



INTRODUCTION

In related news, [Brad] Pitt is going meta. The Hollywood Reporter says he's attached to star in the reality-bending comedy *Chad Schmidt*. The story centers on a talented actor whose dreams of Hollywood fame and fortune are crushed by Pitt's meteoric rise to stardom. The problem? Schmidt and Pitt look exactly alike.
MSN Entertainment News, February 18, 2005

The year 2005 marks the four-hundredth anniversary of the publication of Part 1 of *Don Quixote*, a narrative that turned the tables on all previous literature and that affected—and continues to affect—the development of the novel and other forms of art. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra pays homage to the cultural past as he maps directions for the future. *Don Quixote* is an example of metafiction, characterized by a self-conscious and self-referential approach to literary expression. The linearity of the text is based on the sallies of the anachronistic knight errant, specifically on his search for fame and glory through service to the lady Dulcinea del Toboso. In a parallel plot, Cervantes traces the composition of the chronicle of these exploits, and the text becomes an allegory of writing and of reading. Although *Don Quixote* is highly entertaining, Cervantes looks at such “big” issues as modes of representation, perspective, truth, justice, and social convention, not to mention theory, criticism, and the performance. He brings the book into the world, and vice versa. He engages reality, paradoxically, by flaunting rather than attempting to conceal what Stephen Sondheim has called “the art of making art,” and this becomes the essence of metafiction.

Don Quixote has intrigued and baffled readers for four centuries. We feel for Don Quixote, and we analyze him with ironic detachment. There are critical schools of thought and thousands of studies on Cervantes's masterpiece, but, wonderfully, none can be complete or definitive, because the text keeps exposing new angles of vision and keeps catching us off guard. It makes us look backward and forward, refurbishing tradition and shocking us with its precociousness. It is born of nostalgia and prescience, subject to history and to infinite reprocessing. It is as mutable as life and as timeless as true art should be. It teaches us how to read, that is, to process words and to perceive the phenomena that lie within and beyond words. One of legacies of the *Quixote* is the presence of metafictional techniques in fiction, in other genres, and in the media in general. Those who follow Cervantes and his contemporaries, including Diego Velázquez, the painter in and of *Las Meninas*, employ strategies of self-reflection to convey diverse messages, but all the works labeled as metafiction have a common denominator: the imaginative process

becomes inseparable from the final product. And, as Velázquez portrays emblematically, the creator and the consumer of art have a defined space within the frame.

The essays of this collection offer variations on the theme of metafiction, from the fifteenth century to the new millennium and from the Old World to the New. The only charge to the contributors was that a sense (or sensibility) of metafiction inform their essays. The desired outcome was a range of topics and approaches, and that indeed has been the case. Drama, music, and photography, for example, figure in the scheme. Metafiction involves an array of devices, some used frequently and others surprisingly original. Authors, here conspicuous by their presence, will inscribe not only their particular signatures but themselves, or their fictional alter egos, into a work. The play of metafiction is often serious business, for writers are attempting to validate their legitimacy as individuals and as a group. *Don Quixote* prefigures the self-consciousness of postmodernism and its impact on high and popular culture. The goal of our celebration of the special anniversary is to honor Cervantes's achievement and to highlight the links between *Don Quixote* and what could affectionately be termed its ilk.

Edward H. Friedman