

Cide Hamete Benengeli, Author of *Don Quixote*

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The lecture I'm giving today is a revision of the lecture I gave earlier this year—on April 23rd, the 400th anniversary of the death of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. I must apologize in advance for my audacity in choosing Cervantes' novel, *Don Quixote*, as the topic of my lecture, given my inability to read Spanish. Spanish is the *next* language I intend to study. In the meantime, please forgive my inability to consult Cervantes' original language, and I'll ask for your tolerance of my poor pronunciation. The only language skill I can bring to bear on this discussion is some familiarity with the Arabic language, as we will see later in the course of this lecture.

I will highlight in this lecture the topic of Islam and its relevance to Cervantes' work. In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes portrays various Muslims, both satirically and romantically: colorful Moriscos (Muslim converts to Christianity) and renegades (Christian converts to Islam) are mixed among the "old Christians" who populate the novel. Cervantes not only includes them in his cast of characters, but even adopts the conceit of translating the knight's exploits from a serendipitously discovered Arabic manuscript written by the fabulous Moor, Cide Hamete Benengeli. I will explore the question why Cervantes attributes the authorship of his novel to a fictional Muslim.

My discussion of Cide Hamete Benengeli will center on the tangled question of religious identity in Spain in Cervantes' time. In addition, as we will see, this will be a lecture about concealment and deception. Lies. To frame my discussion, I'd like to set Cervantes in dialogue with another renowned Spaniard, Pablo Picasso. In 1923, Picasso said, "We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand."¹ With Picasso's words in mind, I might reformulate my question about religious identity as a question about art, and fiction in particular. If the novel, *Don Quixote*, which ironically announces itself as an "absolutely true history,"² is in fact a pack of lies—and if Cervantes lies when he claims that this novel was written by a Muslim named Cide Hamete Benengeli—we might ask how these lies make us realize the truth.³

To prepare us to consider this question, we will glance at some history in Spain leading up to the time of Cervantes' novel. We will begin by focusing on the year 1492. This is not only the year in which Christopher Columbus sailed west across the Atlantic under the patronage of the Spanish rulers, King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella I. This is also the year in which Ferdinand and Isabella conquered Granada, bringing to a conclusion nearly eight centuries of Muslim rule in Spain. The new dominance of Christianity in Spain also brought an end to centuries of religious diversity in the country. Under Muslim rule, religious tolerance and intolerance varied over the course of those

¹ In 1923, Picasso talked about cubism with an American critic named Marius de Zayas. The discussion was translated (with his approval) and published as "Picasso Speaks," in *The Arts*.

² See Part I, Chapter I, p. 23. All page numbers in *Don Quixote* refer to the Edith Grossman translation (Harper Perennial, 2005).

³ I should acknowledge that another strong influence on my thoughts in this lecture is the Argentine short story writer Jorge Luis Borges, who mixes fact and fiction to communicate truth. Although I never refer to Borges by name in the body of this lecture, the title of the lecture (recalling Borges' "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*") is a tip of my hat to him.

centuries. Yet Spain remained religiously diverse: Spanish Jews, Christians, and Muslims were permitted to maintain their religious practices and doctrines. These three distinctive religious threads all contributed to the fabric of Spanish culture. The advent of Christian rule marked a stark and abrupt contrast. In 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella issued the Alhambra Decree, which dictated that all Jews in Spain must either convert to Christianity or leave the country within four months. Jews who remained in Spain and converted to Christianity were called *conversos*. A parallel history can be traced with Christian rulers impressing similar criteria on Spanish Muslims. Muslims who converted to Christianity under these pressures were called *Moriscos*. We might understand such royal edicts as efforts to subject to a single, homogeneous religious narrative a country traditionally characterized by multiple, heterogeneous religious narratives. The Church, by way of Spain's Christian rulers, exerted its authority to judge which stories were true and which stories were false—which stories to keep and which stories to dismiss as imaginary. This anticipates a central theme in *Don Quixote*: the clash of competing narratives, and the resistance of rival stories to being domesticated and subjugated to a single standard of reality.

Despite the fact that numerous Spanish Jews and Muslims converted to Christianity, both *conversos* and *Moriscos* remained under an abiding cloud of suspicion, and Spain's rulers questioned whether their conversions had been complete and genuine. Under the burden of doubts and accusations, some *conversos* and *Moriscos* fled Spain to evade the Spanish Inquisition. In some cases, they fled to the New World, including New Mexico. Parenthetically, I'd like to mention an exhibition recently opened at the New Mexico History Museum here in Santa Fe. This exhibition, "Fractured Faiths: Spanish

Judaism, The Inquisition, and New World Identities,”⁴ focuses on the Jewish side of this history. Among other things, the exhibition highlights the “crypto-Jews,” conversos who preserved their religious identities behind masks of ostensible conversion to Christianity. In New Mexico, for example, old converso families have passed down and maintained covert Jewish religious practices for centuries. In addition, I would note that this year the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies held their annual conference in Santa Fe, which just took place over the past three days.⁵ I attended this conference, and I’m beginning to delve into this fascinating and complex history. With respect to the question whether there might also have been crypto-Muslims in New Mexico, there seems to have been comparatively little research; but I learned a few days ago about a recent dissertation written on this topic, and I’m hoping to track it down and read it.

The enduring suspicion of conversos and Moriscos in Spain brings us up to the time of Cervantes. Unsatisfied by Muslim gestures of conversion to Christianity, the so-called “old Christians” persisted in accusing Moriscos of continuing to practice Islam in secrecy. We might recall that the two parts of *Don Quixote* were published in 1605 and 1615; between these two publication dates, in 1609, King Philip III expelled Moriscos from Spain. This expulsion plays a role in the second part of *Don Quixote*. Whereas Sancho Panza reminds us repeatedly in both parts of the novel that he is an “old Christian”⁶—that is, neither a converso nor a Morisco—in Part II of the novel,⁷ Sancho displays friendship and sympathy towards his Morisco neighbor Ricote, who had been driven into exile and had to disguise himself in order to sneak back into Spain. This story

⁴ <http://nmhistorymuseum.org/calendar.php?id=2605>

⁵ June 26th-28th, 2016. See cryptojews.com and nmjhs.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/spring-16.pdf .

⁶ For examples, see pp. 149, 161, 411, 477, and 484.

⁷ Part II, Chapter 54.

later expands to relate the adventures of Ricote's daughter Ana Felix and a young man named Don Gaspar Gregorio—a romance between a Morisca and an old Christian.⁸

The theme of suspicion of Moriscos is also reflected in Cervantes' novel by the ignominy of renegades, Europeans who abandoned Christianity to convert to Islam. Both Moriscos and renegades play noteworthy roles in this novel. Later in this lecture, I will look in detail at the depictions of a Morisca and a renegade in the Captive's story, one of the interpolated novels in Part I of *Don Quixote*. In the course of this lecture, I will wonder about the ways religious conflict might have shaped Cervantes' views on the character of Spain, and on the Church's efforts to impose a single story on a country where plural and contradictory religious stories have historically taken root.

Before considering the Captive's story, however, I will focus on the question of Cide Hamete Benengeli. How are we to understand Cervantes' invention of the imaginary Muslim to whom he attributes the authorship of *Don Quixote*? Why does he employ the ironic claim that he translated the novel from an Arabic manuscript? One possible answer is that Cervantes invented Cide Hamete as a way to distance himself from his most famous creation, placing the Moorish author between himself and Don Quixote. We might note that, in his Prologue to Part I of the novel, Cervantes writes: "But though I *seem* to be the father, I am the *stepfather* of Don Quixote..."⁹ Cervantes does not own up to the affection of a real father towards his son, and this raises the question who Don Quixote's real father might be. I would add that Cervantes also calls himself the "second author" of the novel,¹⁰ prompting us to seek the novel's first author.

⁸ Part II, Chapter 63.

⁹ Part I, Prologue, p. 3; the italics are mine.

¹⁰ Part I, Chapter 8, pp. 64-65.

Nonetheless, in his Prologue to Part II of the novel, Cervantes demonstrates considerable possessiveness towards the character Don Quixote, going so far as killing him off at the end of Part II to ensure that no one else can fabricate additional adventures for the knight. We might recall that, while Cervantes was composing a sequel to the First Part of *Don Quixote*, a “false” Second Part of the novel entered circulation in Tarragona in 1614, attributed to Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda. In his Prologue to Part II of the novel, Cervantes stakes out a defiant stance against Avellaneda, insisting that he is the one true, legitimate author of *Don Quixote*.

While Cervantes asserts himself as holding exclusive rights to Don Quixote, he *also* asserts that Cide Hamete holds these exclusive rights. We should note that, in Part II of the novel, Cervantes refers repeatedly to Cide Hamete as the “first author” of the novel.¹¹ When calling the Moor the “first author,” he draws a contrast with Avellaneda, the author of the false sequel. Thus Cervantes writes:

Welcome, I say, to the valorous Don Quixote of La Mancha: not the false, the fictitious, the apocryphal one we have seen recently in false histories, but the true, the legitimate, the faithful one described for us by Cide Hamete Benengeli, the flower of all historians.¹²

Moreover, in the final chapter of the novel, Cervantes quotes Cide Hamete’s own declaration, in which the Moor addresses the pen with which he wrote the novel:

Here you will remain, hanging from this rack on a copper wire, and I do not know if you, my quill pen, are well or badly cut, but there you will live, down through the ages, unless presumptuous and unscrupulous historians take you down to profane you... For me alone was Don Quixote born, and I for him; he knew how to act, and I to write; the two of us alone are one...¹³

¹¹ Part II, Chapter 24, p. 614; Chapter 40, p. 713; Chapter 59, p. 848; and Chapter 70, p. 916.

¹² Part II, Chapter 61, p. 862.

¹³ Part II, Chapter 74, p. 939.

While these words testify that the Moor Cide Hamete and the knight Don Quixote are one (insofar as the creator and his creation are unified), this testimony seems to assert simultaneously that Cide Hamete and Cervantes are one. The gap between Cervantes and his novel, as well as the gap between Cervantes and Cide Hamete, seems to collapse. There is only one man who can rightfully claim to be the first and true author, and that man is *both* Cervantes and Cide Hamete—both a Spaniard and a Moor.

How are we to understand this conflation? I take it to mean that Cide Hamete is a fictional projection of Cervantes himself. Stated differently, Cide Hamete is a kind of mask for Cervantes—a kind of concealment. Cide Hamete is a lie. But to borrow and adapt the words of Pablo Picasso: Cide Hamete might be a lie that reveals a truth about Cervantes.

Let's remind ourselves how Cervantes first introduces us to the imaginary Muslim author. At the end of Part I, Chapter 8, Cervantes leaves us—and himself—with a cliffhanger. Don Quixote and a Basque squire raise their swords towards each other; Cervantes writes that “the onlookers were filled with fear and suspense regarding the outcome of the great blows they threatened to give to each other.”¹⁴ Cervantes then writes:

But the difficulty in all this is that at this very point and juncture, the author of the history leaves the battle pending, apologizing because he found nothing else written about the feats of Don Quixote other than what he has already recounted.¹⁵

Why this abrupt ending? Why does Cervantes tell us, at this point, that there is nothing more to read? This might be a topic for a different lecture, but I suspect that the story ends here because the Basque has killed Don Quixote—the first of several deaths of

¹⁴ Part I, Chapter 8, p. 64.

¹⁵ Part I, Chapter 8, p. 65.

Don Quixote related in the novel. In order for the story to continue, Cervantes requires a Moor, Cide Hamete, to come along to resurrect Don Quixote. This is how that happens, as related in the following chapter:

One day when I was in the Alcana market in Toledo, a boy came by to sell some notebooks and old papers to a silk merchant; as I am very fond of reading, even torn papers in the streets, I was moved by my natural inclinations to pick up one of the volumes the boy was selling, and 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...¹⁶

Upon taking the Arabic manuscript to a Morisco interpreter, Cervantes tells us that the interpreter laughs, for he reads in the margin a reference to Dulcinea of Toboso, “the best hand for salting pork of any woman in all of La Mancha.”¹⁷ Dulcinea is Don Quixote’s idealized beloved, and this inspires in Cervantes the joyous realization that he has found the remainder of Don Quixote’s history. Thus, beginning with Chapter 9 of Part I of the novel, and continuing all the way through to the end of Part II, the records of Don Quixote’s adventures are attributed not to the pen of Cervantes himself, but to the historian Cide Hamete Benengeli, whose writings are translated from Arabic into Castilian by a Morisco—a Muslim convert to Christianity.

As for Cide Hamete himself, his identity is ambiguous. He’s apparently a Muslim, and Cervantes expresses concerns about the reliability of his history, given Muslims’ reputation for lying. Cervantes notes that “the people of that nation are very prone to telling falsehoods...and if something of value is missing from [the history], in my opinion the fault lies with the dog who was its author rather than with any defect in its

¹⁶ Part I, Chapter 9, p. 67.

¹⁷ Part I, Chapter 9, p. 67.

subject...”¹⁸ In Chapter 3 of Part II of the novel, the knight himself laments when he learns the identity of the historian recording his exploits; Don Quixote is “disconsolate to think that its author was a Moor, as suggested by the name Cide, and one could not expect truth from the Moors, because all of them are tricksters, liars, and swindlers.”¹⁹

Nonetheless, Cervantes writes elsewhere that “Cide Hamete Benengeli was a very careful historian, and very accurate in all things,”²⁰ and he calls the Moor a “wise and judicious historian.”²¹ Cervantes’ inconsistent assessment of the Muslim author’s veracity and reliability might raise questions about Cervantes’ own veracity and reliability, especially when we note the close identification between Cervantes and Cide Hamete at the end of Part II of the novel.

This dubious portrait of Cide Hamete might prompt us to scrutinize him more carefully. In Part I, Cervantes calls Cide Hamete “an Arabic and Manchegan Author”²²—that is, simultaneously an Arab and a Spaniard. Perhaps more to the point, we discover that Cide Hamete’s *religious* identity is actually hybrid and ambiguous. Part II, Chapter 8, opens with these words:

“Blessed be almighty Allah!” says Hamete Benengeli at the beginning of the eighth chapter. “Blessed be Allah!” he repeats three times...²³

Of course, “Allah” is the Arabic word for “God,” and this invocation seems to support the identification of Cide Hamete as a Muslim. Cervantes later supports this identification

¹⁸ Part I, Chapter 9, pp. 67-69.

¹⁹ Part II, Chapter 3, p. 474.

²⁰ Part I, Chapter 16, p. 112.

²¹ Part I, Chapter 27, p. 226.

²² Part I, Chapter 22, p. 163.

²³ Part II, Chapter 8, p. 502.

when he comments on Cide Hamete's perspicacious reflections on Sancho's loss of his governorship:

So says Cide Hamete, a Muslim philosopher, because an understanding of the fleeting impermanence of our present life, and the everlasting nature of the eternal life that awaits us, has been grasped by many without the enlightenment of faith but with only the light of their natural intelligence.²⁴

Yet despite the fact that Cervantes deems the Moor to be a Muslim philosopher, we're given a more complicated portrait in Part II, Chapter 27. There, we read:

Cide Hamete, the chronicler of this great history, begins this chapter with the words *I swear as a Catholic Christian*.²⁵

The translator of the Arabic manuscript goes on to explain this unsettling oath:

...Cide Hamete swearing as a Catholic Christian when he was a Moor, which he undoubtedly was, meant only that just as the Catholic Christian, when he swears, swears or should swear the truth, and tell the truth in everything he says, so too he was telling the truth, as if he were swearing as a Catholic Christian, when he wrote about Don Quixote...²⁶

This explanation is far from clearing up the obscurity. The reader might still wonder: is Cide Hamete a Christian or a Muslim? Or might he be both?

It seems to me that Cide Hamete must be either a Morisco—a Muslim convert to Christianity—or a renegade—a Christian convert to Islam. Which of these two options is more probable? The twentieth-century Spanish literary critic Martín de Riquer has suggested that Cide Hamete might be a Morisco. This thesis is based on Cervantes' mention, in Part I, Chapter 16, that Cide Hamete might be related to a wealthy muledriver; Riquer notes that muledrivers in Spain were usually Moriscos.²⁷ Despite this suggestion, I will put forward an alternative thesis: I'm inclined to think Cide Hamete

²⁴ Part II, Chapter 53, p. 804.

²⁵ Part II, Chapter 27, p. 636.

²⁶ Part II, Chapter 27, p. 636-637.

²⁷ Part I, Chapter 16, p. 112 and footnote 3.

was actually a renegade. That is, I think he was born into a Christian family, but is now a Muslim. I will base my argument on an analysis of his Arabic name.

Hamete Benengeli's name is prefixed with "Cide," or "Sīdī" in Arabic; this is a title of respect. Don Quixote tells us as much, informing Sancho that Cide "in Arabic means señor."²⁸ In English we might translate this as "mister" or "sir." The Moor's first name, "Hamete," could be rendered as any of several Arabic names: Ḥamīd, or Ḥāmid, or even Muḥammad.²⁹ (All three of these names are cognates, built on the same Arabic root.) My point is that this name is distinctively Muslim. Cervantes could have given him an Arabic name borne by either a Muslim or a non-Muslim Arab; for example, the name Dā'ūd is the Arabic form of David, and an Arab with this name could be a Jew, a Christian, or a Muslim. By calling him "Hamete," Cervantes has chosen to give him a decisively Muslim name.

This name, however, stands in tension with his last name, "Benengeli." While Sancho erroneously and humorously calls the Moor "Berenjena"³⁰—a Spanish word that means "eggplant"—the Moor's actual name, "Benengeli," can be analyzed in Arabic as a compound of two words: "bin" and "injīlī." "Bin" means "the son of," so the Moor's name can be read as something like "Muḥammad the son of Injīlī." "Injīlī" is not an ordinary name. It comes from "injīl," the Arabic word for "Gospel"—the Christian scripture.³¹ "Injīlī" is thus an adjective that means "Evangelical"—or, if I may coin a term, "Gospelish." Altogether, the name "Hamete Benengeli" might be read as

²⁸ Part II, Chapter 2, p. 472.

²⁹ See footnote 12 on p. 338 of Grossman's translation: "Muley Hamet, or Muley Mohammad, took possession of Tunis in October of 1573..."

³⁰ Part II Chapter 2, p. 472.

³¹ The Arabic language derives "injīl" from "evangel."

“Muhammad, the son of the Evangelical One”—or to drive my point home, “the Muslim son of a Christian.”

This implies that Cide Hamete Benengeli is a renegade—that is, he was born into a Christian family, but converted to Islam. What happens, then, when we recall the close identification between Cide Hamete and Cervantes himself? This might suggest that Cervantes has created a fictional projection of himself as a renegade. Why would he do this?

Before attempting an answer to this question, I’m going to take a detour through a different section of the novel, a detour that will lead us back, ultimately, to the same question from a different angle. I’d like to spend a little time examining the Captive’s story, the second of two interpolated stories inserted into Part I of *Don Quixote*. The Captive’s story is told in Part I, Chapters 39 through 41, and it’s an easy story to skim over or forget. It’s been criticized as an interruption of and a diversion from the main storyline. It’s heavy with historical details, but lacks wit or startling plot twists. It’s hard to see the point of its inclusion. Yet this story might reward a little attention, as it might shed light on our question about Cide Hamete.

There’s something confessional—but also evasive—about the Captive’s story, both revealing and concealing the Captive. The Captive might also be, like Cide Hamete, a fictional projection of Cervantes himself. Before getting into the details of why I think the Captive is a fictionalized version of Cervantes, let me review the skeletal structure of the Captive’s story. The story is a first-person narrative, an autobiography recounted by the Captive to Don Quixote’s entourage when they encounter one another at a Spanish inn. The Captive recalls having been held in captivity by Moors in Algiers. The story

revolves around the Captive's efforts (together with those of other Christian slaves awaiting their ransom) to escape slavery and return to Spain. The catalyst of his success in these efforts arrives in the form of a series of letters, written in Arabic, sent to the Captive by a mysterious and intriguing woman in a window overlooking his place of confinement. We learn that she is Zoraida, the beautiful daughter of a wealthy Moor. Promises are exchanged: Zoraida offers the Captive money to help him break out of imprisonment; in exchange, the Captive will take Zoraida to Spain, where she can openly convert from Islam to Christianity, and the two will be married. Their escape plan goes awry when the Captive, Zoraida, and the other fugitive Christian slaves are compelled to take Zoraida's father along with them in their boat. Highly-charged exchanges between Zoraida and her father ensue, with the father alternately accusing and appealing to Zoraida, until the father is left stranded on a desolate beach. Following this, Zoraida, the Captive, and the other slaves are briefly abducted and robbed at sea by a crew of French pirates; by the time our heroes reach the shore of Spain, Zoraida has been stripped of all her material wealth. Having arrived in Spain, the band of fugitives breaks up and they go their separate ways. The Captive and Zoraida alone arrive at the inn, where Don Quixote and his companions are lodged. There the Captive recounts his story to entertain his audience at the inn, as well as Cervantes' readers.

Let me return then to the question of why I think the Captive is a fictional projection of Cervantes. First, the Captive and Cervantes seem to be the same age. According to details provided in the Captive's story, the Captive arrives at the inn where Don Quixote and his companions are staying in 1589.³² We also know that the Captive is

³² The Captive tells his audience, "It is twenty-two years since I left my father's house..." (p. 336) In that year, the Captive learned that "the great Duke of Alba was on his way to Flanders;" the Duke of Alba

“a little over forty, his face rather dark, with a long mustache and a carefully trimmed beard.”³³ Cervantes’ forty-second birthday took place in 1589; in a well-known portrait traditionally identified as representing Cervantes, the man in the portrait matches the physical description of the Captive.³⁴



More noteworthy than his age and appearance, however, is the Captive’s account of his military career and captivity in Algiers, as detailed in Chapter 39. When we look closely at this chapter, we come to recognize that a number of these details match those of Cervantes’ biography. We are told that the Captive chose a military career (as opposed to the ecclesiastical and mercantile options presented to him by his father);³⁵ in pursuit of this career, the Captive left Spain for Italy, and in Piedmont he enlisted as a soldier.³⁶ Cervantes himself left Spain for Italy, and in Naples he enlisted in the Spanish Navy Marines. The Captive served under the Spanish Captain Diego de Urbina.³⁷ Cervantes

arrived in Brussels in 1567. Hence the present year of Part I of the novel is 1589. We should note, however, that this timing of the events in Part I of *Don Quixote* seems to be contradicted by Part II of the novel.

³³ Part I, Chapter 37, p. 326.

³⁴ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miguel_de_Cervantes#/media/File:Cervantes_J%C3%A1luregui.jpg

³⁵ Part I, Chapter 39, p. 335.

³⁶ Part I, Chapter 39, p. 336.

³⁷ Part I, Chapter 39, p. 336 and footnote 6.

also served under Diego de Urbina. Both the Captive and Cervantes fought at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571.³⁸ Following the victory of the Holy League against the Turks in this battle, the Captive was captured at sea and enslaved in Algiers, where the bulk of the Captive's story takes place.³⁹ In 1575, Cervantes was captured at sea and enslaved in Algiers, where Cervantes was kept in captivity for five years. Later in the Captive's story, the Captive tells a false story that he is the slave of a pirate named Arnoute Mami.⁴⁰ Historically, Aranute Mami was the name of the pirate who abducted Cervantes at sea. In fact, the Captive explicitly mentions, in the midst of his story, Cervantes himself. Describing the cruel treatment of Christians by the Captive's second master, Azan Agar, the Captive mentions Cervantes by the latter's maternal surname, Saavedra. This is the Captive's report:

The only one who held his own with him was a Spanish soldier named something de Saavedra, who did things that will be remembered by those people for many years, and all to gain his liberty... [I]f I had the time, I would tell you something of what that soldier did, which would entertain and amaze you much more than this recounting of my history.⁴¹

Historically, Cervantes repeatedly endeavored unsuccessfully to escape, and was finally ransomed and freed in 1580. The life of Cervantes and that of the fictional Captive so frequently intersect, one might imagine the Captive's story to be a fantasized version of Cervantes' own captivity and failed attempts to escape Algiers.

Cervantes' firsthand experiences of captivity in Algiers shaped his literary productions in multiple ways. He wrote a play, probably in the early 1580's, called *The*

³⁸ "In short, I took part in that glorious battle..." (Part I, Chapter 39, p. 337).

³⁹ "...I found myself on the night following so famous a day with chains on my feet and shackles on my hands" (Part I, Chapter 39, p. 337).

⁴⁰ Part I, Chapter 41, p. 353.

⁴¹ Part I, Chapter 40, p. 344.

Bagnios of Algiers, depicting captivity under the Moors, as well as a play called *The Great Sultana*, depicting captivity in Ottoman Istanbul,⁴² before returning to the theme of captivity in a Muslim city in the Captive's story. If, as I am suggesting, Cervantes was motivated to write the Captive's story as a means of revisiting and revising his own history of captivity, and that the Captive is a romanticized version of Cervantes, we may find it useful to regard the Captive as one of Cervantes' masks, a lie that conceals but also reveals some truth about Cervantes. Thus I will bring to the Captive the same question I brought to Cide Hamete: what does the novel tell us about the Captive's identity—in particular, the Captive's religious identity?

What I wish to focus on in this story is the theme of conversion from Islam to Christianity (as exhibited in Zoraida's quest to cross over to a Christian land out of devotion to *Lela Marien*, or Our Lady Mary, the mother of Jesus), as well as the theme of conversion from Christianity to Islam (as exhibited by various renegades who play key roles in the Captive's story). It's noteworthy that a number of historical figures are incorporated into this story—people who were actually renegades. Both of the Captive's masters, Uchali and Azan Aga, were historical renegades. Moreover, the characters of Zoraida and her father were based on real people. The Captive identifies Zoraida's father as “a very prominent and wealthy Moor named Agi Morata;”⁴³ the historical Agi Morato, of Slavic parentage, renounced Christianity and converted to Islam.⁴⁴ In the Captive's account, however, Zoraida's story is an inversion of the historical facts. While Zoraida's

⁴² See “*The Bagnios of Algiers*” and “*The Great Sultana*”: *Two Plays of Captivity*, translated by Barbara Fuchs and Aaron J. Ilika (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

⁴³ Part I, Chapter 40, pp. 345-346.

⁴⁴ Part I, Chapter 40, p. 346, footnote 6. Cervantes indicates at one point in the Captive's story that Zoraida's father is a Ladino (Part I, Chapter 41, p. 355).

father was historically a renegade, the Captive portrays the father simply as a Muslim; and while the historical Zoraida was a faithful Muslim, the Captive portrays her as a Morisca, a convert to Christianity from Islam.

There might be something suspicious about the image of Zoraida as an aspiring Mary; Zoraida not only worships the mother of Jesus, but wants to change her name to Maria. This portrait is oddly idealized. When Zoraida and the Captive first arrive in Chapter 37, they find no room at the inn,⁴⁵ recalling the Gospel story of the Holy Family. Zoraida is presented as a model of holy virtue, heavenly beauty, and a benevolent answer to the Captive's prayers for help. Nonetheless, she coldly abandons her father at the so-called *Cava Rumía*, the cove of the "Wicked Christian Woman;"⁴⁶ as the boat pulls away from the cove, Zoraida's father shouts incriminations from the beach:

Christians, why do you think this perverse female wants you to give me my freedom? Do you think it is because she feels compassion for me? No, of course not, she has done this because my presence will be a hindrance to her when she decides to put her evil desires into effect: do not think she has been moved to change her religion because she believes yours is superior to ours, but only because she knows that in your country there is more lewd behavior than in ours.⁴⁷

Zoraida herself voices, inconsistently, the question of whether Christians or Muslims are more trustworthy. Zoraida advises the Captive not to trust Muslims, warning him, "[D]o not trust any Moor, because they are all false,"⁴⁸ and the Captive replies to her that "Christians keep their promises better than Moors."⁴⁹ Yet Zoraida later tells the Captive, in the presence of her father, "Christians always lie and pretend to be poor in

⁴⁵ "When he entered he asked for a room, and when he was told there was none in the inn, he seemed troubled..." (Part I, Chapter 37, p. 326).

⁴⁶ Part I, Chapter 41, p. 362. While Cervantes (or the Captive) translates *Rumía* from Arabic as "Wicked Christian Woman," in fact it simply means "Christian Woman," without any implication of wickedness.

⁴⁷ Part I, Chapter 41, pp. 362-363.

⁴⁸ Part I, Chapter 40, p. 347.

⁴⁹ Part I, Chapter 40, p. 348.

order to deceive the Moors.”⁵⁰ Of course, in this latter instance, Zoraida is putting on a show to deceive her father. When she says that Christians lie, she doesn’t mean it; she’s lying. This sounds a bit like a variant of the famous Cretan paradox, according to which Epimenides, a Cretan, declares that all Cretans are liars. When Zoraida says in her father’s presence that Christians always lie, we might ask: does she lie as a Christian or a Moor? This brings to mind the question Don Quixote’s companion, Dorotea, asks when Zoraida first arrives at the inn, a question that might be a kind of riddle: “[I]s this lady a Christian or a Moor?” The Captive answers, “She is a Moor in her dress and body, but in her soul she is a devout Christian because she has a very strong desire to be one.”⁵¹

Part of the riddle of Zoraida is the way this idealized Christian story inverts the truth. Why does Cervantes, in the voice of the storytelling Captive, create this mirror image of Zoraida’s historical identity, falsely turning her from a Muslim into a Christian? This isn’t the only inversion in the story. What’s ostensibly a story about a Morisca’s escape to a Christian land is largely a story about renegades. In fact, when the Captive receives his first letter from Zoraida, written in Arabic, he guesses “she must be a renegade Christian.”⁵² What are we to make of this persistent theme of Christians converting to Islam?

Among various renegades in the Captive’s story, the most important is the anonymous renegade who serves as a translator between the Captive and Zoraida. This renegade is the third of the three main characters in the story, and I will henceforth refer to him simply as *the* Renegade, the only name the Captive ever gives him. The Renegade

⁵⁰ Part I, Chapter 41, p. 355.

⁵¹ Part I, Chapter 37, p. 327.

⁵² Part I, Chapter 40, p. 345.

steps into the middle of the action as a solution to a problem: the Captive speaks no Arabic and Zoraida speaks no Spanish. Thus the Captive tells us:

We were all astounded and overjoyed at what had happened, but since none of us understood Arabic, our desire to know what the paper said was immense, and the difficulty in finding someone to read it to us was even greater. Finally, I decided to trust a renegade, a native of Murcia, who claimed to be a great friend of mine and made pledges to me obliging him to keep any secrets I confided in him...⁵³

I'd like to underscore three points in what the Captive has reported: the Renegade is from Murcia⁵⁴—that is, he is a Spaniard; he claims to be a great friend of the Captive; and he has been entrusted with the Captive's secrets.

Yet the stigma of having turned renegade raises doubts whether the Captive has found a trustworthy ally. In response to such doubts, the Captive tells us:

...[C]ertain renegades, when they intend to return to Christian lands, take with them signed statements from important captives testifying, in whatever fashion they can, that the renegade is a moral man, and always has treated Christians well, and desires to escape at the first opportunity. Some obtain these declarations with good intentions; others use them as a possible defense when they come to plunder Christian lands: if they happen to be shipwrecked or are taken prisoner, they show their declarations and say that these papers prove their intention to remain in Christian lands....In this way they avoid the initial violence of their captors and reconcile with the Church, and no one does them any harm, and at the first opportunity they return to Barbary to be what they were before. There are others, however, who obtain and use these papers with good intentions and remain in Christian lands. Well, my friend was one of *these* renegades, and he had statements from all our comrades attesting in every way possible to his good faith, and if the Moors had found him with these papers, they would have burned him alive.⁵⁵

Thus the Captive vouches for this friend, assuring his audience that this man is a good and trustworthy renegade. The Captive goes on to tell us that the Renegade

⁵³ Chapter 40, p. 346.

⁵⁴ Murcia is, incidentally, the birthplace of the renowned Muslim mystic Ibn al-ʿArabī (1165-1240). I hope someday to write a lecture comparing and contrasting the views of Ibn al-ʿArabī and Cervantes (focusing on their understandings of imagination, the unstable nature of reality, and religious pluralism) as well as the way these views might reflect the heterogeneous cultural fabric of Spain.

⁵⁵ Part I, Chapter 40, p. 346.

pulled out from under his shirt a metal crucifix, and with many tears he swore by the God that the image represented, and in whom he, though a sinner, believed completely and faithfully...; he thought...he and all of us would obtain our freedom, and he would find himself where he longed to be, which was reunited with the body of Holy Mother Church, from whom, like a rotten limb, he had been separated and severed because of his ignorance and sin.⁵⁶

Note the divergence and convergence of Zoraida's and the Renegade's stories. Whereas Zoraida wishes to renounce Islam for Christianity and immigrate to Spain, the Renegade, having renounced Christianity for Islam, wishes to come back home to Spain and return to the Christian fold.

The upshot is that, because the Renegade knows Arabic well,⁵⁷ the Captive enlists him as a translator. In response to the Captive's ready trust, the Renegade quickly steps up as the mastermind behind their scheme to escape and takes charge as the leader of the fugitive Christian slaves. The Renegade is exceptionally well suited to this role. I think, however, that there are two significant problems with the Renegade, to which we should be attentive.

The first problem stems from the fact that, even in the midst of asserting the Renegade's trustworthiness, the Captive has informed us that renegades have bad reputations and are justly regarded with suspicion. In Muslim lands, they identify themselves as Muslims, but in Christian lands they identify themselves as Christians, and their true religious commitments always remain hidden. For this reason it's difficult for renegades to gain the trust of their Christian compatriots, and even the Captive himself harbors doubts about his friend. At one point in his story, the Captive tells us:

⁵⁶ Part I, Chapter 40, pp. 347-348.

⁵⁷ Part I, Chapter 40, pp. 346-347.

...we did not dare contradict [the Renegade], fearing that if we did not do as he wished, he would betray us and endanger our lives by revealing our dealings with Zoraida...⁵⁸

Thus the introduction of the character of the Renegade is rich with potential for mistrust and suspicion, heightening the story's tension. Nonetheless, this dramatic potential is never actualized—and here's the real problem with this character. We keep waiting for the Renegade to betray the Captive, and he's given every opportunity to do so, but the event never takes place. One might say that the Renegade is like a bomb in an action film that never explodes, or like a film noir in which there are no secrets and everyone turns out to be on the up and up. This might leave us with an odd sense of unresolved tension by this lack of betrayal. This also makes the Captive's story something of an antithesis of the other interpolated novel in Part I of *Don Quixote*, "The Man Who Was Recklessly Curious;" in that case, excessive suspicion gives rise to betrayal. With respect to the Renegade in the Captive's story, we're given all of the suspicion, but none of the betrayal. The fact that the Renegade turns out to be utterly trustworthy and reliable might be reassuring to the Captive, but this leaves the reader wondering why such unfulfilled potential has been planted into the narrative.

There's a second oddity about the Renegade. His primary reason—perhaps his only essential reason—for showing up in this story is that he's required to provide services as a translator. Yet as the story progresses, the Renegade translator becomes an increasingly cumbersome device. Let me illustrate this. When the Captive tells his story, he recounts, verbatim, conversations between Zoraida and her father in Arabic, conversations that the Captive ostensibly can't understand. While these tempestuous

⁵⁸ Part I, Chapter 40, p. 351.

conversations take place at the height of the story's drama, the Renegade awkwardly inserts himself to translate everything for the Captive.⁵⁹ On other occasions, Zoraida speaks, and the Captive understands, without the translator explicitly intervening. At one point, the Captive and Zoraida are left alone to converse without the translator even being present. Confronted with the conundrum of their ability to communicate, the Captive explains to his audience, "I said this in such a way that she understood very well all the words that had passed between us."⁶⁰ As far as I'm concerned, this explanation is not very satisfying.

Now, it's none of my business to give any writing advice to Cervantes; he's a far better writer than I am. But if I had written the Captive's story, I would have been tempted to streamline the narrative by cutting the translator out of the story altogether (cutting out the middleman so to speak), especially since the Renegade's dramatic potential as an untrustworthy conspirator is never actualized. Thus I can't help asking: why didn't Cervantes simply give the Captive the ability to speak Arabic?

In response to this question, I think there are two very good answers. The first is that any Spaniard speaking Arabic would raise suspicions that the Spaniard is himself a renegade. We might recall this description of Zoraida upon her first arrival at the inn:

From her silence they imagined that she undoubtedly was a Moor and could not speak Christian.⁶¹

That is, speaking Spanish is equivalent to speaking *Christian*. Analogously, speaking Arabic is equivalent to speaking *Moorish*. Thus, when Cervantes portrays the Captive—or when the Captive portrays himself—as being ignorant of Arabic, the motivation might

⁵⁹ Part I, Chapter 41, p. 361.

⁶⁰ Part I, Chapter 41, p. 356.

⁶¹ Part I, Chapter 37, p. 326.

be to protect the Captive's reputation, sparing him any doubts and implicit accusations that he might have converted to Islam.

But there's a second and more direct answer to the question. Why doesn't Cervantes grant the Captive the ability to speak Arabic? The real answer is that Cervantes *does* in fact grant the Captive this ability. The Captive can speak and understand Arabic—but the reader is likely to have forgotten this fact by the time the Captive tells his story.⁶² I would remind the reader of this exchange in Chapter 37, when the Captive and Zoraida first arrive at the inn:

Dorotea took the stranger by the hand, led her to a seat next to her own, and asked that she remove the veil. The Moorish lady looked at the captive, as if asking him to tell her what was being said and what she should do. He told her, in Arabic, that she was being asked to remove her veil and that she should do so...⁶³

This brief glimpse of the Captive translating for Zoraida seems to contradict the Captive's later claim, in Chapter 40, that he doesn't know Arabic. Here he seems perfectly capable of translating from Spanish to Arabic.

To drive my point home: if the Captive speaks Arabic and has no need for a translator, I suspect that the Renegade is not only superfluous, but imaginary. The Captive has invented the Renegade. Or to put this differently, the Captive and the Renegade are one and the same person. This would explain how the Captive and Zoraida can converse when they're alone, as well as how the Captive can understand the exchanges in Arabic between Zoraida and her father. Moreover, it would explain why the

⁶² The Captive is first introduced in Chapter 37; he commences relating his story in Chapter 39. Between these two chapters, in Chapter 38, Don Quixote gives a speech on the topic of arms vs. letters. Thus, by the time the Captive tells his story, following Don Quixote's interruption, details about the Captive's first introduction might no longer be fresh in the reader's mind.

⁶³ Part I, Chapter 37, p. 327.

Renegade never betrays the Captive, remaining the faithful keeper of the Captive's secrets.

While the Renegade, defying out expectations, never betrays the Captive, we might accuse the Captive of betraying his audience. He's lying, splitting himself into two distinct personae, the Christian and the Renegade, to conceal the fact that he has abandoned his Christian faith. Moreover, the Captive may have concealed his renegade identity not only from his audience at the inn, but also from Zoraida's father (for Zoraida's father permits only Christians to speak freely with his daughter⁶⁴). He may have even concealed this fact from Zoraida herself, for the Captive tells us that "she might have been alarmed to see that her affairs were being discussed by renegades."⁶⁵

There's one additional hint that the Captive and the Renegade might be the same person. According to the Captive's report, upon boarding the vessel for their escape, the Renegade "held up his scimitar, and said in Moorish: 'None of you move unless you want to lose your life.'"⁶⁶ Later, arriving on the shore of Spain, the Renegade is told that he "should remove his Turkish jacket and put on a prisoner's coat or tunic that one of us gave to him, though doing so left him in shirtsleeves..."⁶⁷ That is, the Renegade, who up till now has wielded a Muslim sword, dons the disguise of a Christian slave. What's noteworthy is that this description of the Renegade's appearance matches that of the Captive himself when he's first introduced in Chapter 37. There, Cervantes writes:

...[H]is clothing indicated that he was a Christian recently arrived from Moorish lands, for he was dressed in a short blue woolen tunic with half-sleeves and no

⁶⁴ Part I, Chapter 41, pp. 352-353.

⁶⁵ Part I, Chapter 41, p. 353.

⁶⁶ Part I, Chapter 41, p. 358.

⁶⁷ Part I, Chapter 41, p. 366.

collar, breeches of blue linen, and a cap of the same color; he wore ankle boots the color of dates, and a Moorish scimitar hung from a strap across his chest.⁶⁸

The fact that the imaginary Renegade and the storytelling Captive wear the same costume—an incongruous combination of a Christian tunic and a Muslim sword—might signal to us the Captive’s dual religious identity.

These observations bring us back to the imaginary author, Cide Hamete Benengeli. As I concluded earlier, Cide Hamete Benengeli’s name indicates he is a Muslim son of a Christian, and therefore a renegade. Given Cervantes’ close identification with Cide Hamete, I have suggested that Cervantes has created the Moorish author as an alternate version of himself, a fictional projection of himself as a renegade. In the case of the Captive, as noted above, Cervantes and the Captive share a number of common biographical details. Thus, as with Cide Hamete, we might also regard the Captive as a fictional projection of Cervantes as a renegade.

Why would Cervantes fabricate two imaginary versions of himself as a renegade? Might this lead the reader to suspect that Cervantes converted to Islam during his five years in Algiers, concealing this conversion upon his return to Spain—much as the Captive does—yet revealing his religious identity to the eyes of the astute reader? I think this might be going too far. Details about Cervantes’ religious identity are sufficiently obscure to inspire venturesome speculation, but also to thwart definitive discoveries. Another bold thesis holds that Cervantes was born into a converso family, a descendent of Jews forced to convert.⁶⁹ This thesis has enjoyed some popularity over the last fifty years, but has also been met by dismissive rebuttals. We’ll probably never know whether

⁶⁸ Part I, Chapter 37, p. 325.

⁶⁹ See Dominique Aubier’s 1966 book, *Don Quichotte prophète d’Israël*.

Cervantes was a converso, a renegade, or an old Christian,⁷⁰ just as we'll never know whether Don Quixote's real name was Quixada, Quexada, or Quexana.⁷¹

Keeping mindful of this uncertainty, I'm willing to venture thus far: Cide Hamete and the Captive are artistic creations—lies. Yet I hold that Cervantes' fictional identities are lies that reveal the truth. What kind of truth do I think Cervantes has revealed in this lie? Though I'm at the end of my lecture, and don't have much time to develop my answer to this question, I'll offer a condensed and tentative response: What if, during his five years in Algiers, Cervantes gained a fresh perspective on religious pluralism in Spain? What if, when he returned to Spain, he saw his homeland with new eyes, calling into question the drive of the Church and the Throne to impose a single Christian narrative on the pluralistic culture of Spain—a country where multiple religious narratives have long taken root? What if Cervantes has been sensitized to the fact that competing religious narratives tend to clash violently, bringing needless and lamentable destruction? To push this further: what if Cervantes' immersion in rival religious cultures led him to doubt that *any* of these religious narratives could claim to be real? To push this to the extreme: what if Cervantes concluded that there is no homogeneous, integrated foundation of reality at all? From this point of view, one might say that all we have are fragmentary views of reality that successively and temporarily gain the upper hand by

⁷⁰ Of course, being a converso and being a renegade are not mutually exclusive; a Spanish Christian from a historically Jewish family could convert to Islam while living among Muslims. I would note that I attended a lecture presented at the annual symposium of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies in Santa Fe (on June 28, 2016, the day before I presented my lecture at St. John's College) that might address this possibility. "Literary Representations of Crypto-Jews in Spanish Picaresque Novels," by Amy I. Aronson-Friedman, discusses depictions of conversos and renegades in the Spanish novella *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of His Fortunes and Adversities*, published in 1554. If I understood this lecture correctly, one character, a converso, converts from Christianity to Islam and back again when it serves his purposes. Aronson-Friedman's work might well shed light on the fluidity of religious identity in the time and place of Cervantes' birth. Cervantes himself alludes to *Lazarillo* in *Don Quixote* (Part I, Chapter 22, p. 169).

⁷¹ Part 1, Chapter 1, pp. 19-20.

interrupting and negating other views of reality—always violently—only to be interrupted and negated in turn by another provisional view of reality.

We might see how this perspective could have influenced Cervantes' composition of *Don Quixote*. While, at the beginning of the novel, the story seems to be framed in terms of imagination vs. reality—say, giants vs. windmills—as we go deeper into the novel, it looks increasingly like a story of imagination vs. imagination, one fabricated story vs. another, with no authoritative perspective to which we can appeal. Moreover, in the adventures of Don Quixote we see repeatedly that rival narratives tend to find violent ways to interrupt and negate other narratives, defeating any effort to impose authority.

Consider the actions of our central hero, Don Quixote. Adopting the identity of a knight errant, Don Quixote turns his weapons not only against giants, brigands, and fellow knights, but also against Moors. Among the fictional knights to whom Don Quixote looks as models, he emulates above all Reinaldos de Montalbán, famed for having crossed into the land of the Moors to steal the golden statue of Muḥammad.⁷² Quixote's own crusade against Muslims is frequently comical. Recall, for example, his interruption of Master Pedro's puppet show, when he hacks to pieces an ensemble of puppets depicting Moors.⁷³ Yet, in addition to this comedy, the dark side of the knight's violence is also exposed; his crusade is often self-destructive and turned, unintentionally, against the Church and venerable Christian icons. In the final chapter of the novel's first part, the delirious knight takes up arms against a procession of holy penitents bearing an image of Mary, inciting Sancho to shout, "Where are you going, Señor Don Quixote?"

⁷² Part I, Chapter 1, p. 21.

⁷³ Part II, Chapter 26, p. 632.

What demons in your heart incite you to attack our Catholic faith?"⁷⁴ Cervantes' fantasy might then be seen as an expansive unfolding of Sancho's rebuke. The novel might be read as a reprimand of Catholic Spain's mad, brutal, and repressive campaign against pluralism—a campaign that ultimately turns towards self-destruction. Perhaps this is the truth that Cervantes hopes to make us realize, at least the truth that is given us to understand.

⁷⁴ Part I, Chapter 52, p. 441.