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Love Songs in Spanish for Enjoyment and Learning by Robert Stuart Thomson (review)

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The next subsection is Exercises. Within this section, an instructor may choose to use pre-existing activities or create authentic exercises. These exercises may be text, audio, and/or with images. It should be noted that an authentic exercise is based on a topic (as are the pre-existing activities), which is essentially a grammar point. An exercise is also one individual question, which then can be used to make a homework assignment. Exercises are divided into categories based on a grammar topic. Each time an authentic exercise is created by a teacher, that exercise is added to the database of pre-existing exercises for use by a teacher using Spanish Backpack.

The fourth subsection is H(ome)W(ork) Library. It is within this subsection that the teacher makes the homework assignments to be used in his/her classes. Homework assignments are created by clicking on a button entitled “Add Assignments”. The teacher names the assignment, chooses the number of exercises to review to create the assignment, chooses the grammar topic, and then creates the assignment. The assignment then appears in the HW Library and the teacher is given the option of sharing or not sharing it with other teachers. This section is very self-explanatory and easy to use.

The fifth subsection is titled Audio Recorder. This is an embedded recorder that can be used by teachers to create audio files of any kind—pronunciation activity, oral questions to be used in exercises, even listening comprehension passages that can be incorporated into exercises. The Audio Recorder might be the most powerful tool of all as it provides the most possibility of incorporating not only grammar point practice but rather a cultural component that is not found in other sections. This same audio recorder can be used for students to respond orally to questions posed and/or for oral narrations. The Audio Recorder is an excellent addition to Spanish Backpack.

Finally, the sixth subsection, entitled “My Workshops,” is a list of the workshops (online webinars) which have been given. Therefore, this subsection will not be discussed here.

Spanish Backpack is a site which provides teachers who do not have a CMS at their school with traditional, drill-and-kill grammar activities. Some of the sections are easy to follow and use, while other sections are not as user friendly, unless one watches the How-To Video first. It is a program which can be viewed positively for traditional grammar practice. There are two weaknesses in the program. First, instead of focusing only on grammar, the linguistic function should also be considered. Second, and more importantly, there is no cultural connection. Although some of the exercises reference *Conversa* (the language school in Costa Rica), none of the exercises and/or activities demonstrate any cultural connection. In conclusion, if a teacher is looking for a free Spanish site with an emphasis on traditional, drill-and-kill grammar activities, Spanish Backpack may be a good choice for that teacher.

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Thomson, Robert Stuart. *Love Songs in Spanish for Enjoyment and Learning*. Victoria: Godwin, 2015. Pp. 126. ISBN 978-0-96967-749-9.

Robert Stuart Thomson's *Love Songs in Spanish for Enjoyment and Learning* contains a selection of twenty four beautiful Spanish-language boleros, tangos, rancheras and other love songs (on an accompanying CD), around which a lesson is built. The author has provided general background information for each of the songs, as well as some specific language notes for learners of Spanish. Among the songs there are such classics as Gardel's "Mi Buenos Aires querido" and "El día que me quieras," Agustín Lara's "Granada" and Ernesto Lecuona's "Siboney" (both in Plácido Domingo's rendition), as well as the birthday standard "Las mañanitas."

Each of the 24 lessons is accompanied by black-and-white photographs of the composer or performer; a Spanish song lyric with an English translation; Thomson's notes about the historical context of each composition; his interpretation of the song meaning, and several grammar- and lexicon-related outlines (e.g., about idioms). The author, a music lover, writes that the idea for

the volume originated some decades ago when he became familiar with Spanish-language songs during his travels in Mexico and wanted to consult a book with composer biographies, original lyrics and an analysis of the poetic elements of each song. I wholeheartedly agree that target-language songs can provide a memorable, emotion-charged supplementary teaching method.

Thomson's suggestions for how the text could be used include a cloze text, in which an instructor can white out specific words or phrases from the lyric (such as different past-tense forms of verbs, etc.). Although the author recommends that students print the translation of nouns and verbs as the instructor plays any given song several times (109), this need not be the main goal of the activity, depending on the learning objectives of any language program. "Students will need space to write in an accurate translation" (111), writes the author, and, in a grammar-translation course this might be a worthwhile goal, albeit not universally applicable. Other interesting, fun suggestions are song-related projects (for intermediate or advanced levels of proficiency), such as assigning essays about the life and work of a composer or recording artist; the origins of different musical genres, or simply about why a learner finds a song meaningful (117) or how it has been used in a film soundtrack. A thought-provoking prompt is "what to appreciate in the songs." Thomson poses such questions as: "What is the song about? What does the song reflect about the culture which gave rise to it? What makes the song typically Mexican, Argentinean, Catholic, tropical . . . ?" (11). These are, of course, very broad questions that could lead to fascinating explorations of what students believe is "typically" Mexican or Catholic and thus question their own assumptions and biases. Such topics would work very well, I believe, in mixed groups composed of heritage and non-heritage learners.

Some analysis questions, such as: "Does the songwriter use personification and apostrophe, i.e. pathetic fallacy?" (11) or whether the song is written in a major or minor key, use concepts that should be defined beforehand so that learners can benefit from thinking about them. Others are truly difficult to answer, such as: "Are the lyrics original or unusual?" (11), or "does the music seem original"? The answers will depend, of course, on each listener's experience and exposure to art in Spanish, as well as what each individual learner may consider (un)usual or (un)original. Some statements may be found problematic for certain learners. For instance, a reference to a "commonly held idea in Mexico" (23) that "certain regions of the country produce the most beautiful women" may spark interesting discussion. I believe that the use of the diminutive form *farolito* in "Mi Buenos Aires querido" is not an example of a pathetic fallacy, defined as "the composer attributes emotion to an object (el farolito);" it is a simple use of the diminutive in a line evoking the nostalgia of remembering one's childhood (*el farolito de la calle en que nací*). The definition of the verb *arrancar* as: "(meaning to tear out by the roots) is violent and is a tip-off that underneath the stoical exterior of many Mexican men there might lie a volcano" may be read as a gratuitous generalization about Mexican men, for many persons, women and men, Mexican and non-Mexican, maintain a stoic façade whose connection to the very common verb *arrancar* would be difficult to establish. Similarly, it does not appear to be necessary for appreciating "Caminito" to speculate that a female teacher who was the first love of the lyricist Gabino García Peñaloza "had gotten pregnant . . . but whatever the case Peñaloza lost her" (49). Finally, I would suggest that knowledge of original song lyrics in any language one learns is a worthwhile learning experience in itself, whose main point is not that "it will endear you to many native speakers . . . [as] you are acknowledging something beautiful and distinctive in their culture." Our students and we learn different languages in order to enrich our understanding of the world, of human behavior and of ourselves; but it should be recognized that other cultures do not need us to acknowledge their cultural artifacts and their distinctiveness.

With further proofreading, some typographic errors or omissions could be avoided, such as some accent marks in *María* (3, 4); *América* (4); *quedaron en ti* (8); *Dios* (9); *Trío Los Panchos* (19); *Sabor a mí* (11); *estás perdiendo el tiempo* (18), *Los tres García* (23); *malagueña* (31), *trébol* (46); *apariencias* (53); *Javier Solís* (61); *Domínguez* (63), *junto a ti* (83); [*q*]ue cantaba el Rey David; (107), etc. *Di* is not a present tense form but rather an imperative (15); *se le quebró*

should be used instead of *le se quebró* (16). Some punctuation and capitalization errors can also be corrected. The short bibliography (123–24) would benefit from target-language sources and a thorough revision of citing conventions (e.g., some entries do not state an author, some contain annotations and others do not). Some of the information in the main text should also be verified and supported (e.g., the source of information about Argentinean immigration between 1880 and 1930 on page 88). In conclusion, Thomson's *Love Songs in Spanish for Enjoyment and Learning* is an inspired project that could successfully be used to add an enjoyable cultural component in many beginning, intermediate or even advanced Spanish language classes in the hands of a skilled teacher.

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Fiction and Film

Cervantes, Miguel de. *Don Quijote de la Mancha* + volumen complementario. 2 vols. Ed. Francisco Rico et al. Madrid: RAE, 2015. Pp. 1644 + 1668. ISBN 978-8-46726-353-4.

This deluxe edition consists of two hefty hardbound tomes, accentuated by deep cerulean blue dust jackets and coordinated slipcase. It is a revision and update of previous editions, going back to 1998. Beyond the text and notes, the most valuable part of the first volume is the collection of ten probing analyses of foundational topics (1.1349–1642). These alone justify the price of admission. They range widely, from the books of chivalry and the composition of the text to literary theory of that day and even “the narrator” (although the editorial voice is arguably the authoritative presence that staked a claim in 1.8, not the caricature in 1.9). Be that as it may, it is heartening to see the diegetic make modest inroads into the predilection for the mimetic.

Anyone who has edited the *Quijote* turns immediately to problematic passages. We can consider only three, followed by some editorial desiderata. 1) “En un lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme. . . .” Rico concurs with Gaos, Riquer, and others, going back to Cortejón in the early 1900s, that *quiero* is a null or an auxiliary here, but he maintains that the counterpart in the denouement, “cuyo lugar no quiso poner Cide Hamete puntualmente” (2.74), shows volition: “[C]ervantes recupera el sentido propio del verbo.” This sort of linkage is reminiscent of his treatment of the *caso* in the *Lazarillo*. The egregious misattribution to Cide Hamete is ignored, although it casts fresh doubt on the credibility of our editor. Earlier he had stepped out of character, abandoning distance and control, by extravagantly praising Cide Hamete, Don Quijote, Sancho, and Dulcinea (2.40). Two points: 1) Fracturing the frame to introduce Cervantes as agent, rather than focusing on the diegetic puppets he has created and set in motion, creates confusion; and 2) Each pseudoauthor, narrator, or scribbler has an identity pattern. Close reading will clarify who is where at what point and also how individual and collective discrediting occurs, undermining narrative authority. Critical rigor requires that Miguel de Cervantes remain outside the text but also welcomes his occasional autonomous transgressions. He is not a narrator, not a character, but he is the true hero of the work. Don Quijote is a mock hero.

2) “Dicen que en el propio original desta historia se lee que llegando Cide Hamete a escribir este capítulo no le tradujo su intérprete como él le había escrito. . . .” Homage is paid yet again to Diego Clemencín's edition of the early 1830s, where he called this beginning “una algarabía que no se entiende.” We can understand the passage better today because we have better tools. It is indeed ambiguous but clearly it has to do with orality (*dicen que*) and literacy (*se lee que*) and it presents the paradox of having the durable (writing) seek grounding in the ephemeral