

Steinbeck, Quixote and Me

John Steinbeck began writing a Quixote novel in the summer of 1957 and abandoned it on December 26 that same year. He wrote 114 pages before setting it aside.

Steinbeck had already completed 25 novels, including *The Grapes of Wrath*, *East of Eden*, *Of Mice and Men* and *Cannery Row*. He was 55 years old and had won a Pulitzer at 37.

Steinbeck went on to publish *The Winter of Our Discontent* in 1961 and then *Travels With Charley* in 1962. He was awarded the Nobel Prize later that year.

John Steinbeck died in 1968, having published nothing else.

I was 10 years old.

“I think he got to a point where he felt he couldn’t contribute anymore. And it was too heartbreaking to try. I mean, after awhile you get tired of being under attack. You’ve got to remember this was a man who had been under attack since he was a young man... He was under attack most of his life. When he wrote *The Grapes of Wrath* people thought he’d betrayed his own class.” – Thom Steinbeck, (John’s son,) September, 2009¹

Thom went on to say his father was “a mythologist... He could take the broad myth and reduce it down to something you could understand and were living right next door to.”²

The novel John Steinbeck didn’t finish in 1957 was the story of an American man who watched one too many westerns on television, then put on a cowboy hat and set out to correct the injustices he saw all around him.

In June, 2010, CBS News announced online,
“John Steinbeck Archive to be Auctioned. Never-Published Works Among Letters and Manuscripts from Nobel Prize Winner’s NYC Apartment.”³

That CBS story included the following lines: “The writer [Steinbeck] had Ingrid Bergman in mind for *Vikings*, a film script adaptation of a Henrik Ibsen play that he began in 1954 but later abandoned. Another project that was later abandoned was a 1957 reworking of *Don Quixote*, which Steinbeck titled *Don Keehan - The Marshal of Manchon*. Bloomsbury’s catalog says he had high hopes for it and even considered director Elia Kazan for a movie version with [Henry] Fonda in the lead.”

I bought *Don Keehan - The Marshal of Manchon*.

It sat a long while in a New York bank while they wrestled with the details of how to insure the manuscript and transport it. They already had my money, so I told them to just shove it into a UPS envelope but they wouldn’t hear of it.

When it finally arrived I got 6 pages into it then set it aside to scribble a dialogue that popped into my head:

I'm going to finish it.

"You're going to finish reading it?"

No, I'm going to finish writing it.

"What! Who do you think you are?"

I think I'm a ridiculous, middle-aged man who believes it would be fun to write the second half of an unfinished Steinbeck novel.

"Are you comparing yourself with John Steinbeck?"

No. I just think it would be fun. I like to write and this is America and I bought the manuscript.

"You won't be able to publish it."

I don't plan to publish it.

"There are hundreds of writers more qualified than you to undertake such an important task."

They should have pooled their money and bought the manuscript.

"People will be outraged."

Those people stay outraged anyway.

"You should leave the novel unfinished out of respect for John Steinbeck."

"I plan to finish it out of respect for John Steinbeck."

"Are you really going to do this?"

Yes, I am.

"Can I read it when you're done?"

No. You're an obstructionist and a pest. Go away.

"You do realize I'm imaginary, right? I vanish when you quit thinking about me."

Consider it done.

I agree with Thom Steinbeck; his father was a mythologist. He saw recurrent patterns of

human behavior and reconciled the archetypal characters of mythology to the people and events of modern life. My suspicion is that all Quixotists are mythologists. We are attracted to Quixote when we see in him a reflection of ourselves.

Sarah Driggers⁴, in her analysis of Miguel de Unamuno's writings about Quixote, says, "If you rely solely upon reason, your actions will be based upon what you believe to be possible. You're not likely to attempt that which you believe to be impossible."

She goes on to say, "Quixotism is the passionate pursuit of an ideal which may not be attainable. It is the belief that an individual can alter reality and redefine what is possible."

George Bernard Shaw brings Sarah's observation to a pragmatic conclusion:

"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends upon the unreasonable man."

Quixote was an unreasonable man.

John Steinbeck was an unreasonable man.

Progress begins with a rejection of the status quo.

Progress begins when a Quixote sees a giant that needs to be defeated.

Sarah Driggers continues, "Quixotists are the willful creators of their own destinies. Their childlike ability to marvel at the world, desperation to experience a full life, and willingness to pursue goodness and beauty through an adventurous process of trial and error set them apart from all who depend upon common sense. Thus, quixotism has the potential to serve as a mechanism of social change, stretching the limits of the possible."

"Given that quixotism stands in stark contrast to the more cautious, conventional notion of reason, it initially appears to be nothing more than madness and is often summarily dismissed as such. However, one of quixotism's most important principles is its recognition of ambiguity and uncertainty. This philosophy thrives in the space between the known and the unknown."

"Quixotism represents the most profound expression of genius: joyful curiosity about the world and a willingness to explore. As thought and action are inseparable, it is both a belief system and a way of life. While the practice of quixotism leads to a greater number of mistakes than more restrained forms of intellectualism, it also yields more successes as a result of its extreme nature."

I agree profoundly with Sarah Driggers.

Perhaps you see a different Quixote than Sarah and me. This is not unusual. I see in him my own reflection. You see in him yours.

John Steinbeck, a lifelong attacker of windmills, saw in Quixote the reflection of John Steinbeck.

On page 55 of *A John Steinbeck Encyclopedia*⁵, we read:

“Steinbeck loved the writing of Cervantes, especially *Don Quixote*, so much that near the end of his life he was reading the text in the original old Spanish. When his friend and editor Pascal Covici gave him a new edition as a gift, John responded to his wife Elaine Scott Steinbeck, ‘This book is not an attack on knight errantry but a celebration of the human spirit.’ ... John Steinbeck saw *Don Quixote* as a symbol of himself, and the novel’s morally arid time as a mirror of mid-twentieth-century America. Thus, Steinbeck traveled to Spain and La Mancha in 1954 out of a special affinity for the place, and began his journey to rediscover the soul of America in a camper he affectionately christened Rocinante. The fruits of his journey – Operation Windmill as he called it – eventually found expression in *Travels with Charley*. To the very end, the romantic ideals expressed in the work of Miguel de Cervantes stoked the moral and artistic imagination of John Steinbeck.”

When Thom Steinbeck speaks of his father being "attacked all his life" because "people thought he'd betrayed his own class," he's talking about the never-ending criticism his father had to endure from people who believed his championing of downtrodden farmworkers and negroes was "Anti-American." They called Steinbeck a socialist, a communist and a troublemaker.

I admire the man.

Another of Steinbeck's favorite authors was Robert Louis Stevenson, "whose travelogue, *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes* (1879) served as Steinbeck's model for his own book, *Travels with Charley*... Charley is to Steinbeck as Sancho Panza was to Don Quixote."⁶ These few passages from *Travels with Charley* provide us a glimpse of those windmills Steinbeck felt compelled to attack:

I lived then in a small brick house in Manhattan, and, being for the moment solvent, employed a Negro. Across the street and on the corner there was a bar and restaurant. One winter dusk when the sidewalks were iced I stood in my window looking out and saw a tipsy woman come out of the bar, slip on the ice, and fall flat. She tried to struggle up but slipped and fell again and lay there screaming maudlinly. At that moment the Negro who worked for me came around the corner, saw the woman, and instantly crossed the street, keeping as far from her as possible.

When he came in I said, 'I saw you duck. Why didn't you give that woman a hand?'

'Well, sir, she's drunk and I'm Negro. If I touched her she could easy scream rape, and then it's a crowd, and who believes me?'

'It took quick thinking to duck that fast.'

'Oh, no sir!' he said. 'I've been practicing to be a Negro a long time.'"⁷

John Steinbeck - a lifelong lover of Quixote - did all he could to right the wrongs he saw around him. Here is another excerpt from his *Travels With Charley*.

"In Salinas in California, where I was born and grew and went to school gathering the impressions that formed me, there was only one Negro family... [and] the Cooper boys were my friends. Now these were the only Negroes I knew or had contact with in the days of my flypaper childhood, and you can see how little I was prepared for the great world. When I heard, for example, that Negroes were an inferior race, I thought the authority was misinformed. When I heard that Negroes were dirty, I remembered Mrs. Cooper's shining kitchen. Lazy? The drone and clop of Mr. Cooper's horse-drawn dray in the street outside used to awaken us in the dawn. Dishonest? Mr. Cooper was one of the very few Salinians who never let a debt cross the fifteenth of the month. If in Salinas anyone from a wiser and more sophisticated world had asked, 'How would you like your sister to marry a Cooper?' I think we would have laughed. For it might have occurred to us that a Cooper might not have wanted to marry our sister, good friends though we all were."

"Recently a dear Southern friend instructed me passionately in the theory of 'equal but separate.' 'It just happens,' he said, 'that in my town there are three new Negro schools not equal but superior to the white schools. Now wouldn't you think they would be satisfied with that? And in the bus stations the washrooms are exactly the same. What's your answer to that?'

I said, 'Maybe it's a matter of ignorance. You could solve it and really put them in their places if you switched schools and toilets. The moment they realized that your schools weren't as good as theirs, they would realize their error.'

And do you know what he said? He said, 'You trouble-making son of a bitch.' But he said it smiling."⁸

It was fashionable among liberal Americans in 1962 to support the movement toward Civil Rights, but Steinbeck was no newcomer to that fight. He had been attacking the windmill of racism for decades. This is the letter he wrote to the president of 20th Century Fox Films in 1944:⁹

New York
January 10, 1944

Dear Sir,

I have just seen the film *Lifeboat*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock and billed as written by me. While in many ways the film is excellent there are one or two complaints I would like to make. While it is certainly true I wrote a script for *Lifeboat*, it is not true that in that script as in the film there were any slurs against organized labor nor was there a stock comedy Negro. On the contrary there was an intelligent and

thoughtful seaman who knew realistically what he was about. And instead of the usual colored travesty of the half comic and half pathetic Negro there was a Negro of dignity, purpose and personality. Since this film occurs over my name, it is painful to me that these strange, sly obliquities should be ascribed to me.

John Steinbeck

That letter was followed by a telegram sent 3 weeks later on February 19, 1944, stating, "I REQUEST MY NAME BE REMOVED FROM ANY CONNECTION WITH ANY SHOWING OF THIS FILM."

Steinbeck's request was never granted.

In a letter written the same day to Annie Laurie Williams, he said:

"It does not seem right that knowing the effect of the picture on many people, the studio still lets it go. As for Hitchcock, I think his reasons are very simple.

1. He has been doing stories of international spies and masterminds for so long that it has become a habit.
2. He is one of those incredible English middle class snobs who really and truly despise working people."

Steinbeck's predecessor in the fight against the windmill of classism was Teddy Roosevelt. Shortly after his inauguration in 1901, Teddy invited Booker T. Washington to dinner in the White House and white rage was ignited across the south. Roosevelt later wrote, "And in the South I want to make it clear as a bell that I have acted in the way that I have on the Negro question simply because I hold myself the heir of the policies of Abraham Lincoln and would be incapable of abandoning them to serve personal or political ends."¹⁰

In Roosevelt's famous Pigskin Library - a small collection of books he took with him to Africa on a 1-year safari immediately upon leaving the White House in 1909 - we find, of course, a leather-bound copy of Ormsby's translation of *Don Quixote de La Mancha*.

"Where possible I had them bound in pigskin. They were for use, not ornament. I almost always had some volume with me, either in my saddle-bag or in the cartridge bag.... Often my reading would be done while resting under a tree at noon, perhaps beside the carcass of a beast I had killed, or else while waiting for camp to be pitched; and in either case it might be impossible to get water for washing. In consequence the books were stained with blood, sweat, gun oil, dust, and ashes; ordinary bindings either vanished or became loathsome, whereas pigskin merely grew to look as a well-used saddle bag looks."

Theodore Roosevelt
The Outlook,
April 30, 1910

Trust-busting Teddy Roosevelt felt it was essential to have a copy of *Don Quixote* within reach, even when he was on safari in Africa.

Steinbeck opens one of his most successful novels, *East of Eden*, with a note to Pascal (Pat) Covici, his lifelong editor and friend:

New York
1952

Dear Pat:

I have decided for this, my book, *East of Eden*, to write dedication, prologue, argument, apology, epilogue and perhaps epitaph all in one.

The dedication is to you with all the admiration and affection that have been distilled from our singularly blessed association of many years. This book is inscribed to you because you have been part of its birth and growth.

As you know, a prologue is written last but placed first to explain the book's shortcomings and to ask the reader to be kind. But a prologue is also a note of farewell from the writer to his book. For years the writer and his book have been together—friends or bitter enemies but very close as only love and fighting can accomplish.

Then suddenly the book is done. It is a kind of death. This is the requiem.

Miguel Cervantes invented the modern novel and with his *Don Quixote* set a mark high and bright. In his prologue, he said best what writers feel—the gladness and the terror.

"Idling reader," Cervantes wrote, "you may believe me when I tell you that I should have liked this book, which is the child of my brain, to be the fairest, the sprightliest and the cleverest that could be imagined, but I have not been able to contravene the law of nature which would have it that like begets like—"

And so it is with me, Pat. Although some times I have felt that I held fire in my hands and spread a page with shining—I have never lost the weight of clumsiness, of ignorance, of aching inability.

A book is like a man—clever and dull, brave and cowardly, beautiful and ugly. For every flowering thought there will be a page like a wet and mangy mongrel, and for every looping flight a tap on the wing and a reminder that wax cannot hold the feathers firm too near the sun.

Well—then the book is done. It has no virtue any more. The writer wants to cry

out—"Bring it back! Let me rewrite it or better—Let me burn it. Don't let it out in the unfriendly cold in that condition."

As you know better than most, Pat, the book does not go from writer to reader. It goes first to the lions—editors, publishers, critics, copy readers, sales department. It is kicked and slashed and gouged. And its bloodied father stands attorney.

EDITOR

The book is out of balance. The reader expects one thing and you give him something else. You have written two books and stuck them together. The reader will not understand.

WRITER

No, sir. It goes together. I have written about one family and used stories about another family as—well, as counterpoint, as rest, as contrast in pace and color.

EDITOR

The reader won't understand. What you call counterpoint only slows the book.

WRITER

It has to be slowed—else how would you know when it goes fast?

EDITOR

You have stopped the book and gone into discussions of God knows what.

WRITER

Yes, I have. I don't know why. Just wanted to. Perhaps I was wrong.

SALES DEPARTMENT

The book's too long. Costs are up. We'll have to charge five dollars for it. People won't pay \$5. They won't buy it.

WRITER

My last book was short. You said then that people won't buy a short book.

PROOFREADER

The chronology is full of holes. The grammar has no relation to English. On page so-and-so you have a man look in the World Almanac for steamship rates. They aren't there. I checked. You've got Chinese New Year wrong. The characters aren't consistent. You describe Liza Hamilton one way and then have her act a different way.

EDITOR

You make Cathy too black. The reader won't believe her. You make Sam Hamilton too white. The reader won't believe him. No Irishman ever talked like that.

WRITER

My grandfather did.

EDITOR

Who'll believe it?

SECOND EDITOR

No children ever talked like that.

WRITER

(Losing temper as a refuge from despair)

God damn it. This is my book. I'll make the children talk any way I want. My book is about good and evil. Maybe the theme got into the execution. Do you want to publish it or not?

EDITORS

Let's see if we can't fix it up. It won't be much work. You want it to be good, don't you? For instance the ending. The reader won't understand it.

WRITER

Do you?

EDITOR

Yes, but the reader won't.

PROOFREADER

My god, how you do dangle a participle. Turn to page so-and-so.

There you are, Pat. You came in with a box of glory and there you stand with an armful of damp garbage. And from this meeting a new character has emerged. He is called the Reader.

THE READER

He is so stupid you can't trust him with an idea.
He is so clever he will catch you in the least error.
He will not buy short books.
He will not buy long books.
He is part moron, part genius and part ogre.
There is some doubt as to whether he can read.

Well, by God, Pat, he's just like me, no stranger at all. He'll take from my book what he can bring to it. The dull witted will get dullness and the brilliant may find things in my book I didn't know were there.

And just as he is like me, I hope my book is enough like him so that he may find in it interest and recognition and some beauty as one finds in a friend.

Cervantes ends his prologue with a lovely line. I want to use it, Pat, and then I will be done. He says to the reader:

"May God give you health—and may He be not unmindful of me, as well."

John Steinbeck

We can see from Steinbeck's 1952 prologue to *East of Eden* that he was a contemplator of Quixote.

The anima, according to psychologist Carl Jung, is that perfect woman who can exist only in the mind of a man.¹¹ Poet James Dickey understood the anima well:

"There's no moon goddess now. But when men believed there was, then the moon was more important, maybe not scientifically, but more important emotionally. It was something a man had a personal relationship to, instead of its simply being a dead stone, a great ruined stone in the sky."

- James Dickey, *Self Interviews*, p. 67

"I think the idealization of women is indigenous to men. There are various ways of idealizing women, especially sexually, based in almost every case on their inaccessibility. When a woman functions as an unobtainable love object, then she takes on a mythical quality. You can see this principle functioning as a sales device in advertising and in places like *Playboy* magazine. Almost every movie you see has this quality, because you can't embrace the image on the screen. Thousands of novels use this principle, because you can't embrace a printed image on a page."

- James Dickey, *Self Interviews*, p. 153

Quixote's Dulcinea is perhaps the most perfect example of the anima that exists in all of literature.

My own love of Quixote began as I lay on the floor of my mother's home - a teenage boy on Thanksgiving Day - watching *Man of La Mancha* on television. Peter O'Toole will forever be the face of Quixote for me.

I suppose it would be impossible to be a member of the Cervantes Society and not realize that the play and the movie, *Man of La Mancha*, are grossly in error concerning the person of Dulcinea.

Cervantes gave us a Dulcinea that was the perfect expression of the Jungian anima, that perfect woman who can exist only in the mind of a man. But *Man of La Mancha* gives us an Aldonza/Dulcinea who is a real and present prostitute.

The Quixote of Cervantes never meets his Dulcinea. She, the unwitting and arguably unworthy peasant girl, Aldonza, is not even aware of his existence. But in *Man of La*

Mancha, Quixote not only meets Dulcinea but they have significant conversations. And Aldonza/Dulcinea's status as a working prostitute shines a rather bright spotlight on the question of her worthiness to be Quixote's anima-muse, does it not?

I intend to prove that this idea of a prostitute Dulcinea did not originate with Dale Wasserman in his play, *I, Don Quixote* of 1959 as most people believe, but with John Steinbeck's novel *Sweet Thursday* in 1954.

Allow me to explain.

I, Don Quixote was a non-musical teleplay by Dale Wasserman. It aired only once, as the *DuPont Show of the Month* on CBS Television, November 9, 1959. That teleplay was adapted to become the Broadway play, *Man of La Mancha*.

Man of La Mancha won 5 Tony Awards in 1966, including Best Musical. It ran for 2,328 performances and became the 1972 film I watched on television as a teenage boy.

Wasserman is credited with the idea of presenting Aldonza as a reluctant prostitute even though this concept had clearly been made famous by John Steinbeck 5 years earlier in *Sweet Thursday*, the 1954 sequel to his 1945 book, *Cannery Row*.

Cannery Row is set in Monterey, California, prior World War II. In *Sweet Thursday*, the protagonist Doc returns from the war to find Monterey's Cannery Row almost deserted. Many of his colorful friends are gone. Even his close friend Dora, who ran the Bear Flag Restaurant, a whorehouse, has died, and her sister Fauna has taken her place as madam. A former social worker, Fauna teaches the girls how to set a table properly, hoping that such skills might help them attract men who will want to marry them.

Suzy - the Aldonza/Dulcinea character in Steinbeck's *Sweet Thursday* - is a reluctant prostitute who works at the Bear Flag.

The Center for Steinbeck Studies at San Jose State University is the only university research archive dedicated solely to John Steinbeck's life and work. This is their summary of Suzy:

"Suzy arrives on Cannery Row alone and poor. Her smile and candid nature help her find work at the Bear Flag. She is ill-suited for prostitution, as both Fauna and Joseph and Mary observe. Her coarse manners and lack of education discourage Doc's affections but they share a magnetism that the citizens of Cannery Row notice and encourage. Fauna works to soften Suzy's rough edges. Eventually, after the disastrous party, Suzy matures on her own, becoming gainfully employed at the local café and keeping house in the old, abandoned boiler. Only after she has developed self-reliance and faith in her own abilities is she ready to accept and return Doc's affections." ¹²

A prostitute with "coarse manners and a lack of education" sounds a lot like the Aldonza/Dulcinea character from Wasserman's *Man of La Mancha*, does it not?

Lewis Gannett of the *New York Herald Tribune* called *Sweet Thursday*, "Steinbeck's funniest and happiest book." L. D. O'Neill of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* wrote, "Here we are not *East of Eden*, but right smack dab in the unholy middle of it." ¹³

Here are a few memorable excerpts from Steinbeck's *Sweet Thursday*.

"It's always hard to concentrate. The mind darts like a chicken, trying to escape thinking even though thinking is the most rewarding function of man. Doc could take care of this. When you know what you're doing you can handle it. He set his jaw and was starting to turn back to his desk when he saw out of the corners of his eyes the flash of a skirt. He looked out the window again. A girl had come out of the Bear Flag and was walking along Cannery Row near Monterey. Doc couldn't see her face, but she had a fine walk, thigh and knee and ankle swinging free and proud, no jerk and totter the way so many women walked as they fell from step to step. No, this girl walked with her shoulders back and her chin up and her arms swinging in rhythm. It's a gay walk, Doc thought. You can tell so much by a walk - discouragement or sickness, determination. There are squinched-up mean walks, but this was a gay walk, as though the walker was going happily to a meeting with someone she loved. There was pride in the walk, too, but not vanity. Doc hoped she would not turn the corner, but she did. There was a flick of skirt and she was gone."
- *Sweet Thursday*, chapter 6

Cervantes would have left it at that, the anima glimpsed from afar, never to be encountered or known beyond the realm of imagination. But Steinbeck has a different plan:

"Suzy noticed a waiter drifting delicately within earshot. She had discovered something for herself. When in doubt, move slowly. Her head turned toward the waiter and he drifted away. She was delighted with her discovery — everything-in-slow-motion. She then lifted her glass slowly, looked at it carefully, then sipped and held it a moment before she put it down. S-I-o-w-ness — it gave meaning to everything. It made everything royal."
- *Sweet Thursday*, chapter 23

Doc held her chair and then he popped the champagne cork and he smelled it.

Suzy said, "Can I have it?"

"Of course."

She turned the cork in her fingers and looked at it. It was very beautiful. She put it in her purse and took an iris from the vase.

"Do you like champagne?"

"I love it," she said and wondered what it would taste like. And she did love it.

Doc said, "You know, out in the sand dunes there are little valleys covered with pines. Sometime, when you can, let's take meat and things out there and cook our supper. It's very nice."

"The fire reminded you," said Suzy.

"That's clever of you - so it did."

She said, "Doc, will you teach me sometime about the stuff you got in your place?"

"Sure I will." A surge of affection filled him. But he was a little afraid too of her terrible modesty. He looked away from her eyes to the wild iris in her hand. "There's an old Welsh story," he said. "It's about a poor knight who made a wife completely out of flowers--."

- *Sweet Thursday*, chapter 23

These quotes might seem to reflect oblique themes found in *Don Quixote*, but I promised to demonstrate that Steinbeck clearly saw Suzy as Dulcinea, did I not?

Cy Feuer and Ernie Martin produced *Guys and Dolls* on Broadway in the aftermath of World War II. Flushed with the glow of that success, they approached Steinbeck about making *Cannery Row* into a musical.

"[Cy Feuer and Ernie Martin] were interested in adapting John Steinbeck's 1945 novel *Cannery Row* into a musical. They felt that some of the characters, such as marine biologist Doc, would work well in a musical, but that many of the other characters would not. Steinbeck suggested that he write a sequel to *Cannery Row* that would feature the characters attractive to Feuer and Martin. Based on suggestions for the story line by Feuer and Martin, Steinbeck began to write *Sweet Thursday*." ¹⁴

Sweet Thursday became a play called *Pipe Dream* with a musical score by Rodgers and Hammerstein. The play premiered on Broadway on November 30, 1955, and received the largest advance ticket sales in Broadway history to that point, \$1.2 million. It was nominated for nine Tony Awards.

I think it would be safe to say that Dale Wasserman, a lifelong playwright, would have been very much aware of *Pipe Dream* in 1955.

The similarity between Steinbeck's prostitute Suzy, introduced in 1954, and Wasserman's prostitute Aldonza, introduced in 1959, is obvious. But how can we be sure that Steinbeck was thinking of Suzy as Dulcinea when he wrote *Sweet Thursday* and *Pipe Dream*?

I have in my possession the Christmas gift that John Steinbeck sent to Broadway producer Ernie Martin (of Feuer and Martin) in 1953, just as he was beginning to write

Sweet Thursday. It is the 1949 edition of *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha* published by Viking Press in 2 volumes, translated & edited by Samuel Putnam. 9¼x6 inches, clothbound with dust jackets.

Inscribed on the front free endpaper of the first volume is a note written and signed by John Steinbeck.

"Dear Ernie -:

This is required preparation for Project X.

John Steinbeck,
Xmas 1953"

The authenticity of Steinbeck's note has been certified by PBA Galleries of San Francisco, one of the largest and most respected literary auction houses in the world. Devoted to works on paper and related arts, PBA sells rare books, manuscripts, autographs, maps, atlases, prints and photographs.

If you'd care to view the movie made from Steinbeck's *Sweet Thursday*, see *Cannery Row* starring Nick Nolte and Debra Winger (1982.) Regardless of the title, the storyline isn't *Cannery Row* at all but is entirely *Sweet Thursday*.

Following the publication of *Sweet Thursday*, in 1954 and the premiere of *Pipe Dream* on November 30th, 1955, Steinbeck began working on the Quixote novel I mentioned at the outset. He began writing it in the summer of 1957 and then abandoned the novel on December 26 of that year.

Allow me to share a few glimpses of the unpublished manuscript of *Don Keehan, The Marshall of Manchon*. I will allow you to draw your own conclusions regarding Steinbeck's perception of Dulcinea.

It is important to keep in mind that this manuscript is only a first draft. Steinbeck would never have allowed it to be published without considerable revision and polishing, but it will serve our purposes magnificently concerning the question of Dulcinea in *Man of La Mancha*.

Steinbeck opens his Quixote novel thusly:

"No matter how you argue it, I guess the sad fact is Donald Keehan of Manchon was really off his rocker. There has been so much talk about it and writing about it, both in the papers and in learned journals, that that final essential fact has been lost track of. The whole country has been six deep in theories, and not only home-grown, grass root theories either, with the infinitives split and participles dangling all over the place, but big imported three dollar theories too. Everybody with more than two letters after his name has tried to get in the act, and most of them have. One big bull whopper of a semanto-philologist by the name of Razin or Pazin or something like that made the trip clear out from Brooklyn to Manchon which some people call the soft underbelly of California, and by the time he got through making it clear about

the mythos and the symbol and tying it into Middle European philosophy and squaring Bergson around with Hegel, why, no one knew much what it was all about. The whole situation was so bugged up in eighteenth century European philosophy that what really happened got lost."

"What really happened is that good old Don Keehan -everybody knew him, everybody liked him, knew his family, knew his family for generations well, he went Western happy. He looked at so much television and read so many Western novels that pretty soon he got to believing them, and then he flipped his lid and he went out and tried to do them. "

After a bit of literary rambling, Steinbeck describes the Keehan homestead:

"Everybody and his dog in the Manchon Valley knows Donald Keehan, knew his father and his grandfather too. They've been around for a long time. The old Keehan place is only a hundred acres now, but Miss Ethyl Evercreach, the book shoveller at the Carnegie Free Public Library, is an old-times expert and might go far if she wasn't a Democrat. She says the Keehans changed their name back in gold rush times. They had a hundred leagues of land granted by the Spanish Crown and their name was Quejana. When the Americans came, Ethyl says they lost it by Squatters' rights and they gambled and piddled it away. That's how most of the grant lands went."

"The Keehan place is part of the old home ranch. You can still see washed-down 'dobe walls and foundations and a line of olive trees with twisty arthritic branches two hundred and fifty years old. The place must have been pretty royal in its day, but it's just a pile of washed-down 'dobe now."

"Don Keehan was going on fifty. He never got married. There's a story that some dame gave him a rough time when he was going to Santa Clara College when he was a kid and he never got over it, and that may be true. Nobody ever thought he was queer. He just never got married. He was always skinny but as he got older he dried up and seemed to get longer and thinner like a rattle snake in a cold winter. He was nice and polite to everybody and well liked, but there were no handles on him and nobody ever got a hook into him. He was kind of vague and evasive. He lived in a whitewashed stone house with a bell tower on top that Ethyl Evercreach says was the old chapel of the original hacienda. On the tower where the cross used to be is a television aerial as big as the radar at Fort Ord."

So if Steinbeck's Quixote is a gentleman farmer living on the faded remnants of his inheritance, who will be his Sancho Panza?

The writers of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* chose to split the original series character of Captain James T. Kirk into two characters in 1987: the wise Captain Jean Luc Picard and the swashbuckling Commander Will Riker. An insightful decision.

But Steinbeck chose to split Sancho Panza into two characters in 1957, thirty years before *The Next Generation* ever came into being.

Sancho One

“Then there was Willard. He was 14 years old and ran to fat, a nice enough kid. Don inherited him from his dead brother who didn't leave anything else. Willard worshipped his uncle. The two of them watched T.V. together nearly all night, every night.”

"If anyone knows when Donald's brains began to jam their zipper, it would be Willard because he was there every minute. But Willard, you must remember, is fourteen years old, and what is nuts to everyone else is common sense to that crazy kid. Willard was just in that period when boys begin to smell bad and get that vacant all-gone look in their eyes, and most of the time you can't tell whether they're awake or asleep, and you're right. In the second place, Willard would go bail that his uncle jacks up the sun in the morning and tells the wind which way to blow and how hard. And if you should so much as indicate to Willard that his Uncle Donald has come unglued on top, you might just get skinned off above the ears by a stream rock from Willard's slingshot. He can pick three blackbirds off a telephone wire with one five-ounce properly round stone. There are people who say Willard can hit a doorknob at a hundred yards, and that's why Doc Phillips pulls down the shades of his office at the county hospital at night. Doc was just doing his duty one evening when the whole top of his right ear came off and splashed against his framed license to practice across the room. But if anybody knows the story, Willard does, because Willard was right there when Westerns stopped being stories and got real. And it wasn't all at once. It came on as slow as a dog dragging along to scratch his behind. And since Willard was fourteen years old, it's a safe bet he was ahead and his uncle just caught up with him. "

"When the late, late, late show was over usually, and Aunt Theresa had grunted off to bed and said a prayer for them she hoped would get past the suggestion box, Willard and his Uncle Donald Keehan would sometimes practice drawing and firing from the hip. They used an old Smith and Wesson Donald had picked out of the buckle box in the tack room. It didn't bother either one of them that the firing pin was gone. They took turns. One would draw and snap down the hammer and say, 'Bang!' while the other counted to find out how long it took. And then they'd have long discussions about how it should be done and about which was best, the low draw or the side flip or how high you should wear the holster. And Donald would say, 'Now you take Wyatt - I mean Mr. Earp, of course - why he's got his holster so low he can't hardly bend his knee.'"

"And Willard would say, 'Sure, Unk, but how do we know what would of happened if Mr. Earp drawed against Billy. Billy always was an open holster throw hand.' They spoke favorably about the old giants and never had a disparaging word about Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett or even Mr. Bowie."

""They were the granddaddys,' Keehan would say. 'We owe respect to them, but you got to consider they didn't have the equipment. You never fired a flintlock piece, did you son?'"

"No, sir, I never did, ' said Willard."

"Well, it makes all the difference..."

Sancho Two

"The Keehan place looked like a widow's outfit. If anyone ran it at all, it was Joe Rabbit and Joe was a Manchon Indian and never ran anything unless he was watched... He lives in the Keehan tack room, the way his grandfather did. He doesn't keep the ranch up very well, but nobody else keeps it up at all."

"...Joe Rabbit was squatting in the morning sun, which flourished best and most windlessly in front of the stout bars of the pig pen. Joe was a round Indian as most Manchones are - large round head, small round jet eyes, a round torso that pushed his arms out from his sides, and legs so short and thick that when he walked he seemed to be on wheels, and hunkered down he wasn't much shorter than standing up."

"Without greeting he held out his hand for the pan and fell to eating. And when Donald squatted in the warm sun beside him, Joe looked nervously sideways at him and then wolfed his food the way a dog does when another dog is too close. Joe was dressed in his native costume, a ragged red sweater, a blue shirt without collar or buttons, corduroy pants and Congress gaiters with bunion slits on the sides. Joe had never found a pair of shoes designed for square feet. Now he bit each mouthful once to kill it and then swallowed. Eight swallows did it, and then he put the pan on the ground in front of him and wiped his hands on his trousers and picked up the mug of hot beans, which was really his food, and sipped the juice delicately."

Donald said, "I'd like to talk to you Joe."

"What about?"

"Well about some Indian lore."

"What's lore?" Joe asked.

"Customs, practices, habits."

"I got no habits," said Joe quickly, and this was true.

"Well, you're an Indian."

"Who says?"

"I didn't mean it like running it down. Lots of people think Indians are a fine and noble race. Lots of people."

Rocinante

"He wandered into the open carriage shed where vehicles like strange artillery were lined up hub to hub – a surrey, and a hayrake, disk plows, a high-seated cultivator, a

1951 Plymouth 4-door sedan, and a war surplus Willys jeep, as scarred and brown and dangerous as an aged lion.”

Dulcinea

"Perhaps Sugar Mae can remember the name she was born with. She was Dawn Ellison when she drifted into Manchon and got a job as a waitress at Al's Chop House on Santa Lucia Avenue. Dawn had been taking care of herself in a naughty world for twenty-six years when she met Haynes over a steak sandwich. He gave her a hand up and she was grateful, and so he took over her career, built a character for her, changed her name to Sugar Mae, trained her, and finally got her the job as hostess at the Blue Grotto. Sugar is a nice, friendly, simple girl, pretty and well made. Her wants are not unusual. They comprise - sleeping late, dressing expensively, having fun, being rich, and eventually but not right away having the husband and children and the insurance she reads about in the SATURDAY EVENING POST. This is not an unusual pattern of ambition, and to realize it, she is willing to make some concessions, but you can't push her around. She can take on most situations, smiles readily and has, at Hayne's suggestion, modulated her laugh and dropped her speaking voice a full octave, which gives it a husky, velvet tone that matches the light, atmosphere and music of the Blue Grotto - and perhaps contributes to it. Sugar is a goodhearted, tough kid, and what happens to her depends on the breaks she gets. Haynes Garcia was one of her good breaks, and he came at the end of a stretch of lousy ones. Sugar Mae is just like everyone else. She'll string along until something better shows up. Haynes doesn't ask much of her, but when he does, she's ready. That's why he took his editor into the Blue Grotto after the broiled steak. And that's why Editor Walsh got loaded on four drinks and asked several people, including Haynes and Sugar Mae to call him Ed.”

And then there is the fateful moment when Don Keehan meets Sugar Mae...

Sugar Mae Materialized in front of the banquette, and her soft, husky voice was an echo - "Good evening, gentlemen. Oh! Good evening Haynes. Can - may I order you something?"

“This is Miss Mae Sutton,” said Haynes. "Mae, this our hero, Don Keehan.”

"You mean the one?"

"There's only one.”

"Well I am - honored."

"You shouldn't say that, M'am,” said Don. “It wasn't anything at all.”

"Well there's some think it was, and I'm one of them.”

"Well I sure thank you, M'am.”

“What will it be - whisky?”

"I'll have some beer, M'am."

“Two beers,” said Haynes, and his hand made the flat stroking movement that means "take it easy.”

"Coming right up,” said Sugar Mae.

"That's a mighty pretty lady,” said Don.

Haynes couldn't help it. He was made the way he was made, and his mind worked the way it worked, a delicate set of responses to situations, as exquisitely poised for defense or attack as a fine boxer.

“In my business you hear some pretty sad things,” he said.

"Sad?"

"You caught it. Maybe not many would. You didn't say pretty girl. You said pretty lady. Some people would see her hustling drinks and wouldn't see any deeper. And Mae has so much courage and well just plain lady-like guts that she wouldn't let on. She just does what she has to and makes the best of it.”

A waiter slipped near and silently set down the beer.

"What do you mean, Haynes?"

"She didn't tell me. I found out by accident - Mae isn't the kind you usually see in a place like this."

"I can see that,” said Don, although he had never been in a place like this in his life. Tell me about her, Haynes.”

”Remember when you said one brave man could beat the system. Well when she needed it, there wasn't one brave man."

Don watched Sugar Mae drift like an angelfish against the low lights of the bar.

"You can tell,” he said. "What happened, Haynes?" He took a long swallow of beer...

Later in the manuscript we meet Sheriff Albert Altmeyer,

"a good steady public servant with training in running his world from the rough and tumble of the used car business. He was just right for his job. If he had been worse, one kind of people would have disapproved, and if he had been better, another kind of people would have been downright peevisish."

Shortly after Steinbeck introduces us to Altmeyer, we begin to see glimpses of goodness in Sugar Mae:

At noon he [Altmeyer] drove to the Manchon Motel and had a steak and broke up an incipient argument between Haynes Garcia and Sugar Mae.

"What's the beef?" he asked as he passed their table.

"Sit down Sheriff," Haynes said. "Have a cup of coffee. I was trying to get Sugar to do a job for the good of the community."

"There's one thing you can say about the guy," the girl said, "He'd throw his mother to the sharks if he could get a piece of copy."

"What's this community service?"

"Don't listen to him," she said. "He can make murder sound like a visiting nurse. I wouldn't kid you. Chief. I made the pokey before and I don't want to again. I like it right the way I am - and no paddy wagons."

"I got nothing to do with hustling. That's for the town cops."

"It's not hustling," said Haynes.

"It's not something you do if you was watched either."

"You let me talk to him," said Haynes. It's a kind of a game - kind of play acting. What comes out of it is the best damn publicity this town ever had."

"And I'm in the wagon again," said Sugar Mae.

"Can we go to your office and talk, Chief? Sugar's on a virtue pitch."

The final words of Steinbeck's half-finished manuscript seem almost prescient when we look back at them half a century later:

"Spiritual health is a wonderful thing to see. Aunt Theresa looked ten years younger. Even Joe Rabbit noticed the difference, but he didn't trust it. Joe also was in as gay a condition as he could get. He kind of liked the Indian pitch. He thought he might make something of it. Maybe his grandfather might remember some stuff if you gave him a pint of muscatel. In the early darkness Joe wandered out of the tack room just in time to see the great rosy rim of the full moon clear the eastern hills. He gazed at the glory until the round shining splendor cleared the ridge. Joe's mouth opened a little and his eyes glazed and he walked slowly but quickly out to the county road and cut across fields and over fences toward the Santa Lucia range to the west. His feet showed him where to go and he followed. And for the time being he put Indian lore out of his mind."

Steinbeck never returned to the manuscript after writing those words.

Allow me to summarize the chronology of significant events:

1952 Steinbeck opens *East of Eden* by revealing his detailed knowledge of *Don Quixote*

1953 Steinbeck gives a copy of *Don Quixote* to Broadway producer Ernie Martin with a note about the book being "required preparation for Project X." Ernie Martin will later produce *Pipe Dream*, the Broadway musical based upon Steinbeck's *Sweet Thursday*.

1954 *Sweet Thursday* is published with Suzy as a prostitute Dulcinea

1955 *Pipe Dream* premieres on Broadway with a record \$1.2 million in advance ticket sales.

1957 Steinbeck begins his novel, *Don Keehan, The Marshall of Manchon*.

1957 Steinbeck abandons the novel.

1959 Wasserman writes *I, Don Quixote*, a non-musical teleplay that airs only once.

1962 John Steinbeck is awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

1965 *Man of La Mancha*, a Broadway musical, uses the same plot device (Dulcinea as a prostitute) that Steinbeck debuted in 1954.

1968 John Steinbeck passes away at the age of 66.

1972 *Man of La Mancha* becomes a movie starring Peter O'Toole as both Cervantes and Quixote, and Sophia Loren as the prostitute Aldonza, Quixote's Dulcinea.

Wasserman's inspiration for a prostitute Dulcinea clearly appears to have come from John Steinbeck.

But where did Steinbeck find it?

We know Steinbeck was pondering Quixote when he completed *East of Eden* in 1952. His repeated references to Cervantes and Quixote in the prologue of that book leave us little room for doubt.

Steinbeck's next project was *Sweet Thursday*, in which he introduces the concept of a prostitute Dulcinea. We can assume that Steinbeck was familiar with the Bible from the Cain-and-Abel narrative arc and title of his book, *East of Eden*: "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the Land of Nod, on the east of Eden"
- Genesis, chapter 4. (King James Version)

Steinbeck was reading the Bible and thinking about Quixote.

William Faulkner, another Nobel Laureate, spoke of reading the Bible and Quixote: ¹⁵

JEAN STEIN: Do you read your contemporaries?

FAULKNER: No, the books I read are the ones I knew and loved when I was a young man and to which I return as you do to old friends: the Old Testament,

Dickens, Conrad, Cervantes, *Don Quixote* — I read that every year, as some do the Bible. - *The Paris Review*, Spring, 1956

One of the Bible's shortest books, the Old Testament book of *Hosea*, begins with God commanding the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute and to remain faithful to her, even though she will not be faithful to him. Did Steinbeck consciously or unconsciously cross-pollinate this Biblical story with the story of Don Quixote, or is this Hosea connection merely a coincidence? I fear we can only speculate.

Likewise, I find myself speculating on the Bible's influence on Cervantes. I am not the first to do so. Howard Mancing, in his *Don Quixote: A Reference Guide*, says, "Cervantes also knew the Bible very well, as biblical allusions, paraphrasings, and citations are frequent in *Don Quixote* and his other works. (Monroy, *La Biblia en el 'Quijote.'*)" ¹⁶

Perhaps I find in the story of *Don Quixote* only that which I bring to it, but I do occasionally wonder if Cervantes echoed the Bible intentionally.

An innkeeper who has no authority to do so dubs Don Quixote knight.
Jesus is likewise "knighted" by John the Baptist in the river Jordan. John has no authority to do so.

Quixote sees the windmill as a giant that must be defeated.
Jesus likewise saw Death as a giant to be defeated.

Quixote charges the windmill, is lifted up on its wooden arms and dropped onto the ground. Jesus is likewise lifted on wooden arms and dropped onto the ground.

Quixote sees the barber's basin as a badge of honor. To those around him, he merely looks ridiculous. Might Quixote's helmet of Mambrino be Christ's crown of thorns?

Quixote frees the galley slaves only to be rejected by them.
Jesus is likewise rejected by those he has freed.

I see Christ in Quixote, doubt-filled humanity in Sancho Panza and the church in Dulcinea, a woman whose worthiness is seen only by Quixote.

Sancho Panza vacillates. Is Quixote who he claims to be, or is he just a delusional nut? Sancho stays with Quixote and is made ruler of an island. Jesus likewise offers his doubt-filled followers a kingdom.

Certainly Steinbeck was right when he said, "A story has as many versions as it has readers. Everyone takes what he wants or can from it and thus changes it to his measure."

Steinbeck made this statement in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, the book he began writing immediately after abandoning *Don Keehan*, *The Marshall of Manhon*.

John Steinbeck was keenly aware of the flexible nature of archetypes and icons, those mirrors in which we see ourselves.

And no mirror shows us quite so many faces as Don Quixote, that magical mirror of Cervantes.

Roy H. Williams

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⁵ *A John Steinbeck Encyclopedia*, edited by Brian E. Railsback, Michael J. Meyer, p. 55

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⁷ *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*, p. 236, The Viking Press (1962)

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<http://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record.aspx?libID=o184471>. Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library. Dickinson State University.

¹¹ *The Development of Personality* (1954/1991), Volume 17 of *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, "Marriage as a Psychological Relationship"

"Every man carries within him the eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that particular woman, but a definite feminine image. This image is fundamentally unconscious, an hereditary factor of primordial origin engraved in the living organic system of the man, an imprint or 'archetype' of all the ancestral experiences of the female, a deposit, as it were, of all the impressions ever made by woman-in short, an inherited system of psychic adaptation."

¹² *Sweet Thursday*: Character Census and Descriptions
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