



Don Quijote and the Modern Undergraduate Student: Making Cervantes More Accessible to the American Reader

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The arrival of two recent additions to the already sizable number of editions of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's *Quijote* begs the question, "Will we ever see an end to such new editions?" The answer, of course, is a resounding "no." Unlike most previous editions of *Don Quijote*, however, those of Tom Lathrop (Juan de la Cuesta Press) and Salvador Fajardo and James A. Parr (Pegasus Press) have a specific reader in mind—namely, the non-native American reader. The following brief commentary seeks to compare and contrast these two editions and to address the question, "Are such editions necessary for the non-native, undergraduate American reader?" As one such reader who recently had the pleasure of reading *Don Quijote* for the first time, I discovered that selecting the proper edition for my reading level was a considerable undertaking—and an extremely important one, at that. Thus this commentary focuses on my concerns in differentiating between editions in an effort to provide different readers the edition that will be the most beneficial to their experience with the novel.

The first noteworthy difference between the Lathrop and Fajardo-Parr editions lies in the underlying texts that are used. Lathrop chose to base his text primarily on the Schevill-Bonilla edition, a text that he calls "conservative." Since the Schevill-Bonilla edition is an old-spelling edition, Lathrop then was forced to modernize many of the spellings in order to make the work accessible to the modern reader. But he did not modernize *all* spellings. According to his introduction, he would "modernize spelling only when that spelling *doesn't* affect the pronunciation of the word. . . . Where modernizing the spelling *would* affect the pronunciation, [he] made no substantial changes" (x). Thus, *assí* would be changed to *así*, but *ansí* is not changed to *así*. Lathrop addresses this subject and makes some other, more general grammatical notes in his introduction and, as he wisely notes, "[s]ince not everybody will read this introduction, the notions mentioned here are glossed or footnoted as well" (xiii). Fajardo and Parr, meanwhile, chose to employ the John Jay Allen (Cátedra) edition with its largely modernized and regularized spellings as their primary text. They do note that this text, "aunque generalmente modernizado, mantiene aspectos de la lengua cervantina que pueden a veces hacer tropezar a los lectores" (xviii) and their solution is to include a "prontuario de gramática" in the introduction in addition to explanatory footnotes in the text.

The result of these particular choices is that the reader unfamiliar with the *lengua cervantina* may spend more time reading the notes in the margin in the Lathrop edition than he or she would looking up footnotes in the Fajardo-Parr edition. To demonstrate how this plays out, consider the following two examples, both from Part I, Chapter 28. In the first, both texts chose to use "se asconde" in the body of the text, and both annotate it as "se esconde." In the second, the Lathrop text chose to include "extraordinarios" in the body of the text with the note "extraordinarios" in the margin; Fajardo-Parr chose to forgo the annotation and simply included "extraordinarios" in the text. While this is no doubt only a minor difference, over the course of *Don Quijote* several hundred unnecessary glances to the margin can easily become distracting.

Along with the different choices of texts, each edition deals with some of the more common controversies surrounding *Don Quijote* in its own way. Neither text corrects Don Quijote's error when he incorrectly computes that nine times seven is seventy-three; both simply include a note of explanation about the controversy. The loss of Sancho's donkey, however, brings about decidedly different interpretations. Lathrop believes that Cervantes meant to omit this

episode, and he explains his belief in his introduction. Nevertheless, he does include the inserted section explaining the donkey's disappearance in Chapter 23 as a footnote only. Fajardo and Parr, following the Allen text, include the disappearance of the donkey in Chapter 25, italicized and bracketed, with a footnote in Chapter 23 explaining their decision.

Aside from these minor points concerning punctuation, spelling and grammar that the use of different texts causes, the most notable difference between the Lathrop and Fajardo-Parr editions is the use of English in the former versus Spanish in the latter. Lathrop's introduction is almost entirely in English, as are all definitions and footnotes. (Notably, Lathrop chose two styles of annotations: brief definitions of terms in the margins and longer translations of passages in the footnotes. The Fajardo-Parr only uses footnotes.) The Fajardo-Parr edition, by contrast, is entirely in Spanish. Up to three synonyms are provided for difficult words; on occasion, a difficult passage is clarified by a short explanation. Generally speaking, however, the Lathrop edition tends to spend more time on definitions and footnotes—be they extended translations of passages or cultural, historical, mythological, etc., allusions—than the Fajardo-Parr edition.

Thus we are left with the question, "Which of these texts is more appropriate for the American undergraduate reader?" The answer is that it depends upon the level of the reader. It is highly unlikely that the truly average undergraduate Spanish student would have the ability to read *Don Quijote* in Spanish no matter what edition he or she were given, for the sheer volume of vocabulary necessary for the undertaking would prove too daunting. The above-average student, however, can attempt to tackle *Don Quijote*, and the best choice for this student is the Lathrop edition, for several reasons. First, the definitions and footnotes in the Lathrop edition are quite exhaustive, thereby catering to the needs of the above-average student whose vocabulary might not be as developed as that of the good or very good reader. Second, English headings at the top of each page facilitate the location of key events for future reference. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the general use of English in the Lathrop edition—and the inclusion of the *Don Quijote Dictionary* for additional support—is perhaps the key to making *Don Quijote* more accessible for the above-average reader. *Don Quijote* is a rather intimidating text for an undergraduate student, and by using English, Lathrop is able to provide some security for the reader who may doubt his or her abilities with the language. (After all, virtually all

undergraduate Spanish students own a Spanish-English dictionary, but how many own a true Spanish dictionary?)

The good to very good Spanish student would also do well using the Lathrop edition, but he or she might benefit more from the Fajardo-Parr edition. With a more extensive, developed vocabulary, the good student might easily become overly distracted by the many annotations in the Lathrop edition. Difficult words are still defined, this time in Spanish, thereby helping to build vocabulary by forcing the student to continuously think in the language. Because of this, reading the Fajardo-Parr edition is a slightly more ambitious project for more ambitious students.

The exceptional student, meanwhile, should feel free to choose whichever edition he or she desires, depending primarily on his or her confidence in the language. The exceptional student with an outstanding vocabulary should not be discouraged from selecting the Allen or Riquer (Planeta) editions, as they need not be distracted by the vocabulary annotations in the Lathrop and Fajardo-Parr editions and can focus instead on more important footnotes. Exceptional students with less confidence in their vocabularies should probably be guided in the direction of the Fajardo-Parr edition, since the reliance entirely on Spanish will help to improve any perceived deficiencies in vocabulary that they believe they have.

From the above argument, it appears that the answer to the question first posed—"Are such editions necessary for the non-native, undergraduate American reader?"—is a resounding "yes." The arrival of the Lathrop and Fajardo-Parr editions have certainly helped to make *Don Quijote* more accessible for the reader who otherwise might have been overwhelmed by the extensive vocabulary that Cervantes employed in his masterpiece. Who knows—perhaps undergraduate readers will no longer have to purchase *Don Quijote* in Spanish and the English translation simply to understand what is happening! In any event, both the Lathrop and the Fajardo-Parr editions give many more "idle readers" at different levels of language development the opportunity to read Cervantes' immortal classic in its original Spanish than were previously able to do so. Provided that these readers do not take this novel as literal, objective history or as a "guide for living," Cervantes would not have wanted it any other way.

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