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At Their Word: Towards a Trans Reading of Cervantes's *La gran sultana*

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Taking the character of Lamberto at his word when he tells us that he is a trans man, this essay rereads Cervantes's *La gran sultana* and its entire cast through the lens of early modern trans and queer studies. The tropes of the closet, of coming out, of transitioning, and of the beard can shed a new light on the psychological and erotic life of the character of Catalina de Oviedo. Read in this new light, Catalina comes across not as a woman forced into an undesirable interfaith marriage, but as a woman carving out a space for herself to experience the forbidden interracial love she wants to experience, and her attachment to her Spanish Catholic identity comes across as a cover enabling her to enter an experimental space where racial whiteness might inspiringly exist in a defanged state, that is to say, detached from white supremacy.

SINCE THE 1990s, most scholars who have written about Cervantes's marvelous romantic comedy *La gran Sultana* (1615) have commented on the striking message of tolerance radiating from a script that, in Jean Canavaggio's words, "reveal[s] in spite of [its] nationalistic fervor a carefully shaded picture of relationships between Christians and infidels (273)."¹ In the present article, I seek to take this shared assessment a step further. I start by proposing a reading of the play's seraglio subplot that departs from previous critical accounts by taking Lamberto at his word when he tells us that he is a trans man. The critical payoff of this trans reading of Lamberto is not only that it contributes to current efforts to recover trans capacity in early modern literature and culture at large, but also that it forces us to reconsider which characters the field has—fairly unanimously—taken at their word or not in *La gran sultana*. A trans reading of Lamberto leads me to pay attention to the circumstances under which we attribute truth value to what the play's characters tell us about themselves and their erotic lives. I thus reconsider the entire play through the lens of trans and queer epistemologies, and especially the character of Catalina de Oviedo—whom I do *not* take at her word because I do not think that her circumstances allow us to.²

I am not arguing that Catalina herself is a trans or queer figure, but, rather, that the conceptual tools forged in trans and queer studies can help us appreciate the affective contours of Catalina's fictional itinerary in ways different from and more liberatory than the ways it has generally been understood. In particular, the tropes of the closet, of coming out, of transitioning, and of the beard can shed a new light on the psychological and

erotic life of this dramatic character. Read in this new light, Catalina comes across not as a woman forced into an undesirable interfaith marriage, but as a woman carving out a space for herself to experience the forbidden interracial love she wants to experience, and her attachment to her Spanish Catholic identity comes across as a cover enabling her to enter an experimental space where racial whiteness might exist in a defanged state, that is to say, detached from white supremacy. The rising field of early modern trans studies is currently renewing and expanding the critical imagination of early modern studies at large, and it is bound to find a rich trove of narrative and conceptual resources in Spanish comedias. The gambit of this article is that reading Cervantes's *La gran sultana* in conversation with that field can yield an interpretation of the play that moves in the direction not only of tolerance, but of intersectional, antiracist feminism.

The Trans World of *La gran sultana*

Cervantes's comedy *La gran sultana*, published in 1615 and written in the decade before, follows the rise of Catalina de Oviedo, a Catholic Spaniard lost at sea and enslaved at a young age, who remains adamantly attached to all aspects of her identity (especially religious and sartorial) while enslaved in the Great Turk's harem. Catalina spent seven years in the seraglio, hidden from Sultan Amurates by the Black eunuch Rustán, "a sympathetic renegade," according to Barbara Fuchs and Aaron Ilika (xxv). Indeed, he literally has the last word of the play.³ At the beginning of the play, Catalina is suddenly exposed to Sultan Amurates by another eunuch, Mamí. Amurates falls madly in love with her, to the point of giving her *carte blanche* to remain all of who she is while becoming the Great sultana and the mother of the heir to the Ottoman throne: "Que seas turca o seas cristiana, / a mí no me importa cosa; / esta belleza es mi esposa / y es de hoy más la gran sultana" (728–31).⁴ As Fuchs and Ilika suggest, the play

thus resolves the contradictions of Mediterranean identity by, first, making hybridity a permanent condition in the next generation and, second, underscoring the openness of the Ottoman empire to those who would join it (xxvi)

The editors also note that *La gran sultana* evinces a "distinctly humanist and cosmopolitan sensibility, in which the depiction of otherness obliquely reflects Spain's limitations," recalling one of its likely sources, the *Viaje de Turquía* (1557) (xix).

While Catalina's tale of intercultural love and (non-)conversion unfolds in the seraglio, readers are brought into the everyday life of early modern Constantinople, now known as Istanbul, as they follow the picaresque adventures of Madrigal, a Spanish Fool and captive who ultimately finds his way back to Madrid where, as a stand-in for Cervantes, his intention is, "siendo poeta, hacerme comediante / y componer la historia de esta niña / sin discrepar de la verdad un punto, / representado el mismo personaje / allá que hago aquí" (2919–23).⁵ The final narrative component of the play and the starting point of my reflection is a subplot centered on Lamberto, a Hungarian captive who cross-dresses as a woman to follow his German fiancée Clara into the harem, impregnates her there, and has the bad fortune

of catching Amurates's eye before the Sultan fully commits to Catalina at the end of the play.⁶

Discovered by Amurates, Lamberto ventures all to save his and Clara's lives:

TURCO

¡A mí el ser verdugo toca
de tan infame maldad!

LAMBERTO

¡Tiempla la celeridad,
que ansí tu grandeza apoca!
¡Déjame hablar, y dame
después la muerte que gustes!

TURCO

No podrás con tus embustes
que tu sangre no derrame.

CADÍ

Justo es escuchar al reo:
Amurates, óyete.

TURCO

Diga, que yo escucharé.

MAMÍ

Que se disculpe deseo.

LAMBERTO

Siendo niña, a un varón sabio
oí decir las excelencias
y mejoras que tenía
el hombre más que la hembra.
Desde allí me aficioné
a ser varón, de manera
que le pedí esta merced
al Cielo con asistencia.
Cristiana me la negó,
y mora no me la niega
Mahoma, a quien hoy gimiendo,
con lágrimas y ternezas,
con fervorosos deseos,
con votos y con promesas,
con ruegos y con suspiros
que a una roca enternecieron,
desde el serrallo hasta aquí,
en silencio y con inmensa
eficacia, le he pedido
me hiciese merced tan nueva.
Acudió a mis ruegos tiernos,
enternecido, el Profeta,
y en un instante volviome
en fuerte varón de hembra.

Y si por tales milagros
se merece alguna pena,
vuelva el Profeta por mí
y por mi inocencia vuelva.

TURCO

¿Puede ser esto, cadí?

CADÍ

Y sin milagro, que es más.

TURCO

Ni tal vi, ni tal oí.

CADÍ

El cómo es esto sabrás,
cuando quisieres, de mí,

y la razón te dijera

ahora si no viniera. (2713–60) ⁷

A jealous Catalina interrupts the scene and informs Amurates that she is pregnant with his heir. Amurates, overjoyed, sees Lamberto's self-reported transition as the work of divine providence: "que los cielos, en razón / de no dar más ocasión / a los celos que has tenido, / a Zelinda han convertido, / como hemos visto, en varón./ Él lo dice, y es verdad, / y es milagro, y es ventura, / y es señal de su bondad" (2813–20).⁸ Catalina soon asks Amurates to marry Zelinda/o to his beloved Zaida/Clara and to appoint him bashaw of Rhodes, a key location for imperial competition between Turks and Christians. The same Sultan who loves his wife as she is is perfectly happy to enlist a person he believes to be a trans man as high dignitary in his imperial army.

From the perspective of early modern trans studies, the beauty of this scene is that what almost looks like a setup for early modernists to perform a "reveal" reading turns out, in my view, to be a moment of trans affirmation. As Colby Gordon has shown, the reveal reading has developed into a harmful critical habit over the last three decades, as readers tend to mentally strip the crossdressing character while unwittingly reaffirming normative sex and gender ideologies.⁹ This scene, however, resists such interpretive violence. Indeed, although Amurates characterizes the event as "a fortunate miracle" (165) —"y es milagro, y es ventura" (2819)— it is significant that the Cadí, "*el juez obispo de los turcos*" (825 [stage directions]), should insist that and even prepare to explain why this transition is plausible. A Cadí was indeed "a judge, a representative of authority, invested with the power of jurisdiction ... [in charge of] the application of the *shar'*, which is essentially religious law" (Tyan and Káldy-Nagy). That Cadí thinks just like a European, for early modern Europeans thought such transitions were possible, albeit rare. As Thomas Laqueur has shown, prior to the hardening of the two-sex model at the end of the seventeenth century, Europeans saw men and women as existing on a gender continuum (the "one-sex body") ranging from a higher degree of perfection (male) to a lesser one (female), and as able to move on that continuum under the effect of various natural factors.¹⁰

The Cadí, and by extension, Amurates, believe Lamberto's account because it frames the experience of conversion from Christianity to Islam as the achievement of a higher degree of perfection—which is perfectly intuitive for

a Muslim character. After all, “Es señal de su bondad” (2820). At this point, I want to follow Colby Gordon’s invitation to think critically about how (and, in truth, whether) we know what we think we know about characters like Lamberto, and I want to argue, contrary to virtually all scholars who have written about this little marvel of a play to date, that nothing in the play Cervantes wrote conclusively tells us that Lamberto is lying. Yes, Roberto, his tutor, tells us: “Desde su pequeña edad, / fui su ayo y su maestro... / pero no fueron bastantes / mis bien mirados consejos... / para que, en mitad del curso / de su más florido tiempo, / amor no le saltease, / monfí de los años tiernos” (74–75, 83–89).¹¹ But such information about Lamberto’s gender identity and enduring sexual orientation does not determine his sexual identity. The fact that he self-identified as a man early on and has always been sexually attracted to women does not tell us anything about his potential cisness or transness. Similarly, the fact that he impregnated Clara recently enough for her not to show during the play is perfectly compatible with what he claims to be a very recent sexual transition in the seraglio. An early modern reader sharing the general belief that a woman could grow male genitalia under specific circumstances might even have construed the fact that impregnation did not happen before the couple arrived in the seraglio as evidence that sexual transition took place there, just like Lamberto tells us it did.

In other words, whether readers believe Lamberto or not says more about their own beliefs and expectations than about the facts of Lamberto’s life. This is the case for early modern readers and for twenty-first-century readers alike. Twenty-first century readers’ responses to Lamberto’s plotline are largely determined by their familiarity with the genre of comedy. If genres, as Lauren Berlant puts it, “provide an affective expectation of the experience of watching something unfold, whether that thing is in life or in art,” comedy has conditioned us to expect that artificial disguises will be exposed and true identities revealed by the end of the play—which presupposes that the true identities in question be concealed in the first place (6). That is part of the reason why, as my students astutely pointed out in class recently, it is so hard for all of us to see transness and trans capacity in comedies, while we see them more easily in tragedies. Early modern Spanish readers’ responses to Lamberto’s account were likely determined not only by generic expectations but also by religious ones. The idea Lamberto voices that the Prophet Muhammad would be able to make anything (including sexual transition) happen more effectively than Jesus must have been aberrant to Catholic readers and potential spectators.¹² For early modern Spanish readers, then, the inability to see a real sexual transition unfold in this play was largely grounded in religious racism. Because religion constituted a major axis within the early modern racial matrix (I thus use the adjectives “racial” and “religious” interchangeably in this essay), what Lamberto’s account also signals is that, in this play, to transition is to move simultaneously through sex and race. In this article, I avail myself of this simultaneity, of this synergy between race and sex in Lamberto’s self-reported transition, to read the protagonist Catalina’s story of racial conversion through the epistemological lens of sexual transition.¹³

Before doing so, I will point out first that Lamberto’s self-reported sexual-racial transition and Catalina’s own story are drawn against the

background of a dramatic world where most characters seem to undergo, in Constantinople, a profound transformation that often ends up mapped on their bodies. Mamí and Rustán (whose story we don't know) were eunuched before the beginning of the play, and Rustán has now undergone a second transformation (by converting to Catholicism in secret), which retroactively alters the meaning of his castration along racial lines.¹⁴ Lamberto and Clara were resolved to die as Christians (“que muramos / cristianos en todo caso,” 1459) upon being discovered, yet end up accepting Lamberto's appointment as bashaw of Rhodes, which will necessarily entail a shift of political and religious allegiance to the Ottomans, not only in words but in acts and in bodily markings (since Zelinda/o is now read as a man, he has to be circumcised). Madrigal, a Christian captive, let go of the chance to escape to Naples in the past out of love for a local Arab woman. His transformation remains incomplete when, caught red-handed with her, he refuses to save his life by converting to Islam and marrying her: as he explains, he abhors the thought of marriage just as much as the thought of Islam. An aspiring playwright, Madrigal prefers practices of *reversible* transformation, like theater, to irreversible ones, like conversion and marriage. Finally, a striking case of transformation is that of the renegade Salec, who, when asked by an old friend at the opening of the play how he has forgotten who he is (“¿cómo te has olvidado / de quién eres?” 186–87) responds:

SALEC

Que si va a decir verdad,
yo ninguna cosa creo.

ROBERTO

¡Fino ateísta te muestras!

SALEC

Yo no sé lo que me muestro;
solo sé que he de mostrarte,
con obras al descubierto,
que soy tu amigo, a la traza
como lo fui en algún tiempo. (190–96)¹⁵

And so he does, by helping Roberto find Lamberto, his long-lost tutee and student, thereby supporting the romantic arc of the subplot. To lose one's religion constitutes an extreme type of transformation in early modernity, and to profess atheism in early modern Spain was a capital offense. The fact that Salec can do so without being painted as a villain in readers' minds—and in the very opening scene of the play—signals that to enter this play is to enter a world where, whether it be reversible, irreversible, recursive, or retroactive, transformation is a fact of life.¹⁶

“Con Gusto”: the Matter of Catalina's Desires

Listening to the reverberations of Lamberto's self-reported sexual-racial transition throughout Cervantes's play, I want to suggest that queer and trans epistemologies are particularly good tools for understanding Catalina's affective itinerary. In my attempt to model Catalina's itinerary so as to understand what she is experiencing, I find myself mobilizing, in first place,

the queer trope of the *coming out*. Closeted in the seraglio for seven years during which she survived only due to the care of her non-normatively sexed Black friend, Catalina is suddenly outed to Sultan Amurates—an outing that is likely to endanger her. She is *outed*, indeed, as an object of beauty whose very existence was unknown to the Sultan. From then on, she chooses to actively affirm her identity (which, for her, means her race and ethnicity), and it is that active choice that I read as a *coming out*. She affirms it through several unprecedented demands: refusing to change her name for a Turkish one and refusing to convert to Islam; demanding to be provided with Spanish garments (which, given the performative efficacy of garments in early modern imagination, is much more than a detail); demanding to remain in the company of Christians as a Sultana; and dancing publicly in the Spanish fashion—all of which is, of course, unheard of at the Ottoman court. What the interpretive trope of *coming out* accommodates for me, then, is Catalina's brave refusal to change who she is under societal pressure—and even potentially under lethal threat. The positive connotations of that interpretive trope coexist uneasily, however, with the ideological substrate of her specific refusal, which is the misogynistic early modern notion she has internalized that, for a woman, to change means to deteriorate, especially in an intercultural context. Catalina is *coming out*, but as a white woman invested in preserving her whiteness in a non-white culture. Amurates seems, however, less concerned with this ideological substrate than I am (“Vive tú a tu parecer, / como no vivas sin mí,” 1246–47), and this absence of concern clues us into the peculiar quality of Catalina's whiteness, to which I will return shortly.¹⁷

Meanwhile the trans trope of transition explicitly introduced in the play by Lamberto provides an interpretive model for understanding another dimension of Catalina's itinerary running parallel to her *coming out*, which is the transracial move towards Muslim non-whiteness occasioned by her falling in love with Amurates. Of course, generations of scholars have understood Catalina's and the Sultan's marriage as fairly happy somehow by the end of the play: the generic identity of this comedy simply demands it. However, what the same scholars, taking Catalina's rhetoric of dispassionateness as evidence thereof, have been less interested to unpack is when and with what intensity Catalina comes to develop romantic feelings for the sultan. As will soon become evident, I read Catalina as a complex character who is invested in hiding her own inner erotic life and who is so good at it that most readers have failed to see beneath her rhetoric of dispassionateness.¹⁸ I find evidence of her desire for Amurates not only in the fact that every other Christian character who finds themselves in Constantinople in this play seems to be or stay there out of love (Lamberto came to find Clara, Roberto came to find Lamberto, Madrigal stayed for his Arab lover), but also in her mobilization of the language of temptation to describe what she is experiencing, when she prays at the end of act 1: “A ti toca, Señor, el darme ayuda, / que soy cordera de tu aprisco ausente / y temo que, a carrera corta o larga, / cuando a mi daño tu favor no acuda, / me ha de alcanzar esta infernal serpiente!” (821–25).¹⁹ Where there is temptation, there is desire.

When her good friend Rustán—trying to counter the Catholic conditioning that makes Catalina seek martyrdom within a comedy—points out to her that as far as marrying “an infidel” goes, “Si pudieras huir de él, / te lo hubiera

aconsejado; / mas cuando la fuerza va / contra razón y derecho, / no está el pecado en el hecho, / si en la voluntad no está” (1112–18), her response shows that she cannot dissociate this marriage from the notion of sin (“Mártir seré si consiento / antes morir que pecar,” 1130–31).²⁰ That is not because she does not hear or agree with Rustán, but precisely because her “voluntad” is less clearly hostile to the Sultan than she would like it to be. There is more than one way in which this man she should not love can be “ministro de mi tormento” (1988).²¹ It is not a coincidence that, as Christopher B. Weimer notes, while “much of Catalina’s inner torment is a moral and theological one ... the very words with which she verbalizes her objections and fears repeatedly foreground the carnal aspects of her predicament over any others” (25).²² Repressed erotic desire finds its way to the surface in the very terms Catalina uses to disavow it. Her father, a captive, miraculously finds his way to her in act 3 (for this is a romance after all). He accuses her: “has venido a ser / lo que eres por culpas tuyas; / quiero decir, por tu gusto... / De tu propia voluntad te has rendido, / convencida de esta licenciosa vida, / de esta pompa y majestad” (1971–84).²³ In response, Catalina denies that she was motivated by ambition and explains that her virtuous refusal only strengthened Sultan Amurates’s desire.²⁴ But she never explicitly discusses her own desires, leaving it conveniently unclear or unstated whether any “gusto” of hers might have played a role in her assent.

I acknowledge that it is possible for readers to see Catalina as a kind of saint sacrificed on the altar of national interest and to see her marriage to Amurates as a sad mortification of the flesh granting her control, on behalf of Catholicism, over the most powerful earthly sovereign—some embedded spectators do see things that way.²⁵ Amurates becomes convinced without a doubt that Catalina loves him back when she performs a scene of jealousy in act 3, having heard that he has chosen Zelindo/a (Lamberto) as mate for the night in his attempt at securing an heir for the throne. True, the fact that Catalina, being in the know, is trying to save Lamberto’s and Clara’s lives in that moment does give her jealousy a strategic function—but does it mean that she cannot also feel actual jealousy or anger at Amurates’s breaking his promise of monogamy? Is there never room for sincerity in performance? On this point, I fully agree with Stanislav Zimic: “Catalina no ‘se finge celosa,’ sino que está muy celosa” (194).²⁶

In this play, the healthy critical habit of looking for explicit and enthusiastic consent rubs up against the fact that there is no early modern world in which a good Catholic girl could express her potential desire for this dashing Muslim sovereign and remain the heroine of her own play.²⁷ When consent cannot be expressed (here, because of early modern Spanish religious racism), evidentiary rules and what it means to take characters at their word change. Is it so hard to believe that she might actually feel desire for the man whom Christian men themselves describe as incredibly attractive in the opening scene of the play? Indeed, they praise him: “Por cierto, él es mancebo de buen talle, / y que, de gravedad y bizarria, / la fama, con razón, puede loalle” (34–36).²⁸ Her desire becomes still more plausible when this handsome, charismatic, and powerful man abdicates force and does not place demands on her, because he wants her to want him.²⁹ As Ana Laguna reminds us,

the joyful woman that Cervantes seems to have taken as his historical reference, Roxelana (1502–58), the famous Christian slave whom the sultan Suleiman I (1494–1566) called “Hurrem” (cheerful) when he married her ... was tenderly in love with the Sultan, at least according to the surviving letters that she wrote to him: “I console myself with these memories in your absence. I am low when you are away. No one can ease my pain. (161)³⁰

In the reading I propose, then, it is this unspeakable interracial desire—which Catalina hides so well that even the scholarly gaze struggles to see it—that opens Catalina up to change and transformation, making her willing to become the titular “Great Sultana” of the play; and, simultaneously, it is her coming out as attached to her whiteness that gives cover to this transformation, protecting her from the judgment of both the spectators Cervantes had in mind for this play, and the readers he got (since the play was not performed in early modernity and could, ironically yet befittingly, be considered a *closet* drama today). That her transformation ultimately amounts to a racial transition is evident in the fact that, by the end of the play, Catalina is pregnant, and her child will be Muslim, regardless of the religious liberties she negotiated for herself. Her bloodline is now *de facto* converted on the religious axis of the racial matrix, and she assented to that racial conversion.³¹

Like Lamberto’s self-reported sexual-racial transition, the play’s poetics invite us to read the racial conversion of Catalina through the lens of trans epistemologies. For instance, when Amurates tells Catalina, “Y en pensar no te demandes / esto soy, aquello fui, / que, pues me mandas a mí, / no es mucho que al mundo mandes” (724–27), he is encouraging not to overthink perceived changes in her own identity and, instead, to just be all of who she is, to be fully present in the relationship and to step into her power (which she ultimately does).³² The temporal poetics of the play too delineate a timeline of transition. Following Colby Gordon’s invitation to “locate a trans imaginary in early modern theology,” we might notice that the seven years of incubation Catalina spent hidden in the seraglio resemble the seven days it takes God to build a new world in the book of *Genesis*, and the three days she asks of Sultan Amurates (“solo te pido tres días, / gran señor, para pensar [...] / en no sé qué dudas más, / que escrupulosa me han hecho,” 788–89, 791–92) before agreeing to marry him resemble the three days it takes Jesus to resurrect and start a new, “glorious” life, to echo Gordon (17).³³ Reading *La gran sultana* through trans epistemologies gives us a new appreciation for Christopher Weimer’s statement that this play is about Catalina’s “rebirth,” since “the sultana’s final words belong to a woman reborn, not the repressed, frightened Catalina who once preferred death to the Turco’s attentions” (56).³⁴ The transition is not easy, as Catalina experiences deep fear until her final confrontation with her father, but it happens.³⁵

Catalina’s coming out as a white woman is not disingenuous or any less deeply felt than the erotic desire that drives her racial transition by way of bloodline. Catalina would rather take her own life than convert. It is thus within the tension between these two affective positions, these two moves—her self-contradictory and simultaneous embrace of stasis and change—that she finds a space for living. To value that space and what it enables for

Catalina is to follow Joseph Gamble's invitation to "find ways of understanding how people in the past have created—and thus how we might create—livable lives despite the structures that make living more difficult and flourishing seemingly impossible" (16). Again, one can read Catalina as an affectively dead sacrificial lamb using her body to control the Muslim sovereign on behalf of her nation, religion, and father. Or we can read her as a person who found ways of living the interracial affective and erotic life she wanted to live. The latter is the start of an intersectional feminist reading of this play. Reading Catalina's itinerary through queer and trans lenses, thereby using sex as an analog for race (as Lamberto's self-reported sexual-racial transition authorizes us to do), renders visible the complex, unspoken affective infrastructure of a transnational life that might otherwise read as fodder for a silly and racist fairy tale that remained deservedly unperformed. To tweak Barbara Fuchs's statement that "nowhere does *La gran sultana* evince the teleological emphasis on freedom that is so prevalent in other stories of captivity" (*Passing* 85), it seems to me that *La gran sultana* is very much a play about desiring and finding freedom, but a different kind of freedom.

Whiteness Defanged

As previously mentioned, one element in Catalina's itinerary that even queer and trans lenses can hardly make more affectively palatable for us is her attachment to her own racial whiteness, defined as the coalescence of her Catholicism, Spanishness, pale complexion, gendered virtuousness, and class status (her father was a "hidalgo pero no rico" [2255]).³⁶ However, the unwavering attachment that Catalina feels towards her whiteness looks different in the context where Cervantes deploys it than in most of the archives of early modern European drama where incipient white supremacy exerts its toxic force. I fully agree with Barbara Fuchs that "although she steadfastly adheres to Christianity and exercises great power over the sultan, Catalina hardly represents a militant, unyielding Spain" (*Passing* 81). Simply put: Catalina has de facto converted to Islam by way of bloodline, she is not trying to convert anyone to Catholicism, and while she might intercede on behalf of enslaved Christian captives and make their lives a little less harsh in the Ottoman empire, she is unlikely to sway international politics anywhere else than in Spanish readers' fantasies of wish fulfillment or in the Cadí's nightmares. In that context, Sultan Amurates's willingness to respect her self-definition is more the measure of his greatness and of Ottoman toleration than the sign of white supremacy's irresistibility. In this play, racial whiteness comes across as disempowered but not as victimized in a way that would allow it to weaponize its own vulnerability as it so often does in early modern European drama, especially in female form. What we have here is a rare view of racial whiteness defanged.

The defanged quality of Catalina's whiteness becomes even more visible when we read it in the context of the large number of connections that the play establishes between the Catholic Sultana and the Jewish inhabitants of Constantinople. Indeed, when Rustán seeks to save his life by giving an excuse to Sultan Amurates for not presenting Catalina to him over the course

of the last seven years, he goes for what might be a lie (we don't know), but a verisimilar one:

RUSTÁN

Cuando vino a mi poder,
vino de parecer
que pudiese darte gusto,
y fue el reservarla justo
a más tomo y mejor ser.
Muchos años, gran señor,
profundas melancolías
la tuvieron sin color.

TURCO

¿Quién la curó?

RUSTÁN

Sedequías, el judío, tu doctor.

TURCO

Testigos muertos presentas
en tu causa; a fe que intentas
escaparte por buen modo.

RUSTÁN

Yo digo verdad en todo. (549–62)³⁷

When it turns out that a Spanish tailor cannot be found in all of Constantinople to make new dresses for the Sultana as her splendor deserves, a dress is found: “Un judío le trujo / de Argel, a do llegaron / dos galeras de corso, / colmas de barcas, fuertes de despojos, / y allí compró el judío / el vestido que he dicho” (1948–54).³⁸ Finally, once Catalina’s father has been recognized, “mandome / el gran señor que hiciese / cómo en la judería / se alojase su suegro” (1914–16)—perhaps, as Michael Armstrong-Roche insightfully suggested to me in a private memo, because many of the Sephardic Jews who lived in early modern Constantinople had retained a significant part of their Spanish cultural heritage even a century after the expulsion of Jews from Iberia.³⁹ Jews save Catalina’s life, make it possible for her to express her identity by sartorial means, and host her father in a city where location codes community belonging. These are small, seemingly gratuitous, touches, but they accrue to indirectly connect Catalina to the local Jewish community.

This pattern is striking given the strong professions of antisemitism made by Madrigal—a seemingly self-avowed stand-in for Cervantes himself—who spends much of his time inserting “comic relief” into the play by tormenting local Jewish folks, spoiling the meal prepared ahead of time for the sabbath with bacon, spitting on them, and threatening physical violence. Scholars like Ruth Fine (254) and Nicolas Kanellos (48–52) noticed those patterns and contradictions, which led Kanellos (fifty years ago and in this very journal) to put pressure on the idea that the antisemitic Madrigal truly embodies Cervantes’s authorial voice. While I am less concerned than Kanellos with determining Cervantes’s personal attitudes toward Jewish people—focusing instead on the play’s ideological effects—I agree with him that this play

contains an “oblique” and “veiled” criticism of Spanish antisemitism (52). Resorting once again to queer epistemologies, I think of the clownish Madrigal and his loud antisemitic passion as “a beard” for Cervantes’s soft-spoken message of tolerance in an intolerant Spanish context. (A beard is cast in the role of romantic partner in order to conceal their partner’s true sexual orientation.) The more attention we pay to the attention-seeking Madrigal, the less we notice Catalina’s connections to Constantinople’s Jewish community—and that is the point of this character, his is the force of distraction.⁴⁰ As George Mariscal puts it, “the text’s ‘potentially radical message’ is embedded in but not neutralized by the contradictory discourses that surround it” (203).⁴¹ Madrigal performs on behalf of Cervantes the same kind of self-protective obfuscating move that Catalina performs in order to be able to love who she loves against Spanish societal expectations: a performance of adamant Catholic whiteness.⁴²

Catalina’s discreet but significant connections to the early modern Jewish community of Constantinople are also routed through references to figures of the Hebrew Bible. Upon learning that his beloved Catalina is now pregnant and that his heir is on his way, Amurates rejoices:

TURCO

Y así quiero, en alegrías
de las ciertas profecías
que de tus partos me has dado,
que tenga el cadí cuidado
de hacer de las noches días:
infinitas luminarias
por las ventanas se pongan,
y, con invenciones varias,
mis vasallos se dispongan
a fiestas extraordinarias.
Renueven de los romanos
los santos y los profanos
grandes y admirables juegos,
y también los de los griegos,
y otros, si hay más, soberanos.

CADÍ

Harase como deseas,
y de esta grande esperanza
en la posesión te veas.
Y tú, con honesta usanza,
cual Raquel, fecunda seas. (2853–72)⁴³

Fuchs and Ilika’s critical translation glosses the Cadí’s line by noting that “this may be a reference to Jacob’s wife Rachel, mother to Joseph and Benjamin in the book of Genesis. Rachel is not typically invoked as a model of fecundity” (167). Crucial to our understanding of this line is the fact that Rachel had fertility issues and that she ultimately died in labor giving birth to Benjamin. The Cadí’s tongue-in-cheek blessing thus expresses his wariness at seeing a Christian exercise so much influence over the Sultan (and, potentially, the next sultan), and his desire to see her disappear quickly.

More importantly, although the play never drops any hint regarding its source text, I follow in the footsteps of Ruth Fine in reading the character of Catalina as modelled after the Hebrew heroine Esther, who—in the book of the same name—marries the Persian emperor Ahasuerus after he repudiates his first wife Vashti, and, who, as a queen, foils Syrian vizir Aman's genocidal plan against Hebrews by revealing her identity to her husband and interceding in favor of her people.⁴⁴ What Catalina is in a position to do for early modern Christians, Esther was in a position to do for Hebrews—because they both married a tyrannously construed *Oriental* sovereign, and because they both had the courage to *come out* to their loving husband.⁴⁵ As I show elsewhere, across seventeenth-century Europe, early modern plays focused on Hebrew heroines (such as Esther, Mariamne, and Judith) and their plots of liberation often turned ancient Hebrews—construed as a site for Christian identification—into vehicles fit to rehearse whiteness's immunity from slavery (thereby extending transnationally the dynamics uncovered by Urvashi Chakravarty in early modern England).⁴⁶ At the same time, those Hebrew Bible plays often reinforced the notion that contemporary Jews were in theory rightfully enslavable, following the medieval concept of the *servitus judaeorum* explored by Lindsay Kaplan.⁴⁷ In other words, per se, Catalina's resemblance to Esther might not have coded any sympathy for early modern Jews. But Cervantes, as we saw, went out of his way to establish a network of associations between Catalina and the Jewish community of Constantinople, thereby giving Catalina's Estherian dimension a meaning that exceeds the common dramatic strategies of early modern white supremacy. Not only does the parallelism with Esther thicken Catalina's symbolical bond with the Jewish minority; it also explains, to some extent, why queer epistemologies fit so well the narrative of Catalina's life. Indeed, to modern readers familiar with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, Esther is always already a figure through which one can understand, through identification but also through contrast, what it means and feels like to *come out* for queer people.⁴⁸ The reading I am proposing is the flipside of Sedgwick's: I am indeed suggesting that queer epistemologies can help us understand what it feels like for Catalina to exist, feel, and desire in her dramatic world.

The play's under-the-mantle cultivation of connections between Catalina and the Jews of Constantinople sharpens the contours of what racial whiteness defanged might look like. I am certainly not suggesting that the play is framing Jewishness as a subset of whiteness—nothing in the history of premodern Spanish racism that saturated the air Cervantes breathed would support that idea. But I am suggesting that Jewish ways of moving in the fictional world of this play chart a possible path for the white Catalina, one that combines a strong sense of communal identity with intercommunal hospitality within a multicultural system—one where the ultimate object of one's desire is not domination but livability for all. Imagining a racial whiteness willing to follow that path in 2025 feels utopian for many of us. In our own day and age, the toxic theory of the great replacement—a racist conspiracy theory according to which white people are at risk of being numerically taken over by non-white people—shows that what white supremacy fears the most is for white people to become a minority in the

Western world and to be treated the way they have historically treated minorities.⁴⁹ In that sense, what Cervantes's iteration of the genre of the captivity play—in which white characters are by definition turned into a racial minority—can elicit in modern readers is not the anxiety that it was meant to cathartically cathex in its early modern readers, but—perhaps—a sense of hope. Indeed, centering a white girl in transition who loves Muslims and finds herself at home among Jews, *La gran sultana* provides a completely different view of what minoritarian whiteness might look like and feel like in a future made livable for all.

It is with an eye to and big hopes for such a future that I offer this intersectional, antiracist feminist reading of *La gran sultana* in conversation with trans and queer epistemologies. This rewriting is my response to the request made by Rustán—the converted Black eunuch who knew a thing or two about the connections between race and transness—in the final words of the play that, in order to honor Catalina's “deseos ... justos y ... santos,” “que de su libertad y su memoria / se haga nueva y verdadera historia!” (2962–65).⁵⁰ If, in the present essay, the method is the message, the message is a message of hope as well as an invitation for comedia scholars to join in the exciting current critical conversations where trans, queer, feminist, and antiracist lenses intersect and complicate each other. Siglo de Oro literature deserves nothing less.

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1. This article benefited from the feedback it received at the “Early Modern Trans Sexualities” symposium at the University of Michigan in November 2024. I am very grateful to the EmoTrans community for their support and input.
2. Jurado Santos comes closest: she reads *La gran sultana* through a psychoanalytical lens and contextualizes Lamberto’s plotline by mentioning the early modern belief that people could very much undergo sex changes. Yet she stops short of reading Lamberto himself as a trans man and reads him instead as an “androgyn”—“mujer de día y varón de noche”—following modes of reading for the “transvestite” that were popular in the 1990s (62).
3. While Cervantes does not explicitly depict them as Black, Mamí and Rustán have access to the innermost circle of the palace, and as Abdulhamit Arvas explains, the eunuchs with access to the Topkapi palace’s innermost domestic spaces, including the chief harem eunuch, were all Black (120). We also know that Cervantes thought of eunuchs in general as Black, for he includes an “eunuco negro” in charge of the domestic sphere of a Spanish household in his novella *El celoso extremeño*. For a thorough examination of the thematic connection between *La gran sultana* and *El celoso extremeño*, see Laguna (153–54).
4. Unless otherwise noted, citations to *La gran sultana* verse numbers in the critical edition prepared by Gómez Canseco. For English translations, I cite the page numbers from Fuchs and Ilika’s prose translation (*The Great Sultana*).
5. To “become a playwright and compose the history of this girl without straying one jot from the truth, playing the same character there that I do here” (*The Great Sultana* 168).
6. The homophobic trope of a European man cross-dressing to get into the seraglio and catching the Sultan Amurates’s eye is an avatar of the early modern obsessional association of Ottoman masculinity with sodomy and it would have a long shelf life in European dramaturgy. It is, for instance, one of the most recurrent plot lines attached in late seventeenth-century Parisian fairgrounds theater to Harlequin, a stock character adapted from Italian commedia dell’arte. It also features in the third entry of the libretto written by Louis Fuzelier for Jean-Philippe Rameau’s landmark opera *Les Indes Galantes* (1735). In Cervantes’s *La gran sultana*, the Sultan is often accompanied by “garzones,” and Madrigal derides the Cadí for pursuing them as catamites: “**MADRIGAL:** Ella [calandaria] dijo, en conclusión, / que andabas tras un garzón, / y aun otras cosillas más. **CADÍ:** Pues, ¡válgala Lucifer!, / ¿a qué se mete conmigo?” (1607–11). “**MADRIGAL:** She [the lark] said, in sum, that you were after a garzon, and some other little things. **CADÍ:** May Lucifer take her! Why does she meddle with me?” (*The Great Sultana*, 137).
7. “**TURK:** It falls to me to put such vileness to death! **LAMBERTO:** Temper the haste that diminishes even your greatness; let me speak, and then give me whatever death you please. **TURK:** Your lies won’t stop me from spilling your blood. **CADÍ:** It is just to listen to the accused. Amurates, hear him out. **TURK:** Let him speak and I shall listen. **MAMÍ** [aside]: May he find an excuse. **LAMBERTO:** As a girl, I heard a wise man describe the excellence and advantages that man has over woman; from that point on, I wanted to be male, so I asked heaven for its help with this mercy. As a Christian woman, it was denied to me, but not as a Moorish woman. Today I have begged Mohammed to grant me this novel mercy, moaning with tears and endearments, with fervent desires, with vows and promises, with prayers and sighs that would move a rock, all the way from the seraglio to here, silently and with great efficacy. Touched, the Prophet responded

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to my tender prayers and in an instant turned me from a woman into a strong man, and if such miracles deserve punishment, let the Prophet stand for me and for my innocence. **TURK:** Can this be, Cadí? **CADÍ:** And without a miracle moreover. **TURK:** I've never seen or heard of such a thing. **CADÍ:** I will tell you how this came to be whenever you please. I'd explain it now if the sultana weren't coming, whom I see over here" (*The Great Sultana* 164).

8. "The Heavens, in order to provide no more opportunity for the jealousy you've felt, have changed Zelinda into a man, as we've seen. He says so, and it's true, a fortunate miracle and a sign of his goodness" (*The Great Sultana* 165).
9. Gordon explains: "Presented with a Renaissance 'cross-dresser,' the early modernist can only imagine her clothes dropping to the floor. Trans studies has a name for this trope: 'the reveal.' This convention in mainstream media involves the sensationalized and often violent disclosure of a character's trans status to build narrative momentum, introduce a shocking plot twist, or relieve tension through publicly humiliating a trans woman. Unsurprisingly, scholarship on Renaissance 'transvestism' privileges such moments of revelation as they arise in early modern drama...the reveal is not only the privileged content of this body of scholarship, but its methodology" (27–28).
10. The examples that Laqueur culls from Baldassare Castiglione, Michel de Montaigne, and Ambroise Paré center women growing male genitalia when they perform swift and violent movements or activities deemed masculine, and their bodies heat up. Of particular relevance to Lamberto, given his attraction to Clara, is the case of Manuel that Laqueur describes as follows: "a girl, Marie, who became Manuel when she sprouted a penis 'at the time of life when girls begin their monthlies'; a young man in Reims who lived as and anatomically seemed to be a girl until the age of fourteen, when he/she, 'while disporting him[/her]self and frolicking' with a chambermaid, suddenly acquired male genital parts. It is as if making love as a man suddenly gave her the organs to do it 'properly.'... Paré offers the following, entirely naturalistic, explanation for Marie's transformation: the fact that 'women have as much hidden within the body as men have exposed outside; leaving aside, only, that women don't have so much heat, nor the ability to push out what by the coldness of their temperament is held bound to the interior.' So puberty, jumping, active sex, or something else whereby 'warmth is rendered more robust' might be just enough to break the interior-exterior barrier and produce on a 'woman' the marks of a 'man'" (126–27).
11. He has known this "young man... since he was very young" and Lamberto fell in love with Clara and sought to marry her "at a tender age" (*The Great Sultana* 103).
12. True, Lamberto, in his anguish, clearly professes Christianity: "Pues se ha de acabar / en muerte nuestra fortuna, / no esperar salida alguna / es lo que se ha de esperar. / Pero estad, Clara, advertida / que hemos de morir de suerte/ que nos granjee la muerte / nueva y perdurable vida. / Quiero decir que muramos / cristianos en todo caso" (1450–59; "Since our fortunes must end in death, we must not hope for an escape; but know, Clara, that we must die in such a way that death attains for us a new and everlasting life. I mean that we should die as Christians no matter what happens," *The Great Sultana* 133). This could signal that Lamberto never truly converted to Islam; or it could signal that he is now converting back to Christianity, like so many early modern renegades did in response to the demands of transnational lives. The fact that his Christian determination melts away instantly when Amurates appoints him bashaw of Rhodes tilts this reader's scale towards the latter interpretation.

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13. I am not the first to see a meaningful connection between Lamberto and Catalina's plotlines. Compte reads Lamberto's "absurdo interludio" as accenting the malleability and reversibility of gender roles that Catalina's relationship to the Sultan instantiates (namely, Amurates is submissive and Catalina rules over him; Compte 69). Fine also connects Catalina and Lamberto through a shared aesthetics of carnivalesque inversion in a world turned upside down (257). Similarly, Gómez Canseco notes "la mezcla de amor y cautividad, en el desorden moral que significa, en el embarazo compartido por las dos damas o en el continuo cambio de vestimentas y apariencias" (114).
14. Indeed, while, as Arvas explains, "the figure of the [Black] eunuch emerged as an integral, orientalist component of travelogues and stage plays, and as means of signaling Ottoman otherness" (125), once converted to Catholicism, Rustán actually evokes the figure of the Ethiopian eunuch converted by Saint Philip in the Book of Acts, who is often seen as the founder of the Christian Church of Ethiopia. The paradigm of the converted Ethiopian eunuch is present in Iberian drama: for instance, Fra-Molinero notes the use of the phrase "God's eunuch" [*eunuco de Dios*] to refer to Antiobo (Fra-Molinero 113).
15. "SALEC: Truth be told, I don't believe in anything. ROBERTO: You seem a fine atheist. SALEC: I know not how I seem; all I know is that I will clearly show you through my works that I'm your friend just as before" (*The Great Sultana* 105).
16. Gómez Canseco too comments on the transitional condition of all the characters in his preface to the play: "puede asegurarse que los de *La gran sultana* son personajes que no están definidos de antemano y que van creciendo, sin que sepamos exactamente hacia dónde les dirige su destino" (117). The examples above are mostly masculine because the association of conversion to Islam with circumcision, which European stages compulsively rehearsed, transparently mapped religious (and thus racial) conversion onto the body. On the manifestations of this mechanism in English drama, see Degenhardt, 131; Britton, 73; Burton, 53.
17. "Live as you see fit, so long as you do not live without me" (*The Great Sultana* 130).
18. See for instance, Friedman's assessment that "the female protagonist, a Christian, relegates personal concerns to religious devotion; she is realistic, analytical, and clear-sighted ... The man is ordinatorily passionate; the woman impressively dispassionate" (222). This flattening of Catalina's psychology originates in the critic's belief in what I see as Catalina's own strategic self-flattening: "Doña Catalina is an exemplary yet static character. In no way is she deluded, 'trapped' within the fiction, in need of conversion" (223–24).
19. "You must aid me, Lord: for I am a lamb lost from your fold, and I fear that, sooner or later, if you do not come to my aid, this infernal serpent will catch me" (*The Great Sultana* 120).
20. "When force trumps reason and right, then there is no sin in the deed if there is none in the intent. Intention saves or damns us in all we do"; and "I shall be a martyr if I consent to die rather than to sin" (*The Great Sultana* 127).
21. "The minister of my torment" (*The Great Sultana* 147).
22. Weimer reads Catalina as symbolically castrated as she denies her own sexuality and fertility throughout much of the play.
23. You have "come to be who you are by your own faults; I mean by your pleasure" and have "surrendered of your own volition, swayed by this licentious life, this pomp and majesty" (*The Great Sultana* 147).
24. "Si yo de consentimiento / pacífico he convenido / con el de este descreído,

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- / ministro de mi tormento, / todo el Cielo me destruya, / y, atenta a mi perdición, / se me vuelva en maldición, / padre, la bendición tuya. / Mil veces determiné / antes morir que agradalle; / mil veces, para enojalle, / sus halagos desprecié; / pero todo mi desprecio, / mis desdenes y arrogancia / fueron medio y circunstancia / para tenerme en más precio. / Con mi celo le encendía, / con mi desdén le llamaba, / con mi altivez le acercaba / a mí, cuando más huía. / Finalmente, por quedarme / con el nombre de cristiana, / antes que por ser sultana, / medrosa vine a entregarme” (1985–2008). ‘If I have peacefully assented to this unbeliever, this minister of my torment, may all heaven destroy me, and may your blessing become a curse to me, for my perdition. A thousand times I resolved to die before pleasing him; a thousand times, to anger him, I disdained his courtesies; but all of my disdain, my scorn, and arrogance just made him hold me in higher esteem. My zeal excited him, my disdain attracted him, and my haughtiness brought him closer when I fled him the most. Finally, to keep a Christian name, rather than that of Sultana, I fearfully gave in’ (*The Great Sultana* 147).
25. The lyrics of the song the musicians play while Catalina dances in act 3 signals, with their chorus “y está de su alma / su gusto lejos” that they think this is an unhappy marriage for her (2387–88). “Her soul cannot find happiness” (*The Great Sultana* 157). Those musicians, however, are Christian captives and voice the perspective of their culture of origin. Moreover, the chorus line can be construed, more literally and interestingly, as “her soul and her pleasures are far from/at odds with each other.”
26. Zimic, 194.
27. Leyla Rouhi instantiates this mode of reading, which looks for explicit and enthusiastic consent as she “re-considers the play in light of the rapidly changing discourse about sexual assault today” (2) and highlights what Rouhi sees as the emptiness of the Sultan’s rhetorical amorous subjection to Catalina in a context where, in truth, he is all-powerful: theirs is “a marriage without consent” (15). I share Rouhi’s feminist ethos as well as her desire to attend to Catalina’s psychological life in greater depth than the field has done so far. To that end, I am not trying to downplay the duress under which Catalina is put by the fictional context of enslavement, but I do insist that the cultural context in which Cervantes thought his play would be performed or read also matters. Indeed, performance and reading form a context in which Spanish religious racism makes it impossible for Catalina to express consent without losing her virtue (which is what matters most) in the eyes of potential early modern spectators and readers. Reckoning with the multiple contexts in which Catalina exists and makes the choices she makes demands that we finetune our approach to epistemologies of consent.
28. “A good-looking young man, justly famed for his poise and elegance” (*The Great Sultana* 102).
29. Thinking with Rouhi’s reading of the asymmetrical power dynamics at play, I find it significant that the Sultan declares he knows he could rape her, since she is his possession, but that he does not want to: “No quiero gustos por fuerza / de gran poder conquistados: / que nunca son bien logrados / los que se toman por fuerza. / Como a mi esclava, en un punto / pudiera gozarte agora; / mas quiero hacerte señora, / por subir el bien de punto” (1278–85). ‘I don’t want pleasures conquered by the force of overwhelming power; those taken by force are never perfect. As my slave, I could possess you in a minute, but I want to make you my lady, to increase my happiness’ (130). Precisely because he is all-powerful, the

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- Sultan does not need to make veiled rape threats or to aggrandize himself with courteous rhetoric. He need not say anything, and yet that is what he says, I am proposing—perhaps unsurprisingly at this point—a mode of reading that takes him at his word.
30. Laguna reaches a very different conclusion from mine, however, as she, like many, takes Catalina's statements as sincere indications that she does not love the Sultan.
 31. I use the metaphor of the racial matrix to explain the coexistence in early modernity of multiple definitions of the word race, including the religious and the phenotypical definitions of race, in Ndiaye, *Scripts of Blackness*, 4–8.
 32. “Do not wonder, ‘I am this; I was that’ for, since you control me, it’s fit you should control the world” (*The Great Sultana* 118).
 33. The plea from Catalina seeks three days to “think about certain doubts of mine, which have made mi hesitant” (*The Great Sultana* 119). The motif of three actually appears thrice in the play: in addition to the three days that elapse between act 1 and 2, Rustán claims that Catalina had been sick until three days before Sultan Amurates met her (to excuse his failure to out her earlier), and three months elapse between acts 2 and 3, since Catalina is three months pregnant when she informs Sultan Amurates of her pregnancy during her scene of jealousy.
 34. Weimer's conclusion, although it proceeds from psychoanalytical hermeneutic frameworks that are not mine, shares affinities with my argument: he notices “a fundamental opposition between the resolutions of the two plots. Cervantes presents us with a dual final image, simultaneously depicting individuals who at the end of the play return to the self-definitions they held before the action [Lamberto and Clara] and individuals who at the end of the play have willingly embraced new identities of which they could barely have conceived prior to the action [Catalina and the Sultan]” 58). My twist on Weimer's reading is that, read through the lens of trans epistemologies, both Lamberto and Catalina simultaneously stay true to their own self-definitions and have embraced new identities.
 35. Catalina confronts her father with an invocation to Mary: “Virgen, que el sol más bella, / madre de Dios, que es toda tu alabanza, / del mar del mundo estrella, / por quien el alma alcanza / a ver de sus borrascas la bonanza, / en mi aflicción te invoco. / Advierte, joh, gran señora!, que me anego, / pues ya en las sirtes toco / del desvalido y ciego / temor, a quien el alma ansiosa entrego” (1722–31). ‘Virgin more beautiful than the sun; Mother of God, whom the greatest praise; guiding star through the sea of the world, who shows the soul the reward for its storms. I invoke you in my affliction; I am drowning o great Lady, now I drift onto the shoals of weak and blind fear, to which I hand over my anxious soul’ (*The Great Sultana* 140). While the source of Catalina's fear might be hard to locate at first sight (she is under no threat, as Amurates makes abundantly clear), a queer and trans reading makes it easier to empathize with and understand her affect.
 36. “A gentleman but not a rich one” (*The Great Sultana* 154). As critical whiteness studies scholars have shown, racial whiteness can be defined as “an unstable conceptual assemblage drawing on various categories such as phenotype, religion, class, nationality, sexual manners, and modes of civility, among others: the configuration of that assemblage is variable as each of those categories is weighted differently to redefine whiteness (and thus restrict its benefits to specific groups) at strategic junctures” (Ndiaye, “Read it for restoratives” 17).
 37. “**RUSTÁN:** When she came into my power, she would not have pleased you, and it was better to keep her until she grew worthier. For many years, Great Signior, her melancholy left her pale. **TURK:** Who cured her? **RUSTÁN:** Zedequías, the

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- Jew, your doctor. **TURK:** You present dead witnesses in your favor; I'm sure you're trying to get out of this. **RUSTÁN:** I 'm telling the whole truth." (*The Great Sultana* 115).
38. "A Jew brought it from Algiers, where two roving galleys arrived, their dinghies full of loot. That's where the Jew bought the dress I mentioned" (*The Great Sultana* 146).
 39. "The Great Signior ordered me to arrange lodging for his father-in-law in the Jewish quarter" (*The Great Sultana* 145).
 40. For a more generous reading of Madrigal as embodying the "the oddly precarious, increasingly vulnerable fantasy of the syncretist imaginary," see Lezra 176.
 41. Mariscal's critical attention is, like mine, arrested by the relatively positive treatment of the figure of the atheist Salec in the play, and he reads Madrigal not as a stand-in for but as a caricature of Spain.
 42. Alvar Ezquerro recapitulates the information we have that has long fueled debates in the field of Cervantes studies about the possible *converso* origins of the author of *Don Quijote* (29).
 43. "**TURK:** To celebrate the certain prophecies you've given me of your delivery, I want the Cadí to make the nights into days; let endless luminaries be placed in the windows, and with wondrous spectacles may my vassals set themselves to extraordinary celebrations. Let the holy and prophane great games of Rome be restored, and the Greek ones as well, and any other excellent ones there may be. **CADÍ:** Your will shall be done and may this great hope come true. And may you, with honest use, be as fecund as Rachel" (*The Great Sultana* 167).
 44. Fine astutely reads the Cadí as a version of Aman, the biblical Syrian vizir rooting for genocide—a reading that my reading of his tongue-in-cheek good wishes supports (254).
 45. This modelling of early modern white women who toe the line of whiteness yet also reaffirm whiteness after ancient heroines is not rare in Cervantes's work. See, for instance, the modelling of his white-Romani Preciosa after Heliodorus of Emesa's white-Ethiopian princess Charicleia in *La gitanilla* (Ndiaye, "Come Aloft," 126–27).
 46. Those Hebrew Bible plays, like the English materials studied by Chakravarty, "attempt to secure a place for whiteness as unmarked and unmarkable and assert—however tacitly—that white people, even in bondage, are safe from the stain of slavery, from a permanent and immutable signifier of unfreedom" (Chakravarty 80). I analyze at length the ideological work that early modern Hebrew Bible plays do in support of white supremacy in chapter 2 of *The Whiteness Between Us*.
 47. Lindsay Kaplan examines "the *servitus judaeorum*, a concept developed in a range of Christian religious texts that initially adumbrates an inferior spiritual status but evolves into an enduring cursed enslavement visited upon Jews as a consequence of the crucifixion" (Kaplan 2).
 48. Sedgwick compares the dynamics of coming out for the biblical character of Esther and for gay men in the modern Western world. She ultimately lands on the idea that "Esther reflects a firm Jewish choice of a minority politics based on a conservative reinscription of gender roles; however, such a choice has never been able to be made intelligibly by gay people in a modern culture (although there have been repeated attempts at making it, especially by men)" (82). I am grateful to Derrick Higginbotham for pointing me in the Sedgwick's direction here.

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49. This conspiracy theory is most fully articulated in and takes its name from French writer Renaud Camus's 2011 essay *Le Grand Remplacement*. While white supremacist politicians in Europe, inspired by Camus, have been primarily moved by anti-blackness and Islamophobia, American articulations of that conspiracy theory add strong currents of antisemitism to the toxic brew. For a thorough analysis of this conspiracy theory, see political theorist Feola's *The Rage of Displacement*.
50. "Just and holy desires ... a new and true history may be written of her liberty and memory" (*The Great Sultana* 169).