

**Francisco RICO**

*Tiempos del Quijote*

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**Reviewed by**

**Shifra ARMON**

*University of Florida*

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(Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona)



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Francisco Rico's *Tiempos del "Quijote"* presents an archaeology of knowledge about Cervantes's *Don Quijote*. Not, to be sure, an archaeology in the Foucaultian sense of an excavation of discursive formations removed from the particularities of authorship or text, but quite the opposite. Not unlike an archaeologist, Rico sets for himself the dual tasks of dissolving persistent presuppositions surrounding the *Quijote*, and solving equally longstanding *incognitos* regarding the text itself. For example: What exactly happened to Sancho's donkey between the 1604 and 1615 editions of the First and Second Parts respectively? Was Alonso Quijano representative of his cohort —“de los de lanza en astillero”—, of rural Castillian *hidalgos*? How does one explain the fact that the *Quijote* attracted a wider readership outside of Spain than within it during the eighteenth century? Did Adolfo de Castro recover a long-lost work by Cervantes entitled “El buscapie” in 1848?

In pursuit of these questions Rico collates particularities of authorship, material conditions of circulation, and the politics of scholarship with close readings of an unstable text reshaped by centuries of editorial incursion. Taken individually, Rico's interrogations result in dazzlingly erudite analyses presented in a confident yet droll voice that somehow remains hermeneutically committed despite its notoriously polymorphic subject-matter. However, not all readers will welcome Rico's exhaustiveness, which can descend into what one might call scholarship *verité*: the minute, seemingly real-time unpacking of textual enigmas. In conjunction, the eleven republished pieces that comprise *Tiempos del "Quijote"* tend to overlap and echo one another.

Overlap and repetition are perhaps inevitable, for *Tiempos del "Quijote"* assembles far-flung critical essays that Rico published between 1997 and 2009. This assemblage nonetheless provides Cervantes scholars access to an otherwise unavailable archive, either because Rico originally wrote the pieces in Catalan, or because he placed them in publications with limited circulation. Two such essays that *Tiempos* brings to light are the eponymous “Tiempos del *Quijote*” and “La obra romántica más grande de Europa”, both of which appeared in *Quijotismos* (2005), a volume *no venal*; that is to say, not produced for commercial distribution. “Tiempos” traces the novel's rise to the stature of a classic, largely due to foreign rather than native enthusiasm for Cervantes's work. “La obra romántica”, which appeared in *El País* in 2005 under the title “Entre el libro y el

mito”, lays blame for two pernicious (to Rico’s view) interpretations of *Don Quijote* at the feet of the German Romantics: the notion that *Don Quijote* rehearses a conflict between the real and the ideal, and the corollary supposition that this struggle personifies the “presunto espíritu de una presunta nación española” (131). More easily accessed are two essays originally published in *Homenaje a Anthony Close* (Alcalá, 2009): “¿El “rucio” de Sancho?” and “Tras las huellas del asno (1604, 1605, 1608)”.

One of the pleasures of archaeology is the nuggets of understanding that relentless digging can unearth. *Tiempos del “Quijote”* coaxes innumerable pleasures from the substrata of Cervantes’s text, and the storied vicissitudes that followed its initial publication. For instance, I was unaware that the Blas de Nasarre (1689-1751) favored Avellaneda’s *Quijote* over that of Cervantes, while vigorously promoting Cervantes’s dramatic works (118), or that in 1861 the Real Academia Española undertook an abortive attempt to produce an “edición monumental” of the *Quijote*, which subsequently degenerated in committee into a “multitud de torpezas y palos de ciego” (159-161). Other insights I found less edifying. Babiéca’s pronouncement to Rocinante, “Metafísico estáis” in their equine *trot de deux* (Preliminares) alludes, I would argue, and Rico affirms, both to Rocinante’s virtual weightlessness and to his neoplatonic remarks about love. Rico’s well-documented attestation that hunger was thought to give rise to subtlety of thought, and that *metafísico* was considered a synonym for subtlety adds only marginally to my appreciation of the sonnet’s conceptual wit.

Rico’s approach to Cervantine scholarship calls to mind the meticulous spade-and-brush work that allows field archaeologists to fit together scattered shards from the past into plausible narratives. Texts are Rico’s artifacts, be they the *editio princeps* of 1604, Raimundo Bons and Martín Gelabert 1704 *Quijote* (the only Barcelona edition, as Rico explains, based on the *princeps* to be published in that city after 1605), William Lake Price’s ‘composed’ photograph of Alonso Quijano in his library, which, paradoxically, only served to inspire future engravings, or José Manuel Navia’s 200 haunting photographs of La Mancha published as the *Territorios del “Quijote”*, several of which happily appear in full color plates within this volume, accompanied by Rico’s evocative glosses.

“No nos duele entretenernos en pormenores anecdóticos”, Rico confesses in the course of recounting the quixotic lengths to which Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch went to print an authentic *Quijote* on site in Argamasilla in 1863. By making this ephemeral tradition of scholarly anecdote available to a wider reading public, *Tiempos del “Quijote”* allows us to step into Alonso Quijano’s library and dig more deeply into the pleasures of Cervantes’s text.