Authenticity, Authoriality, and the Nature of Electronic Texts: *Don Quijote* in the Age of Digital Reproduction

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AUTHENTICITY, AUTHORIALITY, AND THE NATURE OF ELECTRONIC TEXTS: *DON QUIJOTE* IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL REPRODUCTION

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Abstract

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin provided thought-provoking insights into the way that lithography, photography, and cinema changed the nature of art and our perceptions of it. Among other considerations, he noted that the efficient mass reproduction of works of art affected notions of authenticity, the author, and the response of the viewer or reader. In many ways, the advent of the Internet causes us to review his arguments and expand on them in light of this new, digitized, decentralized, and diffuse method of reproducing works of art, including literature. Among the first online collections of great literature have appeared the collected works of Cervantes. In addition to the textual questions posed by the novel itself, such as who is the author, or perhaps more precisely, where or what is the author, and what is the text, the various cybereditions of *Don Quijote* create even more layers of *distanciamiento artístico*. There are additional questions of authorship: who are the authors/editors/compilers/web designers who post the text to the Internet? What are we to make of the opportunities for readers to be converted instantly into writers through guest pages, feedback forms, and such. Moreover, exactly what is a text in cyberspace? Are e-texts the same as printed texts in every respect? How do hypertextual annotation and other accretions of the Internet change the way we read a text? At heart, these are not so different from the questions that Cervantes himself forces us to consider in *Don Quijote*. The Internet has felicitously added several more layers of textual undecidability that mesh perfectly with the doubts, confusions, and paradoxes of the original.

At the heart of *Don Quijote* is the assumed presence of a created absence, namely, the absence of a single authentic text written by a single verified author. Of course, we can agree that Miguel de Cervantes alone wrote the text that we know, but within the terms of the novel itself, that text is a reaction to the missing *Ur*-text or texts, much as hysteria and religion, in Lacanian terms, are reactions to the missing phallic signifier. Since one could reduce one perspective on the *Quijote* to its definition as a text about texts, it is useful to consider two questions: what is the text, and who or what is the author? To the latter question, we are told that in this novel there is no one author but many: "los autores," Cide Hamete Benengeli, Avellaneda, the Duques who invent the roles for Quijote and Sancho to play during their stay, several different authorial voices

that narrate the intercalated stories, Sancho with his description of the enchanted Dulcinea, the niece and her creation of the sorcerer called Frestón, and even Don Quijote himself when he speculates on what future authors will write about him, as in his "Rubicundo Apolo" speech (I, 2, 27–28). Because of this confusion of narrators, the text is made less and less authentic. If the frame narrator, who is not to be confused with Cervantes, compiled his version from the stories of others, where are those alleged texts? Cide Hamete's text was supposedly in Arabic and had to be translated, a process deemed imperfect even within the terms of the plot itself. In addition, since frequently Sancho and Quijote were by themselves, who recorded their actions and, more importantly, their thoughts? Do we have any faith in the authenticity of their words? Moreover, since the authors themselves are characters in the book, and since the characters discuss the book they are in, how can we define distinctly the differences between author and text?

These issues become even more complicated in light of the dissemination in the last decade of online versions of the works of Cervantes. This digital reproduction of a work of art calls to mind Walter Benjamin's seminal study, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in which he provided thought-provoking insights into the way that lithography, photography, and cinema changed the nature of art and our perceptions of it. Among other considerations, he noted that the efficient mass reproduction of works of art affected notions of authenticity, the author, and the response of the viewer or reader. In many ways, the advent of the Internet causes us to review his arguments and expand on them in light of this new, digitized, decentralized, diffused, and distributed method of the reproduction of works of art, including literature. Not surprisingly, the works of Cervantes were among the first online web collections of great literature to appear. The three most comprehensive sites, at least at first glance, are those created by the Centro de Estudios Cervantinos of the Universidad de Alcalá (http://cervantes.uah.es/), the Cervantes Project, located at Texas A&M University (http://csdl.tamu.edu/cervantes/english/index.html), and the Centro Virtual Cervantes of the Instituto Cervantes (http://cvc.cervantes.es/obref/quijote/). A close look at the presentation of the works of Cervantes by these and other sites sheds light on Benjamin's ideas on art history and their relationship to the most commonly reproduced text by Cervantes, *Don Quijote*.

Two of these sites, the Cervantes Project and the Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, present the works of Cervantes in addition to a wide variety of supplemental materials: biographies, images, musical compositions, an online dictionary, links to other sites, search facilities, bulletin boards, and e-mail utilities. The CEC provides the complete text of all the works of Cervantes without notes or editorial attribution. It is not imme-

diately clear which editions were used, an important detail when considering texts with different versions. Nevertheless, this site, perhaps because of its completeness, appears to be of enormous importance considering that the other two sites under consideration also link to it. The Cervantes Project includes not only the CEC text, but several others, including Schevill and Bonilla's *Obras completas*, a graphical version of the princeps editions of both parts of the *Quijote* as well as other editions of the *Novelas ejemplares*, the plays (via a link to the collection offered by the Association for Hispanic Classical Theater), and other texts, including translations of the *Quijote* into both English and Italian. In addition, the search utility provided by this site is most impressive, giving the reader the ability to find words or phrases in context according to parameters given. The Instituto Cervantes also offers a link to the CEC complete works, but in addition it provides its own edition, still in progress, of the *Quijote*. This incipient edition takes the greatest advantage of its hypertextual environment by including links to notes and images in the text itself. The collaborators are listed on a separate page and include the leading Cervantes scholars of our day, but, it should be noted, for most of the editors listed there is no edited text to view, at least here. As the site informs us, the Instituto Cervantes published its edition of the *Quijote*, edited by Francisco in 1998 (Barcelona: Crítica). Its mention here only points out the incompleteness of the online edition in comparison with the printed version.

With this general description in mind, let us first turn to a paradox implied by Benjamin: on the one hand, art is intended to be reproducible (218); on the other, reproductions can never be exactly the same as the authentic original because they are removed in time and space and as a result lose the aura of the original (220). Many scholars working with old texts know the awe and thrill of holding in one's own hands a manuscript or *princeps* edition of a favorite work. There is even a reference to this excitement and reverence in *Don Quijote* itself, when the "segundo autor" discovers Cide Hamete's *Historia de don Quijote de la Mancha* in Toledo: ". . . quedé atónito y suspenso, porque luego se me representó que aquellos cartapacios contenían la historia de don Quijote" (I, 9, 70). But even here, perhaps especially here, one must deal with the other aspect of Benjamin's assertion: authenticity. In one sense the only original and authentic text of a literary work written for publication is the manuscript, and even that, one might conclude, is and has to be different from the words in the mind of the author as they were written. The numerous corrections we see on manuscripts bear witness to the difficulty in translating thoughts into words. In the absence of a manuscript, one might look for authenticity in the *princeps* edition, frequently thought of by non-academics as the best version, the first version, the one that has not been corrupted by time, the one that

still has its aura. We know, of course, that *princeps* editions were notoriously full of errors. On the other hand, great works of art often contain errors or mistakes; perfection does not automatically translate into authenticity. The first edition of Part I of the *Quijote* contains the notorious and controversial omission of the theft of Sancho's donkey (I, 25, 192), while the second Cuesta edition contains text necessary to understand how the donkey came to be stolen and later returned. A variety of explanations exist to explain this discrepancy, but for the purposes of this discussion it does not matter whether it was intentional or a mistake: in either case, the first edition is quite different from the others, casting in doubt the notion, received from the copying of manuscripts, that subsequent editions can only be inferior to the original.

Again mirroring the complications caused by various textual versions of Quijote's adventures, as well as the protagonists' own comments on those texts, compilations, translations, and editions distance the reader even more from the "authentic work" as editors deal with such issues as which text one is going to edit and how much emendation will be made and how much additional information (and therefore both new context and new content) will be provided. Online editions not only take into consideration these typical questions that confront every editor, but, given the nature of the Internet, they also pose in more radical terms Benjamin's notions of a text in time and space. In other words, the questions not only concern *what* is a text, but *where* is it? *When* is it? As an object lesson, let us assume for the moment that the *princeps* edition is the original, authentic *Don Quijote*. Is the graphical facsimile of the *Quijote* provided by the Cervantes Project website also "authentic"? Benjamin, who wrote at length about the difference between an object and a picture of the object, would of course say no. With these online editions, not only do we not have an ancient book before us, we have no book at all, just digitally created pictures formatted to look like the pages in a book. When we look at pictures of text on the web, we are even further removed from the original edition. Pictures, at least at the time that Benjamin was writing, were objects that could be held, felt, framed, and otherwise manipulated in the physical world. Pictures on the net are in their most essential form nothing more than long series of positive and negative electrical charges represented by 0's and 1's that in turn are translated by software into activated pixels that represent shades of dark and light and hues of color. Although one can touch and feel one's computer monitor, one cannot touch or hold the picture represented on that monitor. The only way to hold it in one's hand in a manner similar to the way in which one can hold the original *princeps* book in one's hand is to print it out, but at that moment that we become not just readers but publishers (one has only to consider the new phrase "publish to the web" to note the change from the traditional meaning of the word "publisher").

Moreover, printers are not consistent in the way they render the on-screen pictures: some are black and white, some alter the proportions to match the printer's default margins, some need toner, and so on.

Perhaps more interesting are the questions regarding where and when is the text? Holding in one's hand a copy of the *Quijote*, even the most miserable error-ridden version, one still can see that this text, even if it is not the authentic text, is right here and right now. Where, however, are the texts offered by the Cervantes Project website? In an extraordinarily post-modern turn, the text is no place and many places at once. If one went to College Station, Texas, where I assume one would find the server on which the Cervantes Project site resides, one might see sleek computer boxes that contain the coding for the *Quijote*, and that, in a real sense, is where this text is even though one cannot see any words or letters just by examining the server. At the same time, one might note that the text as it is saved is merely a function of electrical charges and that an intense magnetic field might erase the text instantly, meaning, one can assume, that the text exists somewhere in the realm of electricity or magnetism, which is getting us just about as far away from a normal consideration of "authentic text" as one can imagine. At the same time, the text does exist because we can access it. Indeed, many people can access the text at the same time and, in a sense, the text, the same text, the authentic text, exists on multiple computer screens in multiple places around the world simultaneously. This astonishing reality leads to the question of time. An original *princeps* edition was published at a certain time and in a certain place; it is an artifact of its age. What time, however, can we associate with online editions? The time when they were digitized or uploaded to the server? These activities most closely reflect the traditional processes of editing and publishing a text. But is it not just as reasonable to say that the time of a digital text is when it is accessed, when the words appear on the computer monitor? This is text on demand that can be created over and over just by reloading the page; whatever authenticity the text input into the computer had, it now has only virtual authenticity to the various readers who choose to read it when and where they like.

Perhaps reflecting the ambiguity of an "authentic time" of a text is the MLA bibliography requirement to note both the date of online publication or update and the date one accesses a site. This seemingly rational format elides three additional difficulties. First, the differences between an original publication and an update are both more subtle and more radical than those between a first and second printed edition. We can easily go back to the first printed edition any time we want and compare and contrast editions without much effort. Online, however, the first edition is almost always replaced by the update, meaning that, even if the update only corrected typographical errors, when one cites a work

that is later changed online, there is no way for a reader to refer to the original citation because it simply ceases to exist. This is not exactly the case with Cide Hamete's manuscript or the other sources of *Don Quijote* written by "los autores", but it is very close (Where are they? How can we study the differences among them? How can we compare the translations to the originals?). Just during the time that it take to prepare this article, the address for the Centro de Estudios Cervantinos edition of the *Quijote* changed (from <http://cervantes.alcala.es/quijote/httoc.htm>). When an address changes, especially when there is no forwarding address left on the old site, the text does not exactly disappear, it just becomes extremely difficult to find until the next update of the various search engines. The second problem glossed over by the citation requirements is that of knowing which date to report if one accesses a web page multiple times. Is the correct date the first time one reads a web page or the last time before publication? More vexing in many ways is the third difficulty: finding the web address in the first place. My source for this information about MLA style is the website of the MLA itself, but the exact page on which the information appears is displayed only in a frame, with no separate address listed. Is the proper citation just <www.mla.org> leaving it to the reader to navigate the site to find the right page (my choice as reflected in the list of Works Cited)? Or do I include the following actual address, found only by inspecting the properties of the link that led to the right page: <http://www.mla.org/www_mla_org/style/style_main.asp?level=2&mode=page&page=1&link=sty72800121438&section=sty51800124510>? The point of my consternation is not just how to cite the reference but to note that on the World Wide Web, because the URL of each individual frame is not displayed, one frequently has no idea of the web address of a page one is viewing in a frame, meaning that, for all practical purposes, the "where" of this text has been deliberately obscured. It is almost as though some supernarrator (*sabio encantador*?) were going out of his way to confuse and obscure the textual authority of this material, a situation that is not just ironic as it is in the novel, but frustrating since we critics are allegedly not allowed the freedom to play around with these sources the way Cervantes did.

Although these sites all offer (or aspire to offer) the complete text of the *Quijote*, it is not always so clear who the editors are. As in the *Quijote* itself, there are multiple layers of attribution. Consider again the Cervantes Project texts. From one screen, one can click on five different versions of the same text: the edition by the Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, a digitized version of the Schevill and Bonilla text, the *princeps* version, the Ormsby English translation, and the Perino edition of the Italian translation. Each of these has some interesting facets to it that highlight the issues surrounding the instability, or rather, the

intangibility, of the text and its authors. Let us start with the version offered by the Centro de Estudios Cervantinos. We find out from other sources, such as the Cervantes Project, that the editors are Florencio Sevilla Arroyo and Antonio Rey Hazas, but, curiously, their names are nowhere to be found on the actual site that houses the text (<http://cervantes.uah.es/quijote/httoc.htm>). Instead, the only name that appears anywhere on or regarding the text of the *Quijote* is that of one Asunción López, dryly listed without any further information other than "Universidad de Alcalá 1997." It takes searching on other web pages to discover that she is not the author or the editor; rather, she "maintains" the website, a brand new intermediary between text and reader than Cervantes could only have dreamed about. She did not write the text, edit the text, or, most likely, even type the text. If she is like other web maintenance people I have known, she possibly hasn't even read the text. Yet, here is her name, the only one other than that of Cervantes himself and, of course, the characters, to grace the pages of this online edition. Moreover, if one accesses the CEC test through the Cervantes Project site, the text that appears is actually a mirror of the Alcalá site, meaning that the virtual text we are looking at is not even the virtual text we think it is but a mirror image of yet another virtual text. In addition, if one uses the search engine, one actually sees what appears to be a re-edition of the CEC text. (A *caveat*, by the way: not all of this information may be true. I am relating the information as I interpreted it from the website. Of course, if I have misunderstood the information due to its digital presentation, that just goes to prove my point more conclusively that there is a great deal of textual and authorial uncertainty in dealing with online texts.) Leaving the CEC version and opening the Italian version, we see at the bottom of the first page several attributions: the translation is by Edoardo Perino (done in 1888). Under the rubric "E-text" appear three names: Marina De Stasio, Clelia Mussari, and Claudio Paganelli. One assumes that these individuals were involved in digitizing Perino's text either by retyping it or scanning it, but it's not made clear exactly what "E-text" means, especially since Claudio Paganelli is again listed after the rubric "HTML," clearly indicating that there is yet another, evidently different, step in the preparation of this text. Finally, if one doesn't like the translation (their words, not mine) there are two different links to Fred Jehle's edition.

Moving along, we notice a couple of other features of these sites that merit attention. On the main page of Fred Jehle's Cervantes site appears the following sentence: "If you find any errors in the texts or have any recommendations, PLEASE let me know." This is a familiar plea by web designers. In some ways, this is a more honest approach to perfection than we see in printed books in which it is too late to make changes to correct errors except in future editions, or it is simply

too expensive to reprint a book to correct just a couple of errors. At the same time, this request both speaks to the fluidity of text on the Internet (some sites change the content of their pages daily or even more frequently) and calls into question the authenticity, or rather, the fidelity to the original, of any text we usually read. Even more, there is an additional page on his site dedicated to the topic, "Textual differences between the electronic version of the novel and the printed version." This is not an uncommon feature of modern editions of older texts, but it adds yet another layer of undecidability in considering this text. Are the words on the page those of Cervantes or those of Jehle? It would seem we are that much farther away from a text that "no se salga un punto de la verdad" (I, 1, 22).

By admitting that the texts we read are not perfect or authentic, and in fact have been altered by modern editors to correct for seventeenth-century editing and printing errors, we are not quite calling editors members of a race of "mentirosos" (I, 9, 71), but it is close. The plea to "please send errors," which on the face of it ought to speak for the honesty and good intentions of the editors, maintainers, coders, and the others, in reality highlights a fact that is politely overlooked in printed editions: they too are full of errors. Usually we just read through them or around them, gloss over them or ignore them, but they are there. We say, "Well, books are published by human beings and subject to error." But wasn't that precisely one of Cervantes' points not only regarding the books that drove Quijote mad but his own book, as well as the Avellaneda text? One of Quijote's main purposes in life once he is made aware of the spurious *Segunda Parte*, is to do everything in his power to point out its errors. He changes the course of his own adventures, and, curiously, even incorporates one of Avellaneda's characters, Álvaro Tarfe, asking him to sign an affidavit for the purpose of attesting to the falsehood and error found in the unauthorized sequel (II, 72, 855).

One of Benjamin's most insightful comments noted that a shift in medium occasions a radical shift in the way we look at a work of art. After a discussion of aura (missing in the reproduction), and perspective (limited in certain media such as film, 228), he moves on to what it is that can actually be seen in a reproduction: "The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject" (236). This is even more true in hypertextual media in which images can be manipulated to highlight areas not intended to be highlighted in the original, in which one can go in a few mouse clicks from Cervantes' description of a translation as a tapestry as seen from behind (II, 62, 811) to a picture of a tapestry seen from behind, or, in one more click, to a translation of the novel itself; or to a situation in which multiple glosses can appear in separate windows or in the scroll bar as the mouse

passes over selected text. Of particular interest to *Quijote* studies is the way these "entirely new structural formations" relate to structural issues surrounding authorship and authenticity that mirror those found in the text itself.

These online texts allow us not only to see and compare errors and omissions from one text to another, they also permit us to manipulate the text in ways that are simply impossible when reading from a book. Take what is perhaps the most useful feature of any of these sites, the search utility of the Cervantes Digital Library, itself a component of the Cervantes Project. (By the way, it used to be called Cervantes 2001 Project. What happens to all those citations to the texts under that name?) After one enters the search text, a new window pops up with the results. If one selected 3-line context, the citations, from various parts of the *Quijote* (and even from other texts if that option was selected) appear on the same page. Thus, for example, if one enters "Rocinante," one gets on a single page all the references to Quijote's horse, thus reconstituting the text and leaving out all passages that do not refer to Rocinante. Moreover, if one selected "Ranked" search type rather than "Boolean," the references are not even in order of their appearance in the text. In many ways Cervantes was playing with texts and the received conventions of writing and reading novels, and one can only image what he would have made of the reader's ability to reorganize and even essentially randomize his text even after it was published.

Another distinctive feature of the websites is the opportunity for readers to become writers as they "send comments" or "sign the guestbook." Again, Benjamin foresaw this turn of events. It used to be that a very few writers wrote for thousands of readers. Now, thanks to the dissemination of print media, and especially the Internet, great numbers of readers have become writers. "The distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character" (232). At the moment these websites do not allow us to go in and change the text of the *Quijote* itself, although that is certainly possible and already a feature of some digital games in which the reader or player is allowed to decide how the story will come out. The point here is that such a feature is technologically quite possible even if it has not yet been incorporated in these sites. But even with the limits on the current role of readers as writers, there is still something remarkable in including as parallel text, along with the primary text, the reactions, emotional responses, questions, insipid banalities, and other comments that readers care to write. Indeed, the very breadth noted in the comments is yet another indicator of the vast differences there are in relationships between text and reader. Notice the extraordinary relationship of these readers to the text as seen in these remarks from the Centro de Estudios Cervantinos site (<http://cervantes.uah.es/libroinv.htm>):

Mis felicitaciones para los que la idearon y para los que la llevaron a cabo. Nunca lo
   he leído, pero como español lo considero un poquito mío.

Lo único que les pido es que pongan mas fotografías de las plazas, museos, castillos,
   universidades e historia.

que tal nomás ando visitando su pagina por que voy a hacer mi tarea. ok . . .

es buena su pagina, pero lo que a veces buscan los chavos flojos como yo es el resumen
   de cada obra en fin me sirvió, y gracias por haber puesto esta pagina. saludos a todas
   las mujeres

¡Cervantes y Dalí! ¡Dalí y Cervantes! ¡Viva España! ¡Viva Chile! ¡Viva la vida! ¡Gracias!

Bueno a mi parecer deberían poner un libro un poco más entretenido. Que no aburriera
   a los jóvenes al contrario que los entretuviera. . . .

deberían tener algunos resúmenes sobre esto porque es demasiado largo para leerlo todo
   por completo.

En mi hogar tengo algunas artesanías de DON QUIJOTES hechas por manos puertor-
   riqueñas.

Finally, it is essential that one note the rich online context in which
these texts are presented. Whereas printed editions may have had an occa-
sional drawing or map as an illustration, the ancillary material found
on these pages is not only vast but offers points of view and additional
details that may color one's reading of the text. Regarding visual media,
in addition to facsimile pages, there is every sort of drawing (ranging
from seventeenth-century engravings of buildings to Picasso's famous
rendering of Don Quijote and Sancho to twentieth-century cartoons),
as well as a multitude of photographs of places mentioned in the novel.
In some cases, they bespeak a conceptualization and literalization of
Cervantes' words worthy of Quijote's reading the *libros de caballerías*
as truthful history. Moreover, especially in some of the more touristy
sites, such as those of the town of Villarrubia de los Ojos and the Parque
Nacional de las Tablas de Daimiel (neither of which, to my knowledge
or that of the magnificent search facility in the Cervantes Project site,
actually appears in the novel), are clearly trying to achieve a certain fame
through association with a great work of literature, just as did Quijote
himself. Perhaps the desire to make real the images one reads is irre-
sistible. In other cases, the images are those of works of art, each one
representing a different interpretation or version of the novel, much as
other authors from Graham Greene to Dale Wasserman have done. One
of the most telling and pertinent comments regarding the online images
comes from Fred Jehle's page regarding images of Cervantes himself
(<http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/wccimage.htm>, a site address that has also
changed over the course of writing this study). His pithy comment, "There
is no authenthic [*sic*] portrait of Cervantes," seems to sum up for the
images the same kind of aporia found in the search for authenticity in
the text itself.

   The textual and interpretive layering noted here can be discovered
by just one mouse-click on the primary *Quijote* sites. If one explores

the various links pages offered, that is, the material available via just two mouse clicks, there is vastly more that could be said about the *distanciamiento artístico* inherent in digital versions of the *Quijote* that appear online. Some of these sites take one quite far afield, such as the page on foods of La Mancha and a forum for searching one's genealogy on www.elquijote.com (which is actually located at www.elquijote.org), a detailed diagram of a Manchegan windmill (http://www.madridejos.net/molinog.htm), and a guide to following Don Quijote's route on bicycle (http://jordicots.netfirms.com/rutaq.htm), all tied together by a webring (http://www.elquijote.org/anillo/default.asp). In addition, there are many more online editions and versions of the novel itself than those that I have mentioned, but from just this evidence one gets the idea that *Don Quijote* on the Internet intensifies and magnifies the same kind of textual dislocation, disconnection, fabrication, and falsification that makes the novel what it is. These web versions add enormously to the ironic and complex activity of reading the *Quijote* in a way that highlights and underscores one of the principal features of Cervantes' masterpiece. The exploration of these virtual texts is truly an *aventura quijotesca*.

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