The Dancing Don

When Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra first set the inimitable Don Quixote into motion, he must have hoped that The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha would become a widely and wildly popular success. The popularity of Don Quixote would have been clear to him when a contemporary writer published a continuation of the book before Cervantes could publish his own. Still, how could Cervantes have guessed that his self-reflexive narrative of painfully humorous disenchantment would definitively alter the future horizons of prose narrative? It would have been equally impossible for Cervantes to imagine that Don Quixote would have such an extended stage life in ballet: from the earliest in 1740 in Vienna to the defining work of Marius Petipa, whose 1876 Moscow Don Quixote would be the basis of later productions, including Rudolf Nureyev’s in 1966. Don Quixote premiered at Boston Ballet in 1982 and was just restaged by the Boston Ballet in its fortieth anniversary season.

One year prior to Nureyev’s comic, romantic renovation of Petipa, George Balanchine premiered his own Don Quixote in 1965. Balanchine was sixty-one and broke with tradition in staging a ponderous work that was somber and unflinching in its portrayal of Don Quixote’s doddering.

On Mars

"Mars as the Abode of Life" was the title chosen by Percival Lowell for his book of 1908. It was to be the defining summary of his life’s work. Not a traditional scientist by standards then or now, Lowell was a member of the prominent Boston family whose span reached from scholarship to politics. In what today federal agencies call “public outreach and education” (EPO is an almost mandatory component of all NSF and NASA grants), Lowell was a true pioneer. In terms of recognition by the lay public, he was the Carl Sagan of his day. Lowell’s legacy is a mixture of wrong conclusions and remarkably important ideas on how signs of life might be found in the Solar System. Almost single-handedly he demonstrated how modern observatories should not be located in cities so their benefactors could bask in their presence, but rather on remote mountain tops where the effects of our turbulent atmosphere and urban light pollution are minimized. Indeed, the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona, a facility operated in a 50% partnership with Boston University, today serves as a test site for state-of-the-art instrumentation developed on campus by Professor Ken Janes in our Astronomy Department.

Lowell’s prominence came from his driving personality, wealth, ambition, good looks and almost religious belief that Mars was a planet in the grip of global warming – a disaster that forced an advanced civilization on Mars to conserve its precious water supply by building a global network of canals to irrigate the planet. That these ‘lines’ or surface markings could be seen visually only by Lowell himself in Flagstaff did not deter him. His drawings and rhetorical flair were seized upon by an ever-outrageous press and welcomed by a public in the first decade of a new century eager and full of Teddy.
Mars, from 1

Roosevelt-type enthusiasm about the capabilities of the modern era. When space probes from the USA and USSR visited the planet 50 years later and found Mars to have a cold, dry and unfriendly environment, the Lowellians dream of finding signs of life in our solar system almost vanished. The Search for Extra-Terrestrial Life (SETI) became a search for radio signals sent accidentally or deliberately towards Earth from possible advanced civilizations on planets in other, and far more remote, solar systems. SETI is still active, resting on its belief that “An absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.”

Advances in the life sciences on Earth and some amazing accidents have brought about new interest and multi-national initiatives to visit Mars to search once again for signs of life. The study of “life in harsh environments” on Earth has revealed that biological activity can flourish under a remarkable range of conditions: from 250°F near underwater volcanic vents to the frozen deserts of Antarctica. Life is far more hardy than we ever envisioned! Could it exist below the surface of Mars in frozen (or even liquid) water deposits? There is precisely such a “follow the water” theme to all upcoming missions to Mars (see side panel). Perhaps the major driver for these missions was the discovery in 1984 of a meteorite from Mars sitting on the frozen and unchanging surface of the Allan Hills regions of Antarctica. This 4.6 billion-year-old rock was blasted off the Martian surface by an impact event and spent about 16 million years orbiting the Sun near Mars and Earth, before finally being captured by the Earth’s gravity about 13,000 years ago. After landing, it was unaffected by terrestrial erosion or climate change before it was picked up by a search team for meteorites in 1984. Recent analyses suggested that this Allen Hills meteorite contained both molecular signatures and “nano-bacteria–molecular signatures” to indicate past life on Mars. Still highly controversial, this has nevertheless renewed interest in a more thorough exploration of the Red Planet, a strategy embraced by planetary scientists eager to study in more depth all aspects of the Martian surface and atmosphere.

The discovery that life is not a single-site phenomenon would surely be the most profound to be made in human history.

Don, from 1

adventures, his alienation from society, and his delusional devotion to a “Dulcinea,” played by Balanchine’s latest muse and prima ballerina Suzanne Farrell. Balanchine played Don Quixote and crafted a ballet both in sympathy with and realistic about the aging adventurer. Nureyev was twenty-eight when he imagined himself as the romantic lead of a work that had little time to lavish on its title character. Nureyev played the young Basilio whose love for the enchanting Kitri faced various obstacles that were to be overcome in a dazzlingly humorous fashion. Balanchine and Nureyev translated Cervantes’ great play of puns and plots into a language composed entirely of movement.

We cannot evaluate these ballets by whether they represent Don Quixote accurately. We can, however, ask how each choreographer responds to the spirit of the work. Balanchine aspired to dramatize the disenchantment and exhaustion that Cervantes identified with the character of Don Quixote and the tradition of episodic narratives of chivalric romance that helped give birth to the modern novel. Nureyev aspired to enchant his audience. He relied on Petipa’s preference for stylizing national and ethnic character in the gestures of the Russian ballet. We encounter in Nureyev commoners with kitsch flamenca flourishes and gypsies with mysterious moves and music. Later, Don Quixote stumbles into an enchanted forest of dryads dancing with delightful Dulcinea.

Nureyev and Balanchine offer us glorious works with wildly different ambitions for Don Quixote and for dance itself. Although we might more readily identify Balanchine’s disenchantment with Cervantes’s masterwork, Don Quixote still forces us to ask if we prefer a destructive kinght-errant tilting at windmills and slaughtering innocents to a crowd of family and friends burning our books to save us from the spell that reading casts over us. How could we choose either?
Profile: What Core Alumni Are Doing

by Zachary Bos

Suzyn-Elayne Soler
Core '98, CAS '00, SED '02
Dartmouth College

The decision between Fordham and Boston University was made even more difficult by the similarity of the two schools: both were large, urban institutions, and both had served very excellent cheese at their respective receptions for potential applicants. However, Suzyn-Elayne Soler – a high school senior in the spring of 1996 – was looking for a college that was large enough for her to disappear into, but also offered more specialized programs for her interests. When she first flipped through a Core brochure, Suzyn-Elayne knew that she had found just that.

The first class of her college career was at 8:00 a.m. and dealt with psychology. This was not a very memorable introduction to higher education. Her next class was Core, and it was the beginning of her passion. When she walked into Tsai, through clouds of music piped through the house sound system for a lecture by Professor Jorgensen she knew in her gut that the Core was the place for her.

One of Suzyn-Elayne’s fondest memories from her tenure as a Core student was the symposium she and her Core circle held on the floating docks near the Esplanade the day before their closing Core banquet. There was wine and fancy chocolate and the obligatory cheese. They chatted about Plato and listened to Bob Dylan. Though they violated a number of local ordinances – including underage drinking and the propagation of amplified rock music in a public space – what they did they did in the name of Scholarship and Truth and all the other excuses Core had taught them to invoke.

After her graduation from Core, Suzyn-Elayne and a few other staunch Corers decided to produce a newsletter as a means of staying involved with the community they had grown accustomed to. Justine Pierce, Elizabeth Adamo and Melissa Sapienza pitched in to release the first issue of The Core Newsletter in the fall of 1998.

In that inaugural edition and two subsequent issues, readers found a play list of the music that had introduced each lecture of the year and the script for the previous spring’s enormously popular Core banquet skit. Professor Nelson penned a column called “Ask Athene,” through which he answered students’ questions with wisdom from the grey-eyed one. Melissa and Suzyn-Elayne were among those honored with the High Honorable Cognomen of Polytropos for continued passion for the principles of the Core.

After graduating in 2000 with a degree in Anthropology and minor concentration in Women’s Studies, Suzyn-Elayne took a position with the University Wellness Center. She helped to administer various programs and publications intended to improve the social, physical, mental, and emotional health of students on campus. But when she heard that the Core Curriculum was accepting applications for their first Senior Administrative Secretary, she was eager to get back involved with her beloved Core. Her enthusiasm, intelligence, and a passion for frequent cheese platters served her as well as she enjoyed two years helping Core behind the scenes.

 Though it was refreshing to be back at Core – the perk that had compelled her to choose BU – she continued to pursue her larger career goals. After two years of night classes, Suzyn-Elayne walked with the graduates of BU’s School of Education in May 2002 for a Master’s degree in Administration Policy and Planning. Her eventual profile: What Core Alumni Are Doing by Zachary Bos Continued Soler pg. 4
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dream is to be a dean or upper echelon official involved in student affairs at a small college, in a position to give to other students the same sort of support and consideration that made her time in Boston so wonderful.

In August, Suzyn-Elayne packed her Rhett the Terrier beanie, pair of framed diplomas, and memories of BU for a move to Lebanon, New Hampshire. She currently works as an Assistant Director of Admissions at Dartmouth College, reviewing applications and making recommendations that help to shape each new autumn’s incoming class. In addition, she travels the country as a jet-setting admissions representative, visiting college fairs and high schools to inform potential students. In the spare remainder of time left after reading mountains of applications, she practices calligraphy and combs through test prep materials in anticipation of a possible future in law school. Whether she will return to school to earn a Master’s in Social Work, a law degree, or a doctorate depends on where she will be able to most make a positive impact on the student body. Until further notice though, she remains in New Hampshire despite the cold and an increasing fear of moose, with fond memories of her time in Core.

Suzyn-Elayne invites old friends to get in touch: suzyn@dartmouth.edu
The Second Annual CAS Talent Review

Photos from the October 29th show

1. Linda Tan
2. Fusion Dance Team
3. Alan Batangan
4. Caitlyn Hesselt
5. Slow Children at Play
6. Sassan Tabatabai
7. Dave Ransom
8. The Yapko Connection: Dave Ransom, Joe Ferris, & Justin Michaels
9. Nicole Levitz
10. Fish Worship Trio: Jay Samons, Jim Jackson & Brian Jorgenson, with Alan Marscher, Eric O’Keefe & Sassan Tabatabai
11. David Kopp & James Winn
12. Colin Pang
13. Brit Aboutaleb & Grace Smith
14. Jane Kim
15. Host Eric O’Keefe

Not Pictured: Alan Marscher as Cosmos II, Scott Williams, and Andy Kingston as accompanying Jane Kim
Seven Scholars
by Professor Sassan Tabatabai

Nodding, the scholars enter in single file; thick glasses magnify old cataract eyes fixed in myopic stares. Like well-behaved boys they sit side by side although the hall is mostly empty. They have come for a colloquium.

Shahnameh and the Oral Epic Tradition

Their winged ears are bruised from a lifetime of anchoring heavy glasses. They wear worn, earthy plaids and beaten browns, their shoulders spotted with flakes and strands of white hair.

Tragic Elements in the Story of Rosta

The scholar’s profile has succumbed to gravity, sunken cheeks exaggerate an oversized nose, flared nostrils swallow the unruly mustache.

Fruit of Vengeance in the Story of Feridun

Shaded by thick eyebrows his eyes are closed, his head is mostly bald and stained with liver spots. From time to time the scholar nods to show he is still awake.

Seeing the Don
by Professor Michèle Mendelsohn

In the Arabic notebook which forms the basis of Don Quixote, Cervantes tells us there is a “realistic picture” of Don Quixote accompanied by Rocinante and by Sancho Panza, who has a “short body, a plump paunch and long shanks”. A picture, so the cliché goes, is worth a thousand words. Yet Cervantes fails to put the words to the picture here. Though he tells us how everyone else looks, he does not describe how Don Quixote looks in the notebook’s “realistic picture”. Why? Does Don Quixote look different from the middle-aged hidalgo with “a robust constitution, dried-up flesh and a withered face” Cervantes describes in the first chapter? Perhaps. And what other forms might he take?

In order to assuage my curiosity, I enlisted the clever students in my CC 201 class and made use of Boston University’s excellent rare books collection. Katherine Kominis, the Assistant Director for Rare Books at the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, kindly allowed us to examine the illustrations to editions of Don Quixote published between the 18th and 21st centuries. Though there were certain similarities, we concluded that knowing the “true” face of Don Quixote is not possible, or even desirable, since our imagination already provides us with such a vivid one.

The description of the “realistic picture” of Don Quixote is one we are happy to go without. Omitting this information is Cervantes’s pre-emptive strike against attempts to uncover his hero. This is a protective gesture, one which guards Don Quixote from defacement by reality and definition. In this sense, Franz Kafka is right when he notes that “Don Quixote’s misfortune is not his imagination, but Sancho Panza”. The real world pragmatism of Don Quixote’s pot-bellied sidekick damages the imaginative world the Don has created for himself. Cervantes must have known this. There is no need to tether the reader’s imagination.