

**FORGET NOT WHO THOU ART: CONTRADICTORY
IDENTIFICATION IN RUIZ DE BURTON'S PLAY
DON QUIXOTE DE LA MANCHA**

**NO OLVIDES QUIÉN ERES:
LA IDENTIFICACIÓN AMBIGUA EN LA OBRA
DE TEATRO DON QUIXOTE DE LA MANCHA
DE RUIZ DE BURTON**

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Abstract

In her play *Don Quixote de la Mancha. A Comedy, in Five Acts, Taken from Cervantes' Novel of that Name* (1856), María Amparo Ruiz de Burton is seen to identify with her Don Quixote, a cathartic character who views himself as impotent and mistreated. The identification of Don Quixote as a colonized, mad Californio is not accidental, but done for ideological effect. He serves as an expression of an incipient—even if problematic—oppositional identity for Californios within the new Anglo/US hegemonic regime post-1848. It is a contradictory identification, loaded with racial and class anxieties, which aims to redress the decentering and despoliation of Californios as a whole while shining a light on those upper-class Californios who associated with their US colonizers. This article suggests that the play's significance, and indeed uniqueness, is the creation of an incipient border identity for the Californios through the prism of madness.

Keywords: Chicano theatre, 19th century, Don Quixote, Ruiz de Burton, madness.

Resumen

En la obra de teatro *Don Quixote de la Mancha. A Comedy, in Five Acts, Taken from Cervantes' Novel of that Name* (1856), María Amparo Ruiz de Burton se

identifica con Don Quixote, un personaje catártico que se ve a sí mismo impotente y maltratado. La posible identificación de Don Quixote con un loco californiano colonizado no es accidental, sino que responde a una posición ideológica. Su *Don Quixote* deja entrever una incipiente —si bien problemática— identidad oposicional de los californianos dentro del nuevo régimen hegemónico anglo/estadounidense post-1848. Esta es una identificación contradictoria, cargada de ansiedad racial y de clase que busca compensación por la descentralización y espolio de los californianos, pero también destaca el deseo de estos por asociarse con el colonizador estadounidense. Este artículo propone que la relevancia de esta obra y, de hecho, su singularidad, se encuentran en la creación de una identidad de frontera para los californianos a través del prisma de la locura.

Palabras clave: teatro chicano, siglo diecinueve, Don Quixote, Ruiz de Burton, locura.

1. Introduction

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We were born to do something else than simply live [...] for the good of our nation or for some other glorious or crazy deed [...] that is our mission on Earth.

María Amparo Ruiz de Burton,
*Letter to M.G. Vallejo.*¹

This ‘crazy mission on Earth’ that María Amparo Ruiz de Burton (1832-1895) mentions in her letter to her friend Guadalupe Vallejo resounds in the first lines of her 19th-century play *Don Quixote de la Mancha. A Comedy, in Five Acts, taken from Cervantes’ Novel of that Name* (1876), where Don Quixote tells his faithful Sancho Panza: “Mine shall be the *mission* to redress [...] to fight incarnate devils” (1876: 5, emphasis added). In truth, we know very little about this play as, while there are numerous studies of Ruiz de Burton’s two novels, there are hardly any that focus exclusively on her theatrical work.² Those that do so emphasize primarily the writer’s reclaiming of her *hacendado* cultural heritage and provide a view of the character of Don Quixote as a displaced and defeated Californio³ —equating his fate with that of the “poor woman” Ruiz de Burton (Montes 2004: 220).⁴ I suggest that we do not stop there, as the reading of this play is further convoluted. While critics have previously overlooked the transgressive potential of madness in the play, this essay suggests that its significance, and indeed uniqueness, is centred round this very aspect, the creation of an incipient border identity for the recently colonized Californio through the prism of madness.

The discourse of the mad, Foucault tells us, can ultimately shape reality and it is precisely through madness that the “values of another morality are called into question” (2009a: 27). Ultimately, the madness of Ruiz de Burton’s *Don Quixote* entails not only a distorted perception of reality but also a critical view of it. Cervantes’ 17th-century *Don Quijote* was a man in the making of his time and, in a similar way, Ruiz de Burton’s play—from the recently originated Mexican American territorial and symbolic border (the Lotmanian “semiospheric border”, as we will explain)—is shaped to echo her discontent with her time: specifically, the new Californio’s subaltern status resulting from processes of displacement and dispossession in the post-1848 US Southwest. In this sense, as this essay shall argue, her theatrical adaptation ultimately reveals the author’s own embryonic border consciousness.

Through the identification of Ruiz de Burton with *Don Quixote*, who lives in a distorted reality as a consequence of his mental disorder, the play becomes a liminal protest space through which to symbolically confront the new threat that US colonial practices posed for a specific social group, the recently colonized, upper-class Californios.⁵ Thus the literary figure of the madman serves as both a symbol of the vulnerability of the individual and as a signifier for the creation of a new Californio identity. Therefore, even though the play personifies Ruiz de Burton’s new reality as the colonized Other, I am persuaded that it nevertheless—and problematically—reclaims her status as a member of the self-styled Californio elite. Consequently, the experience of colonization *interpellated* her (to borrow the Althusserian concept) and she appropriated the same imperialist discourse that she wished to critically unsettle.

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2. From *Don Quijote* to *Don Quixote*

Taking her cue from critics Irene Phillips and Frederick Oden’s speculations, Amelia Montes argues that, before moving to the East coast in 1859, Ruiz de Burton lived in Mission San Diego de Alcalá (1853-1857) where she wrote theatrical productions for the Mission Theatre (2004: 3). Although her *Don Quixote* might possibly have been performed around 1856 in California, it was in 1875 that the author inscribed her play in the Library of Congress under the name ‘Mrs. H. S. Burton’ (Sánchez and Pita 2001: 554). A year later, she had it published by the Californian publishing house John H. Carmany and Co. and presented a copy to the historian Hubert H. Bancroft, who referred to it in his *Essays and Miscellany* (1890). Although there is no known record of performance, there is evidence that the play went to the stage in the form of a note published in the *San Francisco Daily Alta California* in 1876, which stated that Ruiz de Burton had

already “achieved a dramatic reputation by her ‘Don Quijote’” (in Sánchez and Pita 2001: 555). Still, the writer’s popularity as a playwright is difficult to gauge.

The fact that Ruiz de Burton decided to take Cervantes’ novel to the theatre is something intrinsically characteristic of nineteenth-century literary production, with this being the century of the great adaptations and productions of *Don Quixote*.⁶ After all, and as Arun P. Mukherjee claimed, “writing is not just a matter of putting one’s thoughts on paper. Writing is also about social power. How I write depends a lot on who I write for” (1994: 13). In nineteenth-century post-independence Latin American literary spheres, as Strosetzki avers, the figure of the distinguished *hidalgo* is Americanized to deliver contextualized socio-political metaphors. Don Quixote’s character functions as a symbol of the creation of national identities and of Anglo-American colonial criticism (Strosetzki 2010: 74-80). Rubén Darío, José Vasconcelos, Octavio Paz, Juan Bautista Alberdi and José Rodó, all confer on him a moralizing angle (Strosetzki 2010: 74). It is not surprising, therefore, given the ‘contact zone’ (to borrow Mary Louise Pratt’s concept) in which Ruiz de Burton wrote, that she bestowed her Don Quixote with a political dimension and chose to perform the play before both a “captive audience” (2018: 52), as Pedro García-Caro calls it (2018: 52), and a colonizer one.

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3. Symbolic Constructions at the Border

In the 1980s, the cultural semiotician Yüri Lotman conceptualized the notion of the “semiosphere” as the (semiotic but also physical) space necessary for the production and transmission of meaning, and outside of which no semiosis is possible (2001: 123-127). Two of the most interesting consequences of Lotman’s model (which was seemingly based on the notion of the biosphere and the noosphere) are, firstly, the way in which it accounts for the existence and functioning of languages (understood as both cultures and texts) and, then, how it postulates the existence of a disorganized, non-cultural, external space (an-other space) against which the semiosphere defines itself: civilization lies within, barbarians live outside (123-131). This dichotomy (Lotman was, after all, heavily indebted to structuralist methodologies) demanded the existence of some kind of border or frontier, the Lotmanian boundary, that rather than strictly separating these two realms (the civilized and the wild, we and they) functions as a membrane enabling some degree of exchange (as in the biological process of osmosis), thereby introducing conflict and contradiction within the semiosphere (127-138).⁷

The Mexican-American war—the fulfillment of the Manifest Destiny rhetoric—ended with the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and the ensuing change of national allegiance for Spanish speakers in the newly colonized territories. For the

now Mexican American population it meant dispossession of their lands, racial discrimination, segregation and alienation, the start of internal colonialism and of border conflict. The new US (which clearly seemed to articulate an emerging *semiosphere*) required the reinforcement of a national identity (still in the making) which was mostly based on language (English), and skin color (white), all this predicated upon the symbolic construction of sameness and difference. Indeed, immediately after the war, owing to the fear of external contact with the Mexican Other, the US created a new semiotic space which was symbolically and all too materially built around a community characterized by being predominantly white and English-speaking. This emerging space was being reinforced against the non-white, Spanish-speaking Mexican one. The urgency with which this new space was articulated, the impossibility of neatly separating both realms, and the actual presence of Mexican culture within the United States' newly acquired land (the actual frontier went hundreds of miles to the South) provided the perfect breeding ground for the kind of exchanges that Lotman's semiosphere describes.

The frontier space—which in Lotmanian terms is understood as a “semiospheric border”, that interstitial space between the Mexican semiosphere and the US one— allowed for the creation of an ambiguous subtext in Ruiz de Burton's play. Moreover, as Lotman reasoned, for an external culture to be accepted into the semiosphere, it first needs to be ‘translated’ at its border as this is where a higher semiotic dynamism exists and ‘foreign’ texts/cultures can be understood (1996: 24-29; 2001: 136-137). In terms of Mexican-American relations, this frontier constitutes some sort of cultural no-one's land, and here cultures and languages, traditions and prejudices all mix up in unimaginable ways. Furthermore, the semiosphere translates all foreign texts (Michel Foucault would call them discourses) into an acceptable language (Lotman 1996: 24-29; 2001: 131-140).⁸ Hence, in order to be understood (i.e. accepted) by the US semiosphere, Ruiz de Burton maintained in her literary work an ambiguous position by absorbing dominant elements and shaping a discourse that proposed whiteness and upper-class status as the Californio's essential identity components.⁹ This type of Spivakian strategic essentialist position would probably, in the author's view, allow her to fight against dislocation and dispossession. Yet, realistically, it ensured her—at best—a tolerated enemy position within the US semiosphere simply because racial difference became, in the 19th century, a visible marker of alienation. Back in the early 17th century, Miguel de Cervantes was also writing at a time when a semiosphere—Habsburg Spain—perceived it had to be reinforced as a result of the fear of the foreign Ottoman threat. It has been argued that it was in the early modern period when the concept of identity began to be fashioned, and—for Spaniards—to be non-Spanish became equated with being Muslim, Jewish or black (that is, non-white). The national subject and its Other began to be defined,

and religion, language, and ethnicity soon appeared as essential elements. A Christian/white European¹⁰ identity became the basis for the creation of the first nation states, and to be black (non-white), Muslim or Jewish (non-Christian) was viewed as a threat.¹¹

4. A Mad Californio Hidalgo

It is precisely from Ruiz de Burton's semiospheric border position that the play becomes the means to translate her socio-political experiences via the tools of humor and madness. Just as madness protects Cervantes' Don Quixote from his social condition (González 2005: 124), so this madman Don Quixote *hidalgo* allows for the creation of a collective identity that could be applied to the recently colonized Californios and that excluded the lower classes. From the very outset, through repetition and comedy, we find the *hidalgo's* unquestioned madness established:

160 CURATE. He is gone, gone, gone!
 NIECE AND HOUSEKEEPER. Where? Where?
 CURATE. Gone clean mad.
 NIECE. Gone! Where?
 CURATE. Out of his head.
 CARRASCO. And out of town.
 NIECE. Who says that he is out of his head?
 HOUSEKEEPER. Who saw him go out of town?
 CURATE. Teresa Panza, Sancho Panza's wife.
 NIECE. Teresa Panza says that my uncle is gone out of his head.
 CURATE. No, that he is gone out of town.
 NIECE. And because he is gone out of town, must he be out of his head?
 CURATE. No, not for that, but because he talks *wildly*, like a *crazy* man. (Ruiz de Burton 1876: 7-8, emphasis added)

What is interesting in this dialogue is that, by conferring a natural and primitive character to Don Quixote's language ("he talks wildly") and by spatially positioning him in the countryside ("he is gone out of town"), Don Quixote's peripheral status is highlighted right from the very first act. According to Lotman (and as has been briefly mentioned above), in the semiotic production of identity, a boundary separates the space characterized as "cultured", "civilized" and "safe" from that considered to be "primitive", "hostile" and "wild" (2001: 131-143). Therefore, the culture of Ruiz de Burton's Don Quixote —and, with it, the author's own culture too— is transformed into a culture external to the semiosphere (characterized by sanity and the normal). Hence the speed with which the characters, and their dialogue, establish the "untranslatability" of Don Quixote's

discourse and place him on the periphery, the semiospheric border, with his madness (“he talks [...] like a crazy man”).

In an interesting construction of the symbolism of physical spaces, it can be safely argued that the play works to emphasize how —right after leaving his house for the first time— Don Quixote abandons the semiospheric safety afforded by sanity and normality. In turn, by entering the countryside —that is, the semiospheric frontier where “madness” and the “ab-normal” abound— he begins his quest “to help the oppressed, and relieve the unfortunate” (Ruiz de Burton 1876: 15). And if at the semiospheric border, semiosis (the production of coherent meaning) is not possible —Don Quixote’s madness is outside the ‘normal’— in Lotman’s view, change, revolution and transgression are indeed possible. Thus, in the previous dialogue, through repeated short questions which prompt misunderstandings based on linguistic constructions and spatial metaphors (the “out of his head”/“out of town”),¹² the play establishes the peripheral condition of Don Quixote’s language through the sheer impossibility of translating it. Don Quixote’s madness is not only stressed but it serves also as a tool to establish contact with other peripheral characters —“he talks about [...] helping the *helpless*, and defending the *defenseless*, (and) protecting *widows* and *orphans*” (8, emphasis in original). Therefore, from a peripheral position, the individual identity is transformed into a collective one through the prism of shared oppression. Rather astutely, Ruiz de Burton goes even further and implicitly extends the anguish experienced by Don Quixote (that of the author herself) to that of the Californio colonized community.

Crocker argues that the anguish of Cervantes’ Don Quixote “is born out of uncertainty [...] and of inner conflict which is likely to occur when a complacent world-view has been shattered and no new synthesis has yet been reconstructed from the chaos” (1954: 310). This approach, which seems to profit from Raymond Williams’ notions of emergent, dominant and residual elements of culture (1977: 121-126), can be similarly applied to Ruiz de Burton’s 19th century world, characterized by uncertainty and chaos after the radical changes imposed by the 1848 Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty. But if she wanted to give her play a contemporary political dimension, why would she identify with the figure of a madman? Russell states that Cervantes exploits in artistic terms “the principle that the mentality of the psychotic includes the essential qualities of normal thinking” (1969: 313). Ruiz de Burton’s Don Quixote *knows* he is mad but most importantly *wants* to be mad. As the *hidalgo*’s own words confirm: “Sancho, thou must be as crazy as myself” (Ruiz de Burton 1876: 23) and “I will be crazy [...] *perfectly* crazy” (22, emphasis added). Or as Gloria Anzaldúa would put it a century later: “I am mad —but I choose this madness” (1987: 197).

The author was aware that these moments of lucidity in her Don Quixote ('a wise madman') enabled him—and for that matter her—to offer a commentary, from a comic platform, on the social and political climate free from the fear of censorship, as a madman is forgiven everything. Laughter was also viewed as having a curative function so “insanity—provided it was not too violent—was funny” (Russell 1969: 320). Nevertheless, in the 19th century the meaning of the concept of madness had changed considerably from Cervantes' day: the madman is not funny anymore and empathy (albeit limitedly) is possible. Don Quixote is to be understood, therefore, as someone who embodies the tragedy of moral idealism (Crocker 1954: 279). Ruiz de Burton is aware that the comic element can enhance the tragic; after all, Cervantes called his novel a “comic epic” (Stam 1992: 6). Thus, her Don Quixote becomes a madman because—just like Cervantes' *hidalgo*—he does not wish to accept reality. The dedication found in the play's manuscript which reads “A souvenir from Don Quixote the Author” points to Ruiz de Burton's identification not only with the *hidalgo* but also with his madness, which we understand as being both the acceptance and the rejection of reality. In Cervantes' novel, when Don Quixote—presumably¹³—regains lucidity, he accepts his defeat and dies. With this in mind, it is no surprise therefore that we can identify Ruiz de Burton with the figure of a madman who, by contrast, does not die at the end of her play.

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The final three scenes depart most from Cervantes' novel. The author ends her play with Don Quixote caged inside a black carriage (in the novel, the cart episode takes place at the end of part I). It is here that the Foucauldian *langage silencieux* (as he explains it in *Madness and Civilization*) of the madman becomes apparent, for these are the only scenes where, strikingly, Ruiz de Burton's Don Quixote does not have any lines. This contrasts directly with Cervantes' book where, even though we are told that he initially travelled ‘silently and patiently’ in the cage, the *hidalgo* is ultimately allowed the use of language (for instance, to explain his story to the Canon of Toledo). Foucault highlighted the absence of language as a fundamental feature of the classic confinement of asylum life where the “Stranger *par excellence*” was constantly observed and silence was enforced so that “madness no longer existed except as *seen*” (2009a: 237, emphasis in original). Madness has been used in the play as a transgressive tool and Ruiz de Burton decides to enforce silence in the cage (the asylum) to stress even more the *hidalgo*'s madness.¹⁴ Conscious of the visual possibilities particular to theatre, Ruiz de Burton now wants the audience to *see* the madman, not to listen to him. Thus, the inclusion of a muted, caged Don Quixote in her final three scenes has a visual impact on the audience; by now they have taken the side of the *hidalgo* and this draws an empathic response. But what is more remarkable here is the second alteration that Ruiz de Burton makes to Cervantes' cage episode. In this scene we are told that Cervantes' Don Quixote

“travelled seated in his cage, with his hands tied” (Cervantes 2005: 421), yet in the play the *hidalgo* is unchained. In light of this, Ruiz de Burton’s inclusion of the literary trope of the cage and the silence that she chooses to enforce on him speaks directly of the madman’s position of Otherness. And it is precisely her decision to present us with an unchained Don Quixote (still close to nature) that allows Ruiz de Burton to keep the *hidalgo* —and through this, the colonized Mexican American— in the transgressive state of the semiospheric border. Madness allows her to do that and, tellingly, her play ends with a fight that goes unfinished.

Thus, the resulting final cage scene becomes yet another theatrical mechanism to emphasize visually Don Quixote’s despair and anxiety resulting from the experience of uncertainty and inner/outer conflict and the sense of injustice that permeates the whole play. Even though the *hidalgo* is expressly told that he “will be at liberty to depart whenever [he] please[s]” (Ruiz de Burton 1876: 62), the audience/reader will have already sensed that this might be another trick. Nevertheless, the madman’s confinement in the cage shall not be read as a defeat. Nor is this an acceptance on the author’s part of the newly imposed colonized subaltern position because, as we are immediately informed, this confinement is temporary only. In this respect, the *hidalgo*’s last uttered words before entering the cage are revealing. As he tells the Viceroy’s page: “I’ll go for a few days —only for a few days” (62). By now, the play has established the possibilities for subversion that madness and nature can offer (“This wild scenery inspires me”, as Don Quixote has previously uttered). At the same time, he is aware that he, and for that matter the whole community, will need to ‘learn’ a new system of language, those “wild, untamable words” through which, as Foucault tells us, madness can proclaim its own meaning (2009a: 27).

And it is once again in the open countryside, at the semiospheric border, where that transgression can take place. It is worth noting as well here the repeated use of the plural personal and possessive pronouns in some of Don Quixote’s final lines: “*we* can turn shepherds, and make verses and learn to play while *we* herd *our* own sheep [...] *we* will change *our* names, without a care but that of *our* sheep” (Ruiz de Burton 1876: 61, emphasis added). Drawing from the experience of colonization, as symbolized by the confining cage, and using the subversive potential of madness, Ruiz de Burton rallies the whole colonized community into demanding collective action.

5. “Forget Not Who Thou Art”

Manifest Destiny, the US justification of colonial “expansion, prearranged by Heaven, over an area not clearly defined” (Merk 1995: 24), revealed itself in the second half of the 19th century. Fully aware of the ideological apparatus that

accompanied this rhetoric, Ruiz de Burton made her views clear in a letter to Vallejo in 1869: “Manifest Destiny is nothing other than a ‘Manifest Yankie trick’”.¹⁵ Precisely, as an example of one of those ‘Yankie tricks’, the Land Act of 1851 would mark the beginning of Californios’ displacement and dispossession, a practice that was allowed, as Morán González tells us, “according to racialized discourses of white supremacy” (2010: 96). Just as with her two novels, Ruiz de Burton’s play seems to be strongly informed by biographical accounts; so even though the play tells us that the “lying books” (1876: 8) refer to the knight-errantry novels that cause Don Quixote’s madness, the Mexican-American war and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (the latter unilaterally amended by the US in 1851, shortly before this play’s first performance) do, perhaps inevitably, come to mind. After all, this is a play with no fewer than thirty references to lies and truth, and which is instilled with a sustained concern with the concept of honesty. In addition, the play unquestionably draws attention to the Anglo-American squatters’ illegal activities by using the word *cuatreros* —*galeotes* in Cervantes’ novel— which, as the officer informs Don Quixote, means ‘thief’ (16). Remarkably, and perhaps significantly, it is the only Spanish word in the entire play. From the start and all throughout, an emphasis is placed upon honesty, truth and, above all, the effects of lying. Hence, Don Quixote demands of his squire “to mind the truth always” (7), to which Sancho replies, quite cuttingly: “I shall be different from all other servants, sir; I shall not steal from you, sir, and indeed I shall be very grateful” (9). In fact, the author spent much of her life in a legal battle to recover some of her lands, including those she had inherited from her grandfather in Ensenada. Hence the pertinence of the words uttered by Don Quixote before the famous windmills scene: “Stand aside, whilst I engage them in fierce and unequal combat” (9).

Immediately after the US takeover, upper-class Californios who, as Almaguer asserts, “were neither truly ‘white’ in the northern European or Anglo-Saxon sense of the term, nor simply ‘uncivilized’ Indians” (1994: 54), experienced a loss of status. Still, the elite-class position that they enjoyed allowed them to be free from the violence directed towards the mixed or pure-blood indigenous populations (54). In all her writings Ruiz de Burton reflected a preoccupation with distancing land-owning Californios from black and indigenous populations. The sentence uttered by Don Quixote at the beginning of this adventure is worth noting: “Today I shall fight among *my peers*, Sancho, *my equals*” (1876: 10, emphasis added). This is a sentence that is not found in Cervantes’ novel, and it serves to strengthen the author’s semiosphere —one that was characterized by a class and racial episteme. In the 19th century the class status of upper-class Californios and Anglo-Americans was dependent on the exploitation of mestizos, subservient indigenous populations and enslaved Africans. Ruiz de Burton’s play was written during a time of racial

tensions, lynching and violence in the Southwest. Through her Californio Don Quixote, the author, from a semiospheric border position and through a discourse that identifies whiteness with upper-class supremacy, fights against any external threat coming from the non-white, non-upper class Mexican semiosphere that might ultimately contaminate her own class-based and racialized community. This semiospheric frontier mechanism might initially unite the Mexican/Californio and the Anglo-American semiospheres, but it separates them in the end by making each side aware of itself, of its own specificity, and of the differences with the Other. Moreover, as Lotman avers, culture (the domain of the subject) can only maintain a dialogue with an extra-culture (the non-subject) and never with a non-culture (the non-person) (2001: 131). In light of this, before the Mexican American war the US semiosphere viewed the Mexican culture as belonging to extra-culture and some form of dialogue, or translation to a recognizable language, was possible. Yet with the US colonization of the recently acquired territories in 1848, we witness the beginning of a process of displacement of Mexican American culture to a non-culture position. And so, with no translation possible, as Lotman points out, this culture and its texts become aliens (2001: 61-73).

It was as a consequence of Anglo-American colonization that upper-class Californios began to lose the privileges that they had previously enjoyed—and this was a circumstance that Cervantes himself would also reflect through his knight. Of this change of social status manifested in Cervantes' novel, González asserts that,

the pervasive presence of the law as context to Don Quijote's actions is sharp reminder of the knight's real status—of the gap between what he thinks that he is entitled to and that to which the changing social and political conditions have reduced him. Hidalgos were gradually losing their privileges. His madness protects him from his social condition. (2005: 123-124)

While seeking to avoid any anachronistic statements, we can argue that both Cervantes and Ruiz de Burton seem to share the same fears and anxiety about gradually losing their privileges. Throughout Ruiz de Burton's play there are numerous references to class that help the author fashion an *internal* border. As we have already seen, Lotman describes how the semiosphere is itself crossed by internal boundaries, which delineate various inner divisions within the major space. Ruiz de Burton underscores the distinction between the upper-class status of the Californios and the newcomers' lower-class condition through the numerous references in her play to "ill-breeding" (1876: 21), "low-born" (13), "marrying to her equal" (23), "the base-born" (17) and "equal in rank" (39). We also get Teresa Panza's insistence on "not marrying [her] daughter highly" as "she was born to be called Molly, and not ladyship" (23-24), and stories of princesses' mothers (i.e. Queen of Candaya) dying as a result of their daughters not marrying

“a prince equal in rank” (39). In addition, the well-known episode in Cervantes’ novel about Sancho’s failings as governor of Barataria Island might well help Ruiz de Burton to illustrate, in light of her other literary works, not only her belief in the premise that society essentialises one’s identity but also her position against class mobility.

6. “Performing the Spirit of the Law”

Ruiz de Burton was interpellated by the mid-19th century civilization/barbarism ideological debate which informs her literary work and, just as with her two novels, she problematically shows the contemporary preoccupation with distancing land-owning Californios from black and indigenous populations. For instance, in *Who Would Have Thought It?* the author presented the Indian as a savage and dangerous to both the Anglo-Americans and the Mexicans (1995: 35, 78, 201, 269). So, even though there is the existence of a discourse in favor of including the Indians in a ‘civilized’ society, this is in the role of subordinated slaves/servants. The same happens in the play, where Sancho Panza comes to represent the Californio indigenous population and his uncultured condition as a servant is emphasized repeatedly. There are manifold instances where Don Quixote confers animalistic qualities on his squire, inevitably bequeathing an ‘uncivilized’ status to him. From the start, Don Quixote tells him: “thou art a most unmanageable ass, and I ought to beat thee to teach thee to see things in their proper light; but I rather leave it to the irresistible influence of chivalry to civilize thee, beast though thou art” (Ruiz de Burton 1876: 9). Here, the Californio *hidalgo* not only confers animalistic qualities on his squire (‘ass’ and ‘beast’), but also denies him qualities such as honesty and gratitude on the basis of his ‘servant’ status —“I fear thou wilt be ungrateful: all servants are” (9). Sancho confesses to Don Quixote in return that “when asses are sad or sick they can’t bray, and it is just that way with me!” (21), and proclaims that “when I was a boy I brayed to perfection” (27). Halfway through the play, the *hidalgo* reinforces this bestial view of Sancho with the following: “I prefer to be left penniless, than to have such an ungrateful beast near me. Base hearted animal but an ass, thou art, and thou wilt never have sense enough to know that thou art an ass” (28). Sancho, for his part, assumes and internalizes his barbaric status by replying “I confess, sir, that I am an ass who only wants a tail to be a complete ass, and if you put me on one, you will favor me, and I’ll thank you” (28), and finally confesses to be “the biggest beast of them all” (28).

It was in the 19th century that the civilization/barbarism dichotomy (which seems to enact Lotmanian semiospheric dynamics to a great extent) emerged as a means of explaining the social, political and cultural situation in Latin America. In fact,

this play makes it clear that the servants as well as Don Quixote's enemies, the "enchanters" (the American squatters), are "barbarians" (Ruiz de Burton 1876: 31, 36). I am persuaded that the scene of the braying judges should be interpreted through the same prism. Just as in Echeverría's seminal work *El Matadero* (1871), in this scene we find explicit comparisons and references between people and animals—in this case, between the judges and an ass. So, while Ruiz de Burton takes the original Cervantine story, the dialogue she applies to the scene of the braying judges—which follows that of the *cuatrereros*—has a rather contemporary flavor. In Cervantes' novel, the judges do not initially appear in person and their story is told by a man whom Don Quixote meets at the inn (part 2, chapter 25). By contrast, in Ruiz de Burton's play, at the end of the first scene of the second act, two judges enter on opposite sides of the stage without introduction and maintain a dialogue (the longest exchange not actually involving Don Quixote or Sancho). One of the judges has lost his donkey in a forest and the other volunteers to help find it. They agree to bray at opposite ends of the forest, in order to entice the animal back. Finally, the judges find the donkey dead but conclude that their braying is to be admired: "Any one would take you for an ass!" (1876: 19), one judge tells the other. Ruiz de Burton's intention is direct political satire, as the statement from one of the pair indicates: "Do we not get re-elected all the time? We are the most popular judges, let alone our braying, which goes to prove the sagacity of our people" (19). This scene (freshly created by Ruiz de Burton) clearly alludes to the judges' re-election and to the society that elects them—a commentary not found in Cervantes' novel. It is clear that she wanted to show the judges as animalistic and child-like in order to offer a satirical commentary on the judicial system. Inserting here the story of the judges, and thereby interrupting the main narrative of the noble *hidalgo*, leads the audience/reader to reflect on the sociopolitical context and become more empathetically involved. After all, at the time US law was promoting squatter lawlessness against Californio property owners. It is a message underlined by her directions as the judges depart the stage twice, leaving it empty and filled simply with the sound of braying. The resulting soundscape acts as a pause in the play's rhythm, giving the audience some room for reflection. Indeed, the proto-Brechtian technique found in this play (through some kind of incipient distancing effect) may well prompt us to regard Ruiz de Burton as an antecedent to 20th century Chicano theatre (cf. Luis Valdes' 1978 Chicano play *Zoot Suit*). Moreover, Ruiz de Burton—by using this approach—would still not be far from Cervantes' hypotext, since several passages in his *Don Quixote* have been identified by critics as following a theatrical configuration.¹⁶

If at first, as Foucault points out, Cervantes' Don Quixote embarks on an attempt to transform reality into a sign, the *hidalgo* progressively becomes a "negative of the Renaissance world" as similitudes become deceptive and verge upon madness

(2009b: 52-53). By repeatedly confronting *reason* with *unreason*, Ruiz de Burton's play underscores throughout the non-existent relationship between resemblance and signs while stressing at the same time the importance of identities and differences. There is a conscious attempt to prove that reality is controlled by language, which we find explored effectively in the judges' scene with its questioning of shared assumptions about reality. In this scene it is worth noting the following utterances from both judges: "a real donkey's bray"; "a real ass"; "two judges or two real asses"; "mimic braying might be taken for real" and "anyone would take you for an ass!" (Ruiz de Burton 1876: 18-19). The confusion presented centres on the judges not being able to differentiate between real and 'mimic braying' to the extent that the 'mimic braying' is classified as real —"I repeated my braying and the ass repeated his" (18)— and with this the author is able to challenge the colonizers' hegemonic discourse and create an epistemological shift. Likewise, by making use of a dialogue between two representatives of the judicial system, the scene ultimately signals the Foucauldian understanding of knowledge as a construction under conditions of power. It is worth noting additionally that in the third scene Ruiz de Burton uses Sancho's short tenure as governor of Barataria to mock the judicial system. Don Quixote starts by saying "forget not who thou art" and continues with the following: "Thou wilt be called to administer justice. *Remember how very few judges are just.* They rather do an injustice than be thought ignorant of the law, as if their duty were not to execute the *spirit of the law*" (37, emphasis in original). Interestingly, Ruiz de Burton decides to emphasize "Remember how very few judges are just" and "the spirit of the law" —a comment that we do not find in Cervantes' novel. Clearly a "consciousness of subalternity" —defined by Sánchez and Pita as an "awareness of having been conquered and displaced" (2001: 271)— informs Ruiz de Burton's play. In the same way that Cervantes included several tales external to his novel's main story to allow for some literary criticism, so Ruiz de Burton in her theatrical adaptation made use of tales which acted as implied references to the US legal and political system. The moralizing tone that the writer confers on Don Quixote serves to invoke from a semiospheric border position a didactic and 'bilingual' dimension, illustrating for us the 19th century Mexican American experience of injustice. Ruiz de Burton identifies with her Don Quixote, a cathartic character, who sees himself impotent and mistreated.

By the time Ruiz de Burton returned to California in 1870, American colonists had already invaded most of the land. In Scene VII —with Don Quixote's speech to the villagers who confront each other when the braying judges' joke goes too far— the author makes her position clear: "no single individual can insult the whole community, and whole towns can not [sic] take arms for trifles. It should be to defend principles or violated rights" (1876: 27). It should be noted, nevertheless,

that no-one defended the land rights of the author and we should not be surprised by the following statement from her *Don Quixote*: “the property of the enemies, I shall conquer in fair fight” (6). Like the protagonist in her second novel, *The Squatter and the Don*, Ruiz de Burton never recovered —nor ‘redressed’— these lands and died alone in Chicago in 1895 while fighting for their return. One could easily infer that Sancho’s words in the scene at the inn about his wife being robbed by the innkeeper are a nod to Burton’s own suffering: “Don’t rob a poor innocent woman and her innocent children. Help! Help!” (14).

7. Conclusion

It is true that, by identifying with the noble *hidalgo*, Ruiz de Burton wrote from a position of presumed superiority —as “a knight is not a common man” (1876: 9)— but what is also clear is that her *Don Quixote* is her first attempt at articulating and denouncing on the stage —through the tool of madness and from the border of her own ‘maddened’ Lotmanian semiosphere— her new subaltern status. Unfortunately, just as initially happened with her two novels, her play has not received enough attention from critics because she problematically negotiated with the colonizers’ discourse and tried to conform to the social hierarchies of the emerging 19th century US nation. The writer was against the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny and yet she created in this play a racialized and hierarchically class-based community on the stage, articulating, as it were, the “Yankee trick” —a rhetoric of dominance based on, first, the establishment of a semiospheric (new) boundary and, second, the 19th century civilization/barbarism discourse. Hers is a play distorted by a possessive investment in a fixed social-class stratification. She showed a consciousness of subalternity in all her literary work but we would not be doing Ruiz de Burton any justice if, as Aranda says, we expected to find “a Gloria Anzaldúa of the borderlands in 19th century clothes” (1998: 555). Still, like Anzaldúa, she could see how “the clash of cultures makes us crazy constantly” (1987: 81).

As Crocker tells us, Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* dies as a consequence of the triumph of pessimism; that is, the acceptance of reality, and his death logically follows *anagnorisis* (1954: 301). Sancho Panza pleads with him near the novel’s end not to die —“because the greatest madness a man can commit in this life is to let himself die” (2005: 884)— but these words are in vain. By contrast, Ruiz de Burton’s *Don Quixote*’s first and final defeat at the hands of the Knight of the White Moon —the *peripetea*— does not lead to the character’s complete destruction. The play ends instead on an ambiguous note. We see a caged *Don Quixote* who has been tricked and conquered by jokesters who claim aristocratic ancestry. Just before the curtain falls, the stage directions tell us that ‘a bell tolls’

—that literary motif signifying impending tragedy or death. Immediately afterwards, though, the lighting on the stage switches from red to white, and help arrives: the Knight of the White Moon appears on the stage and, to our surprise, starts fighting the red imps who had helped imprison Don Quixote. With that, the curtain falls. Conscious of her new subaltern status—that of a conquered Californio *bidalgo*—Ruiz de Burton is still refusing to see the windmills and has stubbornly decided to fight on against the Colossus of the North or, as her Don Quixote would put it, “the incarnate devils” (1876: 5).

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1. “Nosotros nacimos para hacer algo más que simplemente vivir [...] para el bien de nuestra patria o para cualquier otra obra gloriosa, o descabellada [...] esa es nuestra misión sobre la tierra” (Sánchez and Pita 2001: 75).

2. The scarce criticism produced on this play—to be specific, Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita’s brief introduction (2001), Trujillo Muñoz’s short reference to the play (2006: 21) and the only study which focuses solely on the play, Montes’ book chapter (2004)—contrasts sharply with the extensive research done on Ruiz de Burton’s two novels.

3. The term ‘Californios’ refers to the Hispanic people native to California.

4. Whereas there have been many readings of Ruiz de Burton’s use of the subaltern as compromised by her own class and race politics, these have centred around her two novels and not her only play.

5. Dale Shuger identifies three different approaches to the study of madness in Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*: a first group of scholars who do not focus on Don Quixote’s madness but rather read it as a “starting point that permits parody”; a second who focus on Don Quixote’s psychology and medical theories; and a third who see madness as central to the novel and a mechanism “to reveal and criticise social dynamics” (2012: 4).

6. Ruiz de Burton made use of both Cervantes’ novel in Spanish, including her own

direct translations, and of existing translations which she modified for her play. It seems that she was not necessarily interested in being exhaustive or in respecting textual chronology all the time. Indeed, the two most pertinent scenes are precisely those that come fresh from Ruiz de Burton’s imagination, namely the judges’ scene and the last scene in the play where Don Quixote, instead of dying, becomes engaged in a fight (no other nineteenth-century adaptation ends in such a way).

7. Of course, Lotman’s description of the boundary and its role in the semiosphere is considerably more complex than this brief explanation may suggest. Thus, Lotman writes: “The notion of the boundary separating the internal space of the semiosphere from the external is just a rough primary distinction. In fact, the entire space of the semiosphere is transacted by boundaries of different levels, boundaries of different languages and even of texts, and the internal space of each of these sub-semiospheres has its own semiotic ‘I’” (2001: 138; see also Lotman 1996: 21-42).

8. In addition, when classifying external cultures in order to accept them into the semiosphere, the untranslatable ones are, as Lotman further argues, the absolute outsiders (1996: 61-73).

9. At Pratt’s “contact zone” intercultural conflict, struggle, change and cultural transformation produce processes of “transculturation” (1992: 373). Lotman’s

semiospheric border allows for the creation of a culture “external” to the semiosphere enabling us to better understand the author’s in-between ambiguous position.

10. Interestingly, the first occurrences of ‘*Europa/Europe*’ and ‘*européal/European*’, in Spanish and English, according to the *Corpus Diacrónico del Español* and the *Oxford English Dictionary*, date from the mid-sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries.

11. On the relevance of ethnicity (and gender) in Spanish early modern writing, see the seminal *Gender, Identity, and Representation in Spain’s Golden Age Drama*, by Anita K. Stoll and Dawn L. Smith (2000). See also Davies (2000). On the centrality of issues of racialism in Golden Age Spain, see Sáez (2019).

12. Considering that she was bilingual, Ruiz de Burton was probably well aware of how the spatial metaphors (‘out of...’/‘out of...’) also worked in Spanish (‘perdido el juicio’/‘fuera de sí’, ‘perdido el rumbo’/‘fuera del pueblo’).

13. Foucault questions if Don Quixote’s sudden awareness of his madness by the end of the novel does not in fact mean that “a new madness has come out of his head” (2009a: 28).

14. Foucault explains how in the nineteenth century confinement practices changed and the mad were —for the first time— kept unchained in the asylum: “The ideal was an asylum where unreason would be entirely contained and offered as a spectacle [...] an asylum restored to its truth as a cage” (2009a: 196).

15. “El Manifest Destiny no es otra cosa que ‘Manifest Yankie trick’” (Sánchez and Pita 2001: 280-281).

16. As is well known, Cervantes’ primary aim was to make a name for himself as a playwright (Lope was his model), which he never achieved. For a well-informed and detailed biography of Cervantes, see Canavaggio (2015).

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