MIGUEL DE CERVANTES

Miguel de Cervantes was born in Alcalá de Henares (Madrid) in 1547. He was baptised at the now lost Church of Santa María la Mayor on 9 October that same year, as confirmed by his baptism certificate.

Little is known about Cervantes’s childhood and adolescence. The son of Rodrigo de Cervantes, an apothecary surgeon, and Leonor de Cortinas, he travelled throughout his life around Spain and sought his fortune in Rome, where he worked as a manservant to Cardinal Acquaviva. In 1571, together with his brother Rodrigo, he took part in the Battle of Lepanto and was seriously wounded in the chest and arm.

While returning to Spain by sea (1575), he was captured by pirates and taken to a prison in Algiers, where he remained for five long years. Thanks to the ransom paid by the Trinitarians monks, Cervantes was able to return to Spain.

After these adventurous years, he published his first great novel, La Galatea (1585). In his early years as a literary author, he showed a keen interest in the dramatic genre and indeed some of his plays were performed on the stages of Madrid.

At the age of 37 he met the great love of his life, Ana Franca de Rojas, with whom his only daughter, Isabel de Saavedra, was conceived. However, despite the love they professed for each other, Cervantes ended up marrying Catalina de Palacios Salazar, who was from Esquivias.

Success came towards the end of Cervantes’s life, in 1605, with the publication in Madrid of the first part of his immortal work The ingenious gentleman don Quixote of la Mancha. At the time he was living in Valladolid, but he soon moved to Madrid (1606), to the district now known as the Barrio de las Letras or Literary Quarter. His neighbours were among the great literary figures of the Spanish Golden Age, such as Lope de Vega, Francisco de Quevedo and Luis de Góngora. Some of Cervantes’s finest literary works flowed from his pen while he lived in this quarter: Exemplary novels (1613), Journey to Parnassus (1614) and the second part of don Quixote (1615).

He had already fallen ill by the time he completed The trials of Persiles and Sigismunda, his final work, which was published posthumously in 1617.

He passed away on 22 April 1616 and was buried the following day at the Convent of the Trinitarias.
Rodrigo de Cervantes, may have worked. Rodríguez de Camprodon, where the writer’s father, a doctor, probably helped to keep the warmth provided by the hearth. The surgery is a room dedicated to Rodrigo de Cervantes and displays all the instruments associated with his profession: surgical instruments, spine racks, alabaster, medical treatises and a barber’s chair inspired by the gout stools used by Spanish monarchs. In this same room is a mural decorated with fresco paintings. This wall is one of the house’s original elements and confirms the theory of its existence in the mid-16th century.

In the hall or drawing room, visitors can admire the armchairs or “Friar’s chairs” arranged around a brazier. The draped fabrics and embroidered leather covering the walls helped to keep in the warmth provided by the heater. The surgery is a room dedicated to Rodrigo de Cervantes and displays all the instruments associated with his profession: surgical instruments, spine racks, alabaster, medical treatises and a barber’s chair inspired by the gout stools used by Spanish monarchs. In this same room is a mural decorated with fresco paintings. This wall is one of the house’s original elements and confirms the theory of its existence in the mid-16th century.

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A doorway in the dining room leads to a small kitchen with a fireplace, where the household would gather. This is decorated with utensils and arrangements of fruit and vegetables, spices typically found in Mediterranean and Islamic dishes, and large clay jars used to store water from the well and oil for cooking and lighting the rooms. The tour of the ground floor ends with a visit to the ladies’ drawing room where the women would sit on cushions a la monisca, or Moorish style, to read, play music, do needlework, pray or talk. Rugs, mats and braziers are other typical features of this type of room.

Adjacent to this room is the dining room, which is decorated with a panel of ornamental tiles like the ones found at the Escorial Monastery and features a selection of the most widely used crockery of the period: ceramics from Talavera and Puente del Arzobispo (Toledo), lustreware from Madrid, and pieces from Villalafiche (Zaragoza). A doorway in the dining room leads to a small kitchen with a fireplace, where the household would gather. This is decorated with utensils and arrangements of fruit and vegetables, spices typically found in Mediterranean and Islamic dishes, and large clay jars used to store water from the well and oil for cooking and lighting the rooms. The tour of the ground floor ends with a visit to the ladies’ drawing room where the women would sit on cushions a la monisca, or Moorish style, to read, play music, do needlework, pray or talk. Rugs, mats and braziers are other typical features of this type of room.

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