

# FROM THE FARM TO THE ACADEMY

Rolena Adorno

There are two questions that I have been asked throughout my academic career and beyond. The first is how I got interested in Spanish, and the second is whether I am related to T.W. Adorno. To the first question, I will tell you how. To the second, my answer is “no,” but it has produced many humorous episodes of which I will mention one or two in a postscript to this essay.

## **My Parents and the Humanities**

Until I began preparations for this talk, I did not realize that I had been surrounded by the humanities during my childhood on a farm in the Midwest. The humanists in question were my father and mother. My paternal ancestors (the Klahns) arrived in Iowa from Schleswig-Holstein in the 1860s; my maternal forebears (the Lages), also Holsteiners, arrived in 1900. Both came from the great waves of German emigration to the United States, and they spoke the northern, rural Low German (*Plattdeutsch*). I heard it spoken by my grandparents’ generation – and I understood some of it – but I never learned to speak it.

When my father was twelve years old, he wrote a poem that he sent to “Mr. Henry Ford,” as he called him, titled “The Ford Motor Car.” Dad was inspired by his parents’ first Model T, circa 1913, with which he was photographed, proudly rotating its starter-crank, in that same year. In her later years, my mother took up oil painting. She started with “paint-by-number” kits and graduated to create her own original farm scenes and still-life tableaus. Early and late, my parents respectively cultivated the arts of word and image. Looking back, I am not surprised that I turned to the humanities as my life’s vocation. But this view is possible only by virtue of hindsight. The journey that I began in the same one-room public country school (Center School, Farmington Township No. 9, Cedar County, Iowa) that my parents had attended led me, most recently, to the venerable University of Rome, La Sapienza, where I received an honorary doctorate on November 15, 2022. This road was as much uncharted as it was unimagined.

My parents were my first and inspiring teachers. Using a baseball metaphor, my father would always tell me, “Well, Sis, you’ve got to get out there and pitch!” He

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meant, “You’ve got to do well in school because, God knows, you are never going to be a farmer.” The internal combustion engine’s potential for my father’s farming future had persuaded him that he did not need a high school diploma, so he left high school in the town of Durant, Iowa, at the end of the tenth grade. But for me, he often repeated the dictum of Uncle Ed Klahn, “An education is the one thing that they can never take away from you!” Those words were no doubt uttered during the Great Depression, and they have had lasting value. My father always looked ahead. What would he have said about today’s electric cars? He would have been an enthusiast because when rural electrification came to Iowa, he helped my grandfather set the poles and string the electrical lines in our rural township. My mother was a more contemplative sort. Always devoted to the domestic arts and handicrafts, she became a kind of local Grandma Moses in the last two decades of her life. She had left school, as was done in her day, after her eighth-grade graduation so that she could go to work, sewing and house-cleaning for families in the city of Davenport, Iowa.

### **Provincialism and Aspiration: The Itinerant Salesman**

If I was surrounded by my father’s resonant, expressive language and the rural landscapes that my mother would later render in oils, I was also introduced to music, in the style of Meredith Willson’s *The Music Man*. (It was produced on Broadway in 1957 and on film for the first time in 1962.) Around 1950 an itinerant salesman of musical instruments came through our rural community and, before we knew it, several families had purchased accordions for their children. Unlike the musical’s Professor Harold Hill, our salesman was also a music teacher; he appeared once-weekly in Durant to give us accordion lessons. We Center School students, decked out in our Western cowboy outfits, performed our triumphant “Western Program” in May 1952. It featured five accordion players, me among them, who played such classics as “Home on the Range” and “She’ll Be Coming ’Round the Mountain” while the other fourteen school children sang along. The origin of the latter was a Negro spiritual, “When the Chariot Comes,” which had been adapted by Midwestern railroad workers in the 1890s, according to the poet and biographer Carl Sandburg (1878–1967) in *The American Songbag* (1927).

Among other itinerant salesmen who went from farm to farm, there appeared around 1953 a representative of an entity called the Rural Bible Crusade. By memorizing a substantial number of verses from the New Testament Gospels, we children were awarded bibles, with our names stamped in gold on the leather binding, in the great King James Version. (Our fathers, of course, wrote the checks that paid for them.)

These examples convey what I understand to be my personal legacy from a rural upbringing that was characterized more by outward-looking aspiration than inward-looking provincialism. Of course, we were at once provincial *and* aspiring, and my recent viewing of *The Music Man* brought the message home. If the residents of Willson’s River City, Iowa, were trusting enough to buy musical instruments and band uniforms from an (unbeknownst to them, disreputable) itinerant salesman who did

not know how to play any musical instrument and intended to skip town before the truth was revealed, those fictional parents did it with hope for their children's future accomplishments. And if, when the film's non-musical, cacophonous "concert" began, the parents beamed with proud satisfaction at seeing their children's striving, it was because of their hopeful aspirations and their children's innocent confidence in their own abilities.

In short, *The Music Man* – and rural life as I knew it – was about the awakening of the imagination. My recollection of an awakened imagination came in the early 1950s, when, as I looked up into the country sky and saw an occasional airplane flying high overhead, I told myself, "Someday, I am going to ride on one of those big shiny airplanes!" (I did so for the first time when I was twenty-two years old, flying from O'Hare Field in Chicago to the newly named John F. Kennedy International Airport and straight on to Paris. More on that later.)

17

### **High School and College**

I graduated from the same public high school in Durant, Iowa, that my father had left after the tenth grade. I was the valedictorian of my class of forty-six students, which was not a remarkable achievement. My proudest moment came in my brief valedictory address when I told our parents exactly what our public secondary-school educations had cost them as taxpayers, and I went on to warn them that we could make no hollow promises about future achievement, that all such promises would be empty until we proved otherwise. (Before this performance, I had persuaded the class salutatorian to tone down her own speech's blithe assurances and happy predictions.) After the event, the most glamorous and sophisticated woman in town, in my untested provincial view, congratulated me by saying, "Well! That was certainly no 'hearts and flowers' speech!"

It was a foregone conclusion that I would go to college. With no prior knowledge, and certainly no competing parental alma maters to discuss, we easily settled on the State University of Iowa, because it was the most economical. In my freshman year, 1960–61, the yearly in-state tuition was about \$200; dormitory room and board was about \$800. Also, Iowa City was only thirty-seven miles from the farm.

The State University of Iowa was where I found the world. After fulfilling the foreign language requirement in German (not my ancestral variety but rather the standard High German [*Hochdeutsch*]), I decided in my junior year to add another language. I chose Spanish over French, simply because I'd met some Spanish-speaking families from Colombia, South America, who were part of the "Colombian pipeline" that worked in the great farm-implement manufacturing industry: John Deere, International Harvester, Caterpillar. It was located in the Quad-Cities, the urban area that bridged the Mississippi River between Iowa and Illinois; once called the "Farm Implement Capital of the World," its manufacturing plants closed and went elsewhere (mostly abroad) in the 1980s.

When I started studying Spanish at the age of nineteen in my junior year, I fell in love with the language and its people: the human warmth and cordiality that radiated from my instructors contrasted sharply with the stiff formality of my German professors. The difference was persuasive, so I decided to drop German and major in Spanish. The Spanish faculty told me, “But, Miss Klahn, you cannot possibly do the entire Spanish major in your senior year.” I countered, “Oh, but taking the sequential courses simultaneously will be a great boon. ‘Total immersion’ don’t they call it? And, if I fail, I will be the first person to admit it, so you won’t have to kick me out of the program!” They were persuaded, I was not kicked out of the program, and I graduated *summa cum laude*.

But I had had an earlier “noncontact” with the Hispanic community through the presence of Mexican migrant laborers in our Cedar and Muscatine County rural communities. Their work was harvesting tomatoes, hand-picked, for the H.J. Heinz Company. Now Kraft Heinz, the firm based in Pittsburgh has dozens of manufacturing facilities around the world, but its second-oldest facility, after Pittsburgh, was that of Muscatine, Iowa, on the Mississippi River. The Mexican migrant workers contracted by Heinz were participants in the Bracero Agreements between the United States and Mexico that had been created during World War II and lasted through the mid-1960s. My most memorable recollection of that phenomenon is represented by my niece’s Durant Public School kindergarten class picture of 1960–61. The photo includes the García twins, little Miss Rada, little Miss Saenz, and the three Sandoval children, no doubt cousins. It poignantly registers the migrant workers’ aspirations for the education of their children, despite their impending move to the next areas of harvest, ending in the Pacific Northwest.

Apart from my Spanish studies at the State University of Iowa, my other launch into the world from the university came from Professor Paul Engle (1908–1991), the second, and arguably most visionary, director of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. In 1932 Engle had received the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award, and his winning volume of poems, *Worn Earth*, was published by the Yale University Press that year. In 1963–64, my senior year at Iowa, I won the poetry recitation contest in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. Thus, when Professor Engle was planning an international poetry event featuring Writers’ Workshop poets and translators, he called the department seeking a student who could read poetry credibly in both English and Spanish. I was selected. I read a poem in the Spanish original and as translated by a Writers’ Workshop graduate student at the time, later Poet Laureate of the United States, Mark Strand (1934–2014). The poem, by the Spanish poet Jorge Guillén (1893–1984), who was a member of Spain’s famous Generation of ’27, was titled “Los fieles amantes” (The devoted lovers).

After the May 1964 campus event and the subsequent taping of our dual-language performances, I went off to teach Spanish to seventh through ninth graders at Sudlow Junior High School in Davenport, Iowa. In the early fall of that year, I got a letter from

Professor Engle, who demonstrated the uncommon but essential professorial virtue of listening well and thinking ahead:

“Dear Miss Klahn:

The enclosed [announcement] is sent to suggest that you ought to try for a Spanish-speaking Fulbright. I'd be glad to recommend you, as would others. It would be foolish not to try, since you could always come to SUI if you wanted to next year – although you really should go far away.

Thanks for all the help with the film,

Paul Engle”

19

### **A Fulbright Grant to Spain**

Those few sentences began the process of changing my life. I applied for and was awarded, for the academic year 1965–66, a Fulbright Scholarship (Fulbright-Hays Act, Public Law 87-256) to study in Madrid. Under Francisco Franco's dictatorial rule (1939–1975), Spain was a police state at the time, which made it safe for naïve Americans but dangerous for Spanish citizens and the Romani (Roma) people. At the Universidad Complutense, I pursued Spanish literature, history, and art (with a weekly class at the Museo del Prado). I was unaware that the devastation caused in 1936 by the Spanish Civil War's Batalla de Ciudad Universitaria (Battle of University City) had not been fully repaired by the 1960s. The atrium-high front portal of the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras where I took my classes had featured magnificent stained-glass windows which were destroyed in that infamous battle, but in 1965 that area was boarded over. The windows were recreated, from scratch, in 2010, and I saw them for the first time, quite movingly, in 2015 when I gave a lecture in the very same classroom where, exactly fifty years earlier, I had been a student.

During that Fulbright year, my interest in Spanish-language literary and cultural history was deepened and ultimately became a vocation. I also met my future husband, David Adorno (1926–2003), who shared with me a serious interest in the cultures of Spain. With a PhD from Harvard in mathematical statistics in 1963, David was a Fulbright Professor in 1965–66, teaching mathematics at the Complutense while on leave from his tenured professorship in mathematics at New York University. After teaching mathematics for many years, he switched to the academic field of business administration in its quantitative dimensions; David retired in 1985 as dean of the School of Management at SUNY-Binghamton, now the Binghamton University. When David and I married, I took over the care of his four growing daughters, who are my lifelong stalwarts. David died after our thirty-six years of marriage, but the girls and I have now been the family for fifty-eight years and counting.

It was David who said to me, on New Year's Eve, 1970, that it was time for me to go to graduate school. I can still feel myself sinking against the refrigerator in our kitchen that evening and saying, “Me? Really?” (Here I am recalling from Kang-i Sun Chang's

Intellectual Trajectories talk her acknowledgment of her husband C.C. Chang's extraordinary support: he, too, was determined that his wife should go to graduate school.) I received a PhD in Spanish literature, as the general field of Hispanic literary studies was called, from Cornell University in 1974. I began my academic teaching career in 1976 at Syracuse University; the job offer and my husband's position at Ithaca College meant that our family life would not be disrupted by separations.

### **Guaman Poma's *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno***

In 1972, my second year of graduate study at Cornell, I began to study a chronicle of ancient and colonial Peru titled *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* (*New Chronicle and Good Government*, 1615). Its Quechua-speaking Andean author, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (ca. 1535–50 to ca. 1616), was born after the Spanish conquest of the Incas, and the Spanish viceroyalty of Peru comprised an immense territory that extended the length of the north-to-south cordillera of the Andes and into the tropical forests of the Amazon basin. In shaky Spanish, imperfectly learned from Spanish missionary priests, Guaman Poma wrote a twelve-hundred-page manuscript book that he personally illustrated with four hundred full-page drawings. It had – and has – no peer among Spanish-colonial-era writings of Indigenous authorship. I thought it was a marvel, but in the early 1970s, almost everyone “knew” that “Indians did not write books”!

Thankfully, a few academics in my Department of Romance Studies at Cornell rejected that view, and among them was a young assistant professor named Roberto González Echevarría, now my distinguished colleague and professor emeritus of comparative literature and Spanish with whom I worked in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese here at Yale during the final quarter century of my academic career (1996–2021). With Roberto's support and that of my dissertation director Lucille Kerr, also an assistant professor at Cornell at the time and today professor of Spanish at Northwestern University, I was able to prove the detractors wrong.

Two other factors were essential: The first was that the *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* had been introduced to me by the Andeanist ethnologist John V. Murra, who valued the manuscript book as an extraordinary source of information on the highly articulated Andean agricultural economy that reached from the sierras to the coastal shore and into the Amazon region. His confidence in the work bolstered my own, which was of a very different type. I understood Guaman Poma's work to be a coherently conceived and executed account of Andean civilization from mythical Andean times to its author's too-real Spanish colonial present.

Working with the enormous prose-and-picture volume taught me more than I could have learned any other way. In part because working with this artifact as a “text” had no precedent, I had to start from scratch to determine how to approach it and how to demonstrate that it was a coherent piece of writing – an articulated, cohesive entity – not a collection of assorted notes. Additionally, the suggestions of well-meaning scholars (“Have you considered the possible presence of Erasmus's ideas?”

“Can John G. Neihardt’s *Black Elk Speaks* be a useful touchpoint?”) led nowhere, except indirectly. They helped me realize that I had to “read between the lines” of the *Nueva corónica* itself and ferret out Guaman Poma’s readings, in short, to discover his “library” and to do so with some knowledge of Spanish colonial book culture in the Peruvian viceroyalty at the time.

I found that Guaman Poma’s book learning spanned the Spanish literature of religious devotion; the trilingual collection of sermons (Spanish, Quechua, and Aymara) prepared for the evangelization of Peru’s native peoples; “biographical” compendia of exemplary Christian lives; Spanish accounts of the conquest of Inca Peru; and the occasional, radical Spanish treatise that advocated the return of Andean sovereignty to the Andeans. I learned that humanities scholarship depended not on imposing ideas and models from outside the work in question but on discovering what lay within it. I also learned that Guaman Poma did not slavishly follow the ideas of others, even those authors whom he admired, such as the inspiring Fray Luis de Granada (1504–1588) or the provocative Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566). Instead, he turned his readings of them to his own polemical purposes.

While learning these things about humanities scholarship, I collaborated with—better said, I worked in tandem with—John Murra, the aforementioned Andeanist ethnohistorian-anthropologist, and the Quechua linguist Jorge L. Urioste to prepare a critical edition of the manuscript book. Murra elucidated the pre-Columbian and colonial Andean ethnological and historical content, and Urioste interpreted and translated its Quechua-language texts (no easy task, given that Quechua had become a written language only a few decades before Guaman Poma set pen to paper). I was in charge of transcribing the manuscript, identifying the presence of its European and European-style elements and explaining Guaman Poma’s manipulation of them. Our collective aim was to make accessible all possible areas of Guaman Poma’s knowledge, lore, and learning—Andean, European, and everything in between. At its most comprehensive level, Guaman Poma’s chronicle was an appeal to the king of Spain, Philip III (r. 1598–1621), as the highest authority from whom he could seek justice and to whom he petitioned for the publication of his *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* manuscript so that it could be used as a guide for the reform of Spanish colonial civil and ecclesiastical governance.

My greatest fun was transcribing the eight hundred pages of Guaman Poma’s prose because, without clearly marked syntactic divisions or punctuation, I had to read its utterances aloud to capture their cadences and thus to add sentence markers. In doing so, I came to understand Guaman Poma’s remarkably expressive rhetorical skill, which was nourished by his traditional Quechua oral culture and augmented by his audition of countless Christianizing sermons. Murra, Urioste, and I produced two print editions of the *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno*: in Mexico City in 1980 for Latin American readerships and in 1987 in Madrid for Spanish and European readers of less specialized, more general interests.

Subsequently, in 2001, the Royal Library of Denmark published the high-quality digital facsimile of the autograph manuscript. I provided what in print culture we call “critical apparatus,” but for online use these adjuncts are defined as “navigational aids.” Working with me at Yale were two graduate students in Spanish, John Charles and Fernanda Macchi, who are now, respectively, tenured associate professors at Tulane University in New Orleans and McGill University in Montréal, Québec. The Royal Library’s project director was its keeper of manuscripts and rare books, the philologist-codicologist Ivan Boserup. Boserup’s team photographed the manuscript, each page of which consisted of approximately one hundred and twenty separate photographic shots, all of which were computer-assembled into a single page’s image. The library’s web technicians provided all the features and services that made possible the presentation of the manuscript book on the Danish Royal Library’s website.

From these print and digital editorial projects, I learned how to work with, and to learn from, scholars in other disciplines and to appreciate how their perspectives enriched my own, and how, in fact, our various disciplinary perspectives enhance one another’s research results. I think of it as being analogous to the assemblage of photographic shots that converge into a single enriched (and enriching) image.

Guaman Poma’s *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* is today recognized as a monument of world culture, inscribed in 2007 in UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register. On the eve of the manuscript book’s four-hundredth anniversary, a distinguished group of some seventeen international scholars from several academic disciplines explored the numerous avenues of inquiry that emerge from the work across pre-Columbian and colonial times. The results are published in a five-hundred-page volume, *Unlocking the Doors to the Worlds of Guaman Poma and his Nueva corónica* (2015), of which I am the coeditor, alongside the Royal Library’s Ivan Boserup. If I were to list the myriad book titles that have appeared on the topic of “Indigenous intellectuals” of Mesoamerica and the Andes over the past two decades, you would understand the path-breaking role that the study and recognition of Guaman Poma’s *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* has played in international scholarship.

### **Everything Ever After, Until Now, or Other Lessons Learned**

Literary reference and allusion, the stock-in-trade of literary scholarship and criticism, were thus for me expanded to include other kinds of referentiality. If dealing with a personal, firsthand account of a Spanish conquest-and-settlement expedition, I had to learn how conquest expeditions “got off the ground”: who initiated and supported them (private entrepreneurship) and who set the rules of engagement (the Castilian crown). I set out on such an endeavor via the published *Relación* (Account) (1542) of the Andalusian soldier and explorer Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca (1485–92 to ca. 1559). Cabeza de Vaca’s *Relación* tells a quintessential tale of Europeans confronting the “wilderness” of North America and its native inhabitants for the first time. Penned in the aftermath of the failed Pánfilo de Narváez expedition of 1527, it is a stunning



account of quest and adventure, freedom and bondage, empire and colonialism, miracles and shamanism.

The work is well known and celebrated on three continents in its later edition of 1555, called then and ever since *Naufragios* (Shipwrecks, Calamities). But during a summer fellowship in 1985 at the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, I discovered that the *Relación* of 1542 was known in just three publicly held copies and that in it Cabeza de Vaca offered a candid account of what he learned about native beliefs. He wrote that the native peoples he encountered attributed everything of which they did not know the origin, including the foreign invaders themselves, as having come “from the sky.” This was a signally important testimony in the face of the facetious, universalized hypothesis that all the natives of the Americas thought that the European invaders “came from Heaven” and that they were “gods.”

23

Stunned by that revelation, I worked intermittently on Cabeza de Vaca’s ethnographically interesting, failed-North-American-conquest narrative account until, five years later, one of my brilliant Princeton undergraduate students made a completely original, philologically sound analysis of Cabeza de Vaca’s *Relación* that offered a new understanding of the work in its general outlines. After Patrick Charles Pautz graduated (BA, Princeton, ’91), I invited him to collaborate with me on an edition and study of Cabeza de Vaca’s *Relación*. We worked in tandem but also in close collaboration, producing a three-volume study that includes a critical edition of the original account of 1542. *Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: His Account, His Life and the Expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez* (1999) took us several years to research and write, just a little short of the ten-year odyssey across North America, by sea and on foot, of the expedition’s famous author-survivor.

Upon receiving prizes for our book from the American Historical Association, the Western History Association, and the New England Council on Latin American Studies, Patrick and I joked that the respective awards represented either the three continents on which Cabeza de Vaca is still commemorated—in Spain in his native Jerez de la Frontera; at various sites across this continent; and, in South America, at Iguazú Falls—or, alternatively, that the prizes reflected the three volumes of our multi-year magnum opus along with the three libraries at which we had worked: Princeton’s Firestone Library, the John Carter Brown Library at Brown, and Yale’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Here at Yale, the Beinecke allowed me to teach many of my semester-long graduate seminars on its premises and amid its collections. And I enjoyed doing a once-per-semester session for my undergraduate courses when our Spanish-colonial-era readings included works of which the Beinecke holds various *editio princeps* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In introducing one such session, I wanted to make the point that Walter Isaacson, when researching his best-selling *Leonardo da Vinci* (2017), discovered that Leonardo’s handwritten notebooks were a much better

source with which to work than the outdated, often inaccessible or corrupted electronic records left by Apple's founder with which Isaacson had worked on his also-best-selling *Steve Jobs* (2011). So, I introduced my observation by asking my Yale undergraduates if they knew who Steve Jobs was. No problem: "Apple!" came the excited exclamations. Then I asked if they knew who Leonardo was. An even more-excited outcry broke out: "DiCaprio!" "No," I lamented, "*Da Vinci!*" Even such errors can focus students' interest and attention, and we all had a great good laugh. Without question, the Beinecke has been as much my Yale home as my academic department, and, in my retirement, the Beinecke remains without peer.

Because the two major narratives on which I had worked most extensively, Guaman Poma's *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* and Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación*, purported to be historical narrations, they helped me to realize that even narratives pretending to historical authority formed parts of narrative "chains" in which history's lost referents, gone forever, were replaced by narrative concatenations that were self-perpetuating and self-sustaining. Hence, in *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative* (2007), I argued that the absence of the historical referent effectively generated the Spanish American narrative tradition as it emerged after 1492. From Columbus's famous letter of 1493 onward, that which was left unsaid allowed readers – and especially those readers who became writers – to fill in the gaps. Unable to retrieve the irretrievable events of history, the reading writer of the early modern colonial era most often sought plausibility over precision, more verisimilitude than verity, and consistency with his hopes or beliefs. In the constellation of Spanish-language writings on the topic of European settlement and native displacement in the Western hemisphere, historical (rhetorical) authority came not from unmediated accounts of acts of violent conquest or natives' outcries against them but rather from the configurations of the narrative texts that brought them to life in writing.

All this seems so simple and straightforward as I recall it now that you may be asking, "So what?" This was the alarming question asked by Patricia Meyer Spacks in her Modern Language Association Presidential Address thirty years ago, in 1994. This is where Guaman Poma's unpublished manuscript book, and a few others written around his time, come into play.

It has been recently argued that a lot of world history is today viewed through the lens of colonialization and its devastations. In general, the academy did not see it that way fifty years ago. But *which* academy? In the North American academy, it is true that the likes of Richard White, Patricia Limerick, and Yale's own Ned Blackhawk in his best-selling, National Book Award-winning *The Rediscovery of America* (2023) have greatly advanced Native scholarship, as David Treuer ("On Native Grounds," *The New Yorker*, November 14, 2022, p. 76) has observed. Treuer remarked at the same time that "the Native historian Joshua Reid has startlingly challenged the very 'bifurcation of Indian versus non-Indian colonists.'"

This is not a startling discovery for scholars of Spanish American colonialism working in the Latin Americanist academy; we know that such cut-and-dried racial

and ethnic bifurcation was never the case: Spanish colonialism advocated intermarriage with the Natives, but apart from any such desiderata, miscegenation created a mixed-race society of multiple skin tones and, importantly, varied social-group allegiances. These racial mixtures were categorized and characterized in detail in eighteenth-century visual art in the Spanish colonial genre known as the *casta* paintings. But already in the early seventeenth century, the few Indigenous writers who appeared in Spanish America told a more illuminating story about their own multiple, often contradictory, social and institutional affiliations. I became aware of this from the moment in the early 1970s when I first grappled with Guaman Poma's manuscript book.

I anticipated Patricia Meyer Spacks's important question, "So what?" in *Guaman Poma: Writing and Resistance in Colonial Peru* (1986, 2000), as well as in my introductory essay to the Murra-Adorno-Urioste edition of the *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* (Madrid, 1987). I described Guaman Poma with the Spanish term, *indio ladino*, which was used to identify an Indigenous individual who knew the Spanish language and lived in what I had decided to call a *zona de contacto* (zone of contact). By this I meant the space in which the representatives of native and colonialist institutions and communities intermingled, blurring their binary allegiances.

The English-language version of my phrase was subsequently taken up and popularized by my colleague Mary Louise Pratt in her *Imperial Eyes* (1992) as "contact zone." The term has become a hallmark, in fact a "buzz word," to represent the uneasy accommodations between the colonizer and the colonized. In coining the phrase *zona de contacto*, I had referred to the various group affiliations and social allegiances with which the writing subject Guaman Poma allied himself: pro-Christian but anti-clerical; pro-Andean but ambiguously and simultaneously anti- and pro-Inca; and pro-monarchical in the hope that Philip III, as a member of the European fraternity of sovereign rulers, would recognize the justice of returning sovereignty over the Andes to Andean princes. The appealing shorthand of "contact zone" contains (and conceals) the conflicted, contradictory richness of its contents.

More recently, I faced the challenge of writing for the Oxford University Press Series *Very Short Introductions*, a thirty-five-thousand-word synthesis of three-plus centuries of narrative and lyrical writings produced in the Spanish viceroyalties. My *Colonial Latin American Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (2011) was followed by Roberto González Echevarría's *Modern Latin American Literature* (2012). Roberto and I later put them together, in tandem and in Spanish, as *Breve historia de la literatura latinoamericana colonial y moderna* (A brief history of Latin American colonial and modern literature, 2017). (His *Modern Latin American Literature* has been translated into Arabic, Chinese, Persian, and Turkish; my *Colonial Latin American Literature* will appear in Chinese. The writings of the Spanish colonial era may seem to be confined to the distant past, but the issues they raise are more current than ever.)

### **My Last Word (for Today)**

The lessons I have learned about collaboration across humanistic disciplines and specialties have been tested in my most recent project. I accepted the invitation to deliver the Renaissance Society of America's annual Josephine Waters Bennett Lecture for 2023. For this commission, I decided to get out of my Spanish colonial "comfort zone" and to take on that imperishable team of collaborators: Don Quijote de la Mancha and his squire Sancho Panza. (Here at the Koerner Center you may have enjoyed Roberto González Echevarría's analysis of how the aspirations and actions of some of the novel's literary characters were enlivened and transformed by their interactions with master and squire.) But if I was out of my Spanish colonial comfort zone, I was nevertheless in one of my personal "contact zones." That is, I knew that Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616) had petitioned, more than once, for a royal appointment to an administrative post in one of Spain's American territories and that he was never successful in obtaining one. Could we see, under this light, the artist-author walking through the "picture gallery" of his own novelistic creation?

Spain's America never becomes a topic as such in Cervantes's *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605, 1615), but despite the fact that the Spanish New World is minimally acknowledged therein, my familiarity with Spanish colonial history made it possible for me to "read between the lines" and recognize, in the attitudes and actions of the novel's various literary protagonists – including Don Quijote and Sancho – the illusions and delusions that the fantasy of Spanish New World prestige and prosperity engendered. Nearly implicitly and without identifying them as such, Cervantes satirizes pretensions to Indies prestige so that the *Quijote* becomes, in effect, his "anti-anthem" to America. In it he registers the incommensurability between the idealistic chivalric expectations that had been gilded by the passage of time and the far-away contemporary realities that replaced them, glittering with the gold and silver that seemed to revivify the heroic past but instead produced devastating losses. This is the America of Cervantes's disillusionment (*desengaño*). My "Cervantes and *Don Quijote* at Home and Abroad" appears in the spring 2024 (vol. 77, no. 1) issue of the *Renaissance Quarterly*.

### **Postscript**

Adorno is an Italian surname. In my case, it comes from my late husband David Adorno's Sicilian heritage; his father Rosario Adorno emigrated to the United States from Solarino, Provincia di Siracusa in 1920. Adorno is the matronymic of T. W. Adorno (1903–1969) who, in 1938, exchanged his patronymic Wiesengrund for the surname of his Catholic mother, Maria Calvelli-Adorno of Corsican and ultimately Genoese descent, thus becoming Theodor W. Adorno (Martin Jay, *Adorno*, 1984, 25, 34). I have often been asked if I am related to the great German-Jewish intellectual. This occurred most intriguingly when I gave a series of lectures in 1985 at the University of Frankfurt (J.W. Goethe-Universität) in the very same Institut für Romanische Sprachen und

Literature where, I was told, Adorno typically lectured. It was speculated that I was a daughter born to him in his years (1938–1949) in the United States. The chronology made it feasible, but the facts are otherwise.

Most recently, I was asked, point blank, by one of my distinguished Yale colleagues: “Are you Adorno’s daughter?”

“No,” I replied.

Pursuing the matter further, he asked, “Do you *wish* that you were?”

Again, my reply was negative, adding, “No, of course not. I had perfectly wonderful parents.” My rejoinder returns the reader to the first lines that I wrote for this Intellectual Trajectories essay.