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The Presence of Luis de Camões in Gracián’s Agudeza y arte de ingenio

In memoriam Raimundo Lida
1908–1979

One of Baltasar Gracián’s strengths as a critic and theorist is the breadth of his literary background. Not content merely to appreciate from a distance traditions other than his own, he has mastered their respective classics, citing in Agudeza y arte de ingenio a variety of passages from them—in the original languages—in order to illustrate and support his own theories. In the true spirit of the European Baroque, he crosses cultural and linguistic barriers, rather than erecting them, and thus demonstrates that poetic agudeza and ingenio are by no means the exclusive property of any one geographical, ethnic, or linguistic group.

By asserting Gracián’s cosmopolitan outlook on literature, I do not deny his nationalistic spirit or pride in his own people’s belles-lettres heritage. He is, in fact, quite convinced of the relative superiority of Spanish literature to other national traditions. For instance, in advising the reader concerning the examples he intends to cite in the Agudeza he writes: “Si frecuento los españoles es porque la agudeza prevalece en ellos.” But to give credit where credit is due, he also lists the strengths of various other cultures: “. . . la erudición en los franceses, la elo-cuencia en los italianos y la invención en los griegos” (I, 46). Far from being merely a “localista,” bound up in a narrow and rather chauvinistic “preocupación española,” as E. Correa Calderón claims, Gracián makes a sincere and often highly successful effort to understand and explicate “the substance of Spanish as well as European literary creation.” For him, as Ernst Robert Curtius alludes, literature is Weltliteratur.

Of the vernacular, non-Spanish poets Gracián quotes in the Agudeza, two national groups predominate, the Italians and the Portuguese. A fair amount of criticism has been devoted to the former group, but relatively little has been written concerning the Portuguese presence in Gracián’s treatise. Francisco Sá de Miranda, Diego Lopes de Andrade, Jorge de Montemayor, and Luís de Camões all play a role in the Agudeza, though the latter poet, the subject of this brief essay, is by far the most ubiquitous. Gracián cites Camões far more frequently than he does any of the others and apparently considers him the best artist and most typically Portuguese of the four. In the introductory section addressed
"Al Lector," he places "el afectuoso Camões" on par with "el valiente Tasso" and "el culto Góngora," naming each as the preeminent representative of the poet's writing in his respective language (I, 45-46).

Indeed, some years after the Agudeza was in its final form, Gracián, with a typical flair for word-play, would affirm in El criticón that he loved Camões. Through a persona he says: "Bástale... ser plectro português, tiernamente regalado, que él mismo se está diciendo: ‘El que amo es.’" As Dámaso Alonso comments: "El chiste no es muy bueno, pero es muy revelador: la Poesía, que ha formado algunas censuras a poetas como Góngora, Ariosto, Lope de Vega, Petrarca, tiene como su amado o preferido a ‘Camões’, y la expresión de su amor es el mismo nombre del poeta." Thus, it is easy to contradict Américo Castro's sweeping statement that Gracián "ayuna de amores" and that "nunca es la emoción tema esencial para su obra." Obviously the Jesuit scholar has a taste for "poesía melada" (as Correa Calderón calls Camões' verse), since he regularly breaks his supposed fast—without ever breaking his priestly vows—on the "affectuoso" poet and his lovely lyrics.

Yet it may not always have been Camões that Gracián loved. That is, much of the Spanish verse attributed to him in the Agudeza, the Portuguese may not have written. For example, in Discorso I Gracián quotes a sonnet, a "gran pensamiento... que, por serlo tanto, se creyó del Camões" (I, 50). This sort of thinking has abetted, if not actually caused, one of the major problems in Camões scholarship. In the years after the poet's death, various editors ascribed to him virtually all good verse of doubtful authorship. Often this would mean raiding another poet's work. If a poem even "sounded like" Camões, the editors and critics would make it his.

Naturally, attempts to extricate a reliable canon from the tangle of such unscrupulous scholarship have precipitated a running debate over the authenticity of various poems, a debate that in several cases is not likely to be resolved at any time in the foreseeable future. It is not my purpose here to enter into this sort of eternal polemic, since, as Jorge de Sena observes, Gracián clearly "não está enteressado em questão de autoria." Surely the Spanish scholar would have had nothing to do with editorial piracy had he been aware that it was going on. But he is, after all, far more concerned with finding beautiful poems to illustrate his critical concepts, than with ferreting out and indisputably demonstrating their sources. Thus, Camões presence in the Agudeza is, at least to some degree, the reflection of a literary mirage. This present study shall have to deal not so much with Camões' himself or even with his authenticated poetic corpus, but rather with Gracián's image of the man and his works.

The sonnet, "Horas breves de mi contentamiento," quoted in its entirety at the end of Discorso I, though probably not written by the "real-life" Camões, nonetheless belongs to the "Camões" Gracián depicts in his dissertation. That the critic should without any sincere
skepticism ascribe this famous poem, the capstone of his introductory “Panegírico” on the art of agudeza, to Camões is a high tribute to him. Based on the premise that such a “gran pensamiento” naturally belongs to a great thinker, Gracián’s panegyric of an art is also a panegyric of an artist.

The ebullient praise of Camões continues in Discurso 4, the discussion of the first order of conceptos, those made “por correspondencia y proporción.” With his Aristotelian feeling for orderly causes and proportionate effects, Gracián describes the “armonía ingeniosa” that characterizes “Vençome armor, nam o nego.” “El imortal Camões” proportions “los efectos del vano y ciego amor correlativamente” and makes the effect, “el golpe” that the distraught lover suffers, correspond aesthetically and psychologically to its cause, “el amor ciego” (I, 68–69).

Later in this same Discurso, Gracián quotes what is perhaps Camões’ most widely-known sonnet (he calls it “rey de los demás”), “Alma minha gentil, que te partiste.” He readily recognizes its subtle yet profoundly moving blend of celestial and terrestrial saudade. He also notes that “las agradables proporciones conceptuosas, belleza del discurso, hermosura del ingenio,” though characteristic of all fourteen lines, are especially concentrated in the last tercet. There, in an apt balance of form and feeling, “el célebre Luis de Camões” begs his lost lover:

Roga a Deus, que teus annos encurtou,
que tão cedo de cá me leve a verte,
quam cedo de meus olhos te levou (I, 74).

The influence of Garcilaso de la Vega and of his mentor, Petrarch, on Camões’ poem is obvious. The topos, as well as certain aspects of the technique are inherited. But as Helmut Hatzfeld’s close comparison of “Alma minha gentil” with “In morte di Donna Laura” reveals, an emotional and spontaneous “mezcla realista-fantástica de estilos” has replaced the more intellectual and stylized “pureza estilística ideal” of the petrarchan model. Camões has altered the dolce stil nuovo for his own manneristic ends.

It is this Manueline mannerism which particularly appeals to Gracián. Certainly he thinks highly of the “ingenio italiano” (II, 201–202) and the “primer cisne de España” (I, 124), as he calls Petrarch and Garcilaso elsewhere in the Agudeza. But he cites Camões more than he does both of them together. As Curtius writes: “Gracián schafft aus dem Stilempfinden seiner Zeit eine neue Theorie” and “kreist um einen idealen Kanon der Meister des concepto.” Camões, the mannerist poet of the waning Renaissance, fits into this circle with far greater ease than do either of the more “classical” poets of the High Renaissance.

The next reference to Camões comes in Discurso 5, “De la agudeza de improporción y disonancia,” and also focuses on the mannerist elements of his work. Gracián quotes “Aquela, que de pura castidade,”
which Sena admits is not one of the poet’s “sonetos . . . intensamente dramáticos ou doridos,” though certainly “não era disso que Gracián está teorizando e exemplificando.”20 Instead of the poem’s dramatic or emotional aspects, he concentrates on its rhetoric, which was always a popular topic among critics of a baroque or mannerist persuasion.

The sonnet, with its strictly formulated and balanced pattern of argument, comes near to being a debate. “Dicen entre sí contrariedad los elementos de la disproporción”; the various elements of the poem seem to contend one with another, though in a carefully arranged scheme. The jarring incongruity of Lucrecia’s “pura castidáde” and the “cruel vingança” she inflicts on herself (and not on her assailant), as well as the stark contrast between the “morte breve” her mortal body suffers and the “larga vida” her memory achieves, are juxtaposed for the maximum rhetorical effect (I, 83). The several “contraries,” however disparate, together form a pleasing and intelligible whole, a discordia concors in the best tradition of mannerist style.

Another woman figures prominently in the next of Camões’ sonnets that Gracián quotes. In Discurso 6, entitled “De la agudeza por ponderación misteriosa,” he explains how the poet is able to make “¿Cómo ficaste, Pórcia, tal ferida?” intellectually, as well as aesthetically stimulating to the reader. By posing a series of unanswered (and perhaps unanswerable) questions, “el conceptuoso Camões” deepens the mystery surrounding the noble lady’s death. “Ponderando las circunstancias del dándole una y otra salida,” he stirs the reader’s ingenio to action, forcing him to play the detective. Clearly an effort corresponding at least in kind to the poet’s own “aumento de sutileza” is necessary if one is to read this “digno soneto” as it should be read (I, 96).

Camões is not mentioned again until Discurso 22, “De las ponderaciones juiciosas, críticas y sentenciosas por exageración,” where Gracián lauds him for the skillful hyperbole in “Sete annos de pastor Jacob servia.” He feels that the poet can effectively sound the depths of his lyrical feeling only through rhetorical “exageración,” writing: “Así como el ingenio en los grandes objectos no se satisface, sino con un relevante encarecimiento, así en la voluntad suele ser tanta la intención del afecto que no se satisface con menos que una exagerada ponderación.” The grander the passion, the grander the rhetorical distortion, for only by hyperbole can a noble ingenio represent the grand dimensions of his ardour (I, 220–221).

Since Camões is so “extremado en estos encarecimientos,” Gracián quotes another of his amorous “exageraciones,” the first stanza of the first Canção. Of this inclusion Sena writes: “O facto de Gracián apenas escolher uma canção para os seus exemplos . . . de agudeza e de engenho, quando dá tanto lugar aos sonetos, desmente as acusações de excessivo abstraccionismo conceptista, que em geral estão latentes no menosprezo tácito da crítica pelos géneros líricos maiores.”21 Indeed, the Portuguese poet is an undeniable exception to José María de Cossío’s
statement that "los grandes líricos del siglo XVI no movieron excesiva-
mente su entusiasmo." 22 "El que amo es" always enthuses Gracían. 
And one can be sure that the lyric's supposed "excesivo abstraccionismo
conceptista" would particularly appeal to a scholar engaged in the
compilation of "ein idealer Kanon der Meister des concepto."

Shortly after his discussion of hyperbole, Gracían treats another of
the poet's rhetorical flourishes, paradox. In Discurso 24 he explains that
"suele concluir y perfeccionar el grave y sutil Camões sus sonetos" with
an "encarecimiento paradojo." Then to illustrate his point Gracían
quotes these ingeniously twisting tercets from "Quem vê, senhora, claro
e manifesto":

Assim que a vida, e alma, e esperança,
E tudo quanto tenho, tudo, é vosso,
E o proveito disso eu só o levo;

Porque é tamanha benaventurança,
O darvos quanto tenho, et quanto posso,
Que quanto mais vos paga, mais vos debo (I, 241).

Such a paradoxical "sutileza"—as "dificultosa" as it is "primorosa"
(I, 241)—could easily become awkward in the hands of less-talented
poets, but in Camões' it is natural and unforced.

But one may rightly wonder whether Gracían in his zeal for lo barroco
might not on occasion force Camões' works into a critical framework
that is not entirely natural for them. That is, the Spanish scholar may
well depict his subject as more baroque—more rhetorical, more hyper-
monic, more paradoxical, and especially more conceptista—than he really
is. 23 As Corres Calderón notes, Gracían tends to see "la poesía anterior
o contemporánea a través del cristal parcialísimo de su temperamento,
de su segunda naturaleza, de su firmísima afición conceptista." 24 He
may therefore somewhat overemphasize Camões' incipient mannerism,
his budding tendency towards distortion and exaggeration for rhetorical
effect that became so popular in the seventeenth century.

The quotes from the poet's various works are not wrenched wildly
out of context (as far as "context" can be ascertained in Camões), so
an accusation of overt "proof-texting" is not warranted. Still, Gracían's
"inconfundible personalidad" 25 shows through the examples he chooses.
The Agudeza is, in fact, not only a record of its author's tastes, but
also is a chronicle of his search for ideological and technical forebears
for himself and his literary epoch. The Baroque was an inherently inse-
cure age, and Gracían seems to view Camões not only as a source of
exemplary conceptos, but also as an actual precedent for conceptismo.

The critic therefore looks to the poet for support of his theory of
"la agudeza crítica y maliciosa" (Discurso 26), quoting another of his
"noncanonical" Castilian verses:
Ruégos, que me digáis
Las oraciones que rezastes,
Si son por los que matastes,
Si por vos, que así matáis;
Si son por vos, son perdidas,
Que ¿cuál será la oración,
Que sea satisfacción,
Señora, de tantas vidas?
Si decís, que encomendando
Los que matastes estáis.
Si rezáis, ¿por qué matáis?
¿Para qué matáis rezando?

The poet cleverly "malicia a dos vertientes, equivocando la intención, y dóblase entonces la sutileza, porque se fingen dos motivos, ingenioso cada uno" (I, 258). Gracián is clearly pleased that Camões can be as sharp-tongued as he is sharp-witted. In the tradition of later baroque poets like Quevedo and Góngora (quotations from whose works also appear in this Discurso), the Portuguese poet’s agudeza is a rapier meant for more than mere exhibition.

When he next mentions Camões, Gracián temporarily puts aside questions of rhetoric. In Discurso 35, "De los conceptos por ficción," he quotes "Nun jardín adornado de verdura." As with conceits made "por ponderación misteriosa" (Discurso 6), an appeal is made in this poem to the imagination; "este género de conceptos ... con la invención y la suspensión entretienen mucho el ingenio" (I, 77), causing the reader willfully to suspend his disbelief and enter the literary web. Indeed, the poet effects a remarkable poiesis and creates a self-sustaining locus amoenus that, as Roger Bismut asserts, is in some respects a miniature of the Isle of Venus in Canto 9 of Os Lusíadas.27

In Discurso 26 and 37 Gracián focuses on a principal component of Camões’ poiesis, his “argumentos conceptuoso-s." Referring to “Quando da bela vista e doce risa,” the critic, again in an Aristotelian frame of mind, claims that “la paridad de un efecto se arguye con correspondencia a otro, y de cualquier circunstancia a otra igual." To prove his point he cites the last tercet of the poem:

Que de tanta estranheça sois ao mundo,
Que não é de estranhar, dama excelente,
Que quem voz fez, fiçese ceo e estrellas (II,84).

Ignoring Camões’ rather manneristic manipulation of petrarchan imagery, Gracián instead concerns himself with the passage’s internal rationale and balance. Like many of the literary theorists of his day, he was interested in the logic behind literature. Little wonder, then, that the critic expects Camões to be more than just a storyteller who strings his
thoughts onto a narrative thread. His “argumentos” must be more than just subject matter; they must be well-conceived, reasonable “arguments.” So Gracián readily appreciates the logician behind the poet—“el sutilísimo Camões”—and quotes his tercet which because of its coherence and almost formulaic order, resembles very closely a syllogism.

In Discurso 37 Gracián continues his investigation of various other “maneras de argumentos conceptuosos,” citing Camões’ poetry on three separate occasions. The first verse quoted is a catchy tercet which the poet bases on “la contrariedad . . . grande fundamento de toda sutileza”:

Porque poco aprovecha, linda dama,
Que sembrase el amor en vos amores,
Si vuestra condición produce abrojos.28

But Gracián is quick to grant that “hay aún su latitud en esta misma contrariedad, y sus grados de oposición, según la mayor o menor distancia; entre los opuestos efectos, a circunstancias de un mismo sujeto, se forma el argumento conceptuoso” (II, 89). Clearly, the conceptista, to be most effective, must range freely over a subject (or subjects), examining it (or them) from a variety of perspectives in order to detect the changing patterns of their relationships.

Continuing his study of the “maneras” of mannerism, Gracián includes in this Discurso another piece of Castilian verse:

Mi corazón me han robado,
Y Amor, viendo mis enojos,
Me dijo: “Fuete llevado
Por los más hermosos ojos,
Que desque vivo he mirado.
Gracias soberanas tales
Te los tienen en prisión,”
Y si Amor tiene razón,
Señora, por las señales,
Vos tenéis mi corazón.”29

In “este gran concepto del Camões,” Gracián states, “de las adyacentes [se] saca la ingeniosa consecuencia.” This is, “las circunstancias”—the various parts of the argumento—when juxtaposed, automatically form a clever conceit (II, 90–91).

In this final reference to Camões in Discurso 37, Gracián, still concerned with the Aristotelian model of paired causes and effects, quotes and analyzes “Apartábase Nise de Montano.” He claims that the poet works “de las causas a los efectos,” but has also recognized that the converse of this pattern—“el contrario”—is equally reasonable and practical. That is, the artist starts with the effects and traces them to their
respective causes. From either perspective “se toma ingeniosamente el argumento y se forma la primorosa correspondencia” (II, 93).

But not all good conceptos need follow such open and easily-recognized styles of discourse. The next mention of Camões comes in Discurso 44, “De las suspensiones, dubitaciones y reflexiones conceptuosas.” Like Discursos 6 and 35, this chapter is devoted to conceits that tantalize the reader’s imagination as well as his reason. “Reflexión” Gracián defines as “un reparar y volver sobre lo que se va diciendo que arguye sutiliza y da ponderación.” By “limitación o excepción”—both aspects of this process—the poet refines his argument, making “gustosas correcciones” of his original premises. In the case of this tercet, for example:

Saetas trae en los ojos, con que tira,
¡Oh, pastores!, huid, que a todos mata,
Si no es a mí, que de matarme vivo

Camões adds “a la excepción una extremada contradicción y encarecimiento” (II, 131–132). Mannerism here becomes almost rococo in its nicety.

The final reference to Camões’ works is made in the final Discurso (53), where Gracián deals at length with the problems of literary imitation. He praises the poet who “imita...no roba, al gran Virgilio, en su Lusiada, describiendo la muerte de Inés de Castro. La destreza está en trasfigurar los pensamientos, en transponer los asuntos, que siquiera se le debe el disfraz de la acomodación al segundo, y tal vez el aliño, que hay ingenios gitanos de agudeza” (II, 257).

The term, “gitano,” is crucial here. For Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcellos it is synonymous with “thief”30; thus, Gracián cautions his readers that clever imitation is only one step removed from clever thievery. But Camões is no robber or plagiarist. He may originally have borrowed some of his material, but has rearranged and reconstituted it in such a manner as to make it uniquely his own. Though related to Dido, Inés is certainly not her twin sister or clone. Each character has a distinctive personality, as do their respective creators. Virgil’s influence on Camões is strong, but not onerous.

The same can be said, in turn, of Camões’ influence on Gracián: it is present but never overbearing. The Spanish scholar has ranged like a wandering “ingenio gitano” (“wanderer” is certainly another possible connotation of “gypsy”) over the pages of western literature. His style of thought and composition have obviously been molded in the process. But as Klaus Heger affirms, one must recognize both Gracián’s great originality as a litterateur and his close association with the European literary tradition.31 In other words, he fashions, as well as is fashioned by the culture of his continent.

Kevin Larsen
NOTES

1. Agudeza y arte de ingenio, ed. Evaristo Correa Calderón (Madrid: Castalia, 1969), I. 46. All further references to this work will be noted in the text by volume and page number.


3. Virginia Ramos Foster, “A Note on Gracián’s Agudeza y arte de ingenio and Baroque Esthetics,” Romance Notes 11:3 (Spring, 1970), 611.


5. Many students of Gracián deal in passing with the Portuguese influence on his works, but to my knowledge there has been no study devoted specifically to this topic. Arturo del Hoyo mentions in his edition of the Agudeza (Obras completas, Madrid: Aguilar, 1960, p. 236) that José María Viqueira was about to publish an article, “Notas portuguesas en Gracián,” in Biblos (Coimbra). But this paper was never published there, and I have been unable to locate it in print anywhere else.

6. Carolina Michailis de Vasconcellos has written a short study of the presence of Sá de Miranda in Gracián’s writings, “Gracián e Sá de Miranda,” Revista Crítica de Historia y Literatura (1897), 212–213. As far as I have been able to discover, this is the only study in print that deals with the literary relations between Gracián and an individual Portuguese.

7. I duplicate here and in every other quote in which Camões’ name is used the spelling that Gracián prefers. He spells it “Camoes” and not “Camões” or “Camoonis” in order to make a word play later in *El criticon*.


14. Other authors besides Gracián have had this same tendency to make the “real” Camões into a literary character, as it were. Since so little is known of his life and the circumstances under which he composed his poetry, even his “biographers” have often fictionalized or romanticized (though most would never admit it) their subject. Thus, the notion of mirage is a central issue in Camões scholarship.

15. Costa Pimpão (*Rimas, Autos e Cartas*, Barcelos, 1944) and Hernándi Cidade (*Obras Completas*, Lisbon, 1946), among others, reject this sonnet from the Camonian canon. However, Dona Carolina in her article, “Investigações sobre Sonetos e Sonetistas Castelhanos e Portugueses,” Revue Hispanique 22:62 (June, 1910), 549–558, argues vociferously for its inclusion in the corpus. In his edition of the Agudeza, Correa Calderón asserts that the Portuguese original was Camões’ and the Gracián includes in his text a Spanish translation of it made by Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola (I, 46).

16. Critics who have previously discussed the influence of Petrarch on Camões are Harnañí Cidade (*O Lírico*, pp. 124 ff), and Jorge de Sena (*Os Sonetos*, pp. 9, 37, 54 *et passim*). Some critics who have studied the relationship of Garciilaso and Camões are: Vieira Lemos and Martínez Almoyna, *A Obra Espanhola de Camões*, p. 102; Helmut


23. One contemporary critic who insists on placing Camões’ lyric poetry well within the Baroque is Harold B. Segal, *The Baroque Poem* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1974), though this view is still in the minority.


26. Among those modern editors who reject this poem from their renderings of Camões’ works are Marques Braga (*Poesias castellanas y autos*, Lisbon, 1929) and Hernâni Cidade (*Obras completas*).


28. Marques Braga, Hernâni Cidade, and Costa Pimpão, among others, omit these lines from their editions.

29. Neither Costa Pimpão nor Hernani Cidade include this poem in Camões’ poetical corpus, though it does appear in Marques Braga’s *Poesias* as the glosa of the mote, “Vos tenéis mi coraçon.” There is, however, one fairly major difference between Gracián’s version and Marques Braga’s, where “gracias soberanas tales” reads “gracias sobre naturales” (p. 28).
