



REVIEWS

Don Quijote: A New Translation, Backgrounds, Contexts and Criticism. By Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. Trans. Burton Raffel. Ed. Diana de Armas Wilson. New York: Norton, 1999. xviii + 862 pp.

Burton Raffel's translation of Cervantes' masterpiece—which has recently replaced Joseph R. Jones's revised Ormsby translation in the Norton Critical Edition series (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981)—is a magnificent achievement. Raffel's translation is very readable and usually very close to the source text of Martín de Riquer's popular edition (Barcelona: Juventud, 1955), on which it is based.¹ Remarkably at times, his prose style captures much of the essence and the flavor of Cervantes' original. This kind of pleasurable readability is particularly useful for contemporary North American college students, to whom this series is primarily directed. However, as they are go-betweens for disparate cultures and times, translations are a compromise. Thus, after outlining this translation's major successes, I will survey what I view as its shortcomings.

Raffel's translation is highly accurate, for the most part, and unlike J. M. Cohen's widely-read version (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), his prose style has grace and retains much of the Cervantine cadence and irony. I offer as an example the passage in the Sierra Morena episode (I, 25) in which Don Quijote turns to Rocinante and exclaims:

"He who himself lacks it, gives you your freedom, oh steed as remarkable for your actions as unfortunate in your fate! Go wherever you will, you who carry written on your forehead that neither the hippogryph ridden by Astolfo, nor the celebrated Frontino, who cost the lovely Bradamante so dear, could match your light-footedness." (153)

"Libertad te da el que sin ella queda, ¡oh caballo tan estremado por tus obras cuan desdichado por tu su146erte! Vete por do quisieres,

¹ [Ed. note: In 1972, Riquer replaced the Juventud text with a newer edition, published by Planeta.]

que en la frente llevas escrito que no te igualó en ligereza el Hipogri-
fo de Astolfo, ni el nombrado Frontino, que tan caro le costó a
Bradamante." (241)

By making very subtle changes to the original language, Raffel is able to explain, in simple terms, what nowadays are some rather obscure ideas, but which would have been plain to a seventeenth-century reader. For instance, in I, 8, Raffel writes of the Basque and his mount: "Seeing him come, the Basque would have preferred to get down from his mule, which was a rented animal he could not trust, but had no choice except to draw his own sword" (48). Although Raffel has altered the conjunctions, relative pronouns, and prepositions to get the point across, this is a very clear rendition of the meaning of Cervantes' "[e]l vizcaíno, que así le vio venir, aunque quisiera apearde de la mula, que, por ser de las malas de alquiler, no había que fiar en ella, no pudo hacer otra cosa sino sacar su espada" (88), in which the reason the Basque wants to dismount is explained in the untrustworthiness of the animal. In contrast, Ormsby's lines here are somewhat confusing: "The Biscayan would have liked to dismount from his mule, when he saw Don Quixote advancing. But it was one of those sorry creatures let out for hire, and he had no choice but to draw his sword" (64). Indeed, it seems as though the Basque did not dismount precisely because the mule was rented, which is not what the passage means.

Raffel also excels at translating the word-play humor in a creative fashion. Among the most memorable examples are his parody of Cervantes' Basque-speak (I, 8), Sancho's malapropisms in passages like the following from II, 7, "My Lord, I've *evinced* my wife to let me go with your grace" (393) and "so all your grace has to do is fix up your will with that little codicil, so it can't be repoked" (396), as well as Pedro's flurry of mistakes, in I, 12, including "he could predict when it would be a good year or an arren one" (63).

But, of course, translation is a Gordian knot. The translator must make compromises to preserve faithfully the original values and appeal simultaneously to a contemporary audience. In fact, the chief weaknesses of this translation seem to derive from the positive ones I mention above. I have six main criticisms. First, the improved readability of Raffel's version requires the omission of archaisms that, in Ormsby's, make the text sound as if it were written centuries ago and not in the latter twentieth century. The lack of archaic terms—such as "thou utterest" (40) as spoken by Ormsby's main character—has the unfortunate effect of not creating in Raffel's English version as great a disjunction between the speeches of Don Quijote and those of the other characters, as exists in the Spanish original. That is, the errant knight occasionally sounds too contemporary for one who is imitating the heroes of days of yore. For instance, on Camacho's wedding in II, 22, Raffel writes the following: "'You really can't call it a trick, nor should you,' said

Don Quijote, 'for how can there be deceit when the ending is virtuous?'" (473). In comparison, Ormsby's version sounds more antiquated and yet its meaning is still clear: "'Deceit,' said Don Quixote, 'is not and ought not to be the term used when the end envisaged is a virtuous one'" (543).

Raffel generally uses characters' names that respect the original text and are much preferable to Cohen's anglicized names, such as the dreadful use of "Andrew" for "Andrés" in I, 4 (48). However, my second criticism is of Raffel's reworking of Cide Hamete Benengeli's name to "Sidi Hamid Benengeli." While, more politically correct in its accurate transcription of Maghrebi Arabic (as the editor points out, p. xv), the new name loses a touch of Cervantine irony as well as a glimpse of the telling cultural insensitivity of the Spanish version.

Third, there are unfortunate repercussions to one simple word choice made throughout the translation. More specifically, Raffel's use of the word "dollar" as a translation of the monetary unit "*real*" not only seems at cross-purposes with creating a Spanish feel—it sounds, rather, downright North American—but it may lead students to believe, contrary to historical fact, that the dollar bill was actually used in early modern Spain. In his "Translator's Note" (xvii-xviii), Raffel defends this use and provides a clever etymological history in defense of "dollar" (the word entered Spanish from German *before* it entered English). Nonetheless, this linguistic event does not support his modernization of Don Quijote's words in I, 2 that "eso se me da que me den ocho reales en sencillos que en una pieza de a ocho" (47), which Raffel changes, along a slippery slope, to "I don't care if you give me ten one-dollar bills or one ten-dollar bill" (21). The problem here lies not only in the numerical change from eight to ten, but, more significantly, in the fact that paper money—as predicated by the term "dollar bill"—was not in widespread use anywhere in Europe until the eighteenth century.

Fourth, in the meta-fictional passages, Raffel generally reduces the narratological ambiguity, making it easier for the reader to continue reading on, but nonetheless altering its meaning. For instance, at the end of I, 8, "el segundo autor desta obra" becomes "I, your second author" (49). In II, 44, the translator "corrects" the narrator's words, from the somewhat incomprehensible "Dicen que en el propio original desta historia se lee que llegando Cide Hamete a escribir este capítulo, no le tradujo su intérprete como él le había escrito" to these unequivocal phrases: "It is said that, in the true original of this chapter, one can read how, when Sidi Hamid came to write this chapter (which his translator only partially rendered into Spanish)" (586).

Fifth, the opening sentence of Part I, which begins with the famously memorable phrases "En un lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme" (35) does not look or sound right as "In a village in La Mancha (I don't want to bother you with its name)" (13).

And last, something with which many *cervantistas* will be displeased is the exclusion of the preliminary materials, including the dedication and the

elogios, which Ormsby provides and which are found in the Juventud source. Raffel does, however, reproduce the appropriate division of Part I into four parts, and he translates faithfully the sonnets and epitaphs at the end of Part I.

These, however, are minor criticisms in the context of this masterful achievement, and I plan on adopting this text when next I teach the *Quijote* in English. I think most English-speaking college students will prefer Raffel's to other available translations, including Ormsby's and Cohen's. The truth is that few of these students will care about the missing *tasa* or *sonetos*. And because Raffel's prose reads so well, students will be able to get through it with greater ease, and more readily come to class prepared to discuss the deeper issues. However, some of those who know the *Quijote* in its original language, I suspect, may still desire to teach from Jones' revised Ormsby and may lament its "retirement" in Norton Critical Editions, for it sounds and feels more like a seventeenth-century Spanish text.

With respect to the critical apparatus and accompanying materials, Diana de Armas Wilson provides an informative introduction and concise footnotes, and has made a good, updated selection of background sources and contemporary criticism. The introduction contains clear biographical information (and there is an accompanying time-line of Cervantes' life as an appendix). In addition, it presents important information on the romances of chivalry, which all students should know before reading the novel.

The footnotes that Wilson provides throughout are used sparingly and are to the point. For instance, on the line in II, 71, where Don Quijote says, "Zamora was not won in an hour," she explains the expression and the history behind it: "Refers to the long siege of Zamora by King Sancho II of Castile, during the war of succession caused by the division of the kingdom of Fernando I (1035-1065). A Spanish equivalent for 'Rome wasn't built in a day'" (732, footnote 2).

In terms of background materials, I am particularly pleased with her short but crucial selections from Sannazaro's *Arcadia*, Rodríguez de Montalvo's *Amadís*, and Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, as well as the notes that explain and contextualize these selections. Also, of particular import, she has reunited, in one place, translations of Cervantes' prologues from the *Galatea*, the *Novelas ejemplares*, and the *Persiles*, as well as the pertinent autobiographical lines from Chapter Four of the *Viaje del Parnaso*. This wealth of resources will be convenient for any teacher who wants to provide students with a quick and valuable introduction to Cervantes and Don Quixote's imitations of genres and characters, perhaps inspiring some students to read beyond the *Quijote*.

The five general interpretations and reflections on *Don Quijote* are all insightful, well-edited, and complementary. These include Carlos Fuentes on *Don Quijote's* modernity, Harold Bloom on the Romantic reading and the notion of play, Javier Herrero on the characteristics of Dulcinea and Don Quijote's love for her, Anthony Cascardi on Don Quijote's self-fashioned

identity, and Michel Foucault on the lack of resemblance between words and things as indicative of the work's modernity.

The nine contemporary pieces of criticism (abridged or adapted articles or chapters that have been published elsewhere) on specific episodes by *cervantistas* Elias Rivers, Ruth El Saffar, Robert ter Horst, Edward Dudley, Nicolás Wey-Gómez, María Antonia Garcés, Henry W. Sullivan, Carroll B. Johnson, and Anne J. Cruz, provide a good sampling of some of the major directions that *Quijote* studies have followed in the last quarter-century. All are very worthy of their place here, and unlike the priest and the barber, I would not send any to the pyre. There is also a valuable article by John J. Allen and Patricia Finch that gives an historical perspective on interpretations of the novel and the influences of *Don Quijote* on later authors.

The last secondary text included in the edition, quite artistically positioned, is a fiction inspired by the fiction: Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quijote*."

With the overall excellence of the edition and the difficulty of the enterprise in mind, I have just two criticisms. First, the introduction seems to place too much emphasis on the importance of the Americas in the novel, an emphasis then reinforced by Raffel's Americanisms and a couple of Wilson's footnotes that point out things American to the exclusion of things European (e.g. footnote 4, page 39, where the reader is informed, in I, 6, that "Ercilla's *Araucana* (1569-1589) stands out among these Spanish poems as the first colonial war epic in America"). While the approach is fresh and based on sound research, such as Irving Leonard's famous tome, some of the ideas in this section are speculative and perhaps better suited to an audience of discerning specialists, rather than to readers of a general introduction. For instance, the fact that conquistadors read books of chivalry, as Leonard showed many years ago, does not in itself prove a connection between Don Quijote and Bernal Díaz, other than the simple fact that they shared common reading habits. Furthermore, the handful of articles and books from the last fifty years on which these ideas are based are not yet representative of a major trend in *Quijote* studies, despite some contemporary interest in the matter. More useful information might have centered on specific historical information about Cervantes' Spain, the Inquisition, the Counter-Reformation, the lives of women and men, nobles and peasants, etc.

Second, the fact that Wilson provides footnotes sparingly is a double-edged sword. While it is a real plus for promoting students' attention spans in our own silicon age of URLs, JPGs and MP3s, it may also be, at times, a drawback. For instance, in the absence of a footnote telling the reader otherwise, he or she might infer that Don Quijote speaks more intelligently on chivalric heroes than he actually does, in say I, 10, where he alludes to two verses from a *romance* on the Cid but states incorrectly that they pertain to the Marquis of Mantua. Some brief footnotes explaining the identity of mythological characters throughout might also have proved useful (as in, for instance,

II, 58, where Vulcan, Mars, Venus, Actaeon, Diana and others are mentioned).

Notwithstanding these minor criticisms, the achievements of Burton Raffel and Diana de Armas Wilson far outweigh any defects. This edition will serve its intended audience of English-speaking college students very well.

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