

## Forum

### Garcilaso de la Vega

TO THE EDITOR:

E. C. Graf's essay into the historical background of Garcilaso de la Vega, the originator of Spain's literary renaissance ("From Scipio to Nero to the Self: The Exemplary Politics of Stoicism in Garcilaso de la Vega's Elegies" [116 (2001): 1316–33]), brings to the fore the political turbulence that influenced Garcilaso's poetic production and offers a more nuanced reading than the *vida y obra* (life and works) method long a staple of golden age studies. Like any critical reading, however, interdisciplinary approaches such as Graf's leave room for debate; moreover, while they refreshingly allow for new insights, their incursions into several fields frequently call for correction and updating. In the spirit of collegial dialogue, I'd like to comment on two aspects of Garcilaso's biography that I believe merit a more precise treatment.

The first bears on the unremitting anxiety Garcilaso felt while in the service of Charles V. Graf presupposes that the young poet, joining in a municipal uprising in Toledo "against the local ecclesiastic authorities," readily takes up with the Castilian *comuneros* in opposition to the emperor. Then, "instead of falling on his republican sword," he does a "remarkable about-face," almost immediately switching over to the imperial cause (1319–20). Garcilaso's first political action, however, meant to restore the Hospital del Nuncio to its rightful administrators. Like other profitable Castilian institutions, the hospital had been taken over by Flemish ministers who were brought over by the Burgundian king and were perceived as alien by a wary populace. In 1520, arguing Castilian interests over those of empire, representatives of Parliament—Garcilaso among them—demanded that Charles take a wife, learn the language, and remain in Spain to build up the economy and balance the local power structure. (Charles's departure instead for Germany to claim his imperial title sparked the *comunero* rebellion, crushed by his troops at Villalar in 1521.) That Charles made Garcilaso a member of his royal guard and rewarded him two years later with the knighthood of Santiago shows just how swiftly the

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monarch realized that he had to placate the Toledan nobility, divided into two family factions: the Alvarez and the Mendoza.

By painting a romantic picture of a “rebel” Garcilaso inspired by “republican zeal” but soon turned into a “model imperial servant” by “political opportunism,” Graf removes the poet too quickly from the complex nationalist resentments over economic privileges that fueled the rebellion (1319–20). Garcilaso’s “disillusionment” with the emperor peaked much earlier than his 1532 expulsion to an island on the Danube (1320). Although Graf calls Garcilaso’s older brother, Pedro Laso, an “ultramoderate who defected back to the royalist camp when the *comunero* movement radicalized” (1320), Charles did not allow Pedro Laso back into Toledo until 1531; indeed, the poet spent most of his short life trying to patch things up between the two. (I note these tensions in my article “Self-Fashioning in Spain: Garcilaso de la Vega,” *Romanic Review* 83 [1992]: 517–38.)

The second aspect concerns Graf’s elision of women from Garcilaso’s biography, a glaring example of their general disappearance from the historical record. The most eventful discovery for Garcilaso studies in recent years, the identity of the mother of the poet’s illegitimate son, Lorenzo Suárez de Figueroa (thanks to Carmen Vaquero Serrano, we now know her to be Guiomar Carrillo, daughter of Fernando de Ribadeneira), helps also to document Garcilaso’s political aggravations. The poet and the young noblewoman were single at the time she became pregnant, and both belonged to distinguished Toledan families. There was, then, no reason for the lovers not to marry, save for the significant deterrent that Carrillo belonged to a family of *comuneros*; like Pedro Laso, her brother never received royal pardon for his treasonable conduct (Carmen Vaquero Serrano, *Garcilaso: Aportes para una nueva biografía* [Toledo: Oretania, 1996]). While Garcilaso never once mentions Carrillo by name, he flouted the emperor’s control by publicly recognizing the son as his own, by giving him one of the most illustrious of his family’s names, and by having his own mother raise the boy in his household.

Graf rightly asserts that Garcilaso’s strained relations with Charles resound in his poetry, which, regardless of its amorous content, “does not escape the political realities of Hapsburg Spain” (1327). These realities, however, can never be complete or

historically accurate until they include women’s agency. Although Garcilaso chafed under imperial rule, more often than not this rule was exercised by the empress Isabel de Portugal, appointed by Charles “lieutenant general and governor of the realm” in his absence. After the emperor’s coronation in Bologna, Isabel dispatched Garcilaso to the Franco-Spanish border to spy on the French (Archivo General de Simancas, Estado, *leg.* 20, *fols.* 265–67, 16 Aug. 1530). Despite what most literary histories repeat, it was not Charles—who, as usual, was out of the country—but Isabel who ordered Garcilaso’s expulsion to the Danubian isle. Furious over his presence at a wedding she did not authorize, the empress wrote Charles that she had exiled the poet, who had already left Castile with the duke of Alba, for responding airily to her magistrate in the Basque country (Archivo General de Simancas, Estado, *leg.* 24, *fols.* 395–96, 19 Feb. 1532).

Nor was women’s agency in early modern Spain limited to royalty. While Graf names the male “principal instigators” of the *comunero* rebellion (1319), he leaves out María Pacheco, Juan de Padilla’s wife. A member of the Mendoza clan, she was condemned to death for continuing the struggle after her husband’s beheading, but she escaped to Portugal, where she taught Greek and Latin. As feminist historians and literary critics have known for some time, we need only search the archives to find the female presence so long kept from public view.

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#### TO THE EDITOR:

A few months ago my interest was particularly aroused by the announcement of a forthcoming article in *PMLA*, written from, it seemed, a new-historicist point of view and dealing with the early modern Spanish poet Garcilaso de la Vega. The close association and the conflicts of this poet with the emperor Charles V have been known of for a long time; I was eager to read a more profound analysis of this relationship and its political implications.

It is an understatement to say that I was disappointed when I read E. C. Graf’s “From Scipio to Nero to the Self: The Exemplary Politics of Stoicism in Garcilaso de la Vega’s Elegies”: more than disappointed, I was dismayed. I will limit my remarks