

Review of: Shyama Prasad Ganguly, ed.,
Quixotic Encounters: Indian Responses to the Knight from Spain –
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I

Don Quijote, Miguel de Cervantes' masterpiece considered by many to be not only the first but still the best novel ever written in the Western world, is also a book that wears its own intertextuality and translatability on its sleeve, calling out from its pages to other cultures and other texts. Thus, in the sixth chapter of Part I (published in 1605), we find the censorious barber and priest picking up (and preserving) a volume by none other than Miguel de Cervantes; in the third chapter of Part II (1615), Don Quijote takes into his hands a copy of the first part of Cervantes' very novel featuring himself; and from the ninth chapter of Part I on, Cervantes officially ascribes the book to an imaginary Arab writer, Cide Hamete Benengeli, thus making it appear to be a mere translation, done into Spanish from the Arabic by an anonymous Moorish scribe in Toledo and relayed to the world by Miguel de Cervantes. A book which purports in this way to be a translation of a text from another culture, however bizarre and arbitrary that claim may seem, has certainly positioned itself from the beginning in the front line of a potential intercultural dialogue through translation and localisation.

In this connection, the story of the reception, translation and appropriation of the *Quijote* in a culture as huge as is India must surely appear of enormous interest, especially as we are dealing with a country where English is widely read, English-language books are readily available, and Cervantes' novel has long been in circulation, if not in the original in a country where few know Spanish, nonetheless and certainly in the various standard translations into English. The *Quijote*, besides, has a special status in Hispanic literature, as still by far the best-known single work of literature to have come out of Spain, with Miguel de Cervantes, who remains that country's most celebrated writer abroad (with only Lorca in any way approaching his name value), in the role of standard-bearer for the literary production of an entire national culture. Despite the clear importance of the subject, this new volume, edited by S.P. Ganguly, Professor of Spanish at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, is the first study ever to have been devoted to the fortunes of Don Quijote and Sancho Panza in India. It therefore forms a ground-breaking project in both literary and cultural studies, whose significance cannot be underestimated; and, indeed, its value in this sense is underwritten by its being presented to the reader, in an appreciative Foreword, by the Ambassador of Spain to India, H.E. Rafael Conde de Saro, who stresses inter alia the timeliness of a venture that comes on the heels of the 400th anniversary, in 2005, of the publication of Part I of the *Quijote*.

II

The volume proper consists of a Preface by S.P. Ganguly and thirteen chapters, of which the most crucial is probably the editor's own ('*El Quijote* in India: Some Transcultural Considerations'), which outlines and analyses the history of the various translations and adaptations of Cervantes' tale in the main languages of India. Of the remaining twelve contributors, two (Sunil Gangopadhyay and Dileep Jhaveri) are creative writers while the remainder are academics; all without exception are both Indian and India-resident. They examine the *Quijote* from a multitude of India-related perspectives, among which the greatest weight is given to the reception and influence of the book in different language areas of India,

with individual chapters examining how it has been read and seen in, respectively, the Marathi, Bengali, Punjabi and Tamil cultures.

We learn from S.P. Ganguly's two contributions, and from elsewhere in the book, that, while there have been manifold *versions* of the *Quijote* in Indian languages, the great majority are abridgments or adaptations and it would therefore be incorrect in most cases actually to speak of *translations*; and, further, that such translations in the proper sense as exist are, on the one hand, of Part I only, and, on the other hand, not *direct* (i.e. taken from the Spanish), but *indirect* (i.e. mediated through a third or even fourth language). The full text of both parts has thus been available in India, other than to the handful able to handle Cervantes' seventeenth-century Spanish, *in English only*, a circumstance assuring it a readership that is pan-Indian, certainly, but numerically limited.

Part I of Cervantes' novel in its entirety has been translated to date into two Indian languages, Hindi and Gujarati. The Hindi version, translated by Chavinath Pandey, was, S.P. Ganguly informs us (64), published by the Sahitya Akademi in 1964, and has been reprinted a number of times, most recently in 2005. A Gujarati version appeared soon after, sponsored by UNESCO and using the Hindi translation as source text, thus constituting an indirect translation at two removes (59). Today, the first complete Hindi translation of *both parts* is in preparation. It will also be a first in a second sense, as it will be the first translation into any Indian language to be taken directly from the Spanish original. The translator, Vibha Maurya of the University of Delhi, is also a contributor to the volume under review. We also learn elsewhere in this volume that a full translation (of both parts) into Tamil is being seriously mooted. Meanwhile and as things stand, *Don Quijotes* of a sort – abridgments, adaptations, translations of certain chapters only, or children's versions, some drawing on Part I only, others using material from both parts – exist, we are told, in another twelve Indian languages, namely: Assamese, Bengali, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu (58-59, 67-68, 113). With these twelve languages plus Hindi, Gujarati and English, then, we may affirm that Don Quijote and Sancho as characters have had the chance to enter the imaginations of those able to read no less than fifteen of the languages used in India – in a list of tongues that, besides, covers the entire geography of the country, from north to south and west to east, and corresponds almost exactly to what most people would list as India's major languages. The paucity of *translations* in the proper sense is thus partially offset by a plethora of *versions*. On this rich and fascinating subject, S.P. Ganguly is to be congratulated on the depth and quality of his research; indeed, as he tells his readers (x-xi), it was that research itself that for the first time revealed to the world the existence of the previously unknown Kashmiri and Sanskrit versions.

III

With respect to the individual contributions to the volume and starting with the two creative writers as above mentioned, we may note that both stress, with all enthusiasm, how greatly Cervantes' deluded knight-errant has influenced them in their own work. Sunil Gangopadhyay, in his opening contribution ('The Most Well Known Character in World Literature', originally written in Bengali), confesses that out of all the literary heroes he encountered in his childhood – even including those of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* – 'my role model came to be that character named Don Quijote' (1). This avowal does not deter him from pointing out (6) that the metafictional nature of the Quijote, with its ramifications, involutions, Chinese-box tales-within-tales and presence of author-as-personage within the text, curiously – and even if direct influence is impossible – throws up strong parallels with

the *Mahabharata*. Dileep Jhaveri, whose piece, 'Encounters with *Don Quixote*', pulls down the curtain on the book, opens with a short story narrating an imaginary meet bringing together Cervantes, Benengeli, Don Quijote and Sancho, all coinciding in a tavern in New York, and goes on to propose a number of creative paths for appreciating Cervantes' masterwork. Like Gangopadhyay, Jhaveri stresses the resemblance to the *Mahabharata*, comparing Don Quijote's stoicism to that of Yudhisthira (160) and his madness to that of Bhima (154). On the latter point, he adds a more universal dimension by bringing in the parallel madneses of Hercules, Orestes, the Fool in *King Lear*, or the biblical David (153-155). It is clear from Jhaveri's contribution that to 'Indianise' the *Quijote* is in no way to cast aspersions on its eloquent universality.

Specifically Indian aspects of reading the *Quijote* are discussed in the contributions by Meenakshi Mukherjee, Preeti Pant and Vibha Maurya. Mukherjee, in her essay 'Returning to Quixote', recalls discovering the man of La Mancha as part of her childhood reading, although, she admits, 'I did not realise what I had read was merely an abridged and simplified version in Bangla which, like all European books available to us, came to us via English' (20). She shows how the Bengali adaptations tend to 'Bengalise' Cervantes' story, exploiting, for instance, the circumstance that 'Don' in Bangla happens to mean 'wrestler', thus unashamedly engaging in what today's translation theory calls 'domestication' - or, to view it from another angle, 'following the Indian tradition of freely modifying the original to suit local taste and the adapter's own creative bent, as had been done for centuries in rewriting the two Sanskrit epics in different Indian languages' (21). Mukherjee looks forward to the day when there will at last be a full translation of Cervantes' novel into Bangla, 'from Spanish, and not via English' (27). Preeti Pant, in 'The *Natyashashtra* and the *Quixote* on the Understanding of Fiction', offers an original 'Indianisation' of the *Quijote* through the prism of literary theory, reading it not in Western Aristotelian terms but via native critical discourse, applying concepts taken from Bharata's *Natyashashtra*. Pant's argument is that, as in Bharata's concept of drama and in Vedanta philosophy in general, reading the eminently metafictional *Don Quijote* we come to see the world as 'an illusion, a play staged by the Creator', who is 'the writer and director of the spectacle' (32). Vibha Maurya, who, as we have seen, is currently translating the entire book into Hindi, explains, in her contribution 'Reading *Don Quixote* through Translation', the methodology she is using in this task, stressing that she has opted to 'use Hindi language of contemporary times' rather than cultivating archaism, the aim being 'to recreate as closely as possible in contemporary Hindi Cervantes' style' while paying special attention to the accurate reproduction of the characters' thought-processes (77).

Other contributors focus on certain more generally 'Oriental' dimensions of Cervantes' work. Susnighda Dey, in '*Don Quijote* in the Oriental Perspective', goes through all the references in the *Quijote* to 'India' and the 'Indies' (decidedly few: seven in all), showing that they tend to be highly generalised and indeed, in some cases, ambiguous since it may not be clear if India or the New World is being referred to (Dey does, though, trace the island of Trapobana, as mentioned in Part I, chapter 18, to Tapobana, a forest in Sri Lanka - 15). This essay is certainly useful for the reader's understanding of the present volume as a whole, effectively making it clear that in comparing the *Quijote* with, say, the Indian epics critics are necessarily employing what is known as the 'new paradigm' of comparative literature, i.e. the approach that seeks similarities between works from different cultures on grounds of thematic or structural parallels rather than direct influences. This line of approach is extended by Minni Sawhney, who, in 'Cervantes and the Religions of the Mediterranean', broadens out the discussion to include consideration of some of Miguel de Cervantes' other works. Sawhney

examines, in particular, his plays *Los tratos de Argel*, *Los baños de Argel* and *La Gran Sultana*, all of which (the first two being set in Algiers) deal directly with the issue, polemical then as now, of Christian/Islamic relations, and concludes that today's reader may find, in Cervantes' handling of the problem, a degree of 'embryonic multiculturalism' (139).

The remaining five essays are concerned specifically with the reception of the *Quijote* in different language areas of India. Two contributors, Kavita Panjabi ('The Non-reception of *Don Quijote* in 19th Century Bengal: Literary Interrogations of Romance and Nationalism') and Ujjal Kumar Majumdar ('*Don Quixote* and the Bengali Reception'), examine the fortunes of Cervantes' knight-errant in Bengal: Panjabi suggests that the *lack of reception* of Cervantes' novel during the Bengal Renaissance period may be ascribed to its critical presentation of attitudes of romantic struggle that were then being positively valorised, notably in Bengal, by the anti-British national independence movement, while Majumdar, noting that the numerous Bengali adapters have tended to present the Don's tale as above all a children's story, echoes Meenakshi Mukherjee in stressing the need for a full version of the book in Bangla, unambiguously targeted on the adult general reader. Tejwant Singh Gill, in the contribution entitled 'Punjabi Response to *Don Quixote*', connects the interest in Cervantes that arose in Punjab literary circles in the 1930s to the repercussions in India of the Spanish Civil War and the popularity at the time of Lorca and Neruda, examines a partial translation by I.C. Nanda, 'the doyen of Punjabi drama' (113) (confined to some sixty pages from Part I), and joins Mukherjee and Majumdar in calling for a full translation of the book, this time into Punjabi. Rajendra Dengle, in 'Marathi Literature's Response to Cervantes' *Don Quixote* – G.A. Kulkarni's *Yatrik*', argues for a major Cervantine influence on *Yatrik* (*The Pilgrim*), a short story published in 1975 by the important Marathi writer G.A. Kulkarni, who, it seems, 'had read Cervantes' novel as a rapid reader in school' (83)! The regional panorama is further deepened by extension to South India with G. Subramaniam's 'Tamil Response to Cervantes and *Don Quixote*', which finds analogies between Cervantes' novel and *Pradapa Mudaliar Charattiram* (*The History of Pradapa Mudaliar*), a work by Munsif S. Vedanayagum Pillai published in 1879 and generally considered 'the first novel in Tamil' (118). Subramaniam also, and significantly, announces that 'the recently established *Pablo Neruda School of Spanish and Latin American Studies* in Chennai has plans to begin a complete translation (Part 1 and 2) of *Don Quixote* in 2006' (presumably, though it is not explicitly said so, from the Spanish?) (121). It appears clear that, whatever the regional perspective, there is a growing pan-Indian demand for greater familiarity with the *Quijote* through translation into Indian languages.

IV

All in all, this volume's exploration of Quixotic encounters in India offers a fascinating, if still incomplete, story, and provides a wealth of information for anyone interested in Hispanic studies, comparative literature and reception theory, as well as the general reader who simply loves and admires Don Quijote and Sancho. The present reviewer's sole reservations concern a number of avoidable typos, notably of Spanish or non-English names, that are scattered across the book, and, more importantly, the absence of a bibliography for the volume as a whole. A full list of all known Indian translations and adaptations of Cervantes' masterpiece, organised by language, would have formed an invaluable complement to the various studies. At all events and despite any marginal quibbles, this bold venture, guided by the Knight from Spain, into uncharted intellectual waters of Indo-Hispanic relations, deserves the highest praise and will stand as a landmark for future explorations of a fascinating area of intercultural study that is only now beginning to display its full and vast potential.