

Anatomical Terminology in Don Quixote

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Rec date: Mar 15, 2016; Acc date: Mar 29, 2016; Pub date: Apr 06, 2016

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Keywords: Medical knowledge; Human body; Anatomy of Man; Don Quixote; Anatomical

Letter

The year 2016 marks the 400th anniversary of the death of Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616), author of *“Don Quixote”*. We pay homage to this brilliant writer analysing the anatomical terminology in his famous book.

In Cervantes day's anatomical medical knowledge have not been widespread and less among writers, but in *“The Ingenious Knight Don Quixote of La Mancha”* (1605) there are 154 words with anatomical significance that Cervantes put in the mouth of his characters. Which are the anatomical terms that appear more? Hand (305), eyes (287), face (153) and heart (141).

There are some factors that explain Cervantes' medical knowledge: many of Cervantes' friends were acclaimed physicians (such as Francisco Díaz and Antonio Ponce de Santa Cruz), he frequently visited the Hospital de Inocentes (a mental asylum in Seville) and he was born in a family of physicians (his sister was a nurse and his father was a surgeon-bleeder and) [1]. There is also evidence that he owned a private library with 214 volumes, including medical books. Were there medical books written by Spanish anatomists in his private library? Yes, it's possible.

The scientific Renaissance embraced by 16th century led to a greater awareness of the human body. The publication of *“De Humanis Corporis Fabrica”* (1542) by Vesalius (1514-1564) is considered as the beginning of modern anatomy, by breaking with the then current Galenic school [1]. Nine years after (1551) Bernardino Montaña de

Monserrate published *“Anatomy of Man”* the first book of anatomy written in the Spanish language [2], which meant that he had to create medical terms in general and anatomical terms in particular. The second book of anatomy published in Spanish was *“History of the Composition of the Human Body”* (1556) by Juan Valverde de Amusco (1525-1588) [2]. Most of the anatomical terms in *“The Ingenious Knight Don Quixote of La Mancha”* match with those used by the two first anatomists wrote in Spanish (Montaña and Valverde) [2,3].

In summary, Cervantes had anatomical medical knowledge widespread and he read the firsts books of anatomy written in the Spanish language, published in 1551 and 1556. We were to end with a sentence of Don Quixote: *“It is not given to complaining knight's errant”*.

Author's Contributions

Authors contributed to the writing and the follow up the case and read and agreed to the final version of this manuscript.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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