

COYPEL'S
Don Quixote Tapestries

ILLUSTRATING A SPANISH NOVEL IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
FRANCE





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TAPESTRIES

*Illustrating a Spanish Novel
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CHARLOTTE VIGNON
With a Foreword by Edith Grossman

THE FRICK COLLECTION
New York



Weaver Working at a Tapestry on a High-warp Loom at the Gobelins Manufactory. Plate 9 of *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* . . . (Paris 1771)

The Enduring Success of Charles Coypel's *Story of Don Quixote*



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. . . . [He] spent his times of leisure—which meant most of the year—reading books of chivalry with so much devotion and enthusiasm that he forgot almost completely about the hunt and even about the administration of his estate. . . . In short, our gentleman became so caught up in reading that he spent his nights from dusk till dawn and his days reading from sunrise to sunset, and so with too little sleep and too much reading his brains dried up, causing him to lose his mind.

—Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*

ACCORDING TO Voltaire, the success of the Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory lay in its tapestry designers. In his *Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751), he wrote: “The finest painters directed the work, which was executed either from their designs or copies from those of the old Italian masters.”¹ Between 1663, when the manufactory was established, and 1690, the royal painter Charles Le Brun (1619–1690) served as the director and chief designer. Under his supervision—and in collaboration with Louis XIV’s powerful minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert—weavers, painters, sculptors, cabinetmakers, and gold- and silversmiths produced sumptuous furnishings for the king’s residences and lavish diplomatic gifts that spread his glory to foreign courts (fig. 1). In the early years of the manufactory, the tapestry iconography was determined by Le Brun and Colbert along with members of the *Petite Académie* (later the *Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*), a group of scholars selected by Colbert to promote

Charles Coypel

Asleep, Don Quixote Fights the Wineskins

1716

Oil on canvas

48 x 50³/₈ in. (122 x 128 cm)

Palais Impérial de Compiègne; long-term loan from the Musée du Louvre, Paris (3560)

PROVENANCE: Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory, from 1716 to 1823. Musée du Louvre, from 1823 to 1832. Château de Compiègne, from 1832 to 1846. Musée du Louvre, from 1846 to 1849. Château de Compiègne, from 1849 to 1939. Chambord, between 1939 and 1946. Château de Compiègne, from 1946 (except when restored at the Musée du Louvre between 1977 and 1981).³

And then he [the innkeeper] hurried into the room, and all the rest followed him, and they discovered Don Quixote in the strangest outfit in the world. He was in his shirt, which was not long enough to cover his thighs completely, and in back it was shorter by a span of six fingers; his legs were very long and thin, hairy, and not particularly clean; on his head he wore a red, greasy nightcap that belonged to the innkeeper; . . . in his right hand he held his unsheathed sword and was slashing with it in all directions and shouting as if he really were fighting a giant. Best of all, his eyes were not open because he was sleeping and dreaming that he was doing battle with the giant, for his imagination of the adventure he was about to undertake was so intense that it made him dream that he had already come to the kingdom of Micomicón and was already engaged in combat with his enemy. He had slashed the wineskins so many times with his sword, thinking he was slashing the giant, that the entire room was covered in wine. When he saw this, the innkeeper became so enraged that he threw himself on Don Quixote and began to give him so many blows with his fists that if Cardenio and the priest had not pulled him off, he alone would have ended the conflict with the giant; with it all, the poor knight did not awaken until the barber brought a large pot of cold water from the well and threw it at him all at once, which roused Don Quixote, but not enough for him to realize what he was doing.

—*Don Quixote* (part 1, chap. 35, p. 306)



Workshop of Peter van den Hecke (Flemish, 1680–1752)
after Philippe de Hondt (Flemish, 1683–1741)

*Arrival of the Shepherdesses at the Wedding of
Camacho*

1730–45 (before 1748)

Wool and silk

10 ft. 3 in. x 18 ft. 3 in. (313 x 555.2 cm)

Signed, lower right: P. VAN. DEN. HECKE [with both N's in reverse]

The Frick Collection, New York (1965.10.20)

PROVENANCE: French royal collection, Paris, recorded in 1749. Possibly collection of the Vicomte de Fontarce, Paris, ca. 1900. Hubert Mersmann, Los Martines, Granada, Spain. Henry Clay Frick, 1909. Childs Frick, Roslyn, New York. Bequeathed by him in 1965.⁴

“Long live Camacho and Quiteria! He’s as rich as she’s fair, and she’s the fairest in the world!”

• •

He [Don Quixote] also liked another group that came in, composed of beautiful young maidens, none younger than fourteen, none older than eighteen, all dressed in fine green cloth, their hair partly braided and partly hanging loose, and so blond it could compete with the rays of the sun; and in their hair they wore garlands made of jasmine, roses, amaranth, and honeysuckle. They were led by a venerable old man and an ancient matron, more agile and nimble than their years would lead one to expect. Their music was played by a Zamoran bagpipe, and the maidens, with modesty in their eyes and on their faces, and with agility in their feet, showed themselves to be the best dancers in the world.

—*Don Quixote* (part 2, chap. 20, p. 586)





Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory under the direction of Michel Audran and his son Jean Audran *fils*
 Main scene after Charles Coypel; alentour after Claude Audran III, Jean-Baptiste Belin de Fontenay *fils* , and Alexandre-François Desportes

Sancho Arrives on the Island of Barataria

1772

Wool and silk; modern cotton support straps and lining
 12 ft. 1 in. x 13 ft. 7 in. (368 x 414 cm)

Signed, lower right corner of field: AUDRAN; lower right corner of border: AUDRAN.G.1772

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (82.DD.68)

PROVENANCE: Given by Louis XVI on August 20, 1786 to Albert and Marie-Christine (sister of Queen Marie-Antoinette), Duke and Duchess of Saxe-Teschen and Joint Governors of the Austrian Netherlands. By descent to Karl Ludwig Johann Joseph Lorenz, Duke of Teschen, 1822. By descent to Albrecht Friedrich Rudolf, Duke of Teschen, 1847. By descent to Friedrich Maria Albrecht Wilhelm Karl, Duke of Teschen, Schloss Haltburn, Burgenland, Austria, 1895 (removed to London, 1936). Alice Bucher, Lucerne, Switzerland (offered for sale, Sotheby's, London, December 8, 1967, lot 1). Galerie Römer, Zurich, 1981. Sold Sotheby's, Monaco, June 14, 1982, lot 571. J. Paul Getty Museum, 1982.⁸

I say, then, that with all his retinue Sancho came to a village with some thousand inhabitants, which was one of the best owned by the duke. They gave him to understand that it was called the *Ínsula Barataria*, either because the village was named *Baratario* or because he had been given the governorship at so little cost. When they reached the gates, for it was a walled town, the village councilmen came out to receive him; the bells were rung, and all the inhabitants displayed general rejoicing, and with a good deal of pomp they brought him to the largest church to give their thanks to God, and then, in a ridiculous ceremony, they presented him with the keys to the village and accepted him as perpetual governor of the *Ínsula Barataria*.

The clothing, beard, plumpness, and short stature of the new governor surprised all the people who were not privy to the secret, and even all of the many people who were.

—*Don Quixote* (part 2, chap. 45, p. 747)

