

SEX AND GENDER IN CERVANTES  
*SEXO Y GÉNERO EN CERVANTES*

ESSAYS IN HONOR OF  
ADRIENNE LASKIER MARTÍN

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(eds.)

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# ADRIENNE LASKIER MARTÍN: CENTERING THE MARGINS FOR EARLY MODERN SPAIN

ESTHER FERNÁNDEZ

## **Toward a Different Center**

It is challenging to write an academic introduction for Adrienne L. Martín, who is still giving so much at a personal and professional level to her students, colleagues and numerous friends outside her field. Those of us privileged to know her are aware of her devotion to friendships beyond academe, surely one of the reasons why she has always sought to unite apparently disparate cultural worlds that are ultimately not very different from each other, particularly at a very human level. Because of this, to pigeonhole her worldview solely into that of a prominent researcher and professor would be to truncate a series of qualities that distinguish her, among them her generosity, openness to new ideas, her optimism and patience with her students, her ability to unite those around her, and her knowing how to enjoy each day to the fullest. For those reasons and for many others, this introduction and each chapter of this volume contain underlying gratitude, personal memories, and the intellectual legacy with which Adrienne is still inspiring us today.

Adrienne began her training as a Cervantist and Golden Age poetry specialist at Harvard University, where she had gone in the Eighties originally to pursue her interests in neobaroque narrative of twentieth-century Latin American literature. Fortunately for us, after taking a course on Cervantes with Francisco Márquez Villanueva, she decided to switch to Golden Age literature and, as she says, never looked back. She studied under the guidance of Márquez and Stephen Gilman, both brilliant early modernist scholars with wide-ranging interests. Claudio Guillén and Christopher Maurer were also important mentors, and they all had a definitive influence on her training and in awakening her evident passion for Hispanic poetry and narrative, her initial concentrations.

During her time at Harvard she won a teaching award, an honor she also earned at Stanford University, where she held her first teaching

position after graduation. It was at that institution that she met Will H. Corral, a Latin Americanist and her husband of almost thirty years. To many of us their marriage is exemplary of how personal commitment and scholarly rigor in very different fields help you maintain your sanity in academe. In that regard, those of us who have had the privilege of studying with Adrienne know that her initial years in the profession are a fount of unforgettable anecdotes and “teaching moments” that frequently enhanced our classes and ultimately created a golden age in United States-based Hispanism. Chatting with Adrienne and Will meant, and means, witnessing a positive confluence of east coast training and west coast cultural ambiance.

While at Stanford Adrienne published *Cervantes and the Burlesque Sonnet* (University of California Press, 1991), a revised and expanded version of her doctoral dissertation (directed by Márquez Villanueva), which the Universidad Complutense de Madrid’s J. Ignacio Díez reviewed as groundbreaking. That book blends three of what are still some of her consistent avenues of research: renewed Cervantes studies, Spanish poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the many aspects of humor. In that first book Adrienne analyzes Cervantes’ unheralded burlesque poetry and justifies including it among the most engaging and revealing work by the Spanish master, pinpointing unrecognized connections to his canonical works. In addition, as a study of sources for a consistently challenging author, *Cervantes and the Burlesque Sonnet* provides a methodology for approaching literature from a perspective that combines philological precision with a measured attention to contemporary theory, in this case the work of Bakhtin.

That type of interdisciplinary research would become characteristic of her subsequent scholarly endeavors, including her present project on animals in Cervantes and other representative, understudied or unknown authors. Her work has been well-received in Spain and beyond, which speaks to the timeliness of her views and quite particularly about how her congeniality and enthusiastic support of her cohort and younger colleagues on both sides of the Atlantic have gone far in building conceptual and very human bridges. In that regard essays like “Public Indiscretion and Courtly Diversion: The Burlesque Letters in *Don Quijote II*” (1991), “Humor and Violence in Cervantes” (2006), “La burla erótica y el arte de engañar en el Siglo de Oro” (2006), and “Female Burlesque and the Everyday” (2009) have become major contributions in the fields of humor and burlesque in Early Modern literary studies.

Her early incursions into burlesque and humor prepared the ground for what would become another important facet in Adrienne's career: her studies on eroticism and sexualities that, at that point, were still marginalized or undervalued by conventional approaches to the traditions of the Golden Age. Her essays on those topics are numerous and stand out because they venture amiably and comprehensively into a field deemed scabrous by older critical generations. Reading those perceptions in counterpoint, the marginality she examines in depth turns out to represent the complex historical and social scaffolding that nourished it. A vivid example of those constructions is Martín's attention to prostitution in Cervantine literature, which required her venturing into the interdisciplinary history of the practice in urban and rural Europe.

She never loses sight of solid Spanish erudition on her topics, as one can ascertain in those studies on prostitution and the underworld in iconic figures like Maritornes or Cervantes's *entremeses*. Essays such as "Maritornes y la prostitución rural" (2006) and "Prostitución e historia social en los entremeses del hampa femenina" (2009), along with a larger analysis of purported deviance in "Sodomitas, putos, doncellos y maricotes en algunos textos de Quevedo" (2008), reflect her interest and commitment to the study of marginal sexualities and their fuller contexts. Some of those pieces were revised and updated into the holistic view she provides in her next book, *An Erotic Philology of Golden Age Spain* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2008).

Along the lines of what she achieves in *Cervantes and the Burlesque Sonnet*, in *An Erotic Philology of Golden Age Spain* Adrienne brings into prominence authors, works and, for that matter, exegeses that had been ostracized for the *literatures* of the Golden Age. Specifically, and drawing from many sources subsequent to Erich Auerbach's authoritative readings, Adrienne argues that erotic literatures should occupy a rightful place in Hispanic philology, which would in turn open the door for a series of interlaced histories that recover the voice and presence of Otherness in fictional texts. Taking as a framework Kai T. Erikson's ideas on deviant behavior, she examines a wide range of characters and historically transgressive sexual behaviors such as prostitution, sodomy, lesbianism, transvestism, and adultery, examining at every instance the state of the critical arts about them.

The developments in that book are complemented by the equally seminal essay collections she has edited with J. Ignacio Díez Fernández, *La poesía erótica de Fray Melchor de la Serna* (2003 and 2011), the