

21L.021 Comedy
Close Reading 4 (250 *words*)

Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and His Artistry
Due Session 11

The assignment is a short and focused exercise in what is commonly phrased as *close reading*. Only 250 words are required. However, this is enough space for you to work on a small piece of text in *detail*. The objective is for you to begin developing a practice of *sustained textual analysis* with a primary text. It also allows me to see how you engage with the *text* or, rather, how you *read* and how you *interpret*.

A few words on close reading to get the wheels turning ...

Thus far, you should be deep into reading *Don Quixote*. By Session 11, you should be at the 352-page mark, as listed on the syllabus. For this assignment, I am asking that you select an early representation of the characterization of Don Quixote (between pages 1-103) in contrast to the development of this figure much later in the text (between pages 104-352). Any claim you make about the passage that you select must proceed from very close attention to voice, language, and structure. Remember, *close reading* is about effective reading. Go deep with your thinking as you consider how the Sorrowful Knight is more than an enigma.

Allow the following paragraph, which is written by Joyce Crick, the translator of your edition of *Sigmund Freud: The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, to provide insight into the narrative portrayal of Don Quixote, who has been described as a figure who is metaphysically and psychologically bound by his devotion to knight errantry. Remember there are two parts to *Don Quixote*: Part I centers on the physical abuse of Don Quixote, that is, as characteristic of Cervantes's artistry, whereas Part II centers on the real madness of Don Quixote, that is, as a different Cervantian formula at narrative play.

The ingenious knight Don Quixote de la Mancha on the other hand is a figure who possesses no humour himself and in his seriousness gives us a pleasure which one could call humorous, although its mechanism shows an important departure from that of humour. Don Quixote is by origin a purely comic figure, a great child, for the fantasies from his books of chivalry have gone to his head. It is well known that in the beginning that is all the poet wanted to do with him, and that his creature gradually grew beyond the intentions of his creator. But once the writer had provided this ridiculous person with the most profound wisdom and the noblest aims, and made him the symbolic representative of idealism, one who believes that his aspirations can be realized, takes his duties seriously and his promises literally, this person ceases to make a comic effect. Just as in other cases humorous pleasure arises from preventing an emotion, in this one it arises by disturbing comic pleasure. (Crick 229)

As you write, allow the words above to guide your critical efforts, especially as you compare an early characterization of DQ to a later characterization of DQ with specific attention to the "comic effect" of cruelty, as orchestrated by Cervantes as author. **Provide textual evidence that is separate from your 250 words.** Remember this is Cervantes's artistry – cruelty is artistic! Tell me how, in the vitality of the characterization of Don Quixote, we glimpse artistry. (See "Introduction" by Harold Bloom for further guidance – in your edition).

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Spring 2016

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