Dale Wasserman, Joe Darion, & Mitch Leigh's

MAN OF LA MANCHA

Burning Coal Theatre Company
February 2012 Production
Directed by Tea Alagic

Dramaturg's Protocol
The Murphey School

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BEFOREWORD

Behold, from out of the west thunders the great warhorse, Man of La Mancha! Ranging from cheers for the “Knight of the Woeful Countenance” to groans of “Really, again?” this is one piece that is both canonical in terms of dramatic literature and a box office success almost every time it is put staged. Perhaps only the Rocky Horror Show inspires more of this sort of reaction.

In an initial assessment, I have opened up the play as written by Wasserman, examined its relationship to the source material (Cervantes' novel), and taken a long-range critical view of the production history. Attached in the appendices are also some images that one may find useful and inspiring.

--Eric S. Kildow, Literary Managers & Dramaturgs of the Americas

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HISTORICAL, CULTURAL, AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

DON QUIXOTE

Written as a satire regarding the chivalric romances of the time, this book has done much to forward the modern novel and cement the modern Spanish language. It comes in two parts, with part one being the far more famous of the two and the second the more critically acclaimed and philosophically serious, particularly on the issue of deceit.

The story begins with a man, Alonso Quijana, who, though generally of sound mind and reason, has found a great deal of his time in his old age. He spends this time reading romances (the books on knightly chivalry that were popular at the time), which proceed to have an unfortunate effect on the old man. Though his wits in regard to everything aside from Chivalry remain intact, he begins to fully believe these works as completely true and conceives the strange project of becoming a knight errant and setting out in search of adventure. Pursuant to this, he changes his name to “Don Quixote de la Mancha,” dons a suit of old armor, renames his horse “Rocinante,” and designates a neighborhood farm girl, Aldonza Lorenzo, as his lady love, renaming her Dulcinea del Toboso (she knows nothing of this).

Setting out, he finds himself at an inn, which he sees as a castle. He asks the innkeeper to dub him a knight and, while keeping vigil over his armor, gets into an altercation with some muleteers who try to remove the armor from the water trough in order to water their mules. The innkeeper dubs him in order to get him to leave. After a run in with traders from Toledo, the unconscious Don Quixote is returned home by a neighboring peasant, Pedro Crespo.

As the Don's family burns his library of books and pass the activity off on an evil enchanter, Quixote himself recruits Sancho Panza as his squire. They sneak off at dawn and it is at this point that the most famous incidents of the book (including the iconic tilting at windmills) begin. Encountering everyone from goatherds and prostitutes to innkeepers, with the Don's imagination expanding the encounters into chivalrous quests. The Don's tendency too respond with violence in things that do not concern him lead to the majority of the issues. Eventually, he is convinced to return to his home
village, with hints that there was a third quest for the Don but that records have been lost.

Part two of the novel begins with a Duke and Duchess deceiving the Don for their entertainment. The issue of deception plays throughout the second novel, with even Sancho deceiving the Don at points. This portion is far more serious in tone and philosophical in nature. Eventually (in the only episode closely mirroring anything in *Man of La Mancha*), the Don faces the “Knight of the Moons.” Being defeated in combat, he is forced to lay down his arms and return home for one year. During this time his madness is cured and, despite Sancho's best attempts, the Don declines to death. On his deathbed, he edits his will to leave his estate to his niece, with the caveat that she be disinherited should she marry a man who reads books of chivalry.

Thus ends the novel *Don Quixote*, which was, as is mentioned above, written in order to satirize and ridicule notions of chivalry and idealism which were rampant at the time.

**CHIVALRY**

The code of chivalrous behavior popular in medieval Romances of the time were the fodder which Cervantes sought to lampoon. They comprise three very basic areas.

- **Duties to countrymen and fellow Christians:** this contains virtues such as mercy, courage, valor, fairness, protection of the weak and the poor, and in the servant-hood of the knight to his lord. This also brings with it the idea of being willing to give one’s life for another’s; whether he would be giving his life for a poor man or his lord.

- **Duties to God:** this would contain being faithful to God, protecting the innocent, being faithful to the church, being the champion of good against evil, being generous and obeying God above the feudal lord.

- **Duties to women:** this is probably the most familiar aspect of chivalry. This would contain what is often called courtly love, the idea that the knight is to serve a lady, and after her all other ladies. Most especially in this category is a general gentleness and graciousness to all women.

Part of the ridiculousness of the Don's adventures is that he clings to these beliefs despite their decline over time. Further, though the knight is bound to serve all women, the Don raises even tavern wenches to the status of ladies, which is part of Quixote's charm in *Man of La Mancha* that he lacks in the novel by Cervantes.
The institution which our protagonist Cervantes faces, the Inquisition, is perhaps one of the most fearsome institutions in Christian history. And the fact that he is to appear before an ecclesiastical court, as opposed to a secular one, means that his situation is quite dire.

Founded in 1480 by “the Catholic Monarchs,” Ferdinand of Castile and Isabella of Aragon, The Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Spain was originally established to ensure the orthodoxy of Spain's large population of converted Jews and Muslims. However, over time, the operations the tribunal opened it up to abuse.

The operation of the Inquisition traces the following path. A quick examination of the offices will show the desperate situation in which Cervantes finds himself.

1. **Accusation**- Though Pope Sixtus IV issued a bull calling for Due process, this was largely ignored as the tribunal was controlled by the crown, not the papacy. The tribunal would issue edicts of grace, which called for those who felt the need to confess their sins in exchange for non-punitive reconciliation with the faith. As a gesture of their orthodoxy and willingness to cooperate with Inquisition authorities, penitents were encouraged to denounce those whom they felt to be of imperfect orthodoxy. It is this, which came to be used to settle grudges and eliminate competitors that really caused the advent of systemic abuse.

2. **Detention**- Upon denunciation, the accused would be detained in preventative custody while the ecclesiastical court examined the case for heresy. Lengthy incarcerations were common, sometimes up to two years, and at certain points of the Inquisition's history, the accused was required to pay for their own upkeep within the prison as well as procedural costs. This cost was assessed regardless of the verdict and often before formal charges were read before the court. Given Cervantes' tenuous fiscal status at this time, one can see how even a simple accusation could be ruinous.

3. **Trial**- This would consist of a series of hearings before the clergy. The accused would be given counsel by a member of the tribunal, but this usually amounted to nothing more than encouragement to tell the truth. The accused could reach acquittal either by demonstrating their own good reputation via witnesses, or casting the trustworthiness of the accuser into doubt.

4. **Torture**- This term is almost synonymous with the institution of the Holy Office. However, torture was never used as a punishment, but instead as a means to extract a confession from
convicted individuals. The need for confession following conviction falls in with church dogma that the confession of sin is necessary if absolution is to be achieved, and reconciliation with the Church was considered to be the highest purpose of the Inquisition in Spain.

5. **Sentencing** - This would be carried out following conviction and confession. Penalties could range from confiscation of property to public penance. The most famous sentence, burning at the stake, was reserved for unrepentant heretics.

6. **Auto da fe** - This is the public spectacle where the penalties would be carried out. Beginning with a procession of the accused and reading of all charges, public penances would be served and the event end with the accused reconciled with the church and receiving the apostolic benediction. Heretics were handed over to civil authorities to be burnt at the stake, an event which was not considered part of the auto da fe, as the Holy Office was permitted neither to kill nor to draw blood. The difference, to the condemned, was largely semantic.

**QUIXOTIC**

The adjective inspired by our mad Don has a number of laudable traits, such as visionary, that are in line with the intentions of Wasserman. Cervantes/Quixote is someone to be respected, or at least admired.

**THE 1960's**

The cultural decade of the 1960's begins, in reality, in 1963 and ends in 1974. *Man of La Mancha* ran for the majority of this, from 1965-1971 and then again in 1972 on Broadway. And though it is stylistically unique in terms of the pared-down approach to the production, it is very much a show informed by the sensibility of 1960's America.

Some cultural theorists have identified this cultural decade as a nightmare cycle in terms of Jungian psychological theory. A repressive culture, unable to reconcile its own standards with the demands of personal freedom, breaks social constraints through extreme deviation from the norm. That Don Quixote was found to be a laudable example, as a man who could not stand the world as he saw it and simply wandered off into his own, makes perfect sense in this case. The United States, facing disorder within its own borders in the struggles of the Civil Rights
Miguel De Cervantes- was a playwright, but is better known for his far more substantial offering *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*, which did much to create the modern novel. Considered one of the “Princes of Wits,” his standing in Spanish literature is not unlike that of William Shakespeare in the English. Which isn't too bad for the son of a surgeon. Rodrigo de Cervantes was not a medical doctor, and at this time a surgeon was a lesser medical practitioner, not unlike a barber. Miguel enlisted in the Naval Infantry in 1570, when he would remain until being captured by Algerian corsairs in 1575. He would eventually be ransomed by his parents and the Trinitarians. It would take five years and four unsuccessful escape attempts to get him home from Algiers. However, the material from this time would make its way into several of his works.

From this point until 1597, he would work as a purveyor for the Spanish Armada as well as a tax collector. However, discrepancies in his accounting would land him in the crown jail of Seville. He would be imprisoned again in 1602. And if we are to take a comment from the novel literally, the first part of the novel was conceived in the prison of Argamasilla de Alba in La Mancha. The great idea was to give literary picture to real life and manners, intruding everyday speech into the literary realm. He also sought to satirize the romance and chivalry of the novels the Don so loves, which were also popular among the general population for well over a century. The majority of the episodes used in *Man of La Mancha* come from the first volume.

Other works, begun once the commercial success of the first part of *Don Quixote* allowed him the financial security to focus on writing, include *Exemplary Novels*, *Viaje el Parnaso*, and *Los Trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*. He would not finish the latter work. *Quixote* would be so popular as to spawn a spurious second part by a figure calling himself Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda. Cervantes' own second portion would not appear until 1615, but was more than sufficient to afford him full financial security for the remainder of his active life.

Born in Autumn of 1547 in Alcala de Henares, Castile. He died 23 April, 1616 (the same date as William Shakespeare, but not the same day... as Spain used the Gregorian Calendar and England the Julian), which was later declared by UNESCO to be the International Day of the Book.
Dale Wasserman- Mr. Wasserman is perhaps a classic example of the self-made man, having gone from orphaned hobo to Honorary Doctorate in 53 years and 440 yards (When he was awarded his honorary doctorate to the University of Wisconsin, Madison, this location was only about a quarter-mile from the place he first hopped a train at 12 years of age).

Having but one year of high school in Los Angeles, Wasserman began working in the theatre at age 19 with impresario Sol Hurok as a self-taught lighting designer. After his rise to Broadway director, he stormed out of an unnamed production saying he “couldn't possibly write worse stuff than [he] was directing.” And thus he left the interpretive occupations to become a writer.

Wasserman's first offering, Elisha and the Long Knives, was a teleplay produced by Matinee Theatre, which received a collective Emmy. Indeed, the original root of Man of La Mancha was a teleplay which is erroneously called an adaptation of Don Quixote, but instead used episodes from the novel to illuminate Cervantes' life. This work would eventually undergo metamorphosis, run for Broadway for over 5 years, and become the warhorse we at Burning Coal are producing. He also adapted Ken Kesey's novel One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest for the stage, which enjoyed a six year engagement in San Francisco.

Recent research by Howard Mancing, Cervantes scholar at Purdue, has found earlier uses of some of Man of La Mancha's most famous lines. Both “To each his Dulcinea,” and “To dream the impossible dream, to fight the unbeatable foe” came from the script and publicity materials for a 1908 adaptation of Don Quixote by American playwright Paul Kester.

He was born 2 November 1914 in Rhinelander, WI. He died 21 December 2008 in Arizona (having moved there because it was one of the few states to refuse to adopt Daylight Savings Time), leaving a substantial body of work unproduced (including Players in the Game, set in 1316 Prague).

Mitch Leigh- Mr. Leigh was born Irwin Michnick and earned both Bachelor and Masters in Music from Yale University. He began his career as a jazz musician, writing jingles for television and radio in order to make ends meet.

One of his first major projects was Man of La Mancha, and he spent much of the remainder of his life and career trying to match that initial accomplishment. His 1966 production of Chu Chem closed on the road and was not seen on Broadway until 1989, when it rane for 68 performances. His 1970 production of Cry for Us All ran for 9, 1976 production of Home Sweet Homer (starring Yul Brynner) opened and closed on the same night, and 1979's Sarava ran for 101 performances. He would not reenter award contention until the iconic 1985 revival of The King and I (also
starring Brynner). For many of these projects, Leigh also functioned as producer, and directed the Brynner-driven revival.

Mr. Leigh seems to be doing ok financially, however, as in 1977 he established the Keith Wilson scholarship at Yale and had a building named for him at that same institution in 2001.

He was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1928. He is still alive.

Joe Darion—Though he is primarily known for his work on Man of La Mancha, Darion also penned a number of Top Ten hits in the 1950's. His contributions to the theatre include Illya, Darling and Better than Wine. He also wrote the librettos of the jazz operas Archy and Mehitabel. His most frequent collaborator was Ezra Laderman, who he also worked with on the oratorio Galileo Galilei and the cantatas A Mass for Cain and A Handful of Souls.

Aside from his work with Man of La Mancha, Mr. Darion seems obscure enough that photographs are often wrongly attributed to him. Several pictures I found in the course of my research are captioned with the claim that they depict Joe Darion, yet the picture is unmistakeably of Richard Kiley, who originated the role of Cervantes/Quixote.

CRITICAL & PRODUCTION HISTORY

In examining the critics' response throughout the history of this production, one stumbles upon a clear continuum ranging from initial response to "And here we go again." We must keep in mind that this is a musical that has had no fewer than five Broadway revivals (Richard Kiley, the originator of Cervantes/Quixote, starred in two of them) and is, as claimed by Wasserman in his book "The Impossible Musical," the most produced musical in American history. This leads to a certain level of accretion and solidification, much of which is evident in the critical record.

Much criticism centers around the question of "how it should be done." The "New York Times" 1984 review of the Darien Dinner Theatre production pointed out that a staircase which descended from the side was not nearly as impressive as the one that "should be lowered stage center" while lauding the retention of the dancing horse staging device (Klein). Aside from Mr. Klein's 1984 review, much criticism regarding the show circles around perennial issues or "rules of thumb" that seem to cling to the production like barnacles. Ben Brantley, on the 2002 production at the Martin Beck, referenced Richard Kiley's lasting impact on the production and points to the very predictability of Brian Stokes Mitchell's attempt to bring the house down with "Impossible Dream." Leah Frank, also in the "Times," points to this precise moment as well in the Darien Dinner Theatre's 1991 production and the 1992 Broadway revival starring Raul Julia was equated to a museum piece.

However, this can be expected from a musical such as "Man of La Mancha." Indeed, its exceptionality is also noted by a number of those same critics. A number of critics note how unlike other works of the time it was, and Mel Gussow hearkens back to a post-Camelot idea of uplift and a major challenge to the conventions of the American musical. Sylviane Gold, writing of the 2007 production at the Long Wharf Theatre, charts its unheralded arrival to warhorse status in the very teeth of opposition. Wasserman, in his introduction to the 1968 Dell paperback edition, notes that tickets to the original production slowly but steadily became status symbols. It is a piece that, stylistically, came across as unique and seemed to be just the ticket for its time, as the American people sickened of the Vietnam conflict and feelings of political impotence at home, it is tempting to follow the Knight of the Woeful Countenance and wander out of a world found distasteful. Which begs the question of whether or not its continued popularity is a reflection of continued discontent in our modern times, a question critic Anita Gates asks of the 2007 White Plains production and was actually one of the motivating factors of the 2007 Long Wharf production mentioned above. Said production even brought into play first person descriptions of life in the Hanoi Hilton and Gitmo.

However, despite this exceptionality, other critics do remind us that "Man of La Mancha" is not without its place in the overall dramatic
world. "Mame," "Oliver!," and "Sweet Charity," all boasted unconventional heroes and were a part of the same season as the original production. The Don/Cervantes finds himself in the midst of starving yet cheerful orphans and sex workers, just to name a few. Further, it helped to set the stage for the concept musical, and "Cabaret" would follow the next year. It is this status as "concept musical" that can be a vital part that is easily missed. Wasserman himself asserts that this is not a retelling of "Don Quixote," the novel by Cervantes, but a story about Cervantes himself in which he tells the story of his erring knight errant. This play within a play structure is called clunky by Naomi Siegel for the 2008 John W. Engeman Theater production, but she also acknowledges its ability to engage both the actors and audience in the creative process, resulting in a powerful experience. Others laud this "poor theatre/DoItYourself" feel as particularly engaging and refreshing. Though it should be noted that Frank Rizzo, writing for "Variety" on the 2007 Long Wharf production, states that the concept may overwhelm the production, making it feel more akin to a production of "Marat/Sade."

Structurally acknowledged to be grouped around the big anthem numbers, even successful productions of "Man of La Mancha" find themselves limping along from number to number. Anita Gates, writing for the "New York Times" even goes so far as to state, "And it is an undeniable fact... that if the star does even a passable job of the show's anthem, 'The Impossible Dream,' the evening is worth any reasonable price of admission." This is echoed in "Variety's" review of the 2002 Brian Stokes Mitchell production.

It is difficult to track the history of Man of La Mancha outside of the sphere of New York and its environs due to the slapdash nature of American theatrical criticism. Searches of Raleigh, Atlanta, and Charlotte newspapers turn up little if any usable material (if they mention productions outside of the realm of simple calendar announcements) while Boston and Chicago newspapers tend to bear reviews of the Broadway productions already discussed in the New York Times. Richard Dyer of the Boston Globe does mention, in regards to the 1978 Boston production that the standing ovation may as well be written into the script of Man of La Mancha "because it happens every night, with every man of La Mancha[sic], in every part of the world.” So there is applause for the production, if a certain assumption that it is impossible to screw up. However, Kevin Kelly, of the same publication, in regards to the 1992 production, rails against the popular appeal of this piece, asserting that the piece cheapens Cervantes and chops Don Quixote into a comic book, and lacks originality, wit, discretion, taste, sensitivity, or intelligence. So evidently, not everybody is a fan of the musical, and, at least critically, popularity is not a measure of true success or artistic merit as some may have it.

In final assessment, this is a piece that should be approached carefully. It is not a retelling of Don Quixote, and to treat it as such would be to miss the point entirely. Wasserman, along with the
structure of the play itself, casts not the Don as the main character, but a fictionalized Cervantes. Thus, we find a strong impulse towards the metatheatrical in the criticism. However, it is difficult to find anything fresh without alienating those (and there are many) who feel they know how it "should" be done. *Man of La Mancha*, like many war horses, have accreted a patina so that certain aspects of the production are as unalterable as the script. Thus, one is caught between the rock of "Oh no, not again." and the hard place of "But that's not how it goes." The secret may be in simple energy, goodwill, and drawing the audience into the environment and making them feel like they're the ones watching Cervantes spin his yarn.
To begin, and this cannot be made clear enough, *Man of La Mancha* is not a retelling of Miguel de Cervantes *Don Quixote*. Wasserman did not consider it to be so, and, structurally speaking, as well as in matters of tone, *Man of La Mancha* bear little more than passing resemblance to the novel written by Miguel Cervantes. There is a hopeful note in *La Mancha* that is not found in *Don Quixote*, and Wasserman's claims to have espied it are delusional at best and dishonest at worst. Put simply, one should remember that the main character's name: Quixote, is very similar to the Catalan “cuixot.” Indeed, the transition from Catalan to Castillian is fairly clear in this case. The word means “thighs” and was a common colloquial reference to a horse's ass.

However, this is not to say that the piece is doomed due to lack of fidelity to the intention of the source material. After all, this would doom figures as diverse as Shakespeare and Ionesco. We should remember that if Don Quixote was Cervantes' *Man of La Mancha*, Cervantes is Wasserman's. The historical Cervantes rose above slavery, penury, and prison to write one of the greatest novels in the Western world, and as such, it seems entirely possible that he should call us to “Reach the unreachable star.” When times get tight and disillusionment runs high, *Man of La Mancha* comes back around again to give us another shot in the arm.

However, this level of popularity comes with a price. The show is heavily encumbered by its production history, as well as the accreted habits and expectations of the Broadway revivals. Like many canonical warhorses, there are strong opinions regarding the “right” and “wrong” way to do things. Depending on the nature of Burning Coal's audience (ie: age, theatrical sensibility, geographical preference), the imposition of a style or concept could be problematic, and may not work to serve the text regardless. The event is inherently metatheatrical, and as mentioned above, the utilization of Burning Coal's intimate space, along with and energetic goodwill will be our key to carrying the day.

Musically speaking, we may take some inspiration from the jingle-like quality to the music. Aside from some of the big anthems, there is a solo/chorus, point/counterpoint/resolution structure (particularly in

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pieces like “A Little Gossip,” “I'm Only Thinking of Him,” and “I Like Him”) that are highly similar to commercial jingles of the 50's and 60's. Given Mitch Leigh's background, this is not only natural, but can be used to our advantage, turning songs into earworms that stick with our audience and leave them humming into the parking lot.

*Man of La Mancha* is a warhorse. Deservedly so. However, producing such a work is far from foolproof, and some of our biggest challenges are going to come from meeting the desires and expectations of the audience while satisfying our own desires for artistic credibility and innovation. The original source material is not the issue, as most Americans who know the story of Don Quixote have never read the book, and the relatively bleak closing chapters of part two are largely a nonissue.

In initial assessment, an examination of our audience, as well as an attempt to create the most immersive experience possible without venturing into the realm of Artaud holds the key to unlocking a piece like *Man of La Mancha*. 
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SUPPORT & SUPPLEMENTAL WORKS


Hoffman, Michelle. "Dale Wasserman, 94, creator of 'Man of La Mancha'", The Arizona Republic, December 27, 2008

Suskin, Steven."Mitch Leigh's Cry For Us All Comes to CD, Plus Kitty's Kisses", playbill.com, October 25, 2009.


La lengua de Cervantes. Ministerio de la Presidencia de España.

de Armas, F.A. Cervantes and the Italian Renaissance.


Cruz, Anne J. & Carroll B. Johnson. Cervantes and His Postmodern Constituencies.


(I also made extensive use of newspaper archives in researching the critical history: New York Times, Boston Globe, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Chicago Sun, Raleigh News & Observer, Charlotte Observer, and Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Should you desire to see the gathered material, please let me know and I call pull up my archived notes.)
APPENDICES

I enclose the following material for you inspiration, edification, and entertainment.
I'm all for green energy, but those turbines creep me out. They remind me of War of the Worlds, or the Tripod Books.

They are unnerving. I can't shake the feeling that at any moment they'll—

CRACK

BOOM

CRACK

BOOM

OH NO. Al Gore, you've doomed us all.

It's coming this way!

Run!

What now? Someone has to stop them.

But who could—

Stand aside!
On the eve of his knighthood, the Don performs a vigil in the tower (18, 21).