

THE POETICS OF MODERN MASCULINITY
IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY SPAIN

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For many writers, politicians and courtiers in early modern Spain, to raise the topic of poetry *was* to raise the topic of masculinity. In Spain, the sixteenth century marks a particular threshold – we might consider it the “early” early modern – during which the country’s subjects and perhaps especially its ranks of elites adjusted to a new national identity: Spain under the Habsburgs ceased to be a self-contained peninsular kingdom dominated by Castile and became a seat of a pan-European and incipiently global empire. Surprisingly, perhaps, one aspect of accommodating this shift was accepting a profound revision in the ways in which relationships between masculinity and nation, masculinity and letters, masculinity and poetry, and poetry and identity were conceived of in the social and cultural imagination. A survey of the so-called “new” art composed during this period (poetry based on Italian models and forms, primarily sonnets and songs) demonstrates that writers perceived a fundamental link between poetry and some of the historical, political and social processes that were transforming Spanish codes of gender, power and privilege.

One of the most striking examples of this phenomenon is the following sonnet, composed by the mid-sixteenth century captain, writer and courtier Hernando de Acuña (1514–80):

Cuando era nuevo el mundo y producía
gentes, como salvajes, indiscretas,
y el cielo dio furor a los poetas
y el canto con que el vulgo los seguía,
fingieron dios a Amor, y que tenía
por armas fuego, red, arco y saetas,
porque las fieras gentes no sujetas
se allanasen al trato y compañía;
después, viniendo a más razón los hombres,
los que fueron más sabios y constantes
al Amor figuraron niño y ciego,
para mostrar que dél y destos hombres
les viene por herencia a los amantes
simpleza, ceguedad, desasosiego.¹

(When the world was new and produced / a people, like savages, indiscreet, / and
the heavens gave furor to the poets/ and the song for which the crowd followed
them, / they imagined Love to be a god, and that he had / as his arms fire, a net, a
bow and arrows, / so that those wild, unsubjected people / would distance

¹ *Varias Poesías*, 248. All translations into English in this essay are my own, unless otherwise noted.

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themselves from his company, and from treating with him; / later, when men came to more reason, / those who were the wisest and the most steadfast / figured Love as a child, and blind, / to show that from him, and from those other men / descends, as an inheritance, to lovers / simple-mindedness, blindness, restlessness.)

A paraphrase of this poem might read, “In the old days, when the world was new, people were in thrall to the love god; but later men came to reason and discovered love to be an infantile force that left them blind and restless.” On the surface, it appears to be a conventional courtly bagatelle. The sixteenth-century sonnet often followed the models of Bembo’s *Rime* or the light and casual style ascribed by Baldassarre Castiglione to Aretino and his fellow courtiers in Urbino in *Il libro del cortegiano*.² But the form was also associated with the epigram, and with the witty insight or *agudeza*, and in keeping with this alternate identity the language of Acuña’s sonnet gestures to some weighty matters. In particular, the phrasing of the opening line, “Cuando era nuevo el mundo” draws the issue of the new world into the poem, and thereby establishes a second plane of significance that has to do with the contemporary imperial project: an archaic society in which indistinct peoples are ruled by their gods and their poets falls under the sway of a new regime, a rationalist meritocracy in which reason displaces tradition as the system that structures perception and truth. The definitive moment for this shift is line nine, “después, viniendo a más razón los hombres.” From the perspective internal to the poem, this line supplies the means by which the terrifying gods and their singers will be subdued. With the onset of the age of reason, the cosmos becomes subject to classification and norms, and this has an important impact on concepts of time and of the divine. “*Después*” sets the chaotic, frenzied era firmly in the past, while the implicit Christian worldview of the present era diminishes the gods of the archaic people to the status of ornamental cupids. Thus, viewed from this angle, the stakes of modernity as they are represented within Acuña’s sonnet are those of equilibrium: reason permits peace of mind.

Read in the context of early modern masculinity, however, several additional elements merit comment. First, the embrace of reason transforms how people are conceived of. Starting in line nine, the indistinct peoples (*gentes*) mentioned in line two become separated into men (*hombres*, line nine) and their others, who are excluded from representation. In addition, these men are themselves arranged into a hierarchy: the wisest and the most constant (*más sabios y constantes*, line ten) wield authority over figuration and meaning.³ As they are represented by Acuña, then, sixteenth-century imperialist ideologies affirmed masculine authority. However, the reference to “constancy” in line ten also provides an important clue regarding the nature of this authority. Acuña’s readers would have associated the word with Seneca, the Iberian Roman author of *De constantia*.

² See Aretino, *Cortegiano*, 30-32. Aretino composes a sonnet on the letter “S,” seemingly without forethought.

³ Acuña draws a distinction between line five’s imaginative *fingir* (to pretend), which is practiced by the archaic poets, and the contemporary rhetorical art of *figurar* (to figure), which provides the basis for poetry as it is composed by the wise modern man.

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As Jane Tylus has demonstrated, Seneca was an important model for sixteenth-century thinkers who sought protection against their vulnerability within the complex and sometimes crushing networks of power and privilege to which they had become subject in early modern culture.⁴ The self-restraint praised by Stoics such as Seneca offered one means of approximating a measure of *subjective* invulnerability, at least, since the Stoic repressed and policed himself before another could do so from without and by force. Acuña, no stranger to the workings of power under Charles V and Philip II, or to the vulnerability of even the most talented and aristocratic nobleman to political caprice, presented the Senecan Stoic as the foremost figure of modern masculinity in his sonnet.⁵ However, his manner of doing so establishes a link between the prudent restraint of the self and the restraint of poetic song. The order of reason is introduced into the poem, as I have said, at line nine, and line nine is, traditionally, the place of the *volta*, or the point at which a poem, which heretofore has flowed like a song, “turns” on itself to become a sonnet. Characteristically, Italian and most Spanish sonnets are composed in two quatrains rhymed ABBA and two tercets whose rhyme is a variation on CDE. The point of transition between one rhyme scheme and another (the *volta*) interrupts the quatrains in order to comment on them in some way. The resulting poem has been transformed from a song into something that more closely resembles an argument.⁶ In this particular sonnet, Acuña figures people and poetry as undergoing parallel processes when they become subject to reason. Their natural tendencies are turned back on themselves and circumscribed, but they are granted new, varying measures of prestige and authority from the regime that has usurped their native power: the principal duty of the wisest and the most constant men, after all, is neutralizing the power stirred up by songs of their savage subjects.

Why are poetry and song so deeply implicated in the social and the political registers of Acuña’s poem? Arguably, Spanish identity was particularly inextricable from

⁴ See *Renaissance Vulnerabilities*, especially 1-30.

⁵ Acuña was born into a noble family whose sons were celebrated fighters. His older brother, Pedro de Acuña, had fought in the Battle of Tunis (1535), as well as in other important battles, and was a favourite of the Marquis of Vasto. Hernando’s family connections and his skills in the courtly pursuits of arms and letters, along with his aptitude for governing (he was entrusted with the fort of Milan from a young age), kept him in the imperial retinue throughout the 1540s and 1550s. He was recognized for having set the Emperor’s Castilian prose translation of Olivier de la Marche’s *Le chevalier délibéré* into verse (he chose a Castilian meter), as well as for the bitter *Memorial* to Philip II, in which he describes his career and his patience with the courtier’s life and seeks compensation for his labours on behalf of the Emperor. See the brief but detailed biographical sketch by Díaz Laríos in *Varias Poesías*, 11-35.

⁶ As Spiller points out, the early history of the sonnet in the Sicilian court of Frederick the Great represents a clash between two court pursuits: music-making and legal argumentation. The sonnet bears the traces of their encounter, as “a tripartite structure of discourse – statement, development and conclusion – belonging to a speaker whose *eloquentia* is the outgrowth of wisdom begins to appear on top of the ... structure of the octave and sestet” (17).

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the Castilian tradition of epics and ballads, in part because of the way the medieval era came to an end in Spain.⁷ Prior to the accession of Charles V of Habsburg to the Spanish throne in 1517, during the centuries of the so-called Christian “Reconquest” of the Iberian Peninsula,⁸ the masculine ideal for Spain’s Christian population was shaped by militaristic values celebrated in poems such as the *Cantar del Mio Cid*, or *Bernardo del Carpio* and in the myriad fragments that circulated through the towns and the great houses of Christian Iberia. These poems described powerful men who wielded a noble will and a powerful fighting arm in the service of their personal honour and the fame of their ancestral houses. In the *Cantar del Mio Cid*, King Alfonso of Castile is forced to grant the Cid a status equal to his own in order to secure his services against the Almoravids: “Those who wish to serve the Campeador / I grant them this freedom, and may they go with the grace of the Creator; / we will gain more from this than if we suffer another disgrace” (“Los que quisieren servir al campeador / de mí sean libres y vayan con la gracia del Criador; / más ganaremos en esto que en otro deshonor”; 1370–73).

When the Flemish-raised grandson of Isabella and Ferdinand inherited the Spanish throne, the medieval era of the great Castilian knights came to a definitive end. While the Catholic Kings had set in motion the “courtierization” of the aristocracy, their policies lost purchase in the years between Isabella’s death and her grandson’s coronation. Charles and his ministers instituted policies that constrained the agency of the great noble houses and placed restrictions on the individual exercise of violence. In addition, under Charles, who was the Spanish monarch but also the Holy Roman Emperor, the force attributed to Spain’s sixteenth and seventeenth-century captains in popular discourse waned. Promoters of Habsburg imperial rule fostered a messianic ideology that presented Charles and his son, Philip II, as agents of God’s will that the globe be united under “one monarch, one empire and one sword” (“un monarca, un imperio y una espada”).⁹ Many writers found it necessary to accommodate their praise of the heroism and the virility of the Spanish fighter to religious and political doctrines which set even the most fearsome captain beneath God and the sovereign in a hierarchy of power. The following lines are taken from a heroic ode by Fernando de Herrera (1534–97), which compares the feats of John of Austria (1547–78) at Lepanto in 1571 to the triumph of Jove over the Titans:

con claro honor de España,
te mostrará la luz desta hazaña.

Que el cielo le concede de César sacro el ramo glorioso
que su valor herede,

⁷ On Spaniards’ persistent identification with the heroic Castilian past, see Cascardi’s introduction to his *Ideologies of History*, 1-15.

⁸ Critics have become increasingly sceptical about the traditional Spanish discourse of the *Reconquista*, since it implies that before the Ummayyad invasion in 711 A.D. a unified Christian nation inhabited the Iberian peninsula. Historically the peninsula was populated by diverse kingdoms and communities.

⁹ Acuña, “Ya se acerca, Señor, o ya es llegada” in *Varias Poesías*, 8.

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para que al espantoso
 Turco quebrante el brío corajoso
 ...
 Mas luego que aparece
 el joven d'Austria en la enriscada sierra,
 el temor entorpece
 a la enemiga tierra,
 y con ella acabó toda la guerra
 ...
 La Fama alzará luego
 y, con doradas alas, la Vitoria,
 sobre el orbe del fuego
 resonando, su gloria
 con puro resplandor de su memoria (86-120)

(the bright honour of Spain / will be shown to you by the light of this deed. / Heaven has conceded that the glorious branch of the sacred Caesar / inherits his valour, / so that he may break / the raging spirit of the fearsome Turk / ... / after he appears, / that Austrian youth, on the rocky mountain, / fear dulls / the enemy land / and with that, the battle is finished / ... / Henceforth, Fame / and Victory will spread, with golden wings, his glory, resonating across the orb of fire / and the pure splendour of his memory.)

Unlike the charismatic and rebellious heroes of the Castilian epics, Herrera's modern heroes participate in a strict hierarchy. Branches of the great trunk of "Caesar" Charles V (Juan of Austria was the Emperor's son by an extramarital union), they receive their victories as gifts from God. The shift away from discourses framing the sovereign virile agency of the Spanish hero paved the way for figures such as the Cid to be eclipsed by the rival figure of the prudent courtier, the Stoic administrator who devoted fewer days to war making than he did to signing the orders and circulars by which the far-flung empire was governed. Erudite poems of the sixteenth century increasingly elaborated this new ideal. In addition to Acuña's sonnet, we can turn to a better known example. The dedicatory section of the First Eclogue of Garcilaso de la Vega (1501–36) describes his patron, Pedro Álvarez de Toledo, the Viceroy of Naples:

Tú, que ganaste obrando
 un nombre en todo el mundo
 y un grado sin segundo,
 ahora estés atento sólo y dado
 al ínclito gobierno del estado
 albano ... (7-12)

(You, who through your labours / secured a name throughout the world / and a rank second to none, / are now attentive and given over solely / to the illustrious governance of the Alban state)

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Garcilaso makes mention of Álvarez's career as a warrior. Subsequent lines describe his patron as, "shining, armed, / representing the fierce Mars on earth" ("resplandeciente, armado, / representando en tierra el fiero Marte"; 13-14). But in a manner similar to Acuña, Garcilaso idealizes the politician and courtier, the former fighter now turned viceroy and man of leisure. In contrast to the two lines the poem devoted to Álvarez's illustrious military career, Garcilaso provides a more extended poetic description of him at the hunt:

... por ventura
 andes a caza, el monte fatigando
 en ardiente ginete que apresura
 el curso tras los ciervos temerosos,
 que en vano su morir van dilatando (16-20)

(by chance / you may be hunting, exhausting the mountain / on a spirited mare who speeds / her course after the frightened deer, / who in vain seek to delay their deaths.)

Separated by roughly a generation, as well as by their principal influences,¹⁰ Garcilaso, Acuña and Herrera each demonstrated attentiveness to the shifting norms and ideals that governed the image of Spanish masculinity. They also shared a sense that Italian poetics might offer the solution to representing the contemporary nobleman and, most importantly, his mediated and complex relationship to authority. Whereas Acuña devised a number of ingenious statements of the mutual dependence of the sonnet form and the modern courtier,¹¹ Herrera favoured the ode (which he described as a form of Italian *canzone*), because it was a form in which to commemorate the circumspect types of heroism practiced by the Spanish fighter in the Christian age.¹² Garcilaso tested the

¹⁰ Garcilaso is associated with imitating Bembo, Ariosto, Sannazaro and Tansillo; Acuña, while he also imitated Bembo and Tansillo, drew from Alamanni, Castellani and Trissino, among others (*Varias Poesías*, 49); and Herrera followed Italian mannerists such as Minturno and Ruscelli, as well as older writers, such as Lorenzo de' Medici. On Herrera's sources, see the contending views of Morros Mestres and Pepe and Reyes (*Anotaciones*, 51-64).

¹¹ Acuña reflected frequently in poetry about the overlap between genres of verse and kinds of men. See Middlebrook, *Imperial Lyric*, 14-58.

¹² "Después de la magestad heroica, dieron los antiguos el segundo lugar a la nobleza lírica poema nacido para alabanzas y narraciones de cosas hechas, y deleites y alegrías y convites. Requiere este verso ingenio vivo y espirituoso, voluntad cuidadosa y trabajadora, juicio despierto y agudo, las voces y oración pulida, castigada, eficaz y numerosa y particularmente, la jocundidad, como los élegos la lacivia y los epigramas los juegos. Y así como la poesía eróica tomó nombre del canto... así la lírica se apellidó... porque no se pronunciaban sin el canto de la lira (*Anotaciones*, 477-478)

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capacities of the sonnet and various forms of song, as well as the eclogue. All three of these men found scholarly reasons to employ Italian forms to represent modern varieties of Spanish masculine identity. But it is also the case that Juan Boscán had linked Italian hendecasyllables to Habsburg culture when he introduced his “new art” of Italianate lyric to Spanish readers. In well known lines of his famous Letter on poetry, addressed to his patron, the Duchess of Soma,¹³ Boscán identified the place and time of his poetic conversion, Granada, 1526:

... estando un día en Granada con el Navagero, al cual por haber sido varón tan celebrado en nuestros días he querido aquí nombrarle a vuestra señoría, tratando con él en cosas de ingenio y de letras y especialmente en las variedades de muchas lenguas, me dijo por qué no probaba en lengua castellana sonetos y otras artes de trovas usadas por los buenos autores de Italia (118)

(... it came about through a conversation. Because finding myself one day in Granada, with Navagiero, whom I wanted to mention by name to your grace, since he was a man so celebrated in our day, and treating with him of matters of wit and of letters, and especially regarding the variety of the many languages, he said to me why didn't I try in the Castilian tongue sonnets and other kinds of song used by the good authors of Italy.)

Boscán was referring to the festivities that were held in Granada that summer to honour the imperial wedding. The celebrations were lavish and drew people of importance from across Europe, but they were also important domestically because they marked a ceremonial endpoint to a period of struggle between the Emperor and his Spanish subjects. During the early years of Charles's reign, some factions of the nobility chafed against their new monarch, who sent an Italian and Burgundian court ahead of him to prepare the country for a new style of rule, and who, upon arrival, made it clear that his gaze extended beyond Spain and over Western Europe. At the same time, towns

(After the majesty of the heroic meter, the ancients gave second place to the nobility of the lyric, a poem born for encomia and the narration of feats achieved, of delights and pleasures and festivals. This verse requires a lively and spirited wit, a will to careful work, an attentive and sharp judgment, and voices and sentences that are polished, carefully considered, efficacious and measured; particularly it requires jocularly, just as elegies require license, and epigrams contests. And just as heroic poetry took its name from the song, so the lyric was named...because it was not pronounced without the song of the lyre).

¹³ Boscán probably composed the “Letter” in 1540 or 1542. It was published posthumously by his wife, Ana Girón, who most likely followed Boscán's instructions as she prepared the manuscript of *Las obras de Boscán y algunas de Garcilaso de la Vega repartidas en cuatro libros* (1543). The Letter sits at the head of the Second Book, which contains Boscán's Petrarchan lyric sequence. The Fourth Book is comprised of the Spanish poetry of Garcilaso. On the *Obras*, Boscán and Garcilaso, see Navarrete (38-125). See also Middlebrook, *Imperial Lyric*, 59-102, and Morreale, *Castiglione y Boscán*.

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throughout the Peninsula rebelled against the new king's authority in a series of uprisings commonly referred to as the *comuneros* revolts.¹⁴ By 1526, the final insurrections had been crushed, and punishments meted out. Furthermore, reconciliation was secured when the Emperor acceded to a number of requests from the towns, among these, the right to choose their Empress. The imperial honeymoon thus celebrated a new era of peace and stable rulership in Spain. But Boscán invoked the prior, troubled era as he made his claims for the superiority of his new art over traditional poetry. In a passage of the Letter in which he describes the sorts of criticism he encountered when he began to work in the new forms, he described how:

poniendo las manos en esto, topé con hombres que me cansaron. Y en cosa que toda ella consiste en ingenio y en juicio...pues cansándome habia de disgustarme, después de desgustado, no tenía donde pasar mas adelante...¿quién ha de responder a hombres que no se mueven sino al son de los consonantes? ¿Y quién se ha de poner en pláticas con gente que no sabe qué cosa es verso, sino aquél que calçado y vestido con el consonante os entra de un golpe por el un oído y os sale por el otro?...Si a éstos mis obras les parecieren duras y tuvieren soledad de la multitud de los consonantes, ahí tienen un cancionero, que acordó de llamarse general para que todos ellos vivan y descansen con él generalmente. (117)

(when first I put my hands to this, I encountered tiresome men. And in a thing which consists entirely of wit and judgment...well, fatigued, I necessarily became displeased, and once displeased, I had no means of moving ahead...who needs to respond to men who are not moved but by the soundings of consonance? And who needs to engage in conversation with people who do not know what verse is, unless it is that which, shod and saddled with its consonantal rhyme, enters you with one blow to the ear, and departs with another? ...If my works seem rough to these men, and they feel lonely for the multitude of rhymes, they have a *cancionero* which kindly called itself “general” so that all men of that sort might live and take repose with it generally.)¹⁵

¹⁴ On the revolts of the *comuneros* and the *hermandades*, see Lynch, *Spain under the Hapsburgs*.

¹⁵ Translating this passage poses a challenge. Differences exist in English and Spanish vocabularies of rhyme and meter; in addition, questions of beat, rhyme and measure were the subject of serious debate among sixteenth-century humanists. Navarrete has translated *consonantes* as “rhyme,” but Spanish “consonantal rhyme” is based on whole syllable. This inscribes a rule of beat that is absent from the contemporary English understanding of the word. David Darst uses the rather awkward “consonantal rhyme” in his translation. I have decided to use the terms “consonance,” “rhyme,” and, in one case, when it is unavoidable, “consonantal rhyme,” as I think they are indicated by the overall sense of Boscán’s text.

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Boscán was an accomplished rhetorician, and thus the tone of these comments is light hearted. Yet despite their air of *sprezzatura*, his words touched at the heart of contemporary anxieties about Spanish identity under imperial rule. The Italian verses Boscán was promoting had a fixed syllable count (eleven), but no set patterns of stress. Furthermore, the sonnets and *canzone* he modeled steered away from the mono-rhymes and the couplets popular in Castilian poetry.¹⁶ Boscán could therefore associate his new lyric with subtle, pleasurable acts of discernment and finely tuned aesthetic judgment, whereas the highly regular, accentual-syllabic rhymed couplets and quatrains of the traditional forms rode roughshod through the head like warring knights, striking the ear with blows (*golpes*) before slamming off and away. The metaphor set traditional, metrical verse in strong contrast with the modern style; but it also linked the traditional poetry with the *caballeros*, or the proud Castilian knights who were still moved by the galloping poetics. These men, Boscán implied, resisted the new poetic forms in the same manner that they had resisted the new political culture in the rebellions before 1526. In contrast to their loutish displays of chauvinism and physical force, Boscán represented his circle as wielding what Anthony J. Cascardi has termed “the authority of taste.”¹⁷ He countered his critics’ bombast with an urbane and understated wit which nonetheless carried an air of threat: “their arguments have seemed so vain to me that I run from even having paused to consider them” (“hanme parecido tan livianos sus argumentos, que de sólo haber parado en ellos, poco o mucho me corro”; 116). The phrase hints that his critics deserved shunning and social exile – a form of death, at court.

But was taste a manly enough form of prowess for a social elite whose position had been forged through centuries of war making? Even *Il libro del cortegiano* conceded the power of metrical war songs, which enraptured Alexander the Great himself, stealing him from the feast and onto the battlefield (100). Neither the sonnet nor the *canzone* was envisioned as having the power to do the same. Moreover, were Italian hendecasyllables capable of performing the cultural work of poetry, namely, the preservation of the historic feats performed during those centuries in the cultural memory? Traditional poetry mimics the cadences of native speech, and both beat and rhyme are powerful mnemonics that facilitate the transmission of stories over time. To change meters threatened to sever Spaniards’ connection with their past. Would the battles and the heroes of the Reconquest be remembered if the Spanish *arte mayor* and *coplas* forms were abandoned? Debate over the question persisted through the century. Boscán’s contemporary Cristobal de Castillejo (1480?-1550) penned a famous attack on Boscán and Garcilaso in which he accused them of heresy and treason for rejecting the poetic tradition that memorialized generations of Spanish men:

Resucítese Lucero
a corregir en España

¹⁶ It should be noted that Boscán was portraying a caricature of Castilian verse; indeed, his remarks in this section of the “Letter” were probably influenced by attacks on poetry that were gaining purchase in erudite circles during the sixteenth century.

¹⁷ See his article “Gracián and the Authority of Taste,” collected in *Ideologies of History*, 133-159.

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una tan nueva y extraña,
 como aquella de Lutero
 ...
 Bien se pueden castigar
 a cuenta de anabaptistas,
 pues por ley particular
 se tornan a bautizar
 y se llaman petrarquistas (5-15)

(Let Lucero be resurrected,¹⁸ / to correct in Spain / a [heresy] as new and strange /
 as that of Luther / ... / Well may they be punished / on charges of Anabaptism, /
 since by their own authority / they turn to baptize themselves / and call
 themselves Petrarchans).¹⁹

And in a passage of his 1580 *Anotaciones*, or “Annotations” to the poetry of Garcilaso de la Vega, Herrera attributed the decay of Spain’s international reputation to the contamination of Spanish letters by Italian influence:

¿En qué región se hallaron reyes tan fuertes, tan guerreros, tan religiosos como los que sucedieron a Pelayo? ¿Quien mereció la gloria, el nombre y opinión, traída de la famosa antigüedad, como Bernando del Carpio? ¿Quién puede exceder la fortaleza y piedad del Conde Fernán Gonzalez, esclarecido capitán de Cristo? ¿Quién fue tan beligeró y bien afortunado como el Cid Ruy Díaz? ... Pues ya la felicidad, prudencia y valor del rey católico son tan grandes, y sobran con tanto exceso los hechos de los otros reyes, que no sufren que se les compare otro alguno... Mas, ¿para qué me alargo con tanta demasía en estos ejemplos, pues sabemos que no faltaron a España en algún tiempo varones heroicos? ¿Faltaron

¹⁸ A famed Inquisitor.

¹⁹ See his “*Repreñión contra los poetas espanoles que escriben en verso italiano*” (Reproof against those Spanish poets who write in Italian meters). Among other barbs, Castillejo dismissed Boscán’s claim that he introduced a “new art” to Spain, asserting that Spain’s traditional poets had been writing in this ostensibly new line form all along: “Juan de Mena, como oyó / la nueva trova polida, / contentamiento se mostró, / caso que se sonrió / como de cosa sabida, / y dijo: “Según la prueba, / once sílabas por pie / yo hallo causa por qué / se tenga por cosa nueva, / pues yo mismo las usé” (157-165) (Juan de Mena, when he heard, / the new, polished song, / showed contentment, / such that he smiled, / as in recognition, / and said, “According to the example, / eleven syllables a foot / I find cause to wonder / why it is taken for a new thing, / for I myself used them”). Juan de Mena was one of Castile’s most important medieval poets, hence Castillejo was pointing to the connection between native poetic traditions and cultural history. In point of fact, there is a difference between the Castilian *arte mayor* and the Italian hendecasyllable. First of all, the *arte mayor* has twelve or fourteen syllables per line. In addition, stress in the *arte mayor* line falls on syllables five, eight and eleven, whereas the new hendecasyllable was – in theory, at least – free of those restrictions.

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escritores cuerdos y sabios que los dedicasen con immortal estilo a la eternidad de la memoria! (904)

(In what region were there found kings so strong, such warriors, men so religious as those who followed after Pelayo? Who deserved the glory, the name and the opinion, brought forth from famous ancient times, as much as Bernardo del Carpio? Who can exceed the force and the piety of Count Fernán González, distinguished captain of Christ? Who was so warlike and so fortunate as the Cid Ruy Díaz? Now that the happiness, the prudence and the valour of the Catholic King are so great, and surpass by so great an extent the deeds of other kings that he does not suffer comparison to another...But, why do I go on for such great length with these examples, for we know that Spain did not lack heroic men at any time. Lacking were sane and wise writers who commended them to eternal memory with immortal style!)

In Herrera's view, both the Castilian lyrics collected in the *cancioneros* and the sonnets and songs composed by Boscán and his early followers suffered from affectation and a particularly Italian brand of lassitude which led to an insufferable and a decidedly un-Spanish effeminacy.²⁰ Herrera may claim the titles of most prolix and most passionate of the many writers who shared this view; however, it had haunted the new art from its inception. Boscán reported his critics as dismissing the work as a "cosa de mujeres" (something for women): "they said that ... this verse was verse or prose, others argued saying that this must be principally for women" ("decían que este verso ... principalmente había de ser para mujeres"; 117).

Of course, in certain ways, the new art *was* for women. This was true literally in the case of Boscán, who shared in the humanist ideal of an integrated society in which men and women of education, judgment and taste were understood to be mental and

²⁰ Herrera restrained his criticism of Garcilaso's sonnets, although he reserved his greatest praise for his songs and eclogues. Even while praising Gutierre de Cetina (1520?-1554?) in the *Anotaciones*, Herrera still found it necessary to qualify: "cuanto a los sonetos particularmente, se conoce la hermosura y gracia de Italia" (with respect to the sonnets, in particular, one recognizes the beauty and the grace of Italy). He nonetheless finds that: "fáltale el espíritu y vigor, que tan importante es en la poesía; y así dice muchas cosas dulcemente, pero sin fuerzas" (280) (he lacks the spirit and vigour which are so important to poetry; and thus he says many things sweetly, but without force). Lest Herrera be viewed as irredeemably xenophobic, it should be noted that his proposals to reform and reinvigorate Spanish letters themselves drew on Italian writers from Minturno to Lorenzo de Medici (see Morros Mestres, as well as Pepe and Reyes, in the *Anotaciones*). Taken together, his diatribes against Italy and Italians reflect, first, a reaction against the weak writing and thoughtless Petrarchan imitations that troubled Italian reformers, as well, and, second, a nationalist sense of affront against Bembo, who had described the actions of the Spanish forces during the Sack of Rome in 1527 as "barbaric." See his comments on 899-900 of the *Anotaciones*.

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spiritual equals.²¹ His four-book *Las obras de Boscán y algunas de Garcilaso de la Vega repartidas en cuatro libros* (1543) and the Letter on poetry contained in it are dedicated to the Duchess. Moreover, the Petrarchan lyric sequence that fills the Second Book represents modern salvation as one part divine grace and one part marriage to the right woman, a sentiment he repeated in a Horatian epistle he wrote for his friend, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza.²² Thus to the criticism that the new art, “principalmente había de ser para mujeres,” Boscán responded with a rhetorical question that aligned him with the genteel courtiers of Castiglione’s Urbino: “who needs to waste time responding to them? I hold women to be so substantial, those who manage to be so, and many do, that in this case anyone who set himself to defending them would offend them” (“¿quién ha de gastar tiempo en responderles? Tengo yo a las mujeres por tan sustanciales, las que aciertan a serlo, y aciertan muchas, que en este caso quien se pusiese a defenderlas las ofendería”; 116-117).²³

Boscán drew on his modern views about gender – both his critical attitude regarding the traditional Castilian knights and his respect for witty, educated women – to shape his poetry. The subtext of gender in the poetry of his friend and collaborator Garcilaso, however, may have been more symptomatic of the experience of the Spanish nobleman under the new imperial regime. As Mary Gaylord observed, one notable feature of sixteenth-century treatises on poetry was the peculiar perspective they often inscribed: “The profession of the poet is contemplated from the point of view of a masculine actor whose enterprise is the expression of his masculinity...the most intense drama in this vision is a man’s internal struggle. The fragile femininity of poetry clearly corresponds to an equally feeble masculinity” (“La profesión del poeta se contempla desde el punto de vista de un actor masculino cuya empresa será la expresión de su virilidad...el drama más intenso en esta visión es la lucha interior del varón. A la frágil feminidad de una Poesía desamaparda, corresponde claramente otra debilidad gemela, la masculina”).²⁴ The figure of Garcilaso is, of course, a paragon of Renaissance Spanish virility. Nearly from the day of his death, the Toledan’s short life and tragic end were held up as a mirror in which other sixteenth- and seventeenth century noblemen might find themselves lacking.²⁵ His status as the foremost example of a man who wielded arms

²¹ A convincing reconstruction of the path by which Boscán received his Italian ideas is presented by Colombí-Monguió, “Boscán frente a Navagero.”

²² A third crucial element is appropriate friendship. See Middlebrook, *Imperial Lyric*, Chapter Two.

²³ The Second Book of the *Obras* serves as a companion piece to Boscán’s Castilian translation of Castiglione, *El cortesano* (1534). See the comprehensive analyses of the relationship between the three texts by Morreale, as well as Navarrete (38-72).

²⁴ “El lenguaje de la conquista y la conquista del lenguaje en las poéticas españolas del Siglo de Oro,” 471-472.

²⁵ For example, in his 1580 *El arte poética en romance castellano* (“The art of poetry in vernacular Castilian”) (c. 1580), Miguel Sánchez de Lima laments the era of “Garcilaso de la Vega...y otros muchos grandes, que nunca por la pluma dejaron la lanza, ni por la lanza la pluma: antes lo uno con lo otro les adornaba tanto, que por esto y por la afabilidad con que trataban a los inferiores, fueron tan amados, queridos y acatados de

and letters is supported by the graceful way in which he represented the shifting identity of the Spanish nobleman in the lines penned to Pedro Álvarez, examined above. Yet Garcilaso's views on Habsburg courtiership had a dark side. While he received privileges at the hands of powerful patrons and was occasionally favoured by the Emperor himself, Garcilaso also identified with the proud traditions of Castilian militarism, and he was clear-eyed about the vainglorious nature of some of the Emperor's most famous victories.²⁶ In addition, he was briefly imprisoned, at the behest of the Empress, in 1532, for having attended an illegal wedding.²⁷

Garcilaso's disappointments with the imperial regime inspired him to write a number of bitter, occasionally satirical lyrics which deal directly with his experiences. Poems such as Sonnet 33, Elegy 2 and Eclogue 2 have received a good deal of attention in recent years from critics seeking to situate him in the context of early modern power dynamics and Renaissance self-fashioning.²⁸ A different group of poems has been less carefully studied and perhaps merits another look. These are the poems I would call the "masochistic lyrics," works such as Sonnet 1 ("Cuando me paro a contemplar mi estado"), Sonnet 2 ("En fin a vuestras manos he venido"), Sonnet 3 ("La mar en medio y tierras he dejado"), Sonnet 5 ("Escrito 'sta en mi alma vuestro gesto") and Song 4 ("El aspereza de mis males quiero"). All of these poems eroticize the experience of subjection at the hands of a powerful Other and suggest themselves as allegories of the courtier's radically dependent and vulnerable state. Despite his close relationship with Boscán, and despite his beautiful Horatian epistle on the Stoic theme of perfect friendship, Garcilaso does not seem to have responded to the life of the courtier with reserves of Stoic self-possession.

The quatrains of his Sonnet 2 provide a good example of the masochistic lyrics:

En fin a vuestras manos he venido,
do sé que he de morir tan apretado
que aun aliviar con quejas mi cuidado
como remedio me es ya defendido;

todos, que no lo son tanto deste nuestro" (19) (the most excellent poet Garcilaso de la Vega, ... and many others, who never set down the lance for the pen, nor the pen for the lance; instead, by the one with the other they were so adorned, that for this and for the affability with which they treated their inferiors, they were so loved, desired and welcomed by all, as those of our time are not). Gaylord also discusses this essay. See "El lenguaje," 470-472.

²⁶ Elegy 2 begins to satirize the behaviour of Charles's troops after the victory at the Battle of Tunis (1535), before Garcilaso corrects himself: "Más ¿dónde me llevó la pluma mía? / A sátira me voy, paso a paso / ... Yo enderezo, señor, en fin mi paso / por donde vos sabéis que su proceso / siempre ha llevado Garcilaso" (22-27) (But, where did my pen lead me? / for step by step I head toward satire / ... / I will adjust, sir, my step at last / toward where you know its progress / has always led Garcilaso). The conquest of Tunis is also the subject of Sonnet 33, which I refer to below.

²⁷ See Cruz, "Self-Fashioning in Spain."

²⁸ See Cruz, "Self-Fashioning in Spain" and also Graf, "From Scipio to Nero to the Self."

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mi vida no sé en qué se ha sostenido
 si no es en haber sido yo guardado
 para que sólo en mí fuese probado
 cuánto corta un espada en un rendido (1-8)

(Finally, I come into your hands, where I know that I will die, so pressed that even to relieve my sorrow in laments is barred from me as a remedy; // I do not know how I have been maintained alive so long if has not been because I was being saved so that it might be tested in me alone how deep a sword cuts into a vanquished man).

On the rare occasions on which this poem is discussed, it is dismissed as immature work in which Garcilaso had not yet mastered the Italian style, and drew instead on Castilian scholasticism and on the tortured laments of Ausias March to fill out his hendecasyllables. Certainly, the cruelty of the beloved leads her to resemble March's *Dame pleina de seny*. However, considered in its cultural and historical contexts, the poem may also be informed by Garcilaso's experience of the demands placed on the modern imperial courtier, as he was required to transform his experiences of dependency, of constriction and of silence into occasions for pleasurable dissembling. A possible allegory of courtly subjection is more marked in Garcilaso's Sonnet 1:

Quando me paro a contemplar mi estado,
 y a ver los pasos por do me ha traído,
 hallo, según por do anduve perdido,
 que a mayor mal pudiera haber llegdo;
 mas cuando del camino estoy olvidado,
 a tanto mal no sé por dó he venido;
 sé que me acabo, y más he yo sentido
 ver acabar conmigo mi cuidado.
 Yo acabaré, que me entregué sin arte
 a quien sabrá perderme y acabarme
 si quisiere, y aún sabrá quererlo;
 que pues mi voluntad puede matarme,
 la suya, que no es tanto de mi parte,
 pudiendo, ¿qué hara sino hacerlo?

(When I pause to consider my state and to look at the steps that brought me here, I find, judging by the places I wandered, lost, that I might have come to a worse state; // but when I am forgetful of my path, I do not see how I could have come to such evil; I know that I am reaching my end, but it is more that I regret that my cares will end with me. // I will end, for I gave myself over artlessly to one who

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knows how to destroy me and finish me should she wish to do so,²⁹ and she will know how to wish for that; // for since my will can kill me, hers, which is not on my side, being able to, what will it do but effect it?)

A more accomplished work of Petrarchan *imitatio* than Sonnet 2, Sonnet 1 is modeled on Petrarch 298, “Quand’io mi volgo indietro a mirar gli anni” (When I turn back to gaze at the years). The works share the initial image of a speaker who, having been disabused of the illusions which once led him astray, gazes back over his life. The Spanish poem deviates from its Italian precursor, however, in its insistent worldliness. For example, the first eleven lines of Petrarch’s sonnet read:

Quand’io mi volgo indietro a mirar gli anni
 ch’anno fuggendo i miei pensieri sparsi,
 et spento ’l foco ove agghiacciando io arsi,
 et finito il riposo pien d’affanni,
 rotta la fé degli amorosi inganni,
 et sol due parti d’ogni mio ben farsi,
 l’una nel Cielo et l’altra in terra starsi,
 et perduto il guadagno de’ miei danni,
 i’ mi riscuoto, et trovomi sì nudo
 ch’i’ porto invidia ad ogni estrema sorte,
 tal cordoglio et paura ò di me stesso.

(When I turn back to gaze at the years that fleeing have scattered all my thoughts, and put out the fire where I freezing burned, and ended my laboring repose, // broken the faith of amorous deceptions, and turned all my wealth into two parts only (one is in Heaven, the other in the ground), and destroyed the profit of my losses, // I shake myself and find myself so naked that I am envious of every most extreme misfortune, such anguish and fear I have for myself.)³⁰

Because Petrarch draws so heavily on Stoic and Neoplatonic philosophies, the nakedness and the vulnerability described in lines 9-11 appear to be metaphysical abstractions. The poem is vague with respect to the cause of its speaker’s suffering; it seems to be an assumed posture that has been refined over a long course of habit. Of course, that is precisely the case. The sonnet appears deep into the 366-poem *Canzoniere*, where it serves a dual purpose, elaborating on the images of Petrarch’s weariness as the years roll past and describing his physical and spiritual emptiness before his salvation. In contrast, Garcilaso’s sonnet remains rooted firmly in the earthly register of cause and effect. Where Petrarch is allusive, Garcilaso’s speaker states clearly, in the matter-of-fact preterit tense, that his imminent death is the result of having given himself over entirely

²⁹ Rivers points to two versions of this poem, one in which the line eleven reads, “si ella quisiere” and the other, which I use here, following Rivers: “si quisiere.” See his discussion in *Garcilaso de la Vega*, 67. I discuss gender in the poem below.

³⁰ The translation is by Durling, 476.

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to the powerful and omniscient figure who will now deal out his doom. The all-knowing, all-powerful, but terrestrial nature of the agent here, added to Garcilaso's use of the word *estado* (state), and the suggestion of imprisonment which Daniel Heiple finds in the second half of the poem, invite us to consider whether Sonnet 1 represents an attempt to fuse courtly and amorous complaint.³¹ A similar experiment in deploying Petrarchan models to reflect critically on Habsburg culture is found in Sonnet 33 ("Boscán, las armas y el furor de Marte"), a poem which – we might note as an aside – finishes on a note of masochistic self-immolation. The sonnet begins with a comparison between the imperial forces and the armies of the war god and ends with the figure of Garcilaso as Dido, weeping and vanquished on her own city walls:³²

Aquí donde el romano encendimiento,
dond' el fuego y la llama licenciosa
solo el nombre dejaron a Cartago,
vuelve y revuelve al amor mi pensamiento,
hiere y enciend' el alma temerosa,
y en llanto y en ceniza me deshago. (9-14)

(Here, where the Roman torch, / where the fire and the licentious flame / left only
the name of Carthage, / my thoughts turn and return to love, / my fearful soul
wounds and burns, / and in weeping and ashes I am undone)³³

Thus while Boscán composed poetry to share with erudite women, and his critics, including Herrera, found the Italianate lyrics to be womanish, Garcilaso explored their potential to represent a pressing contemporary circumstance, the effeminization of the Spanish nobleman within Charles V's imperial regime.

The above survey of the poetry and the criticism that was composed in Spain during the sixteenth century reveals two questions that preoccupied the country's courtly and lettered elites during the period: Were Spain's noblemen still heroic and virile in the modern age? If so, was poetry still the discourse in which to celebrate them? Prose genres such as historical narrative and the novel were gaining in prominence, and they would increase their representational scope as the modern era progressed.³⁴ In the meantime, in Europe, at least, poetry appeared to be fading from relevance.³⁵ As we have seen, the epic had lost privilege as a cultural form. The sonnet, while a flexible and ingenious verbal mechanism in the hands of a poet like Acuña, or (perhaps) Garcilaso, was nonetheless

³¹ On Garcilaso and imitatio see Heiple, *Garcilaso de la Vega*, 58-61.

³² On Garcilaso's use of exemplum to criticize the Emperor, see Graf, "From Scipio to Nero to the Self."

³³ Literally, "I undo myself."

³⁴ For an overview of the discourses that pitted poetry against prose in sixteenth-century Spain, see Randel, "El lenguaje de la conquista y la conquista del lenguaje."

³⁵ The situation was different in the Americas, where *criollos* and men and women of letters were seeking to found a culture that would be legible and prestigious in the eyes of Spain. Poetry was central to the project.

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treated by most writers as court coin, a stamp of a certain degree of erudition and an affiliation with the institutions of power. Given this state of affairs, it seems fitting to conclude this discussion of masculinity and poetry under the first two Habsburgs with a sonnet by Cervantes that puts paid to both the virile Spanish hero and his poem in one deft blow:

Al Túmulo del Rey Felipe II En Sevilla

“Voto a Dios que me espanta esta grandeza
y que diera un doblón por describilla!,
porque, a quién no suspende y maravilla
esta máquina insigne, esta braveza?

Por Jesucristo vivo, cada pieza
vale más de un millón, y que es mancilla
que esto no dure un siglo, o gran Sevilla,
Roma triunfante en ánimo y riqueza!

Apostaré que el ánima del muerto,
por gozar este sitio, hoy ha dejado
el cielo, de que goza eternamente.”

Esto oyó un valentón y dijo: “Es cierto
lo que dice voacé, seor soldado,
y quien dijere los contrario miente.”

Y luego, incontinente,
caló el chapeo, requirió la espada,
miró al soslayo, fuése, y no hubo nada.

(To the Coffin of King Philip II, in Seville // “I swear to God I’m amazed by this grandeur, and I’d give a gold piece to be able to describe it!, for who is not overwhelmed and astounded by this spectacular structure, this fierceness? // By Jesus, every item is worth a fortune, and it’s a shame that it can’t last a century, oh great Seville, a Rome triumphant in spirit and in wealth! // I’ll bet that the soul of the departed, to enjoy this place, today has come down from heaven, where he enjoys eternal glory.” // A braggart heard this and replied, “It’s true what you say, mister soldier, and anybody that says otherwise lies.” // And then, straightaway, he set his cap, clutched at his sword, looked askance, walked off, and there was nothing.)³⁶

³⁶ This poem is collected by Rivers in *Muses and Masks* (42-43). I have used his translation, with a minor adjustment to the ending, which Rivers translates as, “and nothing happened.”

This type of poem, a *soneto con estrambote*, or “sonnet with a tail” was popular among burlesque writers, and thus with Cervantes when his object was satire. In this example, the “tail,” or the extra tercet tacked onto the end of the poem, represents the final evacuation of the medieval ideal of the heroic Spanish swordsman. As the erstwhile stirring scene of the soldier who visits the tomb of his king unfolds, Cervantes uses elevated language to invoke great and virile preoccupations: The oath before God (lines one and five), the soldier’s wonder at the great monument (lines one through six), references to Rome (line eight) and to the passage of time (lines six and seven). But while the language is present, the culture that infused it with meaning is not, with the result that the utterance heaps effacement upon effacement: the ornate tomb, despite its expense, will not survive a century; the king who is buried there goes unrecognized; the equally anonymous soldier, who is given the role of lyric speaker through most of the poem, announces and then demonstrates that his powers of description fail him. Even the poem – which, as a sonnet, should also serve as a monument to eternity – is undone here. Bloated and distorted by the addition of the three extra lines, it performs the exact opposite of poetry’s commemorative function, fixing no image in place, erroneously foretelling the fall of the monument, and claiming ignorance of the king’s name. When the taciturn braggart, himself a contradiction in terms, stalks off, taking the whole scene with him, in line 17, we can guess where he is going: off to the local book seller’s to pick up a copy of *Don Quijote*.

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