

VIR MELANCHOLICUS/FEMINA TRISTIS: TOWARDS A POETICS OF WOMEN'S LOSS

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The notion of *melancholia* as a gendered affliction began with Aristotle, who in his *Problems* (XXX), affirmed that it was a malady that afflicted "all great men."¹ Women, being essentially cold and moist, according to the theory of the humors, were unable, like the warmer and drier men, to become atrabilic; that is, men were able to produce "black bile," the agent of melancholia, whereas women were incapable of producing it. With the cultivation of the classics during the Renaissance, this Aristotelian notion was revived and enhanced by Marsilio Ficino, in his *De vita* (Book I), who "reconceived [melancholia] as a kind of wisdom," and "who defined the affliction as the privileged subjectivity of the lettered" (Schiesari 131, 113). Thus, melancholia came to be conceived as a "blessed gloom"; it became the illness that caused great men—or men became great because of it—to become moral spokesmen for their community, to express loss and truth in terms of transcendent statements, and to "become exemplary of the 'human condition'" (Schiesari 141, 265). Centuries later Sigmund Freud affirmed that the melancholic has a heightened sense of morality and "has a keener eye for the truth than others who are not melancholic . . . [and] it may be . . . that *he* has come pretty near to understanding *himself*; we can only wonder why a *man* has to be ill before *he* can be accessible to a truth of this kind" (cited in Schiesari 5, 9, emphases mine).

Juliana Schiesari, in her book *The Gendering of Melancholia. Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature*, explains that this gendered concept of melancholia was a "cultural myth" that privileged the loss and lack of men over that of women. Simply put, men's loss was more significant than women's loss, such that said notion of melancholia resulted in a discursive practice that excluded women. In the love lyric, for example, melancholia as a discursive practice allowed men to use women as metaphors for loss, at the same time that it devalued and divested women of their own subjectivities. Women, as biologically and culturally defined, could not be melancholic; they could only be "mournful" and thus they "were reduced to the banality and particularity of their existence" (Schiesari 265). This conception produced, as I term it, a cultural dichotomy: *Vir melancholicus/Femina tristis*.

With regard to Spanish letters of the Golden Age,² we can envision Quevedo, for example, as the type of melancholic described by Freud in his famous sonnet "Miré los muros de la patria mía," ruminating his decaying "muros," his crumbling house, his curved staff, and feeble sword, in order to lament the quick passage of time, man's mortal destiny, and, on an allegorical level, to lament the loss of empire. In the courtly and Neoplatonic traditions, loss is symbolized by the woman, either as the lost or unattainable object of desire, desire itself, or as the means to overcome loss through an ascent and union with the sublime idea of beauty. In Garcilaso's courtly Soneto I, woman is a metaphor of the unattainable object:

Yo acabaré, que me entregué sin arte
a quien sabrá perderme y acabarme
si ella quisiere, y aun sabrá querello;
que pues mi voluntad puede matarme,
la suya, que no es tanto de mi parte,
pudiendo, ¿qué hará sino hacello? (35)

In the Neoplatonic tradition, woman becomes a metaphor of recovery, as a means for searching and recuperating that something else that lies beyond woman, as exemplified by Herrera in the conclusion to Soneto 38, addressed to his "Serena Luz": "Que yo en essa belleza que contemplo / (aunque' a mi flaca vista ofende i cubre) / la immensa busco, i voi siguiendo el cielo" (125).

In the amorous tradition, then, the expression and recuperation of loss is expressed and attained by using women as a means of cultural exchange or currency with a convivio of male readers in order to satisfy male ego-investment, as Schiesari notes with regard to Petrarch and his "love" for Laura: "Petrarch's glorification of Laura became the means through which Petrarch attained glory and through which woman as the specular object for erotic self-recuperation became institutionalized. The ecstasy and despair of Petrarch's lyric eroticized lack in terms of a lost object, the bemoaning of whose loss also erected the poetic subject" (167). Whether in such a poem as Quevedo's or Garcilaso's, or in one such as Herrera's, narcissism is a distinctive component of melancholia, for in the end, as Schiesari adds, "it is not so much the lost object that is in question in the melancholic psyche as the melancholic's display of himself as a legitimator or spokesman of the dominant order by virtue of his overdeveloped conscience" (53).

Whereas men can become melancholic, women, relegated to the category of the emotions, can only become hysterical and depressed. Men's loss is greater than women's, thus they have access to cultural production to express their loss, whereas the lesser and intranscendental loss of

women is denied this access and is relegated to the much lower and inconsequential sphere of what Schiesari calls the "prosaics of mourning" (62). Indeed, mourning has long been a privileged province of women, a cultural practice that sanctions the public display of women's loss. Such a public and cultural practice was prevalent in Spain in the form of the *plañideras*, who were paid to cry and mourn the death of someone.³

In order to assess the articulation of women's loss, within the thought of the period, it would not be a fruitful avenue to redefine melancholia or attempt to accommodate women's grief within the melancholic tradition, for—as I shall demonstrate later—this could lead to a discursive trap. Rather, it is necessary to note, first—and as I have already discussed—how the melancholic tradition subverted women's own claim to loss; and, second, to consider other modes of feminine self-representation. It is necessary to see women's grief, depression and mourning as possible expressions of women's resistance and as a feminine symbolic that offers a counter-discourse to the melancholic tradition. As Schiesari affirms in her study of women's lyric of the Italian *cinquecento*, some women "resisted and found ways to reformulate loss by writing out a poetics of mourning in lieu of a poetics of melancholia. . . . Instead of a mere mimesis of melancholic eros, certain women writers reaffirm *mourning* as an intersubjective space within which loss is represented" (77, 166).⁴ In this assessment, and in consideration of this "poetics of mourning," we shall note three elements: (1) whereas men predominantly project themselves as solitary melancholics, but so-called exemplars of the "human condition," for women grief or mourning is often a collective ritual (Schiesari 18); (2) in contrast to men's lofty poetics of transcendent and metaphysical statements, women often rely on a "poetics of the prosaic" (Schiesari 166); (3) the expression of loss sometimes involves the loss of discourse.

In this study I will concentrate, with a few exceptions, on women's love poetry, because it is this lyric that was most cultivated by women,⁵ especially those who saw in it a vehicle in which to express their condition: to oppose—mourn—their subordination to patriarchy, to criticize their subordination by a discursive practice, as a means to express their desire for empowerment, as a way to *de-iconize* the female love object and to express their own subjectivities (see Olivares & Boyce, *Tras el espejo* 8-9). Furthermore, women often had no other choice than to write in the amorous tradition, since the prestigious genres, by their public nature, were often denied them. As Ann R. Jones affirms in both regards:

love poetry centralizes sociosexual differences as no other literary mode does. The narrator of epic or prose romance is not necessarily marked by gender; the speaker in erotic poetry always is. If women are disempowered by their placement in a visual and symbolic order structured around men's fantasies, and if worldly as well as verbal power is

always at stake in reigning love discourses, then a woman love poet is certain to disarticulate and remobilize the sexual economy of her culture. Renaissance gender decorum closed women off from the literary genres most privileged because most publicly oriented: epic, tragedy, political and philosophical theory. But love lyric, as an ostensibly private discourse, an art of the in-house miniature, could conceivably be allowed them. (7)

My only quibble with this statement is that Spanish women poets—excluded by Jones—often go to great lengths to *avoid* marking their erotic poetry by gender, this is especially so when they write in the prestigious italianate forms. Indeed, Leonor de la Cueva y Silva marks her sonnets and octaves with a neutral (=male) or male speaker,⁶ and Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán does likewise in her sonnets, and generally avoids the problem altogether; instead of addressing a loved object, her unmarked speaker addresses abstractions, such as “el Temor” and “la Esperanza.”

The collective ritual of grief and mourning is abundant in the love poetry of women of the Golden Age. A female speaker expresses community by speaking on behalf of women, by empathizing with their plight and loss; who, through such a tradition as the *querelle des femmes*, expresses woman’s complaint against the cruelty and indifference of men; and who also express community on the basis of friendship.

Ramírez de Guzmán, in the *romances* “A las lágrimas de una dama” and “Si quieres vivir contenta”—

Ignorando su valor,
desperdicia Anarda perlas.
¿Quién duda que valgan mucho
lágrimas que tanto cuestan?,
que codicioso Cupido
se ha desatado la venda
por no perderlas de vista
cuando llegare a cogerlas.

Alguna esperanza tiene,
pero poco la consuela
un alivio en esperanza
y, en posesión, una pena.

¿Quién vio padecer a un ángel
y quién llorar las estrellas?
Milagros son del amor,
maravillas de la ausencia.

Del olvido de su amante,
qué dulcemente se queja.
No fuera tan linda Anarda,
si desgraciada no fuera.

Si quieres vivir contenta,
Lisarda, que Dios te valga;
olvida, que la memoria
es un verdugo del alma.

No imagines que te adora
el que te dio su palabra,
que mueve un gusto las lenguas
y no hay gusto sin mudanza.

De palabras no te fíes,
que son ladrones de casa;
y la palabra mejor,
al fin, viene a ser palabra.

Si vive amor en tu dueño,
querrá sin duda otra dama,
que, como el amor es niño,
todo cuanto ve le agrada.

No mires lo que entregaste,
y si lo miras repara
que el bien en su posesión
es menos que su esperanza.

Viendo Clori tan continuas
en su hermosura las perlas,
consolando su pesar
de esta suerte la aconseja:

«No derrames aljófar,
divina Anarda,
que hará amor granjería
de tu desgracia.

»Si las perlas malogras,
Anarda bella,
codicioso Cupido
te dará penas.

»Si el amor a tu amante
le hace grosero,
prueba a hacerlo advertido
con darle celos». (167-68)

Goza de las ocasiones
y en gozándolas te aparta,
que no hay placer que en su busca
muchos pesares no traiga.

Fácil cosa es querer bien,
que amor al descuido asalta;
lo difícil es que puedas
despedille si le llamas.

No admitas a amor de veras,
que vende su gloria cara;
y el menor dolor de ausencia
con su gusto no le paga.

Menosprecia el bien que estimas
y rendirás a tus plantas,
que el despreciar en amantes
es conocida ventaja. (169)

—commiserates with the grief of Anarda—her sister Ana⁷—and Lisarda caused by their respective lover's abandonment of them. The speaker tells Anarda that her *amante* is not worth the tears she sheds; however, if she persists in the hope that her ungrateful lover will return her love, in order to achieve this, she should endeavor to make him jealous. With regard to Lisarda, the speaker has harsher advice: to be happy, Lisarda should forget her mendacious and inconstant lover because his word is not a promise but just a word. However, if she is not inclined to forget him, then she should empower herself by subjecting him to her disdain, in order to bring him to her feet.

María de Zayas, in the *soneto con estrambote*, "Si amados pagan mal los hombres, Gila," expresses the same, drawing attention to men's perfidy and deceit, and asserting that the only true and faithful lover is God:

Si amados pagan mal los hombres, Gila,
dime, ¿qué harán si son aborrecidos?

Si no se obligan cuando son queridos,
¿por qué tu lengua su traición perfila?

Su pecho es un Caribdis y una Escila
donde nuestros deseos van perdidos;
no te engañen, que no han de ser creídos
cuando su boca más dulzor destila. (. . .)

En sólo un hombre creo,
cuya verdad estimo por empleo,
y éste no está en la tierra,
porque es un hombre Dios que el cielo encierra.

Éste sí que no engaña;
éste es hermoso y sabio,
y que jamás hizo a ninguna agravio.⁸ (232)

In these poems, the pastoral convention is used to express collective commiseration, admonition, and resistance. This employment of the pastoral points simultaneously to a lack of discourse and to an appropriation of male discourse. Lacking a discourse to express their collective mourning and to declare their communal resistance, female poets often appropriate the pastoral convention, which was at once a humble discourse, befitting the low status of women, and an elitist discourse invented by men, in the space of which men and women live on equal terms and in which women speak poetry, express desire and lament loss. Because of its predominance in the poetry of women, this pastoral mode should not be seen as merely a ventriloquization of a convention, but as the appropriation of a discursive space in which women criticize their social condition (Jones 124, Olivares & Boyce, *Tras el espejo* 26-27).

Collective mourning is also expressed through identification with mythological figures, what Jones terms a "relationship of willed empathy with mythological heroines" (in Schiesari 168). These heroines often represent precarious feminine identities, among which figure notably Procne and Philomena. Philomena, the prototype of women's mourning, is the subject of various women poets of the 16th and 17th centuries. Unlike men who use the figure of Philomena as the nightingale that sings the advent of Spring, women writers often rewrite this mythic tergiversation, going back to the literal myth portraying Philomena as the woman violated and silenced by her brother-in-law Tereus, and Procne as the avenging wife who slays him. Like her female colleagues, María de Zayas, in the sonnet "A un diluvio la tierra condenada," uses the figures of Philomena and Progne to express a woman's betrayal, and to indirectly express her female solidarity and communal mourning:

A un diluvio la tierra condenada,
que toda se anegaba en sus enojos,
ríos fuera de madre⁹ eran sus ojos,
porque ya son las nubes mar airada.

La dulce Filomena retirada,
como no ve del sol los rayos rojos,
no le rinde canciones en despojos,
por verse sin su luz desconsolada.

Progne lamenta, el ruiseñor no canta;
sin belleza y olor están las flores,
y estando todo triste de este modo,
con tanta luz que al mismo sol espanta,
toda donaire, discreción y amores,
salió Belisa y serenóse todo. (225)

Within the context of Zayas's novella, "La esclava de su amante" (*Desengaños amorosos*), the sonnet assumes multiple ironies. It is authored

by a male, don Manuel, but sung by his beloved doña Isabel. Don Manuel, mindless to the underlying violence and message of the myth, uses it to express a conventional female encomium and celebration of spring. The ultimate irony is that with his own lyric of seduction—which fails—don Manuel prefigures his own death. Don Manuel rapes doña Isabel and pays with his life.¹⁰

In the following *décimas*, Leonor de la Cueva y Silva expresses a desire for empowerment in her praise of "Ródope, mujer deshonesta y la más hermosa de su tiempo [que] vino a reinar en Egipto."

Mientras que sus pies nevados
 baña Ródope, el vestido
 y el calzado guarnecido
 la guardaban sus criados.
 Asió entonces los calzados
 ricos un águila real,
 y con su vuelo caudal
 hasta Menfis los llevó,
 y al mismo rey los dejó
 como cosa celestial.

Él, entonces admirado
 de caso tan peregrino,
 juzgó por dueño divino
 el que lo era del calzado.
 De su gala amartelado,
 la hizo a su gente buscar
 por toda la tierra y mar;
 y hallada Ródope bella,
 el rey se casó con ella,
 y ella en fin vino a reinar.

But it is to be noted that such empowerment depends solely on the familiar courtly topic of beauty conquering men, and consequently is an iconic desire falling within the confines of masculine discourse.

Women's resistance and desire for empowerment is not only noted in the praise of or identification with mythological or historical female figures, but also with female types, such as the *mujer varonil* and the *mujer esquiva*. In the *décimas* "A una dama cazadora," by Ramírez de Guzmán, we note a desired correspondence between the huntress Diana and the poet's alter ego, Clori, who, more than with her "escopeta," slays with her disdain, resurrects with her beauty, and eludes the snares of men:

De ser Clori, en vano trata
 por los bosques homicida,
 pues su hermosura da vida
 a los que su rigor mata.

Si alguna fiera maltrata,
 porque su enojo señale,
 su vista al encuentro sale,
 quitándole los despojos,
 porque nace el tiro a sus ojos
 cuando del tiro se vale.

A un tiempo se ostenta ingrata
 y piadosa se acredita,
 pues su vista resucita
 a cuanto su mano mata.
 En su hermosura retrata
 créditos de su poder,
 dándolo claro a entender
 un ejemplo sin cautela:
 que un soplo mata una vela
 y otro la vuelve a encender. (. . .)

This figure of the *manceba esquiva* is also noted in those poems reappropriated from the *poesía de tipo tradicional*, presumed to be written by men but in *voz femenina*, in which the *manceba* expresses her lament or complaint to her mother. These poems, now effectively in the *voz femenina*, also fall within the tradition of the *querelle des femmes*. In a *romance* by Leonor de la Cueva, the *serrana* tells her mother that she will not be ensnared by love and that her soul shuts the door to men's deceptions:

Pensábase amor, mi madre,
 que a su rigor me rindiera:
 ¡malos años para quien
 a sus engaños se entrega!

Cautivarme quiso un día,
 rayo a rayo y flecha a flecha,
 con los ojos de un serrano,
 el mejor de nuestra aldea;
 pero yo, que ya conozco
 sus engaños y cautelas,
 por no enredarme en sus lazos,
 cerré del alma la puerta. (. . .) (137)

In some *seguidillas* by Ramírez de Guzmán, a *manceba esquiva* and *escarmentada* tells her mother that now she is aware of the true nature of men, and sets forth to warn women not to heed the amorous pleas of men, for they are all false:

Quiera quien quisiere,
 que yo no quiero
 que un amor se me pague

con unos celos.

Entendidos tengo,
madre, a los hombres,
que entretelan el ruego
con las traiciones. (. . .)

Todas las mujeres
vivan alerta,
que las ganan fulleros
con cartas hechas.

No hay un hombre en el mundo
que no sea falso,
ni más piedra de toque
que un desengaño. (172)

Collective mourning of their condition and resistance to men is especially noted in poems written "a petición." In one of various sonnets which Leonor de la Cueva writes "a petición," the female speaker laments her deception by a *galán*, and attributes her gullibility to a "natural" weakness in women to appeal for sympathy: "mas fui mujer y, al fin, mujer ligera". But she converts her self-victimization into an attack against her lover's deceptions: "pero sabiendo, ¡ay Dios!, que eran fingidos / he sepultado en caros desengaños / mi firmeza, mi amor y sus memorias" (119). In another sonnet, "the female speaker is more firm in her resolve not to be deceived. There would have to be a complete contradiction in nature—"veráanse por el aire volar peces, / a las aves nadar será barato, / el lobo del león ganar victoria"—before she would again accept the perpetrator of her *desengaño*: "primero que a la imagen de un ingrato / vuelva yo a dar lugar en mi memoria" (120).

With the term the "poetics of the prosaic," Schiesari refers to woman herself as the subject in the shadow of the culturally superior man and to her melancholia relegated to the lesser category of mourning and depression, her "prosaic grief." As Schiesari explains "By 'prosaic,' I mean that it evokes neither the special status of its poet nor an eroticized poetics of lack as melancholic idyll (. . .) and by way of polemical affirmation in the face of [some] male literary critics . . . who in attempting to value [their] work actually devalue it by suggesting that it is a mere outlet for passion, a mere expression of life, that 'rarely becomes art'" (181, 77, 169). In this sense, then, the "poetics of the prosaic," as well as the "poetics of mourning" have been noted in the poems discussed above. I should now like to extend the term "prosaic" to precisely that: the quotidian events and concerns of women, those matters that very rarely enter into the lyric domain of men. Furthermore, I would like to posit a fundamental caveat to Schiesari's notion of a gendered melancholia. While it may be true that melancholia was a "blessed malady" of men, and that as a discursive practice it privileged men's loss and lack, and that they had access to a sig-

nifying economy to express such, and which was largely unavailable to women, I do not believe that women were conscious of their exclusion on the basis of such a notion as melancholia, either as an illness or as a discursive practice. Certainly they were conscious of the fact that their subjectivities and concerns were not given the same measure as those of men, and for this reason given short shrift in terms of the public expression of such. But I do not believe that they were concerned with or yearned to express, like men, transcendent and metaphysical statements about, for example, the human condition. What they were concerned about was the reality of their condition, universal among women to be sure, but not a reality shared or accredited by men. They were concerned about the abuses of patriarchy, of being second-rate individuals in a society that regarded them as merchandise, of being barred from education and publication. These were the matters that concerned them—over which they mourned—and about which they wrote, and this expression often included the depiction of prosaic events.

In the *romance*, "A una gran señora casada a quien aborrecía su marido," by Marcia Belisarda, we note the collective empathy discussed previously. This poem pertains to a sub-genre often called "occasional poetry," in which an incident or "prosaic" event is used as a pretext for demonstrating a poet's ingenuity and dexterity, such as those many poems depicting a "dama con un clavel en la boca," or "una dama que se picó el dedo," etc. The occasion, and cause of this poem, is a woman scorned by her husband. But behind the prosaicness of the subject and the event, we note a universal condition of women of the period. The poem begins with an apostrophe to a woman admired for her "discreción y hermosura," qualities which more than justify her *querrela* against her unjust husband:

Divino hechizo de amor,
 en quien se admiran a un tiempo
 la discreción y hermosura
 en iguales paralelos,
 a todo sentir del alma,
 todo penar del deseo,
 justamente querellosa
 vives de tu injusto dueño;
 que, como siempre el amor
 sólo del alma hace empleo,
 no se opusieron al tuyo
 imperfecciones del cuerpo.

Alma irracional sin duda
 tiene, pues no aspira a un cielo
 que tantas lleva en sus ojos,
 cuantos hacen movimientos.

Tantos dotes nobles, ricos,
 engrandecen tu sujeto,
 que el más discreto en amarle
 logra felices aciertos.

Que te adoran no lo dudas,
 que a tu dueño envidian, menos,
 los que no alcanzan su dicha
 con mejor conocimiento.

Vive, pues, siempre gozosa
 de que los cielos te hicieron
 deidad que sólo merecen
 gozarla los cielos mismos. (358)

Because her "dueño" does not esteem what he has nor appreciates her love, the speaker describes him as an "Alma irracional sin duda," that is, a beast. In this poem we note the expression of a lack of social mirroring; the woman does not see herself invested in and accredited by the gaze of her husband. Since she only has value in the sense that it is measured and bestowed by her husband, that is "being looked upon," or "regarded," the lack of her husband's affirming gaze also divests her social being. Her depression has no outlet except within the walls of her house and within the collective mourning of women, and within this poem where the speaker takes up her grief and turns it into a vituperation against an abusive husband. By extension the "prosaic" event becomes the motive for a condemnation of patriarchy.

In contrast to a husband's *abhorrecimiento* of his wife, I should now like to turn to a significant and singular poem about female friendship, Sor Violante del Cielo's sonnet to "Belisa" (possibly the Portuguese poet Bernarda Ferreira de Lacerda, to whom Sor Violante wrote an elegiac sonnet):

Belisa, el amistad es un tesoro
 tan digno de estimarse eternamente
 que a su valor no es paga suficiente
 de Arabia y Potosí la plata y oro.

Es la amistad un lícito decoro
 que se guarda en lo ausente y lo presente,
 y con que de un amigo el otro siente
 la tristeza, el pesar, la risa, el lloro.

No se llama amistad la que es violenta,
 sino la que es conforme simpatía,
 de quien lealtad hasta la muerte ostenta.

Ésta la amistad es que hallar querría,¹¹
 ésta la que entre amigas se sustenta,
 y ésta, Belisa, en fin, la amistad mía. (271)

Male *amicitia* is prevalent in Golden Age literature, as noted, for example, in the theme of “los dos amigos” and in such exemplary poems as Garcilaso’s epistle to Boscán, the epistles exchanged between Diego Hurtado de Mendoza and Boscán,¹² Fray Luis de León’s odes to Francisco Salinas and Felipe Ruiz, and Aldana’s epistle to Arias Montano. But generally the theme of friendship in these poems gives way to more important philosophical themes, such as the Neoplatonic musings of Fray Luis in his “Oda a Francisco Salinas,” in which “la amistad se contextualiza y se supedita dentro de una filosofía que los amigos tienen en común” (Olivares & Boyce, *Tras el espejo* 87).

Female *amicitia*, on the contrary and as expressed by male writers—especially in the *comedia*—is usually relegated to the unequal relationship between *dama/criada*. Among female writers the theme of female friendship is not only “practically non-existent” in Golden Age letters, but also rare in all European literature of the early modern period (Martín 57). If, on the one hand, this study attempts to demonstrate aspects of female collective mourning, female solidarity and resistance to patriarchy, there existed considerable sociocultural, political and economic factors that impeded these endeavors. One factor was the absence of freedom; as Albera Contarello and Chaira Volpato note: “If friendship is only possible between free individuals, this underrepresentation may be proof of the slow emergence of women as subjects deciding for themselves and running their own lives” (cited in Martín 57-58). A second factor, and as a consequence of having no freedom, women by-and-large were restricted to the home, and contact and commerce with other women was minimized. And third, where the only options were *monja* or *esposa*, if women chose the latter, they had to vie among each other for the attention of men. As a consequence, female solidarity and friendship were difficult to achieve: “En un sistema patriarcal que asigna a la mujer la función de ser servidora del hombre y establece el casamiento como fin primordial de la mujer, las mujeres rivalizan entre sí para ser avaladas por los hombres, lo cual hace imposible la solidaridad femenina (Olivares, *Novelas* 66).¹³

Sor Violante’s sonnet does not speak to the aforesaid barriers to female friendship and solidarity, but rather implies a frustrated personal relationship whose nature remains undisclosed. The sonnet’s tension resides in the attempt to overcome loss and achieve reconciliation. This highly personal note, to my knowledge, seems to be absent in the male lyric of *amicitia*. Adrienne Martín affirms that Sor Violante’s sonnet “is both *about* friendship and a paen to it. Friendship is the poem’s inspiration, its theme, and its offering. Just as the poetic voice offers the friendship so elegantly inscribed in the poem, the poem itself acts as an emblem and token of female companionship” (61).

The speaker’s strategy is to convince the addressee through what Martín terms a “rhetoric of female friendship” characterized by “an ex-

tremely direct, proselike style, unencumbered by the baroque tropes and conceits that adorn much of her lyric and were typical for her historical period" (61). The friendship Sor Violante offers is a treasure worth more than all the gold and silver of Arabia and Potosí; it is described as a "lícito decoro," a genuine respect, maintained during absence and presence, and in which periods one feels the other's happiness and sadness. The friendship is a constant, shared sympathy and loyalty till death. Commencing with the personal note of the apostrophe to Belisa, then moving to a general characterization of what friendship is—and implicitly what it means to the speaker—the sonnet returns to the personal note but a highly charged one, reinforced by anáfora, parallelism and gradation, and ending with a personal pronoun: "Ésta la amistad es que hallar querría, / ésta la que entre amigas se sustenta, / y ésta, Belisa, en fin, la amistad mía." The sonnet's surprise is that *this* is the friendship the speaker *would like* to find, to have, with Belisa. It is the "type of friendship that *should* exist between female friends" (Martín 62); but it is unshared, unreciprocated: *mía*, not *nuestra*, as Martín emphasizes. The poem, thus, is open-ended, concluding with a longing for female bonding, a mourning, resonating in the space of the speaker's solitude. Compared to the grandiloquent statements and transcendental and metaphysical issues that bind male friendship—exemplified in the above male-authored poems—, Sor Violante's sonnet stands out for its highly personal note: a so-called prosaic matter between two prosaic subjects.

In contrast to Sor Violante's sonnet of female *amicitia*, the following *romance* (with *estribillo*), a *petición*, by Leonor de la Cueva expresses the collective female enmity against another woman. This female *inimicitia* is precipitated by a man, Don Vallejo, who has insulted a group of *medinesas* with a *romance*, in which he praises the superior beauty of Anarda, presumably a *forastera*:

En desagravio de las damas

A salir en su defensa
me han obligado las damas
contra un romance insolente
de quien están agraviadas.

No es ángel Anarda.

Dice don Vallejo en él
que es sola el ángel Anarda;
no es Anarda serafín,
que otras hay que se aventajan.

No es ángel Anarda.

Quien mira sólo a su gusto,
desprecia las más bizarras,
ofende las más hermosas

por sólo la que le agrada.

No es ángel Anarda.

Si de Antandra miras bien
la hermosura soberana,
hallarás que es basilisco
que a quien mira, rinde y mata.

No es ángel Anarda.

Tal fuerza tiene la Elvira
en ser airosa y bizarra,
que al altar de su hermosura
se sacrifican mil almas.

No es ángel Anarda.

Bonita es Julia Amarilis,
airosamente se entalla;
bellas son las medinesas,
todas me recen guirnalda.

Quedará con estos versos
picada la cortesana,
don Vallejo desmentido,
las damas desagaviadas.

No es ángel Anarda. (142-43)

Although the *medinesas* have requested the poet to redress the insult to their beauty caused by Don Vallejo's *romance*, in Cuevas's riposte the primary object of female scorn is Anarda, whom the women insult by calling her, not an *ángel*, but a *cortesana*, a high-class prostitute. Instead of a collective female front directed primarily at Don Vallejo with the objective of "desmentir," the *medinesas* gang up on Anarda. Here we see how a man has provoked competition between women, causing them to victimize one of their gender. In this poetics of the prosaic, with reference to an anecdotal snit of jealousy, we note that the women vie for male attention, and, not finding themselves validated by his affirming gaze and words, take out their wrath on another woman, who presumably has done no more than the other women: to primp for a man.

The poetics of the prosaic is also evident in two *décimas* by Ramírez de Guzmán, in each of which speaker and author are the same. The first expresses the prosaic circumstance of the father's refusal to buy his daughter, Catalina Clara, a "manto," but in which she makes evident her considerable dislike of her father, Francisco Ramírez Guerrero (*Tras el espejo* 153).

*Pidiendo la autora a su padre
que la trujese un manto estando en Madrid*

Doña Catalina Clara
un manto pide de gloria,¹⁴
y si como la memoria
la voluntad enviara,
no duda que se comprara;
mas sabe sufriros tanto
que no le causará espanto,
si os hallaréis sin dinero,
que le enviéis un no quiero
que sea más claro que el manto. (187)

The father's refusal to buy the cloak, which is of little regard to him, is, to the speaker, an act of devaluation, a divestment of self-esteem. And this is what the poem complains. A typical answer to a daughter's complaint, would be something like: "Well, you don't have to get hysterical about it." On the surface, it may seem that the complaint is out of proportion to its cause and therefore hysterical. But the complaint of this deprivation of the cloak is a symbolic utterance of women's deprivation in general. Catalina Clara's father not only functions in a superior position within a familial hierarchy, whose gaze and gestures confirm her personal identity and sense of worth, but also, as Schiesari notes with regard to the father figure in a poem by Isabella di Morra, that "fathers function as the representatives of law, as 'equivalences of subject positions,' on whom her socially constructed identity is literally, prosaically founded" (183). The mourning of this loss is voiced through the emotions, articulated through the essentially feminine hysterical outlet. But hysteria is a devalued mode of representation, a determinately historical one. As Schiesari affirms, "Just as one needs to historicize melancholia, one also needs to historicize hysteria and read this 'female' malady not only negatively as a function of women's exclusion from the public sphere but also positively as a mode of resistance to domestic and religious enclosures. Instead of being hypostatized as an essential feminine space, hysteria needs to be understood as a particularized and historicized means that women have had to articulate loss" (66).¹⁵

In contrast to the poet's loathing of her father, in another *décima* we note how she sympathizes with her mother, Isabel Sebastiana de Guzmán (*Tras el espejo* 153), confined to house and to the culturally determined domestic practice of needlework, which she has come to love, but which is ruining her eyes.

*A la madre de la autora que tenía los ojos malos,
y hacía labor con que se le ponían peores*

Tus ojos forman querella
ponderando que es rigor
amar tanto la labor
que ciegues, Silvia, por ella;
pero como sólo ella
te entretiene, cosa es llana,
tomaré de buena gana
(en esta fineza advierte),
sólo por entretenerte,
que me zurzas la badana.¹⁶ (188)

Because her mother loves to sew, and in order to give her mother some entertainment, Catalina Clara gives her mother an article to stitch, even though she would not like to request this of her, and therein lies the "fineza," here simultaneously a gesture of love and commiseration for her failing eyesight, because she knows that her request will cause her eyes more harm. Yet, suspecting that her mother might take the request as a further burden to her eyes, the poet playfully invites her mother to scold her or spank her, expressed by a conceit—"(en esta fineza advierte)"—, based on the near homophony between "me zurzas la badana" and "me zurras la badana."¹⁷ It bears mention that the poet's request points to the possibility that she herself is not proficient in needlework, and perhaps even refuses to do it. On the other hand, there is nothing in the text that points to the poet's devaluation of needlework or of her mother for doing it. I take the *décima* as both a humorous and sympathetic counterpoint to domestic confinement, "pero como sólo ella / te entretiene, cosa es llana." In this depiction of a prosaic and female quotidian exercise, there appears to be a silent discourse that points to an identification with and recovery of the mother. In order to develop a super-ego and proceed to the formation of an autonomous self, both boy and girl, according to Freud, must "kill off" the mother with whom they have identified, and identify with the father. This is easier for the boy who can identify phallically with his father, but "matricide" can cause psychic tension in a girl. The problem is that the initial positive identification with the mother must be severed on the basis of a new conception of the mother as a devalued person, with whom either the girl continues to identify—thereby assuming her mother's devaluation—or whom she rejects. This rejection is necessary for the formation of her super-ego or narcissism, which is, supposedly, a requisite for becoming a melancholic. However, as Schiesari observes in her discussion of the communal practice of women's mourning, and as is manifested in Catalina Clara's pro-

saic representation of her mother, "the mother is not given up as a lost object but is rediscovered through depression and mourning as an object of love and identification. Through depression and mourning, the mother's imago resurfaces from the interstices of the oedipal to assert her desirability as refigured by her identification and solidarity with other women" (77).¹⁸ While the mother's eyes complain, "forman querella," against needlework, there is implicit another *querella* against a patriarchy that immures women and assigns them "women's work."¹⁹ (The poetry of Catalina Clara displays an interesting psychological profile, as made evident in a male-female dichotomy, even in her nature poetry.) In the assessment of women's literary display of emotions, then, it is necessary to reconfigure a symbolics of loss, based now on the redemption of the cause of depression, and "to give the depression of women the value and dignity traditionally bestowed on the melancholia of men" (Schiesari 93). By so doing, then one can reassess their literary texts that express "mere expressions of life that rarely become art."

The texts which I offer as examples of loss, or better, lack of discourse are those in which female poets maneuver within masculine discourse, appropriating them to their own ends, but which ultimately remain elusive, never never really completely theirs. In the two poems by Leonor de la Cueva, composed of octaves in the pastoral convention, the speakers are male voyeurs who gaze upon their respective pastoras Narcisa y Felisalba.

Cual sale el alba aljófares feriendo
por los celajes del oscuro oriente
en la fresca mañana, al tiempo cuando
ciñe de rosas la nevada fuente,
y cual el sol que rayos derramando
alegra al mundo con su luz presente,
salió Narcisa bella a dar al prado
más flores que el noviembre le ha
quitado.

Al hombre lleva los cabellos de oro
hechos red amorosa de Cupido,
a donde tiene su mayor tesoro
Delio, que de sus rayos se ha vestido;
y aunque el rigor de su prisión no
ignoro,
enredarme en sus lazos he querido,
que aunque son tan severos, mi amor
sabe
que han de ser para mí cárcel süave.

Sobre el nevado y cristalino cielo
que cual delgada nube se atraviesa,
lleva tendido un argentado velo
que el más ufano su hermosura besa.

Quando asomaba en el dorado oriente²⁰
de flores bellas coronada el alba,
a quien hacen con música excelente
los libres pajarillos dulce salva,
y cuando el rubio sol resplandeciente
se manifiesta, sale Felisalba
a ser de su venida anunciadora,
luz del día y afrenta del aurora.

De su cabello el oro acrisolado
en crespas trenzas por el hombro tiende,
que a sus lazos el ciego dios alado
rindió el poder con que cautiva y prende.
Su laberinto en ellos ha cifrado
y en ellos sólo su poder se extiende,
que el alma libre, que una vez se enreda,
presa y cautiva para siempre queda.

Quiero, en fin, retratar, si brevemente,
el dueño hermoso de quien soy despojos:
es nieve pura el cielo de su frente,
y dos estrellas sus divinos ojos;
las negras cejas, aunque amor se afrente,
arcos del cielo son que sin enojos,
como arrojan de fuego tantas flechas

La blanca hermana del señor de Delo
de sus ojos las luces interesa,
para vestir con ellas en la noche
de resplandores su plateado coche.

Un vestido encarnado lleva puesto,
de su desdén crúel insignia clara,
que da nueva hermosura al rostro
honesto

y compostura peregrina y rara.
El cuerpo bello, grave y bien dispuesto,
airoso mueve, y en la margen para
de un cristalino y lánguido arroyuelo
que con su vista se convierte en cielo.

Las guijas de marfil rinde a Narcisa
que el pie nevado baña en su corriente;
y pasando veloz con nueva prisa,
vuelve a gozar de su cristal luciente.
Festeja tanto bien con dulce risa,
y de sus aguas lienzo transparente
quisiera hacer para enjugar con ellas
las dos columnas de alabastro bellas.

(etc.) (125-26)

al libre corazón se van derechas (. . .)

Yo, que detrás de un mirto contemplaba,
libre y ufano del rigor del ciego,
la beldad soberana que miraba,
me sentí herido de su dulce fuego.

Gastó el rapaz las flechas de su aljaba
hasta abrasarme el corazón, y luego
mi alma, por esclava de sus ojos,
el ciego dios la presentó en despojos

Ésta, en fin, es en suma mi ventura;
éste el retrato de mi dueño hermoso;

ésta la causa, sí, de mi locura,
por quien me nombro amante venturoso;
éste el triunfo de amor y su hermosura;
éste el bello portento milagroso,
y ésta de Felisalba la victoria
por quien subo, vencido, a mayor gloria.

(128-29)

In our previous discussion of these poems, Elizabeth Boyce and I noted how the encomia are a strategy by which the poet praises herself,²¹ and perhaps by extension celebrates all women—because she is writing to but across men to women—and expresses her desire for empowerment (*Tras el espejo* 25-26). Like the voyeurs who know where to find their bathing *pastoras*, the reader needs to know where to discover the poet. Doña Leonor, as writer and discerning reader of the amorous tradition, lies in the shadow of her text. As the desired object, in the narcissistic act that love poetry is, she reveals herself in the desired object: Narcisa or Felisalba. The poet composes a lyric of seduction with which she attracts the voyeurs to Narcisa/Felisalba, at the same time that she maintains them at a distance of their desired satisfaction. Through their gaze, the poet celebrates the beauty of the *pastoras* at the same time that she sustains the illusion of power that their beauty and virtue hold over them. Nonetheless, this desired image depends on the male gaze.

What I should like to add to this is that the poems, first of all, express the poet's desire to be desired, so that she indirectly becomes the referent in a discourse of her own making; but that discourse is essentially masculine. She assumes a female speaker in the so-called lesser tradition of the "querrellas femeninas" and in the lesser forms of *romances* and *décimas*, but in the prestigious italianate forms of sonets and octaves in the amorous tradition, we do not encounter a female speaker as the desiring subject. As a woman, doña Leonor, has no symbolic place of her own, no "lugar propio," and as a poet neither does she have her own discourse.

Consequently, she has no recourse but to insert herself within the only symbolic and public place available to her: as the object of a male's desire within a masculine discourse. Secondly, the obligatory adoption of a masculine discourse read by men, and here we know that her poetry circulated in the area of Medina del Campo, can be perceived as an appeal to be accepted within the male community; in other words, she seeks male approbation of her poetic talent, of her ability to assume and exercise "una tradición varonil." The praises penned by men included at the end of her manuscript attest to her successful inclusion within the male community of readers.

In the two poems by Sor Violante del Cielo, we note, as in Doña Leonor, a strategy of accommodation within a male discourse, but one by which she claims for herself a type of love not considered possible in a woman. In the Neoplatonic modality of courtly love, and as seen in our example from Herrera, a woman's beauty inspires in the male lover an intellectual elevation; on the contrary, in a period in which they were considered socially and ontologically inferior, women were not deemed capable of undertaking such an intellectual endeavor.

In the first *romance*, the speaker, identified as female, presents herself as the desiring subject communicating her love to a male object whom she proposes to love intellectually.

¡Qué avarienta de favores,
 qué liberal de tormentos
 es tu piedad con mis ansias,
 es tu rigor con mi pecho!
 ¡Qué obediente a mi destino
 te admira mi pensamiento!,
 pues tus piedades limitas
 por observar sus decretos.
 La mitad de un papel mío
 dejas sin respuesta, ¡ay cielos!,
 no porque el tiempo te falte,
 mas porque yo falte al tiempo. (...)
 Pero qué mucho que tema
 quien sabe, en fin, tan de cierto,
 que nunca de una ignorante
 puede gustar un discreto.
 Mas, señor, si amor es alma,
 y el alma es entendimiento,
 yo que soy la más amante,
 la más discreta a ser vengo.
 Y aunque razón tan notoria
 no me acreditara en esto,
 para abonarme bastaba

de mi cuidado el empleo.

Amo tus partes divinas,
y ámolas con tal exceso
que quiero más tus agravios
que los favores ajenos.

Tú sabes cuánto te adoro,
pues sabes lo que me has hecho;
que amor que ofensas no acaban,
ya no es amor, es portento.

Dirás que muchas te quieren;
bien sé que dirás lo cierto,
que para inmensas victorias
son tus poderes inmensos.

Mas yo sé, dueño querido,
que dirás en todo tiempo
que ninguna, sino Silvia,
supo adorarte sin premio. (288-89)

Through the humility *topos*, the speaker states that such a “discreto” would probably not expect a similar virtue from an ignorant woman. In order to prove her intelligence and superiority over other women—“Yo que soy la más amante, / la más discreta a ser vengo”—the speaker avails herself of a syllogistic argumentation common to the period of *conceptismo* and taken from the Neoplatonic conception of the universe. She recognizes, nonetheless—behind an ironic facade—, that, because she is a woman and because Neoplatonic love is an intellectual operation, society and literary tradition do not lend credence to this possibility. Yet, through her efforts and owing to love’s power, she asserts this capability.

In the second *romance*, which is the response to her petition, the poet assumes the voice of the male speaker who addresses the former female speaker, now as Celia and now the amorous object:²²

Si mis dudas te entristecen,
Celia mía de mis ojos,
ya puedes dejar lo triste,
que ya dejé lo dudoso.

Ya conozco que me quieres,
ya que me estimas conozco;
porque verdades del alma
nunca permiten rebozo.

Las tuyas son tan notorias
que ni cruel las ignoro,
ni falso las desmerezco,
ni ciego las desconozco.

Eres de amor un prodigio,
eres de amor un asombro;

pues ni te asombrqn ausencias
ni te acobardan estorbos.

¡Oh cómo fui temerario
en cuanto fui temeroso!,
pues te agravié con recelos,
pues te ofendí con enojos.

Cesen tus penas, mi Celia,
cesen tus pesares todos,
que si dudé rendimientos,
fue por ganar más despojos.

No con peligros deseos
acreditar lo amoroso,
que tan notorias verdades
no necesitan de abonos.

Recíprocamente amantes,
vivamos siempre dichosos,
ya siendo envidia de algunos,
ya siendo ejemplo de todos. (290)

The male speaker apologizes for his disdain, and now admires the prodigiousness of his suitor, rewarding her effort and constancy with a reciprocated intellectual love.

In the first poem Sor Violante presents a female desiring subject declaring her intellectual love to a male object and addressee, and vying with other women for his attention—"Dirás que muchas te quieren"—; in the second, she invents and speaks through a male speaker in order to confirm her capacity to love Neoplatonically. As Jones remarks with regard to a similar tactic in a poem by Catherine des Roches "the perfect lover . . . mirrors back to [her] the public image Catherine invents for herself. By shaping the discourse of the lover as well as the lady, she produces a duet sung in her own honor" (68). Although the female lover declares in the former *romance* that she seeks no prize for her love, in reality the prize she seeks is masculine confirmation of her capacity to love intellectually. Through the strategy deployed in the *romances*, the female lover's worth is reflected in the masculine object's approbation of her efforts. Yet, if on the one hand, Sor Violante seeks masculine authorization, on the other, we note that said authorization is of her own invention: "the woman poet constructs a man to legitimate herself" (Jones 75). Within the framework of masculine superiority, she attempts to subvert one of its premises; yet the strategy manifested in these texts is one of accommodation, as she maneuvers her discourse within the convention of the dominant discourse. Speaking to and through male readers, and speaking on behalf of herself—as she is competing with other women—, she declares her right to intellectual status. Yet, this right can be only bestowed by a man, and in this case, a man of her own invention. In her claim of

this right, however, she, like Doña Leonor, and lacking her own discourse, has no recourse but to assume the only symbolic and public space allowed a woman, within the confines of a borrowed male discourse, and as such, it seems to me, she falls into a trap.²³

Returning to my earlier statement that, in order to assess the articulation of women's loss it would not be a fruitful avenue to redefine melancholia or attempt to accommodate women's grief within the melancholic tradition, for this would be a discursive trap, I believe this is born out in the texts of Doña Leonor, and especially in these of Sor Violante. If we were to conceive Sor Violante's poetry as an expression of the melancholic speaker exclaiming a lack, in this case the loss of a desired object, and attempting to recover it through an ascent and Neoplatonic union, we could judge it as a failure, because after all, her success was her own fabrication; but this is not the point. The point is that through this sublime aspiration, we note a poet ingeniously striving to become a participant in a cultural ideology and in a male literary activity.

With reference again to my earlier statement, I willingly concede that there are always exceptions, and I find one in an outstanding sonnet by Leonor de la Cueva. So I conclude this discussion with a brief comparison of Quevedo's famous sonnet "Miré los muros de la patria mía"—which I briefly commented earlier in the context of melancholia—with Leonor de la Cueva's not-famous-at-all sonnet "Al miserable estado y desdichas de Medina," in order to argue for a case of melancholia for its author, to advocate for its inclusion within the canon of seventeenth-century *desengaño*, and to demonstrate some differences between male and female composition.

Quevedo's sonnet—

Salmo XVII

Miré los muros de la patria mía,
si un tiempo fuertes, ya desmoronados,
de la carrera de la edad cansados,
por quien caduca ya su valentía.

Salíme al campo; vi que el sol bebía
los arroyos del yelo desatados,
y del monte quejosos los ganados,
que con sombras hurtó su luz al día.

Entré en mi casa; vi que, amancillada,
de anciana habitación era despojos;
mi báculo, más corvo y menos fuerte;
vencida de la edad sentí mi espada.

Y no hallé cosa en que poner los ojos
que no fuese recuerdo de la muerte. (Blecua 184-85)

—has received considerable commentary which sees the sonnet as an expression of Spain's political decline, as a metaphysical meditation on time and death, and as an expression of "Quevedo's moral thought" in which converge the poet's satirical preoccupation with that of his brooding metaphysical poems, as Christopher Maurer notes: "In it we find both an inner vision (experience of the immanence of death) and an external one, of the times in which the poet lives" (441). Quevedo acknowledges the death of "mankind, as though he had assumed responsibility for the moral weakness he had long attacked in others. Quevedo thinks of time not only as a succession of days and years, but also as the state of man's moral life. Not only death, but also sin, the "origin" of time and of death, weighs here" (Maurer 441, 434).²⁴ In this citation we note a convergence as well with Freud's description of the melancholic: that the melancholic has a heightened sense of morality and "has a keener eye for the truth than others who are not melancholic . . . [and] it may be . . . that he has come pretty near to understanding himself." In this sonnet we note the speaker's anguish over national decline, *patria*—"a melancholy image of the end of her greatness as a world power" (Maurer 432)²⁵—, as an objective correlative of his internal anguish, *patria chica*, of the ravages of time and death.

Notwithstanding its "monumentality," Quevedo's sonnet, *bien mirado*—to borrow a term from Sor Juana—, is an assemblage of classical and biblical sources (Maurer, Price): crumbling walls, the sun that dries the creeks, the curved staff, the feeble sword.²⁶ But of course many of Quevedo's poems are constructed from such sources, many of which were commonplaces, but which he invigorates. The recent scholarship on Quevedo's poetry has stressed his sources in relation to rhetoric—*contaminatio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *imitatio*, *inventio*, etc.—which, as Lía Schwartz points out, was the case for composing poetry in the Golden Age, but which was stressed by Quevedo for a definite purpose: "Estas estrategias compositivas eran las puestas en juego para hacer poesía. Pero, además, el bagaje retórico de Quevedo también se manifiesta en la adhesión a sus objetivos centrales: conmover al lector y enseñar una lección ética" (7). Here, Quevedo deploys his sources or *topoi*—"a series of visions" (Maurer 441)—with an incremental spatial movement from the outside to the inside, and from the general to the particular, both of which correspond to the increasing psychological interiorization of the subject. A second factor is the succession of verbs of vision and movement in the preterite, like steps moving from the outside to the inside, a sequence that begins with observation and culminates with an overwhelming desolation: "Miré-Entré-vi-sentí-hallé." The enjambment of the final two verses forcefully takes the reader to the cause of the speaker's desolation: "la muerte." A third factor is the voice that projects a tone of increasing *gravitas*

and ends in despair.

Let us now consider Leonor de la Cueva's sonnet (con estrambote), "Al miserable estado y desdichas de Medina":

Quiéroos pintar el miserable estado
en que Medina está, Gerardo amigo;
yo, que de sus desgracias soy testigo,
puedo contar mejor a qué ha llegado.

Ya sus juegos y fiestas se han dejado,
sus damas acabó el tiempo enemigo;
de sus galanes solamente os digo
que aún rastro de su gala no ha quedado.

No hay caballos, no hay fiestas, no hay carreras,
no hay contento, no hay gusto ni alegría:
todo es penas, trabajos, males, muertes.

No se celebran ya las primaveras,
disminúyese todo cada día.
¡Oh triste villa entre contrarios fuertes
que hacen en ti mil suertes
el tiempo vario y la crüel fortuna,
pues no tienes en ti buena ninguna! (108)

A fundamental distinction between the two sonnets is the virtual absence of learned sources in Cuevas' composition, and this is a characteristic of most of the literature written by women. Writing women were, for the most part, not formally learned; they were barred from academies and universities, so at most they were taught by a *preceptor*, but essentially were autodidacts. In spite of this proscription, a few women were able to compete on a par with men in terms of erudition, such as María de Zayas and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. As a consequence of their cultural deprivation, I would venture that direct Classical influence is virtually nil in their writings, and what sources there are, came to them second hand via their readings, and—with the exception of accessible Biblical sources—most of these sources/*topoi* are Petrarchan.

I do not envision Quevedo really going outside to contemplate crumbling walls, evaporating streams, and complaining sheep; and then coming inside his house to meditate on his curved staff and time-vanquished sword, all of which he perceives as reminders of death (especially in the first version in which he was still—at most—in his early 30s). Rather, he remained in his study, and selected from a treasure of sources and *topoi*, and arranged his selection to compose a metaphysical disquisition on the pervasive presence of death, and a moral statement with regard to a "mundo enfermo," a 'universal' statement that is "Quevedo's and our own" (Maurer 442).

Cuevas's sonnet is not a metaphysical statement about death, but an

observation of the particular death of Medina del Campo. Rather than the influence of Classical sources, the poet depends on her own resources, and what matters is the effect of her immediate reality: "La población de Medina del Campo se había reducido de 15.800 habitantes en 1560, a 2.760 en 1591, y a 650 en 1646.²⁷ Esta cuantiosa reducción de población se debió en la mayor parte a la desaparición de la Feria de Medina del Campo, la lonja, que se trasladó a Madrid en 1571; al reclutamiento de sus varones para servir en las guerras; a las pestes bubónicas y diftéricas que diezmaron la población; y también a las numerosas sequías y pestes de langostas que arrasaron las cosechas y hicieron que sus habitantes abandonasen la villa" (Olivares & Boyce, *Tras el espejo* 108). By 1646 only 4.1% of the population remained of Medina del Campo. Thus, Cueva writes poetry from what her reality and limited experience give her. Instead of a metaphysical meditation, she involves her friend, Gerardo, in a mourning, giving him a *depiction* of the miserable state of Medina. The poem is an epistle in which she wants to *paint* him a picture—*ut pictura poesis?*—of the disintegration of Medina, but what she paints is a blank canvas, all the activities and life of Medina have been erased. As a witness to the devastation of Medina, she is the most privileged to recount the tragedy of Medina, reinforced by the emphatic prosody, 1-6: *yo . . . desgraciás*.

In lines 5-11, the poet relates how all celebration has vanished, and time has not left a trace of the city's *damas* and *galanes*. There are no longer horses and horse races, nor *fiestas*; and perforce no contentment, jubilation nor happiness. Instead "todo es penas, trabajos, males, muertes," all joy and prosperity have vanished. On the basis of the rhyme scheme of line 4, "ha llegado," the structure of the second quatrain is *Ya . . . present perfect*, with the enjambment from line 7 to 8 emphasizing the velocity with which time has wiped out all trace of rich finery and grace: *gala y garbo*. In the first tercet, the present perfect is replaced by the present tense of *haber*, rhetorically expressed as the negative anáfora "No hay," in an incremental gradation, culminating in the emphatic line 11: *todo . . . trabajos* (1-6). Line 12 is linked to the former quatrain by the negative "No" and its emphatic prosody, such that the structure of lines 9-12 is the reverse—in chiasmatic relation—of that of the second quatrain: *Ya . . . present perfect / No hay . . . no . . . ya*.

Springtimes are no longer celebrated, and each day sees all decreasing to nothingness. Again the prosody highlights the ravage of everybody and everything: *disminúyse . . . todo*.²⁸ Lines 5-11 bring to mind the *ubi sunt* motif of Manrique's "Coplas por la muerte de su padre":

¿Qué fue de tanto galán,
qué fue de tanta invención
como trujeron?

Las justas e los torneos,
 paramentos, bordaduras
 y cimeras
 ¿fueron sino devaneos?
 ¿Que fueron sino verduras de las eras?
 ¿Que se hicieron las damas,
 sus tocados, sus vestidos,
 sus olores? (. . .)
 ¿Qué se hizo aquel trovar,
 las músicas acordadas
 que tañían?
 ¿Qué se hizo aquel danzar,
 aquellas ropas chapadas
 que traían?

But whereas Manrique speaks morally of the natural consequences of time, Cuevas relates her affliction caused by the calamities that have beset Medina del Campo.

The sonnet *per se* culminates with a change of its receptor, as the poet now apostrophizes Medina del Campo in a chiasmatic line: "¡Oh triste villa entre contrarios fuertes." The receptor shift propels the *estrambote*: the town is subject to ill fate as it is combatted by a changing and indifferent time, and a cruel fortune (another chiasmus) that leave no good fortune in Medina del Campo.

Quevedo's sonnet deals with a subject who perceives himself surrounded by death, as the poet expresses in another sonnet: "Falta la vida, asiste lo vivido, / y no hay calamidad que no me ronde."²⁹ The sonnet in question—as the one just cited—is an exemplary expression of baroque *desengaño*, of the preoccupation with Death and Time. In many ways, this preoccupation bears similarity with medieval expressions of the same. Seeing Death lurking in every corner, in all material things and in all humanity, is nothing new. It is aptly stated in the many forms of the letrilla

Aprended, Flores, de mí
 lo que va de ayer a hoy,
 que ayer maravilla fui,
 y hoy sombra mía aun no soy. (Góngora 127)

For this reason, albeit a magnificent poem, the subject matter of Quevedo's sonnet—as I perceive it—remains distant from the reader; it is universal, to be sure, because Death *is* the human condition. And the poet can certainly make us cringe by discovering its proximity to us, by pointing out how quickly it can ambush us. But, to put another perspective on the sonnet, what is the speaker's loss?, what is he melancholic about?, what "truth" has his keen eye revealed? Is his loss the vitality of life, life itself?,

is he melancholic because nothing endures?, is the "truth" the omnipresence of Death? Of course, a socio-historical perspective adds another dimension to the sonnet, as it places it within the context of the crumbling of an empire.

Cuevas's sonnet focuses on the assault of Time and Death on one town. Like the eyes of Quevedo's speaker, Cuevas's eyes see devastation, yet it is the particular devastation wrought on Medina del Campo. Unlike the well-travelled Quevedo, Cuevas probably ventured very little from her hometown, which makes her sonnet more poignant, her loss all the more immediate and urgent.

Is Cuevas's sonnet less universal than Quevedo's? I think not. In his sonnet, Quevedo speaks about the universal human condition; in hers, Cuevas not only speaks about the universal themes of Death, Time—and Fortune—, but, more urgently, also about Community. And Community is a universal theme. Cuevas speaks for her community, for those who had to leave, who have perished, for those few who have remained—"yo, que de sus desgracias soy testigo, / puedo contar mejor a qué ha llegado"—, and she mourns the loss of that community: "... el miserable estado / en que Medina está . . .". Not only has she lost that community but also herself, because now she feels herself bereft of her town, not by choice but by fate. Ultimately, the poem is an expression of mourning, *per se*. It is the voice of bereavement caused by the death of Medina del Campo. It is the expression of melancholy caused by *desengaño*: all prosperity, all gaiety, all youthfulness have vanished.

After considering the above sonnets by Quevedo and Cuevas, and the discussion of many of the poems by women, can one sustain the dichotomy of *Vir melancholicus/Femina tristis*? Certainly, in the era in which they lived and in which the poems were written, such a dichotomy was axiomatic. Men's loss was more significant than women's loss. Men could be melancholic, women only mournful. But now, after stripping away the biological, social and political structures that subordinated women, and with a "keener eye for the truth," such a dichotomy cannot be upheld. Women could be just as melancholic as men, and, perforce, their literary texts just as significant. Certainly there are differences—often considerable ones—between male and female literary texts, but the differences are not those of degree but of kind. Women approached their literary discourses in a different manner, conditioned as they were by their inferior status, sometimes ventriloquizing male discourse, often accomodating it to their own, sometimes subverting it; and by creating a poetics of mourning and of the prosaic in order to express, not so much in general terms, the perception of their particular reality.

Notes

¹"Why is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry or the arts are melancholic, and some to such an extent that they are infected by the disease arising from black bile?" Cited in Schiesari 6.

²In this regard, see the important study by Teresa Scott Soufas *Melancholy and the Secular Mind in Golden Age Literature*. Soufas points out that "Catholic authors of post-Tridentine Spain use melancholy in order to engage in a dialectical transvaluation of values, that is, a reexamining and redefining of society and traditional norms that nevertheless does not seek to invalidate those norms or their inversion" (ix). Thus, there was a dialectic between *melancholia* conceived as a good, in the Aristotelian tradition and as promulgated by Ficino and the Neoplatonists—"as a positive component of mental acuity" (9)—and as an evil, as the cause of sin—"In truth it was melancholy that the devil breathed into Adam at the time of his fall: melancholy which robs a man of his ardour and faith" (St. Hildegard of Bingen, cited in Soufas 37). As a sin, melancholia was linked to *acedia* or sloth, man's laxity with regard to his spiritual duties to god, as "man's culpable aversion against the divine good" (Siegfried Wenzel, cited in Soufas 39). I did not find Kristeva's *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* helpful in assessing melancholy as a discursive practice. I agree with Schiesari that because of Kristeva's decidedly clinical approach, when she discusses literature, especially the poem "El Desdichado" by Gérard de Nerval, "one cannot overlook the critic's desire to 'fit' every detail of the poem into the pre-oedipal paradigm that guides her interpretation of melancholy" (87).

³Plañidera. La muger, llamada y pagada para ir acompañando y llorando en los entierros" (*Dicc. Aut.*).

⁴Unfortunately, Schiesari dedicates only a section of one brief chapter, out of six (indeed her introduction is longer) to the application of her theoretical framework to only two poems by the Italian female poets Gaspara Stampa and Isabella di Mora. Nonetheless, I shall attempt to apply aspects of her theoretical paradigm to the works of Spanish women poets, aspects of which Elizabeth Boyce and I have already discussed but which merit more investigation and other critical lines of pursuit.

⁵In the secular love lyric the lacking object of desire is woman, in the sacred love lyric, the object of desire is God. And, as Schiesari puts it, "In both cases, a way is found to speak about a desire that cannot be consummated" (111). In this study, I do not deal with the female religious poetry of the Golden Age; however, in a prior study—albeit not within the melancholic paradigm followed here—I discuss female expression of the desire for God, and the mystical/subliminal recuperation of the divine object by means of the identification of Christ with the female body; see "In Her Image: Christ and the Female Body."

⁶An exception is the sonnet, "¡Válgame Dios, qué penas he pasado . . .!" (112).

⁷"Doña Catalina Clara tuvo tres hermanas: Ana, Antonia Manuela y Beatriz . . . Sus hermanas aparecen en su poesía con los nombres pastoriles de Anarda, Antandra y Tisbe, respectivamente, dándose a sí misma la personalización de Clori" (*Tras el espejo* 153).

⁸This poem, in "Amar sólo por vencer," of the *Desengaños amorosos*, succinctly

states a major theme of Zayas' two collection of novellas: that men are not to be trusted, and the only way to avoid deception and abuse is to seek the protection of the convent. See the introduction to my edition of her *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*.

⁹"Madre. Se llama también el espacio de una a otra margen, por donde tiene su curso natural el río" (*Dicc. Auts*).

¹⁰This sonnet is also discussed in Olivares & Boyce, *Tras el espejo* 19-20.

¹¹There is an unfortunate erratum in *Tras el espejo* which puts *quería* instead of *querría*.

¹²Hurtado's "El no maravillarse hombre de nada," and Boscán's "Holgué, señor, con vuestra carta tanto" (see Martín 61).

¹³Zayas affirms this in her *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*, where female solidarity is only possible outside the bounds of patriarchy and inside the convent, and in her comedia *La traición en la amistad*. See as well Cruz "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Search for the M/Other" 43-47.

¹⁴"'manto de gloria': manto de seda muy delgado y transparente, a diferencia del 'manto de humo,' de seda negra, usado para el luto y el 'manto de soplillo,' de tafetán (*Tras el espejo* 187).

¹⁵For *hysteria* as a mode of discourse in the lyric poetry of female Spanish religious, see my "In Her Image."

¹⁶*badana*: «La piel del carnero u oveja, curtida, blanda y de poca dura» (*Dicc. Auts.*). The *badana* was used, for example, for cushions, hairbands, and embroidererd and framed to hang on walls. Interestingly, the *media badana* is the leather used to bind a book. Could Catalina Clara have been asking her mother to stitch the cover of her manuscript?

¹⁷"Zurrar la badana. Vale lo mismo que tratar a uno mal de palabra u de obra, y de ordinario se entiende por aporrearle" (*Dicc. Auts.*).

¹⁸Anne Cruz offers a completely different interpretation of this *décima* to the poet's mother and also of the one to her father. With regard to the former, Cruz maintains that it, and others, "evidencian sensiblemente una separación entre las dos. La . . . *décima* compara la inatención de la madre en su hija con su demasiado interés por la costura, diversión que le ha afectado la vista . . . Los halagos cariñosos de la poeta a su madre . . . no desmienten la preocupación que siente por el entretenimiento exagerado de la madre en la costura. Ramírez de Guzmán le reprocha su desamor al utilizar el juego de palabras entre 'zurrir la badana,' coser un cuero fino, con 'zurrar la badana,' expresión que significa maltratar de obra o de palabra . . . En cambio, en una *décima* de ocasión a su padre encargándole un manto de Madrid, la poeta pone de manifiesto su poca esperanza en el amor paterno. Le proporciona de antemano la excusa que pudiera ofrecer el padre por no cumplir con su deseo . . . Aunque no debemos juzgar la relación entre padre e hija en base a un solo poema, la comparación de estos poemas nos aclara que, si bien Ramírez de Guzmán requiere y espera el cariño de la madre, en cambio comprende, anticipa y hasta justifica el rechazo del padre. Mientras excusa al padre por su olvido y probable falta de dinero, tal vez debida al juego, sigue exigiendo el cuidado y la atención de la madre" ("La búsqueda de la madre" 58-59).

¹⁹Cf. María de Zayas y Sotomayor, "Al que leyere": "Y así, la verdadera causa de

no ser las mujeres doctas no es defecto del caudal, sino falta de la aplicación. Porque si en nuestra crianza, como nos ponen el cambray en las almohadillas y los dibujos en el bastidor, nos dieran libros y preceptores, fuéramos tan aptas para los puestos y para las cátedras como los hombres" (*Novelas* 160).

²⁰These octaves have the title: "Introduce un galán describiendo la hermosura de su dama."

²¹Of the 36 amorous poems in her manuscript, 16—44%—are female encomia (*Tras el espejo* 23).

²²This *romance* immediately follows the former in Sor Violante's *Rimas varias* (1646).

²³For the manner in which Sor Violante creates her own discourse, see Olivares & Boyce, "Sor Violante del Cielo," in which we comment her amorous poetry to women, and in which the poet subverts "masculine amorous discourse in order to create a lyric of seduction in which the desiring subject is a woman who declares her love to a desired object, also a woman." By doing so, she "conceives poetic creation as a literature written by women for women. And in this poetic world, man is cast to the periphery, if not relegated to the role of intruder. Above all, the female speaker in this poetry appropriates a male prerogative. She becomes the desiring subject; and, because the object of desire is also a woman, the speaker controls the gaze that objectifies the desired beloved, thereby establishing a new perspective and creating a new geometry of desire" (196).

²⁴Maurer adds: "Such implicit reference to sin, to a moral fall, would help to explain the poem's presence in the *Heráclito cristiano*, a book of penitential psalms and other religious poems" (434). For the documentation of the various commentaries of this sonnet, see Maurer. See also Olivares "Towards the Penitential Verse."

²⁵Maurer says that although Blecua questioned the romantic interpretation of the sonnet as an "expression of the political decay of Spain," such an interpretation cannot be discounted (432-33).

²⁶Price comments primarily the pre-1613 version, which does not include the image of the "báculo"; Maurer discovers additional sources. The version cited appeared posthumously in the *Parnaso Español* (1648).

²⁷Cuevas is writing most of her poetry in the decades of the 1630s and 1640s.

²⁸The stress on the *u* is frequent in the poetry of the period for a piercing effect, especially in Quevedo: "llama por las medulas extendida," "medulas que han gloriosamente ardido."

²⁹"¡Ah de la vida! . . . ¿Nadie me responde?" See Olivares "Text and Context."

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