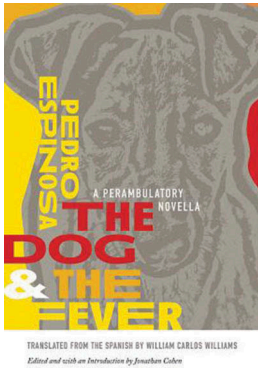


BOOK REVIEWS

Pedro Espinosa. *The Dog and the Fever: A Perambulatory Novella.* Translated by **William Carlos Williams.** Middleton, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2018. 61 pp.

Reviewed by Claudia Routon



When I held *The Dog and the Fever: A Perambulatory Novella* in my hands for the first time, I was immediately taken by the cover, a decidedly modern juxtaposition of shape and palate by designer Mindy Bassinger Hill. The bold reds and yellows against gray indicate that a Spanish work from the sixteenth century promises modern sensibility, delights, and insights to readers in the twenty-first century once again.

The title page faces—mirroring in frame and size—the title page of the original 1625 edition from Cádiz, Spain. This book-maker's attention to detail suggests the whole project has been treated intelligently, thoughtfully, and even lovingly. In fact, it signals a continuing conversation and presages the creative collaboration we see in the book's pages.

The Dog and the Fever is contextualized by multiple frames:

Acknowledgements (Jonathan Cohen, Editor)

Foreword (Paul Mariani)

Introduction (Cohen, Editor)

Preface by the Translator (William Carlos Williams)

Introduction by the Author (Pedro Espinosa)

The Dog and the Fever (Espinosa, translated by Williams)

Notes (Cohen, Editor)

Williams on the Novella (Cohen, Editor)

About the Author, Translator, and Contributors

The novella sits forty-pages long in the middle. Such a presentation highlights the cooperative work that took place to resurrect this translated text. The preface upon preface reminds me, of course, of *La familia de Pascual Duarte* by Camilo José Cela, and of the tools of the Cervantesque. The structure prepares the reader for the novella, and the novella reverberates back to the frames as troubled and difficult—a puzzle.

Even so, the story is a simple one: the narrator goes for a walk and stops to listen to voices he overhears in a cane thicket, a conversation between Chorumbo, “a dog of the chase, and a cynic court philosopher,” and Her Ladyship, Madame Fever (7). The book, the telling of the story, is a recounting of that conversation directed to a Most Excellent Sir. What ensue are long speeches made up of stories, gossip, and proverbs. References abound to money, wine, women, a bishop, the gentry, an old man riding a colt, a prioress, and contemporary literary figures, among others, all dissected by a litany of proverbs that link, intersect, and thrust the narrative forward. Pages six to twenty-six present the Dog’s initial observations, without paragraph break. The Fever responds for fourteen pages before the narration is resumed by the Dog. The last six pages pick up speed as sentences become shorter, louder, and blunt: “Another tack. This and that. Barter. Begone. Pugh. Caresses. Enfeebled. Skinny. Pigheaded. A botcher. With all his might. Tricks of a charlatan. Hollabaloo. Braggart” (45). At the end the narrator excuses himself to resume his stroll.

The narration is discreetly accompanied by a light and timely commentary—moments when Williams clarifies specific word use and literary context. This parallel text is unobtrusive and informative. The original work is acknowledged as an important contribution to the body of literature already celebrated through the literary giants of the Golden Age of Spanish literature—think Miguel de Cervantes, Félix Lope de Vega, and Francisco de Quevedo—at the height of empire. In keeping with their voices, *The Dog and the Fever* is an almost impossible trick of story, intertextuality, play, realism, irony, poetry, and withering satire critiquing the social order.

The poetry intrinsic in the living vulgate, as described by Mariani in the Foreword, has leapt across time and place to be renewed in modern English by Williams. The result is an energetic book in muscular play. Encountering Williams in this work of translation is exciting. The translation began as a collaborative project with his Puerto Rican mother, Raquel Hélène Rose Hoheb de Williams, then in her eighties. Williams keeps the filters of her Caribbean tones in the final product, careful to give her due credit for his fascination with the book and her many contributions. The project was a way for them to connect, bite, and chew, and together they spun webs and threads in constant linguistic whimsy.

In his “Introduction,” Cohen enlightens us with an exquisite treatment of Williams’s context and trajectory, described in detail. Cohen’s observations encompass how Williams links modernism and the work of translation as essential to a living American idiom and how Espinosa’s original work had been attributed to Quevedo, while providing other information and implications drawn from Williams’s autobiography. This little book is a treasure.

I leave you with Williams’s words:

Dog and fever, what more natural to us?

We’re dogs, all of us, at our best and worst if the fever
hasn’t got us, all. Then let us find other means to hide it
than our present ones, for its sweat reeks from us....

For a low-down mutt you’ve got to be low-down.

Low-down and double talk, to bring down the highest:the Dog and the Fever. (1)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claudia Routon is professor of Spanish at the University of North Dakota. Her translations appear in numerous journals, and her third book of translated poetry, *Sky Chess* by Antonio Ángel Agudelo, is forthcoming.
