

Among the ailments that arise in the course of Cervantes' epic are the following:

Syphilis: "He forgot to tell us who was the first man who ever had catarrh and who was the first to use ointment to cure himself of the French pox" (part 2, ch. 22). In Cervantes' day, syphilis was called "the French disease" in Spain and "the Spanish disease" in France; in Italy, it was known as both.

Leprosy: "By God," said Sancho, "but your worship got me a nice fellow as a witness of what you say, this gaffer with his whorish amputation or I know not what" (part 2, ch. 29). Cervantes' word here was "gafo," which originates from "gafeded," the Spanish word used to describe involvement of the hands in leprosy.

Trichofolliculoma: "I never noticed her ugliness but only her beauty, which was enhanced in value by a mole that she had above her right lip, like a moustache with seven or eight red hairs like threads of gold and more than a span in length." (part 2, ch. 29)

Acute gastroenteritis: "[T] he poor squire discharged so swiftly and copiously at both ends that neither the rush mat on which he had thrown himself nor the blanket with which he covered himself were of the slightest use to him. He sweated and sweated in such a paroxysm of strains and stresses that not only himself but all present thought he was on the verge of death." (part 1, ch. 17)

Hirsutism: "I shall speak without tears — where, I ask you, can a duenna go with a beard? What mother or father will take pity on her? Who will give her aid? And even when she has a soft skin and tortures her face with a thousand sorts of lotions and cosmetics, she can scarcely find anyone to like her, what is she to do when she discloses a face like a jungle?" (part 2, ch. 10)

Rhinophyma: "But hardly had the light of the day allowed things to be seen and distinguished, when the first object that Sancho Panza caught sight of was the squire of the Wood's nose, which was so big that it almost overshadowed his whole body. It is said, indeed, that it was of huge

size, hooked in the middle, all covered with warts, and of a mulberry color like an eggplant, and that it hung down two fingers' length below his mouth." (part 2, ch. 14)⁵

Somatization: "A physician was sent for, who, after feeling his pulse, took a rather gloomy view of the case and told him that he should provide for his soul's health, for that of his body was in dangerous condition." "The physician was of the opinion that melancholy and mortification had brought him to death's door." (part 2, ch. 74)

Of course, Cervantes' medical descriptions are simply a part of the variegated background of 16th-century Spain against which his story flows. The character of Don Quixote represents an idealized and fictional world (with clear psychotic features); Sancho Panza, representing the natural world of biological existence, is a sobering exemplar of normality. These ironies challenge readers, medical or otherwise, to ask themselves to discern the differences between the fiction and the reality of experience itself.

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Home Reme-

Patching things up

I was sitting behind the desk at a nursing station the other day writing up charts when a man approached a nurse at the other end of the desk. It seemed that an elderly relative had just been admitted and the man was bringing in the old fellow's medications, one of which was a patch that he applied every day "for his heart." The relative had brought the patch but could not find the package. No one could recognize the patch, however, and finally they asked me if I knew what it was. They were rubbery, orange patches with a black centre on a foil sheet. They didn't look like any nitroglycerine patch I had ever seen. But, thanks to a yard full of hawthorne bushes I had no trouble identifying them as patches for bicycle tires. I wonder whether hardware-store medicine will one day be recognized as a form of alternative therapy. I remember the original copper bracelets made from pipe strapping, and the local widespread use of WD 40 for arthritis. More Home Hardware remedies than home remedies, and apparently they don't cause headaches! — Dr. John McCleave, Rexton, NB