



Crossing the Line: A Quixotic Adventure in Two Acts (Juan de La Cuesta--Hispanic Monographs)

Edward Friedman

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Crossing the Line: A Quixotic Adventure in Two Acts is based on Miguel de Cervantes's Don Quixote, published in two parts (1605, 1615). The play does not attempt to "adapt" the novel, but rather to evoke both Don Quixote's errant knighthood and Cervantes's confrontation with literary tradition. Each of the elements—the knight's actions and the author's self-conscious approach to writing—is broadly comic and, at the same time, profound, serious, and engaging. At the opening of the play, as in the prologue to Part 1 of the novel, a fictionalized Cervantes is distraught because he has a finished manuscript but no erudite prologue. A friend advises him to write whatever he likes, just to fill up the space of a prologue. This is the start of something big. As the story proper begins, a small landowner who has become mad from excessive reading of romances of chivalry sets out to right the world's wrongs; he calls himself Don Quixote de la Mancha, and he is later accompanied by his squire, the illiterate but crafty Sancho Panza. Don Quixote and Sancho face a number of obstacles on the road and subsequently find themselves at an inn, where they come across the priest and the barber from their village, who have set out to rescue the knight. True to the strange and contradictory chronology of the novel, they also meet an American professor and graduate student, who are Don Quixote scholars. In Act 2, as in Part 2 of the novel, Don Quixote finds out that a chronicle of his deeds has been published, and, in many cases, characters are familiar with the story. A duke and duchess with a good deal of money and with time on their hands invite Don Quixote and Sancho to their palace, where they devise plots to entertain themselves at the expense of the knight and his squire. They even confer on Sancho the governorship of an island. After departing from the palace, Don Quixote discovers that a false chronicle has been published, and he runs into a character from that book, who certifies that the Don Quixote before him is the genuine knight. Returning home after a defeat in battle, Don Quixote regains his sanity and dies, but he has left an indelible imprint in the memory of those who have followed his trajectory. Crossing the Line captures the spirit of Don Quixote: the humor, the satirical edge, the intricacies of reading and writing, the interest in points of contact between art and life, and the highlighting of irony on all levels. Cervantes represents reality through a dynamic mix of realism and metafiction, self-reference to the nth degree. Stressing the interrelation of process and product, he reveals the seams in his literary tapestry. Inspired by the lessons of the master, Crossing the Line looks to create its own quixotic route for the stage. Edward Friedman is Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of Spanish, Professor of Comparative Literature, and director of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities at Vanderbilt University. He is a past president of the Cervantes Society of America and editor of the theater journal Bulletin of the Comediantes. He has published several adaptations, and his play Wit's End, based on Lope de Vega's La dama boba, was performed at Vanderbilt during the 2006-2007 season, under the direction of Jeffrey Ullom.

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