

## Did Cervantes Learn of Avellaneda's *Quijote* Earlier Than Chapter 59 of Part Two?

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**D**URING THE MANY YEARS that I spent translating *Don Quixote*, I reread the entire text more than 200 times, usually in English. Somewhere along the line, it dawned on me that Cervantes seemed to have learned of Avellaneda's *Quijote* at least as early as the 58th chapter of Part Two. I started searching the literature to see how many other people had noticed this. To my astonishment, I found that I was apparently alone. However, each rereading reinforced my belief that Cervantes was aware of Avellaneda's *Quijote* earlier than Chapter 59. My reason for thinking this is that in Chapter 58 Cervantes gratuitously mentions several times the existing history of *Don Quixote*—the one by Cervantes—while pointing out that the history emphasizes that *Don Quixote is the most enamored knight in the world, and Sancho is extremely witty.*

### Ch. 58:

“Oh, my dearest friend,” said the second shepherdess to the first, “what great good fortune has befallen us! Do you see this gentleman that we have in our midst? Well, I want you to know that he is the most valiant, **the most enamored**, and the most courteous **knight in the entire world**, unless he is not telling the truth, or we have been misled by a published history of his exploits that I have read. I dare say that this good man with him is a certain Sancho Panza, his squire, **whose witty remarks cannot be equaled by anyone else’s.**”

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“Oh,” said the other girl, “let us ask him to stay, my dear, for our parents and brothers and sisters will be immensely pleased by it. I too have heard all these things about the knight’s valor and **the squire’s wit** that you mention. In addition, **they say the knight is the most steadfast and faithful lover known, and his ladylove is a certain Dulcinea of Toboso**, who has been proclaimed the greatest beauty in all of Spain.”

In this chapter methinks Cervantes doth protest too much.

Then in **Ch. 59**, we find:

“Nevertheless,” said Don Juan, “we would do well to read it, for no book is so bad it doesn’t contain something good. The thing I find most disagreeable, though, is that it depicts **Don Quixote as no longer enamored of Dulcinea of Toboso.**”

When Don Quixote heard this, he was filled with rage and despair, and raising his voice, cried out:

“Whoever says that Don Quixote of La Mancha has forgotten or is capable of forgetting Dulcinea of Toboso shall be made to understand by me in a fair fight that he has strayed very far from the truth, **for the peerless Dulcinea of Toboso can never be forgotten, nor can such forgetfulness ever find lodging in Don Quixote’s breast.** His motto is faithfulness and his mission is to preserve it through moderation and without violence of any kind.”

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“From what I have heard,” said Don Jerónimo, “you are undoubtedly Sancho Panza, squire to his lord Don Quixote.”

“I am,” replied Sancho, “and am proud of it.”

“Well, you may take my word for it,” said the gentleman, “that this new author has not treated you with the honesty that you deserve. **He portrays you as a glutton, a simpleton, and a person devoid of humor**—quite different from the Sancho described in the first part of your master’s history.”

To sum up, in Chapter 58 Cervantes seems to be refreshing the memories of his readers—just in case they have forgotten—that the real Don Quixote has always been in love with Dulcinea and that Sancho’s principal characteristic is his wit. By reminding us of these qualities, he shows how absurdly false Avellaneda’s portrayal is when he says in Chapter 59 that Don Quixote is no longer in love with Dulcinea, and paints the character of Sancho as being devoid of humor. I realize this is all supposition at its finest, but I send it forth to have people reconsider an assumption that has been engraved in stone, and to show what too many hours spent translating *Don Quixote* can do to one’s psyche.

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