

**The Baroque Body in Mateo Alemán's  
*Sucesos de don Fray García Guerra and Oración fúnebre***

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The opening lines of Ecclesiastes loom large in Mateo Alemán's *Sucesos de don Fray García Guerra* and the accompanying *Oración fúnebre* (1613). In his *dedicatoria* to the *Sucesos*, Alemán emphasizes the meaninglessness of all human activity, linking the material decomposition of the viceroy's body—"el mal olor de la corrupción del cuerpo"—to the overriding theme of human vanity: "que toda humana confianza es vana" (511-2). And again, at the outset of the *Oración fúnebre*, Alemán exhorts the reader to contemplate the eternal life that awaits on the other side of earthly existence: "¡Oh, temor natural de la muerte! ¡Oh, muerte, forzoso paso para eterna vida! ¡Oh, eterna vida sin temor de la vida! ¡Oh, muerte, vida mortal, que no eres vida, pues pasa como el humo de la vela y nunca en un estado permaneces!" (553). Recalling the lyric power of fray Luis de León, Alemán urges us to listen to the "concertada música de este fúnebre suceso" so that we might awaken "del sueño" of our worldly preoccupations (119-20).

Taken on their own, such statements exude a conventionality that links both the *Sucesos* and the *Oración fúnebre* to the medieval tradition of the *memento mori*, that is, to a Christian orthodoxy that is as much didactic as theological. They highlight the ephemerality of worldly concerns in order to redirect attention to the eternal life that attends the believer upon the soul's return to its true home. In this way, the chronicle of fray García Guerra's arrival in the new world, his promotion to the viceroyalty, and his untimely death are imbued with a deeper moral significance that is also exemplary. Thus, within a few lines, the *Oración* shifts to address the reader directly, supplementing the account of García Guerra's experience in the new world with a multitude of scriptural examples that underscore the more general lesson to be derived from the *Sucesos*.

This essentially allegorical reading of the viceroy's life and death does not, however, exhaust the interpretative possibilities of Alemán's engagement with the Old Testament teachings. As Juan Carlos González Boixo has observed, the revelation that "toda humana confianza es vana" may be read productively as an "expresión manifiesta del «desengaño barroco»" (91). Understood in this way, Alemán's repeated return to the problem of human vanity is revealed as far more concentrated on the world's deceptiveness than on the Christian palliative of an eternal life beyond the grave. In this baroque reading, the religious implications of the original scriptural warning against vanity persist, but in an attenuated form, subordinated to the requirements of the historical baroque as a cohesive *zeitgeist*.

In his ground-breaking study of the historical baroque, José Antonio Maravall enumerates an extensive list of what he describes as baroque *topoi*, concepts that he argues, following the methodology of the French Annales school, define the intellectual and subjective experience of the historical baroque.<sup>1</sup> The idea of *engaño* is foremost among these, but so are several other notions that, significantly, find expression in Alemán's texts: The sense of life as a dream, already referenced above, along with the image the world as a stage, a renewed emphasis on the vicissitudes of fortune, and what González Boixo identifies as the painterly quality of Alemán's medicalized depiction of the viceroy's dissected body, among others, are all elements within a

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<sup>1</sup> See especially the chapter "La imagen del mundo y del hombre" (307-51).

conceptual network that, following Maravall, frame the baroque as a historical period.<sup>2</sup> That these *topoi* are conjured up so explicitly in Alemán's text lends weight to González Boixo's thesis, suggesting that the peculiar contours of his engagement with scriptural authority and medieval orthodoxy is, at the very least, colored by a more localized historical sensibility grounded in a general sense of the instability of worldly affairs.<sup>3</sup>

Above all, Maravall's historical baroque identifies the *topos* of *engaño/desengaño* with a pervasive distrust of worldly appearances within which the problem of vanity is integrated into a more generalized epistemological failure that is to be understood in explicitly historical terms. The nature of this epistemological failure, however, is perhaps less clear. Maravall's project is largely descriptive; his goal is to demonstrate the phenomenological coherence of the baroque as a kind of shared consciousness of epoch and a sense of the deceptiveness of the world is a fundamental part of that consciousness. Yet beyond the observation of the phenomenon itself of *engaño* lies a deeper ontological question that Maravall never fully resolves.

The problem of what lies beyond discovery of the world's inherent deceptiveness is a philosophical question whose resolution requires intellectual commitments that arguably extend beyond the limits of a more purely historical discourse. William Egginton's recent book on what he describes as the "theater of truth" helps to illuminate this distinction. Where Maravall is primarily interested in a history of *mentalités* in which the baroque describes one particular moment in a longer history of consciousness, Egginton associates the Hispanic baroque with a fundamental ontological insight that, in his view, constitutes the defining moment for modernity. Interrogating the problem of *engaño* in such quintessentially baroque writers as Calderón and Góngora, Egginton discovers behind the deceptive veil of appearances not the Christian promise of eternal life in the hereafter but rather the revelation that "representation" refers "to no other reality than itself" (7). This reading of baroque *engaño* not only negates the idea itself of a deeper truth—as embodied, say, in the promise of 1 Corinthians, "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been known" (1 Cor. 13.12)—it more significantly recognizes the realm of appearances as the ultimate condition for all human experience.

<sup>2</sup> Alemán is particularly explicit in his reference to the *topos* of the world as stage: "Farsa es la vida del hombre, teatro es el mundo, a donde representamos todos. El autor y señor de ella reparte los papeles acomodados a cada uno, como sabidor de las cosas todas, en la manera que más nos ajustan y convienen sin faltar un punto en algo que nos es importante para que no yerre la farsa" (567). Alemán's emphasis on fortune as a more general principle in the world comes out most forcefully in his meditation on the fallen destiny of Mexico City: "¡Oh, México!, señora poderosa, princesa del Nuevo Mundo, pues tienes hecha experiencia que el tiempo que más brevemente se pasa es el del gusto sin haber cosa libre de mudanzas, ¿qué fue de tu hermosura?, ¿qué se hicieron de tus fiestas, tus placeres y danzas?, ¿qué de tus curiosas libreas?, ¿qué de aquellos arcos triunfales, alegres instrumentos, repiques de campanas, gallardos talles y bríos, lozana caballería y enjaezados caballos?" (569). It is worth noting here the emphasis on historical change, recalling in this way the Quevedo's elegy to Rome: "Buscas en Roma a Roma, ¡Oh peregrino! / y en Roma misma no la hallas" (340). As for the baroque elements in Alemán's depiction of the deceased, González Boixo writes, "Asistimos en este momento de la narración a las pinceladas más plásticas del *desengaño*, como si se tratara de una pintura barroca. La caza sangrante mostrada en las pinturas de los bodegones barrocos españoles o de la escuela flamenca, las lecciones de anatomía de Rembrandt, tiene aquí su imagen mejorada [...]" (97).

<sup>3</sup> Miruna Achim notes the tendency of other writers to focus on this sense of instability, which frequently is associated with García Guerra himself: "according to most of the writers who chronicled the events of 1611-12, it was fray García Guerra's incapacity and moral failures as archbishop and viceroy and his infringement of urban, political, and moral norms that caused his physical breakdown and that of the kingdom. The three orders—that of legitimate power, that of the socius, and that of nature—all became infected with disorder: the skies presented strange and terrifying spectacles, the water and the air were infiltrated with venoms brought to Mexico from remote and threatening Africa, and, finally, political and social order came on the brink of inversion, of giving way to the new 'monarchy' invented by the black slaves" (89).

For Alemán, in his best-known work, the picaresque *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599; 1604), this idea of appearances as the ultimate condition for human experience is tightly bound up with the *pícaro* protagonist's experience of the material world. Guzmanillo's autobiographical fiction is a virtual catalog of indignities heaped upon Alemán's protagonist as a consequence of his poverty and debilitated social standing. Of particular note are the instances of bodily suffering, hunger, pain, and general discomfort that accompany the *pícaro's* itinerant life on the margins of the urban world. These material hardships mark an important shift in the baroque discourse of *engaño* as the performance that coats the surface of the *pícaro's* experience of social life is repeatedly punctuated by moments of *desengaño* in which physical hardships are finally revealed as bereft of any redeeming allegorical significance. In his encounters with material privation and physical pain, Guzmanillo confronts an essential nihilism that arises as by necessity from the recognition that bodily suffering is, contrary to so much Christian iconography, representative of nothing other than itself. In the *Guzmán de Alfarache*, this radical interpretation of baroque *desengaño* helps to explain the protagonist's sense of profound solitude. Bereft of friends, family, and the consolation of a religious faith that might extend beyond rhetorical posturing, Guzmán embodies the disturbing isolation that is such a common feature of modern urban life.<sup>4</sup>

While Alemán's chronicle of fray García Guerra's final days constitutes a very different kind of literary project, this deeper problem of a baroque ontology recurs through an implicit interrogation of the exemplary claims of the viceroy's religious vocation. Key to this interpretation is the scene leading up to fray García Guerra's death and the subsequent description of his dissected body. Now close to death, the viceroy of New Spain exhorts an intimate gathering of officials to consider the words of the Gospel of John:

[...] les hizo una muy tierna y elegante plática y tal como de su ingenio sobre aquellas palabras del capítulo trece de san Juan que dicen: *Cum dilexisset suos, qui erant in mundo, in finem dilexit eos*. Ponderó mucho este lugar y el amor que tuvo Cristo a sus discípulos por los efectos que de él resultaron; en especial aquella grandeza mayor de sus grandezas, excelencia más excelente de cuantas Dios usó con el hombre, pues, estando ya de partida para la muerte, dejó tan transustanciado su sacratísimo cuerpo y sangre en el santísimo sacramento de la eucaristía debajo de aquellas especies de pan y vino para su gloria y nuestro provecho, quedándose con nosotros por manjar y sustento nuestro, el cual cría un amor y confianza particular para tratar con el mismo Dios. (530-31)

As Miruna Achim notes, Alemán's use of third-person narrative translates the viceroy's final moments into an occasion for dramatic imitation (95).<sup>5</sup> Citing the words of Christ to his disciples before the last supper, Alemán sets the terms for a comparison with García Guerra. Like Christ, Alemán suggests, the viceroy's final encounter with his retinue must be read as an expression of love for his followers. In place of dour warnings of the medieval *memento mori*, one detects in this passage echoes of an evangelical humanism that returns to the original biblical text

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<sup>4</sup> This sense of social isolation is perhaps best captured in Guzmán's one failed attempt at friendship (Gilbert-Santamaría).

<sup>5</sup> "On the level of its multiple exchanges, verbal, physical, and semantic, this scene is highly ambiguous. Alemán begins by referring to García Guerra, who in turn is referring to Christ, but, by the end of the passage, the author's use of the third person singular complicates matters and seems to designate not Christ, but the archbishop. Does the narrative refer, after all, to the encounter between Christ and his disciples, or between García Guerra and his followers?" (95).

in order to reanimate a sense of Christian charity, of a discourse that would locate in the figure of Jesus a far more sympathetic understanding of the human condition in this world.

At the same time, this imitative gesture is complicated by the larger scriptural context of Alemán's citation from the Gospel. John 13 expresses a message of explicit exemplarity that is, by association, transferred to fray García Guerra: "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you. (John 13.14-15).<sup>6</sup> The ritual washing of the feet is an act of humility that informs Jesus's subsequent observation that "servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them" (John 13.16). At the very least, Christ's exhortation that his disciples follow his example invites comparisons with the staging of the viceroy's final encounter with his people.

The larger significance of this comparison emerges with the transition from the viceroy's meditation on the gospel to his remarks—related, again, through Alemán's third-person narrator—on transubstantiation and the "santísimo sacramento" of the Eucharist. Here the discourse of love and charity—"Cum dilexisset suos, qui erant in mundo, in finem dilexit eos"—gives way to a consideration of the mystery of Christ's body and its literal presence in the ritual practice of Holy Communion. In particular, the notion of the *verbum* made flesh is echoed in the very structure of Alemán's writing, as the literal reproduction of the scriptural text is supplemented by an examination of the sacramental body, both in the original gospel and in the Eucharist. For Alemán, that sacramental body represents the highest expression—or as he puts it, "efecto"—of Christ's love, the "grandeza mayor de sus grandezas, excelencia más excelente de cuantas Dios usó con el hombre" (530-31).

This emphasis on the body of Christ and his embodiment in the Host sets the stage for what comes next in the narrative, namely an abrupt shift in focus to the viceroy's dire physical condition followed shortly thereafter by a detailed description of the autopsy performed after his death. Where García Guerra's earlier remarks to his retinue revel in the literal notion of the word made flesh, in a reading of Christ's body as the highest expression of transcendent meaning, the scenes that follow lead to a radical objectification of the viceroy as nothing but the material fact of his body. Thus, Alemán bears witness to a final futile surgical intervention, an incision that—and here Alemán's medical training comes to the fore—is erroneously made "entre la tercera y cuarta costilla" out of which flows "alguna materia por haber corroído ya el diafragma y subido arriba" (531).<sup>7</sup> The discourse of religious transcendence gives way to that of technical expertise as the viceroy's mimetic relationship to Christ is finally undermined by a vague diagnosis of bodily corruption.

Key to this transition is a loss of transcendental meaning. Where earlier in the narrative, the universe is shown to provide repeated signs of the viceroy's fate, here, in the moments leading up to his death, the "materia" that escapes from the surgeon's incision represents nothing beyond a poorly explained biological process. The limited medical knowledge of the period can offer little more, but what it does provide necessarily desacralizes García Guerra's body. Under the cold gaze of the medical expert—such as this term might apply in the seventeenth century—the viceroy is,

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<sup>6</sup> Referencing Jesus's rhetorical question from verse 12, "Do you know what I have done to you," Bultmann underscores this exemplary function: "[...] Jesus' exemplary action is not just an illustration, floating as it were in empty space; on the contrary, the disciples have actually experienced it performed on themselves" (474).

<sup>7</sup> Francisco Ramírez Santacruz, who has written extensively elsewhere about Mateo Alemán's medical training, comments on the significance of this passage in his introduction, which he notes, "ofrece una oportunidad al cronista para criticar el procedimiento" (489).

in the end, nothing more than his pathologized body, incapable of fulfilling the exemplary role sketched out previously in his final reunion with his followers.

The power of this narrative transition from transcendence to objectification must finally be understood as rhetorical; it is born of a self-conscious juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane, of an inflation of readerly expectations that is then summarily punctured by the empirical claims of a dubious clinical diagnosis. Yet it is precisely here that we can begin to see the peculiarly baroque character of Alemán's writing. Where the *memento mori* thrives on a displacement of meaning from this world into the next, as reflected in the guarded optimism of Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, Alemán's narrative here discovers signs that are conspicuous in their failure to convey meaning about the deeper significance of human experience.

The whiff of nihilism that accompanies Alemán's account of the surgeon's failed attempt to save the viceroy recurs a few paragraphs later in the description of the post mortem where it is given a distinctly baroque coloring. A metaphorical unveiling of García Guerra's hidden interior life, the autopsy evokes the baroque dialectic of *engaño* and *desengaño* whereby the deceptive appearances of the world are final stripped away in an act of revelation. Following the same logic as the earlier failed surgical invention, that revealing is cast in terms that deny access to any sense of a deeper meaning. In this instance, however, the corrupted bodily structures that Alemán once again discovers are represented in far more self-consciously aesthetic terms. Beyond the evidence of Alemán's medical knowledge, what is arguably most striking about this section of the *Sucesos* is the aestheticization of the viceroy's defunct body as a grotesque, even monstrous deformation of the natural order: the *podrido* state of his liver, saturated with ill-defined *materias*; the *manchas* on his lungs, "tan levantados que apenas parecían caber en la caja de su asiento"; "el corazón muy consumido y pequeño"; the ribs, so rotten that they dissolve in the examiner's fingers (533). As Alemán himself puts it in his graphic description of the viceroy's copious "médulas," once removed from their original home in his skull: "Fue tanta la cantidad que me pareció si quisieran volverlas a envasar, en su mismo vaso ni en otro tanto más cupieran; fue la monstruosidad mayor que se ha visto [...]" (533).<sup>8</sup>

There is a fundamental anti-idealism that runs throughout this passage, a recognition not just of the material corruptibility of the body, but of an aesthetics of decomposition in which the monstrousness of the viceroy's decrepit corpse signals a movement away from the natural order of things. Read in this way, what Alemán discovers in the dissection of the viceroy's body is the principle of entropy and with it a necessary loss of meaning to the mysterious forces of chaos. It is for this reason, as well, a "caso inaudito, no visto ni oído su semejante [...]" (533).<sup>9</sup> The deeper meaning of this observation lies not, I would argue, in the uniqueness of the viceroy's medical condition—one suspects that indeterminate autopsy findings were not uncommon in the seventeenth century—but rather in the recognition of a more fundamental breakdown in the mimetic process implied by this uniqueness. In referencing the case's singularity, Alemán highlights its inability to signify beyond the literal meaning of the thing in itself. Where García Guerra earlier invokes mimesis grounded in scriptural authority in order to lend his own body a

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<sup>8</sup> In his introduction, Ramírez Santacruz elegantly describes the "pluma que funciona como escalpelo" with which "el sevillano disecciona un cuerpo que empezó a pudrirse en vida y en un tono académico, desprovisto de cualquier expresión de sentimiento o dolor, registra sus hallazgos" (489). This image of the writer as medical examiner contributes to the aesthetic sensibility of the scene, especially when juxtaposed against the possibility of Christian redemption described just a few paragraphs earlier in the text.

<sup>9</sup> In a source cited by González Boixo (97), the autopsy findings are interpreted to include "un absceso hepático roto y abierto al tórax." (Rodríguez-Moguel, 176). Notably, Alemán is unable to provide such specificity in his own account of the post mortem.

claim to transcendent signification, here inscrutable pathological processes break down that same body into corrupted parts whose monstrousness marks them as unnatural, whose uniqueness derives from their absolute disassociation from the natural order.

At one level, Alemán's shift in focus from the transcendent discursive claims of scripture to those of the nascent empirical science of medicine reflects larger historical forces that would continuously challenge the power of religious authority throughout the early modern period and beyond. However, unlike some of the physical sciences—Galileo's astronomical observations come to mind here—that forced a fundamental epistemological re-ordering, the primitive state of medicine as reflected in Alemán's account of the viceroy's autopsy tends in this instance to destabilize the claims of religious orthodoxy without providing a meaningful alternative. Despite the threat to Catholic orthodoxy, Galileo and Copernicus's heliocentric model of the heavens nevertheless preserves the notion of an ordered, decipherable universe. In contrast, the primitive state of medicine, as reflected in Alemán's autopsy report, leads to a negation of structure and an accompanying epistemological breakdown. Unlike other emerging sciences that reveal a new kind of order in the world, and even a new kind of beauty, the grotesque images the make up Alemán's description of the viceroy's defunct body transform the failure of medical science to adequately diagnose García Guerra's illness into a more general pessimism about the meaning of human existence.<sup>10</sup>

At the end of the *Oración fúnebre*, Alemán makes one final attempt to salvage meaning from the viceroy's body. Summoning the Old Testament authority of Moses—whom he curiously denominates “nuestro gran caudillo del pueblo de Dios”—Alemán draws a new comparison between the “difunto príncipe,” García Guerra, and the tablets of the testimony:

¿Qué otra cosa se puede pensar o qué podemos decir sino que nos ha sucedido a la letra lo que tenemos en el Éxodo, cuando aquel gran caudillo del pueblo de Dios, Moisés, dejándolo en lo llano, subió a lo alto del monte a recibir la ley escrita en las dos tables de piedra, que cuando bajó con ellas, por que lo halló idolatrando en un becerro, las tomó, como dicen, a dos manos y, dando con ellas en la falda de aquel monte, las hizo pedazos? Las tablas de la ley han sido nuestro príncipe difunto [...]. Enojose Dios contra nosotros, vio que nuestros pecados eran muchos, nuestra inobediencia grande, que idolatrábamos al descubierto en el becerro de nuestros gustos y pasiones, perdido el temor y respeto. Dio con las tablas en el pie del monte. Allí están hechas pedazos en la peana del altar mayor. Saltaron las médulas de la cabeza por una parte, los despojos interiores de su cuerpo a otra, los huesos a España, los gusanos aquí se apoderan de la carne y su alma dichosa subió a gozar de gloria eterna. (572-73)

Invoking the notion of the scapegoat, “whose biblical function is to operate, in moments of crisis and conflict, to draw upon itself all conflicts or sins,” Achim reads this scene to suggest that “the body of the archbishop-viceroy, the vehicle of communication between the earth and the heavens, is destroyed publically, in an attempt to placate the divine ire, to pay for his follower's

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<sup>10</sup> Part of the problem here derives from the very nature of medicine as a science devoted, in large part, to the evaluation of dysfunction and disorder. This inherent tendency, however, is greatly exacerbated by the failure of medicine to accomplish its goal of a diagnosis as this would provide—at least in theory—an etiology for the viceroy's illness and, in the process, a means of reconnecting his diseased body back to the natural order. In the absence of such a diagnosis, the narrative turns to the baroque motif of the monstrous, that which is, by definition, opposed to the natural order.

sins and disobedience, and to renew the promise of salvation and resurrection” (96). In this way, the conclusion of the *Oración fúnebre* comes to fulfill—in a kind of reverse patristic allegory—the promise of the *Sucesos*’s representation of the viceroy’s meeting with his followers in imitation of Christ.

Yet there is also something unprecedented in the mode of mimesis on offer here at the end of Alemán’s text. The earlier alignment between García Guerra and Christ, despite its ultimate failure, affirmed a message of charity and hope, not just beyond the grave, but in the world below where the viceroy’s followers themselves might carry on his divinely inspired mission in imitation of the apostles. Here, however, the comparison between García Guerra and the word of God lacks the Christian narrative of redemption. As the Old Testament scripture makes clear, Moses’s destruction of the tablets of the testimony in Exodus is an act of anger: “As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses’ anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain” (Ex. 32.19).<sup>11</sup> While Moses and his people are eventually reconciled to God, that reconciliation is not prefigured in their sin of idolatry; the destruction of the tablets is not in itself, in any meaningful sense, redemptive. As González Boixo observes, this final section of the *Oración fúnebre* witnesses “la síntesis del «desconsuelo barroco», en la que Mateo Alemán se aleja del concepto religioso de la muerte como «salvación» y acceso a la «nueva vida» y se limita a presentar su imagen destructiva” (109).

The implicit lack of redemption here raises questions about the signifying function—if any—of the viceroy’s corpse in this final passage from the *Oración fúnebre*. At the very least, the baroque aesthetic that transforms García Guerra’s body into a grotesque deformation of the natural order in the *Sucesos* would tend to undermine attempts to re-animate his corpse as a source of meaning here at the end of Alemán’s second text. Like the fragments of the destroyed tablets of the testimony, the viceroy’s dismembered body embodies a negation of that which it represented in life, suggesting that the notion of meaningfulness is itself only available to and for the living.

The last sentence of the *Oración fúnebre*—reproduced above—may be read to confirm such an interpretation. In returning to the image of the viceroy’s *médulas*, Alemán pulls the reader back to the scene of the body’s dissection and its radical objectification as a monstrosity of nature. This is followed by a curious reference to the “despojos interiores de su cuerpo.” The ironic worldliness of the term *despojos* begs the question of meaning one last time while it simultaneously contests the religious framing of the earlier comparison between the viceroy’s body and the tablets of the testimony. Read in this light, the subsequent mention of the “huesos” that make their way to Spain ironizes their status as relics, leaving as the one arguably uncontested truth of the entire passage that the “gusanos [...] se apoderan de la carne.” Recalling Góngora’s famous sonnet in the *carpe diem* tradition, these words reassert the desacralized body as nothing more than food for worms.<sup>12</sup> All that remains, then, is the viceroy’s soul which now having abandoned his decrepit body ascends to heaven “a gozar de gloria eterna.” With these words, Alemán turns back to the

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<sup>11</sup> Childs emphasizes the destructive nature of Moses’s actions: “Finally, Moses reaches the foot of the mountain—Joshua has already fallen out of the narrative once his role is over—and draws near to the camp. Then he sees . . . in an instant, the calf and the dancing. The writer pauses for one brief glimpse at Moses’s reaction: he became enraged. Then he plunges into describing an unbroken series of violent actions. He threw down the tablets and shattered them, not because he was tired, but to dramatize the end of the covenant” (569).

<sup>12</sup> The reference here, of course, is to Góngora’s interpretation of Garcilaso’s equally famous sonnet in the *carpe diem* tradition in which the imperative to seize “de vuestra alegre primavera / el dulce fruto” is rewritten as a meditation on mortality as a purely earthly phenomenon: “no sólo en plata o violeta troncada / se vuelva, más tú y ello juntamente / en tierra, en humo, en polvo, en sombra, en nada” (220).

possibility of transcendence, but only for the soul, which has now freed itself from corporeal imprisonment.

The final reference to the soul's ascendance to its heavenly home signals a regression of sorts to a more properly medieval interpretation of the exhortation from Ecclesiastes that "all is vanity." For the orthodox believer, the soul's eternal life provides a respite to the torments of earthly existence. In this sense, then, the final sentence of the *Oración fúnebre* may be said to bring things around full circle, confirming a more traditional reading of the *vanitas vanitatum* motif and fulfilling the *Oración's* opening promise of an "eterna vida sin temor de la muerte" (554). Yet this understandable urge to tie up loose ends cannot erase Alemán's sustained interest in the fate of García Guerra's physical remains and, in particular, his struggle throughout the *Sucesos* with the problem of how to interpret the viceroy's dissected body. There is, in this sense, something perfunctory in Alemán's exaltation of the soul's aspiration to eternal life here at the end of the *Oración fúnebre*, as if Alemán were attempting to redirect our attention back to the material fate of the body as the more significant image in this final sentence of the text.

The *Sucesos* ends with an extended description of the viceroy's funeral procession as Alemán traces its trajectory through the streets of Mexico City leading to the Iglesia Mayor where a final sermon is delivered by the "padre maestro fray Luis Vallejo" (548-9). Much of what Alemán relates in this final section exhibits a ritual formalism that tends to undermine the search for a deeper meaning in García Guerra's life and death. There is, however, at least one moment in this final section of the *Sucesos* in which Alemán hints at an alternative mode of understanding the events recounted in his narrative biography that arguably moves beyond the Christian notion of redemptive sacrifice and its subsequent desacralization through the baroque trope of *engaño*. In a seeming digression, Alemán departs from his strict focus on the viceroy's funeral procession in order to contemplate briefly "el caballo en que había hecho la entrada su señoría ilustrísima" (545). After expressing his inability to adequately describe this majestic beast, Alemán proceeds to remedy his literary inadequacies through an appeal to a series of negative comparisons:

No así mostró sentimiento el caballo del rey Alejandro, herido en la batalla de Tebas, ni el del rey Nicomedes en su muerte; no aquel de Julio César que, presagiando el desgraciado fin de su amo, lloraba y no comía; ni los del rey Ludovico Doceno de Francia, de quien hacen memorial las historias por su mucha ferocidad y grandeza, pudieron hacer mayor sentimiento en su muerte de la que conocemos de este. Aquello leímos y esto vimos; lo uno tenemos por tradición y esto sabemos con la experiencia. Todo él nos iba provocando a tristeza, incitando a pena, pregonando memoria y consideración de la muerte, las vanas glorias del mundo y trágico fin de ellas. (546)

The viceroy's steed functions in this passage within a complex rhetorical ploy that attempts to elevate the viceroy himself to the level of Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar. Here, García Guerra is briefly catapulted into the narrative of world history, the dialectic of transcendence and desacralization that marks Alemán's engagement elsewhere with the dead viceroy's corpse giving way to the classicizing discourse of remembrance and the power of the writer's words to confer immortality of a very different kind.

According to Alemán, what separates García Guerra from Alexander and Caesar is our direct experience of his greatness: "Aquello leímos y esto vimos; lo uno tenemos por tradición y esto sabemos con la experiencia." There is perhaps some ambiguity as to the object of veneration here, whether Alemán is speaking of García Guerra or his horse at this point. Either way, his words



here clearly privilege experience over “tradition,” that is, the direct knowledge of events in the present over that which is passed down through the ages in other written texts. Yet, even as he diminishes the claims of historical discourse, Alemán nevertheless sets in place the terms upon which he expects his own text to be received. Embedded within this passage is the tacit promise that through Alemán’s writing the viceroy’s memory will live on.

At the same time, Alemán himself never claims anything like the ancient role of poetic *vates*. Instead, his project exudes an intensely secular interest in documentation. Despite the premonitions that fill the first few pages of his biographical sketch, Alemán’s view of history, like his view of the human body, is firmly rooted in the circumstances of everyday life. The historian—or his surrogate, the biographer—is, in this sense, not unlike the medical examiner, that objectifier of the human body who strips away the transcendental accretions of Christian belief in order to reveal the material conditions of our physical existence.

It is for this reason, as well, that the horse as stand-in for whatever claims might be made for the viceroy’s historical status is such an equivocal figure. While the underlying comparison with Alexander and Cesar serves to exalt García Guerra’s importance, the privileging of his anonymous animal over the man himself introduces a rhetorical absurdity into the passage that is difficult to ignore. In contrast to the far more sober account of the viceroy’s dissected body, such hyperbolic rhetoric in praise of the viceroy’s horse exhibits an ironic self-consciousness that tends to undercut the more extreme claims that might be made for his historical importance. Thus, while Alemán may be said to guarantee the preservation of García Guerra’s memory, he also displays a recognition of the biographer’s role as secular documentarian.

As a solution to the problem of meaning, then, the focus on history in this one digressive passage is consistent with the desacralization of García Guerra’s body in the autopsy scenes. Like the viceroy’s corpse, the viceroy’s place in the history of colonial Mexico is not that of some mythological world-historical figure who, like a divine force, intercedes to change the course of human destiny. He is not Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar, but rather a historical figure of a lesser order, a man whose contributions to the history of New Spain Alemán documents as material facts that merit recognition and remembrance even as they fail to live up to the aspirations of those who would discover in the man and his body evidence of divine providence.

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