

## **Comparison of John Ormsby's 1885 English Translation of “Don Quijote” and Edith Grossman's 2003 English translation.**

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Miguel de Cervantes wrote his masterpiece *Don Quixote* in two separate parts, the first of which was published in 1605 with the second being published 10 years later in 1615. Since then, there have been many translations of the novel into many different languages. In 2002, a group of 100 influential writers hailing from 54 different countries declared *Don Quixote* “the best work of fiction in the world” (Grossman p. xix). According to Grossman, one of the reasons *Quixote* has been so venerated for hundreds of years is because it “contains...practically every imaginative technique and device used by subsequent fiction writers to engage their readers and construct their works” (Grossman, p. xix). The first ever translation into English was published by one of his contemporaries, Thomas Shelton, who translated the first part of Cervantes' novel in 1612 and the second part in 1620 (Ormsby, p.vi). Since Shelton's translation into English there have been numerous retranslations into English, each with their own idea of what was the best way to present Cervantes to an English speaking audience. Two well known translations of Don Quixote into English are the Englishman John Ormsby's 1885 rendition of Cervantes novel into English and the most modern retranslation, and American translator Edith Grossman's 2003 version of Don Quixote in English. Both translators had similar approaches to their translations and similar goals in mind. However, because their translations are separated by 120 years, the audiences that each translated for were different, thus leading them to make different decisions when translating the same work.

### **Skopos**

#### **John Ormsby's translator's note**

Ormsby's approach to *Don Quixote* was to bring the target culture (TC) to the SC, not to uproot

Cervantes and graft him into the TC, much in the way Schleirmaker viewed the translation of foreign texts into a target language (TL). Ormsby's translator's note is more a harsh criticism of previous translations of *Don Quixote* than a traditional translator's note. That being said, he clearly defines his view of fidelity and his approaches to his audience. In fact, his approaches to *Quixote* are a byproduct of the faults that he finds with previous translations. Ormsby's own approach to his translation of *Don Quixote* is one of fidelity to both “word” and “spirit” (meaning). Many of his criticisms of previous translations are rooted in issues of fidelity, whether it was to the words that Cervantes used, the original setting and mood of the story, or a combination of both. Regarding fidelity he states,

The method by which Cervantes won the ear of the Spanish people ought, *mutatis mutandis*, to be equally effective with the great majority of English readers. At any rate, even if there are readers to whom it is a matter of indifference, fidelity to the method is as much a part of the translator's duty as fidelity to the matter. If he can please all parties, so much the better; but his first duty is to those who look to him for as faithful a representation of his author as it is in his power to give them, faithful to the letter so long as fidelity is practicable, faithful to the spirit so far as he can make it. (p. xi)

At the beginning of his note, he starts by criticizing Shelton's 17<sup>th</sup> century translation saying “His fine old, crusted English would, no doubt, be relished by a minority, but it would only be a minority”, “His version has strong claims on sentimental grounds, but on sentimental grounds only”, and “His warmest admirers must admit that he is not a satisfactory representative of Cervantes” (Ormsby p. v). One of his main issues with Shelton's translation are his one to one translations of words, much like Pym's definition of natural equivalence. “It never seems to occur to [Shelton] that the same translation of a word will not suit in every case” (p.vi). Several examples of Shelton's “one word, one meaning” approach his translation are *sucesos* always being represented as *successes*, *suspensio* translated as *suspended*, and *honesto* as *honest*. Ormsby also takes issue with later

translations for various reasons. According to Ormsby, John Phillips' 1687 translation sought to translate *Quixote* “according to the humor of our modern language” by inserting cockney-like humor into the text to which Ormsby responds “His 'Quixote' is not so much a translation as a travesty, and a travesty that for coarseness, vulgarity, and buffoonery is almost unexampled even in the literature of that day” (p.vii). Peter Motteux's 1712 translation, according to Ormsby “treats 'Don Quixote' in the same fashion as a comic book that cannot be made too comic” and is “worse than worthless”(pp. Vii-viii). He criticizes all French translations of *Don Quixote* because they take Quixote out of his “Castillian” environment and essentially put him in France. “French translators, for the most part, consider themselves charged with introducing their author to polite society, and to feel themselves in a measure responsible for his behavior” (p.xi). He is less critical of Charles Jarvis' 18<sup>th</sup> century translation, stating that it “is singularly free from errors and mistranslations” (p.ix). According to Ormsby, Jarvis' translation was more acceptable because Jarvis was one of the first translators to not attach one meaning on one word. In fact, Jarvis, according to Ormsby, was a “diligent student” of the Royal Spanish Academy's dictionary, and that he was very well read and familiar with literature, especially “in the department of chivalry romance” (p.ix).

In trying to stay faithful to the words and spirit of *Don Quixote* Ormsby consulted other English translations, using their notes to help in his translation of the text and used his own footnotes to explain his decisions with certain words and phrases and to explain context that may have otherwise been lost to an English-speaking reader. This was all in an effort to bring the target cultural (TC) into the source culture (SC). Ormsby favored a foreignized translation faithful to the meaning of the words from Cervantes' day and faithful to the SC of Cervantes' original audience. Ormsby foreignizes translation by leaving certain words such as *alforjas*, *olla*, and *bota* in Spanish because “books of travel to Spain have made the words sufficiently familiar to most readers” (p.xiii). He felt like the English translations such as *saddlebags* and *bottle* weren't accurate representations of what Cervantes envisioned. Thus,

with some words he didn't even try to find an English equivalent, opting to keep them in Spanish to not only conserve their original meanings, but also to remind the reader that the story occurs from a Spanish-speaking and a Spaniard's perspective.

Finally, according to Ormsby, *Don Quixote* is a “protest” against affectation and therefore any use of antiquated or older forms of language “should be resisted” (p.xii). He states “Spanish has probably undergone less change since the seventeenth century than any language in Europe, and by far the greater and certainly the best part of 'Don Quixote' differs but little in language from the colloquial Spanish of the [19<sup>th</sup> century]” (p.xii). He published his translation in 1885, which lends itself to this justification of such reasoning against antiquated language. Ormsby felt that by writing in colloquial 19<sup>th</sup> century English he was being faithful to the experience that the 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish-speaking reader would have had when reading Cervantes' original Spanish novel since Cervantes didn't use language that was considered antiquated for his time period. In fact, Ormsby felt that Cervantes himself, when he said “Toda afectación el mala”, was arguing against antiquated language, and thus was seeking to make *Don Quixote* a contemporary work for his day (p.xii). Ormsby tried to conserve this contemporary experience by using Cervantes' same strategy of contemporary language usage. He used all of these strategies to give the 19<sup>th</sup> century English-speaking reader the same perspective as the early 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish-speaking reader had when s/he first read *Don Quixote*.

### **Edith Grossman's translator's note**

With regards to her role as a translator, Grossman states “I believe that my primary obligation as a literary translator is to recreate for the reader in English the experience of the reader in Spanish” (Grossman p.xix). Grossman's translator's note is considerably shorter than Ormsby's. She doesn't critique any previous translations; rather her main focus concentrates on her initial struggles when she took on translating *Don Quixote*.

One of her very first struggles that she mentions in her note was whether to spell *Quixote* with an “x” or a “j”. In both languages it has been spelled both ways. She opted to spell it with an “x” because she wanted to conserve the immediate connection in English with the word *quixotic* which is a direct byproduct of the novel. Her main struggle was figuring out “what kind of voice would be the most appropriate for the translation of a book written some four hundred years ago” (p.xix). After talking to a colleague she decided to translate Cervantes as she had the contemporary works of other writers, much the way Ormsby chose to translate Cervantes for *his* day. “When Cervantes wrote his *Don Quixote*, his language was not archaic or quaint. He wrote in a crackling up-to-date Spanish that was an intrinsic part of his time...a modern language that both reflected and helped to shape the way people experienced the world” (pp. xix-xx). This agrees with what Ormsby thought about Cervantes and his dislike for affectation. Grossman continues, “This meant I did not need to find a special, anachronistic, somehow-seventeenth-century voice but could translate his astonishingly fine writing into contemporary English” (p.xx). Thus, Grossman, 120 years after Ormsby, decided to do the same thing as Ormsby. The only time that she uses archaic or antiquated language is when Cervantes himself uses it for Quixote's crazed rants about chivalry, which, according to Grossman in her translator's note, are very noticeable since they stand in stark contrast to the otherwise contemporary Spanish of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Grossman hoped that by putting *Don Quixote* into 21<sup>st</sup> century English she could conserve the wit, humor, and overall style of Cervantes, much like Ormsby strove to accomplish in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Grossman states, “If my translation works at all, the reader should keep turning the pages, smiling a good deal, periodically bursting into laughter...impatiently waiting for the next synonym...the next mind-bending coincidence...the next incomparable conversation between the knight and his squire” (p. xx). Much like Ormsby, Grossman seeks to give the English-speaking reader the same experience as the early 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish-speaking reader.

Yet “contemporary” for both Ormsby and Grossman is two different things, and in order to give two audiences separated by 120 years the same experience of Cervantes audience, both translators' decisions were synchronic and based in their individual time periods. What was contemporary for Ormsby, to Grossman's audience might sound antiquated, or even like the affectation that Cervantes sought to avoid. To Ormsby's audience, what Grossman's audience sees as contemporary may have been understood, but would not have been considered the norm, and thus, would have altered the experience that both translators sought to give their audiences in their translations.

## **Comparisons**

In any comparison of two retranslations there will be a number of differences, whether small differences in word choice or syntax, to larger, culturally motivated decisions. The differences between Ormsby's and Grossman's English renditions of *Don Quixote* are too many to make a comprehensive list of, but, they are not differences of such a drastic nature that the course of Cervantes' novel is dramatically altered. Nevertheless, even the smallest of differences gives the careful reader a glimpse of the perspectives of each translator and therefore an analysis of some of these differences and patterns is worth discussing. Following are several examples from the first and fourth chapters.

### **Chapter I**

Chapter one of *Don Quixote* is an introduction to the character of Don Quixote; what he is like, from his physical description and how he starts to become the famous delusional knight that he is known for being. In this chapter the differences in what was “contemporary” for Ormsby and what is “contemporary” for Grossman are apparent. The first sentence in Spanish reads “En un lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme, no ha mucho tiempo que vivía un hidalgo de los de lanza en astillero, adarga antigua, rocín flaco y galgo corredor.” Aside from the idiolectal differences of Ormsby and Grossman, two instances where synchrony seems to have played a part in their word

choice occur with the terms *rocín* and *galgo corredor*.

*Rocín* is actually defined as “an old horse”, but neither chose to say *old horse* and both opted for more colloquial words. Ormsby translates it as *hack*, which is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as “a horse for ordinary riding”. The last recorded nominal use of *hack* in reference to horses, according to the OED, was in 1872, which falls into the time period of Ormsby. Grossman translates *rocín* as *nag*. The OED defines *nag* as a type of “old and feeble” riding-horse. *Nag*, in the sense that Grossman uses it, existed in Ormsby's time as well, but according to the OED, it seems to have outlasted *hack* with instances of its usage to refer to a horse as recent as 1998. This would make *nag* more “contemporary” for Grossman than *hack*. Ormsby had the option of using both, but for some reason, maybe idiolectal or personal preference, chose *hack*. Grossman could have used *hack* also, because it still has its place in the English language, but her 21<sup>st</sup> century audience would have an easier time finding *nag*.

Both translators translated *galgo* as *greyhound* but while Ormsby translated it as “a greyhound for coursing”, Grossman translates it as “a greyhound for racing”. The difference between Grossman's rendition of “for racing” and Ormsby's “for coursing” is actually significant. The terms *racing* and *coursing* refer to two very different activities. While Grossman's “a greyhound for racing” simply conjures images of racing dogs for sport, which is fairly common in this century, Ormsby's “a greyhound for coursing” refers to hunting. A greyhound used for coursing is a greyhound that is used for hunting wild game. Ormsby's rendition most likely stems from Cervantes' description of Don Quixote a few lines later as a “[un] amigo de la caza”. His assumption that Quixote's greyhound was for hunting could have also stemmed from his Englishman hermeneutic framework and the time period that he lived in. In the end, the reasons behind the aforementioned decisions of the two translators can only be hypothesized, since neither provided footnotes on the items in question. Either way, both felt like they were effectively targeting their respective target audiences.

The next sentence begins, “Una olla de algo más vaca que carnero,”. Ormsby, as mentioned in his translator's note, keeps *olla* in Spanish, assuming that it was common enough that the native 19<sup>th</sup> century English speaker would know what it is. He translates this part of the sentence as “[a]n olla of rather more beef than mutton”. Grossman approaches this sentence differently. Instead of using the English equivalent of *olla*, which Ormsby said he felt didn't accurately communicate the same meaning as the Spanish word, Grossman focuses on what was in the pot. This, in reality, is what Cervantes did. He only uses the word *olla* to refer to what Quixote cooked and ate from the pot. Grossman translates this as “[a]n occasional stew, beef more often than lamb”. Ormsby's translation also appears to be more of a formal translation than Grossman's. Cervantes' original “algo más vaca que carnero” gives the image that there is a mixture of meat, but that the majority of it is beef, an image which Ormsby conserves with his “rather more beef than mutton” rendition. Grossman decided to render it a bit differently. Her “beef more often than lamb” does away with the image of mixed meat, and while acknowledging that Quixote eats both, she makes it clear that beef is a more common staple for the knight. In her footnote she explains her decision stating “Cervantes describes aspects of the ordinary life of the rural gentry. The indications of reduced circumstances include the foods eaten by Don Quixote: beef, for example, was less expensive than lamb” (p. 19). One final difference in the renditions of the beginning of the second sentence is Ormsby's use of “mutton” and Grossman's use of “lamb”. Both words in the context conjure like images. This difference appears to be synchronous. While *mutton* would be understood by Grossman's 21<sup>st</sup> century audience, it is a bit antiquated for the modern audience, and *lamb* seems to be the more effective term for Grossman's target audience.

#### **Chapter IV**

Chapter four is an instance where in the original Cervantes veered somewhat from his use of contemporary language. His usage of more antiquated Spanish is meant to be a satire of the traditional notion of chivalry. In Chapter four Don Quixote has two encounters where he acts like a noble knight

of legend, both of which don't end like they usually do in the legends, thus serving as satire of the notion chivalry. In the first encounter Quixote finds a man whipping a boy, who is tied up to a tree for not watching his sheep with enough diligence. Quixote makes the man release the boy, but after Quixote leaves, the man grabs the boy again and beats him nearly to death. In the next encounter, Quixote issues a challenge to a group of travelers, claiming that no one is more beautiful than his lady Dulcinea, who consequently is really a girl from a neighboring village who never actually has met Quixote. After this encounter, Quixote ends up getting beaten by one of the traveler's, but blames the mishap on his horse.

In the second encounter one of the travelers asks Quixote for a picture, as proof of the beauty of Dulcinea and he says in the original Spanish, "...aunque su retrato nos muestre que es tuerta de un ojo y que del otro le mana bermellón y piedra azufre, con todo eso por complacer a vuestra merced, diremos en su favor todo lo que quisiere". Quixote wrongly perceives this as an insult, and reprehends the men using more antiquated language, as if he were a knight of old. His original response in Spanish reads

No le mana, canalla infame...no le mana, digo, eso que decís, sino ámbar y algalia entre algodones; y no es tuerta ni corcovarda, sino más derecha que un huso de Guadarrama. Pero ¡vosotros pagaréis la grande blasfemia que habéis hecho contra tamaña beldad como es la de mi señora!

Both Ormsby and Grossman recognized this change in register and its purpose in the original text.

Ormsby translates it as

She distils nothing of the kind, vile rabble...nothing of the kind, I say, only ambergris and civet in cotton; nor is she one-eyed or hump backed, but straighter than a Guadarrama spindle: but ye must pay for the blasphemy ye have uttered against beauty like that of my lady.

Grossman's version reads

Nothing flows from her, vile rabble...[n]othing flows from her, I say, but amber and delicate

musk; and she is not blind or humpbacked but as upright as a peak of the Guadarramas. But you will pay for how you have blasphemed against beauty as extraordinary as that of my lady!

Both renditions use less contemporary English, accurately reflecting the Spanish original. At first glance it might appear that Grossman's rendition is a bit less antiquated than Ormsby's version because of Ormsby's use of the pronoun *ye* and Grossman's choice of *you*, because *you* is still used on a daily basis in modern English. But, it could also be viewed as a difference of perspective. Ormsby's use of *ye* shows that Don Quixote was directing his threat to the specific person who had mentioned the possibility that Dulcinea was “tuerta” and that she had “azufre” coming out of her other eye, since *ye* was once used as the pronoun for the second person singular. Grossman's use of *you* leaves open the possibility that Quixote was threatening the entire group of travelers instead of just the one, since in the middle ages *you* was the pronoun for the second person plural.

Another difference between the two English versions of Quixote's threat are the renditions of *ámbar* and *algalia entre algodones*. Ormsby's use of *ambergris* and *civet in cotton* would be difficult for Grossman's 21<sup>st</sup> century audience. According to the OED, the last recorded use of *ambergris* was in 1874 and the last recorded use of *civet*, a type of chive used to perfume and the literal translation of *algalia*, was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Grossman's choice of *amber* and *musk*, although not common words in the everyday 21<sup>st</sup> century vocabulary, are easier for her modern audience to understand. This choice of less common, older words, was purposeful, since Cervantes' original rendition of the threat was made in older Spanish, with the purpose of satire.

The final difference in the two translations of Quixote's threat is the comparison of Dulcinea's posture. The original text says “más derecha que un huso de Guadarrama”. This is a reference to the Guadarrama Mountains in Spain. First and foremost, both translators opted to keep the reference to the Guadarrama Mountains, thus giving the text a foreign feel and helping fulfill their shared purposes of giving the English-speaking reader the same experience as the Spanish-speaking reader of Cervantes'

day. The words *huso* literally means *spindle*. Ormsby conserves this connection in his rendition of Quixote's threat, and justifies it with a footnote saying “*Más derecho que un huso*- straighter than a spindle-is a popular phrase in use to this day” (p.25). It could be argued though, that the use of *huso* is purely metaphorical and it refers to the peaks of the Guadarrama mountains, but, Ormsby further justifies his rendition stating that spindles used to be made from the wood that was taken from the Guadarrama Mountains. For Grossman's audience this popular saying of Ormsby's day isn't as common. She simply opts for *peak* in place of *spindle*, a simile that her audience can more readily understand and relate to.

### **Conclusion**

No two translations of the same work will yield the same result. Many different factors play a role in the different renditions of the same source text. Each and every person has his or her framework and perspective from which they view and perceive the world around them. This directly affects their translation of a text. Also, different target audiences will influence the translator and lead to the rendering of different translations. If a translator produces a translation without his or her audience in mind, the finished product will not have the desired affect or impact that the translator wanted it to have. Even if the translators have similar goals in mind when they sit down to translate the same work, the results will always differ on one level or another. Both Ormsby and Grossman had the overall goal of giving the English-speaking reader the same experience as the 17<sup>th</sup> Spanish-speaking reader and both chose to write using English that was considered to be contemporary for their day. Despite similar goals, Ormsby's translation was for an audience 120 years before Grossman's and his translation decisions regarding word choice and word play were geared specifically toward that audience. What was contemporary for him, in many ways is antiquated for Grossman's audience. Grossman achieved her translation goals by focusing on her specific audience. Despite the similar goals, during the actual

translation process, both translators made different decisions and produced two different renditions of the original text that are meant to present Cervantes' knight and his squire to two distinct groups of people.

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