

LOPE DE VEGA'S *LA GATOMAQUIA* AND POSITIVE PARODY

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Luis de Góngora mastered the art of the bizarre correspondence. His favourite 'A si no B' formula appears to reject classical notions of representation based on similitude¹, foregrounding instead two oppositional subjects as interchangeable components of a structure that is perversely analogical. In Góngora's poetic universe linguistic and conceptual correlations are often dependent upon the potential reconcilability of the apparently irreconcilable.² But we shouldn't underestimate his rival Lope de Vega's own capacity for linguistic experimentation, an equally problematic approach to the processes of signification which, though not as disproportionately envisaged, symphonically-charged, or as conceptually complex as in Góngora's longer poems, certainly demonstrates its own defiant response to the idealistic connections that are so often manipulated to support hierarchical models of authority.

Nowhere does Lope offer such a sustained liberation of the word than in the burlesque epic published towards the end of his life, *La gatomaquia* (1634).³ The parodic power of Lope's tale of the passionate and jealous love of the 'gato romano' Marramaquiz for the beautiful and treacherous Zapaquilda, is fuelled by the poem's resistance to and rejection of the illegitimate parallels, correspondences and relations that normalise out-moded heroic codes of behaviour and depend upon the increasingly invalid objectivity of epic. In the *Gatomaquia* the essential paradox at the heart of all parody, that is, that even in degrading there is elevation, and in rejection there is reinforcement (Hutcheon 75), is itself a target of parody; and this has inevitable aesthetic and ideological implications. The poem acknowledges a disintegrating faith in the mystical bond between word and thing,⁴ but communicates this disconnect within an overarching framework of absurd identification: what we might term, *gato, si no hombre (mujer)*. Within a heightened context of over-determined meta-artistry, the reader's suspension of disbelief with regard to this central unifying correspondence is rarely threatened. And yet, throughout the poem, a syncopated series of ruptured engagements with generic, mythical/

heroic and tonal archetypes, underlines the apparent arbitrary nature of association and, therefore, the artificiality of its own parodic premise.

Whereas Ariosto had followed the Classical poets, especially Virgil, in his unifying use of the extended simile (Murtaugh), a controlling device that transcends the apparent chaos and flux of the surface narrative; the simplicity of Lope's structure is belied by chaotic, imperfectly realised, correspondences. The wrenching disunity of its analogical infrastructure, and its striking self-reflexivity counters ideal epic pretensions, both aesthetic and ideological, with a deflationary, oppositional discourse, whose realism emerges (somewhat ironically) from a uniquely ludic distortion of verisimilitude.

II

The poem, composed of seven *silvas*, can be briefly summarised as follows: the beautiful Zapaquilda catches the eye of Marramaquiz and seems receptive to his courtship. However, she quickly switches her affections to the new, richer, cat on the roof Micifuf, which plunges Marramaquiz into a near fatal jealous melancholy. By the end of the first *silva* Zapaquilda recalls Marramaquiz back from the brink with a promise to “guardar la fe” as his “esposa” (1.14). But betrayal is imminent. *Silva* two opens with Zapaquilda awaiting news of Micifuf. The recovered Marramaquiz witnesses Zapaquilda's reaction to a note (and food) received by her from his rival and flies into (another) jealous rage. On the advice of a “sabio” he decides to feign interest in Micilda to make Zapaquilda jealous. The ruse works and the *silva* ends with a fight between the two female felines (compared to dogs scrapping over a bone, with obvious echoes of Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, II, 5). In the third *silva* Micifuf organises a serenade for Zapaquilda and from this point on she remains consistent in her loyalty to him. Marramaquiz is once again a concealed observer of the scene, and overhears both Micifuf's marriage proposal and Zapaquilda's suggestion that Marramaquiz be poisoned to remove him as an impediment to their happiness. A confrontation between the enraged male cats is cut short by the arrival of the police who whisk them both off to prison. The fourth *silva* centres on the signing of Micifuf and Zapaquilda's marriage contract, although Marramaquiz has another near fatal incident involving jealous rage (again) and a suspected poisoning (Zapaquilda, however, is never in the frame for this). The blushing bride is kidnapped by Marramaquiz on her way to the altar in *silva* five, and a decision is taken at Micifuf's cat council in *silva* six that only warfare and siege will avenge the dishonour caused by the theft of his wife. The battle is cut short in the final *silva* by the intervention of Jupiter

(fearful that in a world without cats, mice will scale the attics Titan-like), Marramaquiz is killed by a stray bullet and Micifuf and Zapaquilda (apparently) live happily ever after; at least that *might* be the version represented by the “autor famoso” who is called in at the end to record the drama, or more appropriately, perhaps, to dramatise the record.

Even from this brief outline it is clear why critics have been eager to see the *Gatomaquia* as a “parodic revision of a Greek epic, the *Illiad*” (Simerka 170) which of course offers an obvious connection with Lope’s most notorious transgression of the life/art boundary, the representation of Elena Osorio as *Elena de Troya*.⁵ The self-parodic reading is just one feature of what José María Balcells has termed ‘una parodia múltiple’ (29), a plural perspective within which critics have found their own favourite emphasises. For Felipe Pedraza and Manuel Fernández, for instance, the theatricality of the poem as well as clear links to passages in *La dama boba* and *Las almenas de Toro* suggests a parody of Lope’s own *comedia*;⁶ for MacDonald the theme of passionate love and jealousy redeploys the favourite formulae of Ariosto and Renaissance chivalric epic, for Luis Jiménez Martos and, of course, Juan Rozas, the parody is historised and rooted in the sense of *desengaño* that pervades Lope’s later work. Celina Sabor de Cortázar, in the *Introduction* to her 1982 edition of the poem, fuses many of these arguments, though she prioritises a reading of the parody in generic terms, focusing on how the fundamental principles of epics of the past are violated within a contemporary setting.

The engagement with epic is a strong feature also of Diana Conchado’s interpretation, although as Barbara Simerka has noted (178), Conchado is more inclined to read the parody in atemporal and universal terms. In the only monograph on the poem Marcelo Blázquez Rodrigo argues that the *Gatomaquia* is not a parody of Classical or Renaissance epic at all, but a new version of *La Dorotea* in which cats represent real people and epic models are exploited to represent the absurdity of a chaotic and uncontrollable passion.⁷ Simerka’s more recent reading depends upon a definition of burlesque epic as a “specific form of counter-epic poetics characterized by the combination of an aesthetic strategy—the parody of epic conventions—and ideological commentary expressed as deprecatory representations of military heroism and battles’ (161).⁸

The objective of this article is to initiate a re-evaluation of Lope’s poem that moves us beyond arguments over the identification of precedents, of generic affiliations, of parodic targets, and towards an understanding of the function of the text’s generic hybridity, interrupted narrative, and explicit performativity within a parodic

frame that is positively estranging. The text employs all the characteristic strategies of parody (for example, a comic inversion of referents, a revelling in excess, a deliberate infringement of literary and social decorum), but the constructed fiction of the flawed narrator is the lynch-pin which keeps the parodic universe spinning appropriately *al revés*. Thanks to Tomé de Burguillos even the poem's blatant process of subjectification is more apparent than real. For the voice that intervenes to express a subjective perspective on the events of the plot, is as artificial as the cat characters upon whose actions he comments. Despite a tendency to publish the *Gatomaquia* separately from the other poems in Lope's final lyric anthology,⁹ we cannot fully read the poem outside the context of the *Rimas humanas y divinas de Tomé de Burguillos*, and it is not intended that we should.¹⁰

Elsewhere I have suggested that the creation of the Tomé de Burguillos figure is another, extreme example of the transformative dynamism that characterises Lope's poetic practise (Torres 2006); that the false Burguillos subject foregrounds questions of textual authorship and ownership that underlie Lope's *Rimas* (both *Humanas* [1602] and *Sacras* [1614]).¹¹ Both these issues are also pertinent to the *Gatomaquia*. But most significant to the coherency of the anthology as a whole, and to my argument here, is the way in which the Burguillos/Lope relationship foregrounds for the reader the interdependent agencies of the fiction/reality dialectic that informs the burlesque epic along interconnecting axes of theme (the ubiquitous honour plot), perspective (not only multiple but manipulated), and language (in appearing to say what it doesn't mean, the text often suggests what it does mean). By exploiting the fictional author/speaking subject Burguillos, Lope's apparent self-erasure allows for a much more autonomous (indeed authentic) expression of self. For instance, the parodic persona rails freely and persistently against potentially controversial topics such as royal patronage, to the extent that this is identified as the *razón de ser* of the text's composition (vv. 20-21: 'también hay hombres que se dan a gatos / por olvidos de principes ingratos').¹² Through the mechanism of the inherently transgressive parodic subject/narrator, the writer exploits an "authorised transgression," a liberation from established literary codes (whether Petrarchan, Classical epic, Italian Renaissance epic or even the burlesque itself) and conventions (both aesthetic and socio-cultural).¹³ And it is particularly in the transmutation of textual elements in a new context, what Rose refers to as "the comic refashioning of preformed linguistic or artistic material" (52), that transgression becomes transcendence.

The established speaker/reader pact in the *Gatomaquia* is particularly overturned by stressed similes and fluid identifications,

what we might refer to as analogical communicative misfires, which depend entirely on reader expectation only to confound and “counter” these expectations entirely.¹⁴ Familiarity with mythical archetypes such as Narcissus, Mars, Hercules and Adonis; with iconic epic figures such as the Classical Menelaus, Paris, Aeneas, or the Italian Orlando, Rodamonte, Mandricardo, Ferragut; with conventional amorous topoi and metaphors such as the nightingale, the ivy/wall, vine/elm etc.; is dispensed with as meaning-less, but indispensable to meaning in the newly transformed and transforming context. The estrangement generated by this defamiliarised reading lies at the heart of Lope’s positive parody. Not only does Lope’s insubordinate rewriting revitalise a Renaissance poetics of *imitatio* that was growing stale, and allow him to re-position himself at the centre of lyric practice, but it also has implications beyond the aesthetic dimensions of the literary text. The loss of stable individual identities in the fragmented, performed, narrative hints at a collective cultural ‘loss’, an identity crisis experienced at national level. By foregrounding the potential for socio-cultural transformation beyond the aesthetic dimensions of the literary text, Lope’s gentle parody acquires a sharply acerbic satirical edge.¹⁵

III

Even before the poetic narrative commences the reader of the *Gatomaquia* is encouraged to accept definitions and identifications which will subsequently turn out to be valid only in so far as they are false. The sonnet which precedes the poem, but which arises out of it retrospectively, is from the fictitious *Doña Teresa Verecundia* to the *Licenciado Tomé de Burguillos*:

Con dulce voz y pluma diligente,
y no vestida de confusos caos,
cantáis, Tomé, las bodas, los saraos
de Zapaquilda y Micifuf valiente.

Si a Homero coronó la ilustre frente
cantar las armas de las griegas naos,
a vos, de los insignes marramaos,
guerras de amor por súbito accidente.

Bien merecéis un gato de doblones,
aunque ni Lope celebréis, o el Taso,
Ricardos o Gofredos de Bullones;

pues que por vos, segundo Gatilaso,
 quedarán para siempre de ratones
 libres las bibliotecas del Parnaso.

Doña Teresa functions as the reader's reader. But this role is compromised by her fictitious status and the validity of her interpretation is implicitly challenged. She has grasped the advantages of the semantic instability of '*gato*' for the production of the text's humour, and she recognises the author/narrator's none-too-subtle material objective in writing, but she has fallen into the trap of taking the text quite literally at its Homeric and anti-Gongorist word. Thus not only does she deny Lope's counter epic the "confusos caos" which gives its parody its unique power, but she also erases the *other* protagonist, Marramaquiz, whose alternative perspective on events will invade the text like a meta-commentary, raising questions about a process of artistic representation that is too closely allied to subjectivity. If we accept Marramaquiz as Lope/poet, and not just Lope's poet, then Teresa's early omission may have a double proleptic function, anticipating the literal demise of the fictional character, but also heralding the figurative demise of Lope's earlier Petrarchan poetics. In this context Tomé's role as a "segundo Gatilaso" is doubly ironic, being neither realisable nor desirable.

An alternative Homeric identity is signposted by the poem's title. "Maquia" invokes a whole series of martial epics, ancient and early modern, while the shocking juxtaposition of "gato" aligns the text most directly with Homer's burlesque epic, the *Batracomiomaquia*.¹⁶ In purely schematic terms, the poem's opening (ll. 1-55) conforms to the codified, tripartite introductory formula of epic (proposition, invocation and dedication),¹⁷ thus seeming to reinforce the title's generic signposting. However, the overtly auto-biographical voice which dominates the opening boasts an anti-Homeric identity which is rooted insecurely in a Virgilian intertext of dubious authenticity:

Yo, aquel que en los pasados
 tiempos canté las selvas y los prados,
 éstos vestidos de árboles mayores
 y aquéllas de ganados y flores,
 las armas y las leyes
 que conservan los reinos y los reyes,
 agora, en instrumento menos grave,
 canto de amor suave
 las iras y desdenes,
 los males y los bienes,

no del todo olvidado
el fiero tarantántara, templado
con el silbo del pífaro sonoro. (I, 1-13).

The first four lines evoke the apocryphal opening of Virgil's *Aeneid*:¹⁸

Ille ego qui quondam gracili modulatus avena
carmen, et egressus silvis vicina coegi
ut quamvis avido parerent arva colono,
gratum opus agricolis, at nunc horrentia Martis
arma virumque cano...

The self-reflexivity of these verses made them popular in the Renaissance (used both by Milton in *Paradise Regained* and by Spenser in *The Faerie Queen*), but they have no satisfactory manuscript authority, their intimate tone is glaringly out of place in an epic proemium (a “vulgar intrusion” as Austen put it, 110), and if included before the traditional *arma virumque cano* opening would blur the relationship between Virgil's epic and Homer's. In other words, by invoking a marginalised, anti-authoritative intertext to establish the fictional narrator's authority, the *Gatomaquia* gets off to a deliberately shaky start.

Likewise, there is no doubt that the “Yo” announced here represents an evolving writer subject, but the artistic trajectory traced is legitimate only if the reader connects it to Lope and not to Burguillos.¹⁹ Clarity on this point comes slightly later when Tomé is wiped out for the reader by the deceptive linguistic mirroring of the dedication. The “Yo” of the opening (the ‘subject’ is Burguillos) confronts a “Tú,” another “don Lope,” and in the son we see the father, in the text we see the author, and from the perspective of the father we see the individual cost of imperial conflict. The voice that has moved beyond the proclamation of dominant ideologies, once conveniently sanitised in artificial pastoral spaces, is Lope's own; now he sends up the artificial trappings of the bucolic landscape by inverting the conventional associations of *selva* and *prado*. Clearly, the poem's burlesque vision *is* announced here,²⁰ but there is a more deliberate strategy at work in this opening cluster of flawed, severed, misinterpreted and/or misleading associations.

When the poem restarts in Silva 5 with a renewed dedication to “Lopito,” the linguistic and generic freedom of the “gatífera musa”

(V. 23) paradoxically emerges from a lack of options and is authorised by material rather than artistic considerations:

Y no permitas, Lope, que te espante
 que tal sujeto un licenciado cante
 de mi opinión y nombre,
 pudiendo celebrar mi lira un hombre
 de los que honraron el valor hispano,
 para que al resonar la trompa asombre:
Arma virumque cano,
 que *como no se usa*
el premio, se acobarda toda musa;
 porque *si premio hubiera,*
 del Tajo la ribera
 la oyera, en trompa bélica sonora,
 divinos versos, hijos del Aurora. (V, 24-36)

The rejection of the canonic heroic model '*arma virumque cano*' has the advantage of inscribing its creator into a tradition of "sabios" who, free from the constraints of patronage ("a nadie lisonjero" V, 67)²¹ have treated "materias humildes" in "grandes versos" (V, 42) The list culminates with a reference to Homer's *Batracomiomaquia* (V, 68) bringing us back to the title and reasserting a link with counter-epic.²² This should set the stage perfectly for the Homeric degradation to come, the abduction of Zapaquilda/Helen by Marramquiz/Paris. But this will depend on the cats' performance indicating some level of comfort in their Homeric skins and on the reader's acceptance of them, even oppositionally, in these roles. The opening of the poem has demonstrated, however, before we even meet the slippery Zapaquilda and her suitors, that the *Gatomaquia's* word is very rarely its bond.

IV

Barbara Simerka has argued convincingly that much of the poem's critique of aristocratic behaviour emerges from the denigration of the female characters. She suggests that the negative depiction of Zapaquilda, both thematic and linguistic, constitutes a parodic revision of Homer's *Illiad*, based principally on a reading of the poem as an amplification and altering of the pervasive misogynistic discourse of classical epic (171). Simerka also acknowledges a major departure from the *Illiad* in that Zapaquilda is committed to Marramaquiz (the Paris figure) before jilting him to marry Micifuf (the Menelaus figure). I would argue that these associations are valid but only in schematic terms; that the parodic revision is a much more complex one. A brief

analysis of the ambivalent analogical infrastructure that sustains the fluid portrayal of Zapaquilda (and which is inextricably linked to the representation of the males) will uncover just some of the gaps that leave the reader unsettled and somewhere betwixt and between meaning.

Zapaquilda never really plays the Helen role until the moment of her abduction in the fifth *silva*, and even then the identification is always relative. In fact, from the opening image of her “lamiéndose la cola y el copete” (I, 54), elevated upon the rooftop, there is no secure place for the reader to stand in terms of mythical archetypes. She is explicitly compared to Orpheus as she launches into a sonnet (v. 69), but our voyeuristic contemplation of her bathing imbues her image with a Diana-esque eroticism, and there is more than a hint of a downgraded Narcissus in the lines:

Su mismo pensamiento
de espejo le servía,
puesto que un roto casco le traía
cierta urraca burlona (I, 57-60).

A governing principle of the courtly love tradition, the image of the lady as an idealised mirror that reflects and regulates the highest aspirations of the lover, is entirely demystified in its association with the self-seeking and indeed, self-reflexive, *causa belli*. Moreover, the essential ambivalence of the mirror figure expresses the contradictions inherent in a strategy of composite character depiction that depends upon transgressive appropriation. The inability to distinguish between self and other is at the heart of the Narcissus myth, but it is also the shared problem of the author and reader of an imitative text. In the case of the parodic counter text the expected distance between original and imitation, depth and surface, *ser* and *parecer*, is itself a deviant illusion; more refraction than reflection.

Thus the poem bends the narcissistic Zapaquilda into *Micifuf Narciso* at verse 280. Even the juxtaposition of *Zapinarciso* with the bellicose *Gatimarte* (v. 272) cannot redeem the latent effeminacy of the hero's depiction (a deflation of virility that will be confirmed when a fashion footwear emergency keeps him from his own wedding [*silva* 6]).²³ This very anti-Menelaus, pro-Paris strategy is further complicated by the emergence of Marramaquiz as the dominant shape-shifting heroic subject of the poem. Although the depiction of Marramaquiz as the incarnation of *locura celosa* is coloured by shades of Orlando and/or Rodamonte throughout the poem (most notably in the one *silva* in which there is no direct allusion to the Italian epic), his identity is

forged and consistently dismantled in textual fragments. In the first *silva* he is part Adonis (112), part Orlando (125), part Calisto (244), which (if default correspondences could be sustained) would cast Zapaquilda as a would-be Venus, Angelica and/or Melibea. The indeterminacy of Marramaquiz's heroic status is further compounded by his own self-defining narcissistic moment at the end of the *silva*. His jealous lament to Zapaquilda culminates in a rewriting of prior models that positions him at the less sublime end of Polyphemic self-fashioning:

Pues no soy yo tan feo;
 que ayer me vi, mas no como me veo,
 en un caldero de agua que de un pozo
 sacó, para regar mi casa, un mozo; (I, 353 -56).

The poem's process of deviant specularity is foregrounded in the receding, elusive plains of *imitatio* which these verses embrace. When the reader looks into the diversity of texts upon which Marramaquiz's identity is (de)constructed (from Theocritus, Virgil and Ovid in antiquity, to Renaissance versions in Garcilaso, Marino, Stigliani, Carillo y Sotomayor, and much closer to home, in Góngora),²⁴ the authoritative self-fashioning of the subject and of the text itself is effectively destabilised. Moreover, the invasion of the mundane is wonderfully anti-Platonic. Instead of the Narcissus/mirror figure proclaiming the insubstantial nature of reality as a mere reflection, a shadow of an ideal world, the functionality of the bucket celebrates the substance of the real and, as is appropriate to parody, casts very cold water on idealism.

Shards of the Polyphemus mirror are scattered throughout the poem. In the second *silva* the "sabio" Garfiñanto inhabits a cave similar to Polyphemus's outside the debased urban environment of the text. The conventional isolation and social marginality of the monstrous shepherd is converted into a perverse expression of the *beatus ille* trope, proclaiming the independence of a pen freed from the need to bolster political authorities.²⁵ The following *silva* (III) implicitly recuperates the analogy for Marramaquiz through a bull simile that is archetypically epic²⁶ and here further deflated by a reference to the buffoonish Polyphemus of Ovid (Trueblood 739, n. 96). But it is in the fifth *silva* that the poem's intertextual fashioning of Marramaquiz as Polyphemus acquires surface confirmation when Zapaquilda insults her kidnapper as a "Polifemo de gatos" (V, 352).²⁷ While the epithet reinforces the chaotic, alienated presence of Marramaquiz at the wedding scene, it is actually hurled in response to an assertion of self

("Yo soy Marramaquiz, yo soy, villanos, / el asombro del orbe / que come vidas y amenazas sorbe" [V, 283-85]), which betrays a darkly quixotic self-delusion that is connected to deliberate misreading. Marramaquiz, as the narrator points out, has read his Ovid (296ff), and has merged his identity with that of the prototypical Stoic, Hercules, deified for restoring justice and peace to civilisation. The self-identification is subsequently undermined in an extended simile of very tenuous connections, which moves from Marramaquiz to Hercules to Achilles to Nero (V, 331-43). A re-assertion of self, "Yo solo soy tu esposo" (V, 358), similarly flawed (if the operative word is "solo"), motivates the abduction of Zapaquilda and reflects the emphatic perspectivism that will pervade the latter stages of the poem.

From the moment the narrator compares the abduction of Zapaquilda to that of Elena, Proserpina and Moriana (V, 378-91) (associations that defy too close a scrutiny), the poetic universe can only be understood from within the perspective of overtly historicized and contradictory points of views. Zapaquilda's Helen of Troy identity is conveyed on a further six occasions in the final two *silvas*: the narrator in epic mode, and prior to describing the final battle, finds the Illiadic analogy so useful that he uses it three times (VI, 21; VII, 1-2 and VI, 41 "Elena de los gatos"); it is an appropriate point of reference at a moment of divine intervention (VII, 333); and it functions as a suitably persuasive argument when Reposo proposes warfare and siege at Micifuf's senate ("que así cobró su esposa en Troya el griego," VI, 431). The most significant allusion, however, refers to the potential for exaggerated transformation that lies at the heart of subjective perspectivism.²⁸ The theme of artistic creation as transformative process has been highlighted throughout the poem, especially in references to myths associated with Jupiter.²⁹ But when the narrator comments of Micifuf in *silva* VI, 224: "cada cual en su dolor y pena / hasta una gata puede *hacer* Elena," beyond the performative dimension explicit in "*hacer* un papel,"³⁰ the aesthetic principle conveyed suggests a very specific poetic methodology which, among other things, propelled a young Lope de Vega into social oblivion. A metapoetic reading of the *Gatomaquia* in terms of Micifuf and Marramaquiz as split symbols of Lope's own evolving poetic identity, similar to the allegorical function of Polyphemus and Acis in Góngora's poem, is outside the scope of this article (however tempting that might be). What interests us here is the specific subjective perspective that informs and weakens what has been considered the most firmly established comparative framework of the poem; and the potential socio-political ramifications of contemporary reception.

Micifuf's dilemma, in the final stages of the poem, is similar to Menelaus's in one crucial aspect. It is more about loss of face, infringement of honour, violation of social standing, than loss of a wife (e.g. *silva* VI, 316). The private/public dialectic of the contemporary honour code is mercilessly parodied in this feline conflict that seeks justification in the most legendary projection of the personal onto the collective; encapsulated in the inspirational beauty Helen. For Micifuf *griego*, the recovery of Zapaquilda means the recuperation of a very fragile social identity, and he is prepared to go to great rhetorical lengths to achieve it (vv. 235ff). The rhetoric is countered from within the text by the alternative perspective of Marramaquiz "more sinned against than sinner." He reads and remakes Zapaquilda's rejection in the familiar image of Galatea ("más dura que mármol a mis quejas," VI, 165) and thus softens his Polyphemic profile with shades of Salicio.³¹ The reader is familiar also with the image of Zapaquilda as elusive beauty from the "amazona bella" simile of the second *silva*:

Huyóse al fin la gata y, con el miedo,
 tocó las tejas con el pie tan quedo
 que la amazona bella parecía
 que por los trigos pálidos corría
 sin doblar las espigas de las cañas:
 que de tierras extrañas
 tales gazapas las historias cuentan. (II, 104-10).

The primary model for this image is Virgil's unique warrior princess Camilla (*Aeneid* VII, 808-11), whose complex ambivalence crystallises the tension that exists between heroism and sacrifice throughout the epic. She is the equal of Penthesilea, the antithesis of Lavinia, the devotee of Diana, superior to Turnus, the female who functions outside the boundaries of society, rejecting the appropriate roles of wife and mother. She lives as a man by the sword, but dies seeking spoils of gold to wear in hunting or to decorate Diana's temple. She is unique to Virgil and her role is exploited by him to question the glories celebrated in epic battle. Zapaquilda's identification with the Virgilian Camilla is yet another unsettling voice within the Illiadic frame; that is, if we can believe it. In a typical deflation of his own rhetorical technique,³² the narrator intervenes to condemn all such flourishes as "gazapas"; similes are no more than hollow emphatic tools. In the ultimate analysis the reader can believe what he or she likes. A significant passage to that effect is worth quoting in full:

Demás de que el lector puede, si quiere,
creer lo que major le pareciere;
porque si se perdiese la mentira,
se hallaría en poéticos papeles,
como se ve en Homero, describiendo
a la casta Penélope, que admira,
por los amantes necios y crueles
tejiendo y destejiendo,
sin dejarla dormir de puro casta.
Y lo contrario para ejemplo basta,
haciendo deshonesta
Virgilio a Dido Elisa por Eneas
como le riñe Ausonio... (VII, 128-40)

The narrator underlines here what is clear throughout the text. In the exploration of reality through art there are no clear distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, what is true and what is false. The authoritative epicentre of epic, its objective exemplarity, is just authorial invention. But it is not quite accurate to say that the reader is always free to choose, but rather that in some texts more than others, in some genres more than others, the reader is *freed* to choose. In Lope's parody words are released from previously repressive conventions and generic codification. This linguistic chaos, opened out in the *silva* where the *octava rima* would close it down, has positive implications for the reader, who is not caught in narcissistic stasis, but entertained by an endless range of quivering reflections.

The role of the fictional narrator and the fluid depiction of Zapaquilda are just two examples of how the analogical scaffolding of the *Gatomaquia* threatens to give way under the weight of flawed performing subjects and subjective perspectivism. The reader receives the language of the *Gatomaquia* as a highly ambiguous transaction in a highly theatricalised arena. Even the final quick-fire resolution, which brings a swift costume change for Zapaquilda ("mudó el pálido luto en rico traje," VII, 398) is staged, and therefore ultimately received as a product of illusion. Lope's parody lays bare the artificial devices of fiction and the limits of representation, but it also demonstrates how identity can be reconstructed, and boundary lines redrawn. There is much more to the *Gatomaquia* than narcissistic metafiction (Hutcheon); in drawing in the contemporary reader the poem also draws in and recontextualises its broader socio-political context.

Notes

¹Three influential texts stress the role of similitude in formal comparison: *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4. 62; Cicero *De Inventione Rhetorica*, 1.49; Quintilian, *Institutiones Oratoriae* 5.11.24.

²The 'open-signified' has become almost synonymous with the aggressive separation of word and world that characterises Gongora's ambiguous representation of the unstable relationship between the early modern subject and his environment.

³The poem is included in Lope's final lyric anthology, the *Rimas humanas y divinas del licenciado Tomé de Burguillos*. Juan Manuel Rozas' historico-biographical approach reads the collection in the context of the issues informing a *ciclo de senectute* 1627-1635 (71-383), an approach subsequently developed by, among others, Maria Grazi Profeti.

⁴The disintegration of faith in analogic structures in the Baroque is discussed by Antonio Carreño ("Of 'Orders' and 'Disorders,'" 142-43) who develops Michel Foucault's observations on the significant role played by similitude in the epistemology of Western Knowledge. Foucault identified an epistemological shift in which representation replaces resemblance.

⁵This constitutes a significant strand of Antonio Sánchez Jiménez's argument (227-36) for whom the poem is a parody of Lope's own earlier self-representation and of *cultista* poetry. For Celina Sabor de Cortázar the poem is a post-Dorotea text, a final version of the Elena Osorio affair.

⁶It is worth noting that Felipe Pedraza's reading has the added merit of connecting the *Gatomaquia* to the other poems of the *Burguillos* anthology as part of a larger transformative project; namely, the metamorphosis of Lope's artistic creation.

⁷Alberto Acereda (1990, 184) notes an unfortunate resemblance between Marcelo Blázquez Rodrigo's line of argument as first announced in his 1985 doctoral thesis and the *Introduction* to Sabor de Cortázar's edition.

⁸A less popular (and somewhat less compelling) argument is advanced by Acereda (1990 and 1996) who encourages a reading of the poem within the trajectory of other burlesque epics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with a particular emphasis on how a comparison of the *Gatomaquia* with Cintio Merotisso's *Gaticida* can illuminate the creative process informing Lope's text.

⁹Even the most recent edition of the *Burguillos* anthology (Rozas and Cañas Murillo 2004) omits the *Gatomaquia*.

¹⁰Aside from the fact that the opening of the *Gatomaquia* delineates a very clear poetic trajectory, the following is also significant: the location of the *Gatomaquia* within the anthology (it is included as no. 164 of the 168 poems included in the *Rimas humanas*, which is followed by the 11 poems of the *Rimas Divinas*) and the fact that *Burguillos* dedicates sonnet no. 49 "A la sepultura de Marramaquiz, gato famoso en lengua culta, que es la que ellos se entienden."

¹¹The article in question argues that the parodic anthology is so radically and perversely fashioned that its disorienting author-speaker-text-reader paradigm depends greatly upon a paradoxical engagement with the reader's horizon of *non*-expectations. The case is made through an analysis of several

of the sonnets, but is more effectively demonstrated within the absurd frame of the *Gatomaquia*.

¹²All references to the text are taken from Sabor de Cortázar's edition.

¹³Parody as the authorised transgression of medieval carnival culture is central to the theory of Mikhael Bakhtin.

¹⁴This is entirely in keeping, of course, with the etymological root of the term 'parody' and the contradictions surrounding it (see Rose 6-19).

¹⁵Conchado's analysis of generic experimentation in the *Gatomaquia* (421-24) recognises that the shift from parody to satire is realised in great part through the often chaotically conveyed clash of past (epic conventions) and present (contemporary allusion).

¹⁶Conchado argues that the title is the "primera pista que tiene el lector sobre lo que le espera, y es suficiente, en realidad, para comunicar su género" (431). This undermines to a great extent the significance of the opening sonnet, as well as the place of the poem within the *Burguillos* anthology.

¹⁷See Sabor de Cortázar (27-33) for a brief analysis of how the poem simultaneously adheres to and inverts the canonic norms of epic, and consult Conchado (455-66) for a more detailed study of the poem's opening.

¹⁸According to Donatus and Servius these verses were written by Virgil but deleted by his editors. Austin synthesises the argument and concludes against Virgilian authorship.

¹⁹Antonio Carreño has emphasised the fluid nature of Lope's "yo lírico" in his many articles on the poet. See, among others, "Los mitos del yo lírico: *Rimas* (1609) de Lope de Vega," (1995); "'Que érades vos lo más sutil del mundo': De Burguillos (Lope) y Quevedo," (2002), which is an expanded version of his earlier "Los engaños de la escritura: *Las Rimas de Tomé de Burguillos* de Lope de Vega," (1981).

²⁰Conchado refers to the confusion of signs here as "una tergiversación que anuncia el trastorno de textos y perspectiva que efectúa la obra" (460).

²¹On this topic see Conchado (472), and Sánchez Jiménez (230-32).

²²Acereda (1990) accepts these verses as key to the text's generic affiliation, noting three episodes in which Lope's poem and Homer's coincide: when Marramaquiz goes to see Zapaquilda at the start, when the armies prepare for war, and, finally, at the moment of divine intervention.

²³Reyes Vila-Belda has analysed the names of the cats in order to reveal the contribution of the naming process to the text's humour, and to its parodic purpose.

²⁴I have discussed elsewhere the significance of Polyphemus's specular moment within Góngora's *Fábula* and the models that inform the reader's understanding of it (Torres 2006, 71-72).

²⁵See Norden who argues that *Polifemo* can be read as another anagram of Lope.

²⁶See, for instance, *Aeneid*, 10, 454-56 where Turnus attacking Pallas is compared to a lion charging at a bull. The extended comparison of a hero slaying the enemy on the battlefield echoes Homer's *Illiad*. See, for instance, 5,161-64 and 16, 487-89. In each case the bull is, or will be, dead.

²⁷Norden (45-46) draws our attention to the first editor's mis-interpretation of this reference and emphasises the possible symbolic identification of

Marramaquiz with Lope via the Polyphemus allusion (she refers to the play *Las burlas de amor* in which the Polyphemus character seems to represent Lope in the Elena Osorio affair).

²⁸This is a theme which pervades the *Burguillos* sonnets to Juana. See especially no. 7 “Bien puedo yo pintar una hermosura” and the relevant discussion in Torres (forthcoming *Tamesis*).

²⁹See for instance at *silva* II, 6 ff and *silva* III, 171ff. There is also an unsettling system of correspondences announced in these mythological allusions (embracing *eros*, violence and abduction), which anticipates events in Lope’s poem.

³⁰I am grateful to Professor Ángel García of University College London for drawing my attention to the insistence on this terminology in the contracts of actors in the period.

³¹At other moments in the text Marramaquiz is revealed, through his familiarity with Garcilaso, to epitomise the ambivalence of emulative poetics. Thus Micifuf’s re-elaboration of Garcilaso Sonnet X at *silva* 2, 54 (“Dulce señora, dulce prenda mía”) is transformed, quite literally at (Virgilian) source, by the jealous Marramaquiz and culminates in a sacrificial vision of Dido on the pyre (*silva* 2, 194: “Ay dulces prendas cuando Dios quería”). Pigman (16) finds evidence in Cicero, Nonnius and Pliny to suggest that there existed a moral ambiguity at the heart of *aemulatio* that was due to the concept’s association with envy. If we accept Góngora’s jealous lover Polyphemus as a figure for the envious, emulative poet (see Torres 2006), then the Marramaquiz/*Polifemo* identification of the *Gatomaquia* acquires a provocative metapoetic depth.

³²Narrator interventions throughout the text are numerous and take several forms, emerging as destabilising interrogatives (e.g. 1, 282); thematic reinforcements (e.g. 4, 355); generic parodies (e.g. 4, 1-71); and manipulative, self-conscious moments of textual analysis (e.g. 7, 77ff).

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