Seeing is Believing: 
The Rhetoric of Graphic Illustration 
in the History of ‘Don Quijote’

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“Yo apostaré... que antes de mucho tiempo no ha de hab-
er bodegón, venta ni mesón, o tienda de barbero, donde no 
ande pintada la historia de nuestras hazañas” (II, 71; 1087). It goes without saying that Sancho’s prophecy has, to a large degree, been 
fulfilled. Don Quijote is, in fact, one of the works of Western literature 
that has attracted the most attention from the practitioners of the fine 
arts. In this essay I will center on just one aspect of the enormous current 
of plastic imagery the Quijote has inspired, but I would dare to say that it’s 
the most important one. I’m referring to the graphic illustrations of the 
successive editions of the work, both inside and outside Spain.

1 All quotations are from the Francisco Rico/Real Academia edition listed in the 
bibliography.
2 The best work to date on this subject is found in Rachael Schmidt, Critical Images: The 
Canonization of “Don Quixote” through Illustrated Editions of the Eighteenth Century; Patrick 
Lenaghan (ed.), Imágenes del “Quijote”: modelos de representación en las ediciones de los siglos 
XVIII a XIX; Eduardo Urbina and Jesús G. Maestro (eds.), “Don Quixote” Illustrated: Textual 
Images and Visual Readings/Iconografía del “Quijote”; and José Manuel Lucía Megía, Leer el 
Quijote en imágenes: hacia una teoría de los modelos iconográficos (the latter two works had yet to 
appear when I presented the original version of this paper). Also worth consulting is Juan Givanel 
Maás’s Historia gráfica de Cervantes y del “Quijote.” On a series of issues related to the topic under 
discussion, see E. C. Riley’s “Don Quixote: from Text to Icon.” Amid the relatively small amount 
of theorizing about the illustration of literary texts, Edward Hodnett’s Image and Text: Studies in 
the Illustration of English Literature stands out. The aforementioned book by Lucía Megías begins 
to move in interesting directions, but his theoretical apparatus, in my opinion, still needs some 
fleshing out. Scholars interested in the general subject of graphic illustrations of the Quijote now
The illustrations’ significance derives not only from their sheer abundance but from how the analysis of them serves to reconstruct the reception of the work across the centuries. In effect, the illustrations of the work are authentic “time capsules,” crystallizing the way in which the work’s protagonists and their adventures were visualized by artists belonging to different historical moments and cultural contexts. The striking changes we often witness are, without doubt, symptoms of the impact of the complex and variable forces that have molded the manner in which the work has been read across the generations and in different geographical contexts.

But these illustrations are also important not only as symptoms of the reception of *Don Quijote* but as producers of modes of reception. Put differently, graphic illustrations have convinced readers to read the text in certain ways. (Hence, my reference to “rhetoric” in the title of this essay.) In fact, in many cases I would say that they impose certain readings. They end up “occupying” the space of the text, or rather, “colonizing” it.

But before centering more closely on these complex dynamics, some important methodological and terminological matters need to be clarified. While the term “reception” has enjoyed great popularity in literary studies, many have felt a certain sense of unease with respect to the air of passivity the term evokes (“the reader receives the text”). Moreover, the important “reader response” approaches (Ingarden, Iser, Jauss) oftentimes fail to take sufficiently into account the enormous range of material-cultural and ideological factors that have a bearing on the act of reading.

What I mean to say is that the reader never stands before the “text-in-itself,” in a “pure” state, without any mediation whatsoever. The act of reading always is open to pressures from a huge variety of angles—from the practices of reading and interpretation imparted by educational institutions to the norms and usages of the publishing houses. The quality of

have two crucial websites at their disposal: “Iconografía textual del Quijote” (http://dqi.tamu.edu), sponsored by the Proyecto Cervantes and coordinated by Eduardo Urbina, and the “Banco de Imágenes del Quijote: 1605-1905” (http://www.qbi2005.com/), sponsored by the Centro de Estudios Cervantinos. The “Banco” contains, as of mid-May 2007, nearly 9,000 images taken from some 240 editions; “Iconografía textual” has some 11,207 taken from 237 editions. Eduardo Urbina deserves special credit for having been a pioneering proponent of making digitalized versions of the iconography of the *Quijote* available on line.
the paper and the typography, the design of the title page, the decision to publish as a hard-cover or as a paperback, the inclusion of paratexts, from dust-cover blurbs to scholarly footnotes—all of this overdetermines the interaction between the reader and the text.¹

In the abundant theorization about the phenomenology of the reading act itself, much attention has been paid to the dynamic, participatory aspect of the labor carried out by the typical reader. Roman Ingarden, the great Polish philosopher, has highlighted the fact that the text only exists in a latent state, pure paper and ink, until a flesh-and-blood reader actually begins to read it. It’s at this moment that the text begins to acquire its authentic existence, that is, during what Ingarden calls the “concretization” of the text. For Ingarden, the text is full of “places of indeterminacy”—that is, “whenever it is impossible, on the basis of the sentences in the work, to say whether a certain object or objective situation has a certain attribute” (for example, the eye color of a certain character). He goes on to say: “I call the aspect or part of the portrayed object which is not specifically determined by the text ‘a place of indeterminacy’. Each object, person, event, etc. portrayed in the literary work of art contains a great number of places of indeterminacy, especially the descriptions of what happens to people and things” (50).

The reader, influenced by an infinite number of factors related to his/her own individual background and his/her cultural and historical context, will go along “filling out” those places of indeterminacy, generating images much more complete than those registered by the actual words on the page:

In concretization the peculiar cocreative activity of the readers comes into play. On his own initiative and with his own imagination he “fills out” various places of indeterminacy with elements chosen from among many possible or permissible elements .... Usually the “choice” is made without a conscious, specifically formulated intention on the part of the reader. He simply gives his imagination free rein and complements the objects with a series of new elements so that they seem to be fully determined. (53)

¹ On this general subject, see Tony Bennett’s *Formalism and Marxism*, 165-66.
It goes without saying that the way in which those “places of indeterminacy” are “filled out” will vary greatly from reader to reader, or even in the case of the same reader during different readings of the same text (separated by weeks or even years) (see Ingarden 53).

Wolfgang Iser emphasizes the dynamic role of the reader perhaps even more than Ingarden. Starting up with the inalterable words of the text, the reader will proceed to elaborate his or her own individual “gestalt” or “pattern.” The fruitful metaphor of a constellation proves to be particularly relevant: “The ‘stars’ in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable.” Iser subsequently highlights the fact that the author can ably guide us in drawing the lines between the “stars” of the text, but if he is good at his craft, he will also leave us a certain latitude: “no author worth his salt will ever attempt to set the whole picture before his reader’s eyes. If he does, he will very quickly lose his reader, for it is only by activating the reader’s imagination that the author can hope to involve him and so realize the intentions of his text” (282). The texts that don’t allow us that latitude in connecting the lines tend to be more didactic in nature—thesis novels, exempla, etc.

When speaking about the lack of freedom characteristic of the latter kind of text, Iser mentions a phenomenon directly related to the topic of this essay: film versions of fictional works. Comparing the image that comes about from the act of reading with that supplied by a film, Iser comments:

Here we have optical perception which takes place against the background of our own remembered images. As often as not, the spontaneous reaction is one of disappointment, because the characters somehow fail to live up to the image we have created of them while reading. However much the image may vary from individual to individual, the reaction: “That’s not how I imagined him” is a general one and reflects the special nature of the image. (138)

“The point here is that the reader of Tom Jones is able to visualize the hero virtually for himself, and so his imagination senses the vast number of possibilities; the moment these possibilities are narrowed down to one complete and immutable picture [that is, in the film
the imagination is put out of action, and we feel we have somehow been cheated. [...] With the novel the reader must use his imagination to synthesize the information given him, and so his perception is simultaneously richer and more private; with the film he is confined merely to physical perception, and so whatever he remembers of the world he had pictured is brutally cancelled out. (283).

After these very acute observations, it’s surprising that Iser doesn’t reflect on the whole problem of the use of graphic illustrations in literary texts. In the case of the movie, we can simply choose not to see it. In the case of the illustrated novel, there’s no escape: the images form an integral part of its very pages.

Studies on the dynamics of perception of an illustrated text have shown that the eye of the reader will always center first on the graphic image and not on the words (see Goldsmith, 334). That image will force have an influence on the act of concretization of what we’re reading. Even if we resist the images we encounter (“That’s not don Quijote!”), the mental effort required by this rejection will affect our interaction with what Cervantes wrote.

Now, in the overwhelming majority of cases, readers will probably not feel so bothered by the illustrations of the book they’ve bought. If this were the case, they would have acquired another edition—probably with no illustrations whatsoever. In the case of a classic, like Don Quijote, there will always be other options.

The truth is that the publishing industry discovered very early on that the presence of graphic images helped to sell books—first, among the well-to-do classes who bought illustrated volumes because of their higher price (and for the resulting prestige that came about from owning them), and later, among the more humble social sectors, perhaps even more desirous of visual stimuli to make their reading experience more enjoyable, that is, when technology began drastically to reduce the cost of including graphic illustrations. Whether or not works of fiction should be illustrated or not is a problem that isn’t even worth considering: they have always been illustrated and will continue to be illustrated, especially in the case of a “monument” like the one with which we’re dealing.
The history of the graphic illustration of *Don Quijote* is crucial for understanding the “social destiny” of the work, its concrete and real existence. The *Quijote* has always been subject to many materio-cultural determinants; it has never existed simply “in itself.”

Now, some might want to argue that we should look for the primary determining factors in the history of the reception of the *Quijote* amid the hermeneutical efforts with which the “opinion-makers” of the cultural Establishment have wrapped it across the centuries, thereby channeling the way it has been read. Scholars such as Anthony Close have illuminated the process by which the *Quijote* evolved into a Romantic work—that is, the dominant way of understanding it up until the present day.

But let’s stop for a moment. Of the thousands of Europeans that read the *Quijote* in the nineteenth century, how many had also read the Schlegel brothers? How many readers of the twentieth had read Unamuno or Ortega or Avalle-Arce? And here I’m not referring only to the so-called “man on the street” but to cultivated middle-class readers on up. On the other hand, thousands (if not millions) would have seen graphic images inspired by the work, many of them placed materially in the editions they read (or half-read, sometimes just skimming through them to see the pictures as happens so often with illustrated Bibles). These, in my opinion, probably had as much, or even more, to do with the way in which successive dominant readings of the work have been disseminated than all the rivers of ink spilled by the cultural Establishment.

Here we arrive at an interesting problem. From what I just said, I perhaps give the impression that the illustrators function as simple conduits—or “body guards”—of the hegemonic readings produced by that Establishment. A Gustave Doré, for example, would indeed have read the Schlegel brothers and their followers, subsequently giving expression to the interpretive formula of the latter in his images, which then were

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4. The notion of the “social destiny” of the *Quijote* is explored in my “On the Social Deštiny of *Don Quijote*: Literature and Ideological Interpellation” (Spanish translation: “Sobre el destino social de *Don Quijote*: literatura e interpelación ideológica.”)

spread in prodigious fashion throughout the whole world.

But who really knows whether it happened in that way? Could it not be that the plastic artists began to see don Quijote and Sancho in a certain manner which then influenced the thinkers, critics and scholars who produced texts inspired by what they had seen in Cervantes’s work “with their own eyes?” Or perhaps we should instead think about a simultaneous process of mutual “feedback” between plastic artists and wordsmiths, with each group reinforcing what the other “sees” (or believes it sees). We can do so, I think, without recourse to a vague “Zeitgeist” imposing itself in mysterious fashion on all cultural producers of the period in question.

Here we have to take into account the role of the publishing houses and their agents—that is, the level of control that editors exercised on the elaboration of the graphic illustrations, establishing general guidelines and accepting or rejecting specific illustrations. Let’s remember, for example, the central role played by members of the Real Academia Española in the elaboration of the landmark edition of 1780—the one that established the work as a “classic” once and for all. The members of the Academia, not the artists, chose the scenes to be depicted, subsequently providing precise instructions on how to do so. An extreme case, perhaps, but one that shows how individuals exposed to scholarly commentaries on the work in question can sometimes have a bearing on the graphic illustrations of the work in question.

Putting aside the whole problem of who got out ahead of whom, what’s undeniable is that practitioners of the fine arts would very likely influence the scholars and critics in later stages of the history of the work’s reception. Who among the proponents of the Romantic readings would not have seen the illustrations of Doré, for example? Could their

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6. See Javier Blas and José Manuel Matilla, “Imprenta e ideología: El Quijote de la Academia, 1773-1780,” and more recently, “De la palabra a la imagen: El ‘Quijote’ de la Academia,” a collective volume edited by Elena Santiago Páez (not yet published when I wrote the original version of this text).


8. For a prior example prior of this phenomenon, see Schmidt (66-73) and Lucía Megías (327-38) regarding the intervention of John Oldfield in the illustrations of the key edition sponsored by Lord Carteret in 1738.
own concretization of the text have come about without any “rhetorical” influence of the graphic images? Probably not.

The illustrations of *Don Quijote* are, of course, only a part of the rich iconography that surrounds the work. In fact, I believe that one could speak of an actual “icono-sphere” in which the work lives submerged. By this term I refer to the collective quixotic imaginary, generated not only by the graphic illustrations found in editions of the text, but by the prints that circulated—and still circulate—independently of those editions, the paintings, the sketches, the advertising posters, the movies, the cartoons, the labels on food products, etc. This whole massive body of plastic depiction saturates our culture.9

How many literary characters have reached such levels of dissemination? Not many. Don Quijote and Sancho, on the other hand, are almost automatically recognizable even by people who have never read the novel, or in some cases, by people who may be functionally illiterate. We would have to jump over to the religious or commercial arenas—to Jesus Christ, Mickey Mouse, or Ronald McDonald—to find something similar.

Large segments of that icono-sphere don’t derive directly from a reading of the novel, but from the observation—and sometimes the direct imitation—of preexisting images.10 This brings us to another important aspect of the phenomenon under consideration. The illustrators of the work don’t express their own concretizations of the work in completely spontaneous fashion. They are captives not only of the stylistic schools that predominate at the moment, but of the prevailing materio-technical parameters of their expressive medium.

As many studies point out, the expressive options of wood engravings, the several types of metal engravings, or of lithographs may vary

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9 The last section of Givanel Mas’s book centers precisely on this aspect of the imagery prompted by our work. Also pertinent is “Iconografía popular del *Quijote*” by Isidro Sánchez Sánchez, Esther Almarcha Núñez-Herrador and Óscar Fernández Olalde in which they discuss, among other things, the extremely useful website sponsored by the Centro de Estudios de Castilla-La Mancha: “Iconografía Popular de ‘Don Quijote de la Mancha’” (http://www.uclm.es/ceclm/centenarioquijote/).

10 This phenomenon is very well documented in Lucas Megías’s *Leer el Quijote en imágenes*.
enormously. Thus, the graphic representation that later influences the concretizing activity of individual readers is very much subject to the technology of the moment. Also, the more inexpensive graphic illustration of books becomes, the denser the visual environment in which the readers develop their own concretization. (Let’s remember the four hundred or so illustrations of Doré or the approximately eight hundred in the editions illustrated by Tony Johannot.)

And as the years go by, with the inevitable succession of different stylistic schools, there’s a kind of automatic aggiornamento of the visual images of our two protagonists. Their “look” is brought up to date perforce, turning them into our “contemporaries” with something to say about our own condition.

In fact, there is a multitude of ways in which the plastic representation of Don Quijote and Sancho in the illustrations of the text (and in the quixotic iconosphere in general) ends up affecting the configuration of the story in itself, with the resulting ideological ramifications. Needless to say, the very selection of the episodes that are depicted affects enormously the precise spin the illustrations confer on the text. Diverse studies have shown that the earliest illustrations gravitated toward the more grossly physical or popular forms of the comic (coinciding with the dominant reading of the moment). To the degree that the work began to become a “classic,” with or without Romantic trimmings, more nuanced or complex scenes began to be highlighted. An in-depth diachronic study of the choice of the episodes depicted would tell us a great deal indeed about the “social destiny” of the Quijote.

In fact, the simple depiction of the physical appearance of Don Quijote and Sancho already affects the parameters of the story itself. The words on the page continue to be the same, but the “actors” that appear

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11 On this subject, see William Ivins’s crucial Prints and Visual Communication.
12 On this tendency of illustrations to “update” narratives, see Meyer Schapiro, Words and Picture: On the Literal and Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text.
13 This is the solid argument put forward by Rachael Schmidt in Critical Images.
14 Lucas Megías has begun important work in this direction in Leer el “Quijote” en imágenes, albeit only reaching the end of the eighteenth century. He describes what he calls the “programa iconográfico” found in different national contexts, specifying which episodes get depicted in the dominant editions.
in the graphic illustrations can’t help but affect the concretization carried out by individual readers. With the modification of the faces of Don Quijote and Sancho in so many ways across the centuries, we end up with radically different narratives. The “thousand and one faces” of our two protagonists found in the graphic illustrations of the text end up narrating a thousand and one different stories.\footnote{I allude here to the title of an earlier version of this text, “Los mil y un rostros de don Quijote y Sancho Panza: ideología e ilustración gráfica,” delivered at an international conference entitled “El Quijote y el pensamiento moderno,” sponsored by the Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoraciones Culturales (SECC) and the Spanish Ministry of Culture at the Forum Barcelona (2004).}

The multiplicity I just evoked has, of course, its completely reverse side. All the readers that have bought the same illustrated edition are exposed to exactly the same illustrations during their respective readings of the text. As William Ivins has brilliantly pointed out, the printed engraving typical of the Gutenberg Galaxy revolutionized world culture by making possible for the first time what he calls the “exactly repeatable pictorial statement” (see 1-3). Although this development had an incalculable impact on the progress of the sciences and technology (compare the verbal description of a plant with a graphic depiction of it, reproduced exactly from book to book), for students of literature it’s also of the utmost importance. In the reading of a text without illustrations, there will be, obviously enough, an enormous variety of individual concretizations. On the other hand, if different readers look at the same illustrations, at least during a few instants we are all imagining something very similar. (Yes, I realize that we also “read” visual images in different ways, but the variability is manifestly less than what occurs with the decoding of verbal signs.)

This “monological” channeling can be weakened, of course, if the publishing house has commissioned illustrations by more than one artist. As Rachel Schmidt has pointed out, the don Quijote depicted by José del Castillo in the aforementioned 1780 edition displays important differences with respect to that of Antonio Carnicero. Whether consciously or not, the members of the Royal Academy opted to abandon the homogenizing practice of employing just one illustrator, offering, instead, a
dialogue between Castillo and Carnicerio. Roughly the same had already happened with the important edition sponsored by Lord Carteret in the early eighteenth century. Modern editions of the work, for example, like that of Juño García Soriano and Juño García Morales published by Aguilar, sometimes include illustrations by artists of different periods and countries.\textsuperscript{16} 

While this has the healthy effect of breaking up the visual hegemony that a single illustrator can establish, it also can have a deleterious side-effect. That is, my own concretizing activity can be destabilized as it stumbles upon images very different from the previous ones I’ve seen and that I’ve already incorporated, for better or worse, into my own way of imagining the characters. If each face depicted embodies a different story, as I just suggested, running across a different-looking don Quijote and Sancho at regular intervals can tangle up the narrative syntax even more than it already has been at the hands of the playfully sadistic Cide Hamete Benengeli. Quejana, Quijana, Quesada, Quijada—all this onomastic dizziness pales in comparison with the effect of encountering varying facial configurations every $x$ number of pages...

Now, some readers might think that I exaggerate when evoking the variability in the physical appearance of our two protagonistas. How many differences can arise on the basis of what the text describes: “Frisaba la edad de nuestro hidalgo con los cincuenta años. Era de complexion recia, seco de carnes, enjuto de rostro…” (I, 1; 28)? To this initial image other details are slowly added: his beard, his lack of teeth, etc.

And Sancho? The first description only evokes his economic status and his IQ: “En este tiempo solicitó don Quijote a un labrador, vecino suyo, hombre de bien—si es que este título se puede dar al que es po- bre—, pero de muy poca sal en la mollera” (I, 7; 72). And where is his trademark rotundity mentioned? Curiously, the first explicit evocation of a corpulent Sancho (aside from his surname, of course) happens in the first known illustration of the \textit{Quijote}, that is, in the manuscript found in the Alcaná de Toledo by the so-called “second author:” “debía de ser que tenía, a lo que mostraba la pintura, la barriga grande, el talle corto y las

\textsuperscript{16} This edition, which I used when studying the \textit{Quijote} for the first time, includes one hundred eighty two illustrations.
zancas largas, y por esto se le debió poner nombre de ‘Panza’ y de ‘Zancas,’ que con estos dos sobrenombres le llama algunas veces la historia” (I, 9; 87). It’s as if Cervantes were prophesying here about the role graphic illustration of his text would play in the future, generating the image of the squire not through a conventional description but through this exercise of “ekphrasis.”

But let’s proceed now to some of the examples of the differences that have appeared across the centuries. Don Quijote, as just seen, is somewhere around fifty years old. It’s remarkable how the depiction of a man of that age can vary. Generally speaking, our hidalgo tends to appear physically older in more recent times. A don Quijote with a more aged appearance resonates differently than one who looks younger. [1,2]17 The Romantically inflected pathos surrounding our protagonista increases dramatically when we attribute more years and fragility to him. (A little old man charging a windmill is one thing, a well-built mature one doing so is quite another.) But to depict him too much in this direction can turn him into a grotesquely laughable puppet, generating another type of reading. And if we depict him, conversely, with strong legs, capable of provoking envy of any assiduous gym-goer of the present day? [3,4]

And how crazy is don Quijote really? (This, of course, is the typical subject of debate in any course we professors give on the work.) Is there nobility—or even authentic wisdom—in that madness, as the Romantics tell us? There’s nothing like a good illustration to confirm our interpretation.18 [5-13]

Does Don Quijote have a beard or doesn’t he? The text mentions it, but some artists prefer him with only a moustache, as already seen above, or even without a single hair on his face. [14] This may seem like a minor detail, but go ahead and give an imaginary shave to some bearded fellow you know—Jesus Christ or Fidel or Osama. Is he the “same person”? And Don Quijote’s nose? How aquiline is it? [15] And what about his armor?

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17 Illustrations appear at the end of the article.
18 I am currently doing research to determine whether the depictions of Don Quijote’s madness in the graphic illustrations of the work mirror the evolution of the visual representations of the insane in the fine arts and elsewhere, as studied by scholars such as Sander Gilman (Seeing the Insane).
The text emphasizes its outlandish appearance. What happens if we present him dressed in essentially perfect, complete armor? [16]

And when we take off not only Don Quijote’s armor but most of his clothes? Within the iconographical tradition, there are, in fact, illustrators more disposed to depict explicitly the lower part of the body. The text tells us that Sancho averts his eyes so as not to see what’s uncovered when Don Quijote does his somersaults in the Sierra Morena so Sancho can tell Dulcinea just how crazy his master has been driven by her disdain (I, 25; 248). Do we get to see Don Quijote’s behind or not? [17, 18, 19] And in the inn, when he attacks the wineskins, we know from the narrator that his shirt doesn’t cover up everything that modesty demands. How much of his body do we end up seeing and what impression does it produce on us? [20]

Here we run into the whole problem of the physiological operations of our characters. Needless to say, the actual pictorial presence of the latter gives another kind of specificity to our characters. While it’s “natural” that Sancho Panza [21] be presented in all of his corporeal glory, artists vary considerably in their willingness to depict it. [22, 23] The acid test is, of course, the nocturnal adventure of the fulling-mill and the point to which the illustrator is willing to go. Sometimes, it’s pretty far. [24, 25, 26]

But we also find the ethereal “Caballero de la Triste Figura” manifesting this aspect of his being in certain moments of the iconographical tradition. [27, 28] A conscientious diachronic study of the latter would bring us face to face with the whole problematic theorized so brilliantly by Norbert Elias in his historical overview of the way Western culture has approached corporeal operations and their miscellaneous byproducts. [19]

And when the bodies of our protagonists are subject to physical violence? We know just how many beatings Don Quijote receives at different points in the novel. What is the precise spin given to these scenes? Do they come out as grossly comical? Or are they full of pathos, complete with Christological trimmings? [29, 30] And which are the illustrated

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[19] See particularly The Civilizing Process: The Development of Manners (Changes in (ode of Conduct and Feeling in Early Modern Times). For further examples of the exchange of vomit between Don Quijote and Sancho, see Lucía Megías’s Leer el Quijote en imágenes, 149-51.
editions that tend to avoid this kind of scene as much as possible? There are, indeed, many.

Sancho, too, is a victim of violence. While in his case there’s a predictable tendency to accent the comic aspect of that violence, the final result can vary enormously. [31, 32, 33] And then there’s the violence he inflicts, supposedly, on himself. Sancho’s pseudo-self-flagellation allows us to see his body in all its plenitude much better. [34, 35, 36]. As can be seen, Sancho’s corpulence varies quite a bit in these depictions. Generally speaking, the fatter, the funnier.

How old Sancho appears also varies substantially, as the reader has seen. An older-looking Sancho tends to emphasize the degree of plain stupidity that characterizes him, while if he’s depicted with fewer years on his shoulders we perhaps perceive him more as the victim of youthful ingenuousness. And the precise quantity of “sal en la mollera”? Is he a fool? [37] Is he sagacious or astute? [38] And how much of his simple-mindedness is attributable to his condition as peasant? The level of symbiosis with his donkey is symptomatic of how much stress the illustrator wants to put on the squire’s rusticity or even proto-animal quality. [39]

Earlier I mentioned the automatic aggiornamento that occurs with the evolution of the so-called models of representation. The readings of the Quijote that bring it nearer to our modern—or even post-modern—sensibility are progressively reinforced by those sectors of the quixotic icono-sphere that depict our protagonist with more modern expressive touches. The magnificent illustrations of Dalí give expression to characters fraught with “relevance” for the inhabitants of the twentieth century.20 [40, 41, 42]. In sum, a Don Quijote whose madness is a felicitous precursor of surrealism.

In a much less inspired manner, the illustrations of Pilar Coomonte in John Jay Allen’s edition for Cátedra also suffuse a “modern” air into the text. Of all the editions that are used in the college classrooms in recent times, it’s among the few that have graphic illustrations. Their inclusion shows that at least some publishers continue to think that they increase the potential salability of the edition. What is, indeed, true is that they

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20 The illustrations appeared in 1946 in The First Part of the Life and Achievements of the Renowned Don Quixote de la Mancha (translated by Peter Motteux).
also confer a hermeneutic spin on the work. Don Quijote always appears, even in the comic scenes, with a kind of hieratic gravity in the post-Romantic, “Woeful Countenance” mode. [43]

Another recent edition, Francisco Rico’s for Crítica, also includes illustrations, but only at the end in its splendid appendices. We thus don’t constantly run into concretizations that are distant from our own during our reading of the text. But neither can we say that these illustrations fail to influence our interaction with the latter. While they’re schematically didactic (and therefore exemplary for an edition of this nature), they still materialize our characters in a way that will remain lodged in the memory of the reader (that is, the one who, so as to prepare for a “solid” reading of the text, reads the appendices beforehand). [44, 45]

Drawing, now, to a close, let’s look at the scene that narrates the death of Don Quijote. This is the last act of concretization that will take place in the mind of the reader. The interpretation of the novel in its totality will depend, to a large degree, on the precise complexion it assumes. It’s surprising to see how many illustrated editions don’t depict this scene, a fact that in and of itself can affect our final interpretation of the work. The result is not so much to take away importance from this critical juncture of the protagonist’s life; rather, it’s that the graphic representation of it confers a special weight. Are we dealing with the man who has serenely realized the “stupidity” of his project of resurrecting knighthood? [46] Or rather, is it the pathetic moment of defeat with a Romantic twist? [47]

Here the details added by the illustrators can become paramount. In the text the presence of a crucifix in Don Quijote’s bedroom is never mentioned, for example. It’s an element not necessarily lacking in verisimilitude, but placing a crucifix on the wall, as we’ve already seen, reinforces the religious dimension of the ending. It can, for example, suggest Don Quijote’s own religious faith. The presence of a crucifix can even transform the protagonist into a Christic figure. [48]

With this we’ve arrived at the end of our rapid excursion over a very long road. [49, 50, 51] In the same dialogue cited at the beginning of this essay, Sancho proceeds to say, a propos of the horrible tapestries depicting Helen and Dido that hang in the wretched little room at the inn: “pero
querría yo que... pintasen [nuestra historia] manos de otro mejor pintor que él ha pintado a éstas” (II, 71; 1087). Needless to say, it would be wonderful to hear his reaction, along with his master’s, to the images that have been displayed on these pages. Would Don Quijote be tempted to invoke, as he subsequently does, the abominable painter Orbaneja, who was forced to write beneath his picture of a rooster: “Éste es un gallo?” In his absence, the reader will have to be the judge.21

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Figure 1
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Figure 33
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Figure 43
Figures 44 & 45
Figure 47

Figure 48
Figure 49
Figure 50
Figure 51
Sources of Illustrations

47. Gustave Doré. Paris 1863.