

Spain and the Moors

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From its narrative voice to its generic intertexts to the fantasies of its protagonist, *Don Quixote* engages with the problem of Spain's Moorishness at every level. Through a multifaceted engagement, the text considers the place of Moors within Spain in the violent and tragic aftermath of the fall of Granada. Cervantes thus crafts a variety of literary responses to the pressing political problem of Morisco assimilation in the period.

Over the course of the sixteenth century, Spain tried with mixed success to assimilate the Moriscos (or *nuevos convertidos de moros*, Muslims who had been forcibly converted to Christianity) and their descendants, while ostracizing their culture and language. The years immediately after the fall of Granada in 1492 were particularly uncertain. The guarantees of religious freedom offered to the Muslims at their surrender were quickly violated by the Spanish victors, and the ensuing revolts became a justification for more repressive measures. By 1502, a royal decree stipulating that all inhabitants of Castile must be Christians had voided the terms stipulated at Granada as well as older protections for the various *Mudéjar* communities of Castile (Harvey, *Muslims* 21–22). The culturally sensitive approach to proselytism favored by Archbishop Hernando de Talavera, who advocated preaching in Arabic, was replaced by a far more militant approach under Inquisitor General Archbishop Francisco de Cisneros. Muslims soon gave up their violent resistance to the conversions and instead turned increasingly to the covert practice of Islam. An important fatwa issued in Oran in 1504 offered guidance for devout Muslims on how to live as forced converts, through dissimulation and an internalized faith (60–64). By 1526, the Kingdom of Aragon had joined Castile in forcing Muslims to convert. As L. P. Harvey points out, "After 1526 there were certainly many Muslims in Spain, but they all had to be *crypto*-Muslims, and the public profession of faith (*idhan*), an act of such crucial importance in Islam, could no longer be heard in the land" (101).

From the 1520s through the 1560s, legislation against Moriscos was softened by means of bribes, as Muslims agreed to accept baptism and pay a heavy tax so that they could postpone scrutiny by the Inquisition into the real measure of their conversion. This accommodation became increasingly fragile as the century wore on, and Old Christians grew skeptical about any progress in the assimilation of the Moriscos. As the earlier accords expired, the crown passed ever more repressive legislation against Morisco cultural practices, including even the use of Arabic and Moorish names. This time, Morisco leaders were unable to secure postponement, and the legislation led to a violent uprising in the mountains of the Alpujarras (1568–71), which was put down only after heavy fighting and widespread destruction. The defeated were in many cases enslaved, and all Moriscos from Granada, with the exception of a very few noble families, were forcibly resettled throughout Castile.

Scholars disagree on the degree of assimilation that was achieved through acculturation and intermarriage during this period. Irrespective of the degree, the recalcitrant, devious Morisco became a reviled stereotype and an easy target for polemicists who argued that Moriscos, given their insincere faith, posed a religious threat to Christians and a military threat to Spain as a fifth column for the Ottomans, while multiplying dangerously because they neither went to war nor entered monasteries. In 1609, after decades of debating what it regarded as the Morisco problem, the crown finally decreed the expulsion from the Peninsula of what was now at least nominally a Christian minority of Muslim ancestry. This move met with strong disapproval from the Vatican. The expulsions, which extended to 1614, caused untold suffering and economic disruption. Cervantes's writing career, and in particular the second part of *Don Quixote* (1615), thus coincides quite closely with the years of greatest strife over the Moriscos and their place in Spain.

Yet however fraught Spain's relation to the last Moriscos on its soil, and despite the legal repression they suffered, Iberia was inextricably connected to Moors and Moorishness. Well into the sixteenth century, Spain was perceived by European travelers as a Moorish nation. And in an important sense it was: language, dress, food, architecture, gardens—all evinced the enduring traces of the culture of Al-Andalus in the Peninsula and could not be legislated away. In many cases, Moorish culture was not even recognized as such by Spaniards—it was simply local tradition—and it required the foreign gaze to stigmatize it as other. Toward the end of part 2 of *Don Quixote*, the hidalgo gives Sancho a lesson on Arabic etymology that establishes both his recognition of its place within Spanish and its ordinariness. From *alhombros* to *borceguies*, Arabic names the stuff of everyday life. While Arabic had been forbidden in the 1560s as part of the wholesale repression of Moriscos, Arabic-derived Spanish could not be purged, and much of the material culture it named endured unproblematically.

The quotidian presence of Moriscos and of Arabic is part of the joke when in part 1, chapter 9, of the novel the primary narrator must find an Arabic translator for the old papers that he buys in the Alcaná market:

... vile con caracteres que conocí ser arábigos. Y puesto que aunque los conocía no los sabía leer, anduve mirando si parecía por allí algún morisco aljamiado que los leyese, y no fue muy dificultoso hallar intérprete semejante, pues aunque le buscara de otra mejor y más antigua lengua, le hallara. (179)

... I saw that it was written in characters I knew to be Arabic. And since I recognized but could not read it, I looked around to see if some Morisco who knew Castilian, and could read it for me, was in the vicinity, and it was not very difficult to find this kind of interpreter, for even if I had sought a speaker of a better and older language, I would have found him. (67)

Speakers of both Arabic and Hebrew abound in the marketplace, whatever the official rhetoric about Spain's exclusive adherence to Christianity, and the translation of an Arabic manuscript in Toledo poses no difficulty.

From the moment the Morisco translator reveals that the old papers are really the *History of Don Quixote of La Mancha, Written by Cide Hamete Benengeli*, the entire text becomes colored by the problem of Christian-Muslim relations and the accommodation of Moorishness in Spain. The original narrator's first thought is that Cide Hamete will pass silently over Don Quixote's greatest deeds, in an effort to diminish the achievements of his natural enemy. But of course the conceit is that there is no Quixote beyond Benengeli's, and the Arabic author's frequent interjections, particularly in part 2, only exacerbate the feeling of ontological uncertainty. Benengeli invokes Allah, swears as a Catholic Christian, and generally reminds the reader repeatedly of the conditions under which this tale is being told.

Beyond the games with authorship, however, the very genre that Cervantes parodies reveals the particular closeness between Spain and the Moors. A Spanish knight of romance, Cervantes suggests, could never occupy the same position vis-à-vis a Muslim enemy as did other Europeans. While the Moors were the traditional enemies in the so-called Reconquest of southern Iberia, that protracted struggle also featured many instances of Christians allying with Moors for specific purposes. Such alliances feature prominently in the foundational narratives of the great heroes Cid Ruy Díaz de Vivar and Bernardo del Carpio. When Cervantes pokes fun at the genre of chivalric romance, then, he also ironizes Spain's traditionally marginal position in relation to Christian Europe. It becomes clear from Don Quixote's first musings on his chivalric models that Spain does not fit neatly in a chivalric paradigm:

Decía él que el Cid Ruy Díaz había sido muy buen caballero, pero que no tenía que ver con el Caballero de la Ardiente Espada, que de solo un revés había partido por medio dos fieros y descomunales gigantes. Mejor estaba con Bernardo del Carpio, porque en Roncesvalles había muerto a Roldán el encantado, valiéndose de la industria de Hércules, cuando ahogó a Anteo, el hijo de la Tierra, entre los brazos. (I: 116 [ch. 1])

He would say that El Cid Ruy Díaz had been a very good knight but could not compare to Amadis, the Knight of the Blazing Sword, who with a single backstroke cut two ferocious and colossal giants in half. He was fonder of Bernardo del Carpio because at Roncesvalles he had killed the enchanted Roland by availing himself of the tactic of Hercules when he crushed Antaeus, the son of Earth, in his arms. (21)

The historical Cid pales beside a romance *caballero*, but the really interesting figure here is Bernardo, supposed slayer of Roland in a myth that cannot be shared by other European nations. Bernardo is a national hero for the Spanish

precisely because he vanquishes the great French paladin when France invades the Peninsula. The Spanish Bernardo thus stands in for Roland's Saracen enemy, in a striking local departure from the *matière de France*. In the struggle against the invading Franks, Spain occupies the space of the religious and ethnic other. As Spain's heroes, both the Cid and Bernardo complicate any simple division between Moors and Christians: both heroes forge pragmatic alliances with Moors. From these first fantasies, then, the text foregrounds the complexity of imagining a chivalric Spain in contradistinction to the Moors.

Cervantes also engages the genre of Maurophilia, the idealizing novels and ballads of lovelorn Moors and their ladies that featured Moors themselves as exemplary knights and lovers. This hugely popular genre, whose most famous examples are the anonymous novella *El Abencerraje* (1561, 1562, 1565), the ballads known collectively as the *romancero morisco*, and Ginés Pérez de Hita's historical romance *Guerras civiles de Granada* (1595; "Civil Wars of Grenada"), paradoxically flourished even as Moriscos were increasingly persecuted. Its highly romanticized vision of Moors provided a strong counterpart to the ostracism of their contemporary descendants and underscored the valorization of Moors and Moorishness in the Spanish imaginary. This valorization is apparent on the first, comically foreshortened sally of Don Quixote, when he is beaten by an irate muledriver and resorts to fantasy to console himself. His chivalric imagination accommodates what at first glance seems a contradiction: the hidalgo first fancies himself the knight Valdovinos, from the *romance* of the Marqués of Mantua, based on Carolingian legends. A moment later, however, he forgets Valdovinos and instead imagines himself the Moor Abindarráez, from the wildly popular *Abencerraje*, which Don Quixote would have read as part of Montemayor's pastoral *Diana* (1562). As the text of *Don Quixote* reminds us, in the novella Abindarráez is captured by the Christian Rodrigo de Narváez, whose generosity toward his lovelorn prisoner, whom he releases so Abindarráez can marry Jurifa, leads to a lifelong friendship among the three. Abindarráez is a worthy model both as a knight and as a lover. The small detail that he is a Moor does not seem to trouble Don Quixote at all. As this double identification suggests, a Spanish knight may occupy contradictory subject positions, shifting from a Carolingian knight to the Moorish knight who would have been his historical foe. Only Spain's intense imaginative engagement with Moors, however idealized, makes such contradictory identification possible.

These broader considerations will, I hope, demonstrate that the Moorish material in *Don Quixote* is hardly limited to the captive's tale, a supposedly exotic and extraneous supplement to the main story but instead absolutely intrinsic to the text. Two episodes, however, are explicitly concerned with the place of these intimate others within Spain. The first is the famous narrative of captivity and redemption in part 1, chapter 37 and following, in which the soldier Ruy Pérez de Viedma relates the story of his imprisonment in Algiers and his escape with a rich and beautiful Moorish woman Zoraida. A figure of romance who also serves the practical purpose of providing the funds for the

escape, Zoraida claims to be a secret Christian desperate to reach Spain. The episode is striking in two respects. First, Cervantes paints a highly sympathetic portrait of the Moorish woman and her father, Agí Morato. Negative portrayal is reserved instead for the Turks, the colonial masters of Algiers, an Ottoman protectorate in the period. Thus a distinction is established between familiar, unthreatening Moors and menacing Turks. Second, and more important, the narrative takes Zoraida to Spain, and her story, though inconclusive, suggests that she will be admitted into the Christian faith and the Spanish polity as the captive's wife or protégée. Cervantes thus harnesses the resources of romance and Maurophilia to tackle the pressing contemporary problem of Morisco assimilation. If the exotic Zoraida (who insists on being called María at the inn) can find a place in Spain as a New Christian, whatever her ethnic and cultural differences, then surely Spain should be able to find room for its most proximate Moors, the Moriscos whose ancestors had in many cases been converted generations earlier. With the highly romanticized vision of a Moor who wishes devoutly to become a Christian, then, Cervantes rebukes those who emphasized the essential otherness of the Moriscos among them.

Cervantes's treatment of Moriscos in *Don Quixote* is strikingly sympathetic, but there are moments elsewhere in his oeuvre that problematize this tolerance. We need to see Cervantes's portrayals in the complex context of Spain's treatment of Muslims, Moriscos, and Moorish culture in the period. The range extends from religious intolerance and political banishment to the idealizations of literary Maurophilia, all constructed against the messy reality of a material culture profoundly marked by the heritage of Al-Andalus.

NOTE

The English translation of *Don Quixote* used in this essay is by Edith Grossman.