

Youth-anizing Don Quixote

A Look at the Noblest Knight in History as He Is Introduced to Young Readers

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Faculty Introduction

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Isabel López's paper insightfully addresses what literary and non-literary worlds recognize as the best-known work in the Spanish language—and as the first modern novel in any language in the Western world, *Don Quixote de la Mancha* by Miguel Cervantes Saavedra. This seventeenth century masterpiece has maintained its popularity and critical acclaim, has been translated into every major world language, and has been adapted through differing criteria in those languages. López has carefully and effectively analyzed and compared the most-recognized translations and adaptations to detail how and why an English-language adaptation for children, the Wishbone series, "*youth-anizes*" that amazing novel. Her invaluable study is unique in context and in perceptive grasp of the adaptations.

Abstract

As Miguel de Cervantes' satirical creation of the ingenious knight, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, continues to be introduced to newer generations, this paper examines the image of Don Quixote as he enters the elementary school realm and highlights lessons Cervantes continues to teach over 400 years after its first publication. Through the lens of a comparative research approach, the findings show a shift from madness, mockery, and violence to self-discovery and loyalty, while the original master of the art, Don Quixote, teaches children to exercise their imaginations. In conclusion, this masterpiece of the Spanish Golden Age must modify certain elements when presented to a younger audience. The tragic composition of Cervantes' Quixote must be "*youth-anized*," temporarily put to sleep, while a more youthful, heroic Quixote makes the first introduction to the adventures hidden in La Mancha.

El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote De La Mancha,¹ the masterpiece that sprang from the vivid imagination of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, has brought sorrowful laughter to readers as they are entertained by a madman destined for inevitable suffering due to the self-orchestrated misadventures his outdated faithfulness to the chivalric code inspire. The first modern novel of the Spanish Golden Age is a complex read, clearly not intended for children during a time when “pedagogic and religious text” (Lathey 196) was the norm in children’s literature. Thomas Shelton introduced the novel into the English language in 1612, a time when children were delighted by stories of the knighthood that Cervantes sets out to criticize in *Don Quixote* (Lathey 196-197). Over four centuries later, new generations of children are being introduced to Don Quixote, and new adaptations morph the image of the knight, leading to his “youth-anizing.” The pun represents a play on the word *euthanizing* as I seek to highlight how the tragic image of Quixote is gently *put to sleep* as he enters the elementary school realm, transforming into a more youthful and inspirational Quixote rather than the pitiful and unfortunate one of the original work.

Recalling my adolescent introduction to the knight with all the complexities found in Cervantes’ Quixote, along with my maternal heart’s desire to introduce the sixteenth century superhero knight to my son, I set out to review a few modern English adaptations of *Don Quixote* for children. The translation of *Don Quixote* by Edith Grossman became the lens through which I examined the selected text for children, keeping in mind the age of the target audience, children of ages eight to ten, as I read each chapter of James Baldwin’s *Stories of Don Quixote Written Anew for Children*, published in 1910. I also examined the 1999 Dover Children’s Thrift Classics version, *The Adventures of Don Quixote*² by Argentina Palacios. The outdated language of Baldwin’s version and the rushed feel of Palacios’, along with the effort of both to maintain a resemblance to the original

¹ Part I of *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote de La Mancha* was published in 1605 (Patrick). Such was the novel’s success that a fictitious second part was published in September 1614 by a rival writer calling himself Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda meant to insult Cervantes; in response, Cervantes quickly published the second part in 1615 (Riley). Cervantes died in 1616; however the adventures of the noble knight and his comical squire have been translated in over 60 languages worldwide (Riley).

² A revised publication of *The Knight and the Squire* from 1979.

Don Quixote that lead the books to keep content too strong for an eight-year-old,³ shifted my attention elsewhere. Finally, I examined Michael Borgan's retelling of *Don Quixote*, the first of the Wishbone Classics series,⁴ published in 1996. As I compared Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, through Edith Grossman's 2003 English translation, to the adapted *Don Quixote* retold by Borgan, I found that although Cervantes intended the creation of the knight to be that of a madman whose visions and valiant quests produced inevitable suffering meant as punishment, the westernized youthful view in Borgan's retelling morphs this image into that of an adventurous visionary while still teaching today's young readers lessons that traveled over 400 years.

Active dialogue and details bring the story to life, acknowledging elements that make books inviting to children while drawing them into the adventure. Borgan's introduction of Cervantes, mentioned by the narrator as his friend, is kept brief with only the most relevant information of his life as a soldier⁵ informing the readers that Cervantes also "lived a life full of adventure" (8) just like Quixote, and includes a quick reminder of his intended purpose for writing *Don Quixote*. The main character list only mentions Don Quixote and those who connect directly to the identity of Quixote⁶ (10), rather than the extensive list of characters Cervantes weaves into Quixote's adventures in the original. The same briefness is maintained with the setting that includes a description of the time-period of sixteenth century Spain to prepare the young reader for the adventures ahead (11).

The story of *Don Quixote* is narrated by Wishbone, a Jack Russell

³ Baldwin and Palacios keep scenes such as the beating of a slave child and the heavy mockery of the wooden horse, Clavileño, a prank performed on Quixote and Panza while at the Duke and Duchess' palace (Baldwin 23-27, 138-143; Palacios 6-8, 37-40).

⁴ The Wishbone Classics series is a collection of twelve classic novels adapted for children of elementary age published between 1996 and 1997. The series tied into the children's television show *Wishbone*, broadcast on PBS Kids from 1995 to 1998. The series is named after the Jack Russell Terrier who narrates the stories.

⁵ Cervantes, born in late September of 1547 in Alcalá de Henares in Spain, served as a soldier for the Spanish Army during the time of the Inquisition, where he suffered an injury that rendered his left hand useless and he fell into slavery for approximately five years until his family could pay for his release in 1580 (Riley).

⁶ Borgan only includes Alonso Quixana, who is Quixote's former identity; Sancho Panza, Quixote's faithful companion; Rozinante, Quixote's horse; Dulcinea (formerly Aldonza), Quixote's lady-love; and Samson Carrasco, who challenges Quixote as a knight (10).

Terrier, who takes on the role of a character from the classic novel he is narrating while guiding young readers through the literary adventure. In his book, *Feeling Like a Kid*, Jerry Griswold identifies the presence of talking animals as a common technique in children's literature to make books memorable, as their imaginations are able to see human qualities in animals due to their need for companionship (3). In Burgan's retelling, the playful pup offers companionship through the adventures as he takes on the role of Sancho Panza, the most faithful of all companions (5). Wishbone injects guided commentary throughout the tale, allowing the young reader to make further use of their imaginations connecting to the world around them, stimulating discussions or their critical-thinking skills. Burgan's adaptation of *Don Quixote* begins "youth-anizing" the knight from the opening chapter.

Youth-anizing the Process of Becoming Don Quixote

Cervantes' opening description of Mr. Quixana, Quixote's identity, and all that embodies his quiet life and love for books, is different from Burgan's quick mention of the gentleman before plunging into the process of becoming Don Quixote (Burgan 12-16). It is a vocalized announcement to his niece and housekeeper, rather than a description of the readings, that led the gentleman to lose his mind,⁷ which can be too complex and distracting for the young reader to follow. This is not secretive, either, as Burgan's Quixote vocalizes a declaration to take on the duties of a knight, "fill my life with danger and adventure, all in the name of doing good" (Burgan 15), simplifying this sense of duty found in Cervantes' Quixote.⁸ The approach, taken by Burgan's Quixote to declare this vocally, rather than simply narratively, calls for the immediate attention of children of elementary school age who will imagine the character's voices while reading the dialogue.

As Quixote is constructing the elements of his newfound identity, he seems to do so in a decisive manner. Burgan's Quixote does not test

⁷ Cervantes introduces the gentleman's lifestyle, pets, food he eats, and description of the books of knighthood popular at the time, including direct quotes from these books (Grossman 19-21).

⁸ Cervantes narrates Quixote's intent "to become a knight errant and travel the world...righting all manner of wrongs and, by seizing the opportunity and placing himself in danger...ending those wrongs" (Grossman 21).

the durability of his armor.⁹ Instead, he decides, “with a little oil, this armor is as good as new” (14). He does not spend days in thought over the name of his horse¹⁰ for he already carries the name Rozinante and Quixote immediately decides, “he will do fine in battle” (Burgan 14). A notable difference in the transformation is the order in which Burgan places the naming of Quixote and Dulcinea. It cannot be a knight’s tale without the mention of a lady-love¹¹ to whom their chivalric quests are dedicated; however, Burgan’s Quixote names her prior to selecting his own name. Dulcinea¹² is named, as quickly and as decisively as are the other components of becoming a knight. Burgan places greater significance on Quixote’s final step of the transformation, choosing a knightly name, by noting the length of time taken to come up with a proper name for his new persona: eight days (16). The placement of this decision and the mention of effort to find a suitable name at the end of the opening chapter places emphasis on the importance of one’s identity and, once again, a declaration of a newfound identity is vocalized¹³ (Burgan 16). Children in elementary school explore self-identification as it is a time in their development where they play the different roles they discover in books and television as part of their quest to identify their own person. Quixote teaches children that the search for self-identity does not have to end in childhood.

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Youth-anizing the Madness

Cervantes injects the idea of a mad state of mind from the beginning of Quixote’s introduction.¹⁴ Although this great passion for chivalric

⁹ Cervantes’ Quixote finds that his armor “had a great defect” and has to repair it after a blow from his sword “undid in a moment what it had taken him a week to create” (Grossman 22).

¹⁰ Cervantes’ Quixote spends four days selecting the name of his nag (Grossman 22).

¹¹ Cervantes explains, “the knight errant without a lady-love was a tree without leaves or fruit, a body without a soul” as he highlights how crucial it is for a knight errant to possess a lady-love as commonly depicted in the tales of knighthood popular during the Middle Ages (Grossman 23).

¹² Cervantes’ Quixote names his lady-love as the first chapter closes, explaining her name “was musical and beautiful and filled with significance” (Grossman 24).

¹³ Burgan closes the first chapter as Quixote declares, “From this day forth, I will be called Don Quixote of La Mancha, the bravest knight in the land” (16).

¹⁴ Cervantes explains that, “with too little sleep and too much reading his brains dried up, causing him to lose his mind” (Grossman 21).

tales is mentioned, Burgan introduces the idea of madness as an opinion vocalized by Quixote's niece and housekeeper rather than as a narrated statement of his condition, to which Quixote replies, "if these books are silly, then I am twice as silly" (Burgan 13), implying he is aware of his mad appearance, yet his decision stands to believe in the adventures he has read, for it is who he is.

As Quixote embarks on his adventure, he finds those who choose to engage in his reality, such as the innkeeper, who officially knights the gentleman as requested (Burgan 18-20). Here, service is rendered to Quixote simply to prevent the loss of a customer rather than fear of a madman¹⁵ (Burgan 18). Burgan shifts the focus from Quixote's mad appearance that evokes fear, to one "so earnest that the laughter in the room fades away" (19) when he takes his oath and is officially knighted, emphasizing for the young readers Quixote's self-awareness of his chosen identity as a knight, rather than being in a mad state of mind.

Burgan makes sure to include a very important chapter in Quixote's journey, the episode of his voluntary insanity due to his distance from Dulcinea¹⁶ (Burgan 55-61). It is here where Burgan introduces the word *mad* to the reader and describes it as a state of mind when a "knight has lost his reason, or his sense of logic, and is acting a little strange" (57). This reaffirms Quixote's self-awareness as to his state of mind. It gives validation to Quixote's sanity, as he is electing to imitate the *mad* state he has read about. It is a vital chapter to include when attempting to give the young reader a sample of the complexities of the original text, as well as to provide a basis for understanding some of these literary intricacies found in Cervantes' novel, should the students choose to read it at a later age. Lathey suggests that the primary intent of Burgan and the editors of *Wishbone* is to entice the young reader to revisit the story in its original text later on (209).

¹⁵ When Quixote visits the inn he is described as a "grotesque figure armed with arms as incongruous as his bridle, lance, shield, and corselet" and the innkeeper renders service out of "fearing the countless difficulties that might ensue" (Grossman 27).

¹⁶ Quixote decides to imitate the penance of Beltebros and sends Sancho to El Toboso with a letter to inform Dulcinea of his condition (Grossman 190-207).

"Youth-anizing" the Adventures

Cervantes' intent is to highlight the foolishness found in the chivalric novels read by adults at the time. This is one of the most drastic adaptations between the original and Burgan's retelling. While it would not be in the spirit of Quixote to eliminate all forms of injury or ridicule, it is largely deflated or completely omitted for the sake of the target audience reading this retelling.

In the first adventure in which Quixote gets dubbed a knight, Burgan modifies certain details of the story. The innkeeper chooses to participate in Quixote's request to dub him a knight because he is "kind-hearted," not to mock him,¹⁷ and he silences the mockery from the others witnessing the event (Burgan 19). The scene is extremely toned-down, as Burgan also eliminated the altercation between Quixote and the mule drivers while keeping watch over his armor among others.¹⁸ These adventures from the original novel portray strong content perhaps too violent for a child, and may be of concern to some parents.

While certain scenes of violence are omitted, others are present but cleaned up to spare the young readers gory descriptions. After the windmills, during his confrontation with the Basque, Quixote delivers a smack to the Basque's head that causes some bleeding (Burgan 33), rather than providing a detailed account of the injuries.¹⁹ Additionally, Burgan makes no mention of the injury Quixote sustained during the altercation.²⁰ These would not be the adventures of a knight and the story would lack much of the element of suspense without episodes of brawls; however, Burgan retells these events in a light fashion suitable for the younger audience.

¹⁷ The innkeeper agrees to knight Quixote "to have something to laugh about" (Grossman 30).

¹⁸ Burgan also eliminates the scene of Andres, the slave boy, being beaten, as well as the rage-filled beating Quixote receives from another mule driver along the road (Grossman 32-33, 40-41).

¹⁹ Cervantes describes the Basque "bleeding from his nose, mouth and ears" (Grossman 69).

²⁰ Quixote loses part of an ear during the altercation (Grossman 69).

"Youth-anizing" the Lessons Taught by Cervantes

Lesson I: Friendship

Cervantes mastered encapsulating life lessons into the adventures of Don Quixote and his squire 400 years ago that still resound with readers today. The purpose of children's literature is not only to entertain, but also to educate the child. Burgan's Quixote maintains lessons relatable to the young reader. With a short caption on the cover, readers are cued to friendship as the focal point of Burgan's retelling of *Don Quixote*.²¹ Sancho Panza was the only character to exist in both the lives of Quixana and Quixote in the same role—that of a friend. Children of elementary school age begin to develop friendships, and Quixote and Panza's friendship serves as an example to follow. True to the iconic description of the two men, Burgan describes Panza "[as] short and fat as Don Quixote was tall and thin, and he had dark, straggly hair and a big, droopy mustache" (20). This is a fundamental image depicting opposing aspects of the duo that readers can envision as they read and recognize in the future.²² Cervantes crafted a powerful bond between the two men that lasted until Quixote's death (Grossman 937-938). Burgan's retelling maintains the same loyalty (126-127) for young readers to aspire to as they develop their own friendships.

Lesson II: The Power of the Imagination

Another key lesson of childhood is the use of imagination, and Don Quixote is like a sixteenth century superhero whose imagination serves as a superpower granting him the ability to see the world through different eyes. Quixote does not see things out of thin air; rather, he sees what is before him in a different light.²³ His superpower allows him to see a castle in the place of a run-down inn (Burgan 18, 36-37; Grossman 26, 111) and a prized helmet instead of a basin (Burgan 50-54; Grossman 153-155). Quixote's imagination teaches children

²¹ On the cover, Wishbone reminds the reader of the bond between man and dog and invites them to "meet Don 'Q' and his best friend, Sancho Panza."

²² Famous artwork of the duo exists throughout the world. Among these are Picasso's 1955 "Don Quixote" and the famous sculpture in Plaza de España in Madrid by Spanish sculptor Lorenzo Coullaut Valera.

²³ Where Quixote sees giants there are real tangible windmills, and Dulcinea is not a figment of his imagination; she exists under a different name (Burgan 25-26, 58; Grossman 58-59, 199-200).

that “reality” is about perspective, as he uses it at times to upgrade what is before him. This can be beneficial to improving children’s writing skills as they learn to describe things or events in a different light by imitating Quixote’s superpower.

Lesson III: Rightful Duty

Burgan’s Quixote encourages young readers to do the right, or noble, thing regardless of consequence or judgment by others. Quixote makes it clear that it is his duty to seek adventure in the name of good deeds (Burgan 15; Grossman 21). The adventures he follows are a result of his desire to do good deeds. When Carrasco defeats Quixote, one who witnesses the scene speaks highly of Quixote’s character and tells Carrasco, “this man you call crazy has lived honorably, always spoken the truth, and fought any evil he encountered” (Burgan 123). Children are presented with an example of what doing good means.

Conclusion

Traditional readers and/or critics might feel the morphing of Quixote in such a drastic way hinders the essence of the immortal character Cervantes created; however, Quixote is a complex character, and he is perhaps more beneficially introduced in layers to allow the reader to absorb the intricacies of Quixote. Burgan, and the team behind the Wishbone Classics series, have succeeded in maintaining the adventures children will remember and lessons important to their age group. As my son shared in this journey, his commentary was essential to see just how resourceful Burgan’s approach is. Edith Grossman says in the introduction to her translation of Quixote, “if my translation works at all, the reader should keep turning the pages, smiling a good deal, and periodically bursting into laughter” (xx), and the description fits that of my son as he read Burgan’s retelling. Therefore, Quixote’s morphing must happen, the madness must sleep, the violence and mockery must be tamed, and the lessons must relate to the young reader, if we are to succeed in making a positive first introduction of Don Quixote that will edify our children’s creativity, self-identity, and sense of rightful duty, leading to a greater appreciation if and when the knight returns to greet them later in life. ■

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Student Biography

Isabel C. López is a senior majoring in Spanish at Sam Houston State University. She is a member of Sigma Delta Pi, the National Spanish Honor Society. While taking a course on Children's Literature in Spanish, Isabel was inspired to revisit the adventures from the classic by Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*. Under the advisement of Dr. Debra D. Andrist, professor in the Department of World Languages and Cultures, Isabel began researching the morphing of Quixote's image as the novel is adapted for children. This research earned Isabel an Honorable Mention for Best Overall Poster at the 2017 Undergraduate Research Symposium. She will graduate in spring 2018 and plans to pursue graduate studies at Sam Houston State University. She hopes to continue her research on adaptations of *Don Quixote* for children.

Editor's Note: Though López's research was presented in poster format at the Undergraduate Research Symposium her submission to *The Measure* was the initial research essay she wrote for her class.