

Not Necessarily Epic: *Translatio imperii* and *studii* in Eighteenth-Century Apologias for the Spanish Nation

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Benito Jerónimo Feijoo, one of Spain's earliest and most celebrated enlightenment authors, observes in his essay "Glorias de España" that "todos los triunfos de los antiguos héroes son muy inferiores a los que lograron nuestros españoles. ¿Qué hazañas pueden Roma o Grecia poner en paralelo con las del Cid y de Bernardo del Carpio?" (179).¹ Not only does Feijoo pit these two Spanish epic protagonists—Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar and Bernardo del Carpio—against the entirety of classical antiquity's heroes, but he also asserts matter-of-factly that the likes of Aeneas, Odysseus, Achilles, and others are "muy inferiores" to the Spanish champions. The heroic tone that pervades this essay is understandable, as is the rather glib delivery of such a hyperbolic comparison. "Glorias" is, after all, a quasi-catalogue of Spain's glorious history, an apologia for its imperial past, and a paean to its future. What is notable in Feijoo's essay is not its nationalism, which is to be expected, but rather the technique by which he establishes Spain's authority. Feijoo and many of his contemporaries sought to legitimize Spain's role and importance on the European stage during the eighteenth century, and in so doing, he and others relied on the literary fusion of three concepts.

First are the medieval topoi of *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii*, which refer to the transfer of power and knowledge, respectively, from one great empire to another. The process of *translatio* underscored a linear view of history with political, military, and cultural legitimacy being passed down a succession of great empires, such as the shift in power from Greece to Rome. Starting in the Middle Ages, European authors began to fervently assert their individual nation's claim as the latest empire in this exclusive genealogy of power.² The second concept I will be discussing is the epic function of

¹ Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, better known as El Cid, is the national hero of Spain and the protagonist of Spain's celebrated epic poem, *Cantar de mio Cid* (c. 1207). Bernardo del Carpio, a semi-legendary warrior-hero from Asturias about whom little is known, supposedly defeated Charlemagne's troops and may even have slain Roland, the epic hero of *La chanson de Roland* at Roncevaux.

² Both England and France engaged in this practice with great vigor. Charlemagne, for example, was viewed by the French as emblematic of political legitimacy. As Holy Roman Emperor and King of the Franks, he legitimized the *translatio* from the glory days of the Roman Empire to that of early ninth-century France.

literature, which represents the literary manifestation of the *translatio*. When medieval nations and kingdoms began to proclaim their politico-cultural authority, epic poetry gained an influential function as the literary standard-bearer of a country's values and cultural relevance. As Francisco Rico notes in his study on El Cid, "los ideales y, si se quiere, la ideología que respira ese Rodrigo no podían ser tampoco otros que los del juglar y su público" (xviii). An epic poem codified and disseminated the values of a people and, equally as important, was emblematic of a legitimate claim to a successful *translatio*, a notion supported by the proliferation of epics during this period. The third concept in play is the validation of Spain's significance in Enlightenment-era Europe. The Spanish eighteenth century witnessed a surge in the number of texts that can be classified as national apologies or defenses, works that aimed to rebuke anti-Spanish rhetoric, and to reassert the country's cultural and historical dominance.

Feijoo is therefore hardly the only one to grapple with these objectives, and in this article I aim to articulate the manner in which Spanish authors of these national apologies reimaged the aforementioned *translatio imperii* and the epic function of literature as cultural exemplar in order to craft eighteenth-century defenses of Spain and Spanish identity. I will first discuss the shift away from traditional epic poetry, which had for centuries fulfilled this role of asserting national legitimacy, yet which had become in Feijoo's time an increasingly irrelevant and waning literary mode. Finally, I will explore what I term the *epic rhetoric* of national apologies in selected texts by Feijoo, José de Cadalso, Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, and Juan Pablo Forner.

Epic poetry has always been closely linked with national identity, pride, and the codification of idealized values. The adjective *epic* is used much more freely today than it was in Feijoo's time, when it usually referred only to heroic verse.³ Covarrubias' *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (1611) defined the term *épico* as: "versos heroicos, contando hazañas de varones ilustres" ("Épico" 357; I modernize the spelling); in the 1732 edition of the *Diccionario de autoridades* it is explained as: "en nuestra lengua esta palabra suena lo mismo que poesía heroica" ("Épico" 535; I modernize the spelling). The noun *epopeya* is similarly defined in the same edition as "[p]oema heroico" (539; I modernize the spelling), and these straightforward definitions would not change over the course of the eighteenth century. Ignacio de Luzán, Spain's most influential eighteenth-century literary theorist, devotes the fourth book of his seminal *Poética* (1737) to explaining and codifying the parameters of epic poetry. It is not enough to define it as a poem written in hexameter, he writes, but rather as a narrative poem that details "una acción ilustre" using heroic verse (432; I modernize the spelling). Luzán, as a neoclassical theorist, would not stray very far from the definitions advanced by Aristotle, and later Le Bossu and Boileau. As was typical of Luzán, his definition of epic format, meter, and style is quite strict. In addition to noble characters and illustrious events, it should espouse Aristotelian verisimilitude, and of course comply with Horace's *utile dulci*—that is to say, it should be entertaining as well as

³ Scanning the headlines from newspapers, blogs, and magazines reveals references to *epic* sporting events, *epic* weather phenomena, *epic* mergers between companies, *epic* meals, or even the oxymoronic-yet-trendy *epic fail*. The idea of *epic fail*, that is to say, a failure of colossal proportions, is thought to have originated on the internet, specifically in memes which popularized the term. None of these terms are related to epic poetry.

didactic. Jovellanos would echo Luzán's ideas in *Lecciones de retórica y poética*, stating that "Es ya universalmente reconocido que el poema épico es el más noble de todos," in that it blends "la diversión, la instrucción y la importancia" (245; I modernize the spelling).

Both the definition of *epic* and the lengthy explanation provided by Luzán point toward a rather hermetic and restrictive delineation of the epic genre. Simply put, Spanish authors intending to write an epic poem in the eighteenth century had a very clear, correct model to follow. Additionally, aspiring epic poets faced a number of unavoidable historical and contextual antecedents: Spanish epics have generally been classified as belonging either to the medieval *cantar de gesta* tradition, or to sixteenth-century *épica culta*. Scholars agree that medieval epic poetry has its roots in the oral tradition of the *juglares* (Beresford 75), and that in Spain, the *cantar de gesta* is usually confined to the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, with the *Cantar de mio Cid* detailing the Cid's military and political exploits and, more importantly, coinciding with the reconquest and the fashioning of the nascent Spanish empire. The vast body of scholarship devoted to the *cantares de gesta* underscores not only the lyrical richness and innovation of these poems, but also the complex interplay between historicity, myth, and the crafting of a national narrative.⁴ This last point is of particular relevance, in that eighteenth-century epics simply could not replicate the socio-historical conditions of their medieval predecessors.

Those epics that originated as written works have traditionally been placed in a separate category, which in Spanish is often termed *épica culta*.⁵ These learned epics, such as Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1532), Camoëns' *Os Lusíadas* (1572), and Juan Rufo's *La Austriada* (1584), have a number of characteristics that set them apart from earlier works. They originate during the Renaissance and do not have their roots in oral tradition, as opposed to classical epics and the medieval *cantar de gesta*. Further setting these epics part from their medieval counterparts, Antonio Prieto argues, is their focus on achieving the Renaissance ideals of *formare* and *nobilitare* (117-18). The notion of *formare*, of shaping and teaching noble readers through Aristotelian *imitatio*, was paired with *nobilitare*, the "making noble" component which combined both an emphasis on genealogy of nobility of the characters and patrons, and the refining and polishing of one's nobility, again through the *imitatio* of the depicted deeds. This is very much the case of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1589), in which the poet makes clear that his epic's purpose is "to fashion a gentleman or noble person" (315). Other works endowed the usual nationalist rhetoric of epic poems with a Christian context, such as Tasso's *La Gerusalemme liberata* (1581), which offers a mythic retelling of the Crusades. The success and influence of the Italian Renaissance epics *Orlando innamorato* by Boiardo (1486), as well as the aforementioned *Orlando furioso* and *La Gerusalemme liberata*, drove the literary legend of the "Canon of Ferrara," the new literary standard and model for Renaissance epics named after the city and the legendary patronage of the Dukes of Ferrara.

⁴ Scholarship on medieval Spanish epics is immense (and beyond the scope of this essay), but I would like to mention a few influential studies. Ramón Menéndez Pidal published exhaustively in this field, see: *Reliquias de la poesía épica española*. Also: Dámaso Alonso, "Estilo y creación en el *Poema del Cid*"; Manuel Alvar, *Cantares de gesta medievales*; and Alan Deyermond, "Medieval Spanish Epic Cycles: Observations on Their Formation and Development."

⁵ For more, see José Cebrián, *La musa del saber: La poesía didáctica de la ilustración española*.

The learned epics of the Renaissance became a quasi-obsession in Golden Age Spain (Prieto 120), as evidenced by Luis Barahona de Soto's *Las lágrimas de Angélica* (1586), an apocryphal continuation of sorts to Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. It is without a doubt that Alonso de Ercilla's *La araucana* (1589) survives to this day as the masterpiece of Spanish *épica culta*. Detailing the Spanish conquest of Chile and the war between the Spanish and the indigenous Mapuche, *La araucana* is notable for its original blending of classical and learned epic styles, its use of fantastic elements, and for its heroic representations and treatment of the Mapuche. The seventeenth century saw a continuation of the learned epic style, though its popularity started to wane, as did the fortunes of the Spanish empire. This crucial development would herald not only a steady decline in originality that would continue into the next century, but it also underscores the discrepancy between Spain's sociopolitical reality and the increasingly anachronistic and grandiose pomp of newer Spanish epics.

Epic poetry in eighteenth-century Spain found itself in a paradoxical situation. The critical attention and esteem shown by Luzán and his contemporaries, as well as the impact of the neoclassical mode, would seem to suggest both interest and appreciation for the genre. Nonetheless, as Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos notes, epic poetry disappeared almost entirely during the course of the eighteenth century (201). Consequently, most anthologies, critical histories, and textbooks make virtually no mention of epic poetry from this period, and modern scholarship has shown very little interest in this genre. Ciara O'Hagan argues that "[t]he wholesale neglect of eighteenth-century Spanish epic poetry in current Hispanic scholarship stands in dichotomous relation to the pre-eminence enjoyed by the genre during the eighteenth century" (83). While O'Hagan is correct in underscoring the lack of scholarship, it is important to qualify the type of "pre-eminence" that epic poetry enjoyed. Epics during this period were indeed viewed as one of the noblest of genres, yet it is far-fetched to speak of "pre-eminence" in an era that saw very few epic poems published, and the majority fade into oblivion. It is important to remember that poetry, regardless of whether it was epic, dramatic, erotic, or otherwise, was the favored literary genre during this time, and that popular poetry sold on the street—ballads, loose-leaf *pliegos sueltos*, and *romances de cordel*—was the most commercially successful (García Collado 368). The reality is that while epic poetry was held in high esteem by the likes of Luzán and the Real Academia, its popularity was waning, and its impact on the eighteenth-century literary marketplace was virtually non-existent. The epic had become a literary relic.

The epic poems written in the eighteenth century were largely derivative works, created by authors who emulated the form and content of classical or learned epics. They were the products of literary nostalgia by learned aristocrats, and the most notable epics in this era came about as a result of literary competitions organized by various *academias* and learned societies. Although some are poems of great lyrical beauty, they remain anachronisms, literary exercises centuries removed from the deeds depicted and, as I will show shortly, disengaged from the function of epic poetry: heralding a new *translatio*. The majority exhibit virtually no poetic or narrative innovation and seem content to ape the style of epics past. The bulk of these works was seen as largely mediocre by both eighteenth-century readers and literary critics ever since. As such, one can read the Count of Torrepalma's *Deucalión* (1770), a baroque-styled account of the flood and a throwback

to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or *La nueva Jerusalén* (1761) by "mediocre coplero" Antonio Escobar (Aguilar Piñal 65).

In 1777, The Real Academia Española decided to establish a series of yearly poetry competitions, open to all, in order to promote Spanish literature. In September of that year, the Academia announced that the first contest would award the prize to the best epic poem written on the subject of Hernán Cortés.⁶ The intent was both an attempt to resuscitate a dying genre and, as Francisco Aguilar Piñal notes, a political effort to bolster national pride and to create a Spanish version of Mexican poet Francisco Ruiz de León's 1775 poem, *Hernandia* (75). Fifty-eight entries were received, and the winning poem was *Las naves de Cortés destruidas*, written by José María Vaca de Guzmán, beating out a similarly titled effort by Nicolás Fernández de Moratín, who was already an established author at the time. Vaca de Guzmán would also win the Real Academia's next competition with *Granada rendida* (1779), a tedious account of the Catholic monarchs' reconquest of Granada replete with mythological allusions and clichéd depictions of great feats of war. He would again defeat a Moratín in the contest, this time besting young Leandro Fernández de Moratín and his epic *La toma de Granada por los Reyes Católicos* (1779). It is worth noting that these works went largely unread by the public, and that in a nail-in-the-coffin moment, the next literary contest to solicit an epic would end in failure—the 1785 competition produced no winner, as the Real Academia's judges deemed no entry to be worthy of the honor. Finishing off the century, we might also mention the two epic poems both titled *La inocencia perdida* that were entries in Seville's own Academia de Buenas Letras' literary contest in 1804. The second place work was written by a young Alberto Lista and the winning entry by Félix José Reinoso.⁷ Both of their poems offer a middling epic interpretation of the fall of mankind from heaven, not unlike Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Although a few scholars have attempted to frame these works as unfairly neglected, or as more substantial than literary curios,⁸ the common thread among these texts is that they all look backward, in terms of both time and in style. The versification runs to the baroque, the imagery is replete with clichés, and the content emulates the epic works of centuries past. While a twelfth-century poem on the reconquest is obviously relevant, a late eighteenth-century work on the same subject matter is more nostalgia and style than epic. What is missing is an understanding of the function of epic poetry, the discourse and defense of national identity, and the relationship with *translatio imperii*. To sing the praises of Cortés more than 250 years after the conquest of Mexico—as Vaca de Guzmán and Moratín the elder did—may be a rebuttal to Spain's so-called black legend,⁹ but it mainly represents a wistful longing for the glory days of the empire. A temporal disconnect between the heroic subject matter and the writer of the epic can be tolerated or excused if

⁶ For more, see María José Rodríguez Sánchez de León, "Los premios de la Academia Española en el siglo XVIII y la estética de la época."

⁷ Reinoso's poem is believed to have been largely completed in 1799. Lista's poem was finally published in 1848.

⁸ The most representative being the aforementioned O'Hagan in her article, "Rewriting Spanish Epic Poetry in the Enlightenment Period: Two Competing Interpretations of *Las naves de Cortés destruidas*."

⁹ The *leyenda negra* or "black legend" refers to anti-Spanish propaganda and rhetoric, especially as it concerned Spain's expanding empire in the Americas. It often focused on human rights abuses of indigenous peoples at the hands of conquistadores and the barbaric Spanish Inquisition.

the poem shows great innovation, be it stylistically or formally. When the Real Academia held the aforementioned failed competition in 1785, the theme was an epic poem “al ángel caído” (Rodríguez Sánchez de León 408), a clear reference to Milton’s work and a reflection perhaps of the Academia’s desire to see a Spanish epic on par with Milton’s innovative poem. As mentioned earlier, the entries that year failed to convince the jury, often weakly mimicking *Paradise Lost* or the Bible.

While works like *La inocencia perdida*, *Deucalión*, *Las naves de Cortés destruidas*, and *Granada rendida* are reasonable facsimiles of epic poems of old—versification, style, and subject matter—they simply are no longer relevant. Their authors are reminiscent of Pierre Menard, the author-protagonist of Jorge Luis Borges’ “Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*,” who attempts to write *Don Quijote*; not to copy, parody, or translate, but rather to come up with and write *Quijote* some 300 years after Cervantes. Borges’ story highlights, among other themes, the relativity and temporality of words and the inexorable relationship between a work, its time period, and its impact on both language and the reading public. Borges writes: “Componer el *Quijote* [*sic*] a principios del siglo diecisiete era una empresa razonable, necesaria, acaso fatal; a principios del veinte, es casi imposible. No en vano han transcurrido trescientos años, cargados de complejísimos hechos. Entre ellos, para mencionar uno solo: el mismo *Quijote*” (55). Spanish poets writing epic poetry in the eighteenth century are analogous to Menard in that they tried to compose, as if it were new, something that had already been written. While the chapters of Menard’s *Quijote* are verbally identical to Cervantes’ original, Borges tells us that they are nonetheless different. Time changes everything, from context to the meaning of words, and makes it impossible to ignore the influence of previously written works.

What eluded most of these poets was the crucial sociopolitical function of epic poetry as it relates to its country of origin, namely the classic topoi of *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii*. Believed to have its roots in the book of Daniel and the tale of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream,¹⁰ *translatio imperii* refers to the transfer of power from one empire to another. This model provided the underpinnings on which much of medieval culture was established: time, history, politics, religion, and even literature all are indebted to this idea that at any given time, only one nation can be the dominant cultural and political force in the world. Both time and therefore history were viewed as linear, and the *translatio* described the transfer of hegemonic rule from one empire to the next, both geographically and temporally. As historian Jacques Le Goff explains it, “The succession of the empires . . . from the Babylonians to the Medes and Persians, then to the Macedonians and after them to the Greeks and the Romans, was the guiding thread of the medieval philosophy of history” (*Medieval* 171).

To view time, history, and power as a linear narrative of course meant that only one empire could succeed its formerly great predecessor. This led to the exclusion of parallel powers, histories, and timelines from a largely European narrative and resulted in a very exclusive genealogy of power. K. Alfons Knauth notes, “The four empires that usually were considered to constitute the chain of translation of imperial and cultural hegemony were

¹⁰ In the dream, the king sees a giant statue with a gold head, a chest and arms made of silver, a belly of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. Daniel interprets the dream as representing a succession of kingdoms, culminating in the kingdom of God on earth.

the following, with some slight variants, according to different interpretations: Assyria/Babylonia—Media/Persia—Macedonia/Greece—Rome and its successors” (254). Generally understood as moving from East to West following the fall of Rome, *translatio imperii* became a core component through which medieval rulers and historians sought to establish and legitimize their political authority. Various Western European powers laid claim to the mantle, and the debate continued through the Renaissance and into the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the *translatio* is an intrinsically teleological theory, one that aims to legitimize the rise to power as a logical and necessary *next step* in a country’s nationalistic or dynastic enterprise. *Translatio imperii* is complemented by a parallel concept, *translatio studii*, or the transfer of knowledge. As Ignacio Navarrete explains, “According to this theory, the center of learning shifts periodically and moves gradually to the west” (16). *Translatio studii* was dependent on a successful transfer of rule or empire, since it “operates by means of educational, academic and editorial institutions, generally in the framework of a hegemonic ideological discourse” (Knauth 250). It refers to an accumulation—as well as transfer—of knowledge, allowing the new empire to build upon the transferred culture, to allow it to stand on the shoulders of giants, as Le Goff notes (*Les intellectuels* 17); it also signifies that the people of a given nation are aware of “becoming heirs to the past, of becoming its modern and ultimate interpreters” (Carron 571).

It is precisely at this juncture that literature would fulfill its role as conduit and standard-bearer of a given culture. More specifically, the *translatio imperii* and *studii* came to be linked with epic poetry and its often hyperbolic, propagandizing, and nationalistic rhetoric—Virgil’s *Aeneid* being the quintessential example. James Nicolopoulos explains that because the epic “was recognized as the most prestigious and exalted form of literary expression, it became the indispensable emblem of a successful *translatio studii*, itself seen as the seal and confirmation of the *translatio imperii*—the ultimate signifier of ‘legitimate’ authority” (4). Keeping in mind that *studium* referred principally to written knowledge and to the concept of *auctoritas* (first political, then eventually literary authority), it makes sense that epic literature would be charged with the task of representing the transfer of power. Epic literature generally follows a basic formula in order to promote a clear *translatio*: establish a link to the glorious past, usually through a genealogy of power that illustrates a country’s heroic heritage (on full display in Chrétien de Troyes’s introduction to *Cligès*, one of the best examples of *translatio* in epic poetry);¹¹ provide clear examples of cultural and military dominance; and establish superiority over foreign rivals.

Spain’s eighteenth-century epics were pale remakes of those of epochs past, and failed to establish a successful transfer of rule or culture. Two factors impeded a convincing *translatio*: France’s cultural and military dominance, and Spain’s conservatism and dwindling empire. The dynamic between France and Spain was complex and often one-sided, with France viewed by many as having a more legitimate claim to the latest *translatio*. The transfer of power from the Hapsburgs to the Bourbons in November of 1700 further complicated Spain’s delineation of imperial authority. In addition to its faltering empire, Spain’s uneasy external relationship with the French would acquire an internal dimension, as the French House of Bourbon ascended to the Spanish throne with Philip V, Duke of Anjou, succeeding Charles II. As Paul Ilie reminds us:

¹¹ In the first few verses, he details the transfer of chivalry and wisdom from Greece to Rome to France.

The incursion of French culture across the Pyrenees in 1701 begins for Spain a reluctant osmosis clogged by intellectual conflict and fraught with threatening change. An ambivalent recipient, Spain was a vessel wrought in the fires of Counter-Reformational intolerance. The Inquisition tempered her heated idealisms by cooling the rare enthusiasm that the educated class might have tendered toward untraditional metaphysics and social thought. (152)

Spain's struggles with its imperial decline and place in the European theater of power ensured that the *translatio* topoi remained relevant to eighteenth-century Spanish literature. The rhetoric of the epic is one of differentiation and exclusion, "a saga of identity and, as such, a saga of alterity" (Connelly 225). When Feijoo, in my first citation, dismisses the accomplishments of ancient Greek and Roman heroes, he does so to solidify the uniqueness of Spanish identity. Of particular importance is the fact that he promotes to the rank of hero purely political figures, as opposed to the warrior/nobleman hybrid that dominated epics. In describing Queen Isabel la Católica, he writes that she is "no sólo más que mujer, pero aun más que hombre, por haber ascendido al grado de heroína. Su perspicacia, su prudencia, su valor la colocaron muy superior a las ordinarias facultades, aun de nuestro sexo . . ." (196). Feijoo's labeling of Isabel as heroic is based on essentially intellectual and moral grounds, and represents a subtle but significant departure from the traditional model of epic heroism. Similarly, his praise of the Cardinal Gil de Albornoz, archbishop of Toledo in the fourteenth century, begins with "Era natural en él el heroísmo . . . caminaba sin perplejidad por los laberintos" (193)—grandiloquent terms that might have previously been reserved for natural-born heroes like el Cid. Russell P. Sebold has argued that Feijoo can himself be viewed as something of a heroic metaphor, and in writing his essays has transformed into a literary character who is in turn "caballero andante del buen sentido," and in turn discoverer of an intellectual New World (76). This echoes Ruth Hill's assertion that one of the developments of this period was "the rise of the man-of-letters and the fall of the man-of-arms. The new philosopher became a just conqueror or hero, and the armed conqueror a villain" (4). This shift would indicate an emphasis on the *translatio studii*, as opposed to *imperii*, and reveals much with regards to Spain's effort to validate its own cultural authority.

While epic poems of this period were disengaged anachronisms, epic rhetoric and the *translatio* topoi did not disappear; rather, they were reassigned to another genre: apologias. Spanish authors of defensive rhetoric reappropriated the *translatio* and the epic function of literature as emblematic of cultural dominance in their quest to justify Spain's place in Enlightenment Europe. Often viewed as lagging behind France, Germany, and England, Spain was caught juggling between its own imperial past, its difficult present and uncertain future. The response of authors such as Feijoo, Cadalso, Jovellanos, and Forner, was the cultivation of a rhetoric of empire, which sought to legitimize Spain's place in the historical continuum. Indeed, there were works that engaged with both the spirit and function of epic poetry, even if their form was not analogous to the great epics of centuries past. Instead, they were texts that focused on the defense of Spanish identity, culture, and place in Europe. The traditional *translatio*, which underscored a transfer of power, was repurposed to reflect a *restoration* of power. Spanish authors yearned for the glory days of the empire that once was, and were, as Javier Yagüe Bosch describes, very sensitive to the black legend and Spain's rapidly deteriorating standing within Europe, and their efforts resulted in a de facto literary tradition of textual defenses and apologias for Spain (121).

Cadalso's *Cartas marruecas* (1789) offers much insight into the concept of empire, Spanish identity, and history. In Letter XLIX, Gazel reflects on the decrepit state of the Spanish language. Can you believe it, he asks, that the language universally accepted as the most beautiful, has become one of least desirable (158)? Cadalso's transparent apologia for the Spanish language takes a wry turn when Nuño reveals that when asked to translate a foreign (read: French) work, he would ruminate on how a Spaniard would express the same idea, then look to see if "algún autor antiguo español había dicho cosa que se le pareciese" (159). Invariably, a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Spanish author would have already written on the subject. Beyond a sardonic defense of Spanish letters, Cadalso is symbolically reclaiming the fallen crown of the Spanish empire, and attempting to halt, or revert, what he perceives to be *translatio studii*. That Cadalso was acutely aware of the *translatio* process is evident when he worries about the cultural metempsychosis taking place, only this time it is "la transmigración de las artes," from the true innovators (Golden Age Spanish authors) to the likes of Voltaire, and other French authors (159).

France's hegemony was a heated subject south of Pyrenees; who can forget Voltaire writing to Frederick the Great of Prussia "les Espagnols n'ont plus guère de héros, et n'ont pas un écrivain" (483), or the literary and diplomatic firestorm that resulted from Nicolas Masson de Morvilliers' infamous entry on Spain in the *Encyclopédie méthodique*, in which he posed the rhetorical question: what has Spain accomplished? "Mais que doit-on à l'Espagne ? Et depuis deux siècles, depuis quatre, depuis dix, qu'a-t-elle fait pour l'Europe ?" (565).¹² Both of these events would greatly impact the type and tone of the apologies written in this period. Nuño's character in this particular letter offers a clear repudiation of the transfer of power or arts to France, essentially making two claims. First, that Spain was the dominant political and cultural empire but a few centuries ago, and secondly, that the coronation of France as the new empire is premature and misguided. In order to do this, Cadalso's rhetorical tack centers on the role of language in the elaboration of empire; in other words, the epic function of language within the parameters of the *translatio*. Specifically, he utilizes a *neutral* Moroccan intellectual (Gazel) in order to establish rhetorical distance and authority, and proceeds to detail the Spanish language's inherent dominance. Spain's decline and France's purported ascension are directly linked to the role of language, he argues: "Los franceses han hermoñado el suyo al paso que los españoles lo han desfigurado" (158). More importantly, Cadalso argues that Spanish is innately endowed with three advantageous characteristics: its laconic nature, its abundance, and its energy. For Cadalso, these ingredients have been usurped by the French, thereby invalidating any *translatio*: "Un párrafo de Voltaire, Montesquieu y otros coetáneos tiene tal abundancia de las tres hermosuras referidas, que no parecía caber en el idioma francés . . ." (158). While French authors clumsily mimic Spanish's inherent beauty, Cadalso bemoans the fact that the current generation of Spanish authors has lost the plot. They largely ignore their forebears' reverence for Spanish and its innate superiority, and are content to translate from the French, Italian, and English, in the process contaminating Spanish with foreign words, "galicismos, italianismos y anglicismos," which are in turn dangerous due to

¹² For more on the Masson affair and its relationship to Franco-Spanish relations, see my article "The Masson de Morvilliers Affair Reconsidered: Nation, Hybridism and Spain's Eighteenth-Century Cultural Identity."

their ability to corrupt the language, and also to make readers believe that other languages are somehow better than theirs (159).

What Cadalso is describing will undoubtedly sound familiar to many modern readers. The introduction, presence and role of foreign words in a language elicits much debate to this day, as evidenced by the ongoing battles against the use of anglicisms waged by France's Académie française or Spain's Real Academia. Whereas today's polemics focus on normalization and preventing *degradation* of a given language in the face of consumerism and globalization, the debate in Cadalso's time belied a different interpretation of the interplay between language and empire. France, in Gazel and Cadalso's eyes, has cheated the *translatio* process by taking the seeds of greatness planted by Cervantes, Vives, Garcilaso, and other Spanish greats, and bringing them to fruition in the pages of its own French authors. Worse yet, not only are Spanish authors watching their rightful cultural authority slip away, they are accelerating the process by translating foreign works instead of looking to their own past.

Although France was viewed by many Spanish authors as the de facto politico-cultural rival (or usurper, if we are to believe Cadalso), the Roman civilization remained the previous seat of cultural power, making the *translatio* debate one that would ineluctably entail comparisons with Rome, and to a certain extent, Greece. As such, authors would frequently employ a series of rhetorical and narrative techniques to establish and underscore their link to Greco-Roman antiquity. In *Cartas marruecas*, letter III serves as a quick refresher on Spanish history, much like Feijoo's "Glorias de España." Cadalso pays special attention to the siege of Numancia by the Romans, focusing on the bravery and indomitable spirit of the Spaniards, worthwhile foes to the great Scipio Africanus and his Roman troops. Not content with underscoring Spain's valor, Cadalso adds that the Romans soon had the pleasure of counting the Spaniards as allies, and thus "formaron los romanos de los españoles el alto concepto que se ve en sus autores, oradores, historiadores y poetas," and that Rome's good fortune made her ruler of Spain (54). The period between the fall of Rome in the fifth century AD¹³ and the marriage in 1469 of the Catholic monarchs, Fernando and Isabel, is largely elided by Cadalso, as if to better establish the link between the glories of Rome and those of Spain. Their rule resulted in "un imperio mayor y más duradero que el de la Roma antigua" (55). Nuño's omission of both Visigoth and Moorish rule, over the course of around 1000 years, makes clear the genealogy of power that Cadalso is proposing.

The revisionist history practiced by Cadalso and many of his contemporaries does not stop with the elision of the period from 476-1469. The Hapsburg monarchy is viewed very unfavorably, and is often presented as a mere obstacle to the unavoidable arrival of the House of Bourbon, a teleological trait common to *translatio* arguments. Unsurprisingly, writing during the Bourbon monarchy, these authors' criticism of the Hapsburgs (though justified in many instances) came freely and easily.¹⁴ Cadalso writes that Charles II, the last Hapsburg monarch, left the country in such a state that "no era España sino el esqueleto de

¹³ The date of AD 476 proposed by Edward Gibbon in his seminal *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776) views the deposition of Romulus Augustulus at the hands of Odoacer as the key turning point.

¹⁴ For more on this topic, see Alexandra Merle, "Défense et apologie de l'Espagne au siècle des Lumières : L'âge d'or des Rois Catholiques chez Cadalso, Feijoo et Forner."

un gigante" (*Cartas* 54). More than simply a criticism of the mismanagement of Spain under the Hapsburgs, these authors deliberately applied the concept of transfer of rule to their rhetoric. As Enlightenment figures, these authors understood that progress, reason, and usefulness had come to complement—and in some cases supplant—acts of military valor in the genealogy of epic and national identity. Our evaluation of history, Cadalso writes in letter IV, should be based on which eras produced advances, "ventajas morales o civiles que produce[n] a los hombres" (57).

Yet again, Cadalso returns to the Golden Age in order to recover the true nature of the Spanish empire, and hopefully translate or restore it to an eighteenth century he views as plagued by weakness and superficiality. Perhaps surprisingly for a decorated soldier, he does more than focus on great military deeds, and instead dwells on the aforementioned civil advances. Spain's science, architecture, agriculture, and industry have all declined from their Golden Age heyday, he argues, allowing France to again usurp the mantle of Spain's empire (60). Cadalso is caught, as Merle explains, in a paradoxical stance. On one hand, he shows "la volonté de faire progresser l'Espagne dans la voie des Lumières," but also a "défense passionnée d'un passé et de traditions propres" ("Histoire" 17). Cadalso's complex personality—itself the subject of a fair bit of scholarship—is on full display in these letters, simultaneously advocating for progress and for a return to the glory days of the Spanish empire. He is not arguing for a chronological return to the past (after all, letter XLIII describes the fossilized, rustic conditions in which the Spanish countryside lives), but rather a return to the epic spirit of empire, which can then be translated into enlightened progress.

The rhetorical strategies outlined above are not exclusive to his *Cartas marruecas*, though that work is by far his most celebrated. Cadalso is also largely accepted by scholars as the author of the passionate rebuttal to letter LXXVIII of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721), in which the French author mocks the laziness, backwardness, and pride of Spaniards. Cadalso's retort, *Defensa de la nación española contra la "Carta persiana LXXVIII" de Montesquieu* (c. 1768), comprised of a tripartite argument in an effort to undercut the French *philosophe's* satire of Spanish character. He first expresses disdain that an Enlightened figure would stoop so low and be so mistaken in his judgment, then moves on to a detailed account of Spain's heroic nature before finishing with an almost sentence-by-sentence gloss of the original text, refuting Montesquieu at every turn. The *Defensa* is a less-polished text than *Cartas*, yet it offers a unique window into Cadalso's apologia for Spanish dominance by virtue of its nature as a direct retort to a French textual aggression. While *Carta marruecas* adopts the fictional epistolary mode and the rhetorical distance of foreign interlocutors, the *Defensa* is aimed squarely at Montesquieu and France's disdain of Spanish cultural relevance, and seeks to disabuse readers by restoring—translating—power back to Spain.

After an introduction where he expresses incredulity that Montesquieu would debase himself by writing such drivel, Cadalso launches into the rhetorical exercise that would characterize this work and much of his oeuvre: he attempts to represent a *translatio* favorable to Spain, one based on Spaniards' atavistic heroism. The heroes, as mentioned earlier, are no longer limited to warriors of yore, but have been replaced by monarchs, authors, and the Spanish populace itself. His "descripción histórica de España" begins auspiciously, by clearly establishing the genealogy of cultures and transfer of power from

the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and especially the Roman Empire. As in *Cartas*, Cadalso pays special attention to the siege of Numancia, showcasing the invincible spirit of the Spanish. Like Feijoo, Cadalso is not content to equate Spain with Rome, but goes further in his efforts to claim imperial primacy, proudly stating the Iberian Peninsula “dio a Roma con el tiempo inmortales emperadores, sabios filósofos y poetas ingeniosos” (*Defensa*). As was the case in *Cartas*, Cadalso’s genealogy of empire essentially skips over the Arab and Visigoth rule of Spain, calling the former “los africanos” and the latter “débil y afeminado ejército de los godos.” The stage was set for the glorious showcase of Spain’s inherent “valor, fe y patriotismo” that was the reconquest, and the Spanish conquest of Naples—which for Cadalso is the root cause of Franco-Spanish enmity. Pelayo, the hero of the reconquest, is viewed solely as a Christian warrior without mention of his Visigoth ethnicity (*Defensa*).

Having described the recovery of Spain’s rightful imperial hegemony, Cadalso chronicles in detail each subsequent monarch’s contributions. The House of Austria is represented in a more favorable light than in *Cartas*, though it is largely depicted as a gradual decline—a series of kings who let Spain’s glory slip away. Carlos V is viewed as one of the greatest monarchs in Spain’s history, though Cadalso reminds the reader time and again that Spain’s glory comes from its land, its identity, and its people, as if it were predestined for empire. In fact, even Carlos V’s achievements were in large part indebted to Spain’s innate greatness: “. . . halló en esta península suficiente cimiento para la gran fábrica de la universal dominación . . . [y] llegó a poseer la mayor monarquía que se había conocido en el orbe” (*Defensa*). Spain’s colonization of the Americas is mentioned only tangentially, probably because it was a double-edged sword that both reaffirmed Spain’s imperial power but also gave fodder to the black legend.¹⁵ Instead, Cadalso focuses not only on establishing Spain’s imperial legitimacy, but also in demonstrating its superiority over France. Note 12 in the *Defensa* betrays Cadalso’s military past as he gives examples of Spain’s triumphs over France, adding that if his country were to build war memorials in Madrid like the Place de la Victoire in Paris, Madrid would be as big as half of Spain. Not content with demonstrating Spain’s military and political dominance, Cadalso further applies the *translatio* rhetoric in his descriptions of Spanish character. In rebuffing Montesquieu’s criticism that Spanish men are always in love and languish underneath women’s balconies, Cadalso retorts that Spain’s aptitude for love is merely translated from Ancient Greece: “. . . se ha pasado de Síbaris a España . . .” (*Defensa*).

The “morbid obsession” with national character (Alborg 686) and the subsequent spate of national apologies and defenses, whether related or not to the Masson de Morvilliers affair, meant that Cadalso and Feijoo were far from the only ones to repurpose the topoi of *translatio* in an effort to legitimize Spain’s legacy and place in eighteenth-century Europe. Jovellanos, in his *Elogio de Carlos III* (1788), embraces a similar rhetoric. As was the case with Feijoo’s “Glorias de España,” Jovellanos does not hesitate to compare Spain’s achievements with those of great empires past. Spain could brag, he writes, about “sus leyes ilustrando la Europa, y sus artistas compitiendo con los más célebres de la Antigüedad” (292). His view of history also follows a linear model of power transference and establishes the Bourbon monarchy as clear descendents of great rulers past,

¹⁵ For more on the representation of the Americas in Cadalso, see Yagüe Bosch.

unsurprising praise since the *Elogio* is directed at a Bourbon king. Jovellanos often invokes the divine designs behind Spain's ascent to power, and his *Elogio* is similarly founded on teleological arguments: "El cielo," he proclaims, "tenía reservada a la de los Borbones la restauración de su esplendor" (299). The splendor in question is actually greater than it has ever been, since Carlos III's beneficent rule has restored the "imperio de la verdad," fomenting the circulation of ideas, the establishment of rights, and the propagation of truth and reason in a fashion never before seen in human history (310). Of particular interest is the charge with which Jovellanos leaves his audience (the *Elogio* was first delivered as a plenary address to the Real Sociedad de Madrid), who he terms the "hijos de Minerva" after the goddess of wisdom and art (311). The *translatio* that has brought Spain its glorious present state must be maintained, and it befalls upon the citizens to continue to carry out the enlightenment of the nation, the "glorioso empeño de ilustrar la nación" (311). Jovellanos stands out in this text due to this prescriptive and collaborative tone, which views a country's cultural dominance as dependent on more than simply the monarchy.

If Jovellanos' epic defense of Spain's achievements and place in eighteenth-century Europe takes a collaborative and optimistic tone, it is not surprising that Forner, one of Spain's most polemical authors, would weigh in on many of these topics in his inimitably vitriolic style. Forner was embroiled in countless literary feuds during his time, yet no subject brought out his literary wrath quite like attacks on Spain. As with the other authors in this article, Forner made constant use of the *translatio* topoi and a rhetoric of empire focused on genealogy to achieve a quasi-epic tone in his texts. Three of his works illustrate this practice: two later works, *Amor de la patria* (1794) and *Discurso sobre la historia de España* (1793); and what is probably his most famous work, the *Oración apologética* (1786). Forner's passionate prose was usually driven by two concerns: the decline of Spanish language and literature, and foreign attacks on Spain and Spanish identity. The *Oración* is one of the rebuttals to the aforementioned insult by Masson de Morvilliers in the *Encyclopédie méthodique*, and is the only one to have been officially published by the Spanish government.

Compared with Cadalso, Feijoo, and Jovellanos, Forner displays a style that is paradoxically both more in-tune with Spain's actual situation, yet also more idealistic. This dichotomy yielded texts that attempted to balance a somewhat pessimistic outlook (Forner was prone to decry the decay of Spain's morals and culture) with a desire to legitimize his country's cultural dominance. His efforts to portray Spain as rightful descendent of great empires functions in a similar fashion as we have seen in other authors, in that he establishes a clear genealogy of power in an effort to demonstrate a convincing transfer of power. He offers examples of imperial and cultural greatness, and finally fends off attacks from France. In his at-times hyperbolic *Discurso sobre la historia de España*, he describes Spain as "la nación más rica y poderosa que ha existido en la tierra desde los tiempos florecientes de Roma" (69). Forner makes very clear the genealogy he favors, as when he argues in his *Discurso* that Spain's involvement in the Americas should be seen as a restoration of the ancient Phoenician and Carthaginian art of conquest through commerce. When it comes to discussing the great rulers of Spain, not surprisingly, Forner's tone echoes that seen in other authors. The Hapsburg monarchy is dispatched as a footnote, while the Bourbons are seen as having restored Spain to its rightful glory, so much so that

it is “hoy en el mismo estado en que la dejaron Fernando el Católico y el Cardenal Cisneros” (*Amor* 19).

Similarly, in his *Oración apologética*, he asserts that Spain has always been a learned country, and that while it may not have produced a Newton or a Descartes, it has yielded more useful thinkers and legislators who prefer to work for the advancement of mankind rather than philosophize (99). His dismissal of Newton and Descartes is in keeping with his across-the-board disdain for philosophers (partly a reaction to the French *philosophes*, whom he loathed), generally described as little more than sophists. Spain's cultural production measures up to that of Greece, France, or England, he argues, and in a declaration brimming with *translatio studii*, asserts that *Don Quijote* is worth more than the works of Descartes or Leibniz (13). While Feijoo's dismissal of Greco-Roman epic heroes in favor of Spain's own might be understandable (they are mostly literary characters), Forner's contempt for foreign thinkers is unique, as is his dismissal of Greek philosophers, calling Socrates a barbarian (22). His defensive argument (this was, after all, a retort to Masson de Morvilliers' attack) is constructed around the notion of utility; in an effort to demonstrate Spain's relevance, he goes to great lengths to both diminish the accomplishment of Antiquity's great thinkers and to underscore the practical achievements of Spanish greats. He self-assuredly proclaims that Spain has produced “[s]apientísimos Naturalistas, intérpretes fieles de las obras del Ente infinito,” none of whom have wasted their time writing pointless theoretical texts, but instead have worked to improve the world in which they actually live (36). The shot across the bow is aimed at France and especially Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois* (1758), and the charge is clear: whereas he and other *philosophes* were busy building castles in the sky, Spain's legislators, doctors, and artists were steadily working to improve the real world.

While the *Oración* reads today like a missive from a scorned lover, it is notable for its twist on the *translatio* topoi. In addition to detailing the military accomplishments of his country, Forner pushes Spain's embodiment of Horace's *utile dulci* as the real achievement. Spain might not have a Descartes, but only because its intellectuals were too busy being practical and productive, unlike those he views as French dilettantes. Forner asks if Spain's libraries really lose their excellence because they cannot claim a Spanish Voltaire, “gran maestro de sofistería y malignidad” (22), and concludes that no—they do not. By changing the definition of power and achievement, he is able to better argue that Spain deserves recognition. Moreover, Forner is not content with simply establishing the genealogy of power we have seen used by other authors in order to establish Spain's imperial heritage. Here too, he tweaks the rules of the game and largely derides and diminishes the achievements of Greco-Roman thinkers. France can claim to be the descendent of those civilizations because, as Forner sardonically argues, they both produced dreamers and sophists who, like Plato, Pericles, Socrates, and others, confused humanity instead of enlightening it (3).

Forner shares Cadalso's preoccupation that Spain's greatness may just be slipping away, and as a result, many of his works focus on this idea of practicality and utility. His essay *Amor de la patria*, presented in 1794 to the royal economic society of Seville, showcases not only his repeated calls for patriotism but also a cautionary tale that invokes the *translatio*. The height of the Greek and Roman civilizations was due to each citizen's love of his or her country, he argues, and their downfall directly linked to its waning.

“Amemos la patria, señores; amémosla de veras” he implores, in order for our great civilization to avoid the fate of Athens and Rome (*Amor* 18). The essay concludes with a charge to the members of the economic society, asking them to emulate the Catholic monarchs who heroically freed Spain from its Moorish servitude, and to free the Spanish people from poverty and vice—a conquest that would be, Forner proclaims, no less memorable or heroic (29). It should be a new epic, for a new age.

The authors and works discussed in this essay all share a preoccupation with Spain, its history, and its place in a rapidly-changing eighteenth century. Intimately cognizant of Spain's poor reputation and declining empire, they sought to craft apologias that would dispel the black legend and rebut the dismissive, mocking attacks from the likes of Montesquieu, Masson de Morvilliers, and Voltaire. The resultant texts go beyond mere patriotic puff pieces or Francophobic name-calling. Feijoo, Cadalso, Jovellanos, and Forner chose to defend their country by employing a rhetorical strategy that endeavored to showcase Spain's past imperial dominance and current cultural relevance—one that is heavily indebted to the heroic spirit of epic poetry, as well as its foundational function. While the apologias and essays discussed above are not epic poems, the authors present Spain's glorious past through a modified *translatio imperii* and *studii* lens. Not content with merely defending Spain against French attacks, these authors repeatedly focused on the transfer of power and knowledge, placing Spain as the rightful descendant to Antiquity's great empires in a revised genealogy of imperial supremacy. Linking ancient Rome and Greece to the modern day is a tactic that Le Goff dubbed a “relaunching” (*Medieval* 36), a strategy readily employed by our authors—many of whom viewed Spain as equal if not superior to Rome and Athens. These were wishful, often nostalgic works, perhaps not entirely convincing to our modern eyes, and they offered little tangible evidence to back up their claims of greatness. Nonetheless, they are emblematic of a shift in literary genres and customs; transferring rhetorical strategies from a dying genre, the epic poem, to a new literary trend, the apologia. As the eighteenth century drew to a close under the shadow of the French Revolution, Spanish authors clung to their desire for a return to the glorious days of empire, be it in real life or at the very least in the pages of their works.

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