



John Phillips's translation of *Don Quijote* (1687) has been considered one of the worst translations of all time, certainly the worst of Cervantes's work. However, an analysis of the Phillips translation in the context of late seventeenth-century English culture reveals in Phillips's work an insightful reading both of the original text and of his own context. Phillips's text presents not merely a linguistic translation of the original work, but also a translation of the literary mechanism of Cervantes's text, by which Phillips reproduces the use of a literary work to indirectly critique contemporary discourse and social mores.

**KEYWORDS:** Quijote, translation, Cervantes, Phillips, humor.

# (In)Decorous Mirth: Phillips's 1687 Translation of *Don Quijote* and the Social Function of Humor

ELI COHEN  
*Swarthmore College*

*(In)decorosa alegría: la traducción inglesa de Don Quijote por Phillips de 1687 y la función social del humor*

*La traducción del Quijote de John Phillips (1687) ha sido considerada una de las peores traducciones de toda la historia, definitivamente la peor versión de la obra cervantina. Sin embargo, un análisis de la traducción de Phillips en el contexto de la cultura inglesa de la segunda mitad del siglo XVII permite ver en la obra de Phillips una lectura perspicaz tanto de la obra original como de su propio contexto. El texto de Phillips presenta no sólo una traducción lingüística de la obra original, sino también una traducción del mecanismo literario del texto cervantino, según la cual Phillips reproduce el uso de la obra literaria para criticar de modo indirecto el discurso, los usos y los valores contemporáneos.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Quijote, traducción, Cervantes, Phillips, humor.



When Ronald Paulson (1998: xvii) suggests that “John Phillips’s translation [of *Don Quijote*] of 1687...seems to have had little effect or currency”, it should be clarified that he apparently means little positive effect or currency, for Phillips’s translation of Cervantes’s text has indeed accrued a substantial volume of critical responses, nearly all of which are explicit in their negative judgment of the work. Only recently, within a context of renewed theoretical interest in translation, has a scholarly reappraisal begun in earnest, a revived attention in which the current study participates and which owes its impetus to recent shifts in theoretical and methodological approaches.<sup>1</sup> Reexaminations of early modern translation such as this represent a response to the sort of question articulated by Jacques Lezra when he asks “what if anything do contemporary theories of translation...allow us to see about the lexical culture of early modernity that was perhaps not clear in that period?” (2015: 156) More precisely, however, this reconsideration of Phillips’s translation of *Don Quijote* suggests that modern theories of translation, just as modern theories of literature or of literary production and reception in general, enable us to grasp dimensions of early modern texts for which early modern readers themselves were not prepared as a consequence of the historical conditions and contexts which shaped their reception of those texts. New readings of old works like that of Phillips are thus enabled both by developments in the field of theory and by the history of interpretation, in this

case both of the translation and of the original, translated text.

Whereas new ways of thinking about the operations and function of translation permit us to expand our modern sense of the early modern limits of translation, critical insights into the nature of Cervantes’s text allow us to widen the field of potential interpretations available in any given moment, including those constituted in the act of translation,<sup>2</sup> while more nuanced historiography of the late seventeenth century in England authorize an increased subtlety in situating works like Phillips’s translation within their contexts. In both instances the relationship of the text (the original and the translated) to its context has been productively complicated, as has the historical picture of those contexts, and it is through just such a reconstruction of the relationship of Phillips’s rendering of *Don Quijote* to its context that a reevaluation of his translation becomes possible.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, a more thorough contextualization of Phillips and his work result in a reading which reveals that, while not unproblematic, Phillips’s text reflects a more accurate translation of *Don Quijote* in terms of the Spanish text’s relation to its own context than a more literal version could.

Phillips, the nephew, student and then aide of John Milton, produced his translation of *Don Quijote* in 1687; it was the second complete translation of Cervantes’s work into English, following Thomas Shelton’s translations of

<sup>2</sup> As Brenda M. Hosington reminds us, “all translation concerns interpreting and rewriting a text” (2015: 36).

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that other critics have recently returned to Phillips’s translation with a similar aim, though with somewhat different results. Thus Anna K. Nardo emphasizes Phillips’s commercial interest in translating *Don Quijote* and in this context explores the parallels between “Cervantes’s negotiation of the perils of publication in Counter-Reformation Spain” with “Phillips’s negotiation of the London book trade in the era of the Popish Plot, the Exclusion Crisis, and the ascendancy of James II” (2012: 2).

<sup>1</sup> This article has been completed in conjunction with the research group “Recepción e interpretación del Quijote (1605-1830). Traducciones, opiniones, recreaciones” (reference: FFI2014-56414-P), financed by the Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad (Programa Estatal de Fomento de la Investigación Científica y Técnica de Excelencia).

1612 and 1620. Despite Phillips's pedigree (aside from his ties to Milton he was an active and widely published author in his own right) and his publishers's investment in the text, which was advertised as being "adorned with several copper plates", his translation of Cervantes's novel has been nearly universally maligned by readers since its publication. Two of the next translators, John Stevens and Peter Anthony Motteux, whose versions appeared virtually simultaneously in 1700, both roundly criticized Phillips's work. Stevens claims that Phillips's text "is so far vary'd that it retains little besides the Name and some of the grand strokes, with a different shadowing, which quite alter the whole frame of the work" (qtd. in Cunchillos Jaime 1985: 19). Motteux, who claims to have "ingag'd to rescue the Hero of Cervantes out of the hands of his former Translators", goes further than Stevens, suggesting that Phillips himself is a Quixotic figure, having "transform'd [Don Quijote] worse than any of his own Magicians...chang'd the Sense, ridicul'd the most serious and moving Passages...added a World of Obscenity and scribling Conceits. He seems indeed to have let his Fancy run away with his Judgment" (qtd. in Randall and Boswell 2009: 634-635). Later assessments varied little in either content or tone and are, if anything, more definitive in their rejection of Phillips's work. In the nineteenth-century, for example, translator John Ormsby called Phillips's rendition "not so much a translation as a travesty, and a travesty that for coarseness, vulgarity, and buffoonery is almost unexampled even in the literature of that day" (1885: vii), while Alexander James Duffield affirmed that

it is to the hateful filthiness of this most foul production that an impression got abroad that the *Don Quixote* was an impure book:

Phillips did not translate—he simply disfigured Shelton's work by introducing between the lines his own ribaldry and the coarse and scandalous jets of the roistering night of the Restoration (1881: XLIV).



Modern readers have tended to agree. In the mid-twentieth century, the translator Samuel Putnam offered his reading of the earlier translator's work, calling it "a disgraceful performance, coarse and clowning" (1949: XII), while Cunchillos Jaime, one of the first scholars to examine in systematic and comparative fashion the earliest translations of *Don Quijote* into English, affirms that the Phillips text can only be considered a translation "si por traducir se entiende entrar a saco en los textos ajenos quitando y poniendo a placer, cambiando el sentido de las cosas y distorsionando el significado hasta convertirlo en una mera caricatura del original" (1985: 4), despite recognizing that it was a "producto de la época de la Restauración" (1985: 5) and "no hacía sino reflejar la opinión generalizada que del libro existía en Inglaterra" (1985: 4).

Later translators' need to justify their own work notwithstanding, such critical judgments rest on two foundations: their authors' own interpretations of Cervantes's text, and their criteria for determining the value of a given translation. Appraisals of this sort value the qualities that Lawrence Venuti identifies as typically associated with translators and translations, that is, invisibility, transparency and fluency (1995: 1-8). In opposition to this model, Venuti argues for the need for an approach according to which "translations can be read as translations, as texts in their own right, permitting transparency to be demystified, seen as one discursive effect among others" (1995: 17). Venuti's contention renews a dispute that has characterized discourse on translation since at



least the early modern era, but that has been subdued in recent times due to what Karen Newman and Jane Tylus describe as “current preoccupations with fidelity, accuracy, authorship, and proprietary rights [which] were alien to [the early modern period]” (2015: 2). Newman and Tylus suggest that early modern translations ranged from “dreadfully accurate renderings of “alien” texts [to] generative misprisions” (2015: 2). This is not to say that early modern translators were unconcerned with issues of fidelity; in fact quite the opposite is true, yet, according to Newman and Tylus, “early modern humanists and writers, printers and publishers, pursued not a narrow literal, linguistic view of translation so often assumed in the “word for word” theory...and that in many ways has come to characterize the current, professionalized world of translation and translators in the computer age” (2015: 23).<sup>4</sup> While early modern England had concerns regarding appropriate methods of translation (Hosington, 2015: 30), nonetheless the line between what we might distinguish as, on one hand, literal translation and, on the other, adaptation was not a consistently clear one in the early modern period, nor were the values assigned to each clearly defined. And in many instances, early modern translators quite consciously described their translations as their creations, rather than as secondary, parasitic works, foretelling in this way the scenario described by Hosington when she describes how, as “theorists have convincingly argued over the past two decades, a translation is not an imperfect derivative text, but a newly created one” (2015: 28).

In what has been called the “the lumpy field of early modern translation” (Lezra, 2015: 155), therefore, notions of accuracy or faithfulness

to the original text were neither universally held nor taken for granted. To the contrary, as Newman and Tylus put it, “a heightened sense of translation’s capacity to overturn binaries was already at play in the early modern era” (2015: 3). Similarly, Newman and Tylus continue, “whereas in translation studies today practitioners and theoreticians argue about the translator’s “invisibility” and about the ethics of linguistic and cultural appropriation, early modern translators seem to view appropriation positively” (2015: 6). Thus, when Putnam affirms that Phillips’s rendition of Cervantes’s text is “by all odds the worst English version—it cannot be called a translation” (1949: xii), he is imputing his own value system on a practice that Peter Burke states was “often free, a process sometimes described at the time as “accommodation””, continuing by pointing out that “*accommodatio* was originally a rhetorical term, used by Cicero and others to describe the way in which orators might adapt their discourse to different audiences...today, translation theorists prefer the term “negotiation”” (2015: 39).

Given that nearly all of the critical attention devoted to Phillips’s translation of *Don Quijote* has proved unable to overcome his overt visibility as a translator, and has therefore been unable to avoid evaluative judgments of the text that ultimately rest on problematic assumptions about the true nature of the original, about the ideal aims of translation and about the relative accuracy of alternative renderings of the text (Godwin decries Phillips’s “utter contempt of the laws of fidelity in translation” [1815: 258]), the work of Phillips’s translation is precisely that which remains obscured by the critical gaze. This analysis resists the temptation to judge Phillips’s translation according to any theoretical ideal; instead, it examines the work that Phillips himself claims to be doing against the

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the case of Alexandro Braccesi, detailed at length in Newman and Tylus (2015: 5-7).

backdrop of a cultural context which, much like that of Cervantes, was experiencing a period of radical instability. Phillips himself seems to have been aware both that he was responding to his own historical and cultural context and that readers might not comprehend his work. The title page to his 1687 version presents his take on the title (*The History of the most Renowned Don Quixote of Mancha: And his Trusty Squire Sancho Pancha*) and offers the following subtitle: "Now made English according to the Humour of our Modern Language" (1687).

As these words suggest, Phillips's objective was not (or at least not merely) to produce a faithful linguistic rendering of the Spanish original into English, but rather (or also) to translate the humor of the original into a form that would speak to his contemporary audience. The use of the modifier "modern" also suggests that Phillips was producing his translation in a period of historical and social change and that he was aware that the target language, as well as the context in which that language was deployed and received, was undergoing a process of transformation. We will examine some of the contours of that process shortly; for now, let us continue to consider the manner in which Phillips frames his translation, as this will provide clues as to his own view of his motives and methods.

Phillips anticipates that his project might encourage just this sort of enquiry in a paratext he substitutes for Cervantes's prologue to Part I. Cervantes notoriously begins his novel with a prologue to the reader that serves to both introduce the novel and to initiate the fiction. After briefly and ambiguously addressing his "desocupado lector" (1998: 9), Cervantes goes on to describe the difficulty he has encountered in writing an appropriate prologue. This difficulty is shortly overcome when a friend stops

by and enters into dialogue with the author, offering his advice on how to proceed. The dialogue itself then becomes the substance of the prologue the reader is reading, a prologue about a prologue, and in this way Cervantes institutes the irony and self-referentiality that will characterize his novel and which will allow it to do so much more than simply assail, as the author's friend would have it, "la máquina mal fundada de tantos y alabados de muchos más" (1998: 18). Through this act of ventriloquism, Cervantes thus anticipates one of the dominant interpretations of his novel, that which views in his characters a laughable parody of the ideal knights of the romances of chivalry which continued to dominate literary tastes even in Cervantes's day. Yet by writing a parody of such books of chivalry, Cervantes produces a work which is at once an iteration of such tales and a vehicle for disparaging them. His, after all, is in the end a story of a knight errant, and it is the ambiguous double nature of Cervantes's tale what continues to make it a fecund source of interpretation to this day. It is also the ironic doubling of Cervantes's narrative that which informs and makes possible Phillips's own interpretation, as he demonstrates through his translation.

Rather than translate Cervantes's prologue as is, Phillips devises his own, though the influence of the former on the latter is unmistakable. Phillips titles his prologue "Something instead of an Epistle to the Reader, by way of Dialogue" (1687). Thus in form, if not in content, Phillips follows Cervantes's lead closely. However Phillips's prologue, unlike Cervantes's, is not a prologue about a prologue; nor does it introduce the authorial slippage that Cervantes instantiates when he turns himself into a character and claims that he is only the stepfather of the





text. The dialogue that constitutes Phillips's prologue presents a conversation about contemporary readers, who, says Phillips, are fickle and capricious. "That were a Romance indeed", he says, "to call Readers Courteous and Gentle in this Age. Coffee has so inspir'd Men with Contradiction and ill Nature, that Readers are as hard to be pleas'd as Ladys in a Mercer's Shop" (1687). To this claim, Phillips's friend inquires, "But why *Don Quixote*? Had you nothing else to trouble your Brain with?" (1687). If it is clear that later readers (including editors, publishers and other translators) have not seen in his work much of value, Phillips here suggests that his contemporaries might themselves have not understood what he was about by making *Don Quijote* English. Yet, he says, Cervantes's *Don Quijote* may avoid the judgmental vagaries of an inconstant readership because "This Book has an Advantage above all others; 'tis a *Book-Errant*" (1687). Phillips suggests that Cervantes's novel is itself "errant", that is, "it is bound by the Constitutions of its Order to suffer all Misfortunes; which, tho they may be terrible to others, to a *Book-Errant* can be no more then Unluckie Adventures" (1687). In Phillips's response to the question "why *Don Quixote*?" we find a precise statement of his intention, as well as an echo of the ironic doubling of the original.<sup>5</sup> He begins by correcting his friend's misguided interpretation of Cervantes's text:

Distinguish, Sir, you take it for a bare Romance; and I look upon it as a pleasant

<sup>5</sup> Newman and Tylus suggest that "early modern theories of translation emerged from paratexts" (2015: 22). One way to understand this is that it was in paratexts to their translations that translators carved out a discursive space in which they could address and theorize about their practice; in the case of Phillips, however, the paratexts of his translation, in highly Cervantine fashion, present the reader with only an indirect insight into the nature and purpose of his work.

Story, to shew how vainly Youth mispend their hours in heightening their Amorous Francies, by reading those bewitching Legends of *Tom Thumb* and *Amadis de Gaul*; and Thousands more of that Nature, not worth naming. Now Instructions are like Pills, for they meet with many humours that keck at their bitterness, unless guilded over with Fable and Fancy. People are sooner ridicul'd, then rated out of an ill Habit; and the best way to represent the Deformity of any thing, is to expose it in a pleasing Mirrour (1687).

Phillips acknowledges that *Don Quijote* offers multiple possible readings but also claims that its central purpose stems from the Horatian principle of "*dulce et utile*", suggesting that those readings are not mutually exclusive but that they are complementary, with the "fable and fancy" making the story's satirical bite more palatable. Moreover, such a pleasant vehicle for serious critique facilitates success in a manner that a more explicit or direct critique would not. Phillips finds in *Don Quijote* a mirror whose indirectness allows him to expose a "deformity" present in his own context. As we will see, the deformity of which Phillips speaks is not yet entirely clear, though he does mention one possible explanation when he describes how vain youth mispends its hours reading books like *Tom Thumb* and *Amadis of Gaul*. While it would behoove Phillips's reader to assume that the translator has a better grasp on Cervantine irony than this claim implies, Phillips nonetheless introduces here a motif that runs throughout his translation, an aspect of his work which has been one of the main sources of much of the criticism directed its way. By linking two texts, one English and the other Spanish, the latter being the most famous of the romances of chivalry produced originally in Spanish and a major source on which both Cervantes and his

character Don Quijote model their discourse, Phillips indicates that the problem of the popularity of the romances of chivalry in sixteenth century Spain, the problem that, at least in principle, motivates Cervantes to write his novel, is similarly a problem in Phillips's England of the late seventeenth century. By including the English text as a parallel example of the sort of text that has helped engender the problematic reading habits he wishes to challenge, Phillips shifts the social context of *Don Quijote's* parodic function to his own cultural milieu. In doing so, Phillips translates not just the words on the page, in either their literal meaning or according to some broader sense, but rather he translates what we might call the disposition of the text, its attitude or stance, the position it takes with respect to its particular literary and historical context. Burke has suggested that in early modernity, "translation did much more than simply spread information. It also encouraged changes in attitude or mentality" (2015: 44). It remains to be seen, through an examination of both Phillips's translation and the context within which it was produced, what sort of alterations "in attitude or mentality" Phillips hoped to generate in his readers.

After the rewritten prologue to the reader, the next locus of Phillips's particular treatment of Cervantes's text can be found in the burlesque sonnets which precede the narrative. Unlike the sonnets in Cervantes's text, several of these reflect a critical attitude towards Don Quijote himself, a feature we will return to later. For the most part, as in the case of the prologue, Phillips's sonnets do not correspond to, nor can be considered versions of, those of Cervantes. The last of these is of particular note, however, as it thematizes the cultural and linguistic transferral of Cervantes's text to England. The "Dialogue between Rosinante and Sancho's Ass" mirrors

the last of Cervantes's sonnets, titled "Diálogo entre Babieca y Rocinante", and demonstrates several aspects of Phillips's methods as translator:



*Ass.* Friend Rosinante, thou lookst wondrous lean.  
*Ros.* How can I choose, that taste nor Oat nor Bean.  
*Ass.* The Horse that eats no Oats, no Oats can shite,  
 How couldst thou carry then both Arms and Knight?  
*Ros.* My Heart was good altho' my Flesh were low.  
*Ass.* 'Tis not the Fashion though, as times now go  
 To serve great Men without reward.  
*Ros.* 'Tis true,  
 But he would promise fair, tho' deeds were few.  
*Ass.* Words feed not Horses, Asses oft they do.  
*Ros.* Else thou hadst starv'd ere now.  
*Ass.* Good Rosinante why?  
*Ros.* Because thy Master's poor.  
*Ass.* Then let me dye,  
 I'll rather serve him then some Lord.  
*Ros.* How so?  
*Ass.* Because the Poor themselves are Asses too,  
 And love the Beasts that carry as they do.  
*Ros.* How might I change? it is too late I fear:  
*Ass.* Not so, if thou an Asses voice wilt hear.  
 To England go, where Fools are rich in Purse,  
 There give it out, though art Don Quixote's Horse:  
 Thou shalt be sought and bought, and taught to vault;  
 Then shewn at Fairs, for every one a Groat;  
 Thus shalt though live at ease, lamented dye;  
 And Smithfield Bards at last shall write thy Elegy.

Whereas Cervantes's sonnet pitches Don Quijote's horse in dialogue with Babieca, the legendary horse of Rodrigo Díaz, el Cid, eleventh-century hero of the *Reconquista* and protagonist of Spain's earliest extant epic poem, Phillips has Rocinante converse with Sancho's ass. The three characteristic elements that have drawn rebuke from Phillips's readers are on display here: an increased vulgarity ("The Horse that eats no Oats, no Oats can shite"); the presence of references to the English con-



text, usually in substitution of references to the Spanish context in the original, though there is no equivalent to the “Smithfield Bards” in Cervantes; and outright additions to the text (including the discussion here of wealthy English fools).

The numerous examples of such alterations to the original have been catalogued elsewhere,<sup>6</sup> so I will restrict myself to offering a few representative examples here from the first few pages of the translation. The infamous first paragraph of Cervantes’s text presents Phillips with another opportunity for transforming the original for his own purposes. Cervantes writes:

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... Tenía en su casa una ama que pasaba de los cuarenta y una sobrina que no llegaba a los veinte, y un mozo de campo y plaza que así ensillaba el rocín como tomaba la podadera (1998: 36).

For the same passage Phillips offers:

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 a forlorn Pegasus, as Lean as a Dover Post-Horse, and a confounded Founder’d Jade to boot...He kept in his House a grave Matron of Fifty for Service, a Niece of Twenty for private Recreation, and a Skip-kennel to Saddle his Horse, and Rob Orchards for Second Course (1687: 1).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For a systematic breakdown of these “textual modifications”, see Cunchillos Jaime (1985) and Nardo (2012).

<sup>7</sup> By way of comparison, Shelton’s 1612 opening

Here, too, Phillips inserts references from the English context (“King Arthur’s Tilters”; “Dover Post-Horse”), simply changes the original (the housemaid’s age shifts from “cuarenta” to “Fifty”), and adds a level of eroticism not found in Cervantes’s text (the “Niece of Twenty for private Recreation”). Later, after determining to become a knight errant, Don Quijote decides he needs an object of affection to serve as the motivation for his heroic deeds. In Cervantes’s words, “se dio a entender que no le faltaba otra cosa sino buscar una dama de quien enamorarse, porque el caballero andante sin amores era árbol sin hojas y sin fruto y cuerpo sin alma” (1998: 43). Phillips modifies the language thus: “he consider’d, that there was nothing now wanting more, but to find a *Gypsie-Mort* for the exercise of his Courtship, and to be the Lady of his Affections; for that a *Knight-Errant* without a Doxie, was like a *Tree* without Leaves, or a *Body* without a Soul” (1687: 5). Here, “Gypsie-Mort” is a slang term which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, may originate from English cant for girl, or more specifically, promiscuous girl or harlot, or from the Romani word for woman<sup>8</sup> (the redundancy found in the use of “Gypsie-Mort” for Gypsy woman would suggest a derogatory emphasis on the ethnic class of the woman), and “Doxie” means floozy or prostitute (again, according to the *OED*). When don Quijote

paragraph reads: “There lived not long since, in a certain vilage of the Mancha, the name whereof I purposely omit, a Yoeman of their calling that use to pile up in their hals old Launces, Halbards, Morriions, and such other armours and weapons. He was besides master of an ancient Target, a leane Stallion, and a swift Grey-hound...Hee had in his house a woman-servant, of about some forty yeares old, and a niese not yet twenty, and a man that served him in fieelde and at home, and could saddle his horse, and likewise manage a pruning hooke” (1612: 1-2).

<sup>8</sup> This according to the Angloromani dictionary of the Romani Project at the University of Manchester.



finally lights on a suitable individual, Cervantes describes her as “una moza labradora de muy buen parecer” (1998: 44), which Phillips gives as “a young fresh-colour’d smerking Country-Wench that went for a Maid, but in truth, was a crackt piece of Ware” (1998: 5). Most of these alterations speak for themselves, at least in terms of content if not significance. This is true, too, when don Quijote arrives at the inn where he will be formally (if parodically and ironically) dubbed a knight, and the innkeeper recounts his own self-styled adventures in knight errantry. What Diego de Clemencín (qtd. in Echevarría 2005: 120) describes as a picaresque map of Spain is transformed into a picaresque map of London; thus “los Percheles de Málaga, Islas de Riarán, Compás de Sevilla, Azoguejo de Segovia, la Olivera de Valencia, Rondilla de Granada, Playa de Salúcar, Potro de Córdoba y las Ventillas de Toledo y otras diversas partes” (1833: 55), which Joaquín Forradellas notes are “los barrios de la mala vida en la España de finales del siglo xvi” (1988: 55), become in Phillips “the *Kings-Bench Rules*, the skulking holes of *Alsatia*, the Academy of the *Fleet*, the Colledge of *Newgate*, the Purlieus of *Turnboll*, and *Picks-Hatch*; the *Bordello’s* of *St. Giles’s*, *Banstead-Downs*, *Newmarket-Heath*; The Pits of *Play-Houses*, the *Retirements* of *Ordinaries*, the *Booths* of *Smithfield* and *Sturbridge*» (1687: 11). Parelleling these verbal transpositions to the English landscape, the engravings that supplement Phillips’s text similarly situate the Spanish knight in a local, that is to say English, environment (Nardo 2012: 10; Lenaghan 2003: 143-148; Megias 2005: 177-183).

Such modifications, of which the examples presented here provide only a minor sample, lead one critic to suggest that Phillips “ocultó al lector inglés el verdadero espíritu cervantino...siguiendo el gusto chabacano y burdo

del período de la Restauración” (Cunchillos Jaime, 1985: 4). Needless to say, what that “verdadero espíritu” might consist of must itself be accounted for. According to Cunchillos Jaime, “la idea predominante que se tuvo [en Inglaterra] durante casi todo el siglo xvii, tanto de la obra como de sus personajes, era la de una farsa destinada a hacer reír, sin sospecharse que podía tener elementos críticos o satíricos ni, menos aún, ideas universales” (1985: 5). Here the critic in question only indirectly describes his reading of Cervantes’s text through an identification of what is missing from that of Phillips: critique, satire and universal ideas. In question in particular, in *Don Quijote* as in Phillips’s translation, is the nature and function of humor. However in the case of a translation, which involves “weighing how best to make that crossing from one world to the other for that elusive third party, the reader” (Newman and Tylus: 23), there are two contexts within which that question is to be posed: that of the original and that of the translation.

With regards to the former, that humor has a significant function within the text is generally agreed upon (with the notable exception, perhaps, of Vladimir Nabokov); it is the nature and purpose of that comic function that continues to produce readers and critics who find themselves situated on opposite sides of an interpretive schism. Anthony Close has identified the two sides of this critical break as those who “treat the comicality of Cervantes’s fiction as simply an obvious and superficial layer, detachable from more thought-provoking layers that lie beneath it” versus those who understand that the comic “pervades and conditions the whole work” (2000: 7). That is, there are those who take the comicality of Cervantes’s novel as an object of critical analysis, and there are those who see it as a means of concealing more complex and





consequential matter which must be excavated from beneath the thin crust of amusing veneer with which Cervantes coats his narrative. Laughing and thinking thus rear themselves as two possible, and often incompatible, reactions to *Don Quijote*. The publication of the second part of the novel, however, already engages the comicality of the first part in serious fashion by introducing characters (who have, like the external reader, read the first part of the novel) both laugh *at* and laugh *within* the text, enabling readers like ourselves to confront our own potential responses as figured in the narrative itself. By enacting such reader responses within his novel, Cervantes transforms laughter itself into serious business.

Other scholars have treated the topic of humor in *Don Quijote* at length,<sup>9</sup> and I will not reprise their arguments here except to point out, as James Iffland does, that the apparent opposition suggested by Cunchillos Jaime (“una farsa destinada a hacer reír” vs. “elementos críticos o satíricos ni, menos aún, ideas universales”) and Close is a false one. As Iffland puts it:

Muchos de los defensores de la escuela *funny book* parecen creer que la risa es un fenómeno inocente, desinteresado, hasta tal punto que si se acepta la noción de un *Don Quijote* esencialmente cómico, no podemos aceptarlo también como libro crítico, inconformista, etc. Pero...la risa no es un fenómeno uniforme, reducible a una esencia primordialmente inocente. Nos reímos por motivos diferentes, muchos de los cuales están lejos de ser inocente. Lo cómico puede encarnar proyectos ideológicos radicalmente distintos, dependiendo en gran medida de quién se ríe de quién y por qué razones. Así pues, definir...el *Quijote* de Cervantes...como *funny [book]* es sólo el comienzo, porque debajo de lo cómico pue-

den estar librándose batallas de dimensiones insospechadas (1999: 34).

Just as much might be said of Phillips’s translation. Cunchillos Jaime offers only a superficial, if common, notion of humor in the Phillips’s text, attributing it to a similar view of humor operative in general in late seventeenth century England. According to Cunchillos Jaime, if “el segundo traductor del *Quijote* no hacía sino reflejar la opinión generalizada que del libro existía en Inglaterra” (1985: 4). Indeed, according to Paulson, “by 1700 at least *Don Quixote* was an immensely popular work in England” (1998: xi), though it was seen fundamentally as “a nexus of theories of laughter” (1998: xv). This account acknowledges implicitly the question raised by one modern critic who asks “why Phillips would burlesque a source text that pursues the agenda he shares. Cervantes burlesqued the chivalric romance, as did Phillips. So why would Phillips travesty Cervantes’s burlesque?” (Nardo, 2012: 6). The traditional view is that Phillips partook of and, through his translation, even encouraged, a debased and oversimplified view of Cervantes characters and of the significance of his novel, participating in a “demotic anglicizing” (Paulson, 1998: xix) and “coarse(ning)” (Nardo, 2012: 4) that would dominate the reception of *Don Quijote* in England during the seventeenth century (Paulson, 1998: xix). According to this reading, Phillips’s apparent break with decorum would reflect, in fact, a generally debased sense of decorum that had emanated from the court beginning in 1660. As John Rutherford puts it, the Phillips translation (or, in Rutherford’s terms, “prostitución”) is full of “la sexualidad y la obscenidad características de la literatura de la Restauración inglesa” (2007: 484). However if we consider more closely the relationship between Phillips’s choice of subject matter, his stated intentions found in the title and pro-

<sup>9</sup> See Eisenberg, Iffland, Close, Scham, Redondo.

logue, and his broader cultural context, we may find a solution which proves less sweeping in its negativity and more nuanced in its insight into the place of this text within late seventeenth century English culture, leading perhaps to more refined sense of the status of humor among competing notions of decorum.

Richard Hitchcock, one of the few recent critics of Phillips's work to propose the importance of reading it within its own context and not simply against the original affirms that "hay que considerarlo dentro del contexto literario apropiado" (2005: 214), stating moreover, with regard to Phillips's alteration of the original, "esto no fue ningún capricho descuidado, sino una maniobra intencionada según la cual pudiera cumplir su propósito humorístico. En efecto, lo que hace Philips es interpretar el texto, adornándolo con referencias a la vida inglesa, y utilizando un léxico conocido entre los lectores ingleses, aunque así consiguiera una versión bastante ajena al texto original cervantino" (2005: 215). While Hitchcock rightly points out the need to concede some sophistication to the Phillips translation, he leaves incomplete the project of offering an understanding of Phillips's "propósito humorístico", an operation which can only be performed through an analysis of the literary and cultural context within which Phillips was working.

Phillips was born during the reign of Charles I, lived through the English Civil War, which resulted in the puritanical period known as the Interregnum, and matured as a writer during the Restoration and the reign of Charles II. In general terms, the second half of the seventeenth century was an era of stark contrasts and intense conflict. By the time Phillips completes his translation of *Don Quijote*, for example, the Puritan inflexibility that had dominated the English Commonwealth and the Protectorate

under Oliver Cromwell in the 1650's (and in which his uncle had played an important role) had given way to the licentiousness and libertinism that is thought to have characterized Charles II's court.<sup>10</sup> The religious and political strife that marked English society in the period also had its effect on contemporary literary production, with the decorum-dominated poetics of neoclassicists like Dryden coexisting with the libertine poetry of John Wilmot, the 2nd Earl of Rochester, and the erotic satire of Restoration comedy, works which reflect the production of what Kevin Sharpe calls "texts of a new politics of pleasure" (2007: 27). The joyful emphasis on pleasure, the erotic and even the obscene that marked this literary culture was the result of the rapid reversals in the political sphere. As Julia Marciari Alexander and Catharine MacLeod describe, "after the repressions of the interregnum and the uncertainties and poverty of the exiled court, there was an appetite for exuberance, indulgence, and transgression" (2007: xiv). Rochester, along with Charles II himself, has been seen as the principal English representative of this "new world of appetite and interest" (Sharpe, 2007: 26), a phenomenon which David Foxon argues was in fact a part of "the Europe-wide emergence of 'libertinism' as a fashionable and pervasive mode of thought whose freedom related to religion, politics, and society as well as to sexual life" (1966: 49). Dale Underwood suggests that the aims and consequences of this libertinism has often been downplayed, at least in terms of any serious ends. For Underwood, Restoration drama has typically been viewed as "a verbally brilliant yet essentially casual, topical, and uncomplicated body of plays... concerned solely with the surface manners of



<sup>10</sup> "as though the pendulum swung from repression to licence more or less overnight" (Baker 1994: 85).



a small and specialized segment of Restoration society...characterized by witty cynicism and sexual promiscuity...largely divorced from the central problems and preoccupations of their age” (1957: 3). In other words, “the historical explanation for what is commonly called the cynicism and immorality of Restoration comedy has traditionally been that of...a reaction to the moral repressions of the Interregnum, a swing of the pendulum, a letting off of steam” (Underwood, 1957: 7). However, continues Underwood, “our growing knowledge of the seventeenth-century intellectual and social history suggests that there are significant areas of relationship between the comedy and its age which have not yet been adequately explored” (1957: 7).

Underwood posits that Restoration comedy “is neither casual nor superficial but a thoughtful, carefully ordered, and pervasively ironic form” (1957: 6-7), while Tom Jones suggests that the libertine texts of writers such as Rochester were designed as a way of interrogating dominant ideology. According to Jones, “Obscenity, in Rochester’s poems at least, is contrived to initiate a questioning of the categories of sexual life” (2015: 232). Christopher Tilmouth ties the development of such literary libertinism in seventeenth-century England to an increasing attitude of skepticism in the age and suggests that this is found precisely in the method of “systematically burlesquing earlier English sources” (2015: 141). Tilmouth continues by insisting that Rochester, for example, constructs in his poetry a “persistently perspectival stance” (2015: 141), one that allows him “to frame assumptions and value-commitments as vulnerable perspectives—typically, as the opinions of exposed dramatic voices—so as to reduce them to mere stances in an aporetic conflict” (2015: 158). As Kirk Combe

describes, “Rochester’s discursive practice is to expose discursive practices” (1998: 18).

Readers of *Don Quijote* familiar with contemporary scholarship on Cervantes’s text will be hard put not to find resonances in these words of much of what is written about Cervantes today, in particular regarding the critical irony and perspectivism which dominate the text. More specifically, however, the possibility that Restoration obscenity might in some way be put to a serious or critical use is reminiscent of what Iffland describes as the function of humor in Cervantes, and stands in stark contrast to what Cunchillos Jaime sees at work in the Phillips translation. Cunchillos Jaime finds in Phillips a microcosm of the Restoration context writ large; for Cunchillos Jaime, in his obscenity-laced translation of *Don Quijote*, Phillips is rebelling against the “estricta disciplina y severos principios” of his Cromwellian uncle, Milton (1987: 6). While it is certainly possible to view Phillips’s work in this light, as an immature act of rebellion by a sophomore nephew who has been corrupted by the vagaries of fashion, it is also possible to consider it as a mode of skeptical critique, and the shifting political and cultural environment of late seventeenth-century England encourages such a reading. If the arrival of Charles II marked the onset of a new representation of “sexual indulgence and pleasure...[which] may have been intended as an antidote to an unpopular Puritanism and as the replacement of a repressive and sterile regime by a monarchy of liberality and abundance” (Sharpe, 2007: 18), the discourse of licentiousness, initially used to celebrate the rejection of Interregnum political culture, was quickly turned against the monarch and the culture he represented.

With the “intensification of a sense of unease and disillusionment which had been steadily

deepening since the first two or three heady years following the Restoration” (Keeble, 2002: 164), as Marciari Alexander and MacLeod point out, “sexual slander became the dominant language of opposition to the king” (2007: xiv). Authors such as Milton, known as dissenters or nonconformists,<sup>11</sup> attacked the court and its reigning ideology, often appropriating and subverting the very modes of discourse made fashionable by Charles II and his followers. N. H. Keeble says that, in this way, and “overwhelmingly, the Restoration world is depicted in nonconformist texts as an epitome of all that is to be rejected, resisted” (2002: 145). Given that the monarchy controlled and restricted publishing through the Licensing Act of 1662, authors needed to find indirect means of expressing their views. Keeble argues that “various expedients were adopted to circumvent these obstacles to the publication of dissenting, radical or revolutionary opinions. Those opinions might be expressed cautiously, obliquely or implicitly; historical and biblical subjects were particularly serviceable in this respect. Fictional worlds could also safeguard authors” (2002: 153). Milton’s representation of evil in *Paradise Lost*, for example, is for Keeble informed by his “contempt for monarchy and for court culture” (2002: 157). Nardo suggests that this was precisely the method used by Phillips who generally “defied the regulators of the press” (2012: 9).

Furthermore, towards the end of Charles II’s reign, the sort of burlesque obscenity evinced in Phillips’s translation of *Don Quijote* has become not the exemplary mode of dominant ideology, but the subversive mode by which that ideology is undermined. As Sharpe suggests, “for a decade or so after Restoration...revolutionary

representations loosened traditional codes and transgressed conventional boundaries, before changed political circumstances dictated a return to moral as well as political norms” (2007: 2). Whereas at the outset of Charles II’s time in power, “promiscuity appeared to be officially licensed and validated” in the 1670s and 1680s, “topicality and specific sexual reference were combined in the devastating critique that initiated a new stage and form in the literature of opposition to Charles II” (Sharpe, 2007: 23), giving way to a new aesthetic that would, by Charles II’s death, condemn the earlier extravagance as “decadent” (Sharpe, 2007: 27). Keeble explains this situation in this way:

in the satires and lampoons of the second half of the decade, that fecund cluster of Restoration images no longer promises a positive culture of pleasure but is perverted to the degrading pursuit of self-gratification: liberality becomes libertine license, fecundity fecklessness and prodigality profligacy. What had been construed as a welcome emancipation from political and religious tyranny has now become an abnegation of all moral restraint which threatens the governance of the state. Uncontrollable sexual appetite and perverse sexual practice is both a central charge against, and one of the rhetorical means by which is registered the degradation of, the court (2002: 175).

To what end, then, the use of such heightened eroticism and even obscenity by Phillips? Kathleen Lubey, in agreement with many of the critics already cited, suggests that the authors of such texts “in all cases...aim to heighten readers’ awareness of their own relation so their reading material” (2012: 12). Such interpretation of seventeenth-century English literature makes possible a more complex reading of Phillips’s translation of *Don Quijote*. Whether he was merely aping courtly culture or skeptical liber-

<sup>11</sup> These distinctions were generally made along religious and political lines, rather than strictly literary ones; see Achinstein.





tinism, or whether he shared his uncle's "antipathy to chivalric epic and Renaissance romance" due to "their obsession with the pageantry and paraphernalia of courts" (Keeble, 2002: 157-158) is perhaps of little importance. In either instance, Phillips can be seen to transform such modes of discourse into "vulnerable perspectives" open to critique and parody. Similarly, in highly Cervantine fashion, he ironically projects his reader and the readerly tastes of his day into his text. To complicate matters even further, Phillips performed within his text the reception of the work he was translating, thus doubling the ironic, perspectival critique his translation embodies. That Phillips used a translation of a Spanish text which itself performs many of the functions he aimed to produce in his own work suggests that Phillips's version of *Don Quijote* operated fully within what John Spurr has identified as the characteristic interplay of masquerade and interest at work in 1670s England, a time, like that of Cervantes in Spain, when many literary works were "eager to disguise whatever moral outlook it may have possessed" (2000: 109). Furthermore, Phillips seems to have recognized in *Don Quijote* a specific critical dimension and methodology, one marked by "multiple forms of textual indirection" (Nardo, 2012: 12), that he wished to transpose to his own context; in doing so, however, he confronted what Burke identifies as a concrete problem for early modern translators who were often seeking to introduce material to readers who had no frame of reference for the original work (Newman and Tylus, 2015: 24).

Consequently, Phillips's rendering of *Don Quijote* into English can be read both as an effect of and response to these circumstances. In an ambitious move, Phillips ridicules, with his mirror of a text, not only the romances of chivalry and their readers, but also *Don Quijote*

and its readers, as well as the producers and readers of Restoration wit, the translation itself evolving a form of double discourse, the first of which coincides with that of the original, and the second of which turns that original itself and its readers, Spanish and English, into an object of scorn. The potential reasons for this are multiple: Phillips may have produced the degraded comicality of his rendering of Cervantes's text in order to lampoon the debauched humor of certain writers of his day or he may have been seeking to lift the comic out of its exile in the realm of the low or the indecorous, much as Cervantes himself is thought to have done (see Close 2000). He may also have wished to mock a Spanish author and his readers in a manner coherent with the anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic fervor of seventeenth-century England. Nardo, for example, refers to Phillips's translation as an "anti-Catholic satire" and suggests that Phillips "represents Don Quixote not merely as a crackpot—the view of contemporary English readers—but as a specifically Catholic crackpot" (2012: 13-15). However, given that his own introduction to the text registers some of the same irony with which Cervantes himself muddies the original, a more generous reading of Phillips's work might find in the "travesty" of his translation a form of indirect commentary on the authors, translators and readers of his day, many of whom no doubt fell into his trap much as later critics have done. Whereas, as Venuti tells us, "translators [of the era] aimed for a stylistic refinement that usually involved a significant rewriting of the foreign text, but that at the same time worked to mask this rewriting [in order to achieve...] an ease and transparency that produced the illusion of original composition" (2000: 55), Phillips everywhere lays bare his activity as translator. When weighed against his comments about the reader

in his prologue, we can read the indecorous transgression of both the original text and the readers' expectations regarding translation itself as an artistic endeavor as just the form of indirect critique that Phillips announces at the outset of his project. Along these lines, Shawcross points out that, like Cervantes, Phillips "sarcastically pokes fun" at the "narrow and prescriptive [if rapidly shifting] demands of the "literati" of his day (2004: 110-111). Much as Cervantes used the second part of his novel as a protracted critique of the readers of his first part through an inclusion of that very text as a published work in the world of the second part (along with the inclusion of Avellaneda's apocryphal second part), Phillips breaks the rules of his enterprise as a provocative measure intended to spur reflection in the reader on the dominant social and aesthetic paradigms of his day.

RECIBIDO EN OCTUBRE DE 2017

ACEPTADO EN OCTUBRE DE 2017

VERSIÓN FINAL DE NOVIEMBRE DE 2017

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