

Roderick Random and his man Strap, Peregrine Pickle and his sidekick Tom Pipes, Matthew Bramble and Humphry Clinker, Launcelot Greaves and Timothy Crabshaw, Squire Wildgoose and his acolyte Tugwell, Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim—and they are still there in Vladimir and Estragon in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. In the clashing of the real and the ideal dramatized in episode after episode throughout *Don Quijote*, a form of satirically inflected writing is created that is one of the great paradigms of literary characterization. Don Quijote is satirized from the perspective of quotidian reality, but equally, his aspirations expose the bankruptcy, philistinism, and unambitiousness of thinking that human beings can live on bread alone. Untenable though Quijote's illusions may eventually prove to be, there is a price to be paid for not believing in them, and the book would not succeed if its readers did not at times wish them to be true. That price is the imagination itself. The enigmatic episode in Montesinos' Cave (pt 2, ch. 22) affords Don Quijote a dream vision that vindicates the truth-in-imagination of chivalric romance. Eighteenth-century writers did not pick up on that extraordinary episode, but they certainly did understand the dual potential of Quixotic characters for satirizing both idealism and its doppelgänger materialism. That is entirely clear from a study of Fielding's Abraham Adams in *Joseph Andrews*, or his Squire Allworthy from *Tom Jones*.

Eighteenth-century writers also picked up on the great opportunity afforded by the Cervantic body. Cervantes is the celebrant, in early prose fiction, of what nowadays we might call the 'abject' body—the body pained, spreadeagled, mutilated, excreting, the body unclothed or absurdly clothed and in all respects stripped of its dignity. This is an aspect of what Mikhail Bakhtin called the 'carnavalesque'; indeed, *Don Quijote* has sometimes been taken for an ideal exemplar of—in Bakhtin's terms again—the 'heteroglossic' text. Alongside François Rabelais, Cervantes is the culmination of the burlesque, subversive spirit of Carnival, with its celebration of revelry and sensuousness and its cultivation of the language and mores of the street, marketplace, and tavern: a spirit equally apparent in some of the *Novelas ejemplares*, such as the story of Rinconete and Cortadillo. Sancho can never forget the tossing in a blanket he receives at the close of Part 1, Chapter 17. Throughout the novel, there is a potential for the story to erupt into slapstick violence that renders the human body vulnerable and ridiculous. What happens in Part 1, Chapter 45, when Don Quijote has appropriated a barber's basin and his donkey's saddlebag, is entirely typical, and remarkable because it fully involves the very dignified characters from the Cardenio story: 'the whole inn was a jumble of weeping and yelling and crying and stumbling and quaking and trembling and disasters and slashing and punching and banging and kicking and blood pouring out all over.'

When Fielding turned decisively towards Cervantes in the famous preface to *Joseph Andrews*, he was influenced by the English translation (1738) of the Spanish Royal Librarian Gregorio Mayans y Siscar's 'Vida de Cervantes' that prefaces the 1737 Spanish edition of *Don Quijote*, a luxurious publication produced under the patronage of Lord Carteret. Mayans argues here that a long prose narrative is a form of epic provided it

fulfils other criteria including verisimilitude, unity of action, and mixed pleasure and profit.¹⁶ Such theorizing provided Fielding with the ideal cover of respectability with which to affront and disrupt the prevailing decorum of Richardsonian fiction. In the continuation of *Pamela* and in *Sir Charles Grandison*, Richardson constructed conversational circles, the purpose of which was to limit individual action and subsume it to a group consensus. Such fictions replace conflict by accommodation and mutual reinforcement. Richardson's narrative structures are typically centripetal and static rather than linear or goal-orientated, turning not upon the actions of an isolated, misunderstood protagonist pitted against society, but on an intimate circle dominated by a centrally authoritative persona such as Sir Charles.

By the 1750s, Richardson's success had created an impasse for other writers—a vast barrier that seemed well-nigh impossible for other writers to negotiate. Mid-century reinscriptions of *Don Quijote* were vital in enabling a form of fiction that, while still qualifying as 'serious', nevertheless provided the readerly satisfactions that Richardson—as readers from Samuel Johnson to Walter Scott have testified—seemed to be intent on denying. Fielding's writing was new, he would claim, because it was old. He distanced himself from the new species of writing inaugurated by Samuel Richardson precisely by allying himself with carefully selected previous practitioners, the most important of whom was Cervantes. Cervantes' ironic, intrusive narrative self-consciousness, physical comedy, and episode-based exposition were the features that attracted him as a means of rendering the vraisemblance of life. From *Don Quijote*, if also from various other sources, Fielding and Tobias Smollett (himself responsible for an important translation published in 1755) drew the licence to incorporate into their works 'low' material, incidents, and idioms that represented the 'impolite other' of Richardsonian fiction. One of the most memorable incidents in *Don Quijote* occurs when the Don mistakes a flock of sheep for a hostile army, and is attacked by their guardian shepherds. An olio of scatological violence in which Sancho and the Don are covered in each others' excrement, the incident authorizes such 'low' events as (in Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle*) the hero's perforation of Mrs Trunnion's chamber pot, making it function as a kind of colander for Captain Trunnion in the berth beneath; or the nauseatingly graphic account in Smollett's *Roderick Random* (1748) of a naval engagement with the French in which Roderick reports: 'I concealed my agitation as well as I could, till the head of the officer of Marines, who stood near me, being shot off, bounced from the deck athwart my face, leaving me well-nigh blinded with brains'—after which he is covered in the entrails of a dying drummer.¹⁷ Fielding directly imitates *Don Quijote* 1.17 in creating the famous scene in the Inn at Upton in *Tom Jones*.

¹⁶ See Anthony Close, *A Companion to Don Quixote* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2008), 235.

¹⁷ Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 167–8.