

## Remembering Anthony Close and His Work

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CERVANTISTAS HAD BEEN ANXIOUSLY awaiting Anthony Close's ground-breaking study of *The Romantic Approach to DON QUIXOTE* when it appeared in 1978. He had announced it six years earlier, in "Don Quixote and the Intentionalist Fallacy," and its appearance more than fulfilled the expectations aroused by a series of articles in British journals over those previous years, during which Anthony had established himself as the most perceptive and articulate of the "hard" critics of Don Quixote. I wrote at that time that he had written "a chapter in the history of ideas about Don Quixote which I think will stand, and within which more detailed and specific relationships can now be elaborated. I think it is a very valuable book."

The Cervantes Society organized a special session at the MLA Convention in December 1979, on "Approaches to *Don Quijote*," consisting of a series of speakers commenting on his book; it drew a large audience and provoked lively discussion. It was clear at the outset that we were dealing with a landmark contribution to Cervantes studies. Patricia and I toured the wineries of Napa Valley with him during that week, and I visited him at Cambridge three years later and a second time around 2000. The last time we coincided was in Los Angeles in 1996. Always affable and engaging, Anthony was a brilliant close reader of Cervantes. I liked his work better than he liked mine, I'm afraid, and we differed significantly in our interpretation of the post-ducual chapters of the book; the strength of his work was always its solid grounding in the intellectual discourse of Cervantes's time.

When I was asked in 1999 to appraise his candidacy for a personal Readership at Cambridge, I sent the following letter:

It must first be said that Anthony Close achieved the international stature described in your letter as requisite for a personal Readership twenty years ago with the publication of *The Romantic Approach to DON QUIXOTE*. The appearance of the book prompted an invitation to Close to participate in a special session dedicated entirely to his controversial work the next year at the annual convention of the Modern Language Association of America. That book and Close's subsequent publications are obligatory references for anyone working with Cervantes's thought and the interpretation of *Don Quijote*. Close is the most outstanding of the students who have studied with E. C. Riley, the pre-eminent Cervantes scholar of the second half of the 20th century, and the *Romantic Approach* is perhaps second only to Riley's own *Cervantes's Theory of the Novel* in the extent of its influence over subsequent critical comment on Cervantes's masterpiece. The originality of his work on the history of the interpretation of Cervantes's work lies in the persuasive account of the often subtle and indirect relationships among dozens of critics in various lines of criticism over more than a century, and in the sheer scope of the work he undertook. Close has convincingly suggested filiations among critics that had previously not been noted, thus changing the way we look at this vast body of interpretive criticism.

His selection by Francisco Rico for the assignments referred to in his Personal Statement [two sections of the introduction to Rico's classic edition] is clear testimony to his current international standing. As it happens, I have just sent to press a review of the Rico *Don Quijote*. Allow me to quote relevant portions of my text: "The second piece of the prologue is the first of two in this sequence by Anthony Close[.] 'Cervantes: Pensamiento, personalidad, cultura' is an excellent evocation of the cultural heritage evidenced in Cervantes's work and a complete and balanced summary of critical contributions to this aspect. The sixth section of the prologue, and one of the most difficult to write, certainly, is 'Las interpretaciones del Quijote.' Close has given in his post-1925 review a full and sensible account of an enormous body of criticism. I have looked

through the ‘Lecturas’ and ‘Notas complementarias’ sections in the second volume of this magnificent edition with his list of critics before me, to see to what extent the fifty or so *cervantistas* who wrote the commentaries coincided in their references with his assessment, and I find that his general outline reflects rather well the contemporary consensus as to whose interpretations have been most helpful.”

‘Theory vs. the Humanist Tradition Stemming from Américo Castro,’ Close’s thorough and lucid subsequent contribution to the Hispanic Issues volume *Cervantes and His Postmodern Constituencies* is an indispensable complement to this discussion, one in which the work of many more recent critics is discussed and placed in its appropriate critical-historical context.

His *Don Quijote*, an introduction for the general reader published in 1990, is a fine, subtle piece of work, second in quality in my judgment only to Riley’s comparable study, in a decade in which five such studies by eminent scholars appeared (others by Peter Russell, Carroll Johnson, and Luis Murillo). All of Close’s publications have kept to the same high standards of scholarship: thorough acquaintance with and responsible treatment of relevant previous criticism, argument characterized by rigorous logic and thorough grounding in the text under consideration, articulate and precise exposition.

In short, I can say with confidence that Anthony Close is one of a handful of authorities on Cervantes who are acknowledged internationally, having produced research that is original and fundamental and that has figured significantly in subsequent work in the field. Having had a major impact on Cervantes studies for the past twenty years, he has established himself in his most recent work as the most trustworthy guide to the plethora of theory-oriented criticism of the present.

I have quoted my reference letter for Anthony’s promotion at what must seem excessive length because I was astonished, and remain so a decade later, by the receipt, in 2001, of a letter from Cambridge asking

for any comments I might wish to add to this letter, it being the case that “Dr. Close has reapplied for promotion, as he was unsuccessful in the 1999 exercise.” I still find their earlier decision utterly incomprehensible. Ted Riley once told me that, for him, the work of two of his students—Anthony Close and Edwin Williamson—validated his entire teaching career.

Anthony could be devastatingly effective in dealing with the criticism of recent decades, and fearless. I want to close this remembrance with some lines from his very thoughtful and learned, yet delightful, account of his correspondence with Professor Alicia Newberg, in *Cervantes and His Postmodern Constituencies*:

I am not indiscriminately opposed to all forms of [avant-garde theory]. My skepticism is directed less at the masters than at their disciples, who tend crudely to emphasize the antihistorical tendencies of the chosen model, turning it into a stereotyped grid of interpretation that can be imposed on any text, regardless of its specificity. Avoidance of that unhappy result, and steering among the highly contentious philosophical problems involved, require a level of sophistication that most practitioners do not possess.

Anthony Close was a brilliant, witty, immensely learned and articulate man. I had looked forward very much to the pleasure of coinciding with him once again at the Coloquios Cervantinos in Guanajuato last fall after many years without seeing him, and I was stunned to learn that his untimely death had robbed me of that opportunity.

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