CARTA BLANCA: REPRESENTATIONS OF SELF
IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY EPISTOLARY FICTIONS

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Abstract

My project explores the role that the epistolary form played in the development of an early modern subjectivity. I investigate how authors navigated epistolary conventions and the expectations of a changing readership in order to express their own personal voice and affect their public identity. Each of my three chapters approaches this topic from a different perspective: chapter one focuses on the history of the epistle, chapter two considers the social impact of the publication of familiar letters, and chapter three explores the materiality of the written form. The first chapter traces the literary development of Garcilaso’s “Epístola a Boscán” as a hybrid that combines the letter’s tendency toward self-exposure with the lyric’s use of poetic artifice to express a complex subjectivity. By considering the formal traits that Garcilaso’s verse epistle shares with the epistolary and the lyric traditions, I reveal how even a so-called “familiar” address to a friend is always simultaneously an exercise in fictional writing. Taking Antonio de Guevara’s Epístolas familiares as a focal point, my second chapter considers the effects of printing one’s own collection of personal letters. In his text, Guevara performs a public identity that exists only insofar as it is represented outwardly. Guevara is a public intellectual only because he plays the part of the “hombre cuerdo” in front of an audience. In turn, his public persona can only succeed if his readers trust that a printed letter exposes a truthful familiar exchange. The third chapter considers Teresa of Ávila’s letters as physical objects and explores how they acquired the status of relics soon after her death. I argue that these letters manage to represent the individuality of Teresa through the use of her own identifiable language, the presence of her hand, and the emphasis on her suffering. In the faithful’s eyes, these textual relics embody the humanity of the saint.
All three of these very different authors help us understand the growing desire for self-expression that unfolded as early modern subjects sought independence from the community and developed new forms to represent their individuality.
# Table of Contents

*Abstract*  

vi

*Acknowledgments*  

1

I. Introduction  

22

II. Garcilaso de la Vega’s “Epístola a Boscán” and the Hybridization of Traditions  

58

III. *Hombre Cuerdo* in the Emperor’s Court: Guevara as the Playful Intellectual  

97

IV. When Flesh Becomes Word: Teresa of Avila’s Handwritten Relics  

138

V. Conclusion  

Appendix. “Epístola a Boscán”  

Bibliography  

145  

148
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Introduction

_Carta Blanca: Representations of Self in Sixteenth-Century Epistolary Fictions_

Enigma 71.
-¿Cuál es la cosa que habla,
y de sentido carece,
con fuego o agua perece,
su forma es pequeña tabla,
y sin vergüenza parece?

La carta habla sin tener boca ni lengua, y su forma es de una tablica lisa y blanca, y como dice Cicerón, _Epistola non erubescit_, la carta dice las cosas sin empacho ni vergüenza, sino con mucha resolución propone lo que el dueño quiere que diga; y así es buen consejo, cortesano y sabio, cuando quieren pedir alguna cosa prestada o dificultosa de alcanzar, hacerlo por carta o billete, si bien se aventuran a que se niegue.

–Cristóbal Pérez de Herrera, _Trescientas once enigmas filosóficas, naturales y morales, con sus comentos_ (1618)

Long before the appearance of newspapers and other public sources of news, letters had a long history of offering their readers both information and commentary.¹ Due to the nature of the form, letters consistently combine public knowledge with private reflection. Thus, the study of private correspondence gives us access into those aspects of personal experience that would otherwise be difficult to document, such as the lives of women, familiar interactions, or the founding of communities. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, with the increase in literacy in Spain,² the development of long-

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¹ The epistolary archive of the count of Gondomar (1567-1626), currently held at the Real Biblioteca de Madrid, is an excellent example of the way well-connected people increasingly shared information by attaching to their letters news or copies of _relaciones de sucesos_. In this way, information about the latest political developments at home and abroad could flow amongst these epistolary networks. See Fernando Bouza, _Corre manuscrito: una historia cultural del Siglo de Oro_ (Madrid: Marcial Pons, Historia, 2001): 146.

² “During the sixteenth century reading appears to have spread into the lower classes of Spanish society, so that levels of literacy were much higher in early modern Spain than scholars have estimated previously.” Sara Nalle, “Literacy and Culture in Early Modern Castile” (*Past and Present* 125 [Nov 1989]: 65-96): 69. On the increase in university
distance trade, and the subsequent improvement in postal routes, the social practice of correspondence spread rapidly, as did the inclusion of the epistolary model of communication in a wide range of books. At the time, manuals for writing letters in the vernacular, theoretical treatises, humanistic letters, *cartas de nuevas*, verse epistles, as well as fictional letters all acquired a central role within Spanish society. Most importantly, many authors discovered that the letter provided an ideal space for self-exposure and individual affirmation. In one sense, the new rhetorical model of self-expression that evolved into the modern genres of autobiography, essay, and novel throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was already a key component of the sixteenth-century letter.

This dissertation explores the way authors used the epistolary form during the sixteenth century to express and shape an individual voice in the first person. I trace the development of this personal voice and the implications of the genre in three different epistolary environments: Garcilaso de la Vega’s “Epístola a Boscán” (1534), Fray Antonio de Guevara’s *Epístolas familiares* (1539, 1541), and finally Teresa of Avila’s personal letters. By moving from Garcilaso’s more literary verse epistle, to Guevara’s collection of letters carefully constructed for publication, and finally to Teresa’s real correspondence, I show how interiority and exteriority always coexist within the

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3 Jürgen Habermas considers that the increase in the traffic of news (via mail and “news letters”) that accompanied the early capitalist traffic in commodities set the stage for the emergence of a new social order, i.e. the “Öffentlichkeit” (public sphere). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT, 1991): 14-26.

epistolary form. The letter’s condition of possibility, the epistolary address, contains an awareness of the reader that shapes the writing process by introducing the other’s gaze into the writer’s own narrative of self. It is precisely at this moment of enhanced self-reflexivity that the literary enters into the domain of letters, and reveals that writing about oneself, one’s private self, necessarily entails constructing a persona for public consumption.

Authority and Fiction

The essential fictionality or literariness that informs the letter writer’s self-presentation can be seen in the strong correlation between epistolary writing and early modern fiction. The success of the classical epistolary tradition (Ovid, Cicero, Horace) and the expansion of an epistolary canon in Spain were intimately connected with the development of the novel.\(^5\) Letters were a common trait of both novela sentimental and chivalric romance, but we also find epistolary narratives in Don Quixote,\(^6\) and the

\(^5\) Marina Brownlee highlighted how the epistolary model of Ovid’s Heroides influenced the development of the novelistic discourse. By presenting first-person accounts of mythological heroines responding to their partners and offering their own perspective of their well-known stories, these letters make possible a space for ambiguity. In this way, Brownlee argues, these epistolary accounts manage to question the referentiality of romance. See The Severed Word: Ovid’s Heroides and the Novela Sentimental (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990).

\(^6\) At the beginning of the novel, it is don Quixote who writes letters and Sancho the one in charge of sending them. At the end, however, Sancho himself addresses a letter to his wife (Book 2, chapter XXXVI). He does not actually “write” it himself, he dictates it and then signs it. The humor of the whole episode cannot obscure the fact that Sancho is now writing in the first person, and readers can hear the character’s own voice without intermediaries. http://cvc.cervantes.es/obref/quijote/edicion/parte2/cap36/default.htm
Lazarillo de Tormes is itself written in the form of a letter. The frequent presence of letters in early modern fiction is undoubtedly connected with the search for literary realism: writers of novels faced the need to explain why their text existed, because it was not self-evident that a writer could simply invent hundreds of pages of fiction. Among the newly literate public, there was still a resistance to literature that was simply entertaining and fantastical, without representing a “real-life” truth that could be of value to readers. Throughout the Renaissance we can observe a growing concern about the historical reliability of texts and a desire to distinguish the limits between fiction and historiography. Thus, many writers relied on textual strategies that would give authority to their works of fiction by making them more realistic and believable; for example, by placing their stories in a remote time and place that would be impossible to verify, or by presenting their work as a translation of a classical text. The inclusion of letters functioned identically, because they justified the conceit that an omniscient narrator outside the narrated events could see into the thoughts of a person. By allowing characters to express themselves in their own words through letters, early modern novels became more realistic.

At the beginning of the early modern period, writers of fiction faced a series of fundamental questions: who is the ‘I’ that narrates, with what right can somebody compose a work for the enjoyment of others, and what authority does a particular story claim. The connection between affirming an ‘I’ in fiction and the right of that fiction to

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be believed was by no means clearly established and believed. During the Middle Ages, fiction was accepted through the ring of truth that the poetic ‘I’ bestowed on the text. Leo Spitzer explains that the game between the poetic and the empiric ‘I’ in the *Libro de buen amor* is possible because “Juan Ruiz could expect this moral to be extracted by his audience (he could ‘get away with’ his coquettish autobiographical game) because in the Middle Ages [...] the habit of confusing the empiric with the poetic ‘I’ was in general unknown” (421). Both Dante and the arcipreste de Hita can write texts narrated by an ‘I’ that bears their own name because, as Spitzer explains, the medieval public “saw in the ‘poetic I’ a representative of mankind.” Moreover, it was from this representative capacity that the poetic voice gained its authority. When Dante starts his *Commedia*: “Nel mezzo del camin di nostra vita/ mi ritrovi per una selva oscura” (*Inferno* I.1-2), the plural ‘we’ seems to equal ‘I’. According to Spitzer, Dante—and we could include the arcipreste here as well— is not interested poetically “in himself *qua* himself” (417), but as an example of the human capacity to experience the truths of the beyond.

Nevertheless, this representative capacity is missing in Petrarch’s autobiographical writings, and we recognize this transition most significantly when reading his epistles. The *Epistolae familiares* start with a preface in the form of a letter that the author addresses to *his* Socrates: “Quid vero nunc agimus, frater? Ecce, iam fere omnia tentavimus, et nusquam requies. Quando illam expectamus? ubi eam querimus? Tempora, ut aiunt, inter digitos effluxerunt; spes nostre veteres cum amicis sepulte sunt”

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9 Leo Spitzer, “Note on the Poetic and the Empirical I in Medieval Authors” (*Traditio* 4 ([1946]: 414-22).
10 Italics mine.
The community to which Petrarch wants to belong, the ‘we’ that he is referring to, is not the same universal Christian ‘we,’ but an elite of lettered men, formed by the authors he admires and those who read them. The authority of the ‘I’ does not lie in its capacity to represent the universal, but in the novelty of having been able to transcend imitatio and to begin the development of an individual poetic voice and a personal style. Petrarch, citing Cicero, compares this personal mode of writing to the way in which the bees produce honey using the pollen that they gather from a variety of flowers (Fam. 1,8). The ability to produce honey distinguishes him, the empirical author, from those who can only imitate the flowers of others, and it gives him access to a community of auctores – and more specifically, to a community of letter writers. It is revealing that Petrarch chooses the epistolary form, instead of a poetic treatise, in order to theorize about imitation and assert the importance of individuality, and that he refers a simile (the comparison with bees) that Seneca originally developed in his Letter to Lucilius, and later Cicero exploited precisely in his own collection of familiar epistles.  

During the Renaissance we can observe how the medieval poetic ‘I’ divides into the narrating ‘I’ and the ‘they’ of the rest of society. Leo Spitzer identified this movement of separation as the secularization of the Western mind (422). In this new conceptual constellation, the person is no longer an interchangeable part of the community but an individual subject. The breach that opens in the conception of the subject as part of a

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11 “What are we to do now, dear brother? Alas, we have already tried almost everything and no rest is in sight. When can we expect it? Where shall we seek it? Time, as they say, has slipped through our fingers; our former hopes are buried with our friends.” In Rerum familiarium libri (trans. Aldo S. Bernardo. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975): 3.
totality finds its aesthetic expression in the transformation of inherited forms and the creation of new ones. In other words, we see how it becomes increasingly difficult for artists to represent the instability of a world that is no longer conceived as the reflection of the celestial equilibrium by means of the epic or the tragic discourse. Consequently, new literary forms emerge that allow writers to bear witness to the ambiguity of the world and to explore the individuality of the human being.

New forms not only express change a posteriori, but are themselves part of the process of expanding the limits of what can be said or known within a specific culture. The novel provides the best example of how a specific form can mold a culture’s changing sensibility. With its formal malleability and its capacity to include an almost infinite variety of discourses, the novel has the potential to transcend normative authority. In this way, it becomes an ideal medium to express social dissonance and individuality. I argue that during the sixteenth century the epistolary form also constitutes a privileged medium that allows early modern authors to push the limits of representation and shape an autobiographical voice with a personal style. The epistolary form gives carta blanca to the author to construct an image of self. The authority of the personal voice that such letters expose lies precisely in the fact that readers will be able to recognize those traits that make the “person” who speaks more human, or more vulnerable. Readers gain almost immediate access to experiences of pain, love, the anguish of exile, etc. and can easily relate to that “person.” This potential identification of the reading public with the

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14 According to Elizabeth MacArthur, the early modern preoccupation with the creation of meaning and with questioning the received order was best conveyed in pluralistic, fragmented textual forms, such as letters, encyclopedias, and dialogs. *Extravagant Narratives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): 12.
author may remind us of the role of the medieval poetic I, the difference here is that the subjectivity we encounter in these early modern epistolary addresses is clearly signaling the author’s individuality.

A series of fundamental ethical issues determine any writer’s choice of a specific aesthetic form, but this was especially evident during the early modern period. In the case of autobiographical works, authors asked themselves and were no doubt asked, how does one write a life and to whom does one write it? What does the world care? What authority does the ‘I’ have who shares details of his or her life? Besides, in the case of a writer’s autobiographical account, one must include what we would now acknowledge as metafictional questions, those of reading and writing, within the narration of personal experiences. The text becomes then a space for intertextuality, where the author’s imagination engages with other texts across disciplines and historic borders. Thus, while the choice of form establishes a horizon of expectations for writers to think and speak about themselves, it simultaneously contains the potential for overstepping those boundaries, as chapters on Garcilaso, Guevara and Teresa of Avila will show.¹⁵

But not every person who decides to write and circulate a text can be considered an auctor. The ‘I’ needs to occupy a position of authority in order to be able to speak, and this generally begins with a legal name. But while having the capacity to justify one’s authority was a fixed prerequisite for writing since the Middle Ages, the path to earning this authority becomes progressively less clear. One of the fundamental effects of the

Renaissance is that the ‘I’ stops having to appeal to traditional sources of authority and can slowly proclaim the right to his own authority based on lived experience, i.e., through hard-earned knowledge. In art, for example, Michelangelo leaves his imprint on his works: it is impossible to look at one of his statues and not recognize the hand of its author, his “signature.”

In the novel we also begin to observe the trace of the author. For example, at the beginning of the *Quixote* readers may believe that they are witnessing real events. The mention of various sources and the variations of the name Quesada, Quijada, Quijana, seem to add verisimilitude to this real-life story, until we reach the end of the first book and realize that we are reading a work of fiction, and that behind it an author is pulling the strings. In his prologue, Cervantes outlines his modern concept of authority: he does not need to cite authorities in order to benefit from their aura.

Instead, he proclaims his own authority by making his presence felt throughout his novel with recurrent gestures to his readers, like commentaries, interruptions, or simply humor.

We can observe a similar evolution of personal authority taking place in the epistolary form, where the formal limits of the medieval *ars dictaminis* were being expanded in a quest to mold an individual voice. We see the development of that impulse toward individuality in Garcilaso, Guevara, and Teresa of Avila. Garcilaso adapted the verse epistle to the vernacular in order to give expression to his feelings of love for his

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17 In his Prologue, Cervantes explains that his book lacks the common “ornato de prólogo, […] innumerabilidad y catálogo de los acostumbrados sonetos, epigramas y elogios, […] acotaciones en las márgenes, […] sentencias de Aristóteles, de Platón y de toda la caterva de filósofos, que admiran a los leyentes y tienen a sus autores por hombres leídos, eruditos y elocuentes.” Cervantes justifies this absence, because: “naturalmente soy poltrón y perezoso de andarme buscando autores que digan lo que yo me sé decir sin ellos.” Cervantes takes full responsibility for his work and does not appeal to any outside authority. See http://cvc.cervantes.es/obref/quijote/edicion/parte1/prologo/default.htm.
friend Boscán. Guevara published a collection of familiar epistles by which he expected to form a connection with the public and be recognized as a public intellectual. Finally, Teresa created an epistolary style that allowed her to influence the religious climate of her time without threatening the patriarchal authorities. Given her political vulnerability, Teresa managed the difficult task of conforming to the limits imposed by social and textual expectations, and simultaneously asserting her own difference. Thus, the formal flexibility of the epistle allowed all three authors to craft a style that reflected not only who they perceived themselves to be, but also how they saw themselves in relationship with others.

This impulse toward individuality that we can observe simultaneously in such varied aesthetic forms closely resembles Foucault’s notion of authority as a personal seal with which the writer marks his literary work. Early modern authors are beginning to claim for themselves public recognition based solely on their capacity to give their work this type of identifiable personal seal. Indeed, common readers were slowly responding to this growing desire for recognition amongst authors. In the files of the Inquisition from Cuenca and Toledo, Sara Nalle observed that the majority of the people being interrogated referred to books by their purpose (life of saint, book of hours, book of recreation) and, less frequently, by their title or the name of its author. As Nalle explains: “In the few instances when an author was mentioned, he himself appears to have been the principal attraction” (85). The authors that I consider in this dissertation all had this powerful impact on readers, and their texts were widely read and translated. As my

19 Sara Nalle, “Literacy and Culture in Early Modern Castile” (Past and Present 125 [Nov 1989]: 65-96).
project shows, one of the keys for their recognized authority and their enduring impact in early modern society lies precisely on their willingness to give shape and expose their difference.

**Private and Public**

In the same way that early modern subjectivity is a complex and burgeoning interplay of interiority and exteriority, the literary also becomes more complex and spills over into epistles, allowing authors to express this subjectivity in different ways. This manifests itself in the way epistolary authors take an active role in constructing their identities, rather than passively repeating their social identities determined by their roles in the community. Authors can affect their public image by presenting their readers with a pathway into their private lives. In this way, they supplement their public personas with components of their inner lives. This almost contradictory relationship of private to public is only part of a larger series of contradictions at the core of literary epistles. I see three distinct ways in which this relationship manifests itself. First, epistolary collections are complex literary acts that promise the illusion of private access to the real experience of a person, but at the same time they are always edited for public circulation. Thus, even the real letters that a person writes to a friend acquire new, supplementary meanings once they are grouped together in a book that the public will read. Second, the invoked reciprocity that any epistle presupposes becomes more complex when letters are written to be circulated, not to be answered. The role of the addressee expands to include the outside reader who faces this personal revelation. Writers can then manipulate this invoked reciprocity to achieve an emotional response from readers and build a “personal”
connection with them, even though this connection becomes more abstract, i.e., more literary. Third, letters represent both an absence and a presence: the absence of the friend is the excuse for writing, but simultaneously the presence of that friend in the writer’s mind is the reason for the epistolary address. This “presence” of the friend means that the communicative exchange “happens” in the writer’s immediate present. In other words, the writer addresses the friend as if a dialogue were taking place during the scene of writing, thus creating the illusion of immediacy. This illusion is manipulated in a literary letter by narrating experiences in a fictitious present. But this spontaneity is not real, indeed epistolary immediacy is a rhetorical exercise that aims to reproduce intimacy as a fictional act. It is not necessarily something negative, but simply part of a literary strategy that bears the same relationship to the “real” as does realism.

We can observe these literary manipulations when we pay close attention to those early modern authors, such as Petrarch and Guevara, who published their own collections of familiar epistles. These men probably sent many letters in their lives, but the texts that we read are clearly a literary model (with their own genealogy: Ovid, Cicero, Horace, Seneca). Grouped together as a collection, these letters are the product of a thoroughly different authorial intention. During the early modern period, it was not uncommon to

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21 We can recognize this imagined immediacy in Petrarch’s famous Fam. IV.1, in which he narrates the ascent to mount Ventoux: “Interim ergo, dum famulos aparande cene studium exercet, solus ego in partem domus abditam perrex, hec tibi, raptim et ex tempore, scripturus; ne, si distulissem, pro varietate locorum mutatis forsan affectibus, scribendi propositum deferveret” (1970, 499-501); “And meanwhile, therefore, while the duties of preparing the meal occupy the servants, I have gone alone to a hidden portion of the inn in order to write this to you hastily and extemporaneously lest with delay my determination to write might subside with the change of place or of our feelings” (1975, 179-80).
write a letter and then make a copy to be saved, particularly in the case of legal
correspondence or in noble houses that kept an archive. But these were mostly
exceptions; hence Petrarch’s explanation that he had letters lying around the house and
wanted to organize them is plausible, but also functions as a literary conceit, and begs the
question of why he copied these letters in the first place. Petrarch always takes the
expectations of his readers into consideration and we can appreciate in his narration many
elements of artifice: his understanding of the function of his work, its thematic
organization, the presence of letters composed only for publication. When Petrarch
affirms in Fam. I.1: “[S]cribendi enim mihi vivendique unus, ut auguror, finis erit” (1970, 95), we cannot take this claim at face value, but instead must recognize it as the
rhetorical expression of the will of the “empiric I” to expose itself to its readers. Petrarch’s explanation at the end of his Epistolae Familiaris that he does not know how
many more epistles he has left to write because he does not know much longer he has left
to live must also be read with skepticism. These familiar epistles are a literary creation

22 See, for example, the collection edited by Helen Nader, Power and Gender in Renaissance Spain. Eight Women of the Mendoza Family, 1450-1650 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), as well as Fernando Bouza, Cultura epistolar en la alta Edad Moderna: usos de la carta y de la correspondencia entre el manuscrito y el impreso (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 2005).
23 Fam. I.1.
24 “[F]or me writing and living are the same thing and I hope will be so to the very end” (1975, 13).
26 “[Q]uantum vite restet incertum habeo et hic liber satis crevit nec, nisi iusti voluminis meta trascendit, plurium capax est, que huius quidem generis scripta iam superant” (Fam. XXIV,13); “[S]ince I know not how long I have to live, and this work has already grown enough and can hold no more without expansion beyond the proper size for books
that ends, not necessarily with the death of their author, but when he decides to write the word “End” and put them in circulation.

Being written in the first person, the epistolary text—like the autobiography—creates the illusion of being an immediate reflection of an empirical ‘I’ that writes in real life. This illusion, which for a modern reader would seem obvious, was still relatively new in the early modern period. Cervantes exploits this ambiguity magnificently during the meeting between don Quixote and Ginés de Pasamonte.27 When Ginés tells don Quixote that he is writing the book of his life, don Quixote asks if he has finished it already, to which Ginés answers: “¿Cómo puede estar acabado […] si aún no está acabada mi vida?” Cervantes plays with the double meaning of the term “vida,” as picaresque life (literary genre) and personal trajectory. We know that the author of an autobiographical work modifies and molds his or her story to create a literary narration that follows the necessary generic conventions. However, Ginés de Pasamonte does not seem to realize the artifice. For him, his autobiography cannot be finished while he remains alive.

This conceit aims at making readers believe that they are reading a real document, that what they learn about the person behind the text is the actual truth. Writers need to emphasize this realism in order to make their texts appear useful to readers, i.e., to convince them that they will learn something valuable by reading about the writer’s experience. But at the same time this patina of realism helps writers disguise what in effect is a creative work that results from applying the author’s own imagination to a

of this sort, I have decided to insert into another volume any letters excluded and out of order here” (1975, 351-52).
27 Book I, chapter XXII.
http://cvc.cervantes.es/obref/quijote/edicion/parte1/parte03/cap22/default_01.htm
standard form. In other words, writers are able to develop a textual persona and explore ways of communicating their own individuality precisely because readers trust that the person that they encounter is real.

Authors of both autobiographies and epistles imagine their works as constructing a communicative bond with their readers. This intensely personal relationship is even more pronounced in the case of an epistolary address than the autobiography, as the imagined presence of the reader is a constitutive feature of the form. Whereas the autobiography functions to enlighten others about the writer’s life when he is no longer there—after his death,—the epistolary writer sees himself in dialogue with the other in real time.28 I see three different ways in which the reader is invoked by the epistolary text. First, a letter conjures up the attention of a textual other to whom the personal revelation is directed. This imagined other is activated through the name of the addressee, but its role is beyond the actual reality of the name. Imagining a receptive reader focuses the writers’ attention and deepens his capacity for introspection. Second, this invoked other is a necessary presence in the epistolary form but its actual instantiation changes with every new reading. This textual other is actualized temporarily in the person who reads the letter. In other words, the outside reader occupies the role of temporary addressee thereby becoming the recipient of the writer’s personal revelation. The trust and the loving character of a letter between friends is then transposed to the outside reader of the text.

28 For example, the famous soldier Diego García de Paredes, otherwise known as “el Sansón de Éxtremadura,” addressed his autobiographical account to his son after being fatally wounded in 1545: “Vinimos a Bolonia, donde siendo Dios servido dio fin a mis días. Dejo estas cosas a Sancho de Paredes, por espejo en que haga sus obras conforme con éstas, en servicio de Dios.” See “Breve suma de la vida y hechos de Diego García de Paredes.” Crónicas del Gran Capitán (ed. Antonio Rodríguez Villa. Paris: Bailly, Ballière, 1908): 255-259.
who is prone to establish a personal connection with the voice that so openly is “addressing” him or her. Third, this personal connection between the reader and the epistolary voice can be used by writers of epistolary collections to influence their public reception. By emphasizing that their letters are real-life documents, writers can use their readers’ trust in epistolary self-disclosure in order to premeditatedly benefit from their emotional response to their revelations. In this way, writers can affect their own public identity by projecting an epistolary persona that readers will trust.

Epistolary collections expose a new type of public authority that derives from the writer’s capacity to represent an identity, i.e., from being publicly. Through the text and its reception, the author introduces his own reflection on his identity into the public sphere. The early modern period makes apparent how the formal developments described above were occurring simultaneously with the very idea of “public” and “private”. In this way, generic transformation goes hand in hand with sociohistorical change. The three main authors that I consider in this dissertation showcase the different social realities that coexisted during the sixteenth century as Spain began to experience the development of a modern state apparatus and the progressive establishment of a public sphere. These processes were slow and complex, and as the examples of Garcilaso, Guevara and Teresa of Avila show, often responded to the continued coexistence of different and often competing concepts of the public and the private.

On the displacement of the epistolary addressee by the outside reader, Susan Rubin Suleiman writes: “[W]hat I as a reader have before me […] is a text addressed to someone else. It is the existence of the second person, whom I displace, that distinguishes my position as reader in epistolary fiction.” See “Of Readers and Narratees: The Experience of Pamela” (L’Esprit créateur 21.2. Summer 1981): 94.
Garcilaso’s works offers us important insights into the distinction between the “public” authority of the state and the “private” experience of its subjects.\textsuperscript{30} As a member of an aristocratic family, Garcilaso had no choice but to support the emperor’s interests. His social position depended on his allegiance to the monarch, particularly following the failed revolt of the Comuneros (1520-22), which had strengthened the power of Charles V and diminished the independence of Castilian nobles.\textsuperscript{31} In this sense, Garcilaso represents a growing opposition between the “public power” of the state embodied in the figure of the emperor and the “private” affairs of individuals. This distinction takes place as the power of the state apparatus is solidifying and its subjects are both controlled by and excluded from it. Garcilaso performs a role inside this “public” apparatus by supporting the monarch’s imperial project and fighting in numerous military campaigns in Europe and Northern Africa. Nevertheless, his lyrics simultaneously expose the painful isolation of the private individual within this developing form of modern empire.

Garcilaso did not seek to publish his work and was not interested in courting readers outside the select circle of humanist friends who were steeped in courtly culture. This was the natural environment for Renaissance nobles who favored poetry. In this sense, Garcilaso is conservative and does not seek social recognition beyond his place in

\textsuperscript{30} Jürgen Habermas describes the development of the terms “public” and “private” in connection with the absolutist state during the sixteenth century: “‘Private’ designated the exclusion from the sphere of the state apparatus; for ‘public’ referred to the state that in the meantime had developed, under absolutism, into an entity having an objective existence over against the person of the ruler” (11). In this narrower sense, “public” is synonymous with “state-related” (18).

\textsuperscript{31} Garcilaso’s older brother, Pedro Lasso, was regidor of Toledo and a key leader of the Comunero revolt in the city. After the Comuneros defeat, Pedro Lasso was forced into exile. Garcilaso’s closeness to his brother’s family affected him negatively. When he attended the wedding of Pedro Lasso’s son (1531), the emperor punished him by sending him into exile.
the emperor’s court. His position is fixed in a stable political apparatus and he recognizes his obligation to the “public” interests of the monarch. After his death, however, Garcilaso’s lyrics were published and directed toward a broader readership. Although his lyrics were presented as the poetic standard for an emerging empire needing to assert its cultural credentials, in truth Garcilaso’s texts expose a much more problematic reality. Far from supplying straightforward propaganda for Spain’s imperial ambitions, Garcilaso’s lyrics often exhibit the tension between his “public” role within empire and his “private” experience of isolation.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider how the publication of Garcilaso’s poetry did partake in the construction of a modern national identity. His poetry is directed toward a growing “public sphere” in order to serve as emblem of the qualities that the nation wishes to identify with: excellence in arms and letters. Here the term “public” is no longer synonymous with the government of society through the state bureaucracy. Instead, “the public” is the sphere of society comprised of the private subjects who experience the control of the state authority, from policing to propaganda (Habermas 18-23). The sense of belonging to a community that this public sphere entails owes to the joint impact of the printing press and the spread of literacy. For the first time, the same texts (from news to fiction) were being read simultaneously by a wide range of people across the nation. This shared experience increased the perception amongst readers that they were part of a national community with a homogenous set of religious, political, and social concerns. Although historians of early modern Spain had originally believed that this “reading public” was limited to the educated urban classes (doctors, teachers, priests,
etc.), more recent studies have questioned this assumption. Sara Nalle documented a widespread rise in elementary-level schooling during the sixteenth century in Castile, both in major cities as well as in villages in rich, densely populated agricultural areas (1989: 75-76). In turn, the access of a larger sector of society to literacy had an impact on the affordability of printed books. Castilian printers soon realized the economic advantages of printing large volume editions of favorite authors and topics, thereby making popular titles plentiful and cheap. Thus, while the scholarly audience for humanist treatises and Latin classics may have remained small, there was a much larger market for “popular” books, particularly for religious writers, like Fray Luis de Granada and Antonio de Guevara.

Guevara’s works are one of the best examples of how early modern authors began to cater to this expanded audience. Guevara was one of the most popular authors of the Spanish Golden Age. His books were printed and reprinted at great speed, and we know that the target audiences for these editions were as much the upper classes as the rural population. Whereas Garcilaso had not personally engaged with the emergence of this varied reading public, Guevara was very aware of its importance and used it to his advantage. Guevara occupied a much more tenuous position than Garcilaso at court. He was a minor noble without sufficient economic support or family influence, and he lacked the humanist credentials of some of his contemporaries. Knowing that his possibilities of social promotion at court were limited, he used his texts to develop a public identity for

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32 For a detailed discussion of the historiographical approach to literacy and the printing-press in early modern Spain in terms of elite culture, see Sara Nalle (1989: 79).
34 Sara Nalle (1989: 77-78).
himself. In this way, Guevara goes beyond the social limitations imposed by a highly stratified society and defines a new position for himself. He is a savvy writer who became a “best-seller” because he understood what this growing public valued: instruction, exemplarity, information about the nobility and the court, but also entertainment. When he published his collection of personal letters, Guevara went a step further and presented himself as the main attraction of his book. The self-image that he creates for public consumption is destined to strengthen his position as a public author, i.e., as an intellectual that the public can understand and respect. The epistolary form contributes to this strategy because readers trust that the person that they encounter in this familiar address is real.

The letters written by Teresa of Avila demonstrate to an even greater degree the importance of the public performance and construction of identity. Although Guevara’s position at court was tenuous, he, unlike Teresa, was not writing in fear of the Inquisition. For Teresa there was much more at stake in how she presented herself, since how she was perceived determined how she would live. Teresa always wrote with the knowledge that her letters would be shown to others: friends of friends, superiors, donors, but also enemies of her reformist movement. Her public audience is not just the nobility, nor the lettered bourgeoisie, but a socially and culturally diverse group with different motivations and intentions. Her appeal to connect on an emotional and religious level with her audience helped her politically, since it gave her cause broader support. Thus, her attempt at showing humility and physical and emotional fragility helped her win supporters, both powerful nobles (like María de Mendoza) as well as nuns, confessors, friars, and regular faithful people.
This dissertation investigates how early modern authors navigate epistolary conventions and the expectations of a changing readership in order to express their own personal voice and affect their public identity. In each of the chapters, I approach this topic from a different perspective: the history of the form, the social impact of publication, and the materiality of the text. In this way, I explore the crucial role that the epistolary form played in the development of early modern subjectivity. The chosen authors generally intended their letters if not for publication, then at least for a wide audience. This expanded circle of readers means that the letters are more than merely archives of biographical detail; instead, they reveal the intrinsic fictionality of any description of self. For early modern authors, the epistolary form convincingly conveys personal content to an eager public for two reasons. On the one hand, the conventional letter exposes the writer’s immediate thoughts and emotions without affectation. On the other hand, the writer composes such a personal text with an understanding of the existence of an expanded circle of readers. Consequently, these published letters supplement the standard dyad of epistle writer and addressee with a third term, the implied second-hand reader. In the triangle that ensues, outside readers assume a fundamental role as ultimately they will be in charge of judging and conferring a social identity on the writer based on his representation of himself and of his relationship to the nominal addressee. The power of this public self-presentation becomes clear when we consider how authors as different as Garcilaso de la Vega, Antonio de Guevara, and Teresa of Avila all chose to write epistles in order to build an emotional connection with their readers while simultaneously exploring and exposing their own individuality.
Chapter 1

Garcilaso de la Vega’s “Epístola a Boscán” and the Hybridization of Traditions

Garcilaso de la Vega’s centrality within the canon of Spanish poetry follows from the sophistication of his lyrics, the liveliness of his language, and his embodiment of the Renaissance ideal of a man skilled both with pen and sword.\textsuperscript{35} I believe that his appeal also lies in the way his poems unapologetically tease his readers by simultaneously frustrating and transcending their expectations. This is particularly evident in his innovative “Epístola a Boscán,” which introduced the verse epistle to the Spanish vernacular.\textsuperscript{36} Here Garcilaso employs a clever “bait and switch” technique to draw the reader along; he entices his readers with autobiographical truth but then retreats behind polyvalent literary language and lyric artifice both of which preclude transparency. In other words, Garcilaso’s letter to his friend Boscán presents the illusion of unmediated access to the writer’s intimacy, i.e., it constitutes a mode of direct speech. However, we know that any literary act is in itself an act of opacity, particularly one that uses language to build sound and rhythm patterns, thereby conveying meaning beyond semantics. Thus,

\textsuperscript{35} Garcilaso is widely credited with renewing Spanish lyric in the early sixteenth century. Boscán compiled Garcilaso’s work before his own death in 1542, and his widow published it posthumously as a joint edition, \textit{Las obras de Boscán y algunas de Garcí Lasso de la Vega repartidas en quatro libros} (1543). But by 1569 Garcilaso’s compositions had become so popular that they were already circulating independently. Their definitive recognition arrived when Francisco Sánchez de las Brozas, el “Brocense” (1574), and Fernando de Herrera (1580) published annotated editions of Garcilaso’s poetry, a practice normally restricted to classical authors. In Herrera’s dedication to the king, he already referred to Garcilaso as “príncipe de la poesía española,” a title that endured in Spanish literary history. Garcilaso’s death (October 13 or 14, 1536) during the Provence campaign greatly contributed to his mythical status as man of arms and letters. Indeed, all the elegies to Garcilaso written by famous poets which Herrera included in his volume develop the trope of death before one’s time in the service of Mars. \textit{Anotaciones a la poesía de Garcilaso} (Ed. Inoria Pepe and J. M. Reyes. Madrid: Cátedra, 2001).

\textsuperscript{36} The complete text together with its English translation can be found on page 148.
while the “Epístola a Boscán” may give us the impression of proximity to its writer, the more closely we read it, the more we find Garcilaso retreating behind the carefully constructed language of the lyric, and even the theoretical discussion of the epistle itself. Due to his choice of genre, the reader’s actual proximity to Garcilaso is inevitably always in flux.

Ultimately, the use of lyric artifice in Garcilaso’s verse epistle foregrounds the complex interplay of proximity and distance inherent in all letters. Epistolary writing in general has at its heart a fundamental constitutive antithesis: while the absence of the beloved friend motivates the author to compose a letter, the actual text has the effect of conjuring up the friend’s presence. The activation of this “other” has another fundamental effect, namely that the writer is faced with an opportunity for self-reflection, and more importantly for self-presentation. Precisely by trying to build a bridge to that distant friend, the writer can disclose his sentiments and intimate concerns, thereby exposing himself to an “other” that is very present in his mind. In this way, the imagined gaze of the other, in this case “Boscán,” is the condition of possibility that enables Garcilaso to write an account of himself. In addressing a letter to this other, the poetic speaker incorporates the other’s gaze into his own self-reflection, so that both co-exist within the text.

Garcilaso’s verse epistle performs a complex literary act: on the one hand, the writer conjures up his own presence through an intimate epistolary address to his literary friend, while on the other hand he demonstrates the difficulty of self-presentation by

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means of lyric artifice. The autobiographical content characteristic of the epistolary narration is thus called into question by a lyric subjectivity that does not follow the same rules. I consider that the coexistence of narrative and lyric models of self-expression in Garcilaso’s text underscores an important development in literary history: the need to develop new ways to think and write about the self. In this chapter, I argue that as a hybrid of epistolary and lyric self-fashioning, Garcilaso’s letter grants us a privileged insight into the development of early modern subjectivity. Precisely because of its exceptionality, the “Epístola a Boscán” has not received the same level of critical attention as Garcilaso’s other works. Unlike his other lyrics, the Epístola is written in blank verse, an uncommon pattern at the time that contrasted greatly with both the traditional Castilian and the Italianate lyric forms. Thus, the Epístola’s lack of rhyme made early modern and contemporary critics alike question its poetic value. I argue that it is precisely the combination of generic traits from the epistolary and the lyric traditions

38 I use the term “early modern subjectivity” to refer to a poetic voice that subverts the constraining pressures of traditional literary genres (epic, tragedy) by performing difference within its own self.
39 Rafael Lapesa first acknowledged the importance of Garcilaso’s “Epístola a Boscán” as “primicia de un género literario” in La trayectoria poética de Garcilaso (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1946): 144. He considers it the first Horatian epistle in the Spanish vernacular, and although “no deriva especialmente de ninguna de las de Horacio, responde al tipo de aquellas en que el venusino mezcla lo doctrinal y lo familiar” (146). Elias Rivers also identifies the Epístola as belonging to the generic “type” of the Horatian epistle, which he defines as “a literary genre which unites in verse the subject-matter of philosophy and the form of the personal letter.” See “The Horatian Epistle and its Introduction into Spanish Literature” (Hispanic Review XXII [1954]: 175-194): 181. Both Lapesa and Rivers impose the type of Horatian epistolary satire into Garcilaso’s text, whereas I consider that Garcilaso goes beyond any one single tradition to create his own hybrid product.
that make Garcilaso’s verse epistle a unique object of study. Within the climate of
generic innovation of the Renaissance, the poetic letter constitutes the ideal space for
self-presentation by combining the letter’s evocation of intimacy with lyric subjectivity.
Readers can observe the more human and vulnerable side of the “person” who speaks and
develop an affective connection with the voice in the text.

The desire for self-expression that motivates Garcilaso’s epistle is intimately
connected with the will to establish a personal connection with the reader. When we
contrast the epistle with the other lyrics that Garcilaso was writing at the time, we find a
remarkable coincidence that can shed light on this desire for literary self-disclosure. The
Epístola is part of a sequence of lyrics that Garcilaso addressed to Boscán in the last
years of his life, while he was participating actively in Charles V’s imperial enterprise of
diplomatic and military expansion. The “Epístola a Boscán” (October 1534), sonnet
XXXIII “A Boscán desde la Goleta” (July 1535),41 and the Second Elegy (August 1535)
all direct an account of the self to the beloved friend. The fact that Garcilaso kept
composing these autobiographical accounts while participating in Spain’s imperial
project and that this experience had such a central presence in his work, forces us to
consider the implications of empire in the construction of an early modern subjectivity.
By considering these three lyrics together, this chapter will provide a better
understanding of the conflicts between a nationalistic imperial discourse and a subject
who asserts his own individuality. Nonetheless, despite the similarities between these

41 Originally without a title, this sonnet became known as “A Boscán desde la Goleta.”
Richard Helgerson retitled it as “A Sonnet from Carthage,” since Carthage and not La
Goleta is the city Garcilaso mentions in the sonnet. See Richard Helgerson, A Sonnet
from Carthage. Garcilaso de la Vega and the new poetry of sixteenth-century Europe.
three lyrics, the *Epístola* contains a fundamental difference. In Garcilaso’s second elegy and sonnet XXXIII, the absence of Boscán only makes more apparent the isolation and hopelessness of the poetic voice. In the letter, however, the address to Boscán implies a will to build a dialogue, and that dialogue is only possible when there is hope, i.e., when the writer still believes that he can be read and understood. The contrasting tone between the epistle and the other two lyrics underscores the different circumstances in which Garcilaso was writing. Whereas he wrote the epistle during a diplomatic mission, he composed the sonnet while he was fighting in the Tunis campaign, and the second elegy shortly after his return from La Goleta to Naples. In these two lyrics Garcilaso presents the terrible effects of imperial conquest on both cities (La Goleta/Carthage) and individuals. Garcilaso confronts the formative violence at the heart of empire and the consequences this violence has for interpersonal relationships. In this way, the choice of genre reflects a different subjectivity; while the epistle reveals a loving and optimistic address to a friend, the sonnet and the elegy contain a darker poetic voice engaged in brooding self-reflection.

But the military role that Garcilaso played in Spain’s imperial project is only second to his key symbolic role in its national imagination. In sixteenth-century Spain, Garcilaso’s lyrics became an emblem for a national community in the process of being created, both geographically and symbolically. When Fernando de Herrera named him “príncipe de la poesía española,” the connotation of heritage seems to suggest that Garcilaso was heir to a long-standing vernacular tradition, when in fact what he represented was the construction of a new one. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, Spanish was not the companion to empire that Antonio de Nebrija had called for in 1492.
As an emerging international power, Spain needed to present itself not only as a dominant political and military force but also as a legitimate contender on the cultural stage. This political context shaped the reception of Garcilaso’s work and helps explain Herrera’s ambitious epithet. Garcilaso was understood as providing Spain with a language and a poetic corpus that could finally hold their own against those of the great empires of the past. Nevertheless, instead of creating something distinctly Spanish and without precedent, his poetic revolution was largely the result of introducing and adapting the new Italian Renaissance forms and themes. This process of assimilation was obviously nothing new, rather it was the continuation of a long tradition: in Rome, Cicero, and later Virgil, Horace, and Ovid copied their more sophisticated Greek counterparts, and the same can be said of fourteenth-century Italy’s classical necrophagy. In all these cases, poets shaped a national vernacular that could represent an emerging empire by implanting a foreign, already respected, language unto their own.

Given that all traditions (national, poetic, and otherwise) are constructions, molded during a particular moment in history by specific people with a particular set of interests and a certain context of production, I propose to read Garcilaso as participating

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42 As Richard Helgerson points out, the same was true for other European kingdoms with imperial ambitions --France, England, Portugal-- , where Du Bellay, Ronsard, Sidney, Spenser, and Camões were developing a literary language that could compare to the admired sophistication of Greek, Latin or Italian.

43 Throughout Europe, a generation of new poets was intent on modernizing their vernacular poetry by both imitating classical models as well as appropriating the new Italian ones, in particular Petrarch’s Canzoniere, which was regarded as the prototype of Italian Renaissance lyric poetry. In Spain, Garcilaso contributed greatly to the development of the vernacular lyric by adapting the eleven-syllable verse or endecasílabo. Previously, lyric compositions had been written in the traditional Castilian octosílabo, the eight-syllable verse with a fixed consonante rhyme used in Cancionero poetry. The eleven-syllable verse adapted by Garcilaso allowed more formal flexibility, and more importantly, it set a different tone for the presentation of the lyric voice.
in the construction of a new hybrid tradition. And better than any other text, his *Epístola* embodies this capacity for hybridization. I consider that as a hybrid form, the epistle exposes a variety of intertextual connections, which highlight the place of Garcilaso himself between generic and national traditions. In this chapter I will analyze how the epistle embodies the multiple antitheses that Garcilaso himself experienced: the opposition between a vernacular lyric and the introduction of a foreign lyric style, the opposition between the Spanish imperial project and the feeling of individual isolation, and finally the opposition between absence and presence. I contend that precisely this accumulation of antithetical situations allowed Garcilaso to create such an impressive poetic corpus and to develop a truly individual voice.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first one, I trace the literary development of the verse epistle as a combination of lyric and letter. Understanding the similarities and differences between these two modes of self-expression will help us understand what kind of subjectivity it can represent. Whereas the letter presents an account of a person that follows a narrative development, the lyric does not follow the same conception of time. A lyric is not shaped according to a series of chronologically coherent events; indeed, it creates a moment outside of social time in a continuous present that is activated with every new reading. Thus, the hybrid combination of epistolary and lyric traits in the *Epístola* forces the reader to reassess who is writing and how we are to interpret this poetic voice. In the second section, I consider Garcilaso’s text within the historical context in which he wrote it, in order to better understand the connection between empire and subjectivity. I contrast the epistle with the sonnet and the elegy that Garcilaso addressed to Boscán during his final years, while he was actively
engaged in expanding Charles V’s imperial project. Reading these three different accounts of the self as a series helps us identify the changes in the subjectivity that they represent. Thanks to its hybrid nature, the epistle makes apparent a trait that all three lyrics share: the need to direct an account of one’s inner emotions to an other. Finally, I argue that this trait connects Garcilaso’s epistle with Ovid’s letters from Pontus. Both poets shared the experience of exile and alienation within the imperial machine, and both sought to establish epistolary bonds that would maintain their sense of shared humanity, of feeling connected.

**Tal cual a culta epístola conviene**

Garcilaso’s “Epístola a Boscán” was decisive in establishing a vernacular tradition of epistolary lyric in the Spanish Golden Age. Its relevance for both writers and critics lies precisely in the fact that it frames the theory and practice of the new genre. Garcilaso writes:

> Señor Boscán, quien tanto gusto tiene de daros cuenta de los pensamientos, hasta las cosas que no tienen nombre, no le podrá faltar con vos materia, ni será menester buscar estilo presto, distinto d’ornamento puro tal cual a culta epístola conviene.

In this salutation, Garcilaso echoes a rich theoretical tradition by which friendship as a literary motif demands the coherence of “materia” and “estilo.” A letter between friends requires freedom in the choice of subject and simplicity and clarity in style. But since

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44 Claudio Guillén notes: “La tradición teórica aquí aludida es tan rica que resulta imposible señalar ningún origen específico para las referencias de Garcilaso sobre la elección de la materia o el estilo (la claridad, brevedad, y sencillez sin adorno), ni para el
Garcilaso articulates this poetic theory within a poetic text, it is important to note not only what he says, but also what he does.

In this first stanza, the author introduces himself and the subject matter of his text. But the way Garcilaso constructs this salutation not only tells us what he plans to discuss, but also how he plans to do so. More importantly, it shows that the formal composition of the text is, in fact, one part of the epistle’s content. By calling attention to the formal aspects of his epistle, Garcilaso emphasizes that he is also engaging in a meta-critique. For example, in these opening lines Garcilaso employs a melodic pattern created by the parallel of sounds in lines 1 and 7 to underscore the content and thus the importance of his epistolary theorizing. Garcilaso achieves this aural effect in three ways: by placing an optional accent in the fourth syllable, by the alliteration of occlusive consonants [k] (Boscán, quien, cual, culta, conviene) and [t] (tanto, gusto, tiene, tal, culta, epístola), and by the consonant rhyme “tiene” and “conviene”. Besides attracting the reader with its sonorous call, the melody phonetically emphasizes the words “culta epístola,” the ultimate object of the poem’s theorizing.

The centrality of “materia” and “estilo” in the theory of epistolary writing finds its poetic expression in the careful interplay of rhyme and rhythm with which Garcilaso attempts to emphasize the deep connection between the two. For example, the choice of blank verse matches the author’s inclination to find a “presto,” that is to say ready, style (l. 6) and the use of open vowels [e, o, a] in all line endings contributes to this feeling of informal relaxation. But Garcilaso breaks the rhyme pattern of this first stanza precisely

when he introduces the word “materia” (l. 4), thereby substituting the expected endings [e/o] of all the other lines by [a]. By using a different sound, Garcilaso calls attention to the word “materia.” Thus, the poem itself performs what it describes: the subject matter that the poet wishes to address (“materia”) supersedes any formal pattern. The various enjambements, the choice of simple language, the lack of adverbs, and the high ratio of verbs in relation to nouns and adjectives, also contribute to the impression of oral informality. Finally, the structural parallelism between “no” and “ni” (l. 4-5) further calls attention to the connection between the terms “materia” and “estilo”.

It is interesting that Garcilaso chooses to introduce the two main pillars of his epistolary theorizing, “materia” and “estilo,” by means of an apophatic definition, thus establishing what an epistle is in terms of what it is not. This use of apophatic argumentation has fundamental implications for our discussion of the epistolary. Affirmation through negation (it is what it is not) presupposes a set of traits that the current object being defined lacks, or in other words, it presupposes the absence of an ideal state. In this sense, apophasis forms the crux of epistolary discourse, where we witness a never-ending game of affirmation through absence.

The “Epístola a Boscán” functions both as generic prescription and as textual performance, and ultimately aims at giving poetic expression to familiarity, i.e., the discourse of an intimate friendship. Garcilaso, by using a variety of content and an uncomplicated style, attempts to convince us that he presents himself without artifice. This is precisely the conceit of any literary letter. As we have seen, however, this familiar style is in no way natural, but always carefully constructed. Given the fact that the author
of a verse epistle needs to be familiar with poetic meter and complex rhetorical figures, the fiction of revelation without artifice is deliberately disingenuous.

As a clear formulation of guidelines, Garcilaso’s *Epístola* helped inaugurate the genre in Spain. This instance of theory within a poem was not an isolated case, but a conceit practiced by many early modern poets, as Roland Greene explains: “In many ways, the most acute poetics of the early modern lyric is written out in poems themselves, such as Garcilaso de la Vega’s *Égloga tercera*” (1991: 216). In order to understand why Renaissance lyricists, and Garcilaso in particular, were so keen to establish theoretical prescriptions, it is necessary to consider the broader context of the lyric and its generic history. The passing from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance was marked by a fruitful exploration of classical genres and an openness to adapt and reformulate them, as well as to develop new ones. By the middle of the sixteenth century, humanist artists and critics generated a formidable corpus of new poetic theorizing, intended to accommodate poetic practices to modern needs. Within this context of renovation and codification, the lyric played a unique role. At the beginning of the early modern period, theorists still regarded the lyric as poetry composed for musical accompaniment, while poets had began writing lyrics for a community of readers. The inadequacy of the term lyric to properly


46 This wave of poetic theorizing coincided with the recovery of Aristotle’s *Poetics* in the sixteenth century (see Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961). According to Daniel Javitch, the success of the *Poetics* was not simply the cause but rather a consequence of a new literary climate. Behind this new impulse to systematize poetic discourse was the concern that the centrality of *imitatio* in Renaissance poetic practice was limiting innovation. Instead of focusing on the specific example of one master author, norms were formulated based on generic practice to reflect the evolving literary preferences. See Daniel Javitch, “The assimilation of Aristotle’s Poetics in sixteenth-century Italy” (*The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* III [1999]: 53-65).
encompass these various types of compositions became apparent to poets in the fifteenth century, although Aristotle had already noted it.\textsuperscript{47} Greek and Roman critics used the term lyric to refer to melic poetry, but there was another type of poetry, different from tragedy and epic, that was not composed to be sung, but read. This “other” poetry was generally self-reflexive, a trait that applies to the modern lyric genre. Roman lyricists in particular mastered a series of lyric forms—epistles, elegies, satires—that were introspective in nature and designed to be read. It was this type of lyric that many Renaissance writers sought to revive. The “re-discovery” of this self-reflexive lyric coincided with the modern inclination to interiority, and in this new literary climate the lyric presented itself as an ideal genre to give expression to a rich and complex poetic voice.\textsuperscript{48}

By the sixteenth century these newly invented or reborn lyric forms challenged the medieval assumption, inherited from Greek literary criticism, that the lyric was a rather trivial form of poetry, constrained by formal impositions and generally inferior to tragedy and epic.\textsuperscript{49} In Spain, the adoption of foreign lyric forms was a reaction against

\textsuperscript{47}Aristotle described this contradiction in his \textit{Poetics} (1-4). As Roland Greene explains, Aristotle “remarked the absence of a generic term which might denote such nonepic and nondramatic kinds of poetry as the works in iambic, elegiac, and similar meters, which imitated ‘by means of language alone,’ as contrasted with the melic poems, which used rhythm, tune, and meter ‘all employed in combination.’ This statement indicates the existence of poetry, lyric in the modern sense, which was not melic in the Greek sense.” See Roland Greene, “The lyric” (\textit{The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism} III [1999]: 216-228): 717.

\textsuperscript{48}Literary critics have debated whether Renaissance authors were reading and imitating this “other” lyric because they were in a different mental space than their medieval antecedents or whether their reading of classical texts that had been “lost” during the Middle Ages brought about the change. For a study of Renaissance literary theory and practice, see Bernard Weinberg (1961) and Charles Sears Baldwin, \textit{Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939).

\textsuperscript{49}Roland Greene explains: “The view of lyric as a minor type of poetry, defined by external factors and not implicated in emergent modern issues such as subjectivity, runs through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; it is a commonplace of these periods that
precisely this dated concept of lyric. Medieval Castilian lyricists had mastered the art of combining music with words, producing catchy lyrics that were as successful at court as in the popular plazas. Thanks to their melodic consonante rhyme and octosyllabic verse, traditional Castilian lyrics were ideally suited to musical accompaniment. At best, these short compositions were fast and witty, but as the controversial critic Cristóbal de Castillejo pointed out, by the beginning of the sixteenth century the traditional octosyllabic verse was too often used only for expressing irrelevant topics (“materia tan liviana”):

¡Cosa vana
que la lengua castellana,
tan cumplida y singular,
se haya toda de emplear
en materia tan liviana! (185)50

For Castillejo, Castilian poetry faced a double problem: on the one hand, the vast number of untalented poets and their watered-down love coplas without depth or originality were giving traditional lyric forms a bad name; on the other hand, the importation of Italian poetic models by the new poets was destroying the specific flavor of Spanish poetry and transforming it into a mere copy of another nation’s tradition. In his mock-serious Reprensión contra los poetas españoles que escriben en verso italiano he blames Garcilaso, Boscán, and their followers for what he considers their anti-national bias and their contempt for the “viejos autores”:

lyric theory, as such, is only intermittently separable from rhetorical theory, and that would-be critics and theorists have to make an explicit case for lyric’s non-identity with rhetoric until about 1600” in Post-Petrarchism: Origins and Innovations of the Western Lyric Sequence (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991): 217. See also Charles Sears Baldwin (1939), Bernard Weinberg (1961), and François Rigolot, Le Texte de la Renaissance: des Rhétoriqueurs à Montaigne (Genève: Droz, 1982).

Desprecian cualquiera cosa
de coplas compuestas antes
por baja de ley, y astrosa
usan ya de cierta prosa
medida sin consonantes.
A muchos de los que fueron
elegantes y discretos
tienen por simples pobretos
por sólo que no cayeron
en la cuenta a los sonetos.
Daban en fin a entender
aquellos viejos autores
no haber sabido hacer
buenos metros ni poner
en estilo los amores;
y qu’el metro castellano
no tenía autoridad
de decir con majestad
lo que se dice en toscano
con mayor felicidad. (191)

The preference of the new poets for hendecasyllabic verse was both a response to the
constraints of popular melic poetry, and a desire to explore new models of lyric self-expression. In his “Carta prohemio a la duquesa de Soma,” Boscán lays down his literary
manifesto and justifies the adoption of the Italianate verse:

porque en él vemos, dondequiera que se nos muestra, una disposición muy
capaz para recibir cualquier materia: o grave o sotil, o dificultosa o fácil, y
así mismos para ayuntarse con cualquier estilo de los que hallamos entre los
autores antiguos aprovados. (115-120)\(^{51}\)

Interestingly, we recognize the similarity between Garcilaso and Boscán insofar as the
two main traits on which Boscán bases this new poetics are precisely “materia” and
“estilo.” The possibility of expressing serious as well as light issues, as the ancient
Greeks and Romans did, constitutes for him the great advantage of these new forms.

Boscán, however, did not actually practice the style of the “antiguos,” as he claims, for

the new forms he adapted were the modern Italian genres, the sonnet and the song. It was Garcilaso himself who introduced the Roman lyric forms to sixteenth century Spanish poetry.

In turning away from musical performance, Renaissance lyricists prove that poetic artifice does not merely function as supplemental adornment but that it is an opportunity to reflect on the difficulty of representation. Much early modern lyric does not faithfully portray a unified poetic voice, but rather creates a space where the subject and the otherness of the subject – what Bakhtin has termed “the subject’s own non-coincidence with itself” – exist simultaneously in language. Poetic artifice helps stage this dual and contradictory presence.

In Garcilaso’s epistle we witness not only a theorizing of a poetic genre, but also the performance of a fundamental concern in the early modern period: the representation of subjectivity. The text presents a complex splitting of the subject into an active voice narrating in the first person, and a passive component as object of the events in the lyric. At the beginning of the epistle, the poetic voice reveals itself by addressing an other (“Señor Boscán”), however this ‘I’ remains hidden as an implicit presence behind a discreet third-person “quien.” Such a beginning implies that Boscán is the main presence in the poem and that the author marginalizes himself. But a closer reading of these first lines leads to quite a different conclusion. Indeed, the author starts to speak about himself as a third person who enjoys sharing his “pensamientos,” even when they cannot be put into words. The split of the ‘I’ into the poetic voice that narrates and the third person

being narrated happens not surprisingly while explaining his sense of alienation from language.

We must wait until line 13 for the grammatical ‘I’ to make its entrance in the poem. The first-person voice reveals itself precisely by saying “digo,” thereby taking authority for the poem. This capacity to speak for himself qualifies him as an autonomous ‘I’. Nevertheless, Garcilaso immediately undermines this autonomy when he introduces the metaphor “caballo”/”pensamiento” (l. 17):

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Alargo y suelto a su placer la rienda,
muchó más que al caballo, al pensamiento,
y llévame a las veces por camino
tan dulce y agradable que me hace
olvidar el trabajo del pasado
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The first-person voice relinquishes authority and lets go of its own thinking. The word “[p]ensamiento” becomes the new active agent and relegates the ‘I’ to a passive ‘me’:

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llévame, me hace, me lleva. In this first part of the poem the repetition of the word
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pensamiento” (l. 2, 18, 32), as well as the gerund “[i]ba pensando y discurriendo” (l. 28) operate as a code for that space where the ‘I’ undergoes a transformation into a passive self. In line 41, “pensamiento” cedes its agency to love, where “amor de parte mía” becomes the new active agent that dominates a passive “me/mi”: me hace, llévame, en mí, me sigue, de mí, en mí. This structural parallel in the poem calls attention to the effect that both thoughts and love have on the subject. In both instances, the ‘I’ is observing a ‘me’ experiencing pleasure.

Garcilaso does not present the splitting of the subject into various grammatical persons as a violent event in which the loss of control threatens the subject’s stability. Rather, the split happens as a natural result of his experience of pleasure. The ability to
love, feel, think, and write brings about changes in the subject that ultimately increase his experience of self. In lines 64-5 the repetition of open vowels and the combination of fricative [s], liquid [l], and nasal [m] consonants create a sensuous musical continuum that reveals the splitting of the subject as a gratifying experience:

así que amando me deleito, y hallo
que no es locura este deleite mío.

Within the brief space of these two lines we find a complex network of subjects and objects. The gerund “amando(me)” reflects an act that goes on in time and in which the subject is not grammatically defined, as if the act of doing had taken over and the subject only existed as merged within it. Curiously, this sense of being within the doing happens also in “pensando” and “d’aquesta libertad gozando.” When the first person subject finally appears, “me deleito,” it does so in an interesting case of grammatical duplication: I to/by myself. “Hallo” refers us back to the same empirical ‘I’ that names, the subject behind “digo.” And finally “deleite mío” creates a double emphasis: First, the repetition “me deleito/deleite mío” draws attention to the sensuous nature of his experience. Second, the morpheme [o] present in “hallo” and echoed in “mío” reinforces the presence of a first person, thus reminding us of who is behind this statement. In these two lines we find a true performance of the split of the subject between the active voice of an ‘I’ who is writing about what he observes are the effects of love on himself as an other, i.e., as a passive ‘me’. However, Garcilaso’s poem claims that this complicated split brought about by the ongoing pleasure of thinking and loving is not “locura”.

In this reading it would seem that the Epístola is just another example of Renaissance lyric, a complex performance of the poetic voice. However, in the final section of the text, immediately following these two lines (64-5), we encounter a different
voice and much more prosaic subject matter: “¡Oh cuán corrido estoy y arrepentido/ de haberos alabado el tratamiento/ del camino de Francia y las posadas!” (l. 66-8); “A mi señor Durall estrechamente/ abrazá de mi parte, si pudierdes” (l. 81-2); “Doce del mes d’otubre, de la tierra/ do nació el claro fuego del Petrarca/ y donde están del fuego las cenizas” (l. 83-5). Garcilaso emphasizes that this lyric is in fact a letter by including plenty of generic markers easily recognizable from the *ars dictaminis*: salutatio, petitio, conclusio. While a complication of the poetic voice fills many Renaissance lyrics, the fact that Garcilaso stresses that the *Epístola* is at every moment a letter both demonstrates its generic importance and demands further analysis.

In order to fully grasp the specific function of the epistolary, it is necessary to examine the classical antecedents of this reformulated genre. In the Roman tradition that served as Garcilaso’s primary influence, there were three main models of verse epistle: the love letter (e.g. Ovid’s *Heroides*), the moral epistle (e.g. Horace’s *Epistles*), and the elegiac letter (e.g. Ovid’s *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, or Ausonius’ and Claudian’s epistles). In Latin, epistles were generally composed in elegiac dystic: a combination of two verses, a hexameter and a pentameter. This metric structure bears a closer resemblance to narrative prose than to the vernacular lyric patterns, certainly than to the medieval *octosílabo*. This formal similarity is evident in the fact that the adaptations of Ovid’s *Heroides* that became an important feature in Spanish romance during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were mostly composed in prose.53 In response to this

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trend of prose adaptation, Renaissance poets attempted to create a vernacular alternative to the Latin dystic. Garcilaso, for example, chose to write his own epistle in *versos sueltos*, whereas for his elegies, generically a close cousin of the epistle, he chose *tercetos encadenados*.\(^5^4\) This unique choice reflects the feeling of informality that, as the “Epístola a Boscán” itself states, is most appropriate for a letter between friends. But the lack of rhyme also has the effect of giving the epistle a certain narrative style. It clearly contrasts with Garcilaso’s other compositions, where he maintains a tighter control of the lyric artifice throughout the text.\(^5^5\) This encapsulates what in my opinion is the central contradiction in the nature of the verse epistle. As a form of self-presentation, Garcilaso’s epistle occupies an ambivalent position between narrative autobiographical discourse and lyric exploration of subjectivity. Within this context of generic renovation and hybridization, thinking of texts in absolute terms as either/or would be too restrictive; instead, I propose to read the epistle as a hybrid of these traditions.

In his *Epístola*, Garcilaso advocates a poetic space where thinking can flow unrestricted by narrow formal rules. Therefore the letter’s softening of formal norms and the freedom for intimate disclosure are perfectly suited to accommodate his purpose. But

\(^5^4\) In his *Anotaciones*, Herrera noted: “Quieren los toscanos que estos versos se usen para representar el verso eroico griego i latino, porque los hallan convinientes para ello por la composición de muchos versos juntos” (668).

\(^5^5\) Herrera’s commentary to the *Epístola* is particularly interesting for understanding the unstable space that this new genre occupied in early modern literary criticism. First, he does not offer an erudite description of the epistle as genre, as he does with all the other lyrics forms. Instead, he focuses on Garcilaso’s choice of *versos sueltos* which, he argues following the Italian authorities in matters of meter (Frosino Lapini, Claudio Tolomei, and others), need to make up for their lack of rhyme with “cuidadosa y diligente animadversión” (668). Clearly the value of the *versos sueltos* was not self-evident at the time and Herrera seems to favor the *tercetos encadenados* for writing a “culta epístola.” This would explain his statement that the opening line of Garcilaso’s epistle functions as “insinuación para escusarse que escreve en verso suelto” (669).
even in simple, unadorned language, as Garcilaso himself experiences, “dar cuenta de los pensamientos” is not an easy task. In this context, lyric artifice can play a determining role, not as mere “ornamento,” but as a creator of meaning in its own right.\(^{56}\) Garcilaso’s verse epistle is always simultaneously just as much a letter as an example of early modern lyric expression. The combination of both is possible because of basic shared traits, the most obvious being the first person subjective stance. Also, both rely on the effects of orality in order to achieve a deeper connection with their reader.\(^{57}\) In a familiar letter, oral cues create the illusion that a dialogue is taking place and that the connection with the absent friend is immediate. The oral quality common to epistolary texts supports the lyric’s temporal uniqueness as an utterance that happens now. With every new reading the lyric’s poetic voice is actualized in the person of its reader.

A clear example of this oral dimension shared by the letter and the lyric, and the immediacy that it suggests, is apparent in the other canonical verse epistle of the Spanish Golden Age, Francisco de Aldana’s “Epístola a Arias Montano” (1577):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Al fin, venido aquí, tomé la pluma} \\
\text{para extender con más limado estilo} \\
\text{tanta del alma alteración secreta;} \\
\text{mas -¡ay!-, que mil y mil, mil y mil vueltas} \\
\text{hice principio, y cuatro mil tras ellas} \\
\text{borré el principio que sin gracia entraba (66-71)}^{58}
\end{align*}
\]

This first line is an exercise in representing immediacy: the poetic voice speaks as a very present, very physical, subject that has come “here” to write. But an internal contradiction

\(^{56}\) As Marshall McLuhan expressed it so succinctly, “the medium is the message.”\(^{57}\) According to Claudio Guillén, letters are the “gozne elemental” between orality and writing (2000: 110).

sits at the heart of this text, or rather metatext, since it contains both a lyrical lament and a narrative description. The poetic voice expresses its frustration for not being able to master the “limado estilo” that a serious lyric requires. The phonetic parallelism between “limado” and “mil,” and the repetition of “mil” (l. 4-5) and “principio” (l. 5-6) emphasize this frustration by presenting the process of revision, or writing as rewriting, as an obsessive repetitive impulse. But the actual text we read does not resemble this ideal lyric. This epistle does not express any “del alma alteración secreta,” but simply narrates the circumstances that led to the author’s frustration about the difficulty of writing. Furthermore, this unexceptional subject matter is expressed with an oral style (the fast pace, the plain language, the interjection “ay”). Hence, the epistle can simultaneously express the sorrow of a lyrical voice and narrate the actual circumstances that brought about this feeling.

Precisely because of its hybrid nature, the epistle is an ideal textual space to observe the different conceptions of time present in narrative and the lyric. Whereas a narrative tells us of time happening, in a progression that has a beginning and an end, lyric’s time is immediate, it does not mimic temporal progression, but transcends it. As Sharon Cameron explains:

[...] the contradiction between social and personal time is the lyric’s generating impulse, for the lyric both rejects the limitations of social and objective time, those strictures that drive hard lines between past, present, and future, and must make use of them. (206)\(^{59}\)

Striking the right balance between social time and personal time becomes particularly challenging in an epistle. It can be confusing for the reader of Garcilaso’s epistle to arrive

at the verses where he falls into formalities more typical of a letter. The various details and seemingly superfluous comments take us out of the lyric and into a space of epistolary generic conventions, of social formalisms and generic etiquette. The lyric voice that was relating an experience of love and friendship begins to recede, and leaves behind a polite, well-written letter to a friend. In these instances, social time breaks into the lyric and undermines personal speech, and consequently the reader feels cheated of a purely lyric experience. This somewhat choppy structure makes Garcilaso’s epistle especially transparent as an historic testimony of generic innovation, and thus a fascinating object of study for critics.

This combination of epistolary and lyric generic traits complicates our understanding of the voice behind the *Epístola*. How should we interpret a complex poetic voice that writes in the name of Garcilaso to his friend Boscán? Any text that attempts to present an individual’s inner life ultimately constructs a fiction of the self, insofar as the author makes aesthetic as well as ethical choices. The epistolary self may seem like a more immediate expression of its author’s voice, but it is nonetheless shaped according to generic conventions. As we have seen, identifying the poetic voice “Garcilaso” as an extension of its namesake author becomes even more problematic when the representation is hinged on sound and rhythm patterns. Sharon Cameron contends that lyric speech is “choral” and that it should not be read as the “recognizable voice of its author” (207). She explains that even in first-person compositions, lyric speech does not issue from the author nor from an anonymous speaker. It does not reflect the presence of an individual’s point of view; in fact, it contradicts the very idea of individual speech. Cameron’s notion of the lyric’s choral voice becomes more useful for our analysis when
connected with Roland Greene’s articulation of the “ritual dimension” of the lyric, i.e., the use of sounds and their distribution into patterns that establish how a lyric should be performed. For Greene, lyric discourse is defined “by the dialectical play of ritual and fictional phenomena,” and the purpose of this ritual dimension is to “superimpose the subjectivity of the scripted speaker on the reader” (1991: 5). Both notions, Cameron’s choral voice and Greene’s ritual element, point at the existence of a poetic space where language functions differently than in social time, where a reality that does not respond to its logic is possible. However, the fact that early modern lyric speech does pretend to represent the actions and thoughts of a real person complicates the use of Cameron’s notion of the lyric’s choral voice. As Greene explains, early modern lyric represents a nominative character, i.e., a unitary human self, or a self struggling to seem unitary, as opposed to an artifactual character, i.e., a self-conscious construction, as characteristic of modernism (1991: 13). In order to understand the value of this phenomenon, we must bear in mind the distinctive characteristics of early modern poetic discourse.

At this moment in literary history, we witness the development of a poetic voice that speaks in the first person, not as an extension of the community, but as a nominative real self that can be identified with the empirical author outside the text. Resulting from this ethical breach in the conception of the subject as part of a totality, there follows a need to justify what authority this poetic ‘I’ has to speak. As a literary strategy, addressing an other justifies self-exposure and it lends the text a patina of authenticity, and therefore authority. The letter’s fundamental role in the early modern development and acceptance of autobiographical discourse is precisely that it makes revelation seem

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60 See pages 4-5 of the Introduction for a discussion on Leo Spitzer, “Note on the Poetic and the Empirical I in Medieval Authors” (Traditio 4 [1946]: 414-22).
The letter presents a self that is constituted and exists only in relation to an invoked other. In turn, readers who face this revelation find themselves occupying the role of the other. In Garcilaso’s epistle, even though the reader may not be the nominal receiver of the text (“Boscán”), his reading does actualize an address to which he is the only witness.

The combination of two different sets of generic conventions into one single text can be a rich and stimulating endeavor, and yet also confusing at times. Garcilaso’s verse epistle proves this. As a hybrid, it offers readers a new vantage point from which to observe the possibilities for self-expression that two individual generic networks offer. Sometimes the seams where they meet are barely perceptible, and sometimes they are rather less subtle. In either case, both in its successes and in its failures the hybrid text reveals a desire to push the boundaries of literary expression. The fact that Garcilaso chose to manufacture a hybrid text with which to give shape to an intimate account of the self and to address it to an other reveals a desire to connect, to be read and understood. In order to better grasp the depth of this desire, I will consider the context in which Garcilaso wrote his letter to his beloved Boscán.

61 In light of Paul de Man’s theory of autobiography, Roland Greene concludes: “Conceding de Man’s argument that autobiography is not a genre in itself ‘but a figure of reading or understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts,’ I might propose that because of its internal disposition and cultural uses, the nominative lyric sequence is a dense, highly developed technology for activating ‘the autobiographical moment’ when two subjects face each other across the fictional divide.” Post-Petrarchism: Origins and Innovations of the Western Lyric Sequence (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991): 14.
Señor Boscán

Understanding the hybrid nature of the early modern verse epistle provides us with a new framework for investigating the three lyrics that Garcilaso addressed to Boscán at the end of his life, when he was fully enmeshed in Charles V’s imperial project. Boscán is a ubiquitous presence in Garcilaso’s early lyrics. Despite their social differences, together they embarked on a very productive literary friendship. But Garcilaso’s exile and his continuous participation in the emperor’s wars inevitably distanced them. In the end, it is precisely Garcilaso’s perception of Boscán’s absence that motivates these late compositions: an epistle, an elegy and a sonnet. While formally distinct, all three lyrics share some fundamental traits: an exhortation to Boscán, the author’s personal experience of empire, and a growing feeling of melancholy. When read in dialogue with each other, in the same light as Petrarch’s lyric sequence, the similarities between these poems demonstrate how self-expression is tightly connected to the need to be recognized by an other. The way these three lyrics differ, however, reveals what is particular about the epistolary form of address.

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62 Garcilaso dedicated to Boscán the humorous octosyllabic Copla VII, “Del mismo Garcilaso a Boscán, porque estando en Alemaña dansó en unas bodas;” praised him in his second eclogue (1533-34) for teaching the young don Fernando de Toledo his “cortesanía;” and apologized for “mi rigor pasado y mi aspereza” in sonnet XXVIII.

63 Garcilaso was a member of a well-known noble family, whereas Boscán belonged to the Catalan upper-middle class. Boscán’s intellectual and literary talents, however, did not go unnoticed and by the time he met Garcilaso, around 1522, he had been hired as the tutor for don Fernando de Toledo, the third duke of Alba. Through different routes, both poets came to inhabit the same courtly culture.

64 He wrote the epistle in October 1534, while on a diplomatic mission from Barcelona to Naples; the sonnet XXXIII “A Boscán desde la Goleta” in July 1535, after the battle for the fort of La Goleta, Tunis; and his second elegy in August 1535, back in Naples after the Spanish victory at La Goleta.
The model that Petrarch instituted with his *Rime Sparse* means that lyrics can be grouped as a series through the repetition of themes and the continuous presence of the nominative lyric voice. Reading Garcilaso’s epistle, elegy and sonnet as a unified series is complicated by the fact that he did not compose his works as a whole to be published in a certain order. However, when we look closer at Petrarch’s own *Rime Sparse*, they are precisely that: a compendium of lyric poems without a predetermined order that would determine their meaning. In fact, one could read the *Rime* in a different order and the result would barely be noticeable. The unity of the work is not achieved through a temporal narrative but through the constant repetition of the same concerns and, of course, through Petrarch’s voice. In Roland Greene’s opinion, Petrarch’s lyric sequence achieves coherence through the unifying structure of the lyric interval, which he defines as follows:

> A phenomenological structure, the sum of several deictic settings on which a poem or a collocation of poems is founded—temporal, personal, spatial, social—and therefore a kind of measure of the lyric’s implied distance between intelligence and object. (19)\(^6\)

The last three lyrics that Garcilaso addressed to Boscán share such a lyric interval: they present the immediate presence of a lyric persona that writes openly about his preoccupations and solitude. We can recognize the two *dramatis personae* that appear in this series, Garcilaso and Boscán, as unitary selves with a fixed identity inside and outside the text. In Garcilaso’s case, however, this unity comes under scrutiny repeatedly throughout the series. Starting with the sonnet and especially in the elegy, we can observe a change in Garcilaso’s mood and an enhanced sense of alienation. Freed from the

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influence of the epistolary, these two poems present a purely lyrical voice. Thus, although “Garcilaso” addresses “Boscán” throughout the series, the different form (epistle, sonnet, elegy) in which he chooses to write underlines the changing state of their connection, and more importantly Garcilaso’s own sense of self in relation to his other.

A fundamental trait common to this series of lyrics is the overwhelming presence of empire, against which all three react in different ways. The epistle depicts Garcilaso traveling across Europe carrying out diplomatic missions for the emperor, whereas the sonnet and the elegy expose the much darker reality of imperial conquest, when “las armas y el furor de Marte” have destroyed cities and civilizations. The changing choice of form responds to these experiences and reflects a profound difference in Garcilaso’s emotional state. Whereas the epistle invokes a desire to establish a connection with a friend, the elegy reveals a deeper sense of disconnection. In the elegy and the sonnet, we can observe the apparently contradictory state of being isolated while a part of a larger whole, i.e., being a small cog within the imperial machine. The elegy begins with a statement, “aquí... nos hallamos la vencedora gente recogida.” The use of the plural ‘we’ points to a feeling of belonging to a community of soldiers. But even though Garcilaso may merge temporarily with this community (l. 1-15), he cannot let go or be rid of his individuality. In the elegy, the self is expressed through a complex network of grammatical persons, and Garcilaso even uses his own proper name to refer to himself in the third person (l. 27). When the poetic voice finally concedes his isolation as an ‘I,’ his voice becomes more distressed and it is this tone that will dominate the elegy until its desperate last words: “y así diverso entre contrarios muero” (l. 193).

66 The sonnet starts “Boscán, las armas y el furor de Marte/que con su propia fuerza el africano/ suelo regando, hacen que el romano/imperio reverdezca en esta parte...”
This miserable conclusion follows not only from Garcilaso’s alienation within empire, but also from the perceived separation from Boscán. In both the sonnet and the elegy, the contrast between the author and Boscán reveals a very different relationship between the two friends than the epistle’s familiarity. In the elegy, the figure of a vulnerable ‘I’ takes shape in bitter opposition to the comforts experienced by ‘Boscán’ (“Tú, que en la patria, entre quien bien te quiere,/ la deleitosa playa estás mirando”). The constant repetition of the word “fortuna” (which has a hold on his life) and “esperanza” (his hopes have been weakened) points to the fragility of Garcilaso’s state, and leads inexorably towards the conclusion: “muero”. Similarly, the last lines of the sonnet reveal Garcilaso’s very dark state, alone and surrounded by the vestiges of war: “y en llanto y en ceniza me deshago”. In both cases, the choice of the present tense can be read as a declaration of the melancholic outlook of Garcilaso’s lyric persona. When we read together the key words that encapsulate the elegy and the sonnet, they make very strong statements: “Aquí Boscán... (yo) muero” and “Boscán... Aquí... me deshago”. Certainly, these two endings are very different from the epistle’s conclusio with a modest date.

The shifting mood in these three lyrics can also be understood as a function of how Garcilaso perceives his connection to Boscán. In writing a hybrid of lyric and letter, Garcilaso draws on an extensive epistolary tradition that establishes a language and a tone to declare one’s love for a friend. The epistolary address means that there is a will to build a dialogue, to connect with that friend. In contrast, the sonnet and the elegy are purely lyric forms. Their address to the other runs the risk of becoming solipsistic when the lyric voice does not relate to the other as a partner. Indeed, Boscán appears as a much more distant figure, and there is no real possibility of replicating the lighter connection
with the friend that the epistle portrayed. In the elegy and the sonnet, we can observe a
deep sense of separation, from the friend and from the world. As we mentioned,
Garcilaso portrays this distance by not always appearing fully in the poem: the poetic
voice is constantly hiding behind other grammatical subjects or behind gerunds. Yet, this
apparent incapacity to communicate can also be read as an alternate mode of self-
expression: Garcilaso’s constant disappearances reveal his growing alienation.

The sense of separation from the friend that the epistle portrayed evolves in the
lyric sequence to reveal a deeper sense of loss. In the elegy and the sonnet, this state of
mind subjugates Garcilaso’s view of himself and limits his imagination to his very
immediate present. Boscán is presented as a mere witness to Garcilaso’s loss: his physical
and symbolic distance functions as a foil to Garcilaso’s miserable reality “aquí.” This
dectic occupies a central position in both the elegy and the sonnet. Its apparent
straightforwardness, however, points at two very different, but nevertheless compatible
places. On the one hand, “aquí” can be read as the physical text, thus pointing to a deictic
structure of being inside the text. In this lyric interval Garcilaso’s persona appears and
disappears from the text as a narrator; he presents himself and comes to us in the text. As
discussed above, the use of gerunds to mask the presence of the subject within actions
connected to the muses also draws attention to this possibility of being inside the art
object. Thus we can read “Aquí Boscán... (yo) muero” or “Boscán... Aquí... me deshago”
as statements of his perceived failure to find an alternate space for self-expression, and
thus for being. On the other hand, within the military context in which Garcilaso wrote
the elegy and the sonnet, “aquí” can also literally refer to La Goleta, and by extension to
a mythical place of imperial conquest: Carthage. But instead of being depicted in glorious terms, “aquí” is the place where the poetic voice feels defeated.  

This lyric sequence gives expression to a subject that defines itself through the experiences of friendship, absence, and isolation. The imperial background is fundamental in forcing the subject to confront its own sense of identity in contrast to the massive power of empire, of which La Goleta/Carthage stands as trans-historical witness. Critics have pointed to the important role that the imperial project played on the new generation of Renaissance Spanish poets to which Garcilaso belonged. Richard Helgerson reads the lyrics that Garcilaso wrote during the Tunis campaign as a concentrated discussion of empire, and he specifically refers to sonnet XXXIII as a “miniature epic” (22). I believe that it is quite telling that Garcilaso never actually wrote an epic poem, but instead he chose to write lyrics. Garcilaso’s lyric sequence manifests the tensions between empire and the individual, but it also does much more.

Literary genres are the product of both historical as well as intertextual relations. Thus, Garcilaso’s choice of form necessarily creates a link with a particular poetic

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67 For a discussion of Garcilaso’s tepid description of the Spanish conquest of La Goleta, see Richard Helgerson.
68 In *Imperial Lyric* (2009) Leah Middlebrook argues that the subjectivity that Renaissance lyric portrays is the expression of a new imperial subject, the courtier, which flourished in the sophisticated court of Charles V.
69 As Marina Scordilis Brownlee and Kevin Brownlee explain in relation to romance: “On the one hand, this means a constant interchange between a given romance text and its literary environment, past and present. Seemingly alien generic discourses and constructs are again and again remotivated in terms of and integrated into a continually transformed and transforming romance generic system. On the other hand, the evolving identity of the romance genre reflects -indeed, results from- a dialectic with social and political history involving issues as diverse as inscribed ideology, sociolinguistic hierarchization, and readership. It goes without saying that social and literary history “interact” in any given romance text.” Kevin Brownlee and Marina Scordilis Brownlee,
tradition. Garcilaso was exposed to the Roman lyric canon during his exile: he
rediscovered Ovid, Virgil, and Horace, an experience that deeply affected his personal as
well as his literary trajectory. Inspired by them, during this time he wrote in a variety of
lyric forms for which there was no Spanish antecedent: one epistle, two elegies, odes both
in Spanish and in Latin, and three eclogues.\textsuperscript{70} In these works we not only recognize
formal similarities, but also hear echoes of these Roman authors. In this context, we bear
witness to parallels in the representation of their personal concerns, their sadness, and
how they perceived their isolation. Thus, in one sense, the choice of these new forms
connects him to a poetic tradition that is beyond national boundaries. When we read
Garcilaso’s “Epistola a Boscán” as part of a lyric sequence integrated by the sonnet “A
Boscán desde La Goleta” and the second elegy, we can hear echoes of Ovid’s elegiac
epistles. In both cases, we encounter poets engulfed in the alienating reality of empire
seeking to give expression to their own sense of self through a personal account to a
friend. In the same way that reading the epistle with the other two lyrics helps us
understand Garcilaso’s process toward self-expression, reading this lyric sequence with
Ovid’s elegiac epistles helps us understand their common need to address a friend as an
act of hope.

\textsuperscript{70} Juan del Encina had written eclogues in a different style. See Ronald Surtz, \textit{Birth of a
Theater: Dramatic Convention in the Spanish Theater from Juan del Encina to Lope de Vega}.
Princeton: Publicaciones del Departamento de Lenguas y Literaturas Románicas de
Ovid, the boldest poet of Imperial Rome, was exiled by Augustus for political and moral reasons.\(^7^1\) Garcilaso, like Ovid, was sent into exile by an offended emperor; however, the fate of both poets proved quite dissimilar. While Ovid was sent to the furthest northeast corner of the empire to endure cold, violence, and cultural isolation, Garcilaso was rather more comfortably stationed in a much more central colonial destination, Naples, which by then was an effervescent center of humanist intellectual and artistic activity.\(^7^2\) Despite the obvious differences in the experience of exile that Ovid and Garcilaso had, I believe that an important connection can be drawn between them. Ovid spent the last years of his life in Pontus writing epistles to his friends in Rome describing his sad state and opening up about his feelings of vulnerability. As a literary model for self-expression, these epistolary elegies created a textual tradition that would resonate centuries later with Garcilaso during his own years as an exile. Thus, I consider the inward lyric that had already originated in times of Aristotle, was later perfected by Roman lyricists and then recuperated by the new poets of the Renaissance, as a poetic tradition, in accordance with Edward Shils’s model for an intellectual tradition.

According to Shils: “An intellectual tradition is a set of patterns, or beliefs, conceptions of form, sets of verbal (and other symbolic) usages, rules of procedure, recurrently and unilaterally linked with each other through time” (22). Reading Garcilaso against the

\(^7^1\) Augustus never explained publicly the reasons behind Ovid’s exile. In his Tristia, Ovid blamed it on “carmen et error” (a poem and a mistake). Following this statement, critics have assumed that the publication of his Ars Amatoria together with some activity of a political nature must have led to the emperor’s harsh decision. Ovid, Tristia. Epistulae ex Ponto (The Loeb Classical Library 151. London: W. Heineman; New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1924): 2.207.

\(^7^2\) Garcilaso was originally sent to an island in the Danube, described in his song III, but Pedro de Toledo, the new viceroy of Naples, intervened to have him transferred.
background of Ovid can shed light into their shared experiences and open up new meanings in his work.

We gain a much more profound understanding of Garcilaso’s *Epístola* when we consider him not simply as the organic outgrowth of a native Spanish tradition, but as part of a tradition of authors who write autobiographical lyrics about despair, loneliness, and the difficulty of expressing the self. Despite their discontinuity in time, these authors are linked by the shared identity of their works. Thus, in the same way that Garcilaso hybridized genres, he himself embodies the hybridization of traditions. Claiming that Garcilaso and Ovid belong to a common literary tradition forces us to give more critical consideration to the connection between Garcilaso’s literary work and his personal experience of the imperial machine. Both Garcilaso and Ovid endured the alienating effects of empire and both addressed lyrics to their beloved friends in order to give expression to their individuality. Linking Garcilaso’s lyric sequence to Ovid’s elegiac epistles stresses that there is a darker side to Garcilaso’s lyric persona than his subsequent public image as “príncipe de la poesía española” would suggest. Garcilaso, like Ovid, exposed the suffering of the private individual against the all-encompassing public power of the emperor.

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Edward Shils describes the linkage between works as a shared identity: “An intellectual tradition exists in a stock of works which those who participate in the tradition ‘possess,’ that is, assimilate into their own intellectual culture and to which they also refer. Intellectual traditions are not necessarily continuous in time; there can be periods of recession in which a tradition is dormant or latent. This state of latency— not extinction— is made possible on the existence of differentiated sets of stocks of works which are handed down or made available to the productive, reproductive, and receptive intellectual through teachers, historians, critics, and editors, and through printed books, journals, and manuscripts made available through libraries, bookshops, and other distributive institutions.” See “Intellectual Traditions, and the Traditions of Intellectuals: Some Preliminary Considerations” (*Daedalus* 101.2 [Spring 1972]: 21-34): 22.
Both Garcilaso and Ovid write about deep inconsolable sorrows, about a profound sense of linguistic and cultural isolation. In such a dark space, writing becomes elegiac. This connection between the letter and death was originally signified through meter: the elegiac dystic used to write epistles was also the meter used for mourning. Writing to an other responds simultaneously to the need to negate the subject’s isolation and to a desire to stabilize words against the ephemeral force of life/speech. As Gonzalo Sobejano poignantly sums up: “Lo que en la carta poética mejor una persona pide a otra [...] es sustancialmente esto: no me dejes caer en la sombra del olvido, guárdame del olvido” (36). But both life and speech are ephemeral, and thus language as a remnant of a moment that is gone is itself elegiac. The apophatic argument at the heart of the epistle (affirmation of presence through negation of absence) is what ultimately signals that there is still hope. By attempting to establish a dialogue with an other, the letter affirms a desire to negate absence/death.

Reading the function of the lyric sequence to Boscán in the context of Ovid, we can recognize that it embodies a fundamental optimism; these lyrics are a symbol of Garcilaso’s enduring hope. The letter makes more apparent this will to connect, and helps us recognize it in the other two lyrics. The epistolary nature of Garcilaso’s first text in the sequence highlights a shared trait: the will to assert his own presence, to be seen by the other. Garcilaso starts each text in the sequence with an exhortation to Boscán in order to make him his witness. Indeed, the name of the friend is the first thing we read in the epistle, the elegy and the sonnet: “Señor Boscán,” “Aquí Boscán,” and “Boscán.”

is thus the necessary other that allows Garcilaso to give an account of himself. Without him, it would be meaningless for Garcilaso to even attempt such an account. We can better understand the significance of this desire to find a witness when we read Ovid’s explanation of why he continued to write letters even in his lowest moments:

cur scribam, docui. cur mittam, quaeritis, isto?
Vobiscum cupio quolibet esse modo. (Tristia V.I., 214)

Why I write I have told you. Why do I send my writings to you, you ask. I am eager to be with you all in some fashion – no matter how (215)

Although Ovid claims to write in order to be present in his friends’ lives (“vobiscum”), the fact is that at the center of this clause lies his desire to be (“cupio... esse”). Writing to an other allows him to be, to create an image of self (to be is to be perceived). In his address to the absent other he affirms his own existence. Ultimately, the letter makes apparent a symbolic absence that is at the core of the individual’s experience of self. In other words, a letter conjures up an absence that is imbedded in the subject’s own sense of identity. Naming the addressee creates the illusion of his presence, of a “real” connection with an actual individual. Perhaps more importantly, in addressing this other, the writer yearns for his reciprocity, literally in the form of a letter, but in fact the ultimate response would be the possibility of being understood, of being read. This unity, however, can never be achieved for it is pre-linguistic, it precedes the subject. In a letter, this intrinsic impossibility of union of the human being is masked (but also revealed) as a physical separation between the writer and the addressee. The real absence of the

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75 As Julia Kristeva points out, “psychoanalysis identifies and relates as an indispensable condition for autonomy a series of splittings (Hegel spoke of a ‘work of the negative’): birth, weaning, separation, frustration, castration. Real, imaginary, or symbolic, those processes necessarily structure our individuation.” See Desire in Language (New York: Columbia UP, 1980): 132.
receiver, whose presence the writer conjures up in the letter, supplants a deeper absence, a separation that will remain without an answer. Perhaps the pleasure of writing a familiar letter to a friend, or as Garcilaso would say “aqueste descuido suelto y puro,” reminds us of our essential dependence on others, even in order to see and represent ourselves.
Chapter 2

_Hombre Cuerdo in the Emperor’s Court: Guevara as the Playful Intellectual_

“[P]orque los pleitos han se de encomendar a los letrados, mas la “gobernación de república” a los hombres cuerdos […] el arte de gobernar ni se vende en París, ni se halla en Bolonia, ni aun se aprende en Salamanca, sino que se halla con la prudencia, se defiende con la sciencia y se conserva con la experiencia”

Antonio de Guevara, _Epístolas familiares_ (I.189)

“En una república son muchos los hombres esforzados, animosos, atrevidos, y decididos; y por otra parte son muy poquitos y aun poquititos, los sabios cuerdos, sufridos y experimentados”

Antonio de Guevara, _Menosprecio de corte_, Prólogo

Antonio de Guevara begins the first text of his first book of _Epístolas familiares_ by giving advice to Charles V; specifically he tells the emperor to show mercy to the leaders of the revolt of the Comuneros (7). At first glance, Guevara is clearly using this grand gesture to define himself for his readers, to craft his persona as the sensible man at court who offers the emperor sage advice in matters of government. But there is something immediately suspicious about this gesture. First, the dates do not line up. It does not make sense that he would give this _razonamiento_ on the eve of the battle of Pavia (August, 1526),7 as he claims, when Charles had already decreed an amnesty for all the leaders of the Comunero revolt in 1522. The only ones excluded from this amnesty were María de Padilla and the bishop Acuña, and Acuña had already been executed in March of 1526, months before the victory at Pavia. Second, given that Charles V had already made a decision regarding the rebels, why would a royal preacher openly question that decision? Guevara would clearly be overstepping himself by giving the emperor political counsel during a sermon in front of the whole court. So the obvious question arises: Is this an honest mistake or a strategic fabrication? And more

7 Por ocasión de la gran vitoria que agora hubistes cabe Pavía, a do vuestro exército prendió al rey Francisco de Francia” (8).
importantly, as the introductory text, what precedent does it set for the rest of the collection, i.e., what purpose does such a distortion serve in a collection of epistles, and what does it tell us about the text and the man? Guevara assumes that his readers will trust that he is telling the truth. But where does this trust originate? Certainly, the fact that Guevara was a preacher, a royal chronicler and a successful published author would give him credibility. But I consider that there is another, perhaps more subtle level of trust that comes specifically from the format in which he has chosen to express himself. The familiar epistle presupposes an affective bond between the writer and the addressee. By offering a collection of familiar epistles to his anonymous readers— even if not all of them are actually letters, as in the case of this razo\'amiento,— Guevara seeks to extend this affective bond to the readers of his entire collection. Readers are naturally inclined to trust familiar letters, they believe the premise that the author is revealing his truth to a friend, and aware of their literary “voyeurism” they assume that they are party to a private revelation. By employing and exploiting the conventions of this genre, Guevara manipulates that trust in order to assert his control over the creation of his literary persona and his very public image: he is the main character in his own book and he carefully controls how he presents himself.

In this way, Guevara’s Epístolas familiares are an exercise in writing the self and simultaneously a drama showing the search for a literary form. To give weight to his exempla, Guevara often manipulates data and sources that are not easy to verify. The reaction of his contemporaries shows to what extent the relation between authority and

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77 By 1539, when the Epístolas familiares first appeared, Guevara had published Libro áureo de Marco Aurelio (Sevilla: 1528), Reloj de principes (Valladolid: 1529), Una década de Césares (Valladolid: 1539), Menosprecio de corte y alabanza de aldea (Valladolid, 1539).
fiction was a hot topic in early modern Spain.\textsuperscript{78} Similarly, modern critics have focused on ascertaining whether his letters can be trusted as a chronicle or whether they should be read as historical fiction, particularly with respect to his discussion of the revolt of the Comuneros.\textsuperscript{79} As in the sixteenth century, the epistolary format invites readers to assume that this is a “real” document, a mirror of the author’s intimacy, when in fact it is a literary construct. I consider more productive the question of why Guevara chooses the epistolary genre as a vehicle for his reflections and how his text figures within the Renaissance debate between authority and fiction.

The problems of verisimilitude in Guevara’s epistles and his rhetorical style have led modern critics to question whether they should be considered part of the early modern process of literary innovation or just a continuation of the medieval \textit{ars dictaminis}. On the one hand, María Rosa Lida famously argued that Guevara’s texts exhibit an “estilo inherente a la Edad Media” (384): a pure display of rhetoric, and his epistles are simply a “reaparición tardía de un género medieval bien conocido: la carta retórica, de asidua ejercitación escolar” (354). On the other hand, Francisco Márquez Villanueva considers that Guevara’s style is modern, because “su arte” attracts readers who like him simply because they enjoy his works, not because of his teachings or moral value (1968: 64-5). Indeed, the persons to whom the author addresses his letters are often merely an excuse to

\textsuperscript{78} See Pedro de la Rhúa’s accusation in his \textit{Cartas censorias}. In \textit{Epistolario español}, ed. Eugenio de Ochoa (Madrid: Atlas, 1945), 229-250. For a critical evaluation of de la Rúa’s comments, see Asunción Rallo, \textit{Antonio de Guevara en su contexto renacentista} (Madrid: Cupsa, 1979), 89-101.

allow Guevara to express his thoughts. His epistles are not simply familiar letters from one friend to another; instead, they represent an acknowledged pact between Guevara and his public. Both accept that what matters are his meditations, not whether they were written as an actual letter and then given to a courier. Therefore when Guevara writes: “Miento si no conocí […]” (I. 311-6), it scarcely matters whether he actually knew the character in question.

I consider that the creativity with which Guevara constructs narratives that appear to be true, whether they are actually true or not, illustrates his understanding of the role of writing not as reflection of truth but as enjoyable verisimilitude. Ultimately, we gain a glimpse of his position regarding truth and autobiographical fiction in the letter that he writes to his exiled friend, the former Comunero leader Pedro Girón. Here Guevara defends the advantages of writing in exile:

escribir desde donde estubiere a todas las partes que quisiere muchas nuevas y aun muchas novelas, como a él se le antojare, o mejor a él le estuviere, y la causa de esto es que, como para probarle una mentira han de ir muy lexos a hacer la probanza, puede el tal mentir, e aun a todos desmentir, estándose él a pie quedo, y quedándole el brazo sano (I. 432)

According to this description, the ideal situation for a writer would be the possibility of writing non-fiction (nuevas) with the same tools of a fiction writer (novelas), i.e., with the freedom to invent.

Thus, the Epístolas familiares reveal a fundamental contradiction in the early modern concept of authority and its connection to truth. On the one hand, Guevara’s authority as a preacher and royal chronicler allows him to speak in the first person as an ‘empirical I’ in order to tell “real” stories (which the public considers truthful). On the other hand, for the readers the interest of these stories lies precisely in who tells them and
how, in the commentary by an author they know and like. Whether the narrated events are true or not becomes secondary, because textual coherence is achieved by the presence of an omniscient narrator, the “auctor.” The narrator has the same name as the author but is simultaneously a character inside a fiction. This duality reminds us of the way Marcel Proust, in a letter to René Blum, characterized the modern narrator: “Il y a un monsieur qui raconte et qui dit ‘je’... qui est ‘je’ et qui n’est pas toujours moi” (12:92). Guevara certainly has a dual presence in his epistles, one as the main character with whom readers can build an affective connection and the other one as the person pulling the strings of his own story.

Ultimately, the problems of verisimilitude become secondary when we read Antonio de Guevara’s Epístolas familiares not as a record of historical events but instead as the autobiography of a man on the margins of the nobility. What is important in the text is not so much what actually happened, but how he represents himself and how he responds to these events. Furthermore, his self-portrayal is directed to a broader reading public, not just a closed circle of nobles. Hence, this epistolary collection becomes a

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81 For a long time it was believed that Antonio de Guevara was the second son of Don Beltrán de Guevara and Doña Elvira de Noroña y Calderón. Guevara himself affirms this repeatedly (Epístolas familiares I. 47, 54, 73, and II. 292). However, J. Gibbs (“The Birthplace and Family of Fray Antonio de Guevara,” Modern Language Review XLVI [1951]: 253-255) found a document stating that Guevara was the son of the illegitimate Don Juan Beltrán, and Antonio Redondo defended this thesis as well in Antonio de Guevara et l’Espagne de son temps (Genève: Droz, 1976): 45-58. Either way, we can affirm that Guevara belonged to an impoverished noble family that had lost its influence. Modern critics have attached great importance to the influence that Guevara’s ascendency had on his personality and his work. Américo Castro (“Antonio de Guevara, un hombre y un estilo del siglo XVI,” in Hacia Cervantes. Madrid: 1967, 86-110) claimed that Guevara’s tendency toward self-aggrandizement owed precisely to his position as “segundón.” Later, Juan Marichal (1971) and Francisco Márquez Villanueva (1986: 517) also followed this opinion.
unique space to study how the new sociocultural structures of sixteenth-century Spain intersect in the person and the work of Guevara. As a marginal figure within the nobility, Guevara had a certain degree of freedom to define his own identity. He was not as bound by tradition as a more powerful noble who had to fulfill the obligations that his title imposed. Instead, Guevara labored to define his own social position as a recognizable public intellectual. He understood the new social power that emanated from the printed work, and recognized the possibilities that it offered a preacher like himself to reach a broader audience. The epistolary form was the perfect medium for this endeavor because it can be filled with almost anything, from personal reflections to descriptions of life at court to moral instruction. In effect, the epistolary form can include all these elements because it is on the margins of other genres just as Guevara was on the margins of the nobility and the republic of letters. Thus, his familiar epistles not only provide him with the freedom to construct his own persona but their ability to incorporate literary features enables him to do so in disregard of actual historical truth.

In this chapter I argue that in writing himself as the main character of his own book, Guevara aims to define for himself a new type of public identity. He recognizes the new social power that is emerging with the growth of the press and a public sphere and channels it in order to become a public authority. But this modern type of authority was still very much connected to the representation of social power characteristic of the old nobiliary system. In effect, just as the overlapping section within a Venn diagram, Guevara’s epistles allow us to observe the tensions that arise as the old nobiliary structure intersects with the new public sphere that is taking shape in sixteenth-century Spain.
This chapter discusses how Guevara forms his public identity as an uncommon hombre cuerdo, a combination of preacher, political counselor and philosopher. First, I examine this hybrid persona in the context of his decision to write a collection of familiar epistles. This collection contributes to his self-marketing campaign, i.e., the creation of his public persona, because as a relatively new genre in Renaissance Spain, he needs to justify its value both in terms of its didacticism and of his own authority. Second, I analyze how Guevara cements his authority by positioning himself as a figure straddling both the sphere of the letrados and the nobility. As hombre cuerdo, his wisdom combines learning and experience, rare traits that make him the perfect counselor. By publishing his letter collection, however, Guevara is able to transcend this narrow social division and to build a public identity by appealing not simply to the letrados and nobles, but also to the broader public.

**Between Nuevas and Novelas**

As there was still little precedent in sixteenth-century Spain for an individual author to publish his own familiar letters, Guevara’s editors were faced with the need to develop a successful marketing strategy. Consequently, the 1543 edition of the *Epístolas familiares* describes the book as an assortment of didactic texts, all beneficial to the reader for their educational content:

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82 It was common for personal letters to be read aloud, borrowed and even copied, but not as usual for authors to actively edit their collections and have them printed. It was more frequent for a deceased person’s correspondence to end up in the hands of curious acquaintances, who would consider it worthy of diffusion. For example, the letters by Hernando del Pulgar, counselor and chronicler to Isabel la Católica, first appeared after his death: in 1500 some were included in the first edition of *Claros varones* and in 1528 they were published as an independent text. Fernando del Pulgar, *Letras* (*Epistolario español*). Ed. Eugenio de Ochoa. Madrid: Atlas, 1945.

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Hay en este epistolario cartas muy notables, razonamientos muy altos, dichos muy curiosos y razones muy naturales. Hay exposiciones de algunas figuras y de algunas autoridades de la Sancta Escripтурa assaz buenas para predicar y mejores para obrar. Hay muchas declaraciones de medallas antiguas y de letreros de piedras y de epitafios de sepulturas y de leyes y costumbres gentiles. Hay doctrinas, exemplos y consejos para príncipes, caballeros, plebeyos y eclesiásticos muy provechosas para imitar y muy plausibles para leer (I. 2)

By using such terms as “dichos,” “razones,” “exposiciones,” “declaraciones,” etc., the editors are careful to signal that this collection includes more than merely personal content; rather, it includes a wide range of texts in which the author instructs and offers advice. They establish the value of the collection by emphasizing its edifying content, and thereby position Guevara solidly within the sphere of high culture. According to their description, Guevara’s authority stems from his knowledge and ability to provide moral guidance, not necessarily from the more personal aspects of the letters, i.e., the real-life individuals to whom he writes or from his first-hand knowledge of life at court. The only information this introductory note presents about the recipients of Guevara’s texts is that they are “príncipes, caballeros, plebeyos y eclesiásticos.” Therefore, since Guevara is counseling such a variety of people, the readers will be inclined to think that he must have advice for them as well.

This idea is confirmed immediately, as Guevara’s Epístolas familiares open with three razonamientos addressed to king Charles V and one to the queen. Guevara chooses this format perhaps because addressing the monarchs directly in a familiar letter would have been too forward, but also because he needs to establish his position as the emperor’s preacher whose word is heard regularly at court. In these first texts he even expands his role as preacher to include those of counselor, historian, and humanist. In this

83 Italics mine.
way, these introductory *razonamientos* clearly support the editors’ marketing strategy as a collection offering moral guidance for all readers.

As described above, in the first *razonamiento* Guevara positions himself within the sphere of the Comunero revolt, thereby surpassing his role as preacher and giving counsel in political matters of national importance. Guevara is careful to establish both a political genealogy for Charles and for himself in order to justify this new role. He compares Charles to other past emperors famous for being just, such as Julius Caesar, Solon Soloninus, Camillus, Consul Silla and the emperor Antoninus Pius, and then he compares himself to Plutarch, Plato and Callisthenes of Olynthus, i.e., a combination of historian, philosopher and essayist. Although we will always have reservations about the truth of Guevara’s claims concerning his involvement in the peace process, by placing this text at the beginning of his collection, it is clear that his first task is to establish his authority.

The second and third *razonamientos* cement this authority by underlining his proximity to the king and his important role as counselor. Guevara writes: “me paresció bien y mucho bien el pasatiempo que antes de ayer le vi tomar cuando a su cámara me mandó llamar […] porque siendo como soy su imperial chronista, a mí pertenece darle cuenta y declararle lo que leyere” (I. 20). Despite the fact that “los príncipes más quieren ser obedecidos que no aconsejados” (I. 11), Guevara describes himself as the

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84 According to Stephen Gilman: “As he himself suggests with assertive modesty, Guevara aspires to be to Charles V what Aristotle was to Alexander, and Plutarch to Trajan.” See “The Sequel to *El villano del Danubio*” (*Revista Hispánica Moderna* XXXI [1965]: 174-184).

85 He claims to have delivered the second *razonamiento* to the king on January 6 (“hoy, día de los reyes”). The deictic “hoy” helps give credibility to the text, even though it lacks a date.
man at court who tells the emperor the sensible truths that he needs to hear. For example, Guevara elaborates on the historical origin of the term king in potentially dangerous terms: “Ante todas cosas mandaba Dios que el rey fuese natural del reino” (I. 16).

Guevara’s statement was certainly daring considering the resistance that Charles V had encountered in Castile for not being “natural del reino.” This resistance to the perceived foreign nature of Charles’ reign eventually culminated in the Revolt of the Comuneros. Hence it is remarkable that Guevara would make such a dangerous affirmation, particularly in the aftermath of the revolt. However, Guevara cunningly justifies the meaning of being “natural” as a religious concept, so that the Hebrews could not have a gentile king and for the Christians the king “conviene que sea buen christiano” (I. 16).

After making a clear statement supporting the legitimacy of this foreign-born Castilian king, Guevara goes on to give him counsel. Additionally, in these initial razonamientos Guevara emphasizes his erudition by explaining the uses of medals in classical culture. In truth, his knowledge of classical culture paled in comparison to that of his antecessor, the humanist Pedro Mártir de Anglería. Guevara was not trained at a university, he did not know Greek, and his Latin was limited. But as a preacher he certainly knew how to

86 Charles V had been born and raised in Flanders, and when he first arrived in Spain at the age of 17, to claim the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, his Spanish was insufficient and many viewed him as a foreigner. Resistance against Charles rose amongst the Castilian nobility who felt that he overtaxed the kingdom to finance his wars abroad, and that he had handed over the government of Castile to his Flemish advisors.
87 Although Guevara arrived at the court of the Catholic Monarchs when he was twelve years old (“Prólogo,” Menosprecio de corte), he was not part of the select circle of young nobles that together with Prince Juan were educated by Pedro Mártir de Anglería. Instead, his work evidences the typical education that was received in monasteries at the time. For example, he knew ecclesiastical Latin, but was not trained in humanistic Latin or Greek. According to Joseph R. Jones, “The surviving examples of his original compositions in Latin are additional proof that he had learned simple Church Latin and that in matters of vocabulary, syntax and spelling, he did not grasp the differences
captivate an audience. Guevara performs knowledge, he presents himself as an expert in national politics as well as in the secrets of the archive—or the pseudo-archive—and thus as a learned man that readers should trust.

In these three razonamientos Guevara consistently tries to establish his authority, but simultaneously undermines it by pushing the levels of verisimilitude in the tone that he uses to address the monarch, as well as in his exaggerated claims. We can see this trend more clearly in the final razonamiento of this introductory set, where Guevara famously makes fun of queen Germana de Foix:

Este domingo pasado, después que prediqué a Vuestra Alteza el sermón de la destrucción de Hierusalem, me llamó y mandó que le dixese de palabra y le diese por escrito quién fue aquel gran philósopho llamado Ligurguio, cuya vida yo loé y cuyas leyes yo alegué. En pago de mi trabajo, y por obligarme más a su servicio, mandó aquel día que comiese a su mesa y dióme un rico relox con que estudiase. Para tan poca cosa como es la que Vuestra Alteza me manda no había necesidad de me convidar, ni tantas mercedes me hacer: porque más merced rescibo yo en mandármelo que Vuestra Alteza servicio en yo hacerlo. (1952: 28)

This early passage offers various clues about Guevara as the main character in the Epístolas. First, when he gave the sermon and how the queen called him are redundant details that only serve to inform the reader about his close relationship with her. Second, although Guevara is writing to thank the queen for her kindness, he actually uses twenty deictic pronouns in this short passage to refer to himself, which instead of denoting humility clearly enhance his own central presence. Third, later in the text Guevara suggests that the queen is superficial, “yo pensé que en el sermón se había dormido, y

between the still living Medieval Latin and the dead language that his antiquarian contemporaries were reviving” (Antonio de Guevara. Boston: Twayne, 1975. 71). For Guevara’s autodidact education, see Antonio Redondo (102) and Alfred Morel Fatio (Historiographie de Charles Quint, Paris 1913. 109-110).

88 Italics mine.
entre las cortinas arrollado” (I. 28). Accusing the queen of falling asleep during a sermon certainly does not show her in a positive light. And to make things worse, Guevara even dares to bring up a nature versus nurture argument that reflects badly on the aristocracy. Quoting Lycurgus, Guevara writes, “al hombre mucho más se le apegade las costumbres con que se cría, que no de las inclinaciones con que nace” (I. 30). These comments certainly give the impression that he addresses the powerful queen with a great deal of freedom and tells her truths that others may have thought, but would not dare voice openly in her presence. Indeed, it is difficult to believe that a preacher would actually have spoken to the queen in this way, which leads us, in turn, to question the verisimilitude of this sermon as a whole.

In this way, these introductory razonamientos demonstrate the essential paradox at the heart of Guevara’s collection. On the one hand, he attempts to position himself within the sphere of didactic literature by emphasizing his role as royal counselor. On the other hand, his epistles cannot be considered merely didactic when the reader realizes that they are plagued by errors in dates, inappropriate treatment of the monarchs, and self-aggrandizement, which all introduce doubt as to the epistles’ verisimilitude, and undermine the seriousness of the whole enterprise. However, instead of considering these instances simply as a breakdown of Guevara’s didactic impulse, I propose to read them in light of the pluralistic and playful essence of the epistolary genre, which reveals a great deal about the man, his time, and the literary conventions that he was working with.

Despite the editor’s concern that Guevara’s collection of familiar epistles be considered high culture, in reality the very nature of the epistolary form implies a
plurality of contents. Since their classical origins, collections of familiar epistles combine the serious and the comic, the public and the private. Thus, the popularity of Guevara’s *Epístolas familiares* owes to his ability to blend different registers, as well as different textual models. His collection combines two of the most popular genres of sixteenth-century broadsheets, the *razonamientos* and the *nuevas de corte*. The final product can thus attract a variety of curious readers by combining the gravitas of the royal preacher giving a sermon with the appeal of the worldly man who inhabits the centers of power and can describe what he experiences. In short, in his collection Guevara not only edifies and instructs, but he also knows how to entertain.

The playfulness of Guevara’s epistolary style and the problems of verisimilitude become apparent in the two letters that he writes to the governor Luis Bravo to mock old men who fall in love: “Letra para el gobernador Luis Bravo porque se enamoró siendo viejo. Es letra que conviene que lean los viejos antes que emprendan amores” (I. 218) and “Letra para el mismo comendador Don Luis Bravo, en la cual se ponen las condiciones que han de tener los viejos honrados, y que el amor tarde o nunca sale del corazón do entra” (I. 224). Apart from the humorous content of both letters, something else strikes our attention. Although these two letters appear consecutively in the volume (numbers 34 and 35), the first one is dated August 7, 1529 and the second one January 24, 1523, thus contradicting the logic of the narrative sequence. As a key component of the epistolary form, the inclusion of a date can make Guevara’s letters more believable. But when the dates do not follow the chronological logic of their composition, then their credibility is

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89 Guevara defines a letter as an alchemy of entertainment and teaching: “Aunque de muchas personas y de diversas partes me trahen letras, con ningunas me alegro como con las vuestras, porque, hablando os la verdad, traen consigo un no sé qué que me alegra, y aun un bien sé qué que me avisa” (I. 336)
weakened and it forces us to wonder whether these humorous letters were composed simply for publication.

Similarly, letters 41 and 42, “Letra para el Condestable de Castilla Don Yñigo de Velasco, en la cual se toca que el hombre cuerdo no debe fiar de la muger ningún secreto” (I. 263) and “Letra para el Condestable Don Yñigo de Velasco, en la cual se toca que en el corazón del buen caballero no debe reynar pasión ni enojo” (I. 266) form another narrative unit, but they are dated August 8, 1526 and January 6, 1524 respectively. In the first of these letters, Guevara is upset and complains that the Condestable’s wife has written to him “mostrando tener de mí algún escrúpulo” (I. 264). The author pleads with the Condestable to go against the general custom of reading letters in public, and asks him not to show his letters to anybody, not even his own wife, since “estoy enojado de lo que Vuestra Señoría osó descubrir, y estoy turbado de lo que la señora me envió a decir” (I. 265). Interestingly, the letter itself exposes the dangers of confiding delicate information to women. Thus, Guevara’s own real life enojo perfectly supports the argument he is making, and increases the humorous effect. In his second letter, Guevara is even more upset because “escribiéndoos yo que no dixésetes a la señora Duquesa ni sola una palabra de lo que os escribía y aconsejaba, le mostrastes mi carta y tuvistes muy gran palacio con ella” (I. 266). Again, the imprecision in the dates undermines the verisimilitude of this humorous exchange.

Finally, Guevara addresses three letters to admiral Don Fadrique Enríquez (letters 30, 31, and 33) in which he develops one single narrative plot: the admiral writes to Guevara too often to ask his opinion on complex issues and Guevara has no time to agree
to his requests. However, the letters are dated October 15, 1529 (I. 199), November 11, 1528 (I. 204), and March 25, although the year in this last letter is not specified (I. 213).

In all these examples, as in the opening *razonamiento* to the king, the date gives the appearance that the letter is real, since it was written at some specific time in the past. However, by giving an inexact date that does not correspond to the narrative progression implicit in the letters, the issue of credibility becomes complicated and it forces the question of whether these groups of letters forming thematic units were really sent, or whether Guevara wrote them only for the press. In that case, did he simply not pay much attention to what date he was writing, or was he intentionally undermining the authority that his letters also strive to establish? In other words, how involuntary could this obvious lapse be? Considering the humoristic content of the letters in question and the critical tone with which he addresses nobles well above his rank, it would seem safe to affirm that these obvious mistakes point at an ironic aspect that problematizes any reading of his letters as didactic. Guevara is the protagonist of his work, the one who invents and the one who jokes, thus these mistakes actually consolidate his authority in his work. Nevertheless, these mistakes clearly establish a very different kind of authority, not the authority based on verifiable truth, but the authority due to an author of literary fiction. Thus, Guevara was clearly writing “nuevas” as if they were “novelas”.

**A Public Eager to Be Informed**

By publishing these epistles at all, Guevara demonstrates an awareness of a new constellation in Spanish society, a new literate public hungry for information about what is happening within the national territory and abroad. The improvement in the circulation
of news coincided with the years of discovery and exploration, and thus the resulting flow of firsthand accounts written from these distant and exotic places stimulated the public’s imagination. Written accounts describing personal experiences in foreign lands were in great demand. Similarly, the establishment of epistolary circles allowed members to stay informed of the latest events simply through the internal circulation of news-letters. Occasionally these *cartas de nuevas* would be leaked and reach the general public, as when a letter from Portugal was distributed in Madrid in the summer of 1582 announcing that the king “había estado seis horas sin pulso ni habla” (qtd. in Bouza 2001: 132), which generated great concern for the future of the Spanish monarchy.

The news of the court as well as news concerning prominent people in villages and towns became one of the favorite topics of the *literatura de cordel*, especially when delivered in a humoristic or satirical tone. Familiar epistles lend themselves well to this type of information because they give the illusion of an illicit glimpse into a private sphere. Thus, it was common for satirical literature, from personal parody to political critique, to take the form of an anonymous letter, because the format encouraged the illusion of truth and secrecy. The archives and libraries of the sixteenth century contain numerous examples of this literature of *avisos*. For example, the rubric “Manuscritos 3287” in Madrid’s Biblioteca Nacional holds a collection of *avisos* and letters that circulated between the years 1593 and 1595, both in printed and manuscript form. Many

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of the *avisos* begin with “Lo que ay de nuevo desta corte” or “Las nuevas de la corte,” but there are also many copies of familiar letters, *relaciones*, or *sucesos* (Bouza 2001: 153-4). These documents were directed to a broad public, interested in knowing what was happening in the metropolis, in the colonies and in those territories where Spain had stationed troops. The collection includes, for example, announcements of official appointments, deaths, marriages, descriptions of military campaigns, or royal travel. Even though Guevara complains that only the nobles are informed of the latest news: “Esta ventaja nos tenéis los que podéis mucho a los que tenemos poco, que en breve espacio escribís a do queréis y sabéis do queréis” (I. 73), the reality is that at this time more people in Spain have access to information through ordinary mail and through the circulation of *nuevas* than ever before.

The main difference between these *nuevas de corte* and a collection of familiar epistles is that while the former were normally short anonymous news updates destined for a public that wanted to be informed, the latter were composed by an acknowledged author. Hence, it is not only the information that matters, but also the establishment of a personal connection with a familiar narrative voice. In this sense, *nuevas* resemble modern newspaper articles while familiar epistles have more in common with personal blogs or serialized opinion columns, in which the author gives his or her own perspective and often provides personal information as well. In the contemporary blog, for example, as well as in a collection of familiar epistles, the personal angle provides a frame and a structure for each additional contribution. The same character appears in every single text and reveals an image of the person that the readers can progressively get to know and with whom they develop an affective bond.
The *Epístolas familiares* are perfect examples of this genre as they consistently provide both the news about the court and details about Guevara himself that lead readers to develop an attachment to his literary character. His habitual presence at court makes him a valuable resource for all those readers who are curious to know about it but do not have access to it. For example, Guevara offers everyday details about the life of the monarchs that would have been generally unknown. He describes how the Portuguese-born queen eats, “come lo que come, frío y al frío, sola y callando, y que la están todos mirando” (I. 115) and how she is served in the “estilo de Portugal,” i.e., “están apegadas a la mesa tres damas y puestas de rodillas, la una que corta y las dos que sirven” (I. 116). He frames his reports as responses to friends who had asked for specific information about life at court. For instance, he claims that don Enríquez Enrríquez wrote him with a long list of questions asking, for example, whether the Almirante and the Count of Miranda were still quarreling, whether the court was expensive or cheap, whether claims were dealt with rapidly, or whether there had been any recent outbreaks of disease (I. 99-103). Despite this single addressee, Guevara assumes that his detailed responses will be interesting to all sorts of curious readers. In his letters, he describes well-known courtiers with irony and displays a witty sense of humor:

> Nuevas de la Corte son que la emperatriz querría que viniese el emperador; las damas se querrían casar; los negociantes, despachar; el duque de Béjar, vivir; Antonio de Fonseca, remoçar; don Rodrigo de Béjar, heredar, y aun fray Dionisio, obispar (I. 90).

In this passage, we can appreciate a general trend in Guevara’s epistolary style whereby he uses enumeration and hyperbole to build a humorous description of the characters at court. But even when he decidedly chooses to make fun of a famous person, there is no real malice in his comments:
Alonso Enríquez, Alvargómez, Salaya, Valderrábano y Figueroa, los cuales son pequeños de cuerpos, aunque no de ánimos, siempre que los veo andar por esta Corte me paresce que están orgullosos, briosos, turbados y enojados, y desto no me maravillo, porque las chimeneas pequeñas siempre son algo humosas (I. 76).

Unlike Francesillo de Zúñiga’s sharp critiques of the nobles, Guevara is more interested in showing off his quick intellect than in fighting political battles against his enemies.

Guevara’s identity as an author is tied to his life as a courtier, and that access is precisely what he sells his readers. He describes the court censoriously as a place for “malquerer, cizañar, blasfemar, holgar, mentir, trafagar y maldecir” (I. 100), which although not exactly an idyllic description, would only have increased the curiosity of readers coming from the perspective of a preacher. Indeed, perhaps this is precisely what people wanted to believe about the court. But despite his performance of a certain contempt of courtly life, Guevara is very aware that his success as a public figure depends on his presence there. Although he writes to his uncle don Diego de Guevara to praise the idealized life of the monastery, which allows solitude and reflection (I. 233), it is the court that provides him with most of the material that he uses in his writing. Without the court it is unlikely that he would have much to reflect on. In fact, the court enables him to sharpen his rhetorical talents and weave his social network. As a preacher, however, and hence as a man of religion, Guevara also needs to justify his constant presence at court by openly condemning it as a decadent place.

91 María Rosa Lida argues that the familiarity with which Guevara addresses powerful men at court must be read as a fictional exercise, as in Zúñiga’s imaginary letters (356).
Public Speaking and Writing a Public Persona: The Skills of the Preacher

Guevara’s attempt to write a public persona for himself is intimately connected to his experience speaking publicly as a court preacher, where he mastered the art of performing knowledge and influence in front of the monarch and the most powerful men in Castile.\textsuperscript{92} Thanks to this experience, Guevara knows how to build a strong rapport with an audience, and he carefully deploys public speaking techniques, like the recourse to affectivity or creative story telling, in order to attract readers to his text.\textsuperscript{93} His epistles emphasize his religious credentials in order to earn the same type of respect and trust from the public who read him as from the congregations who heard him preach. But Guevara’s emphasis on his position as a preacher has another fundamental effect. According to him, his deep knowledge of Scripture gives him the kind of authority that simple writers of fiction lack. He claims that his words contain a deeper moral wisdom: “No en las novelas de Juan Bocacio, ni en las tragicomedias de Calisto, sino en las altas visiones del alto propheta David, se dice y escribe” (I. 419). The difference between his epistles and the “novelas” is that while the latter only entertain, as a preacher his letters are edifying even when they are entertaining. The kind of wisdom that readers will find in

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{92} Asunción Rallo noted that Guevara decided to profess specifically in a preaching order, the Franciscans, because “la predicación es un medio de influencia social.” See “Introducción” (Antonio de Guevara, \textit{Menosprecio de corte y alabanza de aldea. Arte de marear}. Madrid: Cátedra, 1987): 39. Indeed, thanks to his background as a preacher, he was able to obtain his first position at court. On September 4, 1521 Guevara was named royal preacher to Charles V and he entered his service in 1523.

\textsuperscript{93} Asunción Rallo reads Guevara’s literary rhetoricism as a further expression of his preaching style, and therefore argues that as a writer/preacher he believes in the transforming power of words: “El auténtico consejero que monta su prédica sobre la relación directa entre autor y lector, está obligado a explotar, incluso abusivamente, cuantos artificios mantengan y potencien esa comunicación. Conseguir la atención sobre algo que no es una aventura caballeresca o un suspense griego exige una muy especial revalorización de la forma; para que el moralismo sea escuchado se ha de someter a esos hallazgos retóricos que encadenan al lector, es el arte de la predicación” (1987: 59).}
Guevara’s text is reserved for those who, like himself, intimately know the texts that truly matter. Even though Guevara is clearly overstepping the boundaries of didactic writing in his *Epistolae familiares*, he still needs to assert that he is a serious figure whose authority readers can trust.

In composing his letters we clearly see Guevara drawing on his experience as a preacher, insofar as each letter structurally resembles a sermon. At the beginning, the narrator, in a casual and friendly tone, comments on the context that initiates the exchange or jokes animatedly with the addressee. This affective stance is reminiscent of the way in which a good preacher or storyteller grabs the attention of his audience. Having piqued their curiosity, Guevara keeps readers engaged by developing exempla with great narrative skill, as if he were recounting a story to a live congregation. Finally, the same way that a preacher concludes his “oratory” by extracting a concrete moral that will improve the spiritual life of his audience, Guevara extracts a moral that he can apply to the present circumstances of his interlocutor: “de cuyas palabras se puede collegir” (I. 341). By adapting the sermon’s form and tone to his epistolary texts, Guevara is able to earn the same type of attention and trust from his readers that he had learned to provoke in his live audience.

Guevara successfully identifies the points of convergence between public speaking and writing, and draws on the similarities to attract readers to his text. Even when not using the rhetorical skills he developed in his sermons, he constantly refers to his experience as a preacher at court to establish his didactic authority. There are constant mentions of the sermons he gave in the presence of the monarchs, and occasionally he even reproduces them in full. For example, the title of a letter to the Count de Miranda
points out that Guevara has included one of such didactic texts, “una de las notables cartas que el auctor escribe” (I. 58). Interestingly, although Guevara understands the similarities between public speaking and writing, we also realize that he is well aware of the differences between the two media:

Lo que va de la traça a la casa, del modelo al edificio, de la figura a lo figurado y de lo natural a lo representado, aquello va de oír un sermón en el púlpito a leerle después en escripto, porque en la escritura solamente se ceban los ojos, mas con la palabra levántase el coraçón (I. 60).

Here Guevara sets up an opposition between oral performance and written word in terms of “lo natural” versus “lo representado”. He argues that if readers are not moved when they read his sermon, they should not blame him but the medium, since an oral delivery would have done more justice to his power to move an audience. Guevara’s defense of the oral word against its written representation has one fundamental marketing effect: it tells his readers that giving sermons is Guevara’s most important job, because it gives him the opportunity to lift the hearts of his audience. By making this claim in a literary epistle, Guevara is trying to convince his public of his moral and religious authority. But suggesting the superiority of oral delivery to writing has another important effect: Guevara intimates that there are non-textual elements that cause spoken words to have such an impact on an audience. These elements can range from the preacher’s voice and his appearance, to the examples or anecdotes that he uses to bring the sermon to life. By claiming to be a skillful preacher, Guevara virtually acknowledges using these “tricks” of public speaking. In turn, this admission forces his readers to wonder what kind of tricks Guevara is using in his writing.
As part of his strategy to cement his public persona, Guevara performs religious and moral authority, but in reality he lacked a solid formation in theology. He attempts to cover this inadequacy and market himself as a serious scholar by strategically incorporating Latin quotations and the exegesis of classical texts. In a letter addressed to the Guardián de Alcalá, Guevara cites the full original letter in Latin in which the Guardián asked him to explain the following quote from the psalmist: “descendant in infernum viventes” (I. 124). By starting with such a long quotation, he shows his readers that he is a serious theologian, not only because learned men ask for his opinion, but because they do so in Latin. But Guevara chooses to continue the letter in the vernacular so that the broader public can understand his words. Although he uses Latin expressions in his letter, they all stem from quotations, either from the Guardián’s original letter or from the psalms themselves. In fact, the only thing that Guevara actually writes in Latin is the valediction, “Vale iterumque vale” (I. 128). Similarly, in other letters Guevara begins with an incipit in Latin, but never much more than a sentence. In general, if the letter is addressed to a noble he then translates the incipit into the vernacular (I. 266), but not if he is writing to learned men or clergy. This strategy reinforces the cultivated persona that he wanted to present to his reading public, while at the same time his exegesis of those Latin quotations guarantees that the language will not interfere with the reader’s comprehension.

94 Although Guevara ascribes to himself the title of theologian in his own epitaph, “genere Guevara, religion sancti francisci, habitus hujus conventus, professione theologus,” in truth he did not possess this title officially. See Asunción Rallo (1987: 38). In 1540 when he applied for a position as canon at the Collegiate Church of Valladolid, he was not even included in the list of finalists because the position required “confent prebenda et canongia magistra seu licenciato in Theologia.” See René Costes, Antonio de Guevara. Sa Vie. Son Œuvre (Bordeaux: Feret, 1925-26): 311-313.
Guevara uses his experience as a preacher to design an epistolary style that will gain the trust of his readers both by establishing an affective connection with them and by appealing to their respect for religious authority. But Guevara’s experience in public speaking also means that he is well aware of the many tricks that a good preacher uses in order to captivate an audience.

*Epistulae ad Familiaris*

Guevara’s somewhat incomplete classical education did not prevent him from drawing on Cicero again and again as the inspiration for his efforts as an epistolary author. Indeed, for a minor noble with intellectual aspirations like Guevara, Cicero was the ideal role model: he was a member of the Roman lower aristocracy (*ordo equester*) who had managed to rise to political office and become an influential public figure thanks to his excellence as an orator. During his years in the political arena, Cicero corresponded with the most powerful men of his generation. From this position of comfortable independence, Cicero was able to develop a personal voice in his *Epistulae ad familiares* that exuded confidence and familiarity. For his contemporary readers, the appeal of the private correspondence of such a recognizable public figure lay in the fact that his letters gave access to his private life and thoughts (whether they were real or fictional was of little importance). Perhaps most importantly for authors in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain, Petrarch’s recovery of Cicero’s familiar letters around 1390 and his own imitation of his epistolary style in his Latin *Rerum familiarium libri* marked a fundamental step in the development of an early modern autobiographical voice. Given that Petrarch was defining his public identity as the reviver of classical letters, he chose
as interlocutors for his epistles those classical authors whom he admired and with whom he wished to be connected publicly. In other words, Petrarch did not need to disguise the fictitious nature of his letters since readers would be able to identify the literary creation. This decision to write to dead authors had another fundamental effect: in contrast to the strongly formulaic structure of the medieval *ars dictaminis*, destined to reflect hierarchical differences, Petrarch enjoyed more freedom in his letters. The hierarchical differences that the author highlights are not so much social as intellectual. Guevara too starts his *Epístolas familiares* comparing himself to the classics, but for something much more banal. In the opening letter from the “auctor al lector” Guevara compares himself to Plato, Phalaris, Seneca, and Cicero for the simple reason that they all had their letters stolen:

La quexa que aquellos varones ilustres tenían entonces, tengo yo agora: de que las epístolas que algunas veces he escripto a mis parientes y amigos, mal escritas y peor notadas, no sólo me las han hurtado, mas aun a sí mismos intitulado, callando el nombre del que la escribió (I. 3)\(^95\)

Guevara’s intention of presenting himself as an “auctor” (*idem quod* Plato, Phalaris, Seneca and Cicero) and expecting his work to be recognized is thus apparent from the beginning.

By publishing their collections of familiar letters, both Petrarch and Guevara establish themselves as public men. But whereas Petrarch based his authority on his erudition and acted as the link to a classical tradition written in Latin, Guevara sets

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\(^95\) Later Guevara compares himself again to the classical authors with less subtlety: “Homero, Platón, Eschines y Cicerón, en sus escritos, y por ellos se quexan, y aun nunca se acaban de quexar, que cuando sus repúblicas estaban quietas y pacíficas, con ellos estudiaban, y leían, y escribían, y que cuando estaban alteradas y remontadas, ni podían estudiar, ni menos escribir. Lo que por estos tan ilustres varones pasó entonces, pasa cada día por mí” (I. 271).
himself up more in the mold of Cicero by focusing on the fact that he corresponds with the most powerful men in Castile. Thus, Guevara creates a niche for himself by combining erudition with an acute understanding of the changing social climate.

Nevertheless, since Guevara’s role in the country’s affairs was far less grand than Cicero’s, we recognize that Guevara is in fact less motivated by large political or philosophical concerns than by minor questions of social status. By addressing his contemporaries instead of classical authors, like Petrarch, he showcases the complex process of creating an identity as a public intellectual in a changing society, where noblemen felt that university-trained professionals were threatening their position at court. Guevara, who lacks this comprehensive education, shapes for himself the role of the hombre cuerdo (I. 189), i.e., the ideal counselor who combines experience and a first-hand knowledge of life at court with the study of ancient books and a strong religious foundation.

At a time when letrados were making their influence felt at court and the nobility was having to compete with them for the king’s favors, Guevara embarks on a quest to build his own public persona amidst these two groups. Given that he lacked the humanistic training now required to be a royal counselor at court, he adapted his own intellectual expertise to cater to the nobility’s specific interests. Since they felt growing resistance to the type of lettered culture that the new class of professionals favored, Guevara provided them with the type of antiquarian knowledge that they enjoyed and

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96 “[O]tros muchos señores destos reinos, y aun de fuera dellos, me escriben y aun me piden, les declare algunas dudas y les envíe algunas historias” (I. 200).
adapted his historical accounts to portray the nobility in good light. Furthermore, he had the advantage that he could present himself as one of “them,” hence earning their trust and their support. Nevertheless, Guevara did not simply send his letters to powerful nobles or allow them to circulate within the epistolary circles of a reduced important few. Instead, he chose to edit his letters and print them, thereby opening his private side to the eyes of the broader public. In so doing, Guevara clearly shows that he seeks the approval of the public and hopes to be considered as an authority by them. Ultimately, Guevara is both old-fashioned and modern in that he combines a conservative view of social immobility with a keen understanding of the important role that the reading public has in shaping social power. But here lies a fundamental contradiction: his concern with shaping a position for himself as the counselor of the powerful seems to contradict his preoccupation with the opinion of the general public. Guevara’s combination of social conservatism and forward-thinking acknowledgement of the growing public sphere has puzzled readers and made him an uncomfortable name for literary critics. The mistrust that Guevara has traditionally generated stems precisely from his attempt to seek the recognition of opposing audiences with contradictory messages. In order to reach the nobility, Guevara needs to tell them what they want to hear; in order to attract the nobility, Guevara needs to tell them what they want to hear; in order to attract the

98 After don Hernando de Toledo, brother of the Duke of Alba, sends Guevara money “no sólo […] para pagar lo que debía, mas aun para me curar y después me regalar” (I. 402), his gratitude takes the shape of a flattering defense of the nobility’s right to occupy preeminent positions in government. Guevara quotes a sermon that he had delivered to the emperor, in which he interprets a passage from the Scripture: “Eligite ex vobis viros sapientes et nobiles, ut sint tribune.” Guevara cleverly adapts the Bible to fit the Spanish aristocracy’s agenda and claims that God demanded from his people that “los jueces de su república fuesen en sangre limpios, y en condiciones nobles” (I. 405). That is why Moses was raised in the “casa real del Pharaón, por manos de una infanta hija suya” because those destined to govern must be “muy bien criados” (I. 405). It is not difficult to understand why nobles would be willing to make a donation in order to read such favorable adaptations of history.
admiration of the reading public, he needs to pretend that he tells the nobles what he actually thinks that they should hear, i.e., he criticizes them for their general incompetence. As a result of trying to please such different audiences simultaneously, his letters become a hotbed of inconsistencies. But precisely these manipulations of truth and the different strategies that the author develops in order to establish his authority according to the various target audiences make Guevara’s Epístolas familiares a fundamental object of study where we can observe the development of an autobiographical voice in the changing social climate of sixteenth century Spain.

A Class of His Own: Between Nobles and Letrados

In order to develop his ambitious project of public self-promotion, Guevara needs to demonstrate his connection to powerful people. However, in sixteenth century Spain determining who the powerful people were became increasingly difficult. The defeat of the Comuneros had strengthened the king and diminished the independence of the nobility, and now a new class of learned men was also challenging the traditional influence of the nobility at court. As professional counselors began to assume important positions at the court of Charles V, the nobles felt that their primacy was under threat. This new class of licenciados and bachilleres that was sprouting up around the king based its political power on an eminently academic training. By contrast, many noble families believed that the government of the republic should have been limited to them, because they were naturally better suited to lead. They considered that one could only learn to govern after having observed firsthand the exercise of power, and they believed that there was an innate capacity in noble families to produce and educate good leaders.
This concern is visible in the letter that Juan de la Vega, Señor de Grajal, wrote to Phillip II in 1556, following the appointment of professionals to the councils:

que muy diferente cosa es saber las leyes y gramáticas de cómo se ha de governar los Reynos y provincias y hazer justicia al executar el gobierno y la justicia, que si por reglas y instructiones se pudiessen aprender las cosas semejantes, no havría nadie que con un poco de ingenio no disese a aprender estas reglas, ansi de la paz como de la guerra y no saliesse excelente y bastante en el arte, mas como la cosa no está en la sciencia acquista sino en otras virtudes del alma y del ánimo que Dios da a quien es servido hay tan pocos subjectos para semejante officio por más leyes ni libros que haya visto ni estudiado. (qtd. in Bouza 2001: 226)

The nobility’s preoccupation with the growing power of letrados evolved into a general rejection of lettered culture. Fernando Bouza has collected testimonies that show that between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many caballeros snubbed not only typography but good penmanship altogether, to the point that “escribir mal era de señores” (2001: 229). Guevara often complains about the poor handwriting and appalling form in which many nobles sent their letters, although his complaints sound more like gibes than actual accusations of incompetence.99

Nevertheless, the nobility’s disregard for university-trained letrados cannot be read as an apology for ignorance. Despite the threat that some nobles perceived in the increased presence of educated professionals in government, the nobility continued to value and take pleasure from lettered culture. However, they distanced themselves from academic men by pursuing different interests and by favoring specialization within the

99 Guevara criticizes the Condestable don Íñigo de Velasco because his letter “aunque no viniera firmada, la conociera en la letra ser de vuestra mano escrita, porque traía pocos renglones y muchos borrones” (I. 48). He also uses this humorous hyperbolic style to criticize Pedro Girón, “si como era carta fuera ecina” (I. 65), and he cleverly teaches the powerful Enrrique Enrríquez how a nobleman should write: “que los renglones sean derechos, las letras juntas, las razones apartadas, la letra buena, el papel limpio, la nema subtil, la plegadura igual y el sello claro, porque es ley de corte, que en lo que se escribe se muestre la prudencia, y en la manera del escribir se conozca la crianza” (I. 99).
realm of writing. They became bibliophiles who valued literature, and poetry in particular, but who disdained grammatical knowledge and the more mechanical aspects of writing, as well as print (Bouza 2001: 229). Noblemen valued old papers, rare curiosities and classical stories. Their antiquarian taste also privileged documents and customs from early medieval Castile, which in their current situation they could idealize as the golden age of aristocratic values. This erudite craving explains the increase in private libraries that collected miscellaneous medieval texts, from literature to codices, deeds, letters, etc. and which will culminate in the building of the great library of El Escorial.\textsuperscript{100}

In order to appear invaluable to this tendency in the nobility, Guevara appoints himself as keeper of this antiquarian knowledge, and markets his services to meet the specific bibliographical needs of the aristocracy. He claims that his room is full of old books, “un banco de libros viejos, dellos góticos, dellos latinos, dellos moçárabes, dellos caldeos, dellos arábigos” (I. 148), and that studying them is his main occupation, “no tengo otra hacienda que grangerar, ni otros pasatiempos en que me recrear, sino en los libros que he procurado y aun de diversos reinos buscado” (I. 148). Instead of promoting the new printed books –like his own– Guevara underlines the value of old texts: “Los libros viejos tienen muchas ventajas a los nuevos; es a saber, que hablan verdad, tienen gravedad y muestran auctoridad” (I. 148). As an expert reader of such old serious books, Guevara can be very useful to those men who find themselves occupied with matters of government or military service, but who still wish to increase their cultural and social status by engaging in this desirable type of noble-specific knowledge. The dynamic that

\textsuperscript{100} For the development of an antiquarian taste amongst the nobility, see Fernando Bouza (2001: 257-9).
ensues is favorable for both parties: the nobles gain respect by fostering Guevara’s research, and he in turn gains their recognition, which he hopes to translate into public trust when he exposes this recognition to readers in his new printed book of epistles.

Guevara markets himself as the expert in his own newly-developed field: he is the specialized counselor who provides the nobles with what he senses they lack or might be interested in. For example, when the Bishop of Badajoz asks him to adapt some old _fueros_, Guevara speaks as a philological expert to highlight the linguistic differences between old and new Castilian, thus feeding the curiosity of his addressee while at the same time underscoring his own academic authority: “se ha limado y polido tanto la lengua española y es tan diferente el hablar de entonces al hablar de agora, que paresce haberse mudado el lenguaje como se mudó el traje” (I. 149).101 Guevara also makes old medieval texts appealing to his modern interlocutors by explaining the diachronic differences that they struggle with: “Antiguamente, en España, al traer decían ‘trujer’, y al cuchillo llamaban ‘cuchiello’” (I. 150). Similarly, when the Condestable asks him to explain some legal documents from the time of John I, Guevara comments not only on the legal details but also on the language of the thirteenth century: “os reiréis de la rusticidad en el hablar que había entonces” (I. 277). This suggests that the modern language, thanks to the work of writers like Guevara himself, is more polished than its “rustic” medieval counterpart. Guevara is always ready to provide anything his fellow nobles desire: particularly when he can provide them with access to chronologically distant texts.

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101 Indeed, the effects of fashion can also be felt on literary genres, as early modern printers soon realised.
By stressing the difficulty of the tasks with which the nobles entrust him and the long hours of research involved in his responses, Guevara simultaneously emphasizes his own importance. For example, when the archbishop of Seville and the duke of Nájara appoint Guevara as their judge to rule whether Numancia was “Çigüença o Monviedro” (I. 38), he answers with an abundant display of knowledge on the subject and lists as his sources “Plinio, Strabo, Tholomeo, Trogo Pompeo, Pullion, Trebelio, Vulpicio, Ysidoro, Justino y Marco Ancio” (I. 47). The goal of such an exuberant list of classical authors is as much to inform as to overwhelm: Guevara hopes to make it clear that he is the expert to whom nobles turn when they need help with the archive.

The fact that Guevara writes to the members of a social class who justify their hierarchical position precisely through lineage means that he is constantly faced with issues of genealogy and must himself define his own position in this hierarchy. He writes to the Condestable de Castilla that the Guevaras today are “pobres en estados y rentas,” but he underlines that they descend from an old and respected line: “primero hubo condes en Guevara que no reyes en Castilla” (I. 73). Although Guevara feels the need to clarify that his lineage can be traced back in time, it is not as noble as that of his powerful interlocutors. On the one hand, this means that his sphere of political influence is limited. On the other hand, it also means that he has sufficient freedom to define his own public identity. Guevara is the learned minor noble who provides the powerful upper aristocracy

102 In his response, Guevara makes clear that his social role is that of bibliographical advisor to the powerful, “con el debido acatamiento que se debe a tan altas personas, si el uno de vosotros no sabe más de rezar y el otro de pelear, ¿qué sabéis de crónicas y historias antiguas?” (I. 38).
103 Guevara suggests that Christ already exhibited the concern with blood of characteristic of sixteenth-century Spain, because neither he nor his mother “quisieron descender del tribu de Benjamin, que era el menor, sino del gran tribu de Judá, que era el mayor y mejor” (I. 74).
with advice and entertainment, but without representing a threat to them insofar as he
does not compete for positions of power at court. Guevara sees himself as the ideal
counselor for a nobility that should have both knowledge, “al buen caballero también le
parece tener un libro so la almohada como la espada a la cabecera” (I. 251), and curiosity,
so that in order to satisfy them both they need a man like him. As he explains to the
Count of Benavente: “No quiero, señor Conde, que el leer y escribir toméis por principal
oficio como yo que soy letrado” (I. 252). Thus, as long as they remain old-fashioned
nobles, he will continue to be their ideal “letrado”.

Ultimately, Guevara is a self-made man who was forced to create a position for
himself out of his own talents because he lacked the economic means and high birth that
would have guaranteed him an important role at court. When his more powerful relative,
the Marquis de Pescara, writes from the siege of Marseille to ask for his advice, Guevara
responds with an exercise of self-marketing. The Marquis inherited his estate and now
occupies an important position in active military service. Guevara seems to reproach him
for the inequality of their fortunes through veiled criticisms directed elsewhere: for
example, he calls the siege “escrupulosa” and reminds the Marquis what the behavior of
an honorable noble should be. But most importantly, when the Marquis sends him an
expensive “péñula de oro” as a token of his love and as an expression of his power—
Guevara does not specify whether this golden quill was good for writing or just a costly
ornament—Guevara reciprocates by sending him a copy of his book, “Marco Aurelio” (I.
86). With this gift, he equates his own intellectual achievements as an author with his

104 Italics mine.
relative’s military merits. Guevara claims for his work the same respect that the nobles earn through their military achievements.\footnote{Guevara makes this view clear when he asks the powerful Almirante don Fadrique Enríquez to stop bothering him while he is trying to write his next book: “si de aquí a medio año me tornáis a escribir, no os tengo de rescribir, porque tengo entre manos ciertas obras mías para luego las imprimir, y después las publicar” (I. 469). The Almirante writes to Guevara frequently to ask complicated questions and on one occasion when Guevara does not answer rapidly to a particularly difficult query, he becomes “colérico” and accuses Guevara of “tenerle en poco.” His strong reaction only underlines the importance that he gives Guevara, which makes the readers consider whether this is simply another self-promoting trick by the writer.} 

**To Print or Not to Print**

Building a network of friendships with important nobles allowed Guevara to gain both social status and economic support. But the immutable structure of the nobiliary system limited his possibilities of self-development, since the role accorded to him by definition always implied serving those above him. In order to change his social identity Guevara needed some kind of leverage, and he found it in the growing public sphere. By seeking the public’s recognition, Guevara creates the conditions for a reevaluation of his own social identity. He achieves this by building an economy of meaning where his own identity will be defined by the reaction that both the nobility and the public have to each other’s perception of his value. By creating and circulating a written account of himself, the nobility alone cannot determine Guevara’s public identity, and he is able to go beyond the social role that was ascribed to him by this highly immobile environment.

In order to obtain public recognition Guevara needed to make himself available to readers and hope that they would be interested in reading his opinions and sentiments. But the actual process of circulating his letters posed a fundamental question: would
readers react better to manuscript copies or to a printed book? Various sociocultural factors made printing problematic. First, as a minor noble seeking the respect of the nobility, Guevara had every reason to worry about their reactions to his printed letters. Second, his collection did not belong to the humanistic tradition of familiar epistles that were being published in the sixteenth century as didactic models to teach Latin, like the collections by Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda or Juan Luis Vives. Hence, as we saw, in order to print the collection he would require a marketing strategy to give it authority. But despite the problems that printing imposed, it also had an advantage over manuscript circulation: the possibility of reaching a wider audience. Guevara expresses his favor for a broad readership in a letter to Mosén Puche, when he offers a reflection on marriage directed specifically to “las señorases que oyeren o leyeren esta mi escriptura” (I. 373). By encouraging a female readership Guevara further distances himself from the male-dominated humanistic culture, and clearly welcomes the possibility of being widely read. Ultimately, the choice between manuscript circulation or printing will affect Guevara’s project of public self-creation.

Every author during the early modern period sooner or later faced the dilemma of whether to circulate his or her work in manuscript form or to send it to a printer, and it was not necessarily an easy choice to make. Despite the ubiquity of print in the cultural life of sixteenth-century Spain, manuscripts still retained great popularity: they were

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copied, circulated, borrowed, and even stolen. Manuscript circulation was particularly popular amongst the nobles, who feared that their peers might consider their published work as an attempt to seek fame. But perhaps even more important was the connection with monetary exchange, as printed authors received compensation. Hence, it was customary amongst the nobility, who wanted to be considered above such petty financial concerns, to circulate their texts and allow them to be copied. This, for example, is the case of the *Instrucción de Juan de Vega a su hijo acondicionada por Juan de Silva, Conde de Portalegre* (1592), which was extremely popular up until the seventeenth century. In this practical manual, the Count of Portalegre explains to his son how the court works and how he must act in order to give the right impression to his peers. In his own copy, the count of Gondomar wrote “Dijome Gonçalo Vaz Coutinho que esta ynstruçión no la hiço el Conde de Portalegre para probecho de su hijo, sino para letura de curiosos” (Real Biblioteca, Madrid, Mss. II-2807, qtd. in Bouza 2001: 56). Reports about life at court were enthusiastically received at the time, and this *Instrucción* was destined to edify and entertain a select group of initiates without calling the integrity of its noble author into question.

But the machinery for the creation and circulation of manuscripts also had its flaws. For example, it was difficult to claim authorship of a text that was already

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107 The continued success of manuscripts can be explained because they fulfilled different needs than printed texts: manuscripts allowed the latest news to spread quickly; they could be overwritten to incorporate new information; rare manuscripts made for valuable gifts and collector’s items; and, if needed, the number of copies could be limited to a reduced circle of sympathizers (Bouza 2001, 74). Finally, a manuscript text possessed a certain aura of authenticity, which publishers had learned to use to their advantage. Hence, it was not uncommon that a publication claimed to be based on a manuscript in order to make its content more plausible, the *Quixote* being the most famous example.

108 For the popularity of this manuscript, see Nievas Baranda, “Escritos para la educación de nobles en los siglos XVI y XVII” (*Bulletin Hispanique*, 97 [1995]: 157-171).
circulating wildly. Many preachers complained that they had found such deformed copies of their sermons that they could barely recognize their own words. Fray Diego de Arce, for example, complains about the “muchas mudanças, corrupciones y mentiras que hallo en ellos, viéndome en ellos tan disfrazado que no me conozco” (qtd. in Herrero Salgado, 129). For this reason many authors, such as Fray Diego de Arce, justified their decision to print their works in order to exercise control over their distribution and to guarantee their authenticity. When the marquis of Buscayolo published his *Opúsculos*, he wrote in the “Carta dedicatoria al Almirante de Castilla,” that he preferred the press “por menos mal y porque no salgan furtivamente a la calle mútilos, informes, infectos y supuestos” (qtd. in Bouza 2001: 81-82). It must be noted that behind this justification also lies the traditional modesty of authors who do not want to call attention to themselves, either because they are nobles, clergymen, or simply to keep up appearances. For his part, Guevara justifies printing his letters because “a penas he escripto letra que amigos no me la lleven, o ladrones me la hurten” (I. 3). The fact that they were circulating without the proper acknowledgement meant that he was deprived of the due recognition. By publishing them, Guevara seeks to guarantee that the public will recognize his authorial mark in his body of work, both through his name and his personal style. Eventually, he hopes that this popular recognition will extend even to those other letters “que por allá me han hurtado” (I. 3).

One way in which we see Guevara catering more to the public than to the nobility is his emphasis on the pedagogical value of his epistles as textual models. He even goes as far as to encourage his readers to copy and imitate them. Given the previous success of his translation of Marcus Aurelius’s letters, “Muchos señores, y aun señorases, se paran a
lisongearme y alabarme del alto estilo en que traduxe aquellas cartas y de las razones tan
delicadas y enamoradas que puse en ellas” (I. 451), \(^{109}\) and the fact that he admits that his
current collection of familiar epistles is stylistically polished, \(^{110}\) Guevara sets himself as
an epistolary authority. He is well aware of the importance that the general public
bestowed upon textual models, and makes sure to provide his readers with abundant
advice on how to write letters properly. \(^{111}\) Imitating established epistolary models and
even recycling letters was a habitual practice since the times of the *ars dictaminis*. \(^{112}\) The
practice of imitation was part of the common pedagogical model of reading, whereby
copying texts by consummated authorities allowed students to learn both style and
content. This pedagogical model presupposed the existence of an accepted canon of
authorities that had to be known intimately. Hence, Guevara performs his authority by
assuming and asserting that his own style is worth copying.

\(^{109}\) When Fadrique of Portugal asks Guevara if he omitted any of Marcus Aurelius’s
letters from the printed version of his translation *Libro áureo de Marco Aurelio* (1528),
Guevara responds that he published all his moral letters and only left a few of his love
letters behind, “las cuales son más sabrosas para leer que no provechosas para imitar” (I.
451). In fact, he worries that if some reader had imitated them and sinned, he would be to
blame for “haber puesto en ellas razones tan vivas y requeridas” (I. 452).

\(^{110}\) Guevara guarantees that his epistles will be read exactly as he intended, without
mistakes. Despite his modest claim that “jamás escribí carta con pensamiento que había
de ser publicada, ni menos impressa, porque si tal yo pensara, por ventura cortara más
delgada la pluma, y me aprovechara de más alta elocuencia,” he does admit that some of
the letters he publishes were “castigadas y polidas” (I. 4).

\(^{111}\) Guevara begins many of his epistles with a reflection on the genre, “jamás escribí carta de importancia de que no hiciese primero la minuta” (I. 480), and offers numerous
examples of what a letter should and should not look like: “Miento si no me escribió una
vez un caballero pariente mío una carta de dos pliegos de papel, y como escribió tan largo
y no tornó a releer lo que había escrito, las mesmas razones y las mesmas palabras que
había puesto en el principio tornó a poner en el cabo, de lo cual me enojé tanto que la
carta quemé y a él no respondí” (I. 104).

\(^{112}\) It was common practice to seek help writing letters or petitions from the professional
scribes who offered their services in *plazas* or crowded public areas. See Fernando
Bouza, *Corre manuscrito*, 72.
The recurrent contradictions in Guevara’s epistolary collection, both in terms of content (adaptations of sources, confusions about dates, self-aggrandizement) and scope (different target audiences), ultimately point at a changing literary and social environment. Guevara can publish a book of letters where he shares his sentiments because there is a growing interest in personal narratives that can teach and entertain. Powerful politicians, humanist scholars, or religious authorities were traditionally the sources for this type of autobiographical account. However, Guevara skillfully designs a public identity that sets him apart. He cannot be described simply as a politician, as a humanist, nor as a cleric. He is a little bit of all of these things together but made accessible and enjoyable.
Chapter 3

When Flesh Becomes Word: Teresa of Avila’s Handwritten Relics

In the “Sala de Reliquias” of the Discalced Convent of Santa Teresa in Avila, there is one cabinet dedicated specifically to Saint Teresa’s autograph letters. Amongst the objects displayed are two amulets that her devotees would wear in contact with their body: one is an apotropaic amulet containing only Teresa’s signature; the other, meant to be sewn into clothing, contains both her signature and fragments of her own handwriting extracted from her letters. In the same way as her physical relics, which were dispersed after her death, these objects evoke the presence of the saint. I consider that there are specific aspects of Teresa’s doctrine as well as her written persona that make these letters such a powerful embodiment of her and her thought. The lengthy descriptions of her body in pain and her unadorned epistolary style make her readers feel as if they could see the real Teresa, as if she were present in her writing. More than seeing her, the act of reading Teresa means coming into contact with her body, a body that she has transmuted into language. The power of her letters lies in the fact that they represent Teresa’s incarnation into words. Consequently, they function as the perfect synthesis of physical and textual relic.

During the process of canonization at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the interest in Teresa’s handwritten letters grew in parallel to her physical relics. We can see an example of this interest in the “exchange” that took place in 1610 between Juliana de la Madre de Dios and María de San José, the prioresses of Seville and Consuegra.

113 Saint Teresa is usually represented in paintings holding a quill and paper, as the light of the Holy Spirit illuminates her during the act of writing. The iconography follows the image by Peter Paul Rubens, “Saint Teresa of Avila” (1615). Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
respectively. Juliana had recently received Teresa’s little finger, which Jerónimo Gracián, Teresa’s closest collaborator, had personally removed and used to carry around his neck. But she also wanted to bring to Seville part of Gracián’s collection of Teresa’s letters, which at the time was kept in Consuegra. In a letter of April 17, 1610 María de San José, unimpressed by all these demands, denied having any of Teresa’s letters and reminded Juliana that she should already be thankful for possessing the finger: “Conténtese, norabuena, zorra, con esto y con habernos defraudado del dedo de N.S. Madre…, y que no nos enoje ahora más con las cartas” (Archivo MCD Sevilla, qtd. in Madre de Dios and Steggink 60). San José refuses to give any letters to a convent that already possessed a finger of the saint. Hence she deemed the value of the letters to be functionally equivalent to the physical relic.

In this chapter I argue that the authority of Teresa’s letters did not stem simply from their content, but rather from their power to re-create or re-present the humanity of their writer. The written word always bears witness to the earlier person and this deferred presence is also an essential trait of all types of relics. This is especially true of most letters, but what makes Teresa’s case so special is that her particular style conjures up a presence not merely intellectual but also physical. Teresa’s letters are important because they synthesize the relic and the written text: her letters are not only interesting because they express a given idea about church doctrine, but also because they mediate these ideas through the written expression of her body. I see this dynamic developing in three different ways: through the use of her own distinctive language, through the emphasis on her hand both figuratively as script (“de mi mano” as “de mi letra”) and literally as her physical body, and finally through the elevation of her suffering, which brings her closer
to the agony of Christ. Thus for her devotees, Teresa’s letters had the status of relics: by contemplating or touching them the faithful could feel a connection with the physical body of the saint and through it come closer to the divinity themselves.

The Letter as Relic

In her life and deeds, Teresa defied the strict monastic rule of disconnection from the world, which she otherwise imposed on the sisters in her reformed houses. She maintained a prolific correspondence with a wide variety of people beyond the convent in order to achieve three goals: it kept the reform movement active, it allowed her to supervise the functioning of the various convents, and she used it to cultivate a network of friends and allies. Despite the fact that it worsened her already poor health, Teresa insisted on writing letters, often just to keep in touch:

Ya estuve buena de la flaqueza del otro día, y después, pareciéndome que tenía mucha cólera, con miedo de estar con ocasión la cuaresma para no ayunar, tomé una purga, y aquel día fueron tantas las cartas y negocios, que estuve escribiendo hasta las dos y hízome harto daño a la cabeza, que creo ha de ser para provecho; porque me ha mandado el doctor no escriva jamás sino hasta las doce y algunas veces no de mi letra (Epistolario 323).

In her letters Teresa struggled to create a voice capable of expressing her own personal experience while simultaneously establishing for itself the authority necessary for such expression. After her death, however, these same letters posed a significant problem for her friends and collaborators. Traditionally, letters written by saints were venerated because they dealt with prayer and the mysteries of the faith, and thus were considered didactic. In fact, as Teresa herself acknowledged, it was reading Saint

114 Teresa’s suffering is especially present in her letters because the epistolary form allows her to share details about her poor physical state that would seem inappropriate in a more formal text.
Jerome’s epistles that inspired her to enter a convent. But given Teresa’s gender and the radical nature of her religious reform, she could not write freely and she often asked that her more doctrinally radical and thus compromising letters be destroyed.

Nevertheless, although her letters lacked the traditional authority attributed to letters by male saints, their value rose during the seventeenth century in parallel to her physical relics, and they were give pride of place in reliquaries.

Teresa’s letters were compiled and published posthumously in the seventeenth century during the highest point of Teresian fervor, after the saint had been beatified by Paul V (1614), canonized by Gregory XV (1622) and named co-patroness of Spain by the Cortes of Castile (1626). However, this early collection comprised only a small fraction of her correspondence and included letters written primarily during the last fifteen years of her life, when her struggle for reform was at its peak. Her correspondence offers a valuable insight into the religious and political complexities she had to navigate in order to promote the Discalced movement.

115 “Habíanme dado, con unas calenturas, unos grandes desmayos, que siempre tenía bien poca salud. Dióme la vida haber quedado ya amiga de buenos libros: leía en las Epístolas de San Jerónimo, que animaban de suerte que me animé a decirlo a mi padre, que casi era como tomar el hábito; porque era tan honrosa, que me parece no tornara atrás de ninguna manera habiéndolo dicho una vez” (Libro de la Vida 132).

116 Juan de Palafox edited the first collection (Zaragoza: Diego Dormer, 1658). More letters were added in subsequent editions, as they were discovered. The most complete edition includes 476 letters and fragments (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1959).

117 This honor was later revoked due to pressure from the defenders of the apostle St. James. A detailed study of this episode can be found in Erin Kathleen Rowe, Disrupting the Republic: Santiago, Teresa de Jesús and the Battle for the Soul of Spain (doctoral dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 2005).
Teresa first mentions reform in a letter to her brother, don Lorenzo de Cepeda, dated December 23, 1561, in which she describes her plan to set up the first reformed house, the Discalced Carmelite Convent of Saint Joseph in Avila:

[D]igo que personas santas y letradas les parece estoy obligada a no ser covarde sino poner lo que pudiere en esta obra, que es hacer un monesterio adonde ha de haver solas quince –sin poder crecer el número- con grandísimo encerramiento, ansí de nunca salir como de no ver si no han velo delante del rostro, fundadas en oración y en mortificación, como a vuestra merced más largo tengo escrito y escribiré (Epistolario, 4)

After meeting with initial disapproval from both the Carmelite order and the town of Avila, the Carmelite General Rubeo praised Teresa’s task and in 1567 he allowed her to establish more convents as well as two houses for reformed friars within the province of Castile. In the years that followed she founded more convents across Castile, and, under the advice of Jerónimo Gracián, who had just been appointed apostolic visitor of Andalucia, she also founded the convents of Caravaca and Seville (1576). This prompted the Calced Carmelites to complain to General Rubeo, who, fearing a separatist movement, abolished the Discalced Carmelites during the General Chapter of 1575. The situation of the reform movement worsened over the following years. in September 1575 Teresa was forced to withdraw to a convent of her choosing, the Discalced

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118 Teresa founded convents in Medina del Campo (1567), Malagón and Valladolid (1568), Toledo and Pastrana (1569), Salamanca (1570) and Alba de Tormes (1571). In Duruelo, John of the Cross and Antonio of Jesús founded the first house for men (1568) and in Pastrana Teresa founded the second (1569). During a second phase, she founded convents in Segovia (1574) and Beas de Segura (1575).

119 Teresa complains that her enemies are plotting against her and that they have signed an acta to put her under seclusion. Interestingly, the suffering she must endure is presented as paramount to her mission, “los grandes trabajos que para mí, que soy para padecer poco, en estas fundaciones he pasado” (Epistolario, 160).

120 Teresa writes to María Bautista: “me notificaron el mandamiento del reverendísimo, que es que escoja una casa adonde esté siempre y no funde más, que por el concilio no puedo salir” (Epistolario, 152-3).
convents were put under the authority of Calced provincials, and in 1578 the new papal nuncio, Sega, excommunicated and imprisoned the Discalced friars who did not submit, including the future Saint John of the Cross. The situation became so untenable that Phillip II was forced to intervene and a special province was established for the Discalced Carmelites in 1580. Thanks to this intervention by the king, for the remainder of her life Teresa was again able both to visit her convents and to found new ones.

After Teresa’s death, Phillip II ordered that the autograph manuscripts of all her books, *Libro de la vida* (1562-5), *Camino de perfección* (1562-5), *Castillo interior* (1577), and other manuals, were brought to the library of the Monasterio de El Escorial, which Phillip II himself had founded (Madre de Dios and Steggink 66). Her letters, in contrast, were not collected in one single place, but often remained in the hands of their addressees, who sometimes donated them to friends and benefactors (Madre de Dios and Steggink 62, 66-8). There was even debate on whether they were sufficiently relevant or exemplary to be saved, or even published, which necessarily complicated any efforts to collect them. Some of Teresa’s closest friends, like John of the Cross, Ana de Jesús or Isabel de Santo Domingo, considered that her letters were just private documents that belonged to them and thus, following her own orders, they burned them.

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121 Due to her confinement Teresa was not allowed to visit with Sega, so Gracián was the person in charge of exposing the intrigues of the Calced Carmelites and convincing the papal nuncio to release the “olvidado” John of the Cross (*Epistolario*, 461).
122 Palencia and Soria (1581) and Burgos and Granada (1582).
123 Teresa’s letters were valued as objects of exchange in a gift economy. See Natalie Zenn Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).
124 The letters written during the reform could have implicated both the writer and the addressee, thus Teresa often asked that her letters be burned. As Ana de San Jesús explained: “Por haverme tratado de muchas cosas en las cartas que me havía escrito, viendo una vez algo revuelta la religión y contienda de prelados, me envió a mandar la
In reading Teresa, it is this relationship between the doctrinal and the personal that makes her letters so problematic and so interesting. The religious climate of sixteenth century Spain was characterized by the post-Reformation backlash against individual theological experimentation and its intent to subject all aspects of spiritual life to the authority of the clergy. As such, this dangerous climate discouraged lay people, and women in particular, from engaging in any kind of theological speculation.\(^{125}\) Although naturally interested in expressing her ideas in writing, Teresa had to submit to a process of self-censorship and embed her thoughts on doctrine within her personal texts.\(^{126}\) Two important factors further influenced her epistolary style: On the one hand, letters were often read aloud in front of a community that could include benefactors, confessors or superiors, and it was also common to forward letters to others. Therefore, her writing had to perform obedience to the clergy and orthodoxy. On the other hand, the postal system was not safe and it was not uncommon for letters to get lost or even to be stolen, hence the danger that her letters would fall into the hands of the enemies of the reform was quite real.\(^{127}\) Faced with these uncertainties, Teresa needed to be very cautious of both what she said and how she said it. Although her letters do not often deal directly with

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\(^{126}\) Teresa describes how when she told her confessor and superiors that God had ordered her to found a reformed convent, they asked her to keep silence: “iban a mí con mucho miedo a decirme que andaban los tiempos recios y que podría ser me levantasen algo y fuesen a los inquisidores” (*Libro de la vida* 394).

\(^{127}\) On this subject Teresa writes: “No quería que las cogiesen, que de perderse no iba tanto” (*Epistolario*, 76).
doctrine, they are an important source to understand how she developed a voice that could find a space of action for herself. In other words, her letters are interesting for how they negotiate the various political and social structures restricting her free expression.

As a person lacking authority, Teresa carefully controls how she presents herself.\textsuperscript{128} Given that letters occupy a pseudo private space, in this triangular configuration the gaze of a third, unaddressed reader is always present within the relation of writer and addressee. In this way, Teresa’s awareness of a broader public must be factored into her writing, in a similar fashion as postings on Facebook are going to be seen and interpreted by other acquaintances. While her letters construct the fiction of a private dialogue with an addressee, she realizes that she is performing for an audience. This awareness influences every step of the writing process, and it is here, I would argue, that we can see the presence of the literary, in a very general sense, as textual creation that allows for various interpretations.

The fact that all her major works were stored in El Escorial offers a clue to the kind of authority that was assigned to Teresa after her death. Since its completion in 1584, El Escorial was not only one of the most important libraries in Europe, but also an extensive reliquary. Here Philip II stored the largest collection of relics in Spain, with more than 7000 objects that he had imported from all over Europe (Barbeito Carneiro 189). With the Counter-Reformation emphasis on the cult of relics, not only were “antique” relics accumulated, but the bodies of contemporary saints became the basis of new collections. Teresa is the perfect example of this phenomenon: nine months after being buried in the monastery of Alba de Tormes, her body was exhumed and found to be

\textsuperscript{128} In the \textit{Book of Foundations}, Teresa writes: “We are living in a world in which we have to think of people’s opinions of us if our words are to have any effect” (43).
uncorrupted. Over the next years numerous parts of her body were amputated and placed as relics in convents, churches, and in private hands. The biographer of Beatriz de Jesús, Teresa’s niece, explains:

Siempre q[ue] entraban los perlados cortaban carne del S[an]to cuerpo y partían con la venerable m[adr]e, y así cuando vino a esta provincia trajo mucha q[ue] repartió en los conventos q[ue] estuvo: de Ocaña (Toledo) y este de M[adrid]d (fol. 464) 129

Medieval theology saw the person as both body and soul, hence relics were not just a memento of the person, but they were the saints themselves. In regards to the “images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints,” the Council of Trent (1563) established that:

not that any divinity, or virtue, is believed to be in them, on account of which they are to be worshipped; or that anything is to be asked of them; or, that trust is to be reposed in images, as was of old done by the Gentiles who placed their hope in idols; but because the honor which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which those images represent; in such wise that by the images which we kiss, and before which we uncover the head, and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ; and we venerate the saints, whose similitude they bear. 130

The power of relics consists in bringing the faithful close to the physical expression of the divinity. Since the body of the saint has a special connection with Christ, it continues to mediate between the faithful and God even after death. The relic is thus not an object of cult in itself; instead, its value lies in its symbolic capacity to invoke the divinity (*cultus relativus*). Considered particularly powerful were the relics from saints who had suffered physical pain (through martyrdom, self-imposed torture or disease) and who had

actively welcomed it as a way of establishing a deep bond with Christ’s *humanitas*.

Teresa’s relics were considered very valuable and kept appreciating after she was canonized. As the trade in her physical relics grew, so did the interest in her autograph letters. They began to be considered objects not only worthy of being collected but also of being venerated. But the fervor they awaken cannot simply be explained by the issues they dealt with. When Francisco Sobrino, the future bishop of Valladolid, donated the letters collected by the late María de San José to the discalced convent of Valladolid, he explained:

> Todas estas cartas, aunque no contienen cosa de particular importancia de doctrina ni de historia, por solo ser todas firmadas de la Me. Sta. Teresa y todas escritas de su propia mano y letra, si no son dos o tres que son de mano ajena, y por la veneración que se deve a todas sus cosas, se recogieron aquí en este libro. Porque quede en el lugar y reverencia que se deve, le entrego hoy a la Me. Priora y convento de nuestra Señora de la Concepción de las descalzas carmelitas de esta ciudad, como a casa suya, para que en él se guarde con la veneración que se deve a tan sancta madre y fundadora. En Valladolid, a seis días del mes de agosto de mill y seiscientos y catorce años (qtd. in Madre de Dios and Steggink 66)

The didactic content of the majority of Teresa’s letters was quite limited and her successors, as much as her contemporaries, did not consider them to be doctrinally important documents. In this sense, her attempt to downplay her political and religious views and instead to bare the personal was quite successful. According to Sobrino, the interest in Teresa’s letters lay simply in the fact that they were part of “sus cosas,” i.e., a physical extension of her person. But I consider that there is more at stake in this connection between her letters and her relics. All relics must have a connection to the body of the saint, so that they can activate a memory of their presence. The connection of Teresa’s letters to her body is not limited to the fact that she wrote them. What is particular about them is that they effectively contain her body, as part of her rhetorical
strategy but also as a key component of her religious experience. The fundamental trait of the public persona that Teresa shaped while she carried out her religious reform was her physicality. Faced with a problem of authority, she chose to emphasize her weakness in order to seem less threatening. Thus, she presented herself publicly as a provincial old woman who suffered greatly and who displayed admirable humility. Despite being subjected to intense scrutiny, this rhetorical choice helped Teresa remain safe, and it would also prove useful years later to those seeking to have her beatified and then canonized, an honor that the post-Tridentine Church rarely bestowed upon women.\textsuperscript{131} Additionally, the fact that Teresa’s doctrine was deeply mediated by her body adds a further level of physicality to her persona. Teresa’s mysticism demanded close contact with Christ, without intermediaries, just the Creator and the creature. Hence Teresa’s body is revealed in her letters through a very deep and complex association. Her letters are more than just “her things,” as Sobrino understood relics, and more than just the letters of other saints. When the faithful read or simply contemplated Teresa’s letters, they activated a very physical image of her, and her readers could sense that the saint was embodied in her word.

\textbf{Her own language}

Teresa of Avila’s works have seduced generations of literary critics due to their apparent combination of two opposing tendencies: on the one hand, she condemns herself in a way that seems excessive even in light of the tradition of Christian \textit{humilitas}, while on the other, she confidently and effectively ignores the Pauline injunction that women

\textsuperscript{131} For a detailed explanation of the process of canonization, see Gillian T.W. Ahlgren, \textit{Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).
may neither teach nor have authority over men. But while her major works have garnered considerable critical attention, her letters remain comparatively less known. Behind this indifference lies perhaps the assumption that her correspondence was of a private nature and thus lacked interest from a literary or political perspective. Indeed, given Teresa’s position as a reformer, as we have seen, she could not risk writing openly about doctrine or practice, and thus her letters tend to avoid discussing such matters. In fact, a close reading of her letters reveals that they are a repository of the convictions that motivated her other works. In order to express her views without arousing the suspicion of inquisitive readers, she develops certain tactics and procedures. Amongst the details of her everyday life, Teresa subtly introduces the ideas that form the basis of her beliefs. In her discussions of her body, for example, we see the physical connection to Christ so characteristic of her thought. On very rare occasions, Teresa writes overtly about matters of doctrine. For example, in a letter to her brother she describes her mystic experience:

Desde antes que escribiese á vuestra merced me han tornado los arrobamientos, y hame dado pena; porque es (cuando han sido algunas veces) en público, y ansí me ha acaecido en Maitines. Ni basta resistir, ni se puede disimular. Quedo tan corridísima que me querria meter no sé donde. Harto ruego á Dios se me quite esto en público; pídaselo vuestra merced, que hay hartos inconvenientes, y no me parece es mas oracion. Ando estos días como un borracho en parte: al ménos entiéndese bien, que está el alma en buen puesto; y ansí como las potencias no están libres, es penosa cosa entender en mas que lo que el alma quiere. (Epistolario, 410)

But well aware of the danger of writing about mysticism, Teresa concludes: “Harto he dicho. Lo demás no es para carta, ni an para decir” (Epistolario, 410). Any written document could be compromising if it fell in the wrong hands, and here Teresa shows that she is well aware that even in her personal correspondence she must always write with restraint.
Teresa develops this discursive tactic because as a reformer and a woman, she held a tenuous position within the religious climate of late sixteenth century Spain. In her writing and in her own mystical experience Teresa showed that an immediate relationship to Christ was possible. This message was especially radical at a time when the Inquisition feared the development of a Protestant sect within Spain, and all deviations from standard, post-Tridentine exterior performance were being scrutinized. For example, the Alumbrado movement was now considered heretical even though the more open-minded Cardinal Cisneros had judged it positively during the first half of the century. Precisely because learned women had played such a dominant role as teachers within the Alumbrado movement, the Inquisition now had a heightened sensitivity to any woman who spoke openly about doctrine.\textsuperscript{132} In this context, Teresa’s decision both to write about her experience of silent prayer and to found reformed Discalced convents throughout Castile and Andalucia made her extremely vulnerable to persecution. Therefore, in order to mitigate the suspicion that she aroused as a reformer, Teresa constructed a written persona that could perform humility while still communicating some of her main ideas. This literary persona can be seen in all her major works, but even before she wrote any of her books, Teresa developed this rhetoric in her many letters. Looking at Teresa’s letters can offer greater insight into how she managed the seemingly impossible task of influencing the religious climate of the time while remaining an obedient nun.

At face value, her letters give the portrait of an unthreatening old lady thanks to various common threads: her poor health, her obedience to her confessors and superiors, respect for learned men, her ignorance, and often lengthy descriptions of her general

\textsuperscript{132} For a detailed history of the Alumbrado movement, see Antonio Márquez, \textit{Los alumbrados: orígenes y filosofía, 1525-1559} (Madrid: Taurus, 1980).
wretchedness. This epistolary style supported the Counter-Reformation-friendly image of the humble nun who chose a path of poverty and personal renunciation. The ecclesiastical hierarchy and the regular faithful alike read her letters anachronistically as a true portrayal of Teresa the saint, and saw in her unaffected style the ideal expression of a female mystic. I consider that her self-styled “simplicity” is not necessarily a sign of transparency but rather a sophisticated discursive tactic. Teresa’s letters demonstrate an individual’s tactical response against the institutional strategy. Michel De Certeau explains that when faced with a hostile environment that discourages direct action, individuals are forced to develop a tactic, an alternative or even roundabout means of achieving their goals:

[A] tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus[…]. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power[…]. It is a manoeuvre ‘within the enemy’s field of vision’, as von Bulow put it, and within enemy territory (1984: 36-7)

Teresa’s letters are a testimony of how this influential woman constructs a public persona that can enact reform “within enemy territory,” who can speak out without seeming threatening. Consequently, she creates a self that is fictional in so far as it does not represent a reality outside the text, but is rather a tactical performance of the self. In her letters Teresa molds her voice, and thus her “self,” to appeal to the expectations of her interlocutors, be it her superiors, her noble patrons, or Phillip II himself. These expectations turn out to be a weak point that she can exploit, as Certeau explains:

[A tactic] must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where they least expected. It is guileful ruse. In short, the tactic is an art of the weak. (1984: 37)
For Teresa, the letter and its incorporation of her body are precisely such an overlooked area: her portrayal of herself as weak, since it perfectly corresponds to what was expected, constitutes itself in the system. In turn, the voice that she develops in order to speak publicly is unique: since she cannot simply imitate the style of the learned men who have authority, she is forced to develop her own individual language. And this tactical language distinguishes her; she does not sound like other religious writers of her generation, her writing is different. Thus, readers can identify Teresa’s presence in her texts through her unique language.

Teresa is not a naive and unworldly recluse, but rather a very practical-minded subject with a keen understanding of social relationships. She writes: “Bien nos enseña Dios el poco caso que hemos de hacer de las criaturas, por buenas que sean, y cómo hemos menester tener malicia y no tanta llaneza” (Epistolario, 494). She thus acknowledges using rhetorical devices in order to influence the reader and emphasizes those traits that can earn her the sympathy of her audience. Teresa perfected the role of the old wretched nun in order to make herself more likable and her radical message more acceptable. The fact that she started her reform later in life and that her letters stem mostly from those years means that they are an exceptional source to explore how she used her old age as a rhetorical asset. Particularly when she writes to her superiors, Teresa presents herself as an obedient old nun plagued by physical afflictions. Thus she makes her petitions seem less like demands from a proud woman and instead underscores that her faults stem from old age and lack of worldliness, and thus should be ignored. We can observe her tactical expertise in a letter of February 10, 1578 to Juan Suárez, the Jesuit Provincial in Castile. Teresa writes to defend herself against his accusations that
“yo he tratado que el padre Gaspar de Salazar deje la Compañía de Jesús y se pase a
nuestra Orden del Carmen porque nuestro Señor ansí lo quiere y lo ha revelado”
(Epistolario 190). Given the uncertain situation of the Discalced reform in 1578, these
accusations could have held grave consequences for Teresa. In her letter she dismisses
the charges of influencing Salazar and claiming that God had revealed his wishes to her.
But she also employs her best rhetorical asset, her carefully constructed “obedient, sick
old nun” persona, in order to emphasize her innocence. First, she explains that when she
heard the news about Salazar’s decision, “me alteré tanto y dio tan grande pena, que
ningún provecho me hizo para la poca salud, que a la sazón tenía” (Epistolario 190). By
mentioning her poor health, Teresa comes across as frail and unthreatening. Second, she
claims that if God had revealed anything to her, “de muchas personas estoy enseñada del
valor y crédito que se ha de dar a esas cosas” (Epistolario 190). Here she streses her
record of obedience to her superiors in matters of prayer. Finally, Teresa concludes
“medio año ha que no dejan de llover trabajos y persecuciones sobre esta pobre vieja”
(Epistolario 192). She cleverly uses her old age to arouse pity in her readers. In this
context we see how Teresa uses the tactical performance of sickness, obedience, and old
age in order to defend herself from the constant threats that she faced as a reformer and a
mystic.

In her letters Teresa highlights the frailty of her sick body more often than that of
her sex, although she also performs the role of “mujercilla” (poor little woman),\(^\text{133}\) particularly when she is addressing men of higher rank. For example, she writes to father

\(^{133}\) For a detailed discussion of Teresa’s use of the term “mujercilla” in her works, see
Gonzalo Dávila: “Una de las grandes faltas que tengo es juzgar por mí en estas cosas de oración, y así no tiene vuestra merced que hacer caso de lo que dijere; porque le dará Dios otro talento que a una mujercilla como yo” (Epistolario, 444). In her strategic use of the misogynistic trope of feminine weakness and inadequacy, Teresa shows that she is very aware of linguistic nuance and that she can easily play with words to accomplish her own goals. She uses this rhetorical strategy, for example, when she writes to father Juan Bautista Rubeo, the General of the Carmelite Order. With her best diplomacy she lets him know that from his post in Rome he has no real knowledge of how the Calced Carmelites are hindering the reform by spreading rumors about her and the Discalced friars.

Por amor de nuestro señor suplico a vuestra señoría me haga esta merced. Mire que para muchas cosas conviene, que quizá no las entienda vuestra señoría allá como yo que estoy acá y que, aunque las mujeres no somos buenas para consejo, que algunas veces acertamos (Epistolario, 159)

Her performance of humility can barely hide the clarity of her message. Here again we see her simultaneous humility and authority: she needs Rubeo’s help and deserves it because she has counsel to give.134

Alison Weber coined the term “rhetoric of femininity” to describe Teresa’s performance of a feminine literary language. Weber states, “rather than ‘writing like a woman,’ perhaps Teresa wrote as she believed women were perceived to speak” (1990, 11). Weber’s argument suggests that instead of confronting the misogynistic discourse of the Church from outside, Teresa adopts it in order to speak from within. By transforming her language into a rhetoric, Teresa introduces herself into the sphere of the political.

134 Interestingly, Teresa also uses the term “mujercilla” ironically when she writes to her subordinate Ana de Jesús to boast about her successes: “Mire qué sentiría cuando viese un tan gran perlado arrodillado delante de esta pobre mujercilla, sin quererse levantar hasta que le echase la bendición en presencia de todas las religiones y cofradías de Sevilla” (Epistolario, 174).
would stress that Teresa’s lack of authority was not just due to her gender, but even more a function of her radical religious vision. Following Certeau, I believe that we can see more at work in Teresa’s writing. In order to find a niche from which she could be heard and not endanger her own life, she adopted the rhetoric of those who lack political status. Teresa was in a precarious position because she did not fully fit with the normative doctrine of post-Tridentine Catholicism, insofar as she argued for a model of prayer that differed from the one the Church enforced. Instead of praying vocally in public, she developed an individual connection with God through silent prayer, and more importantly, she taught this method of prayer to others. Her doctrinal message was radical, it focused on God’s perfect love. Although she had to present herself as a wretched nun, she believed that God could see inside her and loved her completely. Her writing makes apparent a split between an inner and an outer self. The inner self is the one God alone knows and loves, while the outer one corresponds to the persona that is born out of and against the all-encompassing strategy. This schizophrenic split is ultimately consummated in the mystical union during which only the inner self matters. Teresa’s description of God’s perfect knowledge sent a radical ethical message since it allowed for a space where the individual can be freed from the constant expectation to correspond to a certain identity according to gender, ethnicity and social status. In contrast to this liberating space that God allows for the individual, we find the pressure to conform that society and the Church placed on standard behavior, or in Certeau’s language, the strategy of the powerful.

We must also recognize that Teresa adopts this mode of speech in her personal letters after having endured repeated attacks from her male superiors. In her Vida, Teresa
explains that when she first started speaking about her model of prayer her confessors and other male superiors accused her of pride and in her explanations they saw a distinct lack of humility. For example, she explains that whenever they posed a question, “yo respondía con llaneza y descuido. Luego les parecía les quería enseñar, y que me tenía por sabia” (Libro de la vida, 344). Her autobiography emphasizes the fact that these powerful men misunderstand her, and that in reality she is only a weak and humble “mujercilla.” In this way, Teresa develops a clever strategy: she emphasizes her public image as a simple nun who obeys God completely, and shifts the suspicion instead onto those learned men who displayed such cruelty in their interrogations. She writes,

Bastantes cosas había para quitarme el juicio, y algunas veces me vía en términos que no sabía qué hacer sino alzar los ojos a el Señor; porque contradición de buenos a una mujercilla ruin y flaca, como yo, y temerosa, no parece nada ansi dicho, y con haber yo pasado en la vida grandísimos trabajos, es éste de los mayores. (Libro de la vida, 344-5)

The fear of being misunderstood reappears in her letters, “que mal entendida me tienen” (Epistolario, 259). She acknowledges that human beings have a complex nature, hence “nunca nos conocemos” (Epistolario, 255), but she implies that understanding a woman can be even more challenging: “¡No somos fáciles de conocer las mujeres!” (Epistolario, 229). Having suffered strong opposition for being a woman with religious views of her own, it is not difficult to see why she would recycle this well-worn topic in her own writing. Women were subjected to so much normative pressure that it became difficult for the individual to understand her own nature beneath all the discursive layers. In this environment, writing functions as an extremely powerful tool for those individuals who are constantly denied the possibility of self-expression. Despite all the limitations aforementioned, a letter gives the individual the space to assert her own voice, and thus to
make communication seem deeper and more authentic. As Teresa tells Jerónimo Gracián,
writing letters is “entenderse un alma con otra, no falta qué decir ni da cansancio”
(Epistolario, 302). When she learns that Pedro de Castro y Nero wants to hear her
confession “por curiosidad” (Epistolario, 726) because he does not believe in her visions,
Teresa reacts with apathy and admits that she has lost interest in speaking with anybody
who has not read her texts and does not understand her. When she was younger she was
glad to argue with this type of incredulous father, but now she is “sosegada” (Epistolario,
726) and only wants to speak to those who are willing to hear. Thus, the best way to
know her is through her writings: “para entenderme un confesor y no andar con miedos,
que no hay cosa mejor que vean uno de esos papeles, que me quita de gran trabajo”
(Epistolario, 745). Even though her superiors scrutinized all her texts, she still found that
writing allowed her a space for self-expression.

During the almost four years that Teresa spent in seclusion in the Discalced
convent of Toledo, writing letters was a practical necessity. During this time the reform
was under attack, and Teresa often complains that her male counterparts acted without
thinking and lacked any diplomacy. Given the chance to act, Teresa would have done
things differently, and in her opinion, with much better and faster results for the reform
movement. But she cannot give orders, just advice and comments. In a letter to her
spiritual director, Jerónimo Gracián, in which she gives him clear instructions about what
to do and say, she ends with a postscript that is a perfect exercise in performing humility:
“Mas ¡qué propia de vieja poco humilde!, va ésta llena de consejos. Plega a Dios que en
alguno acierte; y si no, tan amigos como de antes” (Epistolario, 502). Even though
Gracián was one of her closest allies, theirs was a complex and hierarchical relationship.
Gracián was a nobleman thirty years her junior, and even though he had only become a Discalced in 1572, he already occupied a position of authority above Teresa. Thus in order to give him instructions, Teresa needed to deploy her rhetorical tactics. She debases her own intellectual abilities and resists approaching matters in a straightforward way: “Vuestra paternidad lo sabrá mejor decir, que harto bova soy de ponerlo aquí, sino que con otros cuidados quizá se le olvidara” (*Epistolario*, 459). She also uses popular expressions that make herself come across as uneducated: “El negocio está en buenos términos; vuestra merced no lo bulla ahora más que antes será peor [...] Yo aguardara a estar allí para bullir ese negocio, que soy una gran baratona (si no, dígalo mi amigo Valdemoro)” (*Epistolario*, 230). Finally, she exaggerates the humble tone of her requests: “por caridad que no descuide vuestra reverencia en ello” (*Epistolario*, 711). In all these examples, Teresa performs the role of the “poor nun” while actually telling a superior what to do. All this makes apparent how tenuous her position was, even within the reform movement, and how aware she needed to be of her epistolary style. Teresa of Avila’s letters are a testimony to how skillful she was at using specific rhetorical tools in achieving her ends.

Teresa’s “simplicity” manifests itself as well in her relationship with Latin, the proper language for the educated, clerical elite. She had no formal training in Latin, as

135 The 1770 edition of the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* defines the term “bullir” as “se dice de los negocios que se tratan con mucha actividad y movimiento” (546), and “baratón” as “el que tiene por oficio ó costumbre trocar unas cosas por otras” (442). *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* (Madrid: Joachín Ibarra, 1770). Interestingly, Antonio de Guevara’s *Oratorio de religiosos y ejercicio de virtuosos* contains a humorous example of the effects of applying the adjective “baratón” to a religious person: “Si a los que compraban y vendían los echó Christo del templo, ¿no sería también justo que al monge baraton y mohatron, ya que el perlado no le eche del monasterio, le vaya á lo menos siempre á la mano?” (196). See *Oratorio de religiosos y ejercicio de virtuosos* (Valladolid: Juan de Villaquirán, 1542): cap. 48, fol. 252.
she herself acknowledges, “lo que está en latin no lo entiendo” (Epistolario, 685), and she criticized those nuns who wanted to “presumir de latinas” (Epistolario, 259). She does sometimes refer to Latin sententiae, which she may have heard in sermons. In those occasions, she does not write them in proper Latin. Instead, she either adapts them phonetically, for example: “Santa Santorun que yo le digo” (Epistolario, 692), or adapts them to the vernacular: “Maldito el hombre, ecétera” (Epistolario, 171), a familiar quotation from the Vulgate’s maledictus homo qui confidit in homine. Her open rejection of pedantry, particularly from women, or the fact that she cites in a faulty Latin can be seen as part of her rhetorical tactic. She does not want to be perceived as entering into the specifically masculine domain of bibliophile culture, and she is quick to chastise those nuns who pride themselves on their wit, “no sea vuestra reverencia tan aguda” (Epistolario, 138). Instead, she teaches her nuns to carve a space for themselves that does not attract unwanted attention and thus can give them a certain degree of freedom to act.

On a more formal level, Teresa’s failure to conform to epistolary norms can be seen as a further part of her rhetorical strategy. Despite her general familiarity with epistolary etiquette, Teresa’s letters do not always follow the rules, specifically when she introduces colloquial or dialectal expressions, as well as elements of oral speech. For example, sometimes her letters resemble an oral conversation in their lack of organization: she starts to talk about something serious, followed by an excursus about

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136 Ronald Surtz observed that although women were not often able to read Latin, they learned the meaning of certain passages in sermons: “Through sermons the faithful became familiar with Latin quotations from the Bible –together with their juxtaposed vernacular translations– and with excerpts from standard commentaries on the Scriptures.” See Writing Women in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain: the mothers of Saint Teresa of Ávila (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995): 14-15.

137 “Como no soy tan letrera como ella, no sé qué son los asirios” (Epistolario, 416).
her health, then perhaps an anecdote, and eventually she returns to the original topic, not without another interruption or two. Similarly, the profusion of interjections “—a mi parecer—,” “—como dice—“ (Epistolario, 471) and digressions “tornando a lo que le decía” (Epistolario, 733) make her authorial presence further noticeable. This prevalence of orality creates the illusion that Teresa writes as she thinks, without rhetorical sophistication, thus making the idea even more attractive that her letters are a direct expression of her “real” self.

Teresa develops a language specifically designed to meet her needs, she does not simply imitate learned men, but creates a language that purposefully performs the humility expected from a nun. This, in turn, has the effect of giving her great individuality. Precisely by trying openly not to write like a man in order to avoid ridicule or harsh criticism, she shapes an individual written self. In other words, by developing a written style that is appropriate for her status, Teresa grows into an identifiable subject. Even though her individual style results from a tactical attempt not to draw attention upon herself and to seem humble, in the end this very own language makes her texts recognizable representations of herself.

**By her own hand**

Present throughout Teresa’ writings is the belief that a person can become text or that a text can be alive. As Mary Frohlich noticed, Teresa often describes her mystical union using images connected to impression (171-2), and by extension, I would argue, to

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138 In a letter to María de San José, she explains, “los cocos recibí; es cosa de ver,” then she goes on to talk about another issue and later on she adds, “las hermanas se holgan mucho de ver el coco” (Epistolario, 363).
Teresa compares the impression that Christ leaves in her soul to the way in which a seal leaves its imprint in soft wax. Frohlich sees in this image the influence of the royal seal that allowed a document to represent the personal presence and authority of the king in his absence (171). In fact, this representative capacity easily extends to all personal seals and signatures. I consider that the power of Teresa’s description of herself as wax inscribed by a seal lies in the fact that she becomes a written trace that reveals the presence of Christ. She is the medium upon which Christ leaves his impression. But most importantly, once impressed, Teresa becomes a text that can be seen, read, imitated, or even plagiarized. In this way, she has the power both to generate new texts as well as to serve as model for new Discalced nuns. Teresa even describes God as a text. In contrast to the texts written by men, God is the true book that is worth reading, a text in which truth cannot just be read but experienced through the senses: “Su majestad ha sido el libro verdadero adonde he visto las verdades” (Libro de la vida, 323).

This same sense of exemplary text whose meaning can be felt through sensory experience is behind God’s revelation to Teresa: “No tengas pena, que yo te daré libro vivo” (Libro de la vida, 323).

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140 This image has a long tradition in mystical writing. Juan de los Ángeles explains that the immortal soul is the part of the human being that God has created according to its own divine image, “sellado con la imagen de Dios”. See Juan de los Ángeles. Conquista del espiritual y secreto reino de Dios (Obras místicas del m.r.p.fr. Juan de los Ángeles. Ed. Jaime Sala Moltó. Madrid: Bailly-Balliére, 1912): 42.

141 In her correspondence, Teresa uses both her signature and a personal seal in the shape of a skull. It is interesting how even here we see the presence of the body in her chosen emblem.
In her books, Teresa is fond of using metaphors of writing and reading to construct analogies that compare both herself and God to texts that others will be able to recognize. I would suggest that this analogy actually does materialize in real life through her own written texts, which function as physical substitutes for their writer. The person who writes a letter and sends it assumes that her readers will be able to identify her handwriting almost as a personal seal or trace. This distinctive capacity allows the letter to stand in for its writer. The interconnectedness of self and the material text is quite apparent in the Spanish *novela sentimental* of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, where love letters function metonymically as physical substitutes of their writers. When access to the loved one is not possible, a letter written by her hand evokes her presence. Her handwriting is thus an index that denotes her physical self. Teresa’s letters have a similar effect, but with broader Christian connotations. Whereas in the *novela sentimental* letters are meant for the secret consumption of a single person, the lover; Teresa’s letters, except on rare occasions, are meant to circulate and be consumed openly by a larger community.\(^{142}\) In this case, this mode of reading depends upon a further similar metonymy upon which Christian practice is based, the body of Christ. Teresa is aware of this power to invoke her presence when she sends open letters to her Discalced prioresses to share with the other members of the community. Her letters are presented to a varied community of individuals who in some cases cannot read. In this setting, consumption does not simply happen in reading her words but in recognizing her hand. In other words, here the power of the letter does not lie in its didacticism or in its discussion of doctrine,

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\(^{142}\) When Teresa does not want a letter to be made public, she says so explicitly: “no leer en público las cartas que le escribo” (*Epistolario*, 290), “rompa esta carta” (*Epistolario*, 590). See also *Epistolario*, 555.
but in its pure physicality, in its capacity to stand in for its writer. For example, after Teresa was denounced to the Inquisition,\textsuperscript{143} she wrote to the prioress María de San José and asked her to show her letter to the other nuns, because “ver letra mía” (Epistolario, 497) would console them. A letter written by her own hand had the power to bring her presence to her devoted nuns. Similarly, when Teresa speaks about her books, she uses the expression “de mi letra” to attest to her authorship. Handwriting is conceived as part of the person: thus open letters are a way of bringing the community together around the presence of the writer. In this case, a letter is not limited to its content, but the handwritten “letra” itself creates a link.

Teresa’s handwriting acted as a trace capable of activating her personal presence. But in those occasions in which she did not actually write in her own hand and had to dictate her letters, her hand was “miraculously” recreated in her secretary’s own handwriting. At various points throughout her life, Teresa’s poor health forced her to seek the assistance of a scribe.\textsuperscript{144} From 1577 until Teresa’s death, Ana de San Bartolomé worked as her personal assistant, nurse and, when the occasion demanded it, as her secretary. San Bartolomé explains how her job description changed December 24, 1577

\textsuperscript{143} In 1576, two nuns at the Discalced convent of Seville denounced Teresa and Gracián to the Inquisition. From Seville Teresa wrote to María Bautista, the prioress at Valladolid a letter in which she addresses both Bautista singularly and the nuns as a group, thus alternating the singular and the plural forms: “ya saben las cosas que las escriví nos había levantado aquella que se fué. Pues no son nada para lo que nos fué a acusar. Ya lo entenderán. Y venir a deshora sin saber a qué –y no una sola vez- a lo que nos dijo, por la persona a quien llamaron vimos claro ser eso. [...] La otra se entró en otro monasterio. Ayer me certificaron que está fuera de juicio, y no de otra cosa sino de que se fué de acá. Mire qué grandes son los de Dios, que responde por la verdad y ahora se entenderá ser todo desatinos. Y tales eran los que decía por ahí: que atávamos las monjas de pies y manos y las azotávamos; y pluguiera a Dios fuera todo como esto” (Epistolario, 167-8).

\textsuperscript{144} Teresa had various scribes: the widow Ana de San Pedro, her niece Isabel de San Pablo when Teresa was in Avila, her niece Beatriz de Jesús, while in Toledo, and during her last years, Ana de San Bartolomé.
when Teresa broke her arm one night “on her way to the choir.” For the next months, Teresa gave up writing and relied completely on her secretary: “A pocas personas escribo ahora de mi letra” (Epistolario, 30). In her letters, Teresa praises Ana de San Bartolomé, “la secretaria es tal que podrá fiar lo que de mí” (Epistolario, 638). Ana behaved as the perfect scribe, for not only did she write what Teresa dictated, but she even imitated her handwriting: “By her own testimony, she learned to write in one afternoon by copying Teresa’s handwriting, and this miraculous acquisition of the skill was eventually used as evidence of Teresa’s sanctity in her canonization proceedings.” Teresa generally made it a point to explain to her addressee that a given letter was not written by her own hand, but dictated to Ana. But even in those cases, the handwriting was not too different. The power of Teresa’s own hand was lost in those cases, however it was slightly made up for by the power of the miraculous acquisition of her handwriting by the secretary. Even in its absence, Teresa’s “hand” was connoted by the secretary’s imitation.

In De partibus animalium, Aristotle famously contends that the hand is “the instrument of instruments.” Galen later expanded on the double meaning behind this formulation: namely, that the hand is both “instrument of all instruments,” since it can be put to various practical uses and thus function as an instrument itself; but also “instrument for all instruments,” i.e., an instrument that uses instruments (First Book: 4 [1,6]). Following the implications of this double meaning, Katherine Rowe illustrates

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146 Ana’s own autobiographical writings and the accounts of her contemporaries confirm that she was extremely devoted to Teresa. Her devotion was apparent after Teresa’s death, when she took on the role of guarantor of her legacy. But even while she was alive, Ana already excelled in her willingness to imitate the example of the Mother Foundress.
how the hand has been constructed as an agent capable of a certain autonomy since the early modern period:

[T]he hand is linked by analogy as well as physiology to the faculty of reason: it is the instrument of reason and its material counterpart [...] Most importantly, Aristotle’s seminal phrase, “instrument of instruments,” defines the hand as both an object and a body part: it inhabits a liminal space between the object world (the world of tools and weapons it employs) and (as the physical metaphor for those instruments) the world of interiority, intentions, and inventions – of the self.\(^{148}\)

Thus the hand is metaphorically linked to the self and its will. This metonymical link between the hand and the self is present in common language. In fact, Teresa often refers to God’s hands as a true expression of his will: “crea que es lo mejor lo que hace: el dejarlo todo a la voluntad de Dios y poner su causa en sus manos” (Epistolario, 297), “Jamás he pensado que la mano de Dios estará más abreviada para la Orden de su Madre que para las otras” (Epistolario, 397).\(^{149}\) In these examples, God’s hands will both know what to do and perform the act accordingly. His hands seem to be connected directly to God’s interiority and they act without a filter, following only his will. This connection between the hand and the power of the divine can also be seen in the representation of saints. The hands of a saint were a powerful locus of miracles, particularly of medical ones, and therefore occupied such a prominent position in iconography. The hand was the medium for the curative energy, which acted independently from the body of the saint. Thus, amongst Teresa’s contemporaries the hand had a history of acting as a direct intermediary between the divine and the faithful.

\(^{149}\) Italics mine.
Unlike other body parts, the hand is conceived as an agent that has the ability to act; it is the intermediary between volition and action. As a commander of instruments, the hand may choose what to do, it has its own agency and, in some sense, its own intelligence. Behind this idea is a conception of the body “as a locus of self and agency, not merely the instrument of a noncorporeal essence” (Rowe 27). This double meaning of hand as object and agent is also present when Teresa refers to her own “letra,” specifically to the advantages or disadvantages of her hand being recognized. For example, when she first sent the manuscript of her *Vida* to García de Toledo (1562), Teresa asked him to correct any mistakes in her work: “Suplico a vuestra merced lo enmiende y mande trasladar –si se ha de llevar a el padre maestro Avila– porque podría ser conocer alguien la letra” (*Epistolario*, 9). The “letra” she is referring to is not just her handwriting, but specifically the fact that her hand was behind it, both literally as instrument and figuratively as agent. Francisco Sobrino expressed it clearly when he argued that the value of Teresa’s letters was “por solo ser todas firmadas de la Me. Sta. Teresa y todas escritas de su propia mano y letra” (qtd. in Madre de Dios and Steggink 66). The emphasis placed on the actions by Teresa’s own hand attests to the letters’ authenticity, but it also denotes that the hand is not simply a body part, or a mere instrument. Here Sobrino creates a parallel between Teresa and her hand (signed by Teresa/written by her own hand), whereby the hand personified appears to be capable of intent. In fact, by severing the hand from the rest of the body, it acquires a mind of its own which can escape control and act on its own will. Teresa’s hand is dangerous because it is capable of action and intention, precisely the two characteristics that men mostly feared in women and that they tried to submit to clerical control.
When the disembodied hand acquires the status of relic, it becomes an index for the power of action associated with the saint. Whereas other parts of her body (heart, bones, etc) may signify other particular traits, the hand is connected to her agency, a trait historically gendered as masculine. During the process of beatification, the figure of Teresa underwent several readjustments in order to make her transgressions more acceptable and her life exemplary. Masculinizing the saint avoided establishing an uncomfortable link between her authority and femaleness, and instead her agency was explained as a rare Godly gift. Gendering charismatic women as masculine subjects mitigates their subversive power while at the same time emphasizing their uniqueness. These women are not like the others, their bodies may be female but their actions are masculine. They are unique individuals whose example should not be followed by other women, but instead enter into the realm of the mythical. By extension, the power metonymically ascribed to Teresa’s hand could be gendered in order to establish its identity. When portrayed as masculine, hands are symbols of action, they are the instruments that yield other instruments, whereas the hand gendered as female is traditionally an object idealized for the masculine gaze. When allowed to yield instruments itself, the hand is generally confined to the private domain. As a relic,

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150 Gillian Ahlgren explains: “The fact that biographies of Teresa begin rather polemically with a defense of her exceptional nature as a woman underscores the continuing climate of suspicion surrounding religious women […] Over time, it was this climate that emerged victorious as Teresa’s life was increasingly interpreted not as a sign that other women could achieve virtue but as a singular expression of God’s grace, all the more remarkable because it was manifest in a woman” (159).

151 This would explain the vehement zeal that Franco showed to Teresa’s hand, which he appropriated for himself at the beginning of the Civil War and kept in a reliquary for the rest of his life. The Teresa whose authority Franco sought to invoke was an impossible creature that combined masculine prowess with religious purity, a freak of nature that
Teresa’s hand functioned as a metonymy of her moral authority, but through the influence of the gendered hand and the masculine attributes it conjures, her authority in turn can be disembodied and masculinized. Ultimately Teresa’s hand, like herself, performs a complex gendered identity, which has been constructed ab extra to fit opposing agendas.

**Her own cross**

Physical suffering shaped Teresa’s approach to religion, and it contributed immensely to building her narrative of self. The deep connection that she felt with Christ was based precisely on the feeling that she shared his cross, that she also knew his pain. Her acceptance of pain helped her tactic because it presented her as weak and humble while simultaneously stressing that she shared a direct connection with Christ. Thus, her suffering epitomizes her physicality as a means toward religious authority.

From the early days of Christianity, the capacity to endure pain was not only a sign of humble obedience but, most importantly, a symbol of the incarnation of the divine. Mirroring the suffering of Christ’s passion allowed the faithful to recreate in their own bodies that point of connection with a God in human form. During the Middle Ages, hagiographies often contained details about the tortures to which saints subjected themselves, from fasting and sleep deprivation to lashings or wearing a hair shirt. For the nonetheless personified an ideal that fascinated him, the true core of an imagined Spanish nation.

152 Caroline Walker Bynum explains: “Control, discipline, even torture of the flesh is, in medieval devotion, not so much the rejection of physicality as the elevation of it –a horrible, yet delicious elevation– into a means of access to the divine.” See *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991): 182.
Spanish mystics of the sixteenth century suffering was essential to their practice: Pedro de Alcántara limited the hours of sleep, wore a cilicio and walked barefoot, John of the Cross employed mortification to bring his soul closer to the divinity, and Teresa of Avila considered physical pain as a gift from God, “si ha de gozar del Crucificado, ha de pasar cruz [...] que a los que Su Majestad ama llévalos como a su hijo” (Epistolario, 441). By enduring physical pain, these mystics sought to identify with the human nature of Christ.

The concept of *imitatio Christi* is intimately connected to the popular medieval model of prayer that promoted the active visualization of the Passion. Teresa’s own model of mental prayer incorporated this approach. In particular during the first stages of prayer she recommends reading passages from the Passion that describe the suffering of Christ in order to visualize his humanity. Visualizing Christ’s torment can help the individual understand his sacrifice, and ultimately during difficult times of doubt or suffering, recreating this image of the pain offered voluntarily could rekindle the feeling of Christian debt.

The devout individuals who go beyond contemplative prayer and mold their body and their person in order to know the pain of the Passion establish a powerful link with Christ. By means of this physical and psychic transformation, the pious renounce their former self and separate themselves visibly from the rest of the community. Religious men conceived this transformation as a renunciation of their privileged position in society, whereas for women their separation was not a reversal of roles, but rather a deepening of their female traits, i.e., physicality and service. As Caroline Walker Bynum

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153 This model of visualization is described in *Meditationes Vitae Christae* (ca. 1300), which enjoyed great success during the High Middle Ages and inspired, amongst others, Ludolf of Saxony’s *Vita Jesu Christi* (1374), which Teresa claims to have read (*Libro de la vida*, 448).
explains, “women saw the humanity-physicality that linked them to Christ as in continuity with, rather than in contrast to, their own ordinary experience of physical and social vulnerability” (172). By giving in to their physicality (through pain or food deprivation), women stressed the one fundamental trait that Christ had inherited from his mother and shared with all women, his humanity. Having this unmediated physical connection with Christ gave women authority inside their communities, and allowed them a certain degree of freedom from the restrictive intermediary role of the clergy. Besides, this personal experience could justify their desire to write because their example could be useful to others, both men and women. However, rigorous asceticism also placed women in a complex position towards other believers. The women who imitated the passion of Christ pushed against the behavioral norms that the Church envisioned for their gender, insofar as they did not limit themselves to following routines dictated by the clergy. By torturing their bodies and disfiguring their appearance, these women ran the risk of being perceived negatively. Their attempt to imitate Christ can easily be understood as pride and their sacrifice as excess. Therefore, like Teresa, they have to perform humility to counter this perception, as followers of Christ, but mostly as women.

154 Commenting on the gendered chain of authority enjoyed by medieval male authors, Ronald Surtz explains: “women writers had to develop textual strategies designed to make up for their lack of authority.” For example, Teresa de Cartagena “used her own personal experience as an alternative means of authorizing her texts,” while other nuns “claimed that their utterances were divinely inspired, thus effectively parenthesizing not only the ecclesiastical establishment, but also the entire system of written authority and the masculine space of writing that medieval constructions of gender had allotted to males.” See Writing Women in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain: the mothers of Saint Teresa of Ávila (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995): 6. Teresa uses this strategy when her confessors force her to abandon her model of silent prayer, and she claims that it was God who “enseñábame lo que les había de decir” (Libro de la vida, 350).
In her writing Teresa presents herself as a humble servant of God who suffers greatly, but who nonetheless considers suffering as her ally. She is an object at God’s disposal. If she has health it is only because God grants it to her so she can do his work: “Cuando el señor quiere que haga algo, luego me da más salud” (Epistolario, 110). And when he takes it away, he brings her closer to the passion and thus to himself. Her suffering has the power to establish a direct link with God, but she always stresses how she still remains subservient to him. Teresa’s emphasis on her lifelong experience of pain and her acceptance of it not only makes her reader sympathize with her, but also lends her authority. Physical pain had been an integral part of her life since her youth, when she first became ill, and throughout her life Teresa struggled with illness. Teresa draws on these experiences to shape a narrative of her life that emphasizes her imitatio Christi. This almost contradictorily conjoins her authority to speak with her fundamental human weakness; she is simultaneously authoritative and humble. In her letters, Teresa gives extensive accounts of her physical suffering, while accepting it submissively as the cross that God gave her to bring her close to himself. She writes: “es sin piedad este dolor” (Epistolario, 105), “pensé que me moría” (605). Teresa’s network of epistolary friends would have been familiar with her mysticism; in fact, it is quite likely that they would have read one or more of her books in which she described the suffering she experienced during the mystical union. Teresa uses the same language in her letters to describe her suffering in everyday life as when she depicts her suffering during the mystical union,

\[155\] In her letters Teresa constantly refers to her suffering. She offers details of her various conditions: “mucha cólera” (Epistolario, 323), “harto daño a la cabeza” (323), “del corazón y la madre” (597), “me dió un accidente de los grandes que he tenido en mi vida, perlesía y corazón. Dejóme hasta ahora (que no se me ha quitado) calentura y con tal dispusición y flaqueza” (595), as well as the harsh cures: “sangrias y purgas” (608).
and thereby connects both experiences. For the reader of her letters the constant presence of her suffering reinforces the narrative that Teresa was chosen by Christ to help share his cross. Ultimately, her suffering may signify a superficially feminine weakness, but when we read her letters more closely we find that it also provides her with the authority to speak. The power of her suffering lies in the fact that it creates an otherwise impossible position of authority for Teresa within the “enemy territory” of the patriarchal Church. The faithful can recognize in Teresa the sickness that God sends and learn from her exemplary response. But in the description of her suffering, the reader can also indirectly perceive a trace of her mystical union with Christ. Humility allows Teresa to be considered as a regular member of the community with whom the faithful can identify, while at the same time she stands out because she has been touched by Christ.

The role that suffering played in Teresa’s doctrine and in her own experience is complex and in some ways it differs from that of other male mystics. Since her own suffering was mostly the result of sickness and not self-inflicted, her attitude towards mortification was ambiguous. Although her contemporaries testified that Teresa did engage in severe penitential practice (she wore a cilicio made of tin plates that often caused deep wounds that would get infected), in her works she only describes her experiences of intense pain that resulted specifically from sickness – arguably because accepting the suffering that God sent her showed a higher level of humility and a closer connection with Christ than inflicting pain on herself. Hence we need to be careful in

156 During the beatification process, several of her closest collaborators testified that Teresa engaged in severe mortification. Given the fact that they were actively promoting Teresa’s beatification, it is difficult to ascertain how much was true and how much was exaggeration. See, for example, the testimonies of María de San Angelo (51-56), Ana de los Angeles (538-43), and Ana de San Bartolomé (168-75), in Procesos de beatificación y canonización (1934-35), v.18.
analyzing the different approaches to suffering and mortification. In her letters she advises others against excesses in mortification (*Epistolario*, 324-5), and she rejects penance with “violencia exagerada” (*Epistolario*, 255), since excessive rigors “¿para qué sirven?” (*Epistolario*, 278). Furthermore, Teresa strongly believed that nuns needed to enjoy physical and psychological stability, “más vale regalarse que estar mala” (*Epistolario*, 188), because ultimately “un alma apretada no puede servir bien a Dios” (*Epistolario*, 670). In her autobiography, Ana de San Bartolomé recounts an early time when her overzealous prayer led her to deprive herself of food and sleep, until Teresa ordered her: “Daughter, when the bedtime bell rings, stop the prayer, and sleep” (49). And even God seemed to agree with Teresa’s practical approach, for Ana recounts that, “he let me sleep the same amount of time as the others and upon waking I found him in my soul” (49). Although in her writings Teresa welcomes her own suffering as a means of feeling closer to Christ, she is more reluctant to encourage that of others, especially when it does not fulfill any “practical” purpose and it could potentially interfere with their everyday responsibilities.

In order to fully comprehend Teresa’s position towards physical suffering, it is important to understand the value that the body had in the context in which she wrote. The role of the body in the religious experience, and especially, in the apprehension of the divinity, is a central topic in medieval theology. The scholastic doctrine considered that the body, as well as the soul, was equipped with the capacity to perceive the divinity, hence the important role that the exterior senses played in Catholicism. However, the mystics argue that only that part of the soul that has been freed from the external senses is able to come into contact with Christ. This part of the soul which God created according
to his own image must purge the memory of the burden of sensory experiences in order to return to God. Paradoxically, despite their attempt to exclude any sensory experience from their mystical encounter, bodily suffering is very present in their mysticism.\textsuperscript{157} For the mystics, pain constitutes proof that their human nature is being purified and God is emptying the soul (Flynn 273). Thus, when the novices ask Teresa how to know whether the feeling of intimacy with God is real or a product of their imagination, she answers that such “dolor tan sabroso” cannot come from the devil (Moradas, 530).

Unlike other important teachers of mysticism of the sixteenth century, Teresa developed her doctrine from a rather peripheral position. She lacked the academic background of Pedro de Alcántara or John of the Cross, both of whom had studied in Salamanca, and whose perspectives on mysticism were grounded in a deep knowledge of theology. In her autobiography, Teresa declares how important it is to seek the advice of learned men in matters of prayer. Thanks to her contacts, she can be aware of the most important theological currents of her time, but she is reticent to enter openly into such debates, given the rejection that she always received from her male superiors. This would explain why she emphasizes the claim that her model of prayer is just the result of her personal practice. Unlike her male contemporaries, Teresa has no recourse to theological authorities and is forced to perform her intellectual humility publicly. Another effect of her peripheral approximation to theological debates is that her own position takes shape according to the views of those learned men that she encounters and the information that they provide, and as she observes their viability in her own personal practice. Therefore,

\textsuperscript{157} Maureen Flynn explains: “It enters not only into the initial stages of purgation but continues as the soul becomes purified and ascends directly into the arms of Christ.” See “The Spiritual Uses of Pain in Spanish Mysticism” (Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 64.2 [Summer 1996]: 257-278): 272.
her doctrinal interpretation may combine traits from different approaches, as long as they are deemed legitimate by her confessors.\textsuperscript{158} As a consequence of all these external factors, Teresa needed to present her model of prayer as the humble product of her own experience. This model simply worked for her—and the fact that she claimed that Christ talked to her in her prayer certainly helped her argument. In her writings she talked about her experience humbly, with accessible language and without sophistication. This tactical approach had the effect of making her knowledge more accessible. Particularly in her letters, where she speaks favorably about experience and does not offer details about mysticism, Teresa can be considered exemplary by a majority of believers who do not seek a mystical union but simply a way to deepen their perception of Christ. Her readers can easily understand her teachings as well as build a personal connection to this humble person who speaks so clearly about herself.

Teresa’s lifelong suffering contributed to shape the narrative that she had been chosen by God and that her pain was a sign of his grace. This claim was particularly persuasive because it seemed as if Christ had picked her not just by appearing and talking to her but also by giving her pain that replicated his own.\textsuperscript{159} Teresa’s openly humble acceptance of her purpose reinforces this narrative, since despite how “ruín” she claims to

\textsuperscript{158} For example, in her ideas about the use of sensory experience we can perceive the trace of the scholastic theology that was taught in Spain at the time. Teresa seeks the creator in the creatures (\textit{Libro de la vida}, 278-9).

\textsuperscript{159} This is the narrative that her defenders followed to push for her canonization. Ana de San Bartolomé wrote, “But I, not only because of the outstanding favors that God had granted her and that gave testimony of how much he loved her, but even more because of the love with which she had suffered many hardships for him, from what I could see and the part of the hardships in which I was involved, was witness that she was really a true saint and that what the Lord had told me about suffering many troubles in her company was true. And these were only the visible ones; the troubles that she suffered without being seen were infinite” (59).
be, God never abandons her and thus the “gift” of her suffering continues. In contrast even to Christ, or perhaps having learned from his example, Teresa knows that her pain proves that she has not been forsaken. She cleverly exploits this connection to build her authority, and her texts actively draw comparisons with key events in Christ’s life. For example, after founding the Convent of Saint Joseph of Avila, Teresa describes how the devil tempted her: “Acabado todo, sería como desde a tres u cuatro horas, me resolvió el demonio una batalla espiritual, como ahora diré” (Vida, 425). Just as the devil tempted Christ with material goods in the desert, now he tempts Teresa, “me ponía el demonio que cómo me quería encerrar en casa tan estrecha y con tantas enfermedades, que como había de poder sofrir tanta penitencia y dejaba casa tan grande y deleitosa y adónde tan contenta siempre había estado, y tantas amigas” (425). Like Christ in Getsemani, Teresa doubts, but in the end she rejects the temptation. Continuing with the imitatio, when the prioress at the Encarnación convent takes her cause to the provincial, Teresa explains: “Acordéme de el juicio de Cristo y vi cuán nonada era aquél” (Vida, 427). The repetition of these references helps to reinforce in her readers the belief that Teresa’s authority was based on the physical suffering that she shared with Christ.

Readers and critics alike have long been fascinated by the paradox that Teresa, this sixteenth-century woman, consistently criticized herself for being weak, uncultured, and sick but that she simultaneously acted like a strong, independent woman. We can only reconcile this contradiction by reading Teresa’s letters as developing a certain tactical structure. She engages in a process of affirmation through negation whereby she establishes her authority precisely by condemning herself. For example, she asserts humility, which shows that she is special; she asserts her weakness, which shows that she
is strong; she complains about her body, which confirms its importance. Lacking possibilities for speaking directly or asserting herself overtly, affirmation through negation proved extremely useful for Teresa. This mode of self-expression is clearly limited but does provide some small freedom of expression within an “enemy” discourse. Teresa understood that in order to exist within the patriarchal religious establishment she needed to perform the rules that she simultaneously bended. Hence, she necessarily writes herself as weak, but her weakness only makes her a stronger example of Christian virtue, and thus exemplary.

During the canonization proceedings, Teresa’s defenders argued that she had the power to heal, intercede and perform miracles. They offered many instances in which she had carried out seemingly impossible acts in vita, and they also offered evidence that she had miraculous power in mortem. But the seed of Teresa’s miraculous powers had been planted in her own writings. In chapter XXXIX of Libro de la Vida, Teresa offers a list of occasions in which she intervened for the soul of a Christian. This chapter sends a clear message: not only does she have a special relationship with Christ, but as a result of it, he has granted her the power to perform miracles. Interestingly, this power is not limited to her own person, but it extends to her letters as well. When an unnamed man who had been in “pecado mortal” for two years wrote to solicit her help, she offered to pray for him. Thanks to Teresa’s mediation the man reformed himself, but her letters also played a significant role in the miracle: “Decía que cuando se vía muy apretado, leía mis

160 For example, Ana de San Bartolomé claimed that Teresa appeared to her frequently to give her advice. And the fact that nine months after her burial Teresa’s body had not decayed and exuded a sweet odor, was claimed as proof of her sanctity. See Procesos de beatificación y canonización de Santa Teresa de Jesús (ed. Silverio de Santa Teresa. Burgos: El Monte Carmelo, 1934-35. Vol. 18 of Biblioteca mistica carmelitana. 35 vols. 1915-49).
cartas y se le quitaba la tentación” (370). In my opinion, this same intercessory power is what the faithful seek in Teresa’s letters, the same power that physical relics were meant to possess. Just as the reformed man felt the presence of Teresa in her letters and benefitted from her intercession, her devoted followers believed that by reading or being in contact with her letters, they would also encounter the saint and receive her mediation. As textual relics, Teresa’s letters symbolize her incarnation into words; they stand as a powerful embodiment of her presence, and through them the faithful hoped to feel a connection with the divine.
Conclusion

Letters are not only a means of conveying information and maintaining relations, but a place for the exploration and exposure of a personal voice. The very nature of the epistolary form, insofar as its author always has to conjure the presence of the addressee and imagine his possible response, means that the letter is not merely a site of communication but also of performance. For early modern authors, writing epistles allowed them to give shape to a fictional self while always maintaining the semblance of a realistic portrayal. In this way they successfully expanded the limits of personal authority by believing that their own experiences, opinions, and emotions were of public interest. In this dissertation I consider how three very different authors, Garcilaso de la Vega, Antonio de Guevara, and Teresa of Avila, wrote letters in order to express their individuality while simultaneously affecting their social identity. I posit that their epistolary personas had an enduring impact on their public perception because they exposed their intimate feelings (love, pain, vulnerability) and claimed authority for them. Given that the epistle always combines the public with the private, a close analysis of these authors’ epistolary endeavors can shed light into the fundamental issues that early modern authors were beginning to confront: the changes in the traditional concept of authority and its connection to fiction; an awareness of the private individual and an increase in the value of personal experience; the expansion of the centralized state and its influence on the private lives of its citizens; the development of a public sphere avid for information. From their very different social, religious, and cultural backgrounds, Garcilaso, Guevara, and Teresa of Avila faced these growing concerns. The different ways in which they were affected by them and their particular responses help us
understand the complex ways in which these fundamental changes were taking place in sixteenth century Spain.

The first chapter traces the historical evolution of the verse epistle from the classical epistolary tradition to its vernacular reformulation by Garcilaso. I argue that as a new hybrid form (lyric and letter), Garcilaso’s verse epistle is a perfect place for exploring the development of early modern subjectivity. Both the lyric and the epistolary forms aim at giving literary expression to interiority. By combining the lyric’s use of language to convey meaning beyond semantics with the letter’s tendency toward self-exposure, Garcilaso’s “Epístola a Boscán” expresses the complexities of a poetic voice that bears the author’s own name. But the epistle was not the only lyric that Garcilaso addressed to his friend Boscán. During his years in exile, while Garcilaso remained fully engaged in Charles V’s project of imperial expansion, he addressed a total of three lyrics to his literary friend: the “Epístola a Boscán,” the sonnet “A Boscán desde la Goleta,” and the second elegy. By reading these three lyrics in dialogue I show how the figure of the other—in this case personified in Boscán— is fundamental in inducing self-revelation, i.e., giving birth to the self. I read Garcilaso’s address to the loved friend in light of the elegiac tradition of Ovid’s epistles from exile. In these letters, Ovid expressed his pain, his disconnect from imperial Rome, and his deep feeling of isolation. But he also wrote about the simple thoughts that came to mind, as they would to a person who was conversing with a friend. I argue that what makes the epistle such a realistic expression of the individual is precisely this capacity to represent the self from every angle and thereby its full range of possible emotions. By tracing this connection with Ovid—a complex figure within Renaissance criticism, both revered as a poet and shunned for his morally
and politically motivated exile– I stress the difficulty also present within Garcilaso’s work. More than merely subject to the Spanish emperor, Garcilaso is firmly within a tradition of poets intent on testing the very limits of subjectivity.

Taking Antonio de Guevara’s Epístolas familiares as a focal point, the second chapter analyzes the popular success of epistolary collections in the early modern period and their connection with the growth of a new reading public. During the sixteenth century, letters became popular within all social groups as a means of personal communication and information about current events. The upper classes established epistolary communities in order to stay informed about the political, economic, and military developments that were happening at home and abroad. Within these select epistolary circles, information often circulated in the form of news-letters. This early epistolary communities were a first-step in the formation of a broader public sphere united by a desire for information. The expansion of these circles to include a broader readership formed the subsequent step in this process. The composition and publication of Guevara’s epistolary collection exemplifies this two-step process. The nobles and clerics with whom Guevara exchanges letters already belong to a community, albeit a very select one; these are the people who not only read the news, but who make it. The decision to print and expose these exchanges to the public constitutes a veritable step toward the construction of a modern national community. The readers who voyeuristically observe the epistolary exchanges of this select group constitute a new public sphere. Their reading yields a multiplicity of interpretations, as befits a modern, varied public. While these outside readers are not part of the epistolary exchanges that Guevara compiles, their presence is the raison d’être for the publication of the book. In
the meta-commentary that forms a part of his letters, Guevara acknowledges the importance of this new readership.

Circulating one’s letters amongst such a broad public would appear counterintuitive, since it would contradict the familiar nature of the epistolary exchange. Those early modern authors, like Guevara, who published their familiar letters perceived that the print could be a powerful ally to assist them in shaping their own public identity. Although the reality of the “intimate” text changes after publication, the premise of intimacy still remains; thereby allowing readers access into the most private side of an author. The familiar letter presupposes an affective connection between the writer and the addressee. By exposing this familiar exchange to an outside reader, the author can connect with his public in an individual way. In other words, the voyeuristic anonymous reader temporarily usurps the position of the addressee. In this “familiar” exchange, Guevara controls how he represents himself, what information he gives and how. Readers can establish an affective bond with this author, Guevara, who is “addressing” them directly with his own name and with the intention of sharing his ideas, emotions, jokes, advice, and criticism. Although readers do not know Guevara personally, they feel that they have a privileged insight into his private side, and hence feel connected to him in an imagined way. Public exposure and private self-representation allow Guevara to influence his social identity. Although Guevara lacked the family connections, the economic means, and the humanist credentials to further prosper at court, he found an alternate way to improve his social status by becoming a readers’ favorite, a true early modern “best-seller”.

141
The third chapter considers how Saint Teresa of Avila’s letters acquired the status of physical relics. After Teresa’s death, her letters posed a problem for her contemporaries because they lacked the type of doctrinal and didactic content that was traditionally valued in the letters by saints. But Teresa’s gender and the fact that she was a reformer during a time of religious backlash against reform meant that she could not risk writing freely about doctrine. In this way, Teresa’s letters lacked the traditional authority found in those of blessed Juan de Avila or Saint Jerome, for example. However, some of her collaborators kept Teresa’s letters, and just as her physical relics were dispersed after her death, so too these letters came to be viewed as objects worthy of veneration. This chapter explains that the authority of Teresa’s letters did not inhere simply in their content, but instead in their power to recreate their source, specifically through the use of her own distinctive language, the emphasis on her handwriting, and the constant references to her suffering. First, Teresa developed a language that would allow her to yield influence while simultaneously not seeming threatening to the patriarchal religious authorities. Instead of using the language of the lettered men, Teresa creates her own language, characterized by humility and familiarity. This language in turn identifies her as a unique individual, because she speaks in her own style. The faithful could read her letters and see “Teresa” represented in them. Second, Teresa’s letters make apparent another fundamental presence: her hand. Following Aristotle, Galen had theorized that the hand was directly connected to the person’s will. In Christian iconography, the hands of saints often appear as the locus of their power—specifically in medical miracles, where the hand acts as the direct intermediary between the faithful and the divine. Teresa herself often spoke about “la mano de Dios” (Epistolario, 397) as an expression of his true will.
Thus, the implied presence of Teresa’s hand in her letters meant that there was no indirect intermediary; hence, the faithful could find a direct connection between the letter and Teresa’s inner self. Finally, the constant references to her poor health and the emphasis on her suffering reinforced Teresa’s public image as a woman who had been chosen by Christ to share his cross. Because the epistolary form encourages the disclosure of personal information, Teresa often referred to her pain both in her familiar letters to friends as well as in her more carefully constructed epistles to her superiors. In these letters, Teresa used her pain as a rhetorical asset in order to support her tactical performance of the “poor sick, old nun” persona. In this way, the suffering present in Teresa’s personal letters reveals a connection with her painful *imitatio Christi*. For these three reasons, Teresa’s letters had a power analogous to that of relics: by contemplating them, the faithful could feel a connection with the body of the saint and through that connection they might feel the presence of the divine.

In all three of these figures, it becomes clear how much is at stake in the simple composition of a letter; in other words, how in all of these letters we witness the complex performance of subjectivity. These early modern writers were aware that the public was going to judge their epistolary personas, and they played along for their own purposes. By carefully providing access to this new “private” realm, they were able to take an active role in shaping their own public identity. Their letters help us understand the growing desire for self-expression that unfolded as early modern subjects sought independence from the community and developed new forms to represent their difference. In this way, they provide a glimpse into a process that still occupies us today. Although letters themselves are perhaps not as important as they once were, we are
constantly inventing and modifying new literary forms for self-expression, just as our early modern antecedents did.
Señor Boscán, quien tanto gusto tiene de daros cuenta de los pensamientos, hasta las cosas que no tienen nombre, no le podrá faltar con vos materia, ni será menester buscar estilo presto, distinto d’ornamento puro tal cual a culta epístola conviene. Entre muy grandes bienes que consigo el amistad perfeta nos concede es aqueste descuido suelto y puro, lejos de la curiosa pesadumbre; y así, d’aquesta libertad gozando, digo que vine, cuanto a lo primero, tan sano como aquel que en doce días lo que sólo veréis has caminado cuando el fin de la carta os lo mostrare. Alargo y suelto a su placer la rienda, mucho más que al caballo, al pensamiento, y llévame a las veces por camino tan dulce y agradable que me hace olvidar el trabajo del pasado; otras me lleva por tan duros pasos que con la fuerza del afán presente también de los pasados se me olvida; a veces sigo un agradable medio honesto y reposado, en que’l discurso del gusto y del ingenio se ejercita. Iba pensando y discurriendo un día a cuántos bienes alargó la mano el que del amistad mostró el camino, 

Señor Boscán, one who takes pleasure in relating his thoughts, even of things that have no name, will never be at a loss for matter with you, nor will need to seek out a ready style other than that pure ornament which befits a learned epistle. Among the very great benefits our perfect friendship grants us is this free and pure informality, far from affected weightiness; and thus, enjoying that liberty, I say I came with as sure a step as that with which I rode for twelve days, as you will only see as you make your way to the end of this letter. I allow freer and loser rein to my thoughts than to my horse, and it bears me at times over a path so sweet and pleasant that I forget past torments; at others, it carries me over passes so rough that the strain of the present ordeal makes me forget past ones; at times, I follow a pleasant mean, clear and restful, which takes my thoughts toward poetic invention and taste. One day, as I rode along thinking about the benefits of all who have, with outstretched hand, shown the way of friendship
y luego vos, del amistad enjemplo, os me ofrecéis en estos pensamientos, y con vos a lo menos me acontece una gran cosa, al parecer extraña,
y porque lo sepáis en pocos versos, es que, considerando losprovechos, las honras y los gustos que me vienen desta vuestra amistad, que en tanto tengo, ninguna cosa en mayor precio estimo ni me hace gustar del dulce estado.

tanto como el amor de parte mía. Éste comigo tiene tanta fuerza que, sabiendo muy bien las otras partes del amistad y la estrechez nuestra con solo aquéste el alma se enternece;
y sé que otramente me aprovecha el deleite, que suele ser pospuesto a las útiles cosas y a las graves. Llévame a escudriñar la causa desta ver contino tan recio en mí el efeto,
y hallo que’l provecho, el ornamento, el gusto y el placer que se me sigue del vínculo d’amor, que nuestro genio enredó sobre nuestros corazones, son cosas que de mí no salen fuera,
y en mí el provecho solo se convierte.

Mas el amor, de donde por ventura nacen todas las cosas, si hay alguna, que a vuestra utilidad y gusto miren, es gran razón que ya en mayor estima tenido sea de mí que todo el resto,
cuanto más generosa y alta parte es el hacer el bien que el recibire; así que amando me deleito, y hallo que no es locura este deleite mío.

and you, who exemplify friendship, at once came to my mind, with you at least one great and apparently extraordinary thing happens to me: to tell you in a few lines,
it is that, considering the benefits, honors, and pleasures that come to me from your friendship, which I hold so dear, I nevertheless count as still more valuable, nor does anything give me more sweet felicity,

than the love on my part. This holds me so strongly that though well aware of the other aspects of our friendship and closeness, my soul is moved by this alone;

and I know that here delight profits me as nowhere else, for it is usually put off for more useful and serious things. Continually seeing its forceful effect makes me examine its cause,

and I discover that the benefit, distinction, joy, and pleasure that come to me from this loving tie with which our nature has bound our hearts, are things that do not extend beyond myself,

and in myself alone the benefit is made known.

But love, from which fortunately all things are born, including any that might serve your use and pleasure, is itself reason enough for me to hold it in higher esteem than anything else,

for how much more noble and virtuous it is to do good than to receive it; thus I delight in loving, and find that my delight is no folly.
¡Oh cuán corrido estoy y arrepentido
de haberos alabado el tratamiento
del camino de Francia y las posadas!
Corrido de que ya por mentiroso
con razón me ternéis; arrepentido

de haber perdido tiempo en alabaros
cosa tan digna ya de vituperio,
donde no hallaréis sino mentiras,
vinos acedos, camareras feas,
varletes codiciosos, malas postas,

gran paga, poco argén, largo camino;
llegar al fin a Nápoles, no habiendo
dejado allá enterrado algun tesoro,
salvo si no decís que’s enterrado
lo que nunca se halla ni se tiene.

A mi señor Durall estrechamente
abrazá de mi parte, si pudierdes.
Doce del mes d’otubre, de la tierra
do nació el claro fuego del Petrarca
y donde están del fuego las cenizas.

O how ashamed and sorry I am
to have praised the hospitality
along the French road and its inns!
Ashamed that you can now rightly
take me for a liar; sorry

to have wasted time praising a place
that now merits only blame,
where you will find only lies,
sour wines, ugly waitresses,
greedy servants, poor staging posts,

high prices, little money, and a long road
to arrive in Naples at last, without leaving
any treasure buried there,
unless you say that which can never be
found nor had is buried.

Give my lord Durall
a full embrace for me, if you can manage it.
October twelfth, from the land
where Petrarch’s bright flame was born
and from where the ashes of this fire remain.
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