

Lost in the Details: Translating Master Peter's Puppet Show

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TRANSLATION IS A SISYPHEAN task, one that promises frustration and despair for the translator and dissatisfaction, at best, for the reader of the translation. The great Spanish critic Ortega y Gasset says, "the idea that there are philosophers and, more generally speaking writers who can, in fact, be translated is an illusion" (93). After examining the enormity of the translator's task and exploring how translation theory has framed the perspectives of three translators of *Don Quixote*—John Ormsby, Burton Raffel, and Edith Grossman—this essay will examine how those positions affect their respective translations of Maese Pedro's puppet show (II, 26).

In his essay, "No Two Snowflakes are Alike: Translation as Metaphor," Rabassa cites sound, curses, and articles as problems in literary translation, but then focuses on three larger issues that make translation a quixotic enterprise. "The author who knows his language inside out" (8) is the first. Rabassa uses a line from the Brazilian writer João Guimarães Rosa's novel, *Grande sertão: Veredas*: "O diabo na rua no meio do redemoinho," which translates literally as "The devil in the street in the middle of the whirlwind." In the Portuguese, the devil is not only in the whirlwind but literally in the word for whirlwind: "redemoinho." The translator of this difficult text has to deal with how to accomplish a similar feat in English. Second, Rabassa cites the author who has a strong knowledge of local idiom as yet another problem that makes a text untranslatable. Juan Rulfo provides the perfect example here with the title of his short story,

“Es que somos muy pobres.” The title literally says, “It’s just that we’re very poor.” The “Es que,” when translated, sounds strange to the English speaker, giving it affectation; yet in Spanish it not only sounds natural, but also lends humility. Finally, Rabassa talks of those works steeped in their cultural milieu. The example he gives is Luis Rafael Sánchez’ *La guaracha del Macho Camacho*, but *Don Quijote* could be substituted just as easily.

Don Quijote is the quintessentially impossible task for the translator because it combines all of Rabassa’s problems and adds yet another: the cultural milieu that *Don Quijote* is steeped in lies across a temporal gulf of four hundred years. Ormsby, Raffel, and Grossman tackle the problem of *Don Quijote*’s essential untranslatability in different ways. Ormsby relies on a strict fidelity to the letter of the text while Raffel frequently dismantles the literal level in pursuit of higher “sense,” or authorial intent. Interestingly, Grossman falls somewhere in between these two, concerned with modernizing her text for the contemporary audience, yet unable to bring herself to break down the original text in order to reconstruct a new one, as Raffel so often does. Here, once again, Rabassa proves a useful guide: “a translation can never equal the original; it can approach it, and its quality can only be judged as to accuracy by how close it gets” (1). There is no “right” way to translate; there are as many methods and theories as there are translators. However, if the translator is to have any hope of approaching the original, and the reader is to have any criteria by which to judge the translation, then it is critical to explore how a translator “best” makes his or her approach.

Walter Benjamin states: “The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original” (77). The question is how to find that intended effect. “The person who desires to turn a literary masterpiece into another language has only one duty to perform, and this is to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text. The term “literal translation” is tautological since anything but that is not truly a translation but an imitation, an adaptation or a parody” (Nabokov 134). Nabokov’s insistence on a “literal translation” places him on one end of the spectrum. For Nabokov, the higher “sense”

of the text is at the denotative level. He is a formalist in the strictest sense of the word. When translating, we cannot or should not consider culture or anything outside the text. Nabokov goes on to say: "If such accuracy sometimes results in the strange allegoric scene suggested by the phrase 'the letter has killed the spirit,' only one reason can be imagined: there must have been something wrong either with the original letter or with the original spirit, and this is not really a translator's concern" (141). Faithfulness to the word seems to have led Nabokov astray, as he is not concerned with whether or not the reader can make any sense of what has been written. Communication of ideas is secondary to a faithful rendering of the letter.

If communication is not central to the translator's task, one might ask what is the point of Nabokov's fidelity. For whom are his ideal translations written? His theory of translation calls into question what is more important when we read a literary work: the denotative or connotative level, the literal or the metaphoric. After Don Quijote destroys the puppet show, cutting off the nose of Melisendra or her servant girl (Maese Pedro and Don Quijote disagree on who she was), Maese Pedro complains, "Y estas reliquias que están por este duro y estéril suelo, ¿quién las esparció y aniquiló sino la fuerza invencible dese poderoso brazo?" (II, 26; 761).¹ On the basis of Nabokov's theory, a translator would render "reliquias" as "relics" or, at best, "remains" or "vestiges," focusing on the literal sense of the word, but denying the larger, metaphorical meaning of the scene. As Cervantes does so often in the text, he has once again reversed traditional roles. Historically, it was the Moors who mutilated prisoners, for instance the Muslim corsair Arnaut Mami, who was famous for cutting off the noses of Christian galley slaves (Garcés 155), and, here, it is Quijote himself who de-noses the "Christian" puppet. Interestingly, both Ormsby and Grossman translate "reliquias" as "relics," staying literal, but adding an unfortunate religious connotation. It is only Raffel who seems to understand the scene, translating the word as "corpses." Raffel's translation emphasizes the fact that these puppets were representations of human beings. Don Quijote's mistake, in this case, is in seeing them as

1 Quotes from the Spanish text are taken from the Planeta edition of Martín de Riquer.

real people. Raffel's translation allows the reader to take into account Cervantes' reversal motif and make the connection between the treatment of these puppets and the treatment of the Christians.

It is, of course, the paradox of the translator that in order to stay faithful to the original, he or she must often destroy it, then rebuild it in the terms of his own culture, creating a new metaphor. As Schopenhauer states, "The idea has to be dissolved into its most basic components and then reconstituted in the new language" (33). Nabokov, perhaps from his own love of language, refuses to dismantle the words and thus becomes stuck, unable to enter either the spirit of the original language or the language he is translating into. And, it is the "spirit" of the language that is most important in literary translation, for it is there that metaphor resides: "If one has properly grasped the spirit of a foreign language, one has also taken a large step toward understanding the nation that speaks that language for, as the style is related to the mind of the individual, so is the language to the mind of the nation" (Schopenhauer 33–34). "Language and culture are inextricably linked. We cannot translate without an understanding, not only of the cultural references points, but also of the rhythm and style of the culture embedded in that language: "What is most difficult to translate from one language into another is the tempo of its style: that which is grounded in the character of the race or, so to speak in a physiological manner, in the average tempo of its 'metabolism'" (Nietzsche 69). As Rabassa showed us, great writers are difficult to translate because they are so adept at incorporating the history, the rhythms, and beliefs of their own culture into their very language. The "devil in the whirlwind" is a perfect example of a Brazilian culture in which the devil is a much more physical presence than in our own. Once again, we are left with the question of how to translate Schopenhauer's "spirit" and Nietzsche's "tempo" of a culture.

If we accept Saussure's claim that words are signifiers pointing at objects, or the signified, then words become metaphors for objects—or, in the case of translations, for other words. Translation, then, is something altogether different, something akin to what Schopenhauer was getting at when he said that an idea had to be "dissolved into its most basic components and then reconstituted in the new language." A strict word-for-

word translation is impossible without losing the "sense" of the text. In order for a translation to approach the original more closely, it must see the original as the starting point or origin for a pathway that can often lead far from its source. "Translation is really what we might call transformation.... It is a form of adaptation, making the new metaphor fit the original metaphor" (Rabassa 2). Without this "transformation," there can be no translation.

Perhaps the idea can best be expressed in Borges' famed instructions to his translators: "not to write what he said but what he wanted to say" (Rabassa 2). It is the translator's dilemma that he or she must interpret not only the cultural milieu which forged the work, but the authorial intent, even when that intent was not conscious. To do so, the translator must be willing to destroy meaning at the denotative level in order to create meaning at the connotative or metaphoric level. Before moving on to an examination of the various translations of Maese Pedro's puppet show, I would like to take a closer look at how translation theory has framed the perspectives of Ormsby, Raffel, and Grossman.

Joseph R. Jones, the editor of the Norton edition of the Ormsby translation, speaks of Ormsby's work in his preface: "he is so careful to copy the language of the original that where possible he follows the actual word order, translates very obscure words into their Elizabethan equivalents, carefully distinguishes among the forms of address (though the distinctions were lost on the readers of 1885, I suspect), and generally chooses to 'sacrifice' clarity and ease for accuracy" (ix). In other words, according to Jones, Ormsby translated with a mentality not much different from Nabokov's. However, Ormsby's own understanding of his method is quite different, as he explains it in his translator's preface: "The method by which Cervantes won the ear of the Spanish people ought, *mutatis mutandis*, to be equally effective with the great majority of English readers. At any rate, even if there are readers to whom it is a matter of indifference, fidelity to the method is as much a part of the translator's duty as fidelity to the matter. If he can please all parties, so much the better; but his first duty is to those who look to him for as faithful a representation of his author as it is in his power to give them, faithful to the letter so

long as fidelity is practicable, faithful to the spirit so far as he can make it" (Ormsby 3–4).

It would seem that Ormsby is concerned with both the "letter" and the "spirit" of the work, though it is difficult to know what to make of his vague "faithful to the letter so long as fidelity is practicable, faithful to the spirit so far as he can make it." At the very least, he seems more aware of the problem than Jones gives him credit for. Ormsby ends his preface with a much clearer statement of the principle that guides his vision: "Except in the tales and Don Quixote's speeches, the translator who uses the simplest and plainest everyday language will almost always be the one who approaches the nearest to the original" (Ormsby 4). Good advice, particularly when one is translating *Don Quijote*, a work that relies so heavily on colloquialisms. However, Ormsby fails to take into account in any satisfactory way both the cultural milieu of *Don Quijote* and the need to recreate the work for his English audience. His attempt to use the "same method by which Cervantes won the ear of the Spanish people" falls woefully short in terms of a coherent strategy and understanding of the need to break down a text and create a new metaphor to carry the author's vision.

Burton Raffel's preface to the current Norton edition, which has replaced that of Ormsby/Jones/Douglas, shows that he views the translation of *Don Quijote* from an entirely different perspective: "Spanish is a very different language from English; Spanish culture and social organization are different; and in the almost four hundred years since Cervantes wrote, much has changed in all sorts of ways... Readers learned in the ways of early seventeenth-century Spain, will inevitably be pained by any loss whatever. I do not blame them. I ask them, however, to remember that straightforward lexical dislocations, though they may often seem deeply objectionable, are in truth a good deal less important than such larger matters as style, pacing, fidelity to authorial intent and the like" (xvii). Raffel acknowledges the cultural differences that must be dealt with as a translator; however, instead of maintaining the "method by which Cervantes won the ear of the Spanish people" as Ormsby did (essentially attempting a literal translation of culture), or of ignoring cultural differ-

ences as Edith Grossman seems to have done, Raffel embraces the spirit of the culture, then dissolves it in order to create original metaphors, ones that are in line with such "larger matters as style, pacing, fidelity to authorial intent and the like."

His methodology can, perhaps, best be illustrated in his essay "Translating Medieval European Poetry," in which he gives the reader a rare glimpse into how he "approaches" the "sense" of the text: "If then the lesson is that the translator must listen to his original, must sympathize with (and of course must also understand) what his original is trying to convey, it is equally important that the translation be a medium of literary transmission, not merely an empty echo trying to reproduce, more or less mechanically, the original's beat.... At the start of *Beowulf*, for example, we are told that the hero being described 'Oft sceathena threatum, / monegum maegthum medosetla ofteah...' literally: 'Often... he took away of their mead hall seats crowds of enemies, many tribes (people, nations)....'" (34).

Raffel goes on to mention William Alfred's well-known translation of the lines: "More than once, he pulled seats in the mead-hall out from beneath troops of his foes, tribe after tribe" (34). Raffel's point is that a literal translation results in turning Scyld into little more than a practical joker pulling chairs out from under people. Raffel's translation of the passage is the best example I know of the translator's task as immersion into the language and culture of the original only to dismantle it and recreate it in terms of a metaphor that communicates to the new audience: "He made slaves of soldiers from every Land, / crowds of captives he'd beaten / into terror" (34). Nothing of the original remains in Raffel's translation except the "sense" as it was intended for the Anglo-Saxon audience. Raffel doesn't simply copy the method employed by the anonymous poet; rather, he creates a new metaphor of Scyld as a man who could deprive a warrior of his rightful seat in the mead hall, thus depriving him of his freedom, if he so chose. Granted, some might argue that Raffel's translation strays too far from the Anglo-Saxon mead hall, but he strays only on the literal level. On the metaphoric he is spot on: "The literary translator is necessarily engaged with far more than words, far more than techniques, far more than stories or characters or scenes.

He is—and the literary translator of medieval works is even more deeply so—engaged with worldviews and with the passionately held inner convictions of men and women long dead and vanished from the earth” (Raffel 53).

I would argue that the translator of *Don Quijote* should be no less concerned with the “worldview” from which the book emerges, and of which it is constituted. Without those “passionately held inner convictions of men and women long dead,” any translation of the text is a mere echo.

Though Edith Grossman seems more concerned with “modernizing” the *Quijote* for her audience than Ormsby, she still fails to articulate in her preface the need for “transformation” that is essential to a good translation: “Shortly before I began work, while I was wrestling with the question of what kind of voice would be most appropriate for the translation of a book written some four hundred years ago, I mentioned my fears to Julián Ríos, the Spanish novelist. His reply was simple and profound and immensely liberating. He told me not to be afraid; Cervantes, he said was our most modern writer, and what I had to do was to translate him the way I translated everyone else—that is, the contemporary authors whose works I have brought over into English” (xix).

Grossman is essentially acknowledging that she ignored the cultural milieu from which *Don Quijote* had arisen. To say that you would translate Cervantes in the same manner that you would translate García Márquez is to erase all that is unique, not only about Spanish culture, but about sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish history as well. The test is how each translator deals with the proverbs, curses, and scatological humor that run through *Don Quijote*, all of which are unique aspects of Spanish culture, particularly as represented by Sancho Panza, the typical peasant or “cateto.”

I shall limit myself to one example before proceeding to the differences in the translations of Maese Pedro’s puppet show. In Chapter 17 of Part I, right after Sancho drinks Fierabras’ balm, the reader is treated to a healthy dose of Spanish humor:

—Si eso sabía vuestra merced—replicó Sancho, mal haya yo y toda mi parentela! ¿Para qué consintió que lo gustase?
 En esto hizo su operación el brebaje, y comenzó el pobre escudero a desaguarse por entrambas canales... (I, 17; 167)

Both Ormsby and Grossman translate Sancho's curse archaically, witness Ormsby's "Woe is me and all my kindred!" (114) and Grossman's "Curse me and all my kin!" (120). While they are both literally accurate, they fail to connect with the modern reader in the simple manner of Raffel's "damn me and all my ancestors!" (94). In addition, Grossman really misses the mark with her literal translation of Sancho's diarrhea: "At this point the concoction took effect, and the poor squire began to erupt from both channels" (120). The translation of "canales" as "channels" is accurate, but sounds too literary and fails to convey the lowbrow humor of the scene, a humor that is an essential part of Spanish culture, as does Raffel's "pour out liquid at both ends," and best of all, Ormsby's "discharge at both ends." A translator cannot afford to treat one text the same as the other, particularly not a text that comes from a different continent and is four hundred years older than the "contemporary authors" of which Grossman speaks.

Having established the framework of translation theory that surrounds our three versions of *Don Quijote* and each translator's position on the translation "spectrum," let us now look at Part Two, Chapter 26 of *Don Quijote*, in order to ground our theoretical comparison of the craft as it is laid out in practice. Chapter 25 of Part Two ends with "el trujamán comenzó a decir lo que oirá y verá el que le oyere o viere el capítulo siguiente" (II, 25; 753). The word "trujamán" is crucial here in that it literally means "interpreter." The puppet show of the next chapter is going to be "interpreted" for us. On a literal level, it was common practice to have someone narrate a play or puppet show, and, here, the distinction between "narrator" and "interpreter" is key. Therefore, it is important that all three of our translators maintain the meaning of "interpreter."

However, in the first line of Chapter 26 we note, "quiero decir, pendientes estaban todos los que el retablo miraban de la boca del declara-

dor de sus maravillas" (II, 26; 754). Cervantes uses the word "declarador" to describe the boy's duty. Raffle is the only one of the translators to continue with the concept of the boy as "interpreter" as opposed to Ormsby's uniquely male "the boy who was to explain," or Grossman's "narrator." What is the importance of Raffle's maintaining the sense of "interpreter," especially since Cervantes himself changes the word? To answer that question, we must understand the significance of the "Maese Pedro" chapter and how it differs from what has gone before.

Saussure talks of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign. A sign is a combination of form (the signifier) and meaning (the signified) and the relation between form and meaning is based on convention, not natural resemblance: i.e., what we call a "chair" could perfectly well have been called anything else, a "wobble" for example. Throughout the novel, Don Quijote has been misreading his world. He sees a castle for an inn and giants for windmills. Don Quijote uses the wrong signifier; he does not "read" in the conventional way. However, in the "Maese Pedro" chapter, Don Quijote doesn't necessarily misread the sign. Rather, he reads the sign too literally. The sign becomes the signified. In this way, Don Quijote's problem changes during the course of the puppet show from one of misreading to one of mistranslation—or translating literally.

Raffle's decision to emphasize twice the boy's role as "interpreter" impacts the way the reader "sees" the puppet show. The puppets become a representation of reality that needs to be "interpreted." The puppets function as a foreign language functions, that is, as a signifier twice removed: "perro" signifies "dog," which in turn points to the four-legged, furry creature. Octavio Paz says, "When we learn to speak, we are learning to translate; the child who asks his mother the meaning of a word is really asking her to translate the unfamiliar term into the simple word he already knows" (152). Therefore, the boy's "interpretation" can be seen as an act of translation from the unfamiliar world of the puppet show to the familiar, or from a "fictional" world to the real. Maese Pedro's puppet show encapsulates many of the major themes of the novel, such as the parody of the chivalric romance and the captive's tale genres, the treatment of Moors and Christians, role reversals, and finally the question of appearance versus reality. The translator's decisions early in the chapter

are crucial in establishing the puppet show as a simulacrum of the fictional reality of the novel.

The first sentence of the "Retablo" states: "Esta verdadera historia que aquí a vuestas mercedes se representa" (II, 26; 755). "Historia" can mean "story" (Ormsby), "tale" (Raffel), or "history" (Grossman); but while Grossman's may be accurate, in terms of our modern understanding of the word, it has the unfortunate effect of making the puppet show more real than it is, lending it the historical air of "truth," and thus undermining Don Quijote's mistake, his mistranslation. For if it is "real," then Don Quijote's attack on the puppet show is understandable.

The puppet show as a simulacrum or representation of the fictional "reality" of the novel is emphasized further with the remark that Don Gaiferos "está jugando a las tablas" (755). "Tablas" is an ancient game that resembled chess. The translator's job, here, is to find a word that conveys the literal meaning of the game while simultaneously echoing the theme of simulacra that is being established. Ormsby's choice not to translate the word at all is a legitimate one, in that it conveys the foreign flavor of the game. Unfortunately, his choice does little to advance the concept of the puppet show as representation on which Cervantes seems to be playing in this chapter. Grossman's decision to translate "tablas" as "backgammon" is once again technically accurate and, on the literal level, just as close as "chess"; however, for the modern audience, Raffel's translation of "tablas" as "chess" is the only one that maintains the idea of a simulacrum.

Our conception of the puppet show as a representation of reality is critical if we are to understand Don Quijote's attack on the puppets: "No consentiré yo que mis días y en mi presencia se la haga superchería a tan famoso caballero y a tan atrevido enamorado como don Gaiferos. Deteneos, mal nacida canalla; no le sigáis ni persigáis; si no, conmigo sois en la batalla!" (II, 26; 759). The various renderings of "superchería" inform the larger context of the chapter and the novel. "Superchería" literally means fraud, trick, or swindle. As such, the literal "tricking" of Don Gaiferos becomes a mirror for the trick played on that other "famoso caballero," Don Quijote—namely, tricking Quijote into believing that the puppet representation is reality. Clearly, it establishes a much different scenario than those in Quijote's previous mis-readings of the

world around him. Both Ormsby's "treachery" and Grossman's "offense" fail to capture the sense that there are two knights "tricked" here, though Ormsby's translation is at least more specific than Grossman's vague "offense." Raffel's simple translation of "tricks" does the job beautifully.

I have already mentioned Raffel's translation of "corpses" for the "reliquias" left after Don Quijote's attack on the puppets. But it is critical to mention it again, as by now the importance of Raffel's emphasis on the "reality" of the scene becomes clear. If we translate the word as "relics," as both Ormsby and Grossman do, then Don Quijote's attack is simply a misreading of the signifier, or mistaking an unconventional signifier for the conventional one, much as he did with the windmills or the inn. The Quijote of Part Two rarely misreads his world, or at least not nearly so much as in Part One. His problem in Part Two is that he reads the world too literally. When Sancho tells him that the peasant girls are really Dulcinea and her handmaidens, Don Quijote sees them not simply as peasants but as "three village girls on three donkeys" (II, 10; Raffel 409). His descriptions are no longer flowery but exact. "All he could see was an ordinary village girl, and not a very pretty one, with a pug face and a stubby nose" (II, 10; Raffel 410). The abstract descriptions of a Dulcinea whom he'd never seen are replaced by concrete, physical, and literal descriptions.

Don Quijote's disease of "literalness" continues into the Cave of Montesinos, where the peasant girls return asking him to lend Dulcinea "six dollars or however much your grace happens to have with you, against the security of this brand-new cotton petticoat" (II, 23; Raffel 485). Raffel's translation of "dollars" for "reales" is problematic; the modern coinage continually takes us out of Cervantes' fictional world, placing us in a modern America where, except for Kathy Acker, Don Quijote does not belong. That aside, however, the "six dollars" requested and the "four dollars" that Don Quijote has in his pocket are extraordinarily exact for a dream. In addition, we have stepped out of the abstract nature of the chivalric code that characterizes Quijote's fantasies of Dulcinea. She wants money and is offering her petticoat as collateral. The disease of "literality" grows worse as we move to the end of Part Two. Who would have thought that in Chapter 62 of Part Two Don Quijote would dis-

trust Don Antonio's description of the head that answers all questions put to it: "Don Quijote was astonished, hearing the head's powers and capabilities, though he was inclined not to believe Don Antonio" (II, 62: Raffen 689)? Clearly, this is a different Quijote, one who will eventually die from his "literality," his loss of imagination. The episode of Maese Pedro's puppet show is crucial in marking this change in our hero.

The beauty of the puppet show is that in addition to marking that change, it plays with so many of the ongoing themes in *Don Quijote*. Taken from the Spanish ballads, the puppet show is a combination of the chivalric romance and captive's tale genres. However, Melisendra's imprisonment and subsequent rescue appear as parody, mirroring the greater parody of the chivalric romances going on in the novel. Thus, when Don Quijote attacks the puppet show later in the chapter, he is literally attacking with his sword the same genre that Cervantes attacks in the greater context of the novel with his pen.

Don Gaiferos' comic rescue attempt emphasizes the parody in the scene, thus underlining the greater parody in the novel: "Mas, ¡ay sin ventura!, que se le ha asido una punta del faldellín de uno de los hierros del balcón, y está pendiente en el aire, sin poder llegar al suelo" (II, 26; 757). Ormsby's translation is missing the slapstick tone: "But ah, unhappy lady! The edge of the petticoat has caught on one of the bars of the balcony and she is left hanging in the air, unable to reach the ground" (572). "Ah" seems wrong to the modern ear, setting an archaic tone, and the lady is not "unhappy," she's "unlucky," so Ormsby simply misses the mark on that one. Ormsby's scene is too passive for comedy; the lady is simply "left hanging in the air."

Raffen's translation comes closest to capturing the tone: "But, oh, unlucky woman! The edge of her petticoat gets stuck on one of the balcony railings, so she's just hanging in the air, unable to reach the ground." Like Ormsby, Raffen translates "punta" as "edge," which sounds wrong to the ear, as petticoats don't have "edges"; they have hems. Still, Raffen's verb choice of "gets stuck," while not quite accurate, retains the comedy of the scene, particularly when coupled with "so she's just hanging in the air," which has a casual, conversational feel that contrasts hilariously with the

fast-paced action. Still, Raffel's "one of the balcony railings" is wordy and difficult to visualize. How many railings does a balcony have?

Grossman's translation seems the least successful in that it not only fails to capture the slapstick nature but also reads flat. "But oh! What misfortune! The lace of her skirt has caught on some of the wrought iron at the balcony, and she hangs in midair and cannot reach the ground" (631). The addition of finery like "lace" works against the lowbrow humor, and the phrase "some of the wrought iron" slows down the pace of this antic scene.

The next scene exemplifies the difficulty of verb choice for a translator trying to capture both the action and comedy while staying true to the text: "pues llega don Gaiferos, y sin mirar si se rasgará o no el rico faldellín, ase della, y mal su grado la hace bajar al suelo, y luego, de un brinco, la pone sobre las ancas de su caballo, a horcajadas como hombre" (II, 26; 757). Ormsby's "Don Gaiferos advances, and without minding whether the rich petticoat is torn or not, he seizes her and by force brings her to the ground..." (572) gives us the literal translation of "seizes" for "asir" and continues the strong image with "by force brings her to the ground." However, Ormsby's translation is wordy, and it shifts what should be a comic scene toward the violent.

While no one can accuse Raffel of concision in his translation, his choice of words does bring about the desired effect. "Don Gaiferos comes forward and, without worrying whether that rich petticoat gets ripped to shreds or not, he just grabs her and yanks, and like it or not, he brings her down to earth..." (500). His rendering of "asir" as "he just grabs her and yanks" has the necessary force while maintaining the comic element. Further, though his addition of "and like it or not" is a gamble, I believe it pays off. On one level it is colloquial, which, as we shall see in a moment, is important throughout any translation of *Don Quijote*. It also brings to mind the old Bogart and even John Wayne movies, where the hero tells the lady "You'll take it, and you'll like it." The old westerns or detective stories function for the modern reader as the chivalric romances like *Amadís* did for the Renaissance Spanish reader. Raffel's gamble is an example of creating a new metaphor that resonates with the modern audience in the same way that the old metaphor resonated for the

original audience: i.e., the puppet show plays with the genre of chivalric romances where the masculine ideal was a “rough and ready” hero who met the world head on, unlike the reluctant Don Gaiferos. In contrast, Grossman’s verbs are flat: “for here comes Don Gaiferos, and not worrying about tearing the rich skirt, he grasps her and simply pulls her down to the ground...” (631) Even the literal translation of “seizes” is stronger than Grossman’s choice of “grasps.” In addition, “simply pulls her down” for “hace bajar” is wordy and again weaker than the original. The character of the parody is lost as is the chance to create a new metaphor that will resonate with a modern audience.

Any translation of *Don Quijote* must keep in mind Maese Pedro’s advice to his interpreter: “Muchacho, no te metas en dibujos, sino haz lo que ese señor te manda, que será lo más acertado; sigue tu canto llano, y no te metas en contrapuntos, que se suelen quebrar de sotiles” (II, 26; 757). As Ormsby states, “Except in the tales and Don Quixote’s speeches, the translator who uses the simplest and plainest everyday language will almost always be the one who approaches nearest to the original” (3–4). Grossman echoes the thought in her preface: “When Cervantes wrote *Don Quijote*, his language was not archaic or quaint. He wrote in a crackling, up-to-date Spanish that was an intrinsic part of his time” (xix). One of the charms of *Don Quijote* is surely the colloquial, but the question arises of how a translator should render the colloquial for a modern audience without losing the sense of a story that takes place in time past.

All three translators do a good job of maintaining the common speech heard in Maese Pedro’s above admonition to his boy; however, their interpretation of the “counterpoint” metaphor differs greatly in terms of levels of success. Ormsby’s “Boy, stick to your text and do as the gentleman says; that’s the best plan. Keep to your plainsong and don’t attempt harmonies, which tend to break down when they are too elaborate” (571), completely destroys the metaphor of the “sotiles contrapuntos” that break because of their frailty. The choice of the “elaborate” for “sotiles” makes the counterpoints feel heavy, not fine. Unfortunately, Ormsby’s translation offers no new metaphor in its place. Interestingly, Raffle once

again destroys the old metaphor, but unlike Ormsby, creates a new metaphor in its place: “Just stick to the business at hand, my boy, exactly as this gentleman has directed, because that’s the very best way. Give us plain song and don’t mess with counterpoint, which is apt to collapse under its own weight” (500). In Raffel’s translation, the counterpoint is no longer a “delicate” addition that might break, but a heavy “weight” that overburdens the “plain song” with its bulk, causing it to collapse. Raffel’s new metaphor is a reversal of the old, yet it resonates much more strongly with the modern reader than the subtlety of a more “refined” counterpoint. Grossman’s translation barely maintains the metaphor, forcing the reader to question whether she is really successful: “Boy, tend to your business and do what that gentleman says, that’s the right thing to do; go on with your plainsong and don’t get involved in counterpoints that usually break because they’re so refined” (630). Though “refined” is an adequate translation for “*sotiles*,” it does not convey the essence of the metaphor as well as “delicate” or “fine” might have done. It is hard to imagine a counterpoint, or anything for that matter, breaking because it is “refined.” Sugar is refined; things break because they are delicate.

Throughout Chapter 26, as in the entire work, it is the colloquial speech that sets the tone, giving the novel its distinctive character. Nowhere are speech patterns set more clearly than in each translator’s choice of verbs. Ormsby and Grossman both pay lip service to the need to make their language simple, but verbs don’t lie. In this sampling of verbs from the Maese Pedro chapter we begin with the Spanish “*reñir*” from the line “*Carlomagno, padre putativo de la tal Melisendra, el cual, mohíno de ver el ocio y descuido de su yerno, le sale a reñir*” (II, 26; 755). Charlemagne wants to tell off his son-in-law. Yet Ormsby’s “chide,” and Grossman’s “reprimand,” while both accurate translations, fail to maintain the colloquial tone that Raffel’s straightforward “tell off” does. The comparison holds up throughout the chapter. Even such a simple verb as “*hablar*,” as in “*habla con su esposo creyendo que es algún pasajero*” (II, 26; 757), can be rendered a variety of ways. But, though Ormsby’s “speaks,” Raffel’s “chatting,” and Grossman’s “talks” are all plain and simple solutions, Raffel’s choice is the most colloquial. And, of course, we’ve already discussed how the verb choices affect the scene where Don Gaiferos res-

cues Melisendra. Details such as verb choice matter, and yet, in the end, they must take a secondary position to "sense."

If Don Quijote's attack on Maese Pedro's puppet show can be read as the knight's misinterpretation rather than his mis-reading of the world, then Maese Pedro's warning is an admonition to all translators: "No mire vuesa merced en niñerías, señor don Quijote, ni quiera llevar las cosas tan por el cabo, que no se le halle. ¿No se representan por ahí, casi de ordinario, mil comedias llenas de mil impropiedades y disparates, y, con todo eso, corren felicísimamente su carrera, y se escuchan no solo con aplauso, sino con admiración y todo?" (II, 26; 758). Like a bad translator, Don Quijote gets lost in the details; he can't escape literality. Maese Pedro reminds us that, although a translator must submerge himself in the details, he must also surface, in the end sacrificing those details to "sense" when necessary.

Ormsby's translation of Maese Pedro's warning creates its own metaphor, but unfortunately the new metaphor is inaccurate: "Don't pay attention to trifles, Señor Quixote," he said, "or expect to raise things to a pitch of perfection that is out of reach. Are there not almost every day a thousand comedies acted all around us full of thousands of inaccuracies and absurdities? Yet, for all that, they have a successful run and are listened to not only with applause but with admiration and all the rest of it" (572–73). The phrase "or expect to raise things to a pitch of perfection that is out of reach" is original, but not at all to the point. Don Quijote's trifling over details is not about perfection but about appearance versus reality; it is about how Don Quijote perceives the world. He misinterprets the fictional representation of the puppet show as real.

Edith Grossman's translation of the warning is, as usual, technically accurate: "Your grace should not concern yourself with trifles, Señor Don Quixote, or try to carry things so far that you never reach the end of them. Aren't there a thousand plays performed almost every day that are full of a thousand errors and pieces of nonsense, and yet are successful productions that are greeted not only with applause but with admiration?" (632). Grossman comes close to the literal sense of "ni quiera llevar las cosas tan por el cabo, que no se le halle," as well as "impropiedades"; however, the reader is not sure what she means by "carry things so far

that you never reach the end of them," especially as it applies to Don Quijote. The knight's problem is not that of carrying things too far, but of thinking things should be different than they are.

While Raffel's translation is, in many ways, the least literal, it resonates with the major themes of the novel: "Don't worry about little details, your grace, My Lord Don Quijote, and don't expect everything to be exactly the way it ought to be, because that's not how the world works. Aren't we always seeing, all around us and almost as a matter of course, a thousand theatrical pieces shot full of a thousand out-of-place, nonsensical things—and in spite of everything they go merrily on their way, and they're greeted not just with applause, but with admiration and all the rest of it?" (501). Raffel changes the literal sense of "ni quiera llevar" but gains psychological power as he mirrors Don Quijote's mind—the knight thinks things should be a certain way, and they're not. The liberty Raffel takes in translating "impropiedades" as "out-of-place" things pays off, as it echoes the theme of Don Quijote's own sense of foreignness in the world. Raffel is also the only translator to translate "niñerías" as "details," the other two translators choosing "trifles." Again, "trifles" is more accurate, but as discussed previously, the Don Quijote of Part Two is suffering from the disease of literality. It is the "details" of reality that he fixates on in Part Two. Raffel's decision to part from the literal translation again mirrors Quijote's psychological state. Don Quijote is not lost in "trifles" but rather the "details" of a world that is becoming continually more literal, more real.

In Part One of *Don Quijote*, the knight's worldview is distinctly different from those around him. In Part Two, it is all too similar. Ortega reminds us that "Languages separate us and discommunicate, not simply because they are different languages, but because they proceed from different mental pictures, from disparate intellectual systems" (107). In Part One, Don Quijote misreads the world because of his different worldview, but Maese Pedro's puppet show makes clear that the hero of Part Two is a changed man. He no longer proceeds from a different mental picture, but rather from the literality represented by Sancho and the other peasants in the first part. The puppet show marks the beginning of the end for Don Quijote, for once he has lost his worldview, his "sense," he loses

himself and has nothing left to do but die.

“Oh!” exclaimed Sancho, weeping. “Don’t die, your grace, my lord, but take my advice and live a long, long time, because the worst madness a man can fall into, in this life, is to let himself die, for no real reason, without anybody else killing him or any other hands but those of sadness and melancholy taking his life. Don’t be lazy, but get up from your bed, and let’s go out into the fields, dressed as shepherds, the way we decided we would: who knows if maybe we’ll find My Lady Doña Dulcinea behind some bushes or trees, just the way she used to be. (II, 74; Raffel 744)

Don Quijote doesn’t die “for no real reason,” as Sancho exclaims. His “reason” is reality itself. He’s become infected by it. Sancho knows this and futilely attempts to call his master back to the world of the imagination, to the Don Quijote of Part One, to the search for Dulcinea the “way she used to be.”

The translator who gets lost in the literal allows his work to succumb to the same disease as Don Quijote. Literality can kill a text just as easily as it can the “Knight of the Sad Face.”² A successful translator, as Rabassa says, has to “transform” the text. To do that, a translator first has to leave the comfort of his own language, his own culture and enter into that of the language from which he is translating: “What is imperative is that, in translating, we try to leave our language and go to the other—and not the reverse, which is what is usually done” (112). Ortega has the first half of the translation process correct; however, once the translator has submerged himself in the source language and culture, he must not hesitate to tear apart what he finds there, to dismantle the literal meaning in search of the greater “sense,” as it pertains to the cultural milieu and the author’s intent. Once the translator has broken his source material down, he must then make the return journey back to the target language, there to hammer at the words in the forge of his own culture in order to

2 In his classic article “*Don Quijote* as a Funny Book,” Peter Russell demonstrated tellingly how translators’ strikingly different translations of “el Caballero de la Triste Figura” reveal changing views of the protagonist. [Ed. note.]

create new metaphors that speak to a new audience. Without this process of destruction and recreation, a translation is doomed to existence as a lifeless husk, similar to Don Quijote after the Maese Pedro episode.

John Ormsby and Edith Grossman succeed in conveying the literal sense of the text, but only Burton Raffel consistently recreates metaphors that speak not only to our modern world, but that resonate with the themes of the novel. True, Raffel often strays far from the literal sense of the text, and occasionally steps outside of the world of the knight altogether, as with his use of “dollars” for “reales.” His translation is often wordy, but his wordiness has a colloquial feel, which is crucial to the atmosphere more times than not.

As Raffel builds metaphor upon metaphor, he creates an echo chamber in which the novel comes alive as themes bounce off each other, reverberating inside both Don Quijote’s and the reader’s head. “The destiny of man is never to achieve what he proposes.... This is what occurs whenever we engage in that modest occupation called translating” (Ortega 94). In this sense, translating is a quixotic task. It is fitting, then, that for translation to approach any sense of “success,” it must invoke the same sort of re-creation that Don Quijote does when he renames himself, his horse, and his lady in Part One. The translator who fears this act of re-creation strands the reader in a world of meaningless details.

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