

Footnotes

(*1) Regarding my friend who thought *Don Quixote* was the most beautiful thing he ever read: This is, needless to say, not my own evaluation. However these people are out there. I've encountered a couple more people like this on BookTube--people who claim *Don Quixote* is the most wonderful thing that they've ever read.

(*2) On *The History of World Literature* by John L. Voth: I linked to [the whole series on Youtube back in 2017](#), but unfortunately the videos have been removed. (Not surprisingly, I suppose. *The Great Courses* series is, after all, copyrighted content that is sold for profit.) But if you can find a copy of it one way or another, it's recommended listening in my book.

This is, by the way, the second book now that I've picked up solely because I was fascinated by Professor Voth's description of it. The first book (or rather set of books) I read based on Voth's recommendation was [The-Cairo-Trilogy](#) by Naguib Mahfouz.

(*3) On the multiple narrators for *Don Quixote*: The whole idea is a lot of fun, isn't it? It strikes me as something straight out of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. (You may remember that movie was also constantly blurring the lines between the fictional story and the narration of the movie.)

It's a reminder that a lot of the meta-humor that we associate with 20th Century post-modernism is actually a lot older than we give credit for. Meta-humor is not unique to the modern age. (The other old book that springs to mind as using meta-humor to subvert the narrative is [Tristram Shandy](#), but I'm not entirely sure I can count *Tristram Shandy* as a separate entry since, [according to Wikipedia](#), it was directly influenced by *Don Quixote*.)

Although now that I've finished the book, I should add in the caveat that it turns out that the overlapping narrators wasn't as big a part of the book as Professor Voth had led me to believe. Yes, it is in the book, but it's only a handful of times that you actually get the overlapping commentary. Most of the time the narration is pretty straight forward.

(*4) On Part 2: Hopefully I'm describing this in a coherent way. But in case I've left anyone confused, I'll just borrow from [Wikipedia's succinct description](#):

Part Two of *Don Quixote* explores the concept of a character understanding that he is written about, an idea much explored in the 20th century. As

Part Two begins, it is assumed that the literate classes of Spain have all read the first part of the story. Cervantes' meta-fictional device was to make even the characters in the story familiar with the publication of Part One

(*5) **More on Part 2:** Although now that I've read the book, I should add another caveat here that (if memory serves) Professor Voth didn't make entirely clear. Don Quixote and his squire Sancho Panza themselves never actually read the original *Don Quixote*. Instead, they are told about its contents by the other characters. (Actually they receive reports not only of their depictions in the original *Don Quixote* but also of their depictions in [the unauthorized sequel](#).)

(*6) **On the idea of characters in a book being aware of the book itself:** The idea of characters in a book being aware of the book itself is also something that [the Flashman series](#) makes use of--the conceit of the *Flashman* series being that it takes the characters from the public domain book [Tom Brown's Schooldays](#) and then follows their adventures in a world in which *Tom Brown's Schooldays* is in print. In [the first book](#), Flashman admits that the readers will already be aware of him from Thomas Hughes depiction in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. In [Flashman and the Great Game](#), Flashman's character is confronted with the publication of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, and many subsequent Flashman books have characters ask Flashman about the truth of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*.

In [my video introduction to The Flashman series](#), I made the comparison with *Don Quixote* explicit. And I suspect author George MacDonald Fraser was consciously influenced by *Don Quixote*. (Although who knows--it could also just be a case of great minds thinking alike.)

Also, now that I think about, [the Sherlock Holmes stories](#) also have some elements of this. The conceit of most of the *Sherlock Holmes* stories is that Watson is writing the stories up for publication, and in some of [the later Sherlock Holmes stories](#), Holmes will occasionally comment on Watson's previously published stories, which indicates that Sherlock Holmes himself has read some of the *Sherlock Holmes* stories.

...and what else? I'm sure there are other examples of this that I'm just not thinking of at the moment. Help me out in the comments, what am I missing?

(*7) **On my habit of recommending very long and ambitious books to our book club:** ["Yikes -- do you give no thought for brevity?"](#) Whisky Prajer chided me after reading

[my suggestions for book club](#). Yes, point well-taken. I probably was going a little bit overboard on the tomes.

(*8) **On Tom's aversion to *Don Quixote*:** ...and the thing was, Tom had previously indicated he'd be open to re-reading a few books he'd already read for the sake of some interesting discourse in our book club. But *Don Quixote* was emphatically not one of those books.

(*9) **On giving up on Part 2:** I don't know how common this is, but just anecdotally, there was at least one more guy in my office who had also tried *Don Quixote* but had given up on Part 2 as well. Before I started reading the book, this struck me as strange. I mean, for one thing, by the time you get to Part 2 you're halfway through the book already. You might as well just suck it up and finish at that point, right? But plus, based on Professor Voths' description, Part 2 sounded like the most interesting part. "Why would you stop there?" I thought.

Little did I know how close I would come to also giving up on Part 2 myself. If I wasn't in the habit of [publicly declaring which books I start and which books I finish on this blog](#) (and thus creating some accountability for myself), I probably would have also just quietly stopped reading somewhere in the middle of Part 2.

(*10) **Tom moved to Columbia:** On the slim chance that anyone new around here stumbles upon this blog--I am living and teaching English in Saigon. So the bookclub was made up of transient expats.

(*11) **Wordsworth Classics:** These being the editions of classic books most readily available in Saigon, almost all of the other classic books I've read during my stay in Saigon have been *Wordsworth Classics* editions. (For example: [Tom Sawyer](#), [Huckleberry Finn](#), [The Count of Monte Cristo](#), [Brothers Karamazov](#), [Frankenstein](#)). So at this point I'm well aware with the faults of the series.

For one thing, for anything in translation, they always go with an old translation that's already in the public domain. In this case, they've used a 1700 translation of *Don Quixote* by Peter Motteux.

The good news is that despite being 400 years old, it's actually pretty readable. However, it is also on a bit dry. I wonder if a newer modern translation would have

pulled me into this book a bit more? (And perhaps caused me to get through this book a bit quicker?)

The other problem that I've noticed consistently with *Wordsworth Classics* is that their endnotes are so inconsistent and random. (The translator's comments appear at the bottom of the page as footnotes. The publisher's explanations appear at the back of the book as endnotes.) For each book, *Wordsworth Classics* hire a literature professor to write a brief introduction, and add explanatory endnotes throughout the book. But the endnotes just pop up randomly. There could be several numbers on one page, and then we could go 100 pages without any endnotes. Several allusions that are obvious to most literature people are endnoted (such as basic Biblical allusions), but then for most of the obscure allusions the reader is left with no help at all. Sometimes the endnotes are useful, but they're so inconsistent as to always leave you wondering "But why an endnote suddenly here, and nothing for the previous 10 allusions I missed?"

My best guess is that the poor literature professor isn't being paid a lot, and he just goes through and randomly endnotes whatever allusions he knows off the top of his head, because it's been this way for all of the *Wordsworth Classics* books I've read. (In this particular case, the culprit is one Stephen Boyd of the University of College Cork, but I don't think he's to blame since it's been this way with all the other *Wordsworth Classics*). But it's a particular pity with *Don Quixote* because there are so many allusions to other books of knight errantry which would have been nice to know more about. But then, I suppose for a book as long as this one with as many allusions as this one, fully endnoting it would be an impossible task.

On a positive note, though, the 12 page Introduction that Stephen Boyd provided at the front of the book was very useful.

(*12) **The comic book illustration:** I usually like doing something visually appealing and a bit pulpy for these [started posts](#), and after doing a Google Image search, I had a hard time finding an actual book cover that looked like any fun. So I went with the comic book version.

(*13) **On everyone in the book club finishing Part 1 on time:** Actually the originally deadline was in January, and we had to push it back a couple times because everyone was having trouble getting through the book. Which I attribute to the fact that not only was the prose a bit dry, but the pages were very text-dense. So we didn't quite realize how much reading 363 pages was for part 1.

And also I shouldn't say we all finished Part 1. One book club member gave up. But I won't shame her here.

(*14) **On Part 1 being foggy in my mind:** I've been doing my best, though, to keep it fresh in my mind. [I've been listening to the free librivox audiobook of Part 1](#), and I've also been re-reading parts of Part 1 while I've been writing this review.

(*15) **On my progress with *Don Quixote* being hampered by getting distracted by other books:** Actually the real thing that hampered my progress on *Don Quixote* was the same thing that always hampers my reading--my Internet addiction, and all the time I waste on Youtube, [Twitter](#), Facebook, et cetera. But this is such a perennial problem for me ([I've-been-lamenting-this-every-year](#)), that it seems almost uninteresting for me to mention it again here. Certainly if I was able to get my Internet surfing under control and read more books instead, then I'd have a lot more books to report on every year. But to the extent that I've already resigned myself to the fact that I only manage to get a limited amount of books read each year, then the fact that I kept getting distracted by other books is the reason it took me so long to finish *Don Quixote*.

(*16) **I was involved in 2 other book clubs at the time:** [1 book club for general fiction](#) (this is, of course, the exact same book club I've already mentioned--the very same bookclub that we attempted to read *Don Quixote* in), and [1 book club for professional development](#).

Actually there were 3 book clubs if [you count our other co-workers attempt to get a 3rd book club going for general non-fiction](#), but I'll deal with that book club on another day.

All of these book clubs fizzled out in the fall of 2018, but at least for the first several months I was trying to finish *Don Quixote*, they did a lot to distract my attention.

(*17) **On Getting Distracted by Other Books:** To be precise, since [starting *Don Quixote* on December 17, 2017](#), I have finished, and reviewed on this blog, 34 other books.

1. [Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching by Diane Larsen-Freeman \[Second Edition\]](#)--Revisited January 4, 2018
2. [The Civil Wars by Appian of Alexandria](#) March 5, 2018
3. [The Language Myth](#) by Vyvyan Evans, March 14, 2018
4. [The Language Teaching Matrix by Jack C. Richards--Revisited](#), March 28, 2018
5. [A Framework for Task-Based Learning by Jane Willis](#) , May 27, 2018
6. [Speaking](#) by Martin Bygate, July 2, 2018
7. [The Martian Chronicles](#) by Ray Bradbury , July 11, 2018

8. [Palace of Desire by Naguib Mahfouz](#) , July 20, 2018
 9. [The Land of Stories: The Wishing Spell](#) by Chris Colfer, September 5, 2018
 10. [Sugar Street](#) by Naguib Mahfouz, September 18, 2018
 11. [Americanah](#) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, October 8, 2018
 12. [Teaching Unplugged](#) by Luke Meddings and Scott Thornbury, October 9, 2018
 13. [An A-Z of ELT](#) by Scott Thornbury (First Edition), October 18, 2018
 14. [English Phonetics and Phonology: A Practical Course](#) by Peter Roach [Fourth Edition], October 20, 2018
 15. [The Wilful Princess and the Piebald Prince](#) by Robin Hobb, December 1, 2018
 16. [The Enchanted Castle](#) by Edith Nesbit, December 18, 2018
 17. [Coming Up for Air](#) by George Orwell December 20, 2018
 18. [Claudius the God by Robert Graves](#) , January 2, 2019
 19. [The Handmaid's Tale](#) by Margaret Atwood, January 14, 2019
 20. [Teaching Young Language Learners](#) by Annamaria Pinter, February 6, 2019
 21. [Bound for Glory](#) by Woody Guthrie, February 7, 2019
 22. [Sweden](#) by Matthew Turner, September 28, 2019
 23. [Syllabus Design](#) by David Nunan, November 5, 2019
 24. [The Golden Fleece by Robert Graves](#), January 28, 2020
 25. [Designing Language Courses: A Guide for Teachers by Kathleen Graves](#) , April 2, 2020
 26. [Nine Princes in Amber by Roger Zelazny](#) , April 11, 2020
 27. [Learning One-to-One](#) by Ingrid Wisniewska, June 3, 2020
 28. [Being Wagner: The Triumph of the Will by Simon Callow](#) June 26, 2020
 29. [The Guns of Avalon \(The Chronicles of Amber #2\)](#) by Roger Zelazny, July 19, 2020
 30. [Age of Myth by Michael J. Sullivan](#) August 17, 2020
 31. [Norse Mythology by Neil Gaiman](#) September 18, 2020
 32. [Tales of Troy and Greece by Andrew Lang](#) November 8, 2020
 33. [Frozen \(Heart of Dread #1\)](#) by Melissa de la Cruz and Michael Johnston December 1, 2020
 34. [Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH](#) by Robert C. O'Brien December 12, 2020
- Plus finished, but not yet reviewed, [Chomsky's Universal Grammar: An Introduction](#).
And that's not even getting into all the books I [started](#) but [abandoned](#) during this period.

(*18) On *Don Quixote* being completely accessible: Spanish students, I'm told, have to struggle through it in the original 17th Century Spanish, but us English language speakers can enjoy modern translations.
Cervantes was [Shakespeare's](#) contemporary, so I imagine that reading him in the original Spanish would be similar to reading Shakespearean English.

Although I'm also given to understand that in the original Spanish, the character of Don Quixote would imitate the speech of the archaic language of the much older knight errant novels. (One of the recurring jokes in the novel is that none of the uneducated country folk that Don Quixote encounters have any idea what he's actually saying.) So in the original Spanish, it's archaic dialogue inside 17th Century prose style. But fortunately for us English speakers, none of this is a problem in a modern English translation.

The translation I have (as I mentioned in footnote [11](#)) is from the year 1700 translation, but it still presented no difficulties. The prose style was a bit stiff and formal (as older books are), but I had no trouble understanding anything. I suspect a more modern translation would be even easier yet.

(*19) **On *Don Quixote* still being funny:** I'm sure all the puns and wordplay work much better in the original Spanish.

I'm also told that much of the humor in the original comes from the various styles of speech which were used, and apparently this doesn't translate at all.

And I'm sure that the original audience back in 1605 understood all the references and satire that are nowadays lost on modern readers.

...but, in spite of all that, there is still a lot of humor in this book that is timeless, and translates perfectly well to a 21st Century English reader.

(*20) **On all the medieval legends and stories referenced in *Don Quixote*:** There's tons of stories and names constantly being referenced in *Don Quixote*. This is where good footnotes would really come in handy. Sadly (as I mentioned in footnote [11](#)), the Wordsworth Classics edition is lacking in this regard. But, nowadays we have Wikipedia, so if you're so inclined, you can stop reading to look up any references that make you curious.

Among several interesting little tidbits I picked up from *Don Quixote* was the legend of Roderic. *Don Quixote* only made passing reference to it, but by looking it up on Wikipedia, I was able to get the full story.

Roderic was the last Visigoth King of Spain (before the Muslim invasion). There's a whole little legend about how Roderic's downfall, and the Muslim invasion of Spain, happened because Roderic raped the daughter of one of the nobles. (Similar to the Roman legend of [the rape of Lucretia](#).) For centuries, this legend was treated as historical fact. Read all about it on Wikipedia [HERE](#).

If you find those little bits of history and legend interesting, there are a lot of those allusions in *Don Quixote*. So it's another bonus of reading the book.

(*21) **On the unauthorized sequel:** If I remember right, John Voth said that the presence of this unauthorized sequel was what had spurred Cervantes to write his own

sequel in the first place, so that the world might never have had a *Don Quixote* Part 2 if it weren't for the unauthorized sequel. However other commentators I've read claim that Cervantes was already writing Part 2 when the unauthorized sequel was published.

(*22) **On the characters talking about the unauthorized sequel:** References to the unauthorized sequel don't start showing up until about halfway through Part 2, which is one of the reasons that commentators think that Cervantes had already written most of Part 2 before he encountered the unauthorized sequel (see note 21 above). However, there are enough references to the events of the unauthorized sequel that I almost felt like I was missing something for not having read it. I feel like in order to do a thorough study of *Don Quixote*, you would need to read the unauthorized sequel as well to get all the references.

(I have no intention of doing this, but someone who wanted to do a thorough study of the book would no doubt need to do this.)

I did a brief Google Search and was somewhat surprised to find that the unauthorized sequel doesn't appear to be more widely available on the Internet. I was sure it would be on project Gutenberg or something, but no luck. There are scanned copies of [an old edition on archive.org](#), but nothing in a convenient text form.

Of course, if you really wanted to do a thorough study of *Don Quixote*, you'd also have to read *Amadis of Gaul*, and probably about a half dozen other chivalric romances in order to get all the references. So admittedly it's difficult to know where to start with the background reading for a book like this.