

## ARTS

## TELEVISION EUNY HONG KORAL

## Tilting at windmills in an unpalatable stew

never completed. (TNT, Sunday, April 9, at 8pm.)

All would be forgivable except for the fact that TNT is making thousands of educational kits for schoolteachers to use in conjunction with the film: this is being passed off as the real thing.

The press material accompanying the review tape of this film suggest TNT was trying to make a family-oriented picture. This may explain the computer-generated windmill giants, one of the more impressive features of the film. It does not, however, explain why no social or political context is provided, or why there is no mention at all of the Church or the Inquisition.

One would think that Cervantes set his story in 17th-century Spain as an arbitrary decision. Perhaps the

beaches and bars of 20th-century Andalusia would have been an equally poignant setting.

Arbitrariness looms over the entire production. For no apparent reason, a crucial element of Quixote's costume has been altered: the helmet.

As conceived by Cervantes, the helmet is Quixote's own handiwork, fashioned partly from pasteboard. It would have made a terrific sight gag, but this film squanders the joke by giving Quixote (played by John Lithgow) a full set of fairly smart-looking armour. He strikes an inappropriately regal (if anachronistic) figure.

The characters he encounters on the road treat him accordingly as a rich, eccentric senior citizen, and it's all wrong. No wonder the adventures are so dull and listless, with foes and maidens fair buzzing in and out

of the scenes like summer horseflies.

John Lithgow spearheaded this project, and he makes a good effort to give life to this character. But in this slapdash script, his Quixote comes off more as a Hallowe'en costume rather than a substantial role.

The motivation of Quixote's character is chalked up to mere mid-life crisis. He berates his fellow dinner-party guests in one scene: "Are you all so content with lives of comfort? Are eating and sleeping enough for you?"

The production makes half-hearted attempts to include certain elements of the novel: in one scene, Quixote disrupts a stage play to save the actress who is being persecuted on-stage.

He does this because, despite being extremely well-read, he has no sense of fiction, one of the

deeply fascinating mysteries of his character. But the production does not pursue the matter, relegating all Quixote's antics to the vague, boring category of dementia.

Most modern renderings of classic works have a tendency to over-psychanalyse the characters, but this is one production that would have benefited from a more nuanced understanding of its protagonist's internal logic.

Cervantes' novel is visually oriented, offering teleplay writers scores of great ideas on a gleaming silver platter.

The programme includes a scene from Part 2 of the novel, in which a noblewoman overtaking Quixote on the road declares that she has heard of his chivalric adventures and is deeply impressed with his celebrity.

Cervantes' joke here is that the characters in the novel have read the already-published Part 1 of *Don Quixote*. Historically, this is a profound, revolutionary literary event: centuries before the advent of modernism, Cervantes melded the real world with literature, the reader with the characters.

This is one of many elements of the novel born for cinema: the noblewoman could have looked straight into the camera and coyly addressed the audience: "Of course we've heard of Don Quixote. Didn't you watch Part 1?"

Admittedly, it would have been hokey, yet far better than what the film-makers ended up doing. Here, the scene is just an excuse to give a cameo to Isabella Rossellini, who explains that she has heard about this weird guy Quixote from



John Lithgow as Don Quixote character in scene from *Studio executive the author is rewrites, but public domain imagining has for you.*

one conclusion that ons of classic novels be reductive, and ng wrong with a few threads from a create a cohesive

ardson's Oscar- n version of *Tom* was markedly m the Fielding joy nonetheless. The faithful to Fielding's g, and the shots of moral life seemed to taken straight from gh paintings. silly *Man of La* 72) had its merits, thoughtful device of performing the Don rry from his prison

e case of a g TNT television film *Quixote*, the makers have le merely for its gnition to market an e stew seemingly scraps from the m floor. One feels as is watching a review trailer for r, longer film that was