

Spain marks Quixote anniversary

Spain is celebrating the 400th anniversary of the publication of one of the world's most acclaimed literary works, Don Quixote.

The book - the most published and translated second only to the Bible - has been a bestseller since 1605.

Written by Miguel de Cervantes, it tells the story of a mad knight and his sidekick, Sancho Panza.

Several academics say they have now located Don Quixote's village, alluded to in the book's opening line.

Mystery 'solved'

"In a village in La Mancha whose name I cannot recall... " - the mystery surrounding the identity of the village has beguiled readers for centuries.

The BBC's Katya Adler in Madrid says 10 Spanish academics - a multidisciplinary team including professors of international relations, geography, history, philology, mathematics and information sciences- have spent two years plotting Don Quixote's unfortunate adventures onto a map of central Spain.

The most important tribute you can pay the book is to read

it

Carmen Calvo

Spanish Culture Minister

She says they have finally identified Villanueva de los Infantes, about 225km (140 miles) south of Madrid as his hometown.

The sleepy hamlet is now preparing to be over-run by tourists, our correspondent adds.

Don Quixote is widely regarded as the world's first novel and one of the finest ever written.

"I've read thousands of novels but I've never read anything that I've wanted to come back to the way I do this one," said literature professor Howard Mancing of Purdue University in the US state of Indiana.

In 2002, a panel of 100 authors from 54 countries voted Don Quixote as the best book of all time.

Classic tome

But despite its universal popularity, relatively few people have read it to completion.

"Everyone has it on their bookshelves but not even a minority get through it," said Juan Victorio, medieval literature professor at Spain's National Open University.

Written in archaic Spanish, the original version runs to nearly 1,000 pages spanning 126 chapters.

Bookshops have printed new editions, universities and other institutions are holding seminars and readings and Spanish companies promoting the book are being given tax breaks to mark its anniversary.

It is even being distributed to 3,500 indigenous community centres in Mexico.

"This celebration will reach every public library in every corner," Spain's Culture Minister Carmen Calvo said.

"The most important tribute you can pay the book is to read it."

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