

Selected scenes from
O homem e a mancha (1994)
by Caio Fernando Abreu

Translated by Isaac Giménez and Jason Araújo

Translator's Preface

Why did Caio Fernando Abreu turn to Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, widely considered the first modernist novel *avant la lettre* and one of the most translated books in the world, at the end of his life? Why did he choose to do so through what, at least on the surface, seems to be a theatrical adaptation? *O homem e a mancha* (The man and La Mancha) was written in 1994, a very critical year for the author and playwright. Not long after his return to Brazil from a stay in France as a guest at the Maison des Écrivains Étrangers et des Traducteurs (MEET; The House of Foreign Writers and Translators), he was diagnosed with AIDS. Caio F. Abreu passed away only two years later, and, as a tribute to his memory, the play made its official debut in January 1997 at Casa Gávea in Rio de Janeiro after a brief run in November 1996 at Porto Alegre's Teatro São Pedro.¹ Directed by Luiz Arthur Nunes and performed by Marcos Breda, the play has only been performed twice after its premiere: in 2016 for its vicennial and again in 2021 as a multimedia performed reading.²

Primarily known for his confessional prose, which relies heavily on stream-of-consciousness narration and themes of hopelessness, belonging, and queerness, Caio F. Abreu has not received the same critical attention as a playwright. There are various possible explanations for this: Although anthologized and published in 1997 as *Teatro completo*, his plays only gained broader circulation in 2009 with the release of a new edition by Editora Agir, and, to the best of our knowledge, they don't yet circulate in translation. On the other hand, Caio F. Abreu's playwriting is more visceral, humoristic, and often labeled as derivative of his narrative prose, perhaps rendering the task of both theater makers and scholars more challenging. Anticipating next year's tricennial, it is remarkable the extent to which *O homem e a mancha*, while connecting the HIV/AIDS world epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s, a central part of the history of the queer/LGBTQ

¹ For more information, consult Severino J. Albuquerque, "Caio Fernando Abreu, Theatre, and AIDS," *BRASIL/BRAZIL: A Journal of Brazilian Literature* 11, no. 20 (1998): 81–98.

² Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YbKZA699wQ>.

community, with the Iberian literary traditions, continues to resonate with the spectacular nature of the increasingly mediatized interpersonal relations of today. In a time of the hyper-commodification of human experiences and the feelings of emptiness it often brings, Caio F. Abreu presents the world of fiction, and literature itself, as a means for personal transformation and multiplicity. First, he uses a single actor to embody five different characters, each confronting a similar sense of confusion and loss while also taking the audience across different cultural and geographic territories. Second, through what might be considered “uncreative writing” à la Kenneth Goldsmith, Caio F. Abreu engages with the Brazilian tradition of cultural cannibalism, known as *antropofagia*. This cocktail of literary devices and references, though delightfully intoxicating, poses a number of challenges for the translator.

The play reads as a monologue and yet alternates between the voices of five distinct characters experiencing and experimenting with various moods and psychological states. The difficulty for the translator here resides in finding ways to maintain each character’s linguistic specificity while also allowing for the actor to perhaps blur the lines between these distinct voices. Like Russian dolls, a single performer is asked to shift between characters, costumes, and tones that move across temporal, geographical, and fictional realities. Another translation concern is how to capture the humor and the campy sensitivity of a painful universe while remaining playful, ironic, erotic, and full of allusions to pop icons and revered cultural figures. In this regard, we focus primarily on striking a balance between keeping some of the cultural references, sexual connotations, and word games while still rendering some sort of textual estrangement by playing with sound and queering both the characters and situations.

It is also important to mention that the play is written in the long shadow that Cervantes’ magnum opus casts not just on Caio’s retelling of *Don Quixote* but on the larger legacy of Iberian letters. The Spanish novelist’s ghost appears throughout the play via the short baroque and descriptive introductions for each of the 28 scenes.³ These elements not only draw attention to the original inspiration for

³ This includes the Prologue and the Epilogue.

the text but also emphasize the extra-theatrical nature of *O homem e a mancha*. As we see it, the play, which Caio F. Abreu considered “a creative rereading of Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*,” should also be regarded as an *intradução* or an “untranslation,” borrowing Isabel Gómez’s translation of Augusto de Campos’ term. In other words, this creative rereading challenges legibility by hyper-fragmenting the source text and mixing it with Caio F. Abreu’s personal and literary archives. To illustrate this point, the play ends with the author’s signature followed by “São Paulo, Carnival of 1994.” This seemingly insignificant detail may in fact serve as an additional stage direction: The play should take into account the *carnavalesque* both in a literary mode as well as in the mode of socio-political commentary of this particular moment in the mid-1990s for queer communities around the globe.

Though preoccupied with literary legacies, one can also argue that the play reflects the author’s contemporary lived situation, his own biography. In a series of *crônicas* titled “Cartas para além dos muros,” published in the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* between August and September 1994, Caio F. Abreu openly talked about his HIV+ condition and would often use simple word games to both clarify and obfuscate meaning. For example, he would use the location “Gay Port,” a type of direct translation of Porto Alegre, a gesture that can be understood as a deep respect for the power of writing as worldmaking. Caio F. Abreu shows us that both writing and translating are tools for appropriating and re-situating queerness and queer culture within the Iberian and Latin American cultural traditions, an act that pushes to destabilize prescribed canonical readings while allowing for new interpretations aimed at contemporary audiences. In his first “Carta para além dos muros,” Caio concludes, “A única coisa que posso fazer é escrever [...] A vida grita. E a luta, continua.”⁴ Both *vida* and *luta* are central to his plays, and in this spirit we took *O homem e a mancha* as an invitation to play, hoping that our efforts inspire others to both read and engage with Caio F. Abreu’s theatrical oeuvre.

⁴ Included in Caio Fernando Abreu, *Pequenas epifanias* (Editora Agir, 2006), 106–14. Originally published in *O Estado de São Paulo* on August 21, September 9, and September 18, 1994.

**Selected scenes from *O homem e a mancha*⁵
by Caio Fernando Abreu**

A creative rereading of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

In memory of Clarice Lispector who used to call me "Quixote."

"And having said this, may God grant you health and not forget me."⁶
(Miguel de Cervantes, 1605)

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS (to be played by a single actor)

Actor
Miguel Quesada
Man of La Mancha
Don Quixote
The Sad Faced Knight
Willy, a voice from offstage

SET

There is a table in the middle of the stage, towards the back. On the table there is a fairly large globe and, to the side, a stool where a "bossa nova singer" might sit.

To the right, a striped recliner. It can also be a divan or a couch of some kind.

⁵ The word "mancha" can mean a stain, whether of blood, sperm, paint, or dirt. Ultimately it signals an imperfection or something morally reprehensible, which resituates the play within the political and social context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s.

⁶ Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Edith Grossman (Ecco, 2003). This is the last sentence of the Prologue in the original. We chose Edith Grossman's translation, and all quotes and citations from Cervantes' *Don Quixote* that appear throughout the play are her translations.

To the left, a dressmaker's dummy. There is only a torso: no head, no legs or arms. The torso is supported by a wooden base.

In addition, there are three independently painted screens. One is in the back, while the other two are placed on either side, all painted as bookshelves in a library, stuffed with books. Depending on what is happening, the screens can go up and down.

PROLOGUE

Where we deal with the condition of the actor in search of the general in order to arrive at the particular.

The screens drop.

*While the audience walks in, the ACTOR is on stage, partially shaded, sitting on the portable table wearing only a black leotard. They⁷ are sitting in a position that evokes Rodin's *The Thinker*, perhaps. Sitting on the recliner looking down, the ACTOR carefully stares at the globe. After the third announcement the house lights go off while the spotlight grows on the actor. They do not seem to realize and continue looking at the globe. By the fourth or fifth announcement the ACTOR finally reacts.*

The ACTOR is frightened and trembles. They look up. They are visibly nervous. They make the sign of the cross. They try to put themselves back together. The ACTOR slowly begins looking around in seven different directions with very defined head movements—to the left, to the right, upwards, downwards, etc. With each direction they choose different intonations (childish, lyrical, somber, etc.) as they repeat:

⁷ The "Actor" could be any gender/person and hence the use of the pronoun "they."

ACTOR – Once upon a time. . . *once upon a time*. What the hell, once upon a time? Whose once upon a time? When and where? It is so hard to decide. So hard to begin. Let's see, maybe this will help jump start an idea [*They spin the globe. Using their index finger, they randomly stop on a place*]. Once upon a time in. . . Greenland. Too much ice, too white, too many penguins, too many Eskimos, and igloos, too cold. Nah, too boring. Not dramatic at all. Let me try again [*They turn and spin the globe again*]. Once upon a time in. . . the Sahara. Too much sand, too sunny, too many camels, too hot, too dry. My God, I am already so thirsty. . .

The ACTOR grabs a glass or bottle of water that is placed next to him from the floor and drinks it voraciously. They stare at the glass. They touch their face as though they were seeing themselves reflected.

ACTOR – Once upon a time. . . I. Of course it has to be something that I am familiar with. So it's me. For almost 40 years I've been living with myself. I might know a few things about me. That's right, me! Why not? After all, I find myself quite intriguing.

The ACTOR leaves the glass or bottle of water. They spin the globe one last time with exasperation. Then they stand up and face the audience with great conviction.

ACTOR – Once upon a time there was an actor. Too much stage, too many rehearsals, too much spotlight, too many aisles of seats, too much backstage, too much audience—thank God—too many feelings, too many fantasies, too many illusions. Too much. . . too much “Once upon a time.”

Circus-like music. The ACTOR steps down from the portable table and walks towards center stage, arms open.

SCENE 1

Where the ACTOR experiences a small narcissistic episode and yet ends up acknowledging the need for the Other to exist.

ACTOR – Ladies and gentlemen, I am an actor. My name is Carlos. As you can see, I am more or less tall, kind of thin, and quite shy. I don't have much hair left. I am not very muscular, though I think I am. . . likable, fun. I know my body well; I can move, make dramatic, funny, strange, scary gestures. [*While posing and illustrating what they are referring to*] I can also sing [*They hum some improvised song*] I can dance [*Showing some dance moves, flamenco would be ideal*]. Although overall, I mainly perform.

The ACTOR recites a brief text—Shakespeare, a Greek tragedy, Molière; it can be a different text every night. It is important that it is a text somehow familiar to the audience.

The ACTOR [*More serious*] – When I perform, I remain myself, but at the same time I become another. I wouldn't be a good actor if I wasn't able to become that Other. I am not talking about the Other that watches me, even if I am also that Other, because they always see themselves in me, even when they don't like what they see. I am talking about the Other I turn into, that I embody, the one I become when I'm being an actor. The character, that's who I'm talking about. An actor can't be an actor without a character. [*Pause, confused*] So, right here, right now. . . Am I an actor? Am I myself? Am I just nothing, damnit?. . . Am I boring? Am I tripping? Where is the character?

The ACTOR becomes more frenetic. They walk around the stage searching for something until they leave the scene. The last part of their speech is offstage.

ACTOR – Where is the Other? The Other is essential for my survival! Where is the character? I don't make any sense without a character! I will go nuts without a character! I need the Other! [*As*

they exit the stage] They are coming for me! This is sabotage! [*Off-stage, farther away*] We are in production! I told them not to cash the check. Stop, stop it! I want it like that because I want the character. The production company is calling! Where's my phone?

SCENE 2

*Where we meet the figure of Miguel Quesada,
the unfortunate anonymous worker.*

On the empty stage, the light barely illuminates the globe. One hears loud urban noises, truly awful sounds. Car alarms, ambulances, cars honking, police and fire truck sirens, people screaming, typewriters, brakes screeching, the subway rumbling, sidewalk vendors, jackhammers, etc. An imaginary door opens through which MIGUEL, the character, enters. Over the ACTOR's costume MIGUEL wears a suit, tie, perhaps even a hat. He is carrying a briefcase (James Bond style) and various shopping bags, as well as a broom, along with many boxes and packages. He's rather excited. He places his things somewhere on stage and gestures as if closing a door. The noise subsides, now muted, as if from the inside.

MIGUEL – Alone, finally. Far away from all the craziness, free from that nightmare that seemed to never end. Today was definitely the last of those. . . How many years? I don't know, 30 something, 30 or so. Neverending years. I even gave up counting. It felt like time never passed. [*Changing tone*] But then it passed. Time always passes. This is the only guarantee people have. Besides death, of course. [*Excited*] But today I don't want to think about death. I want to think about life. About my new life.

MIGUEL takes off his jacket, his hat, leaving only his tie on over mesh armor. He starts to run around the stage, a bit ridiculously. He begins to dance, tapping his heels in the air, humming "Singin' in the Rain" or something like that.

MIGUEL – I’ve finally arrived at the big day! Miguel Quesada: the unfortunate anonymous worker, the solitary depressive, the insufferable neurotic, the unloved, the nobody-who-never-had-anything-but-his-crazy-impossible-dreams. Miguel Quesada is now free. [*Enlightened, somewhat pedantic*] Ree-ee-tiii-reddd. . . What a beautiful word! It must be one of the most beautiful words in any language. I’m not referring to the pension, of course. Not to all that waiting, obviously. Certainly not to all that misery. [*Poetically*] I’m speaking about the sonority. A question of aesthetics — not economy. A word rich in melody, so full of meaning. Retired. Re. . . tired. Sitting. . . after it all. Sitting. . . in his room, tired. . . Sitting. . . tired. . . in his room. So tranquil, so quiet. This is a sacred thing, silence. Where the angels live. In the most perfect and absolute silence. [*A brief, silent pause*]

Suddenly MIGUEL opens the imaginary door. The urban noises return, insufferable. So loud as to shake the audience.

MIGUEL [*Screaming*] – *Adiós* to this inferno! So long, bloody hell! Goodbye neurotic city dwellers, folks who never wanted me! *Au revoir*, hellish municipality of my daily grind! *Sayonara*, evil metropolis of my solitude without cure! *Adiós*, “*locura*”! I don’t need any of you anymore, women who didn’t love me, friends who betrayed me. *Arrivederci*, scum! [*A knock on the door. The noise disappears.*]

SCENE 3

Where Miguel’s radical decision to disconnect from the outside and the measures taken to do so are revealed.

While MIGUEL speaks, the three painted screens begin to illuminate, making what appears to be a huge library. They descend slowly.

MIGUEL – Beginning today and until the day I die, God knows, I will never leave the house. Just like Marcel Proust, like Juan Carlos Onetti after him. I don’t need anything from the outside. I have

this room here. . . [*He hesitates. He looks at the audience, then at the screens. For a second he becomes the ACTOR again, aware of the three theatrical walls.*] Well. . . here are the three walls of my apartment. I have absolutely everything I need to live without ever needing to leave this place. [*He begins to take things out of the bags and spread them across the stage.*] Food, drink, prescriptions, provisions for many, *many* years. And I also have my souvenirs, my memories that—modesty aside—are mine alone. [*Ironically*] There is no personal gain in this. After all, any man approaching 50 who has worked non-stop since he was 15, no matter how boring his grand life has been—and mine, frankly speaking, was very boring—any man like that can afford to spend the rest of his life living, nothing else. Nothing “real,” I mean. Such a man can only remember, chew, and rummage in his memory chest. [*With melancholy*] Ever since I was young, I’ve always been jealous of old people, those who no longer need to do anything but remember. As if in their minds there is an. . . an overflowing trunk of memories, shining as precious as joy. Amethyst, ruby, emerald. And it doesn’t matter if they’re sad, miserable, or cruel things. They have already been lived and no longer pose any danger. [*Pensive*] Because you have the time. Time chisels away at the stone. [*Aside*] So, I need to take note. . . And besides, everything in this life is a story. Somehow all these things that happen to a living thing are unbearably real, even dreams. . . What was I even saying? Oh, that everything in this life always starts with “Once upon a time.”

The screens should now be fully down. MIGUEL is surrounded by books. The effect is somewhat claustrophobic, though colorful. Miguel climbs onto the platform.

MIGUEL – Once upon a time there was Miguel Quesada, the man who was fed up with everything and never left the house. Buried alive, they said. Demented, a maniac. But he didn’t give a damn. He had his own stories to remember. [*Poetically*] And when I’m tired of thinking about everything I’ve lived, I’ll still have the books, those that I’ve loved the most since childhood in which there are yet other stories. All the stories of the world. So

marvelous! No contact with the world out there, this godforsaken world that we call “reality.” No more waiting in line at the bank, no more signs that read “closed,” no more running around, anxiety, or violence. No more desire. No more people, no more nobody. Only the indispensable, only the essential, only that which is strictly necessary. [*Going towards the telephone*] Then, no matter what, there is always the good ol’ telephone. Just pick up and call. [*Checking the Rolodex*] Let me see here. . . I have the phone numbers for the pharmacy, the supermarket, the pizza joint, the video store, the emergency room. Even the police if I need them, God knows. Rapid, efficient, modern. Nowadays you can have everything delivered. Even sex.

SCENE 4

From the first and inevitable invasion of the so-called Unbearable Reality and the way MIGUEL deals with it.

The telephone rings. MIGUEL is shaken, hesitates, and doesn't know whether or not to answer. Then he makes a gesture as if pulling the phone cord out of the wall. But then he thinks better of the situation as the phone keeps ringing, very loudly, and after a few rings picks up.

MIGUEL [*With a disguised voice*] – Hello, who’s this? Who? Auntie Flora? Whose auntie? Oh, you’re the auntie. Whom are you looking to speak to? Miguel who? Speak up now, dear, the signal is terrible. . . yeah, that’s better. Miguel who’s that? Casa? Nada? Ah, Que-sada! I see you’re a Spanish speaker. That’s the weirdest name, but whatever. [*In a hurry*] No, honey, there isn’t anyone here by that name. What I mean to say is that there was someone but now there isn’t. They’re off traveling. Yeah, this guy Miguel is traveling. Nada, nope, no idea where, sweetie. I don’t know a thing, *capiche?* Hell, I don’t even know him. I just came with the apartment. Better call 4-1-1, ha! *Lo siento*, sweetheart. See ya!

MIGUEL hangs up with force. Preoccupied, he walks across the stage reflecting and trying to keep calm.

MIGUEL – Calm down! Cool it! It always starts the same. After all, I never told anyone about my plan. Some folks are going to call, insist, question. It's a pain in the ass, but it's okay. That way we all get used to it. [*Ironically*] People forget about each other with such ease. What did my mother use to say? "He who is not seen is not remembered." Absence does NOT make the heart grow fonder. That's it. But maybe it's better to take some precautions.

MIGUEL takes the answering machine. He presses some buttons and records a message in a disguised voice.

MIGUEL [*Recording*] – "This is a recording. Miguel is off traveling. He didn't say when he'd be back. Maybe never. No point leaving a message after the beep." [*Electronic beep. MIGUEL continues the monologue.*] There are so few people. William at the storeroom. . . Silvana at the bank. . . Zeca at the bookstore. . . Who else? Oh, Auntie Flora, of course. But the poor old thing is so old and deaf, so debilitated, it isn't even worth it. [*Pauses*] And there's also Caroline. [*With melancholy*] But I don't think Caroline has my contact details. Never asked and never offered. [*Sighs*] No father, no mother, no brother or sister, no neighbor, no creditor, no lover. [*Tired*] I've waited so long for this day. So long. So long. Such a struggle and without truce. I won. I'm exhausted. I don't really know where to begin. [*Stretching*] But let's not be in a hurry. Starting today I have all the time in the world. All the time in the world to no longer do anything.

MIGUEL lies down on the recliner. He yawns and sprawls out. The light dims while he winces, then draws himself in like a baby. Nearly in the dark, he talks to himself quietly.

MIGUEL – To sleep. . . perchance to dream. . . how is it done? So, so tired. Maybe just a little nap. Oh to sleep, good God! What

incredible fatigue. Immense. [*Light shines on the globe*] Like the size of the world. [*Sleeps*]

SCENE 5

*Where a new and disturbing character is introduced,
as well as his strange obsession.*

MIGUEL is asleep. Peace and quiet. Soft light over the globe. We hear some Spanish melody, perhaps just the sound of castanets or zapateado tap dancing. Passionate yet very soft flamenco rhythm. When MIGUEL wakes up, he has already transformed into THE MAN OF LA MANCHA. The transformation is subtle, though progressive. Every now and then, MIGUEL and the ACTOR, both of whom make up the MAN, return to him. Then QUIXOTE begins to emerge.

MAN [*Suddenly waking up*] – La Mancha, my God. La Mancha. Where did that stain go? It was here just a second ago. It can't just disappear like that. [*Searching on the floor*] Right here, it was here, right there. It was clear as day; I remember that. It wasn't a filthy stain; it wasn't ugly either. It was. . . it was just a different color. Almost transparent. Like. . . as if everything was in white, or black, or gray, and somewhere on that surface, out of the blue, la mancha emerged. Do you get it? Still, quiet. Of a different color. Sky blue. Water-yellow. Lilac, violet, purple as a bruise. [*Getting agitated*] No, it can't be that. It can't be purple, for God's sake, not purple.

The MAN wakes up from the reclining chair. QUIXOTE steps down.

QUIXOTE [*Rising, dramatic*] – Ah, damn it! Certainly this must be one of the wizard's grotesque enchantments that keep tormenting me!

The MAN walks on stage searching for the stain. He walks towards the platform as he talks.

MAN – I don't know. I don't remember. I think I was inside. No, it wasn't really like that. It wasn't exactly inside. The stain wasn't around me, like a net, like a piece of fabric, like a bubble. I was standing in the middle of it. That was it. Like I was in a rain puddle. Or was it in a net, in a cage? I don't recall; I don't know. So clear, my goodness. It must be somewhere.

The MAN stands in front of the globe. He jumps on the platform, sits on the stool, in a similar position as the ACTOR during the Prologue, and begins spinning the globe.

MAN – The Indies. . . The trail to the Indies. . . Ethiopia, Persia, Madagascar. And the New World. People say a new world exists, on the other side of an infinite ocean. How would it be over there? How would the perfumed mornings be in the New World? Species, macaws, hibiscus. [*Changing tone*] Where would the stain be? Maybe here, a bit to the South of Trabzon. But Trabzon doesn't exist on this globe. Strange. More to the North, who knows. How strange, the Passargadae should be located here. But it's not here either. Where would Eden be? Funny. Not to the East, nor to the West, neither Northeast nor Northwest. It might be close to Barcelona, I guess. Or farther up North, by El Camino de Santiago. [*Agitated*] The stain must be here, somewhere, I was inside it. Inside. . . not really inside. On top of it, under it. I don't know. I don't recall. It doesn't matter. If it's not here, it doesn't exist. And if it doesn't exist, I don't exist either. . . [*Taking his hands to his head, touching it*] Unless it only existed inside my brain. A stain somewhere inside my brain. A ganglion, a hemorrhage, an aneurysm. But it doesn't hurt, it doesn't beat, it doesn't bleed. [*Touching his body with his hands*] Inside my body. In my skin, like a tattoo, a burn. Although I don't feel anything. It has been a while since I felt anything. [*He starts jumping on one foot, hitting his ear with his open hand.*] Not even this feeling when water gets inside your ears. Not even a buzz, vertigo, a labyrinth. No, nothing!

The MAN throws the globe far away, violently. Then he calms down and steps down the platform, completely transformed into QUIXOTE.

QUIXOTE – Ah, slander, conspiracies, evil schemes. Once again the black legions of Lucifer’s devotees are trying to bewilder me with their malignant cunning. You should know I am not afraid of you demons! [*Walking solemnly to the center of the stage, he then quotes Mario Quintana*]:

“Come, crows, jackals, road thieves!
Ah! From this greedy hooked hand,
No one will dig the sacred light out of me!”

SCENE 6

*Where, at times, the ACTOR reclaims his voice,
but he is fully taken by the quixotic character.*

The MAN remains still, with his clenched right hand dramatically reaching up in the air. The Spanish melody plays again, a bit louder this time. Then, as if he were the ACTOR again, he grabs a heavy, old book and reads attentively.

ACTOR [*Reading*] – “Miguel Esteban, Villaverde, Esquivias, Tisteafuera, Quintanar de la Orden, Argamasilla de Calatrava and Argamasilla de Alba. These were the seven villages in the Region of La Mancha.” It’s right here, in the book. The book doesn’t lie. It was there where the stain was. That’s where it happened.

*The ACTOR stops speaking, with the book still in his hand.
We hear a prerecorded voice reading the first sentences of Don Quixote by Cervantes.*

PRERECORDED VOICE – “Somewhere in La Mancha, in a place whose name I do not care to remember, a gentleman lived not long ago, one of those who has a lance and ancient shield on a shelf and keeps a skinny nag and a greyhound for racing.”

The ACTOR closes the book and turns into the MAN OF LA MANCHA again. He speaks in a pedantic and professorial manner.

MAN – Gentlemen, though my ideas may be unbalanced, as people say—and perhaps they are right about that—certainly, the ideas of this author weren’t when he chose to begin his magnum opus precisely with the line: “Somewhere in La Mancha.” In fact, when he wrote “somewhere”—*en un lugar*—this obviously indicates that the previously mentioned stain occupied—or occupies—space. Physical space, real space. Therefore, even if I can’t find it anywhere, there is evidence that it exists. [*In a different tone*] Even if there isn’t any, who cares? Within me, inside or outside, even around. Could be a net or a wound. Geographical or psychological. Virus or hallucination. The stain exists. And I need to confront it.

The MAN leaves the book on the side. He begins his transformation into DON QUIXOTE. He walks nervously. He grabs a wooden or plastic sword.

QUIXOTE – It seems so obvious that all these jokes are no more than just that. Mere decoys, a paltry scam. Funny business. But as a knight, I won’t succumb to vulgar mumbo jumbo. [*Sighs*] Oh what a fate. . . reverie and perdition. I feel here again the time to depart for new adventures has come. [*Excited*] Spear in hand to defend myself from the villains, from the corrupt ones. Wizards, wicked Moors, oppressors from the global village, beware my name! Your days are numbered.

SCENE 7

When the dreaming knight dresses up as the knight errant and asks the other men who came before him for their blessing.

QUIXOTE gets dressed as he talks. Clothes and armor are improvised with the objects he takes from the business suitcase and/or from the bags MIGUEL brought, more objects spread out on stage.

QUIXOTE – Even if I am temporarily debilitated due to kidney pain [*touching his hips, moaning*], what just happened almost took the life out of me. I will never leave the noble order *de los caballeros andantes*. [*With pride*] Defending damsels, protecting widows, and assisting orphans and other poor, unfortunate, suffering souls! [*To the audience*] Even if the Golden Age⁸ has already passed and only ashes from its previous splendor remain; even if we all feel today that we are about to surrender to the filthy crawls of these laden years which have resulted in my kidney pain and the pain I imagine that you carry in some part of your body or mind, a pain that certainly torments; even if all the vulgarity and prejudices that move freely around the world—the work of knights errant needs to be preserved at all costs. That’s why, in addition to me, who gracefully resists all attacks on destiny, I want to loudly praise other *caballeros* who have, valiantly, kept the flame of dignity and ethics alive.

DON QUIXOTE is completely dressed now, and he naturally looks quite bizarre. Vibrant Spanish music plays in the background. Quixote stands in front of the audience, lifts his sword, and salutes them. He can even ask for the audience’s applause.

QUIXOTE – *Viva* the brave Amadis de Gaula, who never gave up the ghost! Long live the valiant Felismarte de Mircania,⁹ who never spent gunpowder in chimango! Long live the never sufficiently eulogized Tirante, the White, eternally confrontational! And long live also Don Belianis, from Greece! And all the others that I have

⁸ Idade do Chumbo in the original may also refer to the most repressive years of the military dictatorship (1968–1972), often referred to as “anos de chumbo.”

⁹ Caio Fernando Abreu slightly alters the name here. In Cervantes’ original text the term is “Hircania.” Caio changes this name which might refer to “myrcene” and hence cannabis.

perhaps forgotten, not because of contempt, but more so because my departure is imminent and your patience is growing thin.

SCENE 8

Where the baptism of the old nag ultimately known as the Scrawny Rocket Rocinante is narrated nobly and with grace.

QUIXOTE picks up the broom that MIGUEL brought in with his other purchases. With choreographic ritual, he treats it with incredible care. He holds the ribbons as if they were a harness; a feather boa becomes the horse's mane. He improvises and makes the cushion a saddle. He does all this while speaking.

QUIXOTE [*Speaking to the broom*]*—I will call you Pegasus just like the hero Bellerophon's winged steed, born from the severed throat of the dreadful Gorgon. Or perhaps Bucephalus as a tribute to Alexander the Great's stallion. But I'll let you in on a secret. Keep it between you and me. We can't have the riff-raff listening. In my opinion you belong to a lineage far greater than the two I just mentioned. For although you do not have wings nor a mythical birth, you are valiant and as swift as the wind that shakes the olive treetops. We were made for each other, and, like a centaur, one creature we will be. Your name will go down in history, my friend, and that name, forever immortal, needs to be worthy, sonorous, and glorious. A name that dignifies you and me, and on whose back I will ride, page by page, across roads and centuries, centuries, amen. By the blood spilled from the brave fallen in battle, my nag awash in dew, I baptize you Rocinante in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, amen again.*

QUIXOTE ceremoniously makes a cross over the dressed-up broom. Then he mounts the broom in reverse—that is, with the straw in front of his face, making a sort of horse's head—and starts to trot slowly in place.

QUIXOTE – Trot, trot, trot. Rocinante, Rocinante. Don't you love your marvelous sounding name? Don't you see how well it suits you? [*Changing tone*] Enough pleasantries now. Let's go: off to confront dark giants and evil sorcerers. Let's go: to rescue captive white maidens. Let's go: to pluck hateful tyrants from their sordid thrones made of blood. Charge, brave Rocinante, for life is short and the road ahead long.

SCENE 9

How the idolized figure of Dulcinea del Toboso, the beloved of our excitable character, arrives into the narrative.

The Spanish melody is even louder, more vibrant. Mounted on the broom, aka Rocinante, Quixote rides wildly across the stage, crying out, darting about in madness. During his ride he knocks over various objects, screaming, with his sword raised. Slight confusion. The music then quiets as he suddenly stops in front of the seamstress's dummy.

QUIXOTE – Hold your horses, Rocinante my Magnificent. It's not my tendency to leave without first saying goodbye, with a deep attention to detail, that which determines the deepest motivation for my actions. Faced before this divine apparition—waving at me, see that?—as if it were human, the cambric of her white tear-laden handkerchief. It would be disrespectful to address her mounted on the back of the likes of you. Stop here, you beast, I'm shaking. [*Looking at the seamstress's dummy with intense emotion*] Dulcinea! Dulcinea del Toboso! My damselle!

SCENE 10

Where we deal with the sudden and unexpected emergence of the unfortunate Miguel Quesada who exposes his frustrated loves.

Dismounting Rocinante, QUIXOTE gets tangled up in the ribbons, in the ornaments, and takes a nasty fall. Distraught and still on the ground, for a moment he slips back into the character MIGUEL, also somewhat influenced by the language of QUIXOTE.

MIGUEL [*To the dummy*] – You were the only person who could have contributed some color to my life in sepia. I never dared to say anything, Caroline. You were far away, so loyal to your husband, to your boys, to your banal and squeaky-clean existence playing the honest woman. You never dared to think of me as a lover. Me, the invisible man, with no grace, not born like this. [*With bitter irony*] A fellow worker. . . Good morning-good evening-how was your weekend-want some coffee-happy birthday-please-thank you so much. Amiable, sociable, expendable. How terrible and lovely to meet you every morning all those days over all those years, Caroline. [*Tragically*] Woe is me, my platonic and pathetic self. [*With much suffering he musters some verses by Fernando Pessoa/Álvaro de Campos, with a slight Peninsular accent.*]¹⁰ “I will always be the one who waited for you to open the door at the precipice of a wall with no threshold,
And sing the infinite song of capoeira,
In a covered well and hear the voice of God.”

Suddenly MIGUEL collects himself. He puts on a very colorful Spanish shawl. He kisses it and places it against his heart. MIGUEL places the shawl on the shoulders of the dummy. Where the head should be he places a red rose.

MIGUEL – I adorn your naked shoulders, Caroline, so that the night shall do no more damage. And because I know it’s useless, like a sad crow I say goodbye. Never again. . . never again. . . never again.

MIGUEL continues to repeat “never again” as he turns to mount Rocinante. He then transforms back into QUIXOTE.

¹⁰ In the original text the accent is specifically European Portuguese, but for this translation we needed something more territorially capacious.

He then takes a deep, solemn, and loving bow to the mannequin/Dulcinea.

QUIXOTE – I promise to return milady. Balm of my soul, my mischievous guardian angel, my bird's wing of a wounded heart. From the four corners of our vast Spain, I swear to sanctify your name, Dulcinea del Toboso.

Intense Spanish music plays. QUIXOTE nudges Rocinante and leaves the scene in a gallop. For a moment the stage is naked. The light above the globe remains, as well as on the recliner and on the mannequin cloaked in a Spanish shawl, everything a bit unreal.

SCENE 11

How Quixote is looking to be consecrated as a knight and other mundane events.

One of the side curtains lifts. Still trotting on Rocinante, QUIXOTE enters. In his mind, he is going to a castle's courtyard. He greets everyone in a kind and affable manner, sometimes using expressions in Spanish.

QUIXOTE – Good morning, toiling villagers. Hello, beautiful ladies. Greetings, ladies and gentlemen of this charming town. [Stopping to talk to someone] Sorry to bother you, young man, but could you please show me where to find the steward of this remarkable property? Of course, I can. And what is his name? Don Giraldo de Villacañas. ¡Qué guapo! What? At the Inn of the Wild Boars? There must be a mistake. Don Giraldo doesn't spend his time resting on his cushions, enclosed by courtesans. No, no. It's not that I am doubting your words, my charcoaled chap. Muchas gracias. ¡Vale!

QUIXOTE leaves trotting after saying goodbye very politely. He is laughing to himself, happy. He goes around the stage greeting constantly as he wonders.

QUIXOTE – Actually, that’s right! That Don Giraldo must, after all, have his weaknesses. [*Changing the tone*] How are you, Doña Rosita? Still single? [*Aside*] Such a queen! [*Pensive*] As commoners say, Don Giraldo must enjoy drinking left and right. [*Changing the tone*] ¡Buenos días, Bigas Luna! [*Aside*] Such a pervert! [*Pensive*] And on top of that, as the competent administrator he seems to be, he must enjoy a more intimate connection with the people. Nothing more laudable, nothing more political. [*Spurring Rocinante*] And it is still possible. It is possible to find him at the inn, as that chap mentioned.

QUIXOTE “parks” Rocinante, dismounts, and makes a gesture as he enters the Inn of the Wild Boars. In the background, the prerecorded noise of people laughing, fragments of conversations, glasses clinking, loud music, shouts. QUIXOTE asks for permission as he moves through.

QUIXOTE – [*With an As-salamu alaykum*] Noble Castilian Don Giraldo de Villacañas, let me introduce myself. I am the future legend, Don Quixote of La Mancha. . .

SCENE 12

Where we deal with the unexpected and inopportune emergence of the disturbed Man of La Mancha, still with his obsession.

The canned noises stop completely. The MAN OF LA MANCHA returns to the word “stain,” of course. The MAN starts looking around.

MAN – Excuse me? *La mancha*. . . it must be around here somewhere. Can you please get up? Thank you. Sir, you wouldn't have by any chance come across a stain somewhere here. . . No, not like that. No, much larger, and not so dark either. A transparent stain. What's that? [*Louder*] No, no dear, no. Cheaper. Meaning, not so precious. TRANS-parent, I said. It's just a stain. Come again? It's just that without it I'm nobody, *chica*. I live nowhere. Unhoused? No, no I don't know what that means. I'm loose with space, do you get it? [*Agitated*] Damn-it, I have to find this shit stain! Do you understand what I'm saying?

The MAN stops and looks around. There is absolute silence. In just seconds the MAN transforms into the ACTOR. And the ACTOR, panicked, looks at the audience, as if he went blank and forgot the lines.

ACTOR – . . . What am I saying. . . [*Louder*] Saying. . . I was saying. . . [*Disguised, snapping their fingers, aside*] Leave it, goddamnit!

[End of the translation. These are 13 scenes of a 28-scene play.]