

Don Quixote: A Bridge from the Middle Ages to Modernity

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In the recent DreamWorks movie, *Shrek*, Princess Fiona is rescued from a tower in a castle where she is being held captive by a fire-breathing dragon. As she is approached by her “knight in shining armor” she declares,

But wait, Sir Knight. This be our first meeting. Shouldn't it not be a wonderful, romantic moment? What are you doing? You know, you should sweep me off my feet out yonder window and down a rope onto your valiant steed.

With little regard for her request, the knight disposes of the pleasantries and gets down to the business of rescuing. However, when the rescue is complete and danger averted he finally has time to address her concern. She says, “Please. I would'st look upon the face of my rescuer.” And the knight responds in an attempt to match her archaic language, “Oh, no, you wouldn't... tst.”

The connection between *Shrek* and Don Quixote is not so much with *Shrek* as it is with Princess Fiona. She is the one who wanting to live out a fantasy of being rescued by a knight in shining armor reaches back linguistically beyond her grasp. She exemplifies the word “quixotic.” She bridges the gap from the age of damsel-in-distress to an age where this new hero sweeps her off her feet and carries her like a sack of potatoes

to the castle to meet her would-be groom. Don Quixote’s language imitates that of Fiona. Employing malapropisms and inappropriate archaisms in his adventures, he came across a new kind of Spain, one that didn’t readily accept him and his fantasies. In many cases, the people he encountered knew what he referred to but they didn’t tolerate him and would rather throw him over their shoulders like a sack of potatoes as *Shrek* did with Fiona and usher him on his way.

But Don Quixote will not be disposed of so easily. In 2005, there were celebrations taking place world-wide at hundreds of universities and institutions acknowledging the 400th year since the publication of the world’s most popular book aside from the Bible. We should not be without our celebration. We revere Miguel de Cervantes and his contributions and accomplishments here as much as anywhere.

Assuming that the majority of my readers are familiar with *Don Quixote* to some degree and may have even read the book or part of it at some point in the past, most could use some jostling of the memory to reacquaint themselves with the storyline. Therefore I will indulge in explaining some details. To begin with, James Parr provides the following brief description of Don Quixote,

“[Don Quixote] is an extended satire, with elements of novel and romance, originally published in two parts. Part I appeared in 1605, Part II in 1615. The complete 1605 title is *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quixote de la Mancha*, and it contains 52 chapters. The title of the 1615 continuation is modified to suggest a promotion in rank for the protagonist, from *hidalgo* to *caballero*, and that volume contains 74 chapters. ... The original pronunciation of "Quixote" was "key-

SHOW-tay," and it was originally written in Spanish as we now write it in English, "Quixote." Today we write it "Quijote" in Spanish and pronounce it "key-HO-tay." (Parr 387)

As a linguist I take particular interest in this last comment by Parr. To me it is interesting that Don Quixote is spelled with an "x" in English and everyone knows that it is not pronounced "dawn kwixotti." There are no other words in English where the "x" is pronounced as an "h." I am likewise interested in the unique language of the book as written by Miguel de Cervantes. I see his language as a bridge between the Spanish of the Middle Ages and the Spanish spoken today in Spain and Latin America. Cervantes used his characters to reach back like *Shrek's* Fiona to imitate and parody the style of a golden era and at the same time drew attention to what he christened as the true Golden Age of Spanish Literature.

Spanish is often referred to as the "language of Cervantes" just as English is sometimes called the "language of Shakespeare." It is interesting to note that their lives ran concurrently. In fact, they both died the same month of April 1616 a little less than 800 miles from each other. Both of them had a similar impact on the canon of literature in their respective countries and subsequently an even greater impact on the language. Shakespeare captured and contributed hundreds of new words and expressions to the English language.¹

¹ About.com claims that there are over 1700 contributions by Shakespeare to English. Among

Cervantes likewise impacted Spanish.² Harold Bloom wrote in his introduction to Edith Grossman's latest translation of the Quixote that Cervantes and Shakespeare are the central western authors after Dante. He makes a particular point of mentioning that he is not the only one that believes this and that they are not even matched by other potential greats such as Tolstoy, Goethe, Dickens, Proust or Joyce (xxvi).³

While reaching back to the oral culture of the Middle Ages and immortalizing the folk wisdom of the past, Cervantes innovatively created a precedence for the language that would be used to talk about his book for centuries to come. People who do not speak Spanish refer to an odd, eccentric as "quixotic." Others speak of renegades "tilting at windmills" reducing the 1000+ page manuscript to a reference where the protagonist mistakes common windmills for fantastical giants. They are ignorant of the fact that the episode to

them are: addiction, blanket, discontent, cold-blooded, luggage and torture. (as of November 15, 2005)

² Words reported to have come from Cervantes include: *venteril* (adjetivo de venta o ventero), *escuderil* (adjetivo de escudero), *batanear* (verbo de batán), *baciyelmo* (combinación de bacía y yelmo).

³ "In 2002, the book which is widely acclaimed as the world's first modern novel was voted the greatest work of fiction of all time in a poll by the Norwegian Nobel Institute. The judges included 100 eminent writers from 54 countries, among them Salman Rushdie, Norman Mailer, Milan Kundera, Carlos Fuentes and Nadine Gordimer. Don Quixote polled 50 per cent more votes than any other book, including the works of Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Cervantes' contemporary, Shakespeare." Ham, Anthony. "The Impossible Dream Lives On." *Eureka Street*. May 2005.

which they blithely refer in the book occupies little more than a page of the original manuscript. The windmill incident is only a page long. We would not reduce Shakespeare to Hamlet's "to be or not to be" speech or Juliet's "Wherefore art thou Romeo?" speech. Would we? Cervantes could not have conceived of the powerful impact his use of the language would have but I believe he did write powerfully with the intent to make an impact.

So, why celebrate this contribution to language? Where does it situate the Chicano, Latino, Mestizo or Ceceo Spanish of the 21st Century? What does it have to do with the current canon of literature? How would Don Quixote relate to today's novels? It is said that Don Quixote is the first modern novel. Whether or not that is the case is not my purpose here. What I would rather do is show how Don Quixote is the bridge over which Spanish literature passed from the Middle Ages into the renaissance and thereby into modernity and a new way of thinking and perceiving the world.

To speak about this, consider how Miguel de Cervantes was acutely conscious of the genre he chose for the Don's adventures. Specifically, he was conscious of the literary conventions associated with the genre, conscious of the critics, conscious of the characters, conscious of the language and conscious of the impact of that language. His awareness of these five features put him in a position to look back and look forward at the same time. In the following paragraphs, I will explain with direct accounts from the text the relationship between Cervantes' preparation in the past and its impact on what was to follow.

Conventions

One literary convention (rhetorical figures or devices) in Medieval literature is *auctoritas*. This is when an author garners credibility for a work by appealing to the authority of the genre to which the work pertained. Epic poets used to open their poems by calling on their muses, orators cited Ciceronian texts on the art of speaking. Historians liked to establish a *translatio imperii* where they provided a seemingly unbroken chain of genealogy going back to kings and founders that lent legitimacy to a history. Miguel de Cervantes, steeped in this tradition, did not leave Don Quixote out of the custom of *auctoritas*. Right at the beginning of the book, Cervantes published a number of sonnets and other verses as was the custom, praising the text. It is not much different from today's books whose back cover quotes authorities in the field expressing how much they enjoyed the book. This is a very old tradition. Some books even have a "foreword" written by a friend or mentor of the author.

Cervantes employs this convention by writing the foreword and all the laudatory verses at the beginning of Don Quixote. They are downright comical because he wrote them all himself. Cervantes unabashedly quotes "critics" like "Uganda the unknown" writing a commendatory verse saying,

*You will recount the advent-
Of a gentleman from La Manch-
Whose idle reading of nov-
Caused him to lose his reas-:
Fair maidens, arms, and chiv-
Spurred him to imita-
Of Orlando Furio-
Exemplar of knightly lov-;
By feats of his arm so might-*

*He won the lady of Tobo-.(12)*⁴

This Orlando referred to here was the famed French captain under Charlemagne and by 1605 had at least two famous books written in Italian about him – one called *Orlando the Furious* and one called *Orlando In Love*. In French they called him “Roland” and in Spanish “Roldán” and he actually pens a few lines of advice to Don Quixote (not to Cervantes) among those laudatory verses. This creates a situation where one very famous, epic fictional character speaks to a budding young fictional character that is destined to overshadow him.

Cervantes includes other dedications from the likes of Amadís of Gaul, a fictional character from an older Spanish chivalric romance, Gandalín, Amadís’ squire, who writes a few words of advice to Sancho Panza, and Doña Oriana, Amadís’ love interest, to Dulcinea del Toboso. It was a tradition in the Middle Ages for famous heroes to have horses with regal names. Bellerophon’s horse was Pegasus, Alexander the Great had Bucephalus, Amadís of Gaul had Brillador and El Mío Cid had a horse named Babieca. This last one, Babieca, also has a dialogue with Don Quixote’s horse, Rocinante, in one cleverly written (and rhymed) sonnet in the prologue. Pointing to the future, the naming of famous knight’s horses did not end there, other well-known horses include Napoleon’s Marengo,

⁴ All translations are from Grossman (2005). In this translation of the poem she even imitates the “cabo rato” style of the poem as written by Cervantes where the last syllable of each line is truncated.

the Lone Ranger’s Silver, Roy Rogers’ Trigger and of course, Woody’s Bullseye.

Another literary convention connected to that of *auctoritas* is the *translatio imperii* taken from ancient historians. Don Quixote, in shameless self-promotion in Chapter 25 of the first book establishes his own *translatio imperii* through Amadís of Gaul, Don Belianís of Greece, Virgil’s Aeneas and back to Homer’s Ulysses. While admitting that they were all described by their just-as-famous authors “not like they were, but as they should have been.” Don Quixote teaches Sancho and the reader that the knight-errant who imitates them most closely will come nearest to reaching the perfection of chivalry (193).

An amusing story from the first part of *Don Quixote* exemplifies another convention; that of intertextuality. After having done battle with the Basque met in the crossroads and although victorious, Don Quixote was suffering from a wounded ear. Sancho’s insistence that the ear be treated coaxes a description of Don Quixote of a concoction that when taken will cure all his ills. He tells Sancho,

...when I prepare it and give it to you, all you need do, when you see in some battle that they have cut my body in two (as is wont to happen), is to pick up the part of my body that has fallen to the ground, and very artfully, and with great cunning, before the blood congeals, place it on top of the other half still in the saddle, being careful to fit them together precisely and exactly. Then you will give me only two mouthfuls to drink of the balm I have mentioned, and you will see me sounder than an apple. (72)

The balm referred to is called the Balm of Fierabrás and is purported to be left over from the

embalming of Christ. Just like other relics from the time of Christ (e.g. the holy grail, splinters from the cross, water from the River Jordan) the balm supposedly has miraculous power. Sancho latches on to this Medieval convention believing it will not only cure him of his current ills but make him rich when he returns to town to sell it for a profit. When Don Quixote finally gets the housemaid of the inn to assist him in its preparation, he offers some to Sancho. Unfortunately, poor Sancho finds out the concoction is only one of Don Quixote's wild imaginative brews and like his master, Sancho is so repelled by the mixture of oil, wine, salt and rosemary, he vomits violently and ends up worse than he was before. By mentioning this episode, Cervantes has turned another Medieval convention on its head. Cervantes was aware of how these intertextual references would be immediately recognizable to his readers and used them as a common point of reference and opportunity for parody.

Critics

Miguel de Cervantes' consciousness of his critics despite his blasé attitude in the prologue shows up near the beginning in Chapter 6 of the first book. As the story goes, Don Quixote was on his own on his first foray into the wilderness. Before he had even recruited Sancho Panza, Don Quixote found himself recovering at home from his initial encounter with misfortune and injury. While doing so, the maid in the house, together with his good friends the barber and the priest commence a cleansing of his library. It is here that we get a rare glimpse into a relatively new commodity in the beginning of the 17th century. Don Quixote had a private library

full of Medieval texts in which he had completely absorbed himself. According to the barber and the priest, Don Quixote had gone too far and in order to prevent him from incurring further damage to himself or others, they set about tossing the books they deemed inappropriate. This is an amazing passage as each volume is pulled from the shelf, examined, weighed and judged. It reflects and mocks the censorship of Cervantes age at the same time.⁵

And the first one that Master Nicolás handed him was The Four Books of Amadís of Gaul, and the priest said:

"This one seems to be a mystery, because I have heard that this was the first book of chivalry printed in Spain, and all the rest found their origin and inspiration here, and so it seems to me that as the proponent of the doctrine of so harmful a sect we should, without any excuses, condemn it to the flames."

"No, Señor," said the barber, "for I've also heard that it is the best of all the books of this kind ever written, and as a unique example of the art, it should be pardoned."

"That's true," said the priest, "and so we'll spare its life for now. Let's see the one next to it."

"It is," said the barber, "the Exploits of Esplandián, who was the legitimate son of Amadís of Gaul."

"In truth," said the priest, "the mercy shown the father will not help the son. Take it, Señora Housekeeper, open that window, throw it into the corral, and let it be the beginning of the pile that will fuel the fire we shall set." (46)

⁵ See *A History of the Inquisition of Spain* Volume Three Book 8: Spheres of Action, Chapter 4 on Censorship by Henry Charles Lea.

This scene, while hilarious on the surface is laced with references to actual decisions being made in Spain on the merit of certain types of literature. Cervantes is certainly building a bridge to future generations bringing into the light a scathing parody of the book burning bent of the Inquisition. The futility of this exercise is found in the fact that Don Quixote, upon awaking and discovering the rape of his library, is not deterred in his quest and sets out again on his adventures. Cervantes' implicit message to his critics is: "Here is a book whose message cannot be erased by burning." In essence he has their number and is not afraid to publish it to the world. When Don Quixote sets out this second time, he heads straight to the house of Sancho Panza.

Characters

Sancho Panza is a critical element in Don Quixote. Sancho's presence sets up a necessary and crucial dichotomy between the educated eccentric and the grounded simpleton. Sancho is the *sine qua non* of the book's success. Even if all other elements were present, if the interplay between the protagonist and his sidekick were absent, the book would fall flat on its proverbial face. As with Shrek and his talkative, folksy companion, this pattern of a hero and a sidekick or *gracioso*, has been repeated over and over in successful literature.

In *Don Quixote*, Sancho is the folk linguist. He is full of folk wisdom and spouts refrains faster than Don Quixote can imitate Medieval verb conjugations.⁶ As stated before,

he is not present at first as Don Quixote assembles all the crucial elements of his fictitious persona. Sancho is sought out and convinced to come along with the promise that within six days Don Quixote will be successful and Sancho will be governor of an island. While this would not motivate other squires, to a man like Sancho fully ensconced in the feudal mindset, the idea of governorship is better than promising him gold or flocks or herds because ultimately, it would not be his, he would have to pay tribute on his gains to someone higher. As governor of an island however, he would be able to enjoy his own dominion without deference to an immediate superior authority. By the second book, Cervantes ends up granting this fantasy to Sancho, but not in the way one would expect. Sancho is fooled into believing he is governor of an island and all the subjects are told to treat him as such. The carnivalesque element of putting this common laborer in as governor upsets the power dynamic of the middle ages. Cervantes parodies the social system by not only giving Sancho this honor but by making him successful at it. Sancho's folk wisdom is found to be helpful, sage advice for those approaching his judgment seat. In the end it is Sancho who by his own realization, backs out of this role, too uncomfortable with the lofty treatment and 'rich cuisine.' From here on there is a precedent for the dolt who acts as the duke and the leadership is made to look trivial and uninformed. Cervantes' awareness of the genius of Sancho's character keys in on the book's success.

The other characters in the story tied to its success are women. Both those silent and those who speak out find their voice here. The presence of women is a highly bold move, one that gives them an audience they would not have had otherwise. Cervantes includes the whores and the upper class, the runaway and the socially imprisoned, all finding their voice. Few books before this time allowed for such

⁶ See Young 2000.

free expression. Here Cervantes opens the door to a new role for women in literature. Many of these women are hurting and vengeful. They are right in their own sphere and the reader seems to be the only one aware. The stereotypical assumption is that Dulcinea is the only female presence (actually absence) in the text. While perhaps the most famous, because her name is constantly on Don Quixote's lips, she is by no means the only nor the most representative of the role of women crossing the bridge from the middle ages to modernity.

Marcela is a classic example of the how-did-Cervantes-get-away-with-that kind of woman. As Don Quixote and Sancho come across a number of goatherds in the hill country they come to find out that the following morning they will attend a funeral for a colleague of theirs who fell victim to a young lady's charms. The young lady turns out to be Marcela. Don Quixote and Sancho are spared no detail of Marcela's cruelty for spurning Grisóstomo's love. By the next morning, there is no doubt in any of their minds that she is the incontrovertible assassin. In true Medieval fashion, Marcela comes to see the funeral and is presented by the goatherds as a type of Nero coming to watch Rome burn or "to see if with [her] presence blood spurts from the wounds of [the] wretched man whose life was taken by [her] cruelty" (98). According to Medieval legend, the dead victim would begin to bleed again in the presence of their assassin.

Marcela brushes this all to the side and cuts to the chase. Her carefully constructed response to the accusations of the murder of Grisóstomo is more than just a diatribe against men by a loose canon. It is a rhetorically rich invective, spoken eloquently helping the reader

recognize that the word is indeed sharper than the sword. The reader wants to participate in the story and react, "It's not her fault, he's the one to blame for placing on her unrealistic expectations!" But the goatherds are still poised to place an epitaph on his grave declaring the cruel untimely death at the hands of a wench who disdained and ignored him. Even Don Quixote, while moved, responds superficially and reflects his own prejudice.

She has shown with clear and sufficient reasons that she bears little or no blame in the death of Grisóstomo, and she has also shown how far she is from acquiescing to the desires of any of who love her, and therefore it is just that rather than being followed and persecuted, she should be honored and esteemed by all good people in the world, for she has shown herself to be the only woman in it who lives with so virtuous a desire. (101)

Don Quixote still believes that what he saw and heard was an exception to the eloquence of women and not the norm. Yet Marcela is the norm for women in this book. They are strong, independent, decision makers, wearing the pants in the family as it were. Their characterizations create a bridge to modernity in novels by subsequent authors taking tips from these feminine models.

Language

The language of Cervantes' masterpiece is the cornerstone of its foundation. The reader's principle impression of Don Quixote comes through his language. The entertainment value of the characterization of his squire comes from Sancho's abundant use of sayings and proverbs many times misapplied. The banter between the two is peppered with double entendres and witticisms that fly by so

fast, the reader has to return again and again to fully appreciate them all. Of particular mention in their banter appear several archaisms and malapropisms as follows.

Archaisms

Don Quixote was written as a reaction to the Medieval chivalric romances. Some of them are: *Amadis of Gaul*, *The Cabellero of Zifar*, *Don Belianis of Greece*, *Roland the Furious*, and others. Alonso Quijano, had worked himself into a frenzy from reading so many of these books. In the beginning of the book it is even said that his brain simply “dried up” (21). It wasn’t just these books either. He also had in his library the classic stories of Aeneas and Ulysses. So, when Don Quixote dons his armor, chooses his steed and confronts the enemy, he does so imitating these knights of old, whose fictional descriptions are as ridiculous as the description of Lancelot in the story of Camelot.⁷ While such a description

⁷ Lancelot describes the ideal knight in a song from the 1960 Broadway musical, *Camelot*. “A knight of the Table Round should be invincible, succeed where a less fantastic man would fail. Climb a wall no one else can climb, cleave a dragon in record time, swim a moat in coat of heavy iron mail. No matter the pain, he ought to be unwinceable, impossible deeds should be his daily fare... the soul of a knight should be a thing remarkable, his heart and his mind as pure as morning dew. With a will and a self-restraint, that’s the envy of every saint, he could easily work a miracle or two. To love and desire he ought to be unsparkable, the ways of the flesh should offer no allure.”

would seem a bit hyperbolic, Don Quixote has lost the ability to discern between the possible and the impossible. Just like Lancelot, he had unrealistic expectations of his own. Don Quixote adopts in the same loftiness the language of his heroes. Granted, the language is all in Spanish and a lot of it cannot be translated directly. The language functions on its own. For example, the phrase, “quiero guardarme de ser ferido ni de ferir a nadie” (209) shows how Don Quixote likes to talk as though he just stepped out of a bygone age.⁸ The word *ferir* even in Cervantes’ day would have evolved to *herir*. There is no equivalent in English for certain puns like this. English speakers take many of these for granted in their own language. They are special to English and some are special to regional dialects of English. Don Quixote’s Spanish was unique to the region of Spain known as *La Mancha* and then with his own knack for archaic marking, his language becomes a bridge from the old language to the new.

This concept of translatability may be more understandable with some examples of “archaisms” in English. How do you translate “let bygones be bygones” or “comeuppance” into another language? The utility of these particular expressions relies on the compression of English words and phrases that cannot be combined in any other language for a similar meaning. These examples illustrate the difficulty of rendering an accurate picture of Don Quixote’s and Sancho’s artistic use of the language. Some of their sayings, “cual más, cuál menos, todos ellos son una mesma cosa” (501), “Llegué, vila y vencíla” (654), “tropezando aquí, cayendo allí, levantándose acullá, tornando a caer acá” (410) “cepos quedos” (733) and

⁸ Examples in Spanish are from the 1992 Riquer edition of *Don Quixote*.

“siquiera me hiera, siquiera me mate” (734) are all unique expressions.⁹ They only make sense in Spanish. Attempts to translate them only leave the hearer more confused. The main difference between these phrases in Spanish and the ones from English is that Don Quixote’s language is a good 100 years past its time. It is difficult to conceive of someone speaking with the same linguistic traits of the early 20th century now. So much of Don Quixote was archaic that Riquer refers to him as an “archaísmo vivente” – a living archaism – wearing 100 year-old armor and adopting the speech to match (37).

Even Cervantes, in the narration of the story employs archaisms to bridge the gap from books where quoting phrases in Latin added depth and credibility to the text. Cervantes, peppers the prose with phrases like “tantum ossa et pellis fuit” (38) just for fun and for no credible justification other than to intersperse Latin or Latinate phrases throughout the story.

Sancho’s folk wisdom in the form of proverbs bridges the gap from the oral culture of the middle ages to the literate culture of modernity. In the second book when Sancho becomes a governor he gets a certain degree of recognition for this hidden treasure of knowledge. His wisdom is not in the form of astute observation or insightful judgments, but in his ability to recall literally thousands of pithy sayings that made Don Quixote irate with frustration. Sometimes the refrains came so fast it was as if they were cascading and they flowed

⁹ For more examples of phrases that present similar translating difficulties, see Eisenberg 1984.

even more freely the more comfortable Sancho was with Don Quixote’s company.¹⁰

Again, many of these cannot be rendered accurately in English. It must be positively maddening for any translator of the Quixote to wrestle with these. A few examples are: “Quien a buen árbol se arrima, buena sombra le cobija”¹¹ or “dime con quien andas y decirte he quien eres” (733 Rico) ‘tell me who your friends are and I’ll tell you who you are’¹² or some even used by Don Quixote, “buenas son mangas después de Pascua,” ‘The tips are best at Easter’ (335 Rico)¹³.

Grossman acknowledges the difficulty of translating the wordplay in which Cervantes engages at several points. For example, there is one occasion, as Sancho defends his master before the duke where he states, “there’s no more Sorrowful Face or Figure” (657). In the footnote on the same page, she clarifies her own attempt to get as close to the original as possible by the following disclaimer, “there is an untranslatable wordplay involving *figura* (“face”) and *figuro* (a nonexistent masculine form).”

To get a better idea of the awkwardness of the translation of idiomatic phrases, James Parr points to a

¹⁰ Benjamin Disraeli, a prominent political leader in 19th Century England and frequently quoted for his words of wisdom, defended his use of refrains from the ancients by saying, “Proverbs were bright shafts in the Greek and Latin quivers” insinuating that successful scholars should employ them wisely (Blake).

¹¹ Translated by Grossman as, “Lean against a sturdy trunk if you want good shade.” (667)

¹² “birds of a feather flock together.” (610 Grossman)

¹³ “but it is never the wrong time for a gift” (260 Grossman)

specific translation problem in *Don Quixote* using Burton Raffel's translation as an example:

There are other occasions, curiously enough, when Raffel is painfully literal, as when he translates "ponerme la mano en la horcadura" (1.30) as "[to] stick your hand into my crotch," which it could be taken to say, if one cares to be perversely punctilious, but that rendering makes no sense. The meaning is clearly "to show me disrespect." This is said metaphorically by Don Quixote, addressing Sancho in anger. ...this an expression associated with acrobats or tumblers, who would assist one another in certain spinning movements by placing a hand on the partner's upper thigh to facilitate the flip or rotation. What it means here specifically is to show untoward familiarity, but I hardly think "stick[ing] your hand into my crotch" captures that. It is a tasteless translation at best. The old axiom of traduttore, traditore is well illustrated in instances like this one. (392-93)

While this is a good example of the kind of language the reader has to contend with in *Don Quixote*, Cervantes employs another, perhaps even more striking visual image to depict the kind of interaction between knight and squire. Not very far into the narration, Don Quixote perceives two herds of sheep crossing in a valley. Believing them to be two armies meeting on the battlefield, he goads on Sancho and charges into the crowd to attack the animals. The shepherds, alarmed at his actions, attack him and beat him so badly that he is left semi-conscious on the ground begging Sancho to take care of him. Some of the beatings were to the mouth and face and knocked out some of his teeth and so he asks Sancho to look in his mouth to see how many teeth he has

left. In a sort of Looney-toons moment, just as Sancho practically sticks his face in Don Quixote's mouth to count his teeth, Don Quixote is overcome and vomits on his squire. As you can imagine, this upsets Sancho and he vomits in return on his master (180).

Examining this account metaphorically, the vomit is almost like the profusion of feigned wisdom constantly pouring from Don Quixote's mouth and just as repulsive to Sancho. Sancho's vomiting back is symbolic of his proverbial loquacity falling on Don Quixote's ears. The two are not so much repulsed by the other as they are fed up with having to spend so much time together that these kinds of things would annoy them. The interplay of language between Sancho and Don Quixote is such a pivotal aspect in how the novel works that Cervantes' use of this visual image cannot be underestimated.

Malapropisms

Another feature of language important in this linguistic program is the use of malapropisms. A malapropism is the inappropriate use of a word that sounds similar to the word one intends to use. For example, it is reported that a Sanchoesque vice president Dan Quayle once said, "Republicans understand the importance of bondage between a mother and child."¹⁴ The public had to understand that he meant *bonding* instead of *bondage*. While *bonding* is close to *bondage* morphologically, the socio-cultural meanings of the words differ significantly. *Bonding* is the buzzword that reinforces a cornerstone Republican platform of family values. *Bondage* on the other hand, is related to slavery and more modernly includes references to sadomasochistic behavior. These kinds

¹⁴ Reported to have said in a speech in Hawaii, September 1989.

of statements are ubiquitous in *Don Quixote* and more often than not, proceed from the mouth of Sancho Panza.

Sancho's malapropisms are another symbol of the bridge from the middle ages to modernity. At one point, Sancho tries his hand at quoting a phrase in Latin he thinks he knows, "Whoever's in hell... *nulla es retencio*" (198). The actual saying in Latin is, *QUIA IN INFERNO, NULLA EST REDEMPTIO*. But Sancho just quotes the phrase, knowing what the whole should mean, but not knowing the constituent parts. Don Quixote is left wondering what Sancho is talking about and yet continues on in their conversation.

One very popular malapropism crops up as Sancho misunderstands Don Quixote's use of the word "homicidio" (homicide) thinking it is the word, "omecillo" (meaning rancor or hatred) (107). Just a few pages later, Don Quixote finds himself unable to sit through a story without correcting the storyteller as he stumbles through several malapropisms ("cris" for "eclipse", "éstil" for "estéril", and "sarra" for "sarra") (121-22). These passages serve as reminders for contemporary readers of correct forms for words that were commonly mistaken. In some cases, as with the word, "sarra," the word formed part of a well-known, but misquoted saying: "Más vieja que Sarra." Cervantes' awareness of these slips in the language and awareness of the story as a means to educate his readers, made his prose particularly rich.

Impact of the Language

Cervantes' consciousness of the impact of the language is reflected in the work as a whole rather than in sound bytes. He sees Don Quixote's language and his ability to

communicate with others of his time as a bridge that somehow brings them nostalgically closer to a former golden age. This act and the resulting text simultaneously create a golden age out of his own times.¹⁵

Cervantes created a golden opportunity to bridge the middle ages and modernity in molding a character that is both crazy and believed to be mentally ill by most of the characters with whom he associates. Don Quixote's illness turns out to be his unwavering belief in the infallibility of the written word. The cure to his illness is found in his confrontation with the fallibility of the written word. When Sancho mentions the "other" book, he seizes the opportunity to expound on the details that begin to shake up Don Quixote's world. This inversion of literature and reality leads Don Quixote to believe more what was written and discount the reality clearly in front of him. Coming up against his own story in literature greatly disturbed him. He couldn't deal with that "reality." Then he comes across his own "history" in literature that he has to discount because of its blatant, arrogant affront on his character. Up until then his motivation for what he did was in "making true" what was in the Books of Chivalry – after coming up against the Avellaneda version of *Don Quixote*, he now had to disprove / "make false" what was found there. (e.g. going to Barcelona instead of Zaragoza).

Awareness of the impact of the language is 9/10 of the battle. Cervantes hand picked rhetorical conventions from a rich literary tradition. His life up to

¹⁵ Don Quixote himself states in Chapter 20 of the first book, "Sancho, my friend, know that I was born, by the will of heaven, in this our iron age, to revive the one of gold, or the Golden Age. I am he for whom are reserved dangers, great deeds, valiant feats..." (150)

that point had given him ample opportunity to draw comparisons and point out discrepancies between the way the world functioned for epic heroes and the way it worked in reality.

Cervantes had more than a little experience with critics and rejection and therefore handily dealt with celebrity backing by shameless self promotion and fictional endorsements. His innate talents lie without question in his clever use of the language, but it was his confidence and his awareness of the possibilities of the genre that propelled this work to success.

In sum, despite the episodic narrative, Cervantes remained focused on the principle storyline and the protagonist's purpose in life in every episode. Not far from the saying in English, "I have places to be and people to see" the motif of Don Quixote's primary purpose is repeated throughout the novel. He had "wrongs he intended to right, grievances to redress, injustices to repair, abuses to remove, and duties to discharge" (40). Crafting a world of needs merely because he said it was so was enough to get Sancho to follow him and be faithful to his cause. Perhaps to some degree it was his command of the older language that resonated with authority to Sancho. The words from the texts of the Middle Ages became the flesh of Don Quixote in his deeds and speeches. Subsequently, his experiences became the words of stories, plays, music and art that has followed. Our modern world owes a great deal of how we think, react, interact, read and speak to the *Ingenioso Hidalgo de la Mancha*.

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