THE HEROICS OF CONQUEST: HERNÁN CORTÉS IN THE EARLY MODERN HISPANIC EPIC

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THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
DECLARATION

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the MMLL Degree Committee.
ABSTRACT

The Heroics of Conquest: Hernán Cortés in the Early Modern Hispanic Epic

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This thesis explores the representation of the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés in four epic poems spanning the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, investigating how the politico-historical conditions of early modern Spain and Mexico gave rise to varying concepts of heroism. Through an analysis of Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega’s Mexicana (1594), Antonio de Saavedra Guzmán’s El peregrino indiano (1599), Juan Cortés Osorio’s Las Cortesiadas (c. 1665), and Juan de Escoiquiz’s México conquistada (1798), this thesis establishes a transatlantic dialogue between poets writing from both the Peninsula and the Americas, exploring what the diversity of heroisms embedded in their epics reveals about the complex economic, cultural, religious, and political matrix of early modern Spanish and colonial society. In my consideration of how the figure of Cortés is used as a tool to explore issues of patronage, creole identity, evangelisation, and nationalism, I question not only how heroic discourse is conditioned by historical context, but also by the poets themselves, who, far from objective recorders of Cortés’ deeds, harbour their own personal motivations and ideological agendas. Through tracing the epic genealogy of Cortés across three centuries, this thesis not only follows the journey of the conquistador, but also that of the epic genre and its intimate relationship with the history of Spanish imperialism.
La historia de Cortés es un fragmento, pero un fragmento central de la historia de la Edad Moderna. También, a veces parece una epopeya fantástica.

–Octavio Paz, *El peregrino en su patria*.
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INTRODUCTION

The Epic Quest for Heroism

Spain’s era of transatlantic discovery and conquest gave rise to a surge of conquistador narratives in the sixteenth century. Through the form of letters, reports, and probanzas de méritos y servicios, conquistadors gave detailed, first-hand accounts of their experiences in the unfamiliar territories of the New World which were often sent back to the Crown and, occasionally, published and disseminated among the Spanish reading public. Inspired by the heroic tales of medieval romances of chivalry, these highly individualised, self-propagating accounts promoted the conquistadors’ so-called great deeds and astonishing achievements in the face of grave peril and sacrifice, firmly establishing a mythical rhetoric of heroism that would henceforth be reproduced in early modern historiography, art, and poetry.¹ As what was then considered to be the highest form of poetic expression, suitable of singing only the noblest of deeds and men, the epic quickly became the principal narrative of conquest in Spain and the Americas.² While neo-Aristotelian epic theorists such as Torquato Tasso had warned against poets’ use of recent history as the plot for their poems, Spain’s expansionist enterprise in the New World was undoubtedly an attractive lure to contemporary poets who were thirsty to glorify their nation and record the deeds of its heroes for posterity.³ Thus was born the colonial epic tradition; a corpus of epic poems that sang of Spain’s discovery, exploration, conquest, and colonisation of American territories.

Perhaps the most renowned example from this corpus of poems is Alonso de Ercilla’s La Araucana (1569, 1578, 1589), considered by scholars as the primary model of colonial epic poetry.⁴


Aside from its precedential status, Ercilla’s poem has generated a great deal of attention in scholarship for its lack of an identifiable, central hero, with the aesthetic and ideological repercussions of this serving as a contested point of debate among critics.\(^5\) Certainly, *La Araucana* transgresses the standard demands of the western epic tradition that had, since Homer, predominantly taken one individual as the focal point of composition.\(^5\) The theory that epic poetry should centre on the deeds of one hero was a source of discussion among theorists throughout the early modern period. In the sixteenth century, this was principally explored through literary debates over the differences between the modern Italian *romanzi*, with its episodic structure of multiple plots and heroes, and the classical epic of Aristotelian unity, based on a single and complete action led by one, singular hero.\(^7\) The height of these discussions found its peak in the theoretical works of Tasso, for whom the pluralistic narrative strands and multiple heroes of the romance violated epic norms.\(^8\) While neo-Aristotelian poetics such as Tasso’s placed more emphasis on plot than character, the presence of one, sole hero was nevertheless deemed fundamental to epic totalisation and universality.\(^9\) Indeed, for Tasso, ‘although poetry is mainly the imitation of an action, the action cannot be performed unless there is someone to perform it, and the agent or doer has to possess qualities’.\(^10\) Developing these ideas further, Tasso’s contemporary, Paolo Beni, states in his *Comparazione di Omero, Virgilio, e Torquato* (1607) that the ‘various heroic virtues should not be

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11. See also Nicolopulos, p. 10; and Davis, *Myth and Identity*, p. 63. It is important to note, however, that Ercilla was not the first Spanish poet to deal with an American topic. Luis Zapata narrates the conquest of Mexico in cantos XI-XIV of his epic, *Carlo famoso* (1566).


\(^6\) See Denis C. Feeney, ‘Epic Hero and Epic Fable’, *Comparative Literature*, 38.2 (1986), 137-58 (p. 145).


\(^8\) In his *Discorsi dell’arte poetica* (1587), Tasso argues that the multiple plots of romance ‘distract the mind and hinder labor, he who sets himself a single goal will work more effectively than the imitator of a multitude of actions. (…) Multiple plots cause confusion’. See Tasso, ‘Discourses on the Art of Poetry’, p. 119. See also Sergio Zatti, *The Quest for Epic: From Ariosto to Tasso*, ed. Dennis Looney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 16.


dispersed among various persons’ arguing that, instead, the epic poet ‘ought to form a perfect hero’.\footnote{Translation taken from John M. Steadman, \textit{Milton and the Renaissance Hero} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 5.}

A similar position regarding this matter was taken up in the seventeenth century by the French epic theorist, René Le Bossu, who in book IV of in his \textit{Traité du poème épique} (1675) defines the epic hero as ‘the principal personage in any poem’ who ‘must always appear above all the rest’.\footnote{René Le Bossu, \textit{Monsieur Bossu’s Treatise of the Epick Poem: Containing Many Curious Reflexions, Very Useful and Necessary for the Right Understanding and Judging of the Excellencies of Homer and Virgil}, trans. J W (London: Tho. Bennet at the Half-Moon in St. Paul’s Church-Yard, 1695), pp. 174, 194.} Similarly, in the eighteenth century, the Spanish critic and poet Ignacio de Luzán argues in \textit{La poética o reglas de la poesía en general y de sus principales especies} (1737) that ‘la acción épica ha de ser ilustre, grande, maravillosa, verosímil, entera, de justa grandeza, una y de un héroé’, maintaining that while ‘la perfecta unidad de héroe no excluye otros héroes o personas menos principales en la acción, (…) debe siempre descollar y distinguirse el héroe principal’.\footnote{Ignacio de Luzán, \textit{La poética o reglas de la poesía en general y de sus principales especies: ediciones de 1737 y 1789} (Madrid: Cátedra, 1974), pp. 439, 442.}

It thus becomes clear that for these theorists, heroic action was contingent on heroic character and the superlative nature of one individual. For early modern poets, Spain’s recent feats in the New World offered a myriad of potential candidates upon whom they could model their leading hero. One such candidate was Hernán Cortés, conqueror of the Aztec empire. Certainly, the historic events of the conquest of Mexico provided favourable conditions to the unity of action and, in particular, the exceptionalism of heroism that colonial epic poets were looking for. Cortés’ heroic status had long been established, even before his death, in sixteenth-century historiography, particularly Francisco López de Gómara’s \textit{Historia de la conquista de México} (1553), and the conquistador’s own self-fashioned \textit{Cartas de relación}, sent to Charles V between the years 1519-1526. These texts contributed to an idealised mythification of Cortés, representing him as the perfect embodiment of medieval and Renaissance paradigms and one of the greatest men of modern times.\footnote{For more on the heroic portrayal of Cortés in the works of Gómara and Cortés see Glen Carman, \textit{Rhetorical Conquests: Cortés, Gómara, and Renaissance Imperialism} (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006), pp. 97, 111-12; Kathleen Ross, ‘Historians of the Conquest and Colonization of the New World: 1550-1620’, in \textit{The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature}, ed. Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1, pp. 101-42 (p. 116); Stephanie Merrim, ‘The First Fifty Years of Hispanic New World Historiography: The Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America’, in \textit{The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature}, 1, pp. 58-100 (pp. 73, 77); and Pastor, pp. 81, 86-87.} Thus, where the historic conditions of the Araucanian wars in Chile had failed to provide Ercilla with a singular exemplary figure of heroic perfection, the conquest of Mexico and the legendary status of Cortés inspired a number of epic poets to recount his deeds in verse. This subgenre of colonial epic poetry has commonly been referred to by
scholars as the ‘Cortés cycle’; a corpus of epics centred on the historical figure of Hernán Cortés and the conquest of the Aztec empire.\textsuperscript{15}

Written between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Cortesian epics were composed by both Spanish and Mexican poets and constitute works of varying lengths and completeness. The poems have traditionally been viewed with unfavourable critique, with Alfonso Reyes maintaining that they were ‘infeliz desde sus primeros vagidos’.\textsuperscript{16} In recent decades, however, scholars have contributed research to rectify this view, illustrating how the poems should be understood as more than mere versified history. Perhaps the most developed of these studies, fundamental for its comparative approach to a wide range of Cortesian epics, ballads, and dramas of the sixteenth and seventeen centuries, is Winston A. Reynolds’ doctoral thesis: \textit{Hernán Cortés in Heroic Poetry of the Spanish Golden Age} (1957). In this study, Reynolds underlines the archetypal qualities of heroism embodied by the literary figure of Cortés, focussing on his portrayal as an instrument of divine will, his physical appearance, his bravery, daring and wisdom, his ambition, and his compassion; characteristics that can largely be reduced to conventional heroic virtues of martial valour, tactical guile, and religious piety. By examining the conquistador through these standard tropes of heroism, Reynolds’ analysis is nevertheless somewhat flat and unidimensional, and does not fully account for the varying nuances that differentiate each poem and their unique portrayals of heroism. In addition to this, the scholar’s investigation is, on the whole, historically decontextualized, calling for a more comprehensive study that engages with the wider political, social, and cultural significance attached to the hero in early modern Spain and Mexico.

While archetypal and monolithic approaches to the hero such as Reynolds’ have featured prominently in the wider field of hero studies, with Joseph Campbell’s monomyth and the heroic patterns espoused by scholars such as Otto Rank and Lord Raglan providing a conceptual framework for understanding the development of hero narratives, they nevertheless remain deductive, overgeneralised, and ahistorical, failing to account not only for the varying theoretical perspectives that shape the construction of heroism, but also, and perhaps most importantly, the particular temporal contexts in which the hero is embedded.\textsuperscript{17} Certainly, since antiquity, epic poets have utilised the figure


\textsuperscript{16} With similar disdain, Menéndez y Pelayo comments that ‘no hay duda que Hernán Cortés ha sido poco afortunado con sus cantores’. Both citations are quoted in Winston A. Reynolds, ‘Hernán Cortés in Heroic Poetry of the Spanish Golden Age’, unpublished PhD thesis (University of Southern California, 1957), pp. 316-17.

of the hero to accommodate new historical, political, and religious circumstances, adapting the heroic ideal to meet shifting needs and cultural values.\(^\text{18}\) Indeed, as the historical conditions of society have evolved and transfigured, so too has the classical conception of the hero. Thus, while standard typologies continued to inform conceptions of heroism, they were nevertheless subject to transformation and revaluation, giving rise to a myriad of heroic characteristics of a rich and varied scope. In the tradition of the Western epic canon one can find a diverse set of distinguishable heroic attributes, identified by a range of idiosyncratic epithets, from the wrath of Achilles to the prudence of Odysseus, the passion of Jason to the piety of Aeneas, and the wanderings of Orlando to the devotion of Goffredo; each products of the unique conditions of the culture that created them.\(^\text{19}\)

The recognisable and singular traits assigned to specific heroes were a point of discussion among early modern epic theorists such as Tasso, Le Bossu, and Luzán, who respectively refer to them as ‘decorum’, ‘manners’, and ‘carácter’.\(^\text{20}\) In determining the type of heroic quality that the epic protagonist should be endowed with, Tasso states that the poet ‘should present the moral nature fame attributes to him’; a perception that is repeated in Le Bossu’s treatise, who argues that heroic character should be based on ‘the knowledge which we can deduce from (…) history’.\(^\text{21}\) In the particular case of Hernán Cortés, this theory poses an interesting predicament, as ‘fame’ had attributed him many different facets and personas in the early modern period and beyond, often deeply imbued with distinct motives and ideological agendas. Indeed, from the very beginning of the conquest of Mexico, the historical figure of Cortés was riddled in controversy, with his actions in the New World quickly coming under scrutiny as he became subject to a number of accusations and litigation cases which had the potential to seriously compromise his aspirations for a heroic status.\(^\text{22}\) Following his initial departure from Cuba in 1519, Cortés found himself in formal rebellion against the Crown, having repudiated the

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\(^\text{20}\) Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*, p. 92. According to Le Bossu, manners are defined as ‘the inclinations which the poet bestows upon his personages’, p. 169. Similarly, in Luzán’s explanation of ‘carácter’, he states that ‘esto es lo propio señaladamente de este héroe, según nos le pinta el poeta’, p. 452.

\(^\text{21}\) See Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*, p. 105; and Le Bossu, p. 172.

\(^\text{22}\) The conquistador is himself said to have admitted to Charles V that ‘más me cuesta defenderme del fiscal de vuestra Magestad que ganar la tierra de mis enemigos’ as quoted in Luisa Cuesta and Jaime Delgado, ‘Pleitos cortesianos en la Biblioteca Nacional’, *Revista de Indias*, 9 (1948), 247-95 (p. 262).
orders of his superior, Diego Velázquez, by conquering lands illegally. While Cortés’ eventual successes secured his symbolic pardoning through the granting of the Marquesado del Valle de Oaxaca by Charles V in 1529, his actions nevertheless generated many enemies at court, who were eager to paint the conquistador as the embodiment of avarice, greed, violence, cruelty, ruthlessness, dishonesty, and insubordination. One such enemy was Bartolomé de las Casas, so-called defender of the Indians, who saw in Cortés an overly-ambitious, tyrannical man driven by a lust for fame, fortune, and glory at whatever cost: ‘debérsele nombre de puro tirano y usurpador de reinos ajenos y matador y destruidor de innumerables naciones’. The counter discourse of conquest disseminated by Las Casas, later referred to as the Black Legend, thus saw the denigration of Cortés’ name, diametrically opposing the heroic tales of the conquistador espoused by Cortés himself in his letters and by his apologists in their works of history. Las Casas’ portrayal exemplifies how the historical figure of Cortés refuses to be typecast as a one-dimensional, monolithic hero, with what José María Ruano de la Haza refers to as ‘las máscaras de Cortés’ encapsulating his porousness to assume varying identities and epithets. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the epics of the Cortés cycle, in which we encounter a varied depiction of the conquistador-turned-hero.

In this thesis, I will focus on four epics of the Cortés cycle: Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega’s *Mexicana* (1594); Antonio de Saavedra Guzmán’s *El peregrino indiano* (1599); Juan Cortés Osorio’s *Las Cortesiadas* (c. 1665); and Juan de Escoiquiz’s *México conquistada* (1798). Far from a monolithic production of heroic homogeneity, the diversity of heroisms embedded in these epics is deeply revelatory of the political, social, cultural, and religious imperatives of the particular temporal periods.

23 The increasingly precarious political situation of the Cortés family at court was further aggravated following the suspected involvement of his son, Martín Cortés Zúñiga, second Marqués del Valle, in what is now referred to by scholars as the ‘Conjuración de Martín Cortés’: a plot to form a separatist, independent state in Mexico, with Martín Cortés as its head. A more detailed explanation of this historical event can be found in chapter one of this thesis. For future reference, it should be noted that Martín Cortés Zúñiga (son of Hernán Cortés and Juana de Zúñiga) is not to be confused with his older half-brother, also named Martín Cortés; the illegitimate mestizo son of Hernán Cortés and doña Marina (La Malinche).


25 For more on Las Casas’ portrayal of conquest see Merrim, ‘The First Fifty Years of Hispanic New World Historiography’, who argues that ‘Las Casas’ argument consciously (…) invert[s] the premises of the heroic tale’, p. 95.


27 While the use of Cortés for varying ideological and political agendas across Spain and the Americas has been explored by a number of critics across a range of disciplines, the epic, despite being one of the earliest mediums through which the figure was represented, has been marginalised in scholarly discourses.
and geographical locations in which they were composed. Through my investigation of the characterisation of Cortés in these epics, I will explore how each poem projects a unique version of the heroic type, demonstrating how, while dealing with the same historical figure and, for the most part, the same historical events, they differ in their account of the conquest and its leading protagonist. In doing so, I question not only how heroic discourse is conditioned by the historical context, but also by the poets themselves, who, far from objective recorders of Cortés’ deeds, harbour their own personal motivations and ideological agendas. Through this approach, I intend to demonstrate how the glorification of Cortés is dependent upon the somewhat ignoble and practical cause of necessity; uncovering what Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals have referred to as a ‘need-based heroism’.\(^{28}\)

Indeed, it is my contention that it is not solely Cortés’ legendary historical precedent that informs these epics, but the political circumstances and cultural impetus of the society in which he is created as a literary phenomenon, often in response to moments of national and personal crisis.\(^{29}\) To explore this, I question how the politicisation of the hero reflects the wider ideological concerns of early modern Spain and colonial Mexico, providing an insight into how the hugely diverse conditions brought about by Spain’s transatlantic enterprise gave rise to new conceptions of the heroic.

While recognising that these epics are politically-inspired rhetorical works that vein with contemporary anxieties and debates, it is nevertheless equally important to acknowledge their merit as artistic creations of the imagination, informed by the aesthetic demands and tastes of early modern poetics. The components of instruction and delight, or docere and delectare to use the Horatian terms, were a point of debate among poetic theorists of the early modern period, with the theme taking particular importance in the works of Tasso. In both of his discourses, the Italian theorist maintains that the primary aim of the poet is to delight his reader as much as to instruct, conceding the importance of variety in adorning epic plots.\(^{30}\) While firmly disagreeing with the episodic structure of his epic, Tasso nevertheless concedes that Ludovico Ariosto had successfully achieved this goal, with the elaboration

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\(^{29}\) For more on the situations that give rise to the creation of heroes see Orrin E. Klapp, ‘The Creation of Popular Heroes’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 54.2 (1948), 135-41 (pp. 135-36).

\(^{30}\) In the *Discorsi dell’arte poetica* Tasso states that ‘the aim of poetry is to delight’ and that ‘variety is, by nature, extremely delightful’. Tasso, ‘Discourses on the Art of Poetry’, pp. 129, 130. For more on this see Zatti, p. 176; and Charles Peter Brand, *Torquato Tasso: A Study of the Poet and of His Contribution to English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 71.
of amorous and knightly adventures satisfying the modern tastes of both readers and poets alike.\textsuperscript{31} It is for this reason that Tasso defends love as a legitimate theme of the epic; a secondary discourse through which poets could provide their readers with a respite from themes of war and violence.\textsuperscript{32} In the Cortés epics, love is primarily explored through secondary characters, both Spanish and indigenous, presenting the poets with an opportunity for fiction and invention. While \textit{eros} had long constituted an important place in the epic, this ancient tradition nevertheless takes on new meaning when contextualised within the New World, with indigenous ‘Otherness’ adding a novel dimension to the conventional epic \textit{topos}. Through my investigation of secondary characters and their accompanying discourses of love, I will therefore explore how elements of romance serve as a way of exploring ‘Otherness’ in the Cortés epics, demonstrating how love and conquest, the aesthetic and the political, converge.\textsuperscript{33} In doing so, I question how the poets’ diverse representations of natives contribute to the development of taxonomies of race in colonial Mexico, while exploring what this reveals about the poets themselves and their societies.

Through this approach, this thesis seeks to provide an extensive analysis of the different registers of significance generated by the figure of Cortés and the conquest of Mexico and how they are manipulated for varying poetic and political ends in the epics. In Chapter One, I investigate the representation of Cortés in Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega’s \textit{Mexicana} (1594), focussing on the precarious political and economic situation of the Cortés family immediately following the conquest of Mexico, and the discourse of patronage that permeates throughout the poem; an aspect that has often been overlooked by critics. I will explore how Lobo Lasso crafts his portrayal of Cortés to eulogise, defend, and exonerate his patrons, giving voice to an official line of Cortesian propaganda through his poetry. In unravelling the encomiastic function behind Lobo Lasso’s shaping of the hero, I analyse the poet’s engagement with both classical and contemporary models of heroism, considering how Tasso’s reconfiguration of the Christian hero informs Lobo Lasso’s projection of Cortés. Fundamental to this analysis is the role that divine intervention and Ibero-Christian supernatural machinery play in \textit{Mexicana}, reinforcing the poem’s ideological intentions while providing the poet with a canvas to imaginatively explore moments of fantasy and fiction.

In the second chapter of my thesis, I explore \textit{El peregrino indiano} (1599) by the Mexican-born creole Antonio de Saavedra Guzmán, in which we find a creolised vision of conquest. As opposed to singling out the sole enterprise of Cortés, as Lobo Lasso had done, I demonstrate how Saavedra adopts

\textsuperscript{31} Tasso writes in the \textit{Discorsi dell’arte poetica} that Ariosto is ‘read and reread by all ages and both sexes, known in all languages, liked and praised by all’. Tasso, ‘Discourses on the Art of Poetry’, pp. 117-18. For more on this see Daniel Javitch, ‘Tasso’s Critique and Incorporation of Chivalric Romance: His Transformation of Achilles in the \textit{Gerusalemme Liberata}’, \textit{International Journal of the Classical Tradition}, 13.4 (2007), 515-27 (pp. 516-17).

\textsuperscript{32} See Avalle-Arce, p. 36; Davis, \textit{Myth and Identity}, p. 208; and Nicolopulos, pp. 105-06.

\textsuperscript{33} In this aspect, my approach departs from that of Roland Greene, \textit{Unrequited Conquests: Love and Empire in the Colonial Americas} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
a more inclusive conceptualisation of heroism in response to the socio-political situation of Mexican creoles at the turn of the century, and his own private ambitions to solicit rewards from the Spanish Crown. By analysing the creole components that constitute *El peregrino indiano*, I contend that Saavedra’s epic can be read as one of the earliest cultural demonstrations of Spanish American identity. Crucial to my development of this idea is the theme of ‘peregrinaje’, as I consider the wider implications of the term in relation to creole liminality and the cultural complexities of the poet’s transatlantic agenda.

The third chapter of my thesis centres around an unpublished manuscript currently held at the Biblioteca Nacional de España, *Las Cortesiadas* (c. 1665), by the Spanish Jesuit Juan Cortés Osorio. Focusing on the representation of Cortés as a religious hero, I explore how Osorio employs biblical and sermonic rhetoric to provide a messianic conception of heroism. Through analysing the poet’s intertextual use of Christian doctrine, I seek to unravel Cortés’ depiction as redeemer and teacher, and his status as a leading figure of Christian triumphalism. In doing so, I not only seek to reinsert this neglected manuscript back into the field of colonial studies, but also establish Osorio’s place within the wider community of Spanish and Mexican Jesuits writing about the conquest of Mexico in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I investigate Juan de Escoiquiz’s *México conquistada* (1798), questioning how the resurgence of the memory of Cortés in the eighteenth-century epic functioned as an ideological tool in a moment of national crisis in Spain. I focus on how the Cortesian memory is used by Escoiquiz to counter the historical climate of uncertainty and decline that Spain was facing at the close of the century, as he attempts to restore its former glory through the revival of a heroic, national spirit of a past age. I demonstrate that, in addition to the revolutions that were taking place across Europe and the growing calls for emancipation in the Americas, of particular importance to the poet’s construction of heroism is the recirculation of the Black Legend by Spain’s traditional enemies in this period, which incites Escoiquiz to adopt a rhetoric of vindication throughout the poem in an effort to recuperate the reputation of both Cortés and the Spanish nation.
CHAPTER 1

‘No de vil premio, mas de amor movido’ (I. 4): The Poetics of Patronage in Lobo Lasso’s Mexicana

The first poet to set their epic sails on Cortesian waters was Spanish writer Luis Zapata de Chaves (1526-1595) who, in cantos XI-XIV of his Carlo famoso (1566) – a sixteenth-century epic based on the heroic deeds of Charles V – narrates Cortés’ conquest of the Aztec empire.³⁴ Modelled on the chivalric adventurers of Ariosto’s Orlando furioso (1516), the Cortesian hero represented in these cantos is a quintessential ‘caballero’ (XII. fol. 58°) of the knightly code.³⁵ This is most clearly illustrated in canto XII, in which Cortés frees the natives of Cozumel from ‘dos monstruos fieros’ (XII, fol. 56°) – ‘una águila tan fiera’ (XII. fol. 57°) and ‘[un] pez fiero y tirano’ (XII. fol. 57°) – that have tormented them for years, as he slays them in epic battle. Here, Cortés’ heroism is singled out – ‘porque era hombre Cortés de otra ralea’ (XII. fol. 57°) – as he singlehandedly defeats the beasts while the rest of his men watch on ‘desde las paredes’ (XII. fol. 57°). The individualism encapsulated in Zapata’s depiction of the conquistador is without doubt an extension of the heroic legend Cortés sought to project in his own Cartas de relación; particularly the second and third letters. Indeed, in his narrative, Cortés fashions himself as a central figure, endowing himself with extraordinary personal valour and distancing himself from the rest of the group by adopting the first person singular ‘yo’ to create a highly individualised, self-propagating account of hyperbolic proportions.³⁶ This heroic vision would come to influence subsequent historiographical projections of the conquistador in the sixteenth century, with López de Gómara’s Historia de la conquista de México providing a pertinent example in its hagiographic portrayal of Cortés.³⁷

This said, however, in an attempt to prevent conquistadors like Cortés from acquiring excessive power and authority in the distant colonies, throughout the sixteenth century the Spanish Crown implemented a number of legal and bureaucratic structures in New Spain that sought to inhibit the

³⁴ For a study of Zapata’s account of the conquest of Mexico in Carlo famoso see José Toribio Medina and Winston A. Reynolds, El primer poema que trata del descubrimiento y conquista del nuevo mundo: reimpresión de las partes correspondientes del Carlo famoso (Madrid: Ediciones José Porrúa Turanzas, 1984).
³⁶ For more on Cortés’ self-fashioned image of heroism see Pastor, pp. 50-100; and Merrim, ‘The First Fifty Years of Hispanic New World Historiography’, pp. 72-73.
³⁷ On Gómara’s Cortés see Carman, pp. 97-112.
creation of singular, legendary, high-status heroes, seeking instead to produce what Robert Folger terms ‘standard subjects’ based on images of compliancy, loyalty, and subservience. Under tightening colonial policies, there was little tolerance for the individualist personality and chivalric qualities Cortés had been adorned with in Zapata’s epic, thus instigating a transformation of the Cortesian hero that would henceforth be reflected in subsequent epic poems of the Cortés cycle such as Lobo Lasso’s *Mexicana* (1594). As I will consider in this chapter, Lobo Lasso presents an obedient and compliant version of Cortés; a heroic paragon of selfhood based on the Christian virtues of rationality and religiosity that not only seeks to satisfy the demands of the metropole but, equally importantly, those of his sponsors.

**Lobo Lasso and the Discourse of Patronage**

Born in Madrid between the years 1553-1559, Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega descended from a prestigious line of Spanish soldiers and courtiers, not to mention the eminent Renaissance poet, Garcilaso de la Vega. The poet was himself introduced to the Spanish court at a young age, serving as a page to both Philip II and his son, later becoming one of Philip III’s royal continuos. Like his esteemed ancestors, Lobo Lasso was also a soldier, beginning his military career in 1571, serving in Spain, Italy, France, and possibly the Low Countries. While it is unclear whether Lobo Lasso attended university, he was undoubtedly a learned individual, with his military travels across Europe, as well as his encounters with distinguished authors at court and literary circles such as the Academia de Granada, not to mention his relationship with fellow epic poet Alonso de Ercilla, distinguishing him among sixteenth-century Spanish writers. Indeed, while Lobo Lasso has not enjoyed the longevity or poetic

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39 Lobo Lasso’s uncle, Pedro Díaz Lasso, served as pagador de S.M. y contador de la armada in the court of Philip II, while his other uncle, Gabriel Lasso de la Vega, held the role of Philip II’s tesorero general. See Jack Weiner, *Cuatro ensayos sobre Gabriel Lobo Laso de La Vega (1555-1615)* (Valencia: Publicacions de la Universitat de València, 2005), p. 96.

40 See Weiner, p. 95.


42 It is thought that Lobo Lasso lived with Alonso de Ercilla between the years 1571-1572, though it is unclear in what capacity; possibly as a student, companion, or secretary. For more information see Franco Carcedo, ‘La personalidad literaria’, p. 4. For more on Lobo Lasso’s involvement in the literary academies of early modern
status of that of Ercilla, he was nevertheless a well-respected and admired writer within his own lifetime, with contemporary authors such as Miguel de Cervantes and Lope de Vega dedicating sections of their works to him.\(^{43}\) Author of lyric and romance poetry, tragedies, eulogies, and historical prose, Lobo Lasso also penned an epic poem on the conquest of Mexico—\textit{Mexicana}, published in Madrid, 1594—, which is considered by scholars to be the most complete poem of the Cortés cycle.\(^{44}\) Comprising twenty-five cantos written in \textit{ottava rima}, \textit{Mexicana} recounts the events that took place between 1519-1520, leading to the conquest of Mexico by Hernán Cortés in 1521. The poem is an amended and expanded version of the poet’s previous epic, \textit{De Cortés valeroso, y Mexicana} (1588), with both versions of the poem having been commissioned by Martín Cortés—second Marqués del Valle de Oaxaca, son of Hernán Cortés— and Fernando Cortés—third Marqués del Valle de Oaxaca, grandson of Hernán Cortés—, respectively.\(^{45}\) While it is unclear whether the poet was initially approached by Martín Cortés with the proposal of writing an epic about his father, or whether Lobo Lasso himself initiated the process, it can

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\(^{43}\) Cervantes praises Lobo Lasso in his \textit{Viaje al Parnaso} (1614), as does Lope de Vega in \textit{Juan de Dios y Antón Martín} (c. 1608-1611). See Franco Carcedo, ‘La personalidad literaria’, p. 95. According to Weiner, ‘en su época Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega fue un escritor de gran peso para con su público y entre sus amigos, nobles y reyes’, p. 15. On Lobo Lasso’s friendship with some of Spain’s most illustrious writers see Weiner, p. 75.

\(^{44}\) In addition to his published works, Lobo Lasso also authored a number of unedited works. For a comprehensive list see Appendix I in Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega, \textit{Mexicana}, ed. José Amor y Vázquez (Madrid: Atlas, 1970), pp. 211-14.

\(^{45}\) Lobo Lasso reveals on several occasions in his poems at having been commissioned by the Cortés family to write his epics, and documentary evidence detailing the payments received by the poet from the second and third Marqueses del Valle confirms their relationship of patronage. In \textit{De Cortés valeroso, y Mexicana}, for example, Lobo Lasso addresses his patrons, revealing the need to ‘cumplir vuestro mandado’. Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega, \textit{De Cortés valeroso, y Mexicana de Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega. Estudio crítico y edición anotada}, ed. Nidia Pullés-Linares (New York: The City University of New York, 1999), IX. 78. References to the poem will be cited using canto and stanza number. In a document dated October 5, 1591, Lobo Lasso states: ‘item declaro que me debe el señor marqués del valle el salario que me tiene señalado desde el trece de agosto de ochenta y nueve en adelante a razón de cien ducados por año por agente en sus negocios’. As quoted in Weiner, p. 112. Lobo Lasso would later receive another 100 ducats in 1600 from the third Marqués del Valle, which was most likely payment for Lobo Lasso’s \textit{Elogios de varones ilustres}, published one year later in 1601. See Franco Carcedo, p. 15.
be deduced that both the poet and his sponsors stood to mutually benefit from a relationship of patronage; ‘dulce y deseado puerto de la protección’.  

According to Elizabeth R. Wright, the artist’s ‘quest for patronage’ in early modern Spain was often characterised by aspirations of economic mobility and social advancement. Certainly, given the financial instability of writing, the system of patronage became central to Renaissance literary culture, offering writers the opportunity to gain the favour of leading nobles and, in some cases, the monarch.

By his own admission, we know that, despite his noble descendance, Lobo Lasso was of modest social standing, alluding in a number of his romances, albeit with exaggerated sombreness, to a life of poverty, humiliation, and dependency. In his *Manojuelo de romances* (1601) the poet-narrator tells us:

> Yo soy un hidalgo pobre,  
> sólo falta el ser de aldea  
> para no faltar en nada  
> a todo lo que es laceria.  
> (...)  
> Comemos cuando lo hay,  
> cuando no, todo es pendencias,  
> (...)  
> Susténtome de pepinos,  
> de rábanos y de arvejas,  
> y de fáciles legumbres,  
> más que costosas, digestas;  
> y tal vez el aire puro  
> mis vitales alimenta,  
> hasta que acostar me voy

46 As quoted in a letter written from Lobo Lasso to his patron which can be found in Pullés-Linares’ edition of *Cortés valeroso*, p. 183.


48 See Michael James Foulkes, *An Analysis of Writing as a Career in Seventeenth-Century France Based on a Comparative Study of the Career Histories of Jean Racine, Philippe Quinault and Edme Boursault*, unpublished PhD thesis (University of Durham, 2017), pp. 147, 169; and Carlos M. Gutiérrez, *La espada, el rayo y la pluma: Quevedo y los campos literarios y de poder* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2005), p. 163. As can be seen from the dedications of his works, as well as the internal references he makes to prominent aristocrats, Lobo Lasso made every effort to attract the attention of a wealthy patron, even dedicating the *Primera parte del romancero y tragedias* (1587) to the young Prince Philip in the hope to achieve royal protection.
While one might argue that declarations of destitution, misery, and hunger such as these are nothing more than Lobo Lasso’s poetic persona, the ‘inventario de los bienes de Gabriel Laso de la Vega’, carried out at the request of his daughter in 1616, nevertheless indicates the precarious financial situation of the poet.\textsuperscript{49} As one of the richest families in both Spain and the New World, the Cortéses would have undoubtedly appealed to Lobo Lasso as potential patrons that could not only provide him with a steady income but also, through their connections at court and in the Americas, a higher social status through the attainment of honours, titles, and coveted positions.\textsuperscript{50}

In addition to economic and social motivations, the desire to achieve symbolic capital, or what Wright calls ‘literary stardom’, was an equally important factor of literary patronage in the early modern period; that is, the poet’s ambition to fulfil the role of the great poet and be recognised as such.\textsuperscript{51} By his own admission, Lobo Lasso sought to win the artistic renown that accompanied this kind of symbolic capital, revealing in romance 17 of his \textit{Manojuelo de romances} ‘que pienso ser gran poeta’.\textsuperscript{52} Such ambitions of grandeur could not be bestowed upon oneself, however, but rather depended on the official recognition of the poet’s talents; namely through the securing of a patron.\textsuperscript{53} Indeed, according to Helen


\textsuperscript{50} Aside from a plot of land in Madrid and a number of books, the inventory states that ‘todo lo demás indica pobreza’, suggesting that Lobo Lasso was, throughout his literary career, most probably looking for ways to improve his economic situation. As quoted in Miguel Artigas, ‘Lobo Lasso de La Vega’, \textit{Revista Crítica Hispano-Americana}, 3.4 (1917), 157-66 (p. 166). For the edited version of Lobo Lasso’s inventory, see document 35 of Franco Carcedo’s study, pp. 820-36.

\textsuperscript{51} According to Harry Sieber, in early modern Spain writers hoped ‘to find a permanent post, perhaps serve as secretary or chronicler or librarian to a great noble household or a powerful cleric’. Harry Sieber, ‘The Magnificent Fountain: Literary Patronage in the Court of Philip III’, \textit{Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America}, 18.2 (1998), 85-116 (p. 86). In Romance 50 of his \textit{Manojuelo de romances}, Lobo Lasso openly reveals that ‘sigo la Corte, pendiente | de unas remotas promesas, | que de ciertos personajes | tengo por vías secretas’, p. 138.


\textsuperscript{53} Lobo Lasso, \textit{Manojuelo de romances}, p. 52.

Harrison, the ‘image of the noble patron could augment the writer’s reputation’ with their prestigious name certifying the author’s talents and serving as a clear indicator of literary fame.

It must be acknowledged, however, that Lobo Lasso’s decision to write an epic on the deeds of Cortés was inspired as much by his own ideological commitment as his self-interested aspiration to secure patronage, claiming to have been inspired ‘no de vil premio, mas de amor movido’ (I. 4), writing *Mexicana* ‘con tan sanas intenciones, | (…) tan lejos de interés’ (VI. 12). Indeed, the majority of Lobo Lasso’s oeuvre is characterised by a patriotic fervour to recount the victories of Spain’s celebrated heroes, as he encourages his fellow poets to ink their quills to commemorate the feats of Spain’s national heroes. ‘¿Por qué en naciones extrañas | hemos de andar mendigando[?]’ he asks, ‘como si en ésta faltasen | hechos de varones claros’, before reminding poets of their duty to ‘celebrarlos | pues vuestros versos con ellos | quedará perpetuados’.

It was undoubtedly Lobo Lasso’s manifest patriotism, combined with his status as a reputable poet, that attracted the attention of the Cortés family which, it should be noted, was in as much need of Lobo Lasso’s skilled verse as he was of their patronage. Upon completing the conquest of the Aztec empire in 1521, Cortés’ actions in the New World came under scrutiny as he became subject to a number of accusations and endless litigation cases. Indeed, not only was the conquistador forced to face the denigration of his name by figures such as Bartolomé de las Casas, but also by many other enemies he had generated at court whose complaints and charges against him, including that of *crimen laesae maiestatis* (the crime of high treason), resulted in the Crown launching a formal inquest into his actions in 1527. Despite returning to Spain in 1528 and again in 1540 to defend his cause, Cortés’ life

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57 On the patriotic discourse of Lobo Lasso’s works see Hermenegildo, p. 2.

58 Lobo Lasso, *Manojuelo de romances*, 38-39. In his works –particularly his romances, but also his *Elogios en loor de los tres famosos varones don Jaime, rey de Aragón, don Fernando Cortés, marqués del Valle y don Álvaro de Bazán, marqués de Santa Cruz* (1601) and the *Varones y hombres doctos* (c. 1614-15)– Lobo Lasso records the deeds of historical and pseudo-historical figures such as Don Pelayo, El Cid, Fernán González, Jaime I de Aragón, Charles V, Juan de Austria, Álvaro de Bazán, as well as, of course, Hernán Cortés.


60 This is detailed in the fifth of Cortés’ *Cartas de relación*, which stands as a defence against the accusations made against him regarding his self-interest and disloyalty to the Crown. For more on the fifth letter see Carman, p. 63.
nevertheless remained riddled with the tribulation of his lawsuits. These were often costly, with two additional cases filed against him—those of Catalina Juárez and Juan de Guzmán—leaving the conquistador and his family burdened with debt and a quickly-diminishing reputation.61

After Cortés’ death in 1547, the precarious socio-economic situation of the Cortés family was worsened by the suspected involvement of his son Martín Cortés, second Marqués del Valle, in what is now referred to by scholars as the ‘Conjuración de Martín Cortés’: a plot to form a separatist, independent state in Mexico, with Martín Cortés as its head.62 Considered by Randall Ray Loudamy as ‘one of the major political events in sixteenth-century New Spain’, the plot stemmed from the growing tensions between the Crown and the creole community of New Spain in the years following the conquest of Mexico.63 In their attempts to prevent the establishment of independent local elites, the Crown sought to limit the mounting power of the encomenderos through the passing of laws and decrees; most notably the New Laws of 1542, and the numerous royal decrees enforced in 1549, in which the Crown ordered the cessation of native Indian services in the encomiendas.64 This led to a loss of the institution’s economic power, provoking outrage among creoles who felt themselves and their families dispossessed

61 The family of Catalina Juárez, Cortés’ first wife, accused him of murdering Catalina, and demanded half of the Marquesado del Valle de Oaxaca as compensation. The case lasted over eighty years, crippling the Cortés family financially, and resulted in the fourth Marqués del Valle, Pedro (great-grandson of Hernán Cortés), having to pay 42,000 pesos to three descendants of Catalina Juárez. See Weiner, pp. 98-99. Additionally, in 1551, the cacique of Coyoacán, Juan de Guzmán, filed a lawsuit in New Spain against the Cortés family over lands and payments. The suit was renowned not only for being the first time a Spanish family such as the Cortéses had been brought to court by Amerindians, but more importantly because Guzmán won the case. See Jonathan Kandell, La Capital: The Biography of Mexico City (New York: Random House, 1988), p. 177.

62 This has also been referred to in scholarship as the Cortés-Ávila conspiracy or the encomenderos revolt. For more information see Shirley Cushing Flint, ‘Treason or Travesty: The Martín Cortés Conspiracy Reexamined’, The Sixteenth Century Journal, 39.1 (2008), 23-44; Randall Ray Loudamy, ‘Cortés After the Conquest of Mexico: Constructing Legacy in New Spain’, unpublished PhD thesis (Oklahoma State University, 2013), pp. 192-95; and Simpson, pp. 130-36.


of their rights as descendants of those who had conquered the lands.⁶⁵ Despite having spent the majority of his life in Spain, serving in the court of Philip II since he was ten years old, Martín Cortés was nevertheless an American-born creole, and his return to Mexico in 1563 was celebrated by those who looked upon him as their leader and representative.⁶⁶ Indeed, it was just two years after Martín’s arrival in Mexico that a plan was supposedly concocted to settle the grievances of the creole class, in which a group of individuals were to take over the city council building, treasury, and armoury of Mexico City, and once under their control, install Martín Cortés as the head of a new independent state.⁶⁷

As news of the planned rebellion reached Spain, the Crown reacted with wonted severity; in total, eighty-nine people were accused of involvement in the conspiracy, who were varying charged with treason, perjury, bribery, withholding information, obstructing the cause of justice, and associating with criminals.⁶⁸ While the nature of Martín’s role in the conspiracy remained ambiguous, having always proclaimed his innocence and ignorance of any knowledge of the plot, he was nevertheless arrested, charged, and imprisoned on July 16, 1566, awaiting trial for treason and inciting rebellion against the king.⁶⁹ Due to lack of evidence, however, Martin was acquitted of the charges brought against him, spending just a short period of time under house arrest in Madrid.⁷⁰ His association with the conspiracy was, however, to prove costly to the Cortés family; both financially and politically. As well as being banished from returning to Mexico and losing substantial holdings of the Marquesado del Valle de Oaxaca, Martin was also ordered to pay a fine of 50,000 ducats and a loan to the king of 100,000 ducats to discourage disloyalty.⁷¹

⁶⁶ See Loudamy, pp. 192, 196; Simpson, pp. 130-31; and Kandell, p. 190.
⁶⁷ See Loudamy, p. 193; Simpson, p. 132.
⁶⁸ See Cushing Flint, p. 42. The two leaders of the plot, Alonso and Gil Ávila, were convicted of treason and beheaded on October 3, 1566, with their heads displayed on pikes in the main plaza of Mexico City to discourage further rebellion. See Cushing Flint, p. 23.
⁷⁰ See Weiner, p. 101; Kandell, p. 194; and Simpson, p. 136. It is likely that Martín’s friendship with Philip II also played an important role in his exoneration. Having served at the court of both Charles V and Philip II, Martín and his brother Luis accompanied Philip on an expedition to Flanders, as well as travelling to London in 1554 for the king’s marriage to Mary Tudor. For more information see Kandell, pp. 190, 193.
⁷¹ See Loudamy, p. 195; Simpson, p. 136. It would not be until 1574 when the Spanish Crown officially reinstated the economic administration of the Marquesado to the Cortés family—though with significantly reduced holdings and in an economically weak position—and the family was only permitted to travel to Mexico from 1602. See Weiner, pp. 102-03.
It can thus be deduced that the Cortés family was looking for a means to recover their diminishing reputation and win back the king’s favour, and what better way to do this than hiring a skilled epic poet. The ability of a genre as prestigious and grandiloquent as the epic, with its sublime style and heroic outlook, to capture and propagate the eternal fame of its hero was widely recognised in the early modern period, with Lobo Lasso himself reminding readers in the prologue of De Cortés valeroso how men are made immortal not solely through their deeds, but by the poets who sing them:

Y así, si discurrimos por los historiadores y poetas de aquellos tiempos y especulamos sus claros y loables discursos, echaremos de ver cuan importante fue para las personas de quien escribieron el haberlo tomado ellos a su cargo y cuán delante de los ojos nos ponen las glorias de que dignamente triunfaron, haciéndonos testigos de lo que tantas edades ha que pasó.

The epic thus provided Martín Cortés with a suitable means of acquiring long-lasting fame and, even more importantly, royal pardoning, as Lobo Lasso, fulfilling the contractual obligations of patronage, takes on the role of poet-propagandist of the Cortés family:

Y al común error en que están los envidiosos de sus hazañas por verse inhabilitados de otras tales, satisfare con breves y evidentes razones, mostrando cuan sin fuerza son las suyas y cuantas objeciones y tachas padecen y traen consigo los apasionados discursos de su dañado proceder.

Defending the Cortés family in an attempt to recover their reputation and wealth, recuperate their past glories, and regain the king's trust, Lobo Lasso fuels his narrative with exaggerated loyalty to his patrons, not only through the eulogistic veneration of his sponsors, but most importantly through the exaltation of the poems’ hero, Cortés, as he records the noble services rendered by the conquistador to the Crown and to the wider cause of Christianity. In establishing this unassailable, triumphant version

72 Even prior to the conspiracy of Martín Cortés, the second Marqués del Valle had commissioned López de Gómara to write a history of the conquest of Mexico. This was published at a moment when there was a rising tide of opinion against the conquistadores. See Adorno, The Polemics of Possession, p. 133.
73 Lobo Lasso, Cortés valeroso, p. 190.
74 Lobo Lasso, Cortés valeroso, p. 191.
75 Adulatory passages of Martín and Fernando Cortés can be found in the prophecy of Calianera in canto XI of Cortés valeroso. Calianera prophecises that Cortés ‘producirá un pimpollo tierno, | primogénito tuyo deseado, | de gran pecho, valor, ser, y gobierno, | que don Martín Cortés será llamado; | hará en parte tu nombre aqueste eterno, | y vendrá a suceder en el estado’ (65). About Cortés’ grandson, Fernando, the poet states: ‘que si otro nuevo mundo acá quedara, | don Fernando Cortés le conquistará’ (71).
of Cortés, Lobo Lasso draws on the heroic model of Goffredo presented in Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581), illustrating how the systemic effects of patronage influenced the poet’s artistic decisions.

**Hernán Cortés: ‘general de Cristo’ (V. 21)**

Confronted with the accusations of high treason brought against Cortés and later that of his son, as well as the growing demands of the Spanish Crown for compliant, loyal subjects in the colonies, Lobo Lasso was faced with the task of redefining Cortés’ heroism; downplaying the highly-individualised military adventurism celebrated by Cortés’ previous epicist, Zapata, and emphasising the conquistador’s obedience and loyalty to the king and his complete submission to the authority of the state. This is predominantly achieved in the first version of Lobo Lasso’s epic, *De Cortés valeroso, y Mexicana*, through the poets’ artful manipulation of history and the historical figure of Cortés ‘con quien’, Lobo Lasso openly states in his prologue, ‘cierto se deben disimular algunos defetos’. This was certainly not an uncommon practice among epic poets of the early modern period, with Le Bossu advising in his poetics that in their treatment of the hero, poets should ‘give them a lustre and embellish them, as far as they are capable: either by hiding the defects that are therein by some noble and shining qualities’. Without doubt, the heroicisation of Cortés in Lobo Lasso’s early epic is contingent on this kind of poetic embellishment, as the poet embarks on a highly manipulated depiction of conquest, portraying Cortés not as he was, but as he ought to have been. Any episodes from the histories chronicling Spain’s conquest that might diminish or undermine Cortés’ heroic status are thus systematically left out by the poet in the arrangement of his material, as he omits unpleasant facts, events, and actions that could tarnish his idealistic portrait of his protagonist. However, it would be in the second version of his epic, *Mexicana*, that Lobo Lasso more fully redefines Cortés’ heroism in accordance with state demands and the pragmatic needs of his sponsors, utilising the established model of Tasso’s epic, *Gerusalemme liberata*, and the first version of his poetics, *Discorsi dell’arte poetica e del poema heroico* (1587), as the poetic tools to create an alternative paragon of heroic selfhood based on the Christian virtues of rationality and religiosity.

Certainly, Tasso’s writings had a transformative influence on Lobo Lasso’s second epic, providing him with the ideal model of the Christian hero in the character of Goffredo. Following this prestigious model, we note a significant magnification of Cortés’ religiosity in the second version of

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76 Lobo Lasso, *Cortés valeroso*, p. 189.
77 Le Bossu, p. 197.
78 Tasso’s epic was translated into Spanish by Juan Sedeño in 1587.
Lobo Lasso’s epic, as he becomes adorned with Christian qualities, transforming from a martial hero into a devout hero of God. Thus, while the conquistador is referred to in the first version of Lobo Lasso’s poem as ‘el gran Cortés’, ‘el ágil Andaluz’, and ‘un nuevo y fiero Marte’, in Mexicana he becomes ‘el capitán de Cristo’ (II. 38), ‘el general de Cristo’ (V. 21), ‘un cristiano, fiero Marte’ (VI. 69), ‘de tan Cristiano proceder y celo’ (XXIII. 8). Appropriating the roles of apostle and iconoclast, his speeches become infused with religious and missionary rhetoric, as the poet establishes an intimate connection between conquest and conversion that had, since the initial discoveries, characterised Spain’s claims to the New World. Distinguished as God’s chosen vessel to carry out his spiritual mission in the Americas—‘gran varón, del Cielo eleto’ (II. 35), ‘por el cielo cometido’ (IV. 50), ‘por el cielo destinado’ (XI. 34), ‘varón por Dios eleto | para tan alta y singular jornada’ (XXV. 47)—, Cortés’ conquest is presented as a divinely-inspired enterprise; an aspect that is reinforced through the poet’s employment of supernatural machinery—a narrative element that was, on the whole, absent from Cortés valeroso.

Thus, while in the first version of his epic, Lobo Lasso repeatedly refers to ‘la fortuna y hado’, ‘la suerte’, ‘la feliz fortuna’, and ‘la áspera fortuna’, divine partisanship is taken to new levels in Mexicana, with God and his saints becoming fully-fledged characters as Lobo Lasso embraces the Christian supernatural framework theorised by Tasso in his poetics. Under this Christian model of theomachy, religious epithets are also used to describe the Spanish soldiers more broadly, who are referred to in Mexicana as ‘el pueblo ungido’ (VI. 61); ‘bautizado pueblo’ (VII. 37); and ‘el escuadrón crismado’ (VIII. 27), while their indigenous enemy is ‘idólatra pueblo’ (XII. 4) and ‘el campo idólatra’ (XVIII. 31).

80 Lobo Lasso, Cortés valeroso, I. 1; X. 23; VI. 18. These epithets were likely modelled on those used by Tasso to describe Goffredo in Gerusalemme liberata; namely, ‘campion di Cristo’ (XVIII. 94) and ‘cavalier di Cristo’ (IX. 5; XII. 87; XIX. 52). Torquato Tasso, La Gerusalemme liberata (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1853). Citations from the poem will be referenced using canto and stanza number. Religious epithets are also used to describe the Spanish soldiers more broadly, who are referred to in Mexicana as ‘el pueblo ungido’ (VI. 61); ‘bautizado pueblo’ (VII. 37); and ‘el escuadrón crismado’ (VIII. 27), while their indigenous enemy is ‘idólatra pueblo’ (XII. 4) and ‘el campo idólatra’ (XVIII. 31).

81 See Elliott, Empires of the Atlantic World, p. 11. Pertinent examples include Cortés’ fervent speech to his men in canto II (52-53), as well as his extirpation practices in cantos III (8) and XXI (29-34).

82 It should be noted that, in his own Cartas de relacián, Cortés himself attributed many of his victories in Mexico to divine aid: ‘crean Vuestras Reales Altezas por cierto que esta batalla fue vencida más por voluntad de Dios que por nuestras fuerzas’. Hernán Cortés, Cartas de relacián, ed. Ángel Delgado Gómez (Madrid: Castalia, 1993), p. 131. Cortés also establishes a direct relationship between himself and God in his letters, as if endowed with superhuman powers: ‘pareció que Nuestro Señor me inspiró y trajo a la memoria la calzada o presa que había visto rota en el camino, y representóseme el gran daño que era’, p. 327.

83 Lobo Lasso, Cortés valeroso, II. 30; II. 31; II. 35; II. 32. In his discussion of the use of ‘le meraviglie’—the marvellous—in Christian epic tradition, Tasso argues that ‘some works that greatly exceed the power of men the poet attributes to God, to His angels, to demons, or to those granted such power by God or by demons, like saints and wizards and fairies’. Tasso, ‘Discourses on the Art of Poetry’, p. 103. On Tasso's supernatural framework in Gerusalemme liberata see Tobias Gregory, ‘Tasso’s God: Divine Action in Gerusalemme liberata’, Renaissance Quarterly, 55.2 (2002), pp. 559-95. On Lobo Lasso’s employment of supernatural machinery see Antonio Río
God and his saints, and Pluto (Satan) and his minions play active roles in the conquest of Mexico, driving the narrative with their constant intrusions both in favour and against Cortés; so much so, that Lobo Lasso’s epic can convincingly be read as a battle between the supernatural forces of Heaven and Hell.

In the opening canto of Lobo Lasso’s epic, the narrator informs us that Mexico is possessed by the tyrannous stronghold of the Devil—allegorised in the poem by the character Pluto—who the Mexica worship with great reverence (I. 9). Enraged at Cortés’ arrival in Mexico and the prospect of his lands being usurped, his people converted, and the cessation of human sacrifice, Pluto appropriates the role of supernatural antagonist in Mexicana as he plots a number of machinations to impede the conquistador from carrying out his holy mission; most often by summoning ferocious storms (II, V), evoking diabolical dreams, and assuming false apparitions (V, XV, XXI). Lobo Lasso permits the disturbances of Pluto only so far as to prove their futility, however, never constituting any real threat to Cortés who, quite literally, has God on his side. Indeed, throughout Mexicana the continuous attempts of Cortés’ adversaries, both human and supernatural, to hinder the progress of conquest are consistently counteracted by God’s continued support and direct intervention; most frequently through his divine messenger, St. Michael—‘el santo protector’ (V. 21)—, who on several occasions in the poem descends from Heaven to assist Cortés through physical intervention, divine apparitions and dreams, and prophetic revelations.85

Supernatural machinery thus functions as an allegorical manifestation of divinely-sanctioned imperialism in Lobo Lasso’s epic, as the conquest is portrayed as an inevitable act of God. Certainly, the aspect of predestination that marks Cortés’ conquest serves as an incontestable theological justification of Spain’s expansionist enterprise; legitimising the existing political and social order in Mexico and throughout the New World, while also justifying Cortés’ actions. It is for this reason that the poet includes a number of divinely-inspired prophecies guaranteeing the conquistador’s success, presenting the conquest as the fulfilment of a providential plan; a right that had been reserved solely for


84 The belief that the New World had been ruled by the Devil until the Spaniards’ arrival in 1492 was widespread among Lobo Lasso’s contemporaries, with historians such as Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo claiming that ‘el demonio ha seydo señor por tantos siglos’, and that the natives ‘adoran al diablo en diversas formas é ídolos’. Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, Historia general y natural de las Indias, ed. José Amador de los Ríos, 4 vols (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1851), i, pp. 236, 138.

85 Salient examples include that of the second storm of Lobo Lasso’s poem, in canto V, in which St. Michael descends from heaven and, assuming the voice and body of the Spanish fleet’s steersman, directs Cortés and his men to safety; or in cantos XI and XII, which recount the battle of Cintla, when St. Michael descends once again, this time adopting the form of a Spanish soldier, to assist the Spaniards in securing their victory against the natives.
Spain and, of course, Cortés as the conquest’s divinely-appointed leader.\textsuperscript{86} Divine prophecies not only serve as a political and ideological justification of conquest, however, but also provide Lobo Lasso with the opportunity to directly address his patronage requirements. This is most clearly apparent in canto XI of \textit{Mexicana} in which a sleeping Cortés is visited in his dreams by the personified river Tabasco whose prophecy includes a genealogical encomium of the conquistador and his descendants.\textsuperscript{87} Through numerous references to Cortés’ heirs and their marriages to renowned nobles and trusted aides of the Spanish kings, the prophecy attempts to build a discourse of loyalty and nobility for the Cortés family, aggrandising the figures of both Cortés and his son, Martín, and reminding Philip II of the services rendered to the state by the conquistador and the rewards that had rightfully been granted to him by Charles V. The river Tabasco reveals to Cortés that, upon completing the conquest, he will be awarded the Marquesado del Valle de Oaxaca; ‘estado fértil, rico y abundoso; (...) tierra | adquirida por ti en sangrienta guerra’ (XI. 20). When we consider that Lobo Lasso was writing at a moment when the Cortés family was still attempting to reclaim the lost holdings of the Marquesado after the supposed conspiracy of Martín Cortés, lines such as ‘adquirida por ti en sangrienta guerra’ become particularly pertinent to the poem’s underlying intentions, as does the poet’s allusion to Philip II’s protection of Martín: ‘del invicto Felipe, Rey potente, | (...) amparado será con grata frente | don Martín, estimando tus hazañas’ (XI. 25).

Despite Lobo Lasso’s references here to the material rewards gained by Cortés following the conquest, it is important to note that in \textit{Mexicana} the conquistador does not aspire to personal prosperity or glory, but rather acts solely to serve his king and his God. Indeed, contrary to the accusations of his enemies, Cortés emerges from the text as a disinterested and unthreatening vassal who is governed solely by his religious duty. Praying to God in canto XV, for example, he states: “oh tú, Señor, pues mis intentos sabes | que solo a tu servicio van dispuestos’ (46). Where in Zapata’s \textit{Carlo famoso} Cortés had been characterised by his ambition ‘por ganar prez y honra’ (XIV. fol. 72’), reiterated on several occasions in the poem, travelling to the Americas, ‘de donde había gran fama de dinero’ (XI. fol. 55’), in \textit{Mexicana} the conquistador’s motivations for conquering Mexico are presented by the poet as being pure and uninspired by greed or pomposity. Certainly, passion for glory, power, and wealth are inappropriate qualities for the Christian hero as Tasso defined him, who must instead avoid any kind of distraction from his divinely-appointed mission.\textsuperscript{88} Ruled by an erring sense of duty and self-control, Cortés’ moralistic force represents the power of the higher faculties over the lower, illustrated on several occasions by his renunciation of earthly pleasures; both materialist and amorous.

\textsuperscript{86} See, for example, St. Michael’s prophecies in cantos II and XXV.

\textsuperscript{87} This episode is likely to have been modelled on Book VIII of Virgil’s \textit{Aeneid}, in which the god of the river Tiber appears to Aeneas in a prophetic dream. Alternatively, canto IV of Camões’ \textit{Os Lusiadas}, in which the river Ganges addresses King Manuel in a dream, may have been another source of inspiration.

\textsuperscript{88} See D’Alessandro, pp. 113-14.
Above mundane passions of the heart – referred to by the conquistador as “engañoso amor, torpe, liviano” (XV. 53) –, Cortés only has God on his mind – “vuestra es la casa y pretensión que llevo” (XI. 40) –; exchanging the love of women for a love of Christ, thus exemplifying the Christian virtue of caritas. 89 It is for this reason that Cortés never succumbs to romantic passion or illicit lust in Mexicana. Moreover, while in several chronicles, codices, and pictographic narratives of the conquest, Cortés is often pictured and described alongside his translator, Marina (La Malinche), her presence in Mexicana is very much reduced, and most certainly does not appear as Cortés’ lover or the mother of his illegitimate child. 90 Nor do we read of any other of the conquistador’s supposed amorous relations in the New World; starkly contrasting to Gómara’s assertion that Cortés ‘fue muy dado a mujeres, y dióse siempre’. 91 In his attempt to portray Cortés’ strong mastery over his passions, Lobo Lasso also completely removes an episode narrated in the first version of his epic – found in canto XI of Cortés valeroso – that would most certainly have jeopardised this model of abstention; a romance allegory modelled on cantos IX and X of Luis de Camões’ Os Lusiadas. 92

Immediately following the Tlaxcalans’ surrender to the Spanish after a series of ferocious battles in canto X of Cortés valeroso, Lobo Lasso narrates how the goddess Minerva petitions her father, Jupiter, to reward Cortés who has shown great valour in his triumph against the ‘bárbaras regiones’ (XI. 10). 93 Granting her wishes, Jupiter orders that a ‘fiesta a placer’ be held for the Spaniards, ‘con que a Cortés mejor se solazase’ (XI. 22) and ‘que a Cortés más satisfaga’ (XI. 47). Consequently, after the Spaniards are welcomed into Tlaxcala at the end of canto X, Cortés is invited to join a hunt in the forest, taking with him 100 of his men. 94 On the hunt, Cortés encounters a paradisiacal ‘prado ameno y apacible’ (X. 104) adorned with an array of flora and fauna typical of the literary topos of the locus amoenus, including plants, flowers, birds, fountains, and beautiful women:

Con gran diversidad de plantas bellas,

89 D’Alessandro considers caritas to be ‘the virtue that allows the hero to fix his gaze on God’, p. 31.
90 For Lobo Lasso’s brief description of Marina in Mexicana, see XIII. 19
92 Camões’ poem was published in Lisbon in 1572, and translated into Spanish in 1580 by Benito Caldera (Alcalá de Henares: Juan Gracían) and Luis Gómez de Tapia (Salamanca: Juan Perier).
93 This episode is highly reminiscent of cantos IX-X of Camões’ Os Lusiadas, in which the Portuguese soldiers are gifted with the Island of Love as a reward for carrying out their mission: ‘para premio de quanto mal passaram, [buscar-lhe algum deleite, algum descanso’ – Luis de Camões, Os Lusiadas (Lisbon: Antonio Gonçalves, 1572), IX. 19. Citations from the poem will be referenced using canto and stanza number.
94 Once again, this is modelled on canto X of Camões’ epic in which the Portuguese, leaving their vessels in search of fresh water and to hunt for animals, encounter deep in the forest the Island of Love. As in Os Lusiadas (X. 77), canto XI of Lobo Lasso’s epic ends with Cortés receiving a prophecy from the nymph Calianera (XI. 60-81).
y variedad de flores olorosas,
de aves formando rústicas querellas,
sebrando dulces quejas amorosas:
gran suma de hermosísimas doncellas
vio, cabe claras fuentes pedregosas,
que estaban de guirnaldas coronadas,
en danzas, bailes, música ocupadas. (X. 105)

This idealised landscape is highly evocative of the ‘valle ameno’ (IX. 55) of Camões’ Island of Love, which is similarly adorned with ‘nymphas amorosas, | d’amor feridas’ (IX. 41); ‘claras fontes (…) entre pedras’ (IX. 54); and ‘danças e chorēas’ (IX. 21).5 Saturated ‘com mil deleites’ (IX. 41), Camões’ Island of Love provides an atmosphere of abundance, ripeness, and freshness, characterised by a sexualised and erotic discourse of lushness.6 Similarly, Lobo Lasso’s depiction of the Tlaxcalan meadow is also highly eroticised, consistently alluding to the pleasurable; ‘[la] holgura’ (XI. 18). Set within the semantic field of fertility and virginity –‘lácteas vias’ (XI. 20), ‘fértil suelo’ (XI. 21), ‘fértil prado’ (XI. 36), ‘nieve no pisada’ (XI. 26)–, Lobo Lasso’s meadow is populated by a variety of satyrs and nude nymphs, all of whom possess an overtly sensual and sexual aura. As in Camões’ poem, we find the eroticisation of fruits –‘el agradable plátano estendía | sus apacibles ramos deleitosos’ (XI. 29)– and trees –‘el mirto (…) provocador de extremos amorosos’ (XI. 29)–, as well as numerous symbolic references to the erotic love stories of Greek myth alluding to capture, rape, and seduction.7

While Río Torres-Murciano argues that the meadow described in Lobo Lasso’s epic is solely meant to provide Cortés and his men with a deserved respite from warring, I propose that the scene can nevertheless be understood, as Camões’ poem has been, as offering the hero and his men some form of sexual gratification, with the representation of Cortés taking on erotic nuances.8 While Lobo Lasso does not explicitly mention whether Cortés or his men partake in the sexual delights offered by the meadow, the poet nevertheless tells us that Cortés, ‘estando pues en esto divertido’ (XI. 38), lets himself

5 In his analysis of this episode, Raúl Marrero Fente argues that a number of classical models likely also influenced Lobo Lasso’s poetic construction of the meadow. Raúl Marrerro-Fente, Poesía épica colonial del siglo XVI: historia, teoría y práctica (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt a.M.: Vervuert, 2017), pp. 207-17.
6 We read, for example, of the ‘formosos limães alli cheirando | estão virgeneas têtas imitando’ (IX. 56).
7 In stanza 29 Lobo Lasso refers to the seduction of Europe by Zeus, and in stanza 30 the tale of Myrrha, who fell in love with her father, as well as the love story of Pyramus and Thisbe. In stanza 45 he describes the sirens who, with their songs, lured sailors to crash against the rocks.
be carried away by the luring and sensual sounds, sights, and smells that entice him to go further into the pasture, as he engages with all of his bodily senses: ‘con ojo diligente y largo oído, | y el ofalto de suave olor tocado’ (XI. 24). The verb ‘mirar’ is repeated on several occasions in stanzas 25 and 26, illustrating how the meadow is projected through the eyes of the conquistador and how he, as the recipient of such pleasure, stands at the centre of the locus amoenus. The structural positioning of this erotic episode is also by no means coincidental, with the poet modelling his canto on a historical event described in Gómara’s Historia de la conquista de México in which, after their victory in Tlaxcala, Cortés and his men ‘holgáronse allí veinte días’.99 Indeed, according to Gómara, the Tlaxcalans ‘les dieron sus hijas en señal de verdadera amistad, y porque nasciesen hombres esforzados de tan valientes varones, y les quedase casta para la guerra; o quizá se las daban por ser su costumbre y por complacerlos.’100

Lobo Lasso’s description of this pagan garden, seeped in erotic innuendo and profane symbolism, represents precisely the carnal vice that the poet sought to eradicate in his depiction of Christian heroism in the second version of his epic and is thus necessarily disposed of in Mexicana; emphasising the hero’s prioritisation of his public and religious duty over his own private passions, thus complying with the wider discourse of stoicism that permeates the poem. Indeed, throughout Mexicana Cortés embodies the stoic ideal of ‘the disengaged self’ in which the individual is ‘capable of objectifying not only the surrounding world but also his own emotions and inclinations, fears and compulsions, and achieving thereby a kind of distance and self-possession which allows him to act ‘rationally’’.101 Embracing the Renaissance concept of sprezzatura –‘the ability to disguise what one really desires, feels, thinks, and means or intends behind a mask of “apparent reticence and nonchalance”’--, Cortés endures pain, hardship, and inner torment without ever revealing his feelings to the rest of his men in a remarkable demonstration of stoic integrity: ‘aunque de alegre rostro se fingía, | llena está el alma de ansia y desconsuelo’ (II. 59).102 Boldly embracing the stoic abandonment of private freedoms in favour of the wellbeing of the collective, he is commonly referred to throughout Mexicana as ‘el pío Cortés’ (II. 9); a clear imitation of the Virgilian epithet ‘pius Aeneas’ expressed in

99 López de Gómara, p. 93.
100 López de Gómara, p. 93.
102 Harry Berger, The Absence of Grace: Sprezzatura and Suspicion in Two Renaissance Courtesy Books (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 10. The concept of sprezzatura was originally developed by Baldassare Castiglione in Il Cortegiano (1528). Other examples from Mexicana can be found in: II. 51; XI. 48; XVII. 91; and XX. 62.
the *Aeneid* and later in the *Gerusalemme liberata* in the form of ‘il pio Goffredo’.

The epitome of moral strength and self-sacrifice, Cortés is often portrayed in the poem as relinquishing his own wellbeing for that of his men—‘y mientras duermen todos Cortés vela, | que siempre es el que manda centinela’ (XXIII. 34)—as he prioritises his civic responsibility and his duties as a leader over that of his own individual needs. Throughout the conquest, the conquistador loyally and lovingly serves his fellow soldiers, upholding morale and discipline, as he guides them through the most challenging of times: “tengáis de mí, señores, cuánto os quiero” he tells his men, “que por vuestro aumento fui venido” (XIX. 37). Even when he buries his men who have died in the devastating battle of the Noche Triste, he does so ‘con afecto amoroso y compasible’ (XXV. 44).

Cortés’ compassionate magnanimity and clemency are two of his defining qualities in *Mexicana*, as he not only displays ‘pecho generoso’ (XIX. 30) with his men, but also with his enemy, setting captives free and pleading, on a number of occasions in the poem, for peace as opposed to violence, contrasting to the ruthless killer painted by many of his detractors: ‘les dijo que quería | hablar de paz con ellos, que bajasen | las armas y que atentos le escuchasen’ (VI. 20). Indeed, though a highly skilled warrior, it is Cortés’ diplomacy that is most admired by the poet who goes so far as to compare him to the ultimate epic paragon of resourceful guile, Odysseus: ‘asi que el gran Cortés en todo se hubo | cual el sagaz Ulises nunca anduvo’ (XIII. 4). The conquistador’s *sapientia* is displayed in his numerous interactions with his enemy, often resorting to the use of his tongue rather than his sword to resolve conflict: ‘de su elocuente plática se armaba, | que acero no era allí tan fructuoso’ (XIX. 30). Indeed, in the many confrontations with his adversaries, Cortés displays a restrained and composed behaviour, displaying ‘serena faz y mansa frente’ (XV. 47) as opposed to rage and violence, embodying the laudable virtue of ‘templanza’:

Don singular por cierto es la templanza,
grandemente los hombres habilita,
muchu con ella en la opresión se alcanza,
y mucho los trabajos facilita;
de aquél puede esperarse buena andanza

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103 Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1916), VI. 9. Subsequent references to the poem will be cited using book and line number, with exception to Fairclough's translations which will be cited using page number. Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, I. 20. Expanding beyond the projection of physical prowess and martial valour embodied in the arch individualists of the Homeric epics such as Achilles, Virgil created a new heroic ideal founded on moral as well as physical strength, presenting a shift away from the individual self to a more pious form of heroism based on self-control and selflessness. See Quint, p. 84.

104 Other examples of Cortés’ calls for peace can be found in VI. 63; VI. 68; and XVI. 48.
que lo superfluo de su cuerpo quita
y con lo razonable se contenta,
con que a naturaleza no violenta. (IV. I)\textsuperscript{105}

In this stanza, Lobo Lasso aligns himself with wider humanist discussions on the subject of temperance and rationality, echoing the assertions of his contemporaries, Ercilla and Tasso. According to Ercilla, ‘en ocasión y a tiempo nos airemos, | pero con tal templanza y regimiento | que de la raya no pasemos; \ | pues dejados llevar del movimiento, \ | el ser y la razón de hombres perdemos’.\textsuperscript{106} In concurrence with this belief, in his Discorsi del poema eroico (1594), Tasso similarly defends reason as the noblest of the three faculties of the soul, superior to the irascible and concupiscible forces.\textsuperscript{107}

While Cortés undoubtedly stands as the beacon of reason and stability throughout the poem, the secondary characters of Lobo Lasso’s epic represent the irrational forces of ire and lust, revealing a century-old epic struggle between public duty and private aspirations.\textsuperscript{108} Within the Christian army, Lobo Lasso demonstrates a number of examples in which soldiers succumb to the temptation of private goals, distracted from their Christian mission to embark on their own individual adventures. This is illustrated in the romantic transgressions of Aguilar who, on two separate occasions in the poem (IX, XIV), leaves the battlefield in search of adventure, wandering into the realm of romance. Moved to action by ‘la tierna pasión enamorada’ (XIV. 35), he is a faithful disciple of the chivalric code whose heart is continuously inflamed to save beautiful maidens in distress who inspire him through the laws of gallantry to perform great deeds. More concerned with matters of the heart than the sacred mission of conquest, Aguilar is just one of several characters in the poem to be lured to temptation by a beautiful woman, disobeying the rules of reason in search of private desires. Indeed, much like Aguilar, Sandoval is also spurred to action by his passion; in this case an erotic love for his indigenous foe, Taxguaya. This romantic lust between the sexes, also captured in the relationship between Alvarado and Gualca, stands in contrast to the spiritual love experienced by Cortés which transcends the chivalric ideals and erotic exchanges of his comrades. Though arguably heroic in their own right, these types of impassioned behaviours would certainly not befit the type of hero that Lobo Lasso was trying to paint for Cortés in Mexicana and must therefore be reserved solely for the secondary characters in the poem.

The lures of private desire are also demonstrated in Mexicana by the unnamed mass of Spanish soldiers who fight alongside Cortés. Inspired by the opportunity to achieve ‘mayores glorias’, ‘riqueza’, ‘eterno nombre, triunfos y vitorias’ (XV. 51), these soldiers demonstrate a lust for fame and fortune,

\textsuperscript{105} See also stanzas 2 and 3 of this canto.

\textsuperscript{106} Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga, La Araucana, ed. Isaias Lerner (Madrid: Cátedra, 1993), XXX. 3.

\textsuperscript{107} See Tasso, Discourses on the Heroic Poem, p. 47. See also XXX. 6 and XXI. 55-56 of Ercilla’s epic.

\textsuperscript{108} As Le Bossu observes, ‘the poet introduces personages whose humours are contrary to that of the hero’. Le Bossu, p. 202.
which often gives way to excessive greed and violence as they pillage and assault indigenous villages on their passage to Tenochtitlán—‘con hachas y manos codiciosas | quebrantan puertas gruesas y vistosas (...) el oculto metal buscan goloso’ (XX. 42-43)—an aspect of the conquest that Lobo Lasso, much like Ercilla, rebukes.\(^{109}\) This is most fully explored in canto XV of *Mexicana* in the mutiny of the Spanish soldier, Celidón; the embodiment of self-interest and avarice. In this episode, Pluto calls upon the Fury, Megaera, to disrupt ‘el campo con motín y engaño’ (XV. 20). Appearing to Celidón in a dream (XV. 25), the Fury provides him with an oneiric apparition in which he sees himself and his fellow Spaniards betrayed by Cortés, captured by the indigenous tribes, sacrificed to their gods, and eventually eaten (XV. 26-28). Waking from his dream, Celidón gathers his comrades and incites a rebellion to kill Cortés and return to Spain with the spoils of war (XV. 42). While the mutiny of Celidón appears to be a clear imitation of canto VIII of Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata*, in which Argillano is inspired to rebel against Goffredo after Alecto infuses his mind with images of a decapitated Rinaldo who, the Fury implies, has been killed by Goffredo, the episode nevertheless has its own circumstantial historical and political undertones.

Though a fictional character in Lobo Lasso’s poem, Celidón would appear to represent the political faction of Diego Velázquez—governor of Cuba—, that followed Cortés from Cuba out of a selfish and misguided ambition for material enrichment.\(^{110}\) Indeed, in Cortés’ own *Cartas de relación*, particularly the *Carta de Veracruz*, the conquistador was eager to depict Velázquez and his supporters as self-interested individuals; ‘movido más a codicicia que a otro celo’; contrasting sharply to Cortés’ own virtuous and disinterested aspirations.\(^{111}\) The mutiny of Celidón thus more widely reflects the political tensions that existed between the supporters of Cortés and the Velázquez faction; a rivalry that extended beyond the New World to the royal court in Spain.\(^{112}\) With his patronage duties resolutely in mind, Lobo Lasso represents the Velázquez faction in purely negative terms, charging them with jeopardising the success of the conquest for their own self-enrichment. The depiction of Cuba in canto XXI is significant in this regard, portraying the colony under the governorship of Velázquez as a seditious place filled with greed and misdirected ambition:

\[\text{Unos hermanos de otros se quejaban}\
\text{y con palabras y obras se ofendían;}\
\text{los que amistad estrecha profesaban,}\]

\(^{109}\) Greed is a prevalent theme in *La Araucana*, as the poet claims that ‘[la] codicia fue ocasión de tanta guerra’ (III. 3).


\(^{111}\) Cortés, p. 109.

\(^{112}\) See Elliott, 'Cortés, Velázquez and Charles V', pp. xix-xx.
con el bien del amigo enflaquecían;

de ofenderse mil medios intentaban,

fraudes, insultos, robos cometían,

cada cual su bien sólo pretendiendo

y por dañar al prójimo muriendo. (XXI. 61)

This description is a tactical move by Lobo Lasso, feeding into the wider discourse of defence that runs throughout the poem, as it simultaneously helps to justify Cortés’ controversial departure from Cuba in 1519 by underlining the corruption that was present there. Velázquez’s order to send a fleet to Mexico, under the leadership of Pánfilo de Narváez, to arrest Cortés and bring him back to Cuba in canto XXII is thus considered by the poet to not only be illicit and unsanctioned, but more importantly sacrilegious –‘procurando impedir el milagroso | efeto de tan alta y gran jornada’ (XXII. 2)–, for which Velázquez must be held in contempt as a traitor to Spain’s imperial mission and the wider cause of Christianity: ‘cosa que a Dios y al rey ofende tanto’ (XXII. 6).

Expressions of uncontrolled greed such as that displayed by the Velázquez faction and the Spanish conquistadors more broadly are necessarily met with divine wrath in the poem, serving as a direct warning to the conquest’s traitors and the political adversaries of Cortés. An example of this is to be found in the resolution of Celidón’s mutiny in which, attempting to pacify his soldiers, Cortés is joined by the celestial figure of St Michael, who stands side by side with the conquistador, dispelling the mutiny through his threatening apparition (XV. 62). An even greater demonstration of God’s punishment is to be found in the poet’s account of the Noche Triste (XXIV-XV) which functions as a moralising discourse in the poem. Presenting a suffocating scene in which the sky fills with monsters (XXIV. 54) and ‘muerte, horror, congoja, espanto, | dura fatiga y áspero lamento’ (XXIV. 65) fill the air, Lobo Lasso describes the devastating events of the Noche Triste as God’s ‘castigo’ (XXIV. 65), having been offended by the ‘errada vida, de imprudencias llena, | codiciosa, imperfecta, variable’ (XXV. 2) of the Spanish army who have deviated from the conquest’s virtuous intentions: ‘de lo que Dios dispone tan distantes’ (XXV. 11). While Cortés is never implicated in this abhorrent behaviour, as leader of the band he must nevertheless assume responsibility for the actions of his men. Begging forgiveness for their sins, he is absolved by ‘un religioso’ (XXV. 16), while the rest of his men follow his example, thus allowing them to continue with their final siege of Tenochtitlán; reinforcing, once again, the ethical code of the conquest.

113 Lobo Lasso’s use of the word ‘errada’ here may well be an imitation of Tasso’s ‘compagni erranti’ (I. 1), used to describe soldiers who fight for private interests.

114 The final siege of Tenochtitlán is not narrated in Mexicana, with the poet promising a second part to his epic that would never materialise. He does, however, include a prophecy of the fall of the Aztec city in the final canto of the epic in the words of St Michael (10-14).
For Lobo Lasso, the Christian hero should not only abstain from lust and avarice, but also from unbridled displays of anger. Embracing Neostoic debates on the notion of ire, Lobo Lasso demonstrates the immorality and destructive forces of wrath in his epic, referring to it as ‘vergonzosa cólera’ (XVIII. 40) and comparing it to ‘dura peste fiera, contagiosa (…), venenosa’ (XV. 44); completely at odds with the Christian stoicism embodied by Cortés.\textsuperscript{115} Refusing to portray any aspects of the conquistador’s temper, ruthlessness, or propensity towards torture and terror that had been both recorded in chronicles and reported by his detractors, the poet reserves expressions of uncurbed ire solely for Cortés’ enemies.\textsuperscript{116} Within the Velázquez faction, for example, he writes that ‘la ira salta’ (XV. 43), along with ‘odios, rabias, rencores’ (XV. 44), as ‘todos se indignan’ (XV. 43) against Cortés. It is the indigenous characters of Mexicana, however, that are most frequently characterised as acting on the irrational impulses of furor and ira. Much like the Araucanians of Ercilla’s epic, which undoubtedly served as a model for Lobo Lasso, indigenous warriors such as the cacique Tabasco, Maxixca, Xicoténcatl, Cuatlabac, and Cautemoc, are repeatedly referred to as being ‘en ira ardiendo’ (VII. 34; XVII. 89); ‘ardiendo en ira’ (VIII. 36; XII. 55); ‘ardiendo en saña’ (XVII. 61); ‘en furor ardia’ (XVII. 69); ‘con pecho ardiendo en ira’ (XXIII. 63); ‘hiere la ira en el gallardo pecho’ (XXV. 49); even going so far as to compare Maxixca with the epic paragon of ire, the wrathful Achilles (XVII. 9).\textsuperscript{117} Inflamed by notions of pride and vengeance, the indigenous warriors of Lobo Lasso’s epic are arrogant, impatient, rancorous, irrational, merciless, instinctively indignant, and unable to master their passions. Often compared to wild animals during their combat with the Spaniards, they display a bestial violence; untamed, uncontrolled, and unrestrained: ‘parten los bárbaros furiosos | sin orden (…) [de] furor ciego’ (XXIII. 66-68).\textsuperscript{118} The ‘ira feroz, brava, fogosa’ (VI. 30) of the ‘bárbara enemiga’ (XVI. 66) is clearly represented as a flaw in the character of the Amerindians; one of many expressions of barbarity that the poet draws upon in Mexicana.

Indeed, traits of barbarity are ever present in Lobo Lasso’s depiction of the native Americans, as he makes numerous references to their inhumanity and primitivism. They are, according to the poet,

\textsuperscript{115} Classical works such as Seneca’s De ira and Plutarch’s De cohibenda ira were explored with newfound interest in the early modern period. On the rise of Neostoicism in the early modern period see Gerhard Oestreich, Neostoicism and the Early Modern State (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

\textsuperscript{116} For example, Lobo Lasso completely omits the moment when Cortés orders the hands of a number of Tlaxcaltecan spies to be cut off as a result of their supposed betrayal, recorded in book CV of Gómara’s history.

\textsuperscript{117} This characterisation is reiterated throughout La Araucana: ‘de cólera Lincoya y rabia insano | responde’ (II. 23); Lautaro addresses his men ‘ardiendo en furor’ (XI. 73); ‘Tucapel is ‘rabioso y vivo fuego’ (XX. 11) and ‘ardiendo en ira y furor insano’ (XXII. 39). See Craig Kallendorf, ‘Representing the Other: Ercilla’s La Araucana, Virgil’s Aeneid, and the New World Encounter’, Comparative Literature Studies, 40.4 (2003), 394-414 (pp. 404-5).

\textsuperscript{118} The cacique Tabasco, for example, is compared to a ‘toro’, ‘jabali’, ‘perro’, and ‘león’ in his battle with the Spaniards (VIII. 47-51).
'gente sin ley, feroz, airada, | brava, inhumana, fiera y arriscada' (XXI. 80); ‘bestias que la lengua humana hablaron’ (XXII. 29). As well as violating the sacred principles of Christianity through their idolatry, the indigenous also commit crimes against nature, referred to by Lobo Lasso as ‘costumbres crudos’ (IV. 8) and ‘crueldades’ (XXII. 42). This is an aspect of Mexican culture that Lobo Lasso reiterates throughout his epic, providing detailed descriptions of human sacrifice and cannibalism.\textsuperscript{119} Clearly seeking to evoke disgust in his readers, while also providing an ideological justification for conquest, the poet narrates how the Mexica tear off their victims’ skin and wear them over their bodies, ‘tan cruel costumbre’ (XXII. 41), as well as sacrificing children as young as three years old to their pagan gods (XXII. 32). They also provide some of the most atrocious examples of villainy in the poem, such as Hirtano’s attempted rape of Clandina in canto IX and Millolano and his brutes’ abduction, robbery, and enslavement of fellow natives for the consumption of their flesh in canto XIV. Demonstrating a clear familiarity with contemporary debates regarding the rationality and rights of indigenous American societies to self-govern –most notably the polemical exchanges that took place between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda during the debate of Valladolid in 1550-51 and the subsequent literature produced on the subject thereafter–, Lobo Lasso contributes his own views on the matter, endorsing the beliefs of cultural superiority and colonial domination advocated by Sepúlveda.\textsuperscript{120} Drawing on the Aristotelian theory of natural slavery, he emphasises the Amerindians’ inferiority to Spaniards and their need to be educated, converted, and civilised:

\begin{quote}
(...) \\
no a todos el Cielo hizo iguales, \\
aun en las proporciones corporales.
\end{quote}

Unos nacieron para ser mandados, \\
otros para mandar y ser temidos, \\
(...) \\
éstos, para ganar reinos y estados, \\
y nombres justamente merecidos; \\
aquéllos, para serles obedientes \\
y recibir sus leyes convenientes. (XIII. 1-2)\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{119} See particularly cantos XIV and XXII. \textsuperscript{120} For more on the scholastic debates regarding the indigenous peoples of the Americas see Anthony Pagden, The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). \textsuperscript{121} For more on the theory of natural slavery in the American context see Pagden, The Fall of Natural Man, pp. 27-56.
However, while Lobo Lasso abhors the Amerindians for their idolatrous practices and inhumane customs, he nevertheless presents them as worthy enemies of the Spaniards, as they take on a number of admirable, heroic qualities in the epic. Indeed, the poet’s somewhat ambiguous position towards the indigenous can be summarised in his use of the oxymoronic term ‘el gallardo bárbaro’ (XII. 36), used on several occasions in his epic, evoking the idea of the noble savage; loathed by the poet for its barbarity, yet admired for its dexterity and virtue as warriors.

Certainly, Lobo Lasso’s heroicisation of the enemy need not be understood in tension with the ideology of the poem, but rather as another means to bolster the heroic deeds of Cortés, demonstrating how the poet’s construction of heroism is dependent on a pluralistic heroic structure in which the main hero is set against worthy opponents of suitable stature. Indeed, of all the accusations to have been brought against Cortés in the years following the conquest of Mexico, perhaps the most contested in Mexicana is that regarding the ease with which he defeated his enemy. In the opening stanzas of canto XVII, Lobo Lasso refers to ‘la mísera envidia carcomida’ of those who want to obscure the glorious deeds of Cortés by claiming that ‘sujetó gente grosera, | bárbara y en las armas no cursada, | inhábil, sin destreza ni manera | para tomar en su defensa espada’ (XVII. 1-2), utilising his poem as proof ‘para que entendáis la gente que era, | cuan belicosa, fierra y arriscada’ (XVII. 2). The poet’s portrayal of the Amerindian is thus reconfigured to comply with his patronage requirements, appropriating the voice of the ‘Other’ for his own triumphalist narrative. This is reinforced in the addendum of Mexicana in which we find the ‘Apología en defensa del ingenio y fortaleza de los indios de la Nueva España’ written by el licenciado and secretary to the third Marqués del Valle, Jerónimo Ramírez—a defensive paratext that aims to contest the accusations that Cortés was able to conquer Mexico because his enemy was weak, unintelligent, and unprepared—, which transpires to be yet another mechanism to aggrandise the figure of Cortés.122 Countering ‘los que pretenden oscurecer el glorioso nombre de Cortés’, he states that in ‘quitando el ánimo y fortaleza a los indios, y casi el ser humano, disminuyen el mérito que Cortés ganó en vencerlos, porque no se estima más el vencedor de lo que el vencido es estimado’; a clear appropriation of Ercilla’s own justification for his praise of the Araucanians in La Araucana: ‘pues no es el vencedor más estimado | de aquello en que el vencido es reputado’ (I. 2).123 Understood this way, Ramírez’s Apología can be read more as a defence of Cortés than of the indigenous peoples. This said, however, there are a number of Lascasian elements in Ramírez’s Apología which undoubtedly merit more attention from scholars, as he goes beyond a mere rhetorical defence of Cortés to delve into ethical

122 Ramírez’s Apología can be found on pp. 201-7 of Amor y Vázquez’s edition of Mexicana.
123 Lobo Lasso, Mexicana, p. 201.
questions regarding the rights of natives, occasionally contradicting the imperial discourse of superiority endorsed by Lobo Lasso.¹²⁴

Though sometimes differing in their views on the contested rationality of the natives, both Lobo Lasso and Ramírez nevertheless concur in their representation of the Amerindian as a formidable enemy. Rebuking alternative representations of the Amerindian as an innocent, docile, lazy, cowardly, passive, and unintelligent being, Lobo Lasso chooses to depict Cortés’ enemy as fierce, tactical warriors.¹²⁵ The tribe of Tlaxcala, for example, is ‘brava, indómita, fiera, guerreadora, | feroz, airada, súbita (…) | de cuerpos bien formados, desenvueltos, | diestra en las armas y de miembros sueltos’ (XVI. 13). Long lists of adjectives such as these are used frequently by the poet in his description of the enemy; a rhetorical tool to bolster their ferocity. The cacique Tabasco is, for instance, ‘fuerte, diestro, bravo, belicoso’ (VI. 31), while Teudelli is described as ‘experto, diestro, fuerte, invicto’ (XIII. 9), and Xicoténcatl is ‘valeroso, | prudente, experto, grave, reportado’ (XVI. 18). Confronted with such dextrous enemies, Cortés’ conquest is depicted as no easy feat, but rather involves ‘grave riesgo’ and ‘daño inevitable’ (XXIII. 69); ‘envuelta en fatigas y mezclada | con cansancio, trabajos, hambre y duelo’ (II. 56). This is reinforced through the poet’s brutal descriptions of the battlefield, imbued with a Lucanian spirit: ‘rojos arroyos en copiosa vena’ (VIII. 30); ‘la senda usada | de herviente y roja sangre rociada’ (XVI. 64); ‘sudan calles y plazas sangre hirviente’ (XX. 40). Far from naïve, defenseless individuals, the indigenous warriors are a threatening force, as the ruthless remarks of Xicoténcatl, general of the Tlaxcalan army, elucidate: “haré los cuerpos españoles piezas | y serán las mayores las cabezas” (XVI. 31). The Tlaxcalan warriors indeed perform extraordinary military deeds in the epic, with one particular warrior, Ixtlex, fighting ‘con ambas manos de la lanza afierra | y, la espada en los dientes, corajoso’ (XVI. 50). Moreover, the battles that take place in Tlaxcala are presented as being extremely violent, ‘aquí hieren, destrozan, allí matan, (…) magullan, descomponen, desbaratan’ (XIX. 15), with Lobo Lasso woefully narrating the gruesome scene of the Spaniards’ final battle with the Tlaxcalans:

¿Quién las disformes y ásperas heridas
aquí podrá decir que allí se dieron,

¹²⁴ For example, Ramírez claims that ‘no es conforme a razón decir que a los hombres de nuestro polo quisiese [Dios] aventajar más en el ser natural que a los indios de occidente’, because ‘todos los hombres fueron criados a imagen y semejanza de Dios, con entendimiento racional’; completely at odds with Lobo Lasso’s own views on the subject. Lobo Lasso, Mexicana, p. 202.

¹²⁵ Fernández de Oviedo declares in book III of his Historia that the natives were weak, lazy, melancholic, and cowardly, while Bartolomé de las Casas insists on their docility and peacefulness, referring to the Cholulans, for example, as ‘ovejas mansas’ in his Brevisima relación. Bartolomé de las Casas, Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias, ed. André Saint-Lu (Madrid: Cátedra, 1982), p. 107.
las cabezas por medio divididas,
los sesos que en los aires se esparcieron,
las manos de sus troncos desasidas
y los muchos sin brazos se vieron,
de mazas los contrachos derrengados,
la multitud de pechos barrenados? (XIX. 147)

In addition to illustrating the Amerindians dexterity as soldiers, Lobo Lasso also emphasises the noble virtues for which they fight. Following Ercilla’s model, ‘eulogies of Indian patriotism, persistence and valor became conventional’ among colonial epic poets, and *Mexicana* is certainly no exception. Indeed, indigenous resistance is given heroic status in Lobo Lasso’s epic, as Amerindian warriors demonstrate a fierce loyalty to their admirable principles, relentlessly fighting to defend their lands, traditions, honour, and liberty. This is often expressed in the numerous speeches given by the indigenous leaders, which serve as rhetorical displays of courage, bravery, and determination, inciting respect and admiration in the reader. “Ley, libertad y hacienda defendemos” (VI. 46), the cacique Tabasco tells his fellow Tabascans, “pues si aquesto es asi, ¿qué bien nos queda | que tal sin libertad llamarse pueda?” (VI. 48). It is their protection for “[la] libertad dulce, sabrosa” (VI. 44) and “la dulce patria amada” (XVII. 97), that rouses Mexican warriors to fight against their Spanish opponents; strongly reminiscent of the Araucanian leaders of Ercilla’s epic who similarly fight for the preservation of ‘dulce libertad’ (III. 77) and ‘amor de patria’ (III. 34; XXXIX. 1; XV. 54). As in *La Araucana*, indigenous leaders such as Cuetlabac, Xicoténcatl, and in particular the cacique Tabasco, are some of the most developed characters in Lobo Lasso’s epic, moving both reader and poet with their determination to defend their comrades’ freedoms at whatever cost. “¡Os desafío!” (VII. 37), the cacique Tabasco roars to his enemy during battle, singlehandedly taking on several Spanish soldiers at a time, who are unable to defeat him. Indeed, as a warrior, the cacique Tabasco is presented as an equal match for Cortés: ‘de herirle mil maneras Cortés tienta, | mas en la piel la punta no halla entrada’ (XII. 34). In their one-on-one duel, Lobo Lasso refers to them as ‘los dos diestrísimos guerreros’ (XII. 38), stating that ‘cada cual con propicio y diestro Marte | muestra raro valor, industria y arte’ (XII. 38). Even when Cortés is joined by his comrade, Hermosilla, and the cacique is outnumbered, he does not flinch: ‘ni un solo pie movió, de que admirado | el español quedó’ (XII. 39).

However, it is not only the cacique’s physical strength that is praised by the poet, but also his wisdom and virtuous qualities as a political leader. Reflecting the Ercillian tendency to ennoble the non-Christian enemy as examples for emulation, Lobo Lasso inserts the cacique Tabasco into the European model of the mirror of princes in canto VI of his epic, outlining his magnanimity, humility, justness,
piety, generosity, and clemency which should, the poet claims, serve as a paradigm of virtue for Fernando – the poem’s dedicatee – to emulate: ‘este os será, Marqués, un vivo ejemplo, | para que, aunque en edad tierna, lozana, | con la instancia aspiréis que en vos contemplo, | do el príncipe tal gloria y nombre gana’ (VI. 11). Perhaps a subtle means of urging Fernando to act accordingly in his duties as Márques, and not follow the treacherous footsteps of his controversial father, Martín, it is certainly curious that Lobo Lasso does not choose Cortés or even Philip II as the model for princely emulation, choosing instead ‘un natural no cultivado’ (VI. 10) as the inspiration for his advice. Though described in the poem as being ‘falto de ley’ (VI. 10), uncultivated, and barbarous, Lobo Lasso nevertheless acknowledges that the indigenous possess intellectually developed skills in the fields of art and politics, as well as warfare. The Aztec emperor, Moctezuma, is described, for example, as ‘hombre animoso, astuto en cualquier arte, | reportado, sagaz, grave, industrioso’ (IV. 26), whose monarchy, as the poet refers to it, is comprised of similar components to that of Spain, with a ‘corte’ of ‘noble gente’ (IV. 36, 39) and an army of ‘continuos’, ‘soldados’, ‘tiradores’ and ‘píqueros’ (IV. 42). ‘Fértil, ancho, ufano’ (IV. 9), the Mexican district thrives agriculturally, while also boasting ‘fábricas insignes’ (IV. 32), ‘torres ingeniosas’ (IV. 32), and ‘edificios gallardos y costosos’ (IV. 12).127 In his treatment of the Amerindian enemy, Lobo Lasso thus navigates between the dichotomies of barbarity and civilization, scorn and admiration. They are also used, it should be noted, as vehicles to explore introspection and psychological analysis, namely through the poet’s recourse to love poetry, as he establishes an alternative indigenous discourse marked by an emotional outpouring of lament and erotic torment. Indeed, episodes of love and sex constitute an integral part of Mexicana, as Lobo Lasso infuses his epic with a variety of lyrical interludes and romantic digressions played out by indigenous heroines and their lovers.

‘A recrear un ánimo cansado’ (IX. 8): Lobo Lasso and the Poetics of Love

In a letter from his sponsor dated July 13, 1582, Lobo Lasso was advised to ‘excusar todas poesías’ in the composition of the first version of his epic, Cortés valeroso; ‘pues la mezcla de ellas suele causar menos opinión y autoridad a la historia’.128 It would certainly appear that the requirements of Martín Cortés exerted a strong element of control over the creative content of the poem, as the poet demonstrates a determination to comply with his patron’s demands by taking a historical approach to

127 Such praise of Mexican culture is developed further in Ramírez’s Apología, in which he explores the natives’ ‘grande agudeza de ingenio’ in his discussion of their skills in agriculture, medicine, art, astrology, architecture, and politics. Lobo Lasso, Mexicana, p. 202. In doing so, he makes a number of comparisons to ‘Old World’ civilisations such as the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, as well as the modern Western world. He even argues that, though pagan, their ability to believe in divinity serves as proof that they are complex and able beings, p. 203.

his subject matter and avoiding, with exception to the last two cantos, displays of artistic adornment.\footnote{129} Having consulted ‘muchos papeles curiosos con notoria verdad autorizados’, Lobo Lasso asserts that his verses ‘resplandece[n] una pura y viva imagen de la verdad’, ‘faltos de todo artificio’, disinclined to deviate from ‘los limites estrechos | de la verdad, donde fundo mis razones’.\footnote{130} Establishing Cortés as the muse of his epic, the poet rejects the need to look for external artistic inspiration, as the conquistador’s deeds are the only stimulus that he requires: ‘en mi ayuda no déis [Músas] tan solo un paso, | que Cortés, de quien canto, me da tanta, | que enriquece mi humilde y bajo verso, | sin mendigar ajeno estilo terso’.\footnote{131} This said, however, Lobo Lasso nevertheless expresses his anxiety regarding the poem’s rigid historicity, revealing that: ‘no es mucho que yo vaya | en mis cansados versos temeroso, | que como verdad sola en ellos haya | y no ficción ni adorno artificioso, | habrá quien como tales los detraya’.\footnote{132} In airing his apprehensions, Lobo Lasso reveals himself to be among a number of Spanish poets in the latter half of the sixteenth century who were rapidly becoming conscious of the need to ‘aliviar la densidad de sus relatos de la pesada carga histórica que se habían impuesto, en un intento de acercarse a los presupuestos del género’.\footnote{133}

In the Discorsi dell’arte poetica, Tasso claims that ‘the aim of poetry is delight’, conceding that Ariosto, more than any other modern poet, had successfully achieved this goal; he is, Tasso claims, ‘read and reread by all ages and both sexes, known in all languages, liked and praised by all’:\footnote{134} A bestselling work in its time, Ariosto’s Orlando furioso was to have a transformative impact on the poetic practices of the epic throughout the sixteenth century, with its adventurous and enchanting tales of attractive chivalric heroes, lovelorn maidens, and pastoral landscapes presenting an irresistible appeal to readers and poets alike; illustrating how the epic could serve as a means of entertainment as much as education.\footnote{135} Indeed, while the deeds of warfare remained the principal matter of the epic genre throughout the sixteenth century, the incorporation of romance elements began to take on a greater role as poets such as Lobo Lasso strove to meet contemporary demands by adding colour and variety as a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{129} Declarations of commitment to historical veracity were common among sixteenth-century Spanish epicists. See María José Vega, ‘Idea de la épica en la España del Quinientos’, in La teoría de la épica en el siglo XVI: España, Francia, Italia y Portugal, ed. María José Vega and Lara Vilà (Vigo: Academia del Hispanismo, 2010), pp. 103-35 (pp. 110-12).
  \item \footnote{130} Lobo Lasso, Cortés valeroso, pp. 190, 183; I.4
  \item \footnote{131} Lobo Lasso, Cortés valeroso, I.7.
  \item \footnote{132} Lobo Lasso, Cortés valeroso, VII.4.
  \item \footnote{133} Lara Vilà, ‘Épica e imperio. Imitación virgiliana y propaganda política en la épica española del siglo XVI’, unpublished PhD thesis (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2001), p. 673. See also María José Vega, pp. 113-15.
  \item \footnote{134} Tasso, ‘Discourses on the Art of Poetry’, pp. 117-18.
  \item \footnote{135} On the popularity of Ariosto in this period see Avalle-Arce, p. 25; Frank Pierce, ‘History and Poetry in the Heroic Poem of the Golden Age’, Hispanic Review, 20.4 (1952), 303-12 (p. 308); and Javitch, p. 516.
\end{itemize}
welcomed respite from the historical accounts of war.\(^\text{136}\) Thus, while the poet goes to great lengths to dissimulate his use of fiction in the first version of his epic, a dramatic shift of approach can be detected in *Mexicana*, as Lobo Lasso chooses to adapt his work to the aesthetic tastes and trends of the period, emulating popular poetic models not solely for ideological purposes, but also for their artistic value. Following the death of his sponsor in 1589, and with that his imposing demands on style and content, the poet develops a strong literary consciousness in *Mexicana* as he engages more vigorously with the creative impulses of his imagination, exploring alternative artistic avenues of poetic invention. Fuelled by his ambitions to fill the role of the ‘great poet’, Lobo Lasso embarks on an artistic journey of personal outdoing in *Mexicana* —‘para vencerse a sí mismo en aquella materia y sujeto’—, surpassing ‘[el] impetu de su juvenil ingenio’ and maturing his style to elevate the quality of his verse and his status as a poet.\(^\text{137}\) Indeed, according to the poem’s *aprobación*, written by none other than Alonso de Ercilla, Lobo Lasso’s epic ‘se le puede dar mejor ahora, por haberle mejorado con más cuidado y curiosidad’, having introduced a number of fictional episodes that seek to elicit delight and entertain readers beyond his patrons, thus striking a careful balance between the utile and the pleasurable.\(^\text{138}\) This is clearly expressed in the poem’s prologue, written by Jerónimo Ramírez:

Van en convenientes lugares algunas ficciones ingeniosas, sin las cuales pierden el ser y gusto las obras de poesía. No quiso antes usar de ellas el autor por parecerle que de esta manera guardaría mejor el rigor que pide la historia; después acá, considerando de la importancia que es (mayormente a los que escriben metro) juntar lo dulce con lo provechoso, quiso tomar la licencia que se concede al poeta para fingir.\(^\text{139}\)

There are thus several instances in *Mexicana* in which Lobo Lasso seeks to add variety to his poem through the introduction of subplots and secondary themes; namely love episodes: ‘nuevo parecerá tratar de amores | en quien sólo rigor ha prometido, | mas hombres son también los escritores, | con quien amor su límite ha extendido’ (IX. 2).\(^\text{140}\)

\(^{136}\) See Nicolopulos, p. 16.

\(^{137}\) This is the critical summary of the poem’s prologist, Jerónimo Ramírez. Lobo Lasso, *Mexicana*, p. 9.

\(^{138}\) Lobo Lasso, *Mexicana*, p. 3.

\(^{139}\) Lobo Lasso, *Mexicana*, pp. 9-10.

‘verme siempre entre Marte sanguinoso’ (XX. 18), and ‘el horrible son de la trompeta’ (XX. 18), the poet confesses that ‘bien quisiera algún tanto recrearme | cogiendo algunas flores deleitosas, | sin al rigor furioso siempre darme | de las veras marciales sanguinosas’ (XXV. 20). In his attempt to ‘hacer tratable mi escabroso canto’ (XX. 19), Lobo Lasso abandons his militarist discourse on several occasions in Mexicana, replacing the clinking of metal, the shrieks of the wounded, the cries of widowed maidens, the assaults, bloody attacks, and horrific blazes with ‘dulce y blanda lira’ (XX. 19), providing his readers with amatory scenes that constitute some of the most elegant lyrical passages in the poem.

The aesthetic pleasures provided by Lobo Lasso’s love episodes should not, however, solely be interpreted as a means of entertainment. Rather, I propose that the poet’s use of eros simultaneously functions as a political tool that contributes to the broader ideological fabric of the poem; serving to instruct as much as delight the reader.141 Certainly, in a world of shifting cultural and political values, love poetry functions as a ‘complex signifier’ in Mexicana, providing Lobo Lasso with a powerful medium through which to explore colonial matters pertaining to questions of ethnicity, just war, and religion.142 This is predominantly explored through the poet’s representation of female subjectivity, as he introduces a number of indigenous heroines—intentionally crafted from the epic paradigms of Virgil, Petrarch, Garcilaso, Ariosto, Camões, Tasso, and Ercilla—who function both as a site of political and religious allegory as much as rhetorical self-absorption and aesthetic beauty.

The first of these romantic episodes takes place in canto IX of Mexicana, providing the reader with a much-needed break from the intensity of the Spaniards’ brutal combat with the Tabascans. In this purely fictional episode, Lobo Lasso creates literary figures inspired by the passages and episodes of Ariosto’s Orlando furioso, infusing his miniature romance with recognisable literary topoi of the chivalric framework that the contemporary reader would undoubtedly have enjoyed. Having departed from the rest of their soldiers in search of supplies, Aguilar and Matienzo accidentally wander into a typically romance landscape; ‘un espeso bosque’ abounding with fragrant flowers, babbling brooks, and fresh fields (IX. 7-8); in sum, ‘[u]n lugar tan deleitoso’ (IX. 9).143 Startled by the sound of a ‘gemido lastimoso’ (IX. 9), both men mount their horses and gallop through the forest in search of the cry (IX. 10), eager to fulfil their roles as knights in shining armour. It is here that they encounter the indigenous maiden, Clandina, desperately fighting off the advances of her Amerindian suitor, Hirtano, who is

141 According to Roland Greene, the discourse of love is not solely introspective and personal, but branches out to the political and imperial spheres in colonial writings. See Roland Greene, p. 1.
142 Roland Greene, p. 5.
143 The reason for Lobo Lasso choosing Aguilar to participate in these fictional episodes is most likely due to his ability to speak the native language, as alluded to by the poet in stanza 23 of this canto. It would appear that, unlike Aguilar, Matienzo is a purely fictional character, with Lidia Pullés-Linares arguing that there are no records of him among the list of soldiers who participated in the conquest. Lobo Lasso, Cortés valeroso, p. 189.
attempting to rape her (IX. 12). In compliance with the chivalric code that steers them, Aguilar and Matienzo charge at the maiden’s offender ‘con gana de acorrer la joven bella’ (IX. 12), simultaneously establishing Clandina’s role as the damsel in distress: ‘llorosa | del deshonesto intento se mostraba; | (...) con vista baja, vergonzosa, | con lágrimas la hierba aljofaraba; | de tierra el bello rostro alzar no osa’ (IX. 14). Lobo Lasso’s physical portrayal of the Amerindian maiden also ascribes her to the archetype of fair damsel, as he strips away her indigenous qualities and inserts her into a pre-established romance tradition of femininity. Describing her using canonical tropes of European beauty reminiscent of Petrarch’s Laura or Ariosto’s Isabel, she has ‘encrespada madeja’ (IX. 15), ‘mil hebras de oro’ (IX. 15), ‘nevada columna’ (IX. 15), ‘dorada cumbre’ (IX. 15), and ‘virgíneo rostro’ (IX. 18). Upon saving the maiden from dishonour, Aguilar and Matienzo proclaim their uncompromised service to the damsel, pledging that “nuestro intento | es de agradarte en todo, pues se entiende | a procurar tu bien, quietud, contento” (IX. 23), promising to accompany her home until she is “en salvo puesta” (IX. 76) and their knightly mission complete. After thanking her saviours, Clandina begins “el discurso de mi vida” (IX. 74); a reproachful monologue, sprung once again from the world of romance, that reflects on her life’s misfortunes and her successive struggles to defend her honour and chastity.\footnote{This highly elaborate, rhetorical speech is unmistakably modelled on those given by Ariosto’s Isabel and Ercilla’s Glaura who similarly engage in a first-person account of their misadventures. Compare, for example, Clandina’s introduction –“Clandina, dice, soy, hija heredera | de Calpuchi, cacique valeroso” (IX. 26)– with those of Isabel and Glaura: “Isabella sono io, che figlia fui | del re mal fortunato di Gallizia”. Ludovico Ariosto, \textit{Orlando furioso} (Venice: Vicenzo Valgrisi, nella bottega d’Erasmo, 1556), XIII. 4. And in Ercilla’s epic: “mi nombre es Glaura en fuerte hora nacida | hija del buen cacique Quilacura”, XXVIII. 7.}

Through the use of embedded narrative, Clandina’s speech also provides Lobo Lasso with the opportunity to illustrate his lyric mastery, as he incorporates the impassioned lament of her suitor, Hirtano. Referred to as ‘el desdeñado amante’ (IX. 4) –the spurned lover–, Hirtano is characterised as a victim of unrequited love –a traditional theme of lyric poetry–, tormented by Clandina’s refusal to accept his amorous proposals:

\begin{verbatim}
Cansada vida, vida miserable,
suerte infelice, adversa (en esto mia,
y ajena en el contento, variable),
¿dó escondes la ocasión de mi alegría,
dó la serenidad del rostro afable?
Muestra el oculto bien do está mi daño,
que dulce me es morir en tal engaño. (IX. 31)
\end{verbatim}
Drawing on a lyric semantic field of love as pain, death, and deception, Hirtano’s language encapsulates ‘el dolorido sentir’ of Garcilaso’s Écloga primera. Indeed, there are several moments in Hirtano’s impassioned soliloquy in which Lobo Lasso directly imitates the lyric poetry of his esteemed ancestor, with stanza 33 providing a particularly pertinent example:

Por ti ya me agradó la selva umbrosa,  
por ti el callado bosque me fue grato,  
por ti la soledad me fue sabrosa,  
y sabroso de rústicos el trato;  
por ti la dulce fuente, pedregosa,  
porque en ella miraba tu retrato:  
inquieto, variable, bullicioso,  
mudo, perturbador de mi reposo. (IX. 33)

Clearly modelled on the following verses of Garcilaso’s Écloga primera:

Por ti el silencio de la selva umbrosa,  
por ti la esquividad, y apartamiento  
del solitario monte me agradaba:  
por ti la verde yerba, el fresco viento,  
el blanco lirio, y colorada rosa,  
y dulce primavera deseaba.

By deliberately engaging in the intertextual imitation of such a prestigious model, Lobo Lasso not only sought to acknowledge his poetic debt to his predecessor, but also to infuse his own epic with the prestige and poetic legacy of such an established lyricist. Certainly, Lobo Lasso’s descent from the esteemed poet is a detail that he seeks to emphasise throughout his works. In both Cortés valeroso and Mexicana, for example, the poet strategically inserts a number of introductory and concluding sonnets written by his contemporaries who compare him to a ‘new’ Garcilaso – ‘otro Lasso digno de renombre’ –, questioning ‘quién cantará mejor que el descendiente del claro Garci Lasso’; conscious attempts of self-marketing that clearly seek to build his credibility as a poet and bolster his literary reputation.

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146 Garcilaso de la Vega, p. 15.
147 See the introductory sonnet ‘Del Capitán Francisco de Aldana al retrato de Gabriel Lasso de la Vega’ in Mexicana, p. 13; and the sonnet featured in Cortés valeroso written by another prolific poet of the period, Don Luis de Vargas Manrique, p. 126.
Lobo Lasso’s imitation of Garcilaso should not only be considered in response to the author’s poetic ambitions, however, but also for its ideological significance. Indeed, beyond the digressive and ornamental textual pleasures of language and style that Garcilaso’s model provides in *Mexicana*, lies its fundamental role in the poem’s meaning, as Lobo Lasso adapts the lyric tradition to meet diverse political objectives. On the one hand, Lobo Lasso’s lyric episodes can be read as means of exhibiting the poet’s compassion towards the indigenous enemy; acknowledging their human emotions of pain and loss and providing a voice for the vanquished ‘Other’. The question arises, however, as to what extent Lobo Lasso’s attempt to incorporate the voice of the colonised into his narrative is more revelatory of the perspective of the European colonizer than the dispossessed native, for while he focusses on their stories of unfulfilled love, pain, and torture, and in doing so partly grants them agency, he does so by employing an aesthetic framework derived from European literary models and traditions. As Nicolopulos has argued, the occidental practice of *imitatio* is employed by colonial writers such as Lobo Lasso as a tool for ‘making sense’ of the Spanish encounter with new physical and cultural realities, demonstrating how New World peoples and landscapes are assimilated using European iconography.148 In translating a literary world of European tradition to an American stage, Lobo Lasso thus engages in a wider discourse regarding the development of taxonomies of race in colonial Mexico, as the lyric conventions of beauty and psyche take on new significance in the colonial context, corresponding to a Eurocentric, colonising perception of indigeneity based on racial whitening.

The chivalric *topoi* of Lobo Lasso’s romance interludes also serve as a source of ‘ethical-epistemological’ enquiry in *Mexicana*, as his imitation of Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* produces thematic ramifications on the moral and political concerns of the poem.149 This is most clearly evident in the second of the chivalric episodes involving Aguilar in canto XIV of *Mexicana*. Having once again wandered off from the rest of his men, this time in pursuit of an indigenous enemy, Aguilar is distracted by ‘una pequeña luz no lejos vido | en un peñasco cóncavo y hundido’ (XIV. 10). Secretly entering the cave, Aguilar witnesses ‘grandes fuegos encendidos, | do cantidad de carne humana asaban’ (XIV. 12) and a ‘tristísima doncella | (...) sollozando’ (XIV. 21) who is about to be sacrificed –and subsequently consumed– by ‘el sabio Millolano’ and his slave-trading brutes (XIV. 20). Despite being grossly outnumbered by the indigenous bandits, ‘el fuerte Aguilar, (...) | quiso en un riesgo tal poner la vida | por que fuese la dama socorrida’ (XIV. 35); taking out his sword to singlehandedly vanquish the offenders in his courageous attempt to save her life. After doing so, Aguilar addresses the maiden –who reveals herself to be none other than Clandina– stating that “de otro trance y desventura, | si la vista y oido no me miente, | me parece, señora, os he librado, | no menos grave que éste ni pesado” (XIV. 61). Aguilar’s use of the words ‘os he librado’ is of crucial importance in understanding the ideological significance of this episode, establishing the conquistador’s role not only as chivalric knight, but also

148 Nicolopulos, pp. ix, xi.
149 This is a term coined by Zatti, p. 6.
as the protector and saviour of innocent Amerindian victims as he rushes to the aid of the oppressed. While modelled largely on cantos XII, XIII, and XXIII of Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* in which Orlando frees Isabella and Zerbino from the cave-prison of Gabrina and her slavers, on an allegorical level this episode endeavours to demonstrate the practices of slavery, human sacrifice, and cannibalism that took place among the Mexica. The unfortunate victims amongst whom Clandina and her lover Hipandro find themselves are referred to in the poem as ‘presa’ (XIV. 15). Chained and unarmed they are tortured and thrown alive into wood-burning grills after being offered to their pagan gods. Subsequently, their slavers—the ‘inhumana compañía’ of cannibals (XIV. 44)—sit down and feast on their flesh, as they enjoy a banquet of ‘vino y carne humana’ (XIV. 18). Upon being freed by Aguilar, those victims fortunate enough to survive the ordeal rejoice, in what can be read as a rhetorically charged political statement: “¡ya llegó el dichoso día | que nos concede libertad sabrosa! | ¡Ya la dura opresión y tiranía | se acaba y servidumbre ignominiosa!” (XIV. 44). Tyranny and enslavement are aspects of Mexica culture that Lobo Lasso consistently reinforces in his poem, as he alludes to how the Mexica conquered and subjugated their territories through disinheriting, enslaving, and killing, emphasizing the despotism that many of Moctezuma’s unwilling vassals endure. Through Aguilar’s heroic rescue of Clandina, Lobo Lasso thus seeks to represent the liberating aspect of Spain’s conquest; freeing the Mexica’s enemies from the yoke of ‘[el] inviolable mandamiento’ (IV. 38). In doing so, the poet engages once again with contemporary debates regarding the *jus ad bellum* in the New World, drawing on the scholastic writings of both Francisco de Vitoria’s *De Indis* and Sepúlveda’s *Democrates secundus*, which stated that war against Amerindians in defence of the innocent constitutes a legitimate motive for just war, with the practice of human sacrifice and cannibalism representing an indisputable justification of Spain’s conquest and successive campaigns of conversion and extirpation.¹⁵⁰ Aguilar’s chivalrous protection of innocent natives like Clandina from the unjust and cruel practices of their fellow Amerindians thus serves as a moral justification of conquest in *Mexicana*, as he appropriates the role of the ‘life-restoring liberator’.¹⁵¹


Lobo Lasso’s increasing interest in the female psyche is perhaps most fully explored in the character of Taxguaya, whose story features in cantos XVII and XVIII of *Mexicana*. Unlike Clandina, Taxguaya is not a damsel in distress waiting to be saved, but instead embodies a bellicose femininity that defies gender stereotypes; she is, as Lobo Lasso puts it, a ‘milagro de natura’ (XVII. 11). While repeatedly referred to as ‘bella Taxguaya’ (XVII. 17) and demonstrating recognisable features of Petrarchan, virginial beauty such as her ‘nevadas | columnas’ (XVII. 14), ‘crespi hebra y blanca frente’ (XVII. 14), ‘virgíneos miembros’ (XVIII. 51), and ‘prolongadas hebras de oro’ (XVIII. 52), she is simultaneously ‘la fuerte Taxguaya’ (XVII. 21), ‘en quien se encierra | ánimo varonil’ (XVII. 21); a warrior virgin modelled on Virgil’s Camilla.\(^\text{152}\) However, after instantly falling in love with the Spanish conquistador, Sandoval, as they lock eyes across the battlefield, Taxguaya metamorphoses from warrior to lover, distancing herself from the role of Camilla and assimilating the characteristic traits of Virgil’s Dido as she becomes plagued by a burning, lustful desire for her enemy: ‘ya brotan sus mejillas brasa ardiente, | ya con recato gime, ya suspira, | ya se abrasa y se hiela juntamente, | ya se ceba la llama entre las venas, | más de ternezas que de sangre llenas’ (XVII. 32). Indeed, throughout this episode, we see how Taxguaya gradually undergoes an internal transformation as she transfigures from epic heroine to romance maiden, surrendering to her erotic passion and adopting a more traditional role of femininity. Unable to reconcile the divided forces of her fragmented soul, Taxguaya seeks solace in her maid, Amixtla, revealing her love for Sandoval and seeking advice about how to proceed (XVIII. 6-28); an exchange between confidants that mirrors that which takes place between Dido and her sister, Anna, in book IV of the *Aeneid*.\(^\text{153}\) The conversation that takes place between Taxguaya and her maid is steeped in the intensity of lyricism’s pain and anguish provoked by ‘[el] injusto amor’ (XVIII. 1). Ailing from an affliction of the heart – ‘herida mortal buscando cura’ (XVIII. 6) –, Taxguaya is presented as lovesick, as she agonises over “el dolor que me aflige” (XVIII. 8). Interestingly, Dido’s love for Aeneas is described in similar terms: ‘est mollis flamma medullas | interea et tacitum vivit sub pectore vulnus’ (IV. 66-67); ‘at regina gravi iamdudum saucia cura | vulnus alit venis et caeco carpitur igni’ (IV. 1-2).\(^\text{154}\) Both women are beset with “rabiosas ansias” (XVIII. 12), as they internalise a combative tension

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\(^{152}\) Lobo Lasso may also have drawn on contemporary versions of the warrior-maiden such as Ariosto’s Bradamante or Tasso’s Clorinda.

\(^{153}\) The model of Dido undoubtedly presented Lobo Lasso with the opportunity to explore the notions of chastity and honour in his own indigenous heroine, as both women are overwhelmingly concerned with the repercussions and dangers of illicit love. In 1587 Lobo Lasso published his own tragedy on Dido; *Tragedia de la honra de Dido restaurada*. While challenging Virgil’s version of events, he nevertheless uses the ancient poet’s representation of the Carthaginian queen in his characterization of Taxguaya. For more on Lobo Lasso’s tragedy see Hermenegildo’s study.

\(^{154}\) Fairclough’s translation reads as follows: ‘all the while the flame devours her tender heartstrings, and deep in her breast lives the silent wound’; ‘but the queen, long since smitten with a grievous love-pang, feeds the wound with her lifeblood, and is wasted with fire unseen’. Virgil, pp. 427, 423.
between illicit love and their esteemed honour: “sed mihi vel tellus optem prius ima dehiscat | vel pater omnipotens adigat me fulmine ad umbras” (IV. 24-25) Dido pleads, “ante, pudor, quam te violo aut tua iura resolve” (IV. 27); a sentiment echoed by Taxguaya, who implores that the allegorical force, Honor, “no permita el Cielo, no permita | que yo haga a mi limpieza tal ultraje, | ni que traspase, deidad bendita, | tu respetada ley y mi homenaje” (XVIII. 13). It is Amixtla who, like Anna, finally convinces Taxguaya to succumb to her feminine desires, questioning:

“¿Por qué de ser mujer te inhabilitas,
por qué quieres sin fruto sepultarte[?]?

(…)

¿Los gustos del amor por qué te quitas[?]?

(…)

Baste que en las pasadas persuasiones
has tapado al amor el libre oído,
causando en varios pechos mil pasiones
con término arrogante y desabrido.” (XVIII. 19-21)

Heeding the advice of her maid, Taxguaya ultimately surrenders to her passions, prioritising her love for the Spanish conquistador over her duty to her country; ‘ya pesa de aquel hombre más la vista | que el útil de su vida y patria cara’ (XVII. 33). In doing so, however, Taxguaya faces a similarly tragic fate to Dido, for while she does not take her own life, she nevertheless meets an early death in her pursuit of love.

On her journey across the battlefield to find her lover, Taxguaya is mortally wounded by Alvarado who mistakes her for a male warrior, putting a swift end to the romantic story of the star-crossed lovers. As she lies dying in the arms of Sandoval, Taxguaya is converted to Christianity; an episode clearly modelled on canto XII of Tasso’s Gerusalemme liberata, in which we read of the amorous romance between Tancredi and the maiden-warrior, Clorinda and her conversion to Christianity before her death. Thematising issues of erotic desire and egocentricity, Taxguaya’s death allegorically serves to illustrate the destructiveness of those who surrender to their passions, contributing to the wider dialogue between private desire and public duty that permeates Lobo Lasso’s epic. Through her conversion and subsequent death, Taxguaya must renounce her pursuit of personal pleasure and erotic satisfaction to embrace a higher service to God, transforming her love from the realm of the profane to the divine as ‘un nuevo ardor la inflama | que a eterna gloria la provoca y llama’ (XVIII. 64). Through her erasure of selfhood, Taxguaya is thus able to be inscribed within the religious

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155 “But rather, I would pray, may earth yawn for me to its depths, or may the Almighty Father hurl me with his bolt to the shades”, “before, Shame, I violate you or break your laws!” , p. 425.
and political matrix of her colonisers, with this exemplary tale of moral repentance symbolising the wider practice of indigenous conversion and acculturation taking place across the American colonies. It is certainly worth noting that Lobo Lasso is the first of the colonial epic poets to introduce interracial relationships, initiating an epic discourse of *mestizaje* that would henceforth be imitated by poets such as Juan de Castellanos and Antonio de Saavedra Guzmán.

**Uncharted Waters: The Cortesian Epic Crosses the Atlantic**

*Mexicana* was not the last of Lobo Lasso’s artistic outputs dedicated to the deeds of Cortés, with the *Elogio de Cortés* published in 1601 continuing to recount the conquistador’s deeds in Mexico, as well as his subsequent military campaigns in Honduras and Algiers. Presenting a strong intertextual relationship with his epics, Lobo Lasso’s eulogy deals largely with the same historical content, though emphasizing with more vigour the legacy of the conquistador in the aftermath of conquest. Indeed, the author’s focus on Cortés’ status as a national hero is an identifying feature of his prose, as he encourages his readers to consider the magnificence of the conquistador’s achievements, worthy of ‘eternos loores, de levantadas estatuas, de elegante, singular y copiosa historia en duro bronce (…) y de que los claros ingenios celebren sus altos hechos’. Adamant that the efforts of Cortés not be forgotten, Lobo Lasso invites fellow poets to join him on his epic venture: ‘levanten, pues, de punto los claros ingenios (…); escriban sus claros, altos, casi increíbles y afortunados hechos, inmortalizándose con ellos y con sus admirables y extraordinarias victorias’.

As if in response to this request, a number of poets would indeed take the pen to sing the deeds of the conqueror over the course of the next three centuries, though not always with the same intention.

One such poet was Antonio de Saavedra Guzmán whose epic, *El peregrino indiano* (1599), was to provide a more encompassing, pluralistic vision of conquest than that depicted by his epic precursors. Indeed, while Lobo Lasso undoubtedly sought to downplay Cortés’ individualism in *Mexicana*, he nevertheless remains at the centre of the poem; a leading protagonist who is ‘aquí’, ‘allí’, and ‘acullá’ (XXV. 27). The result is that, while mentioning the names and deeds of a number of

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156 The eulogy features part of Lobo Lasso’s *Elogios en loor de los tres famosos varones don Jaime, rey de Aragón, don Fernando Cortés, marqués del Valle, y don Alvaro de Bazán, marqués de Santa Cruz* (1601). The poet also wrote four romances dedicated to Cortés in the *Segunda parte del manojuelo de romances* (1603). The book is lost but its contents were included in the *Romancero general* (1604).

157 A copy of the *Elogio* can be found in Amor y Vázquez’s edition of *Mexicana*, pp. 217-28 (p. 223).


159 This is magnified to a greater degree in the *Elogio*, with Lobo Lasso reverting back to the rhetoric of chivalric singularity that marked early projections of the conquistador: ‘de una parte un grueso ejército, no menor que de doscientos mil hombres, y de otra un Cortés solo; digo solo pues por sola su diestra se consiguió tan importante y alta victoria’, p. 222.
Spanish soldiers who accompanied Cortés on his conquest, they are, for the most part, faceless individuals; limited to fleeting, brief mentions. On the seldom occasions that the poet does detail the names of conquistadors who fought in the conquest, he cuts it short, bound by his duty to sing of Cortés, rather than his comrades, though nevertheless apologising for his brevity:

Pero puede al presente perdonarme
(con todos los demás conquistadores),
que no será posible el dilatarme
dando a sus hechos los debidos loores:
(…)
fáltame el tiempo, que quién son no ignoro,
que su nombre y hechos sé de coro. (XVII. 76)

Unlike Lobo Lasso, who never travelled to the Americas, Saavedra was a Mexican-born creole whose ancestors had directly participated in the conquest of the Aztec empire. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that Saavedra’s creolised vision of conquest would deviate substantially from that of its peninsular antecedent, raising questions as to who the real hero of conquest was.

160 Lists of Spanish soldiers provided by Lobo Lasso in Mexicana can be found in: XI. 66-71; XII. 48-50; XIX. 14-17; XXIV. 67-70.
161 See also XIX. 18 for another of the poet’s apologies to conquistadors not mentioned in his poem.
CHAPTER 2

‘El ver que soy en México nacido’ (XI. 13): El peregrino indiano and the Creole Hero

The figure of Hernán Cortés loomed large on both sides of the Atlantic following the conquest of Mexico, surfacing not only in poetic accounts produced in Spain, but also those produced in its newfound colony in the Americas. El peregrino indiano (1599) – an epic poem of twenty cantos that narrates the Spaniards’ departure from Cuba until the fall of Tenochtitlan and the capture of the last Aztec emperor, Cuauhtémoc – is one such example, written by the Mexican-born creole, Antonio de Saavedra Guzmán. Though still a character worthy of awe and admiration, Cortés’ place in history as the leading figure of conquest is re-evaluated in Saavedra’s epic, as the poet strips away the mask of divine perfection that had previously been crafted by Lobo Lasso to reveal a man of flesh and blood. No longer an image of impeccability, Cortés is varyingly referred to in El peregrino indiano as ‘traydor’ (VIII. 50), ‘ladrón’ (IX. 30), ‘descuydado’ (X. 50), ‘furioso e impaciente’ (XV. 43), acting ‘con ira acelerada’ (XVII. 78). Certainly, where Lobo Lasso had strategically decided not to include any instances of Cortés’ unflattering behaviour, Saavedra is not so selective, choosing to narrate examples of Cortés’ ruthlessness and his cupiditate. Nor are Cortés’ actions presented as being constitutive of the whole as they had been in Mexicana, with Saavedra distancing himself from the synecdochic heroic model of his poetic predecessor in favour of a more inclusive conceptualisation of heroism.

Departing from the humanist tradition that interpreted both the epic and history as the account of the lives and deeds of great men, Lobo Lasso necessarily reduced the rank and file to very brief mentions in his epic, adopting an exclusive approach in which Cortés appropriates the actions of the whole. In El peregrino indiano, however, Cortés is presented as the primus inter pares; the commander of the collective group who, like a shepherd, watches over and protects his flock from harm (II. 8). Rather than singling out the sole enterprise of Cortés, as Lobo Lasso had done, Saavedra takes a more democratising approach, not subscribing himself to the traditional singular hero-centred epic

162 Antonio de Saavedra Guzmán, El peregrino indiano, ed. María José Rodilla León (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt a.M.: Vervuert, 2008). Quotations from the poem will be cited using canto and stanza number.
163 Examples include Cortés’ order for the hands of Tlaxcaltecan spies to be severed (IX. 76); his demand that one of his soldiers be hung for spitting on Moctezuma (XI. 96); and the hanging of Xicoténcatl for disobedience (XIX. 7). For an example of Cortés’ materialist desires see XII. 33-35.
model, but instead adopting the Ercillian framework of the collective hero. This is already apparent from the opening lines of Saavedra’s epic in which he establishes a more inclusive portrayal of conquest based on the collective efforts of the many, rather than the few –“heroicos hechos, hechos hazañosos | empresas graves, graves guerras canto | de aquellos españoles belicosos” (I. 1)–, with Cortés only being introduced in stanza 15 of the first canto.\(^{166}\) This shift in perspective is an identifying aspect of Saavedra’s epic, enlarging history’s scope to demonstrate how the conquest was won by a collaborative effort. Indeed, in his collective memory of conquest, we witness Saavedra’s conscious effort to recognise and commend the contributions made by conquistadors other than Hernán Cortés. ‘Justo será’ he remarks, ‘que se os refiera | el número de gente que venía, | la traça, el modo, el orden y manera, | y el aderente que Cortés traía’ (I. 51). ‘Merece cada qual’ Saavedra exclaims, ‘trunfo de gloria, | y ser, como lo son, engrandezidos, | y ansí, en lo adelante, yo protesto | echar en sus proezas todo el resto’ (XX. 67). Providing detailed accounts of the heroic exploits of ‘aquestos guerreros tan valientes’ (V. 15), the poet packs his epic with long catalogues of Spanish conquistadors, commending their bravery, courage, and suffering.\(^{167}\) Beyond mere mentions, as had been the case in *Mexicana*, these lists are apostrophic, laudatory eulogies, as Saavedra evokes, one by one, the names and deeds of the Spanish soldiers who fought alongside Cortés in Mexico, thus securing their place in the history of conquest. In an intimate expression of camaraderie, the poet employs the personal ‘tú’ form in his address to the conquistadors (I. 58-70), conveying his extreme respect and admiration, bringing their deeds to life, and reinforcing the idea that these men were not passive bystanders, but worthy protagonists: ‘eran los oficiales de la guerra, | capitanes, alférez y sargentos, | (…) por ellos se ganó toda la tierra, | dando fin a tan altos pensamientos, | cuyos nombres la fama tiene escritos | en sus justos anales infinitos’ (XX. 68). Developing this further, the poet chooses to relate the famous battles of conquest, such as the final fall of Tenochtitlan, in the third person plural –‘ganaron’ (XIX. 43); ‘passaron’ (XIX. 62); ‘entraron’ (XIX. 63)–, rather than focussing solely on the actions of their leader. In order to understand the motives behind this inclusive portrayal of conquest, it is of crucial importance to consider both the political and ideological circumstances of the historical context within which the poet was writing, as well as his own personal situation as a Mexican-born creole.

\(^{166}\) Note how the opening lines of Saavedra’s epic contrast to that of *Mexicana*: ‘canto las armas y el varón famoso’ (I. 1).

\(^{167}\) Pertinent examples include I. 58-70; VI. 48-49; IX. 60-63; XV. 49-51; XX. 62-63, 65-66, 87-93. Ercilla also claims to have composed his poem in response to ‘el agravio que algunos españoles recibirían quedando sus hazañas en perpetuo silencio’, similarly including lists of the names of Spanish soldiers who fought in the wars against the Araucanians. See Ercilla, *La Araucana*, p. 69. Examples from Ercilla’s epic can be found in: IV. 8; XIX. 47-50; XXII. 25; XXV. 26-27.
Rewarding the Past

A distinguished member of some of the most illustrious families of both New Spain and the Peninsula, Saavedra descended from a long line of conquistadors and early settlers of the New World including his great-grandfathers, Antonio de Estrada –treasurer, governor, and captain general of New Spain—, and Pedro Díaz de Sotomayor; conquistador of Tenochtitlan and Oaxaca, governor of Pánuco, and landowner of the mines of Pachuca.¹⁶⁸ Through his marriage to Catalina de Villafañe y Alvarado – granddaughter of the conquistador Jorge de Alvarado–, Saavedra was also tied to one of the most renowned conquistador families in New Spain. Owing to this privileged position, the poet inherited various estates within the region of Mexico, while also holding numerous posts in its viceregal government including his role as corregidor (chief magistrate) of Zacatecas. In an unfortunate turn of events, however, by the time of the poem’s composition, Saavedra had been dispossessed of both his lands and his administrative duties, leaving him, along with many of his fellow creoles, financially, politically, and socially debilitated.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, while a number of those who had participated in the conquest and subsequent colonisation of New Spain were initially rewarded by the Spanish Crown with settlements known as encomiendas, therefore gaining significant social and economic capital, by the close of the sixteenth century, the vast majority of conquistadors, and their descendants, had fallen into rapid decline. This was primarily due to a number of policies introduced by the Crown concerning the institution of the encomienda that sought to diminish the neo-feudal privileges that had previously been granted to the conquistadors and their descendants.¹⁷⁰ The implementation of the New Laws in 1542, as mentioned in the previous chapter, ordered that all encomiendas revert back to the Crown upon the death of the present holder, while also enforcing that the free labour of Indians be terminated; legislation that saw the institution lose much of its economic power.¹⁷¹ Ever conscious of the growing influence of the creole elite in New Spain, particularly after the failed rebellion of Martín Cortés in 1566, the Crown continued to exert a tight control over the landowning nobility in the American colonies through the


¹⁶⁹ For more on the potential reasons behind Saavedra’s dismissal from his post see Cacho Casal, ‘Pleitos y peripecias’, pp. 142-48.


implementation of restrictive and centralised bureaucratic policies. These were primarily enacted by royal officials sent from Spain, such as oidores (Spanish jurists) and, most importantly, the viceroy, who were appointed to impose the rule of the distant monarch. The arrival of peninsular Spaniards such as these rapidly gave rise to an antagonistic power struggle with the native-born creoles, fuelled by a competition for both offices and lands. Indeed, much of the capital generated in New Spain was used for the rapid enrichment of Spanish immigrants—commonly referred to as chapetones—who were not only given priority over the native-born elite in the allocation of leading public offices in viceregal society but also held important stakes in mining and trade; a monopoly that frustrated the financial and political ambitions of creoles like Saavedra. The Crown’s discriminatory imperial policies quickly resulted in the impoverishment of many Mexican creoles at the turn of the seventeenth century who, like Saavedra, faced an arduous period of social instability and economic crisis. According to Baltasar Dorantes de Carranza—first-generation descendant of the conquistador Andrés Dorantes de Carranza—in his Sumario relaciónde las cosas de la Nueva España, by 1604 only 196 of the families that had descended from the 1226 conquistadors who originally colonised the lands remained, and those who did were subject to extreme poverty and despair. Finding himself in a vulnerable position in what was becoming an increasingly hostile environment, Saavedra solicits help from the only figure who could right the wrongs befallen onto the creoles of New Spain: his king.

Unlike Lobo Lasso, Saavedra was not being sponsored to write his epic. Instead, he was, in all likelihood, searching for a patron to further his economic and political ambitions. It is for this reason that he publishes his poem in Madrid and dedicates it to his king, Philip III: ‘a quien suplico la reciba

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Indeed, Saavedra makes a number of direct addresses to the monarch throughout *El peregrino indiano*, establishing his intentions for royal patronage from the outset – ‘en vos pongo el intento, en vos le fundo’ (I. 7) –, drawing on a metaphor popular among early modern epicists, in which the poet attempts to steer his poem towards the anticipated port of patronage:

Yrá mi pequeñuela navezilla
a él seguramente encaminada,
justo será, Señor, que en recibilla
paguéis la voluntad bien empleada.
A vuestro amparo y protección se humilla,

(...) suplicoos, sacro César, humildemente,
que sea en vuestro albergue recibida. (I. 10-11)

Using his epic as a means of protecting and advancing his interests, Saavedra looks to his king not only as prospective patron, but also as mediator, judge, and ‘sol de justicia’ (I. 9), as he establishes a judicial dialogue of protests and petitions with the Crown through which he conveys his anxieties, frustrations, complaints, and demands as a dispossessed heir.

Drawing the king’s attention to the abysmal state of affairs in Mexico – ‘el miserable pueblo entrístezido’ (XV. 1) –, Saavedra implores Philip III to ‘socorred vuestro reyno tan amado’ (XV. 2), reminding him that ‘esto os incumbe a vos, señor supremo, | (...) para que con real mano de clemencia | curéis en lo posible esta dolencia’ (XV. 14). Deeply perturbed by the Crown’s treatment of the creole community following the conquest of Mexico, namely its reluctance to grant the conquistadors and their descendants rewards for services rendered, the poet expresses his outrage at the prospect of peninsular newcomers governing ‘las provincias más gruesas del estado’ and reaping the benefits ‘donde sangre ni pelo no ha tocado’ (XV. 10). Drawing upon the basic precepts of distributive justice, the poet insists that the bloodshed, toil, and gruelling tribulations that his and his fellow creoles’ ancestors had endured in the conquest and colonisation of New Spain conferred a legitimate right to both the land and its political administration. Emphasising the endless hardships and physical and mental suffering undergone by the conquistadors –referred to on several

177 See the dedication of *El peregrino indiano* printed on p. 62 of Rodilla León’s edition.

178 Other examples from the period can be found in Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata* (I. 4).

179 It should be noted that, in addition to his epic, Saavedra also made three trips to the Spanish court, as well as composing an extensive file of petitions to further his socio-economic interests. See Cacho Casal, ‘Pleitos y peripecias’, p. 130.
occasions by the poet as ‘mártires’ (I. 53)– Saavedra continuously reminds Philip III of the sacrifices made by these men for their king and country:

Y si queréis, Señor, ver si merecen premio los que la tierra os han ganado, mirad quánto por vos todos se ofrecen, y cómo quedó el campo desdichado; y aunque siendo por vos, bien lo padecen, considerad, Señor, dónde han llegado, con muertes, con trabajos y aflicciones, en tantas rigurosas ocasiones. (XV. 17)

In addition to relaying the perilous tempests, shipwrecks, famine, mutinies, disease, and adverse weather conditions that the conquistadors endured on a daily basis, the poet also provides his king with vivid descriptions of their bloody battles with the indigenous enemy, noting how they gave their lives in the subjugation of the lands: ‘allí se ven cabezas yr saltando | de los míseros cuerpos divididas, | corazones y entrañas palpitando | entre el fluxo de sangre y las heridas, | y al otro miserable agonizando, | las sienes con cruel rigor partidas’ (V. 10). For Saavedra, the allocation of rewards, lands, and privileges should thus be directed ‘al más benemérito primero’ (XV. 14), before undeserving, transient foreigners, as he abhors the Crown’s discriminatory metropolitan biases: ‘mirad, Señor, do llega mi ventura, | que estoy arrinconado, viendo el fruto | que a otros da mi sangre por tributo’ (XV. 8). Speaking not only on behalf of himself, but as the spokesman for the collective concerns of the creole community, Saavedra reveals that:

Ay, como yo, otros muchachos olvidados hijos y nietos, todos de[s]cendientes de los conquistadores desdichados, capitanes y alféreces valientes, los más destos están arrinconados, en lugares humildes diferentes, sin tener en la tierra más que al cielo, de quien sólo esperando están consuelo. (XV. 9)

Saavedra strategically situates this request directly before the conquistadors’ dramatic departure from Tenochtitlan after the devastating events of the Noche Triste in which many men lost their lives. Other examples can be found in II. 77; IV. 36; VIII. 99; and XII. 101.

Other examples include: IV. 60-65; XVI. 16; CVII. 45; and XIX. 69.
Forgotten and cast aside by an ungrateful monarchy that had failed to provide them with an adequate recompense for the deeds of their forefathers, the poet warns Philip III, in a somewhat insolent outburst, that he and his fellow creoles – ‘los bastardos hijos’ of Spain – are ‘aburridos, | de la mala madrasta castigados’ (XV. 11), as he beseeches the imperial motherland to rectify the situation, and in doing so leaves his demands plainly clear: ‘que todos queden, Gran Filipo, honrados | de vuestras reales manos y premiados’ (XV. 16). In an attempt to obtain these rewards, Saavedra infuses his epic with a combative defence of his seignorial rights, imploring his king to grant him ‘lo que tanto me es devido’ (XI. 22), owing that ‘no se hallará quien más que yo merezca, (...) | averlo mis passados conquistado, | descubierto, regido y governado’ (XI. 23). Presenting Philip III with a lengthy account of the merits and services rendered to the Crown by his noble ancestors in both Spain and the New World – ‘[que] han sido, | por linea recta hasta mi, engendrados’ (XV. 7) –, El peregrino indiano thus resembles a carefully crafted probanza de méritos y servicios through which the poet evokes a lifetime of service to the Crown. In doing so, Saavedra focusses primarily on ‘los valientes hermanos Alvarados’ (IX. 58); his grandfather-in-law, Jorge de Alvarado, and his brother Pedro, to whom the poet is quick to assert his relations (XV. 5-6).

Despite making several claims regarding the veracity of his epic – ‘relación muy cierta y verdadera’ (XI. 68) – and presenting himself as an unbiased, reliable narrator who writes from ‘[una] voluntad pura y sincera’ (I. 13), Saavedra’s credibility is inevitably jeopardised by his ancestral ties, as the conviction to provide a faithful rendition of historical events conflicts with the poet’s self-interest. Far from plain, unvarnished truth, Saavedra’s epic conceals a highly manipulated and nuanced account of the conquest that attempts to distort and deceive as much as inform, as history becomes directly entwined with the poet’s political ambitions for self-promotion. This is most notably manifested through Saavedra’s idealisation of Jorge de Alvarado, for whom he creates an embellished heroic discourse; exaggerating, inventing, and occasionally attributing particular events to Jorge that had, in actual fact, been carried out by his brother Pedro, in a process that José Amor y Vázquez refers to as ‘nepotismo retrospectivo’. Through a strategic reconstruction of history, the poet selects and manipulates specific events from the conquistador’s biography and transforms them into a discourse of exemplarity. In doing so, the once peripheral figure who had received marginal attention in the Spanish

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182 See also XV. 7-8.
183 On the genre of the probanza de méritos y servicios see Folger, p. 10.
184 ‘sólo diré que es la verdad sacada | de la verdad más pura y acendrada’ (I. 50). Claiming that his epic is free from personal biases, he states that ‘sabe Dios que no quiero, aunque pudiera, | mostrar mucha pasión’ (XV. 4).
chronicles of conquest becomes ‘el famoso Jorge de Alvarado | capitán, entre todos, excelente, | tenido, obedecido y estimado | por ser tan valeroso y tan prudente’ (I. 63). In his transformation from historical absence to epic presence, Jorge takes on the narrative role of deuteragonist – ‘segundo, sin segundo, | que ganó con Cortés el Nuevo Mundo’ (XV. 6) – a faithful companion who operates in close proximity to Cortés throughout the epic, much like Homer’s Achilles and Patroclus. 186 In establishing this literary partnership, Saavedra provides a plethora of examples in which Jorge proves his dexterity as Cortés’ right-hand-man, often seen leading squads of soldiers or fighting the most dangerous of indigenous enemies – ‘mientras el gran Cortés andava ausente, | (…) Jorge de Alvarado, el escogido, | hizo venciendo infinidad de gente’ (XVIII. 81) – a mythical depiction that feeds into the poet’s petitioning of royal rewards. 187 Another example of Saavedra’s historical manipulation can be found in the genealogy of Jorge presented in canto X. Here, Saavedra recounts how, after securing peace with the Tlaxcalans and converting them to Christianity, Jorge falls in love with the cacique’s daughter, Xúchitl – ‘una hija única heredera’ (X. 30) – to whom he becomes betrothed. According to Rodilla León, Xúchitl was actually called Tecuelhuatzín – baptised with the name doña María Luisa –, and was, in reality, the lover of Pedro de Alvarado, not Jorge. 188 The question thus arises as to why Saavedra chooses to invent this relationship. It is certainly true that, shortly after the conquest, marriages between conquistadors and the daughters of native noblemen became prevalent. 189 These ‘cacica’-conquistador marriages provided a genealogical continuity between the Mexican nobility and the creole elite of New Spain, who became the inheritors of the Mexican lands. 190 The poet’s creation of Jorge’s fictional relationship with the cacique’s sole inheritor can thus be interpreted as yet another justifiable defence of property and rights, with Saavedra presenting himself, albeit through his wife, as the rightful inheritor of native lands.

The poet’s artful manipulation of history also extends to Jorge’s brother, the infamous Pedro de Alvarado. In the same way that Saavedra embellishes history to maximise the deeds of Jorge, he also downplays negative aspects surrounding the character of Pedro; silencing his errors and aggrandising his exemplary behaviour. Known for his extreme greed and cruelty, and referred to by his contemporaries such as Bartolomé de las Casas as ‘[el] grande tirano capitán’, responsible for ‘matanzas y robos, quemando y robando y destruyendo’, Pedro de Alvarado becomes ‘el prudente don Pedro’ (II.

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186 Another ample example can be found in canto XIII. 85: ‘salió Cortés y Jorge de Alvarado | con quatrocientos hombres bien armados’.

187 It is interesting to note that in the Spaniards’ battle with the Tabascans, it is Jorge de Alvarado who takes on the ferocious cacique Tabasco, stabbing him in canto VI. 46, while in Mexicana the Spaniards’ victory over the Tabascans had been secured by the miraculous assistance of St James (XII. 54).


190 See More, p. 6; Villella, p. 72.
82) in Saavedra’s epic, ‘en quien virtud, valor y ser se encierra’ (V. 75), as the poet makes several attempts to defend him from his detractors.\textsuperscript{191} This is most apparent in canto XIII of \textit{El peregrino indiano}, in which Saavedra narrates the killings of the Mexica nobility during the feast of Huitzilopochtli, their patron deity, at the Templo Mayor; a highly controversial act that sparked varying accounts among chroniclers. In a number of indigenous and Spanish accounts, Pedro de Alvarado is held responsible for giving the controversial order to kill the natives, born out of his cruelty and avarice.\textsuperscript{192} In Saavedra’s version of events, however, Pedro is cleared of all culpability, insisting instead that it is the natives who must be held responsible, with Pedro’s actions being presented as wholly justifiable given that ‘aviase rebelado la canalla’ (XIII. 39). Indeed, the poet dedicates a total of twenty stanzas (48-67) to defend Pedro de Alvarado, even going so far as to suggest that his actions had been sanctioned by God (XIII. 63).

Saavedra is eager not only to emphasise his ancestors’ services to the Crown, but also his own, fashioning himself as a devoted supporter and defender of the Spanish monarchy. As well as detailing his loyal services in his role as chief magistrate of Zacatecas (XI. 19-20), the poet also draws attention to his merits as a soldier, making a number of autobiographical allusions to his military contributions in Mexico; namely his alleged participation in the Chichimeca War (1550-1590).\textsuperscript{193} In the preliminary pages of his epic, for example, Saavedra includes an engraved portrait of himself dressed in a suit of armour, encircled by the Latin inscription ‘OMNES INVISI. VULNERAT HASTA NISI’, accompanied by the insignia of the Saavedra and Guzmán families.\textsuperscript{194} Additionally, in the introductory sonnets printed at the beginning of the poem, Juan de Tarsis y Peralta refers to Saavedra’s dual role as poet and soldier: ‘hallará en don Antonio, juntamente, | un Marte con la espada, y con la pluma | un nuevo Apolo, digno de renombre’.\textsuperscript{195} Building on this reputation as poet-soldier, Saavedra inserts

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{191} Las Casas, \textit{Brevisima relación}, pp. 114, 115.
\item \textsuperscript{192} For indigenous accounts of the event see Miguel León-Portilla, \textit{Visión de los vencidos: relaciones indígenas de la conquista} (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1959), pp. 87-98. The Spaniard, Juan Cano, whose testimony is published in the second part of Oviedo’s \textit{Historia general} (XXXIII, LIV), blames the killings that took place at the Templo Mayor on Alvarado’s greed. Similarly, the creole writer Dorantes de Carranza describes Pedro as cruel and avaricious in the \textit{Sumaria}. See Brading, \textit{The First America}, p. 297.
\item \textsuperscript{193} In one of his petitions sent to the King, Saavedra states that ‘yo me he ocupado en servicio de vuestra alteza en los Chichimecas a mi costa, con mis armas y caballos y con mis criados’. As quoted in Cacho Casal, ‘Pleitos y peripecias’, p. 138. The poet’s involvement in the Chichimeca War was, however, contested by a number of sources. See Cacho Casal, ‘Pleitos y peripecias’, pp. 138-39.
\item \textsuperscript{194} For the engraved portrait see p. 60 of Rodilla León’s edition. The Latin inscription can be translated as ‘everyone is hostile until the spear does not wound them’, appearing to refer to the military deeds of the conquistadors against their indigenous enemies. In his article, Cacho Casal suggests that the poet may also be referring to his own political enemies. Cacho Casal, ‘Pleitos y peripecias’, p. 152.
\item \textsuperscript{195} See p. 68 of Rodilla León's edition.
\end{itemize}
himself into the main narrative of his epic, imitating Ercilla’s model of the eyewitness narrator, as if he himself were one of the conquistadors fighting alongside Cortés. For example, major events and battles are narrated in the first-person plural, as the poet places himself in the thick of the fighting: ‘no cessó la canalla de afligirnos’ (XIII. 81); ‘estávamos cansados y heridos’ (XIII. 91); ‘el indio de quien eramos velados, y tanto en nuestro daño lo procura, acudió con gran priessa, muy furioso, a impedirnos el passo peligroso’ (XIV. 23). The poet even laments the events of the Noche Triste as if he had experienced them first hand: ‘no se puede decir, Señor supremo, el lastimoso trance sucedido, que aún referirlo ahora siento y temo | viéndome justamente enternecido’ (XIV. 29). Belonging to a generation whose claims to royal reward depended on testimony and participation, it becomes clear as to why Saavedra appropriates the Ercillian epic model of the eyewitness to fulfil his own motives of self-promotion. The poet not only presents himself as an eyewitness of the conquest, however, but also of colonial society, providing his readers with a unique insight into the creole perspective of sixteenth-century New Spain.

Writing for the Patria

Referred to by Juan Miralles as the ‘inventor de México’, the figure of Hernán Cortés is considered by many to be the founding father of the creole nation in New Spain. As early as the sixteenth century, the conquistador was presented as the figurehead of Mexican criollismo, with the sonnets by Gonçalo de Berrio and Felipe de Albornoz, printed in the introductory pages of Saavedra’s El peregrino indiano, referring to him as ‘padre a la patria’ and ‘padre de un mundo’. A source of pride among creole descendants, the figure of Cortés, and the collective memory of conquest more broadly, became the sight of expressions of creole patriotism in New Spain, as the concept of an American patria that was distinct from the Spanish motherland began to take hold, ushering the formation of a unique colonial identity among Spanish Americans who gradually ceased to resemble their peninsular cousins. While notions of Mexican nationality were to acquire much greater significance in subsequent centuries, there

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196 Other examples include: IV. 48-51; VI. 23; IX. 49, 84, 90; XIII. 75; XV. 24-28; XVII. 26-28, 57-58.
197 Juan Miralles Ostos, Hernán Cortés, inventor de México, 2 vols (Barcelona: ABC, 2004), II.
was nevertheless a strong feeling of collective identity among creoles at the end of the sixteenth-century.\textsuperscript{200} This was primarily due not only to their close proximity to the lands, customs, and peoples of the Indies, but also to the ongoing tensions with the \textit{chapetones}. Indeed, the imperial policy of exclusion of Spanish Americans from offices and lands gave rise to patriotic manifestations of creole distinction and the search for a separate, Mexican identity; a protective mechanism through which they sought to defend themselves from the persistent hostility of metropolitan disdain, using their idiosyncrasies as a means of survival in colonial society.\textsuperscript{201} Thus, while peninsular Spaniards were deemed to be little more than transient foreigners, incapable of respecting and nurturing local communities, Mexican-born creoles asserted their authority as the native citizens of New Spain who were best equipped to manage the lands and its peoples, projecting themselves as Americans, rather than Spaniards.\textsuperscript{202} In doing so, creoles sought to root themselves in an American past that would dispute the peninsular Spaniards’ claims to domination, extracting symbols from indigenous history and precolonial culture with which they could distinguish themselves from their peninsular counterparts.\textsuperscript{203} As a result, by the end of the sixteenth century, preliminary indications of the creoles’ psychological identification with Mexico began to appear, with Saavedra’s epic illustrating one of the earliest cultural demonstrations of Mexican creole identity.

As Davis has argued, the epic played a vital role in the formation of cultural identity in the early modern period, providing a medium for the creation of national subjectivities.\textsuperscript{204} \textit{El peregrino indiano} undoubtedly attests to the emergence of a creole consciousness at the end of the sixteenth century, being

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Davis} Davis, \textit{Myth and Identity}, pp. 1, 15.
\end{thebibliography}
the first work of poetry published in Spain by an American-born poet.\(^{205}\) This is a point that Saavedra himself emphasises on several occasions throughout his work, claiming that ‘soy en México nacido, | donde ningún historiador ha avido’ (XI. 13).\(^{206}\) Saavedra’s self-identification as a Mexican lends a distinctive quality to his work, as he draws on his own experiences in the contemporary reality of New Spain to produce an idiosyncratic poem that is distinct from its European predecessors. Writing from what José Antonio Mazzotti has termed ‘el mirador criollo’, Saavedra’s epic reflects the linguistic and cultural circumstances of sixteenth-century New Spain, providing a unique perspective of conquest in a discourse characterised by its own autochthonous nuances and subject matters.\(^{207}\) In a patriotic manifestation of Mexican alterity, the poet integrates a variety of native elements into his discourse, as he writes to celebrate the distinctive traits ‘de mi suelo amado’ (XIV. 68). This is an aspect of Saavedra’s poetry that is admired by his contemporaries, as they praise his poetic services to the Mexican patria: ‘serás allá en la cumbre levantado, | feliz Antonio, y nuestro patrio nido | será famoso con el nombre tuyo, | y el mexicano suelo, a quien has dado | paga del hospedaje recibido, | estará ufano de llamarte suyo’.\(^{208}\) Taking pride in the creative traditions of his homeland, Saavedra manifests an emotional attachment to the local landscape, its community, and traditions, with his epic reflecting the sentiments and symbols of the poet’s indigenous cultural heritage.

Indeed, the ‘Other’ is not solely considered for its worth as an enemy in *El peregrino indiano*, but for its multi-ethnic value. In canto XI of his epic, Saavedra expresses that ‘México, aquel lugar tan poderoso | me importuna que os vaya refiriendo, | sus costumbres, su asiento y sus mojones, | su comarca, su gente y condiciones’ (XI. 3). Drawing on the culturally curatorial role of the epic, particularly the colonial models provided by Ercilla’s *La Araucana* and Pedro de Oña’s *Arauco domado*

\(^{205}\) See Rodilla León, p. 58; and Cacho Casal, ‘Pleitos y peripecias’, p. 127. Francisco de Terrazas is considered to be the first epic poet born in New Spain, however his epic, *Nuevo mundo y conquista* (c. 1580), was not published until 1902 and only survives in the fragments collected by Dorantes de Carranza. For more information see Juan Carlos Cabrera Pons, ‘El Nuevo mundo y conquista de Francisco de Terrazas en la construcción de una historia criolla de la Nueva España’, *Andamios, Revista de Investigación Social*, 12.29 (2015), 141-60; and Marrero-Fente, *Poesía épica colonial*, p. 137.

\(^{206}\) On the title page of his work, Saavedra refers to himself as ‘nacido en México’; a point that he reiterates again in his prologue: ‘siendo yo nacido en ella’, p. 63.


\(^{208}\) This particular sonnet is penned by the poet’s brother, Iván de Saavedra Guzmán. See p. 71 of Rodilla León’s edition. Other examples include those of fellow creole, Juan de Casáus y Cervantes, who states that Saavedra ‘dexará la región enriquecida’, p. 71; Alonso de Guevara, who compares the poet to Homer, Virgil, Ariosto, and Petrarch who similarly sang the deeds of their homelands, p. 71; and Hernando de Mena who refers to Saavedra as ‘honra del pueblo, ilustre Mexicano’, p. 73.
(1596), Saavedra thus incorporates a number of ethnographic elements into his poem, providing readers with detailed descriptions of pre-Columbian customs, ceremonies, celebrations, games, foods, plants, ornaments, costumes, and natural landscapes; taken from his own first-hand experience. This is occasionally expressed through the use of Nahuatl terminology, with the poet employing native words and symbols to develop his own ample set of primordial references, accompanied by a glossary explaining their meaning to a Spanish-speaking audience.209 As is to be expected, Saavedra thus demonstrates a much higher degree of cultural self-awareness in relation to indigenous rituals and traditions than Lobo Lasso had done. As a result, *El peregrino indiano* deviates from the derisive views of the imperial school and its derogatory stereotypes of Amerindian culture to reveal, instead, the admirable qualities of native civilisation. Indeed, Saavedra engages in a selective appropriation of Aztec history and tradition, choosing only those aspects that would exalt his homeland and further the needs of creole patriotism.210 Refusing to fixate on the savagery of Aztec society as historians such as Gómara or epic poets such as Lobo Lasso had done in their works, Saavedra asserts that ‘no quiero (…) relataros [los ritos y las leyes que observavan] […] otros están dispuestos a informaros, | que sólo este principio desseavan […] | y por aquesta culpa no tocsase | a reyno tan capaz de tantos bienes’ (XI. 12-14).211 Moreover, Saavedra displays no sense of superiority to his indigenous counterparts, insisting that Mexico is not a land inhabited solely by savage barbarians, but is rather a highly developed society with a sophisticated political system, bustling markets with established trade routes, and a developed culture and language.212 Refusing to subscribe to the colonial stereotypes advanced by Eurocentric accounts, Saavedra instead fills his discourse with descriptions of the indigenous ‘juegos, danças, bayles y

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209 In the second half of the sixteenth century, creole discourses began acquiring linguistic traits specific to the geographic and cultural contexts of their authors. Saavedra’s fellow colonial poets, Alonso de Ercilla and Pedro de Oña, also included indigenous terms and glossaries in their epics, likely providing models of imitation for Saavedra. See Mazzotti, *Lima fundida*, p. 30.


211 As was the case in Lobo Lasso’s epic, European projections of indigenous culture often sought to project a world of savagery, displayed through the imagery of human sacrifice and cannibalism. See Carlos Jáuregui, ‘Cannibalism, the Eucharist, and Criollo Subjects’, p. 62.

212 Mexican buildings and temples are compared to the ancient societies of Greeks and Romans (II. 15). In his depiction of the Mexicans’ political system, Saavedra draws on Ercilla’s representation of Chile as a Republic governed by an alliance of war-chiefs who meet in a senate to discuss the course of action to take against the Spaniards. See, for example, Saavedra’s depiction of the council of Tabasco (III. 65-73) and the ‘real senado’ (VIII. 44) of Moctezuma and his advisors (VIII. 43-67). For an analysis of the presence of republicanism in Ercilla’s epic see Imogen Sutton, “‘De gente que a ningún rey obedecen”: Republicanism and Empire in Alonso de Ercilla’s *La Araucana*, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 91.4 (2014), 417-35.
comidas’ (X. 49) that took place throughout the Spaniards’ passage to Tenochtitlan, though undoubtedly drawing on his own personal observation.

In canto II, for example, Saavedra describes the feast provided for the Spanish conquistadors by the community of Cozumel, which includes an array of native, regional foods such as ‘el pavo en empanada’ and ‘yctoteas’ – tortoises, according to Saavedra’s glossary—, cooked on a barbeque, or ‘en tamales’ – a kind of tortilla, according to the poet—; ‘todos de aquellas islas naturales’ (II. 48). The feast is served on a table adorned with precious stones, metals, pearls, shells, and corals native to the island, and accompanied by music played by a range of indigenous instruments such as ‘sonajas, cuerno, rallo y pito’ (II. 48). This elaborate banquet is followed by the natives’ performance of the \textit{mitote}; an indigenous dance in which, according to Saavedra, performers, ‘asidos de las manos, formaban un gran corro, en medio del cual ponían una bandera, y junto a ella una vasija con bebida, de la que, mientras hacían sus mudanzas al son de un tamboril, bebían hasta que se embriagaban’.

The music to which the \textit{mitote} is performed, is made up, once again, of indigenous instruments, ‘[que] suenan con invención muy peregrina’ (II. 63). Another opportunity for the poet to showcase his knowledge of indigenous traditions is provided in canto X, in which he narrates the ‘mil fiestas e invenciones’ held by the Tlaxcalans after securing peace with the Spaniards. Assuming once again his role as ethnographer, Saavedra provides a description of the dances, games, and celebratory traditions of Tlaxcala, such as the pre-Columbian festive rites of the \textit{palo volador} and the \textit{juego de palo}. In his depiction of these performances, Saavedra employs adjectives such as ‘graciosa’, ‘estraña’, and ‘rara’ (X. 36) to convey their exoticism, while simultaneously expressing his admiration for the uniqueness of these peoples and their traditions. The poet also narrates the events as a first-hand witness – ‘que era verlos venir estriaña cosa’ (X. 36) –, drawing on his own local knowledge to provide an authentic depiction of indigenous customs. In this way, Saavedra’s account of the Tlaxcalan celebrations differs substantially to that provided by Lobo Lasso in canto XI of \textit{Cortés valeroso}, which, as explored in Chapter One, was instead based on a Eurocentric literary tradition and localised to a European context.

Indeed, where Lobo Lasso’s depiction of the ‘prado ameno’ in canto XI of \textit{Cortés valeroso} reveals his lack of familiarity with the natural environment of the New World, Saavedra’s representation of the American landscape displays a convincingly autochthonous account of the vicinity of Mexico. Throughout his epic, the poet provides detailed geographical descriptions of the land — its climate and abundant natural beauties such as plants, rivers, animals, as well as the architectural wonders of the city of Tenochtitlan—, authenticating his account by accentuating his direct experience of living in Mexico;

\footnote{See footnote 88 (p. 100) of Rodilla León's edition for Saavedra's glossary entry on the \textit{mitote}.}

\footnote{The poet tells us that, in the first of these ancient festivities, four participants, tied with ropes, climb ‘un grueso palo altissimo’ (X. 35) from which they jump and descend by flying through the air, while in the \textit{juego de palo}, a man lies on his back, skilfully juggling a log with his feet (X. 37).}
‘hallé’ (XI. 17); ‘que yo lo afirmé’ (XI. 18). The pride with which Saavedra describes the grandeur of Tenochtitlan and the beauty of the flora and fauna that encompasses it displays an emotional attachment to the physical landscape, as does his affinity to the people who occupy it and with whom he shares his land. Certainly, Saavedra presents himself not only as a defender of the rights and interests of his fellow creoles, but also of the indigenous population of Mexico, alerting his king’s attention on several occasions in his epic to the invaluable assistance of the Spaniards’ indigenous allies during the conquest. The poet pays particular attention to the services rendered by the people of Texcoco who, while having initially resisted the Spanish conquistadors during the conquest of Mexico, eventually allied with the Spaniards in the final siege of Tenochtitlan. Despite their assistance, however, the Texcocans, like the majority of the Spaniards’ native allies, went virtually unacknowledged and unrewarded by the Crown, quickly losing their status as fellow invaders and colonists, as they became subordinate subjects of the new empire. Challenging their marginalised status in historical accounts, Saavedra goes some way towards trying to rectify this situation. In his capacity as member of the Real Audiencia de México, he strove to defend the Indians of Texcoco, later using his epic as a means of lobbying for the Spanish monarchy to recognise their noble contributions in the conquest. ‘Fue gente muy leal y que ayudaron [con todo lo possible] Saavedra asserts, yet ‘nunca jamás a estos los premiaron’ (XVIII. 87). In many ways, the poet’s efforts to revalidate the rights of the Texcocans parallels those made by his contemporary, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl – the mestizo historian of Texcoco and descendant of ‘don Fernando, rey de Tetzcuco, nuestro caro amigo’ (XIX. 75) –, who also wrote to advocate the deeds of his ancestors and petition for their rewards.

As well as praising the deeds of the conquistadors’ native allies, Saavedra also shares his respect for their indigenous enemies who, as is the case in both Ercilla and Lobo Lasso’s epics, are presented as fierce warriors ‘que por sólo el valor de sus personas | merecen reales cetros y coronas’ (III. 83). In addition to including numerous references to their status as worthy enemies and their noble motivations for fighting, he also provides readers with information on indigenous weaponry and armour. For example, the natives of Tabasco carry ‘flechas, dardos, trabucas, piercing y vara, | [que] tan furiosas despiden’ (V. 8), while their leader, the ferocious cacique Tabasco, wears ‘conchas de tortugas’ (VI. 25) to protect himself from the Spaniards’ blows. In his portrayal of the cacique, Saavedra uses Nahuatl

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215 Other examples include: II. 14-18; IX. 42-43; X. 17-19; XI. 16-18.
216 Saavedra states that ‘los amigos hizieron grandes cosas | en nuestra ayuda, sin faltar en nada, | cierto, Sacro Señor’ (IX. 66). See also IX. 25 and XVI. 50.
217 See Restall, Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest, p. 47.
218 For more on Saavedra’s efforts to defend the people of Texcoco from exploitation during his time as member of the Real Audiencia in 1577 see canto XVIII. 87-88 and p. 316 of Rodilla León’s edition.
219 See Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl’s Compendio histórico del reino de Texcoco (c. 1608), particularly Relación XIII.
terms to best describe his traditional modes of dress, lending, once again, a unique authenticity to the poem. Indeed, throughout his epic Saavedra ensures that his indigenous characters maintain more of their ‘nativeness’ than they had in *Mexicana*. Unlike Lobo Lasso, who seeks to cover up ‘Otherness’ through their assimilation to European paradigms, Saavedra emphasises their autochthonous characteristics. As a result, the women of *El peregrino indiano* are not described as mirror images of Petrarch’s Laura, with blonde hair, pale skin, and blue eyes, but are instead depicted as having ‘cabellos negros’ (XVIII. 19), their skin ‘trigueñuelo el color’ (V. 80), with ‘ojos rasgados’ (XVIII. 19).

While Saavedra’s epic, as these passages show, displays an apparent conviction to defend and celebrate the indigenous peoples and their customs, there is strong reason to believe that this was not born out of genuine concern, but is instead the result of a strategic manoeuvre aimed at fulfilling the political and literary ambitions of the poet. Indeed, evidence collected by Rodrigo Cacho Casal reveals that Saavedra was accused of several abuses in his role as chief magistrate of Zacatecas, namely the mistreatment and exploitation of indigenous peoples, which calls into question the poet’s adopted persona as defender and advocate of indigenous interests. The passages of *El peregrino indiano* that engage with native elements should thus be more convincingly interpreted as rhetorical sites that (i) provide Saavedra with an opportunity to display his talents as a colonial poet, modelling his work on that of Ercilla and Oña who similarly engage with native customs in their epics, and (ii) satisfy his political objectives by allowing him to fashion himself as a prime candidate for managing the lands and the peoples with whom he displays a clear familiarity, while also challenging the accusations brought against him; most likely in the hope that he would be reinstated in his post as *corregidor* of Zacatecas. In this sense, Saavedra’s epic prefigures the politicised process of ‘creole self-exoticising’ that was to take place more prominently in seventeenth-century colonial writing, in which creole intellectuals strategically appropriated manifestations of indigeneity for self-interested reasons. Understood this way, Saavedra’s epic does not merely reflect a Mexican creole identity, but actively assumes one in response to specific cultural and political conditions.

**Creolising the Epic**

As previously mentioned, throughout his epic, Saavedra professes to adhere to the role of historical poet. Referring to himself as ‘historiador’ (XI. 13) and his poem as ‘larga historia’ (I. 50), he makes several claims regarding the *verista* style of his verse, which is, according to him, forthright and

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221 On creole self-exoticising see Stephanie Merrim, *The Spectacular City, Mexico, and Colonial Hispanic Literary Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), pp. 37, 139. The process has also been referred to as ‘automodelación’ in Mary M. Gaylord, ‘Jerónimo de Aguilar y la alteración de la lengua (*La Mexicana* de Gabriel Lobo Lasso de La Vega’), in *Agencias criollas: la ambigüedad ‘colonial’ en las letras hispanoamericanas*, ed. José Antonio Mazzotti (Pittsburgh: Universidad de Pittsburgh, 2000), pp. 73-97 (p. 91).
unvarnished: ‘no lleva ornamento de invenciones, | de Ninfas, Cabalinas, ni Parnaso, | de Náyades, Planetas, ni Tri[t]ones (...) | porque me han dicho, cierto, que es lo fino, | el dezir pan por pan, vino por vino’ (X. 27-28).222 Showing scorn for those ‘otros escritores, | que matizan las faltas con colores’ (I. 51), Saavedra promises that ‘sólo ofrezco un manjar de verdad’ following closely the Ercilllian paradigm.223 The poet’s self-professed status as a historian is certainly bolstered by those who provide the introductory sonnets to his epic, in which he is varyingly referred to as ‘verdadero coronista’ and ‘poeta y padre de la historia’, who writes ‘pura, cendrada y verdadera historia’.224 The esteemed poet and playwright, Lope de Vega, even goes so far as to compare Saavedra to Lucan; an established historical model for early modern epic poets.225 It is also not coincidental that the aprobación of Saavedra’s epic is written by none other than Antonio de Herrera –the official chronicler of the Americas and Castile who was considered to be one of the most prolific historians of the early modern period–, who commends ‘quanto a la verdad de historia (...) procede [Saavedra]’.226 Even modern scholarship underlines the historical nature of the poem, with Amor y Vázquez claiming that ‘historiador era [Saavedra], pues, su fin primordial, del cual la poesía o, más exactamente, la versificación fue mero vehiculo’.227 Certainly, El peregrino indiano is extremely detailed in terms of the dates and chronology of historical events and the numbers and names of soldiers, and it does not, unlike Lobo Lasso’s Mexicana, begin in medias res, but instead provides a historical overview of the conquest, starting with the Spaniards’ departure from Cuba. This said, however, there are nevertheless several instances in the epic when Saavedra surrenders to his artistic impulses. Revealing concerns regarding the monotony of his discourse and the possibility of tiring his dedicatee with excessive historicity –‘parécese, Señor, que os veo cansado, | de oyr tristes verdades lastimosas’ (XIV. 36)–

222 The terms ‘verista’ and ‘verosimilista’ are adopted by Ramón Menéndez Pidal in ‘Poesía e historia en el “Mio Cid”. El problema de la épica española’, Nueva revista de filología hispánica, 3.2 (1949), 113-29. The former refers to ‘una esencial aproximación entre la poesía y la verdad histórica’, while the latter corresponds to ‘invenciones verosímiles, pero no sujetas a la verdad histórica’, p. 125.

223 See p. 63 of Saavedra’s prologue. From the outset of his epic, Ercilla also claims to write a true account of war based on testimonial presence that excludes fictions of love and chivalry. See I. 1 of La Araucana.

224 See the sonnets by Alonso de Guevara, Jerónimo Ramírez, and Vicente Espinel, on pp. 71, 72, and 64.

225 In the sonnet written by Lope de Vega printed in the preliminary pages of Saavedra’s epic, he states: ‘que si es César Cortés, vos soys Lucano’, p. 70. For more on Lucan’s historical epic model and its influence on Hispanic epic poetry see Nicolopulos, p. 127.

226 See p. 61 of Rodilla León’s edition. Antonio de Herrera himself penned a work on the Americas, the Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las Islas y Tierra Firme del mar Océano que llaman Indias Occidentales (1601-1615); better known as the Décadas. For more information on Herrera and the Décadas see Richard L. Kagan, Clio and the Crown: The Politics of History in Medieval and Early Modern Spain (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), pp. 172-85.

227 Amor y Vázquez, ‘El peregrino indiano’, p. 29.
Saavedra, as Lobo Lasso had done, counterbalances his discourse of war with numerous fictional episodes of love and fantasy. These fictional episodes are not merely digressive or ornamental but play a constitutive role in the poem’s meaning, providing Saavedra with further opportunities to comment on the political affairs of sixteenth-century New Spain, while illustrating, once again, the poet’s identity as a creole.

In several instances of his epic, the poet expresses feelings of compassion towards the conquered Indians, illustrating what Villella refers to as ‘creole sympathy’. This is predominantly expressed in the poet’s use of lyricism, as he channels his sympathies and provides a voice for the unrepresented victims of conquest by incorporating episodes of love. One such amorous interlude takes place in canto V, in which Saavedra narrates the story of Curaca. Possessing several tropes of the romance epic, this episode features Pedro de Alvarado, who usurps the role of chivalric knight, while Curaca acts as the damsel in distress. Having been sent with some of his men in search of provisions, Alvarado hears ‘una cansada voz’ near the hillside ‘como que aullando | estava alguna fiera mal herida | o aquexada de cauda condolida’ (V. 76); a notable imitation of canto IX of Lobo Lasso’s *Mexicana*.

Walking towards the sound of the voice, Alvarado hears a young woman calling out for her beloved, Chamabato (V. 77-78). ‘Con el grande desseo que tenia | de saber su fatiga y causa della’ (V. 79), Alvarado asks ‘con semblante suave y regalado’ (V. 81) the reason for her distress, to which she responds, with wonted ‘suspiro lastimoso’, providing the conquistador with a first-person account of her story. Subscribing to the romance tradition of female lament, the maiden begins her speech with hyperbolic lyric rhetoric, lamenting “la vida desdichada” (V. 82) and “el doloroso referir de mi pena desastrada” (V. 82) caused by “aquel injusto amor tirano y ciego” (V. 83). After introducing herself, Curaca recounts her love story with her suitor, Chamabato. Despite falling passionately in love with Chamabato, Curaca refuses to marry him, weighing up notions of pride and honour with her passion. After five years of unsuccessful wooing, Curaca finally succumbs to her desires and agrees to marry him. However, in a cruel twist of fate, Chamabato is called to war to fight against the Spanish invaders, where he is killed in battle. Deeply afflicted by her torment, she asks Alvarado to kill her as she cannot bear the pain of a life without her betrothed, then going on to strangle herself in an attempt to end her

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228 The poet also issues an apology to the ‘célebres damas’ among his readers in VI. 1; most likely imitating the apologies of Ercilla in canto XIX. 1-2 of *La Araucana* and Lobo Lasso in canto XX. 18-19 of *Mexicana* for the lack of amorous material in their epics.

229 Villella, p. 140.

230 The episode also bears a strong resemblance to cantos XIX and XX of Ercilla’s *La Araucana* which narrates the story of Tegualda.

231 Curaca introduces herself in a typically romance format, seen previously in the work of Lobo Lasso, but also in the works of Ercilla, Ariosto, and Tasso: “Yo soy Curaca, la desventurada, | hija del gran Curaca, padre mio” (V. 86).
anguish. In the final stanza of the canto, Saavedra provides his own views on his fictional story, in which love is fittingly compared to war: ‘tormentos, ansias y fatiga, | muertes, incendios, flechos y otros hechos, | pena de amor que a tanta pena obliga, | y tanto atormentáys los tiernos pechos’ (V. 115). Indeed, in her role as ‘mártir del amor’ (V. 79), the figure of Curaca can more widely be understood as a victim of war itself, with the Spaniards’ conquest devastating her chances of happiness. Certainly, the women of Saavedra’s epic provide ample opportunity to explore the impacts of conquest on native civilisation. Armed with Lascasian rhetoric to elucidate the injustice of the Spaniards’ invasion of their lands, the chief woman of Cozumel in canto II makes this plainly clear, introducing herself to Cortés as “señora desta pobre tierra, | que tan injustamente oy has pisado, | que como mal usado de la guerra | estaba el pobre pueblo descuydado” (II. 29). The offences committed against natives is perhaps best illustrated, however, in canto XVIII in which Saavedra recounts ‘el amoroso | trance de dos amantes’ (XVII. 99); the Spanish conquistador Juan Cansino, and the indigenous princess Culhúa.

Separated from the rest of his men and wondering into the forest, Juan Cansino spots ‘una bárbara bella’ on the riverbank, drying her wet hair. Mesmerised by her ‘beldad tan rara y peregrina’ (XVIII. 7), he watches her, unnoticed, before the woman heads off on her way, leaving Cansino feeling lovestruck and impassioned. Unifying the realms of love and violence, Saavedra describes Cansino’s love for the maiden in lyrical terms of pain and torment; ‘el fuego no cassava de afligirle’ (XVIII. 9) as the vision of the woman ‘le está matando’ (XVIII. 9), filling his ‘ardiente pecho’ (XVIII. 10) with ‘el dolor que está sintiendo’ (XVIII. 10). After three days pass, Cansino goes back to the river and, being careful not to be seen, approaches the woman and grabs her from behind. In recounting this episode, Saavedra establishes the semantic field of predator and prey, describing Cansino as restraining the maiden:

como águila veloz, que en torno andando,
buelve y rebuelve con atenta vista,
por asir la culebra va bolando,
hasta llegar do no se le resista.
Y baxando, furiosa, recelando,
el daño, por la cola la conquista,
ansí llegó Cansino. (XVIII. 13)

Saavedra’s choice of the word ‘conquista’ is significant, uniting once again the realms of love and war, with Cansino’s capture of the maiden convincingly serving as an allegory of Spain’s conquest of the New World. Addressing her captor as “malvado, | inadvertido, pérfido, tirano, | (…) baxo, vil, villano” (XVIII. 16), she asks the conquistador: “¿quién te consiente a ti ser tan osado?” (XVIII. 16), as Saavedra once again provides a voice to the annexed ‘Other’. After introducing herself as Culhúa, daughter of the cacique of Culhuacan, Cansino convinces her to lower her defences, exclaiming in similarly violent
terms that “tengo por más gloria averté visto | que ganar esta tierra que conquisto” (XVIII. 22). After wearing her down with promises of his affections, Culhúa eventually succumbs to Cansino’s desires and offers herself to him: “y pues, Christiano mio, (...) | yo me ofrezco por tuya en hora buena, | (...) me doy sugeta a tu cadena” (XVIII. 24); conveying once again the coercive nature of their relationship as captor and captive. Reassuring her not to fear the Christians (XVIII. 26), he invites Culhúa to his camp where they spend four days of ‘ocultas glorias y alegrías’ in his tent (XVIII. 29). Worried that his fellow conquistadors will discover his hidden enemy lover, thus bringing their love affair to an end, Cansino tells Culhúa that, in order for them to keep their love a secret, she must have “el rostro señalado” (XVIII. 30). He goes on to explain that:

sabrás, mi dulce amiga, ¡o, caso fuerte!,
que ay ley entre nosotros inviolable,
mas cruel para mí que acerva muerte,
viendo que es tan precisa e irrevocable,
que a ninguno permite ni consiente
tener muger, y es caso detestable,
y obliga luego a herrar qualquier cautiva,
¡mira qué ley, que a tantas leyes priva! (XVIII. 31)

Described once again as ‘presa de amor’ (XVIII. 32), Culhúa concedes to the Spanish law, permitting Cansino to brand her face –“pon en mi rostro tu señal, acaba, | tu esclava soy” (XVIII. 32)– and, wielding the “hierro tyrano, cruel y aborrezido” (XVIII. 35), Cansino completes his conquest of the maiden; ‘al fin le puso una S con un clavo, | haziendo al Dios de amor sugeta esclavo’ (XVIII. 36). Meanwhile, Culhúa’s father suspects his daughter has been kidnapped by a Spaniard and shares his concerns with Cortés, ordering him to detain the culprit and hang him. After Cansino and Culhúa have been detained, they both address each other in a lyrical lovers’ lament, with Culhúa alluding to the sacrifices she has made, exclaiming that “por ti soy de mi pueblo aborrécida | como quien ha sus leyes corrompido, | por ti padeceré misera vida | y aborrecerme ha mi patrio nido” (XVIII. 61), as she goes on to vow to take her own life. Though initially sentenced to death, Cansino, on the other hand, is pardoned by Cortés owing to the noble deeds that he previously performed in Cuba and Mexico. As well as providing readers with an entertaining respite from the deeds of war, this episode offers insight into the Atlantic slave trade operating in the sixteenth century, and more specifically, Saavedra’s own negative views towards it. Despite mandates issued against slavery from the Spanish monarchy, illegal slave trade was nevertheless rife in New Spain since the very beginning of the conquest, as the Crown’s attempts to abolish Indian slavery were often futile in face of the conquistadors’ endeavours to create a
native labour force to work the lands and mines. While slavery was already prominent in pre-Hispanic Mexican society, as illustrated in canto XIV of Lobo Lasso’s *Mexicana*, there were important differences in its execution following the Spaniards’ invasion of the lands; one such difference being that berated by Saavedra in which natives were branded with a hot iron known as ‘el hierro del rey’. The poet’s apparent condemnation of the European practices of slavery is somewhat hypocritical, however, given that he himself was the owner of a black slave, Francisco, seeming to suggest that this episode does not necessarily reflect the poet’s own personal views, but is rather another example of Saavedra’s strategically self-fashioned persona as defender of the Indians.

As well as the discourse of love, Saavedra also draws on supernatural machinery to reflect on the political and cultural affairs of colonial Mexico. While *El peregrino indiano* is certainly sparser in its use of supernatural elements than *Mexicana* had been, with Saavedra favouring the Ercillian model over that of Tasso, the poet nevertheless engages with the wondrous on two occasions in his epic. The first of these can be found in canto IX, in which Saavedra narrates the encounter between Maxixcaltzin and the indigenous soothsayer, Tlantepuzylama; ‘agorera | de gran reputación, industria y fama, | sutil, astuta y diestra hechizera’ (IX. 95). After a devastating battle with the Spaniards, Maxixcaltzin, the Tlaxcalan commander, contacts the seer to divine the course of the Tlaxcalans’ future against their Spanish enemy. After hearing Maxixcaltzin’s plea, Tlantepuzylama enters a cave where she concocts a potion that she consumes and, after summoning the devil and his furies, is subsequently provided with a vision of the world:

Mostráronle muy claro y evidente,
el mar, la tierra y cuanto cubre el cielo,
(…)
Vio a Italia y a Flandes y Alemania,
Constantinopla y toda la Turquía
todos los reynos de la grande España,
y el sacro emperador que los regía
(…)
Vio que estaba dispuesto y ordenado
que México también se sugetasse (IX. 117-120)

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233 Miralles Ostos, p. 362.
234 See the manuscript held at the Archivo General de Indias: ‘Antonio de Saavedra Guzmán’, 1592, Archivo General de Indias, ES.41091.AGI/24/INDIFERENTE,2066,N.73, fol. 2’.
After seeing the imminent deaths of her fellow Tlaxcalans in their war against the Spaniards and ‘la sugención de toda aquella tierra’ (IX. 122), Tlantepuzylama reveals the prophecy to Maxixcaltzin – “tú y todo este reyno libertado | será del español presto regido” (IX. 124), advising him to stop the war and make peace with their enemy; advice that the commander heeds.

Stemming from an established epic tradition of necromancy, this episode engages with a number of potential models; both ancient and early modern, European and colonial. Indeed, the figure of Tlantepuzylama is reminiscent of a long line of oracular figures found in epic poetry; namely, Lucan’s Erichtho and Ercilla’s Fitón.235 As in Saavedra’s epic, in book VI of the Pharsalia, Sextus Pompeius seeks the witch, Erichtho, to ascertain how the coming battle will go (6. 569-603). This episode takes place in the cavern of Dis – the archetypal site of prophetic visions of this kind –, in which the sorceress invokes the infernal powers, calling upon the furies of Pluto’s realm to assist her (6. 685-718).236 Similarly, in canto XXIII of La Araucana, the poet-protagonist Ercilla descends into the cave of the enchanter, Fitón, who, once again, summons Pluto and his furies and concocts a potion to assist him with his prophecy. Drawing on these two subtexts, Saavedra imbues both Tlantepuzylama and her necromantic cave with grotesque horror as he seeks to evoke the morbid ambience and horrific imagery used by his epic predecessors, as he describes the rancid stenches, animal blood, poison, saliva, birds’ eyes, foetuses, giblets, guts, hairs, rotten flesh, human body parts, teeth, nails, and bones that make up her gruesome brew.237 The prophetic vision of the globe that Tlantepuzylama is provided with after consuming her potion draws on the literary topos of the mapamundi that was developed in the Middle Ages, and made popular in the early modern epic by Camões’ Os Lusíadas and Ercilla’s La Araucana.238 In both Camões and Ercilla’s epics, the mapamundi is an encomiastic literary device used by the poets to celebrate the imperialist expansion of their empires.239 The protoimperialist function of the mapamundi is similarly adopted by Saavedra, who uses the prognosticative visions produced by the device to illustrate Spain’s greatest triumphs around the world. The poet’s witch episode thus plays an ideological role in the poem, not only providing him with the opportunity to praise the empire of his prospective patron, and therefore solidify his allegiance to the monarchy, but also granting him with a means to legitimise Spain’s overseas empire, by presenting the conquest as an inevitable, predestined act of divine fate.

It must be noted, however, that the prophetic episode of canto IX is not purely imitative of western epic tradition, but equally rooted in indigenous practices of witchcraft. In reality, Saavedra’s

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235 It is possible that Ovid’s Medea from the Metamorphosis (7. 262-78) may also have served as a possible model.
236 For a more detailed breakdown of Lucan’s witch episode see Nicolopulos, p. 119.
237 For more on the ingredients that make up Erichtho and Fitón’s potions see Nicolopulos, pp. 156, 170.
238 See canto X of Os Lusíadas and canto XXIII of Ercilla’s La Araucana.
soothsayer scene is partly based on historical accounts of the conquest that state that, during their battle with the Spaniards, the Tlaxcalans called upon their seers to divine the next course of action to take against their enemies. Indeed, the poet reveals that such forms of necromancy were, and continue to be, habitual in Mexico: ‘oy no ay en el mundo | adonde se use más la hechizería, | y algún indio en el arte, sin segundo, | que habla con el diablo noche y día’ (IX. 128). Drawing on his knowledge of pre-Columbian and colonial forms of witchcraft, Saavedra creates an ethnographically verisimilar portrayal of indigenous divinatory techniques. In setting the episode in a cave, for example, the poet pays tribute to pre-Hispanic tradition, for in Mesoamerica, caves served as sacred sites of divinity in which powerful deities could be summoned during rites and rituals such as that performed by Tlantepuzylama. Additionally, in describing the magical brew crafted by the sorceress, the poet uses the Nahuatl term ‘peyote’; a beverage of herbs and roots that worked as a hallucinogen consumed to induce a trance that allowed the practitioner to forecast the future. In addition to the classical botany and medieval bestiary of European epic models, Tlantepuzylama’s peyote features an exotic catalogue of autochthonous herbs and objects native to Mexico, such as tezontle, caquiztli, quauhnenepil, piciete, tobacco, závila, and uleaxi; ‘cosa[s]’ Saavedra tells us, ‘que no ay acá en Castilla’ (IX. 108). Indeed, where Ercilla had focussed solely on Old World marvels and iconography in his description of Fitón’s necromantic potion, Saavedra reformulates the epic topos to incorporate the local landscape, expanding the imaginary of the tradition to new geographic and cultural horizons, and expressing a peculiar and localised poetic voice distinct from that of his epic precursors. In this transformative adaption of the western literary tradition, Tlantepuzylama’s peyote thus becomes a melting pot of indigenous and European ingredients; a thoughtful amalgamation of two rich traditions that not only reflects the hybrid cultural outlook of Saavedra, but is also indicative of the cultural mestizaje that was taking place in New Spain more widely.

The second of Saavedra’s supernatural episodes takes place in canto XIV, in which the poet employs the narrative technique of notional ekphrasis to recount a dream he has had to his king. In relaying his dream, Saavedra reveals that, after falling asleep, he awakens ‘en un prado apazible’; a typical pastoral landscape ‘de plantas y florestas adornado, | do las corrientes aguas, con sonido | dulce,

243 See Burkhart, ‘Spain and Mexico’, pp. 442-43.
244 For the full account of Tlantepuzylama’s sorcery see IX. 95-129.
alegran las flores estimadas | de mil varias colores matizadas’ (XIV. 37). There he meets a nymph ‘de tanta perfección y tal belleza’ (XIV. 39) who guides him through ‘un valle deleytoso’ (XIV. 40). As the two walk further into the valley, the *locus amoenus* soon transforms into ‘un lugar emponçoñado’ (XIV. 43) in which they find ‘[un] cóncavo horrible y cueva escura’ (XIV. 58) from which horrendous clouds of fumes and noises emerge, ‘donde tiene su reyno el inhumano | Plutón’ (XIV. 48). Accompanied by his nymph-guide, the poet-protagonist embarks on a descent into Hell, where he sees two rivers of the underworld, Cocytus and Lethe, and ‘el barquero Charón’ (XIV. 49), as well as the three-headed dog ‘Cancervero’ (XIV. 50); witches; ‘fieros animales ponzoñosos (…) que guardan una puerta cenagosa, | do habita la cruel libidinosa’ (XIV. 51); and ‘otros mil savandijas que allí andaban’ (XIV. 50). Within the dark depths of Hell, Saavedra encounters a range of vices including ‘la Ira raviosa’ (XIV. 52), ‘la Codicia’ (XIV. 53), ‘la Luxuria’ (XIV. 54), ‘la Avaracia’ (XIV. 55), ‘la Gula’ (XIV. 56), and ‘la Pereza’ (XIV. 57). Confused at finding himself in Pluto’s realm, Saavedra asks the nymph why she has brought him to Hell, to which she responds by claiming that she wanted to show him those who, for their crimes, were banished from “aquel monte esclarecido” (XIV. 60); Mount Parnassus. Transported to the mountain, ‘do la virtud se estima y precia, | y donde es colocado el virtuoso’ (XIV. 66), the poet-protagonist meets another beautiful nymph, Sapiencia, who provides him with more information about the mountain. After their meeting, Saavedra witnesses the coronation of Philip II with the ‘corona de prudente’ (XIV. 61), in which the king is set upon a stage surrounded by the seven heavenly virtues. In her attempt to stop the coronation, Invidia engages in verbal combat with Fama about the merits of the king, to which Fama responds with an outburst of praise, recalling Philip II’s many attributes and accomplishments for the Spanish empire and Christendom, detailing the dominant historical events of Philip II’s reign (XIV. 88-104).

A number of poetic models can be identified as potential sources of imitation for Saavedra’s dream sequence. The poet’s tour of Hell unquestionably derives from book VI of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, which relates Aeneas’ descent into the underworld –which also takes place in a cave, accompanied by the Sibyl–, which was later reproduced in Dante’s *Inferno*. Indeed, Saavedra’s dream vision shares a number of similarities with Dante’s epic. The ‘lugar emponçoñado’ of Saavedra’s story can most certainly be compared to the Dark Woods of Dante’s work, while many of the vices that the poet meets in his descent into the underworld are also to be found in the nine Circles of Hell that Dante visits with his guide, Virgil. It is certainly no coincidence that, in canto IV of Dante’s *Inferno*, the poet wakes up on ‘the edge | of the abyss, that cavern of grief and pain’, where he peers down a dark pit ‘wreathed in cloud’. Also of interest, is the comparison between Saavedra’s depiction of Mount Parnassus with Dante’s nine spheres of Heaven; namely the appearance of ‘Sapiencia’ who corresponds to sphere four

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245 It should be noted that Virgil himself used Homer’s description of Hades in book XI of the *Odyssey* for his construction of the underworld.

(the Wise) of the Paradiso. The first nymph that Saavedra meets, characterised by her beauty and her ‘doradas madejas’ (XIV. 40) and with whom the poet falls in love, can also be compared to Dante’s Beatrice, who guides him through Heaven in the Paradiso. The most notable source of inspiration for Saavedra’s dream sequence is, however, provided by Juan de Mena’s La Coronación (1438) – a poem of 51 stanzas dedicated to Íñigo López de Mendoza, marqués de Santillana –, which follows the same structural plan as Saavedra’s. In this poem, Juan de Mena recounts a dream in which the poet descends into Hell where he witnesses historical and mythological figures being punished for their vices. When he wakes up, he finds himself on the meadow of Parnassus, surrounded by figures who have earned a place on the mountain for their virtues; one of whom is the much-praised Marqués de Santillana who is presented with a laurelled crown of ‘sabiduría’ and the four cardinal virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance.

As well as the structural and narratological similarities between the two poems, Saavedra’s dream sequence also echoes the didactic intent of La Coronación. Indeed, through the contrasting visions of Hell and Mount Parnassus both poems use ekphrasis as a means of praising their subjects while also providing a critique of society’s vices. Like Juan de Mena’s poem, Saavedra’s dream sequence is allegorical in nature, serving as a political commentary of sixteenth-century New Spain. Understood this way, the poet’s descent into Hell functions as a moral condemnation of the sins that plagued contemporary Mexican society. It is certainly not incidental that in the canto immediately following Saavedra’s katabasis, the poet embarks on a recrimination against the corruption and abuses of the administration of the colonial order. Painting a picture of a society plagued by cruelty, avarice, and opportunism, overrun with corrupt officials and despots, Saavedra provides Philip III with a denunciation of the widespread corruption infiltrating viceregal society in the king’s indefinite absence from the colony. Warning of the dangers of ‘royal absenteeism’, Saavedra alerts the king’s attention to the abuses of power by members of authority sent from Spain who go unrestrained and unchecked in a society that, ‘ausente de su rey tan soberano, […] no puede jamás ser bien regido, | faltando vos, Señor, y es caso llano, | que en tan larga distancia en vuestra ausencia | no tienen los agravios resistencia’ (XV. 1). Indeed, the Spanish administrators sent to Mexico are as much the antagonists of Saavedra’s poem as the Indians, portrayed as vice-ridden individuals with sinister intentions. Engaging in what Stephanie Merrim refers to as ‘the heart of traditional creole discourse per se, creole complaint of Spanish abuses’, the poet alludes on several occasions to the corrupt and unrestrained power of viceroys who, governing

247 It is important to acknowledge that there has been much critical discussion concerning Juan de Mena’s debt to Dante. See Florence Street, ‘The Allegory of Fortune and the Imitation of Dante in the Laberinto and Coronación of Juan de Mena’, Hispanic Review, 23.1 (1955), 1-11 (p. 6).

248 For a more detailed summary of the poem see Diane Chaffee, ‘Ekphrasis in Juan de Mena and the Marqués de Santillana’, Romance Philology, 35.4 (1982), 609-16 (pp. 611-12).

249 For more on the term ‘royal absenteeism’ see Elliott, Spain, Europe, and the Wider World, p. 181.
New Spain in place of the distant monarch, had almost absolute authority in the colonial order and, as such, ruled as unrestrained despot, dabbling in illegal trade, bribery, favouritism, clientelism, and the selling of public offices and bureaucratic services to whoever was prepared to pay for them; ordinarily their friends and family and almost always peninsular Spaniards. This is a source of bitter complaint for Saavedra who, no doubt reflecting on his own personal situation of dispossession, gripes ‘que no es tan poco justo limitarlo | a quien qualquier vir[í]ey quisiere darlo’ (XV. 15).

Considered in line with the poet’s pleas to his king to rectify the injustices experienced by the creoles, the dream episode of canto XIV thus serves to reinforce Philip III’s role as the intended interlocutor of Saavedra’s epic; drawing his dedicatee’s attention to the hellish vices of colonial society, while establishing his duty as the creoles’ saviour and protector. Indeed, while the encomium of Philip II during his coronation on Mount Parnassus can most certainly be read, like the mapamundi of canto IX, as a propagandistic expression of loyalty and allegiance to the Crown driven by a genuine desire to sing the deeds of the recently deceased emperor, the poet is also subtly imploring Philip III to exercise the same prudence, justice, and clemency that his father had possessed. Using Philip II as a paradigm of emulation for his heir to follow, Saavedra uses the coronation episode as a means of establishing the ideal standards of kingship, spurring the newly crowned monarch, Philip III, to live up to the poet’s high expectations; particularly regarding his dutiful obligation as their king to ameliorate the worsening conditions experienced by creoles in the distant colony.

**Saavedra: The Pilgrim-Poet**

While Jacques Lafaye has denied the existence of a ‘literatura americana’ in the sixteenth century, concluding instead that ‘más propiamente se ha de hablar de una aportación a la literatura española’, *El peregrino indiano* demonstrates that this is most certainly not the case, serving as a testament to the emergence of a uniquely creole epic discourse in which traditional epic tropes become bound up with the political and cultural implications of an unmistakably American context. Indeed, despite adhering to the formal and aesthetic traditions of the Renaissance epic and incorporating contemporary European trends into its narrative, Saavedra’s epic absorbs native Mexican elements and acquires its own unique

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tone, subverting European models even in its attempts to imitate them.\textsuperscript{252} \textit{El peregrino indiano} can thus be understood as the artistic result of the encounter between the Old and the New Worlds; a literary production that carefully negotiates between the poet’s own divided loyalties. Indeed, Saavedra’s epic reveals a dual perspective that manifests itself in an oscillating metropolitan-colonial dialect of continuity and rupture. On the one hand, the poet establishes a definitive link between his epic and the imperial ideologies and power structures of Spain in his efforts to be officially recognised and compensated by his king. Certainly, the fact that \textit{El peregrino indiano} was published in Madrid should not be overlooked, illustrating, along with the copious amounts of imperial praise and propaganda in the poem, the means through which Saavedra sought to accommodate himself within the metropolis’ bureaucratic system. Clearly apparent alongside the poet’s discourse of allegiance to the Spanish Crown is, on the other hand, his fidelity to the Mexican patria – its cultural paradigms, peoples, and traditions –, to which he is bound psychologically as much as geographically. In shifting between these two polarities, Saavedra displays a fractured sense of self; a position that is encapsulated in the very title of the work.

Identifying the ‘peregrino’ of Saavedra’s epic has divided opinion among scholars. Thinking about the term in its religious sense, there is evidence to reasonably suggest that the pilgrim of Saavedra’s poem is Hernán Cortés, referred to by the poet as ‘David segundo’ (II. 2); a crusading prophet in search of promised lands. Certainly, Cortés is represented as a devout figure in \textit{El peregrino indiano}, often seen giving evangelical speeches to the natives.\textsuperscript{253} I, however, support José Antonio Mazzotti’s ‘resemantización’ of the term, choosing to consider its wider implications in relation to questions of identity formation and creole liminality.\textsuperscript{254} Certainly, the concept of \textit{peregrinaje} is polysemic. The early modern definition provided by Sebastián de Covarrubias defines ‘peregrino’ as those who ‘andar en romería, o fuera de su tierra’; a definition that continues to be upheld by the Real Academia Española: ‘dicho de una persona que anda por tierras extrañas’.\textsuperscript{255} The interpretation of ‘peregrino’ as ‘stranger’ or ‘wanderer’ convincingly encapsulates the political and cultural complexities of Saavedra’s creole experience. Writing from a point of symbolic exile and exclusion, the poet identifies on several occasions in his poem as being an outsider – ‘arrinconado’ (XV. 8) –, placing himself among the ‘bastardos hijos’ (XV. 11) of the creole community who fail to identify as either

\textsuperscript{252} On the creole subversion of European models see Kathleen Ross, \textit{The Baroque Narrative of Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora: A New World Paradise} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 5.

\textsuperscript{253} See, for example: I. 50-56; VI. 72; X. 24-25; and XII. 9-14.

\textsuperscript{254} José Antonio Mazzotti, ‘Resentimiento criollo y nación étnica: el papel de la épica novohispana’, in \textit{Agencias criollas: la ambigüedad ‘colonial’ en las letras hispanoamericanas}, pp. 143-60 (p. 150).

\textsuperscript{255} Sebastián Covarrubias y Orozco, \textit{Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española} (Madrid: Luis Sánchez, 1611), p. 585. See also ‘Peregrino’, \textit{Diccionario de la lengua española} (Real Academia Española, 2021).
Spaniards or Americans, but rather, somewhere in between. In this way, the term ‘peregrino’ captures the liminal experience of the poet as a Spanish American, tied up with notions of estrangement, exclusion, and hybridity; symptoms of what Benedict Anderson terms the ‘fatality of trans-Atlantic birth’. In his anthropological study on pilgrimage as liminal experience, Victor Turner claims that ‘liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between’, comprised of ‘ambiguous and indeterminate attributes’ that are sparked by ‘culturally defined life-crises’. The result is what has varilying been referred to as a ‘subject-in-process’ or ‘an identity in the making’ that oscillates between diverse and, often, contradictory perspectives and loyalties. Conscious of his own nomadic status, Saavedra seems to confirm this interpretation in a revealing stanza of his epic, in which he compares himself and his fellow creoles to ‘los que en pueblos no sabidos, | andan acá y allá descarriados, | y el madero arrojado es su consuelo, | y en él albergan su desdicha y duelo’ (XV.11). Seeking emotional refuge on board the ship that carries him across the Atlantic, it is certainly fitting that Saavedra claims to have written his epic ‘en setenta días de navegación con balanças de nao’ onboard the galleon bound to the ports of Spain, encapsulating once again the transatlantic agenda of his work. For these reasons, it can be deduced that Saavedra himself is the pilgrim of his poem, through which he embarks on an epic search of identity to heal the ontological insecurities of his ‘ánimo ofuscado’ (I.2). Considered this way, it is plausible to propose that Saavedra is the hero of his own epic, with his transcultural truths and expressions of an emerging creole consciousness overpowering a discourse of conquest traditionally governed by the figure of Cortés. Certainly, unlike Lobo Lasso, Saavedra chooses not to prioritise Cortés in his epic, instead wielding his pen to propagate his own merits and claims to reward. In doing so, the once supreme hero of Cortés becomes a semi-peripheral figure in El peregrino indiano, summoned at the poet’s whim. The marginalisation of Cortés from the narrative of conquest would not last long, however, as the conquistador was to return to the fore once again with the dawn of the seventeenth century, ready to reclaim his place as the conquest’s leading hero.

256 For more on this idea see José Antonio Mazzotti, ‘Introducción’, in Agencias criollas: la ambigüedad ‘colonial’ en las letras hispanoamericanas, pp. 7-35 (pp. 14-15).
259 Higgins, p. 5; and Merrim, The Spectacular City, Mexico, and Colonial Hispanic Literary Culture, p. 5.
260 Saavedra Guzmán, El peregrino indiano, p. 63.
CHAPTER 3

‘Venerarle podemos por divino’ (fol. 155v): Hernán Cortés and the Jesuit Spanish Epic

As the era of conquest drew to a close, the literary presence of Hernán Cortés most certainly did not, as seventeenth-century writers continued to record his deeds in a plethora of ballads, sonnets, histories, and plays, as well as a number of neo-Latin and vernacular epics.\(^{261}\) Particularly significant among this corpus of Cortés-inspired works are the contributions of members of the Society of Jesus.\(^{262}\) Perhaps not surprising given the religious undertones often associated with Spain’s conquest of Mexico, a number of Jesuits turned to the figure of Cortés as inspiration for their writings, with notable examples including the likes of Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora in his *Piedad heroica de Don Fernando Cortés* (c. 1691-1693), as well as established playwrights from across Europe.\(^{263}\) In addition to theatre, a prominent genre featured among Jesuit production on the conquest was the epic; a species of poetry that had proven to be extremely popular among members of the Society.\(^{264}\) In what can be considered as a subgenre of Jesuit New World epics, poems dedicated to the figure of Cortés included Pedro Paradina’s *Cortesias* and Agustín Pablo Pérez de Castro’s *Cortesiadis, sive poem epicum de Ferdinando Cortesio Mexicanorum debellatore*; both of which were written in Latin.\(^{265}\) The theme was nevertheless also addressed by poets writing in the vernacular, namely the Spanish Jesuit Juan Cortés Osorio in an unpublished epic composed in the seventeenth century; *Las Cortesiadas*.

**Juan Cortés Osorio: Poet, Preacher, Patriot**

Though a prolific member of the Society of Jesus and a prominent intellectual of seventeenth-century Spain who authored a number of works in his lifetime, both Juan Cortés Osorio and his epic have nevertheless been neglected in critical literature and remain little known within the realm of


\(^{262}\) Jesuit literary contributions on the conquest of Mexico and the figure of Cortés have been explored by Dietrich Briesemeister who focusses specifically on epic production in ‘Un nuevo poema épico neolatino sobre Hernán Cortés: la *Cortesias del jesuita Pedro Paradinas*, Studia Philologica Valentina, 15.12 (2013), 25-46.

\(^{263}\) Reprecht Wimmer has investigated the figure of Cortés in Jesuit theatre focussing, above all, on works produced in the south of Germany in ‘Hernán Cortés en el teatro jesuitico de los países de habla alemana’, in *Desde los confines de los imperios ibéricos: los jesuitas de habla alemana en las misiones americanas*, ed. Karl Kohut and María C. Torales Pacheco (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt A.M.: Vervuert, 2007), pp. 697-712.

\(^{264}\) On the Jesuits’ engagement with the epic genre see Briesemeister, pp. 31-32.

\(^{265}\) For more information on these poems including possible dates of composition see Briesemeister's study.
This is largely due to the near void of biographical information about his life, with studies by scholars such as Eugenio de Uriarte and Carlos Sommervogel providing only the most basic components about the author. Born in Sanabria (Zamora) on 8 February 1623, Osorio entered the Society of Jesus in Madrid, 1637, at fourteen years of age. Opting for a career in teaching rather than missionary work, Osorio held positions as professor of theology and philosophy in the Society’s colleges of Oropesa, Toledo, Murcia, and Alcalá, as well as that of catedrático de prima in Estudios reales at the Colegio Imperial de Madrid. Alongside his profession as an educator and scholar, Osorio also assumed a number of administrative duties within the Society, including his roles as book censor and visitor of libraries, while also undertaking sermonic activities as a preacher, having penned and performed sermons across Spain; one of which survives in printed edition. In addition to sermonic

266 In the two aprobaciones of Osorio’s work Constancia de la fee, y aliento de la nobleza (1684), Alonso Carrillo and Antonio de Ron both describe the author as an esteemed political thinker and writer, as well as an established member of the Society of Jesus. Juan Cortés Osorio, Constancia de la fee, y aliento de la nobleza (Madrid: Antonio Román, 1684). Page numbers are not available for the aprobaciones. All subsequent quotations will be cited using page number, where available.

267 See Eugenio de Uriarte and M. Lecina, Biblioteca de escritores de la Compañía de Jesús pertenecientes a la antigua Asistencia de España (Madrid: Imprenta de la Viuda de López de Horno, 1930), pp. 299-303; and information collated in the Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus, ed. Augustin de Backer, Aloys de Backer, and Carlos Sommervogel (Brussels: Schepens, 1890), p. 1397.

268 Eugenio de Uriarte and M. Lecina, p. 1397. According to this study, Osorio died in Madrid on 23 July 1688. Due to a lack of documentary evidence, I have been unable to establish any familial connections between Osorio and Hernán Cortés. In terms of parentage, preliminary findings indicate a marriage between Antonia Cortés y García de Villalpando and Luis Osorio de Reinoso who are described as having had children (‘con sucesión’), although research remains tentative and inconclusive. See Javier Gómez de Olea y Bustindia and Pedro Moreno Meyerhoff, ‘Los Señores y Marqueses de Fuentehoyuelo’, Anales de la Real Academia Matritense de Heráldica y Genealogía, 6, 2000, 87-154 (p. 98); and Baltasar Cuartero y Huerta and Antonio de Vargas-Zúñiga y Montero de Espinosa, Índice de la colección de Don Luis de Salazar y Castro, 49 vols (Madrid: Maestre, 1956), xiv, p. 129.

269 On Osorio’s academic posts see Mercedes Etreros, ‘Introducción’, in Invectiva política contra D. Juan José de Austria, by Juan Cortés Osorio, ed. Mercedes Etreros (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1984), pp. 11-78 (pp. 25-26); and José López de Toro, ‘Un poema inédito sobre Hernán Cortés, Las Cortesiadas’, Revista de Indias, 1948, 199-228 (p. 205). It must be noted that, due to lack of archival evidence, I have not been able to ascertain whether Osorio carried out any missionary work throughout his life.

270 Osorio censored various texts for publication, including that of fellow Jesuit and epic poet Hernando Domínguez Camargo for whom he wrote the aprobación of San Ignacio de Loyola poema heroico (1666). For more on Osorio’s administrative duties see Etreros, pp. 25-26. Osorio’s Sermón III de S. Bruno (1666) features part of a compilation of sermons entitled Laurea complutense. Sermones varios a singulares asuntos. Escritos por insignes maestros de la oratoria christiana published in Alcalá in 1666.
literature, Osorio engaged with an eclectic range of literary genres and subject matters, both secular and religious, including apologies, satires, political philosophies, and, of course, epic poetry.\textsuperscript{271}

Much like the author himself, little is known about the circumstances surrounding when, how, or why Osorio’s epic, \textit{Las Cortesiadas}, was written. With exception to the brief studies by José López de Toro and Elizabeth Davis, the poem continues to receive limited attention from scholars and has previously been held in low esteem regarding its poetic content and quality.\textsuperscript{272} Currently held at the Biblioteca Nacional de España (Mss/3887 v.4), the unedited and unpublished poem forms part of a volume of \textit{Poesías castellanas varias} that features a range of Spanish and Italian authors.\textsuperscript{273} Comprised of five books –533 octaves, 91 folios–, the poem begins on fol. 130\textsuperscript{r} \textit{in medias res}, midway through the Spaniards’ battle with the Tlaxcalans, and finishes on fol. 229\textsuperscript{v} following the meeting between Cortés and Moctezuma. The lack of information on the title page of the manuscript makes dating the text problematic. This said, however, fol. 129\textsuperscript{v} does contain an octave –with lines crossed out and corrected– that appears to be dedicated to Philip IV, providing us with a chronological clue as to the possible date of the poem’s composition.\textsuperscript{274} The octave reads as follows:

\begin{quote}
Oye al Barón Philipo que a tus plantas
leal se rinde y juntamente un orbe
que yace entre los golphos donde tantas
vidas sediento el occéano sorbe:
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{271} Osorio’s works include: \textit{Memorial apologético al excelentísimo señor conde de Villaumbrosa} (1676), which also goes by the name of \textit{Reparos historiales apolojéticos dirigidos al excelentísimo señor conde de Villaumbrosa} (1677); \textit{Conferencia verdadera} (1677); \textit{Desvergüenzas de la plaza} (1678); \textit{Fantasia política} (c. 1678-1679); \textit{Academia política} (c. 1679); \textit{Constancia de la fe y aliento de la nobleza} (1684); \textit{Visión de visiones} (1688); \textit{Respuesta monopántica dirigida a Don Frisfris de la Borra, nuevamente confirmado con el nombre de Fiera-Bras, Judain} (date unknown). Also listed among his writings are several letters dated 1685, 1686, 1687 and 1688, sent to the Duke of Gandía informing him of recent events taking place within Madrid and across the Spanish empire more broadly. As Etreros points out, it is possible that some works attributed to Osorio, namely \textit{Visión de visiones}, may not, in reality, have been authored by him, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{272} López de Toro, for example, states that ‘por fortuna para el padre Cortés su poema ha permanecido hasta ahora en la oscuridad’, p. 208. See the analysis of the poem by Elizabeth B. Davis in ‘La épica novohispana y la ideología imperial’, in \textit{Historia de la literatura mexicana: desde sus orígenes hasta nuestros días}, ed. Beatriz Garza Cuaron, Georges Baudot, and Raquel Chang-Rodríguez (México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1996), pp. 129-52 (pp. 147-50).

\textsuperscript{273} From my observations, the writing style of the scribe is not consistent throughout the entirety of the \textit{Poesías}, suggesting that there were, in all likelihood, several scribes involved in the compilation of the volume.

\textsuperscript{274} On the previous folio, fol. 129\textsuperscript{v}, there is a heading that has been crossed out –‘Diálogo de la prudencia en la elección. Personas que hablan: Achiles, Héctor, Paris, y Zoilo’–, which may initially have intended to be another dedicatory dialogue addressing ‘mi Señora Doña Josepha de la Caclntera’.
Oye una de las causas porque espantas
con armas y poder, pues sin que estorbe
soberbio foso el piélago profundo
assaltos dieron más allá del mundo. (fol. 129v)

It can be deduced that this dedicatory octave, written in the present tense, was composed when Philip IV was still alive; that is, before 17 September 1665. Based on this assumption, we can tentatively estimate that the poem was written in or before this date, however no solid evidence exists to support this.

No less ambiguous are the possible reasons behind the poem never being published. There are, of course, multiple reasons that might account for this, relating as much to practical issues, such as the high cost of printing, to the changing tastes of seventeenth-century Spanish readership. For López de Toro, the most likely reason why Las Cortesiadas was never published was due to its probable incompleteness. Referring to Osorio’s epic as ‘una cosa incompleta’ that ‘más bien parece un proyecto o embrión que una obra totalmente acabada’, López de Toro not only notes the lack of indicative markers in the manuscript such as ‘libro I’ or ‘fin de poema’, but also, rather subjectively, claims that ‘cinco cantos para encerrar en ellos la epopeya de Cortés, son demasiado pocos’.

275 Juan Cortés Osorio, ‘Las Cortesiadas’, in Poesias castellanas varias, c. 1665, 4 (Biblioteca Nacional de España, MSS/3887), fol. 130r-fol. 229v. Quotations from the poem will be cited using folio number. Himself a renowned lover of the arts, Philip IV had earned the reputation of being an excellent patron. He, along with his wife Queen Mariana of Austria, had also served as patrons of the Colegio Imperial de Madrid’s Estudios reales. See John H. Elliott, Imperial Spain 1469-1716 (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 319; and David de la Croix and Soraya Karioun, ‘Scholars and Literati at the Imperial College of Madrid (1560-1767)’, Repertorium Eruditorum Totius Europae, 4 (2021), 19-25 (p. 19).


277 Intriguingly, Virginia Cox has noted that there were numerous instances of unfinished epics on New World themes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See Virginia Cox, ‘An Unknown Early Modern New World Epic: Girolamo Vecchietti’s Delle prodezze di Ferrante Cortese (1587–88)’, Renaissance Quarterly, 71.4 (2018), 1351-90 (p. 1352).

278 López de Toro, p. 207. See also pp. 204-7.
it well may be the case that Osorio decided to move on to another project midway through writing his epic – a conceivable possibility given his growing interest in satire –, the brevity of his epic is not, however, reason enough to assume its incompleteness. Indeed, an overview of Spanish epics written and published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reveals that there were numerous works of the same length and even shorter dealing with equally lofty themes, with examples including Jerónimo de Urrea’s *Victorioso Carlos Quinto* (1579, five cantos), Miguel Giner’s *Sitio y toma de Amberes* (1587, six cantos), Melchor Xufre del Águila’s *Compendio historial del descubrimiento, conquista, y guerra del reino de Chile* (1631, three cantos), as well as those of a religious theme such as Sánchez Galindo’s *Primera y segunda parte de la Christi Victoria* (1576, two cantos). Moreover, an analysis of the poem’s structural composition gives reasons to believe that Osorio had every intention of limiting his epic to five cantos. By concluding his epic with the meeting between Cortés and Moctezuma, the poet is not only able to tactically avoid controversial events that he may not have wished to draw attention to – the death of Moctezuma; the unfortunate series of incidents leading up to the Noche Triste; the execution of Cuauhtémoc –, but also redirects the readers’ focus from the physical conquest of Mexico towards its spiritual conquest; specifically the ardent act of evangelisation that takes place in the final book of Osorio’s epic, book five, which becomes the climax of the poem. Certainly, the central focus of Osorio’s epic is not the final fall of Tenochtitlan, which is mentioned only briefly in one of the poem’s prophetic episodes, but the ongoing process of religious conversion; clearly indicating the extent to which *Las Cortesiadas* is indebted to the author’s spiritual and educational formation as a Jesuit, as well as the profound influence of religious epics produced in this period.

Certainly, epic poems of a religious nature were not lacking in the seventeenth century. The spiritual climate of post-Tridentine Spain had given rise to a copious amount of devotional literature, while Tasso’s Christianisation of the epic genre further stimulated poets in their choice of Christian themes. Though not, by any means, a sacred poem, Osorio’s epic is nevertheless comprised of several religious and biblical elements as the poet strongly develops the spirituality of both conquest and conqueror; demonstrating how a Cortesian epic could serve devotional purposes as much as political purposes. This said, the poet was writing in a period when religion was inseparable from national policy, with Jesuits like Osorio not only serving as defenders of the faith, but also as disseminators of imperial ideology.

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280 It is thought that more than eighty-five religious epics were published in Spain between 1552-1694. See Davis, *Myth and Identity*, p. 129. For more on the production of the Christian epic in Spain see Pierce, *La poesía épica*, pp. 220-21.

281 For more on the Jesuits’ place within the imperial framework of Habsburg Spain see Peggy K. Liss, ‘Jesuit Contributions to the Ideology of Spanish Empire in Mexico’, *The Americas*, 29.4 (1973), 449-70.
Indeed, Osorio’s religious fervour is equally matched by his patriotism. Referred to in the Visión de visiones (1688) as ‘el acérrimo Padre de la Patria’, Osorio displays an unwavering loyalty to Spain and its monarchy in his writings.\(^{282}\) This most often takes the form of political advice, commentary, and reflection; an aspect of his oeuvre that is overlooked by scholars and yet provides a crucial insight into the author’s ideological commitments. On several occasions in his writings, Osorio expresses his desire to provide a service to the state —‘a emplearme en servicio de la Patria’—, emphasising the utility of his works for the benefit of his country.\(^{283}\) This is not solely achieved through his propagation of an imperial ideology, but most often through his symbolic appropriation of the role of arbitrista; those who, according to John Elliott, ‘set themselves to analyse the ills of an ailing society (…). It was under the influence of the arbitristas that early seventeenth-century Castile surrendered itself to an orgy of national introspection’.\(^{284}\) Debates regarding whether Spain was or was not in a state of decline in the seventeenth century have divided contemporary historians.\(^{285}\) This said, what cannot be denied is Osorio’s own conception of seventeenth-century Spain as a period of political and economic decline; a feeling of disillusion that is manifested on several occasions in his works.

Compared in his own age to Juvenal, Osorio penned a number of satirical dialogues during his literary career, through which he addresses a range of political, economic, social, and religious matters pertaining to seventeenth-century Spain.\(^{286}\) These works reflect a strong sense of disillusion regarding the degradation of Spain’s hegemonic power and the relentless wave of threats and devastation that the country endured during the reigns of Philip IV and Carlos II.\(^{287}\) Certainly, the particular historical circumstances of economic decline, territorial loss, social conflict, war, famine, and disease that Spain


\(^{283}\) Osorio, ‘Prólogo’, in Constancia de la fee, page number not available. This is also noted by the author of the second aprobación of Osorio’s Constancia de la fee, who refers to the work as ‘utilísimo libro’, noting the author’s ‘continuos estudios, y útiles trabajos en todas letras sacras, y eruditas en beneficio de la causa pública’, page number not available.

\(^{284}\) Elliott, Imperial Spain, p. 300.

\(^{285}\) For more on the debated decline of Spain see Helen Rawlings, The Debate on the Decline of Spain (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Henry Kamen, Imagining Spain: Historical Myth and National Identity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, Crisis y decadencia de la España de los Austrias (Barcelona: Ariel, 1984).

\(^{286}\) According to the Conde de la Viñaza, ‘pasaba por el Juvenal de su tiempo, pues así se le llama en muchos papeles y documentos’, as quoted in Eteres, p. 28. For more information on Osorio’s satirical works see Eteres, 11-78; and Carlos Gómez-Centurión Jiménez, ‘La sátira política durante el reinado de Carlos II’, Cuadernos de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea, 4, 1983, 11-33 (pp. 19-21).

\(^{287}\) Particularly the Conferencia verdadera (1677), Desvergüenzas de la plaza (1678), and Fantasía política (c. 1678-1679).
faced in the seventeenth century –referred to by Osorio as ‘tan mal siglo’– ush­ered a mentality of fatalism among intellectuals like Osorio who had, on a personal level, felt the full brunt of Spain’s national crisis:

El cielo se nos muestra huraño, los tiempos sin tiempo, los elementos enemigos, y la tierra, sobre todos, cruelmente madrastra. Nuestros mantenimientos se han subido a las nubes porque las nubes no quieren bajar a nuestros mantenimientos. Los astros influyen contagios, el aire respira volcanes, al mar se le ha olvidado aquello de estar en leche, enojado de que ya no le surcan ni nuestras galeras ni nuestros navíos, ni nuestras flotas ni nuestros galeones. Los campos agostados sin que veamos en ellos un agosto, los pueblos desolados y desollados, la campana desierta, la guerra olvidada, la paz ignominiosa, nuestros pocos soldados (de quienes ya se va dando cabo) desnudos y a la sopa de los conventos, nuestros tesoros más escondidos de lo que estuvieron antes del descubrimiento del Nuevo Mundo, (...) los remedios se nos han convertido en dolencias, los médicos nos despulsan y nos desangran, los enemigos nos jeringan nuestra honra por tierra, y toda nuestra tierra sin honra.

Demonstrating a comprehensive awareness of the complexities of Spain’s dilemma in this period, the issues mentioned by Osorio in this excerpt provide the foundations of what was to be more fully explored in the author’s subsequent work, Constancia de la fe. Published in 1684, a period that is now considered by historians such as Elliott to be that of ‘Castile’s total administrative and economic collapse’, the Constancia de la fe is dedicated to the kingdoms of Castile and León, as the author sets about analysing ‘las causas de su perdición, y ruina’. Lamenting ‘los menoscabos de su monarquía, [y] la declinación de su imperio’, under which ‘no ha padecido jamás nuestra nación mayores calamidades ni mayores ignominias’, the author embarks on a rigorous examination of the multiple factors that have, in his opinion, contributed to Spain’s downfall.

290 Osorio, Invectiva política, pp. 144-45.
291 Elliott, Imperial Spain, p. 366. See Alonso Carrillo’s aprobación of the Constancia de la fe, page number not available.
292 Osorio, Constancia de la fe, p. 5; Osorio, Invectiva política, p. 91. In many ways, the Constancia de la fe, particularly the first book, closely resembles the political philosophies and reasons of state that were circulating in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Spain. Indeed, in the margin of the work, Osorio cites political
Of primary importance, Osorio claims, is the decline in Spain’s international standing through the continual loss of its territories. In addition to the outbreak of war with France in 1635—a longstanding enemy whose empire was quickly growing—, Osorio notes that Spain also faced a number of revolts from the territories it held across Europe, with the disastrous decade of the 1640s witnessing the revolts of Sicily and Naples, as well as those of Catalonia and Portugal, leading to the liberation of the latter in 1640; a devastating loss that Osorio describes in the following terms: ‘el haber perdido España la corona de Portugal fue tanto mayor pérdida que la de Troya y Cartago, quanto fuera más formidable destrozo cortarle a Hércules un brazo que dar la muerte a un Pigmeo’.293 Matters were made worse by the signing of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, through which the Spanish monarchy was forced to recognise the independence of the Provincias Unidas following the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). Beyond Europe, indigenous revolts against the Spanish colonial governments also took place in the Philippines and New Mexico, contributing to a growing sense of consternation among Spaniards at the realisation that the empire was gradually crumbling away.294 As a result of these territorial losses, Osorio laments how Spain’s prestige was severely damaged as it not only became subject to ridicule from its European enemies—‘los que nos invidiaban, trocaron su invidia en mofa’—, but also hatred and scorn: ‘nació el odio, inseparable compañero de los imperios grandes’, which instigated ‘una universal conspiración a nuestra ruina’; later referred to as the Black Legend.295 In their ‘ambición de dominar, no solamente en Europa, sino en toda la redondez de la tierra, y discurriendo por los sucesos pasados, y por las acciones de algunos particulares’, Spain’s enemies, Osorio claims, ‘infamaron la Nación Española de soberbia, injusta, avarienta, y cruel’.296 In doing so:

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293 Osorio, Constancia de la fee, p. 10. In the ‘Academia política’, Osorio laments that ‘ahora lloran los castellanos y cantan los portugueses’. Osorio, Invectiva política, p. 201. For more on Spain’s defeats during this period see Elliott, Imperial Spain, pp. 341-60.


295 Osorio, Constancia de la fee, pp. 10, 119. An example of the ridicule Spain faced can be found in a poem entitled El gacetista español desesperado by Mothe Le Vayer (writing under the pseudonym Fabricio Campolini): ‘Este miserable gacetista | rompe y rasga gacetas | que ya no contan sus derrotas | y entrega su ocupación al demonio. | Sabe perfectamente que ha sido vencido | ha vuelto la espalda a su patria | y sólo muestra el culo.’ As quoted in Ricardo García Cárce, La leyenda negra: historia y opinión (Madrid: Alianza, 1998), p. 58.

296 Osorio, Constancia de la fee, p. 121.
No se contentaron con divulgar por todas las naciones manifiestos, y relaciones tan ajenas de verdad, como llenas de malicia, para malquistar con todos a los españoles, sino que para comprobar sus calumnias tradujeron, y estamparon en todas lenguas el memorial del señor Obispo de Chiapa. 297

Certainly, Las Casas’ works, and in particular his Brevisima relación, were widely disseminated across Europe in the seventeenth century, having been reprinted and translated into various languages including English, French, Dutch, and German. 298 The circulation of these translations, and the accusations that they contained, led to the proliferation of hispanofobia which was henceforth projected in foreign historiography, seeking not only to criticize Spain’s actions in the Americas, but to target the questionable morality of its conduct throughout the empire. 299

This political degeneration was accompanied by Spain’s financial decline. The sustained conflicts in France, the Low Countries, Catalonia, Naples, Sicily, as well as territories across the Atlantic and the Pacific, had a devastating economic impact, adding to the accumulation of debts that Spain had already acquired during its rigorous campaign of imperial expansion; a reality that would be reflected in the multiple bankruptcies of 1596, 1607, 1627, 1647, and 1656. 300 The introduction of new taxes such as the millones, coupled with the high cost of living, further added to economic suffering in Spain, resulting in an impoverished population that was, according to Osorio, forced to sustain ‘el peso enorme de los tributos’ in an unjust system that endorses ‘la impiedad de gravar a los pobres, eximiendo a los poderosos’. 301 Changing fiscal circumstances in the Americas also had a decisive impact on the Spanish economy, with New Spain’s so-called ‘century of depression’; the New World’s diminishing reliance on Spanish imports; the spread of piracy; and the growing interests and successes of Dutch and English traders, resulting in a dramatic reduction of money coming in from Spain’s American possessions. 302 Acknowledging the variety of ways in which ‘la plata de las Indias ha hecho muchos daños’ to the state, Osorio also deplores how Spaniards have been hoodwinked by the prospect of gold,

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297 Osorio, Constancia de la fe, p. 121.
298 See García Cárcel, p. 263.
299 Two important studies include García Cárcel, La leyenda negra; and María Elvira Roca Barea, Imperiofobia y leyenda negra: Roma, Rusia, Estados Unidos y el Imperio Español (Madrid: Siruela, 2016).
300 See Elliott, Imperial Spain, p. 285; and Hendrickson, p. 181.
301 Osorio, Constancia de la fe, p. 16. Concurring with Osorio, Elliott claims that ‘it was the poor who suffered’ from the introduction of said taxes. Elliott, Imperial Spain, p. 286.
302 Woodrow Borah, New Spain’s Century of Depression (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951). For more on the effects of trade in the American colonies on Spain’s economy see Elliott, Imperial Spain, pp. 292-93, 322, 361, 367.
silver, and other precious metals from the Americas, rather than focussing on what was sustaining the country—wheat—, claiming that:

los labradores se desdeñaron del afán laborioso de las tierras, pareciéndoles indignamente empleado en coger granos de trigo, cuando otros en las Indias recogían granos de oro: con que, cesando la labor de los campos, se agotaron las verdaderas minas con que estuvieron prósperos estos Reinos y pudieron por tantos siglos alimentar ejércitos poderosos. (...) Los campos son perpetuos y alcanzan a todos, las minas se agotan y a pocos hacen felices.\footnote{Osorio, \textit{Constancia de la fee}, pp. 95-96. Diego de Saavedra Fajardo, who Osorio cites in the margins of the \textit{Constancia de la fee} (pp. 21, 109), claims something similar in his \textit{Idea de un príncipe político cristiano}: ‘falta la cultura de los campos, el ejercicio de las artes mecánicas, el trato y comercio, a que no se aplica esta nación, cuyo espíritu altivo y glorioso, aún en la gente plebeya, no se quita con el estado que le señaló la Naturaleza, y aspira a los grados de nobleza, desestimando aquellas ocupaciones que son opuestas a ella’. Diego de Saavedra Fajardo, \textit{Idea de un príncipe político cristiano} (Milan: no publisher, 1642), p. 545.}

The decay of agriculture that Osorio refers to here is, in his opinion, exacerbated by Spain’s growing dependence on foreign imports rather than utilising its own resources—‘y faltando mercaderías de España, fue forzoso valerse de las estranjeras’—; a reality that the author views as equally destructive for the Spanish economy and unemployment.\footnote{Osorio, \textit{Constancia de la fee}, p. 95. This idea is also presented by fellow Jesuit Baltasar Gracián y Morales in \textit{El criticón} (1651, 1653, and 1657), in which Critilo states that Spaniards ‘abrazan todos los extranjeros; pero no estiman los propios’. Baltasar Gracián y Morales, \textit{El criticón} (Madrid: Renacimiento, 1913), p. 242.}

These last two complaints fit into a wider discourse of social critique reiterated throughout the \textit{Constancia de la fee}, in which Osorio blames ‘nuestra comodidad, nuestra pereza, nuestro descuido, nuestra ignorancia, y nuestra presunción’ for many of the problems Spain faces:

No es fácil, que el bien público se consiga, si todos no cooperan. No se puede mudar el todo, si las partes principales rehúsan concurrir al movimiento. Los que viven en el sosiego de la paz, gozando de la quietud, y el regalo de su casa, no quieren moverse, ni que les falte nada de su comodidad, y con todo eso se quejan, de que no se junten poderosos exércitos, y que los soldados no resistan, como si fueran de bronce, a la sed, a la hambre, a la necesidad, al desabrigo, al desvelo, al cansancio, y a los continuos riesgos de la vida, y les acusan de que no venzan al número superior de enemigos.\footnote{Osorio, \textit{Constancia de la fee}, pp. 125, 106.}
For Osorio, society’s idleness has led to immorality, lasciviousness, and ‘la comodidad del descanso’ which have had a detrimental impact on the sustaining of Spain’s empire; economically, militarily, and politically.\footnote{Osorio, \textit{Constancia de la fee}, p. 55.} Indeed, with exception to a few issues regarding policy, Osorio does not blame the monarchy for Spain’s ills, but rather the Spanish nobility which becomes the main source of his resentment in the \textit{Constancia de la fee}.\footnote{This said, however, in the \textit{Visión de visiones}, Osorio –if he is indeed the author of this work– directly addresses Charles II, pleading that he saves Spain from complete loss: ‘vuelva, vuelva a su antiguo esplendor tu corona, tu tesoro abundante, tus ejércitos floridos, restaurado a su grandeza tu reino, pues sabrá su espíritu ardiente y su comprensión sin semejante sacarte de chiste de las naciones y restituirte la soberana, temida y respetada Majestad del rey de España’. See Osorio, \textit{Invectiva política}, p. 275.} Referring to Spain’s nobles as ‘no solamente inútiles, y inhábiles, sino dañosos a la República, como árboles infructíferos que no solo ocupan la tierra, sino que la esterilizan’, Osorio complains that the nobility is not the inspiring force it once was, no longer focussed on honour and fighting for their country, but instead motivated by greed and selfishness: ‘el estrago, que la prosperidad ha causado en no pequeña parte de la nobleza, es aún más lastimoso, porque en parte ha embotado las espadas, y entorpecido los brazos de la República’.\footnote{Osorio echoes the Count-Duke of Olivares’ belief that ‘the Spanish nobility was failing in its duties of leaders’, leading him to sponsor the founding of the Jesuits’ Colegio Imperial in Madrid in 1625 for the sons of nobles, where they could gain an education that would support their development of their duties as nobles. See Elliott, \textit{Imperial Spain}, p. 342.} Condemning the misappropriation of human and economic resources on banal extravagances –‘trajes, joyas, combites, festejos, y otras ostentaciones, más proporcionadas a la vanidad, que al gusto’–, Osorio accuses the nobility of living ‘en tan afeminadas delicias, que si los vieran sus antepasados, los desdendaran como a indignos abortos de su casa, y de su sangre’, as they fail to live up to the memory of their ancestors.\footnote{Osorio, \textit{Constancia de la fee}, pp. 99, 97.} Indeed, Osorio’s scathing critique of the nobility establishes a discourse of comparison between contemporary Spain and its glorious past –‘cortéjese la grandeza, en que hemos visto la monarquía de España, con el estado presente’–, as he contrasts ‘los antiguos héroes de España’ with its ‘tan desconocidos sucesores’.\footnote{Osorio, \textit{Constancia de la fee}, pp. 7, 113, 110.} This is perhaps best displayed through Osorio’s physical description of the two, drawing on motifs of masculinity and femininity, honour and shame, bravery and cowardice. ‘Los antiguos héroes de España’, Osorio tells us:

\footnote{Osorio, \textit{Constancia de la fee}, pp. 94, 98. See also: ‘bien se puede presumir, que si volvieran al mundo se hallaran arrepentidos de haber empleado sus hazañas en honrar a tan desconocidos sucesores, y se corrieran sin duda de la ingratitude, y el desprecio con que se vieran tratados de sus mismos descendientes; y que esto sucediera así, parece cierto, porque reinando en el mundo el engaño lisonjero, el interés cobarde, la gala afeminada, y el regalo delicioso, no puede hallar gracia la integridad robusta de los hombres varoniles.’ Osorio, \textit{Constancia de la fee}, p. 109.}
como estaban acostumbrados a las armas, comúnmente nos los pintan, el vestido de acero, en la siniestra el escudo, y en la diestra, o la espada, o el bastón; el semblante sin pompa de gudejas, y el cabello raso, la barba mal peinada, el color adusto, los ojos severos, y el aspecto tan varonil, que bien se echa de ver, que el espejo de armar, era solo el espejo en que se miraban.\footnote{Osorio, Constancia de la fee, p. 113.}

‘Los modernos’, on the other hand, sport ‘las telas extranjeras, compradas en perjuicio de la patria’:

la cabeza oprimida con el cabello, y con el cuidado de peinarle, y pulirle, con la misma prolijidad, que las mujeres. La tez de el rostro bien curada, y alguna vez bien teñida; la barba curiosamente afeitada; los bigotes amasados con olorosas confecciones, o lo que es peor, raídos, por disimular ser hombres, perfiladas las cejas, halagüeños los ojos; y todo el aspecto de quien desea agradar. (…) La espada sirve de joya, no de armas. Lo demás del vestido consta de tan impertinentes sainetes (…) Úsanse, y se aprecian las medias tan transparentes, que supongan otras, y tan delicadas, que necesiten de continuo artífice. Los zapatos tan justos, y puntiagudos, que con un soplo de el aliento puedan mover de el puesto al que los calza; y en fin toda la compostura es tal, que parece estudiada de la liviandad, y de una femenil afectación.\footnote{Osorio, Constancia de la fee, pp. 113-14.}

Disgusted at the effeminate nature and vain aesthetic focus of seventeenth-century Spanish nobility, Osorio mourns the loss of the masculine, honourable culture of a past age, rueing the moment in which ‘se durmió el valor, fiándose de la fama’ and when ‘una nación tan belicosa llegase a olvidarse tanto de los usos de la guerra’.\footnote{Osorio, Constancia de la fee, pp. 120, 124. This is reinforced in the following comparison: ‘si los primeros eran incontrastables a los trabajos, y a los riesgos, y así de todas las empresas salían bien; los segundos son como las flores delicadas, que no pueden resistir al cierzo, y en cualquiera dificultad pierden las fuerzas, y el brío, y muestran, que no son de aquellos hombres por quien se obró la salud de el Pueblo de Dios.’ Osorio, Constancia de la fee, p. 114.} For Osorio, Spaniards have become complacent and indifferent:

engañando sus ánimos varoniles con el hermoso semblante de la paz, los aficionó a la quietud del descanso, y alagándolos con el esplendor del fausto y agradó de las delicias, les entibió el ardimiento y sossegó aquel impetuoso orgullo de conquistar y vencer.\footnote{Osorio, Constancia de la fee, p. 93.}
The fire in their souls must be reignited, and what better way to do this than delving the archives of Spain’s heroic history to provide readers, specifically the nobility, with exemplary models to emulate. Indeed, through the provision of ‘heroicos ejemplos de religión y valentía’, La constancia de la fé aims to ‘excitar la generosa esperanza de mejoría, y de contrastar la fortuna, repitiendo las hazañas de nuestros antepasados’.\textsuperscript{315} In doing so, Spain’s glorious past could not only serve as a suitable means through which Osorio propagandises his nation and the Spanish empire more widely, but also functions as a pedagogical resource for the betterment of the nobility—‘de cuya educación pende el honor de toda la nación’—through the provision of exemplary models worthy of imitation.\textsuperscript{316} Indeed, Osorio even goes so far as to argue that ‘el olvido de las hazañas de los mayores, [y] la desatención de los exemplares antiguos’ has been a contributing factor in the deterioration of the empire, as he laments how the memory of Spain’s great heroes is gradually fading away.\textsuperscript{317}

Committed to the belief that the restoration of historical memory could be the much-needed saviour of the Spanish nation, Osorio engages with what Thomas Carlyle has termed ‘hero-worship’, through which the reverence and commemoration of past heroic figures, or ‘Great Men’ as Carlyle refers to them, could ensure national survival even in a period wrought with social, economic, and political deterioration.\textsuperscript{318} Certainly, Osorio was not alone in his endeavour for, as Manuel Calderón has argued, in the seventeenth century ‘the regulation of works of fiction had a common objective, both from a political and religious perspective— to ensure that literature was steered towards a regeneration of the Hispanic Monarchy’.\textsuperscript{319} By nostalgically drawing on an age of imperial adventure and conquest in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, and commemorating the heroic figures who had courageously

\textsuperscript{315} Osorio, \textit{Constancia de la fé}, p. 460; ‘Prólogo’, page number not available. Hence the title of the book’s reference to the ‘aliento de la nobleza española’. The work’s approving authority, Don Alonso, confirms this to be the case, describing how Osorio draws upon the history of Spain’s ancestors and the ‘varios resplandores de las virtudes’ in order to ‘conservar la constancia de la fé, y el aliento de que necesitan los nobles naturales españoles, para conservar lo adquirido, y para adquirir lo descubierto’, page number not available.

\textsuperscript{316} ‘Aprobación’ by Alonso Carrillo, in Osorio, \textit{Constancia de la fé}, page number not available.

\textsuperscript{317} Osorio, \textit{Constancia de la fé}, ‘Prólogo’ (page number not available). The \textit{Constancia de la fé} attempts to rectify this situation. According to the author of the \textit{Constancia’s} second aprobación, ‘lo que se miraba casi escondido entre las confusiones del olvido, y entre celajes más distintos, se vea ya con el verdadero color, que da el Sol de la verdadera historia a cuanto iluminan sus hermosos rayos’, page number not available.


fought in the interests of their country and their faith, Osorio seeks to revive Spain’s greatness, not only in the *Constancia de la fe*, but even more manifestly in his epic poem.

**Hernán Cortés: A Jesuit Hero**

While predating the *Constancia* by some twenty years, *Las Cortesiadas* already affirms Osorio’s conviction to provide his readers with a national hero worthy of emulation.\(^{320}\) Writing in the aftermath of a series of devastating territorial losses, rebellions, bankruptcies, and general disillusion, Osorio would certainly have been well aware that Spain was already, in 1665, very much ‘a nation awaiting a saviour’.\(^{321}\) A model of Spanish patriotism, national values, and religiosity, Hernán Cortés would undoubtedly have been an obvious choice for the poet, while his conquest of Mexico could provide the military and theological imperatives needed to restore Spain’s greatness. The poet’s choice of genre is also of extreme ideological importance. Indeed, while López de Toro observes that Osorio ‘se sale de la órbita de sus escritos políticos (…) para adentrarse de lleno en los campos de la épica’, he has failed to account for the political foundations of the epic which had, since Virgil’s politicisation of the genre, served as a form of national and imperial propaganda, particularly in times of political instability.\(^{322}\) This is most certainly something that Osorio was conscious of, claiming that ‘los resplandores de la poesía son como lucidos cometas, que anuncian las calamidades de los Imperios’, giving the example of ‘el reinado de Philipo Quarto’, in which ‘llegó la poesía a tanta altura, que casi ha sido profesión universal de todos los ingeniosos (…) porque la experiencia enseña, que las Repúblicas suelen morir cantando como los Cisnes’.\(^{323}\) Acutely aware of the poet’s duty to restore glory in times of imperial decline and the epic’s ability to project an image of past splendour, Osorio attempts to revive the heroic imperialism of the sixteenth century, establishing a discourse of conquest and victory led by the inspiring *exemplum* of Cortés.\(^{324}\)

The epic’s ability to set examples was most certainly an alluring appeal to Osorio who criticises the genre of theatre for precisely its refusal to do this. While acknowledging theatre’s potential to ‘incitar los ánimos a la virtud’, he regrets that ‘los teatros se han hecho, para no pocos, las ferias de la

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\(^{320}\) Intriguingly, in his epic Osorio, through the character of Cortés, alludes to what would become the defining thesis of his later work: “que en mi noble nación, tan de diamante | nace el valor como la feé constante” (f. 193’).


\(^{322}\) López de Toro, p. 207. For more on the politicization of the epic see Quint, p. 95; and Davis, *Myth and Identity*, pp. 11-17.

\(^{323}\) Osorio, *Constancia de la fe*, pp. 102-3.

\(^{324}\) The propagandistic, national underpinnings of the poem would also account for the poet’s choice to write in the vernacular as opposed to Latin, as other Cortesian epics had been written in. Or as Antonio de Nebrija so aptly put it in the prologue to his *Gramática de la lengua castellana* (1492), ‘que siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio’. Antonio de Nebrija, *Gramática de la lengua castellana* (Barcelona: Linkgua, 2011), p. 11.
culpa y los emporios de la lascivia’ through its representation of ‘amores ilícitos’ and ‘blandas ternezas de los amantes’; a condemnation that concurs with the Catholic Church’s general disdain of texts lacking a moralising purpose.\(^3^{25}\) Given the poet’s conviction that literature should have a didactic function, epic must surely have appealed to him as a superior genre, with its high style and honourable subject matter providing a more suitable medium to inspire men to virtuous action. Certainly, the use of exemplary models – particularly biblical and historical figures – is a defining aspect of Osorio’s writings which he uses both to inspire virtue and rebuke vice.\(^3^{26}\) ‘Tienen los exemplos un singular atractivo en nuestra naturaleza’ Osorio tells us, ‘o porque la soberbia humana con las ventajas agenas se excita a la emulación, o porque se empacha la cobardía de no aspirar a las glorias, que otros alcanzaron a conseguir’.\(^3^{27}\) He adds that ‘aunque todos los exemplos, por extraños que sean, son poderosos para convencer, los exemplos domésticos son más eficaces, y tienen más fuerza para persuadir’, given that they are well known and more relatable.\(^3^{28}\) This was a practice common among Jesuit writers, who often used Christian exemplars for moral and devotional teaching.\(^3^{29}\) Intriguingly, one such exemplary life worthy of imitation was to be found in the figure of Cortés whose national and religious symbolic value was appropriated by Jesuit writers to promote the spiritual tradition and

\(^{3^{25}}\) Osorio, *Constancia de la fee*, p. 101. This surely helps to explain the complete lack of romance elements in Osorio’s epic. This idea is reiterated in the poet’s critique of contemporary novels of chivalry: ‘los antiguos libros se divertían en las fingidas hazañas de los Libros de Cavallería, y aunque en muchas cosas fuera buena política el reformarlos, por lo menos tuvieron la conveniencia de teñir los ánimos de los españoles de aquellos generosos pensamientos, con que ganaron tantas islas, y tantos reinos, venciendo monstruos, y obrando hazañas, con que dejaron más admiración en las historias, que cuanto la ociosidad había mentido en las fábulas; pero ya aquellos libros no dan gusto, y solo agradan los que van enlazando correspondencias amorosas, y paran en felices sucesos de los amantes.’ Osorio, *Constancia de la fee*, p. 102.

\(^{3^{26}}\) A prime example of this can be found in Osorio’s sermon, in which he draws on the virtuous behaviour of Saint Bruno to ‘exortar a los hombres, a que sigan su doctrina, y quiere que la persuasión sea el ejemplo de sus siervos, para que así entienda el mundo, que no solo debe atender a las persuasiones de quien retórico exorta, sino es también a las luces del exemplo’. Osorio, ‘Sermón III de S. Bruno’, in *Laurea complutense. Sermones varios a singulares asuntos. Escritos por insignes maestros de la oratoria christiana* (Alcalá: Francisco García Fernández, 1666), pp. 52-85 (p. 67).

\(^{3^{27}}\) Osorio, *Constancia de la fee*, p. 66.

\(^{3^{28}}\) Osorio, *Constancia de la fee*, p. 66.

\(^{3^{29}}\) In both the *Ejercicios espirituales* and the *Constituciones*, Loyola highlights the importance of such exemplary models, advising that ‘mucho aprovecha el leer algunos ratos en los libros de imitacione Christi o de los evangelios y de vidas de santos’, claiming that ‘para pasar adelante en las virtudes, ayuda mucho el buen ejemplo de los más antiguos, que anime a los otros a su imitación’. San Ignacio de Loyola, *Obras completas de San Ignacio de Loyola*, ed. Ignacio Iparraguirre (Madrid: Editorial Católica, 1963), pp. 220, 474.
moralising goals of the Society of Jesus, drawing in particular on the conquistador’s pious deeds in service of the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{330}

Certainly, the poet’s characterisation of Cortés in \textit{Las Cortesiadas} is not solely focussed on his value as a national example—‘el héro castellano’ (fol. 142’), ‘[el] fuerte castellano’ (fol. 147’)—, but also as a religious example—‘capitán del cielo’ (fol. 211’), ‘Hércules Christiano’ (fol. 190’)—, with his conquest of Mexico providing an inspiring story of Christian devotion, piety, and salvation, as well as an impressive national victory for Spain. In creating a model of Christian perfection in Cortés, Osorio draws on some of the main tenets of the spiritual tradition of the Jesuit Order—namely pious obedience, humility, and self-control;—virtues that Loyola had propounded in both his \textit{Ejercicios espirituales} and his \textit{Constituciones}. Espousing the complete ‘abnegación de sí mismos’ (p. 482), Loyola instructs current and prospective Jesuits to ‘poner debajo de los pies el mundo y sus vanidades (p. 479), admonishing ‘[la] cobdicia de riquezas’ (p. 226), ‘[la] cresida soberbia’ (p. 226), ‘la ambición’ (p. 592), ‘[el] amor propio’ (p. 482), ‘la sensualidad’ (p. 217), ‘la ira, venganza y ferocidad’ (p. 265), and other such ‘pasiones o vicios ofensivos de su divina Megestad’ (p. 461), in favour of ‘[la] piedad y misericordia’ (p. 214), ‘la razón’ (p. 217), ‘la humildad’ (p. 227), ‘la pobreza’ (p. 227), ‘[la] obediencia’ (p. 271), ‘[la] caridad’ (p. 271), ‘[la] puridad’ (p. 434), ‘la paz’ (p. 469), ‘la modestia’ (p. 469), ‘[la] simplicidad religiosa’ (p. 469), ‘la temperancia y honestidad’ (p. 470), ‘[la] fortaleza’ (p. 476), ‘[la] devoción’ (p. 477), ‘[la] perseverancia’ (p. 531), ‘[la] disciplina’ (p. 592); virtues that allow the incumbent to ‘mejor poder servir a Dios’ (p. 228), while simultaneously ‘imitar y parescer más actualmente a Christo’ (p. 231).\textsuperscript{331} These foundational Jesuit values constitute the essence of religious heroism for Osorio. In this regard, his sermon on Saint Bruno, delivered at the newly established Jesuit school of Murcia in 1655, serves as an interesting supplementary text to \textit{Las Cortesiadas}, providing us with a unique insight into the poet’s views on what, in accordance with Jesuit teachings, comprises a worthy Christian hero. In eulogising the ‘noble exemplar’ of Saint Bruno, as well as other Christian heroes such as Saint John, Osorio’s hagiography rebukes ostentation and

\textsuperscript{330} Notable examples include the Italian Jesuit Giovanni Rhò’s \textit{Variae virtutum historiae libri VII} (1644) which represents Cortés as an exemplary Christian man, along with Alonso de Andrade’s catechetical manual for soldiers, \textit{El buen soldado} (1642), which mentions Cortés as a notable example of a Christian soldier. Additionally, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora’s \textit{Piedad heroyca de Don Fernando Cortés} (1659) celebrates ‘el piadosissimo y religiosissimo Don Fernando Cortés’ as an exemplary model of Christian heroism, citing his pious deeds following the conquest of Mexico including the establishment of Churches and Hospitals. Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, \textit{Piedad heroyca de Don Fernando Cortés}, ed. Jaime Delgado (Madrid: José Porrua Turanzas, 1960), p. 73.

\textsuperscript{331} Loyola, \textit{Obras completas}, page numbers have been cited after quotations to avoid confusion. Loyola’s tenets on the basic Jesuit virtues were also explored by Spanish Jesuits such as Luis de la Palma in the \textit{Práctica y breve declaración del camino espiritual como lo enseña el B.P.S. Ignacio, fundador de la Compañía de Jesús en las cuatro semanas de su libro de Ejercicios} (1629).
ambition, while praising solitude, contemplation, mindfulness, and religious discipline. Thus, while he condemns ‘la ignorancia’, ‘la inmodestía’, ‘la ambición’, ‘la vanidad’, ‘[la] ostentación’, ‘la celebridad’, as well as other vices including laziness, ire, gluttony, and envy, he praises ‘el recato’, ‘la sabiduría’, ‘la aspereza’, ‘el retiro’, ‘el silencio’, ‘la abstinencia’, and ‘[la] humildad’. Promoting a life of poverty and hermitage such as that professed by Loyola, he admires ‘el austero modo de vivir’ and the ability to ‘resistir a los vientos de la vanidad del mundo’, one who stoically abstains from ‘el divertimento de la ciudades’ and ‘se esconde en la soledad, y se retira al silencio de los montes’, dedicating their life ‘solo para servir a Dios’.

Service to God need not solely be achieved through the cultivation of the interior life, however, but also through martial deeds. Indeed, for Osorio, martial heroism and Christian spirituality are two sides of the same coin, as he establishes a direct link between ecclesiastical programmes and warring:

Y es cosa maravillosa, que el cuidar de la disciplina eclesiástica entablaba la disciplina militar; aumentar los eclesiásticos, era multiplicar soldados (…); y el rendirse, y sugetarse al Vicario de Christo, era lo mismo que vencer y sujetar a los enemigos de España.


335 Osorio, ‘Sermón III de S. Bruno’, pp. 73-74. In his comparison of the city and the countryside, Osorio appears to contribute here to the Horatian beatus ille theme, perhaps drawing on Fray Luis de León’s Vida retirada.
336 Osorio, Constancia de la fe, p. 130. See also: ‘El primer desvelo de los (…) gloriosos héroes, era el fundar monasterios, erigir sacerdocios, fabricar, y adornar templos, recoger las reliquias de los santos, colocarlas con decencia, visitar, y enriquecer los santuarios, y hacer piadosa vanidad de ser los más rendidos, y consantes hijos de la iglesia romana’. Constancia de la fe, p. 130. It is worth remembering that Loyola himself had been a soldier, and the Jesuits were often referred to as ‘soldados de Dios’ and taught the art of war in their colleges, in support of Olivares’ programme to train better military leaders. See Javier Burrieza Sánchez and Manuel Revuelta González, Los jesuitas en España y en el mundo hispánico, pp. 34-35; and Elliott, Imperial Spain, p. 342.
Certainly, in Las Cortesiadas, martial victory is not at odds with Cortés’ religious mission, and Osorio by no means plays down the violence of the conquest, as he refers to the ‘montes ya de cadáveres pisando’ (fol. 135v), or the Spaniards’ fear of ‘despoblar al nuevo mundo’ (fol. 134v). Nor does he dampen the military dexterity of Cortés who, like his epic predecessors, is a force to be reckoned with on the battlefield: ‘con fulminante espada | prueva a rayos que no hay quien le resista’ (fol. 141v). This said, his daring and brave fortaleza is matched not only by his sapientia – often described as ‘cuerdo’ (fol. 173v), using his prudence and guile to overcome the enemy—, but also his piety, reason, and compassion. Countering century-old accusations regarding Cortés’ ruthlessness and cruelty, Osorio, much like Lobo Lasso had done, presents us with a figure who often chooses to forgive his enemy rather than destroy them, or as Cortés himself professes: “más intento | vencer piadoso, que obligar violento” (fol. 193v); thus exemplifying one of the basic tenets of Jesuit spirituality presented by Loyola, who in the Ejercicios espirituales states that ‘todo buen cristiano ha de ser más prompto a salvar la proposición del próximo que a condernarla’.337 When coming face to face with his enemy following their defeat in battle, Cortés, unlike Aeneas who, in book XII (919-952) of the Aeneid is moved by rage to slay the pleading Turnus, is instead moved by clemency: ‘al Bárbaro combida al escarmiento | de su fatal ruyna la memoria | al español su pecho generoso | mueve al perdón excita a lo piadoso’ (fol. 193v). Osorio continues: ‘la benigna piedad de su deseo | no tanto le agradece a la violencia | de sus armas el ínclito tropheo | quanto el triumpho que ofrece a su clemencia’ (fol. 193v). Certainly, the unwavering ‘piedad del capitán valiente’ (fol. 178v) and his ‘clemencia compasiva’ (fol. 191v) is what makes him superior to his epic predecessor, Aeneas, ‘dando piadoso en su discurso sabio | más fuerza a la razón que a la espada | de la divina luz los rayos puros | blando introduce asi en los pechos duros’ (fol. 215v).338 The Cortés of Las Cortesiadas is not a merciless killer, but a caring preacher who relies on his use of divine knowledge and inspiration as much as his sword. Indeed, this is a poem that focuses primarily on the evangelical triumphs of Cortés, with his characterisation being endorsed with a theological, spiritual dimension, far beyond that previously captured by Lobo Lasso. What we see before us is not a Christian conquistador modelled on previous epic heroes such as Tasso’s Goffredo, but a figure modelled on Christ himself: an imitatio Christi who embodies the Christian ethos of Jesuit spirituality espoused by


338 This is a trait that even the indigenous enemy acknowledges as being admirable: “mas si no miente la señal afable | de la clemencia que en tu pecho vive | que eres Dios de piedad en lo agradable | de tu semblante lo benigno escribe” (fol. 149v). Cortés’ piety is a point of interest in seventeenth-century literary production, with Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora’s Piedad heroica lauding ‘los positivos actos de su piedad’ (p. 27) in its eulogy of the conquistador. Cortés’ clemency and piety can also be seen in Feldkirch’s play (1679) in which Cortés defeats his adversary Diego de Roya (revisioned in the work as a pagan prince without a name), but pardons his life. See Wimmer, p. 701.
Loyola in his works of spiritual formation and Osorio in his sermon. More than just an epic hero, Cortés is a Jesuit epic hero.

One of the ways in which Osorio exemplifies this in his poem is through the act of suffering. Both internal and external forms of Christian penance and devotion are explicit throughout Las Cortesiadas, aligning both with the seventeenth-century religious epic’s establishment of ‘un nuevo tipo de heroísmo cristiano el cual destaca el sufrimiento paciente y la resistencia frente a la tentación’, and the Jesuits’ own propagation of abstention, self-discipline, and hardship. Moreover, in his Memorial apológetica, Osorio talks about the way in which those who work for ‘la promulgación del evangelio’ must always suffer; be it through the dangers of land and sea, tyrants and thieves, etc.; much like the Jesuit missionaries ‘en Chile, Tucumán, Paraguay, los Mohos, Río Marañón, la Florida, Congo, Monomotapa, Maysur, Mogor, Sian, China, Cochinchina, Tunquin, Japón y otras partes, [que] no se han valido de otra escolta que la de los corderos en medio de los lobos’. This rhetoric of suffering can be observed in book four of Las Cortesiadas, in which Osorio narrates Cortés’ ascent of the volcanic mountain, Popocatepetl, alongside his fellow soldiers. Described in terms of a religious, mystic pilgrimage abounding with physical and spiritual suffering, we read how Cortés bravely faces the dangers put before him. Emphasising the harsh conditions and the difficulty of the journey, Osorio relates the withering of Cortés’ soldiers as they climb the mountain:

(…) los inclitos soldados
por tantos riezgos que aun temiera Marte
si no oprimidos siguen fatigados
de su Heroico esquadrón el estandarte:

339 For more on Christ as an epic model see Davis, Myth and Identity, pp. 141, 149.
341 Osorio, Memorial apológetico al excmo. señor Conde de Villa-Humbroso de parte de los missioneros apostólicos de el imperio de la China, representando los reparos que se hacen en un libro que se ha publicado en Madrid este año de 1676 en grave perjuicio de aquella mission (Madrid: no publisher, 1676), fol. 137v, fol. 138r. Note Osorio’s inversion of the Lascasian lamb-wolf metaphor.
342 Osorio manipulates historical ‘truth’ here to magnify his hero’s martyrrial splendour, for according to Cortés’ Segunda carta-relación, he himself did not climb the mountain, but instead sent some of his men to do so: ‘envié a diez de mis compañeros, (…) con algunos naturales de la tierra que los guiasen y les encomendé mucho procurasen de subir la dicha sierra’. Hernán Cortés, Cartas de relación, p. 199.
343 It was, in reality, not Cortés who suffered these hardships, but his soldiers, for as the conquistador relates in his Segunda carta-relación: ‘[mis compañeros] fueron y trabajaron lo que fue posible para subirla y jamás pudieron, a causa de la mucha nieve que en la sierra hay y de muchos torbellinos que de la ceniza que de allí sale andan por la sierra y también porque no pudieron sufrir la gran frialdad que arriba hacía’. Hernán Cortés, Cartas de relación, p. 199.
The freezing conditions of the mountain are eclipsed by the burning spirit of Cortés who, ‘a pesar de los riezgos de la vida | mueve a sus valerosos capitanes’ (fol. 197’), martyrishly battling the ‘frío intenso’ (fol. 198’) and ‘mil fatigas’ (fol. 197’) that pound his body.

Through his narration of this episode, Osorio establishes a discourse of martyrdom in which Cortés suffers in imitation of Christ, prioritising the evangelical mission above his own needs. In doing so, the boundaries between epic and hagiography are conflated in Las Cortesiadas, as the ideals of hero and saint converge. Indeed, while in Camargo’s Poema heroico de San Ignacio de Loyola (1666), the saint behaves like a hero, in Las Cortesiadas Osorio casts his hero in saintly robes, so much so that, on several occasions in the epic, the conquistador is mistaken for a god by the indigenous characters. In book two, for example, when a group of Tlaxcalans approach Cortés to offer gifts and reverence, they address him as if he were a god, denying the possibility of him being ‘humano’ or ‘mortal’ (fol. 149’), and instead affirming the conquistador’s divine qualities: “la vista con tus hechos de[s]mentida | del ser humano, que el semblante arguye, | cuando heredada no, bien merecida | divinidad sagrada te atribuye: | (...) que eres Dios” (fol. 149’). This is reiterated later in book two when Maxixca, addressing the senate about the “inclitas hazañas” of Cortés, claims that “venerarle podemos por Divino” (fol. 155’); an assertion that is not only supported by the members of the senate who, ‘admirando | sus hechos, sus razones, su persona | deidad le juzgan’ (fol. 156’), but also the Tlatoani of Tenochtitlan, Moctezuma, who similarly regards Cortés ‘juzgándole divino’ (fol. 208’, fol. 211’). Even the poet himself cannot resist referring to Cortés as ‘[el] español divino’ (fol. 163’) in his narration of events. In response to these claims, Cortés meekly denies his divinity, expressing that “no soy Dios, dice humilde, soy esclavo | de otro señor, cuya grandeza admiro, | de otro poder cuya hermosura alabo” (fol. 149’). Cortés does, however, allude to having been chosen by God to carry out his mission in Mexico –“de pocos españoles me hizo el cabo” (fol. 149’)–, indicating God’s support of the conquest and his own unerring allegiance to his divine protector: “con su sabor de nada me recelo,

344 Loyola not only encourages ‘peregrinaciones’ such as that undertaken by Cortés in Las Cortesiadas, but other forms of ‘peligros o trabajos de los que en el Señor nuestro podrían amorosamente sufrir’. Loyola, Obras completas, pp. 271, 434.

345 Davis discusses ‘the importance of hagiography for the writing of a heroism that is not bellicose’, in Myth and Identity, p. 144.

346 The initial identification of Cortés with the Aztec god Queztalcoatl by Moctezuma is documented in Cortés’ second letter. Cortés, Cartas de relación, p. 228.
The celestial protection of Spain’s conquest of Mexico, and its broader defence of Catholicism throughout the globe, is a point that Osorio emphasises in his *Constancia de la fe*, as he establishes a divine bond between ‘la Corte del Cielo’ and the Spanish nation; ‘tierra escogida de Dios’.³⁴⁷ ‘Tú sola, o España invicta, y siempre asombro de los Infieles, con Castillos y Leones’, Osorio proudly states, ‘te aplicó, y te adoptó el Cielo para su alimento, y su conservación’, going on to describe the reciprocal relationship between God and his divinely-appointed effectuator as ‘un contrato tácito de que los españoles habían de promover la causa de Dios, y Dios la causa de los españoles.’³⁴⁸ It is for this reason, Osorio asserts, that ‘las victorias [de España] dependen singularmente de la Providencia divina’, listing the conquest of Mexico as one of the prime examples.³⁴⁹ It is perhaps, then, of no surprise that a triumphalist fate hangs over Osorio’s conquest epic, as it quickly becomes apparent that Cortés and his men—‘el esquadrón cathólico triumphant’ (fol. 136)—are not the only players in the conquest, as the conquistador reminds his soldiers that “tantos tropheos el favor divino | consagró a vuestro aliento más que humano” (fol. 132).

Much like Lobo Lasso’s *Mexicana*, Osorio’s epic not only relates the battles between Spaniards and Amerindians, Christians and pagans, but also God and Satan as we witness the intervention of divine characters such as Saint James, or the malevolent Pluto and his infernal aides who, through dreams, visions, prophecies, and direct involvement, drive the narrative and provide it with an additional layer of theological and political focus.³⁵⁰ It is certainly not unusual that Osorio would choose to include the Devil—as represented by Pluto—as a character in his epic, drawing not only on the Christian epic tradition of supernatural machinery discussed by Tasso in his *Discorsi dell’arte poetica*, but also on the Jesuits’ association of American idolatry with Satan. Like other missionary orders such as the Franciscans, the Jesuits firmly believed that Satan and his furies ruled the Americas, inspiring pre-Hispanic religion and corrupting the souls of natives.³⁵¹ In *Las Cortesiadas*, we thus see his numerous

³⁴⁷ Osorio, *Constancia de la fe*, p. 132; ‘Dedicación’ (page number not provided).
³⁴⁸ Osorio, *Constancia de la fe*, ‘Dedicación’ (page number not provided); p. 132.
³⁴⁹ Osorio, *Constancia de la fe*, p. 25. For Osorio’s discussion of the conquest of Mexico see pp. 118-19.
³⁵⁰ For this reason, I disagree with López de Toro who labels Osorio’s use of supernatural machinery as ‘de baja calidad’, p. 218. Osorio himself claims in his *Constancia de la fe* that during Spain’s numerous battles against the heathen across the empire, ‘faltando los medios humanos, se alistó gente en el Cielo, y bajaron visiblemente los espíritus soberanos a pelear por España’, p. 116.
attempts to hinder the progress of Cortés’ conquest, making his allegiance to the indigenous enemy immediately clear in book one as he promises to protect Xicotencatl from the invading Spanish forces:

(…)  
bien sabes de mi Imperio soberano  
que nada teme el que lo puede todo:  
bien que el Imperio se te opone en vano  
quando yo a tu defensa me acomodo  
yo te defiendo, y nunca el Cielo pudo  
romper tirano tan constante escudo.  

Por tu defensa me verás piadoso,  
por tu victoria me verás armado,  
esforzando tu aliento belicoso  
ya como Dios, y ya como soldado:  
confía que mi brazo poderoso  
amparando tu pecho, y a tu lado  
en el rigor será de la batalla  
para ellos rayo para ti muralla. (fol. 138v)

To which Xicotencatl responds by promising his “supremo Dios” (fol. 139r) that “el fin de esta nación (…) es abatir la religión piadosa | que en tanto siglo han aprobado el uso” (fol. 139r). Thus, the indigenous do not solely make war against Spain, but Christianity more broadly –‘que contra España y contra Dios milita’ (fol. 177v)–, defending Pluto’s stronghold and therefore protecting their own infernal practices. In his attempts to safeguard his loyal worshipers, Pluto takes on various forms, occasionally as ‘un horrible indiano, | en forma de hombre, pero en nada humano’ (fol. 137v), and other times as a monstrous vision rooted in Aztec cosmology. The latter can be found in book three, in which a ‘monstruo de prodigio’ (fol. 169v) appears before Moctezuma, taking the form of a feathered bird with a mirror on its forehead. Significantly similar to the ‘Séptimo presagio de la venida de los españoles: el ave con espejo en la cabeza’ narrated by Bernardino de Sahagún in the Florentine Codex (c. 1577-1579), this episode details the moment in which Moctezuma is presented with a mirror that provides him with a vision of a dark sky populated solely with ‘tristes estrellas’ (fol. 170v).352 The mirror vision

352 See León-Portilla, Visión de los vencidos, p. 23. It is difficult to ascertain how familiar Osorio would have been with Sahagún’s manuscript, given the uncertainty regarding the manuscript’s ownership and accessibility in the seventeenth century. It should be noted that the prognostic episode is also recounted by Diego Muñoz Camargo in the Historia de Tlaxcala (c. 1576-95). See León-Portilla, Visión de los vencidos, pp. 26-27. In terms of possible
reveals to Moctezuma ‘el triste anuncio de su ruina grave’ (fol. 171’), foreshadowing the Spaniards’ imminent victory over the Aztec empire:

(…)

hombres vestidos vee de limpio acero
con traje horrible, con semblante fiero.

Con las espadas que en su mano obstentan
hieren sin miedo, sin defensa matan
las Campañas de América ensangrientan
ejércitos opuestos desbaratan. (fol. 170’)

Unable to hold his gaze on the mirror through sheer terror of the ‘infeliz pronóstico’ (fol. 171’), Moctezuma nevertheless returns his eyes to the transmitter of his demise and ‘ve triste suceso, | de una cadena se miró agravado | su cuello adusto con el grave peso: | con torpes grillos del temor atado | y con los lazos de sus dudas preso’ (fol. 171’). Moctezuma not only sees his and his empire’s demise, but that of the whole of the Americas as it falls to the Spaniards. With timely significance, as soon as Moctezuma’s vision is complete, news arrives that the Spaniards are approaching Tenochtitlan, thus intensifying the inevitability of the foretold events.

It is not only the indigenous characters of Las Cortesiadas who receive supernatural assistance and deific premonitions, but also Cortés, who is protected by the divine powers of God and his saintly auxiliary, St James, who consistently thwart any attempts, both martial and supernatural, to stop the conquest. This becomes apparent as early as book one in which, amidst an enduring battle with the Tlaxcalans Cortés, seeing the victory leaning towards to the side of the enemy, looks up to the sky and raises his hands in prayer:


353 Note the similarity of Osorio’s prophetic episode with that which occurs between the indigenous soothsayer, Tlantepuzylama, and the Tlaxcalan warrior Maxixcalztín in canto IX of Saavedra’s El peregrino indiano, as discussed in Chapter Two.
Piadoso Dios de cuya mano pende
el honor que de triunfos se alimenta
sin cuyo aliento, aun la vitoria ofende,
con cuyo amparo, aun la desgracia alienta:
tus españoles, y tu fe defiende
no sea que, alcanzando lo que intenta
con blasphemias el Bárbaro te arguya
que no pudiste, pues la Causa es tuya. (fol. 145v)

No sooner than making his petition: ‘apenas dijo, quando el viento mueve | dando al indio fatal desasosiego | en un caballo de fogosa mueve | un sol luzido de nevado fuego’ (fol. 145v). This episode relates the miraculous apparition of a white horse carrying St James who assists the Spaniards in their battle; a miracle recounted in a number of sixteenth-century chronicles as well as the epic works of Lobo Lasso and Saavedra. Intriguingly, through witnessing the miracle of the apostle, the Tlaxcalans realise the futility of their heathenism – ‘maldice ya la multitud Indiana (…) la esperanza vana | de su Dios falso, la verdad mentida’ (fol. 146v) – and are henceforth referred to in Osorio’s narrative as noble, dexterous allies as opposed to ‘bábara canalla’ (fol. 141v). Divine intervention through this Christian miracle is thus what contributes to the establishment of peace between the Spaniards and the Tlaxcalans; an actuality for which Cortés is eager to express his gratitude: ‘al Dios de España y al Apóstol santo | gracias rindió Cortés agradecido, | que cuanto al mundo fue invencible tanto | al Cielo siempre se mostró rendido’ (fol. 147v).

Another example of divine partisanship can be found in book three, in which Cortés’ fortunes rely once again on the intervention of the celestial messenger, St James. In this book we read how the natives of Cholula lure Cortés to the city by promising that it is a Christian stronghold that will revere the Spaniards’ God; a ruse to kill Cortés and his men. Despite their cunning plan, the Cholulans’ trick does not succeed because God does not let it: ‘mas no permite el Cielo que consiga | de los Indios el

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354 See canto XII of Lobo Lasso’s *Mexicana* and canto VI of Saavedra’s *El peregrino indiano*. In chapter XXXIV of his *Historia verdadera*, Bernal Díaz del Castillo ridicules this miraculous episode as it was recounted in Gómara’s chronicle, claiming that: ‘y pudiera ser que los que dice el Gómara fueran los gloriosos apóstoles señor Santiago o señor san Pedro, e yo, como pecador, no fuese digno de verles; lo que yo entonces vi y conoci fue a Francisco de Morla en un caballo castaño, que venia juntamente con Cortes (…) Y ya que yo, como indigno pecador, no fuera merecedor de ver a cualquiera de aquellos gloriosos apóstoles, allí en nuestra companía había sobre cuatrocientos soldados y Cortés y otros mucho caballeros; (…) y si fuera asi como lo dice el Gómara, harto malos cristianos fuéramos, envíándonos nuestro señor Dios sus santos apóstoles, no reconocer la gran merced que nos hacía’. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, ed. Miguel León-Portilla, 2 vols (Madrid: Historia 16, 1984), i, pp. 149-50.
bárbaro despecho | la ejecución de tan cruel hazaña | que vela atento el gran patrón de Españá’ (fol. 175v). God thus sends St James to a sleeping Cortés, warning him of the conspiracy planned against him:

Español así yaces descuidado
siendo tu vigilante el que te ofende
mira que el Indio contra España armado
su arco empuña su estación enciende:
venga a tu Dios no menos agraviado
en la hazaña sacrílega que emprehende
pues ya para hacer prospero el insulto
da a hombres muerte, a los infiernos culto. (fol. 176v)

Historically, this revelation is carried out by Cortés’ interpreter-come-lover, Marina, or –as is the case in Lobo Lasso’s epic– Alvarado’s lover, but in Osorio’s epic it is a divine being who delivers the warning; a more fitting engagement with the epic tradition of celestial descent which dually serves to reinforce God’s consent of the Spaniards’ controversial massacre of the Cholulans.355

Without doubt, the clearest demonstration of God’s unerring support of Cortés’ conquest is to be found in book four, returning once again to the episode in which Cortés and his men climb the volcanic mountain of Popocatepetl. After his agonising ascent and finally reaching the summit of ‘[el] monte que hasta el Cielo se levanta’ (fol. 206v), Cortés looks out and casts his eyes over the horizon of Tenochtitlan, where he sees the palace of Moctezuma with its dominant architecture, and his vast and powerful army. His confidence begins to wane:

(…)
mayor es el poder de Moctezuma
que el de Xerxes su dilatada espuma
que agota ríos inundando a Grecia:
quién no dirá que con soberbia pluma
voló mi presumpción fiando necia
vana temeridad incauto empeños,
a incontrastables hondas frágil leño. (fol. 199v)

During these moments of self-doubt, a celestial being –‘el valeroso apostol de la guerra’ (fol. 201’), St James–appears to Cortés in the form of a shepherd. Upon realising that the shepherd is a divine figure, Cortés throws himself to the shepherd’s feet and pays him due reverence, employing a rhetoric of spiritual pilgrimage similar to that used previously during the Spaniards’ ascent of the mountain:

(...o luz primera 
del firmamento, o Príncipe sagrado, 
de la Iglesia de Dios a quien venera 
dictador su aposthólico senado: 
o Pastor fuerte q a la rabia fiera 
de los lobos que asaltan tu ganado 
opones tal valor que a la venganza 
el cayado tal vez sirve de lanza.

Guía y alumbra con tu luz divina 
la grey de tu Cathólico rebaño 
que por montañas ásperas camina 
vago sin certidumbre en suelo extraño 
defiéndele que incauto se aecina 
donde armando el poder con el engaño 
yá meditando están crueles robos 
añudas fieras carníceros lobos. (fol. 200’)

It is at this moment in the epic that St James reminds Cortés that “el Dios que contra México te elige | porque la rindas a la feé más pura | tus pasos mueve tus designios rige”, questioning “[¿]qué dudas 
quando el Cielo te asegura?” and pacifying Cortés’ anxiety: “no temas, no receles | que tú eres español 
ellos infieles” (fol. 200’). Undoubtedly modelled on book one of Virgil’s Aeneid in which Aeneas and his companion Achatês meet Venus who, disguised as a Carthaginian huntress, gives them a promising prophecy, enveloping the two men in a cloud from which they observe the people of Carthage, Cortés is similarly wrapped in a cloud from which he continues to observe Moctezuma’s court.356 This said,

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356 Compare the following: ‘at Venus obscuro gradientes aere saepsit | et multo nebulae circum dea fudit amictu, | cernere ne quis eos, neu quis contingere posset, (...) iamque ascendebant collem, qui plurimum urbi | imminet, adversasque adspectat desuper arcæ. | Miratur molem Aeneas, magalia quondam’ –Virgil, Aeneid, I. 411-21– with: ‘desde la nube que tejió lucida | sombras a la atención del Mexicano, | la Corte de su imperio esclarecida |
absorto contemplaba el castellano: | la arquitectura que desvanecida | dió soberbia altivéz al aire vano, | novia que con alcázeres oprime | el ancho lago que del peso gime’. Osorio, Las Cortesiadas, IV. 205º.
however, another possible source that may have inspired Osorio is the Transfiguration of Jesus narrated in the New Testament, in which Jesus and his disciples climb an unnamed mountain where, upon reaching the top, he is wrapped in a cloud and begins to radiate light, before being joined by the prophets Moses and Elijah who reveal his identity as the Son of God.\(^{357}\)

Following this, the divine shepherd then accompanies Cortés, in Dantesque fashion, to witness the depths of Hell in which the conquistador observes Pluto and his furies conspiring against him. Following a traditionally epic description of Hell –based on the epic models of Homer and Virgil’s Hades– and an Ovidian-inspired depiction of the infernal Furies, we read how Moctezuma’s sages solicit the help of Pluto and his minions to destroy Cortés:

Moctezuma, responden, nos obliga
de prodigios del Cielo amenazado
a rogarte que temples la fatiga
que atemoriza a su Real cuidado:
A esta nación que aborreció enemiga
por serlo tuya pide que indignados
la sepultes en llamas del abismo
o entre sus ansias, que será lo mismo. (fol. 203\(^v\))\(^{358}\)

To our surprise, however, not only is the simple presence of St James enough to terrify the repulsive Furies –‘pero al apóstol miran, y a sus señas | de los incendios al profundo lago | huyen temblando de la luz que obstenta | iris divino a la infernal tormenta’ (fol. 202\(^v\))–, but Pluto is equally reluctant to provide further assistance, lamenting his lack of power against God, to whom he is always inferior:

Ay! Clama que con ásperas cadenas
injustos hados mis violencias atan
ay! que con iras de razón agenas
los Cielos mis intentos desbaratan:
ay! que vino al aliento de mis peñas
ay! de mi que mis males no me matan
ay! triste que se frustra mi desvelo
ay! infeliz que pueda más el Cielo! (fol. 203\(^v\))

\(^{358}\) For the description of Hell see fol. 202\(^v\). For the depiction of the Furies see fol. 202\(^v\). For a physical description of Pluto see fol. 203\(^v\).
Relinquishing his power, Pluto completely retires from his divine battle with God, thus opening the path for Cortés to conquer Mexico unperturbed: ‘torciendo la dorada llave | del secreto de Dios de tal manera | le infunde luz que llena misterioso | el alma grande del varón dichoso’ (fol. 205’). It is at this point in the narrative that Cortés is given yet another prophecy by St James; perhaps the most important prophecy of the entire epic, providing Cortés’ conquest with an aspect of religious predestination and, as a result, political and ideological legitimacy:

El Cielo, dice el vice Dios, destina
rendir al yugo de su imperio augusto
con las coyundas de la ley divina
la indómita cerviz del indio adusto:
por tu medio y tus armas determina
salvarle blando castigarle justo
dándole en ti predicador armado
de guerra apóstol, y de paz soldado.

Riesgos, congojas, pérdidas, fatigas
.te aguardan no desmayes extremeño
y las armas que juzgas más amigas
serán estorbos del mayor empeño:
pero de todo quiere que consigas
triumphos el Dios de las victorias dueño
y tan gigante honor que por crecido
dé sombra a los pasados si no olvido. (fol. 205’)

It is after this prophecy and St James’ revelation of the final victory over Tenochtitlan, that Cortés is referred to as ‘capitán del Cielo’ (fol. 211’), with references to his piety, religiosity, and divine nature intensifying as the fourth book of the epic closes, and its climactic final book unfolds. It is in this fifth and final book that Cortés truly proves himself to be, in the words of the prophesising St James, ‘predicador armado | de guerra apóstol’ (fol. 205’).

**Epic Evangelism: Preaching the Gospel in *Las Cortesiadas***

A defining feature of the Society of Jesus was their missionary activity. The Society’s commitment to world evangelisation through saving souls and defeating heresy and heathenism saw Catholicism’s global reach extend to unprecedented bounds in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Indeed, immediately following Loyola’s establishment of the Order, the Society of Jesus acquired an
international status, with missionary activity expanding across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the newly-discovered Americas.\textsuperscript{359} It was, as Aliocha Maldavsky puts it, the first ‘global religious order’,\textsuperscript{360} an observation that Osorio propagates in his \textit{Memorial apológetico}:

Que no les baste a los Jesuitas el haberse ido a los arenales y desertos más estériles de la África, a las tierras más bárbaras, y más incultas de la América, a las regiones más inaccesibles, u más septentrionales de la Europa, y a los últimos términos de China, y Japón en el Asia (…) Rompen los Jesuitas la tierra de nuevo, prepáranla, siembran la palabra divina, riéganla con su sudor y sangre.\textsuperscript{361}

This, of course, as Osorio indicates, extended to colonial Mexico where, since their initial arrival in 1572, the Jesuits established schools, conducted catechetical preaching, and indoctrination of Indian communities, before gradually heading further north in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{362} Indeed, Jesuit missions continued to take place in Northern Mexico when Osorio was writing \textit{Las Cortesiadas}, and while evidence suggests that Osorio did not himself travel to Mexico –or indeed


\textsuperscript{361} Osorio, \textit{Memorial apológetico}, fol. 137r.

\textsuperscript{362} For more on Jesuit activity in Mexico see Liss, Peggy K. Liss, ‘Jesuit Contributions’, pp. 326-29, 461; Stephanie Rohner, ‘La \textit{Historia antigua de México} de Francisco Javier Clavigero y la educación indígena en Nueva España’, \textit{Hispanic Review}, 88.2 (2020), 133-55 (p. 136); Burrieza Sánchez and Revuelta González, \textit{Los jesuitas en España}, pp. 187-189. See also the contemporary seventeenth-century source that Osorio may have consulted: \textit{Historia de los triunfos de nuestra santa fe entre gentes las más barbaras y fiera del nuevo orbe: conseguidos por los soldados de la milicia de la Compañía de Jesús en las misiones de la provincial de Nueva España} by Andrés Pérez de Ribas (1645).
anywhere abroad—to conduct missionary work, his effort to partake in the Jesuit goal of world evangelisation is reflected in his epic.  

Most certainly, *Las Cortesiadas* reflects the missionary fervour of the Society, and in particular Osorio’s missionary mentality. In a number of his works, Osorio expresses his veneration of those who risked their lives travelling to dangerous lands, who he varyingly describes as ‘siervos de Dios, y verdaderos imitadores de los apóstoles’; ‘predicadores de Christo’; and ‘varones santos’, establishing a direct link between missionary activity and heroism:

> Los que van a los últimos términos del mundo para predicar la fe, son amigos tan declarados de Dios, como se ve en sus virtudes. (…) Desprecian su patria, su hacienda, su honra y su vida, solo porque los demás hombres conozcan, amen y sirvan a Dios; y libres de todo interés y de toda vanidad, emprenden asuntos tan heroicos que solo puede atribuirse a un aliento Divino el intentarlos.

The association of missionary with hero plays out in *Las Cortesiadas*, with Cortés being presented as one of the first missionary heroes of the Americas as he takes on the heroic role of apostle in the poem. Directly countering accusations regarding his thirst for gold and his extreme brutality and cruelty, Cortés prioritises the salvation of souls and the spreading of the Christian faith over mundane acquisitions of riches. His motives are, as he reveals to the indigenous lord Maxixca, “de tan sana intención” (fol. 159r), focused purely on the evangelistic purpose of the conquest which is, he claims, driven by “un constante celo | de publicar Cathólicas verdades | que América ygnoró tantas hedades” (fol. 159r). This justifying discourse is developed further in book four of the poem, in which Cortés addresses the Mexican nobility, explaining that “no el odio vuestro no el amor del oro | me ha conducido a tierra tan extraña | solo hacer que adoréis al Dios que adoro | será mi pretensión, será mi hazaña” (fol. 211v). His cause is, Osorio confirms, ‘armado de la fe más pura’ (fol. 131v), while the conquest is referred to by Cortés as “tan piadosa guerra” (fol. 211v). In emphasising the purity of Cortés’ motives,

363 According to Reff: ‘Beginning in 1591, the Jesuits over the course of a half-century baptized over four hundred thousand Indians and established dozens of missions across what is today northern Sinaloa, Sonora, southern Chihuahua, and northern Durango’, p. 122. Osorio himself refers to these missions in the *Conferencia curiosa*, describing the brave missionaries as: ‘los hombres que viven emboscados en los arcabucos y espesuras enmarañadas de las incultas selvas de la América, o embrenfados en los más empinados y ásperos riscos como los brutos más fieros (…) [en] Cinaloa y California (…) rogándoles que, atendiendo a la doctrina (…)’. See Etreros, p. 52.

364 Osorio, *Memorial apologético*, fol. 3r, fol. 6r, fol. 41r.

365 Osorio, *Constancia de la fe*, p. 370. See also the *Memorial apologético* in which Osorio refers to Jesuit missionary activity as ‘una acción tan heroica, como desterrarse eternamente de su patria, y ir a los últimos términos del mundo, dispuesto a morir por la fe’, fol. 91v.
and painting his expedition to Mexico as a providential, salvific mission aimed at converting and evangelising, Osorio contributes to the polemical debates regarding the legitimacy of Spain’s conquest, defending its position as the bearer of Christian Truth; a religious justification that continued to espouse the ideology of sixteenth-century epicists such as Lobo Lasso, as well as Osorio’s seventeenth-century contemporaries such as Solórzano Pereira.\textsuperscript{366} While both the spirituality of Spain’s conquest and Cortés’ role as evangelist were addressed by Osorio’s precursors, it is nevertheless taken to new heights in Las Cortesiadas, with the conquistador’s status as an apostolic hero being deeply grounded in a theological foundation that considerably surpasses the limits set by previous poets.

One notable aspect in relation to Cortés’ missionary fervour is his duty as iconoclast. Indeed, as the seventeenth-century Spanish Jesuit Juan Eusebio Nieremberg writes in one of the prologues to his Varones ilustres, the Society of Jesus’ goal was not only ‘cazando almas para Christo’, but also ‘extirpando herejías’.\textsuperscript{367} The narrative of conquest is framed in Las Cortesiadas as a liberating action carried out by Cortés who saves innocent victims from the yoke of diabolical pagan practices: “quantos esclavos me ofrecéis admito | por libertarlos de inhumanos dientes” Cortés exclaims, “que tan cruel y abominable ritos | ni le admite mi ley, ni le consiente” (fol. 150'). Quite possibly encapsulating Osorio’s own disdain for human sacrifice, Cortés refers to the ritual as “ofensa” and “holocausto” (fol. 150'), rebuking the “impía superstición rito funesto” (fol. 160') as “impiedad sangrienta | que no admite mi ley ni disimula | la crueldad que anima, y alimenta | bárbara religión infama gula: | a la venganza la piedad me alienta” (fol. 160').\textsuperscript{368} We thus find numerous examples in the epic in which Cortés is seen destroying idols and erecting the cross: ‘la religión sacrílega desdeña | que el uso autorizo en el paganism’ Osorio narrates, ‘y con zelo Cathólico despeña | segunda vez al padre del abismo: | enarbolando la gloriosa seña | que adora la piedad del christianismo’ (fol. 163'). It is in book three, however, that Cortés’ crusade against heathenism is most clearly exemplified. In narrating the events preceding and including the massacre of Cholula, Osorio chooses to distance his hero from the controversial action, as we read that while killings are taking place in the city, Cortés heads towards the temple of Cholula –Tlachihualtepetl– where a pagan priest is about to carry out a human sacrifice. Seeing the unfolding events, with ‘piadoso furor, rigor clemente’ Cortés ‘mata al culpado, libra al inocente’ (fol. 178'); an episode that closely resembles canto XIV of Lobo Lasso’s Mexicana in which Aguilar saves Clandina from being sacrificed, although in Osorio’s version it is Cortés who takes the

\textsuperscript{366} In his Política indiana (1648), Solórzano Pereira argues that while ‘mucha gente ordinaria iría a estas navegaciones con este cebo [el deseo y codicia del oro, y la plata] (…) en nuestros Católicos Reyes y sus bien mirados caudillos, siempre tuvo el primer lugar el de la conversión de las almas de los infieles’. Juan de Solórzano Pereira, Política indiana (Antwerp: Henrico y Cornelio Verdussen, 1703), p. 19.

\textsuperscript{367} As quoted in Burrieza Sánchez and Revuelt González, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{368} Throughout his epic, Osorio describes human sacrifice as ‘cruel’ and ‘sangriento’, which ‘ofende al Cielo’ (fol. 178').
leading role as saviour. As was the case in Lobo Lasso’s epic, this episode not only serves to reinforce the hero’s devout piety, but also provides a moral justification of conquest, with Cortés cast as the protector of innocents from the inhumane and bloody practices of human sacrifice. Upon being set free, the slave—who, it transpires, is the son of the noble chieftain of Tepeaca— informs Cortés that he, along with ten other young men, had been kidnapped by the tyrannous Mexica, going on to thank his saviour and promising to assist Cortés with his conquest of Mexico, and vowing to avenge the death of his people at the hands of the Mexica. Transforming the unattractive narrative of the massacre of Cholula into a dazzling story of Christian piety, Osorio is also careful to depict the events at Cholula as being a battle between the different Indian tribes based on disputes that had been established long before the Spaniards’ arrival and thus downplaying their responsibility. The Tlaxcalans, for example, ‘vengan con fuego en la ciudad espera | el antiguo renor del mexicano’ (fol. 190r). It is Cortés who stops them from burning down the whole city, as he doesn’t want to inflict destruction but Christian punishment: ‘abrasarala ya si no opusiera | Cortés su imperio a la encendida mano | porque su noble esfuerzo al enemigo | no sea destrucción, sino castigo’ (fol. 190r); a subtle allusion, perhaps, to the title of Las Casas’ damning work: Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias.

In addition to his duties as iconoclast, Cortés proves himself to be a devoted evangelist in Las Cortesiadas. A talented orator, it becomes clear that Cortés conquers as much with his words as with his sword, or as Osorio aptly puts it: ‘si a lo violento no, a lo persuasivo’ (fol. 153v). This is a point that the poet reiterates time and again, describing his hero as ‘discursivo’ (fol. 131v), ‘rethórico’ (fol. 144v), ‘eloquente’ (f. 161v), with ‘imperiosa voz suave estilo’ (fol. 193v), as Cortés uses his discursive ability not only to persuade his soldiers to action, but also utilises ‘la eloquencia de su labio’ (fol. 215v) to diffuse Christian doctrine among the natives. Cortés’ apostolic qualities are modelled, no doubt, on Christ Himself who Osorio describes in similar terms:

plata su voz y sus palabras oro:
era su lengua la dorada llave
de la ciencia de Dios cuyo tesoro

369 The episode might also be partially based on Arias de Villalobos’ Canto intitulado Mercurio in which a Tlaxcalan warrior, el malli, is going to be sacrificed on Moctezuma’s orders. Praying to heaven, the vision of a saint appears in the sky and frees the slave, p. 210.

370 In this regard, Osorio once again aligns the representation of his hero with the Jesuit requirements set out by Loyola, who in the Constituciones states that ‘deben procurarse los medios humanos o adquisitos con diligencia, en especial la doctrina fundada y sólida, y modo de proponerla al pueblo en sermones y lecciones y forma de tratar y conversar con las gentes’. Loyola, Obras completas, p. 592.

371 A pertinent example of Cortés’ speeches to his men can be found on fol. 132’ during their battle with the Tlaxcalans.
para prompto remedio de sus males
prodigo repartía a los mortales.

Quanto eloquente el labio pronunciaba
authorizaba la virtud divina
siendo lo que decía y lo que obraba
manifiesta experiencia a su doctrina:
siempre piadoso en sus prodigios. (fol. 227)

Cortés’ skills as a preacher reach their climax in book five of the epic, in which Osorio narrates the famed meeting between Cortés and Moctezuma. This meeting had, of course, been captured in both epic poetry and historical chronicles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but in Las Cortesiadas it takes on a deeply theological quality as Osorio makes use of his sermonic and oratorical training to create a catechetical episode unlike any other previously captured in the conquest narratives.372 Upon meeting Cortés for the first time, Moctezuma addresses the conquistador:

Debate pues saber que causa pudo
conducir a tu ejército esforzado
rompiendo invicto el cristalino escudo
de un mar inmenso de distancia armado
(…)

Dime si rindes a deidad alguna
(…)
dime por qué motivos me importuna
oráculo en mis templos repetido
que te aleje de mí, ¿es competencia?
¿Es embidia, es temor o es reverencia? (fols. 215r-215v)

Establishing a dialogue between indoctrinator and indoctrinated, Cortés thenceforth embarks on a sermon in which he enlightens the monarch and his subjects on the history of Christianity –from God’s initial creation of the world until Christ’s resurrection and the fall of pagan Rome to Christianity– in a

372 López de Toro rightly asserts that none of the previous Cortesian epics ‘introduce personajes pronunciando discursos de la largura del Cortés en el canto V’, p. 227. Osorio’s epic may well have influenced Hazart’s 1725 play in which, according to Wimmer, we find ‘un discurso de evangelización altamente retórico dirigido a Moctezuma’, p. 706.
sustained effort to convert Moctezuma and the Mexica to Christianity. This lengthy doctrinal oration—extending from octave nine until the closing of the book in octave 101—fuses the realms of epic and catechism to create a sermonic discourse that captures the rhetoric of Jesuit missionary projects taking place around the globe in the seventeenth century. Preaching the gospel to pagan lands, Cortés draws heavily on the Old Testament—particularly the Book of Genesis—going into fine detail on the fundamentals of the Christian religion including the mysteries of the Trinity, Reincarnation, and Redemption, as well as recounting foundational Christian stories such as the fall of Lucifer (fol. 217r), the creation of Adam and Eve (fols. 217r-218v), the Great Flood (fol. 219v), the Tower of Babel (fol. 221v), and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (fol. 223v). The moral imperative of these biblical stories is extremely important, subtly drawing comparisons between Old Testament narratives and that of Osorio’s conquest narrative, as biblical themes such as sin and divine punishment, rebellious kings, monotheism and polytheism establish points of comparison with Cortés’ conquest of Mexico.373 Take, for example, Cortés’ narration of the story of the idolatrous Nimrod whose characterisation reveals striking similarities with Moctezuma, while the sinful pagan region of Babylonia is comparable to Tenochtitlan.374 Similarly, it seems beyond mere concurrence that Cortés narrates God’s destruction of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in anticipation of the Spaniards’ imminent destruction of Tenochtitlan, with Cortés drawing a direct parallel between the sinful sodomic practices of the Aztec city and the legendary cities of Sodom and Gomorrah:

Era el delito el disonante abuso
de un vicio tan nefando, tan obsceno
que aun la inmodestía términos le puso
por torpe horror aun de la culpa ageno:
Perdona, o Gran Monarcha, que no excuse
notar lo que en sus súbditos condeno,
que está en tu impio crimen tan malvado
no solo permitido, auctorizado. (fol. 223v)

373 According to Burrieza Sánchez and Revuelta González, catechisms such as that performed by Cortés often included ‘ejemplos piadosos e historias moralizantes’, p. 138.

374 Cortés draws on the story of Nimrod to explain how idolatry was born and spread across the world—including, of course, Mexico—: “por cultas y por bárbaras naciones | se difundió tan contagioso el daño | que en el aprecio las supersticiones | eran verdad, y la verdad engañó: | opuso philosophicas razones | la razón natural al culto extraño | mas ciego el mundo en su ignorante rito | ejecró la verdad como delito” (fol. 222v). Interestingly, Loyola also discusses the sinful city of Babylonia in the Ejercicios espirituales, describing it as a nesting ground of despicable vices, ‘donde el caudillo de los enemigos es Lucifer’. See Loyola, Obras completas, p. 226.
In creating direct parallels between contemporary events and scriptural stories, Osorio provides yet another form of justification of the Spaniards’ divinely sanctioned destruction of Tenochtitlan and the annihilation of its pagan practices, for who could possibly question the authority of biblical history and its continuation in the present day? Additionally, in detailing the pious feats of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, and Christ, Osorio establishes a lineage of Christian heroism that conveniently leads to Cortés; the latest in a long line of Christian heroes who, like Christ and his predecessors, had come to promised lands to deliver God’s message, thus securing his place in the history of Christian salvation.

**Osorio’s Theological Agenda**

Though not narrated in *Las Cortesiadas*, the purpose of Cortés’ catechetical lessons is, we assume, the prospective conversion of Moctezuma and his subjects. But what about extratextually? What had Osorio intended to achieve by including such a densely theological discourse, aside from the metaphorical sanctification of Cortés and the showcasing of his own oratorical skills as a preacher? To answer these questions, we must first consider the importance that the Society of Jesus afforded to *eloquientia sacra*; the use of the written word for the dissemination of religious ideals. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Jesuit writers composed a cornucopia of theological, didactic texts such as catechetical manuals and sermonic literature, which were considered by the Society to be an effective complementary means of preaching and converting.375 This extended to the realm of poetry, considered by Clossey to be ‘perhaps the medium most successful in capturing the urgency of the enthusiasm for mission’.376 For preacher-poets like Osorio, the epic was a particularly suitable poetic form because, while Davis rightly asserts that ‘el pensamiento teológico que informa el texto de Cortés Osorio hace que no sea particularmente representativo de las épicas del ciclo cortesiano’, the epic had long been used by poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to poeticise biblical themes and catechetical lessons, despite the reservations of the epic theoretician Tasso.377 Thus, departing from the likes of

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376 Clossey, p. 117.

377 Davis, ‘La épica novohispana y la ideología imperial’, p. 148. See also Pierce, who claims that ‘a fines del siglo XVI y durante el XVII (…) se produce una satisfactoria unión entre las exigencias de la enseñanza cristiana y la autonomía de la poesía’. Pierce, *La poesía épica*, p. 14. Warning against the use of sacred themes in epic
Marco Girolamo Vida’s *Christias* (1535), Diego de Hojeda’s *La Cristiada* (Seville, 1611), and Alonso de Acevedo’s *Creación del mundo* (1615), which transformed Christian scripture into classical epic form, the fifth book of Osorio’s *Las Cortesiadas* can similarly be read as a versification of the Book of Genesis, utilising the epic genre as a vehicle of doctrinal lessons that, arguably, carried more narrative appeal than other written forms such as manuals. Certainly, given the popularity of epic in the seventeenth century, the heroic poeticization of Osorio’s theological content would likely have rendered it more palatable, as would his writing in the vernacular. But precisely who was Osorio’s intended audience?

There are several possibilities that one might posit in response to this question. Firstly (i), it can be argued that Osorio’s epic was composed with the intention of carrying out spiritual improvement in its everyday readers; a means of ensuring that the Catholic dogma could be read and enjoyed from beyond the pulpit. By contemplating the pious acts of Cortés—an accessible model of Christianity from which moral lessons could be drawn—, readers might be inspired to live honourable, devout lives; particularly the nobility who, as previously argued, were often the recipients of Osorio’s counsel. A second possibility (ii), is that Osorio wrote his epic, particularly book five, to be used as a pedagogical tool to assist the evangelisation of natives in New Spain, contributing to the plethora of works of theoretical missiology, catechisms, illustrated bibles, doctrines, sermons, and religious pamphlets that were circulating during this period in the American colonies. Contributing to the Jesuit missions taking place across New Spain in the seventeenth century, *Las Cortesiadas* could thus be considered a tool for indigenous indoctrination; a militant evangelising text to convert infidels. It cannot, of course, be ascertained whether Osorio ever intended for his poem to be published or exported to the New World. Although, as a globally-reaching Society, it would not be completely unfounded to suppose that Osorio wanted his work to reach Jesuit missionaries in the colonies, and Idalia García has noted that in the seventeenth century, crates of religious books were imported to Jesuit schools in New Spain.

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poetry, Tasso in his *Discorsi dell’arte poetica*, reminds his readers that ‘the epic poet will not dare reach his hand toward [sacred] histories (…) ; rather, he will leave them, in their pure and simple truth, for the pious, because invention here is not permitted. (…) The theme of an epic, therefore, should be taken from chronicles of true religion but not of such great authority as to be unalterable’. Tasso, ‘Discourses on the Art of Poetry’, p. 105.

378 As Pierce asserts, ‘no hay duda de que los gustos del público del siglo de oro se iban preferentemente por las obras heroicas o históricas en verso’. Pierce, *La poesia épica*, p. 221.

379 For more on the variety of evangelising literary resources used in the colonial Americas see Maldavsky, p. 102; and Michael Karl Schuessler, *Foundational Arts: Mural Painting and Missionary Theater in New Spain* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2013), pp. 4, 15.

380 Idalia García, ‘The Importation of Books into New Spain During the Seventeenth Century’, in *A Maturing Market: The Iberian Book World in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Alexander S. Wilkinson and Alejandra Ulla Lorenzo (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 45-66 (pp. 45-46). Note that some of these books, such as the
Additionally, given the number of New World epics produced by Jesuit writers in this period, it appears that the Society was, as Virginia Cox has argued, invested ‘in the question of Christian epic and its role in evangelization’. This said, however, while embracing a simplicity of style largely devoid of the seventeenth century’s characteristically baroque rhetoric, extravagant style, and ornamental complexities such as that found in Arias de Villalobos’ Canto intitulado Mercurio, it is important to remember that Las Cortesiadas is nevertheless a cult epic and most likely sought to target a lettered, almost certainly Spanish or creole audience, as opposed to an indigenous readership. Had Osorio sought to write for the purposes of indoctrinating the indigenous masses, he would most likely have chosen a different genre, such as theatre, which would have granted his work greater accessibility to a wider-ranging audience.

A third possibility (iii) proposes that Osorio’s epic could be considered part of the growing trend of catechetical manuals written for soldiers by Jesuits in the seventeenth century. As Vincenzo Lavenia has observed, in the years following the Council of Trent (1545-1563), ‘the existing Christian literature directed at those exercising the profession of arms (…) was replaced by manuals exhorting sacrifice in the name of the faith’. Inspiring discipline in soldiers, the catechetical manuals encouraged troops to rid themselves of vices and embrace Christian piety; praying, confessing, taking Holy Communion, and putting their faith in God to assist them in their divine war against infidels. Intriguingly, one manual, written by the Spanish chaplain Alonso de Andrade, El buen soldado, offers a number of comparisons with Osorio’s epic, drawing on the figure of St James as the ideal warrior saint, while also citing Hernán Cortés as an exemplary model for Christian soldiers. Following this trend, Osorio’s epic could similarly have provided soldiers stationed around Spain’s empire with a paradigm of Christian values in the figure of Cortés, rousing integrity, piety, and devotion and deterring unwelcomed behaviour at a time when Spain’s future relied on the virtuousness of its soldiers. One

Spanish Jesuit Juan Eusebio Nieremberg’s De la diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno, were even translated into indigenous American languages. See Hendrickson, p. 133.

381 Cox, p. 1361.

382 Osorio was most certainly conscious in his use of style, with a particularly interesting segment from La visita de la Esperanza y el Tiempo claiming that ‘la verdad no necesita de tanta afectación, y los hombres cuerdos suelen despreciar por pueriles semejantes locuciones’. Osorio, Invectiva política, p. 84. While on the title page of his ‘Visión de visiones’, Osorio describes the text as ‘escrita por ella misma en lenguaje casero dice lo menos porque la entiendan todos (…) ojo avizor que habla en plata’. See Osorio, Invectiva política, p. 207.


385 Lavenia, p. 600. Examples include Antonio Possevino’s Il soldato cristiano (1569).
final theory (iv) that we might consider, is that *Las Cortesiadas* was written as a teaching resource for Osorio’s own pupils at the *Colegio Imperial de Madrid*. This would not only explain the brevity of the piece and its status as an unedited and unpublished work, but would also account for the highly detailed, didactic direction of the poem, perhaps hoping to train and inspire his pupils to missionary activity in the Americas and beyond.\(^386\) Perhaps, therefore, we can read *Las Cortesiadas* as a form of recruitment literature or even a missionary manual that, through the stirring sermonic speech delivered by Cortés in book five, could provide aspiring missionaries with the solid foundations of how to preach Catholicism in distant lands. Certainly, this was not unheard of, with Francesco Benci –Jesuit professor of rhetoric at the Collegium Romanum—citing in his martyrdom epic, *Quinque martyres e Societate Iesu in India* (1591), that his work addresses the aspiring missionaries and prospective martyrs that he taught at the College, who are encouraged to take his verses with them on their evangelist missions to America and China; thus providing us with a crucial insight of how Jesuits perceived the utility of the epics for missionary activity.\(^387\)

Whichever of these options one chooses to defend, what cannot be denied is the devout focus that distinguishes *Las Cortesiadas* from any other of the Cortesian epics that precede it. It is for this reason that we do not find any love episodes in Osorio’s epic; no romantic wanderings, no damsels in distress, no idyllic pastoral landscapes, nor lovelorn knights. Osorio was not enticed by the beauties of

\(^386\) Reff provides an intriguing anecdote, claiming that in Jesuit residences and colleges of the seventeenth century, ‘dinner was followed every night with a reading from a book chosen by the master of novices or rector. Missionary accounts (…) were particularly popular after-dinner reading’, p. 219.

\(^387\) ‘At uos, o socii, quibus almi nomen Iesu | Et noua praefixit piietas, et feruidus ardor, | Ignati patris exemplo, | Quos sancta secutos | Signa per ignotae diuinæ lumina legis | Ferre iuuat terras, longinquæ per aequoræ uectos | Seu procul Americae, seu uos diuersa Sinarum | Ora tenet, quacumque plaga uos diuidit orbis | Extremus, uites certes, certosque pericli, | Quæ uos cunque agitant curae, quæ munera, quisquis | Vos labor exercet, fructu minuente laborem, | Si uacat, et tenuem uatis non spernitis orsum, | Accipite haec, uestras acuant quae carmina mentes, | Instillentque acres perfuso melle liquores.’ (‘But you, my companions, who have been inspired by sweet Jesus’s name, a new devotion, and fervent love by Father Ignatius’s example, you, who follow the holy standards and delight to carry the light of divine law across unknown lands; borne over distant oceans, whether detained in far-off America or upon the remote shores of China, wherever seas and far-flung lands separate you from us, fearing for your life, and into certain danger; whatever worries beset you, whatever duties, whatever task oppresses you, the reward lessens the hard work; if you have leisure, and you do not despise the meagre undertaking of the poet, then take these verses to sharpen your resolution as you imbibe courageous draughts with their honey coating.’ Francesco Benci, ‘Quinque Martyres’, in *Francesco Benci’s Quinque Martyres: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, by Paul Gwynne (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 105-397 (pp. 106-7). For more on this epic poem see Cox, p. 1361.
lyric or the adventures of chivalry as Lobo Lasso and Saavedra had been.\footnote{According to Arthur Terry, ‘the influence of the Orlando Furioso had already begun to decline before 1600, to be replaced by imitations of Tasso or by the specifically religious epics’. Arthur Terry, Seventeenth-Century Spanish Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 188. Additionally, the inclusion of any such amorous episodes would have been at odds with the Jesuit-inspired portrayal Osorio seeks to present of Cortés throughout his epic, for as Loyola consistently instructed, the Jesuits were expected to practise the complete ‘abnegación de todo amor sensual’. Loyola, Obras completas, p. 523, see also p. 539.} His epic demonstrates minimal poetic adornment, favouring a more prosaic style in the prioritisation of his strictly religious predilection. In presenting Cortés as the paradigm of Christian virtue, Osorio not only satisfied his spiritual goals as a Jesuit, but also his nationalist objectives as a Spanish patriot, creating a hero who could inspire his fellow countrymen to moral perfection; a concern that, as we see from his Constancia de la fe, weighed heavily on his mind, as the Habsburg empire moved closer to collapse at the end of the seventeenth century. Despite his grievances, however, Osorio held a flicker of hope for the salvation of his nation, proud that Spain had not passed into the hands of foreigners:

Tu piedad y tu dicha han conseguido la singular gloria de reservar tus fértiles campañas a los tuyos, y eximir tus altos montes de las señas enemigas, sin permitir que sus excelsas cumbres humillasen su cerviz a la huella de pie extraño.\footnote{Osorio, Constancia de la fe, ‘Dedicación’ (page number not provided).}

Little did Osorio know that just six years later his worst nightmare would be realised, as Spain –‘sin mezcla de nación extranjera’– entered a new period of political turmoil, with the eighteenth century ushering a tumultuous change in dynasty, as well as the continued loss of Spanish territories.\footnote{Osorio, Constancia de la fe, ‘Dedicación’ (page number not provided).} Having passed away in 1688, it would be down to a new epic poet to beat the drum for the Spanish nation; Osorio’s successor, Juan de Escoiquiz, who at the very end of the eighteenth century, on the eve of Spain’s loss of its American colonies and amidst the recirculation of the Black Legend by Spain’s traditional enemies, similarly looks to Cortés in his México conquistada (1798) as an ideological weapon to resurrect Spain’s past glory.

\footnote{According to Arthur Terry, ‘the influence of the Orlando Furioso had already begun to decline before 1600, to be replaced by imitations of Tasso or by the specifically religious epics’. Arthur Terry, Seventeenth-Century Spanish Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 188. Additionally, the inclusion of any such amorous episodes would have been at odds with the Jesuit-inspired portrayal Osorio seeks to present of Cortés throughout his epic, for as Loyola consistently instructed, the Jesuits were expected to practise the complete ‘abnegación de todo amor sensual’. Loyola, Obras completas, p. 523, see also p. 539.}
CHAPTER 4

‘Llevado del amor de mi patria’: Reconquering the Narrative in Juan de Escoiquiz’s México conquistada

The dawn of a new century brought with it the much-needed change that Osorio had hoped for, as the winds of the Enlightenment that had blown over the Pyrenees thrust Spain from a position of decadence and despair to that of modernity and progress in the eighteenth century. The reformist measures of the new Bourbon dynasty, most notably under the administration of Charles III, ushered a period of economic, scientific, and cultural development, as Spain began to enjoy a steady population increase, improved agriculture and commerce, fiscal prosperity, as well as a thriving intellectual culture in the arts and sciences. In a period marked by the rationalisation of thought and scientific discovery, one might assume that there was little need to revisit the heroic spirit of Spain’s Golden Age, and that the figure of Cortés could finally retire on the shelf of antiquated heroes. In reality, however, the figure of Cortés is resurrected with great interest in the eighteenth century, with the topic of the conquest and colonisation of Spanish America becoming an intellectual talking point among many of Europe’s most esteemed Enlightened scholars. Within the Iberian Peninsula, Cortés once again saturated historical and literary writings, with his Cartas de relación enjoying renewed fame in a re-edited edition of 1770, while Antonio de Solís’ Historia de la conquista de México (1684) underwent no less that twenty editions throughout the eighteenth century, accompanied by the republishing of Bernal Díaz’s Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España in 1795, not to mention the debuting of Francisco Javier


Clavigero’s *Historia antigua de México*, originally written in Spanish and concluded in 1778. Hispanic literature was no less susceptible to Cortés’ charms, particularly theatre and poetry, which experienced an impressive number of works dedicated to the Cortesian theme in the eighteenth century, including a number of epic poems: Agustín Pablo de Castro’s *La cortesiada* (c. 1748), Francisco Ruiz de León’s *Hernandia. Triunfos de la fe y gloria de las armas españolas. Poema heroico* (1755), José Vaca de Guzmán’s *Las naves de Cortés destruidas* (c. 1777), Nicolás Fernández de Moratín’s *Las naves de Cortés destruidas* (c. 1777), and closing the century, Juan de Escoiquiz’s *México conquistada* (1798).

The emergence of a Cortesian epic subset in the eighteenth century attests to a revival of interest in the epic genre more broadly which, in both practice and theory, enjoyed renewed fame in Enlightenment Europe, particularly following Voltaire’s intellectually provocative *Essai sur la poésie épique* (1726); a rigorous interrogation of the epic that instigated a wide range of critical responses from epic practitioners and theoreticians. It is intriguing then, that the eighteenth-century epic has been, for the most part, disregarded in critical scholarship, reflecting a widespread neglect of eighteenth-century Hispanic literature in the field of Spanish and Latin American literary studies. Consequently, works of literature produced in the eighteenth century concerning Spain’s conquest of the Americas have received insufficient attention from scholars, with critical observation largely being reduced exclusively to Spain’s Golden Age. It is my contention, however, that the eighteenth century represents a pivotal moment in Spanish and Latin American literary history, wedged between the early modern and modern state, between colonial and postcolonial realities; an exceptional period of tradition and transformation. At this unparalleled juncture of history, the epic provides us with an invaluable insight into the changing consciousness of the eighteenth-century Hispanic world, as does the symbolic figure of Cortés, who resurfaces in an Enlightened age of reason and empiricism, to once again reclaim his

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393 In eighteenth-century Spain, the most notable example is perhaps book IV of Ignacio de Luzán’s *Poética o reglas de la poesía en general y de sus principales especies* (1737), which he dedicates to epic poetry. See also Luis José Velázquez de Velasco’s *Orígenes de la poesía castellana* (1754) which provides a discussion of the epic in chapter III.7. Another important example of eighteenth-century epic theory includes Louis Racine’s *Discours sur le poème épique* (1755). For more on eighteenth-century criticism of Spanish epic poetry, including a discussion of Voltaire’s essay and his critique of Ercilla’s *La Araucana*, see Pierce, *La poesía épica*, pp. 52-109. See also David Williams, ‘Voltaire’s “True Essay” on Epic Poetry’, *The Modern Language Review*, 88.1 (1993), 46-57.

place in Spain’s historical narrative. Investigating the representation of Cortés and the role of the epic in the eighteenth century, this chapter will focus specifically on Juan de Escoiquiz’s turn-of-the-century epic, _México conquistada_ (1798), as I explore how and why Escoiquiz resuscitates the hero in response to Spain’s imperial and colonial metamorphosis at the close of the century, while noting how the concept of heroism adjusts to the Enlightened era in response to shifting political and intellectual stimuli.

‘Mais que doit-on à l’Espagne?’: Imperial Dissolution and Conquest Polemics in Eighteenth-Century Spain

In 1794, an individual named Pedro Valverde requested a license for the reprint of Cortés Osorio’s _Constancia de la fe_, which was granted a year later on 13 July, 1795. Why might Osorio’s work—a text, as discussed in the previous chapter, founded on a desperate call for the national salvation of Spain—resurface at the end of the eighteenth century, precisely when Escoiquiz was writing his epic? The explanation is to be found not in the modernising reign of Charles III, but that of his successor, Charles IV, during which Spain’s period of progressive ‘flow’, to use Richard Herr’s terms, was cut short by a regressive period of ‘ebb’. Indeed, the final decades of the eighteenth century would finally extinguish the little hope that had remained in Osorio regarding the revival of Spain’s great empire, as recent advances in economics, agriculture, and science began to unravel following Charles IV’s ascension to the throne in 1788. Within months, his reign became burdened with escalating international tensions, economic crisis, and imperial decay in what Jeremy Adelman terms ‘the great epoch of upheaval and struggle’; a period defined by revolution and imperial collapse. The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, coupled with the mounting threats to Spain’s colonial possessions across the Atlantic, generated a tide of territorial and maritime conflict and economic pressure in the final years of the eighteenth century, pushing Spain’s once thriving empire to the brink of collapse. The

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395 According to Escoiquiz in his memoirs—_Memorias_—, his epic took him three years to complete. Given the existence of a letter dating from 1797, in which the author seeks economic support from the _Imprenta Real_, we can deduce that Escoiquiz began writing his epic sometime around 1794. See Juan de Escoiquiz, _Memorias, 1807-1808_, ed. José Ramón de Urquiyo y Goitia (Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2007), p. 62.


397 Jeremy Adelman, _Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic_ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 2. This period is also fittingly described by Herr as the ‘hectic years’ in _The Eighteenth-Century Revolution in Spain_, p. 316; and ‘the crisis of Bourbon Spain’ by Lynch in _Bourbon Spain_, p. 375.
glorious years of conquest and expansion had given way to desperate preservation and inevitable dissolution.

Having already lost a number of its European territories as a result of the Spanish War of Succession at the beginning of the century, as well as its damaging involvement in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-8) and the Seven Years’ War (1756-63), Spain’s waning territorial position was escalated by the countless wars of the final decades of the eighteenth century. Spain’s decision to join Austria, Prussia, and England in the counterrevolutionary coalition against France, following the execution of King Louis XVI –Charles IV’s cousin– in 1793, resulted in the French invasions of Catalonia and the Basque provinces, until peace was achieved in 1796 in a reinstatement of the Franco-Spanish Family Pact. Peace was short-lived, however, as the alliance with France provoked Britain into declaring war on Spain, resulting in the British navy issuing a blockade on the port of Cadiz, thus wreaking havoc on Spain’s colonial trade for several years and devastating the economy. Without doubt, incessant warring with France and Britain resulted in fiscal disaster for Spain, with royal credit plummeting in the final decade of the eighteenth century. In a desperate effort to manage the economic crisis Spain now faced, the Crown raised taxes and imposed direct charges on the nobility, while also decreeing the expropriation of Church lands. These measures unsurprisingly resulted in public outcry, not only among the aristocracy but also the wider sections of society which had to contend with growing inflation, as wages fell, prices rocketed, and unemployment rose. Consequently, the Crown not only witnessed popular uprisings in the metropole –most notably in Guadalajara in 1797, and Seville and Asturias in 1798–, but also in its American colonies, having adopted a rigorous policy of taxation in its colonial dominions to fund its wars in Europe. As deficits grew to new heights across

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398 For more on Spain’s military campaigns in the second half of the eighteenth century see Gabriel B. Paquette, ‘The Dissolution of the Spanish Atlantic Monarchy’, The Historical Journal, 52.1 (2009), 175-212 (p. 178); and Lynch, Bourbon Spain, pp. 317-23 and pp. 388-95.


400 On the impact of Britain’s blockade of Spanish ports on Spain’s colonial monopoly, see Herr, The Eighteenth-Century Revolution in Spain, p. 398; Lynch, Bourbon Spain, pp. 367-370; and Adelman, Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic, pp. 102-6.


402 See Lynch, Bourbon Spain, pp. 167-71; Rodriguez O., p. 50; and Herr, The Eighteenth-Century Revolution in Spain, p. 397.


Spanish America, so did popular protest and rebellion, as the conditions of previous colonial pacts came into question.\footnote{405}

Aggrieved by the implementation of Bourbon reforms –initially introduced by Philip V, which saw the restructuring and centralisation of Spain’s colonial possessions in the Americas as a means of increasing the Crown’s control through the monopolisation of administration, education, agriculture, trade, and industry, as well as the introduction of heavy taxing--, and stirred by the recent revolutions in Europe and the declaration of independence of the North American colonies, Spanish Americans across Mexico, Peru, New Granada, and Venezuela turned to political and armed resistance to express their objections in the second half of the eighteenth century.\footnote{406} This not only included slave uprisings and major indigenous revolts such as that led by Túpac Amaru II in Peru –the biggest Indian rebellion the New World had witnessed since the conquest--, but also creole insurrection, such as the rebellion of Quito in 1765, the Comunero revolt of New Granada in 1781, and the Conspiracy of the Machetes that took place in Mexico in 1799.\footnote{407} Creole discontent had reached unprecedented heights in the eighteenth century, provoked by Bourbon tax abuses and the continued prioritisation of European Spaniards over Spanish Americans in the appointment of high-ranking offices.\footnote{408} Expressions of creole patriotism quickly spilled over into calls for independence, as encapsulated by radical creole insurgents such as the Peruvian Jesuit exile Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán who in his Carta dirigida a los españoles americanos –written shortly before his death in 1798– encouraged his fellow Spanish Americans to follow the example of the English colonies of North America and free themselves from the yoke of Spanish tyranny, under which they have received nothing more than ‘ingratitud, injusticia, servidumbre y desolación’.\footnote{409} Echoing the complaints of the creole epic poet Antonio de Saavedra Guzmán some


\footnote{405}{On Spanish American deficit in this period see Rodríguez O., pp. 33-34.}

\footnote{406}{For more information on the Bourbon reforms see Feros, pp. 195-199; and Rodríguez O., pp. 19-33.}

\footnote{407}{The Conspiracy of the Machetes was an unsuccessful rebellion led by the creole rebel Pedro de la Portilla who sought to declare war on Spain and proclaim the independence of Mexico. See Hernando Castillo Guerra, \textit{Diálogos en el panteón liberal de México}, 2 vols (México: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 1999), I, p. 151. For more information on Spanish American insurgence in the eighteenth century see Brading, \textit{The First America}, pp. 535-540; Lynch, ‘The Origins of Spanish American Independence’, pp. 32-45; and Rodríguez O., pp. 24-32. On slave trade revolts in the Americas, see Adelman, pp. 92-95.}

\footnote{408}{According to Feros, despite making up only five percent of the population, Spanish-born whites ‘occupied as many as 95 percent of all higher administrative offices in the colonies’ in the eighteenth century. See Feros, p. 199. See also Brading, \textit{The First America}, p. 537.}

200 years earlier, Viscardo draws on what Brading calls the ‘traditional themes of creole patriotism’ – namely the creole’s status as the dispossessed heir, as he reminds his compatriots of the Spanish government’s refusal to grant them a stake, both politically and economically, in the lands they had been born in.  

It is only in revolting against Spain – ‘un país, que nos es extranjero, a quien nada debemos, de quien no dependemos’ – that ‘se verá renacer la gloria nacional’. While it would not be until the 1810s and 1820s that movements of national liberation such as those promoted by Viscardo would be realised, eighteenth-century displays of insurgency nevertheless stood as testament to the crumbling of Old-World bonds, paving the way for the independence of Latin America.

As well as facing territorial attack within the European continent, mercantilist conflict on the waters of the Atlantic, and colonial insurgency in the Americas, Spain also encountered scathing intellectual attack with the resurfacing of the Black Legend in the eighteenth century. Reviving the anti-Spanish prejudices initially adopted in the sixteenth century by Spain’s traditional rivals, Enlightened intellectuals across Europe, particularly the French philosophs, resurrected a discourse of Hispanophobia by launching a series of virulent attacks on the Spanish national character, as well as denigrating its scientific and cultural stagnation, its religiosity, politics, and imperial history. Certainly, for many French intellectuals of the eighteenth century, Spain represented the antithesis of the Enlightenment; irrational, superstitious, and ignorant, its cultural and intellectual paralysis saw it lag far behind the advances being made in the rest of Europe. Accused of religious fanaticism and

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Political Emancipation and Creole Hegemony: Viscardo’s Letter to the Spanish Americans (c. 1791)’, History of European Ideas, 44.1 (2018), 49-59. Viscardo was not, of course, alone in his calls for American independence, for over in New Spain another creole, Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, was quickly emerging as ‘the chief theorist of the Mexican insurgency’. Brading, The First America, p. 585.  

Brading, The First America, p. 538. Like Saavedra, Viscardo paints a damning picture of the peninsulares, accusing them of being greedy, dishonourable, selfish wrongdoers; ‘pícaros imbéciles’. Viscardo, as quoted in Gutiérrez Escudero, p. 341. While Viscardo’s complaints bear a striking resemblance to those of the sixteenth-century epic poet Saavedra, explored in Chapter Two, the crucial difference between the two is Saavedra’s expressed loyalty to the Spanish monarchy and, unlike Viscardo, he never expresses any desire to emancipate America from Spain’s colonial rule.  

Viscardo, as quoted in Gutiérrez Escudero, pp. 330, 342.  

For more information on the revival of the Black Legend in the eighteenth century see García Cárcel, pp. 139-188; Javier Yagüe Bosch, ‘Defensa de España y conquista de América en el siglo XVIII: Cadalso y Forner’, Dieciocho, 28.1 (2005), 121-40 (p. 121); Rawlings, pp. 50-51; and María Elvira Roca Barea, Imperiofobia y leyenda negra, pp. 353-400. On specifically French Hispanophobia in the eighteenth century see María Elvira Roca Barea, Fracasología: España y sus élites: de los afrancesados a nuestros días (Barcelona: Espasa, 2019), pp. 82-106.  

As Feros observes, by the end of the eighteenth century, ‘there was a feeling (…) that Spain had been left behind by the rest of Europe and that it would take decades to catch up’. Feros, p. 156. For more on eighteenth-
imperial brutality, the *philosophes* considered Spain a political anti-model, attributed not only to the oppressive power of the Inquisition —whose accused repression and brutality stood at the forefront of much Enlightened critique—, but equally to Spaniards’ sloth, greed, and cruelty. Indeed, Spain’s detractors sought to propagate hyperbolic, and often caricaturist, stereotypes when defining its national character; Spaniards were lazy —‘invincibles ennemis du travail’—, poor, dirty, covetous, haughty, and above all, violent. Destructive and brutal by nature, Spaniards were accused of merciless religious and racial intolerance, while their voracious expansionist policy, most notably in the Americas, came under severe scrutiny as Enlightened intellectuals reengaged with sixteenth-century debates regarding the legitimacy of Spain’s conquest and subsequent colonial policies.

The spectre of Las Casas therefore returned with vigour in the eighteenth century, as his *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* enjoyed renewed popularity outside of Spain, being republished in French, Dutch, English, German, and Italian. Anticolonial rhetoric thus became tinged with an Enlightened hue, undoubtedly encouraged by the developments made in political science, and growing concerns regarding human rights and individual liberty, sparked by the French Revolution. Hence was reborn what Julián Juderías terms ‘la leyenda colonial antiespañola’; embraced by the likes of some of Europe’s most esteemed intellectuals including Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau, de Pauw, Diderot, Raynal, among many others. For these individuals, Spain’s conquest of the New World had

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416 According to Stephanie Rohner, there were ten printings of Las Casas’ work in the eighteenth century: five in French, two in English, one in Dutch, one in German, and one in Italian. See Stephanie Rohner, ‘The Mexica Museum of Francisco Javier Clavigero’, unpublished PhD thesis (Yale University, 2018), p. 101.

417 Julián Juderías, *La leyenda negra. Estudios acerca del concepto de España en el extranjero* (Salamanca: Junta de Castilla y León, 1997), p. 247. For an extensive selection of the anticolonial arguments presented by these
not only been erroneous on an economic and commercial level, as Spain failed to fully capitalise on the opportunity she had been given, but most prominently on a moral level; having been founded on ambition, exploitation, and inhumanity.\textsuperscript{418} This is most vigorously addressed by who can perhaps be considered the most detrimental anti-colonial detractor to have surfaced in the eighteenth century: Guillaume-Thomas François Raynal in his \textit{Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce européen dans le deux Indes} (1770). A bestseller in its time, Raynal’s work has been described as ‘the ultimate colonial-empire destroyer’, expressing particular aggressiveness towards Spain, with volumes six and seven dedicated specifically to the conquests of Mexico and Peru.\textsuperscript{419} Seeking to deheroicize the conquest, the work presents Spain’s conquistadors, including Cortés, as cruel and ruthless criminals who, driven by their own private ambitions, destroyed innocent and defenceless victims, thus echoing Las Casas’ accusations from centuries past. Conquistadors are described as being ‘rampant’, ‘violent’, ‘capable de tous les forfaits qui le conduiront les plus rapidement à ses fins’, ‘la soif du sang le reprend’, matched only by ‘la soif de l’or’.\textsuperscript{420} Defending indigenous rights and rebuking Spain’s unjust appropriation of foreign lands, he exclaims:

\begin{quote}
Vous n’avez aucun droit sur les productions insensibles et brutes de la terre où vous abordez, et vous en arrogez un sur l’homme votre semblable. Au lieu de reconnaître dans cet homme un frère, vous n’y voyez qu’un esclave, une bête de somme.\textsuperscript{421}
\end{quote}

In lamenting the arrival of the Spaniards, ‘dévastateurs du Nouveau-Monde’, and the ‘cruautés abominables’ that unfurled in their wake, it is perhaps unsurprising that Raynal reveals himself to be a proponent of American independence:

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\begin{quote}
individuals see Marcel Merle and Roberto Mesa, \textit{El anticolonialismo europeo. Desde Las Casas a Marx} (Madrid: Alianza, 1972), pp. 103-35.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{418} For further examples of Enlightened critique of Spain’s mishandling of commerce and economy following the conquest of the Americas see Merle and Mesa, pp. 135-200; Iglesias, ‘Montesquieu and Spain’, p. 147; and Rawlings, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{419} Enlightenment Spain and the “Encyclopédie Méthodique”, ed. Clorinda Donato and Ricardo López (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2015), p. 12. It should be noted that Denis Diderot contributed to volumes six and seven of the \textit{Histoire philosophique}.


\textsuperscript{421} Raynal, II, book VIII, chapter 1, p. 252.
Que les tyrans de tous les pays, que tous les oppresseurs, ou politiques ou sacrés, sachent qu’il existe un lieu dans le monde où l’on peut se dérober à leurs chaînes[.] (…) Que l’idée d’un pareil asyle épouvante les despotes et leur serve de frein. 422

It must be acknowledged that Spain also faced condemnation of its colonial enterprise from within its own walls, most notably in the ilustrado Benito Jerónimo Feijoo’s bestselling Teatro crítico universal (1726-1739). In line with his French contemporaries, Feijoo rebukes the greed that motivated many individuals to conquer:

Queréis hallar tierras, donde no sólo haya ruinas de oro, sino que las mismas poblaciones, paredes, tejados, utensilios, todo sea oro. ¡Oh ciegos, cuánto erráis el camino! (…) La causa de religión que alegáis para descubrir nuevas tierras, no niego que respecto de algunos pocos celosos, es motivo; pero a infinitos sólo sirve de pretexto. (…) Substituyeron a una idolatría otra idolatría. (…) Los españoles introdujeron la adoración del oro y la plata. 423

Equally deplorable was the Spaniards’ cruel treatment of the natives, comparable to ‘los más brutales indios de la América’:

Estos sacrificaban víctimas humanas a sus imaginarias deidades. Lo mismo hicieron, y en mucho mayor número algunos españoles. ¡Cuántos millares de aquellos míseros indígenas, ya con la llama ya con el hierro, sacrificaron a Plutón, que así llamaban los antiguos a la deidad infernal de las riquezas! 424

Blurring the roles of the civilised and the barbarian, Feijoo poignantly asks his readers: ‘¿quién os parece que arde en más voraces llamas en el infierno, el indio, idólatra ciego, o el español, cruel y sanguinario?’ 425 The irony, for Feijoo, is that despite its efforts for great riches, Spain achieved little more than ‘la nota de cruels y avaros, sin darnos la comodidad de ricos.’ 426 In reality, he tells us, ‘el

423 Benito Jerónimo Feijoo y Montenegro, Teatro crítico universal, 8 vols (Madrid: Blas Román, 1778), IV, Discurso décimo, XVII.
424 Feijoo y Montenegro, IV, Discurso décimo, XVII.
425 Feijoo y Montenegro, IV, Discurso décimo, XVII.
426 Feijoo y Montenegro, IV, Discurso décimo, XVII.
oro de las Indias nos tiene pobres. No es esto lo peor; sino que enriquece a nuestros enemigos. Por haber maltratado a los indios, somos ahora los españoles indios de los demás europeos.  

The surge of accusations that Spain had faced throughout the eighteenth century –be it the ridicule of its intellectual backwardness, the propagation of unsavoury stereotypes, or the reprehension of its colonial policy–, culminated in the infamously polemical article by Nicolas Masson de Morvilliers titled ‘Espagne’. Published in Charles-Joseph Panckoucke’s *Encyclopédie méthodique* in 1782, the article became ‘the embodiment of all perceived slights against the Kingdoms of Spain’, labelling the nation as the most ignorant of Europe –‘c’est peut-être la nation la plus ignorante de l’Europe’–; an attitude epitomised by the author’s immensely provocative question: ‘mais que doit-on à l’Espagne? Et depuis deux siècles, depuis quatre, depuis dix, qu’a-t-elle fait pour l’Europe?’.

Masson’s question unleashed an intellectual and political storm in Spain as Spanish apologistas reacted with patriotic ferocity in their vehement efforts to defend their nation and rehabilitate its deteriorating reputation. The Masson affair thus provoked a surge in apologetic literature in the final decades of the eighteenth century, characterised by a rhetoric of defence and the positive propagation of Spain that sought to discredit the accusations made against her. The defence of Spain’s national honour was supported at governmental level, as the Crown launched a counter-offensive campaign to silence Spain’s detractors. This was not only carried out through banning the importation of the *Encyclopédie méthodique* –accompanied by the Crown’s demanding of an official apology–, and the broader

427 Feijoo y Montenegro, IV, Discurso décimo, XVII.
prohibiting of polemical, anti-Spanish works, including Raynal’s *Histoire philosophique*, but also through state sponsorship in the form of economic incentives directed at Spain’s writers to defend the nation.\(^{432}\) In 1786, for example, the Academia Española offered a prize for the best refutation of Masson’s article.\(^{433}\) The winner was Juan Pablo Forner, a renowned *apológista* and Francophile, whose *Oración apologética por la España y su mérito literario* (1786), sought to defend Spain’s history, peoples, language, and culture; a patriotic discourse infused with national fervour.\(^{434}\) Certainly, the *apológista* writings of the late eighteenth century were defined by what Bernardita Llanos describes as ‘el surgimiento progresivo de un espíritu nacional’, driven predominantly by the denigration of Spain’s reputation by her detractors, but also partly by the Bourbon dynasty’s continued efforts to reinforce traditional Spanish imagery as a means of legitimising its claim to the Spanish throne, and partly by the outbreak of the French Revolution and the lurking threat of French invasion which instigated the recourse to pro-Spanish – and therefore anti-French – national traditions and symbols.\(^{435}\) These factors served as ‘catalyst[s] in a national discourse of self-definition’ in late eighteenth-century Spain, as Spanish intellectuals concerned themselves with questions regarding national identity, expressed in a heightened cultural and historical awareness that reconsidered what it really meant to be Spanish.\(^{436}\)

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\(^{432}\) It should be noted that a Spanish translation of Raynal’s work surfaced in 1784, by the Duke of Almodóvar, Pedro Francisco Jiménez de Góngora y Luján, but this was a heavily redacted and adapted version, seeking to correct the accusations made against Spain. For more information see Ovidio García Regueiro, ‘*Ilustración* e intereses estamentales: (antagonismo entre sociedad tradicional y corrientes innovadoras en la versión española de a ‘Historia’ de Raynal)’ (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1982), pp. 192-205. On the prohibition of Masson’s article in Spain see Herr, *The Eighteenth-Century Revolution in Spain*, p. 221. For more information on the blocks imposed on French works more broadly see García Cárce, 175; and Herr, *The Eighteenth-Century Revolution in Spain*, p. 71. On the economic incentives offered by the Spanish government see Rohner, ‘The Mexica Museum of Francisco Javier Clavigero’, p. 106.


\(^{434}\) For an analysis of Forner’s text see Rawlings, pp. 56-57.


\(^{436}\) Raillard, p. 31. According to Feros, ‘the long eighteenth century in Spain was a time of profound ideological debate over national character …). Spaniards’ identity was the product of encounters with other Europeans and especially a reaction to their disparagement by some of their neighbors and rivals …). When Spaniards responded to these criticisms they were able to define themselves as a distinct nation - bearers of unique cultural and religious values and the product of a singular history’. Feros, p. 154. On the concept of nationhood in eighteenth-century Spain see Feros, pp. 153-88; and José Antonio Maravall, *Estudios de la historia del pensamiento español, siglo XVIII* (Madrid: Mondadori España, 1991), pp. 42-60.
Delving the archives of Spain’s rich history, Spanish intellectuals sought to protect their nation’s reputation through recourse to its past splendour in a pre-Romantic reclamation of Spain’s Golden Age. On a cultural level, this was achieved through an editorial campaign of literary patriotism which saw the resurgence of new editions and anthologies of Golden Age texts and authors, as well as an ardent defence of Spanish literature, that had come under attack in recent decades by Spain’s critics. The cultivation of a nationalist discourse was also expressed in a renewed interest in Spanish history, as Spain’s past once again became the best form of defence. Revisiting Spain’s glory years, historians consciously strove to challenge the negative stereotypes that had been assigned to Spain and instead promote a national identity based on glory, honour, bravery, and imperial success, patriotically resurrecting the memory of its legendary heroes and rewriting history as a series of heroic feats.

Spain’s conquest of the Americas was certainly no exception to this concerted effort to reassert control over its historical narrative, as the subject of American conquest not only became a source of patriotic pride, but also an opportunity to correct to the (mis)representations projected by Spain’s denigrators and establish an official discourse. This was reflected at a governmental level through

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438 As Feros observes: ‘forging the Spanish nation required its would-be architects to look anew at the country’s history in the belief that a nation could not exist without a shared history of origins, laws, religion, culture, and exploits. This history, or the writing of this history, alone could transform a disparate collection of individuals and communities into a living, unified nation.’ Feros, p. 170. On Spain's revived interest in national history in the eighteenth century see also Gonzalo Pasamar, *Apología and Criticism: Historians and the History of Spain, 1500-2000* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 2, 45; Mestre Sanchis, *Apología y crítica*, pp. 18, 36, 48, 76, 86; and Herr, *The Eighteenth-Century Revolution in Spain*, pp. 229, 337-41. For the histories of Spain published in the eighteenth century see Feros, p. 171.

439 According to Feros, ‘all of these popular histories tended to foreground events and exploits that could unify Spaniards and inspire pride in their homeland and ancestors’. Feros, p. 172. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, as Llanos exemplifies in her study, eighteenth-century historians and writers typically revisited the deeds of heroes from the ages of the *Reconquista* and the New World conquests.

the Crown’s establishing of the Archive of the Indies in Seville in 1785 – thus ensuring the authorised compilation of historical documentation relating to its transatlantic empire –, while also asserting control over what was permitted to be published about America, as well as issuing a royal order, in 1779, for the writing of an official history of the New World ‘que tanto puede conducir al honor de la nación y a vindicarla de las groseras calumnias con que la han pretendido infamar algunas plumas extranjeras’; a task entrusted to Juan Bautista Muñoz, who published the first, and only, volume of his work Historia del Nuevo Mundo in 1793.441 The government also sought to promote a heroic image of Spain’s conquests in the New World through the symbolic figure of Hernán Cortés, as exemplified by the poetry competition for the best epic poem to exalt Cortés’ destruction of his ships in Veracruz, organised by the Real Academia Española in 1777. The competition was very well received, with the Academy welcoming within the region of 45 to 53 submissions, several of which were presented by some of Spain’s leading literary figures.442 As Maurizio Fabbri has argued, the competition clearly demonstrated the government’s awareness of the capabilities of the figure of Cortés for rousing patriotism and regenerating pride in the Spanish nation; a realisation that is reflected in the eruption of literary works dedicated to the figure of Cortés and the conquest of Mexico in the final decades of the eighteenth century.443 A symbol of national pride and imperial strength, Cortés was nostalgically appropriated by Spain’s playwrights, poets, essayists, and epistolists to inject a discourse of heroism into a crumbling narrative of empire, as the cultural memory of his mythical deeds and the spirit of his conquest became ideological tools for the propagation and defence of the nation.444


444 Notable theatrical examples include Agustín Cordero’s Cortés triunfante en Tlascala (1780) and Fermín del Rey’s two heroic comedies: Hernán Cortés en Cholula (1782) and Hernán Cortés en Tabasco (1790). Letter IX of José Cadalso’s Cartas marruecas (published posthumously in 1789) is also frequently cited by scholars for its apologetic rendering of Cortés and the conquest. For a detailed exploration of the letter’s reception by contemporary scholars see Ciara O’Hagan, ‘Rhapsodic Defence or Enlightened Critique? A Re-Reading of
The same can be said of the political and patriotic power of the epic genre which, no doubt in response to the decline and denigration of Spain and its American empire, resurfaced in the final decades of the eighteenth century to offer, once again, the shelter of its sublime walls to the deeds of Cortés. The epic must certainly have been seen by Spanish apologistas as a suitable vehicle for defending the nation and regenerating pride in Spain, given its longstanding relationship with the protection and propagation of empire and colonial legitimisation, while its ability to contribute to the social and political arenas made it an appropriate genre for engaging in the polemics of the late eighteenth century. As well as its espousal of traditional national values such as militarism, vassalage, honour, and religion, the epic was itself esteemed as a national treasure, with its noble status and patriotic impulse providing the ideal conditions for poets to restore the dwindling pride of the Spanish nation. One such poet ready to take on this task was Juan de Escoiquiz, whose México conquistada would draw on the political power of the epic and the figure of Cortés to defend his nation and restore it to its former glory.

Cortés Enlightened: Defending the Nation in Juan de Escoiquiz’s México conquistada

Born in Ocaña, Spain, on 14 July, 1747, Juan de Escoiquiz Mezeta, while relatively unknown today, was an important figure in the political and literary realms of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Following the death of his father, Juan Martín de Escoiquiz –teniente general de los Reales

Hernán Cortés’s Conquest of Mexico in Carta IX of Cadalso’s Cartas marruecas’, Bulletin of Hispanic Studies, 94.1 (2017), 63-76.

445 As María José Vega observes, epic poets ‘describen sus poemas como subsidios del olvido, como remedios de la memoria futura, como un acto de servicio personal, como una imbricación de historia, autobiografía y epopeya, como un elemento más en la construcción, mediante las letras, de la gloria nacional y no sólo de la dinástica.’ See María José Vega, p. 108.


447 This becomes immediately clear from a reading of Escoiquiz’s Memorias, which provide us with key information about his life and ideology, particularly regarding his involvement in state affairs and international politics, as well as the Memoirs written by his political enemy, Manuel Godoy –first minister and valido of Charles IV–, in which Escoiquiz features prominently. José Ramón de Urquijo y Goitia goes so far as to say that Escoiquiz was ‘uno de los actores fundamentales (...) de la historia española’ at the turn of the century. José Ramón de
Ejércitos— in 1758, Escoiquiz was sent to be educated in a Jesuit school in Toulouse, France, where he became fluent in Latin and French. His studies were interrupted by the proposition to become a page in the court of Charles III, where he spent six years in the Enlightened environment of Spain’s most progressive administration. Following his time at court, Escoiquiz, unlike his father and his brother Manuel—segundo teniente de Guardias Españolas—, chose a career in the Church, serving for 22 years as the canon of Zaragoza. The lures of the court proved too strong for Escoiquiz, however, as he returned to Madrid once again in 1790 to assume the position of sumiller de cortina under the recently coronated Charles IV, and later the role of court tutor to the Prince of Asturias, who would go on to become king Ferdinand VII, choosing Escoiquiz as his royal advisor. While in Madrid, Escoiquiz frequented salons and literary circles, taking part in tertulias and producing a respectable body of literature: ‘único objeto de mi afición’, ‘mi pasión dominante’. Throughout his lifetime, Escoiquiz penned a wide range of works, with his ability to read both French and English enabling his translation of writers such as Edward Young, Louis Cotte, Pigault-Lebrun, and John Milton, as well as a number of pedagogical works. In addition to several autobiographical and political works, Escoiquiz also composed an epic poem, México conquistada, published in Madrid, 1798, by the Imprenta Real.


448 See Escoiquiz, Memorias, p. 61. According to Herr, it was not unusual for high-born Spanish youths to be sent to Jesuit schools in France, until the order was expelled there in 1764. Herr, The Eighteenth-Century Revolution in Spain, p. 74.

449 As relayed by Escoiquiz in his Memorias, p. 61. Escoiquiz explains that Charles III’s invitation for him and his brother to join the court was owing to the esteem with which the king held their father, who had led a life in service to his king and country. See Memorias, pp. 59-61.

450 See Escoiquiz, Memorias, p. 70. On his brother, Manuel, see p. 61 of the Memorias.

451 See Urquijo y Goitia, p. 10; and Escoiquiz, Memorias, p. 62. In his Memoirs, Escoiquiz boasts of his close proximity to Charles IV and his queen, Maria Luisa of Parma, claiming to visit them at the Escorial ‘a almorzar todas las mañanas’, and was even asked to ‘perfeccionar la instrucción de su hija la infanta doña María Luisa’, p. 65. The queen, he tells us, ‘me distinguió y favoreció cada día más (…) y cada día me recibía mejor, como también el Rey, a quien había hecho venir a algunas de mis audiencias y que me honraba, aun en público, siempre que me veía’, p. 74.

452 Escoiquiz, Memorias, pp. 62, 70. See also Urquijo y Goitia, pp. 12-13.

453 It is thought that Escoiquiz dedicated himself to learning English during his canonship in Zaragoza. See Urquijo y Goitia, p. 10. Some of Escoiquiz’s pedagogical translations include: El amigo de los niños (1794); Lecciones elementales de Historia Natural por preguntas y respuestas para el uso de los niños (1794); Tratado de las obligaciones del hombre (1795); and Elementos de geografía (unpublished).

454 As well as his Memorias, notable works include: Manifiesto de los intensos afectos de dolor, amor y ternura del augusto combatido corazón de nuestro invicto monarca Fernando VII, exhalados por triste desahogo en el seno de su estimado maestro y confesor el señor Escoiquiz (1808); Idea sencilla de las razones que motivaron el
Comprising 26 cantos written in *ottava rima* and spread over three volumes, the poem opens in classical Virgilian form –‘Las armas canto y el varón Hispano’ (I. 1)–, immediately setting the politicised, propagandistic intention that informs the entire work. Indeed, it is my contention that Escoiquiz’s epic can be read as a direct response to the accusations that had been made against Spain by her detractors in the final decades of the eighteenth century. While there is no evidence to suggest that Escoiquiz was sponsored by the Crown or government to write his work –as other writers had been–, his proclaimed ambitions to dutifully serve his country and his decision to dedicate the poem to Charles IV indicate the patriotic spirit of the work; a suspicion that is confirmed in the poem’s prologue, in which Escoiquiz reveals himself to be an unwavering *apologista* of Spain’s transatlantic conquests.

Varying substantially from the conventional style and content of traditional epic prologues, Escoiquiz displays an Enlightened mentality in the composition of his prologue. Discursive and essayistic in style, the prologue conflates entrenched national pride with critical observation and rational argument –‘llevado del amor de mi patria y de la fuerza de la razón’ (p. xxxi)–, to provide its readers with ‘una justa y moderada defensa’ (p. xxxii) against those who ‘han procurado obscurecer nuestras viaje del Rey Fernando VII a Bayona (1814); and Las cuarenta verdades sobre el planteamiento de la Constitución (1820). He is also thought to have written an *Apología de la Inquisición* (date unknown).

Juan de Escoiquiz, *México conquistada: poema heroyco*, 3 vols (Madrid: Imprenta Real, por P.J. Pereyra, 1798). Citations from the poem will henceforth be referenced using canto and stanza number. Quotations from the prologue will be cited using page number. It is worth noting that Escoiquiz’s decision to split his epic into three volumes may have been inspired by Ercilla’s *La Araucana*.

The existence of a letter dated October 5, 1797, ‘de Juan de Escoiquiz pidiendo ayuda económica para imprimir su poema México conquistada’ reveals that the publication of his epic was carried out at the expense of the *Imprenta Real*, but fails to evidence any economic incentive or exchange behind the writing of the work. See ‘Carta de Juan de Escoiquiz pidiendo ayuda económica para imprimir su poema México conquistada’, 1797, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MSS/22988/16, fol. 1’. Expressions of Escoiquiz’s patriotic rhetoric of service are to be found in his *Memorias*, in which he claims to desire ‘el bien de mi patria’, dedicating himself ‘con el más ardiente celo por mi generosa y desgraciada nación’. Escoiquiz, *Memorias*, pp. 69, 71.

Escoiquiz’s prologue is revealing of the author’s stylistic and political intentions and is thus a crucial component of his epic. As María José Vega argues: ‘los prólogos de autor (…) son lugares teóricos incompletos, por asistemáticos, dirigidos, interesados y selectivos. Trasladan una representación mejorada de la práctica de la escritura y encauzan la lectura del texto en tanto que proponen gestos de afiliación política y literaria y definen el punto de observación desde el cual el poema quiere ser juzgado.’ See María José Vega, p. 106. Escoiquiz himself highlights the unusualness of his prologue, stating that ‘para acomodarme al uso de algunos escritores modernos que han publicado poemas épicos, debía comenzar este prólogo por una larga y erudita disertación sobre las leyes de la epopeya, y concluir con una exposición de la fidelidad y propiedad con que me parece que las observe en el que doy a luz; pero además de que esto sería gastar inútilmente el tiempo, tengo por cosa impropia el hacer, aun en los términos más modestos, semejante elogio, en lugar de dejar que lo hagan los lectores, si la obra lo merece’. Escoiquiz, p. iv.
glorias, y en especial las de los conquistadores de la América’ (p. vii). Employing a rhetoric of vindication, Escoiquiz utilises the space of his prologue as an opportunity to engage with contemporary debates over the legitimacy of Spain’s New World conquests and the morality of its colonial policy, thus situating the epic within the wider context of eighteenth-century polemics. Clearly outlining the intention of his prologue—and by extension that of his epic—, he claims that:

Lo único a que aspiro es a hacer ver al mundo que no merecen los españoles que los traten con el vilipendio que los tratan, como también tapar la boca a los escritores parciales e injustos, que tiran a quitarles la estimación a los ojos del mundo por medio de las más atroces y ridículas calumnias. (p. xxxi)

Seeking to discredit and dismantle the accusations of Spain’s critics, ‘aquella maligna ralea de escritores extranjeros’ (p. xxvi)–namely Raynal whose work, inspired by the ‘exageraciones inadmisibles y desatinadas’ (p. xviii) of Las Casas, he classifies as ‘un tejido de absurdos [que] no ha perdonado con su pluma impia al mismo Dios’ (p. xxv)–, Escoiquiz responds directly to the unfounded allegations of Spain’s jealous detractors, contesting their validity in a point-by-point refutation, and promoting a defensive national discourse in their place. As well as employing the rhetorical tool of refutatio, Escoiquiz also draws on epideictic rhetoric in his prologue, not only praising the motivations and consequences of Spain’s New World conquests, but blaming those carried out by Spain’s accusers—France, Britain, and Holland–, admonishing their cruel and devastating colonial practices, and thus demonstrating their hypocrisy. Questioning ‘si debe reputarse como peculiar de los Españoles una tacha que les es común con sus respectivas naciones, y si será sufrible que estas hallándose en el mismo

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458 Echoing the defensive assertions of Sepúlveda in his Democrates secundus, Escoiquiz claims that Spain’s conquests in the Americas ‘han ido fundadas en razones’ (p. xi), which he explores at length. The poet also names William Robertson as another of Spain’s detractors in his History of America (1777). It is important to note that Escoiquiz not only takes issue with Spain’s foreign critics, but also ‘aquellos españoles intrusos que alaban, adoptan y difunden por afectar erudición extranjera semejantes paradojas’ (pp. xxv-xxvi), perhaps referring to the critique of Spanish colonialism presented by Feijoo in his Teatro crítico universal (explored above). For a discussion of the historical works composed in the eighteenth century that engaged with the question of the legitimacy of Spanish colonialism in the Americas see Cañizares-Esguerra, How to Write the History of the New World, pp. 171-90.

459 Escoiquiz was not alone in employing this strategy, for as O’Hagan has explored in her study of Cadalso’s Carta IX, other ilustrado writers exploited ‘the Enlightenment opposition to slavery’ as ‘an attempt to assuage Spanish culpability’. O’Hagan, ‘Rhapsodic Defense’, p. 70. See also Manfred Tietz, ‘La justificación de la conquista en España en el siglo de las luces: del Cristo al logocentrismo’, in La representación de la conquista en el teatro español desde la Ilustración hasta finales del franquismo, ed. Wilfried Floeck and Sabine Fritz (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2009), pp. 39-66 (p. 45).
caso se la improperen’, Escoiquiz invites the nations who have criticised Spain’s actions in the Americas to look at their own histories and determine whether they were able to conquer without bloodshed: ‘vénganse, pues, a vista de este inaudito exceso de crueldad los escritores extranjeros a motejar a los españoles, y comaren con ella los excesos de estos en sus empresas’ (p. xxx). In an effort to paint Spain’s European neighbours as the real ‘monstruos’ (p. xxx) of colonial and imperial greed, Escoiquiz goes on to name the atrocities and cruelties committed by the French, English, and Dutch governments in detail, employing Lascasian rhetoric against its previous practitioners:

Desolaron una tras de otra nuestras colonias indefensas y dormidas con la seguridad de la paz, (...) y ejerciendo sin perdonar a clase, edad, ni sexo, en sus infelices e inocentes vecinos, todo cuanto el vicio más torpe y la más refinada inhumanidad podían dictar, haciéndolos morir entre los más bárbaros y prolongados tormentos, y concluyendo con reducir a cenizas sus haciendas y casas. (p. xxix)

This stands in direct contrast to the glorified vision of Spain’s transatlantic conquests that Escoiquiz projects in his prologue, and indeed throughout the epic, with the conquest of Mexico being of particular singularity for being ‘el más grande, el más maravilloso, el más noble que quizás habrán visto los siglos’ (p. vi)–; the greatest, most impressive event of human history: ‘no se hallará otra más gloriosa en los anales del género humano’ (p. vi). For Escoiquiz, like his fellow apologistas, the conquest and the figure of Cortés become tools through which to enact Spain’s resurrection, as he carefully rewrites the narrative of conquest and the role of its leading protagonist to create a new national myth; one based on heroic splendour, justice, and progress.

Integral to this glorified projection of conquest is, of course, the poet’s conception of heroism, which he consciously reconfigures to adapt to the social and political needs of the late eighteenth century. Certainly, Escoiquiz’s is not an outmoded, archaic heroism, but is based as much on transformation as it is renewal, as the poet seeks to strike a balance between the patriotic glory of a past age, and the Enlightened virtue of the new. As in Solís’ account which, it should be noted, serves as the primary historical model of México conquistada, Cortés dominates the narrative, as Escoiquiz singularises his deeds in the opening stanza of the poem: ‘con la prudencia y el valor guerrero | conquistó el vasto imperio mexicano’ (I. 1).460 Subscribing to the conventional epic dictum of sapientia et fortitudo, the poet presents his hero as a characteristically dextrous military fighter – ‘el hombre más fiero’ (I. 53); ‘representaba a Marte belicoso’ (II. 56); ‘su gran talento y su increíble | valor’ (III. 71); ‘Hernando, a quien nunca distraían | los riesgos’ (IV. 47)–, cataloguing his many incredible feats, often climaxing in astonishing battles in which Cortés singlehandedly takes on and defeats powerful

460 Other examples include: ‘tal Hernando | corre, abate, destroza los guerreros, | todo lo arrasa con sus golpes fieros’ (XVI. 123); and ‘montó a caballo Hernando, y puesto al frente | a México guió su fiera gente’ (VIII. 100)
While the narrative begins in medias res, with Cortés and his men having already defeated the warriors of Tabasco, Zempoala, and Tlaxcala, the author nevertheless uses analepsis on several occasions in the poem to detail the skirmishes and battles leading up to the final fall of Tenochtitlan. In doing so, Escoiquiz provides detailed militaristic descriptions, predominantly influenced by a range of classical and early modern epic models—most notably Virgil, Lucan, Ercilla, and Lobo Lasso—, but perhaps also by his own military education and the war stories told to him by his father. We thus read, in traditional epic fashion, of the blood and gore of war:

El lago, en sangre bárbara teñidas
sus ondas, está lleno de quebradas
tablas, remos, saetas esparcidas,
cabezas, brazos, piernas separadas,
cadáveres y heridos que, agotadas
sus fuerzas, cerca de las conocidas
playas perecen tristes sollozando,
pasto a los carniceros peces dando. (XXIII. 103)

Certainly, Escoiquiz is not reluctant to narrate the ferocity of the Spanish army—the representatives of ‘una nación tan brava y poderosa’ (VIII. 63)—, taking great pride in ‘la hispana valentía’ (V. 102), as he includes catalogues of the Spanish troops in which he exalts ‘todos estos fortísimos soldados’ (II. 67).

While undoubtedly characteristic of the epic genre, Escoiquiz’s glorification of the Spanish army and the military prowess of Cortés goes beyond mere archetype or the poet’s desire to replicate the conventions of traditional epic poetry, simultaneously serving a redemptive and exemplary function. By presenting the bravery, courage, determination, and dexterity of Cortés and his men, Escoiquiz is challenging the stereotypes purported by Spain’s detractors regarding Spanish laziness and, more specifically, accusations such as that espoused by Masson that Spain had no proficient artillery men: ‘aujourd’hui on n’y trouveroit peut-être pas un général à comparer à ceux d’une autre nation; on n’y

461 Take, for example, an episode from canto XVI, in which eight men launch themselves against the hero and ‘sostiene inmóvil el furioso | choque Cortés, como un sólido muro | de los arietes el encuentro duro’ (XVI. 91).

462 Escoiquiz reveals in his Memorias that his education was ‘en parte, como era natural, militar’ (p. 60). For more on the representation of warfare in early modern epic poetry see Michael Murrin, History and Warfare in Renaissance Epic (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and Miguel Martínez, Front Lines: Soldiers’ Writing in the Early Modern Hispanic World (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

463 Escoiquiz dedicates one particular stanza to exalting the soldier-chronicler Bernal Díaz del Castillo (II. 60), perhaps indicating the poet’s familiarity with La historia verdadera.
trouveroit pas un seul artilleur!’. Additionally, it is perhaps no coincidence that an epic glorifying the deeds of Cortés, the quintessential representative of Spain’s military values, should resurface at a moment when Spain was facing intense military conflict in Europe and across the Atlantic. According to Lynch, despite the Spanish monarchy’s propensity to war in the eighteenth century, the recruitment of troops posed a serious issue due to the unpopularity of military service. Reinforcing the ties between past and present, Cortés, ‘valiente y práctico soldado’ (VI. 106), would thus no doubt have served as an exemplary military figure who could encourage recruitment while also motivating soldiers on the frontlines, whose memory could inspire military resistance, rejuvenate Spain’s warrior culture, and incite national ardour on the battlefields.

The militarist rhetoric of Escoiquiz’s epic is balanced with expressions of Enlightened virtue, as he creates a hero who exceeds his role as a warrior to embrace a new set of values, thus reflecting, as Cox Campbell describes, ‘a society that, while retaining vestiges of a conqueror past that prized virtue and valor, had begun to embrace new values such as rationality [and] public contentment’. Certainly the Cortés of México conquistada is not stuck in a by-gone age, as we witness a shift from his chivalric and Christian values, prioritised in previous epics, to more civic values, with less focus being paid to the hero’s ardent Catholicism or gallant grandiloquence, and more being paid to the progressive hombre de bien of the eighteenth century. As an Enlightened conquistador, Cortés excels in the rational virtues of humanity, pacifism, sensitivity, and clemency; a just and inspiring leader who strives for public good.

(...juntaba un generoso corazón, incapaz de otra codicia,

464 Masson de Morvilliers, p. 556.
466 As Nuria Soriano Muñoz puts it, ‘el conquistador era, en esencia, un estímulo a la conducta para las generaciones del presente’. Nuria Soriano Muñoz, ‘Guerra y cultura histórica a finales del periodo colonial. El culto al conquistador Hernán Cortés entre el ejército borbónico’, Revista Complutense de Historia de América, 45 (2019), 239-60 (p. 252). See also Cox Campbell, p. 138. The figure of Cortés thus serves, to use the words of the eighteenth-century poetic theorist, Ignacio de Luzán, as ‘un ejemplo que sirva de estímulo a su valor y le anime [al lector] a empresas grandes’. Luzán, La poética, p. 121.
467 Cox Campbell, p. 16.
469 It should be acknowledged that some of these virtues were already depicted by Lobo Lasso in Mexicana, as explored in Chapter One, which appears to have served as a model of imitation, with the qualities of reason and rationality being appropriated by Escoiquiz to serve Enlightened, and by extension, ideological purposes.
que de gloria y un ánimo piadoso,  
quedeterminaba siempre su justicia;  
sobre esto el trato franco y cariñoso  
desusúbditos era la delicia,  
perosinincurrir en la bajeza,  
su autoridad guardandocon firmeza. (V. 12)

A stoic controller of passions, regulating his anger even in the face of great misfortune and provocation –‘contuvo | su ardiente rabia’ (XV. 83)–, and exhibiting complete disinterest in power and riches, the Cortés of Escoiquiz’s epic is the antithesis of the Cortés described by the anti-Spanish propagandists of the eighteenth century.470 Far from a haughty, violent, cruel, and greedy villain, Cortés is consistently referred to throughout México conquistada as ‘generoso’ (IV. 74), ‘humano’ (III. 80), ‘cariñoso’ (XI. 70), ‘amable’ (II. 57), ‘piadoso’ (II. 5), ‘enternecido’ (XVII. 113); a sensitive hero who weeps over the devastation wreaked by war:

pensando el triste fin de sus valientes  
guerreros, vierte lágrimas ardientes.

Lágrimas dignas de su generoso  
pecho, que no conoce el hombre duro  
y villano, que solo cuidadoso  
de su propio interés no siente apuro  
por el ajeno[.] (XVII. 113-114)471

470 De Pauw, for example, describes Cortés as ‘le premier brigand’ who carried out not a conquest, but a string of violent ‘massacres’ and ‘déprédations’. Cornelius de Pauw, Recherches philosophiques sur les américains, ou, mémoires intéressantes pour servir à l’histoire de l’espece humaine, 3 vols (London: no publisher, 1771), II, p. 207; de Pauw, I, p. 197. Similarly, Robertson critiques ‘the barbarous manner’ of Cortés’ treatment of the natives ‘whom he punished so cruelly’. William Robertson, The History of America, 3 vols (London: no publisher, 1788), II, pp. 524-25. Antagonistic depictions of Cortés such as these can also be found in the arts, with Vivaldi’s opera Motezuma, premiered in Venice 1733, presenting an unfavourable depiction of the conquistador as a cruel, despotic leader. See Ireri E. Chávez-Bárcenas, ‘Vivaldi’s Motezuma: The Conquest of Mexico on the Venetian Operatic Stage’, in The New World in Early Modern Italy, 1492-1750, ed. Elizabeth Horodowich and Lia Markey (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 288-308.

471 Another example of a crying Cortés can be found in Lobo Lasso’s Mexicana (XXV. 44).
A fervent pacifist, Cortés does everything in his power to achieve his conquest through peaceful means. Often found curbing ‘la venganza carnícerá’ (XV. 92) of his troops, Cortés encourages his men to exercise refrain, humanity, and generosity when coming face to face with their enemies, exhorting them:

Que los impetus vivos moderando
de la cólera, huyáis de dar motivo
en los pueblos que fuereis transitiendo
a la menor discordia. Nuestro arribo
esperan todos ellos, anhelando
conocer por las obras si efectivo
es el carácter generoso, humano,
que la fama pondera en el hispano.

¿Qué dirán, pues, si ven que demostramos
lo contrario en los hechos: que a los fieles
aliados inhumanos maltratamos,
que a nuestra misma religión infieles
despreciamos audaces sus sagrados
preceptos y que, en fin, somos crueles,
lascivos, insolentes y ambiciosos?
Huid de estos apodos vergonzosos.

Vuestro propio interés a ello os convida,
que no nos tiene cuenta que nos miren
como una gente bárbara, homicida,
incapaz de amistad,
(…) 
Portaos, pues, de modo que os admiren,
tan buenos en la paz con los amigos
como en la guerra fieros enemigos. (II. 90-92)\textsuperscript{472}

Proleptically referencing eighteenth-century accusations regarding Spain’s brutality and greed, Cortés urges his men to challenge the negative reputation they would be tarnished with in subsequent years. Countering “la falsedad con que ha pintado | (...) nuestro carácter” (IX. 57), Cortés practises

\textsuperscript{472} This particular speech is strategically placed immediately before the events leading to the massacre of Cholula narrated in cantos III-IV.
magnanimity and tenderness over violence, with Escoiquiz eager to prove the ‘generoso | carácter’ (II. 99) of his nation, by demonstrating how the Spaniards conquered ‘tratando a todo pueblo humanamente (…) | pues tiernamente a todos los quería’ (II. 100). Time and again in the narrative we thus witness Cortés promoting peace, contemplating “la guerra con odio, en no sirviendo | para el bien general de los humanos” (XXII. 25), making every effort to ‘evitar la efusión de sangre humana’ (XV. 106), ‘más con el aire y con la voz venciendo | que con el hierro’ (XII. 72). An excellent example of this can be found in the means Cortés employs to convert the natives, never resorting to forceful violence, but instead promoting peaceful liberty with Enlightened flair:

Pues ser debe un acto voluntario
la elección, añadió, solo quisiera
os dignaseis de dar el necesario
tiempo, para que claro se os hiciera
ver con la razón sola cuán contrario
es vuestro culto a lo que la sincera
conciencia a todos dicta, aunque siguieseis
después con libertad el que quisieseis. (IX. 78-79)

A far cry from the religious intolerance berated by Spain’s critics, conversion is only ever enacted peacefully ‘con dulces persuasiones’ (XVII. 30) in México conquistada, highlighting the Spaniards’ characteristic espousal of justice, liberty, and clemency. For Cortés, this is a conquest of love, not war, as he looks for every opportunity to display his empathy and compassion, quickly earning the epithet ‘Cortés compadecido’ (IV. 4); repeated on several occasions in the poem.473 Tormented by the devastation and destruction caused by battle, Cortés and his men show compassion for the dead, including that of their enemies:

y en medio de montones espantosos
de sangrientos cadáveres se vieron,
se despertó en sus pechos generosos
la piedad, y benignos recogieron
los heridos que menos obstinados
no quisieron negarse a ser curados.’ (IV. 89)

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473 In presenting his hero in this way, Escoiquiz is also satisfying the theoretical demands of epic heroism set out by the eighteenth-century theorist Ignacio de Luzán in his poetics, who states that the epic hero must be ‘afable y benigno en extremo’, displaying ‘magnanimidad’ as well as ‘fuerza’ and ‘valor’. Luzán, La poética, pp. 452, 450.
Those who have died in battle are respectfully rounded up and buried (IV. 93), while those who have survived are liberated from their imprisonment by the just hand of Cortés:

Todos tenéis sin duda merecida
la muerte más cruel,
(...)
mas en nosotros la bondad abunda.
(...)
Estad pues totalmente asegurados
de vida y libertad
(...)
Justo es también que mi clemencia extienda
a esa mísera plebe seducida:
llamadla, pues, y hacedla que comprenda
quanta es nuestra piedad[.] (IV. 94-97)474

As well as forgiving his enemies, Cortés’ paternal tenderness extends to his mission to liberate the natives of Mexico from the tyranny of Moctezuma, with Escoiquiz subscribing to the Spanish saviour complex previously adopted by poets such as Lobo Lasso and Osorio. The epitome of the Machiavellian prince, ‘juzgando falsamente que el respeto | de un monarca consiste en ser temido’ (VI. 54), Moctezuma –‘un tirano cruel’ (VI. 53), ‘un monstruo’ (VI. 50), ‘un tigre el más furioso’ (VIII. 83)–, is not only the antithesis of Cortés but also Charles V who, Cortés assures the ‘tiranizados’ (VI. 50) natives, “lejos de pretender usurpaciones, | contento con su imperio y ajustado” (VI. 63), will provide “la deseada | protección de la España, y lograrían | ver su patria del yugo libertada” (VI. 64).475

As had been the case in Lobo Lasso’s *Mexicana*, the liberating role played by the Spaniards in their conquest is best illustrated in *México conquistada* through Escoiquiz’s inclusion of fictional episodes, which not only serve to provide an aesthetic respite from the monotony of war, but also fulfil ideological purposes; namely, establishing the victimisation of natives under the rule of Moctezuma, and consolidating the Spaniards’ roles as redeemers and saviours. The first of these episodes takes place

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474 Other examples include: ‘perdonó a todos ellos, encargando, | que libre cada cual a su partido | y población volviese, y comparando | de la guerra y la paz la diferencia, | procediesen con él en consecuencia’ (XV. 94); “bien veís que debía, | a vuestra imitación endurecido, | trataros cual tratáis la gente mía, | cuando la apasionáis, y ese atrevido | orgullo castigar cual nueva ofensa, | mas de otro modo todo hispano piensa. | Libres estáis, volved incontinente | a México” (XXIII. 115-16).

475 From the Bourbon monarchy’s perspective, the defence of the Indian remained central to the justification of Spain’s dominion in the Americas. See Feros, p. 206.
in canto II in which we are introduced to the indigenous characters of Marina and Glauco, who asks the maiden how she came to be travelling and assisting the Spanish troops with the conquest. Responding with a lament typical of sixteenth-century lyric poetry —“¡Ay, señor! Respondió con un suspiro, después de mil instancias, cuánto diera por poder reducir a un breve giro la serie de mi historia lastimera!” (II. 29)—, Marina reveals that she is the noble daughter of the King and Queen of Guazacoalco, Glauro and Xalisca who, upon their death, left her under the tutelage of her evil uncle, Leogano, with whom she endured “[un] duro tormento” (II. 31). When the time came for Marina to marry, she had many aspiring suitors. While initially indifferent to the advances of these men, this changed when she caught sight of the handsome Aloro:

Mas, ¡ay de mí!, perdí bien prontamente
esta quietud un día que gozaba
en un balcón hacia una vega hermosa
de la vista extendida y deliciosa.

Vi a lo lejos un joven adornado
de ricas galas, cuya gallardía
me dejó sorprendida. (II. 33-34)

Bitten by “[el] amor tirano” (II. 35), she consents to him asking her uncle for her hand in marriage who, it quickly transpires, has other plans for Marina, ordering for her to be tied up and taken away where she next finds herself onboard a ship, crossing waters to be sold as a slave to Tabascans. Preferring not to share the atrocities that befell her during her six years as a slave, she does reveal that she was informed that Aloro, her beloved, was murdered by her uncle, the same day that she had been taken away. She finishes her story by lamenting that she remains a slave, but this time to the Spaniards: “mas soy esclava, y bien que agasajada entre gente extranjera desterrada” (II. 52). While still enslaved, Escoiquiz is quick to compare, however, the treatment of Marina by her fellow natives to that of the Spaniards. She is, he tells us, ‘gozosa entre los españoles’ (II. 53), and should be grateful for ‘la singular bondad de aquella gente que la acogió tan generosa, cuando su patria la trataba tan cruelmente’ (II. 54). So grateful and content is she that when given the opportunity to assist the Cholulans with their plot to kill Cortés and

476 As well as assisting with the characterisation of Marina as a victim and showcasing Escoiquiz’s talents as a poet, the inclusion of a characteristically sixteenth-century style lyric may also be considered as the poet’s contribution to the campaign of literary patriotism of Golden Age texts and styles that was flourishing in the late eighteenth century, as discussed above.
defeat the Spanish army and become the ‘heroína’ of her ‘patria’ (III. 98) in the following canto, she refuses, choosing instead to stay loyal to Cortés and the Spaniards.477

Another attempt to elicit sympathy at the mistreatment of natives in pre-conquest Mexico is found in cantos XIV and XV, in which we learn the story of Lemano. The episode begins with the indigenous messenger, Talisco, travelling across Mexico to inform Cortés of recent events that have taken place while Cortés is away fighting Pánfilo de Narváez and his army. Before reaching Zempoala, where Cortés is stationed, Talisco arrives at ‘un valle deleitoso’ (XIV. 81) brimming with ‘fresca y tierna hierba, los olores’, ‘de mil hermosas y variadas flores’, ‘los dulces cantos con que celebraban | los simples pajarillos sus amores’ (XIV. 83), ‘un rápido arroyuelo cristalino’ (XIV. 81); a locus amoenus that clearly signals the introduction of a fictional episode. After sleeping on the meadow for two hours, Talisco is awoken by a group of four men armed with darts who tie his hands and blindfold his eyes, leading him to ‘una cueva honda y obscura’ (XIV. 86) where he meets ‘el desdichado príncipe’ (XV. 1), Lemano. After asking Talisco where he is from and what he is doing on their land, Lemano asks the messenger about the newly-arrived Spaniards, specifically “[si] son esos guerreros tan humanos | como la fama cuenta, y su glorioso | general cual valiente generoso” (XIV. 92). Talisco responds with a laudatory description, describing Cortés as “un padre cariñoso | para nosotros, siempre declarado | protector del virtuoso y desvalido, | y terror del malvado fementido” (XIV. 94). Pleased with Talisco’s response, Lemano asks the messenger to guide him and his men to Cortés when, upon arriving before the conquistador, he reveals his “triste historia” (XV. 18). The rightful heir to the kingdom of Texcoco, Lemano relays how, after falling in love with the beautiful Elmina, his parents sought permission from Moctezuma for the two to marry, who maliciously refuses, entrusting Elmina—“esta víctima misma del tirano” (XV. 51)—over to the perverse Belorano: his chief priest. Upon hearing the news, Lemano exclaims, in lyric fashion, how “una nube obscura | cubrió mi corazón” (XV. 11); a lament that soon turns to anger and revenge, as he plots and successfully manages to enter Moctezuma’s palace and retrieve Elmina. They have since, he tells Cortés, been living in hiding with their young baby, now appearing before the Spanish conquistador in search of his help. After hearing Lemano’s fateful story,

477 Escoiquiz’s Marina is a fictional reworking of the historical figure of the Nahua interpreter Malintzin, more commonly known as La Malinche, who the poet paints as a heroine in his epic, dedicating an extolling stanza in praise of her loyalty and assistance to the Spaniards: ‘¡Doña Marina tú, cuya memoria | en duro bronce existirá grabada, | mientras dure de México la historia! | ¡De la España jamás será olvidada, | pues tal parte tuvistes en la gloria | que adquirió en su conquista celebrada! | ¡Oxalá que mi fuego alcance a tanto, | que pueda eternizarte con mi canto!’ (II. 26). La Malinche’s loyalty to the Spaniards would later become seen by Mexicans as betrayal to the Mexican nation, or as Octavio Paz puts it: ‘Doña Marina se ha convertido en una figura que representa a las indias, fascinadas, violadas o seducidas por los españoles. Y del mismo modo que el niño no perdona a su madre que lo abandone para ir en busca de su padre, el pueblo mexicano no perdona su traición a la Malinche.’ Octavio Paz, El laberinto de la soledad (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 110.
Cortés indeed ‘le prometió (...) su generosa | protección’ (XV. 62); a promise that he ultimately realises later in the poem when, in canto XXII, he reinstates Lemano to the throne of Texcoco, eliciting the gratitude of the Texcocans who praise the “alma generosa” (XXII. 24) of Cortés, “justo, protector de la inocencia” (XXII. 21), thanking him for “dar la mano a la desamparada | justicia en esta peregrina esfera” (XXII. 24).

Through the narration of these two love stories, Escoiquiz is thus able to represent the misery that Moctezuma’s annexed subjects lived under prior to the conquest, while clearly identifying the Spaniards’ role as liberators; a dynamic that the poet reinforces throughout his epic, as the natives continually plead with Cortés to free them from the yoke of tyranny:

Tal es el yugo cruel que nos oprime,
que sola vuestra mano vencedora
puede romper. Un héroe sublime
cual vos, a quien un pueblo triste implora,
preciso es que piadoso se lastime
de su infelicidad y, sin demora,
le ampare y le liberte de un tirano
que nada sino el ser tiene de humano.

Vos sois, Señor, nuestra única esperanza. (VI. 56-57)\(^{478}\)

As well as providing civil defence, Spain’s conquest of Mexico is also presented in the poem as a moral rescue, as Escoiquiz draws on the negative stereotypes that had been purported over the last three centuries regarding the natives’ practice of human sacrifice and cannibalism. Indeed, the poet attempts to provide overwhelming evidence in the poem that seeks to prove their animalistic savagery, defining the Mexica as ‘aquella nación bárbara y sedienta | de sangre’ (XVIII. 23) who, unlike the generous, humane Spaniards, are ‘cerrados | (...) a todo sentimiento | de humanidad’ by ‘un cruel encantamiento’ (XXIII. 64); ‘[el] odioso | humano sacrificio’ (VIII. 1). Escoiquiz thus fills his narrative with vivid, descriptive imagery depicting the brutality of human sacrifice, rarely missing a chance to berate ‘el culto insano | de aquel pueblo’ (VIII. 15), ‘esa crueldad que hieren | la razón’ (IX. 65), ‘costumbre detestable, aborrecida’ (IX. 66), ‘vicio insufrible’ (IX. 66), ‘cruel canicería’ (VIII. 23), while mourning ‘las víctimas humanas miserables | de aquellos sacrificios deplorables’ (VIII. 5). Take, for example, the opening of canto VIII which is particularly detailed:

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\(^{478}\) Another example includes the following petition: “librad con justiciero | brazo tanto infeliz, que acongojado | os pide reprimáis su tiranía | y nos volváis la paz y la alegría” (VIII. 83-84).
Frente de las capillas se elevaba
cinco palmos una ara de bruñido
jaspe verde que en punta remataba,
en la que por la espalda sostenido
el infeliz que se sacrificaba,
y de piernas y brazos bien asido,
esperaba gimiendo la postrera
época de su suerte lastimera;

hasta tanto que el bárbaro agorero,
armado de un cuchillo muy cortante,
le abría el pecho y le arrancaba fiero
el corazón, rociando en el instante
con la sangre caliente el carnicero
ídolo, abandonando el palpitante
cadáver al ministro destinado
a repartirlo, cual manjar sagrado. (VIII. 16-17)

Escoiquiz completes his description by not only mentioning the ‘varas, con calaveras ensartadas’ (VIII. 18), but also chillingly capturing ‘los ayes y los gritos lastimeros’ (VIII. 21) of those next in line to be sacrificed. Equally disturbing is Escoiquiz’s account of the natives’ cannibalistic practices, told through the character of Aguilar who provides an eye-witness account, recalling his time as a prisoner under various indigenous tribes, when he and his compatriots were ‘a su inhumano dueño presentados’:

Este que demostraba en el semblante
con gesto y risa atroz su cruel malicia,
en todo a la de un tigre semejante,
después de haber gozado la delicia
de ver nuestra miseria, al circunstante
auditorio de bárbara milicia
mandó que de allí al punto nos llevase,
y a cada uno en su jaula nos cerrase.

Acostumbraba aquella abominable
voraz gente encerrar de esta manera,
y engordar el cautivo miserable,
dándole de comer cuanto quisiera,
con el mayor cuidado imaginable,
como a las aves en la caponera;
vivo después, a lento fuego asado,
era para ella plato regalado.

Así fueron mis tristes compañeros,
que hasta el fin sus destinos ignoraron,
comidos por aquellos hombres fieros
al paso que en las jaulas engordaron. (III. 29-31)

By presenting indigenous cruelty in this way, Escoiquiz seeks to defend the conquest as a morally justified enterprise, casting Spaniards in the role of civilisers, ‘introduciendo con ella’, as the poet reinforces in his prologue, ‘la racionalidad, la civilización, y la verdadera religión.’ (p. xii).\(^{479}\) Indeed, the prevention of the heathen practices of human sacrifice and cannibalism are identified by Cortés in the poem as the principal motivation for his conquest, revealing to Moctezuma that “el único objeto aquí me envía | de hacer feliz el reino mexicano, | desterrando la horrible idolatría | que ha dominado en él tantas edades, | sus torpezas y bárbaras crueldades” (IX. 59).\(^{480}\) Even Moctezuma himself recognises the so-called civilising aspect of Spain’s conquest, referring to the Spaniards as “reformadores” (IX. 52).\(^{481}\) Certainly, Spain is clearly labelled by Escoiquiz as ‘la nación de más cultura’ (VIII. 70), with the poet displaying racial superiority in describing the Spaniards as morally and physically superior beings to their American counterparts: ‘que no les proponía que igualasen | del español la ciencia y la fiereza, | pues que no era posible lo alcanzasen | siendo más débil su naturaleza’

\(^{479}\) As reflected by Escoiquiz, ‘eighteenth-century Spanish authorities still justified Spanish sovereignty over the Americas and their inhabitants by the obligation to civilize and Christianize the Native Americans’. Feros, p. 199. On the use and understanding of the word ‘civilización’ in the eighteenth century see Maravall, pp. 213-32.

\(^{480}\) This is repeated in canto IV, in which Cortés claims that “esta [la bondad] es la que hasta aquí nos ha traído | surcando un nuevo mar vasto y profundo, | a desterrar de vuestro fementido | pueblo ese culto tan atroz e inmundo, | esas humanas víctimas que herido | tienen mi corazón y que el fecundo | americano suelo hacen horrible | a los ojos de todo hombre sensible” (IV. 95).

\(^{481}\) Moctezuma’s description of the Spaniards as ‘reformadores’ is an interesting word choice –used also by Solís in his historical account in which the Spaniards are referred to as ‘reformadores orientales’–, undoubtedly alluding to the Spaniards’ role as so-called civilisers and their introduction of a new religion, laws, and customs. Antonio de Solís y Rivadeneira, Historia de la conquista de México, 2 vols (Barcelona: Piferrer, 1771), I, p. 236. Within the context of the eighteenth century, the word ‘reformador’ takes on an additional significance, encapsulating the reformist spirit of the Enlightenment, and perhaps subtly attempting to counter accusations regarding Spain’s intellectual and political backwardness or even championing Spain with the introduction of the Enlightenment in the New World.
In expressing these xenophobic views, Escoiquiz touches on another important debate circulating in the second half of the eighteenth century regarding what Antonello Gerbi calls ‘la disputa del nuevo mundo’: the polemics surrounding the debated ‘inferiority’ of New World natives; or as Escoiquiz himself puts it in his prologue, ‘de si se les debia considerar como a los hombres faltos de razón’ (p. xii). Adopting theories of scientific racism, in their works Enlightened thinkers such as Buffon, de Pauw, Raynal, and Robertson argued that natives of the Americas suffered from a state of intellectual and physical degeneracy, leading them to conclude that Spain’s conquests were ‘empresas absurdas, sanguinarias e innecesarias contra unos seres impotentes y apenas humanos’. While undoubtedly convinced of Spanish superiority and American barbarism, it is important to note that Escoiquiz does not accept the philosophes’ depreciation of the Amerindians as weak and defenceless, claiming in his prologue that depictions of ‘el carácter sencillo e inocente de dichos pueblos, que hacía facilísima su invasión’ is simply ‘ridiculous’: ‘parece si se les oye que no eran hombres, sino rebaños de corderos incapaces de defenderse, y mucho menos de ofender, en una palabra, pueblos meramente pasivos y cuales no han existido ni existiran’ (p. xiii). He continues:

Pretender contra el unánime testimonio de todos los historiadores, contra lo que dicta la razón por sí sola, que unos pueblos conquistadores, cuales lo fueron singularmente los mexicanos, que fundaron aquel vasto imperio a fuerza de armas, que estaban continuamente en guerra con las naciones comarcanas, cuyas costumbres eran tan crueles que no solo sacrificaban sus prisioneros, sino que se alimentaban de sus carnes, habían de tener una sencillez y una docilidad

482 See also: “es muy cierto también que son mortales | los españoles, mas están dotados | de más valor, de fuerzas corporales | y agudeza mayor, como criados | donde el sol al nacer más liberales | influencias comunica. Aventajados | así a los demás hombres” (IX. 72). Biological determinism such as that espoused by Escoiquiz continued to be a factor in eighteenth-century taxonomies of race. For more on the classification of race in the colonial Americas see Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, ‘New World, New Stars: Patriotic Astrology and the Invention of Indian and Creole Bodies in Colonial Spanish America, 1600-1650’, The American Historical Review, 104.1 (1999), 33-68; and Anthony Pagden, The Fall of Natural Man.

483 In his study, Gerbi discusses ‘las teorías de la inferioridad del Nuevo Mundo’ presented by Enlightenment thinkers such as Buffon, Hume, Voltaire, Raynal, De Pauw, and Robertson, among others. Gerbi, p. x.

484 Tietz, p. 52. For an in-depth exploration of Enlightened race theories regarding American degeneracy see Gerbi, pp. 3-295; and Feros, pp. 203-11. As Gerbi notes, these accusations did not pass uncontested by novohispanos such as Clavigero. See Gerbi, pp. 176-92. See also Rohner, ‘The Mexica Museum of Francisco Javier Clavigero’, p. 82. It should also be noted that these racist theories did not solely target indigenous groups, but also creoles, ‘for it questioned their capacity to govern civilised and industrious societies’. See Núñez Faraco, ‘Between Political Emancipation and Creole Hegemony’, p. 57.
columbina, es un dislate tan clásico que no merece más impugnación que el desprecio. (pp. xiii-xiv) 485

As a means of reinforcing these arguments, Escoiquiz turns to the characterisation of the indigenous characters in his poem. Recycling Ercilllian motifs as Lobo Lasso had done, the poet presents the Amerindian warriors as ferocious enemies, highly skilled in the art of war –‘en ciencia militar sobresalía’ (II. 74)– inspiring admiration in Escoiquiz who lauds ‘la valentía | del mexicano pueblo’ (I. 17), often dedicating stanzas such as these to brave Mexica warriors:

Tú, o mancebo Leocán, fuiste el osado,
que despreciando el riesgo, ejemplo diste
inmortal a tu pueblo intimidado;
tú con la espada el duro yelmo heriste
el primero, mas fuiste desgraciado:
romper su fino acero no pudiste
y, horadándote el pecho el bravo hispano,
la vida por tu patria diste ufano. (XVI. 127)

Armed with ‘brazo vigoroso’ and ‘firme rostro y corazón seguro’ (XVI. 53), like Ercilla’s Araucanians, the Mexican warriors courageously fight “en defensa | de nuestra cara libertad peleando, | moramos todos sin hacer ofensa | al honor” (XXIII. 130).486 Far from the degenerates depicted by the likes of Buffon and de Pauw, Escoiquiz’s Amerindians are cunning and strategic, consistently portrayed as being the instigators of violence in the narrative. Indeed, it is the Spaniards who are, time and again, victimised by the ferocious natives, subject to ‘las continuas traiciones y atrocidades de los bárbaros’ (p. xvii).487 They are, ‘gente dura, | a la sangrienta guerra acostumbrada, | igualmente que al tráfico y la usura’ who fight the Spaniards not at great disadvantage, but rather ‘espada con espada, escudo a escudo, | pecho a pecho’ (IV. 55). Their military prowess is matched by their intellectual aptitudes, as Escoiquiz paints a culturally, economically, and politically developed society, boasting magnificent architecture, flora and fauna, with its own form of written communication and structured government

485 The parallels between Escoiquiz’s arguments and those found in the Apología of Lobo Lasso’s Mexicana are notable.
487 Examples from the poem include the Cholulans plot to kill Cortés and his men in cantos II-III; Moctezuma’s suspected ordering of the murder of Juan de Escalante in Veracruz in canto X; and the assault of the Mexica on Alvarado and his men in canto XIV.
managed by cultured and sagacious nobles. The purpose of the poet’s complimentary characterisation of the indigenous enemy as ‘gente | culta y guerrera’ (I. 11) appears not to reflect any genuine admiration, but rather serves to defend the glory of Cortés, demonstrating that the conquest was no easy feat – reinforced by the gruesome battle scenes that devastate the Spanish army –, thus bolstering, as Ercilla and Lobo Lasso had done, the Spanish heroes through the glorification of their enemies; or as Escoiquiz puts it: ‘dar tanta mayor gloria al pueblo hispano | cuanto más viva oposición tenía’ (XVII. 26).

The indigenous warriors are not the only opposition that Cortés and his men face, however, as they must also heroically overcome the machinations of supernatural forces. From the mid-eighteenth century, the relevance of Catholicism in an increasingly Enlightened age of rationalism and scientific development was being called into question as the philosophical positions of deism and scepticism grew in popularity across Europe. In the Spanish peninsula, ilustrados such as Feijoo promoted the progression of science free from scholastic theology, criticising the veneration of false saints, miracles, and superstitions, opting instead for advanced analytical thought. This said, however, Christianity still weighed heavily on eighteenth-century Spanish mentality, so that while México conquistada is most certainly not the religiously-imperial epic of Osorio, and Escoiquiz’s Cortés is by no means a messianic hero, religious elements are not eradicated from his epic, often expressed in the form of supernatural machinery. The coexistence of scepticism and religion in the late eighteenth century is clearly something that Escoiquiz was conscious of, with the prologue of his translation of Milton’s Paradise Lost providing unique insight on his views regarding the employment of religion in the eighteenth-century epic:

Su [Milton] conexión con la religión le hayan atraído muchos más censores que a otros compositores de poemas épicos. (…) Ha de encontrar precisamente muchos adversarios, en especial en un siglo en que un partido numeroso de hombres preciados de críticos no da cuartel a las verdades más evidentes, principalmente religiosas, intentando sumergir al mundo en un absoluto pirronismo, sobre todo lo que pertenece a ellas.

488 For Escoiquiz’s description of Mexico – ‘ciudad de la mayor magnificencia’ (I. 14) – see I. 8-29.
489 This is a rewriting of the refrain used by Ercilla in La Araucana: ‘pues no es el vencedor más estimado | de aquello en que el vencido es reputado’ (I. 2).
490 For more on works debating the place of God and Christianity in the eighteenth century see Herr, The Eighteenth-Century Revolution in Spain, pp. 365-70.
Empiricism, Escoiquiz claims, need not be at odds with religion, echoing Tasso’s belief that the marvellous is not only a crucial component of epic poetry, but of society itself, ‘en la que concuerdan la tradición constante, y universal de todo el género humano, la naturaleza, y la razón’ and that ‘su convencimiento (...) será tanto más claro cuanto mayor sea su ciencia; pues como dice el célebre Bacón, la poca ciencia o filosofía conduce a la incredulidad y la mucha trae al hombre a la religión’. The inclusion of supernatural machinery in his epic need not, therefore, be considered anachronistic, nor should it jeopardise verisimilitude, ‘pues sin ella, la composición de su obra, era del todo imposible, o en lugar de un poema, hubiera dado a luz frío y exacto tratado de metafísica’.

Serving ideological and aesthetic purposes, Escoiquiz, like Milton, employs supernatural machinery in the form of the interventions of God and Satan. First introduced in canto V, in which the poet provides his readers with a classical description of Hell –‘la temida | vasta región que habita el espantoso | alado pueblo, que con su caída | dejó al linaje humano siempre odioso, | objeto de sus iras inmortales’ (V. 2)–, we are told that, having been worshipped by the Mexicans for centuries, Satan is furious to learn of the Spaniards’ departure from Cuba and their desire to ‘introducir la religión sagrada | de Jesucristo’ in Mexico (V. 6). Fearing his ‘ruina total’ (V. 13), he and his minions unleash a web of machinations aimed at thwarting Cortés’ conquest –‘no hubo peregrino | medio que de impedirlo no buscasen | ni obstáculos que astutos olvidasen’ (V. 6)– in the form of storms, apparitions, and mutinies; carried out predominantly by the furies Envidia and Discordia who sow the seeds of conflict throughout the narrative. These attempts are countered by ‘la divina protección’ of God and his angels, as the Spanish army conquer Mexico ‘contando con auxilios celestiales’ (XII. 115). On several occasions in the epic, God orders his angels to assist the Spaniards in moments of difficulty, often inspiring ‘nuevo aliento’ (XII. 22) among the troops and protecting them from mortal danger. An example of this can be found in cantos XIX and XX, in which Cortés is seriously injured in the battle of Otumba. With his life hanging in the balance, his men pray to God for his recovery –‘que en la sagrada víctima clavados | los ojos, silenciosos la adoraban, | y en sus humildes votos hermanados, | la vida de Cortés solicitaban’ (XIX. 85)–, to which God responds by sending one of his angels to fly down and heal Cortés’ wounds: ‘le aplica la insensible | mano, y los cruels síntomas serena. | Respira nueva vida el apacible | rostro, y el pulso sus medidas llena’ (XX. 10). It is at this moment in the narrative that God sends the allegorical figure of Glory –‘una dama hermosísima y alada’ (XX. 16)– to meet Cortés. Departing momentarily from the historical narrative of conquest, together they embark on a Dantesque journey, in which Glory

493 Escoiquiz, Paraiso perdido, p. 13.
494 Escoiquiz, Paraiso perdido, p. 5.
495 Examples include an episode from canto V in which Envidia visits Velázquez in Cuba and infiltrates his dreams, encouraging him to send Narváez to wage war against Cortés (V. 60-63); or in canto XII when Discordia orders a sleeping Belorano to convince the Senate to name Guatimozin as the new monarch in place of Moctezuma and make war against the Spaniards (XII. 98-99).
‘la sabia guía’ (XX. 32)– guides Cortés up a treacherous mountain to her temple which, she tells him, many have tried and failed to reach, “pero tú, a quien el cielo ha distinguido | con tan grande favor, estás seguro” (XX. 31). As they journey up the mountain, Cortés must heroically defeat a series of allegorical passions in the form of animals and monsters who attempt to deter him from his path to glory, including a deer, ‘el Temor’ (XX. 34), a turtle, ‘la Pereza’ (XX. 35), a lion, ‘la Ira’ (XX. 38), as well as beautiful nymphs playing sweet music in a traditionally pastoral landscape of chirping birds, scented flowers, and flowing waters, who transpire to be the disguised, monstrous allegories of ‘la torpe Gula’ (XX. 52) and ‘la Lascivia’ (XX. 53).496 When Cortés finally reaches the gates of Glory and enters the temple, he sees a wall hung with portraits which, Glory tells him, “a España pertenece, inagotable | plantel de belicosa y noble gente. | No hay hecho de sus hijos admirable | que no esté aquí grabado exactamente” (XX. 65). The wall is, in essence, a wall of glory, which allows Escoiquiz, through the use of ekphrasis, to eulogise Spain and its glorious past, “‘recordando ahora los famosos | héroes que en ella más se han señalado’ (XX. 70).497 Heroes include Don Pelayo (XX, 74), Fernán González (XX. 79), el Cid (XX. 79), as well as famous monarchs such as the Catholic Kings, Isabel and Ferdinand (XX. 80), not failing to leave out the colonial heroes of the New World: Columbus (XX. 81), Pizarro (XX. 95), and of course, Cortés. As Cortés contemplates his own portrait on the wall of heroes, Glory assures him that his deeds “serán tenidos | por invenciones de la encantadora | poesía y cual fábulas oídos” (XX. 91)– an interesting reference to the epic ‘Cortés cycle’–, going on to prophesise about the imminent and providential fall of Tenochtitlan: “añadirás a España el vasto imperio | mexicano, vencidas felizmente | sus huestes” (XX. 92). Glory’s use of the word ‘felizmente’ is important here, setting up Cortés for his departing question as he asks his prophesising guide “[¿]qué utilidades | mi conquista dará en otras edades[?]” (XX. 106). By framing Cortés’ question in the future tense, Escoiquiz is able to use Glory’s prophecy as a way of exploring the advantages of conquest in a postcolonial reality, not only referencing Mexico’s reception of the gospel and its abandonment of heathenism (XX. 107), or its so-called civilisation through the introduction of Spanish laws (XX. 109) and culture, coming to rival Spain in arms, letters, and riches (XX. 108), but also situates the discourse within the political climate of late eighteenth-century colonialism, reinforcing a pro-colonialist rhetoric in retaliation to the anxieties surrounding American emancipation:

Durará muchos siglos el sosiego,
 a pesar del ejemplo contagioso
de otras colonias, en que arderá el fuego

496 This episode serves as yet another example to reinforce Cortés’ stoic qualities as a controller of the passions.
de la atroz rebelión, y el venturoso
pueblo al ver su fatal desasosiego
dará gracias al Todopoderoso
que del yugo infernal le ha libertado
y a tan benignos reyes le ha entregado.

Mas qué mucho que dure la dichosa
quietud, pues que florece la sagrada
religión, basa firme en que reposa
la lealtad del vasallo, sin que osada
se atreva a descubrir su frente odiosa
la impiedad dura, que, desenfrenada
cual víbora, emponzoña todo estado
que en su seno la abriga descuidado. (XX. 110-111)

Directly addressing the instances of emancipatory rebellions and revolutions taking place throughout the American continent at the end of the eighteenth century, Escoiquiz, through the prophesising discourse of Glory, seeks to quash these expressions of defiance by reinforcing a colonial attitude of vassalage, obedience, and subordination, no doubt serving as a warning to the insurgents – both indigenous and creole – against further unrest.498

Instances of colonial propaganda such as this can be found throughout the work, as the poet consistently endeavours to project the political, social, and economic benefits of conquest, not only for Spain, but for the conquered Mexicans; thus creating a counter discourse to that provided by creole insurgents such as Viscardo and Teresa de Mier.499 Presenting an idealised depiction of colonial

498 Escoiquiz’s pro-imperial, pro-colonial stance is echoed in the prologue of José Mariano Beristán y Martín de Souza’s Biblioteca hispanoamericana septentrional, dated 1816. In this prologue, the author takes aim at the ingratitude of Americans towards the Spanish monarchy, employing similar snake imagery to that used by Escoiquiz in the cited stanza: ‘los que hoy abren sus sacrílegas y serpentina bocas para llamar a sus padres y abuelos tiranos, codiciosos, ladrones, usurpadores y usureros; los mismos ¡qué infamia! que gozan y disfrutan los beneficios’. He goes on to charge the creoles as ‘los principales autores de las desgracias de la América’, and dismisses their cause as ‘una rebelión tan torpe y bárbara, como ingrata e injusta’. José Mariano Beristán y Martín de Souza, Biblioteca hispano americana setentrienal (Mexico: Fuente Cultural, 1883), pp. 26, 27.

499 Once again, a similar position is adopted by Beristán de Souza in his prologue, as he commends the ‘frutos de orden, de justicia y de prosperidad’ that the conquest has accomplished and the ‘notoria felicidad de estos países en lo religioso, en lo moral, en lo político’, no doubt in response to the accusations laid down by Viscardo in his letter. Far from cruel and tyrannical, Beristán de Souza describes Spain as ‘una nación grande y generosa’, ‘a
Hispanic society, we note how those who have been conquered by Cortés—most notably the Zempoalans and the Tlaxcalans—adore their conqueror, as Escoiquiz displays the fraternal bonds of empire. When the Spaniards enter Zempoala, for example, the natives shower them with ‘aclamaciones | (…) en todo iguales | a las de un triunfo. Desde los balcones | echaban flores (…) juzgando que inmortales | éramos, bendiciendo a los hispanos | los niños, las mujeres, los ancianos’ (VI. 66). ‘Deseaban | todos’, he continues, ‘con voluntad libre y sencilla, | unirse a los dominios de Castilla’ (VI. 68). Spain and Mexico, Escoiquiz patriotically rejoices to his dedicatee, Charles IV, and his wife, María Luisa de Parma, are ‘unidos | bajo de vuestro cetro poderoso, | los pueblos vencedores y vencidos | formando un solo imperio venturoso, | como a padres os aman y rendidos’ (I. 4), with the rhyming pattern of ‘unidos’, ‘vencidos’, and ‘rendidos’, serving once again to reinforce a pro-colonialist attitude of union and submission at a delicate point in Spain’s history when it was on the brink of losing its American colonies. This propagandistic colonial stance is captured in the poem’s cathartic happily-ever-after ending in which Cortés promises the Mexican population a peaceful, just, and magnanimous rule under the Spanish empire, to which they respond, closing the poem, with ‘vivas aclamaciones’: ‘de contento | el pueblo no cabía. Se entregaron | las armas, y prestado el juramento, | Cortés entró triunfante, y al imperio | de España se agregó aquel hemisferío’ (XXVI. 88).

The utility of Spain’s conquest of Mexico is reciprocal, with Escoiquiz eager to demonstrate the benefits brought by colonialism to the Old World. As Cortés informs Moctezuma in canto IX, “os lo pide el Rey más estimable, | deseando contraer una alianza | con vos y vuestro pueblo, que sea estable, | cimentada en reciproca confianza | y produzca un comercio ventajoso | entre uno y otro imperio poderoso’ (IX. 67). In response to doubts raised by Enlightenment thinkers regarding the usefulness of owning transoceanic colonies, Escoiquiz accentuates the economic advantages of colonial empire. This is predominantly achieved through the poet’s employment of a rhetoric of abundance when describing the lands of Mexico and the commodities it produces. Tenochtitlan is presented in the poem as a Latin American cornucopia; an edenic, idealised landscape populated with endless natural

500 This sentiment is reiterated in Escoiquiz’s dedication to the king, ‘Al Rey’, in which he recalls ‘las felicidades que a los habitantes de este se le han seguido desde la época de su reunión a la Corona de España, siendo una de las mayores para ambas naciones la que disfrutan bajo el amable y justo gobierno de V.M’ (p. iv).

501 Escoiquiz was certainly aware of the fragile position his country was in, claiming in his Memoirs that, if Spain were to lose her colonies in the Americas, ‘[quedaría] perdida, sin comercio y sin marina’, while England would appropriate the monopoly over transatlantic commerce and trade (p. 210).

Like the bucolic eclogues of classical and Renaissance tradition, Escoiquiz provides a botanical catalogue of flowers, fruits, plants, and vegetables: ‘muchas flores’ (IX. 98), ‘mil calles de frutales’ (IX. 99), ‘lozanas plantas’ (IX. 99), ‘las ramas se rompían, agobiadas del peso de las frutas más hermosas | (…) guayabas, mameyes, y sabrosas | anonas, paltas, y otros delicados | géneros de los nuestros ignorados’ (IX. 100), ‘arbustos y legumbres excelentes | y extrañas que aquel clima producía’ (IX. 101), ‘el frisole y pallar de diferentes | castas, la dulce papa que suplia | del pan la falta, las sobresalientes | y delicadas piñas, el picante | agi, el nitchile, y el maguei punzante’ (IX. 101), ‘cristalinas aguas (…) en que vivía | un número de peces (…) | de todas cuantas clases producía | el clima mexicano, mantenidos | de pastos y alimentos escogidos’ (IX. 107). Echoing the discourse of plenitude and excess used by America’s early colonial writers, such as Columbus in his diary entries, and heightened by the use of hyperbolic and alliterative language, Escoiquiz strategically alludes to the commercial benefits brought by Spain’s New World conquest, emphasising the utility of native commodities—as illustrated through his use of indigenous vocabulary—, previously unavailable in Europe, such as the prickly agave, cocoa, tobacco, and cotton, to which Spain’s detractors are indebted. As if written in response to Masson’s infamous question—mais que doit-on à l’Espagne?—, Escoiquiz’s answer is quite simply the discovery and conquest of a whole New World, and the economic and commercial benefits that came with it.

Consilium principis
While Escoiquiz may well have been moved by a genuine love for his country, it is also possible that personal ambitions fuelled the writing of his epic. This is insinuated by the poet’s principal political enemy, Manuel Godoy; valido and first minister of Charles IV. In his memoirs, Godoy paints a damning portrait of Escoiquiz as a manipulative, power-hungry, and ambitious individual, motivated by a malicious desire to win royal favour and replace Godoy as the king’s favourite: ‘trabajó en descartarme y heredar mi valimiento’. One of the ways in which Escoiquiz may have sought to do this was through

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504 On the rhetoric of abundance employed by Columbus in his writings see Pastor, pp. 29-32.

505 Manuel Godoy, Memorias, ed. Emilio La Parra López and Elisabel Larriba (Sant Vicent del Raspeig: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alicante, 2008), p. 621. In his own Memorias, Escoiquiz would work hard to counter these accusations, claiming that he was driven solely by ‘el bien de mi patria que me desentendiese totalmente de estas naturales inclinaciones (…), éstas eran en mi tan moderadas, que estaba lejos de lo que
the writing of México conquistada; saturated, as previously explored, with patriotic rhetoric and defensive discourse. Escoquiz’s hopes to restore Spain’s former glory, and in doing so placate his king, lie not only in propagandistic recourse to the past, however, but also advice in the present, as the poet takes on, on several occasions in his epic, the role of advisor; for as the character of Cortés himself puts it: “franqueza (…) es la muestra más atenta que de un vasallo fiel está en la mano para probar su amor al soberano” (VI. 85). An examination of Escoquiz’s memoirs reveals that while serving in the court of Charles IV, the poet was deeply disillusioned with the state of Spain –‘este infeliz reinado’– in the final decade of the eighteenth century, illustrating an acute awareness of the internal problems that his country faced, particularly under the ‘extraña debilidad’ of Charles IV and his corrupt and tyrannical favourite, Godoy, and his ambitious queen, María Luisa de Parma:

Sentía en el alma la debilidad con que el miserable rey los dejaba gobernarlo todo a su arbitrio. Veía con amargura las costumbres públicas perdidas con su ejemplo, el erario arruinado, el ejército aniquilado, los empleos vendidos, la justicia prostituida, la nación consternada y, en fin, los males de que hablaré con más extensión adelante.  

Lamenting Charles IV’s weakness as a puppet king who took ‘una parte pasiva’ in state affairs, Escoquiz expresses the concern ‘que me causaba la opresión en que gemía la España bajo la desatinada administración de la Reina y del ministro favorito’.  

Like many of those disappointed with the reign of Charles IV, the poet pinned his hopes on the young heir to the throne, prince Ferdinand, claiming to have accepted the position as court tutor with the aim of ‘llenarle de las mejores máximas e instruirle de modo que su reinado hiciese dichosa a España. ¡Y qué satisfacción sería para mí el haber contribuido a un bien tan grande para mi patria!’  

During his time as tutor, he claims to have instructed the prince on state affairs – ‘en el conocimiento de sí mismo y de los demás hombres, en especial de los cortesanos; en el arte de gobernarlos, y en la verdadera y sólida política’–, utilising the pedagogical resource of ‘[el] espejo de príncipes’.  

Translating this to his epic, while neither Charles IV nor Ferdinand are identified as the recipients of political advice in the poem, we can nevertheless read between the lines, applying the poet’s inclusion of political philosophy to the situation of Spain at the turn of the century. For

justamente se llama ambición’, painting himself to be a ‘desinteresado', 'leal vasallo'. Escoquiz, Memorias, pp. 69, 73, 74.

506 Escoquiz, Memorias, pp. 63, 75, 67.

507 Escoquiz, Memorias, pp. 85, 67.

508 Escoquiz, Memorias, p. 63. Escoquiz can be identified as a Fernandino: ‘those who hoped to restore the nation to its former prosperity (…) [by looking to] Prince Fernando as their champion because he opposed Godoy and resented his parents' dependence upon the favorite’. Rodríguez O., p. 51.

509 Escoquiz, Memorias, p. 63.
example, one cannot but interpret the censure of Moctezuma’s ‘más viles ministros orgullosos, | [que] maltratan sin piedad a la nobleza, | [y] cometen los excesos más odiosos’ (VI. 55) as a subtle rebuke of the ‘poder tiránico del Príncipe de la Paz’, Godoy.\(^{510}\) Similarly, in canto XIII, when the chief priest, Belorano, gives a speech to the Mexica senate, complaining about the state of the monarchy under the control of “un soberano (…) débil” (XIII. 9), this could equally be applied to the reign of Charles IV, as he complains of “los males que agobiada | tienen la monarquía, envilecida; | la real autoridad, amedrentada; | la nación, despreciada y oprimida | la nobleza; gimiendo la sagrada | religión; abatidos los guerreros | y, en el trono, unos crueles extranjeros” (XIII. 7); a remarkably similar description to that provided by Escoiquiz about late eighteenth-century Spain in his *Memorias*, referenced above. In the same canto, upon the election and coronation of Guatimozin –Cuauhtémoc–, the new Aztec emperor, Belorano delivers him an advisory speech, indicating how to be a good prince; words that are perhaps subtly intended for Escoiquiz’s young and impressionable student, prince Ferdinand:

No olvidéis que sois hombre: con recelo
mirad la altura en que os halláis situado:
sed de vuestros vasallos el consuelo,
el protector del pobre y desgraciado,
vivo afecto inspirad al virtuoso,
miedo al malo, respeto al poderoso.

El pueblo al veros diga con ternura:
“ve ahí nuestro padre”. Con afán corriendo
la madre a su inocente creatura
con el dedo os enseñe, repitiendo:
“¡Ese es nuestro buen rey! ¡Con qué dulzura
nos mira a todos! Cielos, atendiendo
nuestros ruegos guardadle. ¡Ay, si faltara
quien a nosotros triste amparara!”

A la bondad unid el valeroso
ánimo, que reprima la fiera
de cualquier enemigo que el reposo
de vuestro imperio turbe, la firmeza
de la imparcial justicia, el cuidadoso
desvelo de que reine la pureza

entre vuestros ministros y empleados,
de modo que, cual vos, sean venerados. (XIII. 62-64)

Such advice was clearly overlooked, however, as Escoiquiz was dismissed from court shortly after the publication of his epic in 1799, giving way to the tumultuous years of his later life which would see his ideology radicalise substantially. 511 Indeed, in the following years Escoiquiz would become involved in a series of polemical intrigues and political plots, namely the failed Escorial Conspiracy of 1807 – in which the poet unsuccessfully led the supporters of Ferdinand to overthrow his father, Charles IV – and the Revolt of Aranjuez in 1808 – which resulted in Charles IV abdicating the crown to his son –, while also playing a vital role in the disastrous negotiations between Ferdinand VII, Charles IV, and Napoleon, which ultimately led to the Napoleonic invasion of Spain in 1808; the same transformative year that saw the beginning of the Spanish American wars of independence. 512 Escoiquiz’s efforts to restore Spain to its former glory had thus ironically ended in devastation, not only for himself – living out the rest of his days in intermittent exile as he fell in and out of royal favour, before dying in 1820 –, but for the nation, as the chains of Spain’s transoceanic empire would finally buckle under the weight of the nineteenth century, and with it the place of Cortés in an emerging liberal state would be thrown in question.

511 According to Escoiquiz, his dismissal from court resulted from a conversation he had with the king and queen, in which he advised them of the misfortunes that would befall Spain under the continued power of Manuel Godoy. See Memorias, pp. 74-75.

512 For more information on Escoiquiz’s involvement in Spanish politics at the turn of the century see Urquijo y Goitia, pp. 16-19.
CONCLUSION

The Ghost of Cortés in the Age of Modernity

Described by Feros as ‘one of the most chaotic periods in the history of Spain’, the first two decades of the nineteenth century ushered an era of political crisis and transformation in the Hispanic world.\(^{513}\) Napoleon’s invasion of the Iberian Peninsula and the ascension of his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, to the Spanish throne in 1808, led to Spain’s War of Independence; a devastating conflict that would ultimately give rise to a new liberal state, encapsulated in the Spanish Constitution of 1812.\(^{514}\) Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, Spanish America was undergoing its own movement of national emancipation as Spain’s American colonies gradually gained political independence from the metropole.\(^{515}\) Against this metamorphic backdrop, Cortés’ mythical presence refused to perish, seeing continued popularity throughout the nineteenth century through the mediums of theatre, opera, prose, and poetry.\(^{516}\) The Hispanic epic would be summoned for one final time to record the conquistador’s deeds in the last known epic of the Cortés cycle: \textit{La conquista del Méjico por Hernán Cortés} (1820) by Pedro Montengón y Paret (1745-1824). Perhaps best known for his didactic and satirical style, Montengón penned a number of works in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including poems, plays, and novels, achieving renown with his best-selling \textit{Eusebio} (1786-88); a philosophical

\(^{513}\) Feros, p. 239.


and pedagogical novel inspired by Rousseau’s Émile (1762). Montengón also had a prolific epic output, having not only translated James Macpherson’s Ossian poems (Fingal y Temora, 1800), but also writing his own romance epic –El Rodrigo (1793)–, as well as two other epics published in Naples in 1820: La pérdida de España reparada por el rey Pelayo and La conquista del Méjico.

Written almost 300 years after the fall of Tenochtitlan, La conquista del Méjico is made up of fifteen cantos written in non-stanzaic hendecasyllabic form that narrate Cortés’ conquest of the Aztec empire, beginning with the conquistador’s visit to the king of Spain in canto one to ask for permission to travel and conquer Mexico –a fictional deviation that clearly seeks to eradicate Cortés’ rebellious departure from Cuba without royal order–, until the Spaniards’ victory over the Aztec empire.

Continuing where Escoiquiz had left off, Montengón projects an essence of postimperial nostalgia in his epic, taking pride in ‘la gloriosa conquista’ (p. 3) and his protagonist, ‘el grande Hernán Cortés’ (p. 5), to whom the poet ascribes laudatory epithets such as ‘héroe ilustre’ (p. 3), ‘admirable’ (p. 106), ‘compasivo’ (p. 95), and ‘compadecido’ (p. 41). Like in other Cortesian epics, Cortés –‘adalid del cielo’ (p. 190)– is described as being chosen by God to carry out his divine conquest: ‘tenía | aquel mismo Destino reservada | a Cortés la conquista del imperio’ (p. 75). In his attempts to justify Spain’s conquest, Montengón presents Cortés as conquering in the pursuit of ‘la paz y la amistad’ (p. 19), with the hero once again taking on the role of ‘liberador’ (p. 67), as he frees the natives from the cruelties of human sacrifice –‘la libertad recobran con la vida | las infelices víctimas, que alegres | por su liberación, manifestaban | su alborozo a Cortés’ (p. 68)–, which is identified by Montengón as the


520 Pedro de Montengón y Paret, La conquista del Méjico por Hernán Cortés: poema épico (Naples: Presso Gio Battista, 1820). All subsequent citations from the poem will be cited using page number.
underlying motive for conquest.\textsuperscript{521} As well as religious conversion and the abolition of human sacrifice, Montengón also highlights, as Escoiquiz had done, the mutual commercial and cultural benefits of conquest ‘a las riquezas | a las comodidades y a las luces, | no menos que a la industria y a las artes | de ambos a dos estados, (...) con el tráfago y giro del comercio’ (p. 163).

It must be emphasised, however, that unlike Escoiquiz, Montengón’s epic goes beyond mere national pride to embrace a more liberal attitude to conquest, acknowledging the failures of Spain’s enterprise in Mexico as much as its achievements. His depiction of conquest is thus not the staunchly propagandistic defence found in Escoiquiz’s epic, nor does he paint a flawless image of Cortés. Indeed, in \textit{La conquista del Méjico} we start to see a chink in the conquistador’s armour and that of the impenetrable story of conquest, as old-age concepts such as national glory and honour give way to notions of justice and liberty. For example, several allusions are made to Spanish brutality in Montengón’s epic. During the massacre of Cholula, the Spaniards are described as vicious and ‘encarnizados’ (p. 131), as the poet describes ‘los lamentos y alaridos | de animosas mujeres y muchachos’ (p. 132) as Spanish conquistadors ‘mataban | madres, hijos, doncellas, y paridas | de su honor, de sus vienes despojadas’ (p. 132), bemoaning ‘el terror, el espanto, y la venganza’ (p. 132) as Spaniards ‘como aves de rapiña iban volando | por las plazas y calles encharcadas | de sangre entre cadáveres y heridos’ (p. 132). Questions are similarly raised regarding the Spaniards’ religious intolerance. Following Cortés’ evangelising speech to Moctezuma in canto eleven, and his attempts to convert the natives of Mexico to Christianity, the Aztec emperor questions the premise of forced conversion and monotheism:

\begin{quote}
¿Qué empeño lleváis, en que los otros abandonen el culto de sus dioses para adorar los vuestros? ¿Qué diríais, si entras en empeño semejante de que adoraseis a vuestras deidades en vez de ese Dios vuestro? (p. 192)
\end{quote}

Drawing on the liberal notion of individual freedom that became prevalent in the nineteenth century, Moctezuma seems to suggest that religion should not be imposed, but rather down to individual choice:

\textsuperscript{521} In his exchange with Cortés in canto one, the Spanish king claims to be motivated in conquering the New World not out of a hunger for gold or other such treasures, but rather: “me interesa | mucho más el bien propio de los pueblos” (p. 10).
a concept that the Spaniards had refused to adopt in their rigorous colonial policy of religious expiration.\footnote{According to Raymond Carr, Spain’s ‘liberal programme’ of the early nineteenth century was founded on ‘civil equality [and] personal liberty’. Raymond Carr, \textit{Spain, 1808-1939} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 98. Building on this idea, John David Hughey observes that ‘catholic unity as developed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was challenged by the rise of modern liberalism, which brought with it the idea of religious toleration or freedom.’ John David Hughey, \textit{Religious Freedom in Spain: Its Ebb and Flow} (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1955), p. 16. On the rise of liberalism in Spain see Hughey, pp. 16-32.}

While Montengón admittedly refers to Cortés’ capture of Tenochtitlan as ‘la victoria por siglos memorable’ (p. 226), he goes on to question how long this memory will last in the national consciousness:

\begin{quote}
\text{Pero como las glorias de este mundo no siempre durar pueden, mas expuestas están a oscurecerse, como el día sujeto a las tinieblas de la noche; y como por sus leyes la natura mezclar quiso los bienes con los males a la natura humana inevitables; así las glorias de Cortés temieron extinguirse con él en el sepulcro, aunque no en la memoria de los hombres. (pp. 227-28)}
\end{quote}

While Cortés’ deeds indeed lived on in the collective memory, they were nevertheless to be saturated in polemic; a harsh reality that Montengón consciously illustrates in the final canto of his epic. Here the god of the Mexican lagoon, Moxualco, appears before Cortés to warn him of the hostility that awaits his memory:

\begin{quote}
\text{¡Valía tanta pena, temerario y ambicioso mortal, que aquí vinieres desde un remoto mundo, a revolvernos este, en que nos hallábamos felices, y que oculto tenían tantos siglos a la codicia y ambición del hombre! ¿Es otro acaso el deplorable objeto, que acá te trajo, que el sonido vano}
\end{quote}
de la fama y del oro, que la muerta
arrebatarte debe en el sepulcro?
Podrás alzar tu tumba de trofeos
y de vanas insignias, y a tus hijos
dejar en manda títulos y honores
y allegados tesoros. Mas las sombras
de tantos infelices degollados
y por ti despojados de sus bienes,
arañarán la tuya con chillidos
lamentables, do quiera que la encuentren,
sin que entonces las armas te defiendan. (pp. 248-49)

Moxualco’s haunting prophecy signals the changing tide that was soon to sweep up the figure of Cortés and wash it up on the shores of bitter resentment and postcolonial rebuke in the nineteenth century, as the conquistador experienced a widespread metamorphosis from imperial hero to postcolonial villain. This was not only reflected in Spain’s own awakening consciousness regarding the injustices of the conquest, but most prominently in Latin American society which denigrated the image of Cortés in response to postcolonial sensibilities.523 The independence of Mexico unleashed what Antonio Rubial García terms ‘[un] furor anti-cortesiano’, as the conquistador became synonymous with the oppression, brutality, and injustice that Mexico had suffered under Spanish domination.524 On the other hand, Aztec civilisation and its heroes, particularly the last Aztec emperor, Cuauhtémoc, became idealised, representing a pro-indigenous vision of the vanquished.525

Postcolonial revulsion towards the figure of Cortés continued into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as he continued to take on an identifiable role as antagonist to the Mexican nation; a position that is artistically captured in Diego Rivera’s mural painting of the disembarkation of the Spanish at Veracruz completed in 1951 in the National Palace in Mexico City, which represents a

523 Already in 1812, the disgruntled Mexican creole fray Servando Teresa de Mier published Las Casas’ Brevísima relación in London, while another edition would be published in Spain in 1821. See Rubial García, pp. 220, 223. Another important work published in the late nineteenth century on Spain’s colonial abuses is Luis Vega-Rey’s Puntos negros del descubrimiento de América (1898). For more information see Bernabéu Albert, p. 119.

524 Rubial García, p. 225.

525 According to Bernabéu Albert, ‘Cuauhtémoc se transformó a lo largo de la centuria en el símbolo por excelencia de la lucha contra la dominación extranjera y en el emblema de la resistencia y de la valentía’, p. 109. On the revival of Cuauhtémoc in the nineteenth century see Bernabéu Albert, pp. 107-109; and Rubial García, pp. 217-18. The term ‘vision of the vanquished’ is that used by León-Portilla in Visión de los vencidos.
deformed and decrepit Cortés; symptomatic, perhaps, of Old-World greed and cruelty.\textsuperscript{526} Beyond the border of Mexico, the myth of Cortés has continued to arouse interest in popular culture, infiltrating, with polemical flair, the mainstream mediums of music, film, and streaming services, particularly during the recent quincentenary of the conquest of Mexico.\textsuperscript{527} In contemporary politics, Cortés has similarly continued to divide opinion. While the right-wing Spanish political party \textit{Vox} has unapologetically appropriated Cortés as a figurehead of Spanish nationalism, on the other side of the Atlantic, the Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador recently demanded that Spain apologise for the conquest and colonisation of Mexico.\textsuperscript{528}

What is clear is that, since his illegal departure from Cuba over 500 years ago, Cortés continues to be at the centre of polemics, claiming his place as one of the most controversial figures of world history, as his myth continues to possess epic grandeur, though tinged with the fatalism of a Greek tragedy. Perhaps more than any other New World discoverer, explorer, or conquistador, the myth of Cortés almost immediately engulfed his historical persona, etching itself into the collective memory of generations. This has unquestionably been due to his ability to adopt multiple personalities and roles over the centuries, from perfidious rebel to loyal servant, political usurper to civilised liberator, ruthless iconoclastic to faithful evangelist; his identity is multifaceted, malleable, and everchanging, ready and willing to don, in carnivalesque fashion, the next mask that will inevitably be thrust upon his face. It is the porosity of Cortés that undoubtedly appealed to epic poets of the early modern period who, as I have endeavoured to demonstrate in this thesis, turned to the conquistador in the pursuit of their own personal and political agendas. Indeed, the Cortesian epics analysed in this thesis, while greatly imitative –both of one other and epic tradition more broadly–, inevitably house the unique circumstances and requirements of their own epochs; revealing a rich epic tapestry stitched with contemporary anxieties. In tracing the epic genealogy of Cortés across three centuries, traversing transnational and transhistorical borders, this thesis has explored the varying conditions under which the discourses of Cortés’ heroism were formed, revealing the diverse political, territorial, economic, national, religious, and emotional significance attached to the hero throughout the early modern period.

\textsuperscript{526} On the mural of Diego Rivera as well as that of José Clemente Orozco see Octavio Paz, \textit{El peregrino en su patria: historia y política de México}, ed. Luis Mario Schneider (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987), pp. 104-5.

\textsuperscript{527} Examples include singer-songwriter Neil Young’s ‘Cortez the Killer’ from his 1975 album, \textit{Zuma}. In film, the figure of Cortés has been appropriated by Walt Disney, starring as the evil antagonist in the animated film \textit{The Road to El Dorado} (2000), as well as in the science-fiction film \textit{Azteca Rex} (2007). More recently, Cortés has been the subject of several television series including the Amazon exclusive, ‘Hernán’ (2019), the Mexican TV series ‘Malinche’ (2018), and Amazon’s ‘Cortés’ starring Javier Bardem as Cortés, which was cancelled in 2020 before filming was completed.


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Sailing the rough seas of global warfare, dynastic change, colonial uprisings, foreign rebuke, and the rise and fall of Spanish imperialism, Cortés remained the connective tissue between the Old and the New World orders, both historically and literarily, revealing as much about socio-political currents of the early modern world as the Hispanic epic tradition in which he was memorialised. Certainly, the epic genre serves as testament not only to the evolution of Cortesian heroism, but more broadly to the changing ideological and literary consciousness of the early modern Hispanic world; an inseparable discursive companion to Spain’s transatlantic enterprise that would inevitably meet its demise in the modern era. In the case of Cortés, however, there is perhaps no resolute ending to this so-called ‘hero’s’ journey, no neatly identifiable conclusion to his story, as the infamous legend of the conquistador would long outlive his epic quest.
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