



A MESSAGE FROM INTERIM PRESIDENT

Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Ph.D.

MIGUEL DE CERVANTES

April 22 marks the 406th anniversary of the death of the groundbreaking, vastly influential Spanish novelist and man of letters Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra.

Born – as far as can be determined – in 1547, Cervantes' best known work is one of the greatest works of fiction: *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*. First published in two volumes (part one in 1605 and part two in 1615), *Don Quixote* is widely considered to be the world's first novel.

Quixote's hero is a nobleman who went mad after reading too many books about gallant knights and chivalry and has ventured out into the world to smite the wicked and help those in need. Alternately comic and poignant, the novel is a powerful meditation on the strengths – and weaknesses – of belief and on the nature of goodness and power.

In one of the novel's most famous sections Quixote attacks a group of windmills after mistaking them for giants. The phrase "tilting at windmills" derives from this episode. The expression is generally used to describe any action considered futile, but I believe there's a deeper and more optimistic meaning to be drawn from it. We note that Quixote takes the occasion as a teachable moment for Sancho, his faithful companion, as he explains that victory may be taken from us but real valor, the courage to continue to believe and to try to "right wrongs" in this world, could never be taken.

Quixote may be mad, yes...but what is ever achieved without belief in one's abilities and goals? Many things that others deem unlikely, foolish, and impossible are not those things at all. Peace? Social equity? Health care for all? A million voices say those and so many other things cannot be achieved. But they can be – if we *believe* they can.

If we allow ourselves to dream.

Change requires dreamers.

And Quixote was the greatest dreamer of them all.

A playwright and poet as well as a novelist, Cervantes in his time was a soldier and a tax collector. His life often not an easy one; he had been a prisoner of war, he was once captured by pirates, and he had known illness, poverty, and obscurity.

That obscurity has long been a thing of the past. Today Cervantes is considered Spain's foremost writer and his character Don Quixote offers the world an indelible image of the glory and pathos of humankind.

This brief excerpt from chapter 11 of Cervantes' immortal novel describes a vision of a heaven on earth.

“Happy the age, happy the time, to which the ancients gave the name of golden, not because in that fortunate age the gold so coveted in this our iron one was gained without toil, but because they that lived in it knew not the two words ‘mine’ and ‘thine’! In that blessed age all things were in common; to win the daily food no labor was required of any save to stretch forth his hand and gather it from the sturdy oaks that stood generously inviting him with their sweet ripe fruit... Then all was peace, all friendship, all concord; as yet the dull share of the crooked plough had not dared to rend and pierce the tender bowels of our first mother that without compulsion yielded from every portion of her broad fertile bosom all that could satisfy, sustain, and delight the children that then possessed her. Then was it that the innocent and fair young shepherdess roamed from vale to vale and hill to hill, with flowing locks, and no more garments than were needful modestly to cover what modesty seeks and ever sought to hide...”

On this, the anniversary of Cervantes' death, we note with wonder and amazement his towering achievement.

Mil gracias y bendiciones,

Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Ph.D.
Interim President

Office of the President
Hostos Community College
475 Grand Concourse, A-Building, Room 341, Bronx, NY 10451
718-518-4300 | PRESIDENTSOFFICE@hostos.cuny.edu

