

# THE RHETORIC OF DESIRE AND MISOGYNY IN *JARDÍN DE VENUS*

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In a lecture called "Spanish Literary Historiography: Three Forms of Distortion" (1967), Keith Whinnom affirmed that one of these distortions was the critical and editorial disdain for the rich tradition of early Spanish writing that deals openly with the representation of sexuality. In the intervening quarter of a century, the situation has changed somewhat with the publication of volumes such as the 1983 anthology, *Poesía erótica del siglo de oro*; and more recently, the 1990 issue of *Edad de Oro* dedicated to the topic of "El erotismo y la literatura clásica española."<sup>1</sup> In addition, feminism and gender studies have given new respectability, desirability (and perhaps marketability) to the task of analyzing texts that were previously thought too prurient to engage the serious critic's attention. Nevertheless, for the most part, critics still practice a type of cultural platonism when approaching Golden Age poetry; and literature of an obscene nature is still placed at the periphery of our scholarly endeavors. While there is no denying that most readers are culturally conditioned to experience discomfort in confronting texts that are frankly sexual in theme, we cannot ignore the fact that this type of literature, especially in verse form, was cultivated by many of the major literary figures throughout the Middle Ages and the Golden Age. Renaissance Spain in particular seems to have been tolerant of ribald discourse, as witnessed by no less a figure than Diego Hurtado de Mendoza who wrote a number of *poesías satíricas y burlescas* that circulated openly.<sup>2</sup> Later in the seventeenth-century when the cultural and religious climate became much less tolerant, this type of poetry continued to flourish under the pen of all the major poets, notably Luis de Góngora and Francisco de Quevedo. The poetry that openly portrays sexuality cannot, then, be dismissed as marginal. It constituted an integral part of the poetic practice of the time, situated in the rather porous border between what was forbidden and what was permissible.

In this article I deal primarily with the collection known as *Jardín de Venus* published anonymously in the second half of the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The allusion to Venus in the title of the anthology immedi-

ately alerts us to its erotic content. No less suggestive is the word *jardín* with its connotations of fertility and Edenic delight. The association between gardens and sexual activity was common at the time, as exemplified by Lope's celebrated ballad "Hortelano era Belardo" whose horticultural images are replete with salacious innuendo. What interests me is not just the overtly licentious nature of the verses but the fact that in the poetry of *Jardín de Venus*, the careful reader will encounter a convergence of poetic discourses prevalent during the Golden Age. More importantly, these varied discourses are informed by attitudes toward the role of women and the feminine body, attitudes that merit our attention.

One of the problems with approaching a collection such as *Jardín de Venus* is one of terminology. The poetry has been called "erotic" but the term proves singularly inadequate since, in the Renaissance, it could be applied to all amatory literature. In 1614, for example, the classicist poet Esteban Manuel de Villegas (1589-1669) wrote a collection of *culto* poetry called *Las Eróticas o Amatorias*, the title of which clearly establishes the synonymy and interchangeability of the terms "erotic" and "amatory." The eroticism of *Jardín de Venus* is not, of course, that found in so much of the love poetry of the Golden Age. The eternal lament of the poet in Petrarchan lyric and its repertoire of images present a longing for a union with the beloved that can never be consummated. This "orthodoxy of frustration"<sup>4</sup> produces erotic tension and a language of desire in the poetry of a Garcilaso or an Herrera, but in ways that are very different from the open portrayal of lust and sexuality in *Jardín de Venus*. According to Deborah Shuger, it is misleading to presuppose that the longing for the absent lady that is found in so many early modern texts is sexual desire (that is, based on genital arousal). Shuger claims that desire was not identified with sexuality until the late seventeenth century and thus, the erotic was not viewed as essentially sexual during the Renaissance.<sup>5</sup> The discourses of desire were informed rather by religion, philosophy, medicine, rhetoric, and politics. According to Shuger, "The history of eros (as opposed to a history of sex) concerns the changing functions of the discourses of desire with respect to the totality of available discourses, that is, with respect to a specific culture" (273). Underlying the imprecise nature of the terminology and the multiplicity of the discourses of desire is the underlying question of whether we can, in the twentieth century, accurately identify what was or was not erotic (however we may understand the term) in other eras and cultures. To phrase the question differently: is eroticism a transhistorical notion? In art, for example, we now view many Renaissance paintings through what can be called an aesthetizing distance, ignoring the likelihood that some masterpieces by a Titian

and even a Velázquez may have been meant primarily for the private enjoyment and arousal of powerful patrons.<sup>6</sup> The seventeenth-century painter Francisco Pacheco certainly implies that this was the case when he denounces those artists "que se han extremado con la licenciosa expresión de tanta diversidad de fábulas . . . cuyos cuadros ocupan los salones y camarines de los grandes señores y príncipes del mundo."<sup>7</sup>

Some historians and critics have dated the origins of modern pornography in the Renaissance.<sup>8</sup> In the last century, Jacob Burkhard, for one, suggested that the humanist embrace of classical culture led ultimately to a form of paganism. This paganism would in the long run manifest itself in texts that can be designated as obscene or pornographic. After all, the imitation of classical authorities would not have been limited to only proper, respectable works with an ennobling and didactic intent. There was the tantalizing example and authority of Ovid, Lucian, Martial and Catullus, to mention only a few. The evocation of classical models provided a way of escaping censorship, as the following passage from the *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (1563) suggests:

Books which professedly deal with, narrate or teach things lascivious or obscene are absolutely prohibited, since not only the matter of faith but also that of morals, which are usually easily corrupted through the reading of such books, must be taken into consideration, and those who possess them are to be severely punished by the bishops. *Ancient books written by the heathens may by reason of their elegance and quality of style be permitted, but by no means read to children.* (qtd. in Findlen 55, emphasis added).

As this passage indicates, the imitation of classical models in the pursuit of elegance and quality of style afforded a respectable cover or pretext for composing literature with a libidinous content. Again, we find an analogy in the visual arts produced during the Golden Age. As Pierre Civil has shown, subjects taken from classical mythology were often used in painting as a pretext for lascivious display: "Ya en el siglo XVI se percibió la utilización de la mitología como un simple pretexto y un soporte privilegiado del erotismo" (41).

The cultivation of texts with a pornographic content may be considered part of the humanist endeavor. Nowhere is this clearer than in Italy, where we have the colorful example of Pietro Aretino, a man celebrated by some as a supremely learned man (he was the author of religious treatises, meriting even the title of "the Divine Aretino"), but also known as "the most horrible, vituperous and ribald tongue

ever born."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the most famous work associated with Aretino is a collection of sonnets that verbally supplements engravings depicting various sexual poses. Aretino's illustrated *sonneti lussuriosi* (1527) originated in Venice but were very likely circulated in Spain by noblemen such as Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, whose patronage and friendship Aretino assiduously courted. Another humanist who indulged in prurient textual pursuits was Scaliger who became the commentator of the *Carmina Priapeia*, a work attributed to Virgil during the fifteenth century. This was an anthology of poems dedicated, as the title indicates, to Priapus, the guardian god of gardens and the personification of the erect phallus. In Italy, poets who wrote lascivious verses were said to be cultivating the garden of Priapus, as Niccolò Franco says of Aretino in *Le pistole vulgar* (Findlen 82).

The Spanish anthology *Jardín de Venus* forms part of what we can consider an alternative Humanist activity. The poetry of this collection provides a good example of the ambivalent use of classical and *culto* sources that so often characterized obscene literature. Whoever the author or authors of this anthology may have been, it is clear that they were well versed in Classical, Italian, and Italianate traditions. The parody and transformation of elements taken from various sources, from *cancionero* poetry to the Petrarchan repertoire, could only have been executed by one or more authors intimately acquainted with the learned poetic practices of the time. The most obvious difference between the poetry of the *Jardín de Venus* and "serious" amatory poetry has to do with the depiction and function of desire. In Petrarchan poetry, as we know, the lady's disdain becomes the inspiration for the poetic "sospiros" or sighs of countless frustrated lovers from Petrarch's "Francesco" to Garcilaso's "Nemoroso" and "Salicio." If the possession of the beloved were possible, their laments—their poetic performance—would be necessarily silenced. Thus, it may be said that the creation of the masculine poetic subject depends on the suspended desire caused by the absence and silence of an unattainable woman. In the frankly sexual poetry of *Jardín de Venus*, there is an apparent reversal of this fetishization of poetic discourse. The poems contained in the anonymous anthology deal with the physical possession and enjoyment of a feminine body—a *mujer de carne y hueso*—who is neither inaccessible nor mysterious, thereby countering the orthodoxy of frustration of more conventional amatory poetry. These poems address not just textual pleasure but also sexual enjoyment. Whereas the Petrarchan tradition needed to supplement absence with elaborate poetic constructs—what has been called the "rhetoric of presence"<sup>10</sup>—the language of *Jardín de Venus* is curiously devoid of ostentatious imagery and metaphors. This is in keep-

ing with Findlen's assertion that "Renaissance pornographers often presented their work as the end of metaphor, a negation of the eloquence and erudition that defined humanist culture. They loudly proclaimed that their works laid bare the truth, stripped of all the metaphorical witticism or allegories that characterized the contemporary culture of learning" (79). In *Jardín de Venus*, physical presence and possession are indeed communicated through a self-conscious metaphorical absence. In the introductory poem, the anonymous lover, the poetic "I" states: "Aquí no hay enigmas ni figuras / rodeos, circunloquios, indirectas, / sino la claridad destinta y pura" (3). With these lines, the anonymous poet clearly sets his anthology in opposition to contemporary poetic practice that favored a *culto* or "high" literary discourse. We can discern this defiant tone also when the poetic persona of *Jardín de Venus* addresses his *lectores discretos*: "Cualquiera que lo es [discreto], o serlo quiere, terná licencia de mirar mis flores . . . Mas los escrupulosos gruñidores / no quiero ni consiento que las vean" (3). The "escrupulosos gruñidores" would presumably refer to those who would object not only to the prurient content but to the abandonment of literary decorum. We have here the author/compiler's attempt to limit his readership and to control any possible criticism directed to either the content or the formal liberties of the collection.

At the same time, the language of *Jardín de Venus* often invokes the rhetorical strategies of other love poetry: the conventions of courtly love—"la dulce mi enemiga cautelosa" (47) or "Querellas vanas, vanos pensamientos" (17), and even the poetry of the mystics—"¡O dulce noche! ¡O cama venturosa! / Testigos del deleite y gloria mía" (47). This is not simple, colloquial, or spontaneous poetry. The poets clearly embrace the principles of *imitatio*, that is, the imitation of prestigious models but only to transform or subvert them. There are throughout, for example, constant allusions to Classical mythology, beginning with the title of the collection. Women are at times described in typically *culto* or elevated terms: "Es una Venus, es una Sirena, / un blanco lirio, una purpúrea rosa" (27). These allusions taken from high literary culture are here divested of their sublimity by virtue of being applied to an available carnal woman often depicted in the throes of passion.

The poetry of *Jardín de Venus* does not adhere to any rigid restrictions of decorum, as defined by *preceptistas*. There is no attempt to match the licentious content that would seem to belong to the popular low tradition with an appropriate poetic form, such as the *villancico* or the *letrilla*. On the contrary, the poems of the collection consistently invite comparison with "serious" amatory poetry as they partake of the very conventions they claim to avoid. As such, they

can be said to be parodic in intent and burlesque in tone. One of the curious features of Spanish amatory poetry, as the editors of *Poesía erótica del siglo de oro* have observed, is that whenever sexuality becomes overt, the result is almost always a burlesque poem.<sup>11</sup> The poetry of this collection would seem, then, to belong to one of the comic subgenres which proliferated in the Golden Age but which have received scant critical attention since. The terms *burlesco* and *de burlas* often had the connotation of "lewd" or "obscene" during this time. Furthermore, one of the categories that Cascales identifies as proper for comedy is "cosas del cuerpo."<sup>12</sup> This is different from the Renaissance poetry of France and Italy, where the explicit evocation of sex is possible in the serious, "high" poetry of a Ronsard, for example. By contrast in Spain, it is almost exclusively within low, comic, burlesque genres—those that deal with the portrayal of a world upside down—that the frank representation of sexuality was allowed to appear. There are, of course, exceptions and, as stated before, the borders between what was proscribed and what was allowed were fluid. The language of *Jardín de Venus* is, however, not exclusively that of low popular culture, nor is it truly carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian sense. That is, while it does emphasize what Bakhtin calls the lower bodily stratum, it is not truly a manifestation of popular culture but is produced rather within the same social/intellectual context that produced respectable, canonical verse. Its purpose is laughter, yes, but it is not the laughter of the marketplace since the wit of these verses is determined by their stance vis-a-vis the canonical model of lyric love poetry. At work is a type of imitatio that would have its culmination in the Baroque. As Aurora Egido puts it:

En el campo burlesco, el rebajamiento de los materiales nobles opera cambios espectaculares, gracias a la ruptura estilística o a los encuadres . . . La poesía barroca es una constante búsqueda de temas y formas nuevas, pero el hallazgo reside, en numerosas ocasiones, en el desafío de transformar los materiales previos gracias a las técnicas de yuxtaposición o de fundido que rompen la *rota* estilística o la tradicional división de los géneros. (88-89)

The poetry of *Jardín* anticipates the poetry of the Baroque in the manner in which it dissolves the boundaries between high and low culture, and explores new genre territories. This poetry, then, represents not so much a repudiation of sublime verse but rather an alternative, parallel or supplemental discourse, reminding us of the etymology of the word "parody." *Parodeia* can mean either "countersong" referring to a composition written in opposition to a previous one, or it can

describe a composition meant to parallel or complement another text (Hutcheon 32).

The ambiguity of discourse and the resulting instability of genre are important considerations, but not more so than the attitudes toward women and sexuality reflected in this poetry. Barbara Johnson has said that literature is "not only a thwarted investigator but also an incorrigible perpetrator of the problem of sexuality" (13). Renaissance poetic practice is certainly no exception. Indeed, the love lyric of the sixteenth century, according to Ann Rosalind Jones, centralizes socio-sexual difference as no other literary mode does (7). The amatory poetry cultivated by Petrarch and his numerous followers is clearly gendered. As suggested before, the construction of the male poetic persona in Petrarchan poetry depends on the textual fragmentation and textual subjugation of the feminine persona. We can see this most clearly in the mythological figure that seems to best represent Petrarchist longing: Daphne. As one of the central feminine myths in Petrarchan poetry, Daphne is a figure whose very feminine shape and essence were sacrificed and transformed into nothing less than the laurel tree, symbol of masculine fame and poetic self-fashioning.<sup>13</sup> Daphne, the quintessential symbol and victim of masculine desire, disappears from the *Jardín de Venus*, where women themselves are frequently portrayed as the active pursuers of sexual encounters. Furthermore, the anonymity of the poems precludes any sense of a historical or individualized male persona attached to these verses. One of the results is that women seem to be presented as relatively equal partners in sexuality. The deity who presides throughout the collection is, after all, Venus, the goddess of feminine desire. In the poem that serves as prologue to the entire collection, the anonymous poet appears to directly address women as both agents of desire and readers of his poetic text:

La dueñas y doncellas que desean,  
 aunque no sean hermosas, ser amadas,  
 perpetuamente este mi libro lean.  
 Y las que de hermosura son dotadas,  
 porque no basta sola la hermosura,  
 aquí hallarán mil gracias derramadas. (3)

There is ambiguity in the first lines through the use of hyperbaton. The poet seems to be addressing women "que desean," women as desiring subjects. This immediate impression is corrected but not eliminated in the completion of the clause, "Las dueñas y doncellas

que desean . . . ser amadas." An association is made between pleasure and literary activity. The author claims a didactic dimension for his book, which he presents as a manual or *ars amatoria* to be used primarily by women who wished to be loved. This is the inverse of Petrarchan poetry that purports to chronicle a male subject's erring passion: Garcilaso's "Cuando me paro a ver los pasos," for example. Implicit in Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and in the poetry of his followers is a warning to other (presumably male) readers not to make the same mistake. This admonition is often quite dramatic as Góngora's "La dulce boca que a gustar convida" makes clear with the lines "amantes no toquéis si queréis vida" (135). In *Jardín*, it is the women who are addressed and invited to partake of sexual pleasures. There is also in the introductory poem of the anthology an indirect allusion to poetic competence or wit. In order for women to be desirable and to experience pleasure, the poet states, beauty is not enough. Of equal importance is the woman's ability to appreciate the "gracias" of the poems. This idea is continued in the next lines:

Espero contentar a las discretas;  
y si alguna huyere de mis flores,  
será de las mohínas indiscretas.  
Si no, muéstrenos ella otras mejores,  
o, a lo menos, confiese si en la cama  
contenta quedaría con peores. (3)

The use of "flores" acquires in this poem several meanings. First of all, it evokes the garden of the title and as such is charged with multiple sexual connotations: pollination, cultivation, watering, fertilization, etc. *Flores* like the *gracias derramadas* or delights mentioned before refer, therefore, to the poet's sexual prowess, his fertility, his strewn seed, and his ability to satisfy: "Espero contentar a las discretas." At the same time, the satisfaction invoked is not merely sexual but also literary or textual, for *flores* allude to the poems themselves. The words *flor*, *florilegium* and *floresta* at the time, and less frequently now, referred to a collection or anthology of poems generally dealing with the same topic. In the introductory poem to the *Jardín*, of equal importance is the invitation to the female reader to display her own flowers, both sexual and textual: "Muéstrenos ella otras mejores," in the sense of "If she is not pleased with my textual/sexual prowess, then let her show us how it's really done." Again, this furthers the association between text and body, between sexual and verbal performance. This is an invitation to discourse and intercourse.<sup>14</sup>



There is a great temptation when reading this poetry to celebrate the seemingly liberated stance expressed in the verse; to view it, as I did in an earlier study, as a poetry written against the grain. Could this poetry represent a site of contestation for prevailing attitudes toward women's sexuality; a new amatory discourse that appropriates and reconstitutes the language of learning and cultured poetry—the language of the center, as it were? Beyond the introductory poem already commented, there are other sonnets in the collection that would seem to justify the interpretation of this type of poetry as a liberating representation of feminine desire. One is the poem in the form of a dialogue between a man contemplating a naked woman who is in turn contemplating herself in a mirror.

- ¿Qué hacéis, hermosa? —Mírome a este espejo.  
 —¿Por qué desnuda? —Por mejor mirarme.  
 —¿Qué véis en vos? —Que quiero acá gozarme.  
 —Pues, ¿por qué no os gozáis? —No hallo aparejo. (12)

At first, this woman, admiring her beauty in search of self-satisfaction, seems to be an uninhibited narcissistic voice, diametrically different from the inaccessible feminine persona of serious amatory poetry. A second reading of the poem, however, reveals a poem remarkable in its encompassing misogyny and certainly one which sums up prevailing attitudes towards the female body. It is a text that exemplifies perfectly Kaja Silverman's observation that "the image of a woman in front of the mirror, playing to both the male look and her own, has become a familiar metaphor of sexual oppression" (139). Indeed, the mirror in this poem reflects a male-created fantasy whose main purpose is to authorize male sexuality and voyeurism. The woman's expression of desire is contained within the mirror and within the poem, both regulated and determined by male desire and volition. It is, after all, the male gaze that initiates the encounter. It is a ventriloquized "female" voice that responds. Woman in this and other poems is displayed as a sexual object, an erotic spectacle who in Laura Mulvey's words "holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire." (19). Furthermore, we find throughout the collection an emphatic reenactment of what Freud termed "scopophilia" — the pleasure of looking at another as an erotic object.<sup>15</sup> The emphasis on vision as the instigator of desire is a constant in Petrarchan literature as well. While the eroticism of Petrarchan literature is not necessarily sexual, it is nonetheless physical in its emphasis on the eyes as the entryway for desire. Thus, even in serious amatory poetry we dis-

cover the erotization of vision, as in the overtly voyeuristic sonnet by Garcilaso:

Con ansia estrema de *mirar* qué tiene  
 vuestro pecho escondido allá en su centro  
 y *ver* sí a lo de fuera lo de dentro  
 en apariencia y ser igual conviene,  
     en él puse la *vista*, mas detiene  
 de vuestra hermosura el duro encuentro  
*mis ojos* y no *passan* tan adentro  
 que *miren* lo qu'el alma en sí contiene. (58, emphasis added)

The following poem from *Jardín de Venus*, is similar to Garcilaso's Petrarchan poem in its insistence on the act of looking as a prelude to a possession that is ultimately frustrated:

Alzó el aire las faldas de mi vida,  
 y vi la servillica colorada  
 y la calcica angosta y estirada,  
 con un hermoso tenojil ceñida.  
     *Mis ojos fueron luego de corrida*  
*por ver la cosa en fin que mas agrada;*  
 pero, de la camisa delicada,  
 les fue la dulce *vista* defendida. (18-19, emphasis added)

The importance of vision in sexual transactions is reenacted time and time again in poems from *Jardín*. The repeated representation and allusion to the eyes, and the act of seeing point to an aggressive voyeurism that, according to feminist critics, may be viewed as a man's "defense against castration anxiety, a means of mastering the female subject." (Silverman 141). This interpretation is clarified by Laura Mulvey: "The paradox of phallocentrism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world. An idea of woman stands, as linchpin to the system: it is her lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence, it is her desire to make good the lack that the phallus signifies" (14).

The poem that depicts the woman watching herself in the mirror interestingly also dramatizes female "lack," specifically in the following exchange: "—Pues, ¿Por qué no os gozáis? —No hallo aparejo." The woman's response suggests her inability to achieve fulfillment without the completing presence of a man. The initial uninhibited self-display and search for pleasure ("Que quiero acá gozarme")

becomes in fact a projected male fantasy that depends on female passivity and an avowed deficiency. Indeed, this spec(tac)ular scene becomes an invitation to ravishing, if not rape, as the rest of the poem reveals:

- ¿Qué os falta? —Uno que sea en amor viejo.  
 — Pues, ¿qué sabrá ése hacer? —Sabrá forzarme.  
 — ¿Y cómo os forzaré? —Con abrazarme, sin esperar licencia ni consejo.  
 —¿Y no os resistiréis? —Muy poca cosa.  
 —¿ Y qué tanto? —Menos que aquí lo digo,  
 que él me sabrá vencer si es avisado. (13)

The poem, then, summarizes neatly two predominant attitudes toward women and their bodies: women are on display to hold the male gaze, and the pleasure derived from seeing is a prelude to the fantasy of rape. The display of women's sexualized bodies is a repeated in several poems, including the following:

Entre delgada y gruesa es la figura  
 que ha de tener la dama si es hermosa;  
 y el medio de negrura y de blancura  
 es la color de todas más graciosa;  
 en medio de dureza y de blandura  
 la carne de la hembra es más sabrosa.  
 En fin ha de tener en todo el medio,  
 pues lo mejor de todo es lo del medio. (4)

In this salacious exaltation of the Classical ideal of *mediocritas*, we discover a debased surveillance of feminity. Just as Petrarchan literature regulates the female body through fragmentation and the definition and enumeration of norms of beauty—hair like gold, lips like rubies, teeth like pearls, etc.—<sup>16</sup> so does this attention to the sexualized female form and anatomy reduce women to dimensions (“entre delgada y gruesa”), textures (“dureza” “blandura”), color (“negrura” “blancura”). The “ideal” woman in this poem is openly on display for male consumption as the presentation of her body as meat could not make clearer: “la carne de la hembra es la mas sabrosa.”

The undercurrent of domination and rape is also a constant in the collection. The exaltation of sexual violence is, of course, not unique to this poetry. For one thing, there were Classical precedents that authorized this rhetoric of violence during the Renaissance, the most prominent of which was Ovid's *Ars Amandi*. The following passage,

for example, is taken from the episode that describes the rape of Phoebe and Hilaira by the Dioscuri:

Though she give them not, yet take the kisses she does not give. Perhaps she will struggle at first and cry, "You villain!" Yet she will wish to be beaten in the struggle . . . He who has taken kisses, if he take not the rest beside, will deserve to lose even what was granted . . . You may use force; women like you to use it . . . She whom a sudden assault has taken by storm is pleased . . . But she who, when she might have been compelled, departs untouched . . . will yet be sad. (Ovid's *Artis amatoriae* l. 664-80, qtd. in Carroll 140)

Images of rape had multiple functions in the literature and art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The representation of rape suited political agendas as demonstrated by prominent works of art such as Rubens' painting *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* or Gianbologna's statue *Rape of a Sabine*. The rape of the Sabine women—a motif taken from an incident in Rome's founding history—was used frequently as a political allegory. It also served more domestic purposes. Carroll tells us that in 1500, Michelangelo Altieri recommended that the rape of the Sabine be mentioned in marriage ceremonies "as a way of underscoring the husband's coercive power over his wife" (144). Rape, thus, meant the subjugation of the other and the domestication and control of destabilizing elements, particularly feminine sexuality. The following poem from *Jardín* is typical of the repeated depiction of forced sexuality that strengthened a misogynist agenda:

Primero es abrazalla y retozalla,  
y con besos un rato entretenella.  
Primero es provocalla y encendella,  
después luchar con ella y derriballa.  
Primero es porfiar y arregazalla,  
poniendo piernas entre piernas della.  
Primero es acabar esto con ella,  
después viene el deleite de gozalla. (11)

The violence latent in this text is both rhetorical (in the harsh rhyme of words like *retozalla*, *derriballa*, etc.) and sexual. Attitudes toward rape can best be illustrated by citing another poem, not from *Jardín* but included in the third section of Alzieu, Jammes, and Lissourges's anthology. This sonnet uses the story of Lucretia to display open disdain toward virtuous women and to condone violence against them:

Ella [Lucretica] se enoja, aprieta, aparta y muerde;  
 mas del gallardo mozo compelida,  
 con un lento gemir sufre la carga,  
 y en medio de la folla el rigor pierde,  
 que es mujer de razón y comedida  
 y al fin, aunque lo escupe, no le amarga.(214)

This rhetoric of violence, even when not as crudely expressed as in this poem, permeates *Jardín de Venus* and is often masked in the guise of helpful suggestions to women in the art of love.

Advice to women is indeed frequently proffered and its purpose is primarily to make manifest the dominion of men: "Mujer, aunque sintáis lo que yo quiero, de agora para siempre os amonesto que no os pongáis a punto tan de presto" (31); or more explicitly, "Siempre habéis de mostrar que sois forzadas, que os vence el marido, y con reparos de resistencia siempre habéis de armaros, y veréis cómo sois más estimadas" (30). The attitude to women is really not very different from other humanist texts that addressed the nature and behavior of women during the Renaissance. What we have is the transgressive counterpart of the various religious manuals and conduct-books that circulated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, instructing women on appropriate deportment. The advice in *Jardín* shares with these erudite counterparts the same representation of female passivity and the importance of never displaying her desire for a man. To express any type of longing for a man, even when the purpose is matrimony is an affront to conceptions of feminine *honestidad*. The following quote from Juan Vives's *De institutione feminae* exemplifies this attitude: "porque no está bien ni es conveniente que la doncella desee marido, o a lo menos si tuviere ese deseo no debe darlo a sentir a nadie, porque en la doncella el tal deseo no carece de cierta especie de deshonestidad" (151).

What are we to make of *Jardín de Venus*? Within a purely literary context, it is important to emphasize that the poems in this anthology question the dominance of standard poetic practice, and as such, contribute to the transformation of poetic language and the creation of new genres. The challenge to the canonicity of Petrarchan poetry, perpetrated by poets who themselves participated in the canon, is nevertheless not accompanied by a similar questioning of social attitudes toward women and sexuality. Close examination reveals that, like the poetic traditions it purports to parody, this poetry continues to subject women to a male gaze that compartmentalizes, codifies them, and commodifies them as poetic and erotic chattel. The portrayal of fem-

inine desire here is not liberating but rather may be read as a strategy to neutralize a desire that was deeply threatening to the claims of masculine preeminence by controlling the image of the woman's body, making it a spectacle and subduing it through violent imagery. The poetry of this collection was the product of a male, learned, humanistic culture characterized by the virile (and vir-tuous) cultivation of wit and the intellect, faculties not attributed to women in the literary circles of the time. Although the invitation in the introductory poem exhorts women to read and to write their desire, this is really only an invitation to participate in a male-generated sexual fantasy. Women's speech, like their bodies, was after all considered dangerous and licentious, as the Italian Francesco Barbaro makes perfectly clear in his *De re uxoria* (1416): "It is proper that the speech of women never be made public; for the speech of a noblewoman can be no less dangerous than the nakedness of her limbs" (qtd. in Baskins 189). Or, as Vives declares succinctly, "en la mujer nadie busca elocuencia ni bien hablar" (49).

Ultimately, this poetry has less to do with foreplay or the seduction of women than with masculine exchange, for it was men who produced this poetry and it was primarily men who consumed it. The not-so-clandestine circulation of this literature was part of the same fellowship represented by the literary academies where male poets vied for preeminence: which poem is wittiest, which pen is mightier, whose is bigger? This fraternity was complete with its own secret language, its own rhetoric of sexuality, its own museum of recurring fantasies. These fantasies include the thrill of the chase, the forceful taking of women when caught ("No" always means "yes" in these poems), the superiority of adulterous love, and the accompanying mockery of marital relations. The lexicon and grammar of erotic language was common currency at the time. Even in *culto* poetry, metaphoric language which at one level seemed to have an "innocent" meaning reveals with closer examination the explicit representation of the sexual. Indeed, this discourse migrated easily back and forth between the serious amatory poetry associated with Boscán, Garcilaso, and Herrera and the scabrous verse of collections such as *Jardín*. Ignacio Navarrete has suggested, for example, that even a canonical poem like Garcilaso's "Hermosas ninfas, que en el río metidas" has sexual connotations (100). "Ninfa" was a common term for prostitute, river banks often provided the setting for sexual encounters, and weeping was a metaphor for ejaculation. The transgression in so-called pornographic poetry is in fact only relative and is akin to the ease with which the representation of the female nude passes from being the object of high art to becoming the object of pornography. The edges of these categories are unstable. As with

art, the language of desire in the Renaissance easily traverses the presumed distance between sublime poetic expression to the titillating discourse meant primarily for the arousal of male readers. Both Petrarchan poetry and the clandestine poetry of *Jardín de Venus* are products of sexual ideology and politics. Paraphrasing Foucault, Pierre Civil tells us that "(E)n estos comienzos de una supuesta 'edad de represión', se observa paradójicamente una verdadera explosión discursiva. En una sociedad cada vez más controlada, a Eros perseguido no se le reduce al silencio; además, aquella fermentación del discurso llegó a sentirse como fenómeno compensatorio" (40). While recognizing the compensatory function of this proliferation of erotic language, we cannot forget that erotic poetry treats women as merely figures of speech, and the male author traffics in the positioning of bodies in a bed or a sentence. Whether in sublime or pornographic verse, the construction and representation of a woman's body is merely rhetorical. In the attempt to contain and define feminine beauty and sexuality, amatory poetry of the Golden Age—whether the high discourse represented by Garcilaso and Herrera or the openly sexual poetry of *Jardín de Venus*—takes its inspiration, its sustenance from the very group that was overtly marginalized in the society of the time.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The anthology, *Poesía erótica del siglo de oro*, edited by P. Alzieu, R. Jammes, and Y. Lissorgues, is the best collection of this type of erotic poetry. It is well annotated and provides a wealth of texts and information. The editors, however, display surprising prudery and unnecessary pedantry in their decision to translate into Latin the vast and varied sexual terminology of sixteenth-century Spain. As a result, we encounter some unintentionally humorous definitions: e.g., *flor* is translated as *membrana virginalis*, and *empanada* as *fututio*.

<sup>2</sup>Although these poems by Hurtado de Mendoza were circulated and celebrated widely, they were not included in the first edition of the nobleman's lyric poetry. According to Fray Hidalgo, the compiler: "[Mendoza] fue Platónico en sus amores : Filósofo en las sentencias : Poeta en las inuenciones : y finalmente, puro, y limpio en su lenguaje. En sus obras de burlas (que por dignos respetos aquí no se ponen) mostró tener agudeza y donayre, siendo satírico sin infamia, mezclando lo dulce con lo prouechoso. La zaharoria, cana, pulga, y otras cosas burlescas, que por su gusto, o por el de sus

amigos compuso, por no contrauenir á la gravedad de tan isigne Poeta, no se dan á la estampa : y por esto, que ya por no ser tan comunes, seran mas estimadas de quien las tenga, y las conozca" (quoted by Adrienne Martín in *Cervantes and the Burlesque Sonnet* 44). As Martín points out, the last sentence is curious in its implication that keeping the ribald verses from publication would make them even more prized and celebrated (43-44).

<sup>3</sup>We do not know who the author or editor of this series of poems was. *Jardín de Venus* constitutes the first part of Alzieu, Jammes, and Lissourges's *Poesía erótica del siglo de oro*. The editors date the poems from around 1550 to 1560, but there is considerable uncertainty surrounding the dates of composition and the possible authorship. Although there have been many conjectures as to the authorship of the poems in *Jardín*, the editors consider the series anonymous, and I adhere to this view. See their introduction, x-xv.

<sup>4</sup>The term "orthodoxy of frustration" is used by Theresa M. Di Pasquale in her article "Donne's Catholic Petrarchans: The Babylonian Captivity of Desire," in *Renaissance Discourses of Desire*, 78.

<sup>5</sup>See "Excerpts From the Panel Discussion" in *Renaissance Discourses of Desire*, 269-76.

<sup>6</sup>For example, Velazquez's celebrated "Venus and Adonis" (known also as the "Rokeby Venus") was inventoried in the private collection of the marquis of Eliche, Gaspar de Haro, a known libertine and adulterer. Furthermore, Haro seems to have had the painting installed on the ceiling of a room in his house, an unusual arrangement which, as Jonathan Brown observes, "offers some confirmation of its purely erotic significance" (Brown 295 n. 34; see also 182-83). Several of Titian's paintings featuring female nudes, including "Venus and Adonis" and "Danae," are believed to have been placed by Philip II in a private chamber (*camarín*) in the Escorial behind a curtain and were shown only to the monarch's selected guests (Civil 45-46).

<sup>7</sup>Quote comes from Pacheco's *El Arte de la pintura* 412, and is cited in Civil 42.

<sup>8</sup>See the informative essay by Paula Findlen "Humanism, Politics and Pornography in Renaissance Italy" in Lynn Hunt's *The Invention of Pornography*. I am grateful to Madhavi Kale for bringing this essay to my attention.

<sup>9</sup>Niccolò Franco in "Rime contro Pietro Aretino con la Priapea." Quoted in Findlen 51.

<sup>10</sup>See Chapter 2 in Paul Julian Smith's *Writing in the Margin* for a discussion of the rhetoric of presence in Garcilaso, Herrera, and G Findle

<sup>11</sup>Introduction ix. See also the excellent article on the tradition of the erotic dream in Spanish poetry by Christopher Maurer, *Edad de Oro* 9, 149-67.

<sup>12</sup>See Margaret Newels' *Los géneros dramáticos* (especially chapter VII) for the best overview of 16th and 17th-century theories on comic genres. Cascales quote is taken from Newels 95. For the development of burlesque poetry, see also the first chapter of Martín's *Cervantes and the Burlesque Sonnet*.



<sup>13</sup>On this aspect of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, see the articles by Durling and Freccero, and the excellent book by Mary Barnard.

<sup>14</sup>Prostitutes in Renaissance Italy were similarly expected to be adept at verbal as well as sexual acts. Lawner tells us that "their job was not only to offer erotic pleasure but also to play the lute, sing, compose sonnets . . . [these] were meant to instill a sense of repose in the lover, but also to excite and stimulate him, waking appetites and creating new pretexts for desires and their endless fulfillment" (Introduction to *I modi*, 22).

<sup>15</sup>For his theories on scopophilia, see Freud's "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 14, pp. 109-40.

<sup>16</sup>See Nancy Vickers for a discussion of the fragmentation of the female body in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*.

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