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Peer reviewed

González Echevarría, Roberto. *Cervantes' Don Quixote*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2015. Pp. 369. ISBN 978-0-30019-864-5.

The present volume is an anomaly: a transcript of the lectures for a semester-long course in English for students of comparative literature and Spanish, given at Yale by Sterling Professor Roberto González Echevarría. There is also a highly unusual redundancy: several of these lectures can be viewed on You Tube. John Rutherford's excellent translation (sometimes curiously disparaged by our author, who wrote the Introduction) is supplemented by selections from the exemplary novellas, John Elliott's *Imperial Spain*, and some classic essays ~~on the Quixote.~~

Topics that claimed my attention are history, law, perspectivism, intertextuality, Freud, grand themes, etymologies, characters and their interactions, Renaissance and baroque (shades of *Geistesgeschichte* and the *Zeitgeist!*), close reading, and how part 2 rewrites part 1. The author illustrates beautifully and repeatedly that literature is made from other literature, although he never makes explicit for the students what he is doing. His focus is on mimesis rather than diegesis, characters rather than characterization, novel and romance rather than satire, and perspectivism rather than point of view. There are remarkable insights along the way. There are also noteworthy oversights, errors, or misreadings. For instance, on pages 31 and 50: “no quiero acordarme” means simply “I don't recall”; it is formulaic, not volitional. For page 36, with its Romantic shading, compare Martín de Riquer's devastating commentary on the knightly farce. On page 45, the defense of Don Quixote's illogic concerning the disappearance of his library ignores the fact that he is always misguided in part 1 in his assessments of reality, as the narrator, Sancho, or another character will make clear. Perspectivists sometimes quote a more ample statement by DQ that what seems to you, Sancho, to be one thing may seem to me another, and to a third person something else, but they never quote the words preceding, his foundational assumption that there are loose amongst us evil enchanters who transform things before our eyes. Therefore, we see different things. On page 50, it becomes clear that our author's concept of “the narrator” is a global one, encompassing any and all; there is no attempt to distinguish among them. On page 218, the sentence “Notice that Dulcinea here is Casildea de Vandalia” seems to blend DQ's lady into Sansón's. On page 221, regarding the lion episode, foolhardiness and reckless endangerment of others can hardly be dignified as courage. On page 270, *Cárcel de amor* might be mentioned as a precursor to Cervantes's epistolary experiments. Page 286 does not make clear that *fabla* is a factor almost exclusively in part 1. On page 314, it is indecorous, to say the least, to describe British scholars of the hard (i.e., non-Romantic) funny book school as being hard mainly “in their brain arteries.”

Focusing now on three issues of greater import. First, it puzzles me that someone who has such a keen analytical mind and eye for detail—who repeatedly reminds students to be alert to details—would choose to ignore aspects of how the story is assembled, told, and transmitted. Three early instances include: 1) the obvious differences in motivation and attitude toward Don Quixote that characterize the first and second pseudo authors; the first is ironic, dismissive, and negative; the second is naive, gushing, and highly motivated, but he appears too late in the game to reorient the reader to his Romantic perspective in the few pages he is allotted; his witless reference to aged maidens who went to their grave as intact as the mothers who bore them is priceless. The narrative metalepsis or transgression of narrative level or frame at the end of part 1, chapter 8, goes without mention, despite the fact that George Haley's classic article is required reading. This is the first appearance of the editorial voice of the text, and it represents a changing

of horses in mid-stream, the quite remarkable replacement of one extradiegetic-heterodiegetic (frame) narrator by another.

Perhaps more important, however, is the contrast--within the first nine chapters!--of hard and soft readings, with implicit criticism of the soft or Romantic approach *avant la lettre*. One searches in vain here for such niceties as focalization or the disnarrated. Second, there is the matter of the continuing attachment to Renaissance and baroque, terms borrowed from art history, and the attempts to apply these concepts, endemic to architecture or painting, to literature. It really doesn't work. Unless you can believe in a mysterious time spirit that informs and determines all thinking and all the arts of a given period, give it up, and instead follow the lead of the Italians by using centuries (*Cinquecento*, etc.) for periodization—for our purposes, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. *Chiaroscuro* can conceivably be found in both *Las Meninas* and the *Quixote*, but the transgressions of the frame in both represent a much more significant parallel, and an aspect more forward-looking than time-bound. Third, orality and literacy, along with questions of transmission and origins are more substantive matters for the *Quixote* than either of the two preceding. What shall we do with Clemencín's "algarabía que no se entiende," the "Dicen que . . . se lee que . . ." of part 2, chapter 44. Can orality, or oral tradition, offer reliable grounding for the written record? Do "caracteres arábigos" (part 1, chapter 9) indicate "Arabic" or "Aljamiado"? Can origins in orality, or translations, or transliterations be trusted? If not, how can we trust the holy books of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam? All of this merits substantive commentary.

Although displays of erudition may impress undergraduates, we should limit ourselves in an introductory course to what neophytes really need to know, particularly so when fundamentals of dealing with the text proper may otherwise go begging. This course likely serves its intended purpose at Yale. Comparative literature students are perhaps better served than Spanish majors. It is Yale-centric and old school, favoring soft readings and perspectivism, neither of which has much traction today. Unless you share the author's talent for textual analysis and his wide reading, don't try to emulate. Content yourself with strategic borrowing. Finally, in designing or revamping a *Quixote* course, consider several other comprehensive overviews: Martín de Riquer, Luis Murillo, Anthony Close, Carroll Johnson, and the MLA's 2015 second edition of *Approaches to Teaching Cervantes's Don Quixote*. Discerning readers should appreciate the many insightful remarks in this open course, whether read on the page or viewed online.

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