

RAPE AND REPENTANCE: VIRUÉS' EL MONSERRATE
AND READING GOLDEN AGE FOUNDATIONAL MYTHS

Elizabeth B. Davis

The Ohio State University-Columbus

At the end of an essay on cultural violence in *Daphnis and Chloe*, John J. Winkler poses a methodological question that is particularly pertinent for those of us who study Renaissance literatures while living in a postmodern world: should the author's meaning be the goal of our reading? "Should we concede that much authority to the writers we read? If our critical faculties are placed solely in the service of elucidating an author's meaning, then we have already committed ourselves to the premises and protocols of the past" (30). I do not believe we can sidestep the problem Winkler addresses. Indeed, its resolution is difficult but particularly urgent in the case of older texts that offer a challenge to modern readers both on the level of establishing authorial meaning and on that of values or belief systems immanent in them but no longer palatable to us. A reader who is guided by criteria of post-structuralist theories such as feminism, for example, may actually be disturbed by Golden Age texts that attempt to set aside gender and other kinds of difference.

But what if the author's meaning is difficult to establish because it depends on the meanings of previous texts that have informed it, and whose voices still speak in it and through it? It might appear that only a philological approach could serve to disentangle all these story-lines. In the case of *El Monserrate*, as in all of Golden Age epic, there exists an abundance of intricate intertextual relationships that problematizes the inference of meaning. In the Renaissance, as Alicia de Colombí-Monguió has written, "la imitatio suele producir—aunque no siempre—una relación funcional entre texto y modelos, una refracción de las diferentes voces que conviven en él determinando el modo significativo del texto mismo" (140). Under such circumstances, we grasp at the shape of the author's meaning by reconstructing the relationship of the text to its models,

whether these be linguistically-specific, literary subtexts or easily-recognizable story lines (what we might more generally refer to as "sources.") Especially in cases where several models play against one another in the new text, as in the case of *El Monserrate*, meaning can be subtly shaded, requiring more—not less—elucidation as the action of time erodes the relationship of models to text.

This study attempts to weigh the mandates of these two types of reading with regard to a Golden Age text that is problematic for the modern reader in various ways, and to scrutinize the advisability of approaching such a text from the vantage point of post-structuralist theories without enlisting the aid of more formalist approaches. Specifically, I address the problem of whether it is possible to achieve a complete reading—one that takes into account intertextual relationships, among other things—of a text in which Castilian male discourse erases or writes over regional and feminine identities, without entering into complicity with the author's meaning.

El Monserrate is a religious epic about the discovery of the Virgin's image and subsequent founding of the monastery at Monserrat, published in Madrid in 1587.¹ Its author is the Valencian Captain Cristóbal de Virués, who is said to have "fought with great courage at the battle of Lepanto." Because epic tends to textualize matters belonging to the public arena, that is, political matters, in ways that are intended to be serious and free of irony, this genre, perhaps more than any other Golden Age literary kind, unabashedly mobilizes discourses of Renaissance nationalism and imperial monarchy. It is therefore no surprise that *El Monserrate*, like imperial Spain, constructs a homogeneous "Castilian" self at the expense of, and in the process of, attempting to suppress difference. Within this framework, it is fitting that Virués' epic should represent the Battle of Lepanto as the ultimate test of Christian, specifically Spanish, military might against the Ottoman Turk. Indeed, a large mid-section of the poem glorifies an analogous victory of Christian forces, led by Spanish heroes, over Moslem warriors in Africa. But for a foundational text that makes explicit reference to the glory of Habsburg empire, *El Monserrate* has a rather unseemly beginning. The event that calls the rest of the work into being is the rape and murder of the Count of Barcelona's daughter by a hermit who lives on the wild summit of Monserrat. It is this hermit, Juan Garín, who

after undertaking a pilgrimage of atonement, witnesses the founding of the sanctuary for the Virgin's image on the same site where he had earlier buried his victim.

Virués' text appears to presuppose a reader who is comfortable with the homogenizing view of state and empire fashioned here. That regional alterity was "written out" of the text when Virués chose to compose his royal octaves in Castilian, rather than in Catalán—long the literary language of his native Valencia—, would presumably not be problematic for such a reader, nor would the suppression of gender difference. Both erasures, however, are likely to trouble a twentieth-century reader who, on the one hand, acknowledges linguistic and cultural diversity as a fact of sociopolitical life, and on the other, is no longer satisfied to adduce contemporary social mores in order to justify misogynous representations of women or acts of violence against female characters in the text.

The poet's choice of Castilian Spanish (*castellano*) as his literary language is by no means exceptional for the Valencian writers of his generation. Roughly speaking, the abandonment of non-dominant vernacular tongues throughout Europe can be seen to coincide with a period of nation-state consolidation. Throughout the continent, due to reasons of cultural hegemony as well as political primacy, the languages of the dominant regions—what Benedict Anderson refers to as "print-languages" (43-44)—began to be used almost exclusively for the purposes of publication. In Spain, *castellano* had been the literary language of the Court of Castile for hundreds of years, but by the sixteenth century its preeminence extended to the administrations of the semi-periphery. Fernand Braudel writes that language is an important sign of national identity, noting that "the Castilian language spread over the whole Iberian peninsula in the sixteenth century, and became the language of literary expression used by Aragonese writers from the time of Charles V" (I, 163). Having been adopted by the upper classes throughout the country, Castilian was hegemonic and became a symbol and abbreviation of the nation-state as a whole, while other regional languages began to lose what public voice they possessed as their own writers gradually began to produce manuscripts in the language of Castile. These developments cannot be divorced from the emphasis contemporary Spaniards placed on the vital role language would play in imperial expansion. The place given to language in the project of empire had

been made quite explicit (by Antonio de Nebrija and others) from the very beginning.

Against this general background, there are specific factors that contributed to the loss of Catalán as Valencia's literary language. These factors include the increasing pressure brought on Valencian writers by local publishers to write exclusively in *castellano* for commercial reasons, the establishment of pro-Castilian viceroalties in Valencia at Charles V's behest—particularly the court of Germana de Foix, and demographic changes that further strengthened the position of Castilian over Catalán. According to Philippe Berger, Castilian Spanish was used by virtually all Valencian writers by the years 1540-1550 (332-33). Virués' text was published some thirty years later, and grants more than a deferential nod to Castilian, though there are pertinent variants in the different editions of the poem. Describing Monserrat, the protagonist says:

Están las peñas como si aserradas,
 O partidas a mano hubiesen sido,
 Menos o más en partes levantadas,
 Según menos o más hayan crecido;
 Y de vellas la gente así cortadas,
 Y el monte en tantas partes dividido,
 Fue Mont Serrat en catalán llamado,
 Que es lo mismo que decir monte aserrado.

*Pero la universal lengua de España,
 De Mont Serrat llamóle Monserrate,
 Y así se ha de llamar esta montaña
 Por cualquiera que en tal lengua della trate:
 Fuera otra cosa afectación extraña,
 Y quitar a la lengua su quilate,
 Pues es en ella propio ya tal nombre,
 Y así es razón, señor, que yo la nombre?*

Virués' character takes no offense at the Castilian modification of the mountain's name and, on the contrary, seems to take for granted that the Castilian name of "Monserrate" will achieve greater currency than its Catalán equivalent. It is also worth noting that Valencia is only mentioned once by name in the text of Virués, while the poet invokes the greatness of the Castilian throne repeat-

edly. Toward the end of the poem, Pope Leo IV prophesies the glory of the Habsburg line, noting that the marriage of the future Philip III will take place in Valencia:³

Y con divino altísimo consuelo
 Y gozo en general de España toda,
 Y en especial del valenciano suelo,
 Donde será la suntüosa boda;
 Suelo favorecido por el cielo
 En grato ser a vuestra sangre goda,
 Y con razón, porque tendrá Valerücia
 En aquel tiempo altísima excelencia. (16.27)

The reference to Virués' birthplace is made in the most encomiastic terms, of course, but the mention of that "suelo favorecido por el cielo" is preceded by the "gozo en general de España toda," which joy can be explained by the matrimonial celebration of Philip II's heir. That the marriage occurs in Valencia only exemplifies the ability of a consolidated central power to reach into the semi-periphery it dominates and controls. Virués, who after all had fought with distinction under Juan de Austria at Lepanto, paints a happy picture of a Valencia whose identity is uncomplicatedly subsumed under that of "España toda," metonymically rendered in the Castilian Court of Philip II and his offspring. Thus, *El Monserrate* belongs to a category of texts that, according to Jaume Pérez Montaner, "forman parte...de la literatura castellana, de la cultura de la metrópoli" (161-62). The notion of a Spain protagonized by Castile is inscribed into the very linguistic thread of a text that also serves to "Castilianize" Monserrat, by transforming the mountain and its monastery into an emblem of Catholic Spain, revered by Isabel and Fernando as well as by Philip II, to whose Escorial it is explicitly likened here. In the light of late twentieth-century gains won by the Autonomous Communities of Spain, Virués' inclination to downplay local difference—linguistic and political—might seem to have an odd ring to it. At a time when the local language of the País Valenciano and of the other regions that comprise the Spanish State has been vigorously (though not unequivocally) reestablished, the centrist tendencies the epic promotes might constitute an obstacle for those modern readers who find themselves at odds with the political pro-

gram that informs Virués' thought. Those readers are then forced to carry out a "resisting reading" of *El Monserrate*.⁴

However, the neutralization of female otherness in Virués' text, specifically the sexual violence against women that goes unchallenged here, may well be a more insurmountable obstacle for the twentieth-century reader. After the opening scenes of sexual violation and murder, the epic displaces all the reader's attention onto the terrible remorse and repentance of the hermit Garín. One supposes the inscribed reader of Virués would interpret the poem as a variation on the story of the "Fall," a tale of penitence and redemption and, since the epic culminates in the foundation of the monastery at Monserrat, an affirmation of the values of organized monastic life over the more independent vocation of hermitage. However, the initial episode of rape could also be seen as a problem that constitutes internal evidence for another kind of reader, one who is immediately offset by gender and who may well resist Virués' attempt to gloss over other kinds of difference in order to fashion a suppositious universal subject in his text.

The rape scene in *El Monserrate* serves as a catalyst for the rest of the plot-line, but it does not authorize revenge in the text of Virués as it does in other representations of rape, such as that in Shakespeare's *Lucrece* (cf. Kahn 141). This is largely due to the fact that in *El Monserrate*, contradictory as this may seem, the assailant is turned into the victim, tempted and deceived by the forces of evil. Count Joffré Velloso brings his nameless virgin daughter, possessed by demons, to the hermit Garín to be exorcised. The Count, duped by one of Satan's minions, leaves his daughter in Garín's cave for nine days, during which time the hermit experiences temptations of the flesh such as he has never known, since he has lived most of his life in the solitude of Monserrat. He finally resists no longer, but even at the moment of his transgression, the text seems to bend over backwards to blame the woman: "de hombre, y tan bueno, se convierte en fiera / Cual si Medea o Circe le prendiera" (2.21).⁵ Garín's loss of control is encoded in language that deliberately summons images of lethal female sexual power. The young woman's subject position, not strong to begin with, is nullified by framing the rape according to a masculinist perspective. Indeed, as she is being violated, the Count's daughter remains speechless:

Volvía los ojos la doncella honesta,
 Triste, turbada, atónita y confusa,
 Como si preguntara, ¿qué obra es ésta
 Tan nueva ¡oh padre! que tu mano usa?
 Y aunque él la entiende, no le da respuesta;
 Que bien conoce que no tiene excusa;
 Ni desiste del acto torpe y ciego,
 Rendido al sensual furioso fuego. (2.25)

Like Philomela, whose rape and silencing Virués will evoke through the poignant song of the nightingale later in the poem, the daughter of Joffré Velloso does not speak and cannot do so afterward to seek redress, because Garín, following the advice of Satan who appears to him in the form of another hermit, slits her throat. The protagonist then buries her body.

Immediately filled with remorse, the hermit prays for forgiveness. His prayer for absolution, however, is an enumeration of abstractions containing not one specific reference to his own offense. Absent from his confession is any mention of the woman whose body he has violated, then mutilated (the verb later used to recall the act is "degollar"). The specific (life, woman, rape) is buried first as referent, then as signifier, under an avalanche of generalizations about sin. The impression that the reader is meant to place the previous rape and murder scenes under erasure is borne out by repeated subsequent allusions to Garín's virtuous life. Fleeing Monserrat in order to escape the just wrath of the Count of Barcelona, Juan Garín comes upon a ship preparing to set sail for Naples. Invited on board by the Italian General who leads the armada, Garín is offered dinner, which he refuses because, the text announces, he is a "varón de continente vida" (3.45). His virtue thus restored in the framework of a masculine construction that is also related to the gendering of national identity, Garín embarks on a pilgrimage to Rome that is frequently textualized as a heroic fight for his life—that is, the life of his soul. His objective is to make a full confession to the Pope, who will establish proper penitence for his sin: Garín must crawl on all fours from Rome across the Alps and back to Monserrat, where he will remain in that position until a small child tells him that his repentance is ended. The nameless daughter of Joffré Velloso is practically forgotten in the telling of

Garín's trials and tribulations, even though all the narrative action issues from the scene of her rape. Implicitly characterized as a tempting "Eva" to the Virgin's "Ave," and as a sacrificial lamb on whose broken body the monastery at Montserrat is founded, the female figure vanishes for the better part of the text. According to John J. Winkler and to Patricia Klindienst Joplin, the inscription and later elision of rape in narrative is, in fact, so common as to constitute an unsettling pattern. The rape is "written out" of the text but the erasure is imperfect, so the repressed "prior violence" lingers and threatens to return.

But if we read back into the rape and murder all the sexuality and the violence that Virués seemingly has removed from his text, that is, if we treat rape not as a metaphor for the "Fall" or for anything else, but as violence suffered in the female body, then it becomes difficult to read the story of Garín's spiritual rehabilitation with the same enthusiasm one imagines early readers of *El Monserrote* to have felt.⁶ This lack of affinity with what we might call Golden Age sensibilities is a problem which the reader who wishes to de-center misogyny or other ideologies that inform the text must confront, because for the contemporary reader as for Virués, the hermit's drama was presumably very compelling. After all, one of the meanings of the text is that of Christianity: that divine forgiveness is available to all, even to the author of a heinous compound crime like Juan Garín. Indeed, one need not go back as far as the sixteenth century to find living examples of penitence; images of Holy Week processions from the entire Spanish-speaking world readily come to mind. The religious belief system that informs *El Monserrote* may strike us as remote, excessively austere or overstated, but its fundamental tenet—that penitence and Papal pardon are effective and extend even to the most despicable acts—was an organizing principle of spirituality for Cristóbal de Virués and others like him.

Accounting for ideological difference is an important step in reconsidering Renaissance texts, but the kind of "rereading" in which I have engaged in the first part of this study smuggles an agenda into the scholarship, one that calls for an indictment of ethnocentric, sexist, and other values promoted by the Golden Age text that are noxious in that, to some extent, they have helped shape western culture and continue to hold it in their sway. The issue of

literary representations of rape is one that has real and vital consequences, for, as Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver point out, "literary and artistic representations not only depict (or fail to depict) instances of rape after or as if they have occurred; they also contribute to the social positioning of women and men, and shape the cognitive systems that make rape thinkable" (3). What I object to in Virués' narrative is, finally, not the promise of redemption for the rapist's soul, but the relentless masculine perspective that turns the episode of the woman's rape into Juan Garín's narrative, while depriving the female character of a subjectivity that alone could articulate *her* story. Expedient to Virués for reasons of narrative strategy, but disturbingly dispensable in human terms, the woman is never made to/allowed to express outrage over what has been done to her. Still less does she seek revenge, even when at the end of the poem, her father, having pardoned Garín "because God had pardoned him," finds her still miraculously alive. Instead of demanding satisfaction—something we might consider a basic human right—the daughter of Joffré Velloso, with the iridescent scar gleaming like an opaline choker around her neck, declares her resolution to remain forever within the newly-built monastery on Monserrat.

The above reading of *El Monserrate*, grounded primarily in feminist theory, might well conclude that it is the monastery, not the penitent, that becomes a metaphor or an icon for the Spanish State. Habsburg Spain, like the apparently solid and unassailable shrine at Monserrat, was nevertheless constructed on a foundation of suppressed alterities. The author of *El Monserrate* fabricates a literary analogue to real, historical events; in the same spirit that the Spanish State systematically dismantled Jewish and Morisco communities throughout the country and colonial administrations subdued the Amerindian peoples of Spain's recently conquered territories, Cristóbal de Virués sacrifices the Count of Barcelona's daughter in order to ground his foundational text. But as the recent resurgence of old nationalisms in Eastern Europe and other places suggests, otherness abated remains a potentially destabilizing force that the state must continually neutralize and contain. If this were not the case, if nationalist and masculinist values were preordained and firm, Virués would probably not have had to assert them so resolutely in his text.

To summarize: a feminist theory that "rereads" rape can alert us to textual problems that more traditional methodologies avoid; it can help focus our attention on those elements that the text covers over or appears to forget. Feminism, likewise, can sometimes point to a surprisingly suggestive correlation between the female body and the body politic, for which it may stand.⁷ It can also assist us in asking tough questions of the Golden Age text. However, though all this is true, I am the first to acknowledge that any critical reading of a long text that rests primarily on the ramifications of a single episode (in this case, the rape scene) hazards excessive narrowness. Critics can too easily raise the objection that such an analysis is too focused and that it discards too many elements, even ones that are consistent with its own arguments. Moreover, given the resonances of Classical epic that still vibrate in the heroic poems of the Spanish Golden Age, those same critics might observe that a post-structuralist reading centered outside the text does not take into account the ways in which the various subtexts inform and actually constitute meaning in the new text. While conceding that the argumentation of the feminist reading is not defective, they might contend that it lacks erudition.

We can like it or not, but there is some truth in this objection. Specialists in the field who have tried to impart Golden Age texts to students who do not have a working knowledge of the main subtexts that echo through the literary texts of the time (Classical mythology, ancient epic, the Bible) will acknowledge that this unfamiliarity makes it more difficult to achieve a reading that does not vitiate the text. In the second half of this study I wish to consider to what degree the awareness of such intertextual relationships enhances the ability of competent readers to accomplish a thorough reading of the Golden Age text, regardless of how much affinity they may have for its ideological base. One ramification of this issue might be that a conscious formalist approach, because it looks for textual unity that creates meaning, precludes the possibility of carrying out feminist or other post-structuralist readings of the text. I will return to this point later.

In the prologue to his *El Monserrate*, the poet reaffirms Horace's recommendation that poetry must of necessity demonstrate "dulzura y utilidad" in order to achieve excellence. This is especially true, according to Virués, in "aquella principal poesía llamada épica o

heroica" (503). Virués, like Ercilla and others, looked to the ancients for many of the materials they used to fashion their own poems. Writers such as Homer and Virgil provided them with a recognizable repertoire of conventions, devices and themes that smuggled the "sweet" (the pleasurable or entertaining) into the new text. By the late Spanish Renaissance, however, reading material increasingly needed to be religious or moralistic in order to qualify as edifying ("útil"). From this perspective, the *translatio studii* project underwent an adjustment as the Bible took a privileged place beside the writers of Antiquity as the other great subtext for literary endeavors of the period. It would be inaccurate to create the impression that this was altogether new, since religious epic had been written since the beginning of the Renaissance.⁸ What one begins to notice in the religious epic of these years, however, is an intensification of austere and somber themes such as that of repentance, and graphic—even gory—representations of the religious hero's torment, a tendency that later culminates in works such as Diego de Hojeda's *La Cristiada* (1611). Nonetheless, if we stop to consider that Virués' poem was published only eighteen years after Part One of *La Araucana*, a text that in important ways set the paradigm for Spanish epic of the period, and that Virués himself was a captain at Lepanto, then the foregrounding of religious elements in his poem appears to signal an important shift away from profane epic. That Virués should wish to redefine or newly prioritize the sacred epic makes a good deal of sense because by 1587 the Tridentine mandate had grown strong enough to coax him in that direction.

Virués seems to have thought a lot about how to write an epic that would be equal to the occasion: one that would preserve enough characteristics of ancient epic to qualify it as belonging to that poetic kind, while at the same time satisfying the religious demands that the Counter Reformation increasingly placed on him. These constraints may have influenced his choice of subject, but the subject in turn intensified the need to cast the religious as heroic, to make of the repentant pilgrim a larger-than-life figure. What was there in Classical epic that could serve as a model for such a hero?

Because of his travels and the almost consecrated sense he had about leading the surviving Trojans to Italy and founding Rome, "pious Aeneas" might well have been the poet's chosen example, but he was not.⁹ Virués looked, instead, to the *Odyssey* for poetic

imagination. In truth, he turned to Homer for more than just inspiration, since he patterned entire episodes of the main body of *El Monserrate* on portions of the *Odyssey*, specifically on *Odyssey* 9-12, the section referring to the "Great Wanderings" of Odysseus. Though the idea of mission or pilgrimage does not attach to the profile of the Homeric hero in a particularly sharp way, Odysseus is an archetype of the wanderer whose final homecoming is less significant than the delays and reversals of fortune that befall him on his journey, as modern poets such as Constantine Cavafy still remind us:

When you start on your journey to Ithaca,
then pray that the road is long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge.
Do not fear the Lestrygonians
and the Cyclopes and the angry Poseidon.
You will never meet such as these on your path,
if your thoughts remain lofty, if a fine
emotion touches your body and your spirit.
You will never meet the Lestrygonians,
the Cyclopes and the fierce Poseidon,
if you do not carry them within your soul,
if your soul does not raise them up before you. (36)

If Juan Garín could have known Cavafy's verses, he might have saved himself a lot of trouble.

From *Odyssey* 9 Virués takes the figure of Polyphemus, whom he transforms into an Italian cyclops named Formínolo, leader of the *lestrigones*, a monstrous people also of Homeric provenance (*Odyssey* 10). Homer's Laistrygones are giants, whose leader, Antiphates, devours human flesh. Odysseus and his men barely escape from them by ship. In the text of Virués, Juan Garín and his Italian travel companions are taken prisoner by the equally anthropophagous *lestrigones*, whose caves are kept well supplied with potential "meals" (13.55-61). Shortly thereafter, Formínolo chooses ten young men to be cooked for his dinner, then selects others of the Italians to be thrown to beasts that the *lestrigones* keep as pets:

Confusamente sierpes y panteras,
Dragos y grifos, tigres y leones,

Mantícoras, crocutas y otras fieras,
 Varias en fuerzas y armas y naciones,
 Son en aquel cercado prisioneras
 De los más fieros, que ellas lestrigones,
 Solamente por gusto allí criadas
 De ser de humana carne sustentadas. (14.8)

Formínolo picks Garín as one of the victims to be placed in the lions' den, and only a last-minute rescue by the Castilian hero, Diego Florel, saves him from being devoured.

Virués also takes from the *Odyssey* two enchanting but deadly female figures, Circe and the siren. In fine Homeric form, these figures tempt Juan Garín and try to derail his pilgrimage of repentance. Homer's Circe is a sorceress with a beguiling song and the power to turn men into swine (*Odyssey* 10). Such is the fate of Odysseus' crew. When the hero foils her attempts to enchant him, as well, she marvels at his lucidity, restores his men to their original state, and entices them to remain with her for a year, which they do, as if in a trance. As we have seen in the first part of this study, the Circe figure of *El Monserrate* is none other than the daughter of the Count of Barcelona, who at the moment of her rape is compared to the Homeric sorceress and to Medea (2.21). This pejorative characterization of the woman encourages us to view the hermit not as a perpetrator, but as the prey of an irresistible female force that transforms him from man to beast, as Homer's Circe had done with Odysseus' crew. This is the misogynist underpinning of a female representation that actually reaches beyond misogyny, since in this case it explains away rape and murder as the result of temptation by dark forces that possess greater than human strength. There is evidence to suggest that contemporary readers may have taken a very different view of all this. The poet's friend Baltasar de Escobar wrote that, by assigning the marvelous in turn to Satan and to God, Virués rendered his epic more believable, more true.¹⁰ The fact is, however, that the poet chose to represent the evil force as a woman, thereby associating her sex with diabolical power, generally. The Homeric episode, which already presents a negative representation of Circe but no corresponding atrocity, is in fact much milder than *El Monserrate* in this regard. In Homer, Circe finally sends Odysseus

and his men on their way with proscriptions designed to vouchsafe their return home.

Homer's "Seirenes," of course, are quite another matter. Scylla and Charibdis have the power to "sing a man's mind away" (12, l.50), then whisk him overboard and eat him (12, l.246). Something of this deadly might attaches to the siren that appears in *El Monserrate*, though a thoroughly Christian cosmology and demonology have overturned the pagan one so wondrously present in Homer's text. Virués' narrator apostrophizes Satan who, disguised as another hermit, planted the seed of temptation in Garín's heart in the first place, calling the Devil a wild beast, a cruel monster that with a siren's voice enchants the wisest and most valiant of men (2.9). The reader thus stands forewarned when Garín comes upon the figure of a "sirena" as he makes his way to Rome, seeking absolution from the Pope. Coming upon an earthly paradise with a palace set on crystal foundations in the middle of a lagoon, the hermit hears the siren's song, then follows it through a labyrinth until he sees her. Her beauty is equal to that of any of the women in so many Petrarchan sonnets (her attributes include a "vestidura de carmesí," "dorado cabello," "manos que a la nieve no tocada exceden en blancura," "blando pecho," etc.), and her song reproaches Garín for fleeing from sweet human love (12.52-54). An angel warns the exiled protagonist against sleeping in so soft a bed as can be found in such a place, whereupon the hermit awakens to find a "doncella" beside him. Garín recognizes her as the daughter of the Count of Barcelona, who claims to be waiting for his love and tries to ensnare him with her tongue and hands, finally resorting to tears and threats. This is a far cry from the mysterious song of Homer's sirens and their rapid dispatch of six of Odysseus' men. For here, the terrible attributes of the siren are displaced onto Juan Garín's dead victim, now demonized in a manner that seems disquieting even when viewed in terms of the sixteenth century, which are not our own. Since Garín's crime was prompted by a temptation from the Devil, Virués' text suggests—in the same vein as an old Spanish proverb—that woman is literally and metaphorically "la piel del diablo." *El Monserrate* insists, perhaps too tenaciously, that Satan is a wolf in sheep's clothing, that he can dupe us because he can take on any form. Why, I wonder, is this text so quick to absolve Juan Garín

from responsibility for his deeds? And why does it have so little to say about free will to choose right over wrong?

This question is a bit perplexing, especially in a text as religious as *El Monserrate*, which is filled with biblical allusions and figures. Far and away the most prominent of these is Mary Magdalen. In this epic, the Magdalenic figure stands for both eroticism and for the power of penance.¹¹ Virués establishes links between the New Testament figure and the hermit Garín on several different levels, beginning with the story of Garín's birth, which resembles that of Venus in all respects: both are sea creatures, washed ashore on large scallop shells. The repentant Mary of Magdala has, of course, been widely interpreted as a belated reincarnation of the figure of Venus (Malvern). The Magdalen's hard ascetic practices now cloak the splendid beauty of the ancient goddess in sackcloth. In this explanation of Garín's origins, there is already a foreshadowing of the kind of complications and the eventual *dénouement* in his own narrative.

But aside from this hint of identity between Garín and the Magdalen, the epic makes the connection between the two quite explicit in other places. For example, there is an episode in which Garín's ship puts to port at Marseille and the hermit disembarks to visit Mary Magdalen's temple and the nearby cave where she lived out her last years of penitence and asceticism. On the walls of a monk's cell at Magdalen's temple, Garín sees ephrastic scenes of the Eucharist, the Immaculate Conception and Assumption, Mary Magdalen's conversion, and the stories of St. Agueda and Judith and Holofernes. An explanation in verse accompanies each scene. The narrator seizes this occasion to make the point that poetry can prove the truth of pictorial art by joining together "heroica alteza y cordial dulzura" (6.13). He continues:

Dos cosas en que fundan sus poemas
 Los que la heroica gravedad imitan,
 Con dulce voz cantando obras supremas
 De ejemplos graves que a virtud incitan;
 Y estos, para alcanzar nobles diademas
 De eterno lauro, en todo se habilitan;
 Pues si a lo dulce lo útil fuere junto,
 En todo se tendrá el debido punto. (6.14)

This is as close as Virués comes to an art of poetry, and it elaborates on the idea of blending the sweet with the "useful," already expressed in kernel form in the prologue. The most recurrent elements are those of sweetness in the manner of expression ("dulce voz"), and gravity and exemplarity in the subject matter ("ejemplos graves que a virtud incitan"). That this formula is expressed in the context of religious ephrasis suggests that Virués automatically accords "grave" or heroic status to the sacred subject. Apart from the fact that the poet could have wished to hold at bay critics who might challenge the gravity of his own work, this passage constitutes a reaffirmation of the idea that the religious subject be deemed appropriate for the epic. As noted above, the 1580s renewed the engagement of writers with religious epic, and there followed a veritable flowering of sacred epics in countries where Spanish was the literary language.

Garín's final confession upon arriving in Rome binds him even tighter to the image of Mary Magdalen. Humbling himself by kneeling at the Pope's feet as Magdalen had done at the feet of Christ, the hero weeps ("el llanto vierte con dolor interno"). The Pope listens to "el lloro del contrito penitente," then hears his confession, ordering him to return the next day for penitence and absolution. Since the conversion scene is the pivotal moment in Mary Magdalen's narrative, the text similarly induces us to privilege the tearful confession of Juan Garín. In the same way that Magdalen's tears were said to be the most perfect confession because they were wordless, Garín's tears mark a kind of closure on his wretched past, though his tale is far from over.

Earlier I made the claim that many Biblical figures inhabit the ostensibly epic world of *El Monserrate* and that their stories inform its meaning in various ways. A case in point is the passage in which three such figures converge: the scene in which Garín is lowered into the lions' den of the *lestrigones*. At this point, the narrator compares Juan Garín to Job for his patience, while Garín compares himself to Paul, saved from a tempest at sea, and to Daniel, who suffered the same kind of torment he now faces. These are only brief allusions, and the text does not attempt to set up elaborate analogies between Garín and the three Biblical characters mentioned. The hermit points to the example of Paul because God has already delivered Garín from a maritime storm, whereas the com-

parison he makes between his present ordeal and Daniel's understandably turns into a prayer for salvation.

The suggested comparison between Garín and Job is more intriguing, but also more problematic in some ways. As in Garín's case, it was Satan that instigated Job's trials. In both instances, the Devil's motive was to devastate the life of a virtuous man and by destroying him, to affront God. But in Job's case, the Adversary had God's permission to tempt the man. The *Monserate* does not exhibit corresponding terms. The most salient difference between the epic and the Biblical story, however, is that when tempted and tormented, Job never cursed God. In the case of Juan Garín, as we have seen, there was hardly any resistance to sexual temptation, and the hermit compounded his own crime by taking his victim's life. The poet wants us to focus on Job's patience as a way of endorsing his own hero's long-sufferance, thereby suggesting his virtue.¹² And in fact, we can only find proof of the hermit's gravity and exemplarity (his "heroica gravedad" and "ejemplos graves") if in his conduct we search out the sole attribute of Job's that fits: his patience. Because Juan Garín is not, in a strict sense, a righteous man, as was Job. He is a criminal and sinner in search of the forgiveness that he ultimately finds at the end of his journey, on his return to Monserrat.

By dint of the intricate interweaving of Biblical and Classical narratives in *El Monserate*, Spanish heroism itself seems to have suffered radical redefinition at the hands of Cristóbal de Virués. For here, in the story of the hermit Garín, the poet focuses on an epic battle that has cosmic proportions, on the one hand, but which is intensely private and internal, on the other. By fashioning his hero after Mary Magdalen and Job as much as after Odysseus, Virués stretches and recombines the codes of epic to include disciplinary trial and repentance of the virtuous.

Having taken into account the strongest Classical and Biblical subtexts that *El Monserate* refunctions to its own ends, I now return to my point of departure: is it possible to trace these stories of trial and repentance as Virués has deliberately intertwined them with his own hero's narrative without entering into complicity with the poet's meaning? I believe the honest answer is no, but I do not think this entails an automatic commitment to "the premises and protocols of the past," to use Winkler's words, nor do I wish this conclusion to be construed as a call for a return to formalism. I remain

disturbed by the dismissal of regional and feminine identities in the discourse Virués mobilizes in his epic, but I think there is much more to *El Monserrate* than the problem of rape and its erasure, enormous as that problem is. That said, I take some satisfaction from the fact that the author's meaning itself is not uncomplex and from the possibility that we can explicate authorial meaning without subscribing to it.

Neither do we have to put down our pens once we have done that. This epic, the object of my study, is vulnerable to all sorts of queries. First of all, there is much in the philological study of this text that a complete feminist analysis can use. Homer, after all, is the *Urtext* for all the stories of lethal sorceresses. The *Odyssey* can shed light on some of the problems of female representation in *El Monserrate*. The danger, therefore, lies in neglecting the philological study of a text at the same time one attempts to carry out analysis that has its theoretical base outside that text. If we bring to post-structuralist analysis the benefits of conscious formalism, our work will be strengthened, not diluted. Thus, a feminist analysis of *El Monserrate* could take advantage of more traditional scholarship to discuss such aspects as the feminization of the hero through allusions to his Venus-like birth and through constant and sustained identification between Juan Garín and the figure of Mary Magdalen. Likewise, starting from a position of familiarity with *Aeneid* 4, such an analysis would have cause to point out that Garín is not a virile, Aeneas-like hero who seduces and abandons, but a character who suffers and who pays for his crime.

Those of us who are determined to read old texts in new ways do not have to remain hopelessly at odds with a work like *El Monserrate*. I like to think that it is possible for twentieth-century readers to confront a text such as this one "in acceptance of difference," to use Elizabeth Rhodes' term, not with the idea of endorsing, but certainly in order to understand the religious discourses that govern it. In her study of another neglected text of the period, Luis de Granada's *Libro de la oración y meditación*, Rhodes calls for an approach that entails "a willingness to consider the old book as a subject, not an object, as a self-determining entity of semiotic independence whose original boundaries should be respected and whose original significance can and should be at least partially recovered, and appreciated instead of altered or ignored" (45). I

would add that when we have recovered the "original significance" of that book, when we believe we have recaptured the author's meaning, it is just the first part of our task that is accomplished. Only then are we at liberty to decide what our attitude toward that meaning will be. Only then are we prepared to respond to those questions that previous generations of scholars did not ask of the text.¹³

Notes

¹There has always been some controversy over the publication date of the first edition. Cayetano Rosell rejects the claim that there ever was a 1587 edition (503), while Mary Fitts Finch, a recent editor of the poem, explains the discrepancy by the fact that the *privilegio* was issued in 1587, while the work was published by Querino Gerardo (Madrid) in 1588. Finch is correct about the *privilegio* date but not about the date of publication. The Biblioteca Nacional of Madrid holds both editions and the publication date is clearly indicated in both cases, therefore I think there can be no question that the *princeps* dates from 1587. Rosell bases his edition on that of Sancha (1805), even though he admits that it contains many alterations even when compared to that of Milan (1602). He also admits that the variants of the Milan edition are so numerous that he hasn't even attempted to show them. He adds that Sancha's edition is "la más cabal y correcta," and that its variants "en nada desvirtúan los pensamientos de Virués," so that he has decided to follow them, "excepto en los casos en que padecían el sentido, la integridad o el espíritu del original." All of this would seem to suggest a certain arbitrariness in Cayetano Rosell's editorial decisions, especially since the Sancha edition is so late (some 200 years after the last Golden Age edition).

²All quotations of *El Monserrate* are taken from the edition of Don Cayetano Rosell, BAE 17 (Madrid: Rivadeneyra, 1851). In my text the Canto number will be indicated first, followed by octave, in this case, 5.10-11. I have modernized the usage of "u" and "v," and have added accents where necessary. I wish to call attention to the fact that the second octave (emphasis mine) does not appear in any edition prior to that of Sancha (1805), which Rosell takes to be completely reliable. I think we must question, however, whether the octave was composed by Virués or whether it was added by Sancha. The nineteenth century, after all, had its own reasons for republishing epics of the Golden Age, not the least of which was to construct a genealogy for the full-blown nineteenth-century nationalist conception of Spain.

³The marriage of Philip III and Margarita de Austria did indeed take place in Valencia in 1599. One wonders how Virués could know this when preparing his manuscript for publication in the late 1580s, unless, perhaps, because the marriage was pre-arranged.

⁴The idea of a "resisting reading" is, of course, not a new one. Feminists have propounded such a reading of male-authored texts for some time. See Judith Fetterley.

⁵It is perhaps not a coincidence that this was one octave that Virués rewrote to accentuate the demonized representation of the woman. In the 1588 edition the wording is "se convirtió en una brava fiera." The Milan edition shows the emendation, which has appeared in all subsequent editions of the poem.

⁶I am engaging here in a "rereading" of the rape scene of *El Monserrate*, Canto 2, according to the methodology proposed by Higgins and Silver, Introduction.

⁷The body politic as political metaphor is much older than the more specific use I allude to here. For the traditional use, see Hale 1971; and for one of many examples of the use feminists have made of this metaphor, see Kaminsky.

⁸Important models from the Italian Renaissance were Sannazaro's *De partu virginis* (1526), the *Carmen Paschale* of Sedulius, Macario Muzio's *De triumpho Christi* (1499), and the *Cristias* of Marco Girolamo Vida (1535). The catalogue of Spanish epic poems included at the end of Frank Pierce's *La poesía épica del Siglo de Oro* (1968) shows abundant examples of religious epics from early in the sixteenth century and continuing to appear well into the seventeenth.

⁹Mary F. Finch compares Virués' poem to the *Aeneid* and Philip II to Augustus. According to Finch, examples of Virgil's influence in *El Monserrate segundo* include: Garín's being torn between God and the Devil, his recounting of the story of his life, his being warned by a groaning voice from a cave telling him that he has no place in paradise, a dream telling him to continue on his original plan, the Magdalene's appearance in Garín's dream warning him of his danger, and the fact that "the future is revealed to both Aeneas and Garín" (29-32). While these similarities between the *Aeneid* and *El Monserrate* are real enough, I believe they are traceable in large part to conventions of epic, generally, and that the case for influence is much stronger between the *Odyssey* and Virués' poem.

¹⁰Escobar's letter (which says that "lo verisimil siempre en este Poema va templando lo maravilloso para que no pase al eceso, i lo maravilloso cuando parece que va a eceder, atribuyendosse a Dios, o al Demonio, se salva con lo verisimil, esto se vee bien en la estança ultima del Canto primero, que comiença...diziendo lo que Satanas puede y obra con estimu-

lo de hermosura en nuestra flaqueza") appears for the first time in the 1609 edition. It has not been reprinted in any modern edition.

¹¹For a feminist "re-visioning" of the Magdalenic figure, see Davis: 38-48.

¹²Moshe Greenberg writes that the Book of Job is far more complex than the "late passing reference to Job's patience" would have it (283). By the time Virués writes, the virtue most commonly associated with the Job figure is his patience, yet the biblical character is so much richer than this.

¹³This article is part of a book-length study on the writing of identity in Golden Age epic which I am preparing. It was written with the help of a Seed Grant from The Ohio State University, a grant from the Program for Cultural Cooperation Between Spain's Ministry of Culture and United States' Universities, and a travel grant from the Tinker/Latin American Studies Program at The Ohio State University.

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