

## ***DON QUIXOTE IN A NUTSHELL***

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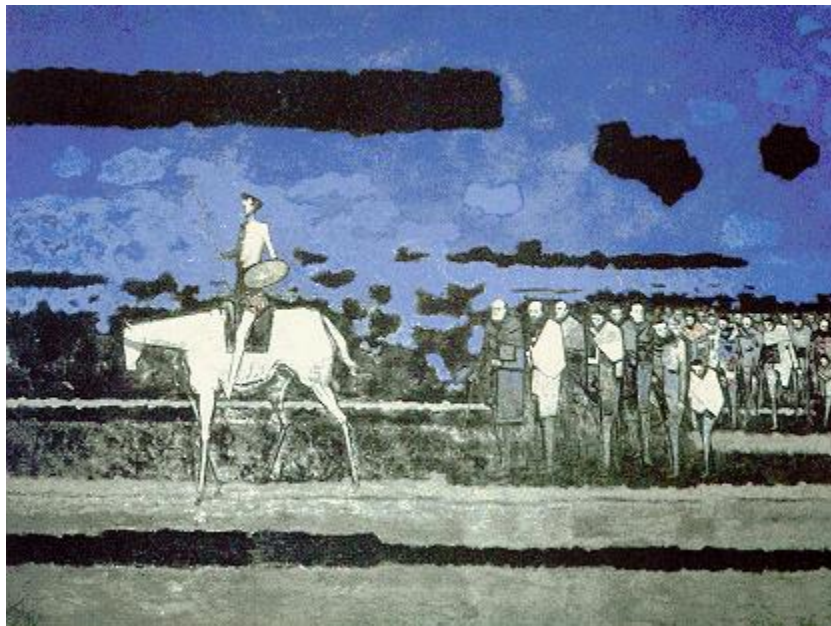
**Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote***

### **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 After being ransomed, he returned to Spain, where the letters were no longer valid and where he struggled both in defining a career path and as a writer.**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 *pícaro*), 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.



Examples: INTERTEXTUALITY

This cartoon is only funny if you know a particular question. What is that question?



*"Who's next?"*

What Tennessee Williams play provides the intertext of this cartoon?



*"Stella!"*

## META-

In Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (The Ladies-in-Waiting, 1656), one finds a painting about painting, a meta-painting. The artist is in the work, and the subject of his work—the king and queen of Spain, Philip IV and Mariana—is reflected in the mirror in the center. Focus is on the spectators, including the princess Margarita. It is said that Velázquez painted himself in such illustrious company because he wanted to stress the importance of the artist and the work of art. The painting becomes the *intertext* of many other works, including a series of studies by Pablo Picasso and the British artist Richard Hamilton.

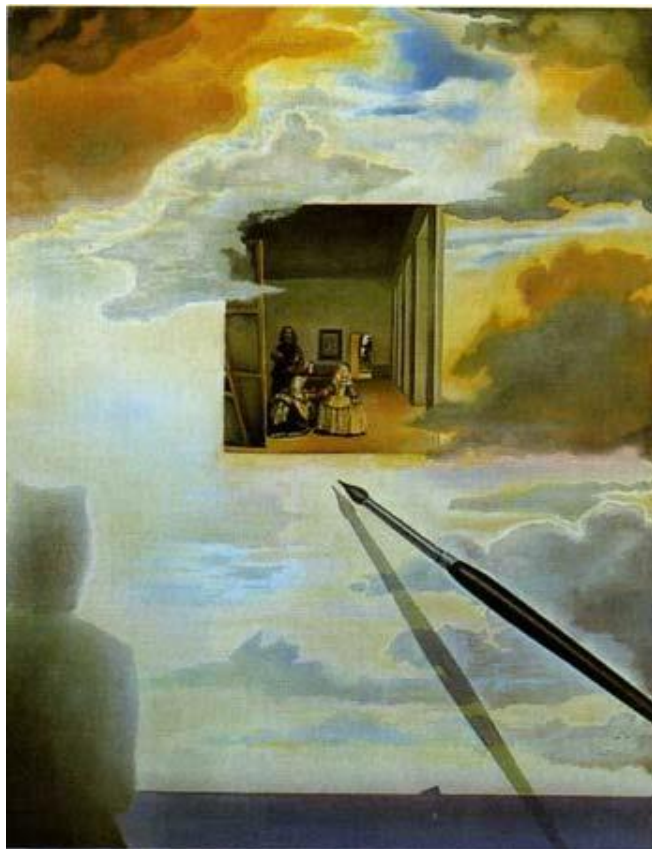
In sum, not only is *Las Meninas* an example of baroque art and meta-art, but it serves as the intertext of the works by Picasso, Hamilton, and many others.











## Lope de Vega (1562-1635), prolific Spanish playwright and poet

### 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)*