

# Kenyon College

## Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange

---

Faculty Publications

Modern Languages and Literatures

---

3-2012

## Exchange in and beyond the Cartas marruecas of José Cadalso

Travis C. Landry

*Kenyon College*, [landryt@kenyon.edu](mailto:landryt@kenyon.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digital.kenyon.edu/modernlanglit\\_publications](https://digital.kenyon.edu/modernlanglit_publications)



Part of the [Modern Languages Commons](#), [Modern Literature Commons](#), and the [Spanish and Portuguese Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

"Exchange in and beyond the Cartas marruecas of José Cadalso." *Modern Language Notes* 127 (March 2012): 248-264.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Modern Languages and Literatures at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact [noltj@kenyon.edu](mailto:noltj@kenyon.edu).



PROJECT MUSE®

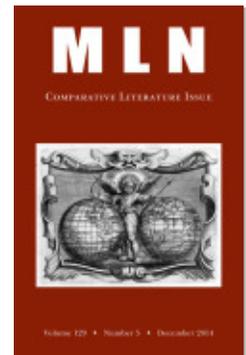
---

## Exchange in and beyond the *Cartas marruecas* of José Cadalso

Travis Landry

MLN, Volume 127, Number 2, March 2012 (Hispanic Issue), pp. 248-264  
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press  
DOI: [10.1353/mln.2012.0075](https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.2012.0075)



➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mln/summary/v127/127.2.landry.html>

# Exchange in and beyond the *Cartas marruecas* of José Cadalso



Travis Landry

Several days' journey removed from the palace of Mulay Mohammad bin Abdallah, the sultan who ruled Morocco in the latter half of the eighteenth century, an anonymous Spaniard recorded a series of observations about the indigenous trees beyond the city of Mogador. Though most would be unrecognizable in Spain, one tree of particular note, the author remarks, bears a fruit that “se asemeja a nuestras aceitunas sevillanas” (Antonio Rodríguez Villa 298). The extensive roots of this tree, the argan, span out in all directions so as to support robust branches that grow up from the ground without a central trunk, and it is added that the inhabitants of the region depend on the abundance of its fruit for their cattle, cooking oil, and other necessities. This account comes from a member of the official entourage of the Spanish ambassador, Jorge Juan, during a six-month state visit in 1767 spent in the company of Juan's Moroccan counterpart, Ahmad bin Mahdi al-Ghazal, or ‘El Gazel,’ as he was known in Spain.<sup>1</sup> At this moment in history, both nations found sufficient diplomatic cause to reach out across the Strait, and al-Ghazal, for his part, had traveled to Spain the year before, in 1766, with a lavish retinue hosted by Carlos

<sup>1</sup>Annotated editions and studies of José Cadalso's *Cartas marruecas* most often refer to the Moroccan ambassador as Sidi Hamet(e) al-Ghaz(z)al(i), or simply, Sidi Hamet El Gazel. Although subject to variation across historical accounts of Morocco, his complete name, as documented by Thomas K. Park and Aomar Boum 136, was abû al-abbâs aHmad bn al-mahdî al-ghazzâl al-andalusî al-mâlaqî, while in Arabic, the signature of the 1766 al-Ghazal journal in al-Arabi's critical edition with facsimile reads أحمد بن المدهي الغزال. My use of the modern accepted spelling of “al-Ghazal” throughout this paper follows that of Nabil Matar 486–87.

III. His extended visit covered more than fifty Spanish towns, and he, too, left to posterity a detailed record of the experience.

Those familiar with the epistolary work *Cartas marruecas* by José Cadalso, which was written between 1768 and 1774 and published posthumously in 1789, will recall that al-Ghazal's widely publicized visit to Spain provides the imaginative point of departure for Cadalso's own central character, Gazel Ben-Aly, and the letters he exchanges with his Spanish confidant, Nuño Núñez, and aging African mentor, Ben-Beley. The above description of this particular Moroccan tree, however, is to be found far from Cadalso and, for that matter, from the time period surrounding the actual visit of Jorge Juan to Morocco in 1767. Instead, it appeared in a resurrected version of the Spanish ambassador's sojourn published in an 1880 edition of Spain's *Revista Contemporánea*, an important journal of the time devoted to international cultural exchange. Antonio Rodríguez Villa, the historian contributor of the piece, there includes a prefatory note that reads:

Para su confección me he valido principalmente de un curioso manuscrito de mi propiedad . . . de letra del siglo pasado. . . . Escritos estos apuntes por testigo ocular . . . tienen tal saber de verdad y tan detalladas noticias, que unida esta circunstancia a la no menos atendible de lo casi desconocida que es esta embajada, creo ha de interesar a los lectores ya por uno ya por otro concepto. (258)

Strangely, this explanation of curious origins recalls Cadalso's own preface from a fictitious editor who puts in question the authorial voice of a manuscript that "por muerte de un conocido" (78) fell into his hands. Yet, there is nothing about this document brought to light by Rodríguez Villa that would suggest a similarly ironic intent. On the contrary, this repackaged chronicle offers a faithful reproduction of a log kept by someone with unfettered access to Jorge Juan's travel experiences while in Morocco on the Sultan's invitation.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, though these three works might come together in such a way, their common ground owes something to the rather inconspicuous argan. This tree indeed should give cause for reflection on world literature today and approaches to reading an intercultural text like Cadalso's, which endures as a canonical piece of eighteenth-century Spanish literature. Theorizing on the advantages of distant reading for an appreciation of how "*form as force*" (92) moves across space and time, Franco Moretti draws upon trees to illustrate "divergence

<sup>2</sup>It is most plausible, according to Víctor Rodríguez Casado (55n23), that the original manuscript came from Jorge Sanz, the official secretary to Juan during these years.

in literary history" (78). In this model, Darwin's evolutionary tree provides the initial example, as continuous random variation of forms occurs in branch-like succession in response to migrations and fluid environmental pressures. Moretti qualifies, however, that the "tree of culture" thus conceived for literature and as distinct from the Darwinian model must be both branching *and* interconnected. In this way, a "typical pattern" emerges in which "divergence prepares the ground for convergence," only to ultimately result in "further divergence." Convergence, nevertheless, does not mean coalescence, that is, "ubiquitous hybridity" in the Bakhtinian sense of culture filled with "other people's words," since limits emerge to impede "cultural 'interbreeding'" (80–88). These limits, according to Moretti, cannot be surpassed because of the material constraints of differing structures of governance, social stratification, market practices and the like from one place and period to the next. As such, convergence amounts to crossover without closing off the possibility of future departures from which embedded traits might resurface with new autonomy.

To be sure, Moretti's "tree of culture" offers one way to conceptualize the branching behind Cadalso's *Cartas marruecas*, but it does not allow us to readily transcend traditional, Eurocentric arguments centered on questions of imitation in an already crowded house of Enlightenment epistolary novels and reformist satires. To 'world' literature according to relationships of indebtedness is to seek branched interconnections that grow from a single trunk. Narrative genealogies of the sort become hierarchical and place "the later text in the position of writing back to the first" (Tanya Agathocleous and Karin Gosselink 465). In other words, Cadalso ends up looking like just one more twig on the eighteenth-century epistolary trunk of Richardson, Laclós, and so many others. Yet as an alternative, the organ displays numerous large branches moving outward and upward in a constellation without a predictable pattern, even at the level of divergence-convergence-divergence. Several shoots of the same labyrinthine root system, for example, might grow parallel or, more likely, away from one another, without ever leading us to wonder whether or not they belong to the same tree. Given the unity of their clustering, we intuit a structure in place to hold them together even if unfamiliar or unapparent.

Hence, to read *Cartas marruecas* as world literature requires that world literature first be understood not as a set of texts, traceable to a single trunk, but rather as a way of reading, as David Damrosch would have it, that puts works into circulation "beyond their culture of origin" (4). In this model, the literary system functions as a net-

work of exchanges, and works take on new life in a process of *transculturación*. This concept, which Damrosch borrows from the writings of Fernando Ortiz, is used to emphasize cultural reciprocity rather than the absorption of one culture by another (24). Likewise, recent approaches to transnationalism problematize oppositional understandings of imperialist globalization. Instead of specious dichotomies, the preference is for an elucidation of the back-and-forth linkages that circumvent borders (Hyun Sook Kim and Jyoti Puri 140–43). Vilashini Cooppan, for her part, speaks of nations as entities made through movement. From relational thinking concerned with flows, she sees nationalism as forever in tandem with internationalism: “Spatially, world literature connects, linking vastly different periods and cultures together. Temporally, it haunts, ghosting new texts with the residual presence of older ones and old texts with the anticipatory presence of new ones” (14). Such “ghosting” offers an attractive substitute to the search for origins so central to traditional influence studies, which often naturalize hegemony once the European trunk emerges. It also tells us that every nation is “fantasmatic,” carrying the outside within from the very inception: “All national subjects live their nationalism in the mode of loss, for all must contend with the difficult process of identifying with something that is not entirely there, that exists in the present yet recedes into the deep past of national history, and that seems to promise future inclusion but constantly works by present exclusion” (32). This specter is the living dead of each nation. Hence, only through “retroactive reading” (Srinivas Aravamudan 11) of the complex agency embedded in such nationalist projections does it become possible to draw out less-evident forms of cultural resistance from within the ‘pre-dominant’ authorial voice.

The melancholy of Nuño Núñez in *Cartas marruecas* typifies this “fantasmatic” idea of a nation. His calls for renewed patriotism, the resurrection of forgotten heroes, and the dictionary project in search of primitive usages offer but a few of the most salient examples. Loss, too, fills the “presencia silenciada” (165) that Michael Iarocci posits regarding Cadalso’s search for the truth of Spain, “una verdad que no se cifra en las palabras de ninguno” (174). Yet in the tripartite interlocation of this text, so central to the *perspectivismo* that Mariano Baquero Goyanes attributes to Cadalso (11–26), the gaze of Gazel, who authors sixty-nine of the ninety total letters, is no less a reminder of such a present absence than Nuño’s own nostalgia. A Moor in Spanish clothing, Gazel at once *orients* and *disorients* the reader in much the same way that the author’s oxymoronic aspiration toward an impartial

critique offers the most seductive of contradictions about Spain. The tension of the Strait, a symbolic point of crossing, is in the need for tolerance of cultural difference rather than its embrace, for in the shadows of such tolerance lurks the loss tied to the haunting legacy of the brutal *reconquista* and expulsion. In the eighteenth-century Spain depicted by Gazel in his eleventh letter, “cierta amistad universal” has begun to supplant the unnatural and unnecessary conventions of the past; this new world is “una familia común en que todos son parientes no solo todos los españoles, sino todos los hombres” (122–23).<sup>3</sup> This episode forms part of the author’s larger humanist agenda, and hence we are meant to take Gazel at his word. Thus, the idealism is in the very idea of such cross-cultural harmony.

Demarcated by difference, Gazel’s out-of-place preference for Spanish attire first jeopardizes his entry into this social circle, then facilitates it. Something similar, in fact, occurs in his relationship with the reader, as it were, through an act of narrative redressing. Cooppan avers that “nations, like subjects, say what they wish were true” (5). Cadalso, too, believed in such a correlation between nation and individual; Nuño, whom most see as the closest reflection of the actual author, remarks in letter twenty-one, “cada nación es como cada hombre” (139). Gazel exchanges his outer Moorish garments, while his African body remains alien in its constitution once set in the European context. His intention is not to assimilate, but rather to pass unnoticed, “con menos nota” (83). The nation, then, is analogous to the individual to the extent that it is foreign to itself. In truth, whether in the guise of Nuño, Gazel, Ben-Beley, or all three at once, Cadalso paints his own nationalism in a most ironic light. The introduction (77–82) and *protesta literaria del editor* (303–06) evidence only the most explicit attempts at self-referential framing. The work as a whole, and especially in the case of Gazel, attests to “the paradoxical nature of reason, its apparent and perplexing inability to fulfill the tasks it sets for itself” (Gary Handwerk 218). Faced with such an insufficiency, such loss, the partial subject transforms itself into an object so as to overcome the void. With the rationalism of Cadalso, this bridging also amounts to a real (not simply contrived) passing between continents, though we would never know it by looking at European trees alone.

Despite his unfeigned observations, in his present absence Gazel is ironic. Made into an object to fill the void of Cadalso’s partial sub-

<sup>3</sup>See Elizabeth Scarlett for a discussion of the implications of Cadalso’s gendered speech.

ject—Spanish nationalism—he functions as a trope for a particular form of *transculturación* embedded in the language writ large of his hybrid identity. This hybridity roots in the conceptual distance his country of origin connotes. Indeed, the geographic proximity of the two nations historically serves to exaggerate rather than dispel the notion that Spain and Morocco stand worlds apart. We might recall the words of Domingo Badía, the enigmatic Spanish spy who went by the name Ali Bey in his journeys disguised as a Muslim prince across North Africa and the Middle East from 1803–07: “La sensación que experimenta el hombre que por primera vez hace esta corta travesía no puede compararse sino al efecto de un sueño. Pasando en tan breve espacio de tiempo a un mundo absolutamente nuevo, y sin la más remota semejanza con el que acaba de dejar, se halla realmente como transportado a otro planeta” (11). Temporal and spatial, the operation of distance here is not unlike the epistolary form itself for the way in which language structures the exchange of these two worlds in Cadalso’s critique.

To better understand the epistolary form in this light, it is useful to begin with the admission of Jacques Derrida in *The Post Card*: “distance myself *in order* to write to you” (28). There can be no writing without distance, and exchange makes explicit the ineluctable, sequential nature behind the transmission in this particular iteration of *transculturación*. That is to say, in terms of crossover, the implications for the epistolary form are many. It is contradictory and paradoxical for being composed of opposing viewpoints which engender the “doubly oblique” gaps of contrary possibilities (Janet Gurkin Altman 207); it is the narrative form at odds with closure and associated with “play on meaning” rather than “fixed, authoritative significance” (Elizabeth J. MacArthur 23); and, it carries in its fragmentary constitution a structural tension built on internal inconsistencies (Nigel Glendinning 72). Hence, letters point to the problems of all literature and, more broadly, of narrative, given the communicative dimension of writing in and for response. The epistolary form is writing as exchange, and Cadalso literally exchanges his voice for that of a Moor in Spanish clothing so as to reflect on his own nation. The world, as consequence, becomes synonymous with the separation between the voices and, by extension, with language itself. To be sure, this space proves a good thing, as long as it is filled in equal measure to the complexity of its pluralistic nature.

Goethe believed that to read oneself in translation has the effect of a mirror; the transmission is *Wellliteratur* as process (Damrosch 7).

The distance, then, between self and self-image is at once familiar and foreign, while the mediation encompasses both. Cadalso's advocacy for *el justo medio* could very well be a figurative extension of this dynamic, given that it informs his thinking about authorship: "el amigo que me dejó el manuscrito de estas Cartas y que . . . fue el verdadero autor de ellas, era tan mío y yo tan suyo, que éramos uno propio . . . de modo que . . . puedo llamar esta obra mía sin ofender a la verdad" (80). In other words, the mirrored effects not just in terms of translation or Cadalso but also for the world literature approach make exchange, "el asunto más delicado que hay en el mundo" (82), since the flows and linkages between nations, like those between individuals, never amount to transactions of equivalence. There will be cultural surplus and loss, which a shared heritage between two intertwined countries like Spain and Morocco only heightens.

One way to understand the loss, from a transnationalist perspective, centers on power and asymmetrical relationships of dominance. But there are others. Standard readings of Cadalso's *Cartas marruecas*, whether with respect to European epistolary models, perspectivism, or postcolonialism, for all their insights, also prove not to be *world enough* to account for the type of negotiation that undergirds the text. World literature is no longer about 'Great Books' or alterity studies that fetishize the cultural 'Other' in "stranger celebration" (Rajini Srikanth 202) until we find ourselves in critical states of "false consciousness" (Dorothy Figueira 33). Instead, it is about the "interfaces" that are "uniquely appropriate for a world that is increasingly defined by anxious relationships, whether they be political, social, ethnic, gendered, religious, or technological" (Sarah Lawall 50). The argan tree works well for the way its structure recalls the "radical-system" (5) that defines the self-generating multiplicity and development of the rhizome described by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. The grafting of the rhizome mends breaks toward an ever-greater complexity of heterogeneous connections and new structures of meaning that emerge via the ruptures of these exchanges. Relational reading of Cadalso, though it may decentralize him to a certain extent, also makes this intercultural complexity possible for the very same reason.

In a literal sense, the reciprocal ambassadorial visits between al-Ghazal and Jorge Juan were occasions for a host of exchanges, from lavish gifts to diplomatic civilities to captive slaves. Indeed, to understand better the double-edged nature of reconstructive history, that is, what it means to rediscover exchange in and beyond *Cartas marruecas*, it is worth returning to Jorge Juan and the 1767 visit he made

to Morocco. Across the Strait on one particular day toward the end of his stay, Juan finds that the Sultan has outdone himself by sending fifteen ostrich eggs, followed by a platter of cherries with a message explaining that they are the first of the year, delivered untouched in order to give Juan the pleasure. In return, the Emperor requests the presence of someone who can prepare a hot chocolate for him in the traditional Spanish way, and so successful is the specialist charged with this operation that upon taking leave of the Emperor he returns to Juan weighted down with several ounces of gold and an invitation to go back the next day to give a second demonstration at the palace:

Este mismo criado fue al día siguiente a enseñar el modo de hacerle, y el mismo Emperador se informó de cómo le tomaba nuestro Monarca, cuya imitación es su fuerte pues aunque le agrada la leche sin embargo de saber que se podía hacer con ella no quiso, solo porque preguntando de nuevo si su amigo el Rey Carlos lo tomaba así, casual, o improvisadamente respondió el criado que no; tómalo por fin sin ello sorbiendo la primera espuma hasta seis veces sin tocar el líquido sobre que se refrendaba la que de nuevo se batía, hasta que en la última lo consumió todo mojando pan, bizcochos que llevó el mismo criado, a quien este día regaló una buena alfombra. (Víctor Rodríguez Casado 35)<sup>4</sup>

But this gift from the Sultan is only a token gesture. To show the real extent of his gratitude for this private lesson in the fine art of hot chocolate, the following day he gives Juan nine captive Spaniards along with two large boxes of chocolate that had been given to him during an earlier visit from the French ambassador. The Emperor Abdallah makes it clear through his messenger that he does not like the French chocolate one bit as much as the Spanish.

Hence, to see the world differently is to experience it differently, but exchange persists as a nuanced affair. Erich Auerbach discusses discovery using Rabelais, who voyages into the mouth of a giant only to find a French peasant planting cabbages (268–70). Damrosch char-

<sup>4</sup>This passage as cited is a direct transcription of the original spelling and syntax of the journal entry reproduced by Rodríguez Casado. However, in Rodríguez Villa 289, the same episode appears polished as follows: “Este mismo criado volvió al día siguiente á enseñar el modo de hacer el chocolate, y el mismo emperador se informó de cómo lo tomaba nuestro monarca, cuya imitación es su fuerte, hasta el punto que gustándole mucho la leche y sabiendo que se podía hacer con ella, no la quiso, porque, preguntando de nuevo si su amigo el rey Cárlos lo tomaba así, y respondiéndole el criado que no, quiso tomar el chocolate sin leche, sorbiendo la primera espuma hasta seis veces sin tocar el líquido sobre que se forma y que sucesivamente se iba batiendo, hasta que por fin lo consumió todo mojando pan y bizcochos que llevó el mismo criado, á quien este día regaló una buena alfombra.”

acterizes the trajectory of reading world literature similarly, “a sharp *difference* . . . a gratifying *similarity* . . . and a middle range of what is *like-but-unlike*” (12). This middle range is the mediation, the gaze of Gazel, *el justo medio* that Cadalso promotes, and yet it is something more still. During the 1766 visit al-Ghazal made to Spain prior to Juan’s trip to Morocco, he saw numerous cities and towns, attended bullfights and flamenco dances, and dined at banquets filled with regional cuisine. Following his entourage, in the July 1 issue from that same year, the *Gaceta de Madrid* wrote that in Seville “por la tarde pasó su Exc. a ver la famosa Torre, conocida por el nombre de la Giralda, y la examinó muy despacio” (213). What al-Ghazal was thinking at that moment, his interest and curiosity, even astonishment, perhaps mirrored (perhaps not) the same wonder felt by the observer traveling with Jorge Juan, who found in the Moroccan city of Marrakech a tower that “se parece a nuestra Giralda de Sevilla, y aun se dice ser obra del mismo artífice” (Rodríguez Casado 39). The tower is the same and different, *like-but-unlike*, just as when the *chocolate* of Carlos III is stirred by the hand of Mohammad bin Abdallah. In sum, “el asunto más delicado que hay en el mundo” amounts to the critique of one’s own world precisely at the moment we realize that this world has never been nor will be our own.

Here, in brief, are some reasons why. Scholars of Cadalso have long assumed, and rightly so, that Ahmad bin Mahdi al-Ghazal (again, also known as Hamet[e] al-Ghaz[z]al[i] in Spain) inspired the name and narrative for the character of Gazel in *Cartas marruecas*. After all, Gazel himself opens his first letter with an explanation about his decision to stay in Spain after the Moroccan ambassador’s entourage has departed. Having broken away on his own, this Gazel is meant to be a fictional off-shoot of the retinue. However, history also tells of another Gazel, Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, the prophetic Muslim writer born in the eleventh century in what is now northern Iran. Known as ‘al-Gazel’ in the Christian West, al-Ghazali remains one of the most influential thinkers of the early modern period. His legacy stems, in part, from his position that “there is not in possibility (anything) more wonderful than the form of this world” (Eric L. Ormsby 75). Beyond its place of origin, once in circulation this philosophical tenet would later infuse the discordant thinking of Leibniz and Voltaire on the best of all possible worlds.

Yet, within the Muslim world, al-Ghazali’s works have been both rejected and revered because of his belief in the heterogeneity of knowledge. Ebrahim Moosa describes him as a *bricoleur* whose persis-

tent “cross-pollination” (30) of views provides the most meaningful bridge between Christianity and Islam of any Muslim philosopher. One interpretation of al-Ghazali’s often disputed idea is that “the world, at this precise instant, cannot be better,” but, nevertheless, “it can change” (Ormsby 259). Part of this reformist platform hinges on *radical* contingency, much like, I would add, the world of letters, and to what extent any of this finds its way to Voltaire and, through historical circumstance, to Cadalso during his lifetime remains another branch. Cadalso’s *Cartas* is a reformist text, but still more important is al-Ghazali’s view of change, or rather exchange for understanding the loss inherent to it. This mystical thinker, ghosting the rationalist nationalism of Cadalso, spent years of his life wandering in search of knowledge as a traveler who proclaimed in his teaching “To the road! To the road!” (al-Ghazali 176), and his often-heard message was deceptively simple, “Live in the world as if you are a stranger, or like one crossing the street” (qtd. in Moosa 279). Hence, this other Gazel, from another time and place, is for all the world of the same unfamiliar tree. Each traveled to know better the road.

In this respect, the cultural cross-fertilization works because travel was the “grammar of the self” (Moosa 139–64) for al-Ghazali. When the world amounts to “the grandest textbook of them all,” the space of the trajectory is the topography we read, but the relationship between travel and writing simultaneously upholds and collapses the security of proper meaning (Georges Van Den Abbeele xvi–xxiii). Deviation, transport, wandering—these movements all rely on a bridge suspended over the abyss of an eternal return to the center that never was: “Travel then becomes the metaphor of metaphor while the structure of the metaphor becomes the metaphor for the travel of meaning” (xxiii). Narrative, for al-Ghazali, tethers the truths of experiential learning together, as factual as they are fictional, and the language of its webbing is no less divine than its mysterious origin. This same metaphor, in its very necessary and temporal constitution, alone affords the ontological coexistence of contraries, which is why Derrida says that the “‘literal’ meaning of writing” is “metaphoricity itself” (*Of Grammatology* 15). Metaphoric language enables at once that which *is* and *is not* through a logos of being without presence. The epistolary form, that is, writing as exchange, exploits this contrariness, and Cadalso’s Gazel embodies it. Absent a recognizable trunk, the beautiful supporting structure of the argan lies in its unseen roots, for the cohesive, branched plurality they engender.

Indeed, crossover is often most meaningful where it is least evident. The intersection of al-Ghazali, the ‘Gazel’ of the early modern period, and the eighteenth-century Gazel of *Cartas marruecas* exploits relational reading so as to bring us closer to what haunts the latter, the other al-Ghazal. With respect to Cadalso’s text, there is no question about the relevance of the Moroccan ambassador’s visit to Spain in 1766; the protagonist states outright that he has broken off from the entourage. Yet no scholar of Cadalso has ever looked at what the ‘foreign’ gaze of Gazel in *Cartas marruecas* might share with the observations about Spain contained in the journal that the real ‘Gazel,’ the ambassador Ahmad bin Mahdi al-Ghazal, wrote during his stay in Spain. As it happens, this al-Ghazal was a prolific writer, having devoted himself to poetry, a series of epistles, and biographies on important religious figures. His travel narrative of Spain, *Natijat al-ijtihad fi al-Muhadana wa-al jihad* (The Result of Perseverance in Truce-Making and Holy War),<sup>5</sup> in addition to being noteworthy for its meticulous descriptions of the country and its customs, is composed in poetic prose. Still, I would argue that his personal motives explain much more about the mission than what he says of Spain. Gazing at the Giralda, he states: “El laminar está algo retirado de la mezquita y, por su grandeza y altura se parece al laminar de la Kutubiyya” (qtd. in Nieves Paradela, “La vinculación” 79).<sup>6</sup> From this observation, we no longer have to rely on the *Gaceta de Madrid* and wonder what was going through the Moroccan ambassador’s mind as he slowly examined the tower. His land and past stared back at him, and the echoes of the bells sounded in his heart with misgiving. In the twelfth century, the Giralda, which inspired countless church towers across Europe, was modeled on the Koutoubia mosque, and the bells, for al-Ghazal, were a modification that rung with the ineffable losses of exchange. In a world of distance mediated by the *like-but-unlike*, the Giralda thus described *is* and *is not* the Koutoubia.

<sup>5</sup>The translated title included here comes from Matar 486. The only other published title that I have found in English translation is *The Consequence of Efforts in Our Settlements and Holy War*, from Park and Boum 136. The title in Spanish is given as *Consecuencia del esfuerzo en la paz y en la guerra* by Alfredo Bustani, who published the first critical edition of the complete text in Arabic, complemented by a Spanish prologue, notes, commentary, and an index. This edition also contains a detailed map of the Moroccan ambassador’s itinerary and numerous exceptional photographs of Spain’s Islamic past as visible during the Civil War and early years of Franco’s reign, including a rare 1937 shot of Moroccan pilgrims in the Alcázar of Seville during their return from Mecca.

<sup>6</sup>For the purposes of this essay, the passages of al-Ghazal in Spanish translation are taken from the two studies by Paradela as indicated, with cross-referencing of various sections of his journal in extant (though largely fragmentary) Spanish, French, and English translations, as well as the original Arabic

Another more impassioned moment occurs when al-Ghazal reaches the great mosque of Córdoba. He and his retinue find themselves drawn to it as if it were a living body, and from the moment they cross the threshold, the ambassador suffers from a heavy heart. Yet, he states: “llegamos a imaginar que los muros y las columnas de la mezquita nos saludaban y nos sonreían para aliviarnos del gran pesar que sentíamos. Llegamos, incluso, a conversar con estos seres inanimados, a abrazar, una a una, todas las columnas y a besar, por dentro y por fuera, las paredes” (qtd. in Paradela, *El otro* 55). The members of the Moroccan entourage linger there, leave, and return over some days. Then one evening, while walking the mosque alone before dusk, al-Ghazal stumbles upon two large slabs on the ground with sacred inscriptions from the Qur’an: “Y cuando divisé esas dos planchas se me saltaron las lágrimas y caí sobre las piedras haciendo rodar mis canas en ellas y quitándoles el polvo con mi barba. No podía levantar la cabeza debido al escalofrío que se me vino al contemplarlas” (56). He calls to the priests who oversee the site, reprimands them for such blasphemy, and demands that the language (and hence the slabs) be returned to the highest wall.

The anonymous 1767 account of Jorge Juan in Morocco includes inscriptions as well, but they are of a different sort—the faded markings of a Spanish colonial past. For example, above one of the entrances to the main square of Larache, the nameless *testigo ocular* behind this ambassadorial chronicle manages to decipher: “Reinando en España Carlos II y gobernando esta Plaza el Maestre de Campo Don Francisco Vilers y Medrano, se.....esto.....” (Rodríguez Casado 24). He then adds that “la falta de letras de estos dos últimos renglones” left some doubt about the message. I would say the same about Cadalso’s *Cartas*, but not for entirely the same reasons Michael Iarocci so thoughtfully calls our attention to the silences contained in the epistolary form. Rather, my reservations have to do with how the text is read. On the one hand, studies and editions of Cadalso continually discuss the importance of Montesquieu, Goldsmith, and other such models, since Cadalso apparently had them in mind. He suggests as much in the opening paragraphs of the introduction (77–8). On the other, he also makes a point, first, to distinguish the Spanish tradition for being “de este lado de los Pirineos,” and, second, to note the actual historical visit of the Moroccan ambassador (78). Nevertheless, when it comes to critical work on Cadalso attention to al-Ghazal is

absent.<sup>7</sup> Part of the problem stems from the standard perception that with Cadalso's text "we learn nothing of substance about the Moroccans' way of life, their society and attitudes" (Glendinning 57), or as Thomas O. Beebee decries, "Cadalso has no wish to raise Islamic culture above the Spanish—nor even, as he could, to recognize the distinctly Islamic aspects of Spanish culture" (94). These readings fall short of capturing what a text like Cadalso's actually achieves.

To put it bluntly, the reason "we learn nothing of substance" in this respect is because 'we' are barking up the wrong tree. The argan would be a better bet, since its structure allows for the relational reading which this paper has sought to model. Of the Moroccan ambassador, Nabil Matar states: "al-Ghazal's account is important because it shows Spain during the second half of the eighteenth century through the eyes of a cultural stranger who described what Spaniards and other Europeans took for granted" (487). In this instance, Matar is not concerned with *Cartas marruecas* in the least, and yet his assessment of al-Ghazal, ironically, echoes the consensus on Cadalso and his use of *Gazel* to carry out a nationalist critique. The critical shift of the present paper, therefore, is no different from the perspectivism already ingrained in Cadalso's own writing, and the reason is rather uncomplicated. As Matar points out, "Inevitably, the more he wrote about Spain, the more al-Ghazal revealed and told about himself and his Moroccan world" (487). In other words, depending on the tree, the other side of the Strait is not so distant as it might seem, and thus certain truths become unmistakable—the fundamental connection between travel and Islamic cultures, for one, and the pluralism at stake in our own humanity, for another. These were lessons made clear by al-Ghazali, the Muslim philosopher, as early as the eleventh century. So, when Cadalso's *Gazel* comments on the barbarity of Spanish bullfighting in Letter LXXII, the distance to the ambassador's own experience is very little, for as he himself concludes: "Cuando fuimos preguntados, para tranquilizarlos (a los españoles), consideramos buena esta diversión suya, aunque nuestra opinión era la contraria, ya que el martirio de los animales no está permitido, ni por la ley coránica ni por la natural" (qtd. in Paradela, *El otro* 72). This reflection pushes back against the broad brush of history that has painted the Moroccan ambassador as

<sup>7</sup>This disregard is in spite of the fact that al-Ghazal's journal can be found in its entirety in Arabic, as well as in Spanish, French, and English selected translations used in publications concerned with aspects of the document's content and history. For the former, see the editions of Bustani and Ismail al-Arabi; for the latter, see those of Commandant D., Auguste Gorguou, Matar, Arribas M. Palau, Paradela, and Henri Pérès.

a great aficionado of bull-fighting simply because it is known from the *Gaceta* records that he attended these spectacles. Consequently, parallel passages like these, once placed together, open new space for understanding both texts and their historical context in tandem. The nationalism is thus seen to be international from the outset.

What is less obvious, however, is where language factors in this crossing of continents. For world literature to be a “renovative concept” (Roland Greene 1244), it must account for and suture the ruptures of the rhizome behind such cultural interface through complex grafting. The primary mission of al-Ghazal was to rescue captive Muslims and bring them back to Morocco, but he was no less intent on the return of hundreds of Islamic texts. In fact, he promises in his account that each and every slave who journeys back home will do so with a book on his or her head. In this way, a translation takes effect across the Strait, through the personification and travel of text as it literally traverses the passage. The symbolic act is itself a narrative of an Islamic nationalism in terms of restoration and return. Here again we have the mirror, but the sacred language of the Moroccan people, which for al-Ghazal was embodied in these texts, cannot and should not be *like-but-unlike*. Neither should it be made to look like the great mosque of Córdoba, where statues of saints now stand, nor the Giralda of Seville, from which Christian bells still ring. Restoration is his implicit message, and something similar motivates the dictionary project of Nuño Núñez in Cadalso’s own work. Both yearn, in fact, for stasis and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Yet language resists such sovereignty, so that the writing of al-Ghazal and Cadalso inevitably tells a different tale across time and space. The journal of the former is replete with transliterations of Spanish words, from chair to hat, and these imbued the Arabic of North Africa with new multi-cultural complexity in the years after his return (Matar 486–87).<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Nuño Núñez wanted nothing more than to fix meaning in a primitive past, for distancing, in the Derridean sense, is about the walls of our thought rather than the physical separation between us. The malcontent Spaniard says as much to Ben-Beley: “Si . . . fueses europeo cristiano y avecindado . . . sería obra muy ardua la de escribirte” (187). Cadalso’s *Gazel*, too, knows that in translation a sentence can appear the same and “ser en la realidad muy diferente” (203). It is, as he tells his African mentor in Letter LXI, akin to the

<sup>8</sup>Though Matar provides a general sense of the importance of this facet of al-Ghazal’s text, it is Pérès who catalogues all the new words introduced by al-Ghazal with their derivations and varied spellings.

figurative, essential truths imbedded in the deceptive, literal appearances of a text like *Don Quijote*. The knight of the sad countenance says so himself when in the printer's shop of Barcelona he reflects that translation is rather like looking at tapestries on the wrong side, because "aunque se ven las figuras, son llenas de hilos que las escurecen y no se ven con la lisura y tez de la haz" (1032). The turn toward real cultural understanding, however, comes at the moment we see that the 'right side' is already blended in a complex interweaving of threads, or, as Cadalso writes, "tal es el mundo y tal los hombres, que pocas veces vemos sus obras completas" (302). From that point on, these artifacts mean more because of the confusion, not in spite of it, and the notion of 'ours' becomes obsolete. This fundamental interconnectedness is also, as Gazel tells Nuño in his final letter, what turns the distance of the Strait into something "intolerable" (301).

As consolation, new lines of literary history, like trees without trunks, show that the world is there for the mending. This paper therefore argues for recuperation on multiple levels. It demonstrates through relational reading that the loss of exchange is its surplus, the bounty by which intercultural hybridity might be better understood once we understand better how to look for it. The thesis is twofold. On the one hand, this approach to pluralism moves beyond genealogies of indebtedness. The argan provides the conceptual model for this articulation because its structure lends itself to unity in clustering rather than a story of origins. On the other, we discover particular insights both allowed for and in support of this alternative way of reading. A reassessment of Cadalso's *Cartas marruecas* becomes less about Cadalso and his text, and much more about the Gazel(s) that inhabit its message. This leveling is not by accident, and it is at no expense to one of Spain's most revered writers. Rather, it reminds us that when al-Ghazal falls to his knees to clear the dust from those two tablets with the grey hairs of his beard there is something powerful to be learned, something far removed from self-satisfying claims about Cadalso and his imitation of European epistolary predecessors. It has to do with clearing away residues of one past in order to make room for another. Indeed, the kisses and caresses of columns at the Mezquita of Córdoba bring solace where confusion reigns, but a deeper understanding of why requires attention to al-Ghazal's curious, perhaps unintended admission. He acknowledges that, "por dentro y por fuera," the structure consoled him—as if to say that in this interwoven world the *like-but-unlike* is what remains to be embraced.

## WORKS CITED

- Abbeele, Georges Van Den. *Travel as Metaphor from Montaigne to Rousseau*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992. Print.
- Agathocleous, Tanya and Karin Gosselink. "Debt in the Teaching of World Literature: Collaboration in the Context of Uneven Development." *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* 6.3 (2006): 453–73. Print.
- al-Arabi, Ismail, ed. *Natijat al-ijihad fi al-Muhadana wa-al jihad*. By Ahmad bin Mahdi al-Ghazzal. 1766. Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1980. Print.
- al-Ghazzali, Abu Hamid Muhammad. "Al-Ghazzali: Confessions of a Troubled Believer, from *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, Deliverance from Error." *Anthology of Islamic Literature*. Ed. James Kritzeck. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1964. Print.
- Altman, Janet Gurkin. *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1982. Print.
- Aravamudan, Srinivas. *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688–1804*. Durham: Duke UP, 1999. Print.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003. Print.
- Badía, Domingo (Ali Bey). *Viajes de Ali Bey*. Barcelona: Editorial Óptima, 2001. Print.
- Baquero Goyanes, Mariano. *Perspectivismo y contraste de Cadalso a Pérez de Ayala*. Madrid: Gredos, 1963. Print.
- Beebe, Thomas O. *Epistolary Fiction in Europe, 1500–1850*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. Print.
- Bustani, Alfredo, ed. *Consecuencia del esfuerzo en la paz y en la guerra*. Larache: Publicaciones Del Instituto General Franco Para La Investigación Hispano-Árabe, 1941. Print.
- Cadalso, José. *Cartas marruecas / Noches lúgubres*. Ed. Joaquín Arce. Madrid: Cátedra, 1990. Print.
- Cervantes, Miguel de. *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Madrid: Alfaguara, 2005. Print.
- Commandant D. "Une ambassade marocaine en Espagne sous le règne de sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah, petit-fils de Moulay Ismail (1766). Relation de voyage de l'Ambassadeur Sid Ahmed Ben Sid el Mahdi el Ghazzal, secrétaire du Sultan (Traduction analytique inédite)." *Le Lien Médical Marocain* [Casablanca] ns 1–4 (March–July 1933). Print.
- Cooppan, Vilashini. *Worlds Within: National Narratives and Global Connections in Postcolonial Writing*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009. Print.
- Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003. Print.
- Deleuze, Giles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974. Print.
- . *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987. Print.
- Figueira, Dorothy. "Comparative Literature versus World Literature." *Comparatist* 34.1 (2010): 29–36. Print.
- Gaceta de Madrid* 26 (July 1, 1766): 213. Print.
- Glendinning, Nigel. "Structure in the *Cartas marruecas* of Cadalso." *The Varied Pattern: Studies in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*. Eds. Peter Hughes and David Williams. Toronto: A. M. Hakkert, 1971. 51–76. Print.

- Gorguou, Auguste. "Ambassade marocaine en Espagne au 18e siècle." *The Umayyad Mosque in Córdoba: Texts and Studies*. Frankfurt: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, 2008. 1:12–23. Print.
- Greene, Roland. "The Post-English English." *PMLA* 117 (2002): 1241–44. Print.
- Handwerk, Gary. "Romantic Irony." *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Romanticism*. Vol. 5. Ed. Marshall Brown. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. 203–225. Print.
- Iarocci, Michael P. "Sobre el silencio en las *Cartas marruecas*." *Hispanic Review* 65 (1997): 159–76. Print.
- Kim, Hyun Sook and Jyoti Puri. "Conceptualizing Gender-Sexuality-State-Nation: An Introduction." *Gender and Society* 19.2 (2005): 137–59. Print.
- Lawall, Sarah. "Canons, Contexts, and Pedagogy: The Place of World Literature." *The Comparatist* 24 (2000): 39–56. Print.
- MacArthur, Elizabeth J. *Extravagant Narratives: Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary Form*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990. Print.
- Matar, Nabil. "Al-Ghazal (c. 1766) Moroccan Ambassador and Traveler." *Literature of Travel and Exploration*. Vol. 2. New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003. 486–87. Print.
- Moosa, Ebrahim. *Ghāzalī and the Poetics of Imagination*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2005. Print.
- Moretti, Franco. *Graphs, Maps, and Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*. London: Verso, 2005. Print.
- Ormsby, Eric L. *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute over al-Ghazali's "Best of All Possible Worlds"*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984. Print.
- Palau, Arribas M. "Algunos datos sobre el viaje por España del embajador marroquí Ahmad al-Gazzal (1766)." *Actas de las II Jornadas de Cultura Árabe e Islámica* (1980). Madrid: Instituto Hispano-Árabe de Cultura, 1985. 41–63. Print.
- Paradela, Nieves. *El otro laberinto español: viajeros árabes a España entre el siglo XVII y 1936*. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2005. Print.
- . "La vinculación a un pasado: al-Andalus en tres viajeros marroquíes a España." *Revista marroquí de estudios islámicos* 2 (1991): 73–82. Print.
- Park, Thomas K. and Aomar Boum. *The Historical Dictionary of Morocco*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2006. 136. Print.
- Pérès, Henri. *L'Espagne vue par les voyageurs musulmans de 1610 a 1930*. Paris: Adrien-Maissonneuve, 1937. Print.
- Rodríguez Casado, Víctor, ed. *Jorge Juan en la Corte de Marruecos*. *Revista General de Marina* supp. 4 (1941): 3–62. Print.
- Rodríguez Villa, Antonio. "Una embajada española en Marruecos y estado de este imperio en tiempo de Carlos III (1767)." *Revista Contemporánea* 27 (1880): 257–308. Print.
- Scarlett, Elizabeth. "Mapping Out the *Cartas marruecas*: Geographical, Cultural, and Gender Coordinates." *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 33 (1999): 65–83. Print.
- Srikanth, Rajini. "Overwhelmed by the World: Teaching Literature and the Difference of Nation." *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* 7.2 (2007): 192–206. Print.