



Thomas Percy & John Bowle. Cervantine Correspondence

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Thomas Percy & John Bowle. *Cervantine Correspondence*. Ed. Daniel Eisenberg. Exeter: Short Run Press, 1987. xxii+74 pages.

The recognition that criticism of Cervantes or of any other Spanish classical author has a history, in any sense other than as a series of hypotheses to be superseded, is rare enough. Anthony Close's *The Romantic Approach to Don Quixote* is the exception, not the rule, and even Close's book has a thesis to prove, and not just a history to recount. As editor of *Cervantes*, I repeatedly sought to commission historical surveys of aspects of Cervantes' works, and only once in eight years did I succeed, with Javier Herrero's "Dulcinea and her critics" (II, 1). Rarer yet is a book like this one, whose interest lies quite simply in the contemplation of the enthusiasm for *Don Quixote* and its author shared by two eighteenth-century scholars and bibliophiles, as manifested in a correspondence that spans almost fifteen years, between 1767 and 1781. As Eisenberg notes, the historical importance of this exchange lies in the fact that here "we are witness to the birth of the study of *Don Quixote*, central to the beginning of Hispanism."

Eisenberg has excised irrelevant material from the letters—some twenty percent of the total, he says—and there are long gaps at times between letters, but in this collection one still gets the sense of a real relationship between John Bowle, editor of the first scholarly edition of *Don Quixote* in 1781, and Thomas Percy, whose *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) played a crucial role in the renewed interest in medieval English poetry among the Romantics.

With respect to *Don Quixote*, the relationship between Bowle and Percy evolved over the years, so that while it was Percy who originally planned "an improved translation with large Notes & Illustrations: as well containing Criticisms on the Spanish Phraseology of the Author, as large Extracts from the old Romances by way of a Key to his Satire" (2 April, 1768)—Clemencín *avant la lettre*—, by 1775 he was writing Bowle about "your researches [on *Don Quixote*]," and three years later, as Eisenberg notes in his Introduction, he was "sorry that I must continue an idle Spectator of your curious Researches, without being able to advance them" (29 August, 1778). The correspondence nevertheless documents Percy's abiding interest in Cervantes and *Don Quixote*, and it is a pleasure to read of the joy each of these men takes in finding a long-sought book or successfully bidding for one at auction, or in locating an obscure source to illuminate the masterpiece of "our favorite Author," as Percy calls Cervantes.

The book begins with a brief Introduction identifying Percy and Bowle and closes with a useful "Index of People and Books" mentioned in the letters. Thanks are due to Professor Eisenberg for giving us this curious little volume. Is it too much to hope that now someone will republish Bowle's *Don Quixote*?

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