



**THEIR MAJESTIES THE KING AND QUEEN OF SPAIN
ACCOMPANIED BY
HRH CROWN PRINCESS SIRINDHORN
AT THE SIAM SOCIETY**

Wednesday 22 February 2006

The Siam Society auditorium was the setting for the ceremonial presentation to His Majesty the King of Spain and to Her Royal Highness Princess Sirindhorn of a translation into Thai of the Spanish classic, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, by Professor Swangwan Traicharoenwiwat.

The royal party was welcomed to the Society's premises by M.R. Chakrator Chitrabongs, President of the Siam Society, by Honorary Advisors, Honorary Members and members of the Council of the Society. The Director of the Royal Spanish Language Academy gave a speech placing *Don Quixote* in its universal context, and after presentation copies were offered by the translator to the royal party, His Majesty addressed the assembled diplomats and invited guests. Their Majesties were then invited to visit the Kamthieng House in the Society's grounds.¹

For the record, however, we wish to present a summary of Professor de la Concha's speech, and the text of His Majesty's address.

The Director of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language spoke of the universality of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, the parody of the knight errant who is at the same time a perfect exponent of chivalry, whose madness has moments of lucidity, in a world where reality and illusion fuse, where episodes accumulate and tales are added to the overarching structure. Below is a much-curtailed summary of his speech:

We all have the image in our minds. On a broad plain, mounted on a raw-boned horse and bearing a lance, rides a thin man, some fifty years old, wearing an outfit of medieval armour that is rusty and outlandish. At his side, mounted on an ass, rides a stout, ruddy villager, his squire. They are known universally as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

These fictional characters, now transformed into mythical ones, set out to roam the lands of La Mancha, in the Spanish heartland, a little over 400 years ago, and since then have been ceaselessly traversing the entire world. Today, with the first translation of

¹ A report of the event will appear in the *Siam Society Newsletter*, new series, no.2, 2006.



Their Majesties and HRH Princess Sirindhorn listening to the welcome address of the President of the Siam Society



Their Majesties and HRH Princess Sirindhorn moving to the Kamthieng House



their chronicle into the Thai language, for which we are indebted to the distinguished Professor Swangwan Traicharoenwiwat, their travels bring them to Bangkok, the ancient Kingdom of Siam...

The first part of *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* was published in 1605; it was an immediate success, and various editions were brought out, in Spain, Portugal and elsewhere in Europe; a few months later hundreds of copies were carried across the Atlantic to be distributed in the New World. Ten years later, in 1615, Cervantes published the Second Part and in its Dedication, made to a noble benefactor, with reference to the success achieved, he remarked that he had recently received a letter from the Great Emperor of China requesting, or as Cervantes says “imploring me”, to send him the sequel to the book “because he wished to found a college where the language of Castile [Spanish] should be read and taught, and he wished the textbook to be the story of Don Quixote”. Furthermore, the Emperor wanted Cervantes to travel to China in order “to be the Rector of such a school” although, he added, both wittily and to the point, that the Emperor had said nothing about paying for the journey (II. Prologue).

This is why I say Cervantes must be glad that *Don Quixote* can now be read in the Thai language...Cervantes [would] not find this... incongruous, and ... Don Quixote [would] feel quite at home. To understand this, we must bear in mind that the very creation of this account of Don Quixote’s adventures was a quixotic enterprise; when he wrote [his book], Cervantes was in his fifties and had already lived through many eventful experiences. He had been valet to a Roman cardinal, and had fought at the battle of Lepanto. He was held prisoner in Africa for over five years, and later became a tax collector in Andalusia where, after some confusion regarding money matters, he ended up in jail. It was here, though, behind bars, that the story of Don Quixote was conceived; it arose from a specific place and time, seventeenth century Spain, but has since developed and taken limitless wing, through all space and history.

When Cervantes began writing [his novel], he affirmed that the exploits of this eccentric character were common knowledge and had been written down by various scholars, from which he, as the second author, had taken the original data... Cervantes offers us every little detail of the knight-errant’s daily fare, of his dress and the fact that hunting was one of his passions... [Don Quixote] took a fancy to reading tales of chivalry, very popular in Spain since the fifteenth century, which told of incredible feats performed by heroic figures journeying through imaginary lands and kingdoms, defending impossible causes on behalf of a damsel who would become their lady and sovereign. Our knight from La Mancha was so besotted with such literature that he sold a goodly part of all he had, fine arable land, to buy more and more books of this type, and in reading them he became so entranced that he lost his mind. Thus, confusing “story” and “history”, he decided to carry on the tradition of the adventures he had read about; he dug out an old coat of armour, improvised a helmet, took a farm labourer from his little village to serve as his squire, and the two of them set out to roam La Mancha. At the first inn they came across, he had



Their Majesties looking at a Siam Society publication



His Majesty King Juan Carlos signing the Society's guest book in the Kamthieng House

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himself knighted by the traditional ritual, and Aldonza, a peasant girl he came across there was transformed into the “Lady of his thoughts”, henceforth to be known as the Lady Dulcinea of Toboso.

From this moment onwards, his adventures occurred one after another, all following the same pattern: his mission was to protect the weak and obtain triumphs that could be proffered to his precious lady. Unfortunately, the addled state of his mind led his efforts to end in fiasco, such as when he confused the huge cloth sails of a windmill with flesh-and-blood giants against which he charged furiously...

The result, as can be imagined, is a babel of voices and echoes of other voices and echoes of echoes, all telling and retelling a thousand made-up tales... a huge tableau of bygone Spain, in which the highest traditions of Spanish literature (and, to a good extent, of all Western literature) are set out and revitalized through the presence and works of over 650 actors... who move about Cervantes’ stage...

Shortly after setting out upon his adventures, Quixote had answered “I know who I am” to the farm labourer Pedro Alonso, who on finding him injured tried earnestly to make him realise he was not Don Quixote of La Mancha but “that worthy gentleman Master [Alonso] Quixano” (I. 5)... Don Quixote was breaking down the barriers of his own daily reality to inaugurate ... the idea of “I is another”.

Don Quixote saw a rider approaching on a dapple-grey steed with a gold helmet on his head. “What I see and perceive”, warned Sancho Panza, “is nothing but a man on a grey ass like mine with something glittering on his head” (I. 21)... Don Quixote replied that it was common knowledge that “Everything to do with knights appears to be contrariwise and all because of a crew of enchanters who lead us to think things are what they are...”

The truth is, accordingly, manifold and a combination of perspectives.

Parody, as on many other occasions throughout the work, is here pervaded with melancholy. The inner struggle between [the real] Alonso Quixano and Don Quixote is not only resolved in grotesque failures or in beatings and blows; it also produces within him doubts and inner pain of conscience...

Cervantes... created in *Don Quixote* a uniform world, without borders of time and space... Cervantes wanted his novel to be for people of all ages and types... One day as Don Quixote was walking in the city of Barcelona, he met a Castilian who tried to make him see reason and return to reality, that is to say, to return home to look after his estate and his family; and he said: “You’re a madman [...] and you have the knack of turning everyone who has to do with you into madmen and dolts.” (II. 62). This was “reasonable” advice, yes, but disastrous as well. If Don Quixote had accepted it, the paths towards freedom, towards fantasy, towards the utopia of changing the unfair world we live in would have been closed off to him...

The dialogue between Alonso Quixano and Don Quixote gradually transforms reality ...the story ...ends when Alonso Quixano, having regained his senses, is ready to die... This [universality] is why we can say, not just that Don Quixote has today arrived in Thailand: it is that Don Quixote has today become a Thai.

His Majesty King Juan Carlos of Spain then spoke:

Within the intensive itinerary that the Queen and I have for our State Visit to Thailand, this official presentation of the first translation of *Don Quixote* in the Thai language has an especially deep meaning for us, and fills us with satisfaction.

A satisfaction that is united with the honour of having HRH Princess Sirindhorn here with us, and that of being able to put into her hands this first copy. We appreciate her presence as a show of her affection for Spain, and as a symbol of the Thai people's interest in our rich cultural heritage.

I would also like to express our gratitude to all of you for attending, especially the diplomatic representatives of our Latin American sister nations, who share with us the heritage of Cervantes's works, and the rich legacy of a common language. In addition, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the hospitality of the Siam Society, the established, prestigious organisation that is hosting this event today.

Spain could find no better cultural ambassador to Thailand than Miguel de Cervantes, nor a better letter of presentation than his immortal *Don Quixote of La Mancha*. Neither could the commemorations organised to celebrate the 400th Anniversary of the work's first being published in Madrid in 1605 find a more perfect finale than this presentation, which today has brought us together here in Bangkok.

The novel *Don Quixote* stopped being the exclusive patrimony of Spaniards a long time ago. Don Quixote himself is a universal figure, one of those rare literary characters who, over the course of history, has taken on a life of his own, with profoundly human dimensions.

Cervantes's masterpiece, which you can now read in your beautiful language, is embraced as part of their heritage by all of the peoples that make up the great concert of Hispanic culture, and with them, all of the countries of Latin America: that is, the vast family of 400 million people who, live, create, and express themselves in Spanish today.

From the very beginning of the modern era, during the first half of the sixteenth century, Spain had news of your lands thanks to the tales of sailors and

explorers, as well as the works of chroniclers and Christian missionaries. Magellan, who began his voyage in 1519 and arrived at the Philippine archipelago of San Lázaro in the spring of 1521, was accompanied by Antonio de Pigafetta, who wrote a book titled *The First Trip Around the Globe*.

In it, he described places and customs from these Oriental regions which dazzled his Spanish contemporaries.

Another Spaniard, an Andalusian from the town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, manservant to the King of Siam, later reported on the customs of the court, and his countrymen were astonished by these tales of great elephants tied with chains of gold and horses bedecked with jewels and pearls.

But Spaniards were not only fascinated by exoticism and material riches. Soon, they began to receive even more valuable information regarding Oriental philosophy and its spiritual riches.

At the end of the sixteenth century, a Dominican friar, Juan Cobo, born in Cervantes's homeland, translated a marvellous book titled *Beng Sim Po Cam*, printed on rice paper and whose sole extant copy, now in Spain's National Library in Madrid, was brought to King Philip III. The subtitle of this work expresses the wealth of its contents: 'Rich Mirror of the Clean Heart'.

We find here lessons of universal value, as when Master Beng says: "The man who is wise of heart should love others and do good to all."

In this same spirit, Spain today opens itself to the World.

The Spanish language is spreading around the planet. In the United States, there are now more than 40 million people who express themselves in our language, and it has been estimated that by the year 2030, 7.5 per cent of the world's population will be able to communicate in Spanish. Spanish is now considered the third most important international language in the world in terms of its number of speakers and their development level, its geographical range, its commercial value, its literary prestige, and the interest in studying it as a second language amongst those who are not native speakers.

Spanish language studies in Thailand are experiencing a very promising moment.

More than 40 years ago, Chulalongkorn University founded its Spanish department, which currently has more than 200 students, and it has been joined by Ramkhamhaeng University, where Professor Swangwan Traicharoenwiwat teaches.

It is to her that we owe the fine Thai translation of *Don Quixote* that has just been presented. Moreover, at Khon Kaen University and Prince of Songkla

University Phuket Campus, the number of students in Spanish language programmes continues to grow year after year.

I would like to thank the Thai authorities, and all of the universities and other centres where our language and culture are taught, for their interest and support. We see the introduction of a pilot project for teaching Spanish at three Bangkok primary schools as a major first step in further spreading the Spanish language.

The knowledge of foreign tongues undoubtedly eases communication; but it also encompasses a higher value, that of serving as the key to opening the doors of exchanging philosophical and spiritual values.

We have come to Thailand in a spirit of strengthening our ties of friendship and co-operation, and in this spirit, today's event seems to us highly significant.

Before concluding, I would like, once again, to thank Princess Sirindhorn for being with us here today, and to express our sincere congratulations to Professor Traicharoenwiwat for her devotion to a titanic task, and the very fine results of her efforts.

I hope that the cultural exchange between our two countries may be increasingly intense, in the assurance that this will serve to create a space for growing friendship, mutual knowledge, and reciprocal understanding between Thailand and Spain.

Thank you very much.
