

World



Troubled water Tourists return to the Iguazu Falls walkway, on the border of Brazil and Argentina, after it was closed due to high water levels caused by heavy rain

Cheese from donkey milk puts the ass in delicacy

Albania

Tom Kingston

At his restaurant in Tirana, Elio Troque cannot order donkey cheese fast enough to keep up with demand.

"People need to reserve two to three days ahead for 100g of the cheese, with some wanting it served 36 hours after it is made, when it has a ricotta-like consistency, while others prefer it aged for 40 days," said Troque, owner of the Oxhaket restaurant.

Demand is rising despite the price tag of €150 per plate. "I think it might be the most expensive cheese in the world," Troque said.

Prized by the ancient Greeks and Romans as a cure for ailments, and reputedly bathed in by Cleopatra to keep her skin soft, donkey's milk has long been sought after, but in Albania donkey cheese is a firm favourite for foodies.

The jennies, or female donkeys, produce a small amount of milk compared with other livestock: about half a litre a day, which is why it sells for €60 a litre.

"The milk is more translucent than cow's milk and has hints of lemon, orange, mint or cacao, depending on the herbs the donkeys have been eating," said Jaco Meci, who has 30 donkeys and supplies Troque's restaurant.

The reason the cheese is so expensive, he explained, was that 25 litres of milk make just 1kg of cheese. About ten litres of cow's milk is enough to make 1kg of cheddar.

Cervantes was a poet but he didn't know it, says historian

A new book begs to differ with the author's withering assessment of his own verse, writes Isambard Wilkinson

Miguel de Cervantes, the author of *Don Quixote*, wrote that "heaven denied me the poet's grace" and that he was "better versed in adversity than verses".

A new book, however, seeks to prove him wrong and to show that he was not only the creator of what scholars deem to be the first modern novel but also one of the great poets of Spain's Golden Age.

José Manuel Lucía Megías, the country's foremost Cervantes biographer, argues that the writer's poetry was overshadowed by that of the playwright Félix Lope de Vega, his great rival, even though his verses enjoyed acclaim during his life.

Megías also suggests that the success of *Don Quixote* has shrouded his poetry, as have Cervantes's own remarks about his lack of poetic talent, which have been taken at face value rather than with the irony that he intended.

"Lope de Vega dominated

Spanish poetry like a king but at the time there were other marvellous poets and one of them was Cervantes," Megías, a literature professor at Madrid's Complutense University, told *The Times*. "On at least two occasions Lope himself paid tribute to Cervantes's poetry. And *Don Quixote* itself could only have been written by a poet."

Academics estimate that Cervantes published more than 15,000 lyric verses, which include all forms ranging from love and elegiac to burlesque and satirical. Many appear in works such as his pastoral novel *Galatea* as well as *Don Quixote* and his compilation of short stories, *Exemplary Novels*.

"Like all the writers of his era, Cervantes wrote poetry. He started as a poet and finished as a poet," said Megías. He added that the writer's first known works are poems written in his youth and that in *Journey to Parnassus*, published in 1614, two years before his death, Cervantes wrote: "From my earliest years I loved the sweet art of pleasant poetry."

In 1602, before they became embroiled in a row, Lope de Vega asked Cervantes to write a laudatory sonnet for *La Dragontea*, an epic poem about Sir Francis Drake.

Cervantes is considered a mainstay of Spain's Golden Age of baroque literature



Lyrical Cervantes

From Book 1 of *La Galatea*, 1558:

Away fire, noose, frost and arrow
That scorches, binds, cools and wounds love;
Such a flame my soul does not want,
nor does it desire such a knot.
Consume, gird, press, kill; let
another's will be as much as it wills,
But mine shall spurn arrow, snow, or
net, I do not wish
To have mine in its heat undone.
My chaste intent will its fire cool
the knot I'll break by force or art,
my ardent zeal the snow will undo
the arrow shall be blunted by my
thought
And so I will not fear the fire, the
noose, frost nor arrow.

"If the king of poetry asks you for a sonnet, it's because he thinks you are a good poet," said Megías.

However, Cervantes's poetic success was soon limited by his enmity with Lope de Vega, who was 15 years his junior and the creator of a new form of play that won him Spain's theatrical crown. The cause of their rupture is unknown but in 1604 Lope de Vega said, writing of poets, that "there is none so bad as Cervantes".

Megías said: "Lope controlled the poetic world, as well as that of the theatre, the cultural industry of the

time. So what emerged was Cervantes as the king of prose, Lope the king of poetry."

Cervantes, however, was a highly accomplished technical poet, Megías said: "He not only wrote *sestinas*, a 12th-century metre, which very few poets managed, but also *cabo roto* verses, where the last syllable is missing, which is seen at the start of *Don Quixote*, and was invented at that time."

He also created a new metric form himself, a new strophe, called *el Ovillejo*, a ten-verse work of which seven verses were of eight syllables and three of three. "This would have taken off if Lope had used it in his works but because of their clash he did not," said Megías.

Megías's book, *Miguel de Cervantes. Poesía*, has already persuaded some literary figures in Spain to reassess his poetry. "Cervantes's statement about his own poetry as well as my disjointed reading of his poems, led me to a mistake that I have maintained for seven long decades," wrote Luis María Anson. "But Megías has changed that. Cervantes was a notable poet." Pablo Neruda "was undoubtedly inspired by Cervantes's *Grisóstomo* poem when he wrote his *Canción desesperada*," he added.

Megías concluded: "Lope paid the greatest homage to his rival in 1630 when he wrote, 15 years after Cervantes's death, about his 'verses of diamonds' — what beauty, what a critique."

Canadian's song is first in French to Ibn streams

Canada

Charles Bremner

A song by a Canadian singer has become the first in the French language to reach one billion streams on Spotify, thanks to its use as a background track on TikTok videos.

Patrick Watson, 45, from Montreal, composed *Je te laisserai des mots* (*I will leave notes for you*), a wistful piano number, in 2010 for *Mères et Filles*, a low-budget film starring Catherine Deneuve. The song became a sleeper hit in 2019 after it was used in a YouTube video compilation of nostalgic scenes.

The video was reposted by Justin Bieber, the Canadian singer. It was then widely adopted by people chronicling their lives on TikTok during the pandemic. "The modern pop song is now the soundtrack to people's home movies," Watson said at the time.

After Spotify reported that it had reached one billion streams, Watson posted on Facebook: "It's a dizzying number... almost impossible to comprehend. I grew up in Montreal and am extremely proud that a French song has crossed the language barrier."

The success puts him ahead of other French language artists with global followings. These include Stromae, a Belgian whose father immigrated from Rwanda, and Aya Nakamura, a Franco-Malian who sang at the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics in July.