Don Quixote Illustrated

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400 years ago, after 20 years of silence, rejection, and failure, Cervantes published a very unusual and funny book, *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha*, destined to become not only the most important work of fiction ever written, but incredibly enough the emblem of a culture and the symbol of a nation. We do not know when or where exactly Cervantes wrote it or indeed how an old man, whose life was marked by constant personal and professional disappointments, managed to write such a book. Don Quixote has become the most universal of heroes, the father to a myriad of quixotic sons and daughters; a myth and a symbol, an image, and an icon. He is a familiar character in many remote lands, even to children, through repeated translations, adaptations, and incarnations in literature, but also reborn and betrayed in over 80 operas, 200 films, and countless musical, artistic and popular representations. At the start and at the core of this massive proliferation of images are the illustrations of the text, what we call the textual iconography of the *Quixote*. Paradoxically, the thousands of woodcuts, engravings, etchings, drawings, and lithographs that have accompanied the text in its glorious journey are, for the most part, four hundred years later, a little known interpretative tradition, and a much neglected critical and artistic treasure.

The reasons for this neglect and lack of appreciation are various and complex and, to a large extent, are attributable to the primacy of the word, the text, over the image, but also to the rare and often inaccessible nature of the editions in which the illustrations have appeared. Although some sample illustrations are often reproduced in critical studies, bibliographies and exhibition catalogues, we lacked access to the complete iconographic record of illustrations appearing in the thousands of *Quixote* editions published since 1605, as major contributing elements to both the canonization of the novel and to the iconic transformations of its principal character.

In recent years, the critical interest on the illustrations of the *Quixote* has intensified, as demonstrated by the publication of three major monographs by J. Hartau (Berlin, 1987), R. Paulson (Baltimore, 1998), and R. Schmidt (Montreal, 1999). Of equal significance are the 2003 exhibition at the Museo del Prado in Madrid entitled *Images of ‘Don Quixote’*, with a richly documented and illustrated catalogue prepared under the direction of Patrick Lenaghan, Curator of prints at the Hispanic Society of America in New York, and the 4th centenary exhibit at the National Library of Spain.

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entitled *The Quixote: Biography of a Book*. These studies and events place the illustrations in new and diverse cultural, aesthetic, and historical contexts, demonstrating their key critical value and role in the reception and interpretation of the novel. Together they made evident the urgent need to provide a more complete and accessible resource to the rich artistic tradition of the textual iconography of the *Quixote* in order to better understand its significant contribution to the editorial history and critical reception of Cervantes’ novel still largely unknown to readers and unexamined by critics.2

A brief overview of the *Quixote* illustrated shows that the visual readings and interpretations of the narrative are in technique, approach and perspective representative of the means and views characteristic of each age and century, from the early baroque woodcuts of the 1600’s to the colorful surrealist drawings of the 20th century. Indeed, as John Harthan has observed, “A history of modern book illustration could almost be written in terms of this perennially popular classic alone” (153).3

For almost 400 years artists have been illustrating the *Quixote*, some following their own inclination and views of the text, some pushed by the needs and desires of an editor or institution, but all trying to capture and replicate in the few instances afforded by their images the genius of its creator, as each one of them understood it, in their particular time and place, and for their intended public. After all, as Harthan rightly points out, “book illustration is like a hand-mirror in which one can see reflected great historical events, social changes and the movement of ideas down the centuries”(8). In the case of a great work of fiction, such as the *Quixote*, one can appreciate in the illustrations certain preferences and clear points of view, ideological and aesthetic, but cumulatively, and sequentially, the resulting contribution is a key interpretative visual reading and a unique form of visual knowledge. The illustrators are capable of creating an image representing a complex narrative meaning, setting, and characterization; their images make tangible and accessible the fictive reality described by the author in his text; they are both a useful reading guide and an effective tool to see what we are told, to confirm the reality of the words, and at their best, they not only depict imaginary actions but visually illuminate and elucidate the text for the reader as visual annotations.

In the case of the *Quixote*, its illustrated history4 could be divided into five periods, which roughly coincide with Harthan’s five historical divisions (Baroque,

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2 The celebration of the 4th centenary of *Don Quixote* in 2005 is producing an avalanche of events and studies, some dedicated to the illustrations: José Manuel Lucía Megías, *Los primeros ilustradores del Quijote* (Madrid: Ollero y Ramos, 2005) and Carlos Alvar, et al., *La imagen del Quijote en el mundo* (Barcelona: Lunwerg Editores, 2004).


Rococo, Neoclassical, Romanticism and the mass market, and the modern “book beautiful”:

1. 1605-1640 (non-illustrated)
2. 1640-1725 (satiric/comic illustrations)
3. 1725-1800 (idealized illustrations)
4. 1800-1880 (romantic illustrations)
5. 1880-2005 (artistic illustrations)

After an initial period of non-illustrated editions, from 1605 to approximately 1640, the text is initially embellished and adorned, as it was customary in the latter part of the 17th century, by individual artist and engravers reflecting and emphasizing the predominant interpretative views of the time, i.e. its comical and satirical aspects. This stage is represented by the work of Savry (Dordrecht 1657) and Bouttats (Bruselas 1662) and is represented in our collection in the London 1700, Paris 1713, and Amberes 1719 editions. The same sort of approach and technique can be seen also in the anonymous illustrations present in the London 1687 edition containing the English translation by J. Philips. The Savry/Bouttats illustrations are copied and recopied many times and are the ones included in the first illustrated edition published in Spain in 1674, reproduced and augmented by Diego de Obregón. They remain in use well into the 18th century, as seen in the Barcelona 1762 edition in our collection.

The next period, already in the Rococo era in the early 18th century, is that dominated by the elegant illustrations based on Charles-Antoine Coypel paintings and designs. Originally produced as models for the production of tapestries, they were soon converted to illustrations by the most famous engravers of the time, both in France and England, and used in all types of editions throughout the 1700s. This stage can be appreciated in our collection in the two English editions published in London 1725 and 1731, and in particular in the beautiful French edition published by Peter de Hondt in La Haye in 1746. They remained extremely popular in Europe well into the 19th century, but not so in Spain, where they were never well received and were eclipsed after 1780 by the illustrations published in the famous Ibarra edition. Our collection includes 18 editions with Coypel’s illustrations, none of them published in Spain. Although more refined in technique and style, the characters and actions of the novel are still depicted in a satirical comic manner.

Beyond Coypel, the 18th century gave us some of the most memorable representations of the Quixote, as seen in the illustrations by John Vanderbank, William Hogarth, Francis Hayman and Thomas Stothard in England, and Daniel Chodowiecki in Germany. But most significantly, starting in 1771 with the illustrations by J. Camarón included in the Madrid edition published by Ibarra, and continuing with the Spanish Royal Academy editions (1780, 1782) also published by Ibarra and illustrated by Carnicer and others, the first sets of Spanish illustrations appeared; created by Spanish artists and engravers, and purposely Spanish in atmosphere and setting. Instead of the
particular inspiration of the individual artist, we see in this period the advent of the official, institutionally conceived and directed visual representation of the characters and episodes in the narrative; from the 68 plates designed by Vanderbank and engraved Van der Gutch for the 1738 classic deluxe edition commissioned by Lord Carteret, to the 31 carefully planned engravings included in the magnificent 1780 Royal Academy edition. With them comes not only a change of tone and emphasis, and a more dignified and reverential vision of the hero, but also the overt desire to exclude those moments and situations thought to be inappropriate, i.e., lacking decorum or lacking verisimilitude. The results are the initial steps in the canonization of the Quixote and its hero well before the romantics were to proceed to his ultimate elevation and mythification, as Schmidt has aptly demonstrated. All the key editions of this period, and their derivatives, are represented in our collection.

The 19th century brings to the illustrated book major technical and technological innovations such as lithography and the appearance on the pictorial novel. Once again the French artists and engravers dominate the scene, and the Quixote attracts in the Romantic period (1800-1880) the creative interests of such notables as Bertall, Daumier, Devéria, Grandville, Johannot Nanteuil, and Lalauze as well as G. Cruickshank and A. B. Houghton in England, and Novelli and Gentilucci in Italy, all of then well represented in multiple editions in our collection.

But undoubtedly the most famous and influential of the illustrators from this period is Gustave Doré. The more than three hundred plates and vignettes in the 1863 edition published in Paris by Hachette in two large folio volumes are without a doubt the best of the well-known Quixote illustrations. They were soon reproduced in England (1864), Spain (1865), and Germany (1866), and they have since appeared in innumerable editions of all types and sizes, up to the present time. To this extent, it is safe to say that Doré’s illustrations have disproportionately influenced our view and conception of the character and his story.

During the 20th century, and in the period called by Harthan the “book beautiful” era, the tendency was for artists to free themselves from the narrative impositions of the text, and even from their functional role as “illustrators” and visual interpreters of the text. Artists in this period felt free to use the Cervantes’ text simply as an inspiration or as a vehicle to express their own personal stories and views, their own artistic style, to create a beautiful visual object in the form of a book. Such is the case of the art nouveau and aesthetic movement illustrators. We can recognize their approach and results, in part, in the illustrations created by Walter Crane, Walther Klemm, Bernard Mahn, and Jean de Bosschére, and more fully in the surrealist illustrations by Dalí, as well as in the most recent abstract and avant-garde representations by Eberhard Schlotter and Reinhold Metz, all part of our collection.

In Spain, during this period, other well-known artists besides Dalí, such as José Segrelles, Gregorio Prieto and Antonio Saura applied their visions and inspiration to illustrate the Quixote reflecting their own personal artistic styles. As an example of this
period we have included in our exhibit the colorful illustrations produced by Segrelles and published in 1966 by Espasa, a labor of over 20 years.

In addition, the list of authors influenced by Cervantes and indebted to the *Quixote* is a who’s who of the most important writers in world literature: from Sterne, Smollett and Fielding to Faulkner, Byatt and Auster, from Flaubert to Dostoyesky, and from Galdós to Unamuno, including, of course, such major contemporary Latin American writers as Borges, Fuentes and García Márquez. Cervantes’ *Quixote* has been a favorite of Romantic philosophers and postmodern intellectuals alike, and indeed the critical history of its reception and interpretation covers and exemplifies every school and aesthetic movement over the last four centuries. Indeed, in a recent poll conducted among the world’s leading authors *Don Quixote* was ranked number one as the most significant and influential literary work. In a survey of 100 authors unveiled at the Norwegian Nobel Institute in May 2002, Cervantes’ novel out-ranked the plays of Shakespeare and masterpieces by authors from Homer to Tolstoy. Writers including Salman Rushdie, Milan Kundera, John le Carre, John Irving, Nadine Gordimer, Carlos Fuentes and Norman Mailer gave *Don Quixote* 50 percent more votes than the second-ranked work on the list of 100 novels, stories and plays.

It is often stated by critics that the *Quixote* is a theatrical, graphic, and visual book. According to E. C. Riley, for instance, the *Quixote* “is a novel conceived in strongly visual terms” (111),5 that is to say, a work in which the illusory world of the Manchegan hidalgo is not just told, but painted and depicted, allowing us to see the representation of his imaginary reality. The plot of the story evolves around the constant desire of the knight to impose and make real what he perceives and believes to be real in his mind; from Dulcinea to the giants. These imaginings, and their subversive parodic portrayal, embodied in the play of the antithesis appearance-reality, constitute, as Riley points out, the key thematics of the novel and control its structure and meaning. Ideals and illusions, perceptions and desires, are exposed as manifestations of a madness visually expressed in the windmills; in the emptiness of their air and in the uncertain fortune represented by the circular movement of their arms. The unique reading afforded by the illustrations becomes then a real and tangible visualization of Don Quixote’s imaginary world, while his story becomes in the process a visual text that attempts to capture a non existent reality; that is to say, the illustrations paint and depict what is absent or negated by the words in the text.

The interpretative tradition represented by the textual iconography owes its existence, ironically, to a gradual tendency in the textual history of the *Quixote* to complement and amplify the text with multiple paratextual elements such as portraits, biographies, maps, documents, and, of course, illustrations, in an apparent effort to make the *Quixote* a more accessible and better understood and appreciated classic, thus

allowing readers to see, and thus to know, not only the never read but also the never seen in the parodic text, the so called “nunca visto” or imagined world of Don Quixote.

The main rare book collection supporting our project is the Cervantes Project Collection at the Cushing Memorial Library and Archives of Texas A&M University. In recent years, the Cervantes Project and the Cushing Memorial Library have acquired a large number of significant illustrated editions for the purpose of creating a collection specialized in illustrated editions of the Quixote. The collection includes over 750 editions, published since 1617, and close to 2,000 volumes, and is concentrated in 18th and 19th century English, French, and Spanish illustrated editions. We estimate the digital archive of the collection will eventually include upwards of 20,000 images.

The Cervantes Project has created a fully accessible, searchable and documented electronic database and digital archive of all the illustrations that form the textual iconography of the Quixote, as permitted by copyright limitations, along with the necessary interfaces and visualization tools to allow for the kind of access and knowledge until now unavailable. We further envision the archive as a research depository to complement the textual and bibliographical electronic resources already present in the CP, as well as a unique digital variorum image collection able to extend the value of our Electronic variorum edition of the Quixote. The archive allows worldwide electronic access to unique and rare textual and graphic resources by scholars, students and users in general interested in Cervantes’ work and the influence of his masterpiece through 400 years from multiple perspectives: textual, artistic, critical, bibliographical, and historical.

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