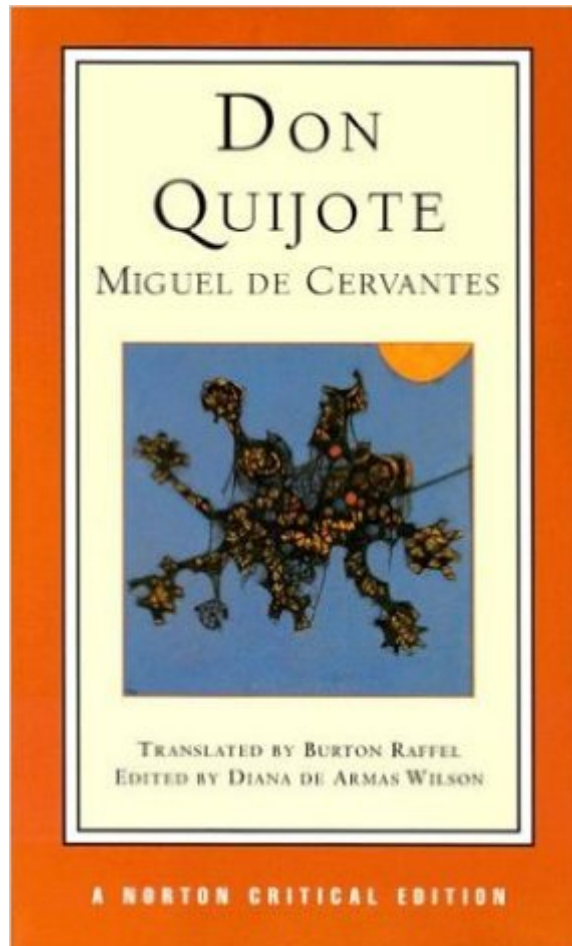


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# Don Quijote (Norton Critical Editions)



## Synopsis

The text reprinted here is based on award-winning translator Burton Raffel's masterful translation of *Don Quijote*, which is consistent, fluid, and modeled closely on the original Spanish. "Backgrounds and Context" invites readers to explore the creative process that culminated in the publication of *Don Quijote*. Included are selections from works parodied by Cervantes (*Amadis of Gaul* and *Orlando Furioso*) and a portion of the spurious sequel to Part 1 written by Fernndes de Avellaneda. "Criticisms" presents fifteen major interpretations of both the novel and selected episodes, describing Cervantes's intellectual milieu, revealing how he infused new life into the literary modes and motifs he had inherited, and illustrating the fundamental importance of *Don Quijote* in the history of modern fiction.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I've spent a bit of time comparing the early pages of Burton Raffel's decade-old rendition with Edith Grossman's brand new one. Both are excellent, so you can't go wrong---and I think either would be a better choice for most people than past translations. I've chosen Raffel's, though, based not only on word choices (and I think some people need to lower their antennae when it comes to things such as Sancho referring to his "kids", which seems quite natural), but on Raffel's better balanced, more focused style, and his clarity of phrasing (which also involves word choices). Raffel's style overall is traditional. Grossman seems to jump between the literal, which is sometimes confusing, and the breezy and modern, which is enjoyable but not as wry and witty as Raffel's balanced

approach. For example, Grossman's description after our hero has tried to grapple with the philosophical convolutions of de Silva: "With these words and phrases the poor gentleman lost his mind, and he spent sleepless nights trying to understand them, and extract their meaning. . . ." Raffel writes: "Arguments like these cost the poor gentleman his sanity; he'd lie awake at night, trying to understand them, to puzzle out their meaning. . . ." A minor example, but with Raffel's rhythm and word choice you can almost visualize the old fellow lying awake trying to "puzzle out" the "arguments"---not just "words and phrases," per se. Raffel is often more subtly attuned. Notice also that "cost the poor gentleman his sanity" is not as modern-sounding as "lost his mind." So don't think that because Raffel uses a few modern word choices for the sake of vigor that he's less distinguished.

This review is for the Norton Critical Edition, translated by Burton Raffel. Hopefully you are already aware, but *Don Quixote* is a timeless classic and some of the most satisfying 1,000 pages ever written. The reviewers trashing the translator have legitimate complaints, but I'm afraid I think they are too harsh, considering the positive qualities of this edition. *Don Quixote* has been translated into English well over a dozen times. I have read at least part of most of the translations, and Raffel's is simply the most accessible one. The flow is uninterrupted and thoroughly engaging. It could satisfy a high school student just as well as an adult bookworm. This is how Raffel's work as a translator shines; you simply don't have to stop and think about those convoluted sentences that don't translate into English well. Raffel finds a way to make it work. Yet it's clear to me that there is no perfect translation of *Don Quixote*, and this is no exception. Raffel tries so hard to make the book accessible to English readers that in some cases he goes entirely too far. For example, almost every reference to gold, silver, and copper coins is Americanized into dollars and cents. In one passage, Cervantes writes that there is no reason to prefer eight reales over a piece of eight. Raffel has turned a piece of eight into a "ten dollar bill." It is utterly bizarre to force the 16th century characters to talk about ten dollar bills in a time when paper money and the American dollar didn't even exist, rather than simply explain what a "real" is in a footnote, as all other translators do. Similar inexcusable modernisms occur throughout the book. There are also several occasions where Raffel seems to miss Cervantes's subtle humor.

'*Don Quixote*' is largely considered to be a satire on the popular chivalric ballads of Cervantes' day, but don't be fooled. This novel is no satire on chivalry, itself. Indeed, through the trials of Quixote and Sancho Panza, Cervantes is perhaps the greatest promoter of chivalric ideas that the West has

ever known. No other protagonist so thoroughly embodies the ideals of heroism, romantic love, friendship, honor, discretion, trust, virtue, and adventure than does Don Quixote. It just so happens that he is insane, but the author is able to look beyond that. So too should the reader. The knight's sallies are absolutely delightful and, it must be credited, alone prove Cervantes' genius in writing. The dialogue between Quixote and Sancho is excellent comedy, creating a duo that has gone unsurpassed in originality and endearment for five centuries. "Is it possible that Your Worship can be so thick skulled and brainless as to not perceive the truth of what I allege?" Classic. But these adventures, hilarious as they may be, give us frame for a storehouse chivalric truisms, the like of which can be found in no other work of fiction. A sampling would include: "An author had better be applauded by the few that are wise than laughed at by the many that are foolish;" "Anyone who has been a good squire will never be a bad governor;" "There is a wide difference between flying and retreating; valor which is not founded on the base of discretion is termed temerity or rashness;" and "Whenever virtue shines in an emanant degree, she always meets with persecution." The reader cannot help but to love such regal assuredness, such profound idealism. Ironically, Quixote's insanity never really contradicts his optimism and in fact vindicates it.

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