

Cervantes and His Women Readers

Lisa Vollendorf

Desocupado lector, sin juramento me podrás creer que quisiera que este libro, como hijo del entendimiento, fuera el más hermoso, el más gallardo y más discreto que pudiera imaginarse.
(Prologue, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, pt. 1)

When Cervantes wrote part one of *Don Quijote* as an epistle to the reader, he began a conversation with his reading public that would inform and define modern literature. His iconoclastic prologue crystallizes the triangular relationship among authors, texts, and readers. Whether as an idle or gentle reader, a listener, or even a teller of quixotic tales, the consumer of fiction is positioned as key to the novel's life and legacy. Ten years later, Cervantes solidified novelists' reliance on readers by inscribing readership into the structure, form, and plot of part two, in which nearly everyone—from authors to translators, galley slaves to aristocrats—is intimately involved in reading, writing, narrating, and acting out the story of Don Quijote and Sancho Panza. This lively dialogue between texts and consumers defined the novel as a self-conscious interplay between literature and life.

Undoing the conventions of literature, Cervantes exposes the pedantry and artifice of the pastoral, chivalric, byzantine, and epic genres so popular in his day. He drew on all of those genres to produce a new entity that spoke directly to readers and their world. In that enterprise, he cast a wide net, depicting the lives of rich and poor, Christians and non-Christians, well-known literary characters and real people. By providing an overview of the tumultuous society in which he lived and wrote, Cervantes inscribed the conflicts of the modern nation-state as well as the challenges facing everyday people into what many

have deemed the most influential novel in Western history. Whether viewed from the perspective of Marxism (e.g., Cohen), “new aestheticism” (e.g., Parr), Jungianism (e.g., El Saffar), psychoanalysis (e.g., Sullivan), narratology (e.g., Mancing), materialist historicism (e.g., Johnson; ter Horst, “Rhetorical”), or postcolonialism and postmodernism (e.g., de Armas; Graf; Simerka and Weimer; Wilson; and the March 2005 *Hispania* anniversary issue), *Don Quijote de la Mancha* emerges as a triumph in literary history. Continued interest on the part of readers and critics confirms that Cervantes did indeed produce “a novel of modern times” (Quint).

Perhaps because Cervantes was, in many respects, a writer for modern times, feminists have been hesitant and occasionally divided in their engagement with his writing. His appeal to modern sensibilities is highlighted, for instance, by the frequent use of psychoanalysis for understanding Cervantes’s depiction of the feminine (e.g., El Saffar; Cruz, “Psyche”; Fuchs; Hernández-Pecoraro; Wilson). Similarly, Bakhtin, Foucault, and Girard have been used to good effect to mine the meanings of Cervantes’s representations of women (e.g., Alcalá Galán; Ciallella; Jehenson). Contention is no stranger in Cervantes studies, and women’s studies is no exception. For instance, Theresa Ann Sears unabashedly criticizes readings of Cervantes as a protofeminist as “willfully unnuanced” (54). In a fascinating overview of the alliances between Cervantes and his feminist constituencies, Anne J. Cruz (“Cervantes”) observes that some ideas, such as that of Cervantes being a homosexual (e.g., Combet; Rossi; ter Horst, “Was Miguel?”), are generally dismissed by scholars. Analyses of relationships, marriage, beauty, free will, femininity, and masculinity (e.g., Velasco) represent only some of the points of contention and engagement among feminists who have sought to understand the multiple intersections—between history and culture, art and representation, gender and psyche—that continue to intrigue us in the twenty-first century.

I would propose that in light of recent research on women in early modern Spain, feminist historicism has opened new paths for approaching *Don Quijote* and for enriching our understanding of the dynamic relationship among readers, writers, and texts in early modern Spanish literature.¹ Specifically, new knowledge about women in Spain should help us re-read Cervantes’s relationship to his cultural and literary context. Highlighting women’s relationship to the written word in seventeenth-century Spain and in *Don Quijote*, I suggest a paradigm to reconstruct the relationship between the text’s creation and its readership, between authorial production and readers’ consumption. To illustrate the rewards of this approach and its relationship to other critical investments in early modern studies, I offer a reading of Marcela and Zoraida, two of the most-studied female characters in *Don Quijote*. My final section suggests how feminist historicism might encourage critics of all persuasions to rethink the relationship between Cervantes and his readers, arguing that the relationship turns on the topics of hybridity and difference that continue to captivate scholars across theoretical lines.

Defining Readership

I take as a point of departure an argument that has informed many feminist critiques of pre-nineteenth-century literature for two decades. The argument aims to articulate the limited uses of criticism focused on images of women in men's texts by showing that such representations exclusively provide us insight into the male psyche. Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley summarized this argument in *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings*: "[F]or a male author to write [about] women in these periods was to refer not to women—but to men, to desire not relationship with women, but relationship to the traditions of male textual activity, and, by extension, of male social and political privilege" (4). They emphasize here "homosocial literary activity" (4), which highlights the masculinist orientation of early modern literary culture. Cited by critics, including myself, in the twenty-first century (Nadeau 40; Volendorf, *Reclaiming* 38), the focus on homosocial literary activity persuasively cautions critics against relying on male-authored texts for an understanding of women's lives. Conversely, it has the adverse effect of negating the possibility that authors reached across gender lines. In sum, it negates authors' potentially self-conscious involvement with readership as well as genre, and with men as well as women who formed part of the growing reading public in late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Europe.

The lack of attention paid to women readers makes sense in light of what was known about female literacy and literary production until very recently. Using the marker of one's ability to sign one's name, literacy statistics surveying that period have varied between 25% and 40% in urban areas, with women's literacy lagging behind men's by some 40%–50% (Nalle, "Literacy" 69; Nalle, *God* xvi). Yet the basic measure of signature only speaks to a small part of the equation (cf. Saenger; Cátedra and Rojo). An individual who signed an Inquisitorial deposition could not necessarily also read what she signed. Furthermore, the ability to read must be broken down into phonetic reading, by which a person could pronounce words out loud but not necessarily comprehend their meaning, and comprehensive reading, by which one has the ability to understand the written word. Cátedra and Rojo have estimated that comprehensive reading ability ranged from 0% in some rural areas to 40% in some urban areas (12–13). Their statistics break down previous estimates and also suggest that we should think about reading in categories that include phonetic readers, comprehensive readers, and merely "aural consumers" of early modern texts. Such considerations encourage exploration of the relationship between the text and its historical context, as well as the relationship between Cervantes's oeuvre and other textual production and consumption during the period.

Such inquiries are even more pressing in light of new evidence confirming that women's relationship to the written word was more complex than previously determined. Women's personal library inventories confirm that elite- and artisan-class women owned, if not read, books in Latin and Spanish that ranged from chivalric and pastoral novels to prayer books and religious conduct manuals. Some

of the women for whom inventories exist could not sign their names, thus book ownership could have been more a sign of prestige than a sign of the ability to read. Some women were the sole readers in their households, thus raising the question of whether the ability to read was seen as a benefit in marriage choices or other family matters among the largely uneducated classes.²

Female literacy across class and ethnic lines has been studied within *morisco* and *converso* communities as well. For both ethnic minorities, literacy appears to have played a large part in the transmission of culture, as evidenced by higher literacy rates among *conversos* and also by the clandestine *aljamiado* texts produced by the *moriscos* and discovered centuries later.³ Similarly, *moriscas* and *conversas* now are believed to have had important roles in maintaining religion and culture. For instance, Mary Elizabeth Perry argues in *The Handless Maiden* that *moriscas*, who rarely knew how to read or write, nonetheless occupied increasingly important roles as their male counterparts went into hiding or exile during periods of severe oppression. Perry's study on Hispano-Muslim women overlaps with the findings of Renée Levine Melammed and Gretchen Starr-LeBeau on *conversas'* roles as keepers of culture (166–74; 259–62). Evidence showing that merchant-class *conversas* could read and write at rates higher than those in the general population raises the possibility that they were charged with maintaining written culture as well as household practices and religious ritual. Similarly, Perry's discussion of a *morisca* who "carried copies of Arabic writings between households, hiding them beneath [her] skirts" (Perry, *Handless* 6) confirms that Hispano-Muslim women, who were traditionally divorced from active, public religious roles, found themselves in a complicated position vis-à-vis religion and religious texts.

These conclusions are supported by research that shows Spanish women of Old and New Christian heritage as having been active in public, private, secular, and religious spheres. They ran schools, convents, and small businesses; advised kings, princes, and battered women. From within and outside of convents, they functioned as community leaders, educators, and reformers. They worked as vendors, seamstresses, and healers, and often pieced together a living based on a combination of these activities. Throughout the social spectrum, women positioned themselves as key to the functioning of the emerging nation-state and often overcame the obstacles placed on them by that state and its culture of control.⁴

In terms of literary history, numerous women living within and outside of the convent overcame the obstacles that lay between them and the written word. With the Tridentine rise of convent foundations and the popular example of Saint Teresa, women began to read and write in numbers never before seen on the Iberian Peninsula. From 1580–1700, a boom in women's writing occurred that would forever change Hispanic women's relationship to the written word. As readers, they purchased, read, and otherwise consumed fiction, devotional texts, and conduct manuals, as suggested by Cátedra and Rojo's detailed inventories of women's libraries as well as by women's literary texts. As writers, they cultivated

every known genre—writing poems, plays, prose fiction, autobiography and biography, and letters dedicated to other sisters and friends, religious sisters and advisors, and to well-placed patrons. By focusing, almost without exception, on women's issues—such as motherhood and sisterhood; female friendship, relationships, sexuality, and desire—women authors introduced the reading public to the female experience and presented that experience as grist for the literary mill. In a short period that coincided with the literary maturation of Miguel de Cervantes, women were an increasingly important force as consumers and producers of literature, as well as participants in public life.⁵

Women and the Written Word in *Don Quijote*

The above schema suggests that a revolution in women's relationships to the written word and to the dominant culture was afoot during the time that Cervantes was writing his masterpiece. By placing reading and writing at the center of the novel, Cervantes delved into the implications of that revolution. His keen inscription of social conflict and change is widely recognized as a hallmark of his writing and perhaps is nowhere more apparent than in his repeated criticism of his culture's emphasis on purity of blood. Similarly, *Don Quijote* explores women's changing roles in society and in the literary sphere. As E. Michael Gerli summarizes, *Don Quijote* is "a book as much about books and the readers and writers of books as it is about the mad adventures of its redoubtable protagonist and his amusing squire" (2).⁶ Most striking to any critic focused on gender and difference is that women and men of different classes and ethnic backgrounds figure as readers and writers, listeners and storytellers in the novel. As Carroll Johnson has put it, "No one, not even illiterate Sancho, remains untouched by books" (*Don Quixote* 71). Female characters across class and ethnic lines are empowered as producers and consumers of texts in the novel. Similarly, some characters excluded from access to the written word—either because of lack of comprehension or lack of literacy—lack voice and influence.

The scrutiny of Don Quijote's library (ch. 6) manifests the stigmatization of those who refuse to engage with the pleasures and power of reading. Specifically, Don Quijote's niece and housekeeper show no regard for books, wanting instead to throw them all into the flames immediately. The priest and the barber, as instigators of the scrutiny of the library, exercise some judgment in their choices, thereby defining themselves as readers and critics, albeit arbitrary and bad ones at that. The niece and the housekeeper, armed only with the suspicion that books inspire insanity, sacrifice all texts to the fire. Given the female relatives' hostility toward books and their effects, it is not surprising that these characters remain on the margins of a novel constructed around textual pleasures.

Indeed, the niece and the housekeeper belong to a minority of characters hostile to the written word. Even Teresa Panza produces letters, and Sancho learns the chivalric code. The novel criticizes the domestic women's petty attempts to exert control: unable to prevent quests inspired by literature, they gleefully participate in the book burning as an attempted exercise in control. Eight chapters

later, Marcela's powerful example contrasts with the anti-textual characters' limitations. Viewed as a "masculine" woman (Fuchs 22) and as a character who most mirrors the novel's "free-willed protagonist" and seeks to "establish a feminine narrative self" (Gabriele 507–09), Marcela also has been identified as a literary innovation without precedent (Jehenson 28). Principally, she is a character intimately connected to a textual tradition. Her relationship to the written word animates her actions and makes her independence possible.

In contrast to the niece and the housekeeper, Marcela derives her power from books: she is empowered by her total comprehension and concomitant rejection of the role assigned to women by the pastoral tradition. Her complete knowledge of the codes of gender and romance in the pastoral tradition liberates her from the rules of romance. Extracting herself from the role of object, Marcela positions herself as a subject, as a woman appropriating a traditionally masculine narrative of independence and freedom. She speaks for herself ("Vengo [. . .] a volver por mí misma," 141) and she articulates her positionality and agency ("Yo nací libre, y para poder vivir libre escogí la soledad de los campos," 142). In these few words, Marcela explains her rejection of multiple gender norms that operate both in literature and in life. She refuses to comply with the dicta that women must return men's affection, marry by a certain age, and remain domestically bound to maintain a chaste reputation.

In that she takes an active role in the public sphere and in defining the terms of her engagement with that sphere, Marcela resembles historical women who intervened in public culture and occupied roles—as authors and artists as well as founders of convents and managers of businesses—traditionally prohibited to them. Intervening in what might be considered the most masculine of genres, for example, Beatriz Bernal (b. 1500s) wrote a chivalric novel, *Don Cristalián de España*, in 1545, peopled with dozens of female characters. Likewise, Sofinísba Anguissola (1531–1626) was court painter to Philip II during Cervantes's lifetime. The noblewoman Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza (1566–1614) went to England in search of martyrdom and documented her spiritual journey in numerous letters and poems. Cervantes certainly would have known of these and other women. He would have observed the changes in women's roles in the public sphere and would have known of women following the literary and spiritual example of Teresa de Avila, whose work was widely read by the time he was composing *Don Quijote*. The fictional Marcela shares these and other women's commitment to forging new ground. Rather than being held captive by literary or social traditions, Cervantes's Marcela ingeniously seeks to navigate the gender constraints.

The effectiveness of Marcela's discourse lies in her knowledge of the male characters' story about her. It is in this fundamental sense that Marcela represents an intervention into the pastoral genre. At the textual level, she speaks on her own behalf and tells a story that deconstructs the men's versions of her arrogant, homicidal actions. Marcela upsets men's dominance over language and narrative. She is able to do so because her knowledge of the pastoral genre arms her. She

knows prospectively that men will depict her as cruel and cold—an ice queen who refuses their warm embrace. In this sense, her speech engages all pastoral discourse and challenges readers and writers of pastoral fiction to consider women, who so frequently are represented and so rarely represent themselves. At the intertextual or generic level, the character turns the pastoral genre's treatment of women upside down. Marcela exemplifies women's ability to comfortably occupy a position of agency and independence, a position in which women act as creators and narrators rather than idealized creations of male shepherds and masculinist literary tradition.

Insofar as Marcela uses her knowledge of the pastoral tradition to escape the genre's entrapment of women as objects, Cervantes's representation of her is one of the most ingenious representations of women in male-authored Golden Age literature. That the male characters are woefully unprepared to react to Marcela's speech extends that ingenuity to encompass a more profound critical commentary on gender relations. After Marcela declares "no gusto de sujetarme" (143) and exits the scene, the responses of Don Quijote and the other male characters critique traditional literature's entrapment of female characters. That is, traditional plots exclusively legitimate the objectification of women, and Cervantes reveals that this impedes the characters and therefore the plots from exploring female characters' subjectivity. We see this in Don Quijote's response to Marcela; he perceives that the other men will follow her and is moved to take on the role of protector: "Lo cual visto por don Quijote, pareciéndole que allí venía bien usar de su caballería, socorriendo a las doncellas menesterosas, puesta la mano en el puño de su espada en altas e inteligibles voces, dijo, 'Ninguna persona, de cualquier estado y condición que sea, se atreva a seguir a la hermosa Marcela, so pena de caer en la furiosa indignación mía'" (144). In spite of being intrigued by Marcela's independence, Don Quijote cannot free himself from the trap created by his fiction-bound chivalric code. Marcela emerges as she entered, being described by a male character as "menesterosa" and "hermosa." Further solidifying the irony of the male reaction, Cervantes depicts the men picking up where they left off. They bury Grisóstomo and promise to engrave a blame-casting epitaph on his gravestone: "Murió a manos del rigor / de una esquiva hermosa ingrata" (145). Finally, Don Quijote persists in his idea to offer his services to Marcela (145).

Through the Marcela episode, Cervantes gives the pastoral and chivalric genres a twist and, also, connects those genres to the shifting roles of women in his culture. The episode exposes the limits of masculinity and femininity bound by literary and cultural codes by revealing those codes to be so restrictive as to be inoperable in the changing world. In the face of evidence that shows traditional femininity as constraining women's ability to exercise free will as well as traditional masculinity impinging on that will, the male characters continue to react as though nothing were different. Yet historical evidence suggests that women were changing, or at least resisting, those codes of conduct. Just as the depiction of the niece and the housekeeper shows them to be marginalized by their anxiety about

the written word, the narration of Marcela and Grisóstomo provides one of many examples of Cervantes's keen awareness of the changes in women's relationship to the spheres of influence that included writing, reading, and public life.

Hybridity and the Other: Rethinking Feminist Alliances through Zoraida

Zoraida of the Captive's Tale emerges as another extraordinary female character in *Don Quijote* for whom orality and literacy play a key role. The standard synopsis of her story overlooks this important aspect of the character. Simply put, the chaste young Muslim woman steals from her father and regales a Christian captive with wealth so they can both be liberated and flee to Catholic Spain. Overlapping class, race, gender, religion, exchange, and commerce, Zoraida's narrative provides an excellent point of entry for critics interested in interrogating this cross-section of issues in early modern society and culture (e.g., Brownlee; Garcés; Gerli; Johnson, *Cervantes*).

Carroll Johnson's chapter on the Captive's Tale in *Cervantes and the Material World* raises many questions for further feminist historicist inquiry. He deciphers Zoraida's progressive diminishment throughout the tale while also deconstructing the critical interpretation (e.g., El Saffar; Gerli) of it as representing a return to an idealized Spain "presided over by peace and justice" (Gerli 42). Johnson suggests that Zoraida journeys from linguistic and economic empowerment in protocapitalistic Algiers to voicelessness and poverty in feudo-agrarian Spain, where the old order triumphs and Zoraida is promised, at best, a position as a second-class *morisca* citizen (*Cervantes* 92). His brilliant analysis accounts for the diminution of the self that is utterly apparent in the journey Zoraida takes from producer of discourse and creator of plots to a seemingly feeble character silenced by her inability to speak the language of her future husband and country.

Although Johnson observes that Zoraida steals from her father, he also downplays the connection between her protocapitalistic success and her thievery, asserting that the "narrative makes clear that Zoraida owns all the means of production" (*Cervantes* 85). It is true that she stands better positioned than the captive, Ruy Pérez, for at least she will inherit her father's wealth; yet the young woman betrays her father emotionally, economically, and culturally to acquire that wealth and leave Algiers.⁷ These are no small matters: her freedom depends on betrayal, and after that betrayal she loses her economic and discursive power. In the end, all that she retains is her allure as an exotic, Muslim woman seeking a new homeland.

An alternate, differently historicized reading of the nation's treatment of religious and gender difference can help us render a less problematic reading of the connection between Zoraida's economic power and her thievery. First and foremost, Cervantes presents Zoraida as empowered through the mutually dependent mechanisms of money and discourse. In this schema, language is as important as money: Zoraida is able to put a plan into motion through both mechanisms. Her compromised position as someone who only has access to wealth through theft underscores the marginalized position she occupies as a

woman in her home culture. This compromised position is most evident in the self-damning statement to the captive in which she writes: “[N]o te fies de ningún moro, porque todos son marfuces” (1: 430, ch. 40). Although readers know that Zoraida cannot be trusted by her father, the captive takes her at her word. He responds positively to her plea, affirming his commitment to take her to Christian lands and acknowledging the righteousness of her slur against the “Moors”: “[S]abe que los cristianos cumplen en lo que prometen mejor que los moros” (1: 431, ch. 40).

The dichotomy between Christian reliability and Muslim infidelity and the discourse of the idealized homeland (“tierra de cristianos”) frame the interaction and, indeed, the relationship between Pérez and Zoraida from the outset. The inherent hypocrisy of the exchange also highlights the complex relationships between Zoraida and her father as well as between Christians and Muslims. Instability marks all of the relationships, in which an emotional, perhaps even religious, economy destabilizes the protocapitalism of Algiers. Ruy Pérez and Zoraida both emerge as naive participants in these initial exchanges: she because of her willful enactment of a narrative that will eventually contain her; and he because of his blind faith in the promises of that narrative.

The tropes of an idealized homeland and false promises of religious harmony must have resonated with many readers of *Don Quijote*. In 1580, the same year that Cervantes himself was freed from captivity in Algiers, Philip II established himself as the ruler of Portugal. The threat of the Inquisition in Portugal motivated thousands of *conversos*, whose ancestors had fled Spain to avoid persecution in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, to return to their homeland. The idea that Spain represented a relatively safe haven resonates with the Captive’s Tale, thus bringing us to consider the means by which Cervantes masterfully inscribes the predicament of minorities into the narrative. The equation of Spain with safety makes sense for the Christian captive. Yet, as Johnson argues, based on Pérez’s military occupation and his family situation (in which inheritance was divided among all brothers) (*Cervantes* 81–83), and as Cervantes’s own experience seems to reflect, the captive may return home only to occupy the liminal position of a man no longer central to his family.

Equally relevant for readers is Zoraida’s idealized view of Spain as a safe haven for Christian converts. Although the rhetoric of salvation may have appealed to some readers, those who had knowledge—either firsthand or through others’ experience—of the treacherous nature of the Christian state would have raised their eyebrows at this glorified representation. Given that the readership of *Don Quijote* likely included the entire spectrum of socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, male and female readers and listeners would have made connections between such language and the betrayals of a state that had broken its promises not to persecute Jews and Muslims and to welcome New Christians into the fold. Like those who sought a homeland that never materialized for them, Zoraida becomes disconnected from a culture that defined her and enabled her to speak.

At her home, Zoraida occupies a secondary position insofar as she is an enclosed woman in her father's home. But she is able to exert power over Pérez through her use of discourse, intellect, and appropriated wealth. Like many of the *moriscas* discussed by Perry, she has a special relationship to the written word, yet it is only a partial relationship by which she produces discourse under circumstances made possible by the shelter of her native culture. Displaced by her journey to Christianity, Zoraida becomes mute and powerless; she is an exotic other whose appearance betrays her cultural roots: "Mora es en el traje y en el cuerpo; pero en el alma es muy grande cristiana" (406). This description, like others that invite voyeurism of Zoraida/María in the inn (406–07), confirms that the character is a convert and an outsider in a country that, by 1605, treated both groups very poorly.

Like the *morisca* mentioned by Perry who admitted to inquisitors that she had carried Arabic texts under her skirts, Zoraida holds her language and culture close to her body. She temporarily displays them in her appearance. Like thousands of *moriscos* whose relationship with their culture had been disrupted by the Christianization of Spain, Zoraida moves from a location of relative power to one of marginalization, from production of discourse to hiding that discourse. Pérez's description of Zoraida articulates the trap in which she now exists: she is stuck not only with the clothing, which she can exchange, but also with a body that always will give her away as an inauthentic Christian.

The story leaves the reader wondering what will happen to her and Pérez now that they have reached a land much different from the one of their dreams. Johnson asks whose story is sadder: that of Pérez, who will find himself on the margins of his own land's people, or Zoraida, whose silence speaks for her loss of language and culture. Imagine the response of those who, living on the ethnic or economic margins, would have read or heard this story. The tale speaks specifically to the *conversos* betrayed by the *limpieza de sangre* statutes in the mid sixteenth century; to the Portuguese immigrants who viewed Spain as the "least worst" choice as a safe haven; to the *moriscos* whose culture had been the subject of discriminatory decrees and expulsions; and to all of the *segundones* and others who, like Ruy Pérez, felt frustrated by the limited opportunities of the shifting economy.

Cervantes's placement of a woman at the center of the Captive's Tale inscribes a gender-focused narrative into Spain's nation-building drama. His repeated criticism of the ideology of purity of blood suggests that he understood that the statutes affected women profoundly by increasing pressures on them to maintain, or at least appear to maintain, sexual chastity and pure family lines. Zoraida, whose blood presumably will mix with that of Pérez and thereby further delegitimize his position, represents future losses to be had by *moriscos*, *conversos*, and all New Christians. The Captive's Tale comments on the tragedy of the modern nation-state by drawing attention to the failure of the state to follow through on promises to Muslims and Jews; its refusal to assimilate the new classes that it created by forcing thousands to convert, the removal of Muslim children from their

parents' homes, and other deeds by which the government had destroyed the potential of a rich, and richly hybrid, nation. Such changing rules of engagement redefined the roles of women and minorities, likely sensitizing those readers in particular to the critique of prejudicial nation building put forth by Cervantes.

Refining Critical Alliances

Feminists, historicists, materialists, Marxists, and psychoanalytic scholars have a critical investment in deciphering the text's relationship to the complex hybridity that defined and vexed the emerging Spanish nation. At this stage, Spanish feminist historicism necessarily involves consideration of multiple classes, religions, and ethnicities. By looking anew at this maturing field, we might find that critical alliances converge in ways that lead to new, probing analyses of Cervantes's work.

By positioning Zoraida at the center of the discussion of race, class, and difference in early modern Spain, the *Captive's Tale* highlights women's relationship to the early modern nation. Zoraida represents the potential for women's centrality at the same time she reveals the limits of women's access to power. Both in terms of economics and discourse, she is contained after offering herself up for exchange. Unlike Marcela, Zoraida cannot upset any genre, for hers is the quintessential historical narrative of conversion, displacement, and silence. Yet Marcela and Zoraida share a position as outsiders and an engagement with the written word. In this regard, both transcend the boundaries of their respective narratives and enact broader narratives of marginalization. Both speak from the margins yet assert control over their respective stories. In this fundamental sense, Marcela and Zoraida offer a point of convergence between the Cervantine textual labyrinth and the shifting historical realities of seventeenth-century Spain.

Reading Marcela as a pastoral author/actor opens up the possibility for further discussions of comparisons between her narrative and the literary production or even historical examples of other women of Cervantes's day. Indeed, Marcela's textual example of a gynocentric intervention into masculinist literary tradition anticipates many of the women's texts published later in the century (Romero-Díaz; Soufas; Vollendorf, *Lives*). Emphasizing the historical connection, Zoraida's role in the *Captive's Tale* leads to the consideration of connections between cultural and economic power and production. Cervantes further highlights these multifaceted issues in the episode involving Sancho Panza's neighbor Ricote and his daughter Ana Félix. Her open-ended tale, in which Christian characters seek a pardon for the *moriscos*, underscores the difficulties that await Zoraida and her future husband. The analysis of Zoraida offered here suggests that historical feminist approaches also promise to help us further recover the Hispano-Muslim and Sephardic aspects of Cervantes's oeuvre.⁸

The arguments put forth here only scratch the surface of multiple connections among Cervantes and his readers. Further comparative studies will lead to a better understanding of the relationship between men's and women's literary production and will, I believe, reveal more ways in which women entered into a con-

versation with Cervantes about the changing relationship of individuals to means of economic and cultural production in the imperial and colonial contexts.

One example of the reinscription of Cervantes's work by a woman in that context arose decades after his work across the Atlantic. In 1676, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz wrote a playful *villancico* depicting the Virgin Mary in battle garb complete with *yelmo*, *botines*, and *armadura*. Using a masculine model for the Virgin Mary was commonplace to religious writing, in which the Virgin often was described as *varonil*. Yet Sor Juana takes the representation a step further, depicting Mary as a *caballera andante* in the tradition of Don Quijote's quest to stifle injustice: "La que venga los agravios, y anula leyes injustas, asilo de los pupilos, y amparo de las viudas; La que libertó los presos de la cárcel donde nunca, a no intervenir su aliento, esperaran la soltura."⁹

Sor Juana's quixotic Virgin highlights the profound resonance *Don Quixote* likely had with those who observed or directly experienced injustice in the pan-Hispanic world. The *villancico* thus brings us to consider Cervantes's readership in an international context as well as from the perspective of gender. *Conversos* and *moriscos* navigating a culture with changing rules about New and Old Christians and the privileges of citizenship would have read *Don Quijote* very differently from those who occupied positions of privilege in Spain or the Americas. Sor Juana may have seen the potential for liberation and for limitation in *Don Quijote's* portrayals of the modern state and the modern self.

The endless possibilities for these and other interpretations of the novel have been highlighted by readers worldwide. Most recently, Algerian writer Assia Djebar spoke to the influence of the novel at the New York Public Library in April 2005, identifying Zoraida as a literary foremother for Arab women writers.¹⁰ Djebar's remarks point to the promise of new approaches that focus on women and minorities as readers of Cervantine texts. Indeed, her comments open a world of alternative, subaltern readings that has yet to be sufficiently explored; a world in which we can imagine the authors of the covert *aljamiado* texts and the women who hid such texts in their skirts as readers of *Don Quijote*; a world in which *moriscos*, *conversos*, and other potentially disenfranchised readers made their own connections between literature and life when they read about Marcela, Zoraida, and the other characters who tilt at their own windmills.

Focusing on the Cervantine legacy from the standpoint of women and minorities confirms that although Cervantes used masculinist literary models to shape his novel, he engaged in an entirely new kind of literary activity that transcended the homosociality of previous textual production and reached out to a growing reading population. Speaking to many possible readers whose relationship to the written word and access to the dominant culture was shifting even as he wrote, Miguel de Cervantes constructed a novel that was modern in its innovative engagement with literature and life. The modernity of *Don Quijote* thus lies in its inclusion of techniques and topics that have reached out to countless "idle readers" and inspired generations of women and men to seek pleasure as consumers, producers, and interpreters of the text.

From the daughters of Zoraida in Algiers to the literary descendants of Marcela in artistic production the world over, *Don Quijote* continues to engage readers and writers in a conversation that has lasted four hundred years. By inserting the novel's centuries-long engagement with women and minorities into that conversation, critics of all stripes will honor the legacy of the man who taught us to understand the fluid relationship between readers, writers, texts, and the lives lived by all.

California State University, Long Beach

NOTES

1. The feminist historicism advocated here grows out of historicist and materialist feminism of the 1990s, such as that seen in Traub, Kaplan, and Callaghan; Wayne.

2. See Cátedra and Rojo for a discussion of women's instruction, reading, and book inventories (39–67, 222–23). Also see Bouza Alvarez for more on women as readers.

3. For more on the intellectual life of the *moriscos*, see Harvey 122–203.

4. On aristocrats, see Nader, Romero-Díaz, Sánchez, and Weissberger; on working women, see López Beltrán, and Perry (*Gender and Disorder*); on nuns and *beatas*, see Arenal and Schlau, Bilinkoff and Greer, Giles, Poutrin, Schlau, and Weber; on education and advisory roles, see Vollendorf, *Lives* 169–86.

5. The boom in textual production is the topic of my *Lives of Women*, which discusses over fifty women of diverse class and ethnic backgrounds.

6. Edward Friedman makes similar observations in “Reading Inscribed.”

7. Although Johnson convincingly discusses Algiers as having an ethically and economically primitive system in which “wealth is generated by taking it from somebody else” (*Cervantes* 78), the fact remains that Spanish readers likely viewed theft as reprehensible, although some Christians may have seen this as less reprehensible if performed in the name of Christian salvation.

8. Johnson urges critics to recover these roots as well in his linguistic and cultural explanation of “quijote” (“Dressing Don Quixote”). See Lee for a discussion of the Ricote episode.

9. The 1676 *villancico* (1: 10) is online at the Dartmouth Project (<<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sorjuana/>>). I am thankful to Emilie Bergmann for help in locating the text.

10. I thank Barbara Simerka for this reference and for her generous help with this article. For a summary of the 2005 *Quijote* celebration at the New York Public Library, see <<http://www.elcultural.es/Quijote/noticias.asp>>.

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