

Ana María Rodríguez-Rodríguez. *Letras liberadas: Cautiverio, escritura y subjetividad en el Mediterráneo de la época imperial española*. Madrid: Visor Libros, 2013. p. 192. ISBN: 978-84-9895-142-4.

In current times, as xenophobic tensions are continually denounced in Spanish newspapers, while the government proposes and articulates the recognition of nationality for descendants of the Sephardim diaspora, and immigration through the Southern borders of the European community becomes increasingly deadly and expensive, reading about captivity in the early modern Mediterranean does not bear comfort, but enhances awareness. Ana M^a Rodríguez-Rodríguez brings us a moment of clarity and depth in her reading of books that otherwise would seem one more expression of early orientalism and European objectification of the Other.

This book deals with a topic that has called the attention of numerous scholars, such as María Antonia Garcés and Lisa Voigt. Both of them have contributed greatly to our knowledge of captivity on both sides of the Atlantic, in Cervantes, and the Mediterranean Sea. Rodríguez-Rodríguez is in dialogue with both of these scholars when she proposes to study the work of three authors—Diego Galán, Antonio de Sosa, and Miguel de Cervantes—as primarily literary products where biography, history, reinsertion, and deviation suffer tremendous transformations in the hands of the writer. Rodríguez-Rodríguez organizes her analysis in three chapters, each of them concerned with seminal writings about captivity in the seventeenth-century Mediterranean: Diego Galán's *Cautiverios y Trabajos de Diego Galán* (as early as 1612), Antonio de Sosa in his *Topographia e historia general de Argel* (1612), and Miguel de Cervantes in four plays (*El trato de Argel* (1581-83), *Los baños de Argel* (1615), *La gran sultana*, and *El gallardo español*).

Ana María Rodríguez-Rodríguez profiles Galán, Sosa and Cervantes's utilization of texts and knowledge as instruments of power after their captivity, probably as much as they did it during their times deprived of freedom. Going beyond bookish knowledge and literary tradition, these authors express a sheer necessity to conform to the expectations of Spanish readership and authorities, while simultaneously negotiating a description of real life within the Ottoman Empire. In their texts they domesticate the danger and fear of the Other, as much as they confirm the traditional literature on Muslims and Renegades, while they adjust their real

experiences to traditions accepted by their readership, and avoid falling into the lure of the exotic (26, 89). Ana M^a Rodríguez explores these complexities in compelling topics like the captive's body, his sexuality and torture, his religion, and gender domination/submission of the prisoner.

In the first chapter, "Vicisitudes del *yo* autobiográfico en los textos de cautivos. *Cautiverio y trabajos de Diego Galán*," based on a comparison of the two versions of this account, Rodríguez-Rodríguez creates an enlightening analysis of the increasing fictionalization in Diego Galan's autobiographical report. This is a privileged text for this type of elaboration, since the two extant manuscripts, by way of comparison, permit a sound study of the evolution from factual to fictional in Galan's writing process (22-25). For the critic, the explanation for the changes between the two versions is that in the first one Galan reorganizes his experiences, and pays attention to historical data, but in his second version Galan seeks a reconciliation of his identity damaged by the conflict between the Turkish and Spanish cultures, originated in his years in captivity in the Ottoman world and reinsertion into Spanish society (74).

In the second chapter, "La crueldad del cautiverio: historia y propaganda. *Topographia e historia general de Argel*," Rodríguez-Rodríguez presents her reading beyond the usual concerns about race, religion and xenophobia in Spanish literature. Unlike in Galan's account, violence is tremendously present in the last two dialogues of Antonio de Sosa. Avoiding simplicity, Rodríguez navigates the meanings of cruelty in these gory conversations. Torture deprives the human being from its voice. The pain generated in the process is re-elaborated through the text's narration of histories of Algiers and elsewhere. The victims endure unutterable sufferings, opening them to new meanings. Finally, the texts of captivity and torture appeal to the reader's help and awareness, while they explore the limiting realities of an Empire that cannot protect its subjects from ignominy, silence, and submission (130-32).

The third chapter, "Masculinidades en conflicto. Las comedias de cautiverio de Cervantes," deepens our understanding of the debated relation between history and fiction in Cervantes's captivity plays. Being the first playwright who dedicated his plays to the topic of captivity, the study of the meaning of gender and sexual performance in his characters is of the utmost relevance. Rodríguez is not convinced by the current trend of making biographical connections with the love affairs and unrestrained

desire in the characters of Cervantes's captivity plays (168). She prefers to think in terms of the fictionalization of memories, a respectable claim since Rodríguez attests it through a reflection about the representation of female captives in Cervantes's captivity plays. Rodríguez-Rodríguez is very compelling in her analysis from the perspective of fiction and its rules, beyond historical, biographical, and multicultural claims.

The book finishes with an opportune epilogue about the captivity of westerners in North Africa, the reclusion of immigrants in the modern Europe due to the European Community's immigration rules, and the perceived need to control the movement of low-wage labor through the Mediterranean border of the EU.

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