THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY IN QUEVEDO'S AND BORGES'S POETICS

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The notion that skillful speech is a sign of manliness has a long history that is intertwined with that of political culture. The conceptions of civic virtue and decorum that inform canonical rhetorical and poetic theories from antiquity through the early modern period and beyond envision the ideal citizen as displaying a masculine control of word and body. By contrast, social deviance is codified as a lapse into effeminateness, presumably manifest in the inability to contain verbal and emotional outpour. In one of his letters to Lucilius, Seneca articulates these assumptions with characteristic heavy-handedness. He begins his reflection thus: "You ask me why a corrupted fashion of speech has appeared at certain times, and how the tendency of personal styles toward certain failings originated, [...] you ask why there was a period which exercised the right to metaphor without any sense of shame" (243). In response, Seneca posits that as verbal expression is a mirror of character, stylistic sobriety flourishes in virtuous times while ornate rhetoric comes about with social degeneracy. Language rich in archaisms, neologisms, unusual sentence structure, and ornament is regarded as epitomizing moral laxness. Equated with immoderate material indulgence, it is identified with a disordered soul, consumed with lethargy and wantonness. As part of his physiological definition of language Seneca includes a telling description of Maecenas which presents his wearing of overly lose garments, his lavish lifestyle, and his deliberately abstruse and "sprawled" speech as interrelated symptoms of his emasculated nature: he "had two eunuchs in his public escort who were more men than he was" (244).

Comparable identifications of masculinity with verbal asceticism, and effeminateness with licentious artificiality reappear in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. Associating the contemporary predilection for

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flamboyant speech with the depraved grooming of slaves' bodies, Quintilian says:

> As those dealers think there is no beauty in strength or in a muscular arm, and certainly not in a beard and the other natural endowments of the male, and so take what might, if left alone, have developed into sturdiness and soften its supposed hardness—so do we cover up the manly form of eloquence and the power of lean and vigorous speech with a delicate veneer of style, and think effectiveness of no importance, so long as everything is smooth and polished. I look rather at nature; any real man is handsomer to me than any eunuch [...] (465)

Such conceptions of productive eloquence as projecting a natural manly vigor can be traced back well before the Roman rhetors, to classical Greece where speech is considered a pillar of polis institutional life and, hence, an extension of the exclusively masculine body politic. The preoccupation with ensuring that verbal communication be endowed with the requisite virile self-possession is, for instance, quite patent in Plato's *Republic* which warns that esteemed actors not play women, as female pathos-ridden expression compromises moral good (72).

In early modern Spain, verbal prowess continues to be conceived as a performance of masculine authority. Marks of the regulation of language according to the parameters of normative body politics are pervasive, from Gonzalo Pérez de Ledesma's demands that oratory exude an "hermosura varonil" and that it be "robusta con nervios y bien proporcionada" (105), to Alonso López Pinciano's definition of poetic invention as "ingenio macho y varonil" (126), to Francisco de Quevedo's attacks on the effeminate nature of *culteranismo*. Mar Martínez-Góngora relates the emphasis on masculine bodily control present in humanist aesthetic discourses and in didactic and courtly conduct literature to the curial subject's anxieties regarding his ability to maintain political and social power in an era of uncertain change. It is well to remember that analogous preoccupations would have been experienced by the Silver Age Roman rhetoricians. With the end of the Republic and the rise of imperial autocracy, the senatorial elite is forced into a domesticated role. While adapting to a "pacified" existence that, as vividly shown

in Tacitus' *Annals*, warrants discretion far more than an overt display of force, verbal craft continues to draw inspiration from an imaginary based on Republican ideas of individual freedom and power (35, 173, 113). Hence, for example, we can explain the deliberate bluntness and striking concision of Senecan laconism as a concerted attempt to endow verbal expression with the agility and muscle of military feat.

Similarly concerned with the displacement of the rugged *miles gloriosus* by the urbane courtier, Golden Age Spanish writers are variously driven by the need to conserve the heroic stature of letters. Baltasar Gracián, for instance, models rhetorical *agudeza* as a display of greatness, the ingenious use of the pen, like the uttering of the witty saying, being conceived as a weapon of courtly conquest (see Blanco). Such ideals are also entrenched in the practice of poetry, as is evident in the seminal poetic theories of the Renaissance. Reflecting on the continued mark of a warring "instinct" in the poetry of a courtly age, Anthony Cascardi notes, "The sword, on Elías' account, still hangs (albeit loosely) at the courtier's side" (266, 267). The urge to maintain a palpable link between poetic ingenuity and military power is clearly manifested in Fernando de Herrera's commentaries (Middlebrook 140). As Paul Julian Smith has pointed out, while Herrera celebrates the fact that Spanish verse has benefitted from Tuscan influence which has infused it with sophistication, he feels compelled to specify that the Castilian tradition conserves its vigor, seen as a lingering sign of Spain's stalwart devotion to arms in the epoch of the *Reconquista* (Herrera 151). Where "'la [lengua] toscana es muy florida, abundosa, blanda y compuesta; pero libre, lasciva, desmayada y demasiadamente enternecida y muelle y llena de afectación,'" the Spanish tongue, Herrera declares "'es grave, religiosa, honesta, alta, magnífica [...]'" (qtd. in Smith 85).

At the same time, the concern with maintaining manly vigor does not translate into the imposition of affective and stylistic sobriety in an absolute sense. Coexisting as it does with the demand for cultivated refinement, the championing of a martial ethos is, in a sense, counterbalanced. This is exemplified in Juan Boscán's "Carta a la Duquesa de Soma," which mocks the charge that the embellishment of Castilian verse through the adoption of Italianate forms "[...] principalmente havía de ser para mugeres y que ellas no curavan de cosas de sustancia, sino del son de las palabras y la dulçura del consonante"

(116). Discrediting the facile equation of femininity with frivolity, Boscán criticizes the traditionalist adherence to stylistic asceticism as culturally impoverishing (see Navarrete 70). His aristocratic conception of poetry as an extension of courtly performance involving men and women in gentile playful exchange undermines rigid dichotomies between the useful and the pleasurable along with the stringent gender divisions that often accompany them (see Lorenzo). This liberation of poetry from narrowly didactic boundaries would be continued in future generations, as most notably shown by Luis de Góngora's vindications of creative license (Chemris 7).

It is against such developments that Quevedo's poetics are pitted. Utterly rejecting the notion that the objective of poetry was not only to edify, but also to "deleitar" (López Pinciano 112), Quevedo is categorical in his indictment of artifice. He reacts virulently against the aestheticizing trends of his own time, characterizing them univocally as manifestations of stylistic pretension devoid of social value. In Ignacio Navarrete's words, "[...] Quevedo seeks to rescue lyric poetry from the feminized realm of decorative poets to the sinewy world of masculine action and empire" (236). With this in mind, my analysis focuses on Quevedo's gendered poetics and on Jorge Luis Borges's life-long dialogue with them. My objective is thus two-fold: on the one hand, to foreground the extent to which Quevedo's poetics are bound up with the exhibition of masculinity, and on the other to consider the continued presence of normative body politics in the twentieth-century writer. Those who have examined the relationship between Borges and his Golden Age precursor have considered their common awareness of the arbitrary nature of language (Johnson, Kluge), their stoic reflections on the ephemerality of human existence (Maurer), their stylistic affinities (Stavans, Taravacci), and Borges's personal self-identifications with Quevedo (Gomes). These are all valuable and necessary approaches. However, the writers' shared corporeal imaginary has yet to be examined. By undertaking this task, I relativize the commonly held notion that while early modern poetics are conditioned by prescriptive rhetorical ideals, late modern verse is a product of autonomous invention. Also qualified will be the associated idea that where in pre- and early modernity the written word is still embedded in "body-centered" notions of communication as a performance of patriarchal authority, in the late stages of print culture the word has been entirely

liberated from the bonds of the *in vivo* rhetorical act (Berger 147-48). The material assumption underlying such periodizations is that, with the growth of a mass public accompanying the expansion of print, the reception of texts comes to be wholly understood as an individualized event in which the reader freely exerts his or her interpretive agency.

My view of Borges's oeuvre as embedded in a performative rhetorical genealogy requires some preliminary justification, given that the mature Borges insistently undermines the idea that writers exert authoritative influence over readers. Where Quevedo is concerned, the proposition is uncontroversial, given the common view of him as an ardent polemicist who brandished his pen in favor of ultra-conservative social stances, while also playing partisan politics. Aside from operating in a world where writing continues to be recognized as a form of dynamic social interaction (Bouza), Quevedo is passionately invested in perpetuating modes of communication founded on oratorical control of the audience (García-Bryce, *Transcending Textuality*; Peraita). Meanwhile, in contrast with conceptions of literary transmission founded on the premise of an audience captivated by the aura of the rhetorician, Borges's reflections on the interchangeability of reader and writer can be said to imagine reading as a disembodied and open-ended process. Hence, some critics' tendency to view Borges as a quintessential exponent of the boundless interiorized textual universe that is the hallmark of late print culture (Genette). And yet, as can be gathered from an attentive examination of Borges's commentaries on Quevedo's poetics, from his early so-called *criollista* period, to his later career as consummate cosmopolitan author, the performance of masculinity remains, throughout, an operative aesthetic principle.

There are perceptible differences between Borges's earlier and later appropriations of Quevedo's masculine affect. The young Borges is particularly interested in linking Quevedo's *conceptismo* to a brash forcefulness, consonant with the stridency of his own poetic manifestos. Meanwhile, in later years, when Borges has abjured his former dogmatism and fashioned his authorial persona as a model of dispassionate aplomb, he evaluates Quevedo's poetics in accordance with a pacified conception of writing that claims to dissociate their stylistic efficacy from their sensorial impact (García-Bryce, "Borges criollista y clásico"). And yet, despite this contention, Quevedo's masculine *energeia* lives on in the mature Borges's quest to redefine

the epic hero for modernity. As Ricardo Piglia has asserted, while at first glance one might oppose Borges's early self-identifications with an Argentinean genealogy rooted in the *pampa*, its foundational battles, and patriotic heroes, to his later characterizations of himself as belonging to a sedentary urban world of letters, removed from true action, in fact, both facets of his authorial persona remain active throughout his career. Rather than being substantively opposed, then, arms and letters are variously brought together in an ongoing counterpoint that Borges revisits as his relationship with his own work and that of his precursors unfolds (Piglia 6).

Through the speech on arms and letters given by the *Gran Turco* in the political satire *La hora de todos*, Quevedo articulates one of his main concerns, namely, that the cultivation of letters can signify the demise of true heroism: "De su espada, no de su libro, dicen los reyes que tienen sus dominios [...] En empezando una república a señalar premios a las letras, se ruega con las dignidades a los ociosos, se honra la astucia, se autoriza la malignidad y se premia la negociación; y es fuerza que dependa el victorioso del graduado, y el valiente del doctor, y la espada de la pluma" (300). This preoccupation strongly informs Quevedo's poetic theory which accordingly emphasizes the importance of endowing language with authoritative power, as is shown in the commentary on Fray Luis de León's poetry which he addresses to the Count-Duke of Olivares. To be understood both as a means of fishing for favor at court and as a synthesis of Quevedo's aesthetic convictions, the letter hails Fray Luis as epitomizing an "inclinación [...] severa a los estudios varoniles" ("Dedicatoria" 37). Identifying him with such figures as Aristotle, Horace, Seneca, Martial, and Erasmus, Quevedo situates Fray Luis within a humanistic tradition that is cast as distinctly, as well as reactively, masculine. Resolute in his intent to establish an all too direct link between poetry and statecraft, he invites comparison between Fray Luis's austere verses and Olivares's commanding prose, by commenting on one of the Count-Duke's instructional letters. He contends that its straightforward language has an immediate effect on the actions of its addressee: "enseñó al autor lo que debió escribir y lo que pudo escusar, sin afectación ni dificultades, enseñando juntamente a escribir y a obrar" (42).

Conditioned by the criteria of political action, the stylistic features of poetry are tied to the rhetorical standards of the *vir bonus et prudens*

in a strict sense. Clarity is accordingly upheld as the mainstay of virtuous expression. Meanwhile, associated with Gongorism, the deployment of artifice is categorically maligned. Sounding an alarmist note on the formidable dangers of stylistic polish, Quevedo cites Petronius's admonishments against his contemporaries at the start of the *Satyricon*: "Séame lícito decir [...] que sois los primeros que echaron a perder toda la elocuencia y, componiendo cosas ridículas, con vanos y leves sones hicistes que el cuerpo de la oración desmayado cayese. [...] Poco ha que esta inorme y fanfarrona parlería de Asia vino a Atenas, y los ánimos de los mancebos [...] los hirió de contagio a manera de pestilencial constelación [...]" (48). Exploiting the association extant since Greek antiquity between Asian cultures and feminine softness (Herodotus 543), the quotation profiles the burgeoning of poetic sophistication—in particular the use of Latinisms and circumlocutions—with debilitating foreign invasion. The comparison of ornate expression with a fainting body, bereft of self-control is equally noteworthy for its marring of the boundaries between poetic treatise and satirical attack.

So rigid is Quevedo in his association between poetry and masculinity that, in contrast to his contemporaries, he virtually ignores its function as a vehicle of pleasure. While he does occasionally express his appreciation for the elegance of certain writers, he preponderantly views poetry as a means of imparting wise *sentencias* and clear ideas. Significantly, his definition of clarity as straightforward simplicity differs from the prevalent tendency to uphold the standard of clarity in a more nuanced sense of perspicuity, which combines a certain degree of transparency with an element of enticing opacity, in keeping with the belief that artistic expression must distinguish itself from common speech (Jáuregui y Aguilar 125). This notion is central in early modern poetic theory. As much as the function of poetry is related to that of edifying rhetoric, it is allowed greater aesthetic freedom. Hence, where López Pinciano, following Horace, hails poetry as a key instrument in the foundation of republics (125), he asserts its differences vis-à-vis rhetoric. About the use of metaphors, he says: "Materia era esta común al rhetórico como al poeta [...] mas, porque muchas más usan los poetas y con modos diversos y más afectación [...]" (López Pinciano 237). He then devotes considerable attention to explaining poetry's necessary recourse to "ornato" (López Pinciano 522). Quevedo's categorical pronouncements against affectation present a stark contrast to this more

flexible stance. Without seeking to moderate or qualify his terms, he adheres to rigid dichotomies: virtuous poetry is masculine—meaning that it is clear, precise, controlled, and pure in an absolute sense—in contrast to deviant poetry which is adorned—meaning that it is unclear, effeminate, impotent, swollen, and crossbred. While the target here is specifically Gongorist poetry, the absence of any vindication of stylistic refinement encourages the reader to condemn all manner of artifice.

As one might expect, Quevedo's antigongorist satirical poems pursue the antimonies latent in the letter on Fray Luis in far more drastic terms. Referring implicitly to Góngora's burlesque poems on sodomy, Quevedo appropriates the homophobic scatological humor employed by his rival in order to attack him (see Martín). The ribald tropes used by Góngora to deride certain social types are now turned on his own poetic practice which is equated with excrement and anal sex. In one of the poems, Góngora is mocked as "Poeta de bujarrones / y sirena de rabos, / pues son de ojos de culo / todas tus obras o rasgos" (*Poesía original completa* 1090). "Bujarrón," as the note to Blecua's edition reminds us, means sodomite. Similarly, another verse of the same poem proclaims him "Almorrana [...] de Apolo" (*Poesía original completa* 1093). Quevedo pursues the conceit further in a poem that, presenting a striking parody of *cultismo*, combines the display of neologism with extreme obscenity. The last two tercets read: "Has acabado aliundo su Parnaso; / adulteras la casta poesía, / ventilas bandos, niños inquietas, / parco, cerúleo, veterano, vaso: / piáculos perpetra su porfía, / estuprando neotéricos poetas" (*Poesía original completa* 1099). Here, the same cluster of associations between foreignness and sexual transgression operative in the letter to Olivares resurface with an abject turn. "Aliundo," for instance, signifies outsider. The corruption of poetry by this outsider is, as we see, said to "worry children," which might first be taken simply as a reference to the fact that Góngora's poetry is shocking to the public. But given the final all too explicit reference to sodomizing "neotéricos," that is, innovative or avant-garde poets, the reference to Gongora's harassing young men is evident (see Arellano). Góngora is also proclaimed to be, himself, sodomized: "Bosco de los poetas / todo diablos y culos y braguetas, / que con tus decimillas, / adjetivas demonios y capillas; / contra el púlpito flechas, / contra Florencia escribes, / y dicen lenguas ruines / que de atrás os conocen florentines" (*Poesía original completa* 1104). "Florentines" here is a reference to effeminate men.

While Quevedo's antigongorist attacks do, in some sense, provide insight into his larger literary program, it is also well to understand them as a facetious rhetorical performance. Bearing in mind Andrée Collard's long established thesis that the existence of two separate schools—*culteranismo* and *conceptismo*—is an eighteenth-century invention, we should avoid monolithic oppositions between the two authors that would mistakenly pigeonhole Góngora as primordially concerned with verbal ostentation and Quevedo with conceptual substance. Both impetuses are present in both authors. At the same time, though, there are legitimate reasons for contrasting them. While, as Carreira has demonstrated, some of their poems are extremely similar in their structure and tropes ("Conceptismo"), their overall authorial agendas show significant differences. Where Góngora openly endorses spectacular formal embellishment (1095), Quevedo, as I have noted, fervently defends verbal asceticism. Navarrete has held that they represent two distinct culminations of the Petrarchan tradition: while Quevedo radically questions the legitimacy of its tropological conventions, Góngora "tested the system as far as it would go," constructing a poetics of formal surfeit and taking it to a self-referential extreme (238). Hence, the particular relevance of Góngora's poetics for *modernismo* and subsequent avant-gardist currents that had a key role in developing a modern secularized aesthetic-self consciousness (see Chemris 104-142). Relatedly, Smith foregrounds the sense in which, in its gratuitous formal excess, the *Soledades* frees poetic language from social dogmatism, thus transcending the constraining dichotomies between authoritative manliness and undisciplined effeminateness: "The anonymous protagonist is curiously nonvirile, led apparently at random from one incident to another" (86). In this regard, it is telling that Borges's criticism of Gongorism and his partiality to Quevedean poetics—noted long ago by Emir Rodríguez Monegal—reaffirms the traditional "discursive prison of binary, reactive oppositions" (Smith 86) between the masculine and the feminine. It bears mentioning that Borges's gendered poetics have recently received attention from queer studies criticism which, foregrounding homophobic undercurrents in his work, relates his abiding identification with traditionalist heteronormative discourses to his presumably conflicted sexual identity (Brant, Foster, Balderston).

In his essay collections titled *Inquisiciones* (1925), *Tamaño de mi esperanza* (1926), and *Idioma de los argentinos* (1927), Borges lays the foundations for a national poetics. Portraying Argentina as a culturally emergent nation, he underscores the need to instigate its cultural development: "Ya Buenos Aires, más que una ciudá, es un país y hay que encontrarle la poesía y la música y la pintura y la religión y la metafísica que con su grandeza se avienen" (*Tamaño* 14). In the context of this project—that of erecting a national cultural imaginary—Quevedo's verbal dogmatism resonates strongly. Seeking to break with *modernismo*, Borges grounds his poetics in the rhetorical tradition of the Quintilianic *vir bonus dicendi peritus*. Diverging from Pietro Taravacci's contention that Borges elaborates a "'sistema retorico' personale e significativo" (15), I would emphasize that, like Quevedo, the young Borges makes use of a rhetorical conception of language in the most traditional or reactionary of ways: verbal art is cultivated as a projection of masculine authority.

Borges advances a manifestly prescriptive agenda: "Lo grandioso [...] es instigar una política del idioma" (*Tamaño* 39). This "política" consists, to a large degree, in the policing of language. To this end Borges grounds his modern poetics on categorical distinctions between what he sees as vapid linguistic formulae and useful ones. As is evident in the many passages devoted to exemplifying desirable and undesirable epithets and metaphors, efficacy emerges as a key linguistic standard, in keeping with Quintilianic and Senecan predilections for energetic over pleasurable eloquence, a tendency, as we saw, also pivotal in Quevedo's poetics. Not coincidentally, Borges cites Quevedo's *La culta latiniparla* in explaining the core principles of his verbal ethos. Recalling its strident mockery of *culteranos* for their avoidance of plain speech through the recourse to contrived synonyms and contorted sentence structure, Borges perpetuates Quevedo's enmity against "soft" poetics. Moreover, Borges goes so far as to qualify him as unconcerned with crafting pleasant sound: "Quiero añadir que nunca hubo en Quevedo el concepto auditivo del estilo que sojuzgó a Flaubert [...]" (*Tamaño* 40). One might rightly wonder about the meaning of this point in the context of comments that are largely focused on poetry. Certainly, it is consistent with Borges's tendency to privilege forceful concision over mellifluence as a poetic standard.

The essay "Menoscabo y grandeza de Quevedo," included in *Inquisiciones*, is particularly reminiscent of Quevedo's commentary on Fray Luis de León's poetry. In addition to Borges's reference to Quevedo's style as "bizarría varonil" (44), we find there the same celebration of linguistic asceticism, the same value-ridden differentiation between ornate and austere language that we encounter in the letter to the Count-Duke of Olivares. The distinction that Borges draws between Góngora's and Quevedo's poetry speaks for itself: "El conceptismo [...] es una serie de latidos cortos e intensos marcando el ritmo del pensar. [...] El gongorismo fue una intentona de gramáticos a quienes urgió el plan de trastornar la frase castellana en desorden latino" (*Inquisiciones* 48; see Roses 312-332). Like his precursor, Borges treats Gongorism as a foreign aberration. Also worth underlining is his description of Quevedo's verse as quickened beats marking the rhythm of thought. This conceit, along with the accompanying characterizations of Quevedo's poems as assertive and efficacious, stress the traditional connection between agile expression and masculine *energeia*. The vindication of lucid curtness is particularly identifiable with Seneca's linguistic philosophy. Coming to mind most immediately is a passage from his already mentioned letter to Lucilius. In that passage, quickened gait is held to be a sign of genuine manliness: "Don't you see how, if a man's spirit has lost vigour, his limbs drag and their feet move sluggishly? If it is womanish, how the softness is manifest in the man's walk? If it is keen and fierce, how the pace is excited?" (243). These physiological tendencies are then transposed onto verbal usage to suggest, as we saw, that linguistic terseness is the sign of true masculinity. While Borges does not go to the extreme of directly equating corporeal gesture with verbal power, in his poetics such identifications are implicitly present in residual form.

Borges's allusions to the technical "perfection" of Quevedo's language—its precision, its conceptual synthesis—clearly point in this direction. "El solo nombre de Quevedo es argumento convincente de perfección y nadie como él ha sabido ubicar epítetos tan clavados, tan importantes, tan inmortales de antemano, tan pensativos" (*Tamaño* 53). Not so much an indication of the adjectives' philosophical density, but rather of their sensorial charge, "clavados" is best interpreted as an expression of forcefulness—one that can be associated with entrenched characterizations of assertive language as sharp and thrusting. The

references to the importance and lucidity of Quevedo's adjectives might be similarly interpreted, as can be further clarified in light of the essay that Borges devotes to the famous sonnet that begins "Cerrar podrá mis ojos." Prefacing his appreciation for the effectiveness of the penultimate tercet on the immortality of the soul with a reflection on the language of one of Quevedo's metaphysical treatises on the topic, Borges exalts the "dignidad varonil" of his didactic writing (*Idioma* 68). He then amplifies this image of Quevedo's authorial persona, portraying the poem as an assertion of virile agency:

> Quevedo casi no razona; intuye más bien. La intensidad le es promesa de inmortalidad y no la intensidad de cualquier sentir, sino la de la apetencia amorosa y, más concretamente aun, la del acto. [...] Quevedo, hispano íntegramente y seguro de la realidad de las cosas –no de la gasificada *cosa en sí* que para consuelo de ametafísicos preparó Kant, sino de las caseras cosas individuales– sugiere una supervivencia de lo corpóreo, de las ya para siempre apasionadas venas y médulas. (69)

Thus, poetic language is endowed with the vitality of experience itself. This qualification must not, however, be taken as promoting a Romantic surrender of reason to subjective emotion. Borges, rather, upholds the Quevedean conceit as an epitome of precision and acuity. "Intensidad," then, means rhetorical impact attained through muscular linguistic virtuosity. While Kant would oppose rhetorics and aesthetics, regarding the former as a programmatic form of communication, wanting in intellectual value, and the latter as an epistemologically superior gratuitous mode of representation (198-99), Borges's youthful recuperation of Quevedo upholds the continued value of rhetoric in the realm of modern poetics. In Borges's linguistic utopia, "true" poetic expression transmits the brazenness of live action. It is thus utterly in line with the aspirations of Christian and classical oratory to instigate audience affect through the deployment of technical skill (see Taravacci). In sum, Borges's vindication of Quevedo on the grounds that his verses reproduce the intensity of the act itself is closely attuned to Quevedo's panegyrical identification of Fray Luis's verses with Olivares's executive prose.

While the "act" referred to in Borges's analysis of the sonnet "Cerrar podrá mis ojos" is not political, but rather amorous, it unequivocally stands as a means of reaffirming masculinity. Read as a reference to sexual consummation, the tercets are removed from the realm of Neoplatonic abstinence. In its emphasis on a model of masculinity based on the radical sublimation of physical desire, the Neoplatonist courtly tradition that conditioned Petrarchan and post-Petrarchan love lyric undermines conceptions of masculine exemplarity related to military heroism and embodied in epic literature. If in the sphere of epic, heroism is exhibited through extraordinary bodily and social power, the courtly lover, is, in contrast, placed in a submissive role. Functioning within a domesticated hierarchical structure in which his power is limited, he must practice self-sacrifice and discretion, which brings him dangerously close to female disempowerment. Discussing the unease provoked by the awareness of this problem, Martínez-Góngora notes the repeated attacks on effeminateness in Castiglione's *Il cortegiano*: "La defensa, frecuente en la obra, contra el 'afeminamiento', denota la conciencia de debilidad del cortesano ante la similitud que halla entre su situación de dependencia política y la de la mujer" (427). In response to this insecurity, continues Martínez-Góngora, some of the Spanish love poets, such as Garcilaso and Boscán, depart from Petrarchan norms and reaffirm male sexual fulfillment, given "la percepción por parte del sujeto masculino del importante papel de la actividad sexual en la configuración de la identidad masculina [...]" (428). Sexual feat is, in turn, put on a par with "valor militar" (Martínez-Góngora 429). Consistent with this political symbolism, Borges's essay on Quevedo's love sonnet emphatically casts the metaphysical content of the poem as denoting sensorial plenitude. Making Quevedo, the man, organically part of his oeuvre, Borges underlines the decidedly carnal flavor of his verses. Insistent on this reading, he quotes from another sonnet to further demonstrate this quality: "'Sobre el Sol arderé, y el cuerpo frío / Se acordará de amor en polvo y tierra'" (*Idioma* 69). From it he draws a conclusion that is at once surprising and entirely aligned with his agenda: "Ese *frío* –tan insignificativo y haragán, a primera vista– es insinuador, por contraste, de la carnalidad y aun de la satisfacción y ápice de ella, de la que escribió Schopenhauer: La cópula es al mundo lo que la palabra al enigma. [...] Todo esto, sin embargo, no es sino la manifestación de la voluntad de vivir y la concentración, el foco de esta

voluntad, es el acto generativo" (*Idioma* 69). In distancing Quevedo from the noumenal realm and situating him squarely in the phenomenal one, Borges reaffirms the associations between masculine corporeality and rhetorical plenitude.

If Quevedo's pointed, curt, and forceful style is deemed to exude masculine potency, Góngora's florid, abundant style is symbolically equated with sexual and verbal weakness. Borges's denunciation of *modernismo*, which is treated as a direct continuation of *gongorismo*, is drastic in its profiling of poetic styles. In the spirit of Quevedo's bellicose pronouncements against *culterano* decadence, the essay "Ejecución de tres palabras" proceeds to purge poetry from the damaging effects of ornamental artifice by eliminating certain tautological adjectives conventionally used by *modernistas*. Borges deepens the binarism set up in a previous essay where he proposes that the *culterano* "cultiva la palabrera hojarasca por cariño al enmarañamiento y al relumbrón," while the *conceptist* "es enrevesado para seguir con más veracidad las corvaduras de un pensamiento complejo" (*Inquisiciones* 115-6). As occurs in that essay, in "Ejecución," Borges regards *culteranismo* and *conceptismo* as transhistorical tendencies, the former being a persistent mark of verbal torpor, antithetical to the communicative exigency of the latter. The *modernista* use of the adjective "inefable," is revealingly described as "[...] una confesión de impotencia, y escribir, por ejemplo, *tarde inefable*, equivale a decir: *A mí no se me ocurre nada* [...]" (*Inquisiciones* 164). Borges adds: "Los que negando esto negaren la eficacia del lenguaje y creyeran que hay cosas inefables, deberán suspender acto continuo el ejercicio de la literatura [...]" (*Inquisiciones* 165). Subsequently condemned to the fire is "misterio," deemed equally objectionable for its radical lack of substance. We are reminded of Quevedo's satirical vignette on the *poeta culto* in *La hora de todos*, whose exaggerated verbal exhibitionism leaves its audience "en ayunas" (175). In keeping with Quevedo's opposition between effective and aestheticizing language, Borges equates verbal artifice with *horror vacui*, a sign of impotence.

Such trenchant stances, however, would be revised in the *longue durée* of Borges's "post-*criollista*" years. In the prologue to his 1982 anthology of Quevedo's poetry, *Antología poética,* Borges modifies his previous emphasis on the opposition between *conceptistas* and *culteranos*: "He equiparado a Góngora y a Quevedo, que es costumbre contraponer. El tiempo borra o atenúa las diferencias. Los adversarios

acaban por confundirse; los une el común estilo de su época" (14). In fact, the statement tells us as much about the development of his own persona as author as it does about the Golden Age poets. Its proclaimed detachment from the battles waged by the literary rivals is utterly consistent with Borges's insistence on disengaging his own writing from particular temporal polemics. Already in 1932, in "El escritor argentino y la tradición," Borges criticizes the deliberately nationalist elements of his youthful works which he dismisses as "olvidables y olvidados libros" (*Discusión* 270). Furthermore, he later sees to it that the essays comprised in *Inquisiciones*, *Tamaño de mi esperanza*, and *Idioma de los argentinos* are excluded from his *Obras completas*. No doubt troubling to him were their abundant use of *argentinismos*, as well as their zealous tone and their rhetorical dogmatism. Their openly prescriptive agenda jars with the mature author's contention that a work attains the stature of a classic, not because of its specific stylistic traits, but, rather, as he says in "Sobre los clásicos," because generations of readers have perused it (*Otras inquisiciones* 773). No longer conceived as the instigation of particular sentiments, literary experience is now imagined as an infinitely fluid exegetical process in which endless successions of private readers generate "interpretaciones sin término" (*Otras inquisiciones* 773).

While for the nineteen-twenties Borges, the idea of Quevedo's sensorial presence conditions the reception of his poems, seen, as we will remember, as testimonies of his eternally throbbing "médulas," the older Borges, whose notions of authorship and readership have become abstracted from the phenomenal world of live performance, dissociates the man from his writings. Such is the well-known conclusion of his 1940s essay "Quevedo": "Quevedo es menos un hombre que una dilatada y compleja literatura" (*Otras inquisiciones* 666). In direct opposition to his previous carnal reading of Quevedo's erotic poems, Borges at this point explains them as linguistic abstractions: "considerados como documentos de una pasión los poemas eróticos de Quevedo son insatisfactorios; considerados como juegos de hipérboles, como deliberados ejercicios de petrarquismo, suelen ser admirables" (*Otras inquisiciones* 663).

At one level, such statements seem to do away with the notion of writing as an extension of masculine oratorical performance. However, the move to denude Quevedo's verses of their vital context reveals some interesting tensions. In relation to the sonnet "Desde la Torre,"

which is quoted in its entirety in "Quevedo," Borges says: "No faltan rasgos conceptistas en la pieza anterior (escuchar con los ojos, hablar despiertos al sueño de la vida), pero el soneto es eficaz a despecho de ellos, no a causa de ellos. No diré que se trata de una transcripción de la realidad, porque la realidad no es verbal, pero sí que sus palabras importan menos que la escena que evocan o que el acento varonil que parece informarlas" (*Otras inquisiciones* 663). On the one hand, it is suggested that the original rhetorical intent of the verses does not determine their modern reception, but on the other hand, the reader intuits their masculine utterance.

In order to put Borges's vindication of interpretive freedom in proper perspective, we need to return to his 1982 edition of Quevedo's poetry. In the prologue to that edition Borges reminds us of the important intertextual component of Quevedo's verses which is, he despairs, lost on modern readers:

> Quevedo quería que el lector de los versos "Huya el cuerpo indignado con gemido / debajo de las sombras" pensara en el fin de la *Eneida*: "Vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras." Otro ejemplo. Quevedo famosamente escribe "Polvo serán, mas polvo enamorado" para que quien leyere recuerde a Propercio: "Ut meus oblito pulvis amore jacet." Nuestro tiempo, devoto de la ignorante superstición de la originalidad, es incapaz de leer así. (*Antología poética* 13)

In a certain sense, Borges's impatience with the cultural amnesia of his contemporaries contradicts his celebrations of a detached, ever-evolving, and infinite interpretive process. We can surmise from the above passage that all interpretations are not equally rich: current readers' obliviousness to the original Latin sources is something to be lamented. In "La postulación de la realidad," Borges writes: "Para el concepto clásico, la pluralidad de los hombres y de los tiempos es accesoria, la literatura es siempre una sola" (*Discusión* 219). In one respect, Borges's own treatment of literature as a universal arena purports to qualify the universal as all-inclusive and timeless, beyond the constraints of national and historical sensibilities. However, discernible in Borges's commentary on Quevedo's borrowings from Latin traditions, is a keenly felt identification with his cultural framework. The fact that at this stage Borges's commentaries on Quevedo display a pensive lucidity—in

contrast to his earlier emphatically impassioned rapport—ought not be seen as a sign of emotional disengagement. There is simply a change in tone to a more measured form of expression. This composure, we might add, falls safely within the bounds of masculine *virtus*.

That Quevedo's masculine ethos continues to operate in Borges's own authorial project shows that his precursor's language, far from being transmitted as a purified structure, comes laden with cultural density. Thinking about the way in which some of Borges's late poems engage with the Spanish author can further illuminate the modern writer's ongoing appropriation of the Quevedean conceit as well as of its gendered connotations. These rereadings bring to mind Hans Georg Gadamer's definition of hermeneutics as a dynamic engagement with literary tradition. Gadamer argues that reading texts from the past ideally involves actively communing with them and, thereby, confirming the continued vital presence of tradition in modernity (146-47). While in his essays on Quevedo Borges tends to belittle the experiential continuity of literary transmission that is stressed in Gadamer's traditionalist stance, the marks of this continuity are patently perceptible in his poems.

Included in *El oro de los tigres* (1972), the poem "El idioma alemán" begins thus: "Mi destino es la lengua castellana, / El bronce de Francisco de Quevedo" (1116). "Bronce" would be a metaphor for Quevedo's language which is crafted like a metal, but the work also conjures up the image of a bust of the author: like the commemorative sculptures of classical warriors and statesmen, Quevedo's language is invested with an authoritative aura. Defying those maligned modern readers who privilege "original" innovation over awareness of literary tradition, Borges includes visible traces of Quevedo's compositions in his own poems. Just as Quevedo incites the reader to pair his verses with Virgil's and Propertius's, Borges invites us to identify some of his words with Quevedo's. In "El pasado," we read: "Todo era fácil, nos parece ahora, / En el plástico ayer irrevocable: / [...] la implacable / Espada que retumba en la balanza; / Roma, que impone el numeroso hexámetro / Al obstinado mármol de esa lengua / Que manejamos hoy, despedazada" (*El oro de los tigres* 1086). These verses recall Quevedo's famous sonnet "A Roma sepultada en sus ruinas," which is included both in the 1982 anthology and in an earlier 1948 collection of Quevedo's works, *Prosa y verso*, which Borges prepared with Adolfo Bioy Casares.

Borges's image of language as stubborn marble fractured by modern use ingeniously elaborates the reflections of Quevedo's pilgrim: "Buscas en Roma a Roma ¡oh peregrino! / y en Roma misma a Roma no la hallas; / cadáver son las que ostentó murallas" (*Antología poética* 67; *Prosa y verso* 899). More specifically, displaying the synthetic evocative power epitomized by Quevedo's *conceptismo*, Borges's language in ruins ("lengua despedazada") emerges as a witty unraveling of the idea implicit in Quevedo's Rome in ruins.

Later in the poem "El pasado" we read: "No hay otro tiempo que el ahora, este ápice / Del ya será y del fue, de aquel instante / En que la gota cae en la clepsidra. / El ilusorio ayer es un recinto / De figuras inmóviles de cera / O de reminiscencias literarias / Que el tiempo irá perdiendo en sus espejos" (*El oro de los tigres* 1087). Here, coming readily to mind is Quevedo's poem "Represéntase la brevedad de lo que se vive." Included in both of Borges's Quevedo anthologies, the well-known sonnet offers a meditation on ephemerality whose sober content is reflected in its spare style. Continued in Borges's poem is Quevedo's articulation of a paradoxical process whereby an awareness that everything passes is always present. Moreover, Borges's word choice, "del ya será y del fue," echoes Quevedo's "soy un fue, y un será, y un es cansado" (*Antología poética*, 17; *Prosa y verso 883*).

It might be argued that the above poems give voice to a profoundly introspective self who ponders life with quiet resignation, a persona seemingly antithetical to that of the commanding statesman or the fiery warrior. That solitary self mirrors the secular modern reader, the individual who comes to terms with historical time analytically. Among the most iconic portrayals of this reader is the one evoked in Quevedo's "Desde la Torre," a poem particularly dear to Borges: "Retirado en la paz de estos desiertos, / con pocos, pero doctos, libros juntos, / vivo en conversación con los difuntos / y escucho con mis ojos a los muertos" (*Antología poética* 24). The model of literary transmission evoked in Quevedo's conversation with the dead brings to mind the animated dialogues with writers from antiquity carried out in Petrarch's *Epistolae Familiares*. In other words, literary transmission is understood as at once intimate and detached, subjective and enlightened (see Walters and Carreira,"Quevedo"). This ideal balance of affects and reason attained by the solitary reader is an ongoing source of wisdom, the ultimate antidote to temporal destruction, as is suggested in the last

verses of "Desde la Torre": "En fuga irrevocable huye la hora; / pero aquélla el mejor cálculo cuenta / que en la lección y estudios nos mejora" (*Antología poética* 24).

This pacified humanism is but one facet of the mature Borges's relationship with Quevedo. The two authors are also united in their perpetuation of the connection between arms and letters. While the mature Borges had little patience for the proclamatory nationalist rhetoric of his youth, portrayals of patriotic heroes are ubiquitous across his entire corpus. The innumerable military episodes retold in his stories and poems evoke an epic imaginary that brings together heroes from a wide variety of contexts, from the Argentinean independence wars, to the frontier battles against the Indians to the south of Buenos Aires, to canonical Western history and myth, to Norse legend. As Diego Alonso has shown in his analysis of the "Poema conjectural," Borges modernizes the epic by portraying a hero who reflects self-consciously on his fate. The "I" of the poem, written entirely in first person, is Francisco Narciso de Laprida, one of the fathers of the independence, who contemplates his own death, at once comparing himself with the fallen captain from Dante's *Purgatorio* and identifying himself with a specifically "South American" destiny (Alonso 106-07). In contrast to the traditional hero whose mythical stature denotes an absolute distance from the historical reader, Borges's Laprida ruminates wistfully about his past wish to lead a different life, one devoted to books and law: "presenta una densidad individual que revela su carácter contradictorio y el tiempo en el que se desarrolla la acción se confunde con el presente de la escritura" (Alonso 108). This rewriting of epic commemoration from the perspective of subjective memory is visible in many of Borges's poems about military heroes.

Such poetic epitaphs can, in turn, be compared to Quevedo's epigrammatic poems, several of which are contained in Borges's two Quevedo anthologies. Rooted in Greek and Roman traditions, these funerary dedications to contemporary figures as well as to legendary heroes, says Sagrario López Poza, are cultivated as a conventionalized epideictic genre that Golden Age writers would practice both to display artistic *ingenio* and to cement their ties with the social elite. At the same time, palpable in many of them is a sententious tone, at once intimate, resigned, and restrained, traits that are visible in Borges's heroes. We may take as an example Quevedo's "Túmulo al rey de Suecia Gustavo

Adolfo" which is included in the 1948 anthology. In the poem, the king, speaking in first person, observes his own assassination: "Y bala providente y vengadora, / burlando de mi arnés, defensa vana, / me trujo negro sueño y postrer hora" (*Prosa y verso* 898). Borges's and Casares's footnote plays up the tragic disenchantment of the hero by likening his self-consciously theatrical death to Hamlet's. The verses, furthermore, are closely comparable to Borges's "A la efigie de un capitán de los ejércitos de Cromwell": "Capitán, los afanes son engaños, / Vano el arnés y vana la porfía / Del hombre, cuyo término es un día; / Todo ha concluido hace ya muchos años" (*El hacedor* 822).

In light of the dynamic cultural and existential identification with Quevedo's poetics displayed above, the opinion that Borges emits in his "Quevedo" essay about his precursor's "best" passages should be regarded with considerable suspicion. "Las mejores piezas de Quevedo existen más allá de la moción que las engendró y de las comunes ideas que las informan. [...] Son (para de alguna manera decirlo) objetos verbales, puros e independientes como una espada o como un anillo de plata" (*Otras inquisiciones* 666). As demonstrated by Quevedo's own hegemonic definitions of linguistic purity, the reference to language as "pure" is ideologically weighted. The standards of rhetorical efficacy implicit in the conception of purity have a politically and socially charged history. No less charged is the identification, apparently made in passing, between Quevedo's best writing and a sword, here characterized as an independent sublimated form. It seems difficult to forget the fraught cultural significance of this pairing, given Quevedo's conscious attempt to maintain the historical link between sword and pen, an effort in which Borges himself is also invested.

Like Quevedo, Borges explicitly roots the craft of writing in the commemoration of the sword to which his poem, "Espadas," is dedicated.

> Gram, Durendal, Joyeuse, Excalibur.
> Sus viejas guerras andan por el verso,
> que es la única memoria. El universo
> las siembra por el Norte y por el Sur.
> En la espada persiste la osadía
> de la diestra viril, hoy polvo y nada;
> en el hierro o el bronce, la estocada

que fue sangre de Adán un primer día.
Gestas he enumerado de lejanas
espadas cuyos hombres dieron muerte
a reyes y serpientes. Otra suerte
de espadas hay, murales y cercanas.
Déjame, espada, usar contigo el arte;
yo, que no he merecido manejarte.
(*El oro de los tigres* 1085)

As most clearly indicated in the last two verses, which implicitly play upon the classical identification of sword and pen, poetry (here referred to as "arte") has a double meaning. It at once marks the demise of heroism and inaugurates its fertile afterlife. The use of the present-tense verb "andan" in the intimation that the legendary swords "andan por el verso" infuses them with vitality that tends to undermine the sobering pronouncement about the end of epic glory. Renewed emphasis is again placed on the endurance of the epic hero in the figure of the sword as persistent reminder of "la osadía / De la diestra viril." The agglutination of succinct and evocative associations of the sword with glorious battles then culminates with the poet's direct invocation of the mythical instrument. Addressing the sword in an intimate tone, the poet unites the humanist with his violent past, as he coaxes the weapon to let him handle it. Quevedo, one might imagine, would have understood this gesture well.

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