

**Notions of Man and Manhood in Seventeenth-century Iberia:
the Nobleman of *La margarita del Tajo que dio nombre a Santaren*
of Ángela de Azevedo**

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ABSTRACT: This essay examines notions of man and manhood in the plays of the Ángela de Azevedo, in particular *La margarita del Tajo que dio nombre a Santaren*, Azevedo's least-known and least-studied work. This essay considers the portrayal of the nobleman in this work as a representation of Spain's and Portugal's troubling realities of decadence and perceived effeminacy. Additionally, it considers how Azevedo participates in current debates on masculinity by incorporating a close reading of the characterization of Britaldo, the main male protagonist. The analysis reveals Azevedo's extraordinary boldness and open criticism of all men, sparing no disapproval toward the men of Portugal, her otherwise beloved country. Ultimately, in a society ruled by male disorder, only the dignified behaviour of women meets noble precepts of male conduct.

KEYWORDS: *La margarita del Tajo que dio nombre a Santaren*, Ángela de Azevedo, Masculinity, Effeminacy, Spanish *comedia*.

In the last few decades, the few women writers of early modern Iberia have been the focus of intense scholarly research.¹ This recent attention has not only brought forth some of the most interesting, yet virtually unknown, women writers, but has also provided an opportunity to learn about their lives and times from a feminine perspective. Among them, we find the Portuguese born Ángela,² who, along with her

¹ Anthologies of the works produced by early modern women writers are now available in modern editions. See, for instance, Lola Luna, Teresa Soufas, or Amy Kaminsky. A renewed appreciation for their lives and works has given rise to a myriad of historical and literary studies. See, among others, *Zayas and Her Sisters*, ed. Judith Whitenack and Gwyn Campbell; *Entre la rueca y la pluma*, ed. Evangelina Rodríguez Cuadros and María Haro Cortés; *Dramas of Distinction: A Study of Plays by Golden Age Women Writers* by Teresa Soufas; and *The Lives of Women: A New History of Inquisitional Spain* by Lisa Vollendorf.

² Much like other women writers, we know very little about her. Soufas has collected few biographical details from very brief entries on encyclopaedias or catalogues. We know that she was a noblewoman, born in Lisbon at the beginning of the seventeenth century. She married an aristocrat, had a daughter, but upon her husband's death, both her and her daughter entered a Benedictine convent. We can assume that she spent the remainder of her life there.

writerly contemporaries, contributed three plays to early modern theatre: *Dicha y desdicha del juego y la devoción de la Virgen*, *La margarita del Tajo que dio nombre a Santarén* and *El muerto disimulado*. Although there are no references to the place or date of her texts' publications, it is estimated that Azevedo composed her plays during her court service to Philip IV's wife, Queen Isabel de Borbón, who reigned from 1621 until 1644 (Soufas 1997: 2), although some critics have also suggested that they might have been written after 1640, in a post-restoration Portugal (Wade 2007: 326). What we do know is that Azevedo enjoyed a privileged position, not only in terms of education and intellectual stimulus, but also for her renowned beauty, wit and intelligence (Soufas 1997: 1).³

All three of Azevedo's plays reveal, as Jonathan Wade has appropriately argued, the author's fondness for Portugal, her native country. All three plays are set in Portugal and in all three Azevedo's connection to Portugal appear in the form of geographical, cultural and linguistic references. These references do seem to indicate that the author maintains a strong bond and a patriotic admiration for her country, although, as we shall see, there is also a competing discourse that is much less patriotic. This is particularly the case in Azevedo's least-known and least-studied play, *La margarita del Tajo que dio nombre a Santarén*, this essay's principal focus. In this play Azevedo depicts the story of Saint Irene, a popular narrative in the hagiography and balladry of Portugal. The work, written in verse, and divided into three acts, follows the traditional structure of the *comedia* genre. The plot is as follows: Irene, a dedicated nun, becomes the amorous focus of Britaldo, a nobleman who notices her during a visit to the local convent. However, Britaldo has just wed Rosimunda, a noblewoman whom he had pursued with dogged persistence. Now in love with Irene, Britaldo suddenly despises Rosimunda and attempts to conquer the nun. The situation worsens as Remigio, a monk and Irene's spiritual advisor, also becomes attracted to his pupil. Nevertheless, she remains committed to her faith. Remigio, unable to obtain the young woman's love, resorts to black magic, and gives Irene a poison that makes her appear pregnant. Due to her apparent lack of chastity, Britaldo declares revenge and orders her murder. Ultimately, all wrongdoing is exposed, Irene's virtue is restored, and her body, surrounded by angels, appears on a sepulchre on the river Tagus. In the end order is restored; following Irene's martyrdom and exemplary conduct, all beg for forgiveness and dedicate themselves to repentance and intensified devotional practices.

La margarita del Tajo, like many other women-authored works, has been interpreted in terms of both women's awareness and circumvention of societal restrictions and feminine desire.⁴ Yet, while this play does question and confront women's

³ While there are no records of her plays' representations in popular theatre, Soufas suggests that Azevedo might have staged them in the settings of the palace (1997: 1). Unless otherwise noted, all references to Azevedo's play and quotations are from Soufas's edition in *Women's Acts*.

⁴ See, for instance, Lisa Vollendorf (2003: 272-91).

issues, it is also a highly politicized work that probes rebelliously, not into women's roles and restrictions, but into men's roles, questioning conventional notions of man and manhood. It exposes the dark side of male centred society. These notions acquire a complex importance in Azevedo's era. The goal of this essay is to explore these issues as a deeper critique, wherein as men, particularly noblemen, become objects of intense scrutiny. Although women playwrights often had to select subtle ways to convey a critical message, Ángela de Azevedo is exceptionally bold because she does not minimize her criticism of masculine conduct. The nobleman, in particular, is exposed to severe and, at times, unrestrained attacks that show masculinity's fragility and falsehood, which hinges on the diminished status of both countries and on the consequent crumbling of manly ideals.

The main male protagonist is Britaldo. When he confides in Etcétera, his servant, he begins by narrating his quest for an appropriate bride and presents his many desirable attributes. He depicts himself as a gifted gentleman: rich, gallant, and the successor of Nabancia (Soufas 1997: 269-73).⁵ At first sight then, Britaldo appears the perfect nobleman, possessing all those characteristics essential to his status. José María Díez Borque points out that the nobility was a sector of society dramatized in order to assert its existence, and that theatre tends to present nobles in their ideal state, incompatible with the vulgar, the cowardly, and the prosaic (1976: 273-74). Among the nobility's main traits, Díez Borque names *pureza de sangre*, kindness, skill with arms, beauty, and, of course, money (1976: 274-82). Francisco Ruiz Ramón adds "valor, audacia, generosidad, constancia, capacidad de sufrimiento, idealismo, apostura, linaje" (1971: 154), traditional qualities that further enhance the noble status of the *galán*. Britaldo does appear to fit the pattern. In addition to being the only son and heir (Soufas 1997: 198),⁶ Britaldo takes the time to choose a wife equal to his rank, one with whom to have offspring, who would be "gloria de padres y abuelos" (1997: 240). Indeed, his chosen wife, Rosimunda, confirms that she is equally illustrious, possessing both, "sangre y nobleza" (1997: 630). We are also told that Rosimunda had several fitting suitors; therefore, Britaldo had to rise to the challenge and prove himself worthy of her love. According to Britaldo, the competition was fierce; by winning Rosimunda's favour, he confirmed his valour:

En esta empresa amorosa
me hallé, y en unos torneos
que allí entonces se ordenaron
salí por aventurero;
y fue tal la suerte mía,
que Rosimunda, atendiendo
primorosa a mis ventajas,
dio por mi victoria el pleito. (1997: 297-304)

⁵ Nabancia was an ancient city in Portugal, which takes its name from the River Nabán (Soufas 1997: 314).

⁶ Here and henceforth, the play's quotations are cited by verse number.

When Rosimunda accepted Britaldo as her future husband, they became the *it* couple, the subject of “mil envidias” (1997: 306). Adding to the typological work of Juana de José Prades’s *Teoría sobre los personajes de la Comedia Nueva*, Christophe Couderc emphasizes the importance of personal relationships among noble characters, “regidas por el principio de la obediencia, y/o del vasallaje, a favor de la vertebración de una sociedad ficticia que refleja una visión del mundo aristocrática” (2006: 27-8). Furthermore, decorum, both moral and dramatic, must be respected: “es decir, la coherencia interna del personaje, entendida como una relación de conveniencia entre su discurso y sus actos, por una parte, y su condición (social) por otra” (2006: 34). Initially, Britaldo appears to behave according to the convention of rank, and general principles of decorum and propriety. Indeed, when Britaldo is first introduced, we are told that he carries himself according to precept:

No consiente un pecho noble
que la fineza peligre,
por eso siente callado
las pasiones que le afligen. (1997: 41-4)

Nonetheless, the plot quickly reveals that Britaldo’s nobility is deceptive. In fact, there are certain responsibilities inherent in his rank that he does not adhere to at all. In addition to the qualities already mentioned, Díez Borque cautions that aristocracy is not based on power, luxury or pleasure, but rather on the nobleman’s responsibilities to his king, his nation, his religion and his bloodline (1976: 289-90). Although Britaldo tries to assert himself as a nobleman of physical and intellectual worth, his actions contradict his words and call into question his allegedly superior manhood.

During the long and dramatic account of his lovesickness, Britaldo—for the length of over two pages—often sighs and uses expressions such as “el día de mi entierro” (1997: 330) in reference to his nuptials, or that he finds himself in such a dilemma that he is risking his life and health (1997: 403-04). In sum, his ordeal is “la guerra en que vivo, / ésta es la lucha en que muero” (1997: 409-10). However, as it is typical of the Golden Age *gracioso* to poke fun and always speak the truth, Etcétera does not hesitate to ridicule the exaggerated nature of his master’s discourse:

Bien pudieras,
señor, en mi nombre mesmo
decir todo lo demás
para decirlo de menos,
y no estar con letanías,
digresiones y progresos,
hipérboles, elogios
y otros encarecimientos. (1997: 425-32)

Britaldo’s exaggerated behaviour must also be read bearing in mind ideologies of identity and nationhood. For Britaldo is actually Portuguese. Following Britaldo’s command to the musicians “despejadme / este cuarto” (1997: 57-58), Etcétera reveals his master’s identity:

Condición
de portugués en pedir;
daránte por el servir
No un cuarto, mas un doblón. (1997: 58-60)

Those familiar with seventeenth-century dynamics can easily recognize some of the common ideas shared among Spaniards regarding their peninsular neighbours. Etcétera's assessment of his master's discourse coincides with the widely accepted notion of a typically Portuguese exaggerated sentimentalism. As Miguel Herrero García points out, in the literature of the time, Portuguese was synonymous with *enamorado*: "fácilmente enamoradizos e imaginarios, y algo viciosos por esta parte" (1966: 168). In the characterization of the Portuguese lover, tears and sighs are commonplace signs of true pain (1966: 169). In addition, Etcétera's play on word—no un cuarto, mas un doblón—must also be read as an assessment regarding the Portuguese. *Cuarto* and *doblón*, usual monetary references, acquire an additional meaning that deviates from an apparent praise of Portuguese generosity. For it is likely that *cuarto* is not a monetary reference, but rather a reference to lodging, thus implying that although the Portuguese might reward their servants with money, they might not be the most hospitable of people. In fact, Britaldo exemplifies this when he commands his musicians: "despejad." Britaldo's abruptness underlines the precarious situation of serving such a demanding and inhospitable Portuguese master. It is certainly true that Azevedo does glorify Portugal in her three *comedias*, and that "she occasionally does so at the expense of the Spanish empire" (Wade 2007: 325). Wade's convincing analysis reveals several geographical, linguistic and cultural references that highlight Azevedo's patriotic admiration for Portugal. Even Etcétera is perplexed at his master's exaggerated sentimentalism, since, as he aptly divulges, the Portuguese language holds a certain flair for conciseness:

¿Posible es que para un hombre
decir que se siente preso
de amor, sean menester
circunstancias ni rodeos
si no decir claramente
con un portugués despejo:
"querolhe bem, acabouse"? (1997: 445-451).

Thus, while Azevedo does extol Portugal and the Portuguese language in the voice of Etcétera, the same admiration does not extend to her country's noblemen.

Nevertheless, extreme sentimentalism is not Britaldo's only flaw as he quickly succumbs to passion and becomes emotionally unstable. Ironically, Azevedo addresses the traditional dichotomy (wherein men are associated with reason, and women, with feelings) in a manner that situates Britaldo within a feminine characterization. In *Dramas of Distinction* Soufas points out that Etcétera employs terms such as frenzy [*frenesí*] and folly [*locura*], when describing his master's sickness. These are terms usually associated with a "longstanding medical tradition characterized as

typical of females” (1997: 91). Therefore, the allusions made do not reinforce Britaldo’s alleged virility, but rather suggest his deficiency in this field. Other occasions in the text provide clues regarding Britaldo’s lack of virility. For instance, and although he has found many eligible ladies as suitable mates, none has fully pleased him. The hesitation, as he states, was on his part, not theirs (1997: 275-76). We can also assume that his marriage to Rosimunda has not been consummated, since his “sickness” began the day of his wedding. Furthermore, as Rosimunda’s maid comments, her mistress’ sadness is due to “la pena esquivia / de su esposo” (1997: 605-06). Additionally, when Rosimunda discloses the causes of her unhappiness to her father-in-law, she stresses Britaldo’s *esquivanza* (1997: 703) as the main reason. This reference is not without negative consequences for Britaldo, since *esquivia*, a term generally reserved for the woman who is averse to the idea of marriage, now “remarks the possibility of impotence on Britaldo’s part” (Soufas 1997: 95).⁷

The implications of Britaldo’s feminine conduct refer to a wider discourse that hinges on imperial impotence, idleness and, by consequence, effeminacy. The lament that the urban setting has turned men into women repeats itself in a variety of genres, thus revealing that notions of man and manhood come under attack in seventeenth-century Spain and Portugal. By the end of the previous century, Spain’s image had decayed from one of pride and power to one of weakness and decadence. Many factors contributed to the malaise that characterized the seventeenth century. Demographic, agricultural, epidemic and economic crises, coupled with international losses, translated into the weakening of the empire and, consequently, Spain’s discredited position in the world (Kamen 2005: 242-51). Many critics have examined the decline of the Spanish empire and its perception, especially the role of the *arbitristas*,⁸ whose influence was felt beyond the economic sphere. The *arbitristas* were of the same opinion as many of the time: that the root of the problem stemmed from the wealth and luxury that had corrupted the good customs of men; in its place, idleness prevailed (Elliot 1989: 251, Leffeldt 2008: 465-66). Since the aristocracy was, in addition to the clergy, the only social class with the means for such a lifestyle, the criticism was therefore directed principally at them. An overhaul of the whole institution was therefore viewed as necessary. Furthermore, the accepted notion of the extreme luxury and idleness of the aristocracy contributed to the wide belief that true men had ceased to exist. Instead, noblemen, and by extension the entire empire, came under attack for their decreased masculinity and increased effeminacy:

The glory days of the rightness and justness of its [Spain’s] combined holy and imperialistic causes had slipped away. Hope was replaced by disillusionment; heroism and the “can-do” spirit devolved into the shame of emasculation. In terms of projecting a virile image abroad, Spain was forced to capitulate in the war over feminizing its enemies and to accept the punishment of its own feminization. (Donnell 2003:151-52)

⁷ In *Dramas of Distinction*.

⁸ These were writers of treatises (*arbitros*) that aimed at solving economic problems. They were drawn from the clergy, state officials, merchants and even the army (Kamen 2005: 251).

Indeed, as Donnell explains, Spain's nobility changed from austerity to flamboyance, resulting, along with their idleness and gender ambiguities, in affected behaviour, which in turn "tested the very concept of masculinity" (2003: 155-56). It was widely accepted that proper masculine behaviour was the answer to the situation, and that the model to emulate was the medieval nobleman of the era of the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella. As a result, many of the models prescribed derived from the *Reconquest* knighthood, and virtues such as martial prowess, Christian devotion, moderation, including sexual restraint and chastity, were continuously emphasized (Lehfeldt 2008: 475-79).

The situation in Portugal was hardly more positive. Since its annexation to Spain in 1580, Portugal had lost most of its empire and prowess. Much like Spain, the model worthy of emulation was found in the past feats of Afonso Henriques, Portugal's first king. This paradigm required "valentia física (o esforço, como se dizia até ao século XVI, inclusive), a fidelidade ao senhor e a generosidade gratuita (ou liberdade)" (Saraiva 1981: 125). Yet, away from the battlefield, the Portuguese found themselves unable to maintain their core values, and engaged in the same idleness as their neighbours. According to Saraiva, the decadent state of the Portuguese court continued for most of the seventeenth-century and did not improve with the restoration (1981: 133-34). Christian military heroism had ceased to be; in its place, money triumphed (1981: 135). The new man became characterized by "seu desdém pelo trabalho manual, o seu culto da "discreção", o seu gosto da despesa sumptuária, as suas "artes" de sociedade" (1981: 132). Not surprising, the seventeenth-century popular manuals of courtesy also reveal a preoccupation with this subject. In Portugal, the general sentiment translates into a longing for sobriety and virility, values of a Portugal long past. Francisco Rodrigues Lobo looks back, to "aquela dourada idade dos Portugueses" and laments that his *Corte na aldeia* offers only mere "riscos e sombras que ficaram dos cortesãos antigos e tradições suas" (71). D. Francisco de Melo in his *Guia de Casados* also expresses grief over the current state of the nation and the lack of true men. Melo's insightful advice demonstrates that there is a fine line between *lindos* and *concertados*:

Permite-se-lhe ao casado moço ser loução e usar de todos os adornos de sua pessoa que a um homem são decentes ... o concerto dos aposentos do senhor, o asseio de sua pessoa, finalmente, estas coisas que os antigos desprezavam, hoje são lícitas e não tem o vício em seu uso senão em seu abuso. Façamos diferença de lindos a concertados. (2003: 111)

Alongside virtues such as cleanliness, honesty, Christianity, and order, Melo also adds "armas que não faltem" (2003: 144), thus prescribing the return to a martial ideal: specifically, that men should engage in arms.

The preoccupation with sexually ambiguous men and with the lack of true men is widely documented in the historical accounts of both countries. David Higgs, for instance, has shown that the period of the dual monarchy was one of the most troubling, where the current anxieties translated into greater and harsher penalties for

those accused of sodomy and other similar acts (2006: 39); Higgs goes as far as suggesting that early in the seventeenth-century, there were “signs of a ‘homosexual panic’ in the Inquisitorial practice” (2006: 40). However, this does not mean that this climate was born out of Spanish rule. This was rather a concern shared by both countries, because, according to Higgs, “the height of the campaign against sodomy took place after the restoration in 1640 of a Portuguese dynasty, the Braganza family” (2006: 40).

The anxiety regarding the idleness of the empire and the ensuing negative consequences is a theme of major concern in Azevedo’s *comedia*. Etcétera introduces the problem with the assertion that idleness is to blame for his master’s predicament. In his speech the *gracioso* makes clear that idleness ought to be avoided; although he is sympathetic and comprehends love, he occupies his time with many activities, among them, the unfortunate, inconvenient and constant demands of Britaldo. The master, by contrast, spends his time building a labyrinth of woes, sobs, and whispers (1997: 953-61). Britaldo’s ideal of love, contrary to the one that Etcétera seeks and supports: one of “calidad” (1997: 954), is nothing but monstrous (1997: 971). In fact, Díez Borque reminds us that: “la ociosidad será contraria al espíritu de la nobleza ... En definitiva, es la sangre la que determina la acción del noble. Por encima del lujo y el placer está la obligación que cumplir” (1976: 298).

According to José R. Cartagena-Calderón, Lope and others insist on defending “la función de las armas y la guerra como uno de los valores supremos que orientan la conducta de los nobles ...” (2008: 255). This posture was perhaps viewed as necessary by many playwrights insofar as they faced tremendous pressure from those who claimed that theatre represented a major cause of the effeminacy of the nation.⁹ Therefore, in the absence of military activities, the *comedia* tends to construct environments design to promote the exercise of virility; quite often these include *corridos de toros*, *juegos de caña* and *caza* (Cartagena-Calderón 2008: 266-68). Azevedo, however, does not offer any virile possibilities to Britaldo. Removed from the traditional precepts of masculinity, and without any male-oriented distractions, Britaldo falls victim to feminization. Contrary to most playwrights of her time, Azevedo does not defend a hierarchical and traditional view of society as is. On the contrary, Azevedo reveals that theatre does indeed participate in the debate on masculinity by including, not just traditional models of virtue, but actual references to both countries’ troubling realities. The proliferation of effeminate male characters or *lindos* in the *comedia* certainly corroborates this point.¹⁰ It reveals that this is a theme of considerable importance in all realms of society and creative thought. At the same time, it also

⁹ See for instance “‘Un-Masculine Activities’ and Spain’s Entertainment Industry” in Donnell (2003: 65-72).

¹⁰ *El Lindo don Diego* by Agustín Moreto is probably the best known and most extreme portrayal of this character; in general lines, the *lindo* is an effeminate male, mostly concerned with self-image and attire. There are several works on this topic; see, for example, Cartagena Calderón’s “‘Él es tan rara persona.’”

offers an opportunity to examine how theatre and playwrights participate and fit within the current debates on the feminization of the nation.

It is true that Britaldo is not the typical *lindo*, nor does he reach the extremes of Moreto's Don Diego. However, allusions to his lack of sexual virility clearly point toward a character that resembles the conventional feminine rather than the masculine. Although Britaldo does not display the "narcissistic preening and attention to his clothing and hair, his gestures" (Stroud 2007: 141), he does relate to the general characteristic of the English fop as outlined by Stroud; that is, "he is vain; his emphasis is on external style rather than internal substance ... he produces nothing" (2007: 145). Certainly, Britaldo's actions and words reveal contradictory postures, which leads us to consider that his nobility is only material, and that his character is deficient. Britaldo is a rather self-centred individual, for—as we shall further elaborate—he devotes his time to pleasing only himself.

Even as Britaldo attempts to demonstrate strength and virility, his efforts are artificial and fail to meet expectations. While he alleges that he has shown his bravery in tournaments, and even firmly states that any honourable man is compelled to fight until death (1997: 1818-31), the plot tends to pinpoint his lack of martial prowess. At first sight, Britaldo doesn't hesitate to draw his sword when needed; after all, the nobleman, simply because he is noble and has honour, is viewed as valiant, and accordingly he must face any and all affronts (Díez Borque 1976: 302). David Gilmore in *Manhood in the Making* has identified that this behaviour is common to all cultures, where "a man must prove his manhood everyday by standing up to challenges and insults ... [a]s well as being tough and brave" (1990: 16). So, when a stranger¹¹ intervenes on Irene's behalf, and challenges Britaldo to a duel, the latter responds with due aggression. Nevertheless, in spite of his initial boastful confidence, he is rapidly defeated. Ironically, Britaldo's lack of stamina is the main reason for this defeat: "cansado de pelear / he caído; hados injustos" (1997: 1214-15).¹² Again, Britaldo's limitations include not only several character flaws, but also physical inadequacies.

Elizabeth A. Lehfeltdt points out that at the beginning of the seventeenth century, both Philip IV and the Count-Duke of Olivares agreed that the nobility lacked and had forgotten their military prowess (2008: 489). It probably comes at no surprise to the audience that it is Etcétera again who offers an insightful assessment on bravery. When Britaldo reprimands him for abandoning him, they end up engaging in a dialogue about bravery. Britaldo asks: "¿no me dirán de qué sirven / acá en el mundo los flacos?" (1997: 1718-19). Among other reasons, Etcétera responds that even the brave need the weak. He explains that if the entire world were made up only of courageous, and (since they are always willing to put their lives at risk by answering to any and all affront), there would be no one left. He also adds that in order for the brave to be

¹¹ This stranger is an angel sent by God to defend Irene's virtue.

¹² Noteworthy, too, in these words is Britaldo's moral passivity, for he accepts no responsibility for his physical weakness, preferring to attribute his debility to fate.

viewed as such, they must fight someone. Logically, the loser would then assume the role of the weak (1997: 1718-15). Taking into account the outcome of Britaldo's duel, the implications of this observation by Etcétera serve to reinforce Britaldo's weakness. In fact, Britaldo later admits that the mysterious competitor revealed excessive prowess (1997: 2345-47), thus further aligning himself with the *mundo de los flacos*, the very men that he claims to abhor. Once again, Etcétera illuminates the discussion by pointing out the true meaning behind the so-called obligation of nobility:

Hay varias obligaciones;
algunos tienen, obrando
por miedo de obligación,
el huir por gran pecado;
otros, que no escrupulean,
con su flema acomodados,
por obligación de miedo
no hacen en huir reparo. (1997: 1832-39)

The result is a nobleman of very little moral and physical worth. His noble actions and conduct are only simulated, fuelled, as Etcétera suggests, either by obligation or fear. Worse yet are the references to the lack of scruples and the negative implications of those with *flema*. According to the *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, "flemáticos" were those "hombres tardos, perezosos y dormilones" (Covarrubias 2006: 915). Britaldo's deficient characterization is thus complete.

¿Qué puede un viejo cansado
decir a quien la fortuna
ha dado un hijo malo?
Con los ojos os respondo,
que hechos granizos y estando
vuelto mis cabellos nieve,
me quedo un invierno helado. (1997: 2029-35)

Moderation and devotion to his faith also seem to be elusive goals for Britaldo. Since Irene will not give in to his advances, he plans a more persuasive approach; he will use Remigio, Irene's superior and counsellor, to convince her. When Etcétera replies that Remigio will not accept such a mission since it contravenes his virtue, Britaldo simply responds: "por fuerza haré que lo haga" (1997: 2366). When rumours circulate that Irene is no longer virtuous, Britaldo does the unthinkable: he orders her death of a cloistered nun, that is, a bride of Christ. In doing so, he dishonours both rank and religion. At first he uses bribery, but then resorts to violent threats if Banán, a knight turned assassin, does not follow orders:

Pero si aquí no te mueven
mis dádivas y caricias,
si cobarde las desprecias,
si flaco no las estimas,
mi cólera te amenaza,
mi rencor te desafía

a ser, mi enojo probando,
el blanco de las desdichas. (1997: 3482-89)

At this point, we can anticipate the negative implications of this conduct for Britaldo, since nobles who abuse their power and status, end by losing their dignity and honour (Díez Borque 1976: 290). However, Britaldo also discards other noble precepts, such as respect for women (Díez Borque 1976: 279). He openly rejects Rosimunda, and even wishes her dead: “¡Qué enfado! / morid vos y mueran todos” (1997: 2019-20). His courtship of Irene, on the other hand, represents an additional infraction by Britaldo; she is after all a woman of an inferior caste, but also, as Etcétera points out “una esposa del cielo” (1997: 498). Therefore, seducing her would be sacrilege. However, in spite of these warnings, Britaldo is not deterred and retorts with “amor en nada repara” (1997: 497).

The fact that Britaldo has noticed Irene in church is yet another marker of his questionable character, as church was ideally the sacred site for reflection and prayer, not to be profaned by illicit amorous encounters. Lehfeldt mentions the sermon of the Dominican Francisco de León of 1635 where he criticizes the blasphemous conduct of noblemen in church by claiming that they treat it like public theatres, with their impious actions and wandering gazes (2008: 476). In reality, it is the lowly nun Irene who attempts to teach Britaldo the dignified behaviour suitable to a nobleman, including respect for the Church. She also describes different types of love, stressing divine love, the true measure of love that neither shows interest nor seeks no reward. Britaldo, on the other hand, suffers from egotistical love, an ambition driven by self-interest alone. Ultimately, the only appropriate possibility for them is the love that both nun and nobleman share with God, Irene’s only true spouse (1997: 2558-61). Like Castinaldo, she urges Britaldo to place reason and prudence above passion (1997: 2665-75). When he attempts to take her hand, she spares him no criticism:

Tened, señor, que desdice
De una condición hidalga
acción que es tan descompuesta,
tan grosera y tan villana. (1997: 2548-51)

Christopher Gascón has explored the role of women as mediators in Azevedo’s plays. In addition to Lacan and Girard, Gascón makes use of Victor Turner’s concept of *communitas* to present an alternate model to the rigidity of society’s hierarchy (2005: 126-27). Following the model of African societies, Turner notes the maternal and feminine nature of mediation, an aspect also present in Lacan’s mediation of imaginary desires (Gascón 2005: 127). When men attempt to mediate, however, these

endeavours are always motivated by self-interest, sometimes tainted by a tendency to resolve conflict through violence, and often marked by a propensity to sacrifice the desires of women or other dispossessed characters in the name of the common (male) good. (2005: 127)

By contrast, women succeed because they display virtues such as “humility, prudence and [the] ability to model the correct behavior she [Irene] recommends” (2005: 136). Indeed, while all others fail, Irene – although temporarily – is the sole person able to convince Britaldo to behave appropriately. Gascón’s analysis reinforces that the only true noble characters in *La Margarita* are women, a trait that extends consistently to all female characters in Azevedo’s plays. Yet, Azevedo’s disapproval of male behaviour goes further than simply criticizing “male approaches to conflict resolution” (Gascón 2005: 142). Azevedo’s ideological stance is much more serious. That is, men are not only incapable of solving any conflict, they are also the main cause of disorder, since they are displaying improper conduct in every circumstance.

René Girard’s theories on mimetic desire provide explanations to Britaldo’s conduct. Girard explains that Cervantes’s Don Quixote’s desires are not born within him; rather, they are “drawn from Amadis de Gaula, the most perfect chivalric model: the disciple [Don Quixote] pursues objects which are determined for him, or at least seem to be determined for him, by the model of all chivalry” (1965: 2). Hence, Britaldo’s words imitate the precepts that a nobleman ought to follow. Just like Don Quixote’s, Britaldo’s model belongs to a heroic past, or at best, to a declining aristocracy, represented in the play by his father Castinaldo. He is a member of a nobility that has lost all lustre.

Yet, as the “*vaniteux*—vain person—cannot draw his desires from his own resources” (Girard 1965: 6),¹³ Britaldo seeks to emulate the desires of others. That is, he desires Rosimunda because many other men also desire her. Similarly, it is possible to argue that he desires Irene, because she is desired by God, certainly the most admirable model to imitate. Indeed, as Girard explains “a *vaniteux* will desire any object so long as he is convinced that it is already desired by another person whom he admires. The mediator here is a rival, brought into existence as a rival by vanity, and that same vanity demands his defeat” (1965: 7). Thus, Britaldo’s desire for Irene can only increase after he meets, what he perceives to be another worthy suitor; however, Britaldo as the *vaniteux* falls short of expectations; therefore, he is unable to defeat his opponent (an angel in disguise). Again, as in Don Quixote’s case, the distance between Britaldo and his mediator(s) is vast, and, above all, spiritual. Britaldo is unable to emulate in physical or moral fortitude the actions of the truly heroic noblemen of the past.

Ultimately, desire can only lead to violence. Girard explains in *Violence and the Sacred* that “as soon as one trespasses beyond the limits of matrimony to engage in illicit relationships—incest, adultery, and the like—the violence, and the impurity re-

¹³ Girard also notes that “Nobility as a class is devoted to vanity [and] is the first class to become decadent” (1965: 117).

sulting from this violence, grows more potent and extreme” (1977: 35).¹⁴ Violence was constant in seventeenth-century Iberia. Teófilo F. Ruiz explains its pervasive nature from the official *autos-de-fe* and public executions to its systematic manifestations in everyday life (2001: 163-86). Acts of violence “functioned as discourses of power. They reinforced specific structures of power and legitimated the hierarchical tiering of society” (2001: 165). Indeed, Britaldo’s source of desire is to engage in an illicit relationship that results in the ultimate violence: the murder of Irene. Here again, we are faced with the possibility that Britaldo’s Portuguese identity might be a contributing factor to this extreme act of violence. There are other writers who also speak of the violent nature of Portuguese men. The most vicious example of this unfortunate Portuguese vice is perhaps found in Zayas’ novel *Mal presagio casar lejos*. The story narrates the ill fortunes of two sisters—doña Mayor and Doña María—at the hands of Portuguese husbands in a nation where, as Zayas points out, “poca simpatía [existe] con las damas castellanas” (Zayas 2000: 338). Doña Mayor is brutally attacked and killed by her husband and Doña Maria, upon witnessing such a cruel spectacle, throws herself out the window, breaking her legs in the process, and spending the remainder of her years as an invalid (2000: 338). Therefore, violence exerted by Portuguese men is a common discourse in the literature of the time; violent perpetrators are able to inflict great and life-longing harm on their usually female victims with very little punishment. Azevedo’s play however, does not grant victory to Britaldo’s threats or violent behaviour. His attempts to exert power through violence are crushed either precisely by his own debilities or by the intervention of the divine. Ultimately, his violence is always defeated so that, unlike in Zayas’s novels, this male protagonist cannot realize his desires through violence. Thus, contrary to Díez Borque’s earlier assertion, aristocracy in Azevedo is not represented in its ideal state, but rather as a class in decay, much like its empire.

Azevedo’s models of masculinity fall short of her audience’s expectations. In an era that attempts to redefine and rescue manhood by means of a heightened sense of masculinity, Azevedo’s men are precisely the opposite. Although the present analysis focused only on Britaldo, the nobleman, it is clear that troubles stemming from male inadequacies are systemic. The hired assassin Banán acts in accordance with his own self-interest and greed, while the monk Remigio succumbs to the most primal of sexual desires. Other examples abound; for instance, Don Fadrique de Miranda from *Dicha y desdicha del juego* pledges his love for Doña María de Azevedo, but soon forgets his obligation when a wealthier lady appears. Later, when Felisardo offers his sister as spoils in a gambling match, Fadrique happily accepts this

¹⁴ Studies have shown the violent nature of men in women-authored plays. Vollendorf notes that Alvaro from *El muerto disimulado*, another of Azevedo’s plays, “spends a good part of the play discussing his wish to kill his sister” (2003: 276). Other similar examples abound; Alvaro has also inflicted violence in Clarindo, his best friend. In the same play Jacinta’s father chases her with a dagger because she doesn’t want to marry a suitor chosen by him. Similar situations happen in *Dicha y desdicha del juego y devoción de la Virgen* also by Azevedo.

arrangement, eager to enjoy his reward. Furthermore, Azevedo's fondness for Portugal does not extend to her Portuguese countrymen. Thus, Azevedo's preoccupation with, and participation in the debate surrounding notions of man and manhood extend to the entire Iberian Peninsula; male decay reaches beyond Portugal and pervades both Portugal and Spain. Although her male characters pay lip service to hyper masculinity as the ideal, their actions do not match their words. All are incapable of reproducing the prescribed models of virtue and the unblemished virility of their ancestors. Azevedo subverts societal order, even as she apparently restores it. Finally, male disorder is all that remains in a society where notions of man and manhood prove to be mere figments of the imagination from times long past.

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