

The Moor and the Novel: Narrating Absence in Early Modern Spain.

Mary B. Quinn.

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Beginning with the anonymous popular ballads published in mid-sixteenth-century peninsular songbooks and ending with the 1615 appearance of part 2 of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quijote*, Mary B. Quinn's recent book studies the relationship between the origins of the novel and Spanish literary representation of Muslims and Moriscos, as converts from Islam to Christianity were called. Quinn argues that as a late medieval Iberian world defined, in her view, by chivalric confrontation, on the one hand, and

convivencia among Christians, Muslims, and Jews, on the other hand, gave way first to the reality of forced and false conversion and then to outright Morisco revolt and expulsion, late sixteenth-century authors rejected their predecessors' nostalgia for the era of reconquest. In so doing, they also spurned the tropes of the ballad tradition and embraced the narrative flexibility of prose. Quinn claims that the layered narration, multiplicity of voices, and representation of interiority that characterize *Don Quijote* mark the end point of this formal journey and the invention of the modern novel.

Following an introductory chapter on the history of early modern Spain and competing theories of the novel, the book's astute second chapter studies late medieval ballads about Christian and Muslim knights locked in battles for love and territory. The popularity of these so-called *romances fronterizos* even after the 1492 conquest of Granada by the *reyes católicos* Fernando and Isabel is codified in their repeated publication, first in cheap pamphlets called *pliegos sueltos* and then in anthologies produced throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Quinn emphasizes an important if circumscribed subset of this archive, the early sixteenth-century songbooks of instrumental music for the vihuela. The third chapter offers close readings of two late sixteenth-century prose texts, the anonymous novella *El Abencerraje* and the first part of Ginés Pérez de Hita's *Guerras civiles de Granada*, a fictionalized history of the political and familial intrigue that wracked the final years of Nasrid Granada. Tracing the tension among epic and novelistic conventions through the sentimentalized depiction of Muslim characters in these texts, Quinn argues that, like earlier poets and musicians, peninsular prose writers and their readers sought to escape from the lived violence of their present. Quinn claims in her fourth chapter that as the failure of Morisco assimilation became evident at the turn of the seventeenth century, Pérez de Hita and others elected a tougher-edged style of historical narration. This is the style that characterizes part 2 of Pérez de Hita's *Guerras civiles de Granada*, which addresses the Second Alpujarras War of 1568–71, a bloody Morisco uprising in Granada. Reading the "Captive's Tale" from part 1 of *Don Quijote* as well as the Maese Pedro and Morisco Ricote episodes from part 2, Quinn argues that Cervantes employed this emergent sense of historical rupture to the dual ends of formal innovation and political criticism.

Quinn is at her strongest when analyzing ballads, not just as they appeared in the songbooks studied in her second chapter, but also as they are refashioned in the Pérez de Hita and Cervantes texts examined in subsequent chapters. Like the orientalist tropes repeated in genres largely absent from Quinn's book — traditional literary forms like the *comedia* and Petrarchan lyric, as well as other kinds of writing, like chronicle, religious polemic, and legal commentary, for instance — the recurrence throughout the early modern period of these ballads in both poetry collections and prose narrative suggests a more complicated genealogy of form and chronology of cultural sensibilities than Quinn allows. A more thorough accounting of those works that do not treat Muslims and Moriscos but are typical of genres studied by Quinn would likewise have made the specific claim about the "the Moor and the novel" more persuasive. Quinn's major query is nevertheless of deep importance to students of Renaissance literature, cultural

historians, and literary theorists working across a range of fields: why and how do new literary genres often take shape at moments of considerable political, social, or religious upheaval? As Quinn demonstrates, to study early modern Spanish literature is to strive to formulate an answer to this important question.

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