

## ENRIQUETA ZAFRA

Triplette, Stacy. *Chivalry, Reading, and Women's Culture in Early Modern Spain. From Amadís de Gaula to Don Quixote*. Amsterdam University Press, 2018. 214 pp.

In *Chivalry, Reading, and Women's Culture*, Stacy Triplette analyses the impact that women that read, write and act in the pages of books have in the actual women who read, write and act in the real world. In order to accomplish this, Triplette traces the influence of the female characters (Amadís's lover, Oriana, his and her mother respectively, Elisena and Brisena; and the enchantress, Urganda la Desconocida) in the male authored, *Amadís de Gaula* (1508) over the women and men who wrote and consumed fiction in the early modern period and beyond. There is no denying, as Triplettes rightly points out that *Amadís* had a notorious appeal for female audiences from Isabel la Católica to Teresa de Ávila and that moralists, such as Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, Luis Vives or Fray Luis de León just to name a few, had a problem with women reading novels of chivalry. I agree with Triplette that this problem is not merely of an erotic nature, since many found chivalric romance to be a threat because of the genre suggested strategies through which literate (and I would also add non literate) women might subvert social norms. Chivalric romance, as Triplettes notes, gives real women, real roles, as mothers, lovers, wives and daughters but also less conventional roles such as wise women, warriors and travelers, in which to recognize themselves. In fact, these "real" women who read and write, make love and give birth gave early modern women an example to emulate activities normally not recommended to honest women, such as writing fiction, joyful lovemaking and traveling.

In chapter one, "Women's Lives and Women's Literacy in *Amadís*," the author focuses in explaining the importance and influence that *Amadís*, one of the most popular books in the early modern period, had for creating a space for women where "rules can be broken" (12). For this purpose, this chapter discusses episodes in Montalvo's *Amadís de Gaula* associated with a network of female characters, paying particular attention to the epistles written by them. In *Amadís*, as Triplette indicates, women's letters are sometimes a substitute for action, for although men do most of the fighting, women do most of the writing. This fact creates a ripple effect (11) that has very important consequences on women agency.

In chapter two, "Women's Literacy in Beatriz Bernal's *Cristalián de España*," we are able to experience first-hand the impact that *Amadís* had in "real" women since in this chapter, Triplette analyses *Cristalián* (1545), a chivalry novel written by the sixteenth-century writer, Beatriz Bernal. Though Bernal did not publish her novel under her name until her daughter named her as the author in 1587 to secure permission to print a new edition (83), she revealed her gender in the liminary material. In the prologue, in a very chivalric manner, a fictionalized version of herself finds a manuscript in a crypt and reads and translates it for a new public (85). Triplette notes that in *Cristalián* female characters are more elaborated and not only write as a form of action like they did in *Amadís*, but also act and become primary rather than secondary players (81). However, women in *Cristalián* use reading and writing for

good, but also for evil. The good are represented by the old Membrina and the young Celina, the “good enchantresses,” Membrina conveniently resist marriage in order to preserve her independence and Celina, for me the most interesting because not only is she a wise woman and a ruler who chooses her own marriage partner without disturbing her study or her rule, but also is one of the few female characters in Iberian romances to rescue a male character (95). But not all women who practice magic have good intentions. Indeed, Beatriz Bernal also creates the “evil enchantresses,” Danalia; *la doncella del gavilán* (‘lady with the sparrowhawk’) and the elderly Drumelia. It is through the corrupt reading practices of these evil *sabias* that Bernal expresses her greatest degree of ambivalence about women’s learning and its consequences, which validates the fears put forward by moralists (96). The most interesting point about this chivalry novel that Triplette’s underlines is that the sheer number and variety of Bernal’s female characters in *Cristalián* suggest that women in Bernal’s world have both physical and intellectual strength, but they still must play by a set of rules more constricting than those articulated for men. However, submission to men is not inevitable; it can be indefinitely deferred, both by scholarly practice and by magic (115).

In chapter three, “The Triumph of Women Readers of Chivalry in *Don Quixote Part I*” and chapter four, “The Defeat of Women Readers of Chivalry in *Don Quixote Part II*,” Triplette puts forward the natural duality present in Cervantes, who as part of his creative process always likes to offer two contrasting points of view. Hence the characters of Luscinda and Dorotea as the good readers of chivalry in Part I, and the bad women or better said, the bad readers of chivalry novels in Part II, represented by the Duchess and Altisidora. As we know, in Part I, Luscinda and Dorotea have been cheated, in one way or another, by the men in their lives but as Triplette notes, these two seemingly naïve young women use chivalric romance as a handbook of creative solutions for the predation of men (117). Both Luscinda (the writer of letters) and Dorotea (the performance artist Micomicona) end up as the women on top thanks to the agency that chivalry novels grant female character through the written word. In Part II, Cervantes’s view is less rosy, for while he still affirms that women can and should read, he presents chivalry as a tool for mischief rather than redemption (153). The most interesting part of this chapter is how Triplette traces the relationship among hierarchy, gender, and reading communities, showing how Cervantes uses the Duchess and her household to build a model for his readership and then critique those readers, especially women readers. The contrast between the Duchess and Altisidora, two very different readers, allows Triplette to explore reading as a site of class and gender struggle in early modern Spain and although humiliation awaits both women, Altisidora redeems herself by defying not only authors but also authority figures.

In the “Conclusion” that Triplette could have entitled with her last entry, “Chivalry is Dead, Long Live Chivalry,” the author takes us to the twenty-first century with Rosa Montero’s 2005 *La historia del rey transparente*. This last example brings home the thesis of Triplette’s study, that is, that chivalry novels spoke and still speak to any women author who, like the readers *Feministas Unidas*, are invested in women’s experiences. In this regard, *Chivalry, Reading and Women’s Culture in Early Modern Spain* is a must-read.

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## MARIA VAN LIEW

Zecchi, Barbara, coord. *Tras las lentes de Isabel Coixet: Cine, compromiso y feminismo*.

Publicaciones de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2017. 495 pp.

Who is Isabel Coixet and where and how to place her work? This edited volume pursues these questions via twenty-two Spanish language selections focusing on the feature-length films, documentaries, writings, interviews, and self-image produced by the Barcelona-born director. In the prologue, Coixet speaks of a sense of “vulnerability” under such close scrutiny and her awe of “una mirada plural, apasionada y entregada” on the part of the twenty-three contributors and the editor, as well as her appreciation for the opportunity to “revisit” what she has done up until “now,” referring to 2014. Coixet has remained prolific since the appearance of this volume with three feature-length films, numerous documentaries, and other short projects in circulation between 2015-2019, attesting to the benefit of said volume in understanding the underpinnings of an already vast and valuable opus in constant state of expansion. Two initial features are Zecchi’s twenty-page comprehensive introductory overview followed by a translated essay (originally published in English by Nuria Triana Toribio in 2006), which set a tone recognizing Coixet as an early proponent of a form of post-national cinema that defies categorizing her work per se as “Spanish” or “Catalan.” As Toribio observes, “[s]us películas indican que se pueden esquivar algunas etiquetas hasta cierto punto, eligiendo en su caso las estrategias exitosas de los *autores mediáticos*...” (63). This initial commentary grants us insight into a committed relationship with the director’s artistry and perceived motivations in producing “global cinema.” Four “lenses” organize the individual studies and a final interview with Miss Wasabi into a rich guided tour of Coixet’s techniques, aesthetics, and driving ideologies. I chose to read this text strictly in the order presented to experience the sequential logic by which the sections (or *ángulos*) propose to guide us through the director’s “ways of seeing.”

**Parte I. GRAN ANGULAR: Travelling sobre la producción de Isabel Coixet** explores Coixet’s methods for deconstructing the traditional predominance of 1) national modes of identification, production, and recognition, and 2) the heterosexual male gaze in favor of framing her cinematic stories in terms of taste, touch, smell and sound which, to varying degrees, implicate the spectator as more than passive voyeur. It opens with the aforementioned Capítulo 1. LUGARES, a discussion of Coixet as a transnational phenomenon who employs strategies of language (often English) and other conventions such as the nowhere/everywhere of Independent American cinema to sidestep the confines of national labels. Toribio insists that she forces us to “despertar al futuro transnacional, que parece