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Don Quixote

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

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The team that brought you a rendition of **Gulliver's Travels** now turn their attention to another of those works by celebrated ancients who would surely be astonished (if not miffed) to find themselves adapted for unfledged youth. Unlike the satire which has always made for difficulties in dealing with Swift's book, narrative expansiveness is the problem posed by Cervantes. Near enough a thousand pages of Cohen's old Penguin translation are needed to take us through the multiple journeyings of the Knight of the Doleful Countenance with its numerous side-trackings and the interpolated stories that interrupt them, so that much clarity of purpose is demanded of anyone trying to take short cuts.

At 352 pages it may seem that Martin Jenkins is prepared to be generous to his author's original, but a brief glance at the book will reveal that, as with **Gulliver**, the generosity is exercised rather towards his illustrator. Almost every page opening has the spacious text confined within boxes which are combined with or overlay monochrome drawings and decorations by Chris Riddell, while whole pages are often given over to him for more substantial portraits and scene-settings in colour. This necessitates the curtailing of both the quantity and the length of episodes taken over from the original but Jenkins nonetheless has sought to include all the significant adventures in the two parts of the story. Clearly, no kind of translation is involved, but rather the recasting and ruthless abridging of an unacknowledged English source. The storytelling is necessarily brusque and includes some twenty-first century phrases and jokes. (Sancho's distorted mention of Cide Hamete Benenjeree leads to a remark that 'the Moors are very fond of ice-cream'.)

Both the writing and the powerful portraiture of the illustrations tend to support a view of **Don Quixote** as farce at the expense of an aged and knackered Romantic. That's legitimate enough, for Cervantes was in no wise sentimental about his deluded hero, but among the abridgments for children I retain a preference for those by James Reeves and Olive Jones, with their illustrations by Edward Ardizzone and George Him, which allow sympathy and a muted sense of tragedy to creep in.

Running Order:

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