

Mirror on the Stage:  
(Refl)Ekphrasis and Agustín Moreto's *La loa de Juan Rana*

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Best known for his play *El lindo Don Diego* (1662), the remainder of Agustín Moreto's *oeuvre*, including his *entremés*<sup>1</sup> work, has been mostly ignored by critics. Cayetano Alberto de la Barrera y Leirado asserts: "Su ingenio, viveza y natural festivo, le abrieron las puertas de los saraos y academias, y acaso debió al jóven é ilustre Calderón la entrada y parte que tuvo en los festines literarios del Buen Retiro" (275).<sup>2</sup> Like Pedro Calderón de la Barca, Moreto composed theatrical works for a famous actor of the Spanish royal courts, Juan Rana, alias Cosme Pérez (1593-1672). Eugenio Asensio has asserted that Juan Rana represented "la más completa identificación del actor con su personaje" (166).<sup>3</sup> Hannah E. Bergman similarly observes that this character preserves "rasgos del bobo del teatro anterior, que se destilan en algunos toques característicos: la 'flema' que desespera a los demás interlocutores, las disparatadas 'razones' de sus explicaciones, un determinado traje, ciertos ademanes, gestos, cualidades de la voz" (67).<sup>4</sup> With these numerous accolades one may easily have overlooked the fact that in 1636 Juan Rana was arrested by Spanish authorities and found guilty of sodomy. This could have single-handedly ended a person's career and, at times, his life, yet his popularity grew after receiving a curious pardon from the Spanish monarchy.<sup>5</sup> Peter E. Thompson analyses many interludes written specifically for this Spanish *gracioso* and demonstrates that "what is important [...]

are the many Juan Rana *entremeses* that constitute a professional, public, and flagrant confession of the actor's irregular sexuality" (8). In other words, playwrights, as will be shown in Moreto's *La loa de Juan Rana* (1664),<sup>6</sup> would write this actor personal works that would include clues and references to his publicly known sexual crime.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, there are critics, like Francisco Sáez Raposo, who find Thompson's study anachronistic, as the "revolución o liberación sexual" of the 1960s was centuries away from Golden Age Spain (34). I would point out that there are many precedents during the seventeenth-century in the Iberian Peninsula where we find examples of homosexual<sup>8</sup> characters or *graciosos* (for example, the aforementioned character of don Diego) that show by counterexample Raposo's statement.<sup>9</sup> In spite of this critique, in this present study, I will not only define and discuss a new literary word, *reflekphrasis*, but I will also use it as a way to study the possible homoerotic or sodomitic undertones of Juan Rana in Agustín Moreto's *La loa de Juan Rana*.

To begin, the similarities between the homosexual and the artistic, which is crucial to this current study, are plentiful and deserve some explanation. Spain, much like the rest of Europe, defined homosexuality as a combination of both male and female characteristics. The same dualities present in human sexuality are equally found in art but, much like in *La loa de Juan Rana*, an imbalance and power struggle surges. The beauty of the feminine is transferred by the male pen in an attempt to appropriate what is otherwise foreign to the masculine representation. James A.W. Heffernan states that a battle of expression emerges between the feminine and the masculine; "the male speech striving to control a female image that is both alluring and threatening, of male narrative striving to overcome the fixation impact of beauty poised in space" (1). In other

words, through art and literature, the masculine tries to control the feminine. As a result, Heffernan investigates this struggle between the male word and the female image through the use of *ekphrasis*. An ekphrasis, broadly speaking, is an ancient stylistic recourse that sketches a visual object through narration. Michael Baxandall has also described ekphrasis as having “qualities of detailed lifelikeness, of physiognomic expressiveness, of variety, and they describe these in an affirmative form, for ekphrasis is a device of epideictic, the rhetoric of praise or blame: there are no neutral ekphrases” (87). Frederick A. De Armas has defined many different kinds of ekphrases, such as notional (a description of an imagined work), combinatory (combines more than one work of art), and fragmented (uses parts of a work of art), yet affirms that “most literary ekphrases cannot be held to just one of the above categories” (“Simple Magic” 23).<sup>10</sup> William Worden, when reflecting on the possible Cervantine theory of art and how Miguel de Cervantes illustrates a future painting of himself, coins the term “auto-ekphrasis” which may be defined as an ekphrasis described by the same person being portrayed in the painting (180-81).<sup>11</sup> While there are various types of ekphrases, I believe that a new ekphrastic representation emerges in *La loa de Juan Rana*. In this *loa*<sup>12</sup> or *entremés*, the reader is confronted with an original form of ekphrasis or what I would like to term *reflekphrasis*. As we shall soon see in the study of the *loa*, *reflekphrasis* is a depiction of a reflection in the narration. More specifically, the reflection presently being studied comes from a mirror that Juan Rana looks into. I will argue that in *La loa de Juan Rana* specific reflekphrastic scenes represent a more complex play on the sexuality and sexual crime of this fool. In this *loa*, the male pen of Moreto is in a way controlling the feminine characteristic (i.e. sodomy) of the *gracioso*. The mirror is central in explaining the *loa* and reflekphrasis.

Like all *loas*, *La loa de Juan Rana* is performed before the first act, and here serves to introduce the actors of the *entremés* to the audience. It begins with a monologue in which a retired Juan Rana warns us that “ya nada me hacen creer con desemulo” (234). Although around thirty years have passed since his very public arrest and eight years since he “retired”<sup>13</sup> from the stage, the beginning of the *loa* insinuates that Juan Rana feels very comfortable alone and does need to return to theatre.<sup>14</sup> Orozco, another actor, enters and informs Juan Rana that his presence is requested by the royal family to perform in a *loa* at festivities.<sup>15</sup> Orozco also surprises the *gracioso* by notifying him that he will perform “seis papeles” in the *loa*. Even though he brushes off this suggestion, Juan Rana moves center stage. While at first hesitant to participate, Juan Rana is asked by Orozco:

Pues si os veis en un espejo  
con una Luna muy fina  
entera vuestra persona,  
desde el pie a la coronilla,  
y tocándoos con las manos  
halláis ser otra distinta,  
¿no creeréis que sois la otra? (240)

Juan Rana responds that this transformation would be absurd and wonders where such a mirror is found to which Orozco answers: “¿Adónde? en el armería” (242). The reader likely assumes that this is a direct reference to the *Armería Real* on the palace grounds. As this argument goes further, on stage there would seem to appear two mirrors.<sup>16</sup> Juan Rana looks to one of the mirrors where he very easily identifies himself and subsequently glances at the empty frame. As the play progresses, the actor describes the majority of the characters that appear behind this frame. The characters that Juan Rana “performs” and believes to be present are Antonio de Escamilla, Alonso de

Olmedo, Mateo de Godoy, Maria de Quiñones, Maria de Prado, and Manuela de Escamilla, all well-known actors of the time.<sup>17</sup> Each time a character emerges, Juan Rana extends his hand through this *espejo* and pulls out the actor from the other side. In the end, Juan Rana is able to act out all six characters in one *loa*.

In essence, the joke of this *loa* is based on the inability of the unsophisticated actor to tell the difference between a reproduction, that of the mirror, and the real person. It is this kind of confusion that makes Don Quijote think that the puppets are real people or Finea in *La dama boba* (1613) reject a suitor, after seeing a portrait of him, because he has no legs. As Laura R. Bass asserts, “only a fool [...] does not know that a portrait is just a representation and not a presence” (114).<sup>18</sup>

Effectively, the qualities of the mirror, or, more precisely, its frame, play a vital role in *La loa de Juan Rana*. This portal to the stage is used as a passage from which all the characters come to life; as such, it serves as a theatrical “womb.” The frame, by itself, serves as a means for reproduction in the literal (reproductive) and artistic sense of the word. According to the *Diccionario de Autoridades*, *reproducción* is “la producción que de nuevo, o segunda vez se hace de una misma cosa, o la restauración de la ya deshecha u destruida, por la unión de las partes que la componían” (586). In other words, reproduction is a copy and reflection of an original. The mirror not only functions as a birthing canal but also reproduces an “inverted” image of reality: it takes all the parts of the original and reverses it; the left becomes the right and vice versa. Sabine Melchoir-Bonnet also notes a parallel between the mirror and visual art: “the mirror shares, with the art of painting, an emphasis on the worth of the image, resemblance, and simulation, all of which are intertwined with the theme of looking at one’s self,” much like Juan Rana does throughout the *loa*, “the visual arts are thus

inseparable from any study of the mirror" (3). Painting and theatrical staging, like the mirror, moreover, are incapable of fully and correctly replicating the original object as they are solely visual reproductions. An ekphrasis as a written reproduction of visual art or object is just that, a reproduction. However, given that the visual arts and the mirror are so connected, an ekphrasis or, in this case, a reflekpheasis can therefore be defined as a suspension in the action to describe a reflection be it of oneself or that of another person, much like the descriptions given by Juan Rana of what he believes to be himself but are, in fact, other characters in the *loa*.

It is interesting to note that it was not only wealthy royals and nobles that owned mirrors at this time but also actors: "an actor for the king, for example, possessed six [mirrors], but they were perhaps tools, used to study the gestures of his craft" (Melchoir-Bonnet 29). In this *loa* six characters are pulled out by Juan Rana from the empty frame much like the number of mirrors used by a monarch's actor. This *gracioso* may be using these six different individuals as a tool not only to show some hidden characteristics that will pick up on his sexual deviation but also to practice and study his craft by describing what he sees.

When discussing the inversion of the mirror and the importance of it to the reflekpheasis in the present *loa*, we must not forget that, at the time, the word *invertido* was a synonym for a homosexual: the sexually inverted person.<sup>19</sup> While trying to mimic the opposite sexuality the *invertido*, ironically, ends sexual reproduction. In an interesting twist, only three years had passed since the birth of the future king Charles II of Spain (1661-1700), the only surviving offspring of Philip IV of Spain (1605-1665). Charles II, much like the *invertido*, was later incapable of producing an heir possibly caused by the amount of

consanguineous marriages that was practiced by the Habsburgs. As a result, his death also brought the end of the Habsburg reign in Spain. Juan Rana was in fact married, as Bergman affirms, but “*enviudó antes de 1636, y por lo visto no se volvió a casar*” (66). He also had two children but both of them had died by the time this *loa* was enacted (68), leaving him, like Charles II, without an heir. Even though it may not be argued that the *loa* foreshadows the future of Charles II’s reign, one can nonetheless contend that the inverted image of the mirror or its frame is taken to yet another level by making a covert reference to Juan Rana’s sodomitical crime.

María Cristina Quintero offers many examples of art that illustrate the mirror and reflection where women take a central role (for example, Titian’s *Venus at her Toilet*).<sup>20</sup> Quintero declares that the paintings “depict a beautiful woman” (87) and while Juan Rana was certainly not this, he is the holder, as it were, of the mirror on the stage making him symbolically assume the feminine role and quality. As a *gracioso*, moreover, he is made to parody the role that women played in front of the mirror as seen in Golden Age art. Instead of looking at himself and contemplating his beauty, he will breathe life into his characters. Then again, for the audience or reader of the play this would not have been the first example of a male holding or looking at a reflective image of himself. The story of Narcissus gives a hyperbolic example not only of a *reflekphrasis* but also touches on the theme of vanity. The narration is stopped, much like it is seen in the *loa*, to describe Narcissus’s beauty as reflected in the water. There is, however, a slight difference between the Narcissus story and the present *loa*: Narcissus dies while reaching for his own reflection<sup>21</sup> whereas Juan Rana gives life to other characters; the former just happens to be a nonproductive *reflekphrasis*. For Narcissus, vanity gets the better of him. It is

typical at the time for the woman to be portrayed as sitting in front of the mirror to observe her own reflection. Neither Narcissus nor Juan Rana is actually a woman, yet both use a female-identified object to relate their respective stories. For Narcissus, the reflection stemming from the water can easily stand for the mirror itself. Juan Rana, because of his known crime against nature, as has been argued, is part of both the male and female domain. The mirror, as a prime example of inversion, furthermore advances the homosexual undertone of the theatrical work. Let us now turn to the *loa* to show how reflekpheasis is used to further play on this *gracioso*'s sexuality.

Ironically, in *La loa de Juan Rana*, this famous buffoon warns us not to believe everything we see, but he does just that as the action progresses. While hesitant at first, Orozco successfully convinces Rana to go to the palace, the exact location of the mirror which is used as a tool of perception, persuasion, and act.<sup>22</sup> The first manifestation of reflekpheasis appears when Juan Rana believes to be Antonio de Escamilla. He is described as being an *estatua* that Juan Rana must pull out of the frame “para que haga su papel” (242). Henceforth all characters come to life much like the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. Pygmalion, a very talented sculptor, falls in love with his sculpture but is unable to bring her to life. He prays to Venus, who takes pity on him and asks Cupid to use one of his arrows to give life to the statue-Galatea. If we follow the storyline of the myth and take it one step further by relating it to our current *loa*, Juan Rana would fall in love with every sculpture that he symbolically breathes life into by pulling them out of the mirror; since the first three characters he pulls out are men this could be a possible hidden allusion to his sodomitical acts. The *loa*, then again, does not overtly claim that Juan Rana loves this character-statue. The mirror does, on the other hand, fulfill its purpose



when Juan Rana asserts that “pensaba que era / así un tantico Escamilla” (244). It is important to note that Escamilla is the only character in the interlude that is referenced as being an *estatua*. This is also the only time in the *loa* where the word is ever found. Juan Rana does not describe the reflection seen in the frame but it certainly does reflect something inside Juan Rana: his inner Escamilla.

For the second character, the well-known Spanish *gracioso* is further confused when told that he would become Olmedo:

Digo, que Escamilla soy; [...]
 mas ¿cómo he de ser Olmedo
 con la cara de un Macías,
 bigotillo a la francesa,
 planta de retrato, y vista,
 la capita a la jineta,
 y con la habla de almíbar? (244)

Here, a pure *reflekphrasis* describes what Juan Rana sees even though, to the audience of the *loa*, he was already behind the “mirror.” The viewer or reader of the play may parallel the appearance of Olmedo and Lope de Vega’s *El caballero de Olmedo* (1620). Peter E. Thompson claims that the tones of the verses mock those of the renowned play but in doing so they also link Juan Rana to the tragic hero: “Indeed, with his arrest for *el pecado nefando*, Juan Rana could have been put to death. Instead he, unlike Alonso, returned alive and well from *la Puerta de Alcalá*” (167 n24). The actor also believes, similarly to the Escamilla episode, that there are some resemblances between himself and the actor he sees as his own reflection: “yo podía ser Olmedo, / así en algunas cosillas” (244).<sup>23</sup> In yet another possible extratextual reference, the audience may connect these particular lines to those found in *Lazarillo de Tormes* where Lázaro works for a “fraile de la Merced” but quickly leaves him for breaking

too many shoes and “por otras cosillas que no digo” (111). In his edition, Francisco Rico acknowledges the sexual connotation that *romper los zapatos* and the word ‘cosillas’ had and have for readers (111-12 n8-9) making this homoerotic reference more overt.<sup>24</sup> It was very common for irregular sexualities to be portrayed on stage in seventeenth-century Spain because theatrical commentators were also concerned with “visual stimulants to heterosexual passion: lascivious dancing, for example, and the revealing costume of the female transvestite” (Bradbury 570). As Gail Bradbury has noted in her study of sexuality in the Spanish theatre, “dramatists were not averse to including the occasional sly reference to homosexual practices” (571). Both Moreto's Don Diego and his depiction of Juan Rana in this interlude show that the playwright did not concern himself with this overt sexual commentary in the presence of the men at court. In any case, the similarities between Juan Rana and Olmedo appear to have some underlined and veiled references to sodomy.

As the final male character takes centre stage, Juan Rana's simplicity does not seem to dissipate as he is just as surprised to become the *viejo* Godoy. Since this *loa* was performed in 1662, our *gracioso* was close to his seventies so it should come as no surprise that the parallel of both Godoy and Juan Rana is their age: “porque siempre los mozos / vuelven viejos” (246). The purpose of the reflekphrasis in the first three characters, while still somewhat maintaining its reflection in the male sphere, is clear as Juan Rana sees in himself something that is manifested through these actors: Escamilla references the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea; Olmedo alludes to a possible link to *El caballero de Olmedo* and the homoerotic episode in *Lazarillo de Tormes*; and, Godoy, through his age, resembles our famous fool. In the end, the male characters paint Juan Rana as an enamored

and aging sodomite. In a sense, the male eye continues to control the overtly feminine.

But Juan Rana is not limited to only play male roles. He is, in effect, very conscious of his inability to play female characters and believes to have caught on to Orozco's deception when stating that:

Pues ahora he de cogeros.  
 Confieso por mi desdicha,  
 que me he vuelto tres barbados  
 de personas muy distintas,  
 pus no puedo hacer la [loa]  
 sin la gente femenina.  
 Y no es posible hacer,  
 que con esta mascarilla  
 sea María de Quiñones,  
 cuya cara es bien prendida  
 cuyo talle es bien carado  
 cuya habla es muy mellisla<sup>25</sup>,  
 cuya representación  
 es de lo de a mil la libra. (246)

Even though he is at first hesitant to believe that he can portray the next three female roles, he is once again tricked into looking at the empty frame and see María de Quiñones waiting for the *gracioso* to recognize her. He does not realize that the mirror from the *Armería Real* is playing tricks with his perception and, this time, his sexuality through reflephrasis. For the reader and even for the protagonist, the fact that his reflection is both male and female does not warrant extreme gender panic as this metamorphosis goes along with the purpose and the amusement of the *entremés*. The fact that this gender change also entertains the common knowledge of his forbidden sexual acts is a visual and theatrical game that Moreto plays with his audience. The

reflekphrasis is the necessary stylistic tool to illustrate both genders that Juan Rana embodies as it reflects not only his masculine but also his feminine attributes by describing other characters.

Juan Rana paints himself as both a man and a woman before he looks at what he thinks is his reflection but is in fact just other actors on the other side of a frame. He, as it were, has the characteristics of both genders as he is a man (male trait) who is attracted to other men (female trait): he is in fact representing a sodomite. The reflekphrastic scenes reinforce Juan Rana's perceived same-sex desires by directly describing him as a hermaphrodite. In effect, he even recognizes this ambiguity as he shouts: "Santa Cristina; / ¡que yo mismo no supiese / nunca, que era hermafrodita!" (246). A hermaphrodite, as a hybrid of both sexes, allows our *gracioso* to fool himself not only into believing that "seis papeles podéis hacer" (238) but also that he can honestly be a man and a woman at the same time.

It is not sufficient, nevertheless, to play just one female role. The *loa* makes it so that this buffoon believes that he is a man and a woman as the "seis papeles" are divided equally between male and female actors. In order for the sexual ambiguity to truly become a factor in this *entremés*, Juan Rana must not only become three different male actors but he must also portray three different actresses. There is, therefore, equality amongst the sexes. As it turns out, much can also be said about the final two characters that Juan Rana embodies: Maria del Prado, "tan hermosa, tan pulida / como aceda" (248) but very temperamental; and Manuela de Escamilla, a talented singer.

In an interesting twist, María del Prado, another distinguished actress, is the only *estatua* in the play that speaks. Not only that, but she does this before being pulled out of the mirror and brought to life. Her impatience is shown as she yells:

“Ea, valga el diablo sus tripas. / Acabe, pues, porque estoy / ya de esperarle mohina” (248). Basically, she wants Juan Rana and Orozco to quickly finish up the interlude as it is putting her in a sour mood. Her disgruntled attitude appears to mirror that of Juan Rana in the early stages of this one act comedic play. As an angry character who wants to close out the *loa*, Maria del Prado inversely resembles that hesitant and unwilling *gracioso* who did not want to participate in the production of the *entremés*. A mirror, as already stated, shows the opposite: Juan Rana did not want to play a part in this *loa* much like Maria del Prado could not wait for it to be over. This flashback further acknowledges the femininity within Juan Rana as he is being reenacted by a woman with a hostile attitude. We will shortly return to this point but in any case what is important to note is how Juan Rana fully adopts his hermaphrodite qualities by not only saying that he is a male with female qualities but also having a woman take up his role and becoming a fool, as we will see portrayed in the next and final character.

María del Prado, as has already been discussed, is the only *estatua* that speaks before being actually pulled out of the mirror. This scene may also point to what Juan Pablo Gil-Osle has termed as a speaking ekphrasis or the “act of speaking, or the appearance of it, in one painting” (95). While specifically referring to Bocaccio’s *Amorosa visione*, the reasons for the usage of speaking ekphrases can also be useful in this current study as “they interact directly with the viewer through speech; while speaking they dramatize well-known stories; they assure their permanence in the mind of the reader; and most important of all, a selective use of the powerful rhetorical speaking ekphrasis enhances the voice of the [narrator]” (101). In other words, Maria del Prado surprises Juan Rana by speaking to him; she is able to play with this *gracioso*’s sexuality by making him believe

that he has turned into another woman; by being the only character that speaks, she stands out and could possibly be remembered by the audience; and, finally, Agustín Moreto may be emphasizing the importance of this character to the *entremés* as a whole. Through speech, Maria del Prado morphs reflekpheasis into a speaking ekphrasis that highlights Juan Rana's irregular sexuality. Her attitude is hostile and irritable by the fact that it has taken such a long time for someone to pull her out of the mirror. Her manner mirrors that of don Gonzalo de Ulloa in Tirso de Molina's *El burlador de Sevilla*. For Peter E. Thompson, this scene "would seem to be an ironic reference to the last scene in Tirso de Molina's *El burlador de Sevilla*, where the dead father appears as an avenging statue" (166 n17). Maria del Prado may herself become a hermaphrodite, like Juan Rana, referencing the role of a talking statue like don Gonzalo. This possible hermaphroditic similarity between María del Prado and don Gonzalo could be an attempt by Moreto to demonstrate that the characters that Juan Rana pulls out of the mirror must hold similarities to him. She becomes a memory image that must speak in order to remind the readers and viewers of the *gracioso*'s femininity through the female characters he believes himself to be.<sup>26</sup> Essentially, by being able to describe himself through reflekpheasis as a woman, Juan Rana and the *loa* further contribute to the ever-growing display of sexual inversion of this *gracioso*.

On another level, it is not only Juan Rana who sees something within each character of the play, but, inversely, all the actors must also believe themselves to have some similarities to this famous *gracioso*. This is exemplified by the musicians who sing: "A la Escamilla imita / Rana de tonos; / pues haga él las terceras / y ella graciosos" (248). In other words, the next female character, Manuela de Escamilla, and Juan Rana should switch

roles. In doing so, they would also change genders. This inversion of genders and sexualities, as we have seen, is typical of the *invertido* as they represent both the masculine and the feminine. Through this, the present work tries to highlight that it is not only Juan Rana who sees in himself traits that are present in the other characters but that they, as with the example of Manuela de Escamilla, too, have characteristics of Juan Rana. In a way, Manuela de Escamilla should transform into *graciosos* and by doing so she would appropriate certain qualities of Juan Rana.<sup>27</sup> All the characters that are pulled out of the mirror must also see something of this buffoon in themselves, potentially making him a universal character.

The first male and last female characters that this fool pulls out of the empty frame, furthermore, share the last name: Escamilla. This appears to be a total sexual inversion as he is first transformed into a male Escamilla and then ends the *entremés* believing to have become a female with the exact same name (if not a female representation of the first male Escamilla).<sup>28</sup> Moreto begins with male characters to keep gender in check even though, as we have seen, this does not necessarily prohibit allusions to the main character's same-sex preferences. The playwright, then, twists the sexes and finally portrays Juan Rana as a disgruntled hermaphrodite who should change roles with the female Escamilla. This full-circle of characters could not be a mere accident as it appears that the author positioned each character and gender within his *loa* very carefully and purposefully. Each actor, it seems, is placed within the text first to keep the gender in check, and then to openly describe the actor as a man with sodomitic desires.

Juan Rana, in the end, was a phenomenon of his time: it is obvious that his popularity grew after his arrests as playwrights continued to script out personal *entremeses* for him. The use of

the reflekpheasis in Moreto's *La loa de Juan Rana* plays on Juan Rana's supposed sexual ambiguity: the reflekpheasis is a uniquely appropriate literary instrument useful in portraying Juan Rana as a hermaphrodite, basically, denoting his dual or inverted sexuality. In this *loa* the mirror has become a key tool in understanding inversion and reproduction: death and birth. Juan Rana performs the deed of pulling each character out of the mirror in order to allow them to perform in the play that was to come. Through the characters that he pulls out of the mirror, this Golden Age *gracioso* performs both the male and female role. In the end, the beauty and spectacle of *La loa de Juan Rana* is that it metaphorically manages to artistically connect the idea of reflection, reproduction and sexualities on the Spanish stage.



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<sup>1</sup> The *Diccionario de la comedia del Siglo de Oro* defines entremés as “equivalentes a la *farsa*, tal como se desarrollaron en Francia o en Italia...el entremés es la pieza básica, representada en principios entre el primero y el segundo entreactos” (126).

<sup>2</sup> In 1639, Moreto graduated from the Universidad de Alcalá de Henares where he received his degree in logic and physics. In 1643, he was ordained as a clergyman and, by that time, he in all likelihood had begun his literary production. After six years, he became a member of the Academia de Madrid ó Castellana. The secretary of the Academia, Cáncer y Velasco, was one of Moreto's literary collaborators and, as indicated by Cayetano Alberto de la Barrera y Leirado, this was the place where the two first met. His literary contribution slowed down after he became a priest in Toledo and “renunciados los aplausos que le daban merecidamente los teatros, consagró su pluma á las alabanzas divinas, convertidos el entusiasmo ó furor poético en espíritu de devocion” (275-6). He died in Toledo in 1669.

<sup>3</sup> In *El triunfo de Juan Rana* (1670) by Pedro Calderón de la Barca, the actor is proclaimed as being “el máximo gracioso” (Wilson 115). Under “Cosme Pérez,” the *Genealogía, origen y noticias de las comediantes de España* confirms the actor's alias and that he “fue mui zelebrado en la parte de grazioso, y aun excedió a todos los de su tiempo, y solo con salir a las tablas y sin hablar probocaba a risa y al aplauso a los que le veían. Estubo retirado mucho tiempo por su edad y despues de algunos años mandaron los Reies que saliera en una fiesta del Retiro el año [dejado en blanco] y le sacaron en un carro” (117). This royal call refers to *El triunfo de Juan Rana* (1670) as the stage directions of the play states that “sale Juan Rana en una carro triunfal, con mucho acompañamiento” (Wilson, 11).

<sup>4</sup> Bergman also emphasizes Rana's popularity by pointing to an old painting: “Entre los centenares de comediantes cuyos nombres recordamos, sólo uno ha sobrevivido hasta nuestros días en su figura corpórea, retratado por mano de pintor desconocido en un cuadro al óleo hoy perteneciente a la Real Academia Española de la Lengua” (65).

<sup>5</sup> See Thompson for more information on the date of Rana's arrest and brief summary on the *pecado nefando* in Spain and its punishment (2006, 5-16). Bergman reproduced a quote from Emilio Cotarelo y Mori that provides further information on the nefarious sin attributed to Juan Rana:

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“En cuanto al negocio de los que están presos por el pecado nefando, no se usa del rigor que se esperaba, o sea esto porque el ruido ha sido mayor que las nueces, o sea que verdaderamente el poder y el dinero alcanzan lo que quieren. A don Nicolás, el paje del Conde de Castrillo, vemos que anda por la calle, y a Juan Rana, famoso representante, han soltado” (1965, 522). Laura R. Bass points out that Juan Rana's acting and persona was much loved by the Spanish monarchs. This could possibly indicate why he was set free after being arrested for committing the nefarious sin.

<sup>6</sup> Hannah E. Bergamn believes that: “apareció *el entremés de la loa de Juan Rana* impreso por primera vez en 1664, a nombre de Moreto, en *Rasgos del ocio, segunda parte*, de donde la copiamos. Volvió a estamparse como obra de D. Francisco de Avellaneda...en las colecciones *Floresta de entremeses* (Madrid, 1691) y *Manojito de entremeses* (Pamplona, 1700), sin otro cambio. También se conserva en manuscrito anónimo en la Biblioteca Nacional (Ms. 16.748)” (429). I have seen the original manuscript but have been unable to get a copy of it, as such, all the quotations of the play are taken from Thompson's *The Outrageous Juan Rana Entremeses* who uses and translates the manuscript found in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid.

<sup>7</sup> In his book, Thompson studies sixteen plays written for Juan Rana that also highlight his acts against nature. Bergman states that “se escribieron más de cincuenta entremeses” for this famous *gracioso* (1966, 67). Serralta looks at “cuarenta y cuatro piezas...que los autores que escribían para Cosme Pérez-Juan Rana no sólo no le evitaban las sospechas de homosexualidad sino que, al contrario, las fomentaban a veces dándole incluso en ocasiones – inversión clara y rotunda – algunos papeles de *mujer*” (1990, 82-83).

<sup>8</sup> I will use the term *homosexual* throughout my present study to maintain some kind of neutrality in the vocabulary. I realize that this word may not be the most objective, but, currently, *homosexual* seems to be the most neutral within the social and scientific sphere. While the word “homosexual” did not exist as we know it, James M. Saslow affirms that in the Renaissance “homosexual sex, often called sodomy, was widespread among various classes; although a matter of great official concern, in practice it was often tolerated and at time almost expected” (1986, 7). In other words, while a homosexual identity might not have been formed same-sex desires and sex was present in Golden Age Spain.

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<sup>9</sup> See Daniel L. Heiple for more information about homosexuality in *El lindo Don Diego*. Furthermore, Frederick de Armas has studied characters like Galatea and Florisa in Cervantes' *La Galatea* ('Ekphrasis and Eros') as possibly exhibiting homoerotic characteristics, and Federico and Cassandra in Lope's *El castigo sin venganza* ("From Mantua to Madrid") who reveal, through the myth of Jupiter and Ganymede, their incestuous and sinful desire. Bruno M. Damiani briefly mentions same-sex love between shepherdess (Selvagia and Ysmenia, and Felismena and Duarda) in Jorge de Montemayor's *La Diana* (1983, 48-49). Finally, see De Armas' *Ekphrasis in the Age of Cervantes* for a study, much like the present one, that uses ekphrasis in analyzing Spanish seventeenth-century theatre.

<sup>10</sup> De Armas also demonstrates that while the ancient authors were the ones that believed that an ekphrasis "ought to be a painting or a sculpture, it was up to the Renaissance to reverse the movement from the visual to the verbal and attempt instead to compose art works based on ancient ekphrases, thus fully integrating the concept of the sister arts through a double link" ("Simple Magic" 14). He makes another link between the classics and the Renaissance through ekphrasis since the "symbiotic relation between the sister arts (poetry and painting; literature and sculpture; the verbal and the visual) was a classical motif commonly reworked by Renaissance artists and painters" ("Simple Magic" 21).

<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Ana María G. Laguna also dedicates a study to Cervantes and the power that images hold in his works; and Juan Pablo Gil-Osle studies the speaking ekphrasis (the description of works of art that speak).

<sup>12</sup> The *Diccionario de Autoridades* defines loa as "el prólogo o preludio que antecede en las fiestas cómicas, que se representan o cantan. Llámase assi porque su assunto es siempre en alabanza de aquel a quien se dedican" (1990, 426). The term *loa* and *entremés* are interchangeable but each form specialized in "algunos rasgos temáticos o formales" (*Diccionario de la comedia del Siglo de Oro* 2002, 126).

<sup>13</sup> Thompson believes that most of the *entremeses* performed by Juan Rana were acted between 1636 (the year of his arrest) and 1658 when he had supposedly decided to 'retire' (161 n4). The actor did, however, return to the Spanish stage at least twice: once to perform this present *loa* and the last in *El triunfo de Juan Rana* (1670).

<sup>14</sup> Juan Rana's hesitation to reenter the Spanish stage, which is made clear in this *loa*, is caused by his desire to be left alone. He did not want to continue being in front of the public eye and scrutiny that came with it but it was his popularity be it public or royal which caused his return to the theatre.

<sup>15</sup> Orozco refers to the festivities held on December 22, 1662, in honor of Queen Mariana (Cotarelo y Mori in Lobato 131).

<sup>16</sup> Thompson hypothesizes that there seems to be two mirrors on stage: "The first is a real mirror and hence Juan Rana actually sees his reflection. The other consists solely of a frame behind which the other actors will presently stand" (2009, 252 n. 18).

<sup>17</sup> For more information on each character see *Genealogía, origen y noticias de las comediantes de España*.

<sup>18</sup> While specifically referring to *El retrato vivo*, I feel this quote is equally appropriate for this current *loa*.

<sup>19</sup> Instead of calling the homosexual an *invertido*, Serralta terms the same-sex sexual act an "inversion" (85). I must also point out that nowhere in the text is the word "invertido" used nor does Juan Rana reflect on the opposition of left to right that a mirror produces. Even though this word is not seen in the text, I believe that inversion is present as it is almost impossible that a reflection does not demonstrate an inversion of an image to some degree.

<sup>20</sup> "A number of well-known Renaissance and Baroque paintings depict a beautiful woman (often the goddess Venus) sitting before a mirror, caught in the act of looking at her reflection: Rubens' 'Venus Looking in a Mirror,' [c. 1614–15] Bellini's 'Woman with a Mirror,' [1515] Titian's 'Venus at Her Toilet,' [c. 1555] and Velázquez's 'Venus and Cupid' [c. 1647–51] (better known as 'The Rokeby Venus')" (87).

<sup>21</sup> The Narcissus flower, like the *Armería Real* also found on the Palace grounds, grew where Narcissus died. De Armas ("The Play's the thing") studies the three kinds of flowers present in the gardens of the Aranjuez palace: the laurel, the narcissus, and the hyacinth. This reference, then, highlights the "three amorous flowers [...] that grow in the gardens of Aranjuez, one heterosexual, one narcissistic and the third homoerotic" mentioned in the *loa* to *La gloria de Niquea*. (451).

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<sup>22</sup> After Juan Rana's refusal to participate in the festive *loa*, Orozco tries to convince him to act: "¿Saber no quiere? Sabio adredemente / solía ser." Rana responds: "Pues ya estoy muy deferente" (234). The appearance of the mirror after the discussion between these two characters, refers, for Thompson, "to an item out of reach of most of the audience, a status symbol connected to the court and those who frequented it" (57). The audience of the *loa* should be familiar with the mirror as this *entremés* is being presented in the royal palace.

<sup>23</sup> As noted by Thompson, this similarity is perhaps a reference to his very public arrest.

<sup>24</sup> See Shipley for more information on the word 'cosillas' in the *Lazarillo* episode.

<sup>25</sup> Thompson translates *mellisla* as "sweet" (2009, 247). I have not found this word in any dictionary.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Carruthers believes that memory images "should not be 'mute,' 'silent.' They must speak" (229-30). This is similar to Maria del Prado's presence in the present *loa*.

<sup>27</sup> This, however, does not necessarily make her and the rest of the cast *invertidos* as their sexualities are unknown.

<sup>28</sup> Thompson asserts that the two Escamillas are Antonio de Escamilla (*The Outrageous Juan Rana Entremeses* 252 n19) and Manuela de Escamilla (254 n33).

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Morisca Acts of Resistance and the Subversive Agency of  
Isabel/Zelima in María de Zayas's *La esclava de su amante*

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*“Zelima soy, no doña Isabel; esclava soy, que no señora;  
mora soy, pues tengo dentro de mí misma aposentado un  
moro renegado como tú, pues quien faltó a Dios la palabra  
que le dio de ser mío, ni es cristiano ni noble, sino un infame  
caballero.”*

— María de Zayas, *La esclava de  
su amante*.

With these cathartic words, the protagonist Isabel Fajardo confronts the man who has raped and abandoned her. Her autobiographical account, entitled *La esclava de su amante*, is the opening tale of the *Desengaños amorosos*, María de Zayas's second frame-tale collection of short stories, published in 1647. While Isabel's words express the frustration and suffering she has endured as the object of Manuel's actions, they also display her resistance to the cruelty women faced under the honor code in early modern Spain. From the moment she is raped, Isabel begins to redefine herself and emerges as what Lisa Vollendorf has called “an autonomous subject, an agent of self-invention” (77). Although a Christian aristocrat, Isabel disguises herself as a female Muslim slave named Zelima to secretly pursue Manuel, in the hopes that he will marry her and thereby restore her honor. This disguise as the Muslim Zelima does more than reflect

Isabel's loss of honor and social status after she is raped. It also empowers her as a subversive presence within the *Desengaños amorosos*. Amy Kaminsky has asserted that Isabel takes on the identity of Zelima "because, as a woman abandoned by a man whom she still loves, she is no longer free" and that her slave identity signals "her degradation" and "psychological enslavement" to Manuel (382). While I agree with these assertions, they are only part of the story. Isabel's disguise as a Muslim slave is also the source of a subversive agency that empowers her to confront her rapist and combat the patriarchal repression of women under the honor code. In addition, her textual presence as Muslim and Christian evokes the subversive ability of Morisco women and slaves to preserve their Muslim identity and resist state efforts to assimilate them into the Christian mainstream after the fall of Granada in 1492 (Figure 1).

Bernard Vincent, for example, notes that "las mujeres fueron las campeonas de lo que se podría llamar resistencia pasiva de los moriscos. Sin su obstinación, sin su acendrada fidelidad, se habrían perdido muchos ritos y costumbres ancestrales" (592). Mary Elizabeth Perry, meanwhile, reminds us that following the Muslim expulsion of 1502, "many Moriscos transformed their homes into a space of resistance. Within this domestic sphere, the women in particular taught their children the prohibited Arabic language as well as Muslim prayers. . . . Even when subjected to arrest, interrogation, imprisonment, and punishment by the Inquisition, these women continued to devise strategies of resistance" (*Handless Maiden* 65).<sup>1</sup>



Figure 1: *La capitulación de Granada* by Francisco Pradilla y Ortiz (1882).

Zayas herself lived in Madrid during the latter sixteenth century, a time when new Morisco populations were establishing themselves throughout central Spain following the Christian defeat of the Morisco uprising in the Alpujarra Mountains of Granada in 1569. When considered in relation to the conditions for Morisco women and slaves during Zayas's time, Isabel's duality as Muslim and Christian may be read as a commentary on the "Morisco problem" confronting Spain at the dawn of the seventeenth century. Isabel uses her disguise as the Muslim Zelima to recover her voice and respond to the rape and patriarchal repression she has endured. Her determination to pursue and confront her rapist reflects tensions between

patriarchal control and female agency in early modern Spain. At the same time, however, her decision to re-create herself as a female Muslim slave embodies Moriscas' resistance to state efforts to erase their Muslim heritage and identity. This study re-examines the enigmatic Isabel/Zelima figure in light of the socio-historical conditions of Moriscas during Zayas's time. By so doing, I reveal Zayas's representation of Morisco women and slaves as a means to expose the destructive influences of the male honor code, while reminding us of the challenges faced not only by women, but also religious minorities in early modern Spain.

The narrative frame of the *Desengaños* is set during the carnival season in Madrid, where five noblemen and eight women have gathered in the home of Laura, whose daughter, Lisis, is recovering from a year-long illness. To pass the time while Lisis recovers, ten women, including Lisis, tell stories to the group. Each woman narrates a tale, or "desengaño" since each story is meant to open women's eyes to the cruelty and deceptive ways of men. Isabel is the first to tell a story, and the only frame-tale character who narrates events of her own life. As the narrative frame begins, however, Isabel's disguise as the Muslim Zelima conceals her Christian identity from those present at the soirée. Here Isabel's own voice is absent from the text, while the primary narrator defines her as an object of material exchange that has been passed from Lisis's aunt to her niece as a gift:

En esta ocasión le trujeron a Lisis una hermosísima esclava, herrada en el rostro, mas no porque la S y clavo que esmaltaba sus mejillas manchaba su belleza, que antes la descubría más. Era mora, y su nombre Zelima, de gallardo entendimiento y muchas gracias, como eran leer, escribir, cantar, tañer, bordar y, sobre todo, hacer

excelentísimos versos. Este presente le hizo a Lisis una su tía, hermana de su madre, que vivía en la ciudad de Valencia; y aunque pudiera desdorar algo de la estimación de tal prenda el ser mora, sazónaba este género de desabrimiento con decir quería ser cristiana. (116-17)

As Zelima's Christian identity has yet to be revealed, her status as Muslim slave is presented as a possible detriment to her value, rather than a source of subversive agency.

Isabel's silent confinement within the narrative frame and the narrator's "reading" of her as Muslim slave evokes the displacement and marginalization of Muslims and Moriscos from the Catholic mainstream of early modern Spain. Driven from their communities and forced to conceal any ties to Islam, the Moriscos of Spain were increasingly persecuted and marginalized throughout the sixteenth century until their expulsion in 1609 (Figure 2).

As a population that transgressed religious, cultural and geographical lines that separated Islam and Christianity, the Moriscos were viewed by church and state as a potentially subversive population within the recently re-conquered Iberian peninsula.<sup>3</sup> The 1609 expulsion, however, did not eliminate the entire Morisco population, nor concern over their presence. Perry, for example, estimates that 10,000 to 15,000 Moriscos avoided the expulsion (*Handless Maiden* 166-67).<sup>4</sup> In addition, many Moriscos returned once the expulsion ended, while additional waves of Muslims continued to enter Spain from northern Africa.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 2: *La expulsión de los moriscos* by Vincenzo Carducci (1627). Museo del Prado, Madrid.<sup>2</sup>

Among the areas that attracted Moriscos during Zayas's childhood and adolescence was the court city of Madrid, where Zayas lived during the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup> Prior to the 1609 expulsion, the Moriscos of Granada had been relocated throughout southern and central Spain (Figure 3).



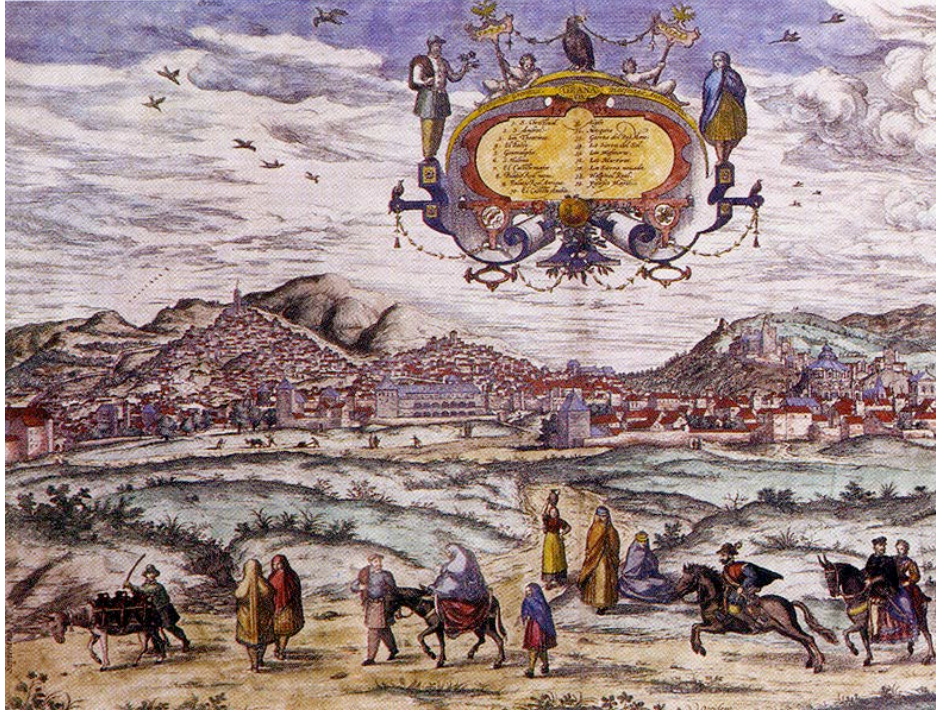


Figure 3: *View of Granada* by Joris Hoefnagel (1564).  
Biblioteca Provincial de Granada.

In 1566 Phillip II issued a ban on all Morisco culture throughout his kingdom. This ban sparked the Morisco uprising in the Alpujarra Mountains of Granada, which began in late December 1568 and lasted almost two years (Harvey 217). When Christian forces finally defeated the Morisco uprising in early November 1570, more than 50,000 Granadan Moriscos were rounded up and deported to areas throughout southern and central Spain. The final destination of the Granadan Moriscos included Albacete, Seville, Cordoba, Extremadura, Segovia, Valladolid, Palencia and Salamanca (Domínguez Ortiz and



Vincent 50-52).<sup>7</sup> Inquisitorial, as well as ecclesiastical, state, and municipal archives throughout Castile corroborate the region's popularity as a destination for the Granadan Moriscos. This is especially true in those regions throughout the sixteenth century with the highest populations of Moriscos, such as Andalusia, Valencia, Aragon, Extremadura, Old and New Castile, and Catalunya (Epalza 19). Based on these events, it is quite likely that the Castilian presence of Moriscos and their eventual expulsion in 1609 made a lasting impression on Zayas in her youth and formative stages as a writer.

Disguised as the slave Zelima, Isabel prepares to tell her story. She exits the central room of the soirée and enters an adjacent changing room. Upon her return, she has carefully constructed her appearance to combine elements of both Christian and Muslim design:

. . . salió Zelima de la cuadra, en tan diferente traje de lo que entró, que a todos puso en admiración. Traía sobre una camisa de transparente cambray, con grandes puntas y encajes, las mangas muy anchas de la parte de la mano; unas enaguas de lama a flores azul y plata, con tres o cuatro relumbrones que quitaban la vista, tan corta, que apenas llegaba a las gargantas de los pies, y en ellos unas andalias de muchos lazos y listones de seda muy vistosos; sobre esto un vaquerillo o albuja [sic] de otra telilla azul y plata muy vistosa, y asida al hombro una almalafa de la misma tela. Tenía la aljuba o vaquerillo las mangas tan anchas, que igualaban con las de la camisa, mostrando sus blancos y torneados brazos con costosos carcajes o brazaletes; . . . . (123)

Yllera explains that *carcajes* were a type of “Argollas, brazaletes usados por las moras” (123 n.22). Kaminsky, meanwhile, observes that Isabel's cambric linen and lace blouse with its

*puntas*, or paired cone-shaped decorations hanging from the sleeves, are European, while the *aljuba* and *almalafa*, as well as her sandals and skirt, are of Muslim design (382). Both the *aljuba* and *almalafa* were long cloaks worn by women that covered the entire body from shoulders to feet.<sup>8</sup> Like the Moriscos, Isabel's appearance is neither entirely Christian nor Muslim, but a hybrid construction of both cultures.

The multiple layers of Isabel's clothing take on special significance when viewed in relation to Ronald Surtz's illuminating work with Inquisitorial documents from Valencia. Surtz's work reveals that Moriscas often hid sacred Arabic texts, called *herçes*, within the folds of their clothing during Inquisitorial raids on their homes. The *herçes* were Koranic passages written on a piece of paper. This paper was then folded and sealed in a cloth sack, and covered with a finer cloth. The *herçes* were believed to have magical powers for healing, but had to be carried or worn to be effective. They were therefore often worn around the neck or sewn into women's garments (424-25). Male Moriscos were more socially active outside the home and adopted Christian dress, which had fewer layers and was tighter fitting, making the concealment of such texts difficult. Women's clothing, on the other hand, was looser and multilayered and more suited to concealing the *herçes* (432) (Figure 4).

Surtz notes that by the end of the fifteenth century, one third of the population of Valencia was Muslim, and that from 1566 to 1620, more than a quarter of Moriscos tried by the Valencia Inquisition for the practice of Islam were women (422, 421). During this period, traditional Muslim attire took on new meaning for Moriscas as not only a sign of their Muslim heritage, but a symbol of resistance to Christian authorities. Perhaps it is no coincidence, then, that Lisis's aunt lived in Valencia, where she acquired the slave Zelima, not knowing her to be the

aristocratic Isabel. This connection to Valencia evokes the subversion and resistance for which the Valencian Moriscos were known during Zayas's time.

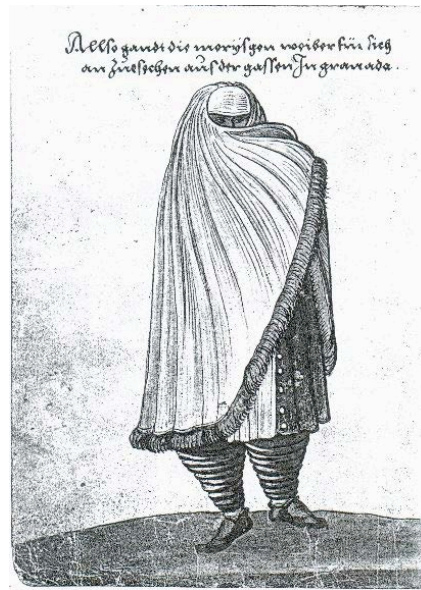


Figure 4: “Morisca in Street Dress.”

*Authentic Everyday Dress of the Renaissance: All 154 Plates from the “Trachtenbuch” by Christoph Weiditz (1529).*

Isabel's spatial move from the adjacent changing room into the center of the main room foreshadows her textual transition from the margins of the frame, where she has remained verbally silent, to a central position of control as narrator and subject of her autobiographical tale. Her ability to re-create herself transforms her status from silent object to

creative agent. As she reemerges, the Moorish attributes of Isabel's clothing deceive even the primary narrator, who defines her solely in terms of her Islamic appearance: "la hermosura, el donaire, la majestad de sus airosos y concertados pasos no mostraba sino una princesa de Argel, una reina de Fez o Marruecos, o una sultana de Constantinopla" (124). When she assumes her central position to begin her tale, Isabel's silent subversion is complete. In her final moments of textual confinement within the narrative frame, Isabel is perceived as a divine being who captivates her audience:

Admirados quedaron damas y caballeros, y más la hermosa Lisis, de verla, . . . , y no acertaba a dar lugar al disfraz de su esclava, y así, no hizo más de callar y admirarse (como todos) de tal deidad, porque la contemplaba una ninfa o diosa de las antiguas fábulas. Pasó Zelima hasta el estrado, dejando a las damas muy envidiosas de su acabada y linda belleza, y a los galanes rendidos a ella, pues hubo más de dos que, con los clavos del rostro, . . . , la hicieron señora y poseedora de su persona y hacienda, y aun se juzgara indigno de merecerlo. (124)

The subversive agency Isabel displays in the narrative frame parallels her prior actions as Zelima while pursuing Manuel. More than an expression of her "enslavement" to Manuel after being raped, Isabel's Muslim identity may be read as a text of resistance that allows her to cultivate control and authority over others.

Only when she assumes narrative control does Isabel relinquish the identity that has been a source of subversion for her. As she breaks her silence, Isabel speaks from a position of textual and social authority as autobiographical narrator and Christian aristocrat:

Muchos desengaños pudiera traer en apoyo de esto de las antiguas y modernas desdichas sucedidas a mujeres por los hombres. Quiero pasarlas en silencio, y contaros mis desdichados sucesos, para que escarmentando en mí, no haya tantas perdidas y tan pocas escarmentadas. Y porque lo mismo que contaré es la misma represión, digo así. – Mi nombre es doña Isabel Fajardo, no Zelima, ni mora, como pensáis, sino cristiana, y hija de padres católicos, y de los más principales de la ciudad de Murcia; que estos hierros que veis en mi rostro no son sino sombras de los que ha puesto en mi calidad y fama la ingratitud de un hombre; y para que deis más crédito, veislos aquí quitados; así pudiera quitar los que han puesto en mi alma mis desventuras y poca cordura. Y diciendo esto, se los quitó y arrojó lejos de sí, quedando el claro cristal de su divino rostro sin mancha, sombra ni oscuridad, descubriendo aquel sol los esplendores de su hermosura sin nube. (125-27)

In this self-defining moment, Isabel strips away the facial markings that label her as slave. In early modern Spain, slaves were frequently branded on a cheek or the forehead with the letter S (*ese*) and a vertical line (*clavo*) through it, proclaiming their status as slave (*esclavo*).<sup>9</sup> Such permanent, physical markings were used to identify slave subjects and prevent their escape. Muslims captured during the fall of Granada, for example, were turned over to their new owners, who “tenían derecho, no solamente a servirse de ellos, sino a herrarlos en la cara o brazos para reconocerlos e impedir su fuga” (Domínguez Ortiz 5). When Isabel later describes the creation of her disguise, she explains that “fingiendo clavo y S para el rostro, me puse en hábito conveniente para fingirme esclava” (153). Because Isabel is able to remove and toss aside these markings (“se los quitó y arrojó

lejos de sí”), they function on a temporary or symbolic level, rather than a permanent, literal one. Isabel herself suggests this as she declares “estos hierros” to be no more than “sombras de los que ha puesto en mi calidad y fama la ingratitud de un hombre.” As she removes her slave markings, Isabel also declares her Christian identity. Her words and actions dismiss the views and opinions of the frame narrator that have thus far defined her for the reader. This ability to create, destroy, and reconstruct herself recalls Joanne Frye’s notion of the female autobiographical narrator: “A woman who speaks in her own voice of her own experience is a subject rather than an object, and as such, she is capable of self-definition and autonomous action” (143). As both subject and narrator of her autobiographical tale, Isabel is able to combat cultural definition and objectification. She is a subjective presence that reminds us of its ability to create and define itself in/on its own terms.

As creative agent, Isabel first constructs herself visually through her elaborate attire, and then verbally as autobiographical narrator. Her resistance to external labels at the moment of her textual transformation from Muslim (Zelima) to Christian (Isabel) also alludes to the process of conversion from Islam to Christianity of the Moriscos, as well as resistance to the dominant Christian mainstream for which Morisco women were known. As discussed above, the Valencia Inquisition tried many Morisco women for preserving and hiding sacred Arabic texts within the folds of their Muslim attire during Inquisitorial raids on their homes. In accordance with such acts of resistance, Perry explains that Morisco women were viewed as a source of subversion for the role they played in preserving Islamic culture within the household (“Behind the Veil” 48). Unlike their husbands and brothers, who were socially and professionally

active outside the home and more assimilated to Christian culture, Moriscas had less contact with Old Christians and raised their children in the religion and culture they knew, that of their Muslim ancestry. This phenomenon persisted in areas most heavily populated by Moriscos, such as Valencia and Granada.<sup>10</sup> As the persecution of Moriscos intensified, the struggle to make them more like Christians shifted from the male-dominated public sphere of battleground, court, and church to the private woman-centered household, where Moriscas were in charge of cultural practices such as child-rearing, cleanliness, and food preparation that Inquisitors regarded as evidence of apostasy (Perry, “Moriscas” 275-76). For Vincent these practices constitute a form of passive resistance, which Moriscas used to preserve their Islamic identity:

. . . las mujeres fueron las campeonas de lo que se podría llamar resistencia pasiva de los moriscos. Sin su obstinación, sin su acendrada fidelidad, se habrían perdido muchos ritos y costumbres ancestrales. . . . Puesto que no se puede realizar en público manifestaciones de fidelidad al Islam, el hogar se convierte en sitio privilegiado para tales manifestaciones. (592-93)

Just as traditional Muslim attire allowed Morisco women to preserve their heritage and resist the efforts of Christian authorities, Isabel’s own Muslim attire becomes a source of subversive power that she uses to challenge and respond to the patriarchal authority of the Spanish honor code.

The theme of honor is integral to Isabel’s evolution since her primary objective is to restore her family’s honor through marriage to Manuel. From the outset, Zayas establishes the psychological and emotional impact the honor code has had on her narrator, who tells us she is the only child of “padres católicos, y de los más principales de la ciudad de Murcia” (127).

As an only child, Isabel is responsible for her family's honor and Manuel's actions have left her with insufferable guilt: "—Nací en la casa de mis padres sola para que fuese sola la perdición de ella" (128). Isabel's feelings reflect the oppressive nature of the code, which made women the repository of man's honor. As Williamsen explains, "Fathers, brothers, and husbands guarded the purity of the women in the family; any stain or reputed stain on female virtue constituted an offense against male honor" (138). Much like the Inquisition's attempts to rid Spain of the subversive threat of the Moriscos, the honor code demanded male authority and control and sought to eliminate the threat of female agency through a culture of fear and suspicion. Williamsen, for example, has observed the influence of the honor code as a social structure "designed to perpetuate unchallenged male dominance and to ensure women's compliance with the cultural expectations regarding morality" (139).<sup>11</sup>

Isabel's relationship with her father reflects the gendered power differential on which the code depended. He belongs to one of the preeminent families of Murcia and honor is central to his identity. Isabel explains that her family moved to Zaragoza so that her father could assist the Crown against the uprising in Catalonia. As she recalls their move, Isabel notes her father's obsession with honor: "Prevínose la partida, y aderezado lo que se había de llevar, que fuese lo más importante, para, aunque a la ligera, mostrar mi padre quién era, y que era descendiente de los antiguos Fajardos de aquel reino" (129-30). It is in Zaragoza that Isabel first meets Manuel, the son of a widow with whom her family temporarily resides. Isabel's beauty catches Manuel's eye, although she initially rejects his advances to protect her honor. After all, it is her father who will decide her marriage, in keeping with the honor code. When her friend and servant, Claudia,



suggests that Isabel accept Manuel's advances and marry him, she replies matter of factly "El gusto de mi padre se hará el mío" (135).

Although Manuel eventually wins Isabel's love and trust, he soon reveals his true colors. One afternoon as Isabel passes by his bedroom, Manuel pulls her into his room and locks the door. Isabel is immediately overcome with fear and loses consciousness: "Yo no sé lo que me sucedió, porque del susto me privó el sentido un mortal desmayo" (137). When she awakens, Isabel experiences a loss of identity and self: "Pues pasada poco más de media hora, volví en mí, y me hallé, mal digo, no me hallé pues me hallé perdida, y tan perdida, que no me supe ni pude volver ni podré ganarme jamás" (137). Ironically, this declaration that she will never recover herself after being raped is itself a piece of the narrative fabric Isabel creates to tell her side of the story and redefine herself. Although she repeats herself and stumbles as she searches for the words to recount the trauma of her rape, Isabel quickly recovers her narrative thread and explains that her feelings of loss soon turned to anger and a determination to take matters into her own hands. As a victim of rape, Isabel's only options are death or marriage. Amy Kaminsky reminds us that "According to the traditional Spanish honor code, in the case of fornication (as opposed to adultery) only the death or marriage of the transgressing couple could restore honor to the family of the woman involved" (391, n.16). Isabel's first inclination is to restore her honor by killing Manuel herself. Her words are reminiscent of the violent sexual act that Manuel has just committed, although now the tables have turned: "arremetí la espada que [Manuel] tenía a la cabecera de la cama, y sacándola de la vaina, se la fui a envainar en el cuerpo" (137). This attempt fails, however, and she turns Manuel's sword upon herself,

declaring “Traidor, me vengo en mí, pues no he podido en ti, que las mujeres como yo así vengan sus agravios” (137). Isabel’s efforts are once again interrupted by Manuel, who “abrazándose conmigo, me quitó la espada, que me la iba a entrar por el cuerpo por haber errado el del infame” (137). That evening she leaves home secretly, taking with her “mis joyas y las de mi madre, y muchos dineros en plata y en oro” (151). As she slips free of her home and her father’s control, Isabel’s declaration conveys an underlying confidence in her abilities: “todo estaba en mi poder” (151). She enlists the help of Octavio, a former family servant, and the two travel to Alicante, where Manuel is to depart for Sicily in service to the Spanish viceroy. When Isabel learns that Manuel wishes to purchase a slave for his journey, she seizes the moment and alters her appearance:

. . . fingiendo clavo y S para el rostro, me puse en hábito conveniente para fingirme esclava y mora, poniéndome por nombre Zelima, diciendo a Octavio [que] me llevase y dijera era suya, y que si agradaba, no reparase en el precio. Mucho sintió Octavio mi determinación, vertiendo lágrimas en abundancia por mí; mas yo le consolé con advertirle este disfraz no era más de para proseguir mi intento y traer a don Manuel a mi voluntad . . . . (153)

Isabel’s plan is successful and Manuel’s family purchases her as their slave. With a sense of pride Isabel notes the convincing appearance of her slave markings, “tan perfectamente imitado el natural, que a nadie diera sospecha de ser fingidos” (154). Her disguise quickly becomes a source of agency that she uses to manipulate her new owners: “yo les supe agradar y granjear, de modo que antes de muchos días me hice dueño de su voluntad y casa” (153-54). These words recall Isabel’s presence in the narrative frame, echoing what the primary narrator has already observed regarding her agency: “sabía muy bien Zelima granjear

y atraer a sí la voluntad de Lisis” (117). Having grown up under her father’s wishes, Isabel is now able to influence others for her own benefit. Her disguise as slave ironically acts as a catalyst of agency and control. As Zelima, Isabel is able to reinvent herself and confront Manuel as a symbolic response to the cruelties women endured under the honor code.

When Manuel realizes the true identity of his slave, he demands that Isabel explain her presence before him. Although Isabel admits the suffering she has endured as Manuel’s victim, her words display an unwavering determination to restore her honor. In addition, Isabel appears inspired by the identity that has become a source of agency during her journey:

Zelima soy, no doña Isabel; esclava soy, que no señora; mora soy, pues tengo dentro de mí misma aposentado un moro renegado como tú, pues quien faltó a Dios la palabra que le dio de ser mío, ni es cristiano ni noble, sino un infame caballero. Estos hierros y los de mi afrenta tú me los has puesto, no sólo en el rostro, sino en la fama. Haz lo que te diere gusto, que si se te ha quitado la voluntad de hacerme tuya, Dios hay en el cielo y rey en la tierra, y si éstos no lo hicieren hay puñales, y tengo manos y valor para quitarte esa infame vida, para que deprendan en mí las mujeres nobles a castigar hombres falsos y desagradecidos. Y quítate de delante, si no quieres que haga lo que digo. (157)

Not only is Isabel willing and able to avenge her loss of honor by herself, her actions will serve as inspiration to future generations of women. In an attempt to calm Isabel, Manuel promises to rectify her situation. Although she no longer trusts him, the need to restore her honor compels Isabel to accept his promise: “más llevaba el pensamiento de restaurar mi honor que no el achaque de la liviandad” (157). Nonetheless, Isabel savors a

moment of success, noting that “para la primera vez [yo] no había negociado muy mal” (158).

During an excursion to an island off the Sicilian coast, Isabel, Manuel, and Felipe are kidnapped by Moorish pirates and taken to Algeria. This twist in her journey tests Isabel's ability to pass as Muslim and preserve her agency while in captivity. Once again she is successful, and her disguise as Zelima now provides her an inside advantage as a perceived member of the dominant culture. Isabel recalls her ability to deceive first the ship's Moorish captain, and then his daughter upon their arrival to Algeria:

Contento quedó el arráez, tanto con la presa por su interés, como por parecerle había hecho un gran servicio a su Mahoma en sacarme, siendo mora, de entre cristianos, y así lo dio a entender, haciéndome muchas caricias, y a los demás buen tratamiento, y así, fuimos a Argel y nos entregó a una hija suya hermosa y niña, llamada Zaida, que se holgó tanto conmigo, porque era mora, como don Manuel, porque se enamoró de él. (159)

It is from Zaida that Isabel receives the elaborate attire she later dons to tell her story at the soirée for Lisis. When Zaida attempts to erase Isabel's slave status, however, Isabel refuses to give up the self-imposed facial markings that have allowed her to deceive her Moorish captors:

Vistióme [Zaida] luego de estos vestidos que véis, y trató de que hombres diestros en quitar estos hierros me los quitasen; no porque ellas no usan tales señales, que antes lo tienen por gala, sino porque era S y clavo, que daba señal de lo que yo era; a lo que respondí que *yo misma me los había puesto por mi gusto* y que *no los quería quitar*. (159, my emphasis)

Reminiscent of her relationship with Manuel's family and later

with Lisis, Isabel's slave disguise provides a measure of influence and control during her captivity. Isabel recalls that Zaida was so taken with her that "yo hacía y deshacía en su casa como propia mía" (159). Even in captivity, Isabel preserves her influence and power. She uses the jewels and money from her home in Zaragoza to pay her fellow captives' ransom and negotiates their safe return to Spain.

Isabel's ability to influence others and preserve her autonomy amidst conditions of confinement suggests the unique challenges that Muslim and Morisco slaves posed to Christian authorities. Although by definition the Moriscos had converted to Christianity, their religious practices were elastic and difficult to control. Domínguez Ortiz and Vincent, for example, note that various post-expulsion *autos de fe* included cases of Moriscos who "a veces eran esclavos bautizados que habían recaído en la práctica de su antigua fe" (258). This continued practice of Islam was all the more troubling to authorities since slaves were exempt from state control and expulsion as the legal property of their Old Christian masters. While authorities prohibited Islamic practices in public, they had no control over the practices of slaves within a particular owners' home:

. . . los esclavos mahometanos que en gran número había en España . . . nunca fueron incluidos en los decretos de expulsión, porque hubiera supuesto una lesión del derecho de propiedad de sus dueños; y tampoco estaban sometidos a la autoridad de la Inquisición, puesto que legalmente no eran cristianos; se sabía que profesaban su culto, aunque se les prohibiera toda práctica externa del mismo. (Domínguez Ortiz and Vincent 257)

This loophole, which allowed slaves to practice their Islamic faith, created an intriguing dynamic between confinement and freedom. This dynamic is reminiscent of Isabel's agency during

her captivity in Algeria, where her status as Muslim slave is a catalyst for control and allows her to negotiate her freedom. Perry also explains that many Morisco slaves were able to create an independent life free of control by Christian masters or officials:

Although most Morisco slaves remained in Iberia under the control of Christian owners, many lived independently. Some became free through manumission or by saving wages to purchase freedom. Others simply fled and made their way to mountains and remote areas where they joined other Moriscos who had settled there, beyond the view of officials intent on expelling them. (*Handless Maiden* 158)

Female slaves, in particular, were valued for their longer life expectancy compared to their male counterparts. They also could reproduce more slaves and provide domestic service (Perry, *Handless Maiden* 167). At the same time, however, authorities feared these women since they could raise their children in the Islamic faith, producing future generations of infidels or false Christians. Such formation was possible because children born to slave mothers also assumed slave status and remained with their mothers throughout infancy (Perry, *Handless Maiden* 171-72).<sup>12</sup> Although slavery was not common in all of Spain, Zayas's home city of Madrid was one area where it proliferated.<sup>13</sup> The conditions of confinement and freedom experienced by slaves, and their reputation as a source of subversion, recall Isabel's contained yet subversive presence within the narrative frame and the agency she develops as the Muslim Zelima in pursuit of Manuel.

Back in Zaragoza, Isabel confronts Manuel for the final time. In a public declaration before Zaida, Leonisa, Felipe, and Manuel's family, she demands to know once and for all if he will

restore her honor through marriage:

Cesen ya engaños y cautelas y sepa Zaida y el mundo entero que lo que me debéis no se paga con menos cantidad que vuestra persona, y que de estos hierros que están en mi rostro, cómo por vos sólo se los podéis quitar, y que llegue el día en que las desdichas y afrentas que he padecido tengan premio; . . . . . si hasta aquí con hierros fingidos he sido vuestra esclava, desde hoy sin ellos seré verdadera. Decid, os suplico, lo que queréis que se disponga, para que lo que os pido tenga el dichoso lauro que deseo. (162)

When Manuel tells Isabel he never loved her and reveals his intention to marry Zaida, Felipe draws his sword and kills him, declaring “Ya hermosa doña Isabel, te vengó don Felipe de los agravios que te hizo don Manuel. Quédate con Dios, que si escapo de este riesgo con la vida, te buscaré” (164). With marriage to Manuel no longer an option, Isabel is now obligated to marry Felipe, since he has avenged her honor: “a quien [don Felipe] tan obligada estaba por haber hecho lo que a mí me era fuerza hacer para volver por mi opinión perdida” (164-65). In the closing moments of her tale, however, Isabel rejects marriage to any man, noting the indelible mark Manuel has left upon her: “pues ya no ha de resucitar don Manuel, ni cuando esto fuera posible, me fiara de él, ni de ningún hombre, pues a todos los contemplo en éste engañosos y taimados para con las mujeres” (166). Instead, she chooses to enter the convent and take religious vows. As she kneels before Lisis, Isabel explains her decision: “. . . tengo elegido Amante que no me olvidará, y Esposo que no me despreciará, . . . pues por un ingrato y desconocido amante he pasado tantas desdichas, y siempre con los hierros y nombre de su esclava, ¿cuánto mejor es serlo de Dios, y a Él ofrecerme con el mismo nombre de la Esclava de su

Amante?" (167). As Kaminski observes, conventual life allows Isabel to restore her family honor: "Since Doña Isabel's lover is dead she cannot marry him, nor would she. She *can* choose to become the bride of Jesus, which marriage may also be taken as a valid solution to the problem of familial honor" (391, n.16). Within the convent, Isabel is also able to preserve the agency and self expression she has developed in pursuit of Manuel. Electa Arenal reminds us that although the convent was a patriarchal space that contained women, it also granted them autonomy and the opportunity to develop their creative voice:

The cloister, which common opinion often represents as a refuge (or a prison), was equally a place in which women could support each other and even cultivate a certain amount of independence. It provided women of greatly divergent personalities with a semiautonomous culture in which they could find sustenance, exert influence, and develop talents they never could have expressed as fully in the outside world. In that sense, the convent was a catalyst for autonomy. (149)

Conventual life, therefore, allows Isabel to influence other women and develop the talents and sense of autonomy she has experienced in her journey disguised as a Muslim slave.

The power of Isabel's story is not lost on Lisis, who, in the closing moments of the narrative frame, proclaims "no me siento más firme que la hermosa doña Isabel, a quien no le aprovecharon tantos trabajos como en el discurso de su desengaño nos refirió, de que mis temores han tenido principio" (508). Here Isabel's influence as an example for future generations of women is embodied by Lisis, who also chooses conventual life as a means of protection from men: "me acojo a sagrado y tomo por amparo el retiro de un convento, desde donde pienso (como en talanquera) ver lo que sucede a los



demás. Y así, con mi querida doña Isabel, a quien pienso acompañar mientras viviere, me voy a salvar de los engaños de los hombres” (509). This communal influence from one woman to another contributes to what Vollendorf sees as the “gynocentric exemplarity” of the *Desengaños*. By allowing her female characters to speak for themselves, Zayas infuses a female perspective into a literary tradition dominated by men.<sup>14</sup> Once a silent object defined by the frame narrator and her father’s wishes, Isabel has emerged as a powerful and influential voice that refuses to accept the injustices women often faced under the patriarchal authority of the male honor code.

Isabel’s ability to control how others see and read her grants her autonomy and frees her creative spirit from the oppressive forces of the male honor code. Although she is unable to restore her honor through marriage to Manuel, her decision to do so by entering the convent speaks volumes about the woman she has become. While she can never escape the patriarchal authority of early modern Spain, Isabel chooses the option that grants her physical safety, spiritual and emotional healing, and continued creative autonomy. As a Christian aristocrat who seeks to restore her honor through marriage, it is ironically her disguise as a Muslim slave that frees her inner voice and provides her such autonomy. Just as so many Moriscos eluded and resisted Christian authorities in order to preserve their Muslim identity, Isabel’s decision to embrace conventual life is both a means to preserve her regained sense of self and a refusal to tolerate further abuses at the hands of any man. Her journey as Christian aristocrat disguised as a Muslim slave is also an enduring reminder of the ability of women and religious minorities to challenge and resist authority in early modern Spain. By creating a character who transgresses ethno-religious and geographical boundaries, Zayas reminds us of the mutability

of religious identity. In spite of state efforts to categorize and separate Muslims and Christians in early modern Spain based on appearance and evidence of cultural or religious practices, Zayas demonstrates the inherent shortcomings of such an approach. The dual identity of Isabel Fajardo/Zelima within the *Desenganos amorosos* reminds us that looks can be deceiving and that religious identity could be altered or manipulated to suit one's needs and surroundings during a period of continued tension between Moriscos and Christian authority.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For discussion of the increasing tensions between Moriscos and Christian authorities throughout the sixteenth century and of the failed attempts to assimilate the Moriscos into the Christian mainstream see Domínguez Ortiz and Bernard Vincent 17-72. For further detail on how Morisco women utilized the domestic sphere as a space of resistance to Christian authority, see Perry's chapter on "Dangerous Domesticity" in *The Handless Maiden*, p. 65-87.

<sup>2</sup> The most notable and influential of the dispersions of Moriscos occurred in 1570 as a response to the Morisco uprising in the Alpujarra Mountains of Granada in 1568-70. Previously, under Charles I, prohibitions on Morisco culture had intensified and in 1566 Philip II issued by royal decree a ban on all Morisco culture throughout his kingdom. This sparked the Alpujarra uprising, which was defeated and led to the dispersion of the Granadan Moriscos throughout southern and central Spain. For further discussion of where the Granadan Moriscos relocated, see Harvey 234-37 and Epalza 68-75.

<sup>3</sup> Elliot observes that this view was intensified by the Moriscos' Muslim ties with the Turks, whose encroaching Ottoman empire was a serious threat to Spain's territories in southern Italy and the western Mediterranean under Charles I and, later, Phillip II (168). For further discussion of this topic, see Elliot 235-41 and 305-08.

<sup>4</sup> Philip III exempted Morisco vassals from the expulsion since noble Christian landowners depended upon them for the cultivation of their lands. These vassals accounted for approximately 6 percent of the total Morisco population at the time (Perry, *Handless Maiden* 158). Also exempt were irreplaceable artisans; clerics and nuns; children under the age of seven; and wives, servants, and slaves of Old Christians (Perry, *Handless Maiden* 166-67).

<sup>5</sup> "Había, pues, en la España del XVII una mescolanza de moriscos que consiguieron quedarse, ya con títulos legales, ya disimulados; de moriscos que volvieron, cuya suerte fue variada; de esclavos moriscos y mahometanos; e incluso hubo berberiscos que atravesaron espontáneamente el Estrecho para quedarse en España, pidiendo el bautismo como requisito previo ineludible" (Domínguez Ortiz and Vincent 257).

<sup>6</sup> While debate exists as to the exact year of Zayas's death (both 1661 and 1669 have been suggested), baptismal records indicate she was born in September 1590. She therefore would have been 19 years old when the decree for expulsion was made public on September 22, 1609 in Valencia (Epalza 11, n.1). Greer, meanwhile, cites the appearance of Zayas's signature in the court city of Madrid in 1617 (20). For discussion of the years of Zayas's death and birth, see Serrano y Sanz, *Apuntes para una biblioteca de escritoras españolas desde el año 1401 al 1833*, p. 583-84. For additional information on Zayas's life see Yllera 11-21 and Greer 17-35.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed analysis of the Alpujarra uprising, including its causes and the subsequent relocation of the Granadan Moriscos, see Harvey 204-37 and Domínguez Ortiz and Vincent 35-56.

<sup>8</sup> The Spanish Royal Academy defines the term *aljuba* as "Vestidura morisca, usada también por los cristianos, consistente en un cuerpo ceñido en la cintura, abotonado, con mangas y falda que solía llegar hasta las rodillas" ("Aljuba"). An *almalafa*, meanwhile, was "Vestidura moruna que cubría el cuerpo desde los hombros hasta los pies" ("Almalafa").

<sup>9</sup> Yllera observes that "Era costumbre de la época marcar con un hierro candente a los esclavos en el rostro. La marca más frecuente era la S y clavo, aunque no era la única" (117, n. 2).

<sup>10</sup> Vincent explains that Inquisitorial documents from Valencia in the late sixteenth century reveal that only nine out of 259 male Moriscos questioned did not know Castilian, while 184 of 310 female Moriscos did not, a difference of 3.5% of men to 59% of women. Vincent concludes that, "Las mujeres moriscas valencianas o granadinas, totalmente analfabetas, con escaso contacto con el mundo de cristianos viejos, conservan el lenguaje ancestral mejor que sus maridos o que sus hermanos" (589).

<sup>11</sup> Allyson Poska's recent work on the peasants of Galicia reveals that honor affected all levels of society in early modern Spain, not just aristocrats. Poska also notes that literary representations of the code were often exaggerated, most likely for dramatic effect, since in reality "the Castilian legal system provided women and their families with a variety of mechanisms to restore their impugned reputations, none of which involved murder" (7). In addition, a variety of factors affected male-female relations in early modern Spain, not just honor: "for the most part, historians have remained narrowly focused on honour based on female chastity, ignoring

the other possible social and cultural norms that might have structured gender relations. Early modern Spain was not a unified society, but instead a patchwork of many social classes and regional cultures. Honour may have been only one of many factors that defined the actions and interactions of Spanish men and women” (Poska 9).

<sup>12</sup> Boronat y Barrachina (585) observe that in 1610, the bishop of Orihuela addressed this potential threat in a letter to Phillip III, noting that women are of particular concern “because they are used to being more effective in persuading the children to follow the said sect” (qtd. in Perry, *Handless Maiden* 172).

<sup>13</sup> “La esclavitud era fenómeno frecuente en la España Moderna, si bien limitado en su extensión geográfica, puso [sic] sólo en el sur, *en la Corte* y en algún otro punto aislado como Valencia llegó a tener gran densidad” (Domínguez Ortiz and Vicent 265; emphasis mine). In addition, Serrano y Sanz observes the appearance in 1624 of the name María de Zayas as the owner of a Muslim slave. While he cautions that Zayas’s name was not uncommon in Madrid in the seventeenth century, he explains that “A fines del año 1624, D. Francisco Ordóñez de Lara fué procesado por haber dado muerte en Málaga á D. José de Aguirre, y entre los testigos que declararon figura una esclava llamada Fátima cuya dueña era *doña María de Zayas*” (584).

<sup>14</sup> Vollendorf explains that by “Responding to the masculine literary tradition that portrays women negatively, these texts are meant to free women’s voices and to tell their side of the story” (69).

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## War Machines: Instrumentality and Empire in Early Modern Spanish Drama

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In an age characterized by a fascination with novelty, what David Castillo has called a “culture of curiosity,” innovative machines paradoxically carried Spain toward modernization at a time of theological resistance to change (Castillo 37). Since the era of Feijóo, at least, critical assessments of pre-Enlightenment Spain have emphasized the nation’s cultural “atraso,” deeply rooted in Counter-Reformation Catholicism. But this portrait of a historically backward and epistemologically retrograde Spain is only a small part of a larger picture. It is a commonplace assumption that Spain failed to embrace the emerging knowledge and technologies of the early modern period that culminated in the so-called Scientific Revolution while the rest of Europe surged forward toward the Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> However, the historical and cultural record shows that early modern Spanish attitudes toward scientific and technological advancement were much more complex and were fraught with the inconsistencies and tensions we might expect of a society that strove to achieve political and military advantage through technological innovation while promoting a conservative theology that found the metaphysical implications of scientific progress to be heretical (López Piñero 17-23).

Spain found itself intermittently in the vanguard of scientific advancement throughout the sixteenth century, precisely during its period of imperial expansion, often

promoting the exchange of new ideas in ways that might seem surprisingly progressive. During the last quarter of the sixteenth century, for example, Salamanca was the only European university to admit the teaching of Copernican cosmology, although by century's end, Counter-Reformation theology would reverse this innovation (López Piñero 18). Despite its deference to dogmatic Catholicism and reactionary embrace of scholasticism in the face of rising empiricism in Europe, Spain remained in the forefront of technologies it found useful in pursuing its imperial and political interests. Spain was competitive in the development of artillery, navigational technologies, and the related field of cosmography, which sought to develop a comprehensive knowledge of the world through the methodical study of astronomy and geography, with emphasis on the practical application of new scientific advancements (Navarro Brotons 14-15; Domínguez 145-46).<sup>2</sup> Several treatises on navigation date from this era, including Pedro de Medina's widely translated and reprinted *Arte de navegar* (1545, 1563) and Martín Cortés's *Breve compendio de la sphaera* (1551), both of which were considered so cutting-edge that England, Spain's growing imperial rival, used them for decades before developing its own navigational treatises.<sup>3</sup>

Early modern Spain excelled in the production of firearms and war engines. As historian Kenneth Chase explains, during the sixteenth century Europe may have surpassed Asia in firearm technology (7; 60-61); advances in Spain helped lead the way (Bunch 131). A century earlier, the efficient production of more powerful gunpowder had made possible the development of small arms that could be carried in battle, including the arquebus. By the 1540s, Spanish arms makers were manufacturing the first muskets. These large battle guns required two people to mount and fire, but they broke new ground in the

development of smaller, more portable arms and prompted the elimination of armor, which was ineffective against the musket on the field of battle (Chase 61). The allied victory at Lepanto in 1571 was partially due to the superior firepower of the European forces, whose fleet employed cannons, harquebuses, and muskets against Turkish swords.

Spanish superiority in the development of artillery and navigation technology was a practical response to the necessities of building an empire. Of the Spanish attitude toward the development of technology José Cepeda Adán writes,

Sobre la marcha, por supuesto, y paralelamente al despliegue de las ideas, iba dando respuestas prácticas a los problemas técnicos que se le presentaban en la navegación, en el beneficio de metales, en las artes de la guerra, en el dominio de la distancia y el espacio, en el urbanismo. Es decir, estaba en la primera línea de lo que las necesidades de los tiempos exigían en la vida material con resultados tangibles y útiles (37-38).

Contrary to narratives that portray Spain as hopelessly backward, lagging behind the rest of Europe in embracing the new scientific ideas circulating in early modern Europe, Spanish material culture was highly technological and encouraged experimentation and innovation in the development of practical applications of new scientific ideas, as long as they were useful in supporting Spanish military and political hegemony.

Furthermore, the rise of mechanics was accompanied by a reordering of thinking during this period, and this new way of thinking was itself mechanical. Steven Shapin identifies four aspects of this reordering: the mechanization of nature (through the development of useful technology), the depersonalization of knowledge (which is the growing separation of subject and object and the rise of “objectivity”), the mechanization of

knowledge itself (through the creation of rules and methods to regulate the production of knowledge), and the use of the resulting knowledge to achieve moral, social, and political ends (Shapin 13), what Jessica Wolfe also refers to as "instrumentality" or the application of mechanized knowledge and methods to social and political realms (Wolfe 1). Early modern culture was fascinated with machinery and began to understand the world as a clockwork universe in which the careful, methodical, application of human ingenuity could solve problems and achieve both public and private goals. Here it is interesting to note the multiple meanings of Spanish words like *ingenio* and *industria*, which initially referred to activities of the human imagination but came to refer also to engines and mechanization.

Consequently, cultural artifacts of this period evidence an artistic interest in machines that might be termed an aesthetic of instrumentality. The plastic arts, literature, and theatre of this period represent images of machines that underscore an awareness of burgeoning modernity and its instrumental worldview. The frequent artistic representations of machines, and the way they encourage people to look at them, assimilate them, and attempt to understand them, constitute a system for exchanging ideas about a modern culture in development, expressing a sense of wonder about the ingenious inventions that were a hallmark of the time, and also promoting an awareness of achievement in the successful harnessing of natural forces to serve human needs. Machines are foregrounded in literary works like *Don Quijote* (whose protagonist not only fights windmills, fulling mills, water mills, and mechanical contraptions, but also rails against the “endemoniados instrumentos de la artillería” [448]) and in many examples of Spanish poetry, where they represent images of stability, order, and precision in a

variety of social contexts (Heiple). And in the burgeoning entertainment industry of the age, machines themselves were used to create theatrical illusion in dramatic performance, delighting audiences with mechanized special effects or *tramoyas*.

Indeed, early modern European culture drew multiple parallels between mechanics and theatrical spectacle, portraying ingenious devices and technology as a kind of visual “theatre” to be viewed, contemplated, and assimilated into the public consciousness. The genre of pictorial machine-books known as the *theatrum mechanorum*, or theatre of machines, enjoyed widespread circulation throughout Europe, as evidenced by reprints and multilingual editions, including translations in Spanish. This genre flourished at the end of the sixteenth century with the works of Jacques Besson's *Théâtre des instrumens mathématiques et mechaniques* (1569, with reprints in 1578, 1579, and 1594), Agostino Ramelli's *Diverse e artificiose macchine* (1588), Vittorio Zonca's *Nuovo teatro de machine et edificii* (1607), and *Los veintiún libros de los ingenios y de las máquinas de Juanelo* (ca.1580), attributed to Philip II's engineer Juanelo Turriano.<sup>4</sup> These books juxtaposed detailed pictures of ingenious machines and their constituent parts with prose descriptions to guide the reader in their appreciation. These illustrated treatises on technology described not only existing instruments, such as mills, pumps, and dredges, but also designs for original devices, ranging from the practical to the purely imaginative.

On the practical end of the scale, Ramelli's detailed diagrams of windmills and their working parts, labeled with letters, are considered the earliest illustrations of these ubiquitous machines (Image 1). On the more imaginative end of the scale, Ramelli's original design for a revolving lectern or book wheel, another testament to Renaissance ingenuity, similarly draws associations between mechanics and the creative

imagination in conceiving of such original instrumentation (Image 2).

Ramelli's inventions, of both the practical and imaginative type, strive to accomplish difficult tasks with ease and inspire a sense of wonder or *asombro* in his public. They represent technology as a visual, artistic spectacle to be viewed and appreciated, requiring the active participation of the reader, whose gaze is trained and directed by the labeled images in what Kenneth J. Knoespel has called a hermeneutics of technology (122). The *theatrum mechanorum* is an aesthetic manifestation of a theoretical and practical interest in machines and the effects of mechanization. These treatises have in common a celebration of human ingenuity, of triumph over the natural world through mechanization, and of accomplishing difficult tasks with ease (a concept closely related to the Renaissance court culture of *sprezzatura*). Indeed, the inherent theatricality of these "theatres of machines" culminates later in the seventeenth century in Georg Böckler's *Theatrum machinarum novum* (1662), whose title page depicts Archimedes and a personified Mechanics opening a theatrical curtain to reveal the visual spectacle of modern machinery improving the life of a village (Image 3).

A genre of illustrated military treatises complements the *theatrum mechanorum* throughout the sixteenth century, including Agricola's *De re metallica* (1546), Biringuccio's *De la pirotechnia* (1540), and Spanish reprints of Cornazzano's *De re militari* titled *De arte militar* (1550). Of these, Roberto Valturio's *De re militari* (1472) was the first to be printed by mechanical press, and it enjoyed renewed popularity through multiple editions in the sixteenth century. Valturio details a wide array of military inventions, including tower fortifications, hoists and levers, catapults, cannons, and armored ships. It also includes fanciful

designs, such as this cannon laden war machine in the form of a dragon (Image 4).

Valturio's imaginative machine expresses a consciousness of technology being caught between eras. It not only celebrates the modern age and the ingenuity of its new war machines, but also contemplates the past in the form of the dragon, associated with fantastic chivalric lore from the story of St. George through medieval tradition. Biringuccio's well-known treatise *De la pirotechnia* is comparable in this regard (Image 5).<sup>5</sup>

This illustration shows modern war technology defeating the knight, as horsemen flee from the powerful, impersonal devices that would render them obsolete. The widespread circulation of the *theatrum mechanorum* and war machine books documents not only a cultural fascination with machinery, but also an understanding that such devices were new and potentially life-changing. Technological imagery in the early modern period is self-conscious, representing through visual arts an opposition between modernity and the past that is intrinsically nostalgic.

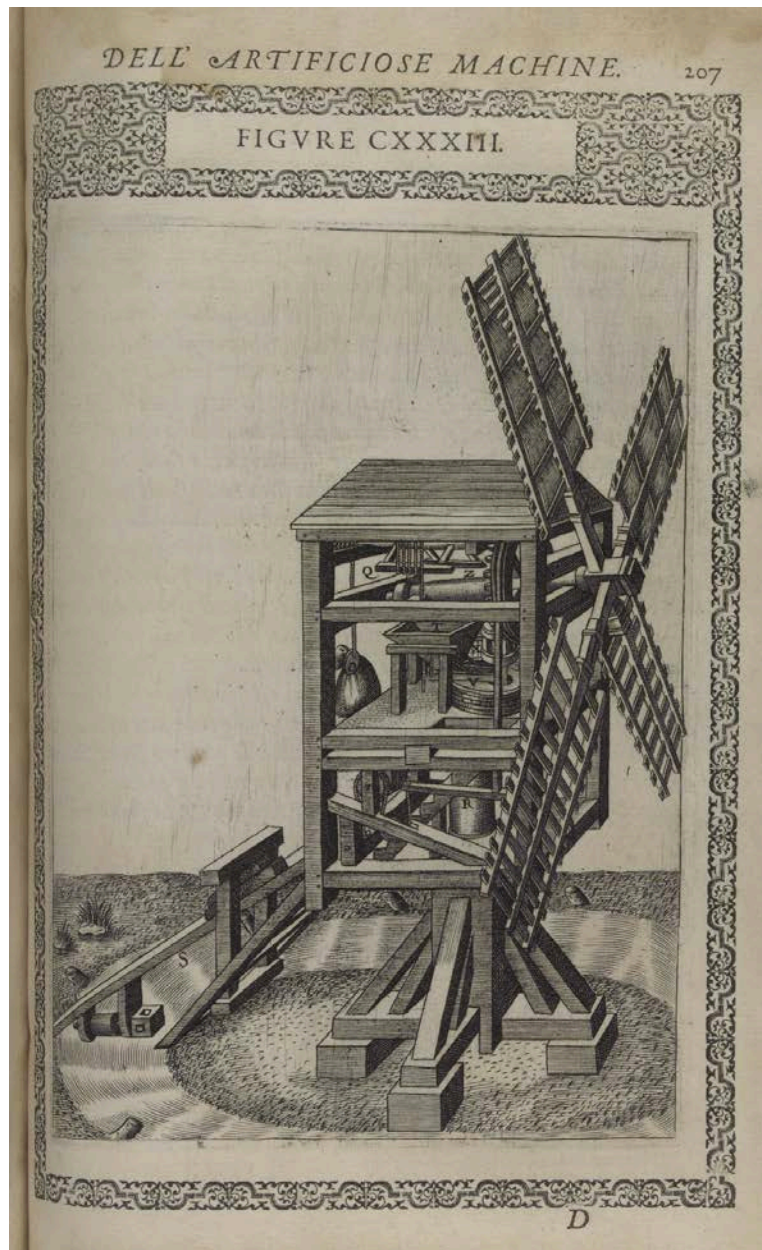


Image 1: Ramelli Windmill



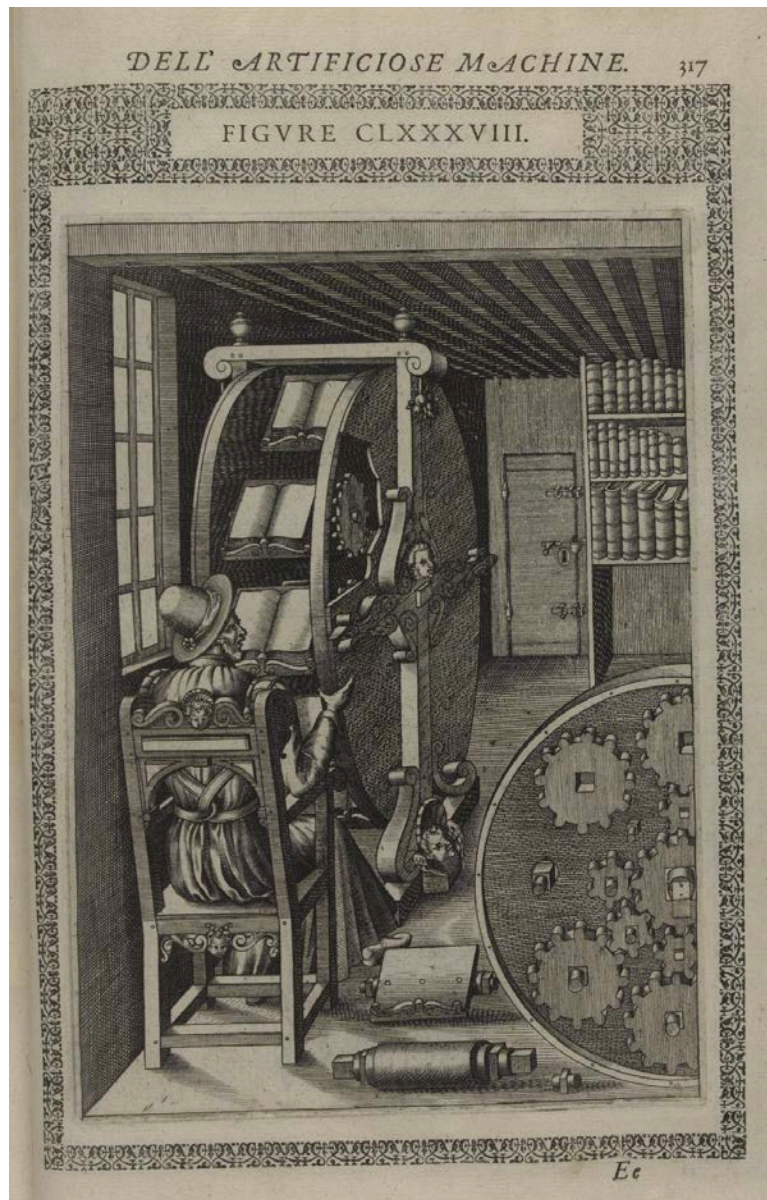


Image 2: Ramelli Book Wheel



Image 3: Bockler



Image 4: Valturio





Image 5: Biringuccio

The *theatrum mechanorum* demonstrates that there is a performative relationship between Renaissance attitudes toward machinery and the problematization of how best to accomplish difficult goals. Machine images come to serve metaphorically as indicators of an instrumental view of human agency. This early modern aesthetic of instrumentality is forward-looking and emphasizes step-by-step approaches to achieving goals (including social and political goals) in a determined, orderly fashion, evidencing the mechanization of knowledge and rise of method identified by Shapin as a part of the reordering of early modern thought. The expectation that success is brought about

through ingenuity and the careful application of method was a hallmark of emerging scientific discourse in this period, and a related instrumental view of human agency is reflected aesthetically in early modern cultural production.

How, then, are war machines and instrumentality represented in the theatre of early modern Spain? Many Golden Age plays are set against the backdrop of war, which reflects a cultural preoccupation during the time of Spain's military intervention in Europe and the Americas. Interestingly, relatively few *comedias* actually depict the artillery and war machines that enabled Spanish hegemony. One practical reason may be the difficulty in constructing large machinery or using cannons and guns on the stage. Even when guns are depicted in Golden Age plays, more often than not they are off-stage sound effects (the phrase "dispara una pieza" recurs in several war dramas), or denoted by one or two characters carrying pistols as unused stage props. Further, the temporal and geographical "distancing" common in many *comedias* sets these plays in the past, sometimes before the advent of artillery. Therefore, the sword becomes the stage prop that most frequently denotes war. Instead of literally representing war machines in battle, then, the *comedia* represents war as an instrumental process or method. The theatrical representation of war participates in the early modern aesthetic of instrumentality, representing war as a means of achieving political ends in an age in which problems could be solved through the efficient application of method.

I have chosen to discuss in this context two dramas from the late sixteenth century, a period of political and economic turmoil and social introspection that coincided with the rise of mechanics. *La Numancia*, by Cervantes, was performed a decade after Lepanto, in the mid 1580s, when economic and political crises prompted the Spanish public to question the limits of its

own imperial ambitions. *El nuevo mundo descubierto por Cristóbal Colón*, by Lope de Vega, was composed a decade later, around the centenary of the Columbian expeditions, and likewise treats Spanish hegemony with thought-provoking ambivalence. My intention here is not to provide a comprehensive literary analysis of both plays; instead I will highlight certain elements that suggest a context of instrumentality. These two plays offer distinct but complementary messages about war, imperial success, and utopian possibilities, while demonstrating that yet another level of instrumentality lies in the nature of theatrical performance itself.

*Numancia* begins with a visual representation of the Roman army onstage; for a reading public the first stage direction indicates that the Romans are armed “a lo antiguo, sin arcabuces” (64). Cervantes sets the scene by describing the absence of modern war machines, distancing his play from his audience’s contemporary associations with war. Throughout the play, most arms references are to swords, which the Romans brandish as a double signifier of their military superiority and the play’s pre-modern setting. The development of war machines dates to the classical period, of course, and the Romans were known for siege engines, catapults, battering rams, and other devices that gave them a tactical advantage over their adversaries. Interestingly, Cervantes does not mention these archetypal Roman inventions. Instead, he juxtaposes the “armas” (100, 124, 402) and “fuertes brazos” (414) of the Romans with the “manos” (166, 624) of the Numantinos, who end the siege with their own hands at the conclusion of the play.

The Numantinos do, however, have a strong fortified wall, which enables them to sustain their defense for several years. Cervantes here represents the historical reality that before the advent of firepower, siege warfare often favored the

defensive position. The invention of firearms would reverse this power relationship, giving the offensive forces the ability to win siege battles until the resulting race for defensive arms would level the playing field in Cervantes's own time (Chase 62). In the pre-modern setting of this play, the Romans dig trenches designed to starve the Numantinos into submission, but the trenches also prevent the Romans from using weapons to storm the city's walls. As Teógenes says at the opening of the second act: "El ancho foso nos estorba el medio / de probar con las armas la ventura" (557-58). The Roman military advantage in this play, then, is not tactical, but strategic, representing war itself as an instrumental process, a method, as a means to an end, both for Rome (through its conquest of Hispania) and personally for Cipión (to achieve fame at all costs). Cervantes's play portrays the institutional victory of Rome as a personal defeat for Cipión, who is deprived of his desired fame by the hands of the indigenous people he attempts to conquer.

Rather than depicting war engines on stage, Cervantes represents Rome itself as a war machine, as a dispassionate, monolithic, almost mechanical force driving relentlessly toward victory, despite the more humane proposals of singular battle and peace treaties that emanate from the Numantino camp. In opposition to the Numantinos' ideal of "justa batalla" (1202), Rome is repeatedly characterized as a cruel and its weapons as "espadas homicidas" (2037) and "espadas pérfidas" (2103). While Romans are associated with technical superiority, they are characterized in the play as morally weak or "flojos" (85-88). In comparison to the sympathetic Numantinos, they are portrayed as a dehumanized, collective military force designed to accomplish its goals with mechanized efficiency. The word "máquina" in this period, of course, denotes not only machinery, but also machinations and strategies employed to achieve certain

ends. Cervantes uses the word this way in many of his literary works, and it also pertains to the instrumental context of the Roman war machine in *Numancia*. But what instruments are available to the Numantinos? Lacking sufficient weapons and strength to fight the Romans, the Numantinos must avail themselves of the only instruments they have, their *industria* (to strategize a way of preventing a complete Roman victory) and their own hands (to carry out their plan). In *Numancia*, war as military conquest is the instrument of hegemonic, imperial power, whose goal is to subjugate an indigenous population. It is a means to an end achieved through technological advancement but also through strategy. While the Numantinos cannot compete on the tactical level of weaponry, the instrumental application of strategy does level the playing field and allows them to eke out a moral, if not tactical, victory. While war itself is represented instrumentally as a means of achieving political ends, the moral context of *how* war is executed determines its perceived legitimacy.<sup>6</sup>

Just as Cervantes juxtaposes the Roman military conquest with *Numancia*'s moral victory, he likewise challenges the unquestioned acceptance of Spanish imperial hegemony. Evoking sympathy for the Numantinos as they face the cruel realities of imperial conquest, Cervantes employs allegorical figures to draw parallels to his own age, in which Spain itself is an empire on the brink of decadence. The personified Duero places the image of Roman weaponry—the “aguda espada”—into the hands of the Spanish empire, who must use it justly to earn the title “España amada:”

¡Qué envidia, qué temor, España amada,  
te tendrán mil naciones extranjeras,  
en quien tú reñirás tu aguda espada  
y tenderás triunfando tus banderas (521-24)



At the end of the play, Fama addresses the audience directly, charging the contemporary “hijos de tales padres herederos” (2436) to enact a happy ending for the play in their own time: “demos feliz remate a nuestra historia” (2448). Cervantes understood the participatory nature of performance and effectively utilized theatrical time and space to propose an interactive referendum on the values of the emergent Spanish nation. This exemplifies what theatre scholar Jill Dolan has called “the utopian performative,” the idea of theatrical performance as a participatory forum in which social and political ideals can be affirmed in shared space and time, encouraging the audience to envision a better future (457).

For Cervantes himself, war had been a way of life, which he understood thoroughly from technical, political, and philosophical perspectives. We have reason to believe that Cervantes also understood theatre as a vehicle for the communication of ideas. In the *Adjunta al Parnaso*, he justifies the redirection of his unperformed plays to a reading public “para que se vea de espacio lo que pasa a priesa, y se disimula, o no se entiende, cuando las representan,” acknowledging that there are important ideas in his dramas awaiting the attentive reader (*Poesías* 183). Not all theatre must be a theatre of ideas, but Cervantes’s words suggest that the dramatic form is conducive to the presentation of ideas, as a meeting of the minds in the shared space of theatrical performance, or, in the case of his unperformed plays, on the page. Thus, there is an instrumental aspect of theatrical performance itself. The interactive nature of performance allows people to come together in a shared space to contemplate ideas considered meaningful by the playwright and the audience, what Richard Schechner has termed the “gathering-performing-dispersing” moments of live theatrical performance (176).

In *El nuevo mundo descubierto por Cristóbal Colón*, Lope de Vega likewise utilizes the interactive theatrical medium to articulate a debate about the moral conduct of Spain's imperial goals. While the play offers an almost hagiographic treatment of Columbus in preparing the indigenous Americans for religious conversion, it also depicts the Spanish conquerors as violent and greedy, exploiting America for its mineral wealth, and establishing a thematic opposition of *Dios* and *Oro* that generates much of the play's dramatic tension. The story of Columbus, of course, historically showcases the successes of Spanish navigation as well as the development of firearms eventually used to subdue the indigenous population. Unlike *Numancia*, in which stage directions prescribe the absence of arquebuses, in *El Nuevo mundo* the arquebus is present as a sound effect *tramoya*, providing an immediately recognizable auditory reminder of Spanish military might. In Act Two, a stage direction reads "disparen dentro dos o tres arcabuzazos" (1447) and a second firing results in injury: "Al tirar disparen algunas escopetas, y caigan en tierra" (1842). The Spaniards' reliance on superior war technology is made clear when Columbus instructs his men, "Mientras que la gente llama, / saquemos las armas todas" (1711-12).



Image 6: DeBry

Modern war machines in this play, therefore, announce the arrival of the Spaniards, who enter brandishing not only their superior arms, but also a giant crucifix: “Huyan todos los indios, y entren Colón, y Bartolomé, Fray Buyl, Pinzón, Arana Terrazas; traiga el fraile una cruz grande verde” (1557, stage direction). Columbus plants the cross in the ground as a beacon of divine enlightenment:

Padre, dadme aquesa cruz,

que aquí la quiero poner,  
 que este el farol ha de ser  
 que dé al mundo nueva luz. (1571-74).

The cross proves to be an even more potent instrument of conquest than firearms, frightening the indigenous characters nearly as much as the previous gunshots, as indicated by another stage direction: *Entran los indios espantados y llegan a la cruz* (1742), and ultimately functioning as the vehicle for indigenous conversion and the expulsion of demonic forces from the New World (2778-2813). While the indigenous characters arm themselves with “arcos” (1243, 2221), “flechas” (1353), and “mazas” (2792, stage direction) the Spanish easily subdue their adversaries with swords, firearms, and, more importantly, the cross, all of which are effectively depicted in Theodor DeBry’s engraving from the same period, *Columbus Landing at Guanahani* (1594) (Image 6).

Like *Numancia*, *El nuevo mundo* dramatizes an empire conquering an indigenous population. This play likewise questions the morality of the conquering force, while reaffirming the legitimacy of conquest as an imperial tool, at least in terms of its evangelizing mission. Also like *Numancia*, *El nuevo mundo* depicts a leader who rises above the problematic morality of his forces. In Lope’s play, however, Columbus succeeds in achieving his personal goals, which are inseparable from the Spanish crown’s missionary objectives. While criticizing the greed and violence of the conquest, the public debate over which unfolded during the decades before the composition of this play, Lope elevates Columbus precisely because of his instrumentality. Columbus is represented throughout this work as the Christopherens, or instrument of Christ, who prepares the indigenous population of the Americas for conversion and spreads universal Christianity. King Ferdinand acknowledges this

at the end of the play, localizing in Columbus's name the undeniable presence of Christ as well as the destiny of Spanish colonization:

Cristóbal, vuestro apellido  
os da alabanza, Colón,  
que autor de tal redención  
algo de Cristo ha tenido. (2870-2873).

Lope, himself a priest, is able to criticize Spanish greed and violence as inhumane aspects of the conquest by opposing them to Columbus as a force for the greater good. Columbus, whose arrival in this play is described as bringing peace, not war (“Que estos huéspedes no son / de guerra, sino de paz” [1891-92]) represents a post-Lascasian concern for the welfare of Spain's new subjects, projected retroactively onto the historical figure who opened the conquest. Juxtaposing *Dios* and *Oro*, Lope invites his audience to contemplate how Spain conducts its empire, showing through theatrical images that war and conquest may be legitimate instruments of empire, but how those instruments are used matters. Lope, like Cervantes, views theatrical performance as playing an instrumental, even empowering, role in encouraging the audience to think about their nation's future direction.

To conclude, then, these two plays from the late sixteenth century reflect a cultural fascination with machinery and instrumentality frequently represented in the visual, literary, and dramatic arts of the time. Often juxtaposed to traditional values of church and state, war machines come to stand for an almost mechanized process of empire building and hegemonic preservation during changing times. War is the instrument of empire, but the legitimate use of this instrument requires careful, deliberate, moral choice. The literal and figurative representation of war machines show Spain to be straddling imperial success

and failure, in plays that lead the theatrical audience to contemplate choices and solutions through the collaborative atmosphere of live performance.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a concise summary of the scholarly debate on the nomenclature of the so-called Scientific Revolution, see Shapin. Recent scholarship has questioned the binarism (and the related Foucauldian conception of changing epistemes) inherent in this term, finding instead consistent evidence of disagreement, contradictions, and multilateral thinking in the early modern period (Westman and Lindberg xviii).

<sup>2</sup> The development of sixteenth-century Spanish cosmography is indebted to Peter Apian's *Cosmographia* (Antwerp, 1539), which was frequently translated into Spanish from the 1540s to the end of the century. A 1575 Spanish translation augments Apian's geographical consideration of the Old World with the inclusion of excerpts from López de Gómara's *Historia general*, evidencing Spain's imperial project. The Newberry Library holds a copy of this hybrid volume (catalog number Ayer 7.A7 1575).

<sup>3</sup> The publication of English translations of Medina and Cortés corresponds to England's rise as an imperial power in the 1580s and 1590s, displacing Spain. Early English editions of Medina's treatise date to 1581, while translations of Cortés were published in 1584 and 1596. All three may be found in the Folger Shakespeare Library, among other archives (Folger catalog numbers STC 17771, STC 5801, and STC 5803, respectively).

<sup>4</sup> Besson's work is considered the first of the genre in its mature form and a Spanish translation of 1602 establishes its circulation in Spain. Nicolás García Tapia persuasively argues that *Los veintiún libros de los ingenios y de las máquinas*, usually attributed to Juanelo Turriano, was in fact authored by the Aragonese engineer Pedro Juan de Lastanosa (87).

<sup>5</sup> The pictorial military treatises of Valturio and Biringuccio express an explicit indebtedness to obvious antecedents, such as Vitruvius Pollio's *De architectura*, and the Latin writer Vegetius, which also saw multiple reprints in the late sixteenth century.

<sup>6</sup> The question of whether Cervantes evokes patriotism in his audience or suggests a more subversive message is a subject of critical debate. Willard F. King acknowledges that *Numancia* is a complex critique of "the legitimacy of the conquest of alien peoples by force of arms" (207). Carroll B. Johnson contends that the play invokes both positive and negative

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visions of imperial Spain (315). Barbara A. Simerka contends that Cervantes's play questions the legitimacy of wars of imperialism in the time of Philip II's campaign in Flanders (61).



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From the Roman Baroque to the Indian Jungle:  
Francis Xavier's *Letters* from Goa, or the Construction of a God

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As soon as he left the European continent for Goa, the capital of Portuguese India since 1510, the Jesuit Saint Francis Xavier started several epistolary relationships to remain connected with both Rome and Lisbon: outside of India, he exchanged descriptive correspondence with his beloved brethren, with his friend and master Ignatius of Loyola, with the King of Portugal John III, and with Simon Rodriguez, the Jesuit Provincial of Portugal. In these letters, Francis Xavier presented to his correspondents all the challenges he faced in his mission to evangelize Asia.

Biographers and historians of the saint have often used these epistles as a primary database. However, literary criticism has neglected to envision them as texts in which the sequence, the juxtaposition, the variety of tones, and the evolution of the writer's psyche would be worth analyzing. Yet Francis Xavier used the only form of communication with the civilization he had left to reinvent his persona in a dramatic situation, to envision himself as the Apostle designated by God to reconcile Rome with "the world" (a term traditionally used in this time period to designate the periphery around the Holy See, self-designated as *axis mundi*, or center of the world), and to prove to the three main recipients of his letters how worthy he was of such a mission. His accounts had to provide very precise proof of the competency he was to demonstrate to a triptych of powers: Loyola the General, John III the Monarch, and Rodriguez the Provincial. An aggressive-to-defensive tone can often be noted in his correspondence with the Portuguese Crown, through his descriptions of the development of Goa, the projection of Counter-Reformation urban design in the middle of the "heathen" jungle of India.

These letters also invite their readers to perceive a historical transcendence in which we can see Francis Xavier as a reconciler, but not necessarily in the way in which he intended to be. Today, when the remains of the Jesuit era in Old Goa (a World's Heritage site with very limited maintenance funding) are fighting the growth of the jungle, Xavier's letters can be read with a touch of irony: the location of the Jesuit buildings is still a populated place, but only on certain days, when most pilgrims celebrate the Jesuit saint as part of a rotation in which they also celebrate Ganesh or Shiva. Yet the ambitions of Xavier, a rather young Jesuit nuncio who landed in Goa on May 6, 1542 after a very long journey, were all centered around the elimination of Hinduism and Islam from the Portuguese colony. Unlike the common representation of Jesuit missionaries trying to teach Christian doctrine to the indigenous people by using the preexisting religious traditions they encountered, Francis Xavier had no appreciation whatsoever of these religions: he was a Papal Legate on a mission to eradicate other practices.

Historical cinema, since the crowning of Roland Joffé's *The Mission* in 1986 by the Cannes Film Festival, has had an interest in exploring the life and letters of Jesuit missionaries to find examples of transculturation, but it hasn't shown any interest in representing the complexity of Francis Xavier's encounter with India. Perhaps this is due to the nature of the data in his letters: his omnipresent disgust with local traditions, his negativity about converting the Indian tribes, his pessimism about restoring Catholicism within the Indo-Portuguese community living in Goa, far from the motherland of Rome, and, above all, his rejection of transculturation.

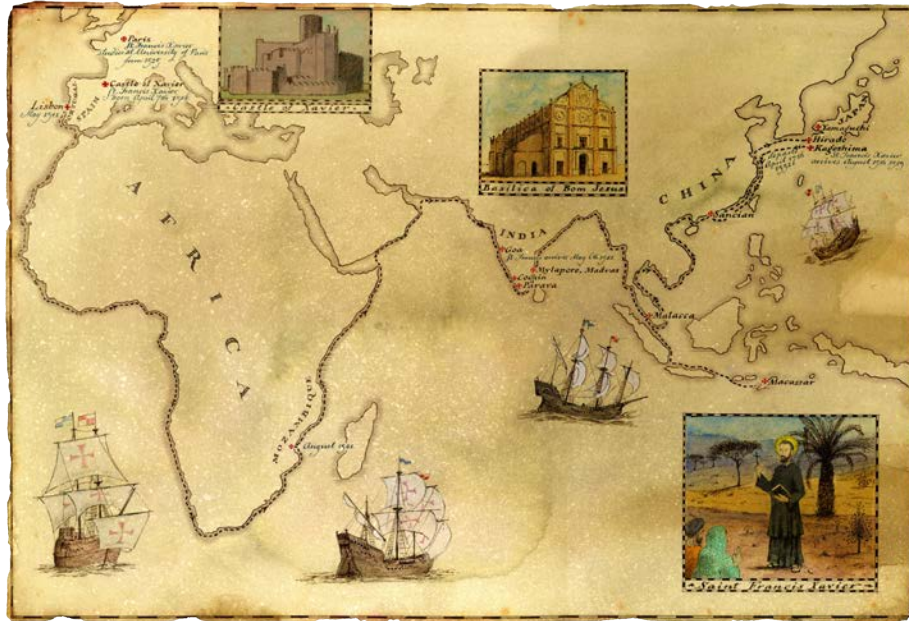


Figure 1: Itinerary of Francis Xavier with travel dates

Many letters show that Xavier had a strong desire to leave Goa, which developed very soon after his arrival, after his recognition of both the corruption around him and the impossibility of changing the culture. He was able to escape and visit other parts of Asia, but was somehow always obliged to return to the Portuguese enclave (Fig. 1). He had envisioned his stay in the Portuguese territory as a short chapter in his mission, a sort of purgatory that would enable him to access the Eastern paradise of Japan, where it was much easier to convert Buddhists to Loyola's Spiritual Exercises, the Jesuit meditation technique. Today, however, we tend to associate the Jesuit presence in China, Japan, and Korea with the figure and missionary success

of another Jesuit, Father Matteo Ricci. This missionary is a peaceful figure who is often remembered as a Western Confucianist, an example of a transculturated holy man closer to the fictitious Gabriel of *The Mission*.

Francis Xavier's destiny was distinct from Ricci's: ironically, he was to remain incorruptible, beyond death, in the very sanctuary of his worst disappointments, and to be worshipped as another deity of the Hindu pantheon. In the heart of Old Goa, his body is still visible: you have only to follow the line of pilgrims and it will lead you to the side chapel of the basilica where, all of a sudden, you will feel like you are in the vacant side chapels of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome (Fig. 2).



Figure 2: Lines of Pilgrims outside of Goa's *Bom Jesu*  
on December 3<sup>rd</sup>



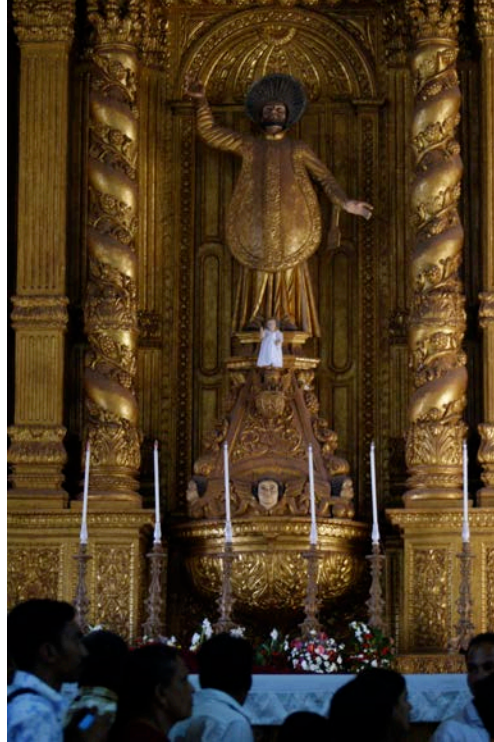


Figure 3: Main Altarpiece of *Bom Jesu* basilica

There you will find a golden casket seemingly floating above your head, rising toward the *trompe-l'oeil* ceilings that are one of the few well-maintained Catholic treasures in all of India (Fig. 3). As soon as you exit this displaced Roman structure, however, you know this place has failed to become the Rome of the East it was supposed to be under the young nuncio's administration. Under this Baroque architectural protection, the incorruptible body of Saint Francis Xavier resists the invasion of the jungle outside the walls of the Basilica of Bom Jesu.<sup>1</sup> Francis did not want to die in this Indo-Portuguese city that meant

nothing to him but constant disappointment, and he didn't. But somehow, his body made its way back to Goa, this ephemeral metropolis he dreaded, to sanctify and justify its construction and its decay.



Figure 4: *Arbol Petrófago* in Misiones, Argentina

The buildings of Old Goa today are like the body of the saint whose right arm was shipped back to Rome: they are still visible but mostly decomposed and incomplete. A few landmarks survived the passing of time but have lost their artistic treasures. Only with difficulty may one picture what the city and the body used to look like when they were at their apogee. Perhaps Xavier's sanctuary became the *locus reconciliatio*; that is, the justification Goa needed for the darkest period of its

Portuguese history, that of cultural imposition. If it weren't for his sacred body, this old city would have disappeared already, the surrounding jungle swallowing its last walls; or, the city would simply never have developed, as can be observed in the *misiones* of Argentina where the rainforest has reclaimed its territory (Fig. 4).

Yet these curious remains of a Baroque world that once wanted to display all the potential of its architecture are still preserved to sustain the memory of a young virgin Jesuit Apostle, who was chosen for the certainty of his chastity and sacrificed to the relatively unsuccessful Romanization of Asia.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps a new approach to this site and (hi)story needs to be taken, through a parallel reading of Xavier's letters to the three leaders mentioned above.

While Xavier remained close to the royal Portuguese court prior to his departure to India in May 1541, his letters were full of hope and projects for conversion. He shared this enthusiasm with Loyola very regularly: Xavier and Ignatius had spent so many years together since their years of university in Paris that their physical separation had to be overcome by an epistolary relationship. Xavier referred to Ignatius as "el padre de su alma," or *padre in visceribus Christi unico*, and Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* as "el libro de su vida" (Gutiérrez 17). In return, Loyola knew Xavier well enough to understand that their hopes and ambitions were the same, and foresaw that their dream to change the world had the potential to result in their eventual sainthood. Hopes of canonization were to abound in Counter-Reformation Rome among the first Jesuits who had invested all their energy in the cause of protecting the Pontiff and the Church since forming their Society as students in Paris. By 1622, both Loyola and Xavier would be canonized.

After the Council of Trent (1545–1563), there were two clearly defined ways for a motivated individual to become canonized: 1) through political consolidation of the Roman Church or, 2) through a missionary work with major repercussions in a remote and unevangelized part of the known world. Ignatius of Loyola picked the first option and stayed in Rome to exercise his function as General of the Society of Jesus, while his close followers, the early Jesuits such as Francis Xavier, Pierre Fabre, and Claudio Acquaviva, were assigned different functions to develop the Society throughout Europe and the world “to the greatest Glory of God.”<sup>3</sup>

Francis Xavier was Loyola's closest disciple, yet he would be shipped the farthest away from Rome, never to be seen again by his companions. Moreover, his assignment was not to evangelize the New World of the Americas, but rather a more challenging task: to convert Asia, a continent of ancient religious traditions, to Counter-Reformed Catholicism. The challenge of drawing these people away from the well-rooted belief systems of Hindu culture was, prior to his trip, perceived as formidable for this young and optimistic aspirant to sainthood: no one among the first Jesuits could dream of a greater cross to bear. Soon after his arrival, Xavier wrote to the Society in Rome:

All the sufferings of the long voyage, all the charge of bearing the sins of others while one has to bear the weight of his own, the having to live a long time together among unbelievers, and the extreme heat of the sun in this climate – all these trials, if borne as they ought to be borne for the love of God, turn out to be very great consolations and the subject of many and intense spiritual delights. (Coleridge I, 121)

Xavier was known to be an enlightened missionary, and he had the capacity to see this assignment clearly, as well as to envision

it as a Passion. His letters indicate that he understood his task as nearly impossible: to connect Rome with the unknown world of India through the corrupt political structure of Catholic Portugal and the growing metropolis of Goa, which it had recently established. It is obvious from his letters that the young man did not have a clear idea of what Goa was like, nor what it had become since the Portuguese had made it their territory 32 years prior to his arrival.

In many ways, to be shipped so far away from the Catholic epicenter, away from the companionship that gave full meaning to the Jesuit mission, was not part of the plan he had pictured for himself. However, his essential participation in the construction of a new urban epicenter for the Church of Rome in the East would suffice. Even before departing from Lisbon, Xavier knew it would not be an easy mission, but the Jesuit soldier remained optimistic. He envisioned innovative and motivating ways to stay in touch with the world he knew, the world of a politically drained and sacked city like Rome, about to be forever changed after the Council of Trent.

His way to survive this strenuous enterprise was to remain faithful to the very investment to which he had committed: the political development of the Society of Jesus, the strongest pillar of the Roman Church, present on all continents. Unlike the humble, Christ-like Father Gabriel of *The Mission*, Francis Xavier was the Papal Legate, one of the officers, the General's right arm, a man to be respected by the highest authorities. Far from his companions, he had full authority as Nuncio to practice Catholicism in the most Jesuit form: that is, to adapt the spiritual method he had received from Loyola, the *Spiritual Exercises*, to shape the political structure of India, and ultimately, to evangelize the whole oriental continent. In his view, the

temporal/political and the atemporal/spiritual could only be reformed and united through this meditation technique.

John III, the Portuguese monarch in 1540, had been exposed to this idea during his encounters with Francis Xavier in Lisbon, and had rapidly become a firm believer in the miracles deriving immediately from the Ignatian meditations. As Xavier wrote to Loyola on July 26, 1540, while still at the Court of John III of Portugal, the King showed great interest in understanding the method and “asked for the book of the *Exercises*” (I, 73). As Roland Barthes explains in his essay titled “Loyola,” the *Spiritual Exercises* project the exercitant into different narrative paths in order for him/her to envision which one will lead him/her to God (41-78). Through the guidance of a spiritual director, the exercitant is isolated for four consecutive weeks in order to envision and simulate various situations. At this point in time, very few copies of Loyola's book were available, since the method was still very recent; a personal copy would have to be made for His Highness. As P. Rayanna points out: “The King ... completely lost his heart to [the Jesuits] and their institute. ... Nobody else, no other crowned head, did ever do so much for the Society of Jesus. No wonder, then, the legend grew that he was a crypto-Jesuit” (65). Francis Xavier understood the kind of fascination he saw in the King.

With full support from the Crown and the Vatican, Francis Xavier was embarking on an adventurous narrative in which he was already designated as the protagonist, and he envisioned clearly himself as such: he was looking forward to a hellish reality in which he would be tested. The rest of his last letter from Portugal expressed great optimism regarding his plan to reconfigure the Government of Goa in accordance with Ignatian meditation on the Last Judgment in everyday life decisions: Francis Xavier would systematically opt for the

*Exercises'* visual representations of the hellish torments one might face if failing to honor one's decisions. Each king, governor, soldier, trader, peasant to cross his path would be faced with a highly detailed depiction of Satan's world, the world awaiting those who diverge from Roman Catholicism. His cosmological vision was absolutely nonnegotiable.



Figure 5: Palm Trees Growing and Pushing Church in Decay  
(Goa, India)

At a time when Spain and Portugal were the two major ruling powers of colonization, the Holy See divides the world to be colonized in two, for the two nations to conquer, evangelize, and baptize. Like the unnamed Papal nuncio and omniscient narrator of the film *The Mission*, around 1540 Francis Xavier started his

long-distance correspondence with Ignatius of Loyola, his spiritual director in Rome, and with Simon Rodriguez, the Jesuit Provincial of Portugal, to which Goa belonged, constantly reporting and seeking their advice in the challenging choices he faced. Rodriguez knew Xavier well enough to understand that the Company's General, Loyola, could have chosen to switch their destinies, if only Xavier hadn't had his Call to mission years before his departure. While the two men were sharing a room at the Spanish Hospital, Xavier woke up Simon Rodriguez one night screaming, "more, more, more" and refused to admit to him what he was wanting more of. It was only years later that he admitted in his correspondence that he was asking the Lord for more sufferings, travails, travels, catastrophes, and persecutions on the part of the world he was about to go evangelize (Gutiérrez 17). Both Loyola and Rodriguez were familiar with this aspect of Xavier's psyche, and this intimacy shows through constantly in the letters.

Knowing that he was far from receiving an answer from them at the time of writing, his tone was always tainted with a certain fatalism and readiness for death, which might occur at any given time in Goa. In other words, he always wrote his letters fully aware that he could be producing his last piece of writing. The letters to Ignatius fulfilled the requirements of confession, spiritual diary, testimony, autobiography, and regularly updated will, all at the same time. This correspondence was never intended to be published or read by an audience, and given the very few editions and the nonexistent literary criticism about them, one can say that they reveal aspects of the saint's personality that have been kept out of the popular image of Francis Xavier as another "Saint Francis." Moreover, as John Patrick Donnelly, S.J., reminds potential readers of these epistles, "Xavier had little literary skill" (528). The future saint never



intended to use these letters as a demonstration of his mastery of rhetorical figures. Nonetheless, the images to which he constantly refers point to a unique imaginary on the author's part, a cosmological vision in which Goa, its jungle, and India are likened to the kingdom of Satan, and its inhabitants to the flying devils of the underworld. Simultaneously, the letters unveil the evolution of Francis Xavier's growing despair with the religious and political situations he encountered in India.

Now that we have described the context in which these letters were produced, let us turn to their literary substance. Over the course of the first eight years he spends in and around India, the initially enthusiastic tone of his writings vanishes, and frustration progressively takes control of his mind. On January 20, 1548, Francis Xavier writes the following lines to King John III of Portugal, the monarch who has granted him the authority to be the religious leader in India, along with the opportunity to simultaneously represent the Portuguese Crown and the Vatican. Xavier is well aware that no one else in Goa has been delegated comparable power, and it is easily noticeable in the tone of his letters to the King:

[T]here is nothing that prevents every living soul in India from acknowledging our Lord as God, and of professing His holy doctrine, except the fact, that the Governors and Commandants who have neglected to take care of the matter have not been severely punished by your Highness. (Coleridge II, 11)

In his letter to the Portuguese monarch, Xavier appears as a figure of authority who constantly justifies his implicit orders to the Crown. After all, he has been sent, first and foremost, to secure the Christian believers (both Portuguese and Indian converts) and verify that they remain virtuous, resisting the

many temptations of life in the tropics, a climate largely associated with evil, Hell, and its temperature.

Moreover, in such weather, nature is not controllable as it can be in Europe. It is challenging to build against the rapid growth of the jungle (Fig. 5). Well aware of this obstacle, Xavier has no hesitation in imposing himself as the middle-man between Rome and the Portuguese Crown to develop Goa and make culture prevail over nature. The following passage is a clear instance of his intention to remind everyone of his political mission as often as necessary:

And I say again that, as I hardly hope that it will ever be so, *I am almost inclined to repent having written what I have*, especially when I think that perhaps your Highness will receive a more inexorable judgment at the tribunal of God on account of the very fact that I have given you this warning. I know not whether at such a time the objection that your Highness may perhaps allege, that you are not bound to believe what I write, will be admitted; and I assure your Highness in the most perfect sincerity and entire truthfulness, that I would by no means have written what I have concerning the Governors and Commandants of these parts, if I had been able in any way to persuade myself that I could keep these things unsaid without sin. (Coleridge II, 11; my emphasis)

The tone of the letter clearly reflects Xavier's frustration with the political power in place, as well as his intention to clarify that his own authority is not to be questioned. The indirect threat made to the King in his letter is immediately followed by a brief theological overview of the risks John III might encounter if he doesn't take Xavier seriously. But what seems at first theological is actually rather legal: the word "judgment" is followed by "tribunal," "fact," "warning," "objection," "allege," "bound,"

“admitted”; all words pertaining to the judiciary world, but also to the general rhetoric of Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*. In this letter, Xavier clarifies the hierarchy of powers for the King of Portugal: Rome is above Portugal, Portugal is above the Governors, and the Governors are in charge of expanding Christianity in the multireligious land of India. Xavier’s rhetoric with John III is usually based on the presentation of a dilemma in which the Jesuit missionary systematically reaffirms his “sincerity” and the difficult choices he must make on behalf of the Crown.

As a good Jesuit, he projects in his letters the Ignatian image of the two roads symbolizing dilemma, echoing Ignatius’s own experience on the way to Montserrat, an image later recycled several times in Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*. As we have seen in the previous passage, it is also through the implicit and voluntary erasure of his message (“*I am almost inclined to repent having written what I have*”) that Xavier reinforces his role as supreme mediator between Rome and the world. Constantly reinforcing that he is a bidimensional authority, both earthly and heavenly, he imposes himself here as the only possible spiritual director for King John III, a spiritual director quite displeased with the performance of his exercitant, and therefore compelled to report the latter’s bad performance to the Jesuit headquarters in Rome. At the same time, his letters continue to invite John III to envision himself as a delegate of Christ on earth and empower him as such, with all the responsibility that this entails.

Before reconciling Rome with Goa, Xavier must first reconcile Rome with Portugal; but he encounters much resistance in the process. Frustration and impatience are two defining characteristics of Xavier, according to Manfred Barthel: “his real failing was his lack of patience, a Christian virtue in which the Apostle of the Indies was almost totally deficient. He

shared in the restless, turbulent spirit of his age, and he had more the temperament of a conquistador than an apostle” (181). Regardless of whether or not Barthel's assessment of Xavier's emotional state upon arriving in Goa is accurate, one can certainly tell from his letters how frustrated and impatient the Jesuit was in his concurrent letter to Simon Rodriguez, now official dispatcher of missionaries appointed by the Vatican: “the King should severely and by an edict declare to all the Governors of India that he trusts no one in India so much as those who with all their might strive to advance the limits of Christianity” (Coleridge I, 20). Not only do we note frustration with the limits of his power, but also a fair degree of impatience.

It is indeed challenging to reconcile Rome with the world when a letter can take up to three years to reach the hands of John III, and his response up to seven years to return to Francis Xavier. No delegated measure can be taken rapidly in such a context. This is why Xavier's letters often point to the dichotomy between the temporal and the eternal: what becomes transparent in the letter is Xavier's will to translate the dynamics of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* to the realm of political affairs, to render the temporal eternal through the infallible meditation technique that the Apostle of India believes he has received. The letters therefore become a space in which Francis Xavier projects his various visions of a future for the Rome of the East he has come to develop. In this process, he also imagines the worst-case scenario: the city in ruins reconquered by nature, the surrounding jungle a metaphor for the chaotic and hellish nature of Hinduism as he perceives it. Xavier's letters become a virtual space in which to continue his own spiritual exercises, superimposing two potential images for the city of Goa.

An exercitant of the *Spiritual Exercises* never ceases to pledge allegiance to his/her director since the exercises continue

beyond the initial required four-week retreat until the believer is faced with the Last Judgment. Ignatian meditation encourages the exercitant to pursue the exercises through the act of writing, particularly in the form of a spiritual diary that can be turned in regularly to the confessor and/or director. In other words, life beyond the retreat of the *Spiritual Exercises* is nothing but a continuation thereof during and beyond life on earth. Francis Xavier was, along with Pierre Fabre, the first Jesuit to ever receive the *Spiritual Exercises*; furthermore, he received them directly from Loyola, who was giving them for the first time. It all happened at the very foundation of the Society of Jesus, in a dormitory room of the University of Paris that the three men were sharing. It is therefore natural that Xavier continues to seek advice from Ignatius, “el padre de su alma,” his spiritual director, who now reigns over the Society of Jesus as Father General from the Casa Professa in Rome.

Francis Xavier uses the letters as a space to project his own victories and fears, where he decodes the temporal reality of Goa through the eternal nature of the Jesuit mission. His concurrent letters to King John III and to Loyola prove that the Jesuit missionary constantly needs to reevaluate the two positions in which he has been placed: director for the King, exercitant for Loyola. Furthermore, Xavier’s letters translate his need to depict India from the perspective of the *Spiritual Exercises*, that is, to envision the new land and its conflicting authorities as another battleground between Heaven and Hell, in which he has been placed as supreme referee. His insistence on the evil nature of the jungle and its people seems to reflect the need for antagonism in Loyola’s meditation techniques. In the *Exercises*, the Christian believer is trained to spend the rest of his life in the awareness of this cosmological war in which each

individual has the potential to fight for God, or to choose to join the Devil.

In his letters, direct invocation of the Divine Father would be written in Spanish instead of Latin, to create a linguistic community with his spiritual director, Ignatius of Loyola, as in the following example: “Y vos, mi Dios, me hicisteis a vuestra semejanza, y no los pagodas, que son dioses de los gentiles en figuras de bestias y alimañas del Diablo. Yo reniego de todos los pagodas, hechiceros, adivinadores, pues son cautivos y amigos del Diablo” (Zubillaga 84). At this point, Xavier’s aversion for Indian culture and nature has reached its peak. The tone of this passage simultaneously imitates that of confession and that of exorcism. It is puzzling to reconcile this writer with the saint whose compassionate and watery eyes still appear today as an icon of Christian virtue all around Goa. Once again, Francis Xavier remains largely associated with Francis of Assisi, a saint who chose poverty and made no distinction between peoples. And yet Francis Xavier confesses his lack of compassion many times in his private correspondence.

Missionary or conquistador? Perhaps the Jesuit is a bit of both, but he is mostly an exercitant and a reconciler. As Barthel suggests, the future saint’s ambition could be to become “the most important Christian evangelist since Paul” (178). According to Julia Reinhard Lupton in *Afterlives of the Saints*, missionaries like Francis Xavier who aspire to be canonized and write their own hagiography while they are still alive “do so by themselves recreating an earlier epoch’s universe of form and meaning” (8). Consequently, Xavier’s letters provide a wealth of detailed information that he reports in order to be recognized as a key reconciler by both Rome and Lisbon. He continues to perceive this unknown world as any other place on the globe, that is, as a theater where the Devil is omnipresent and putting him on trial

from which he will emerge to see clearly through the political games of Portugal. Now in a very similar position to that of Paul of Tarsus, his task is to solve political problems—and he shall do so in the light of the Ignatian meditation technique, in a land that has no affinity whatsoever with the core rhetoric of the *Exercises*, that of simulation and visualization of sin. In other words, Xavier seeks to apply spiritual meditation to political mediation with very little faith in the Indian potential to adapt to his agenda. Reconciliation as a theological concept appears to him as the only possible model for the government of India. As Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:

And all of this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are the ambassadors of Christ, as if God were appealing through us. (*New American Bible* 1310)

In India, Xavier finds himself in the role of the Apostle Paul, with the understanding that his mission also consists of controlling the functioning of the political authorities by deriving his authority from Rome instead of Jerusalem, and by writing Pauline “Epistles” to the Jesuit fathers of smaller missions all over Asia. Like Paul, he depicts a world where the presence of the Devil prevails rapidly once one travels away from Rome. In short, Xavier’s rhetoric reflects simultaneously that of Paul and of Ignatius: he has been placed in a situation in which Christians are persecuted, just like in the early times of Christianity, and his supreme mission is to reconcile the world with God— not an easy task, given the fact that this whole world is in the hands of Satan. From this moment onward, this narrative preconditions

all of his decisions. As his biographer, Henry James Coleridge, states:

The work was preeminently a work which called for an Apostle, a man who would combine the heroic self-devotion which was required for the full instruction of these poor natives, with the organizing power necessary for the establishment of a perfect system of religious teaching and administration of the sacraments among them, in so much completeness and fullness of growth as to stand by itself after he had left the spot for other fields of labour. (I, 165)

Just as Paul had brought Christianity, the Divine message of God coming from Jerusalem, to the lands north of the Mediterranean sea (all countries deprived of His presence), Xavier pictures himself as responsible for a mission superseding Paul's in terms of cultural reception and natural obstacles. Just as Peter had arrived in Rome, the city of the Heathen, and had turned it into the Jerusalem of the West through the martyrdom of his body, Xavier anticipates the necessity of sacrificing his body for the edification of Goa, in order for it to become a divine city. Whereas Paul had to "recycle" pagan temples and transform them into early churches, Xavier must turn the jungle into a Baroque city. The cosmology and the narrative of his letters continue to frame his mission within the narrative of the New Testament.

Fully inspired by the *Spiritual Exercises* and their logothetic vision for one's existence and the construction of a mental narrative to condition it, Xavier often refers in his letters to the four strict existential parameters he has established for himself—*four* being the number ruling the whole Ignatian system—in order to become the concentration (the *summa*) of Paul of Tarsus, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, and the Holy



Virgin: Poverty, Penitence, Virginity, and Devotion to Mary (García 231).<sup>4</sup> These pillars frame Xavier's epistolary discourse, and project him at the same time as a figure uniting the masculine with the feminine. His guaranteed Christ-like virginity gives him an advantage over both Paul and Loyola, who had both known the sins of the flesh. Interestingly enough, his feminine attitude, gaze, and "purity" will become very appealing features for the Hindu believer, who is conditioned to perceive in some of the deities a merging of the feminine with the masculine, particularly in androgynous gods such as Shiva or Kali. For the Christian population already in place in Goa, Xavier's exemplarity remains essentially visual. He has constructed himself as a *summa* of several key actors in the Christian narrative in order to be seen as a live projection of them all in the streets of the city.

His person becomes therefore the very *locus* in which the two worlds (Rome and India) will fight against each other. On January 14, 1549, in a letter that he will sign as "your least and useless son," Xavier writes the following to Ignatius:

I will just touch on a few points relating to these parts of the world which are so distant from Rome ... Most of the Indians are of vicious disposition, and are adverse to virtue. Their instability, levity, and inconstancy of mind are incredible; they have hardly any honesty, so inveterate are their habits of sin and cheating ... Again, all the Indians, whether heathen or Mussulmans, as far as I have been able to make out hitherto, are very ignorant. (Coleridge I, 67-8)

The binary association of virtue with Christianity and vice with India grows stronger with each letter that the missionary writes. His fairly negative vision of India fits perfectly with the Pauline theological approach he has adopted to justify his own role as

Ambassador of Christ in the economy of reconciliation. But Xavier is a general without an army, and most of his letters (to John III, Loyola, and Rodriguez) have one common goal: he begs for obedient “soldiers” to be sent to India and fall under his rule. In parallel, Xavier admits that he places his hopes in the training of Japanese students in Goa, and often mentions his desire to leave India for Japan in order to deal with “people of virtue”: “We have three Japanese students ... They tell us wonderful things about Japan ... They are youths of very good virtue and extremely sharp wit; Paul in particular, who is sending you a letter of very good length. He is now making the Exercises, and with very good fruit” (Coleridge I, 71). Interestingly enough, Xavier’s favorite Japanese student has been renamed Paul through baptism. Xavier’s high regard for Japanese culture goes hand in hand with the solution he presents to Loyola: Japanese Jesuits will have the capacity to help him in his mission to fight the Devil in India, since their culture enables them to reconcile Rome with the world. In other words, Japan seems to be the mediating culture for the unresolvable conflicts and cultural discrepancies between Rome and Goa. Their input, enhanced by spiritual training, is the very seed that Xavier intends to plant in Indian land in order to lead his political mission correctly.

As I stated at the beginning, this task is twofold: Xavier has to evangelize those who seem impossible to evangelize, and then to keep the evangelized from falling back into the un-Christian. Maybe what is most striking in the tone of his letters is his own realization of the limitations of Christianity and the relativity of religion altogether. Even though it is never formulated as such, his insistence on a necessary and strategic religious invasion of India (or the alternative of a complete abandonment of it) reveals the lack of interest that local

spiritualities have for Catholics. The fact that Hinduism is an inclusive religion that can assimilate Christianity as another branch of its multiple worshipping system, along with the consequent fact that Christianity radically excludes the possibility of integrating Hinduism as part of its theological schemas, both complicate Xavier's task of radical and unilateral evangelization.

This is the major challenge that he chooses never to mention in his letters, an unspoken—in other words, Derridean—erasure. His most challenging obstacle remains the very distinct conceptions of time and narrative that Hinduism and Catholicism have, i.e., the circular versus the linear. In the greater continuity of Christianity of which the Jesuits are very fond (as we see for instance in the conflation of Xavier with Saint Paul), every event must be recorded in order to be envisioned within a larger historical perspective, which gives a meaning to the missionary work.

However, as Xavier notices with the converted Indians, “[T]he people are Christian in name rather than in reality, wonderfully ignorant and rude: they cannot read or write. They have consequently no records of any kind. Still they pride themselves on being Christians” (I, 118). It is therefore impossible to make them part of the greater narrative of Christianity, since they envision their conversion as a momentary experience without connection to a historical past or a spiritual future. Their illiteracy does not allow them to envision Christianity as the narrative in progress into which Xavier has been placed as intradiegetic protagonist.

Moreover, one cannot direct the *Spiritual Exercises* for an exercitant that pictures Christ and Krishna as interchangeable divinities. The mission of reconciliation does not find meaning among this population, and Xavier sees little hope for change in adults. Consequently, the Jesuit mission will start focusing on the

children, who can be formatted through a literate and linear conception of time through the free education dispensed by the Jesuit schools in Goa and other parts of India.

In spite of this major challenge and his frequent words of despair to Ignatius, Xavier remains a very determined missionary with a clear agenda that does not require daily approval from his superiors. The style and tone of his writings change radically over the years. The enthusiasm of his letters written from Lisbon gives way to the bitterness of failure to evangelize the masses in Goa in the same fashion that Christ, Paul, and Loyola had done in their own missions. Ironically enough, John III orders that each of Xavier's letters be read during Masses throughout Portugal each time he receives a new one from India, and continues to consider the Jesuit missionary as a spiritual director not only for his own person, but for the whole nation of Portugal. Yet the evolution of style, tone, and arguments in the future saint's letters emphasizes the growing impossibility of conveying the cosmological vision of the *Spiritual Exercises*, as well as translating them into a political framework.

We know now that the site of Old Goa today speaks for the victory of the jungle over the Jesuit mission. This victory of the vegetable over the mineral as a metaphor for the human is an aesthetic phenomenon from which we can draw a myriad of conclusions, both critical and personal (Figs. 5-6). Xavier's dream while in Rome's Spanish Hospital might have been premonitory, since it projected his desire for the natural obstacle, for an implicit battle with the vegetable world, for constant persecution by tropical evil. Goa served Xavier's need for a labyrinth that would justify not only his missionary work but also his canonization.



Figure 6: Ruins of the Church of Saint Augustine (Goa, India)

Today's Goa shows signs of weakness in its Roman Baroque architecture, overwhelmed by the climate of the former Portuguese province. On December 3, people converge from all over the province and the country to Xavier's sanctuary, lining up for hours in the sun to glimpse, for a brief moment, his body in the golden casket. Most people worship Xavier in his sanctuary as "another" deity (Fig. 7).



Figure 7: Street Sign indicating Pilgrimage Line (Goa, India)

It is frequent to encounter his miniature plastic statue or that of Christ next to that of Ganesh in people's cars or houses (Fig. 8). Xavier has been integrated into cultural Hinduism as the reconciler between West and East, but certainly not in the terms that the saint established in his spiritual narrative and registered throughout his correspondence with Loyola, Rodriguez, and the King of Portugal.



Figure 8: Juxtaposition of Hindu and Christian Religious Figures

Xavier's binary cosmology was therefore interpreted against its own conditioning. But the abundant visual representations of the saint, combining a reassuring feminine gaze with a youthful man's body, have served to present another, partial aspect of the saint among many that complement one another. Xavier's image is another medium of the Hindu *darsan*, the direct communication with the image in which the deity expresses emotions and love, and then presents himself in order to bless the viewer. Perhaps the highly pictorial nature of the

Roman Baroque and that of Hinduism had too much in common.<sup>5</sup> In spite of potential theological contradictions, the *darsan* is a Hindu practice compatible with the practice of the *Spiritual Exercises*. In contrast to the abundance of visual representations of the Jesuit Apostle, his letters are little studied and almost impossible to find in Goa. The Bom Jesus Basilica publishes its own biography of the saint that tourists can buy at the door for 100 rupees (\$2). This book, written by an Indian Jesuit priest, concludes with a brief overview of Xavier's letters discouraging pilgrims from searching for answers in these texts "meant only for scholars and not for the reading public for their spiritual profit and edification" (Rayanna 266). I argue that, on the contrary, Francis Xavier's letters are a text that should be made accessible to the "reading public" for readers to envision the complexity of the saint's psyche. They contain his understanding of Indian cultures, and would facilitate the reconciliation of India with Goa's Portuguese history. They contain a partial explanation of why Christianity did not take root in Goa according to Francis Xavier's plans: his radical determination to reject Hinduism, instead of envisioning it as cultural heritage. Through the reading of his letters, one can evaluate the complexity of the man's cosmology, the spiritual narrative conditioning his path to sainthood, as well as the ironic construction of a Catholic saint into a Hindu god, against his own will.



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Notes

<sup>1</sup> Here I envision the term “Baroque” as traditionally defined by José Antonio Maravall in *La cultura del Barroco*, a critical work first published in 1975 in which the Baroque is defined as a historical structure in relation to the construction of a social reality. According to this definition, the Baroque is a structure that develops along with the Jesuit order in the post-Trent Catholic world.

<sup>2</sup> Virginity, although expected of all novices engaging in ministry, could never be claimed by the other founders of the Society of Jesus, especially by Ignatius of Loyola, who had had a rather promiscuous past before his conversion, and who was probably infected with syphilis, according to Manfred Barthel (113-114). Francis Xavier, however, was the epitome of the virgin Apostle: i.e., a perfected version of Paul of Tarsus who, like Loyola, had been sexually active before his conversion experience.

<sup>3</sup> *Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam*, the motto chosen on the day of the foundation of the Society of Jesus.

<sup>4</sup> See Barthes’s structuralist analysis in “Loyola,” in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris: Seuil, 1971).

<sup>5</sup> I refer to the Baroque not only as it has been defined and discussed by Maravall in *La cultura del Barroco* (1975), but also the revised concept in consequent works such as Norman M. Klein’s *The Vatican to Vegas* (2004), Anthony Blunt’s *Roman Baroque* (1974), or Evonne Levy’s *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque* (2005).

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