

Article

A Quixotic Endeavor: The Translator's Role and Responsibility in Bridging Divides in the (Mis)handling of Translations

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Abstract: Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, one of the most translated works of literature, has seen over twenty different English translations in the 406 years since its first translation. Some translators remain more faithful than others. In a world where there should be an erasure of the lines that separate cultures, the lines are, in fact, deepening. John Felstiner explains in his book, *Translating Neruda: The Way to Macchu Picchu*, that "a translation converts strangeness into likeness, and yet in doing so may bring home to us the strangeness of the original... Doing without translations, then, might confine us to a kind of solipsistic cultural prison" (Felstiner 5). By looking at translations of *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, this paper examines how the inaccuracies and misrepresentations by translators deepen the lines that divide cultures. Textual edits are made, plots are altered, and additions are made to the text. These differences might seem inconsequential to the reader, but the reverberations of such changes have tremendous consequences. While there may not be a perfect translation, editors and translators must aim towards that objective. Instead, the translators appropriate the work, often styling or rewriting it in order to mold it to fit their own visions of what the work should be. Thus, *Don Quixote* lives on through translation and is lost due to being an unwitting and unwilling participant of malpractice. The only way to bridge cultures is for the translator responsibly to present readers with translations that stay true to the original. By doing so, readers can be more empathetic towards cultures unfamiliar to them, and only then can we truly have an understanding of others.

Keywords: Don Quixote; translation; world literature; Cervantes; comparative literature; translation studies; malpractice

"Translating from one language to another, unless it is from Greek and Latin, the queens of all languages, is like looking at Flemish tapestries from the wrong side, for although the figures are visible, they are covered by threads that obscure them, and cannot be seen with the smoothness and color of the right side; translating easy languages does not argue for either talent or eloquence, just as transcribing or copying from one paper to another does not argue for those qualities. And I do not wish to infer from this that the practice of translating is not deserving of praise, because a man might engage in worse things that bring him even less benefit."¹

—Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Prologue

¹ See (de Cervantes 2005, pp. 873–74).

1. Somewhere in La Mancha

The story begins as it always has: “There lived not long since, in a certain village of the Mancha, the name whereof I purposely omit, a gentleman of their calling that use to pile upon their halls old lances, halberds, morions, and such other armors and weapons.”² These opening lines of Chapter One belong to the first English translator of *Don Quixote*, Thomas Shelton, so that translation might not be familiar. The basic structure of the plot of *Don Quixote* is recognizable to most. The story revolves around a poor nobleman who obsessively reads chivalric novels. Through this obsession by the protagonist, Alonso Quixano—or Don Quixote, as he is most commonly known—convinces himself that the events of these novels, such as *Amadís de Gaula*³, are real, and he embarks on the journey of a knight to right the wrongs of society through knightly adventures. Following the tropes of any real knight of the time, he requires the assistance and service of a squire, a poor illiterate farmer whom he names Sancho Panza. Trouble follows them seemingly at every turn in their journey. Those they encounter believe that Quixote has gone mad. Those charmed by his knightly act simply oblige to the requests of Quixano and play along with the foolish old man. Those with no sense of humor, usually those in positions of power, find this act to be preposterous, and place all the blame for Quixano’s delusions on his obsession with reading chivalric novels. According to these humorless characters, any serious person must only read serious work and not waste his or her time on such foolish stories. By the end of the two-part novel, after much prejudice and violence inflicted on him, Quixano is snapped back to reality and dies in his bed, disillusioned and heartbroken.

Most familiar with *Don Quixote* will know this basic plot of Cervantes’ two-part novel. At the very least, they will have known of Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, something about a horse, and that windmills are symbolically important somehow. One does not have to look much further than the opening line in Chapter One to realize that most will have heard that it begins with, “Somewhere in La Mancha.” In fact, there is no consistency to how this line has been translated during the four hundred years since its first publication. UCLA scholar Tom Lathrop translates this as, “IN A village in La Mancha, which I won’t name, there lived not long ago an *hidalgo* of the kind that have a lance in the lance rack, an old shield, a lean nag, and a fleet greyhound.”⁴ John Rutherford, in his Penguin translation, writes, “In a village in La Mancha, the name of which I cannot quite recall, there lived not long ago one of those country gentlemen or hildalgos who keep a lance in a rack, an ancient leather shield, a scrawny hack and a greyhound for coursing.”⁵ The most popular and readily available translation is that of the popular Latin American literature translator, Edith Grossman, whose first line of the first chapter is simple and sets the tone for a translation that is easy to read for any reader: “Somewhere in La Mancha, in a place whose name I do not care to remember, a gentleman lived not long ago, one of those who has a lance and ancient shield on a shelf and keeps a skinny nag and a greyhound for racing.”⁶ To most, the variations of this opening paragraph seem insignificant and would seem inconsequential in choosing a version to read. Multiple translations of a work can be available through bookstores, libraries, or digital outlets.⁷ Often, the choosing of a translation is more of an aesthetic choice in cover rather than the actual words on the page.⁸ The words are subjugated by

² See (de Cervantes 1970, p. 17).

³ A 1508 version (the earliest surviving printed copy), written by Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo, was very popular during the time that *Don Quixote* was written. Cervantes makes reference to this Castilian novel in a scene where a priest and a barber search through Don Quixote’s library to burn all of his books of chivalry, which they perceive to be the cause of Don Quixote’s “madness” (De Montalvo 2003, p. 5).

⁴ See (de Cervantes 2011, p. 19).

⁵ See (de Cervantes 2003, p. 25).

⁶ See (de Cervantes 2005, p. 19).

⁷ It is worth noting that the big publishers will always have copies in bookstores. Editions like the John Rutherford Penguin edition and the Edith Grossman Harper Perennial will likely be available at all bookstores over something like the Tom Lathrop Signet or the James H. Montgomery Hackett publishing translations.

⁸ It is important to note that the rise of ebook copies has complicated matters even further. Often, when choosing a digital copy, the choice becomes less of an aesthetic preference but rather one of availability and cost. If people are willing to pay

not only the visual presentation, but also by the ways in which these translators choose to translate the original.

The opening paragraph as first written by Cervantes 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.”⁹ A more accurate translation would be: “Somewhere in La Mancha, whose name I do not care to remember, there lived not long ago an hidalgo with a lance on a shelf, an ancient shield, a skinny nag, and a greyhound for racing.”¹⁰ In Shelton’s translation, he has chosen for the narrator to omit the village or place in La Mancha instead of choosing to show that the narrator does not particularly care about the details when telling the story of Don Quixote. He also gives Quixote piles of weapons and armor where a man of his standing would not have been wealthy enough to amass such a collection.¹¹ While it can be praised that Tom Lathrop used the word “hidalgo”¹² in his translation, he places La Mancha in a specific village with the narrator not being able to remember an exact location, giving an impression quite different from that of the Spanish text, where Quixote does not care to remember. Somewhere can be anywhere, it is just not something worthy of remembering.¹³ John Rutherford translates this similarly, while adding details to the weaponry that are simply not in the Spanish text.

It is worth comparing this opening line between other languages. Those same distinctions of whether it is a village in La Mancha or somewhere in La Mancha and whether the narrator does not remember, does not care to remember, or purposefully omits the name do remain. A common explanation by translators is that going from a Romance language to a non-Romance language simply does not work because there is no equivalent between the languages. The first line of Chapter One is simple enough to disprove such thought. Similarly to John Rutherford, French translator Louis Viardot translates the line as “Dans une bourgade de la Manche, dont je ne veux pas me rappeler le nom [In a village in la Mancha, whose name I don’t want to remember].”¹⁴ Italian translator Ferdinando Carlesi’s and Japanese translator Shin Ushijima’s translations resemble the first by Thomas Shelton. The Italian reads, “In un borgo della Mancina, di cui voglio ricordarmi il nome [In a village in la Mancha, whose name I don’t want to remember],”¹⁵ while the Japanese reads “名はわざと省くが、ラ・マンチャのある村に [I’ll omit the name on purpose, but in the village of La Mancha].”¹⁶ The French, Italian, and Japanese translations suffer the same fate as their English counterparts; each take the Spanish and translate as they will, despite the Italian and French being much closer to the Spanish than English and Japanese are.

Regardless of the target language, these alterations, while minor, are not representative of the Spanish text. By using *hidalgo*,¹⁷ Cervantes is making it clear that Quixote’s economic standing is not equal to those of actual nobility; thus, his armor and horse would also not necessarily be on par

for a digital copy, questions arise: Which edition? Is it cheaper than its paperback or hardcover version? Is it free? Most will pick up a digital copy of a free edition, which will most often be one of the older translations that are out of copyright, like the 1885 translation by British Translator John Ormsby.

⁹ See (de Cervantes 2016a, p. 27).

¹⁰ Translated by Cesar Osuna.

¹¹ In fact, in the paragraph that follows in Chapter 1, it can be assumed that Quixote would not have amassed such a collection given that “[his] curiosity and folly got to such an extreme that he sold many acres of farmland in order to buy romances of chivalry to read, and he took home every one of them he could find.” (de Cervantes 2011, p. 20).

¹² The word “hidalgo” is a word that has no real equivalent in English. In his *Don Quixote Dictionary*, Lathrop defines “hidalgo” as a “member of lesser nobility, gentleman.” Even so, it does not quite capture the same connotation that it has in Spanish.

¹³ It is worth mentioning that La Mancha is a region in central Spain. As Cervantes scholar Roberto González Echevarría says in his introductory lecture to his undergraduate class on the *Quixote at Yale*, “La Mancha is flat, arid, and monotonous.” It was not a desirable place, much less a memorable one for the narrator of *Don Quixote* to remember (González Echevarría 2015, p. 7).

¹⁴ See (de Cervantes 2016b, p. 14).

¹⁵ See (de Cervantes 2017, p. 21).

¹⁶ See (de Cervantes 2001, p. 43).

¹⁷ RAE (Real Academia Española) defines “hidalgo” as “Persona que por linaje pertenecía al estamento inferior de la nobleza.” (Person that by lineage belonged to an inferior class than nobility, <https://dle.rae.es/hidalgo>).

either.¹⁸ Cervantes would know all about the financial struggles of someone like Quixote, having fought in wars while receiving little to no compensation for his service.¹⁹

While these words may seem similar and interchangeable, the consequences from their meaning can vary drastically. Comparing the opening paragraph across multiple translations is the easiest way to compare between the over twenty English translations of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.²⁰ But unless a reader consults with a Spanish edition of the text, the version you choose would seemingly be of little importance. The question we must ask is: Is it?

2. The Importance of Translation

John Felstiner, in *Translating Neruda: The Way to Macchu Picchu*, contends that "A translation converts strangeness into likeness, and yet in doing so may bring home to us the strangeness of the original. [...] Doing without translations, then, might confine us to a kind of solipsistic cultural prison."²¹ Translation serves as a bridge between cultures when the original language is not available to the reader, and it is a way to have access to world literature, often classics, that we would otherwise not have at our disposal. The insight we get into another author, another language, another culture is contingent upon circumstances that are beyond the control of any writer. As Cervantes' biographer William Egginton argues:

When we engage with fiction we are both within and without the story we are reading or watching; we are simultaneously ourselves, locked into our own particular view on the world, and someone else, maybe even someone very different from us, feeling how he or she inhabits a very different world from ours. [...] That ability to experience different and at times even contrary realities without rejecting one or the other is one of the main reasons we are so drawn to fiction, in all its forms.²²

One of the stronger proponents of world literature is Zhang Longxi. In his work on world literature and translation, *From Comparison to World Literature*, Longxi explains the importance of what he calls cross-cultural understanding, which allows us to better connect with people through world literature and translations: "It is absolutely necessary to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, and also to take adequate translation into consideration. The possibility of cross-cultural understanding and the question of translatability are still major issues that challenge comparative studies and world literature."²³ As he astutely points out, without these translations, there can be no basic understanding between cultures and people. It is through the delving into what we perceive as the "other" that we can gain an understanding, and that understanding can only truly be achieved through accuracy in translation.

When looking at a translation, we must look at a few things: what is being translated, when, and by whom, as well as the quality and attainability of each translation. With a work like *Don Quixote*, which has over four hundred years of history and over twenty English translations, the task of finding the "right" or "best" translation is daunting and seemingly impossible without comparing between them. We must ask why there are so many translations, and why so many have come in the last five to six decades. Some scholars argue that each generation must have its own translation for its time due to

¹⁸ A translator has to be able to properly define such a term in the footnotes, glossary, etc. for a reader to properly understand such a term. Quixano is not poor, but he is not part of the higher ranks of nobility either. He is wealthy enough and has land to sell in order to buy books. The fact that La Mancha is somewhere the narrator does not care to remember also implies that it is a humble Castilian village, further giving indication of Quixano's socio-economic standing.

¹⁹ This struggle led Cervantes to having odd jobs when not serving as a soldier, including working as a tax collector. Irregularities in his accounts led to Cervantes' 1597 stay in Seville's municipal jail. It is during this time in prison that it is believed that the idea of *Don Quixote* first came about.

²⁰ As is the case with any translated novel.

²¹ See (Felstiner 1980, p. 5).

²² See (Egginton 2016, p. xv).

²³ See (Zhang 2015, p. 3).

the changes in language. Suzanne Jill Levine, a prominent scholar and translator of Latin American literature, maintains that: “Each century has its own idea of what they want to accomplish with translation. You have to look at the ideology behind the translation to be able to judge it.”²⁴ But even paying due attention to ideology does not ensure that a reader can encounter the author’s vision and words in a given translation. Ideology, too, is difficult to ascertain, because too many translators are not fully transparent in their intentions or the ideological frameworks that serve as the impetus for their translations. This can be seen not only when looking at various translations of *Don Quixote*, but also at literature from across the world.²⁵

The most important concept that must be discussed in the context of translation is fidelity. A translator should aim for fidelity to the text. What that means is a translation that is close to the original not only connotatively, but also denotatively. Fidelity also involves the translator staying as close as possible to the spirit of the original by paying close attention to its original context while deciding how best to render its language into another medium. While doing so, the translator should not impose his/her own vision of what the text should be, but rather honor the intentions of the author (where those can be discerned) and the original connotations, denotations, and contexts of the text. Were translators to hold themselves accountable for their choices rather than allowing themselves to impose their will on a text, the practice of translation would be much improved.

Perhaps to most, any translation is a good translation. As Felstiner suggests, “Our desultory awareness of Latin American literature until the last decade or so has depended on what few hardy translators have made available, and any recent translator must be grateful to them.”²⁶ But that idea is a utopian ideal, not only in the realm of Latin American literature, but in all of world literature. The reader who is not a polyglot is at the mercy of the editorial choices that are made by translators. And even the polyglot reader, aside from having the source texts beside the translation, cannot ever be assured that a given translation is accurate. Too often, there is little transparency with translations, particularly when we reach the big-name publishers and translators. Lest subscribers to the reigning orthodoxy in translation studies take this observation as a call that translators should justify every single choice they make—it is not, and such a call would be preposterous.²⁷ What there should be, and this is something occasionally seen in translations by smaller presses, is a detailed explanation of what the general goal of the translation is, whether that be academic or not, and what kind of ethics the translator is following.²⁸ But too often, because of this lack of transparency and the absence of a code of ethics, translation, especially of *Don Quixote*, has become a practice less of representation than of misrepresentation. This is due to a number of factors: the ignoring, by editors and translators, of the contexts around and within the two-part novel; the mishandling of source texts; and the widespread

²⁴ Suzanne Jill Levine’s comment in response to my paper presented at the University of California, Santa Barbara’s Department of Spanish and Portuguese conference, “The Fabricant: Symposium on the Figure of the Translator”, 16 November 2018.

²⁵ This lack of accuracy in translations can be seen when looking at collections of poetry by the Persian poet, Rumi; the Spanish playwright, poet, and novelist, Lope de Vega; the Syrian poet, Nizar Qabbani; and the Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda. Their poetry often suffers from mistranslation. Their translators may conflate various lines of a poem, rewrite the poem as they see fit according to their own ideas instead of the poet’s, or eliminate stanzas altogether. Poets like Neruda or Rumi often have their works reedited and collected in different editions in order for the publisher to profit from a new collection. It is even more disturbing when this happens to poets whose work is not readily available to the masses because their work is out of print or limited to their country(ies) of origin, like Nizar Qabbani or Lope de Vega.

²⁶ See (Felstiner 1980, p. 14).

²⁷ At “The Fabricant: Symposium on the Figure of the Translator” conference, the translators present argued that such demands for explanations on translation practices could not be met. The idea of having a detailing of editorial choices they made as translators was met with the suggestion that I was asking that an entire book be written alongside each translated work, when, in fact, I was asking merely for a slightly more detailed version of the kind of translator’s note often seen alongside the introduction to a novel.

²⁸ There are already codes of ethics for translation and interpretation. Organizations in place with codes of ethics include the American Translators Association, the International Federation of Translators, the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators, and more. However, even with such organizations in place, many literary translators opt not to join. An argument could be made that they be required to be in such an organization that would have standards of practices to adhere to.

practice of translators who excuse their lack of fidelity to the text by using theories of translation such as those by the oft-quoted Walter Benjamin.²⁹

3. Contexts

Although Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is a work of Western literature, it is still treated differently from a work by Western English writers like Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brönte, Toni Morrison, or Edgar Allan Poe. The difference between these writers and Miguel de Cervantes comes down to *Don Quixote* being a work written in Early Modern Spanish. Because of its language, works like *Don Quixote* and *Amadís de Gaula* are grouped with literature from Central and South American Spanish-speaking countries—works like Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the works of Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz, and the poetry of Pablo Neruda. From a translation standpoint, they are considered to be similar, and the same methods or principles of translation are applied. To see the effects of this situation, one has to look no further than Edith Grossman's translation of *Don Quixote*. Edith Grossman is world renowned for her translation of Latin American authors like Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa. But her specialty is in modern Latin American literature, not Golden Age classics. The Spanish or Castilian spoken and written in the Golden Age of Spain is not the same as modern Spanish from Latin America. Modern Spanish varies drastically between countries today, much less from the Spanish that was written and spoken in earlier time periods. Treating early 17th-century Castilian Spanish as if it is functionally equivalent to 20th-century Latin American Spanish is analogous to treating Early Modern English from Shakespeare's time as if it were unproblematically similar to the diverse forms of English that are used currently. Though the language is not unreadable, many nuances will be lost by a translator who is not alert to them.

With all works of literature, especially one that is over four hundred years old, it is important to keep in mind both the nuances of language and the contemporary contexts shared by the work and its author. As stated previously, Cervantes had quite the life of poverty and struggle. His experiences as a soldier and his incarcerations would inform the plot and characters of *Don Quixote*. And yet, Cervantes did not feel the need to think simply of himself; instead, he focused on representing all of those who were considered "other" like himself, and through his characters, he could make his readers find some sympathy and empathy for those struggling through life's obstacles. Egginton reminds us of this fact:

His own disappointments in turn seemed to prime him to be unusually attuned to the suffering and misfortune of others. In a time and culture when xenophobia was the national religion, when the poor were assumed to have deserved their lot, and when women were thought to be naturally subservient to men, Cervantes regularly used his writing to explore the feelings and experiences of religious and ethnic minorities, social outcasts, and women.³⁰

Cervantes makes these characters represent those he had encountered in his life and those with whom he continued to have run-ins as he struggled to find a place to call home and a way to make a living.

In relation to this point, Cervantes had to place his story within a framework that readers of his time would be familiar with—one in which he could make his point about his knight living out his adventures and dealing with the disappointment that comes from dealing with society. This came at

²⁹ In addition to excusing themselves with Walter Benjamin, the names of Jorge Luis Borges and Alexander Pope are consistently raised when arguing against what has become the status quo in translations and translation theory. Translators attempt to shield themselves from any criticism by going on the defensive. Gregory Rabassa, famous translator of Latin American writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar, wrote a defense that he deemed a "memoir", where he details how difficult translation is, and titled it *If This Be Treason: Translation and Its Dyscontents*. Perhaps the best way to sum up the tone of the 2018 conference "The Fabricant: Symposium on the Figure of the Translator" at the University of California, Santa Barbara came from translator and professor Jerome Rothenberg, who offered this comment: "It's very difficult to be a translator".

³⁰ See (Egginton 2016, p. xx).

a time where Cervantes had not quite risen to the heights of his contemporaries like Lope de Vega during the Golden Age of Spanish drama in the late 16th century. Vega's plays would be dominated by fast action and would not concern themselves with characterization. Cervantes' plays were quite the opposite, and thus did not garner the kind of support that Vega's works obtained.³¹ Finding little success in the theatre, Cervantes turned his attention to writing his now-famous novel within the framework of a once popular but dying literary form, the chivalric romance. But he gave this form a meta-literary twist. As Egginton states, "Cervantes made his books be about books, and the characters in his books into readers and interpreters of other characters in those books."³² Even if the romances of chivalry were on their way out, Cervantes knew that, due to the popularity of such works as *Amadís de Gaula*, people would recognize the satirical nature of his story while also recognizing the serious moments and messages that he hoped to convey.

Don Quixote is thus an intertextual novel. Cervantes, through the narrator in the prologue, makes his intentions clear and sets up his book within a bookish framework. The goal of Cervantes and the narrator of *Don Quixote* is to write the type of novel of romance and chivalry that Alonso Quixano is obsessed with. The narrator relates a conversation he had with a friend in which he is given advice to the composition of the novel:

You only have to imitate the style of what you're writing—the more perfect the imitation is, the better your writing will be . . . So, fix your attention on bringing down the ill-founded framework of those chivalresque books, disposed by many, and praised by many more; for if you achieve this, you won't have achieved little.³³

Ironically, having translated these very lines, translators often go on to ignore this passage in order to serve their own agenda. Some choose to translate the novel into a comedic story; some choose to translate it into a tragic story; and some retain aspects of both as the original did, but this can only be achieved if the context around which the story is structured is taken into consideration by the translator. Overemphasizing or underemphasizing these tragic and comedic tones can change the meaning of the work in a way that Cervantes had not intended. The chivalric romances were written in a sloppy and rushed way, with many of the same inconsistencies that one finds in cheap romance novels now, where the quality of the writing often is not very high (though the work may still be entertaining). Ignoring (or trying to compensate for) this aspect of the chivalric romances that were popular at this time also threatens to change the perception of how Cervantes wrote this novel, thus causing more confusion when translators look into the source texts when constructing their translations.³⁴

Often, prominent translators like Suzanne Jill Levine will justify this by referencing Alexander Pope's translation of Homer. It is with this argument that translators introduce the idea of translation as a *creative act*. Jill Levine uses the translating of gender-identified nouns as a justification for mistranslating even the most common terms, particularly focusing on:

Latinize words whose effect in English is often archaic, or even vague, such as amiable, whereas the Spanish counterpart amable is a common, vivid word. Or the betrayal of gender-identified nouns in Romance languages by the neuter noun in English: La luna is always more feminine than "the moon."³⁵

³¹ Vega, in fact, would show his disregard for Cervantes' "old way" of composing plays with a poem titled *The New Art of Writing Plays in Our Time*. As stated in the introduction to William T. Brewster's translation of *The New Art of Writing Plays*, Cervantes had "plentiful lack of sympathy for the so-called Aristotelian rules", such as those that Vega would go on to write four years after Cervantes had published the first part of *Don Quixote* (de Vega 1914, p. 16).

³² See (Egginton 2016, p. xxi).

³³ See (de Cervantes 2011, p. 9).

³⁴ This is, of course, for translators who choose to consult with a source text or any other text to begin with.

³⁵ See (Grossman 2010, p. 2).

The translator will rarely locate the infidelity to the original text in themselves and their work, but place the blame on the grammar, the source language itself, etc. Furthermore, Levine states that “A translation will never be the text it imitates, which was written in another language, but it can be a version lying dormant and, like Frankenstein, animated by a mad translator (to use an Infantesque metaphor), a text illuminated and motivated by the original, realized in its next life, in translation.”³⁶ This kind of distancing and “othering” language used when referring to a text is troubling. Instead of striving for the Other to be Familiar, Jill Levine describes a monstrous process in which the dead original is brought to an alienated form of life. Throughout, the text remains an Other, and this monstrously “creative” act of literary resuscitation is portrayed as something to be admired by both readers and translators.

When it comes to *Don Quixote*, Levine brings in the name of Jorge Luis Borges because of his “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*,” a short story often referred to as his summation of all translation theory. While discussing Borges’ work, Levine maintains that “[h]ere, Cervantes’s masterpiece becomes a tentative web of propositions that change with each new historical act of reading; each successive reading, rewriting, translating of a text enriches and ensures the original’s survival anew.”³⁷ Source texts, historical context, any alterations, etc. are all ignored here. What remains is a text seen as inferior until the translator brings the work back to life by any means necessary, usually at the cost of fidelity to the text.

4. The Mishandling of Source Texts

Miguel de Cervantes’ *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*³⁸ was edited by Francisco de Robles and first published by Juan de la Cuesta in 1605, with the second part being published ten years later. This first printing in 1605 was called the *princeps* edition. The text has been subjected to malpractice almost from the first printing. As was customary in those times, Cervantes would have handed his original handwritten pages to a professional scribe, who would have created a clean copy before handing it over to a printer.³⁹ In fact, Francisco Rico, editor of the Real Academia Española authoritative text, points out that this handwritten copy would have lacked some unity and clarity due to all of the additions that any writer would add to the margins. As he points out, it would be impossible for Cervantes, given the size of the first part, to rewrite it all before submitting it to a professional scribe.⁴⁰ Given how long Cervantes spent writing *Don Quixote*, we knew that he would amend and add to the text throughout the process, as is normal in the writing of any text—whether it be a literary masterpiece or even the paper you the reader are reading currently. This is apparent with additions such as the Captain recounting his story in Chapter 39 and the mentions of the *Exemplary Novels* in Chapter 47.

In the process of creating the clean copy, the scribe would have added spacing and punctuation that could be missing. Given that the first printing in 1605 was unexpectedly successful, a second printing was needed. This second printing came that same year, but not without changes to the manuscript. This second printing by Juan de la Cuesta would introduce the theft of the donkey in Chapter 23 and the recovery of said donkey in Chapter 30. Cervantes scholar Roberto González

³⁶ See (Jill Levine 2009, pp. iii–iv).

³⁷ See (Jill Levine 2009, p. 5).

³⁸ *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* is the original title by Miguel de Cervantes. The two-part volumes are now more commonly titled simply as *Don Quixote*.

³⁹ See (Rico 2005, pp. 100–1).

⁴⁰ “No tenemos ninguna noticia directa sobre el autógrafo de Cervantes que constituiría la primera redacción completa de *El Ingenioso Hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*, pero hubo de tratarse de un manuscrito que no brillaba por la claridad ni la uniformidad. El volumen publicado con aquel título . . . contiene páginas escritas en diversas épocas y que a veces tuvieron o pudieron tener vida independiente.” “We have no direct information about the autograph of Cervantes that would constitute the first complete editing of *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*, but it had to be a manuscript that did not shine by clarity or uniformity. The volume published with that title . . . contains pages written at different times and that sometimes had or could have had independent life.” (Rico 2005, p. xcvi).

Echevarría concludes that these “hilarious paragraphs” are justified: “The writing in these added passages reads much like Cervantes’ prose to me—though not to other scholars who think this is somebody else’s writing—so editors have incorporated them into the final version of this novel.”⁴¹ One of those scholars who thinks this addition to the manuscript was not intended, authorized, or created by Cervantes is UCLA scholar Tom Lathrop. In the introduction to his 2005 translation, Lathrop explains that “these additions have led some editors to believe that Cervantes went down to Cuesta’s print shop and corrected his huge mistake himself. Far from the truth. The way it was in the first edition was exactly as he wanted it.”⁴² Lathrop goes on to explain further why the donkey chapters do not belong to Cervantes. These scenes have been addressed differently by many of *Don Quixote*’s translators, with none having conclusive evidence for the inclusion or exclusion of these scenes. Due to its rising popularity, a third printing with additional alterations by de la Cuesta was available in 1608. It is impossible to tell if Cervantes himself had made changes to the text after the original printing. The problem that arises from the printing practices of this time is explained by Egginton, who states that “[n]one of his original manuscripts survive. In fact, very few manuscripts from that period do. At the time, the very idea of saving manuscripts would have seemed most unusual.”⁴³

As literacy rates exploded during this time, so did the popularity of this novel. Before the second printing by de la Cuesta could be released, cheaper pirated copies appeared in London, Valencia, Zaragoza, and Brussels. Not only did Cervantes not reap the benefits of the popularity of his novel through sales because of these pirated editions, but there was also no quality control over these editions. Because of this lack of editorial overview, editors of these editions made changes to the novel as they saw fit before selling them. In a time when there should be a clear original and authoritative text, we have three versions by the original printer and countless pirated copies, all from around the same time period.

5. Translation versus Adaptation (and the Idea of Untranslatability)

While scholars like Zhang Longxi believe in the important of world literature and the ability of readers to connect to art outside of their general purview, that perception seems to be an unpopular one in academia at present. A recent challenge to the idea of world literature, even to the *possibility thereof*, has been the idea of untranslatability, especially as formulated by Emily Apter and her aptly titled book: *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*. This culmination of a series of lectures, journal articles, and republished chapters clearly stakes out Apter’s position. Apter endorses “World Literature’s ‘deprovincialization of the canon and the way in which, at its best, it draws on translation to deliver surprising cognitive landscapes hailing from inaccessible linguistic folds,” and approvingly notes R.A. Judy’s citation of “the eleventh-century Islamic philosopher ibn Sina” while referring to “the ‘arousal’ and ‘wonder’ [takhyil] sparked by poetic syllogisms.” However, she goes on to express “serious reservations” about what she sees as the “tendencies in World Literature toward reflexive endorsement of cultural equivalence and substitutability, or toward the celebration of nationally and ethnically branded ‘differences’ that have been niche-marketed as commercialized ‘identities’”.⁴⁴

While Apter has no problem citing (though at second hand) Islamic philosophers, she makes quite clear that she is uncomfortable both with the idea of “cultural equivalence” and with “the celebration of nationally and ethnically branded differences” marketed as “commercialized ‘identities’” in world literature. It appears to be out of this very discomfort with the way translation handles either sameness or difference that she builds the foundation for her theory of the “untranslatability” of texts. But she offers no solution to this “problem” she has identified. What she does instead is to situate herself within a tradition of other scholars and theorists:

⁴¹ See (González Echevarría 2015, p. 76).

⁴² See (de Cervantes 2011, p. xvi).

⁴³ See (Egginton 2016, p. 3).

⁴⁴ See (Apter 2013, p. 9).

Drawing on philosophies of translation developed by Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Samuel Weber, Barbara Johnson, Abdelfattah Kilito, and Édouard Glissant, as well as on the way in which the Untranslatable is given substance in the context of Barbara Cassin's *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (whose English translation I supervised with co-editors Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood), the aim is to activate untranslatability as a theoretical fulcrum of comparative literature with bearing on approaches to world literatures, literary world-systems and literary history, the politics of periodization, the translation of philosophy and theory, the relation between sovereign and linguistic borders at the checkpoint, the bounds of non-secular proscription and cultural sanction, free versus privatized authorial property, the poetics of translational difference, as well as ethical, cosmological, and theological dimensions of worldliness.⁴⁵

But as impressive as some might find this list of names, Apter never clearly identifies the influence these figures have had on her notion of the untranslatability of texts. She does not identify the translation theories of Jacques Derrida, Samuel Weber, or any of the other figures she mentions. Instead, we are merely left with the idea of “untranslatability as a theoretical fulcrum of comparative literature with bearing on approaches to world literatures, literary world-systems, and literary history” and a seemingly never-ending list of other purviews and possibilities.

The problem in contemporary translation practice does not begin, of course, with Apter's idea of untranslatability. For many years now, scholars, editors, and translators have all used Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay, “The Task of the Translator” to explain their methodology or thinking behind the idea of (un)translatability.⁴⁶ Within the first paragraph of his essay, Benjamin states that “[n]o poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the audience.”⁴⁷ Benjamin establishes almost immediately that no work of art, no work of literature, belongs to the reader, and instead brings us to the idea that art belongs to the artist. While he is not wrong that the work belongs to the artist, it certainly belongs to each reader as well. He continues to explain what he means with this idea of art not belonging to the reader by clarifying that “[t]ranslation is a form. To comprehend it as a form, one must go back to the original, for the laws governing the translation lie within the original, contained in the issue of its translatability.”⁴⁸ If translation is a form (an art form), then Benjamin is stating that the translation is just as much a creative process as the original act of writing. The work of translation is placed side-by-side with the original work, seemingly making them equal because translation requires creativity. While it is not incorrect to maintain that choosing the appropriate word requires a certain kind of effort and creativity, to claim that such work is itself a work of art is simply giving it too much credence. With that assertion alone, the translator, and certainly Benjamin, are subordinating the original language, author, and work to this newly created “form” of the literature. That is the first step in removing any legitimacy and importance from the original work.

Benjamin goes on to make it appear as if this act of translation is doing the original work and author a favor by infusing some type of relevance or life back into the work itself:

Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife. For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ See (Apter 2013, p. 10).

⁴⁶ One is tempted to assume that many translation scholars have not bothered to read the original essay themselves, since all-too-often, Benjamin's ten page essay is reduced to one or two quotes which all of Benjamin's adherents seem to have memorized.

⁴⁷ See (Benjamin 2002, p. 253).

⁴⁸ See (Benjamin 2002, p. 254).

⁴⁹ See (Benjamin 2002, p. 254).

With that, Benjamin set the precedent for what has become the norm in the modern theory and practice of translation. Benjamin's ideas, when combined with the idea of a book being an assemblage or line of flight, as Deleuze and Guattari would define it,⁵⁰ give the translator or editor leeway to alter the work in whatever way they see fit, because as Benjamin states, the art of translation is a creative process that gives the translator the creative freedom to bring the original work to light whichever way he or she sees fit without any restrictions, as long as it seems right and natural to the translator.⁵¹

Benjamin further continues his justification for the mishandling of texts through translation by casting doubt on the notion of accuracy: "Theory would be hard put to define the nature of this accuracy and therefore could shed no light on what is important in a translation", while maintaining that "[t]he obvious tendentiousness of a writer's literary style may in time wither away, only to give rise to immanent tendencies in the literary creation. What sounded fresh once may sound hackneyed later; what was once current may someday sound archaic."⁵² While this may seem to provide an explanation of the need for multiple translations of a given literary work, it raises more questions than it answers. Why is it when they are transmitting the words of world authors that so many translators find that it is acceptable to change the authors' words in order to sound "fresh" and "current"? While it is true that language is constantly evolving, it is by no means an impossibility to read old texts or old versions of languages. For all intents and purposes, we do not do this to English writers, or do we?⁵³

With Benjamin's parameters and their seemingly unlimited possibilities, it is no wonder that since his essay was published, there have been at least ten different translations of *Don Quixote* in English. One after another, translators feel like they have to resuscitate not only the "dead" work of art, but also the previous and dying translation that time has passed by. Out with the old, in with the new. A new reinvention. A new re-telling. A new interpretation rather than a translation. Beyond anything that is done to the text itself, the problem originates in the perception of what a translation is and should do. While, ideally, translation would be about the transmission of the text, the author, and the surrounding context, under the influence of contemporary uses of Benjamin, translation has become less a process of transmission than a process of adaptation in all but name.

When presenting at *The Fabricant* conference at the University of California Santa Barbara (Fall 2018), scholars and translators Suzanne Jill-Levine and Jerome Rothenberg argued against the arguments being made in this essay by referencing Walter Benjamin. But they also frequently referenced a work whose poor quality as an accurate translation is overlooked, Pope's *Homer*. While Pope's translation of *The Odyssey* might have sufficed as a translation at the time, it would fail to pass muster as a modern translation, though it might still have literary value as an adaptation. In its verse form (Pope's recognizable heroic couplets) it strays so far from Homer's dactylic hexameter that it becomes less a work of Homer and more a work of Alexander Pope. With the simple act of referring to the work as Pope's *Homer*, scholars and translators like Levine and Rothenberg confess that the importance and significance of "Pope's *Homer*" lies more in what Pope did with *The Odyssey* and less in the story and poetry attributed to Homer.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ See (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, pp. 503–4).

⁵¹ Deleuze and Guattari refer to these "lines of flight" and "assemblages" as ways to explain the ever-changing nature of any given thing. Their point is that nothing remains static, it is constantly evolving, constantly changing, and if it does become static, it dies and becomes what they define as "molar." This line of thinking comes from a similar school to that of Benjamin, if not heavily influenced by it.

⁵² See (Benjamin 2002, p. 256).

⁵³ We actually do this as well, except with works in English, any altering of the text is given the respect of being called an adaptation or reinvention. It is not always done with good intentions though. The works of Shakespeare suffer a similar fate to that of these older works in translation. Readers and scholars find the language to be too archaic and too difficult to read, implying that it is not worth the effort. Thus, we see "modernized" versions of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and the ever-popular *No Fear Shakespeare* series.

⁵⁴ They also reference *One Thousand and One Nights*. They argue that the additions to that text are what have become more popular and loved the most by readers, but what choice does the reader have if that is what is available to them? If you think of Rumi, the translations of Coleman Barks do the same. They are rewritten in the same way to give readers something easier to quote. We have become obsessed with something that is easily quotable. Which sounds more quotable: "In a

Similarly, Cervantes scholar Charles Patterson proposes an idea of translation as adaptation in his work on Cervantes' eight interludes.⁵⁵ As Patterson states in *Eight Interludes*, his goal "in translating the interludes is for them to be performed before English-speaking audiences", and that included "a willingness to modify the text wherever it seemed necessary in order for the actors to be able to speak it and audiences to be able to connect with it".⁵⁶ But changes like this to any text change the intent and appropriate (even steal) the words of that particular author. Despite Patterson stating that "the plays contained here [are] translations of Cervantes's interludes, not adaptations",⁵⁷ when character names are changed to make them more "humorous" for the reader, or the translator takes a reference that makes sense in the original context and changes it into a reference to Michael Jackson because the modern audience would know that better, those acts alone remove the words and meaning from Cervantes and put them firmly into the service, even ownership, of the translator. Regardless of whether a work is for the stage, personal reading, or academic reading, when the author's words and the context surrounding them are altered or even replaced by the translator's personal and literary choices, then the work of the author—in this case, Cervantes—no longer belongs to him/her, but to the translator.

6. There Can Only Be One First—The Shelton Translation

Given that the source text was corrupted with emendations that supersede the intentions of Cervantes and the original text, it is almost guaranteed that any translation that follows these corrupted Spanish editions would also be corrupt, and would, in fact, be a betrayal of the source text. Instead of striving for any fidelity to the original Spanish, such translations subordinate that Spanish to the demands of a target language. Too many translators either take liberties in their editorial choices or employ a translation process that lacks any real depth in its research. As long as works of literature continue to be subjected to such practices of misrepresentation, the divide between us and the literature of the past, its authors, and other languages and cultures will go unchallenged.

This issue can be traced all the way back to the first translation of the first part of *Don Quixote* by Thomas Shelton in 1612. Shelton, instead of using the authorized texts printed by Juan de la Cuesta, used a bootleg copy out of Brussels published two years after the original printings. The existence of this bootleg may be problematic enough, but it is fundamentally problematic for English-language readers because it served as the source text for the very first English translation of Cervantes' novel. Shelton states that he "[t]ranslated some five or six yeares agoe, The Historie of Don-Quixote, out of the Spanish tongue, into the English . . . in the space of forty daies: being therunto more than half enforced, through the importunitie of a very deere friend, that was desirous to understand the subject."⁵⁸ Anyone who has done even the most amateur attempt to translate anything, including something as short as a poem, can attest to the process requiring a tremendous amount of time and effort to achieve a translation that is worthy of the name.⁵⁹ If, in fact, Shelton actually took only forty days to translate the first part of Cervantes' novel, that would be quite the achievement, even though the translation is mediocre. For as full of faults as Shelton's translation may be, and as faulty as his choice of source texts definitely is, these mishandlings and mistakes are not so severe as to prevent readers from recognizing much of the substance of the Spanish original.⁶⁰

village in La Mancha, the name of which I have no desire to call to mind" or "Somewhere in La Mancha, in a place whose name I do not care to remember"? "Somewhere in La Mancha" certainly has a better ring to it, but is it accurate?

⁵⁵ Also known as *Novelas Ejemplares* or *Exemplary Novels*.

⁵⁶ See (de Cervantes 2015, p. xxi).

⁵⁷ See (de Cervantes 2015, p. xxi).

⁵⁸ See (de Cervantes 1970, p. 9).

⁵⁹ Remarks such as this by Shelton work in two distinct ways; it is either a way to self-praise for completing a translation in such a short period of time, or it can serve to excuse themselves for any errors made in haste.

⁶⁰ That is not to say that this mediocre achievement should be celebrated, but it should be noted that a translation done in haste can still retain a reasonably high level of fidelity to the source text. If a translator were to dedicate more time and effort in crafting a translation, it could be possible to get close to what the author intended.

But in the seven years from translating and then publishing it, Shelton never bothered to go back and correct any of his mistakes; instead, as he continues to explain: “I was content to let it come to light, conditionally that some one or other would peruse and amend the errors escaped, my many affairs hindering me from undergoing that labour.”⁶¹ His edition shows all of the major faults and patterns of error that are typical in a translation done in haste—Shelton uses multiple and carelessly chosen cognates, mistranslates vocabulary, does literal translations of syntax and idioms, and employs free adaptation when translation proves to be difficult. This would prove to be acceptable if this translation were to simply reach a friend instead of a wider readership. But in the latter case, Shelton should have taken the time to rework his translation to be more accurate and better suited for that wider readership. Instead, the work remains a betrayal for the simple fact, as admitted by Shelton himself, that his laziness and unwillingness to put more work into his translation proved to be the biggest downfall to the first attempt to translate *Don Quixote* into English.⁶² Given the novel’s popularity during this time, it is apparent that Shelton was more concerned with getting his translation out into the world and reaping the financial benefits than presenting an accurate representation of the novel. And yet in doing so, it should be noted that Shelton is quite transparent about the haste in which he translated the novel, displaying an honesty on that point that most later translators of *Don Quixote* have lacked.⁶³

The Harvard Classics edition of the 1612 Shelton translation raises an important point, however: “The present version, in style and vitality, if not in accuracy, [is] acknowledged [as] the most fortunate of English renderings.”⁶⁴ While Shelton’s translation might not be worthy of standing up against more accurate and modern translations, it is worth remembering for being the first—even if it is a wholly inaccurate one. This translation by Shelton precedes the printing of the second part of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (the printing of the translation to the second part of the novel comes with its own set of problems). Even so, some scholars and writers like British writer James Fitzmaurice-Kelly believe that his translation deserves a second look because it captures both the ‘noble’ and ‘familiar’ styles in the characterization of Don Quixote and Sancho ‘with such effect as no man has matched in English’. Opinions like this give the impression that as long as the translator captures or retains enough of the novel to catch a reader’s attention in the target language, then the translation is a good one.⁶⁵

Although Shelton’s name appears on the cover of the 1620 translation of the second part, his role has come into question in academic conversations ever since. One of those who questions the validity of the Shelton 1620 translation is retired university librarian and Quixote translator James H. Montgomery.⁶⁶ According to Montgomery and other scholars, such as Dr. Anthony lo Ré, emeritus professor of Spanish at Chapel Hill⁶⁷, the translation’s style and tone drastically change from Chapters One through Forty and then from Chapters Forty-One through Seventy-Four. Montgomery’s efforts to track differences came after his discussions with Dr. lo Ré through correspondence. Montgomery’s search yielded significant results. Varying degrees in grammatical construction and the use of syntax between those two sections became immediately apparent. Montgomery compiled a list of the incidence

⁶¹ See (de Cervantes 1970, p. 17).

⁶² Aside from the fact that no translation should employ free adaptation when moving between languages, as stated in the term itself, it then becomes an adaptation, not a translation.

⁶³ The point being that most English translators of *Don Quixote* do not have much transparency in their methodology, their editorial choices, and their choices of which texts to consult.

⁶⁴ See (de Cervantes 1970, p. 3).

⁶⁵ This argument is often made by scholars or those in the translation field. The idea is that a level of creativity should be employed by the translator to make the translation work. It is problematic to assume from the project’s origin that the work needs to be “fixed” or altered to make it work. These stylistic, linguistic, and contextual changes are often thought of as necessary by translators. In fact, a number of scholars and translators at recent academic conferences have used the example of “translating” a novel to the big screen. Certain elements are said not to work when changing mediums, but that is where their argument falls flat. When moving between mediums, it is no longer an act of translation, but rather adaptation. The 1931 film adaptation of *Frankenstein* with Boris Karloff is no more a translation of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* than is Kenneth Branagh’s film of *Hamlet* a translation of Shakespeare’s play. If any kinds of changes are made that were not in the original source, it is no longer a translation, but rather an adaptation.

⁶⁶ James H. Montgomery and Hackett Publishing Company published his translation of *Don Quixote* in 2009.

⁶⁷ See (Montgomery 2006, p. 212).

of vocabulary words, grammatical forms of words, and syntax to establish with proof what had long been intuitively apparent to anyone who simply read both translated parts of the novel—that is, that Shelton’s participation in the translation ended after Chapter Forty of the Second Part. In this example, Shelton, as the translator, is not being transparent about his work or about whom, in fact, should be credited alongside him. This attempt to receive full credit for a collaborative translation is not the only example in the history of translations of *Don Quixote*. Peter Anthony Motteux was an English author, playwright, and translator whose translation of the novel came in 1700. His four-part translation of the novel is often strictly credited to him without the acknowledgement to the many who helped him with “his” translation.⁶⁸ This is common knowledge amongst Cervantistas, but has now been forgotten by others. One only has to look at the title page of his translation, where it clearly states that it was “[t]ranslated from the Original by several hands.”⁶⁹ Translator Samuel Putnam, when discussing the translations of Shelton and Motteux in his introduction to his 1949 translation, states that “Shelton at least does not undertake to improve or expand upon the original or to turn those two superb creations, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, into a pair of English clowns in the manner of Motteux.”⁷⁰ Unlike Motteux, though Shelton rushes his translation forward into publication, he retains some remnants of what the original was like in Spanish. Quite a few translators, however, through their editorial and translation practices, are significantly less concerned with accuracy than even Shelton proved to be, with some changing the novel’s tone to a more somber register, while others give it a more comedic tenor—rarely is the two-part novel given the proper balance of both. In such hands, translation is no longer a matter of a rushed or even botched job, but something more akin to appropriation, re-writing, and even theft.

7. The Theft and Re-Appropriation of *Don Quixote*: The Phillips Translation

The worst transgressor of any of the translators of *Don Quixote* has to be John Phillips, nephew of the English poet John Milton. A “hasty hack writer”,⁷¹ he was known to have translated many works from French, including his 1687 edition of *Don Quixote*. His translation of Cervantes is not based on an authorized Spanish edition, or even on a bootleg copy like the one used by Shelton, but rather on the 1677 French translation by Filleau de Saint-Martin.⁷² Thus, Phillip’s work is a translation of another translation, an abomination twice removed from the original novel. Phillips deliberately alters the whole frame of the work starting in the first few lines:

In some part of Mancha, of which the Name is at present slipt out of my Memory, not many years ago, there liv’d a certain Country Squire, of the Race of King Arthur’s Tilters, that formerly wander’d from Town to Town, Cas’d up in Rusty old Iron, with Lance in Rest, and a Knight-Templers Target, bestriding forlorn *Pegasus*, as Lean as a *Dover* Soft-Horse, and a confounded Founder’d Jade to boot.⁷³

⁶⁸ See (de Cervantes 2000).

⁶⁹ See (de Cervantes 1795, p. xii).

⁷⁰ See (de Cervantes 1795, p. xii).

⁷¹ Milton biographer Willam Riley Parker dismisses Edward Phillips as “a hasty hack writer” who made a practice of literary opportunism (Parker 1996). It is Phillips that most scholars identify as the source for the odd—even incredible—story of Milton supposedly teaching his daughters to pronounce languages they could not actually understand, in order that they might “read” to him in those languages after he had gone blind. According to Phillips, Milton’s daughters Mary and Deborah were:

condemn’d to the performance of reading, and exactly pronouncing of all the languages of whatever book he should at one time or another think fit to persue; viz. The Hebrew (and I think the Syriac), the Greek, the Latin, the Italian, Spanish and French. All which sorts of books to be confined to read, without understanding one word, must needs be a trial of patience, almost beyond endurance: yet it was endured by both for a long time. (Darbishire 1932, p. 77)

⁷² The first French translation in 1614 by King Louis XIII translator, Cesar Oudin.

⁷³ See (de Cervantes 1687, p. 3).

Like many translators, seeing an opportunity to “improve” the text, he imposes his vision onto the text. Instead of creating a faithful representation that would serve as a window into Spanish culture and language, Phillips widens the divide by removing any Spanish context, and imposes his vision onto the text by setting it in England, because in his view, what the novel needed was to be Anglicized. Having had the opportunity to read this passage to a variety of academic audiences, while emphasizing how translations can divide groups of people through misrepresentation and mishandling of texts, I have found that listeners are moved to laughter at how ridiculous the Phillips translation sounds having been changed so drastically. Some scholars have questioned the validity of this example by stating that this translation is an anomaly that has been ultimately forgotten and discredited, but my response has always been to ask: What of the readers who encountered *Don Quixote* for the first (and perhaps only) time through this piece of hack work? What if this translation had not been forgotten and discredited, but had become an example for others to follow? Given the lack of precise translation practices in the early 16th and 17th centuries, a translation such as that by Phillips should be looked at as both an extreme example of what has happened and a very realistic example of what *can* happen to a text. The idea of making something or someone more English or more American (a practice followed even now by translators of foreign-language texts in this country)⁷⁴ should remind us of the erasure of context that was happening in this 17th-century translation. It is for these reasons that a translation like this is crucial to examine as an example of what not to do.

8. The Grossman Methodology: An Example of the Rise of “Good Enough”

Most of the translators of *Don Quixote*, perhaps without always realizing it, have been guilty of adhering to the doctrine of the untranslatability of world literature. They fall in line with the theories of Emily Apter and Walter Benjamin. However, a bit like unhappy families in Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, they are each guilty of betraying the text in their own way: whether it suffers from free translation like Shelton’s, is completely robbed of its Spanish roots and voice like Phillips’, or is just mishandled by others. The issues with modern translations are two-fold: First, the translator does not believe in translatability (meaning *accuracy* and *fidelity* in translation) and does not do the work necessary in putting together a faithful translation, and secondly, the publishing houses, particularly the big-name publishers, are often unwilling to invest the time and effort necessary in putting together a faithful translation. Big publishing houses like Penguin Classics and HarperCollins operate with the expectancy that they will generate large profits through sales. In an economy marked by the rise of ebooks and readers searching for the easiest and quickest method for reading, the investment in producing a translation or book needs to be profitable. With that, translators that are established and well known are often asked to translate these works, particularly when the works are as important as *Don Quixote*. While John Rutherford was tasked with the Penguin Classics translation, Edith Grossman was hired by HarperCollins Publishers for their 2003 translation.

Edith Grossman is a distinguished prize-winning translator of primarily Latin American literature. It has been stated by Garcia Márquez that he prefers to read the translations of his novels by Grossman and Gregory Rabassa to his own originals.⁷⁵ If that is the author’s preference, then that is fine, but it alters the fact that, in the case of *Don Quixote*, the novel is being adapted rather than translated.⁷⁶ Grossman’s 2003 translation is one of the most widely available translations, and has received critical

⁷⁴ Charles Patterson, in his translation, *Cervantes’s Eight Interludes* (of which there were more than eight), changes references to a German musician to Michael Jackson for an American audience.

⁷⁵ See (Rabassa 2005, Back cover).

⁷⁶ Neil Gaiman has also gone on record stating that the primary focus of any “translation” of his work should be to capture the spirit rather than the literal. Again, that is the author’s choice, but it presents the work differently because an accurate translation it is not. The problem is that these authors can decide what they value most about their work when moving them between languages, but by not having the author available to state such things, the code of ethics would be critical with works by Shakespeare, Milton, Cervantes, Tolstoy, etc. Even the works of Gaiman and Garcia Marquez should have their own translations that fit this code of ethics.

acclaim for its simple language that allows readers to read the novel with ease. Her edition trumps the Penguin Classics translation by Rutherford in bookstores, usually with multiple copies and even a Deluxe Edition that simply has a new cover.

Any translation will have its losses when moving between languages, but the role of the translator is to minimize those losses. At times, we lose cadence, rhythm, and tone. It would be unrealistic for anyone to expect any translator to effectively translate such sentences as: “La razón de la sinrazón que a mi razón me quejo de la vuestra fermosura . . . Los altos cielos que de vuestra divinidad divinamente con las estrellas os fortifican y os hacen merecedora del merecimiento que merece la vuestra grandeza.”⁷⁷ There is a certain cadence that is required for a perfect translation. Grossman renders the passage this way: “The reason for the unreason to which my reason turns so weakens my reason that with reason I complain of thy beauty . . . the heavens on high divinely heighten thy divinity with the stars and make thee deserving of the deserts why greatness deserves.”⁷⁸ While this sounds “close enough” to the original Spanish, it will never capture the tongue-twisting nature of the Spanish. It could be said that Grossman misses the mark with her rendition. It is not that it is inadequate in some way, because it still conveys what the Spanish was aiming for. The much older and ever-popular translation by John Ormsby⁷⁹ captures the rhythm slightly more accurately than Grossman does: “The reason of the unreason with which my reason is afflicted so weakens my reason that with reason I murmur at your beauty . . . the high heavens that your divinity divinely fortify you with the stars, render you deserving of the desert your greatness deserves.”⁸⁰ The goal should be to get as close to the original words and then make the necessary stylistic changes so the passage flows and the imagery comes across. Grossman herself acknowledges the important role translation plays in the ability to relate to other cultures because it “represents [a] concrete literary presence with the crucial capacity to ease and make more meaningful our relationships to those with whom we may not have had a connection before.”⁸¹ In practice, she does the opposite by using the older of two editions of a Spanish text by editor Martin de Riquer, the newer of which Grossman ignores not purely for editorial reasons, but “for reasons both critical and sentimental.”⁸² She used the older and inferior copy because it was convenient to her, because it was the version that she was most familiar with and one she used in college, akin to a college professor who teaches the same textbook that she used in college. She admits in her Translator’s Note to using this edition by Riquer because it is based on the first printing of the book (with all of its historic slips and errors) and has useful notes that include discussions of problematic words and phrases based on Riquer’s comparisons of the earliest 17th-century translations into English, French, and Italian.⁸³

Whereas the first Riquer editions have around a thousand footnotes between the two volumes, Grossman’s edition only contains roughly five hundred—all shortened and most just transcribed from Riquer’s edition. And yet, given that she’s transcribing Riquer’s notes and translating with a modern Spanish dictionary next to her, she continues to assure the reader that she “felt an ongoing, unstoppable rush of exhilaration and terror, for perfectly predictable and transparent reasons, at undertaking so huge and so important a project.”⁸⁴

Where some modern translators like Tom Lathrop or James H. Montgomery write extensively about their editorial choices when constructing their translations and which editions they consulted,

⁷⁷ See (de Cervantes 2016a, p. 29).

⁷⁸ See (de Cervantes 2005, p. 20).

⁷⁹ His 1885 translation, while free and easily accessible on the internet, has had a lasting popularity amongst translations of *Don Quixote*. While his language might seem a bit “antiquated”, Ormsby captures the tones and characters of the Cervantes original. For the 400th Anniversary Edition, Restless Classics, a subdivision of Restless Books, chose Ormsby for their anniversary edition.

⁸⁰ See (de Cervantes 2013, p. 26).

⁸¹ See (Grossman 2010, p. 11).

⁸² See (Grossman 2010, pp. 66–67).

⁸³ See (de Cervantes 2005, xviii).

⁸⁴ See (de Cervantes 2005, xviii).

Grossman chooses not to be transparent, and instead spends her Translator's Note defensively describing how strenuous the task of translating is. As she states in one of her lectures, her primary task was "not to become involved in academic disputation or to take sides in any scholarly polemic but to create a translation that could be read with pleasure by as many people as possible."⁸⁵ Instead of pursuing accuracy, she says in the Translator's Note that her primary obligation is to recreate the experience an original language reader might have with the book.⁸⁶ This is, in its way, an admirable goal, but it confuses the roles of adapter and translator: While an adaptor might well try to recreate the experience, the primary duty of a translator is to transmit the text as accurately as possible. As a translator, if you do what you want with the text and focus on just the reader's experience (an experience you are imagining and projecting from your own), you are working more on an adaptation than an actual translation. As I stated earlier, Grossman's edition is the most readily available and has received much critical acclaim, but that acclaim was achieved to the detriment of the primary text. In her Translator's Note to *Don Quixote*, she ends with the all-too-telling admission not only of her priorities, but those of her publisher:

I began the work in February 2001 and completed it two years later, but it is important for you to know that 'final' versions are determined more by a publisher's due date than by any sense on my part that the work is actually finished. Even so, I hope you find it deeply amusing and deeply compelling. If not, you can be certain the fault is mine.⁸⁷

Those words concluding her Translator's Note are critical in approaching her translation. Her translation is deeply amusing, deeply compelling, and very readable, but Grossman did not do the research that is needed in putting a translation together. This is partly due to her own less-than-ideal decisions about source texts, but it is also because the publishers had given her a very short two-year deadline to translate a thousand-page novel. By the end, we come full circle in the almost four-hundred years between Shelton's and Grossman's translations. Both rush their translations without doing the necessary work to preserve the voice and the words of Miguel de Cervantes, and neither really care by the end. They will both take the blame, but at the end of the day, it does not matter to them because they have somehow managed to produce (and be paid for) something that was "good enough," and that will always be enough for them.

Most translators of *Don Quixote* provide an inadequate translator's note (if they provide one at all). Grossman does so as well, but she has since given a series of lectures across multiple universities in which she details her process for translating poetry and her process for translating *Don Quixote*. While other translators hide their inadequacy and their mishandling of texts, Grossman puts it on full display for her audiences. What better way to remain invisible than to hide in plain sight? She has since gone even further by publishing a series of lectures ironically titled *Why Translation Matters*. In the prologue to her lecture series, Grossman invites the reader into the world of translation by explaining a process that she undoubtedly employed with Cervantes' thousand-page, two-part novel during those two years:

As a first step toward accomplishing so exemplary an end, translators need to develop a keen sense of style in both languages, honing and expanding our critical awareness of the emotional impact of words, the social aura that surrounds them, the setting and mood that informs them, the atmosphere they create. We struggle to sharpen and elaborate our

⁸⁵ See (Grossman 2010, p. 68).

⁸⁶ Interestingly enough, John Rutherford's Penguin edition of *Don Quixote* also has a translator's note, "Translating Don Quixote". He spends eight pages explaining the "impossible" task of translating instead of explaining more than just a couple of his editorial choices. This practice of explaining the idea of untranslatability is common amongst big-name translators. Near the end of his proving the impossibility of translations, Rutherford concludes that "the translation of *Don Quixote* does turn out to be logically impossible, after all." (de Cervantes 2003, p. xxxi).

⁸⁷ See (Grossman 2010, p. 69).

perception of the connotations and implications behind basic denotative meaning in a process not dissimilar to the efforts writers make to increase their familiarity with and competence in a given literary idiom.⁸⁸

With two years to complete a project of such magnitude, Grossman had no time to develop a “keen sense” of the style of the Spanish in Cervantes’ time. She argues that “[t]ranslation is crucial to our sense of ourselves as serious readers . . . we would find the absence of translations to read and study inconceivable.”⁸⁹ But her approach is reductive, and she admits as much during a Q&A for *Don Quixote*: In order for her to make it accessible to modern readers, she had to simplify the language, and that included looking for the modern equivalents of words. In adopting such a reductive approach, many modern translators fail to do the basic research necessary in their translations, nor do they adequately consult older texts in order to improve upon them and restore the work being translated to the context from which it was formed and in which it was written. Such translators have the opportunity to produce a translation that is equal to or surpasses those that they used when they first read these novels or studied them at university, but they refuse it. The necessary process and structural expectations are forgotten, or ignored, by both, and the opportunity to bring to the future something that exceeds the past is refused.

In her chapter, “Translating Cervantes,” Grossman explains that the occupation of translator is impossible at best and a betrayal at worst. By doing so, she attempts to draw sympathy from the reader in a way reminiscent of the rhetoric employed in Mark Polizzotti’s *Sympathy for the Traitor: A Translation Manifesto*.⁹⁰ He defines the purpose of his manifesto with two principles that will help the reader to think differently about translation:

Two guiding principles obtain throughout the discussion that follows. The first is that translators are creative artists in their own right, on a par, and in partnership, with the author being translated. The renowned Spanish translator Gregory Rabassa⁹¹ has posited that the translator is “the ideal writer because all he has to do is write; plot, theme, characters, and all the other essentials have already been provided, so he can just sit down and write his ass off”. While the position is by no means universally accepted, it provides a useful lens through which to gauge the importance, responsibilities, and limitations of translation. The second principle is that translation is a practice. For all the many fascinating theoretical approaches one can take to the subject, I believe that ultimately it’s the end result that counts, the fruit of an activity.⁹²

This is unconvincing, at best, and places only the thinnest of respectable-sounding veneers on top of the underlying reality of what these translators are attempting to do. By establishing a *mea culpa* of this kind, translators seem to think that they are excused for their malpractice.

Perhaps it is fruitless to look too closely into the practices of a wide range of specific translators and try to sort out between them where the problem inherent in so many translations of Cervantes’ novel might be located. Perhaps that problem is sitting—in plain sight—right in front of us. In the concluding pages of Grossman’s essay on translating Cervantes, she defines what she was intending

⁸⁸ See (Grossman 2010, p. 15).

⁸⁹ See (Grossman 2010, p. 19).

⁹⁰ This book is a manifesto that tried to explain what translation is and is not. It is an attempt to excuse the choices that translators have to make and the difficulty that accompanies said choices. Like the oft-quoted Walter Benjamin essay “The Task of the Translator”, it attempts to inoculate translators against the consequences of their choices.

⁹¹ One thing worth noting is that a lot of these translators who justify their mishandling of texts tend to align themselves with those who do the same and are equally as famous in the world of translation studies. Often, translators like Suzanne Jill-Levine, Gregory Rabassa, Edith Grossman, and Ilan Stavans will compliment each other’s work. Their arguments are all similar and all reference Borges, Pope’s Homer, and Benjamin when defending their work.

⁹² See (Polizzotti 2018, p. xiv).

her translation to be, making a fundamental distinction between commercial and academic translations while discussing her methodology:

I decided, too, that I was not creating a scholarly work or an academic book, and therefore I would not study and compare editions—no more than I would begin my work by checking on how other translators had done theirs. And yet, despite my lack of academic intention, pretension, and purpose, for the first time in my translating career I chose to use footnotes . . . There was no reason I could think of for an intelligent modern reader to be put off by difficulties in the text that were not intended by the author.⁹³

Perhaps in this very statement we can see the underlying cause of the manifold problems in translation. In a similar vein, Gregory Rabassa, when reflecting on his translation of Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, admits: "I haven't looked at other versions of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to see how my peers in other languages have done in this respect . . . it is inevitable that the translation from stately Spanish should sing in quite a different way."⁹⁴ Translations from one language into another will always "sing" in a different way. The intention is never to figuratively trace over the original into a target language, because that would never work. Languages have too many differences, nuances, and subtleties for that to be possible.

But in the final analysis, the argument must be had for defining what a translation actually is and what its best intentions must be. Much of the evidence from the translators themselves suggests that they insert too much of their own "creativity" into the act of translation, impose too much of themselves on the author, and pay too much regard to their own contexts and motives and too little regard to those of the author.

9. Epilogue

While in discussion with Diana de Armas Wilson, scholar and critic Ilan Stavans raises the comparison of translation and the restoration of old historic buildings from all of the dirt and debris that has accumulated over the centuries. He writes that "[c]leaning a building is a cosmetic undertaking. It doesn't undermine the original architecture; it simply makes visible the invisible in its surface."⁹⁵ He clarifies that translation is not exactly the same; it is not a cosmetic undertaking, but rather an "actualizing." This is in reference to Spanish editions of *Don Quixote* that have taken on the undertaking of exposing the work to younger audiences who often cannot and will not put in the effort of reading literary works that are difficult to read. These "modernized" editions often make the text easy to read, much like the *No Fear Shakespeare* series that SparkNotes publishes. In this case, and in the case of Grossman's translation of *Don Quixote*, the idea that the old language needs to be scrubbed off to reveal the work for it to be appreciated is troublesome, to say the least. To call these editions translations and market them as such is not only irresponsible, but also dangerous. They are adaptations—often reductive exercises in dumbing down what was once a great work. They strip the work of what it is, and present it as a banal product of an age afflicted with rampant attention-deficit disorder.

While it is inevitable that there will be more translations of *Don Quixote*, we must ask more of translators and publishing houses. If their aim is to make a commercial text, then their edition should be referred to as such—an adaptation and not a translation. The translator is then responsible for being as transparent as possible about what went into their editions: What source texts were consulted, which other editions they compared, what translation methods they used, and what types of choices they made. The attitude that is evident in all too many translators must change. Translation *is* a creative act, but it is only creative in its way of attempting to produce a translation that remains as close to the

⁹³ See (Grossman 2010, p. 63).

⁹⁴ See (Rabassa 2005, p. 98).

⁹⁵ (Stavans and de Armas Wilson 2016, pp. 1–10).

source as possible. Being a writer who translates equips you with the tools necessary to choose your words wisely in your translation, but does not give you the right to rewrite the text. With translation theory and translation practices as they are now, the only Quixotic endeavor would come in the form of acquiring any sense of transparency and some code of ethics. For without them, what chance can we, the reader or the scholar, have but to trust the translations available to us?

We must treat these windows into other cultures as the treasures that they are by adopting a translator's ethos that will allow us to see the full vision, or as close to that as is humanly possible, that the author intended. The days of following Walter Benjamin, Emily Apter, or the good-enough translation must end, and that is essential for the future of translations to prosper. Works of world literature, such as *Don Quixote*, must be treated with the same care and attention given to any country's historical landmarks, because that is, in fact, what they are. They are remnants of a specific author, place, culture, and time. Works like those of Shakespeare, Milton, Chaucer, and Cervantes deserve to be more than mere references, like the countless novels that are referenced in *Don Quixote* but have inevitably been lost. They must be preserved if we want to continue learning about life, about others, and about ourselves from the arts.

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