Does it take place in stages, or all at once?

"To write histories and other books one needs a fine mind and a mature understanding. To tell jokes and write wittily is the work of geniuses; the most intelligent character in a play is the fool, because the actor playing the part of a simpleton must not be one" (507). Would you say that *Don Quixote* is a work of genius, by these criteria?

Why do you think Cervantes brought Part I into the narrative of Part II? What dimensions of the story are made possible by this technique? What aspects of the knight-errant's character, if any, does this allow to be explored?

Having concluded the work, what impression do you have of *books* about chivalry and knights-errant? Did Cide Hamete accomplish in you his goal to "make men hate those false, absurd histories in books of chivalry" (982)?

Taken as a whole, does this work intend to amuse, instruct, or both?

"One of the faults that have been found in this history is that the author included a tale called *Inappropriate Curiosity*; not that it's a bad one or badly told, but it's out of place and has nothing to do with the history of the great Don Quixote" (506). Is this a valid criticism? Why might Cervantes have included this story in the work?

Suggested use: This study guide includes a few questions and observations about Miguel Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Among possible uses, one could consider these comments while reading the work; or one could use them as starting points for a classroom discussion.

