



“Bendito sea Alá”: A New Edition of *Belianís de Grecia*

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“¡Bendito sea el poderoso Alá!” “¡Bendito sea Alá!” says Cide Hamete Benengeli, repeating the phrase three times, on the occasion of Don Quijote’s third sally in chapter 8 of Part II. I cannot but repeat the illustrious historian’s words on the occasion of the new sally of the valorous and invincible knight-errant Belianís de Grecia.¹ This new edition of the chronicle of his chivalric deeds marks the book’s return to print for the first time since the sixteenth century, which makes it the most significant edition to appear since the first edition in 1547 (the same year in which Cervantes was born). And may praise go to Lilia E. F. de Orduna, whose career-long project, which began with her doctoral dissertation, of preparing a modern edition *Belianís* has finally been realized. For years (at least since 1973) Orduna kept announcing her forthcoming edition of this romance of chivalry, as she published a series of some twenty essays on the subject (see her edition, II, 516–18), and worked to complete the annotated text. The difficult political context of Argentina in the last quarter of the twentieth century, together with other circumstances, delayed completion of the

¹ Jerónimo Fernández, *Hystoria del magnánimo, valiente e inuencible cauallero don Belianís de Grecia*. 2 vols. Introducción, texto crítico y notas de Lilia E. F. de Orduna. Kassel: Reichenberger, 1997. lxxx + 431, 531 pp.

project years beyond what one would normally expect. But the important thing is that *Don Belianís* is once more available for Hispanists in general and *cervantistas* in particular.

Orduna's edition is text-oriented. Her 80-page introduction consists primarily of: 1) a detailed description of the four sixteenth-century printings of the work: Burgos, 1547; Estella, 1564; Zaragoza, 1580; and Burgos, 1587; 2) bibliographical information on the sequel, consisting of parts III and IV (Burgos, 1579), and the Italian (1586), English (1589), and French (1625) translations; 3) information on the press in Burgos where the work was first printed, 4) what little is known of the author's life; 5) a justification for this edition; 6) interesting observations on the language and style of *Belianís*; and 7) the criteria for this edition. Following the end of the text of Part II, there are valuable indexes of: 1) proper names, 2) places, and 3) words annotated in the text. Finally there is a 28-page detailed bibliography, dominated by Orduna's own exhaustive and valuable work for over a quarter of a century. Overall, this is a meticulous scholarly work worthy of admiration and unstinting praise.

Belianís is the oldest son of the Emperor Beliano of Greece and the *infanta* Clarinda, daughter of the King of Spain; his brothers are Don Clarineo de España and Lucidaner de Tesalia. While out on a hunt with his parents, and only fourteen years of age, Belianís battles a frightful lion and a bear, and pursues the latter into a cave that turns out to be enchanted and where the young prince launches his chivalric career. Even in his teenage years, when the events recorded here take place, Belianís is the tallest, strongest, handsomest, and bravest man in the world. His beloved lady is the most beautiful woman in the world, the peerless Florisbella, daughter of the Sultan of Babylon. His arch-rival (both politically and for the hand of Florisbella) is the valorous and noble Prince Perianeó, son of the Grand Caliph of Persia. Throughout his adventures, Belianís is supported and assisted by the *sabia* Belonia, who frequently appears (in various shapes and guises) at strategic moments with a prophecy, a *doncella* to lead the way to a new adventure, a magic healing balm, or a ride in an enchanted *carro*. Meanwhile, the interests of Perianeó in particular and the Persians in general are forwarded by the enchanter Fristón. Much of the

action in the book revolves around an epic struggle between Christians and infidels and against the implicit comparison between the grandeur of the ancient world and excellence of modern times. In the culminating scene, the Emperor Beliano, his three sons, and the disenchanting figure of the Greek hero Achilles, representing Christianity, defeat five disenchanting Trojan heroes led by Hector, representing the pagan forces. The four modern Christians survive, while all the ancient heroes die in combat; Christians defeat pagans and moderns defeat ancients at the same time.

Belianís has a greater scope of vision and a relatively more coherent action than do most Spanish romances of chivalry. While the cast of characters is large and varied, with the usual lot of *gigantes* and *jayanes*, evil and treacherous knights and monarchs, beautiful maidens and crafty *dueñas*, a wide variety of fearsome beasts, and enormous armies of knights and soldiers. Continuity and focus are provided by the political and military interests of the royal house of Greece and the protagonist's undying love for Florisbella.

One thing that should be of particular interest to readers of Cervantes is the overwhelming importance of enchantment throughout the story. Unlike what we find in *Ama dís* and most other romances of chivalry, where supernatural intervention is occasional and usually benign, the world of *Belianís* is one dominated by deceit and enchantment. Knights and ladies are sometimes moved about like pawns in a chess game, as magicians (some dating back to the days of the Trojan War) jockey behind the scenes for numerical advantage in a battle, possession of an enchanted sword or ring, to trick and mislead their rivals, or to seek revenge for an old grievance. *Belianís* is often fooled by appearances manipulated by Frestón and winds up chasing after a vision of Florisbella in distress, fighting with his own father, or being lured into a trap. It is no wonder that Don Quijote's evil rival is named Frestón (see below) in recognition of this figure's importance in *Belianís*.

Although Orduna does not make the case in any detail in her introduction, I would like to propose that among Spanish romances of chivalry *Belianís de Grecia* may rank second only to *Ama dís de Gaula* in interest to Cervantes scholars. *Ama dís* was clear-

ly the most original and influential romance of chivalry in Renaissance Spain, of supreme importance both for Cervantes and Don Quijote. But *Belianís* is, I suggest, a clear second for both, and therefore of particular importance for readers of Cervantes' novel. Here, in brief outline form, are the reasons for my assertion:

- Belianís and *Belianís* are mentioned more frequently in the text of *Don Quijote* are any other chivalric hero or work except Amadís and *Amadís*;
- the same is true—*Amadís* first, *Belianís* second—of the frequency with which Clemencín cites or refers to *libros de caballerías* in his exhaustive notes to *Don Quijote*;
- the first two sonnets in the burlesque prefatory verses to Part I of *Don Quijote* are from Amadís and Belianís;
- the romance to which Alonso Quijano considered writing a sequel in I, 1—and which Daniel Eisenberg speculates may reflect Cervantes' own intention²—is *Belianís*;
- in the scrutiny of books in I, 6, the only two Castilian romances of chivalry not burned are *Amadís* and *Belianís*—along with the Portuguese *Palmerín de Inglaterra*, the Catalan *Tirante el Blanco*, and the Italian *Espejo de caballerías*;
- Don Quijote's nemesis, Frestón, who first appears in I, 7, is none other than the evil enchanter Fristón, bitter enemy of Belianís but yet chronicler of his adventures;
- in a particularly significant statement, Don Quijote, in his commentary on imitation in I, 25, suggests that *Belianís* is specifically the major rival to *Amadís*;
- Belianís and Amadís are the only heroes of chivalric romances mentioned in the poems that dose I, 52;
- Belianís is again mentioned as the primary rival to Amadís as the only two knights from the romances of chivalry mentioned in II, 1; and
- the same is the case when the Condesa Trifaldi cites ro-

² Daniel Eisenberg, *La interpretación cervantina del Quijote* (Madrid: Compañía Literaria, 1995), pp. 39–69. The suggestion is repeated in Eisenberg and Maricarmen Marín Pina, *Bibliografía de los libros de caballerías castellanos* (Zaragoza: Prensa Universitaria de Zaragoza, 2000), p. 279.

mances of chivalry in II, 38.

Similarly, *Belianís* plays a major role in Avellaneda's *Quijote*. In this sequel, *Ama dís* is relatively unimportant, while the previously mentioned Italian *Espejo de caballerías*, *Belianís*, and the *Espejo de príncipes y caballeros* (*El Caballero del Febo*) by Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra (published in 1555) are the works most frequently mentioned and which provide names for characters and inspiration for various adventures. In the final chapters, especially, references to and characters from *Belianís* are central to the plot.

In sum, congratulations and great thanks to Lilia Orduna for her labor of love in making *Belianís* available again. It is a wonderful book, worthy of close attention by all Cervantes scholars and other readers of *Don Quijote*.

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