Don Quixote Unbound: Intertextuality, Interpictoriality and Transculturality in Flix's German Graphic Novel Adaptation (2012)

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Abstract

Comics adaptations of literary classics often struggle to step out of the shadow of their model. This article explores how the recent adaptation of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* by German comics artist Flix transposes the Golden-Age classic to a contemporary German setting, updating the story to speak to some of modern society's concerns. Flix's approach is marked by an ironic distance from his textual and pictorial sources, which he repurposes without losing sight of the Spanish novel's story arc, character constellation, and narrative devices. The adaptation restores the original comicality to a classic that has mostly been read as a tragic story. While the adaptation inscribes itself into Germany's cultural fabric, it proposes a *Don Quixote* that transcends traditional notions of clearly delimited, monolithic national cultures.

Keywords: adaptation, canon, cartooning, Miguel de Cervantes, parody, superhero comics, satire, translation

Introduction

Since the publication of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* some four centuries ago, the two-part novel has been adapted to a variety of art forms and media. Although the number of people who have read Cervantes's Golden-Age classic in its entirety may be rather small even among native speakers of Spanish, as a recent poll suggests,[1] the title character and his squire Sancho Panza are universally known, and their recognition value arguably exceeds that of other classic literary figures. Comics are relative latecomers to the diverse stream of *Don Quixote* adaptations. Some isolated antecedents aside, it is not until the 1940s that we find a significant number of comics adaptations of the novel, both in Spain and elsewhere.[2] Most of these are targeted at young readers, often with a clear pedagogical aim, as in the US-American series *Classics Illustrated*,[3] or the Spanish *Joyas Literarias Juveniles* [Literary Gems for the Young], whose *Quixote*s were translated and disseminated widely.

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[1] Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 'Barómetro de junio 2015: Estudio nº 3101' (June 2015), 11–13, http://www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/-Archivos/Marginales/3100_3119/3101/es3101mar.pdf (accessed 14 September 2017).

[2] See Esther Almarcha Núñez-Herrador, Óscar Fernández Olalde and Isidro Sánchez Sánchez, *Don Quijote en los tebeos* (Ciudad Real: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2005).

[3] See William B. Jones Jr., 'Classics Illustrated and the Evolving Art of Comic-Book Literary Adaptation', in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. Thomas Leitch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 214–236, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199331000.013.12.

In a damning assessment of six decades of *Don Quixote* adaptations up to the early 2000s, Antonio Martín comes to the conclusion that 'Estos cómics adaptan la novela maestra de forma lineal y la convierten en un simple *digest* en el que se intenta sintetizar lo esencial de la acción, suprimiendo todos los matices, por lo que el cómic es un simple y pobre resumen, casi un telegrama, de la obra original' [These comics adapt the master novel linearly, turning it into a simple digest that attempts to synthesise the essential elements of the plot, suppressing the nuances along the way. Consequently, these comics are a plain and poor summary, almost a telegram, of the original work].[4] While Martín's indictment may not do full justice to the diversity of *Don Quixote* comics in the era reviewed, it does highlight some key characteristics and common pitfalls found in most adaptations. The fact is that twentieth-century *Don Quixote* comics in the strict sense — and by that I mean here comics of some length and narrative complexity that show a sustained hypertextual relationship with Cervantes's novel rather than being loosely inspired by it or merely presenting 'quixotic' characters[5] — tend to move within the reassuring aura that surrounds a literary classic, offering, for the most part, illustrated versions of Cervantes's novel that have been drastically reduced and simplified. In so doing, *Don Quixote* comics 'invoke not only their specific precursor text (…) but the aura of literature as such to

[4] Antonio Martín, 'Los cómics del *Quijote* en España', *Cuadernos de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil* 12, no. 177 (2004), 45–55 (50). Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine.

[5] Cf. Manuel Durán and Fay R. Rogg, 'Sightings of Cervantes and His Knight in the Twentieth Century', in *Fighting Windmills: Encounters with Don Quixote* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 219–247, https://doi.org/10.12987/yale/9780300110227.003.0009.

confer a sense of authority'.[6] It would appear that adaptations of *Don Quixote*, arguably more so than those of other literary classics, struggle to distance themselves from the gravitational centre of their source text while maintaining a nuanced intertextual relationship with it.

One specific reason for that can be found in the circumstance that *Don Quixote* comics are adaptations not only of a literary classic but also of a long-established iconography of its protagonist.[7] This can be seen as an advantage or disadvantage, depending on the adaptor's overall aim and approach. If the intention is to tell essentially the same story in a different medium, preventing the reader from experiencing any serious cognitive or aesthetic challenge, then the adaptor may be grateful for the celebrity of Cervantes's hero, drawing closely on both the literary text and the related iconographic tradition; the recent two-part English-language adaptation by Rob Davis (2011/2013)[8] testifies to the fact that this approach does not preclude the possibility of creating an engaging and aesthetically compelling graphic narrative. If, on the other hand, the adaptor sees Cervantes's novel as a starting point for exploring new narrative possibilities in a different medium rather than a blueprint to be followed closely, then Don Quixote's established visual identity and the status of Cervantes's novel as a universally acknowledged literary monument may be obstacles in this exploration. But, as Julie Sanders

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[6] Thomas Leitch, 'Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory', *Criticism* 45, no. 2 (2003), 149–171 (165), https://doi.org/10.1353/crt.2004.0001.

[7] Cf. Mieke Bal, 'Facing the Face: To Be or Not to Be Don Quijote', *World Literature Studies* 11, no. 4 (2019), 69–83 (72).

[8] Rob Davis, *Don Quixote: Volume One* (London: SelfMadeHero, 2011); Rob Davis, *Don Quixote: Volume Two* (London: SelfMadeHero, 2013).

reminds us, 'it is usually at the very point of infidelity that the most creative acts of adaptation and appropriation take place'.[9]

A recent German-language adaptation of *Don Quixote* to the comics medium, which I shall refer to as '*Don Quijote* the comic', marks a radical departure from the predominant pattern outlined above. Released originally in serialised form between October 2011 and May 2012 in the German national broadsheet *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (*FAZ*), the 118 daily instalments by comics artist Felix Görmann, who publishes under the pen name *Flix*, adapt Cervantes's novel not only to a different medium, but also transpose it linguistically (from Spanish to German), geographically (from Spain to Germany) and historically (from the early seventeenth to the early twenty-first century), recasting the novel for a contemporary German audience.[10]

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[9] Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2006), 20, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203087633.

[10] The serial instalments have been available online since their original publication (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 'Don Quijote', https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/cartoons/flix-don-quijote-11482899.html (accessed 28 September 2021)). Already in 2012, the series was published in book format with minor additions, some subtle changes to individual panels and an enhanced paratextual environment; in 2014, a well-received Spanish translation was released (see, e.g., Juan Rodríguez Millán, 'Don Quijote, de Flix', *Cómic para todos* (17 February 2014), https://comicparatodos.wordpress.com/2014/02/17/don-quijote-de-flix/ (accessed 14 September 2021)). Unless stated otherwise, my analysis is based on the German book publication: Flix, *Don Quijote: Die denkwürdigen Abenteuer des tapferen Ritters von der traurigen Gestalt* (Hamburg: Carlsen, 2012).

This article explores how *Don Quijote* the comic unleashes Cervantes's novel's transcultural potential, creating new cultural and aesthetic possibilities for the Spanish classic. I will argue that, despite the adaptation's obvious distance from the novel, Flix leverages affinities and points of contact between Cervantes's protagonists and their twenty-first century German reincarnation, exploiting these through the specific possibilities offered by the comics medium. My interpretive analysis of the graphic novel will investigate the ways in which Flix reconciles the adaptation's defamiliarising Germanness with the hypotext's Hispanicness. Following a discussion of the target audience and marketing strategy, I will examine the connections that link the German adaptation to its Spanish model and to the Hispanic world more widely, trying to account for the intertextual and interpictorial strategies and their overall effect. It will become clear that, far from being an easy-reader version for children, college students or those reluctant to engage with the original literary text, Flix's *Don Quijote* appropriates its sources in subtle, sophisticated ways.

Lawrence Venuti considers adaptation and translation to be close siblings in terms of the operations that are at work in producing one and the other. According to Venuti, both of these second-order creations enact interpretations of their sources, decontextualising and recontextualising them.[11] For Flix's adaptation, it is worth keeping in mind that the 'close siblings' translation and adaptation are two dimensions of the same work. Inasmuch as the medial transposition[12] conditions the translation, the whole of this adaptation is more than the sum of its

[11] Lawrence Venuti, 'Adaptation, Translation, Critique', *Journal of Visual Culture* 6, no. 1 (2007), 25–43 (30), https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412907075066.

[12] Irina O. Rajewsky, 'Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality', *Intermédialités* 6, 43–64 (51), https://doi.org/10.7202/1005505ar.

underlying operations. More specifically, I will argue that the move from literature to comics entails a basic shift in the text's narrative design, which is not fully accounted for by the semiotic differences between the two media concerned but points towards Flix's particular narrative poetics.

Rewriting a Spanish Golden-Age classic

Don Quijote the comic is not a translation in the strict, linguistic sense of the term. In fact, hardly anywhere does Flix engage with the original's wording or literary style by directly drawing on one of the existing German translations or translating from the Spanish himself. The lines the characters deliver are almost completely of Flix's making, arising from the episodes — some of which can be loosely mapped onto the novel — as they unfold within the twenty-first century German setting. Most episodes, as well as the numerous embedded narratives found in the novel, have been discarded entirely. This radical departure from the wording of Cervantes's acclaimed novel and its multi-layered episodic fecundity contrasts with most adapters' eagerness to preserve at least the general stylistic characteristics as well as certain emblematic key episodes of that text.

I see three reasons behind this lack of concern with the novel's wording, style and, as we will see, narrative design. Firstly, given that Flix's adaptation involves a linguistic move from Spanish to German, the graphic novel is from the outset less invested in hailing Cervantes's masterpiece as a timeless literary monument, and therefore better placed to escape the aura of the original than Spanish-language adaptations; after all, a German-language *Don Quixote* will always be removed from the original by a linguistic gap, a situation that is further complicated by the fact that there exist a good number of German-language translations of the novel. Secondly, Flix's decision to transpose the original story to a different setting as well as to the present further weakens the link

between hypertext and the hypotext. Thirdly, and most importantly, Flix's adaptation explores Cervantes's literary, word-based narrative through the specific means of the medium of comics; this exploration shifts the focus from the novel's wording, literary style, and narrative discourse towards the story's potential for scenic enactment and visualisation. Because of these factors, *Don Quijote* the comic's engagement with Cervantes's novel involves several operations that relate as much to Flix's interpretation of *Don Quixote* as to his narrative poetics as a comics artist, resulting in a rendering that, at first glance, appears to have little in common with its hypotext. In fact, if it weren't for the cover, title page and foreword, even to readers familiar with the story line of Cervantes's novel the intertextual relationship might not be immediately obvious.

A brief plot summary of the 1,300-odd monochrome panels may help us appreciate the extent to which *Don Quijote* the comic departs from its model.

Plot summary

Flix's 136-page adaptation tells the contemporary story of a quirky elderly man by the name of Alonso Quijano, who lives alone in a spacious house on the outskirts of Tobosow, a village in the northeast of Germany. The protagonist, whose civic fervour and progressive dementia have got him into several scrapes, is forced by his daughter, Antonia, who is a single mother, to move into a nursing home in Berlin by the name of *Cervantes*. Together with his preadolescent grandson Robin, who is an avid reader of Batman comics and thinks of himself as The Dark Knight, Quijano sets out on a series of loosely connected adventures in and around Berlin. After a final showdown, in which the increasingly confused protagonist crashes his bicycle into his daughter's car, Quijano makes his will and dies peacefully in bed in the nursing home.

Indicative of Flix's distance from Cervantes's novel, the adaptation's title contrasts with the almost complete absence of the name 'Don Quijote' from the text itself. Although under the influence of his grandson's obsession with Batman, as we will see, Alonso Quijano eventually comes to consider himself a knight, at no point does he think of himself as Don Quixote,[13] nor is there any evidence that he — or anyone else, for that matter — might be aware of the existence of a Spanish novel by that title. The graphic novel's title *Don Quijote* therefore links the text to Cervantes's novel without claiming that Flix's protagonist *is* Don Quixote. Rather, the reader is invited to infer that Flix's Alonso Quijano, who shares his name with Cervantes's title character before he decides to follow the path of the fictional medieval knights-errant, has been conceived as a contemporary German equivalent of the Spanish title character: mentally confused and nostalgically attached to a world that no longer exists, or perhaps never existed in the first place.

Target audience and marketing

The *FAZ*, where Flix's adaptation was first published, is read by Germany's economic and educated elite.[14] The readership of the comic's original release can therefore be assumed to possess a basic familiarity with the Golden-Age text. However, for the book publication, whose

[13] When referring to Cervantes's novel and its protagonist, I use the common English spelling, 'Don Quixote'. To draw attention to the absence or presence of that name in Flix's adaptation, I maintain the spelling 'Don Quijote' used in the German text.

[14] Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 'Objektprofil September 2017', 17–22, http://docplayer.org/68032875-Frankfurter-allgemeine-zeitung-objektprofil-september-2017.html (accessed 30 August 2021).

target audience is less clearly defined, Flix seems to anticipate the possibility that readers may possess little or no knowledge of Cervantes's novel.

From the very start, the book edition strives to appeal to a wide German audience and their shared experience as readers of high-brow literature. The book's front cover (Fig. 1) replicates the design features of the popular *Universal-Bibliothek* [Universal Library], a widely-known series of affordable paperback editions of literary classics established by the German publishing house Philipp Reclam jun. in 1867.[15] On the cover, we see Quijano (on his bicycle) and his grandson Robin (on a donkey) — an arrangement that anticipates the character constellation and links the adaptation to its hypotext *Don Quixote* — against a plain yellow background: this colour links the book to the Reclam flagship series of 'German literary classics (including classics translated into German)'.[16] The cover design further uses the same text placement and graphic design elements found on Reclam's covers from 1988 to 2012.[17]

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[15] Monika Schmitz-Emans and Christian A. Bachmann, *Literatur-Comics: Adaptationen und Transformationen der Weltliteratur* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 338, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110266764.

[16] Reclam Verlag, 'English information: What do the colours stand for?', https://www.reclam.de/service/english_information (accessed 17 August 2017).

[17] See Friedrich Forssman, 'Zur Neugestaltung 2012', in *Die Welt in Gelb: Zur Neugestaltung der Universal-Bibliothek 2012*, ed. Karl-Heinz Fallbacher (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2012), 9–37 (26–28), https://www.reclam.de/data/media/Die_Welt_in_Gelb.pdf (accessed 17 August 2017).

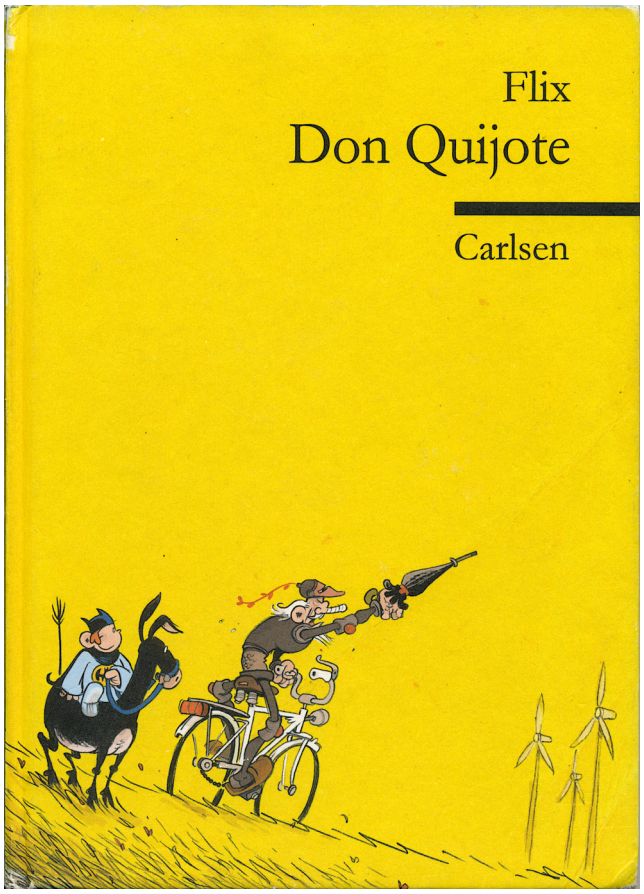

Figure 1: Front cover of *Don Quijote* (© Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2012).[18]

In a self-ironic note suggesting heavy use of the book, the cover even mimics the scuffed edges that are the hallmark of a well-thumbed copy of what to generations of students across German-speaking countries is simply known as a *Reclam-Heft* [Reclam booklet]. This marketing strategy is noteworthy for three reasons. Firstly, it presents Flix's graphic novel as a literary classic, appealing on an immediate level to a readership drawn to the elitist end of the cultural spectrum. Secondly, it implicitly claims the adaptation of Cervantes's novel as a *German* classic. Although, as noted above, the emblematic yellow series of Reclam's Universal-Bibliothek

[18] All figures are used with permission of Bonnier Media Deutschland GmbH.

includes translations into German, in the 2017 catalogue 75% of the 835 titles were classics written in German. Given further that most readers would have encountered the booklets in lessons of German literature, it is plausible to assume that to them the yellow cover signals a key text of the German-language literary canon. Thirdly, and perhaps less obviously, even for readers who are not seeking out highbrow literature, the cover taps into the widely shared experience of handling the delicate small-format booklets, potentially stirring up memories of the often ambiguous encounter with classic literature in an educational setting.[19] The very materiality of the book cover therefore creates a sense of familiarity for a large sector of the potential German-speaking readership, anchoring *Don Quijote* the comic firmly in the German cultural fabric.

Hispanism in* Don Quijote *the comic

To the names already mentioned that link *Don Quijote* the comic to the eponymous novel — *Alonso Quijano*, *Tobosow* (whose ending *-ow* [o] corresponds to a toponymical pattern commonly found in the Brandenburg region of northeast Germany),[20] *Antonia* and *Cervantes* —

[19] The cover of the 2017 Reclam autumn catalogue playfully addresses the love–hate relationship many readers have with the publisher's flagship series. Three alliterating lines claim emphatically that, regardless of whether readers like Reclam's booklets, these ultimately fulfil the primary purpose of books, which is that of being read: 'GEHASST. / GELIEBT. / GELESEN!' [Hated. Loved. Read! (past participle)].

[20] Ingrid Cáceres Würsig, 'El *Quijote* en un cómic alemán: trasposición y actualización de la narrativa cervantina', in *Cervantes en los siglos XX y XXI: La recepción actual del mito del 'Quijote'*, ed. Paloma Ortiz de Urbina (Bern: Peter Lang, 2018), 121–132 (124).

we can add those of *Sancho Panza*, a local shopkeeper and close friend of Quijano's, who dies a natural death at the beginning of the comic, *Father Pérez*, the late parish priest, Quijano's bicycle *Rosinante*, a hair salon by the name of *Mambrin*, a confused fellow resident of the nursing home called *Carrasco*, Quijano's deceased cat *Dulcinea*, and *Teresa*, the girl Robin secretly admires. In fact, apart from Quijano's grandson Robin and a certain *Don Moliniero* [sic], whose name can be seen as a (linguistically awkward) acknowledgement on Flix's part of the emblematic importance of (wind) mills both in the original *Don Quixote* and in his adaptation,[21] all named characters have previously appeared in Cervantes's novel, albeit in roles that are different from those ascribed to them in the graphic novel.

But the graphic novel's Hispanism does not stop at these specific intertextual markers. Throughout the first half of the graphic novel, we find references to Spain and Hispanic culture, widely understood. The company planning to erect the wind farm that provokes Quijano's outrage, for example, is called *La Mancha* (10); and the billboard advertising the project is provided by a certain *Paulo Coelho*, who claims to provide 'Beschriftung aller Art' [signs of all kinds] on the side of his van (10); in Quijano's house we spot an oversized reproduction of a famous etching by Francisco de Goya (16), which our hero doesn't hesitate to paint over to have a solid surface for creating a placard with the words 'Nein danke!' [No thanks!] (16), voicing his protest against a number of issues; a traffic sign shows the way to a fictitious place *Toledow* (32) (pronounced approximately like the Spanish town of Toledo), another one points to the very real *Spanische Allee* [Spanish Avenue] in Berlin (32); a truck on the motorway bears the inscription

[21] Spanish *molino* means 'mill', *molinero* is the 'miller'.

'ETA: Freiheit und mehr' [ETA: Freedom and more] (32);[22] a boy wears a T-shirt with the inscription 'L. A. Mancha' (37); a street scene in Berlin shows a shop window with a sign in Spanish that reads 'Farmacia' [pharmacy] (48); and after initiating a violent confrontation in front of the Berlin Reichstag building, Quijano is examined in the *Francisco-Goya Klinikum* [Francisco Goya Medical Centre] (61). All these references are part of the represented world, whose Germanness is neither explicitly affirmed nor put into question. While transposing Alonso Quijano into a German setting inevitably detaches him from the original Spanish context, as we have seen, this Germanisation is counterbalanced by a Hispanicisation of the environment in which the story unfolds.

Yet the novel's engagement with Hispanic culture goes even deeper than the casual references and allusions just listed might suggest. This is the case with the double reference to Goya, which serves a specific purpose in the narrative. The repurposing of the reproduction of Goya's etching and Alonso Quijano's medical examination in the Francisco Goya Medical Centre function as indicators of, and a subtle comment on, the protagonist's mental state. The destruction of Goya's *Caprice* no. 43, 'El sueño de la razón produce monstruos' [The sleep of reason produces monsters] (16) (Fig. 2), immediately precedes the first series of episodes in which Quijano is shown to act violently, assaulting a bystander at a demonstration (17) and

[22] Notably, in the Spanish translation this slogan is changed to the less provocative, more on-topic 'W & G: Welles & Gilliam', alluding to film makers Orson Welles and Terry Gilliam, whose ambitious Don Quixote projects hadn't come to fruition at the time of writing of Flix's comic. Gilliam's *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* finally premiered in 2018.

rampaging about in a brothel (23), whose name 'Das Lustschloss' [The Castle of Desire] is an ironic echo of the *castles*, real and imagined, Don Quixote encounters in Cervantes's novel.

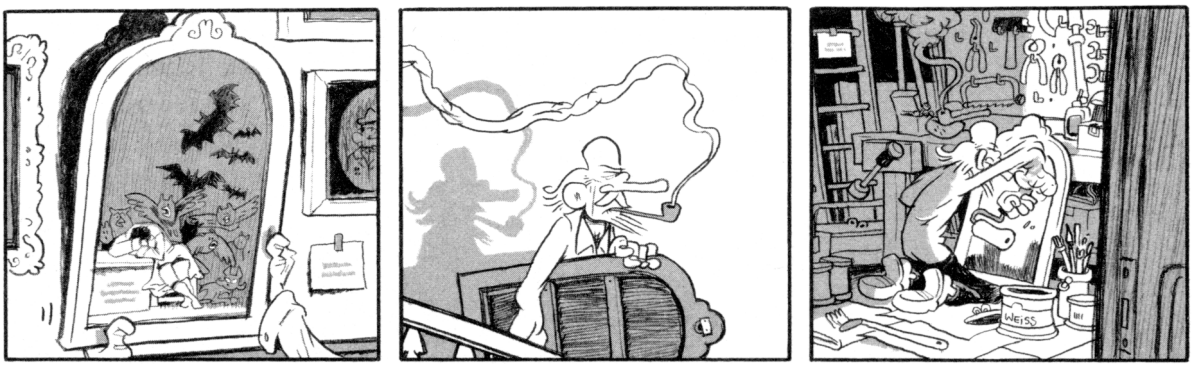

Figure 2: Alonso Quijano converting Goya's *Caprice* no. 43 into a placard (16) (© Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2012).

Not only does the introduction of Goya's emblematic etching at this point invite us to read Quijano's 'monstrous' behaviour as the consequence of the metaphorical 'sleep of reason', which, according to Goya, leads the way to madness; the conversion of the etching into a placard with a blunt message of protest (see above) further illustrates that Quijano is unwilling, or unable, to take on board Goya's warning, acting directly against its principle. Consequently, Goya's allegory of Spanish society and artistic creation[23] turns into a comment about Alonso Quijano's mental state.

[23] Sarah D. Harris, 'The Monster Within and Without: Spanish Comics, Monstrosity, Religion, and Alterity', in *Representing Multiculturalism in Comics and Graphic Novels*, eds Carolene Ayaka and Ian Hague (New York: Routledge, 2014), 113–129 (120), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315775340-8.

The result of a CT scan of Quijano's brain carried out after another violent episode seals the protagonist's transfer into the nursing home (62). The name of the hospital, Francisco Goya, links the medical assessment back to the etching's philosophical point about the need to balance fantasy and reason. Although modern medicine has assigned a scientific label to Quijano's suffering — the CT images suggest damage to the brain, presumably because of Alzheimer's disease (Fig. 3) — Goya's etching reminds us that there is a more generous way of looking at Quijano's apparent madness than the clinical diagnosis.

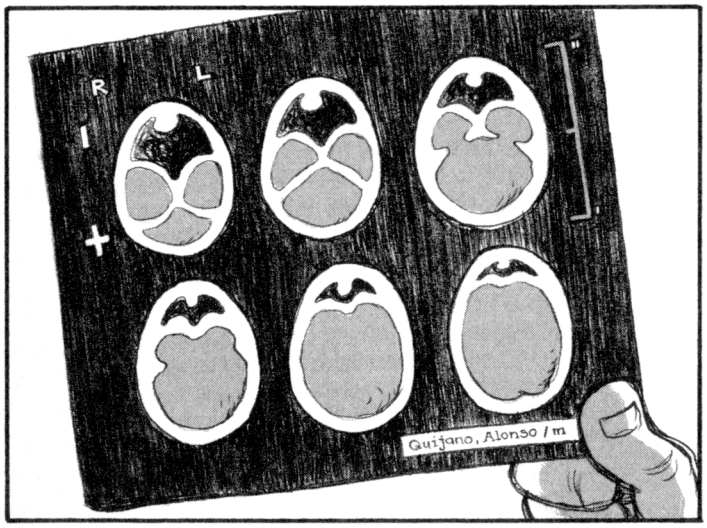

Figure 3: CT scan image of Alonso Quijano's brain (61) (© Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2012).

Flix takes things even a step further, calling into question the credit generally given to medical testing. Upon closer inspection, the CT images incorporate the emblematic silhouette of Batman, which suggests that his grandson Robin's obsession with The Dark Knight has, quite

literally, penetrated the old man's mind. This link between Goya's etching and Batman is reenforced by the visual prominence of the bats in the *Caprice* itself.[24]

While the playful intertextuality, interpictoriality and transculturality, all of which I will consider in more detail shortly, are part of the appeal of a serialised comic in a highbrow-newspaper like the *FAZ*, they also function as a constant reminder of the Hispanic origin of Alonso Quijano's tale. On a biographical level they show Flix's fascination with Hispanic culture and *Don Quixote*. In interviews, the comics artist has repeatedly reported that that he owes his original encounter with Don Quixote to his grandfather, who read the novel to him in German translation and later suffered from dementia like Alonso Quijano.[25] It was this childhood experience, according to the author, that prompted him to dedicate his *Don Quijote* comic to his grandfather (14).

Internal and external communication systems

The conflation of a Germanised *Don Quixote* on the macrolevel, and a Hispanicised German setting on the microlevel, results in a culturally hybrid text in which we can see in operation two

[24] Matías Martínez, '*Don Quijote* als Literaturcomic: Reduktion oder Transformation narrativer Komplexität? Die Quijote-Comics von Will Eisner, Rob Davis und Flix', in *Cervantes en los siglos XX y XXI: La recepción actual del mito del 'Quijote'*, ed. Paloma Ortiz de Urbina (Bern: Peter Lang, 2018), 99–119 (118).

[25] See, e.g., Marcus Lippold, 'Gegen Windräder und Comics, die blöd machen: Don Quijote zieht wieder in den Kampf', *NTV* (16 July 2012), https://www.n-tv.de/leute/buecher/Don-Quijote-zieht-wieder-in-den-Kampf-article6726026.html (accessed 14 September 2021).

communication systems: an internal one, which concerns the interaction of the characters within the diegesis; and an external one, which operates between text and reader. As Manfred Pfister has pointed out with reference to the staging of dramatic texts, 'the informational value of a single verbal or non-verbal signal changes according to whether it is evaluated within the framework of the internal or the external communication system'.[26] Flix's adaptation builds on the resulting discrepant awareness between the characters and the readers,[27] insomuch as the characters are completely unaware of having been borrowed, in one way or another, from Cervantes's novel; nor does it occur to them that the names they carry and the inscriptions pointing towards Hispanic culture could be seen as incongruent with the setting of the graphic novel. Even the pair's adventures in and around Berlin, which echo certain episodes from Cervantes's novel,[28] do not imply a knowledge of *Don Quixote* on the characters' part.

While in principle the observation regarding two distinct communication systems applies to all fictional literature, in Flix's graphic novel the external communication system is charged with meaning to an extent characteristically found in parodic, satirical or pastiche re-writings of texts. In all these types of second-order creations, the intended effect depends crucially upon the readers' familiarity with the model or models, as the hypertext is designed to unfold its full meaning potential only if, on a first level, the reader recognises that there is an 'interplay between

[26] Manfred Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, trans. John Halliday (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 40, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511553998.

[27] Ibid., 49–50.

[28] See Cáceres Würsig, 'El *Quijote* en un cómic alemán', 125–128.

texts',[29] and, on a second level, identifies the commonalities and differences between the model and its re-writing. The adaptation's character constellation is one aspect that exemplifies this tension between recognition and difference.

Character constellation

Despite the adaptation's distance from its hypotext, it captures some of the key ideas that drive *Don Quixote* the novel. Flix achieves this, among other things, by projecting characteristics of the model's protagonists flexibly onto Alonso Quijano and his grandson Robin, turning the character constellation on its head. Crucially, it is Robin whose excessive consumption of superhero comics prompts him to seek adventures with his grandfather, while the latter's mental issues are motivated in line with contemporary medical concepts. Robin's distorted perception of reality and his obsession with The Dark Knight rub off on his grandfather, inverting the dynamic between knight-errant and squire found in Cervantes.

Another shift in the character constellation occurs when Quijano fails to come to his senses towards the end of his adventures, sudden and externally motivated as this may be in the Golden-Age novel.[30] Instead, it is Robin who emerges from the adventures on the side of his grandfather

[29] Dennis Cutchins, 'Bakhtin, Intertextuality, and Adaptation,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. Thomas Leitch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 71–86 (81), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199331000.013.4.

[30] Randolph D. Pope, '*Don Quijote*, Segunda Parte: Capítulo 74 y final', in *Estudios de literatura española y francesa: Siglos XVI y XVII – Homenaje a Horst Baader*, ed. Frauke Gewecke (Frankfurt: Vervuert, 1984), 169–174, https://doi.org/10.31819/9783964562036-015.

with a heightened sense of reality, a development that inverts that of Sancho Panza in Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, who becomes more and more deeply invested in his master's imaginary identity as the story progresses. In a two-page epilogue following Quijano's death (133–134), Robin confronts the neighbourhood bully and his gang without assuming the imaginary identity of Batman, as he did previously. In fact, for the first time (and unlike Don Quixote in Cervantes's novel, who never directly approaches his lady Dulcinea) Robin even plucks up the courage to speak to his secret flame Teresa, who forms part of the gang. This optimistic twist invites the reader to shift attention from Alonso Quijano's demise to his grandson's newly found self-confidence, suggesting a reading of Flix's adaptation in terms of Robin's coming of age.

The final panel of the comic (134) shows Robin and Teresa setting out on an adventure, gliding through the air on the back of the giant, fire-spitting bat that made an earlier appearance as part of the boy's Batman fantasy. Both a literal take on the superhero's *batmobile* and reminiscent of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza's imaginary ride on the back of the wooden horse Clavileño (*DQ* II, 40–41),[31] this oversized, borderless panel reconciles Robin's new self — he no longer wears his Batman costume — with a demonstration of the power of imagination, which knows no boundaries.[32] While the connection of the character constellation and the story arc with

[31] To reference specific chapters of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, I use the abbreviation *DQ*, followed by the part of the novel (in Roman numerals) and the chapter number (in Arabic numerals).

[32] Florian Trabert, '»Comics sind gefährlich!« Flix' *Don Quijote* als Metacomic', in *Graphisches Erzählen: Neue Perspektiven auf Literaturcomics*, eds. Florian Trabert, Mara Stuhlfauth-Trabert, and Johannes Waßmer (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015), 109–123 (117),

Cervantes's novel remains clear, Flix has reworked it in such a way that it corresponds to his characters' very own logic and development.

A second aspect of Flix's adaptation that transposes a basic feature of Cervantes's novel for a contemporary German audience is the comic's self-conscious metafictional and metaliterary dimension.[33] As the corresponding passages are predominantly found in the book edition's paratexts, these warrant a more detailed discussion.

Paratexts

The first original paratext is Alonso Quijano's letter to the fictitious local daily *Märkischer Volksfreund* (1). In this reader's letter the outraged Quijano complains about the newspaper's disgraceful insistence on including comics in its culture section, pointing at the illiteracy and moral corruption of the young brought about by what he considers to be reprehensible reading matter — a wholesale criticism that echoes Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954). It is not a gratuitous detail that Flix has Quijano sign off the letter in Sütterlin, a handwriting script taught in German schools between 1924 and 1941 and today widely perceived as antiquated and difficult to read.[34] Quijano's crusade against comics establishes the lead character

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https://doi.org/10.14361/transcript.9783839428252.109; cf. also Martínez, '*Don Quijote* als Literaturcomic', 118.

[33] Cf. Cáceres Würsig, 'El *Quijote* en un cómic alemán', 128.

[34] Peter von Polenz, '6.2. Schriftlichkeit/Mündlichkeit, Bildungsgeschichte, individuelle Kommunikationsformen', in *Deutsche Sprachgeschichte vom Spätmittelalter bis zur Gegenwart,*

from the beginning not only as a *Wutbürger* [enraged citizen], whose fanatical activism makes him the target of Flix's satire, but as an individual who is out of touch with the world around him.[35] The obvious irony of having the protagonist of a graphic novel rail against comics, to which I will return later, is indicative of Flix's self-conscious approach to the medium and sets the tone for his engagement with some of the subtleties found in Cervantes.

The book title and subtitle are followed by a line that explicitly states the distance of the graphic novel from the Spanish hypotext: 'frei nach dem Roman von Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra' [freely adapted from the novel by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra] (11). While the notion of a free adaptation is as commonly used as it is vague, the foreword (12–13) discusses the relationship between hypotext and hypertext in more detail.

Readers familiar with Cervantes's novel will immediately recognise a narrative device employed in the *Prólogo* of *Don Quixote*'s first part, where an imaginary friend praises the work

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vol. 3: 19. und 20. Jahrhundert (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 37–76 (44–49), https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110824889.3.37.

[35] In the foreword to the book edition (12–13), the German term *Wutbürger* is explicitly used with reference to Quijano. The government-sponsored Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache [Association for the German Language] chose *Wutbürger* as Word of the Year 2010 (Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache, '"Wutbürger" zum Wort des Jahres 2010 gewählt', *Pressemitteilungen* (17 December 2010), http://gfds.de/wutbuerger-zum-wort-des-jahres-2010-gewaehlt/ (accessed 22 August 2017)). The fact that Flix picked up this popular neologism for the 2012 book publication of his *Don Quixote* adaptation illustrates not only how closely the text is linked to contemporary Germany's sensitivities, but also Flix's ironic detachment from Quijano's extreme civic fervour.

and states its alleged purpose. In a slight change of strategy, here the voice is not explicitly mediated by that of the author: Flix attributes the foreword directly to a certain Frank Schirmmacher, the fictitious co-publisher of the equally fictitious *Märkischer Volksfreund*, one of the two newspapers where the *Quixote* comic is said to first have appeared between 2011 and 2012. Schirmmacher, whose name and biographical details are closely inspired by the late Frank Schirrmacher (1959–2014), prominent journalist and former co-publisher of the *FAZ* where the comic strip did effectively appear in serialised form, opens his foreword by quoting the well-known first sentence from Cervantes's original prologue, thereby explicitly aligning the two paratexts.

Adaptation as performance

In what is conceptually the most revelatory passage of the foreword, Schirmmacher reflects on the graphic novel's way of adapting Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, claiming that rather than *Adaptation* [adaptation], Flix prefers to call his approach *Neuinszenierung* [revival], in the sense of 'The action or an act of staging a new production of an old play, musical, etc.',[36] with a strong resonance of *mise-en-scène* (12). This term is used again in the colophon, where Flix's *Don Quijote* is referred to as the author's 'zweite Neuinszenierung eines literarischen Klassikers' [second revival of a literary classic] [136], the first one being his earlier *Faust* adaptation.

While the link with drama and performance may be obvious in the case of Flix's adaptation of the first part of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*, which is, after all, a tragic play, we

[36] *OED Online*, 'revival, n.', 1.b., http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/164908 (accessed 9 November 2016).

might not expect to find the term *Neuinszenierung* used with reference to an adaptation of a non-dramatic, narrative text. Given that *Neuinszenierung* further implies a distancing from the original, including the possibility of radical changes to the text in line with a particular interpretation, for *Don Quijote* the comic the term could be seen to apply in a metaphorical sense, dwelling precisely on the implication of a high degree of creative freedom. In the foreword this is explicitly contrasted with a more restrictive understanding of *adaptation*: 'Flix bevorzugt das Wort "Neuinszenierung" für seine Art, klassische Literatur zu bearbeiten. Und die Freiheiten, die er sich nimmt, um dem Kern der Vorlage näherzukommen, gehen deutlich über das bloße Adaptieren hinaus' [Flix prefers the term 'revival' for his way of adapting classic literature. And the liberties he takes to get closer to the core of the original exceed by far those of mere adapting] (12).

I would contend that for the text considered here, the difference between adaptation and *Neuinszenierung* is not just one of degrees of creative freedom, but holds a heuristic potential that extends beyond metaphorically characterising the process involved in adapting a literary classic. Flix's *Don Quixote* adaptation can itself be examined as a *Neuinszenierung* in the stricter sense, insofar as the comic shows one of the key characteristics of dramatic texts: the lack of a narrator.

Pfister identifies the 'absence of a mediating communication system',[37] which in narratological terms we can refer to as the lack of an extradiegetic narrator, as the key structural difference that distinguishes a traditional dramatic text from a narrative text. While it is evident that this distinction does not apply to comics in general, where more often than not, captions supplement the characters' direct discourse, one of the most striking formal features of Flix's

[37] Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, 4.

adaptation is the complete absence of captions and the corresponding suppression of the extradiegetic narrative voice, which in Cervantes's novel plays a fundamental role in presenting and evaluating the knight-errant's adventures. Instead, in *Don Quijote* the comic the narrative is driven exclusively by the characters' verbal exchanges within the represented world and the drawings, many of which contain diegetic inscriptions.[38] The unfolding of the story before the reader's eyes, then, has an immediacy similar to that of a traditional drama performed before an audience. It becomes clear that Flix engages with *Don Quixote* the novel through the lens of a particular understanding of comics adaptations as a narrator-less form of graphic narrative.

The lack of an extradiegetic narrative voice observed in *Don Quijote* the comic is also found in Flix's other non-autobiographical comics. A glance at *Held* (2003), *Sag was* (2004) and *Mädchen* (2006), on the other hand, shows that the comics artist's stance in this matter varies across his oeuvre. In this trilogy, he makes ample use of captions that accommodate the voice of an autodiegetic narrator (extradiegetic level), which the reader is invited to take as a fictionalised version of the comic creator's own voice. This seeming inconsistency throws light on Flix's narrative poetics, suggesting that to him, a comic's extradiegetic narrative voice (characteristically articulated in captions) is a direct extension of the author's and, therefore, restricted to autobiographical comics. Given that an adapted work of fiction does not originate from the adaptor's biographical experience, according to this line of reasoning it is only logical that in his adaptation of *Don Quixote*, Flix sees no place for an extradiegetic narrative voice.

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[38] Charles Forceville, Tony Veale and Kurt Feyaerts, 'Balloonics: The Visuals of Balloons in Comics', in *The Rise and Reason of Comics and Graphic Literature: Critical Essays on the Form*, eds Joyce Goggin and Dan Hassler-Forest (Jefferson: McFarland), 56–73 (66).

Unlike in his adaptation of *Faust*, where this kind of narrator-less, disembodied graphic narrative could be seen to mirror the lack of a narrator in Goethe's drama, it is clear that in *Don Quijote* the comic the adaptor's reluctance to channel the prominent voice of Cervantes's narrator into captions cannot be accounted for by pointing at a structural similarity. The absence of an extradiegetic narrative voice in the *Don Quixote* adaptation must therefore be taken as a key formal interpretant, to use Venuti's term,[39] that is linked to the adaptor's particular poetics and shapes the graphic novel's narrative design throughout. In the sense just discussed, then, *Don Quijote* the comic can be understood to *perform* a version of the story of Don Quixote rather than *narrate* it in a different medium.

Drawing style and interpictoriality

As Charles McGrath has pointed out, 'no matter how far the graphic novel verges toward realism, its basic idiom is always a little (…) cartoonish'.[40] This cartoonishness, whose principles of distortion and iconic abstraction — as opposed to the realism associated with the tradition of academic drawing — constitute, for some authors, the very essence of 'narrative drawing',[41] has

[39] Venuti, 'Adaptation', 31.

[40] Charles McGrath, 'Not Funnies', *New York Times* (11 July 2004), https://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/11/magazine/not-funnies.html (accessed 14 November 2016).

[41] See, for example, Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2007), 119–120; Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics*, trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007),

been at the heart of comics since the medium's modern origins in the newspaper funnies and is certainly evident throughout Flix's oeuvre, perhaps most clearly in his parodic adaptation of the first part of Goethe's *Faust*.[42] There, Flix transposes one of the most philosophical and revered texts of the German literary canon into the comics medium in a humorous, satirical way, using a very similar drawing style to that employed in his adaptation of *Don Quixote*. In both texts, the cartoonish approach to the characters contrasts with the comparatively detailed and realistic rendering of backgrounds. The 'Kastennasen' [box noses][43] of most male characters are perhaps Flix's single most striking stylistic feature (Fig. 4).[44] Unlike Flix's *Faust* parody, however, his

161–162; Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 46.

[42] Like *Don Quijote* the comic, the cover design of the 2010 book edition of Flix's *Faust* is based on the yellow Reclam booklets series. This parallel reenforces the marketing of Flix's *Don Quijote* comic as a German classic.

[43] Anna Stemmann, 'Who the Fuck is Flix? Von Kastennasen, Heldentagen und Schönen Töchtern', in *Ruthe – Sauer – Flix: Das ist doch keine Kunst: Comics und Cartoons zwischen Shit happens!, Nichtlustig und Schönen Töchtern*, ed. Christine Vogt (Hamburg: Carlsen, 2015), 93–97 (95).

[44] On one occasion, Flix even borrows a character from his own *Faust* adaptation for his *Don Quijote*. A fellow resident of the nursing home is drawn identically to 'Meph' — which is short for 'Mephistopheles', the devil in *Faust* — who in both adaptations can be seen to hold up a stack of papers with the word 'Pakt' [pact] (see Fig. 4). However, this intramedial visual reference to

Don Quixote adaptation is based on a book that was itself conceived as a parody. Is this graphic novel adaptation then a parody of a parody?

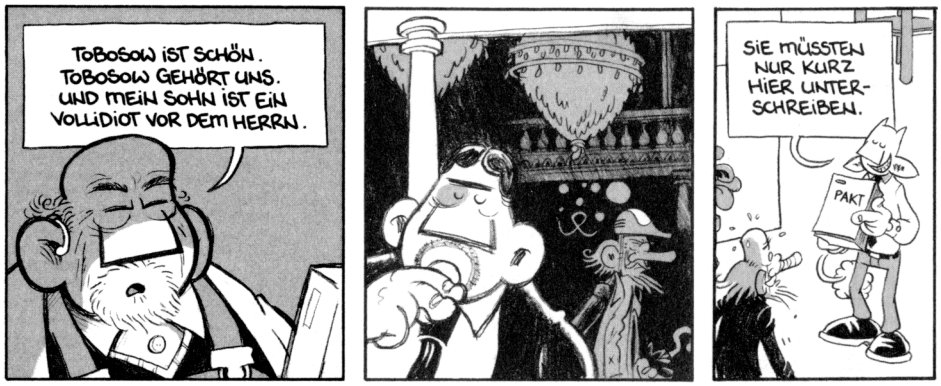

Figure 4: Examples of Flix's box noses (left to right: 9, 23, 63: 'Meph') (© Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2012).

Since Romanticism at least, the reception of *Don Quixote* has taught us to read Cervantes's novel as 'a serious and even tragic work'.[45] However, it is worth recalling that 'For more than one and a half centuries after the book was first published, readers, not only in Spain but in all Europe, apparently accepted, without cavil, that *Don Quixote* was simply a brilliantly successful funny book', as P. E. Russell has pointed out.[46] The earliest Spanish readers would also have

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his previous work has no further implications beyond confirming Flix's playful approach to intertextuality.

[45] Thomas R. Hart, 'What's Funny about Don Quixote?', *Hispanic Research Journal* 10, no. 3 (2009), 227–232 (227), https://doi.org/10.1179/174582009X433185.

[46] P. E. Russell, '"Don Quixote" as a Funny Book', *Modern Language Review* 64, no. 2 (1969), 312–326 (312), https://doi.org/10.2307/3723440.

been consumers of *libros de caballerías* (romances of chivalry),[47] the literary genre parodied by Cervantes with the declared purpose of 'bringing down the ill-founded framework of these chivalresque books'.[48]

By transposing the story to a twenty-first century German setting, Flix's adaptation removes the romances of chivalry from the horizon of reception. It is clear, then, that *Don Quijote* the comic is not even indirectly a parody of that genre. Instead, Flix redirects the hypotext's parodic impulse towards superhero comics — a genre as widely known as it is criticised by 'discerning readers',[49] which makes it a plausible twenty-first-century equivalent of the near-forgotten Spanish romances of chivalry. The cartoonishness of the characters in Flix's adaptation is therefore neither the consequence of a humorous appropriation of a (supposedly) serious book, nor of a parodic take on a parody,[50] but taps first and foremost into the hypotext's very own comicality, which Flix articulates with ease in his preferred drawing mode. This comicality is grounded as much in the exaggerated, burlesque nature of the protagonists, as in the numerous absurdities and slapstick elements of the plot, and the often hilariously bizarre verbal exchanges

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[47] Judith A. Whitenack, 'Don Quixote and the Romances of Chivalry Once Again', *Cervantes* 13 (1993), 61–91 (62).

[48] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, trans. Tom Lathrop (New York: Signet Classics, 2011), 9.

[49] Cf. Wolk, *Reading Comics*, 100–101.

[50] Cf. Eric S. Rabkin, 'The Good, the Bad and the Parodic in Graphic Adaptation', in *Drawn from the Classics: Essays on Graphic Adaptations of Literary Works*, eds Stephen E. Tabachnick and Esther Bendit Saltzman (Jefferson: McFarland, 2015), 82–95 (84–86).

between the knight-errant and his squire. At the same time, Flix's adaptation leverages the comic potential of rendering Quijano and Robin as a parody of contemporary superheroes. It does so not only through the storyline, which shows Quijano and Robin fighting the (imaginary) forces of evil;[51] *Don Quijote* the comic also borrows stylistically from superhero comics.

While the characters show the marks of distortion typically found in cartooning, as we have seen, in drawing the fast-paced action of certain episodes Flix makes systematic use of ribbon paths, motion lines and impact flashes often associated with superhero and other action comics.[52] While relatively limited in number, this symbolic representation of movement and impact occurs in panels where Quijano's civic fervour and progressive delusion turn into violent behaviour. In the early stages of the story we see the old man swinging his umbrella (objective view) (Fig. 5); later on, as Quijano assumes the identity of superhero/knight, certain panels show him brandishing his sword, dressed in full armour (subjective view) (Fig. 6).

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[51] Cf. Matthew J. Smith, 'Superhero Comics', in *The Routledge Companion to Comics*, eds Frank Bramlett et al. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 128–136 (128–129).

[52] Elisabeth Potsch and Robert F. Williams, 'Image Schemas and Conceptual Metaphor in Action Comics', in *Linguistics and the Study of Comics*, ed. Frank Bramlett and Roy T. Cook (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 13–36 (14–15), https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137004109_2. McCloud, among others, does not terminologically distinguish between *ribbon paths*, or lines that describe 'movement (…) from one location to another', on one hand, and *motion lines*, that is, lines indicating 'motion without regard to path', on the other (ibid., 15). In his terminology, both kinds of lines are indistinctly referred to as 'motion lines' or 'zip-ribbons' (McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 111).

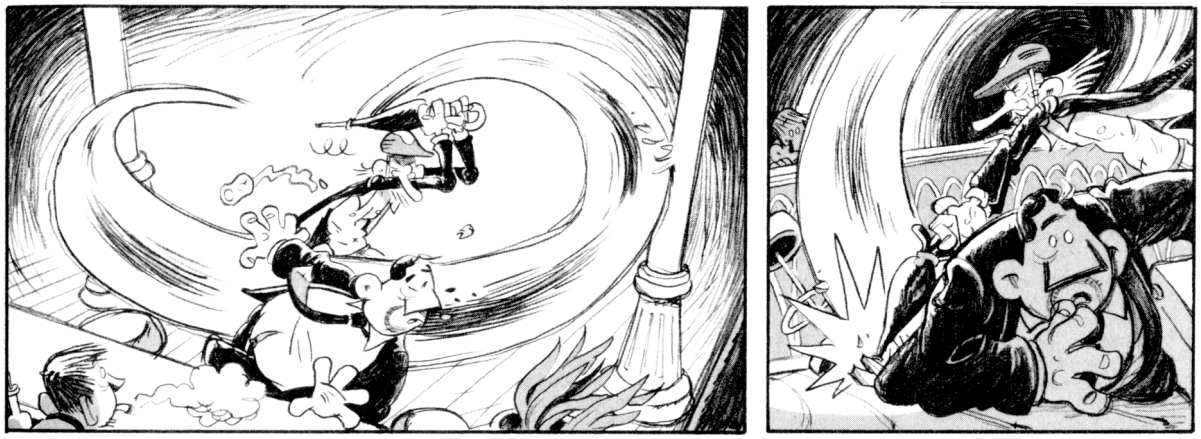

Figure 5: Alonso Quijano swinging his umbrella: ribbon paths and impact flash (23) (© Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2012).

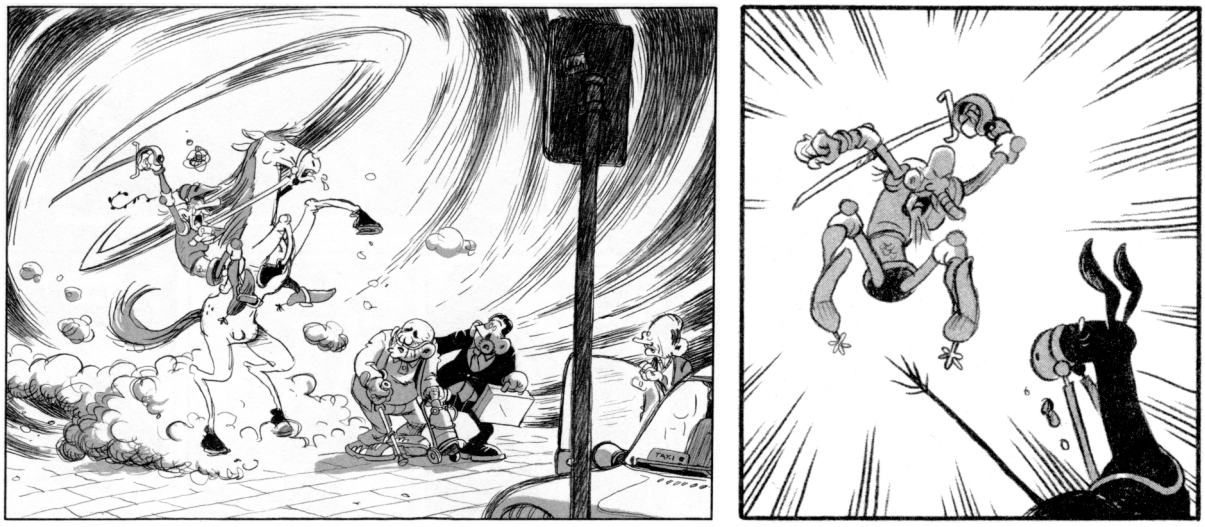

Figure 6: Alonso Quijano brandishing his sword in his assumed identity of knight: ribbon path (left, 57) and motion lines (right, 113) (© Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2012).

The proposed link between the use of kinetic lines and impact flashes in action-laden panels of *Don Quijote* the comic, on one hand, and the conventions of superhero comics, on the other, seems plausible. But we should not overlook the fact that these conventions equally apply to humoristic comics ('cartoons'), where we find an abundance of falls, punches and escapes. Luis

Gasca and Román Gubern, in their magnificent compilation of comics' semiotic devices, record numerous examples under the heading 'Símbolos cinéticos' [Kinetic symbols], ranging from *Mickey Mouse* to *Popeye*, *Felix the Cat* and *Mortadelo y Filemón*, including also, of course, examples from action comics.[53] Given that *Don Quijote* the comic is not a self-respecting superhero comic but a parody of that genre, conceived as an adaptation of Cervantes's (humorous) novel, Flix's use of kinetic lines and impact flashes cuts through both strands of this convention, seamlessly blending the adaptation's overall humoristic style with the violent action found in the parodied genre.

Independently of the nature of the source material, Flix's cartoon mode itself serves as a stylistic clue for the audience not to expect a realistic engagement with the subject matter, 'but rather a humoristic fiction', as Pascal Lefèvre has suggested.[54] In that way, the cartoonish drawing style predisposes readers to expect light reading matter. Some of the stylistic choices in cartooning, on the other hand, are themselves codified, as Thierry Groensteen argues, because 'Dans le registre de l'humour, tout particulièrement, l'hégémonie stylistique d'un certain nombre de créateurs (…) a assuré la diffusion de codes graphiques qui semblent désormais inscrits dans les genes de la BD comique' [In the register of humour, in particular, the stylistic hegemony of a number of creators has ensured the dissemination of graphic codes that now seem to be inscribed

[53] Luis Gasca and Román Gubern, *El discurso del comic* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2011), 141–184.

[54] Pascal Lefèvre, 'No Content Without Form: Graphic Style as the Primary Entrance to a Story', in *The Visual Narrative Reader*, ed. Neil Cohn (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 67–87 (80), https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474283670.ch-003.

in the genes of humorous comics].[55] Many comics artists, Groensteen goes on to explain, have learned to draw the human body not by stylising anatomical features observed in the real word but by copying their favourite comics creators. As a result, we find a degree of similarity between certain characters 'à grand nez, grands pieds, grands yeux, grosse tête et corps élastique' [with big noses, big feet, big eyes, a big head and an elastic body].[56]

In the case of Flix's *Don Quijote*, the degree and particular kind of stylisation underlying the visual conceptualisation of the comic book's protagonists, however, is not fully explained by this generic tendency to perpetuate certain cartooning tropes, but can be linked to the established Quixote iconography. One specific point of contact for Flix's approach to his protagonists' visual identity is Picasso's popular 1955 sketch 'Don Quijote y Sancho',[57] which we find reproduced at the very end of the comic as part of the full-page frame showing Quijano's death notice (132). Unlike Goya's *Caprice*, which is placed as an oversized object in the protagonist's living room (see Fig. 2), at first sight Picasso's iconic image could appear to be a purely decorative reproduction at a reduced scale (Fig. 7).

[55] Thierry Groensteen, 'Corps', *Dictionnaire esthétique et thématique de la bande dessinée*, (2014), http://neuviemeart.citebd.org/spip.php?article814 (accessed 24 August 2022).

[56] Ibid.

[57] For a reproduction of Picasso's sketch see, e.g. *Pablo Picasso: Paintings, Quotes, & Biography*, https://www.pablopicasso.org/don-quixote.jsp (accessed 24 August 2022).

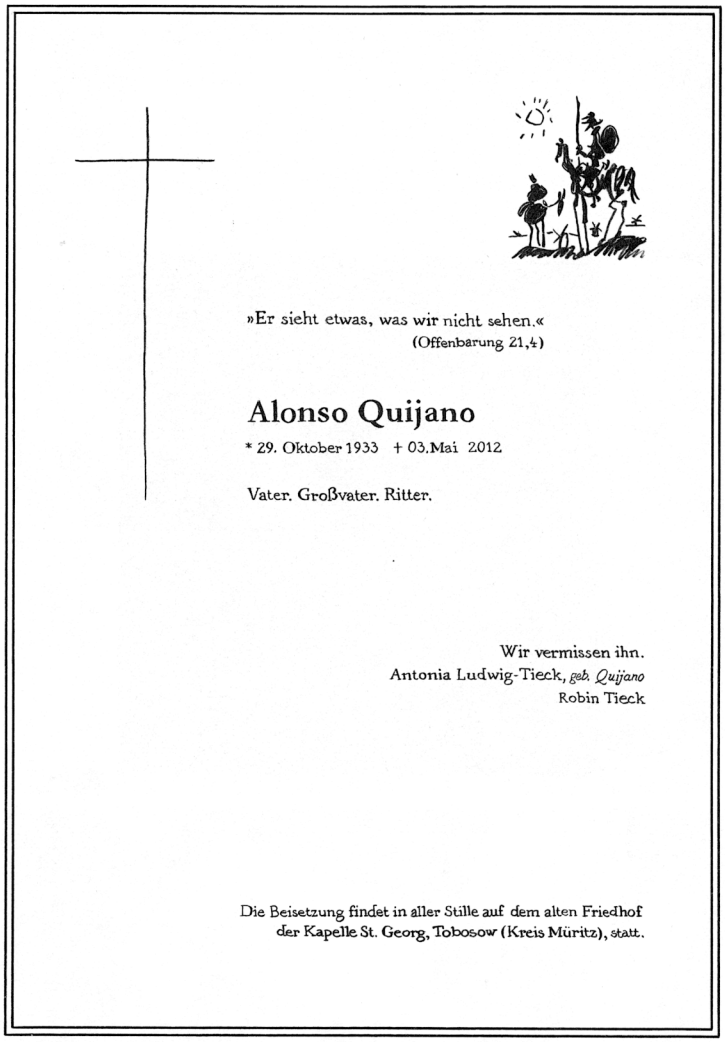

Figure 7: Alonso Quijano's death notice (132) (© Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2012).

Upon closer inspection, however, we notice that Flix has re-drawn the image with some minor stroke variations. The heads of both Sancho Panza and Don Quixote have been changed to conform with the respective silhouettes of Robin and Quijano: Sancho Panza's hat resembles the double-pointed cap of Robin's Batman costume; similarly, Don Quixote's basin-helmet has been re-designed in line with the cycle helmet worn by Alonso Quijano. While the protruding back of Don Quixote's helmet in Picasso's sketch is missing in Flix's re-drawing, a lock of hair is now sticking out from his neck, much like that of Quijano in the graphic novel. Finally, not only is

Don Quixote's nose proportionally longer than in the original sketch, but it is pointing in a more upward direction (as is his beard), which further approaches the knight-errant to Alonso Quijano's visual identity (see Figs 1, 2, and 8).

All in all, the deliberate misquotation of Picasso's sketch, which seems to have eluded commentators to date, reenforces the playful, at times defiant, attitude towards cultural icons that characterises Flix's adaptation as a whole. The subtlety of the changes to Picasso's sketch turns this into an instance of *concealed comic interpictoriality*, to use an expression coined by Margaret A. Rose.[58] However, unlike the examples discussed by Rose, where a parodying artwork is not easily identifiable as deriving from an interpicture, Flix's re-drawing of Picasso conceals not its origin but its own originality.

The visual identity of both Quijano and his grandson corresponds to a reduced iconographic feature set that blends effortlessly with Flix's cartoonish drawing style referred to earlier. A glance at the history of *Don Quixote* illustrations shows that the majority of artists have conceived of the knight-errant as a slim bearded character with a pointy nose; Sancho Panza, on the other hand, is generally portrayed as being of small, chubby build.[59] Flix's debt, then, is not to any artist in particular but to a generalised idea of the physique of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza respectively, i.e. to a type rather than a specific representation.[60]

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[58] Margaret A. Rose, *Pictorial Irony, Parody, and Pastiche: Comic Interpictoriality in the Arts of the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2011), 223.

[59] See, for example, the reproductions in Johannes Hartau, *Don Quijote in der Kunst: Wandlungen einer Symbolfigur* (Berlin: Mann, 1987).

[60] Cf. Cáceres Würsig, 'El *Quijote* en un cómic alemán', 123.

Batman, The Dark Knight

Having established that the comic's cartoonish drawing style carries over the model's own comicality, I will now pay closer attention to Flix's parodic approach. As we have seen, from the very start Alonso Quijano is introduced as a campaigner against comics. The specific target of the comics adaptation, however, is the superhero comics genre, exemplified by *Batman*, *The Dark Knight*. When Alonso Quijano temporarily moves into his daughter's flat in a housing estate in Berlin, he picks up a comic book in his grandson's bedroom (34). The partially visible title page of the comic reads *The Dark Knight* (in English). The following panel shows a slightly tilted and cropped passage from the comic book, in which Batman addresses his nemesis, the supervillain Scarecrow. The border of subsequent panels nearly coincides with panels from the embedded Batman comic, as indicated by a thin line that runs just inside the external panel border (35) (Fig. 8). This view represents Quijano's perspective as he reads his grandson's comic book. The specific mediality of the visual reference to Batman is indicated by the low-resolution halftone patterns in the background, which mark the Batman comic as a printed comic book within the fictional world.

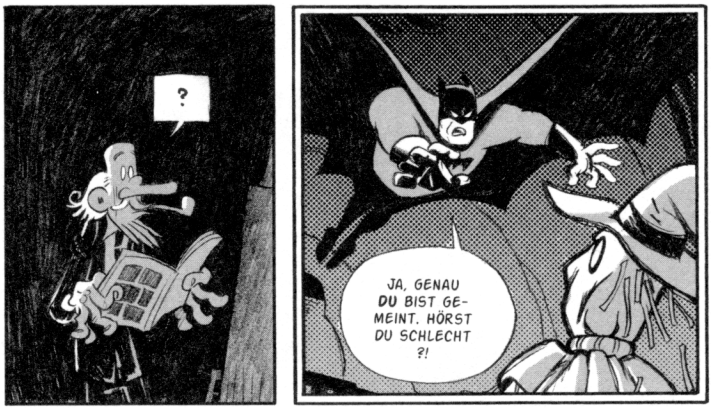

Figure 8: Alonso Quijano reading *Batman, The Dark Knight* (35) (© Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2012).

Although Quijano's increasingly confused state of mind is not the consequence of reading comic books, the episode discussed here is an allusion to the opening chapter of Cervantes's novel, where we are told about the *hidalgo*'s obsession with romances of chivalry. It is remarkable that Flix's updating of the plot does not sacrifice the original novel's metaliterary, reflective quality, which embeds the consumption of a certain kind of reading matter within a text that represents itself a parodic version of the same kind of reading matter, here superhero comics.

The detail that makes this shift from romances of chivalry to superhero comics so effective is the choice of comic. By presenting Robin as an avid reader of *Batman*, as opposed to, say, *Superman* or *Spider-Man*, Flix not only finds the ideal superhero, whose sidekick's name coincides with that of Quijano's grandson Robin; more importantly, Batman's byname, *The Dark Knight*, evokes knighthood as the conceptual centre around which both the romances of chivalry and Robin's favourite superhero comic revolve, at least on the surface.[61] The German equivalent of Batman's nickname, 'Der dunkle Ritter', is subsequently used by Robin and his mother, repeatedly reminding the reader of this connection. And as Quijano and Robin set out on their

[61] On his webpage, Flix refers to the encounter with Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (New York: DC Comics, 1986) as a key experience, which motivated him to pursue a career as a comics artist (Flix, 'Der Flix', http://www.der-flix.de/flix (accessed 14 September 2021)). Coincidentally, in 2005 the *FAZ* included a selection of Batman comics (in German translation) as volume 7 of its book series 'Klassiker der Comic-Literatur' [Classic comic books]. Published in 2005–2006, the twenty volumes of the series broke new ground in bringing canonical comics to a highly-educated German readership.

adventures, the former buys into the latter's obsession all too willingly, offering to instruct his grandson in the art of becoming a (dark) knight (see 74ff. in particular). The increasing delusion of Quijano as he identifies more and more with the role of knight, finds its visual expression in panels that show him in full armour on horseback, alongside Robin riding on a donkey (Fig. 9), as opposed to the objective (albeit always cartoonish) representation of Quijano's physical appearance earlier and later in the graphic novel (see Figs 1, 2, and 8).

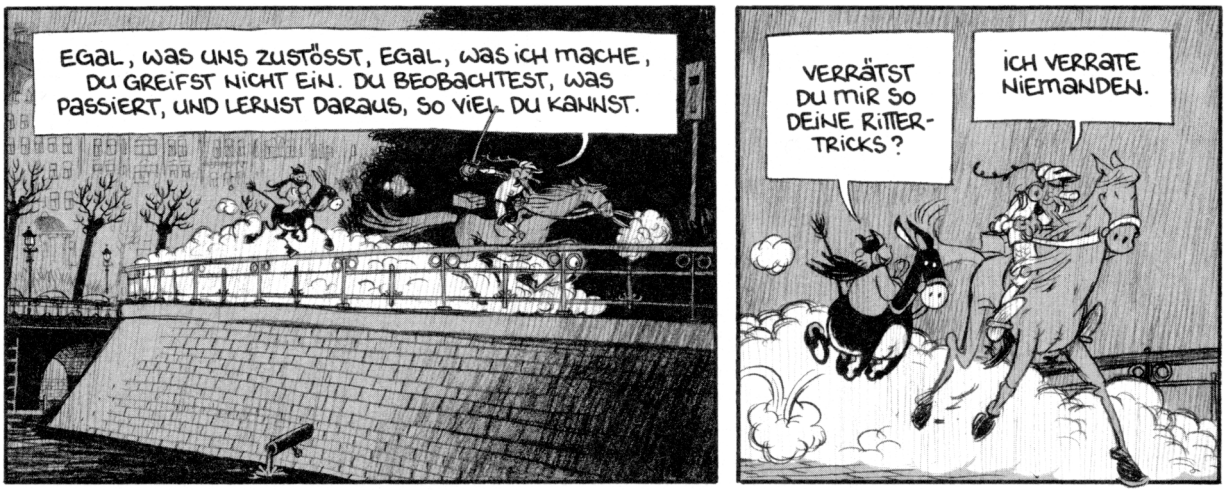

Figure 9: Alonso Quijano and Robin at the height of their fantasy (78) (© Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2012).

By making Alonso Quijano an enemy, and Robin an enthusiastic reader, of comics, Flix creates a conceptual axis that motivates the actions of both grandfather and grandson, tying them together in their exploits as their interests converge. The specific focus on superhero comics establishes the target of the adaptation's parodic purport. Just as Cervantes's *Don Quixote* does not propose to do away with literature — he specifically targets romances of chivalry —, Flix's re-writing does not take on comics as a medium but aims at a specific genre. *Batman, The Dark*

Knight, as the specific driver of Robin's superhero fantasy, stands in for the superhero genre as a whole.[62]

The low-resolution halftones in the *Batman* panels contrast with the complete absence of noticeable halftones in the drawings of the embedding narrative. While this contrast is crucial in distinguishing the Batman comic visually from the primary narrative,[63] it further points towards a categorical difference between the traditionally low production value of superhero comics on the one hand, and the higher quality of Flix's more serious reading matter, the graphic novel *Don Quijote*, on the other. That the halftones are not linked to the reproduction of comics panels within the comic per se, becomes clear when examining the reflective embedding of panels from Flix's own serialised *Quixote* comic.

Reflective embedding and metalepsis

Whereas in the case just discussed, the visual reference to *Batman* draws attention to a specific comic from a different genre, towards the end of Robin and his grandfather's adventures Flix reproduces panels from earlier episodes of *Don Quijote* the comic within his own adaptation,

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[62] Ironically, Batman is widely seen as one of the most complex and rounded US-American superheroes, especially in Frank Miller's 1986 revisionist *The Dark Knight Returns* (cf. Matt Morris, 'Batman and Friends: Aristotle and the Dark Knight's Inner Circle', in *Superheroes and Philosophy*, ed. Tom Morris and Matt Morris (Chicago: Open Court, 2005), 102–117, and Aeon J. Skoble, 'Superhero Revisionism in *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*', in *Superheroes and Philosophy*, 29–41).

[63] Cf. similarly Trabert, '»Comics sind gefährlich!«', 116.

drawing on a narrative strategy used by Cervantes in his novel. In Flix's adaptation, this mise en abyme is motivated by the storyline. When Robin reaches a point of boredom, hunger and exhaustion that makes him want to stop playing knights, his grandfather throws a fit insisting that he, Quijano, really *is* a knight. As evidence he shows his grandson episodes from a comic strip about himself, published in a newspaper (112), which we can presume to be the *Märkischer Volksfreund*, the same publication targeted by Quijano's angry attacks on comics. In two extradiegetic panels Flix's adaptation reproduces various panels from three earlier episodes, all of which appear to support Quijano's claim to knighthood (Fig. 10). However, they only do so because the episodes are quoted incompletely, stripping the reproduced panels of their immediate context.

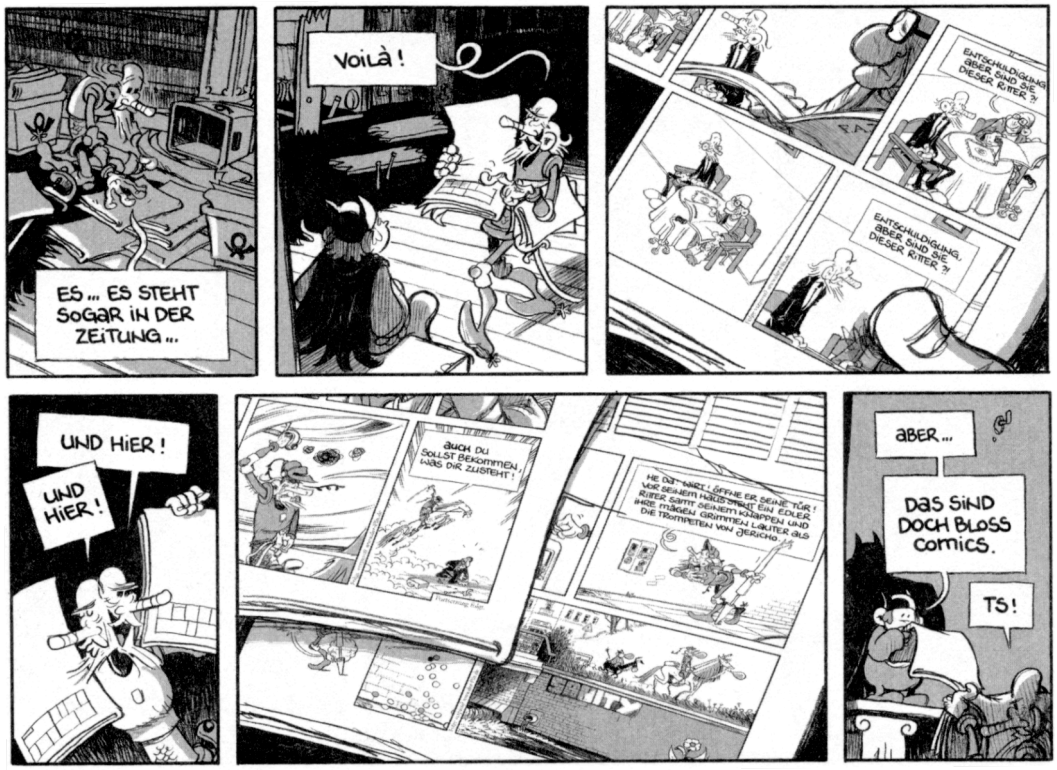

Figure 10: Earlier episodes as evidence of Alonso Quijano's alleged knighthood (112) (© Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2012).

If we compare the panels reproduced within the extradiegetic panels with the episodes they presumably reproduce (see 66, 58, and 87), we find that in all three instances of reflective embedding, the quoted episodes have been edited, but in such a way that there are no obvious changes to the panels themselves. Each one of the referenced newspaper episodes consists of two blocks of two tiers. The self-quotation, however, conflates the original episodes' four tiers to two, deleting the first tier of each block. As a result, the final tier of these episodes is placed directly underneath the second tier of the first block. Although this change to the referenced episodes does not fundamentally affect their meaning, the reduced reproduction of the original episodes foregrounds those panels that most strongly support Alonso Quijano's claim to knighthood. However, I contend that the significance of these panels resides less in the exact nature of the alterations made to the quoted episodes than in the fact that Flix has modified the visual quotations in the first place. Turning briefly to Cervantes's novel may once again help us appreciate the implications of this strategy.

The embedding of panels from the comic into a later episode of the same comic is roughly equivalent to Cervantes including references to a published story/history (*historia*) of Don Quixote's adventures in the second part of his novel (*DQ* II, 2–4).[64] Importantly, despite some striking similarities between the content of the book referred to in the text and the first part of

[64] This is one point where most film or comic adaptations that include this self-referential device at all, introduce a shift that involves the inclusion of Cervantes's book as an object in the embedding medium, thereby changing the original intramedial reference (literature–literature) to an intermedial one (film/comic–literature) (see Rajewsky, 'Intermediality', 53).

Cervantes's own novel, no passage from that book is reproduced verbatim, nor is there any other compelling evidence that the publication actually is the first part of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Finally, at no point do the characters commenting on the published story/history consider this to be a work of fiction. These observations have led Brian D. Patrick to argue that contrary to many Cervantist scholars' claim, the self-reflexive, metaliterary passages in the second part of Cervantes's *Don Quixote* do not qualify as a metaleptic transgression[65] of the boundary that separates the 'world in which one tells [from] the world of which one tells'.[66]

What the self-reflexive references in both texts have in common, then, is that they claim rhetorically what they deny structurally — that is, while affirming the existence of a publication about their respective knights' exploits, both Cervantes and Flix ultimately deny the corresponding real-world publication entry into the fictional world: *Don Quixote* the novel, by 'carefully avoid[ing] inclusion of the book and its author (…) among the things and persons encountered by the two heroes in Part II', as Anthony Close has observed;[67] *Don Quijote* the comic, by misrepresenting the quoted episodes from the presumed publication. In doing so, Flix has effectively recreated in his adaptation inconsistencies analogous to those found in

[65] Brian D. Patrick, 'Metalepsis and Paradoxical Narration in Don Quixote: A Reconsideration', *Letras Hispanas* 5, no. 2 (2008), 116–132 (118–120).

[66] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 236.

[67] Anthony Close, *A Companion to Don Quixote* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2008), 175.

Cervantes's novel. Taking up the metaphor of the mirror in the text,[68] in Flix's comic the reflective embedding of earlier episodes is in fact not a faithful reproduction at a smaller scale, as the concept of the mise en abyme suggests in its strictest application, but a subtly doctored mirror image.

Dorrit Cohn has suggested that the conceptual difference between mise en abyme and metalepsis is often blurred in literary theory due to the similarity of their effect on the reader.[69] In *Don Quijote* the comic we distinctly see both narrative devices in operation. The imprecise reflective embedding is complemented by Robin's dismissive remark, 'Aber… das sind doch bloss comics' [But… they're just comics] (112), which openly denies credibility to the episodes that Alonso Quijano draws on to confirm his status as a knight, similar to the exchanges in the second part of Cervantes's novel, where the knight-errant and his squire question the veracity of the existing narrative about their exploits. While the visual misquotations that undermine the referenced episodes' value as evidence are subtle clues directed at the reader of the graphic novel (external communication system), Robin's metafictional comment on the comic medium's truth value is targeted, in the first instance, at Quijano, who ignores his grandson's indirect appeal to reason (internal communication system). For the reader of the adaptation this comment doubles as an ironic deprecation of Flix's artistic medium. In addition, Robin's remark effectively declares the pair part of a fictional text, thereby establishing an interior metalepsis, where the

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[68] See Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley with Emma Hughes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

[69] Dorrit Cohn, 'Metalepsis and Mise en Abyme', *Narrative* 20, no. 1 (2012), 105–114 (108–109), https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2012.0003.

characters not only 'become readers or spectators of their own stories',[70] but also show an awareness of their own fictionality, which is ontologically incompatible with their status as fictional characters.

Both Alonso Quijano's attempt to use fiction as a literal benchmark for reality and Robin's detached view of comics in this episode echo the multiple comments found in *Don Quixote* the novel regarding different ways of reading and the truth value of fiction (see, e.g., *DQ* I, 32). While Cervantes's treatment of these issues throughout his extensive novel is arguably more varied and complex than that found in *Don Quijote* the comic, in the episode discussed here, Robin's reaction reveals an important shift away from his extreme identification with superhero comics at the beginning of the story, where he appears to be completely absorbed by his fantasy of being Batman, towards being able to distinguish clearly between reality and fiction.[71]

Far from copying Cervantes mechanically, Flix's use of reflective embedding is not only motivated by the story but also fully adapted to the comics medium. The inaccuracy of the visual quotations, which are deliberate misquotations, subtly undermines the comic strip's apparent presence as an object in the diegesis, leading to the puzzling conclusion that despite the undeniable self-reflexivity, the referenced comic strip is not that previously published in the *FAZ* in empirical reality, but is paradoxically marked as fictional in both the external and the internal communication systems.

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[70] Ibid., 108.

[71] Needless to say, comics are not per se fictional. Within the diegesis of *Don Quijote* the comic, however, they are seen as intrinsically fictional.

Conclusion

German comics artist Flix subjects *Don Quixote* to a re-writing that harnesses the novel's basic character constellation, its narrative arc, various emblematic episodes, as well as its metaliterary, metafictional and self-reflexive devices to create a twenty-first century German version of the Spanish Golden-Age classic. Unlike many Spanish-language adaptations, *Don Quijote* the comic's intertextuality does not operate on the level of literal quotations or close paraphrases, but through character and place names, as well as on the episodic level, where Alonso Quijano's adventures evoke the novel by allusion and ironic detachment. Flix's approach challenges the aura of untouchability that surrounds this literary monument in many adaptors' conception.

The numerous imprecise references to Cervantes's novel result in what we could call a fuzzy match between hypertext and hypotext. The visual identity of the title character and his sidekick, while drawing loosely on the types found in the established Don Quixote iconography, is rooted not only in the comic medium's tendency towards cartooning, but also in Flix's particular drawing style and his parodistic take on superhero comics.

The interpictorial references found in Flix's adaptation transcend the body of works traditionally linked to the *Quixote* reception. This is particularly salient with Goya's *Caprice* and the intramedial reference to superhero comics, both of which, in conjunction, play a key role in driving forward the story. In what is perhaps the most ingenious twist of *Don Quijote* the comic, Flix postulates superhero comics as the twenty-first-century equivalent of romances of chivalry, choosing *Batman, The Dark Knight* as the specific intertext. This change entails an important shift in the protagonists' specific traits and the character constellation: Alonso Quijano's detachment from reality is explained in line with contemporary medical concepts of dementia; the obsession with 'dangerous' reading matter, on the other hand, falls onto preadolescent Robin. As

a result of this shift, both characters' actions are motivated within the framework of our contemporary understanding of the world.

This contrasts with the suspension of disbelief required on part of the contemporary reader to buy into Cervantes's fanciful premise of an elderly *hidalgo* whose brain has dried up 'from his little sleep and considerable reading'.[72] What in Cervantes is ultimately an unbelievable story, in Flix's re-writing stands as an overall plausible tale anchored in the shared or accessible experiences of coming of age and ageing in postmodern society. The specific societal challenges highlighted range from bullying among children, to the pressures on single parents, homelessness, and the institutionalisation of the care for the elderly.[73]

The destiny of Goya's famous *Caprice* illustrates Flix's repurposing strategy quite literally. Here a famous image is put to practical use as a placard, converted from an object of aesthetic contemplation into an object of practical use. This iconoclastic destruction of a work of art can be seen as a metapoetic mise en abyme that captures, metaphorically and on a reduced scale, Flix's approach as an adaptor of *Don Quixote*. The result is a fresh tale that owes great part of its appeal to the rich intertextual and interpictorial fabric into which the comic is inscribed. *Don Quijote* the comic maintains an ironic distance, refusing to quote any of the borrowed elements faithfully or in earnest. The fact that the illustration based on Picasso's sketch shows Alonso Quijano and his grandson 'as if' they were Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, is a subtle, but particularly cogent demonstration of this principle.

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[72] Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, 21.

[73] Cáceres Würsig, 'El *Quijote* en un cómic alemán', 130–131.

In Alonso Quijano's death notice (Fig. 7) we find the iconographic and textual dimensions of the knight-errant's travel across cultures, space and time condensed into a single page (132). Visually, Flix seems to suggest that he privileges Picasso as the source closest to his vision of the pair's appearance; textually, Antonia's surname, 'Ludwig-Tieck', references the translator of the first noteworthy German version of Cervantes's novel.[74] The implications of this reference on a page of strategic importance within the narrative go beyond its anecdotal value of pointing at the translator of the German version Flix would likely have encountered as a child.

The barely disguised reference to Ludwig Tieck, one of the key figures of German Romanticism, can be read as an acknowledgment and reminder of the key role translators play in the mediation of cultural heritage across cultural-linguistic borders and historical eras. Taking Venuti's claim regarding the affinity between translation and adaptation to its ultimate consequence, Flix's *Don Quixote* adaptation integrates the iconographic and textual traditions that are a central part of its horizon of reception, into a semiotically multimodal artefact, blurring the boundaries between translation and adaptation: the re-writing of Tieck (himself a re-writer of Cervantes) and the re-drawing of Picasso (himself an heir of the *Quixote*-iconography) are two aspects of the same operation that updates a universal classic for a twenty-first-century German audience.

While many readers since the German Romantics have embraced *Don Quixote* primarily as a serious work, Flix's update restores the original comicality to what, for Cervantes's contemporaries, was first and foremost a funny book. But unlike the funnies, which aim at easily

[74] Cf. Javier García Albero, 'Historical Aspects of the Translations and Translators of the *Quixote* in Germany in the 20th Century', *MonTI* 5 (2013), 1–9 (2, 8).

consumable entertainment, Flix's is a self-conscious, sophisticated comics adaptation that inherits from Cervantes many of the narrative devices that are at the root of the novel's originality and complexity, packaged in an engaging and easily relatable cartooning style.

400 years after Don Quixote first came to life as a literary character, the story of the knight-errant stands before us stripped of the historical circumstances surrounding the work's production and original reception. Unlike Miguel de Cervantes, who lacked a clear notion of where the story of his *hidalgo* from La Mancha was heading,[75] today's adaptors see much more clearly. They know, as we do, how Don Quixote's life ends, and sense a coherence, progression and closure in his story that was not obvious to its first author, nor to the early readers of the novel's first part. Hindsight and historical distance, then, put Flix in a position where he can build on a shared contemporary perception of *Don Quixote*, rather than the long-winded, complex, at times incoherent narrative that it is, drawing on Cervantes's novel for support and inspiration. The result is a tight narrative that is less concerned with narrow notions of fidelity than with internal consistency in accordance with the adaptation's own premises.

The eclectic, at times defiant or even iconoclastic attitude towards cultural icons that characterises this adaptation's playful intertextuality and interpictoriality does not discriminate between high and low culture. This practice, as well as the resulting levelling of traditional

[75] See Edwin Williamson, '*Don Quixote*, Part I (1605)', in *The Oxford Handbook of Cervantes*, ed. Aaron M. Kahn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 87–117, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198742913.013.6.

cultural hierarchies, has been considered part of a stylistic conception of postmodernism.[76] However, the fact that the German and the Hispanic exist alongside one another without drawing the attention of those inhabiting the fictional world points beyond the text towards a common feature of contemporary societies, at least in their cosmopolitan phenomenology. Following Wolfgang Welsch, in contemporary cultures the coexistence of elements from two or more cultural-linguistic spheres that have traditionally been considered distinct with clearly defined borders, has been normalised to the extent of going unnoticed by those experiencing them.[77] From this angle, Flix's *Don Quijote* can be seen as proposing a transcultural, post-national Germany that has fully integrated into its new normality 'foreign' elements traditionally associated with Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and Hispanic culture more widely. Trying to categorise *Don Quijote* the comic along the lines of a monolithic, homogenous cultural identity is to ignore this transculturality, which 'combine(s) material from differing cultures to create new shapes, genres and discourses that seek, not only to remain significant for the cultures they reference, but

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[76] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 45–46, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822378419; see also Stephen Melville, 'Postmodermism [sic] and Art', in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Steven Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 82–96 (89), https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521640520.005.

[77] Wolfgang Welsch, 'Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today', in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, eds Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage, 1999), 194–213.

also to produce new meanings that can no longer be proclaimed authentic or otherwise with regard to their original components'.[78]

Christina Kraenzle and Julia Ludewig have suggested that certain 'bold and sometimes parodistic reinterpretations of literary classics' published in Germany over the last decade, such as Flix's *Faust* adaptation, 'anchor German cultural and literary heritage on a comics map in which linguistic borders and national canons are less important than promising story material'.[79] In *Don Quijote* the comic, this potential of comics adaptations to free canonical texts from the straitjacket of their culture of origin certainly comes into its own, bearing witness to the power of classics to stay relevant as part of a transnational heritage. It is important, however, to keep in mind that Flix accomplishes this from outside the culture in which the adapted text was conceived and in which it is rooted, in a move that emphatically reenforces a key criterion for a work of world literature: its active presence 'within a literary system beyond that of its original culture'.[80] One factor that arguably limits from the outset the appeal of Flix's narrator-less *Quixote* performance to audiences outside of Germany is 'the international tendency' — and, I

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[78] Afef Benessaieh, 'Multiculturalism, Interculturality, Transculturality', in *Transcultural America / Amériques transculturelles*, ed. Afef Benessaieh (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010), 11–38 (27–28), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1ch78hd.4.

[79] Christina Kraenzle and Julia Ludewig, 'Transnationalism in German Comics', *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 11, no. 1 (2020), 1–9 (4), https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2020.1718836.

[80] David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 4, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691188645.

would add, the corresponding market expectation — 'to base graphic "novels" heavily on autobiography, biography and reportage',[81] all of which favour a prominent extradiegetic narrator.

Ironically, while unleashing the Spanish *Don Quixote* into a transcultural setting, *Don Quijote* the comic at the same time inscribes itself firmly into contemporary Germany's cultural fabric; not least because it invites its readers to engage with the graphic novel as a quasi-German classic in the tradition of the *Reclamheft* — a take on *Don Quixote* that does not easily travel across cultural boundaries. This defamiliarising Germanisation may be another reason why Flix's adaptation has not attracted much attention so far in any of the Western countries with a comparatively strong comics tradition and readership.[82] The exception is Spain, which has always exhibited an interest in claiming foreign-language *Quixote*s as part of its own heritage, if only as evidence of the novel's universality and endurance amidst an ever-increasing volume of cultural products competing for our attention.

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[81] Paul M. Malone, 'A Periphery Surrounded by Centres: The German-Language Comics Market, Translational Relationships, and Graphic Novels', *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 11, no. 1 (2020), 10–30 (25), https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2019.1629606.

[82] To date, Flix's *Don Quijote* has been translated into Spanish (2014), Macedonian (2014), Turkish (2015), Russian (2016), and Dutch (2018). More recently, Carlsen has sold the translation rights for Mandarin Chinese (personal e-mail communication from Claudia Jerusalem-Groenewald, Carlsen Verlag, 17 September 2021).

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