

CHAPTER NINE

GIANTS ON PARADE, TYRANTS AFLAME IN QUEVEDO'S SONNET, "DESENGAÑO DE LA EXTERIOR APARIENCIA"

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In an age when printed publications required royal licenses in Spain, and theatrical works from 1615 onward likewise required licenses for performance, authors could not openly criticise the crown without risking suppression of their texts or more severe sanctions. Even texts that obtained such licenses were still subject to expurgation or outright prohibition by ecclesiastical and civil authorities. As scholars have shown, however, these conditions did not impose an obsequious silence on dissentient voices (Sullivan 1990, 143; Kahn 2008, 39-40). "Explicit criticism of the monarch, even had it been possible [...], was unnecessary," Melveena McKendrick observes (2000, 36). Instead, writers employed techniques of distancing and indirection, ambiguity and abstraction to overcome the constraints of censorship. Publishing circumstances that might well be perceived as repressive ultimately served to promote a refined subtlety and ingenuity of expression in subversive discourse. The Golden-Age *comedia* has been the object of most scholarly attention in this regard. The present study shows how similar techniques of oblique representation and abstraction in poetry of the period could enhance a critique of power. I take as my example Francisco de Quevedo's sonnet posthumously titled "Desengaño de la exterior apariencia con el examen interior y verdadero." This sonnet, by keeping its critique of particular Habsburg authority below the surface, constitutes an imaginative instruction and artful exercise in how to regard shows of power more generally. The poem is also subtly specular, inviting readers to consider

what dark recesses behind their own façades may also be worthy of opprobrium.¹

Alfonso Rey's edition of Quevedo's moral poetry presents the text of the sonnet as follows:

¿Miras este gigante corpulento
que con soberbia y gravedad camina?
Pues por de dentro es trapos y fajina,
y un ganapán le sirve de cimiento.
5 Con su alma vive y tiene movimiento,
y adonde quiere su grandeza inclina.
Mas quien su aspecto rígido examina
desprecia su figura y ornamento.
Tales son las grandezas aparentes
10 de la vana ilusión de los tiranos,
fantásticas escorias eminentes.
¿Veslos arder en púrpura, y sus manos
en diamantes y piedras diferentes?
Pues asco dentro son, tierra y gusanos.

The general reader in the Golden Age would have readily recognized the central analogy of this sonnet as a reference to the custom of parading enormous anthropoid figures, called *gigantes* or *gigantones*, through a town's streets and plazas for certain holidays and major civic events. These imposing yet insubstantial effigies, the sonnet argues, are analogous to the transient, superficial grandeur of mortal tyrants. The basic comparison and the lesson drawn from it are neither original nor unique to Quevedo, as we will see. The sonnet's achievement, rather, lies in the way Quevedo masterfully deploys the central image in language that shifts from descriptive details to intellectual paradox to earthy moralising.

Whereas Golden-Age readers would have been familiar with the colossal puppets of the sonnet's opening description, present day readers may need more clarification than the quatrains provide, in order to appreciate the cultural reference. It does not help that the image has generally gone unacknowledged or unrecognized in collections of Quevedo's poetry. Even detailed, annotated editions pass over it without comment. José Manuel Blecua's, Antonio Cabañas's, and Alfonso Rey's editions, for instance, do not offer an explanation of the *gigante*. Perhaps Spanish editors have deemed the sonnet's principal image too patently apparent, too self-explanatory to require comment, but its sense has

¹ This essay owes much to the Revd Dr Colin P. Thompson, whose lectures introduced me to the sonnet under consideration here.

nevertheless escaped the notice of trained Hispanists. Willis Barnstone’s English translation of the sonnet, for one, does not recognize the reference to popular pageantry. Barnstone renders the quatrains’ description of the processional giant as if it were merely a caricature of the physical dimensions of a “fat giant of a man” out for a stroll (1993, 55). A recent textbook designed for Spanish secondary schools likewise disregards the central conceit in its comments and questions on the poem (Echazarreta and García 2007, 228). In the light of the potential for inattention or misapprehension, then, the *gigante* merits a more thorough explanation.

Associated primarily, though by no means exclusively, with Corpus Christi processions, *gigantes* like the one Quevedo describes played a conspicuous part in various public rites in the Middle Ages and early modern period (Maldonado 1975, 61). Their use extended throughout Western Europe, particularly in the Iberian and Italian Peninsulas, Britain, France, and Germany. The earliest documented *gigante* of this sort dates from 1265, in a description of a procession in Portugal (Muir 2005, 104), but the tradition is doubtless much older. Its roots may ultimately be intertwined with the ancient practice of burning a giant wicker man—the Celtic sacrifice Julius Caesar describes in his commentaries on the Gallic Wars. The tribes of Gaul, Caesar records, would erect colossal effigies fashioned of osiers, “figures of immense size, whose limbs, woven out of twigs, they fill with living men and set on fire, and the men perish in a sheet of flame” (VI.16; 1958, 341). Burning the gigantic images, as I will discuss, is an enduring feature of certain vestiges of the tradition in Spain, where, centuries later, the figures have sometimes been burnt and sometimes preserved for the festivities of subsequent years.

Whether consigned to the flames or to the storeroom for the next parade, the Spanish *gigantes* consist of rather brittle, light, flammable materials. In the Golden Age, they were generally fashioned of wickerwork wattling and laths, fleshed out with papier-mâché and rags or other such stuffing (Very 1962, 80). Bedecked with showy clothes and jewellery, “además, suelen ir coronados, pues representan a los reyes y poderosos del mundo” (Zugasti 2005, 70). At times, the processions have included more than a dozen giants at once, and their painted faces and particular garb distinguish members of both sexes and various races. When not transported on a cart, the lower portion of the wicker framework is left hollow so that the entire monstrosity can be carried along and manipulated by a person hidden within (Quevedo’s “ganapán” of line 4). Cristóbal Pérez Pastor transcribes an anonymous sixteenth-century manuscript that details this gargantuan puppetry: “son los gigantes llevados de ciertos hombres que metidos dentro de los cuerpos van sobre sus hombros

moviéndolos y haciendo meneos y vueltas y vistas a la parte que quieren” (1914, 405). In addition to their rigid bobbing and dancing in the Corpus Christi processions, Golden-Age *gigantes* participated in other festivities, sacred and secular alike (though an unambiguous distinction between sacred and secular is not always possible or helpful when considering early modern customs); they appeared at celebrations for patron saints’ days, beatifications and canonizations, the formal relocation of sacred images, processions in honour of the Immaculate Conception, even royal occasions. A traditional dancing giant formed part of the gala reception and masquerade that Toledo put on for Philip II and his new queen, Elizabeth of Valois, in 1560. “El Rey anduvo disfrazado” along with other members of his court, and among the “curiosas danças” on display for their formal entrance, the royal biographer Luis Cabrera de Córdoba mentions “la de los gigantes, antigüedad que siempre parece bien” ([1619] 1998, 210).

But Cabrera de Córdoba’s positive reaction to the time-honoured spectacle was not always shared. Royal favour and participation did not last. Already in the seventeenth century there were complaints against the use of *gigantes* and other profane displays on solemn religious occasions. In the following century, repeated protests against the perceived sacrilege compelled Carlos III to ban the practice outright. His royal decree of 21 July 1780 reads:

Habiendo llegado a noticia de S.M. algunas notables irreverencias que en la fiesta del Santísimo Corpus Christi de este año se han cometido con ocasión de los gigantones y danzas [...] se manda que en ninguna Iglesia de estos Reynos [...] haya en adelante tales danzas ni gigantones, sino que cese del todo esta práctica en las Procesiones y demás funciones Eclesiásticas, como poco conveniente a la gravedad y decoro que en ellas se requiere (qtd. in Martínez Gil and Rodríguez González 2002, 172).

Nevertheless, the prohibition was understood only to apply directly to Corpus Christi and the most solemn celebrations. The *gigantes*, in spite of opposition from some corners and waning popularity, survived in the more municipally oriented *fiestas patronales* of Navarre, for example, in a variety of pageants in certain areas of Latin America, and in the *fogueres* or *hogueras* of St John’s Day in Alicante, where they still form part of the pyrotechnics. Even Toledo’s Corpus Christi processions have reinstated the tradition. Since 2009, carefully restored, eighteenth-century *gigantes* have taken up their old place in the streets of the city (Fernández-Layos de Mier 2011, 30). And perhaps the *gigantes* most readily accessible to today’s tourist industry are those of Pamplona, where they are a daily

feature of the week-long *Sanfermines*. Ernest Hemingway’s first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, gives them a passing mention: “All we could see of the procession through the closely pressed people that crowded all the side streets and curbs were the great giants, cigar-store Indians, thirty feet high, Moors, a King and Queen, whirling and waltzing solemnly to the *riauriau*” ([1926] 1962, 155). If Hemingway had dedicated more than one sentence to the procession of dancing giants, this aspect of Pamplona’s famous festivities might have come to be as generally recognizable as the running of the bulls is today.

Having thus briefly reviewed the material and historical background of the *gigantes*, we can turn to a more detailed analysis of the workings of Quevedo’s sonnet. From the start, the poem posits a contrast between two modes of viewing: superficial observation (line 1) and more considered, imaginative scrutiny (line 7). The first line follows what is for Quevedo a favourite format. Among the nearly 500 of his sonnets that have come down to us, eleven begin with the query “¿Miras ...?,” “¿Ves ...?,” or “¿No ves ...?,” and another half dozen begin with declarative or conditional variations on these rhetorical questions: “Tal vez se ve ...,” “Viéndote ...,” “Si vistes ...,” and so forth. The sonnet’s opening question in the second person serves to implicate the reader in the scene; it immediately enjoins the reader to look, to visualise, as if present, a processional figure moving along a street. Within the concise constraints of the sonnet form, the details are minimal but effective in evoking the *gigante*’s monstrous proportions towering over the crowd, and the lordly attitude its comportment suggests. The root of “corpulento,” moreover, echoes that of Corpus Christi, the holiday with which the processional giants were most closely associated. *Gigantes*, as we have seen, might be brought out in procession for a variety of holidays and celebrations, but it was the Corpus Christi processions in which they accompanied royalty (Martínez Gil and Rodríguez González 2002, 160-61). The verbal hint anticipates the target of this satire: the despotic royal.

The sonnet wastes no time in puncturing the superficial display. Despite its apparent splendour and imperious demeanour, this spectacle’s inner substance is nothing but rags and rubbish. The term “fajina” in line 3 denotes kindling, leafy padding, or bosky stuffing more generally. Quevedo’s contemporary, Sebastián de Covarrubias, defines *fajina* as “leña menuda para encender la gruessa. [...] También llaman fajina las hojarascas, digo hojas secas, de *fagus*, *fagi*, por la haya, por quanto sus hojas, después de secas, son a propósito para lo dicho y para embolver en ellas los vasos y otras cosas que han de caminar, para que no topen unas con otras. Y debaxo deste nombre se entienden toda broça de hojas secas y

espadañas” ([1611] 2003, 581; s.v. *fagina*). The reference to a material used for both stuffing and kindling in line 3 anticipates the “arder” of the closing tercet; the material element foreshadows the tercets’ moral, metaphorical reading of the physical figure.

The essential, animating core of the *gigante* is nothing regal. The “ganapán” of line 4 is a burly roustabout, a common drudge. Covarrubias again provides a richly descriptive definition: “Este nombre [de ganapán] tienen los que ganan su vida y el pan que comen [...] a llevar a cuestras y sobre sus ombros las cargas [...]. Son ordinariamente hombres de muchas fuerças, gente pobre y de ninguna presunción, viven libremente y va comido por servido; y aunque todos los que trabajan para comer podrían tener este nombre, éstos se alçaron con él por ganar el pan con excesivo trabajo y mucho cansancio y sudor” (627; s.v. *ganapán*). A brawny labourer of this sort operates and animates the processional figure. This is the sense of lines 5 and 6 of the sonnet. The *gigante* is quite literally soulless and depends for its apparent life and movement on the *ganapán* hidden within, maneuvering the splendid doll to bow, bob, and swagger where he pleases.

By line 6, the sonnet requires its reader to employ the same sort of keenly discerning scrutiny that the poem is at once describing and prescribing. The reader must recognize that the referent of the possessive “su” of line 5 has shifted from the *ganapán* back to the *gigante* in lines 6 and 7. It is a verbal means of conflating the person and the persona in this spectacle, conflating the puppeteer and the puppet, as it were; but a true understanding of the scene, the sonnet suggests, calls for an attentive construal to distinguish between the two, visually and verbally. It is the *gigante*’s “aspecto rígido” that gives the viewer a telling clue in line 7. The static mask and stiff shell provide the visual give-away of the *gigante*’s sham nature. The verb *examinar* here signals a more considered manner of viewing than the *mirar* of the opening line. José González de Salas, Quevedo’s friend and first posthumous editor who formulated the title of the sonnet, picks up on this key word as well: “el examen interior y verdadero.” The examination depicted in line 7 is exterior but acutely observant, and on it hinges the imaginative, interior examination that is to come in the tercets. While the initial sight of the *gigante* in the opening lines may have inspired wonder and admiration, the more careful study of its deportment breeds contempt. The viewer recognizes the outward show as being essentially worthless.

With the traditional *volta* following the quatrains comes the sonnet’s lesson. The tercets render explicit the analogy between the gigantic illusion and tyrannical power, as line 9 moves from the singular object of

the preceding lines to a more generalised, plural application. The target of the sonnet’s satire is the corruption and hypocrisy of the powerful politicians and courtiers of Quevedo’s day. It is, on the one hand, a generic attack on morally hollow despots, but it also contains hints that its critique might hit closer to home for the Habsburg court of the time. Contemporaries would hardly have been able to read “escorias” in line 11 without noticing the resonance with the name of the Escorial. The combined pantheon, palace, and monastery at San Lorenzo del Escorial, lauded as the eighth wonder of the world in early modern Spain, was the foremost monument of the Habsburg dynasty and a pet project of all three Philips who reigned during Quevedo’s lifetime. *Escorias* are slag heaps, piles of dross and offscourings from mining or metallurgy. The Escorial was constructed on and derived its name from a site where ironworks in the area once discarded their dregs, according to the etymology that has gained widest acceptance since the sixteenth century (Trapero 1997, 241). Tyrants’ empty illusions, as the echo of the toponym underscores, may stand out among the wonders of the world, but ultimately prove chimerical—mere *châteaux en Espagne*, founded on rubbish.

The question of lines 12-13 parallels that of the opening lines, but the reader is now primed to adopt the second mode of viewing. This is the more considered, imaginative scrutiny that permits one to visualise the dogsbody and the worthless stuffing within the effigy; now it extends to visualising the moral worth and spiritual end of the *tiranos*’ pomp. The key word here is the verb “arder,” for the visual, metaphorical, and moral dimensions it contributes. The tyrants smoulder in imperial purple, the colour of regal and ecclesiastical authority. They coruscate amid precious gems. But their burning ambition, lust for power, and displays of opulence will ultimately come to nothing. The verb recalls the real custom of burning the *gigantes* for certain festivities, as in the *fogueres* of Alicante today, and thus serves as a link to the sonnet’s central image. More to the point, it conveys, succinctly and vividly, the glittering spectacle the tyrants present, and heralds the all-consuming, evanescent nature of their splendour. As with the image in the quatrains, here again the visible exterior is not necessarily devoid of hints. Just as the “aspecto rígido” permits the observer to recognize the ruse, so too does the glister prompt one to imagine other, more metaphorical fires: the tyrants’ fervid self-promotion and the flames of perdition. Again the language of lines 12-13 requires the sort of scrutiny the sonnet commends. A zeugma allows the omission of the verb that corresponds to “manos,” requiring the reader to infer the repetition of “arder,” and this process of inference mirrors the way the discerning viewer may educe the unseen fires of smouldering

decadence and future, fiery torment. One must imaginatively perceive the immaterial ends of superficial show, the sonnet reiterates. The flamboyant veneer gives way to cinders.

More subtly still, the dialectic of exterior and interior in this sonnet urges self-critical scrutiny on the part of the reader. The sonnet openly invites outward observation from the first line: “¿Miras ...?” But the curt closing line, heavy with sibilance as if the speaker spat it out in disgust, concludes with inward insight. The words are carefully chosen. *Asco*, “es lo mesmo que el latino llama *nausea*,” Covarrubias tells us. He suggests an onomatopoeic etymology, assigning *asco*’s origins to the word for seasickness pronounced while retching with revulsion: “creo está corrompido el verbo de *nauseo*, o del sonido que haze en la garganta *ahhs*, *ahsco*” ([1611] 2003, 155-56; s.v. *asco*). Its use in the sonnet signals, at one level, an appropriate reaction to the nauseating interior that underlies the sham opulence, while implicitly urging reflection on what of one’s own sickening interiority *nausea* might bring forth. The “examen interior y verdadero” also entails introspection. All pride and pretence can be punctured by recognition of the shared, universal end of all mortal things, the “tierra y gusanos” of line 14. This *memento mori* echoes Matthew 23.27: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.” Imaginative projections, based on fixed principles, serve to expose hypocrisy and unmask *gigantes*.

María José Tobar Quintanar (1999) has pointed out the uncanny similarities between Quevedo’s sonnet and several lines from Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola’s verse epistle to Don Francisco de Eraso, “Con tu licencia, Fabio, hoy me retiro” (328-30). Her article makes an important point: Quevedo’s imitations made use of Classical and Scriptural sources, as well as texts by near contemporaries. The relevant lines from Argensola read as follows:

¿Has visto los colosos artizados
sobre un arco triunfal? Pues por figuras
los contempla de insignes potentados:
en el ropaje de las vestiduras
venerables y sacros, mas por dentro
de bálago trabado en puntas duras.
¡Oh qué clavos se topan al encuentro
en el ánimo agudos, que sustentan
grave el semblante, lastimado el centro! (ll. 187-95; 329)

There are, of course, notable similarities between Quevedo’s sonnet and Argensola’s *epístola*, from their queries in the second person, to their consideration of the sordid wadding “por dentro.” As Tobar Quintanar rightly points out, however, it is impossible to know which poem, if either, is an imitation of the other, because, although Argensola’s *epístola* is known to have been composed between 1604 and 1606, Quevedo’s sonnet cannot be dated with any degree of accuracy. The *epístola*’s early date relative to Quevedo’s literary career, and Quevedo’s more sustained, detailed development of the basic image, lead Tobar Quintanar to suggest that the sonnet is more likely the derivative text in this case. I would propose, however, that both poems may well have a common source in Hernando de Zárata’s *Discursos de la paciencia cristiana* (1592). It is a volume with which Quevedo is likely to have been familiar, for it was printed in Alcalá de Henares shortly before Quevedo began his studies there (Jauralde Pou 1998, 94). Moreover, Zárata dedicated it to Juan Tellez Girón, Duque de Osuna, the father of Quevedo’s patron, Pedro Tellez Girón, the Duque de Osuna who became viceroy of Sicily and Naples, where Quevedo served as his secretary. Zárata’s *discurso* emphasises the universality of human suffering; life’s afflictions are the lot of the lowliest pauper as well as the highest monarch:

no es otra cosa esta nuestra vida, sino un perpetuo pelear con los trabajos y afflicciones [...] pues nadie vive sin ellas, aunque sea Rey, o Papa: detras de aquellas vestiduras que resplandecen hay dos mil géneros de pesadumbres y tormentos. No *mires*, dize Chrysostomo, la *purpura*, sino al alma muy sangrienta y colorada mas que la *purpura*: ni *mires* la corona, sino los cuydados que rodean su cabeça y coraçon: los sobresaltos de día y de noche, los buelcos en la cama: los peligros de la vida y de la honra [...] Pues si esto se dice de los sceptros, coronas y tyaras, donde parece que se vive sin trabajo ni cuydado, qué diremos del pobre y del que es menos que el Rey? [...] Son estos grandes del mundo, semejantes a aquellas grandes figuras de *gigantes* que el día del sanctísimo sacramento salen en la processión, que por su *grandeza* se divisan desde lexos sobre las cabeças de la gente, y traen a los mochachos y a los simples abobados: y sabido lo que es lo que assí espanta, viene allí debajo sustentando aquella machina un pobre hombre, cansado y sudando, salariado por una miseria por todo el día, que cuando a la noche se acaba la fiesta, se dexa caer sobre una pobre cama, o suelo, o lo primero que halla, hecho pedaços, y a vezes arrepentido, aunque sin provecho, de aver traydo con tanto trabajo y tan poco fruto, aquella carga tan grande, aunque por ella era mirado y respectado en la processión. *Tales son* estos personajes grandes del mundo, que en esta processión del, son los mas altos, ilustres, y señalados con el dedo, levantados sobre todos, *mirados* de los niños, que no estiman más de lo que parece: y bien *mirado* son unos hombres flacos como los demás, y por

ventura de menos fuerças y quilates, que por una liviana paga traen a cuestras aquella pesada carga del officio, o dignidad, sudando y cansados, que assí lo confessarían si les apretassen los cordeles, y tomassen su confesión: y quando se acaba la processión y la fiesta desta vida, si por su desdicha no les cabe buena suerte, se arrojan en aquella dura cama del infierno, cansados y quebrantados (E8^v-F1^v).

The similarities, in terms of lexis and logic, between this passage and Quevedo's sonnet are striking. I have italicized several of the most significant. Zárate goes on to reinforce his argument by expounding a second, related image. He draws a comparison between the "señorazos" of this world and a hollow statue or *coloso* such as Argensola would later use:

Y si esta comparacion de los gigantes no basta, o dixeredes que otro la dixo primero (aunque no por esso es peor)² tomemos un gigante de bronce,

² The precedent to which Zárate refers is probably that of Alonso de Villegas. Villegas makes use of the *gigante* comparison in the 1586 sequel to his immensely popular version of the *Flos sanctorum*, in which he recounts the lives of Old Testament saints (*Flos sanctorum: Segunda parte y historia general en que se escribe la vida de la Virgen [...] y de los sanctos antiguos*). When describing Cain's horticultural toils in Genesis 4, Villegas adds a lengthy disquisition on manual labour and the tribulations of power:

No ay officio tan trabajoso como el cavar, ni ay vida tan trabajada como la de los que quieren tener y valer en el mundo. Suelen en fiestas principales sacar danças de gigantes, y ver uno dellos causa admiracion, la pompa y magestad que lleva, tan levantado sobre todos, con adereços de oro y seda, con gente que le sigue: y si con atencion se mira, debaxo del se verá un pobre hombre de poco ser cansado y trasudado, que va rebentando: assi succede en las personas que pretenden estados de mundo, y ser en el tenidos y estimados, mirados en lo exterior, muestran magestad, y auctoridad, con el officio, vestidos ricamente, muy acompañados de gente de servicio, y dentro va una desventurada alma pobre de virtudes, cansada con vicios, y reventando con las cargas y obligaciones proprias de los officios altos. [...] Desto darán testimonio todos los muy ocupados en negocios de mundo: y que pretenden ser y valer en el, que como se ha dicho son cavadores. (M1v)

Much later, in the seventeenth century, the Jesuit Juan Eusebio Nieremberg would promulgate the idea still further in his well known ascetical treatise, *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno: Crisol de desengaños*. Nieremberg imagines potentates crushed under the weight of their grandeur, like Quevedo's *ganapán* bearing up under the giant puppet:

que dura más que el de palo y cañas, y sea el Colosso de Rodas, que a cabo de muchos años se cayó, y quando cayó, se dize, que apenas avía hombre que con los braços pudiesse abarcar el dedo pulgar, y dentro tenia grandes cavernas, y pinos, y travesaños de hierro, culebras, lagartos, y savandijas. Esta es la figura destes officios y dignidades, Unos señorazos que parecen de bronce, immortales y perpetuos, y que reluzen quando les da el sol, y dentro estan llenos de barras que les atraviessan el alma, y de maderas con que se sustenta aquella grandeza: y savandijas y culebras, que roen el coraçon. (F1^v)

A useful addendum to Tobar Quintanar’s argument, then, is that we must look to contemporary prose as well as poetry when seeking possible sources for Quevedo’s imitative verse. More importantly, we here encounter a poetic choice between two related images: the processional giant and the colossus. Quevedo, I would suggest, makes the more judicious selection. Unlike the fixed statue, the *gigante* on parade allows him to create a scene of livelier action, and he seizes on wider possibilities that prove crucial to the sonnet’s message. The sonnet more naturally implicates the reader in the dramatic situation as one of the bystanders who witness the procession. The two modes of viewing the spectacle, as Zárate’s exposition makes clear, are already implied in the varied witnesses who would be present at such a scene; one may regard the *gigantes* with stupefaction, like “los niños” and “los simples abobados,” or observe them, “bien mirado,” with knowing recognition of their true nature. No static simulacrum, the animated *gigante* confronts the careful observer with the apparent paradox of motionless mobility: its body is moving, yet its aspect is unmoved. Recognizing this anomaly is the basis of the viewer’s disparaging reaction in the second quatrain. By contrast with Zárate’s bronze colossus, the material out of which the processional *gigante* is fashioned is truly of sham value, a tawdry veneer. Argensola compensates somewhat for this material problem by locating his colossus on a triumphal arch, which may indeed be an ephemeral decoration, but the viewer is less likely to have occasion to glimpse its humble innards.

los poderosos de la tierra, sobre quienes llueven tantos trabajos [...] Son como los gigantes que sacan a las fiestas grandes en las ciudades, que son unas figuras muy vistosas, muy cubiertas de oro y seda, de mucha grandeza y majestad: esto es lo que parece; pero lo que no parece es un hombrecillo muy cansado y muy sudado, y que, reventando y muriendo, lleva aquella grandeza sobre sus hombros. Las acémilas de los grandes, cuando hacen las primeras entradas en la corte, van cargadas de riquezas, [...] pero aunque la carga sea tan rica y tan lucida, al fin es carga que las mata y las abruma: así es la honra, el imperio y el mando. ([1640] 1957, 157)

Finally, the idea of a procession itself grants Quevedo a framework for the trajectory of his sonnet and the eschatological suggestions of the final tercet. Clear discernment comes with the steady contemplation of the way of all flesh, “cuando se acaba la procesión y la fiesta desta vida,” the inexorable end to which the sonnet leads and compels the reader to consider.

There is an irony, in retrospect, in the sonnet’s allusion to the Escorial in the context of processional giants and fiery potentates. In August and September 1663, under the auspices of Philip IV, Spain celebrated the centenary of the Escorial’s construction.³ The festive pageantry on the occasion featured a combustible “castillo de vistosa arquitectura,” surmounted by “un gigante de desmedida grandeza” (Santa María 1664, A5r)—rather like what Lope de Vega describes in the celebration of San Isidro’s canonization four decades earlier in Madrid: “un castillo de fuego con un gigante, que con serlo, se movía a todas partes ligeramente” ([1622] 1856, 157). At ten o’clock on the inaugural evening of the Escorial’s centenary, a salvo of rockets and fireworks announced the imminent conflagration of the powder-filled *gigante-castillo* contraption itself. Fray Luis de Santa María, who lived and taught at the Escorial, describes the spectacle: “Antes de darle fuego, dispararon los Artífices de estos divertimientos, quanta pólvora anima, una copia innumerable de cohetes, [...] y otras infinitas invenciones de fuego [...] Dieron fuego al castillo, y abortó aquella preñez de pólvora, tanto rayo de luz, tanto penacho de ardores, truenos, relámpagos, estallidos” (1664, A5r). And the Jeronymite friar goes on to recount the brief, blazing splendour of a scene that had required so many sleepless days to construct. “Ardió finalmente todo el castillo, y el gigante, y aun no sé, si lastimó, que se abrasasse en el término de una hora, lo que había ocupado muchos días al desvelo,” though he rather ruefully concedes that such fleeting extravagance is necessary for a suitably impressive public event of its kind: “si faltan estos festejos, estos juguetes, estas invenciones de la pólvora, parece, que falta a la fiesta el luzimiento, siendo esto lo que sirve menos, y cuesta más” (A5v).

Within two years of these celebrations, Philip IV would be buried in the royal pantheon at the Escorial, in the niche he himself had designated; and within a decade, the vast palace-monastery complex, the greatest monument of the Habsburg dynasty, would likewise prove ephemeral. A chimney fire in the northern wing of the Escorial turned into a raging,

³ The foundation stone was laid in 1563, though Philip II did not issue the official Letter of Foundation until 1567. Construction of the Escorial formally concluded in 1584 (Kamen 2010, x-xi).

fifteen-day holocaust, which left the structure “enteramente desmantelado, tiznadas sus paredes, hundidos gran parte de sus techos, despojado de los altos chapiteles y agujas que lo adornaban, y envuelto por decirlo así, en escombros y ceniza”—a gigantic ruin that took seven years to rebuild (Quevedo 1849, 128-29).

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