

# Classical Letters and Millenarian Madness in Post-Conquest Mexico: The *Ecstasis* of Fray Cristóbal Cabrera (1548)

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**Abstract** The present article incorporates an edition and translation of an extraordinary Latin poem by Fray Cristóbal Cabrera, a humanist scholar and Franciscan missionary who worked in New Spain from the early 1530s until 1546–1547. The *Ecstasis*, the longest acrostic composition in western literature, is a first-person fiction, reminiscent of Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, in which the poet describes an apocalyptic vision of judgement and his slide into madness after an earlier premonition that God's wrath would fall upon Mexico City. The poet professes to reject pagan literature but his sustained engagement with several classical authors, especially Catullus, Virgil and Cicero, provides a key to the interpretation of this enigmatic work.

## Introduction

Anglophone scholars have begun to acknowledge the richness and extent of Latin literature from early modern Spanish America and Brazil.<sup>1</sup> Authors of the early colonial period, however, have yet to secure proper recognition – even those whose

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<sup>1</sup> Jesuit authors expelled from Spanish America in 1767 have received most attention: A. Kerson, 'Diego José Abad. *Dissertatio Ludicro-Seria*', *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, 40, 1991, pp. 357–422; A. Higgins, *Constructing the Criollo Archive: Subjects of Knowledge in the Bibliotheca Mexicana and the Rusticatio Mexicana*, West Lafayette, 2000; A. Laird, *The Epic of America: An Introduction to Rafael Landívar and the Rusticatio Mexicana*, London, 2006.

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literary accomplishments won wide acclaim in the sixteenth-century Atlantic world.<sup>2</sup> Fray Cristóbal Cabrera (1513–1598), a missionary associated with the conquistador Hernán Cortés, was the most prolific Latin poet in the Americas in the earlier 1500s and he wrote the first verses ever to be printed in the New World. The friar's literary career as a poet, theologian and translator of Latin and Greek began in Mexico and was to continue for some fifty years in Spain and Italy, but his achievements are now almost forgotten.

The *Ecstasis* is the most astonishing and original of all of Cabrera's works. It is a kind of *Bildungsroman* in verse, in which the narrator gives an imaginary account of his intellectual and spiritual development. The poet explains that he had long been devoted to humanist learning after his arrival in the Indies. Instructed by a dream to turn his back on pagan classical literature, he dedicates himself to the intensive study of Christian texts, fasting with such zeal that he becomes ill and insane. In this state, he has a vision of God's judgement in the countryside near Mexico City in which he sees sinners of various callings, including men of the church, being taken down to hell. After the Bishop of Mexico intervenes and orders him to be confined and forcibly medicated, the poet is restored to health, but the plague of which he had sought to give warning nonetheless falls upon the native population.

The discussion to follow, which introduces an edition and an English translation of the *Ecstasis*, seeks to show how examination of its classical models prompts interpretation of the poem as a satire of the millenarian views which were held by many Franciscans in sixteenth-century New Spain (as colonial Mexico was known).

### Life and Work of Fray Cristóbal Cabrera<sup>3</sup>

Cristóbal Cabrera was born near Burgos, Spain, in 1513 and crossed the Atlantic when he was sixteen or seventeen years old.<sup>4</sup> He would thus have arrived in Mexico City only a few years after the Spanish conquest. Under the tutelage of Fray Juan de

<sup>2</sup> Two other prominent figures were Alessandro Geraldini (1455–1525), former tutor of Catherine of Aragon and bishop of Santo Domingo in the Caribbean, who composed odes and wrote an account of his voyage to Hispaniola, and José de Anchieta Llarena (1534–1597), the Jesuit founder of Sao Paulo and grammarian of the Tupi language, whose epic *De gestis Mendi de Saa* was published in 1563.

<sup>3</sup> N. Antonio, *Bibliotheca hispana nova*, I, Madrid, 1783; [orig. 1684], pp. 238–41 provided an early bibliography in Latin. Only a few studies are specifically devoted to Cabrera: E. J. Burrus, 'Cristóbal Cabrera (c. 1515–98), First American Author: A Check List of His Writings in the Vatican Library', *Manuscripta*, 4, 1960, pp. 67–89; 'Cristóbal Cabrera on the Missionary Methods of Vasco de Quiroga', *Manuscripta*, 5, 1961, pp. 17–27; L. Campos, 'Métodos misionales y rasgos biográficos de don Vasco de Quiroga según Cristóbal Cabrera, Pbro.', in *Don Vasco de Quiroga y Arzobispado de Morelia*, ed. M. Ponce, Mexico, 1965, pp. 107–58; J. Closa Farrés, 'Notas sobre el primer texto latino publicado en América', *Universitas Tarraconensis*, 1, 1976, pp. 143–54; E. Ruiz, 'Cristóbal Cabrera, Apóstol grafómano', *Cuadernos de Filología Clásica*, 12, 1977, pp. 59–147; J. F. Alcina Rovira, 'Cristóbal Cabrera en Nueva España y sus *Meditatiunculae ad principem Philippum*', *Nova Tellus*, 2, 1984, pp. 131–63; A. Laird, 'Franciscan Humanism in Post-Conquest Mexico: Fray Cristóbal Cabrera's Epigrams on Classical and Renaissance Authors (*Vat Lat* 1165)', *Studi Umanistici Picensi*, 33, 2013, pp. 195–216; 'Radical Visions of Post-Conquest Mexico: Humanism and Experience in the Poetry of Fray Cristóbal Cabrera', in *The Rise of Spanish American Poetry 1500–1700*, ed. R. Cacho Casal and I. Choi, Oxford, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Alcina Rovira, 'Cristóbal Cabrera' (n. 3 above), pp. 131–9 deduces details of Cabrera's early life from his writings and other primary sources.

Zumárraga, the first Bishop of Mexico, Cabrera joined the Franciscans in the 1530s. He was ordained priest and spent some years as a missionary in Michoacán, assisting Vasco de Quiroga, who is celebrated for establishing native communities on the blueprint of Thomas More's *Utopia*.<sup>5</sup> In the early 1540s, Fray Cristóbal lived in or near Hernán Cortés's Mexican residence in Cuernavaca. Some time between 1545 and 1547, the friar returned to Spain to assume a canonry in the region of Valladolid, moving to Rome in the 1560s, when he was commissioned to translate the Roman Tridentine Catechism into Spanish.<sup>6</sup> After settling in Rome permanently in 1576, he endowed a *hospitalis domus* or residential home for women near the church of San Michele.<sup>7</sup> He died in 1598.

Cabrera's *Dicolon icastichon* (1540), a humorous poem on how to baptize an Indian, was the earliest – in any language – to be printed in the Americas, as a coda to a handbook on administering baptism.<sup>8</sup> His first two books were subsequently published in Spain: the *Meditatiunculae* (Valladolid 1548), a volume of acrostic poems in Latin, and *Flores de consolación* (Valladolid 1550), a set of pious maxims culled from Christian fathers and translated into Castilian for Cortés's wife, Juana de Zúñiga, who had accompanied her husband to Cuernavaca in 1530.<sup>9</sup> In his dedication to her, written in Cuernavaca, the author explained that he preferred Latin to the vernacular, especially since he had been living in places where 'the language of the Indians is used more than Spanish' (*donde se tracta más la lengua de los indios que la española*).<sup>10</sup>

The manuscripts Cabrera produced in Mexico include a Latin translation of early Greek commentaries on Paul's Epistles and epigrams on classical, patristic and

<sup>5</sup> Campos, 'Métodos misionales' (n. 3 above); S. Zavala, *Sir Thomas More in New Spain*, London, 1955; A. Laird, 'The Classical Foundations of *Utopia* in 16th-Century Mexico', *Comparatismes en Sorbonne*, 6, 2015, online: [[www.crlc.paris-sorbonne.fr/FR/Page\\_revue\\_num.php?P1=6](http://www.crlc.paris-sorbonne.fr/FR/Page_revue_num.php?P1=6)].

<sup>6</sup> P. Rodríguez, *El Catecismo Romano ante Felipe II y la Inquisición española*, Madrid, 1998, pp. 89–95, 101–5.

<sup>7</sup> Antonio, *Bibliotheca* (n. 3 above), p. 238. Cabrera's will and testament (Archivo de la Obra Pia, leg. 71 fols 63<sup>r</sup>–67<sup>v</sup>) are cited in T. James, *Spanish Rome*, New Haven and London, 2001, pp. 144–5.

<sup>8</sup> The elegy survives in the final leaves of the otherwise lost *Manual de adultos*, Mexico, 1540. The pages are in the John Carter Brown Library: facsimiles, transcriptions and translations are in J. García Icazbalceta, *Bibliografía Mexicana del siglo XVI*, Mexico, 1981; orig. 1886, p. 58 and Closa Farrés, 'Notas sobre el primer texto latino publicado en América' (n. 3 above). The elegy's debts to Ovid and Erasmus are surveyed in A. Laird, 'Migration und Exildichtung in der lateinischen Kultur Kolonialmexikos' in *Exil und Literatur, Grazer Beiträge Supplementband XIII*, ed. V. Coroleu Oberparleiter and G. Petersmann, Horn/Vienna, 2010, pp. 103–6.

<sup>9</sup> *Meditatiunculae ad Serenissimum Hispaniarum Principem Philippum*, Pincia [Valladolid], 1548: a copy is in the Biblioteca Nacional de España (BNE) [R/11385]. The author's dedication is all that survives of the *Flores de consolación, dirigidas a la muy ilustre y muy generosa Señora, la Señora Doña Juana de Zúñiga, Marquesa del Valle*, Valladolid, 1550, but I have located the early Italian translation of the work in the BNE [R/30316]: *Fiori di consolatione ad ogni fedel Christiano necessarii [...] tradotti dallo Spagnolo per M. Pietro Lauro Modone*, Vinigia [Venice], 1562.

<sup>10</sup> The dedication to the lost *Flores de consolación*, copied in Bartolomé José Gallardo, *Ensayo de una biblioteca española de libros raros y curiosas*, II, Madrid, 1866, cols 164–5 is discussed in Laird, 'Radical Visions of Post-Conquest Mexico' (n. 3 above).

Renaissance humanist authors.<sup>11</sup> There are also autographs of two longer poems which Cabrera probably wrote during his stay in Cuernavaca: a satire in hexameters and an elegiac epistle, taking after Ovid's *Tristia*, on the loneliness of a missionary as a 'barbarian among barbarians'.<sup>12</sup> After returning to Europe, Fray Cristóbal Cabrera wrote more than thirty works, including a Latin memoir of Vasco de Quiroga's missionary methods in manuscript (1582). The last book he published was a 'metrical meditation' in Latin, Italian and Spanish, *Rosarium Beatae Mariae* (Rome 1584).<sup>13</sup>

## Context of the *Ecstasis*

The *Ecstasis* is one of the *Meditatiunculae*, 'Little Meditations', the collection of devotional acrostic verses which was dedicated to Philip, the Crown Prince of Spain, and published in Valladolid in 1548.<sup>14</sup> The opening poems are structured around the letters of the *Paternoster*, the *Ave Maria* and the *Credo*, followed by a series based on other religious formulae or themes including the Beatitudes and the Cross, and then by verses in a variety of metres. The *Ecstasis*, the lengthiest poem (236 hexameters), is the finale and its importance is signalled by two apologetic *perorationes* which follow. The first, in verse, is another acrostic formed from the 'Stoic' text *Unum scio quod nihil scio*, 'The only thing I know is that I know nothing', addressed to the Holy Mother Church. The second prose *peroration* addressed to Philip reveals that all of the *Meditatiunculae* were *primitiae*, 'first fruits', written when the poet was reaching adulthood in the Indies:

*Haec habui, Sereniss[ime] Princeps, quae celsitudini tuae offerenda duxi,  
nenon ingenioli mei primitias Principi meo, vti par erat, secundum Deum  
consecrarem. Quanquam fateor ingenue cum huiusmodi meditatiunculis  
animum ad pietatem exercerem, non eras in hoc albo. Nanque a pene puero  
ipse ultra oceanum vectus, interque occidentales indos agens, velut in  
cuiusdam Eremitae recessu abditus...*

(*Ad serenissimum Hispaniarum Principem Philippum peroratio*, fol. 77<sup>r</sup>)

<sup>11</sup> *Argumenta in omnes Beati Pauli Epistolas et alias* [Vat. Lat. 1164]; *In illustrium classicorumque theologorum opera extemporalia epigrammata* [Vat. Lat. 1165, 96–104]. The *In philosophorum, oratorum, historicorum classicorum opera extemporalia epigrammata* [Vat. Lat. 1165, 105–9] are edited in Laird, 'Franciscan Humanism' (n. 3 above), pp. 209–15.

<sup>12</sup> The lengthier manuscript poems, presented in Ruiz, 'Cristóbal Cabrera' (n. 3 above), are examined in Laird, 'Migration und Exilidichtung' (n. 8 above), pp. 107–14, 'Radical Visions' and 'Franciscan Humanism' (n. 3 above), 205–8, and anthologized in J. Quiñones Melgoza, *Hispana Seges Nova*, Mexico, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> *Rosarium Beatae Benedictae[ue]; & Almae Virginis Dei genitricis Mariae... Meditatione Trilingui meditata*, Rome, 1584. Ruiz 'Cristóbal Cabrera' (n. 3 above), p. 103 implied this printed version was lost because it is not in the Vatican Library. J. F. Alcina Rovira, *Repertorio de la poesía latina del Renacimiento en España*, Salamanca, 1996, p. 53 located a copy in the Biblioteca Nacional de España. Another is in the Bodleian Library [Vet. F1 e.161].

<sup>14</sup> Cabrera, *Meditatiunculae*, fols 73<sup>r</sup>–77<sup>v</sup> (n. 9 above). Alcina Rovira, 'Cristóbal Cabrera' (n. 3 above), pp. 153–60 includes a Latin text of the *Ecstasis*. Alcina's discussion (160–63) is the only treatment the poem has received to date.

I have had these poems in my possession, most serene Prince, which I thought should be offered to your lofty majesty, to consecrate the first fruits of my small talent to my Prince, as was only right in God's eyes. Although I frankly confess that at the time I was exercising my mind in devotion with little meditations of this sort, you were not on my agenda. In fact, I was only a boy when I voyaged across the ocean, living among the Indians of the west, like one hidden away in some desert...

The contents of the collection thus date from before Cabrera's return to Spain in 1546–1547. The *Ecstasis* itself must have been written in 1545 or afterwards because it mentions the plague which afflicted Mexico in that year. It also has concerns in common with the two longer manuscript poems Cabrera composed in New Spain: the satire inveighed against the pride, lust and avarice of the Spanish settlers, and the elegiac epistle championed early Christian authors as the ideal companions for the solitary missionary in the Indies.

## Synopsis of the *Ecstasis*

### *Proem* 1–45

The poet laments the amount of time he devoted to pagan literature instead of reading Christian texts, before relating the events which brought about his change of heart.

### *Narrative* 46–217

46–89 After spending twelve years in the New World, the poet is directed by a dream to concentrate on sacred texts alone, but he studies scripture so ardently that he becomes ill.

90–197 His obsessive studying and fasting lead to an apprehension that the City of Mexico will be brought down by God, just as Jonah in the Bible had feared the Assyrian capital Nineveh would be destroyed.<sup>15</sup>

98–112 Leaving the estate of Cuernavaca the poet then runs the distance of 'twelve parasangs', more than 40 miles, to Mexico City.<sup>16</sup> He stays overnight in a monks' hospice.

113–20 The next day he hurries on, to lie down under the shade of maguey plant and watch the heavens.

121–33 Some Indians approach to give him food and drink: he refuses their offer and begs them to worship God, but they carry on scattering flowers.

136–64 The Vision: Priests, monks, primates, pontiffs, 'mechanics', negligent physicians and drug-sellers, spongers and 'heroines' – those who are too strict

<sup>15</sup> Jonah 1: 1–2: 'Now the word of the Lord came to Jonas, the son of Amathi, saying: Arise and go to Niniveh, the great city, and preach in it: For the wickedness thereof is come up before me.'

<sup>16</sup> *Bis sex parasangas* (*Ecst.* 98) was reckoned to be equivalent to 40 miles in the period Cabrera was writing: Cuernavaca is in fact 53 miles from Mexico City. The Near Eastern unit of measurement is in accord with the Book of Jonah's influence here.

and too indulgent alike – are all being led down to Tartarus.<sup>17</sup> After sunset, the poet sees glorious knights on white horses ascending to heaven.

165–75 By nightfall, the monks find the poet and urge him to eat and to accompany them. He refuses, and they have carried him back to their lodging by some Indians.

176–81 Believing the monks to be servants of an evil demon, the poet fasts for three more days.

182–92 He is taken to the Bishop of Mexico, who sees his frantic warnings of an impending apocalypse as a sign of illness.

193–217 The doctors summoned by the bishop declare the patient is deluded and turn their backs on him, having him confined to a cell, and his protests go unheard: ‘a story sung to deaf people’, as the saying goes.<sup>18</sup> In torment for ten days, he remains awake, refusing medication until God shows him pity.

### *Epilogue* 218–36

The poet, restored to full health, gives thanks to God, but the calamity he feared did come upon the Indians: Mexico was devastated by a plague, on a scale without precedent.

## Literary Models and Classical Sources

Two books of scripture have a central bearing on the structure and conception of the *Ecstasis*: its acrostic text came from Jeremiah, while the Book of Jonah provided the matrix for the poem’s main narrative (90–181), and accounted for the poet’s perception of Mexico City ‘appearing as Nineveh once did’ (96). In Jonah 1: 1–2, the Lord had instructed the prophet to preach in the Assyrian capital and the poem’s clear evocation of Jonah 4: 5–6 will be presented below. The emphasis on fasting in Jonah is paralleled in the *Ecstasis* as well – but while the people of Nineveh had heeded the prophecy they heard and proclaimed a fast to avert God’s punishment, neither the Spaniards nor the native Mexicans have any regard for the warnings they receive from the poet.<sup>19</sup> In addition, an image from Revelation 19: 14 of ‘armies in heaven ... on white horses’ (*exercitus qui sunt in caelo... in equis albis*) inspired the

<sup>17</sup> The distinctive styling of *mechanici* (derived from μηχανικός) as *moechanici* (147) plays on the grecism *moechus* ‘adulterer’, ‘fornicator’ (μοιχός), connoting a social class tainted with vice. Verses 193–214 to follow may hint at why the poet deemed physicians and pharmacists ‘heedless of their responsibility’ (*obliti officii* 148) and worthy of punishment. *Heroinas* (149) may be an ironic term for women who sought attachments to ‘heroes’ or conquistadors: it also evokes the wicked or anguished women from Greek myth in the underworld of Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI.445–51.

<sup>18</sup> The saying in *Ecstasis* 204, *Sed canitur frustra... fabula surdis*, derives from Virgil, *Eclogue* 10.8 (*Non canimus surdis*) and Terence, *Heaut.* 222: *Ne ille haud scit quam mihi nunc surdo narret fabulam!* cited in Erasmus, *Adagia* I.4.87. Antonio Serón, a Valencian Latin elegist contemporary with Cabrera twice used the pentameter *Nitimur in cassum, canitur mea fabula surdo*: J. M. Maestre ‘Notas de crítica textual y hermenéutica a la obra poética latina de Antonio Serón. I: El epicedio a Valencia por la muerte de Juan Ángel Gonzalez’, *Faventia*, 11, 1989, pp. 49–69, at 64.

<sup>19</sup> *Ecstasis* 87–8, 104–7, 168–9, 181. Jonah 4: 7–9: ‘the people of Nineveh believed God and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them’; contrast the reactions of the Indians and of the Bishop in the *Ecstasis* (129–32, 192).

poet's description of knights on white horses heading for the realms of heaven (*equites in equis insigniter albis... qui coelica regna petebant*, 157–8).

Augustine's *Confessions*, an emotional narrative of a penitent sinner addressed to God himself, is echoed in Cabrera's proem and sets the tone for the composition.<sup>20</sup> The poet follows Augustine in expressing remorse for reading the *humana volumina* (26, 73) of pagan antiquity, but other conversion narratives and works of vision literature like the Apocalypse of Paul are in play too.<sup>21</sup> The early third-century *Passion of Saint Perpetua and Saint Felicity* is a likely influence: the *Passion* recorded the dreams of Perpetua and of a priest named Saturus prior to their martyrdom in Carthage, and both Perpetua and Felicity are mentioned by name in the Canon of the Mass.<sup>22</sup> A well-known example of vision literature in Middle English with some resemblance to the argument of Cabrera's premonition (though not a source for it) is the Prologue of *Piers Plowman*, in which the poet saw a tower on a hill and a 'donjon' in a valley, symbolising heaven and hell, with 'a fair feld ful of folk' representing the world of mankind in between.<sup>23</sup>

The most important Renaissance model for the *Ecstasis* is Desiderius Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (entitled *Stultitiae Laus* or *Moriae encomium* in Latin), a work which became known all over Europe after its publication in 1511.<sup>24</sup> Drawing some of its paradoxes from Lucian and Seneca, Erasmus's satirical essay presented Christianity as a kind of madness, arguing that enraptured Christians enjoyed an experience 'very similar to dementedness' (*dementiae simillimum*). Ancient Platonic traditions of conceiving madness or ecstasy (literally 'standing outside oneself') as a route to mystical or philosophical understanding were influential as well, and several Christian humanists had discovered comparable conceits in patristic interpretations of scripture.<sup>25</sup> Erasmus returned to the subject in his Basel edition of the New Testament and in his *Adagia* – from which Cabrera draws on a number of occasions in this poem.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Ecstasis* 27: *Vt pius es, domine*; *Confessions* 1.1: *magnus es, domine*.

<sup>21</sup> R. K. Emmerson and R. B. Herzman, *The Apocalyptic Imagination in Medieval Literature*, Philadelphia, 1992; L. Jiroušková, *Die Visio Pauli. Wege und Wandlungen einer orientalischen Apokryphe im lateinischen Mittelalter*, Leiden and Boston, 2006.

<sup>22</sup> T. J. Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, Oxford, 2012, contains a text, translation and commentary.

<sup>23</sup> W. Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue, line 2, ed. D. Pearsall, Exeter, 2008, p. 56.

<sup>24</sup> M. A. Screech, *Erasmus: Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly*, London, 1980, is an authoritative study including a text and translation. For Spanish responses to the text, see M. Bataillon, *Erasmus y España: estudios sobre la historia espiritual del siglo XVI*, transl. A. Alatorre, Mexico City, 2007; French orig. 1937, pp. 73–84, 718–22 and *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> 'Ecstasy', *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., Oxford, 1997, p. 528; M. A. Screech, 'Good Madness in Christendom', in *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry*, ed. W. F. Bynum, R. Porter and M. Shepherd, I, London, 2004, pp. 25–39.

<sup>26</sup> In a letter of 1 November 1540 [Ms. Vat lat. 1164, fol. 173], Cabrera thanked Fray Juan de Zumárraga for providing him with the Basel New Testament: *inueni eadem fere omnia in exemplari Basiliensi (cuius copia nobis fecerat Caritas tua)*. Echoes of the *Adagia* in the *Ecstasis*: (i) *Ecst.* 30–31, *Vt clauum clauus pellit, sic mens mea demens/Mente repulsa fuit demente, furorque furore*, compare *Adagia* 1.2.4 *Clavum clavo pellere* 'drive a nail out with a nail' in Erasmus, *Collected Works*, XXXI, Toronto, 1982, p. 48; (ii) *Ecst.* 58–9, *Nil ultra meditans, corio vt canis vsque recurrens/Vncto*, compare *Adagia* II 1.5.22: *canis assuetus corio*, 'a dog used to its lead', vol. 32, 201–2; (iii) *Ecst.* 204, *Sed canitur frustra (quod dicunt) fabula surdis*,

The *Ecstasis* recalls several classical texts, but it has some very marked parallels of theme, structure and diction to Catullus 63. Both works involve protagonists who make a journey overseas before excessive religious zeal leads them into a state of ecstatic frenzy in which they lose their judgement and identity. In Catullus's poem, Attis, a young devotee of the goddess Cybele sailed to Phrygia and castrated himself 'goaded there by frenzied rage and bewildered in mind' (*stimulatus ibi furenti rabie, vagus animis* 63.4): he briefly came to his senses and expressed regret for his actions before being driven once again into a state of madness (*demens* 63.89), after Cybele bade one of her lions to 'suffer its own lashes' (*tua verbera patere* 63.81) and terrify him into submission. Cabrera's narrator, having travelled to the New World, repents of his foolish enthusiasm for profane literature to find his 'demented mind has been driven back by a demented mind and his frenzy by a new frenzy' (*sic mens mea demens/Mente repulsa fuit demente, furorque furore* 30–31), so that he comes to know God's lashes (*tua verbera noui* 33). The narratives in each work are succeeded by a prayer: the poet of Catullus 63 asked Cybele to direct her rage away from him and to drive others into a state of insanity, while the narrator of the *Ecstasis* closes by giving thanks to God, acknowledging his sins and 'deserved scourging', and seeking Christ's blessing.

Further convergences of phrasing confirm that the resemblances to Catullus 63 in Cabrera's text cannot be coincidental. The feminized Attis's pursuit of 'the swift chorus on hurrying feet' to practise the Bacchic rites on Mount Ida (*citius adit Idam properante pede chorus* 63.30) is paralleled in the *Ecstasis* by the poet's rush to celebrate Mass (*citius propere feruens ad sacra synaxis* 109), and the subsequent comparison of Attis to a wild heifer escaping the weight of the yoke (*veluti iuvenca vitans onus indomita iugi* 63.33) corresponds to the end of the *Ecstasis* – where the Franciscan poet likens himself to 'an unbroken foal or a horse that has cast off its bridle' (*veluti indomitum pullum effrenemque caballum* 229) – in addition to *quasi iuvenculus indomitus*, 'like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke', in the acrostic text spanning *Ecstasis* 32–55, from Jeremiah 31: 18. Finally, the protagonists of both poems have been, in different ways, rendered barren: the literally emasculated Attis complains that he has become part of himself, 'a sterile man' (*ego mei pars, ego vir sterilis* 63.69). For his part, Cabrera's narrator admits that the virtue and piety he possessed when he had gone mad left him empty (*me sterilem fugit* 221) once he recovered his health.

It is hard to explain these sustained allusions to a poem by Catullus which was not yet circulating in Spain at this time, let alone in New Spain.<sup>27</sup> Although

Footnote 26 continued

compare *Adagia* 1.4.87: *Surdo canis, surdo fabulam narras* [You sing to a deaf man, you're telling a story to a deaf man] vol. 31: 376 and n. 18 above; (iv) *Ecst.* 217: *Bullam me nosti figmentum denique terrae*, compare *Adagia* II.iii.48 entitled *Homo bulla* [Man is but a bubble], vol. 33, 156–60, and Cabrera, *Meditatiunculae*, fol. 43, (poem 2) verses 1–2: *Bulla homo, quid te delectat? quid te iuvat, oro?/Eheu quam miserum est quod creditur esse beatum* [Human bubble, pray, what pleases you? What avails you? Alas how wretched is what is deemed blessed].

<sup>27</sup> Catullus is not one of the many poets Cabrera name-dropped in his epigrams on classical authors (n. 11 above) composed at around this time in Mexico. The first verses of Catullus printed in New Spain, 64.210–46 (the Theseus and Aegeus episode) and 64.307–83 (the song of the Fates) would appear in a



complete editions of Catullus had been printed in Italy – the first appearing in Venice in 1472 – and some of the shorter compositions were disseminated independently, the small number of those known in peninsular Spain had only a very limited reception: the poem about Attis was certainly not among them.<sup>28</sup> That Attis poem, however, was imitated in an invocation of Cybele which formed part of a still little known Latin ode, *Sedes ad cyprias Venus*, by the renowned Castilian poet and soldier, Garcilaso de la Vega (1501–1536).<sup>29</sup> Garcilaso had encountered his *recherché* Catullan model not in Spain, but in Naples where he was attached to the *Accademia Pontaniana* in the early 1530s.<sup>30</sup> One can only speculate about how a model known only to Garcilaso could reach a Franciscan priest in Mexico just a few years later, but it might be pertinent that in 1525, Garcilaso had married a lady-in-waiting to the king's sister, Elena de Zúñiga, who was from the same family as Cortés's wife, Juana de Zúñiga.<sup>31</sup> A humanist education was sometimes afforded to such well-born women in Spain during this period and Doña Juana may possibly have had a part in making a text of Catullus available to Cabrera when he was in Cuernavaca.<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, an anxiety about the damaging effects of the classical literature which goes back to Christian antiquity is central to the story of the *Ecstasis*: it is the subject of the long proem and it triggered the succession of events recounted in the narrative. The expression of this anxiety brings Augustine's *Confessions* to mind:

*Ex habitu mores, manibus monumenta prophana  
Non secus atque prius versantem, ficta legentem,  
Carmina casta parum, lasciva poemata, nugas,  
Verborum ambages sectantem denique caecum.  
Lumine me orbasti sensus communis, vt amens*

Footnote 27 continued

teaching anthology compiled by the Jesuit Bernardino de Llanos: *Poeticarum institutionum liber, variis ethnicorum, christianorumque exemplis illustratus*, Mexico, 1605.

<sup>28</sup> B. Taylor, 'The Hispanic Reception of Catullus in a European Context', *Euphrosyne*, 35, 2007, pp. 355–64.

<sup>29</sup> The *Sedes ad cyprias Venus*, not published until 1898 by Eugenio Mele, was reprinted in E. Mele, 'Las poesías latinas de Garcilaso de la Vega y su permanencia en Italia', *Bulletin Hispanique*, 26, 1924, pp. 35–51.

<sup>30</sup> J. H. Gaisser, *Catullus and his Renaissance Readers*, Oxford, 1993, pp. 193–254 draws attention to the importance of Catullus for Pontano and Sannazaro in Naples; R. H. Chinchilla, 'Garcilaso de la Vega, Catullus and the Academy in Naples', *Caliope*, 16, 2010, pp. 65–81 explores the later influence of the Academy, later led by Scipione de Capece, on Garcilaso.

<sup>31</sup> According to the *Diccionario biográfico español*, XIV, Madrid, 2009, p. 756b (sv. Cortés), Juana de Zúñiga was daughter of the Conde de Aguilar and the Duque de Bejar's niece; B. Morros ed. *Garcilaso de la Vega: Obra poética y textos en prosa*, Barcelona, 1995, xxx notes that Elena was daughter of Iñigo de Zúñiga, first cousin of the Conde de Miranda and *maestresala* (chief stewardess) for the Catholic Queen Isabel.

<sup>32</sup> See n. 2 above on Catherine of Aragon. Francisca de Nebrija succeeded her father Antonio as chair of rhetoric in the University of Alcalá, where Isabel de Vergara was renowned for her knowledge of Latin and Greek; Luisa de Medrano taught rhetoric in Salamanca in the early 1500s. See further M. M. Graña Cid, *Las sabias mujeres: educación, saber y autoría*, Madrid, 1994; V. M. Márquez de la Plata y Ferrándiz, *Mujeres renacentistas en la corte de Isabel la Católica: Beatriz de Bobadilla, Beatriz Galindo, Lucía de Medrano, Beatriz de Silva, Catalina de Aragón y María Pacheco*, Madrid, 2005.

*Vndique iam cunctis, te declarantem viderer. (Ecstasis 40–45)*

I turned profane monuments in my hands just as I had before, reading falsities, verses quite unchaste, lascivious poems, trifles, as I blindly followed winding trails of words: you deprived me of the light of common feeling, so that, as I was declaring You, to everyone everywhere I seemed beside myself.

At the same time, the very language employed in this disavowal of pagan texts comes from authors like Catullus, Virgil, Horace, Ovid and Martial.<sup>33</sup>

Cabrera also adopts Virgil's strategy for beginning an epic. After the long proem of 45 verses, the narrative of the *Ecstasis* opens with a geographical description of the territory newly colonized by Spain:

*Sed quo gesta modo res est, est dicere. dicam:  
Indorum regio procul hoc quae distat ab orbe  
Nostro, quae oceani vasti concludit abyssum,  
Ductu continuo, longe lateque vagata,  
Orbem quippe nouum latio quam nomine dicunt,  
Me quo[n]dam exceptit.<sup>34</sup> (Ecstasis 46–51)*

But it is necessary to tell how this was brought about. I shall tell it: the realm of the Indies which lies far away from our own world, which marks the end of the vast ocean's abyss, spreading far and wide with a long shoreline, the world which indeed they call 'New' in the Latin tongue, once took me in.

This transition mirrors the abrupt move in the *Aeneid* from the proem to a topography of the Tyrian colony of Carthage in order to explain the causes of Juno's resentment of Aeneas and the Trojans:

*Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso...  
...Tantaene animis caelestibus irae?  
Urbs antiqua fuit, Tyrii tenuere coloni,  
Karthago, Italiam contra Tiberinaque longe ostia. (Aen. I.8, 11–13)*

Muse, relate the cause, how was the divinity offended?... Why was there such wrath in her divine heart? There was an ancient city held by colonists from Tyre, Carthage, opposite Italy and the distant mouth of the Tiber.

The goddess's anger (*irae*) in Virgil is later matched in the *Ecstasis* by anticipation of God's wrath (*Dei...iras* 90) coming down upon the Spaniards. Cabrera's debt to Roman epic is further evident when the poet begins his account of the astonishing vision he witnessed:

<sup>33</sup> Catullus 1.4: *aliquid putare nugae*; Horace, *Sat.* 1.9.2: *nescioquid meditans nugarum*; Martial IX.1.5: *verborum ambages*; Ovid, *Met.* XIV.957: *verborum ambage novorum* (compare *Met.* X.19); Valerius Maximus, I.8.10: *inter obscuras verborum ambages fata cecinit*. Allusions to these authors recur throughout the text, along with Juvenal. Claudian, *De raptu Proserpinae* I.120 is echoed at *Ecstasis* 96.

<sup>34</sup> The use of *latio* (*Ecstasis* 49 quoted above), ablative of *Latium*, as an adjective modifying *ore*, 'tongue', in place of the correct *latino*, is clearly irregular but it sustains the evocation of Virgil's proem by recalling *Aen.* I.6: *Latium, genus unde Latinum*, 'Latium, source of the Latin race.' Cabrera's *lātīō* cannot be emended to *lātīnō*, because the verse would not scan.

*Isthic persistens occasum solis adusque  
Attonitus simulacra hominum variasque figuras  
Mirabar. tunc visa mihi nunc nolo profari.  
Eloquar an taceam? Cautis tamen eloquar. Esto.* (Ecstasis 135–8)

Remaining there right until sunset, I was astounded by images of men and various figures, as I wondered at them. I have no wish to tell now of the things I saw then. Should I speak or keep silent? I may speak to those who are cautious. So be it.

Aeneas too had been ‘astounded’ (*attonitus*) at the apparitions of both the Penates and Mercury, and Virgil had conveyed in a very similar way his hero’s hesitation about whether to speak or keep silent on hearing the ghostly voice of Polydorus. And the language used of the coverlet in Catullus 64 (‘varied with the ancient figures of men... with wonderful art’) seems to have informed the description of the images in Cabrera’s vision.<sup>35</sup>

Biblical sources are interwoven with classical models throughout the *Ecstasis*. The poet’s earlier description of the place his vision occurred is a striking example:

*Sub fruticem quendam, quem indi dixere Magaeum,  
Tensus humi iaceo meditans resupinus ad umbram* (Ecstasis 118–19)

Under a sort of bush, which the Indians have called a *maguey*, I lie stretched out on the ground meditating, reclining in the shadow.<sup>36</sup>

That is an evocation of Virgil’s first *Eclogue*:

*Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi  
silvestrem tenui Musam meditaris avena.* (Virgil, *Ecl.* I.1–2)

You, Tityrus, recumbent under the cover of a spreading beech, meditate upon your woodland Muse on a slender pipe.

The Book of Jonah is recalled at the same time. By resting in the shade to see what would befall the city of Mexico, which he has already compared to Nineveh (96), the poet is following the prophet Jonah’s example:

So, Jonah went out of the city [Nineveh], and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. And the Lord God prepared ivy, and made it to

<sup>35</sup> *Talibus attonitus visis et voce deorum*, *Aen.* III.172; *attonitus tanto monitu imperioque deorum*, *Aen.* IV.282; *Eloquar an sileam?* *Aen.* III.39 (compare Erasmus, *Moriae encomium* 30: *eloquarne, an sileam? Cur autem sileam, cum sit vero verius?*); *vestis priscis hominum variata figuris/heroum mira* virtutes indicat arte, *Cat.* 64.50.

<sup>36</sup> The ‘Indian’ term *maguey* was not Mexican, but from the Carib language of Taíno. The earliest attested use of the word in Spanish was in a 1521 letter by Alonso de Suazo in *Colección de documentos para la historia de México*, ed. J. García Icazbalceta, I, Mexico, 1858, p. 361, but it had already appeared in Latin in 1516: according to Peter Martyr’s *Third Decade*, VII.11 (*De orbe novo decades: I–VIII*, ed. R. Mazzacane and E. Magioncalda, Genoa, 2005, p. 392) *maguey* was used of a drum in the Antilles: *Tympanum maguey dicitur*.

come up over Jonah that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So, Jonah was exceeding glad of the ivy. (Jonah 4: 5–6)

But here in the *Ecstasis*, the maguey, the green prongs of which can grow to twenty feet in height, is what provides shelter. This is a dig at Jerome's controversial translation in the Vulgate, quoted above, of the Hebrew *qiqqayon*, 'gourd', as *hedera*, 'ivy' – a revision to which Augustine's objections were well known.<sup>37</sup> After all, *cucurbita*, the Latin for gourd, had been used in the earlier biblical manuscripts of the *Vetus Latina* and by Jerome himself in his earlier commentary on the passage in question.<sup>38</sup> By inserting the Mexican plant in a vignette derived from that passage, Cabrera sidesteps the controversy even as he calls attention to it.

## Fantasy and Reality

The authentic local colour provided by the maguey or agave, now cultivated for tequila, contributes to the reality effect of the poem's narrative. Other details are consonant with Fray Cristóbal Cabrera's experience of New Spain: the historical author lived in Mexico City and Cuernavaca which are both mentioned in the poem. 'The estate they call Cuernavaca' (*villam quam Quadnauacam dicunt, Ecstasis* 101–2) refers to the palace Hernán Cortés built for himself in 1532 after Charles V granted him the region as a fief. Cabrera's dedication of the *Flores de consolación* to Juana de Zúñiga reveals that he was there and gives the original name of the place in the Mexican language of Nahuatl: 'Cuernavaca, or, as the Indians say, *Cohuanauac*' (*Cuernavaca o como los indios dicen, Cohuanauac*).<sup>39</sup>

The observation of the Indians scattering flowers could be based on an authentic indigenous ritual practice.<sup>40</sup> Their refusal to heed the poet's warning – in contrast to the obedience of the people of Nineveh to Jonah in fasting and doing penance – might be connected with the fate suffered by the native population recorded at the end of the poem:<sup>41</sup>

*Populum quoque flagra sequuntur  
Lux numquam in terris vidit pestemque luemque  
Emersisse parem. Nil dirius accidit indis.* (*Ecstasis* 224–6)

<sup>37</sup> Augustine, *Epistulae* 71.5, 82.5. Jerome, *Epistulae* 115 referred to the controversy as the *ridicula cucurbitae quaestio*: J. L. Heller, 'Notes on the Meaning of  $\kappa\omicron\lambda\omicron\kappa\acute{\omicron}\nu\tau\eta$ ', *Illinois Classical Studies*, 10, 1985, pp. 67–116, 81–91.

<sup>38</sup> Jerome [Hieronymus], *Epistulae*, 104 and 112; *Commentarius in Ionam prophetam*, ed. S. Risse, Turnhout, 2003.

<sup>39</sup> On the dedication, see n. 10 above. *Quadnauacam* in the *Ecstasis* is close to the standard transcription of the original name, *Quauhnauc*, 'edge of the woods': J. Lockhart, *Nahuatl as Written*, Stanford, 2001, p. 23. Alcina Rovira, 'Cristóbal Cabrera' (n. 3 above), p. 156 did not recognize this approximation and proposed *Quernavacam* (156, n. 69): 'Corregí *Quadnavacam* por *Quernacacam*' [sic].

<sup>40</sup> I. Glendinnen, *Aztecs*, Cambridge, pp. 213–35.

<sup>41</sup> Jonah 4: 7–9: n. 19 above.

Scourges gripped the people too, the light has never witnessed a plague and calamity come forth upon the earth like it. Nothing more dreadful has ever befallen the Indians.

What is presented here as the fulfilment of the poet's foreboding really did occur. Of a succession of plagues to afflict Mexico, a typhus epidemic in 1545 was the deadliest.<sup>42</sup> In 1576, the Franciscan chronicler Fray Bernardino de Sahagún wrote that 'the very great universal pestilence' of 1545 – *mātlāzahuatl*, 'green rash' in Nahuatl – had killed 800,000 natives.<sup>43</sup>

Some friars had been predicting that such a scourge would come upon Mexico City as divine retribution for the greed and corruption of the Spaniards in the colony. The fact that the majority of the victims were natives was given a positive interpretation: the disaster was seen in part as a punishment inflicted on the *colonists* (who lost Indian tribute and labour) but it was principally regarded as God's way of rewarding the Indians with rapid redemption, in recognition of their willingness to convert.<sup>44</sup> Their sufferings were thus justified in the context of an expectation shared by many Franciscans that the final age before Christ's coming and the Last Judgment were swiftly approaching.<sup>45</sup>

The *Ecstasis*, though, is neither autobiography nor an expression of that millenarian creed. The poet indicates that his behaviour gave the monks and the Bishop good grounds for discounting his warnings of destruction and judging him to be mentally ill. Readers are thus left unsure whether his prescience, if it was not completely invented in the first place, was divinely prompted or a delusion brought on by a frenzy of contemplative reading, sleep deprivation and fasting. Firsthand accounts of visions and miracles generate uncertainty about whether they can be reliable – and in some cases about whether the writers of such accounts themselves believe what is being reported. Texts in the Latin tradition of first-person conversion narrative, such as Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, Boethius' *Consolatio* and Petrarch's *Secretum*, along with the *Passion of Saint Perpetua and Saint Felicity*, could illustrate this tendency.<sup>46</sup>

The *Ecstasis* invites particular doubts about the veracity of the premonitions it narrates, because the narrator himself gives several indications, on his own

<sup>42</sup> H. J. Prem, 'Disease Outbreaks in Central Mexico during the Sixteenth Century', in *Secret Judgments of God. Old World Disease in Colonial Spanish America*, ed. N. D. Cook and W. G. Lovell, Norman, 1992, pp. 20–48; R. McCaa, '¿Fue el siglo XVI una catástrofe demográfica para México?' *Cuadernos de Historia*, 15, 1995, pp. 123–36; see also D. T. Reff, *Plagues, Priests and Demons: Sacred Narratives and the Rise of Christianity in the Old World and the New*, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 122–9.

<sup>43</sup> B. de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: Introductions and Indices*, transl. A. J. O. Anderson and C. Dibble, Salt Lake City, 1982, pp. 93–4, 98; compare (from c. 1580), D. Muñoz Camargo, *Descripción de la Ciudad y Provincia de Tlaxcala de las Indias*, ed. R. Acuña, Mexico, 1981, p. 36.

<sup>44</sup> J. de Grijalva, *Cronica de la Orden de N.P.S. Augustin en las Provincias de la Nueva España en quatro edades desde 1533 hasta el de 1592*, Mexico, 1924 [orig. 1624], p. 223.

<sup>45</sup> D. A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots and the Liberal State 1492–1867*, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 102–27; J. L. Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*, Berkeley, 1970; G. Baudot, *Utopia and History in Mexico*, Niwot, 1995.

<sup>46</sup> G. Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*, II, Cambridge, 1951, pp. 600–624; N. C. Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion in Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, Ann Arbor, 1996; W. Nelson, *Fact and Fiction in Renaissance Storytelling*, Cambridge, 1973.

testimony as well as through other characters, that he was insane. Still there is some equivocation: the same narrator's account of his state of mind after he was locked up in isolation for his own good is unsettling:

*Nullis hic linguis dici queat ut cruciabar  
Insanus reliquis mihi quam sanissimus uni.* (*Ecstasis* 200–201)

No tongues could express how I was in torment – as one who seemed insane to everyone else, yet sanest of all to myself.

There is the further consideration that even if the poet was raving mad, the prediction he made did happen to come true. The narration of the *Ecstasis* thus fulfils two of the conditions stipulated by Tzvetan Todorov for his technical definition of 'the fantastic' in modern prose fiction:

First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural or supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is, so to speak, entrusted to a character, and at the same time, the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work – in the case of naive reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations.<sup>47</sup>

As Cabrera's story is set in the real world of actual places and people, the reader is indeed obliged to hesitate over whether the vision it recounts can be *naturally* explained (because the narrator had gone mad) or *supernaturally* explained (in that God really was forewarning him of a disaster). Todorov's second condition for the fantastic is met too: the reader's hesitation is shared by a character, namely the narrator of the poem, and that hesitation becomes a central theme. But his third condition is not: the hexameter verse form of the *Ecstasis* and its pervasive literary allusions undermine its credibility and force the reader to adopt a poetic interpretation of the text. So too does the consideration that this text is an acrostic – the longest in Latin literature.

## Acrostic and Interpretation

The initial letters of each of the 236 hexameter lines of the *Ecstasis* spell out the words of Jeremiah, 31: 18–19:

*Castigasti me Domine, et eruditus sum, quasi iuenculus indomitus: converte me et convertar; quia tu Dominus Deus meus. Postquam enim convertisti me, egi poenitentiam: et postquam ostendisti mihi, percussi femur meum. Confusus sum, et erubui, quoniam sustinui opprobrium adolescentia mea.*

<sup>47</sup> T. Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, transl. R. Howard, Cleveland, 1973, p. 33.

Thou hast chastised me Lord, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after thou didst turn me, I repented; and after thou didst instruct me, I smote my thigh: I was confused, yea, even ashamed, because I bore the reproach of my youth.

The biblical quotation is appropriate given the poet's concern with the potential destruction or redemption of Mexico, a city which other Franciscans compared positively or negatively to Jerusalem. This excerpt is from the part of Jeremiah known as the 'book of consolation' which offered hope that Jerusalem would be restored.<sup>48</sup>

The words and phrases in the vertical acrostic harmonize impressively with the theme of the horizontal text they accompany. For example, the first letters of the verses which related the poet's revelatory vision of judgement spell out *postquam enim convertisti me*, 'after thou didst instruct me'; and the ensuing acrostic text *percussi femur meum*, 'I smote my thigh', aligns with the poet's self-destructive fasting which made the monks abduct him for his own good. The word *confusus* from the final sentence of the acrostic text from Jeremiah could not better reflect the poet's error in believing that the monks who wanted to help him were agents of an evil demon.<sup>49</sup>

*C* redideram secum qui me disperdere vellent.  
*O* mnes qui dicto nollent audire putabam  
*N* on ex parte Dei, sed daemonis esse maligni.  
*F* irmiter abstineo triduum ieiunus ab escis.  
*V* ectus postridie perque indos raptus in urbem,  
*S* enis distantem miliis, ad praesulis aedes  
*V* t mihi prospiceret, deponor. Episcopus horret.  
*S* alve, dico, Pater. Salve quoque, dixit, amice. (Ecstasis 178–85)

I really believed that those who were looking after me were enemies, and servants of the Enemy who wanted to destroy me along with themselves. I was thinking that all who were unwilling to pay heed to what I said were not on God's side, but that of a malign demon. Resolved on my fast I abstain from food for three days. The next day, carried by the Indians, I am taken by force

<sup>48</sup> W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah. 2 Chapters 26–52*, Minneapolis, 1989. Fray Jerónimo de Mendieta, *Historia eclesiástica indiana* (c. 1595) invoked Jeremiah to present Mexico City as a fallen Jerusalem, its inhabitants in captivity; for Fray Toribio de Benavente [Motolinía] writing earlier in the 1540s, Mexico City, once a Babylon, had been 'another Jerusalem': Brading, *The First America* (n. 45 above), pp. 108–16, 281–6; Phelan, *Millennial Kingdom* (n. 45 above), pp. 103–10.

<sup>49</sup> Fray Julián Garcés, (in *De habilitate et capacitate indorum*, Rome, 1537, fol. 6, which he wrote in New Spain) made such a claim about his opponents in his own Dominican order: *Nullum ergo retrahat queso ab hoc opere falsa talium assertio qui diabolicis instigati suggestionibus incapaces religionis nostrae asserunt Indos istos: haec certe vox sathanica est, & dolentis daemonis suum subuersum iri cultum, ac ex auarissimorum Christianorum faucibus erumpens*. (I beg that no one be diverted from this duty by the false assertions of those who, instigated by suggestions from the Devil, maintain that these Indians are incapable of religious practice. This utterance is indeed satanic, of a demon grieving that his own worship is about to be overturned, as he puts his words into the mouths of the most avaricious Christians).

to the city, a distance of six miles, to the bishop's palace. I am set down so that he could have a look at me. The Bishop shudders. 'Greetings, Father', I say. 'Greetings to you, my friend', he said.

It may be no coincidence that Erasmus had given a prominent place to Jeremiah 10: 14, *stultus factus est omnis homo ab scientia confusus est*, 'Every man is made a fool *confused* by his wisdom' at the climax of the *Encomium Moriae* or *Praise of Folly*. There, Folly or *Stultitia* explained that the prophet Jeremiah would not have a man glory in his wisdom because man has no wisdom at all.<sup>50</sup>

The acrostic in the *Ecstasis* solves the conundrum posed by the poem which is almost a Cretan paradox: *how far should we take seriously the visionary narrative of a poet who claims he was insane?* The answer lies in the association of acrostics with prophecy and madness in a text from pagan Rome which circulated in sixteenth-century Spain.<sup>51</sup> In the *De divinatione*, Cicero offered an important reflection on the Sibylline books in which the subjects of the oracular poems they contained were spelled out by the initial letters of their constituent verses:

*Non esse autem illud carmen furentis cum ipsum poema declarat (est enim magis artis et diligentiae quam incitationis et motus), tum vero ea, quae ἀκροστιχίς dicitur, cum deinceps ex primis versus litteris aliquid conectitur, ut in quibusdam Ennianis: Q. ENNIUS FECIT. Id certe magis est attentī animi quam furentis. Atque in Sibyllinis ex primo versu cuiusque sententiae primis litteris illius sententiae carmen omne praetexitur. Hoc scriptoris est, non furentis, adhibentis diligentiam, non insani.*  
(Cicero, *De divinatione* II.54.111–12)

It is quite evident that this [Sibylline] poem is not the work of someone frenzied from the quality of its composition: it exhibits artistic care rather than emotional excitement. This is especially evident from the fact that it is written in what is called an *acrostic*, wherein some meaning is formed from the first letters of each verse, as in some of Ennius's verses, 'Q. ENNIUS FECIT'. That is more the effect of a focused mind than a frenzied one. And in the Sibylline books, throughout the entire work, each prophecy is embellished with an acrostic, so that the initial letters of each of the lines give the subject of that particular prophecy. This comes from a writer who is not someone in a frenzy, but one who takes pains, not a madman.

The speaker, Marcus, thus made it very clear that the acrostic texts he knew were not the productions of crazed Sibyls. Rather they were composed with deliberation and care by writers who were sane, not insane. That very passage must have led

<sup>50</sup> *Moriae encomium*, ed. C. H. Miller, in Erasmus, *Opera Omnia*, IV.3, Amsterdam, 1979, p. 180: *Cur non vis hominem in sua sapientia gloriari, optime Hieremia? Nimirum, inquiet, ob id, quia non habet sapientiam.*

<sup>51</sup> A. Escobar Chico, 'La pervivencia del corpus teológico ciceroniano en España', *Revista española de filosofía medieval*, 4, 1997, pp. 189–202 describes the early circulation of Cicero's *De divinatione* and *De natura deorum* which were anthologized in works like Fray Antonio Torquemada, *Jardín de flores curiosas*, Salamanca, 1570.



Cabrera to employ the acrostic verse form used throughout the *Meditatiunculae* for an inventive first-person narrative poem about madness and prophecy.

The acrostic form of the *Ecstasis* thus provides the key to the poem by signalling that its *author* (as distinct from its narrator) could not be mad at all. Furthermore, that author's involvement with the classical literature goes beyond the verbal echoes noted above: the pagan Cicero's remarks about a pagan form of prognostication end up providing the cornerstone for this poetic edifice. It is also significant that the poet had earlier called classical texts *ambages verborum*, 'windings of words', because Virgil and Valerius Maximus had used *ambages* of the Cumaean Sibyl's riddling prophetic utterances:

*Talibus ex adyto dictis Cumaea Sibylla  
horrendas canit ambages antroque remugit,  
obscuris uera inuoluens* (Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.98–100)

With these words from her shrine the Sibyl of Cumae sings her fearful riddlings, and roars from the cave, wrapping truth in dark obscurities.

*inter obscuras verborum ambages fata cecinit;  
(Valerius Maximus, Memorabilia I.8.10)*

She sings of fate amidst dark riddlings of words.

But Cabrera's use of the phrase *verborum ambages* in conjunction with *monumenta* and *caecum*:

*... manibus monumenta prophana  
Non secus atque prius versantem, ficta legentem,  
Carmina casta parum, lasciva poemata, nugas,  
Verborum ambages sectantem denique caecum* (*Ecstasis* 40–43)

I turned profane **monuments** in my hands just as I had before, reading falsities, verses quite unchaste, lascivious poems, trifles, as I **blindly** followed winding trails of words,

constitutes an uncanny allusion to Virgil's brief account of the Cretan labyrinth:

*Veneris monumenta nefandae  
hic labor ille domus et inextricabilis error;  
magnum reginae sed enim miseratus amorem  
Daedalus ipse dolos tecti ambagesque resoluit,  
caeca regens filo uestigia.* (Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.26–30)

as **a record** of a wicked sexual passion, here is the work: that dwelling and the inextricable maze; but actually taking pity on the great love of the queen [Ariadne], Daedalus unravelled the building's tricks and **winding trails**, guiding [Theseus'] **blind** steps with a thread.

That allusion raises further possibilities. The poet of the *Ecstasis* could be aligning the *monumenta* of pagan literature with Daedalus's memorial of a depraved love. The Cretan maze can be connected to the formal construction of this acrostic text:

verses arranged in configurations, to be read vertically, horizontally, diagonally or even palindromically, were known as *labyrinthi*.<sup>52</sup> Bernardino de Llanos, one of the first Jesuit educators in New Spain, explained such poems in the final section of his text book on poetic composition, published in Mexico City in 1605:

*DE LABYRINTHIS*

*LABYRINTHUS locus est multis viarum ambagibus inflexus. Quatuor fuisse Labyrinthos fama percelebres docet Plin. lib. 36. c. 13. Creticum, Aegyptium, Lemnium, Italicum. Horum ad similitudinem efformari possunt carmina variis itinerum circuituionibus, occursibus, et recursibus mirabilia.*<sup>53</sup>

LABYRINTHS

A Labyrinth is a *locus* curving around with many **windings** of ways. Pliny informs us in Chapter 13 of Book 36 [of the *Natural History*] that four labyrinths were famous by repute: the Cretan, the Egyptian, the Lemnian and the Italian. In comparison to those, amazing verses can be constructed, with all kinds of circuitous courses, convergences and routes back.

The second sentence of this definition used the phrasing of Pliny's description of the Cretan maze.<sup>54</sup> The word *ambages* was taken from the same source but transposed to be given prominence in Llanos's first sentence, which defined a labyrinth as a *locus*. As *locus* often denoted a passage in a text, its function here hints at a slippage between a labyrinth as a physical construction and its poetic counterpart. Llanos continued:

*Vna tamen non omittenda praeceptio, debere nimirum carmina eius modi esse ut ne umquam, vel artificii necessitate cogente vel litterarum concursus, aut desinentiae, aut numeri explendi gratia, videantur quidem perspicuitate, sententia, elocutione, ornatuque destitui: deque bonae compositionis & poeseos integritate perdere.*

Just one precept should not be overlooked: a need for artifice or concurrence of letters, whether to round off or fill out a metrical measure, should never force verses like this to appear deprived of clarity, meaningful content, good expression or adornment, and thus lose out with regard to the integrity of good composition and poetic creation.

The *Ecstasis* is in perfect conformity with this instruction. The remarkable concurrence of its argument with the letters from the text of Jeremiah has in no way impaired the poem's conception, content and form. Moreover, the *artificium* of that acrostic has helped to reveal the poet's ultimate message.

<sup>52</sup> D. Norberg, 'Acrostics, *carmina figurata* and other poetic devices', in *An Introduction to the Study of Medieval Latin Versification*, ed. J. Ziolkowski, Washington, DC, 2004, pp. 48–57.

<sup>53</sup> Llanos, *Poeticarum institutionum liber* (n. 27 above), p. 500.

<sup>54</sup> Pliny, *Natural History* XXXVI.13.19: *itinerum ambages occursusque ac recursus inexplicabiles continet.*

## Author and *persona*

In his illuminating article on the *Meditatiunculae*, Juan Alcina Rovira offered a short but helpful summary of the *Ecstasis*, characterising it as an ‘autobiographical poem’. Alcina Roviera viewed its agent-narrator as a *porte-parole* for the author, Fray Cristóbal Cabrera, and identified the unnamed bishop in the poem with the historical bishop of Mexico, Fray Juan de Zumárraga:

Cabrera expresses the need for drastic change in the moral as well as the political environment of the Indies in the form of a prophecy which presses for action. But not even the best people recognize this. Not even Zumárraga who at the end treats him as a madman. It is the expression of powerlessness, of being aware he is *sterilis* (221), that brings the author in his final verses to take refuge in a personal, individual form of religiosity.<sup>55</sup>

Considerations of context are certainly essential for interpreting a work of this kind, but the artifice involved in the *Ecstasis* subverts the seriousness of what it relates. The text is caricaturing the views of those Franciscans contemporary with Cabrera who believed that millenarian prophecies of destruction were soon to be fulfilled in the New World.

The contrast drawn earlier between the narrator of the *Ecstasis* and the poem’s actual author also works against reading the poem’s content as documentary or autobiographical testimony. That narrator deemed the monuments of pagan literature *friuola prorsum nulliusque usus*, ‘really silly and of no use’ (verses 69–70), while the actual author was really making effective use of classical sources in the poem – and he even revealed in his *peroratio* to Prince Philip that the study of ancient pagan sources provided him with the basis for his religious poetry:

*iam adolescentior in animum induxi mihi & Musis, hoc est, Deo opt[imo] Max[imo] tenuissimo calamo meditari. vnde haec carminum ratio a priscis quibusdam autoribus vsurpata, & quae ingeniosis etiam hominibus facessere solet negocium, tunc adolescenti mihi coepta est aridere. (Meditatiunculae 78v)*

Already coming of age, I resolved to meditate with the most delicate reed for myself and the Muses – that is for God, the Best and Greatest. Hence the principle for my songs was taken from certain authors of antiquity, and the system which usually does the job even for men who are talented, then began to smile on my youth.

The original and primary meaning of the Greek title, *Ecstasis* – ἔκστασις, ‘standing outside oneself’ – nicely signals the position of the poem’s narrator in relation to its author.

## Conclusions

Fray Cristóbal Cabrera came to stand outside himself in another way. Historians of early modern Europe who know of him as the translator of the Tridentine Catechism in the 1560s or as a Spanish priest influential in the papal court show little

<sup>55</sup> Alcina Rovira, ‘Cristóbal Cabrera’ (n. 3 above), p. 162 (my translation).

awareness of his prior career in New Spain. On the other hand, two late colonial bibliographers who each attempted exhaustive inventories of Mexican authors to highlight their nation's literary and intellectual patrimony omitted him altogether.<sup>56</sup> Given that the source common to both of them, Nicolás Antonio's *Bibliotheca Hispana Nova* (Madrid 1684), had included a life of Cabrera and quite a full list of his works, their omission can only be explained by Antonio's biography having failed to give any indication that its subject had ever crossed the Atlantic.<sup>57</sup> The 'European' Cabrera had been sundered from the 'American' Cabrera and the two would not be reunited until 1872.<sup>58</sup>

The fact that the Franciscan's work for so long had no reception in Mexico (and therefore no imitators) makes its distinctive qualities all the more salient. The *Ecstasis* in particular is an unusually innovative piece. Its fusion of the discursive forms of confession, prayer and satire with the narrative modes of autobiography, vision literature and epic constructs a harrowing psychodrama: the acrostic from Jeremiah, which provided the poem's programme, ends up being eclipsed by the realistic fiction it generates. The classical, biblical, patristic and humanist sources in the poem retain something of their original contexts, at the same time as they are turned to convey the singular experiences of an individual in an exotic colonial environment.

Those sources identifiable in the *Ecstasis* hint at the impressive range of texts that may have been available to its author in Mexico, barely two decades after the Spanish conquest. The apparent debts to Catullus are surprising because that Roman poet was little known, even in Iberia, in the 1540s: the evocations of Catullus 63 in particular suggest the interesting possibility of a connection between Cabrera and Garcilaso de la Vega. But the significance of the classical and humanist influences on the *Ecstasis* extends beyond the history of literature and scholarship. Cicero's observation that acrostics cannot be written by a madman accentuates the contrast between the sane author and the insane narrator of the poem, implying that not every Franciscan in New Spain believed that the end of the world was nigh, while the parallels to Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* hint that the forewarnings of an impending apocalypse might have an ironic or parodic dimension.

The *Ecstasis* was the first narrative poem in Latin to be composed in the New World, and its story is actually set in post-conquest Mexico. That alone, leaving aside the feat of its record-breaking acrostic, should be enough to secure Fray Cristóbal Cabrera's work an important place in Spanish American literary and intellectual history – a history which, as vital productions in Latin are beginning to emerge, has yet to be written in full.

<sup>56</sup> Juan José de Eguiara y Eguren, *Bibliotheca mexicana*, Mexico, 1755; J. M. Beristáin, *Biblioteca Hispano-Americana Septentrional*, Mexico, pp. 1816–21; A. Laird, 'Bibliothecae (Hispanic)', *Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Neo-Latin World*, II, Leiden and Boston, 2014, pp. 928–9.

<sup>57</sup> Antonio, *Bibliotheca* (n. 3 above), p. 238 followed the details of Cabrera's birth and origins in Burgos with a syncopated account of his early life in three words: *vitae caelibis et ecclesiasticae tandem Romam venit*, 'bound to a celibate life in the church, at length he came to Rome.'

<sup>58</sup> H. HARRISSE, *Bibliotheca Americana Vetusissima: Additions*, Paris, 1872, pp. 129–30, 163, 171 was the first to identify the *Christophorus Cabrera Burgensis* who wrote the verses in the *Manual de adultos* in Mexico (n. 8 above) with the Spanish author described by Nicolás Antonio.

**TEXT**f. 73<sup>f</sup>

ECSTASIS, cuius Acrostichis est  
illud Hieremiae. Cap. xxxi

CVm te vera salus, mea lux, mea spes, mea vita,  
Auribus obsurdis, oculis caligine pressis,  
Sensibus omnino obtusis & mente iacente,  
Talpa nimirum iam multo caecior ipsa,  
Ipse miser post terga viam, te dico relinquens, 5  
Gustu praedulcem daemens gustare nequirem,  
Ad mundi scennam vertebam lumina vanus.  
Si quid erat sapidum, si quid dulcedine plenum,  
Tactus guttureus corruptus febre negabat  
Illud dulce sibi, potius quam aiebat amarum. 10  
Me caepit, fateor, dementia magna vagantem.  
Et veluti lippus radiosque iubarque coruscum  
Declinat solis tamquam sibi valde nocium,  
Offensus male luce petit miser ille tenebras,  
Morbi quod fuerat tribuens solaribus illis 15  
Iucundis radiis, ita sane lippus agebam.  
Nec tamen vltterius discinctum me, Pater alme,  
Esse sinis. virga tu me clemente coerces.  
Effer lingua animi interpret memoranda flagella.  
Te pudeat minime. Domini ne flagra verere. 20  
Effer, quid titubas? quid tam verecunda? fatere.  
Rumpito cancellos, laxa retinacula, lingua.  
Verum fida refer. Qui possim non memor esse  
Dum viuam, Domine, accepit mihi muneris huius,  
Inflictique flagri meriti quo sum reuocatus 25  
Tortus, ab humanis ad diua volumina mire?  
Vt pius, es Domine. vt tu peccatoribus aegris  
Semper ades medicus, semper miseraris egenum.//

f. 74<sup>v</sup>

Scis morbis aptare probe tua pharmaca nostris  
Vt clauum clauus pellit, sic mens mea demens 30  
Mente repulsa fuit demente, furorque furore.  
Quam mirum, quam saepe mihi memorabile gestum.

continued

|                    |   |    |
|--------------------|---|----|
|                    | Verbera suscepi vigilans, tua verbera noui.<br>Ante sacram dotem qua me dignatus es Autor,<br>Sat facilis peccata mihi commissa remittens   | 35 |
|                    | Indulgere soles. postquam sanctissimus ordo<br>Inditus accessit, postquam celebrare synaxin,<br>Verbi diuini mysteria tangere sacra,<br>Vidisti immeritum, sed non mutare priores   |    |
|                    | Ex habitu mores, manibus monumenta prophana<br>Non secus atque prius versantem, ficta legentem,<br>Carmina casta parum, lasciua poemata, nugas,<br>Verborum ambages sectantem, denique caecum:<br>Lumine me orbasti sensus communis, vt amens<br>Vndique iam cunctis, te declarante, viderer.         | 40 |
|                    | Sed quo gesta modo res est, est dicere. dicam.<br>Indorum regio procul hoc quae distat ab orbe<br>Nostro, quae oceani vasti concludit abyssum,<br>Ductu continuo, longe lateque vagata,<br>Orbem quippe nouum latio quam nomine dicunt,<br>Me quondam <sup>59</sup> excepit. bisenos plus minus annos | 45 |
|                    | Illic perpetuos triui. illic hospes agebam<br>Totus in humanis studiis noctesque diesque,<br>Victus discendi quodam vehemente calore.<br>Sacrum perparce tangens, persaepe prophanum.   | 50 |
|                    | Clericus ipse stas preculas persoluere cursim<br>Ore tenus solitus, nil amplius hic remoratus,<br>Nil vltra meditans, corio vt canis vsque recurrens<br>Vncto, per somnum tali sum phasmate doctus./  | 55 |
| f. 74 <sup>r</sup> | Est mihi propositus codex celeberrimus ille<br>Rerum sacrarum Thesaurus, fons, Paradysus,<br>Testamenta duo complectens sancta Latine.<br>Est simul oblatu crater argenteus, isque<br>Mirifice fabrefactus, vini plenus odori.<br>Et mihi, quid vinum? dixi, quid Biblia sacra?                       | 60 |
|                    | Expauit. soluitque leuem res mira soporem.<br>Tunc vigil hoc agitans mecum quod phasma moneret,<br>Coniecto, amandare procul monumenta decere   | 65 |

<sup>59</sup> 1548 quodam.

continued

|                    |   |     |
|--------------------|---|-----|
|                    | Omnia quae in precio fuerant mihi, friuola prorsum<br>Nulliusque vsus sacris collata libellis   | 70  |
|                    | Vini laetifici qui sunt Apotheca legenti.<br>Ergo dolens animi fastidio quicquid amaram,<br>Rumpo leues versus, humana volumina mitto.<br>Tunc Divina peto, tunc libros explico sacros.<br>Assideo, voluo, lego, gusto, pendeo, miror       | 75  |
|                    | Regales gazas. rapior pietatis amore.<br>Quare compunctus magis ac magis ipse dolebam<br>Vere, perpendens quas retro temporis horas<br>In nugis male perdiderim studiosus inepte.<br>Altum pensiculans sacros dum lectito libros,           | 80  |
|                    | Tam calidus certe, fueram quam frigidus ante.<br>Vino prae nimio quod stulte sedulus hausi<br>Diuinis e scriptis totus inebrior, atque<br>Omnibus irascor peccantibus, haud mihi parcens.<br>Multa legens solus mecumque relecta retractans | 85  |
|                    | Insomnes ducebam multas irrequietus<br>Noctes, paruoque cibo satiabar abunde.<br>Victu perpaucio, multo sudore, labore,<br>Somno non vilo, cerebellum deficit humor.<br>Dumque Dei legerem horrendas irasque minasque//                     | 90  |
| f. 75 <sup>v</sup> | Excidium populi, ventura flagella, ruinam,<br>Visum est omne mihi in nullos quadrare ad amusim<br>Sicut in Hispanos indis mistos & in indos.<br>Mexicus indorum myriadibus vrbs numerosa<br>Euertenda suis meritis, nisi iam respiret,      | 95  |
|                    | Vt Niniue quondam, apparet. sententia sedit.<br>Sollicitus populi cui flagra futura timebam,<br>Praepropero a moeniis distans bix sex parasangas.<br>O Deus, vt deducebas ad carnificinam<br>Sontem me miserum nil clara luce videntem.     | 100 |
|                    | Tristitia affectus discedo, relinquoque Villam<br>Quam Quadnauacam dicunt. me Mexicus vrget.<br>Veni nocte domum Monachum serotinus hospes.<br>Accipiunt me bene Monachi. coenarene vellem?   |     |

continued

|                    |  |     |
|--------------------|--|-----|
|                    | Me rogitant. erat Aduentus tunc temporis aera.   | 105 |
|                    | Effero quam coenam fessus magis expeto <sup>60</sup> cellam.                             |     |
|                    | Nec mora, me quidam monachus deducit amice.  |     |
|                    | Incumbens libris pernox dormire nequiu.  |     |
|                    | Mane citus propero feruens ad sacra synaxis.   |     |
|                    | Consecro rite quidem. sanus tunc sacra peregi.   | 110 |
|                    | Officii memor hospitibus iam pendere grates  |     |
|                    | Non multis tendo. queis postquam dico valete,  |     |
|                    | Verto viam solus famulos praeuertere in vrbem  |     |
|                    | Emissos iubeo. ipse pedes secedo petoque   |     |
|                    | Radicem montis non longius inde remoti.  | 115 |
|                    | Treis mecum sacros decreui ferre libellos.   |     |
|                    | Indorum iam tecta videns vicina quiesco.   |     |
|                    | Sub fruticem quendam, quem indi dixere Magaeum,  |     |
|                    | Tensus humi iaceo meditans resupinus ad vmbram,  |     |
|                    | In superos caelos semper mea lumina figens.  | 120 |
| f. 75 <sup>r</sup> | Multi tunc indi concurrunt vndique. multi/<br>Euentum nouisse volunt instanter, & orant: |     |
|                    | Ecquid agam? quid solus ibi? quid nam mihi vellem?                                       |     |
|                    | Gens mihi amica cibos tunc pocula sponte ferebat   |     |
|                    | Ieiuno. Nil inde quidem delibo. sed illud  | 125 |
|                    | Profero suspirans, vultis mihi gratificari,  |     |
|                    | O indi, Dominum semper timeatis, ametis.   |     |
|                    | Este fide firmi, reliquum nil appeto vestrum.  |     |
|                    | Non sine profusis lachrymis, non absque dolore,  |     |
|                    | Indi suscipiunt verbum breue. spargere flores  | 130 |
|                    | Tunc circum circa properant. absistite, dico.  |     |
|                    | Et minime cedunt. sileo certamen omittens.   |     |
|                    | Nubibus intentus cerebello (fors) male sano  |     |
|                    | Tanquam sanus homo contemplor digna notatu.  |     |
|                    | Isthic persistens occasum solis adusque  | 135 |
|                    | Attonitus simulacra hominum variasque figuras  |     |
|                    | Mirabar. tunc visa mihi nunc nollo profari.  |     |
|                    | Eloquar an taceam? cautis tamen eloquar. esto.   |     |
|                    | Tendere vidi homines quo caussa tremenda vocabat.  |     |
|                    | Perpendi tumidos, elatos, atque superbos,  | 140 |

<sup>60</sup> 1548 expecto.



continued

|                    |  |     |
|--------------------|--|-----|
|                    | Omnes a facie Domini pro crimine pelli;<br>Sacrificos, monachos, primates, pontificesque<br>Tradi non paucos hosti miseraeque gehennae.<br>Quod licet indigne nimioque furore ferebant,<br>Vincti parebant diris lictoribus ipsi.  | 145 |
|                    | Atque ita confusi sese male discruciabunt.<br>Moechanici quidam medicique, & pharmacopolae<br>Obliti officii damnantur, tum parasyti.<br>Sic Heroinas haud paucas cerno subire<br>Tartara damnatas nequicquam vociferantes,  | 150 |
| f. 76 <sup>v</sup> | Et pariter nimium molles nimiumque seueras,<br>Nec non quae multis faciem corrumpere fucis//<br>Daemone correptae curarant nocte dieque<br>Iudicium Domini stupeo, deploroque casum<br>Sortemque illorum qui vindice morte peribant.   | 155 |
|                    | Tristis eram. video paulo post sole cadente<br>Innumeros equites in equis insigniter albis,<br>Militiamque Dei qui coelica regna petebant<br>Inuicti, laeti, cum floribus atque coronis.<br>Hos ego suspiciens, quonam miser ipse relinquo?<br>Ingemino, sum odio dignus? sum dignus amore?<br>Peccator tibi sum fateor Pater optime, sed tu<br>Es mihi spes ingens. nati miserere miselli.<br>Rumor ad hospicium monachum manauerat. illi<br>Concubia iam nocte mihi venere fauentes. | 160 |
|                    | Viserunt. saluere iubent. resaluto libenter.<br>Successus causam inquirunt. non, non licet, inquam,<br>Illam proloquier. ieiunum pascere curant<br>Fratres humani. renuo. ad se ferre laborant.<br>Et renuo. cubitare volo hoc in gramine, dico.   | 165 |
|                    | Morem cum nollem gerere, illi me violenter,<br>Voce reclamantem, rapiunt. hinc tractus ab indis<br>Robustis humeros ad tecta monastica veni.<br>Maxime Rex regum, qui me circumdedit angor<br>Ex raptu? quid nocte tuli tu Maxime nosti.   | 170 |
|                    | Versor in angustiis infandis, opprimor isdem.<br>Me bene curantes hostes, Hostisque ministros  | 175 |

continued

|                    |  |     |
|--------------------|--|-----|
|                    | Credideram, secum qui me disperdere vellent.<br>Omnes qui dicto nollent audire putabam<br>Non ex parte Dei, sed daemonis esse maligni.   | 180 |
| f. 76 <sup>r</sup> | Firmiter abstineo triduum ieiunus ab escis.<br>Vectus postridie perque indos raptus in vrbem,<br>Senis distantem miliis, ad Praesulis aedes/<br>Vt mihi prospiceret, deponor. Episcopus horret<br>Salue dico, Pater. salue quoque, dixit, amice.           | 185 |
|                    | Salue iterum. quid quaeso noui? quae causa laboris?<br>Verbum priuatim dicam tibi, praesul amande.<br>Multis inde viris semotis, ille quid? inquit.<br>Eloquor an nescis Domini ventura flagella?<br>Te minime lateat. perdet mox ille scelestos.          | 190 |
|                    | Et nisi poeniteat peccantes, vae, pater, illis.<br>Respondit, quid ais? lachrymis discedit obortis.<br>Venerunt medici quos iusserat ille vocari.<br>Bilem dixerunt illudere sensibus atram.<br>Vertunt terga. iubent me obscuro rite cubili               | 195 |
|                    | Intrudi tacite. rapior trudorque repente.<br>Quid loquor abreptus? populo quid clamito coram<br>Vociferans? Homines miseri, respiscite tandem.<br>Occlusus lecto decumbo iacere coactus.<br>Nullis hic linguis dici queat vt cruciabar                     | 200 |
|                    | Insanus reliquis mihi quam sanissimus vni.<br>Admitto haud aequus medicis medicamina mille.<br>Morbo non villo clamabam me ipse teneri.<br>Sed canitur frustra (quod dicunt) fabula surdis.<br>Vi affixus lecto, manibus pedibusque ligatus <sup>61</sup>  | 205 |
|                    | Saevisque affectus flagris distorqueor isthic.<br>Tam misere afflictus iacui bis quinque diebus<br>In tenebris, <sup>62</sup> Dominus dicens, mihi lumen amoenum,<br>Nil metuam, nil formidabo, nil trepidabo.<br>Vrgebar somno nonnumquam & peruigilabam, | 210 |
|                    | Illustra Domine, aiens, haec mea lumina semper,  |     |

<sup>61</sup> 1548 legatus.

<sup>62</sup> 1548 Iu tenebris.

continued

|                    |  |     |
|--------------------|--|-----|
|                    | Obdormire veta, nigra ne morte prahendar.                |     |
|                    | Prorsus <sup>63</sup> quae fuerant intenso commoda morbo |     |
|                    | Pergebam fugere vt menti plus peste nociua.//            |     |
| f. 77 <sup>v</sup> | Respexit tandem tua munificentia clemens,                | 215 |
|                    | O Deus, ad sontem tormenta grauissima passum.            |     |
|                    | Bullam me nosti figmentum denique terrae.                |     |
|                    | Restituor mihimet totus te commiserante.                 |     |
|                    | Illud iam sanus dicam, ingenueque fatebor,               |     |
|                    | Virtus & pietas quae insana mente vigebat,               | 220 |
|                    | Me sterilem fugit dum vixi corpore sano.                 |     |
|                    | Ast id quod populi capiti miser ipse timebam             |     |
|                    | Decidit in proprium. quamquam si cuncta notantur,        |     |
|                    | O quam nil vanum. populum quoque flagra sequuntur        |     |
|                    | Lux numquam in terris vidit pestemque luemque            | 225 |
|                    | Emersisse parem. Nil dirius accidit indis.               |     |
|                    | Sed mea cognoui peccata, flagella notauit                |     |
|                    | Commerita, expendens vitam pueriliter actam,             |     |
|                    | Et veluti indomitum pullum effrenemque caballum          |     |
|                    | Nequam me gessisse, tibi parere rebellem.                | 230 |
|                    | Te bonitatis inexhaustae fons, pronus adoro,             |     |
|                    | Ingenteisque tibi grates laudesque rependam              |     |
|                    | Aeternum, semperque tui meminisse libebit.               |     |
|                    | Muneris accepti memorem me spero futurum.                |     |
|                    | Est tamen illa mihi tua gratia saepe precanda,           | 235 |
|                    | Aetheris vt regno potiar te, Christe, fauente.           |     |

## TRANSLATION

### ECSTASIS

the Acrostic of which is the text from Jeremiah 31

O True Salvation, my light, my hope, my life! Since, with deaf ears, eyes pressed by darkness, senses altogether numb and an idle mind, already blind, blinder indeed than a mole, I was wretchedly leaving the way behind me – I mean leaving You [5] – and since in my delusion I could not taste what was overwhelmingly sweet to taste, I vainly turned my eyes to the scene of the world. My stricken throat, corrupt

<sup>63</sup> 1548 Prosus.

with fever, was refusing to accept that anything wise or sweet could be sweet, and rather said it was bitter [10]. A great delusion, I admit it, took hold of me as I wandered about. Just as someone with sore eyes, who rejects the sun's rays and shining beam as something potently harmful, wretchedly seeks out darkness as he is badly wounded by the light, and ascribes his illness to the sun's pleasant rays [15], so was I going around with sore eyes. But You do not allow me to be unguarded any further, dear Father. You direct me with Your merciful rod.

Speak out, o tongue, interpreter of the soul, of the strokes you have to recount. You should not be at all ashamed, to fear the lashes of the Lord [20]. Speak out. Why do you falter? Why so modest? Speak. Break the seals. Loosen your restraints, o tongue. Faithfully recount what is true. Could I not be mindful, as long as I live, Lord, of being one who has received this gift for myself, of the deserved lash inflicted on me by which I have been called back, [25] turned from human to divine volumes in a wondrous way?

As You are gracious, Lord. As You always come to Your sick sinners as a physician, always may You pity one in need. You know how to properly apply Your medicines to our ailments. As a nail drives out a nail, so my demented mind was driven back by a demented mind [30] and my frenzy by a new frenzy. How wonderful and how often to be recalled is what You did for me. In wakefulness I underwent and came to know Your lashes. Very easily You review the sins I have committed [35] which You are accustomed to forgive. After the time came for the holiest appointed liturgy, after You saw me unworthily celebrating the Mass, touching the holy mysteries of the divine Word, but not altering my former habitual custom, as I turned over profane monuments in my hands just as I had before [40], reading falsities, poems quite unchaste, lascivious verses, trifles, as I blindly followed false trails of words: You deprived me of the light of common sense, so that, as I was declaring You, to everyone everywhere I seemed beside myself [45].

But it is necessary to tell how this was brought about. I shall tell it: the realm of the Indies which lies far away from our own world, which marks the end of the vast ocean's abyss, spreading far and wide with a long shoreline, the world which indeed they call 'New' in Latin, once took me in [50]. Twelve whole years, more or less, I passed there. There as a stranger I spent nights and days on humanistic pursuits, overwhelmed by a sort of fierce ardour for learning, touching upon the sacred all too rarely and upon the profane all too often [55]. Even though a priest I was accustomed to going hurriedly through the set little prayers, paying only lip-service, dwelling on nothing for too long, making no further reflection, like a dog constantly running on a comfortable lead, before I was instructed by this vision in my sleep: the most renowned book of all is set before me [60], the storehouse of sacred possessions, the source, Paradise, containing both the holy Testaments in Latin. At the same time a silver vessel is put before me, it is marvellously fashioned, full and fragrant with wine. 'Why the wine? why the Holy Bible?', I said to myself [65]. I was afraid. The strange situation dispelled my light sleep.

Then, awake and exercising myself about what the vision portended, I decided it was right to discard all the great monuments [of classical writing] which had been so precious to me – really they were silly, and of no use compared to the small holy books [70] which are a Store of cheering wine for whoever reads them. So grieving

at heart I shrink from anything I had loved: I destroy my light verses, I cast away my books on human subjects. At that moment I seek those on the divine, at that moment I interpret sacred texts: I attend to, turn through, read, savour, weigh up and marvel at [75] their royal treasures. I am overwhelmed by the desire for piety. Wherefore goaded by remorse I was more and more truly aggrieved, dwelling on the hours of time I had earlier wrongly wasted on trifles in my foolish zeal. As I read the holy books again and again in deep reflection [80], I am surely as ardent as I had been cool before. Through the excess of wine which I stupidly drank unremittingly, I become completely inebriated on divine writings and I am angry with all sinners, sparing myself least of all. Reading many things in solitude, and rehearsing with myself what I had read again [85], I spent many sleepless nights without rest, and I was fully sated on little food. With paltry sustenance, much exertion, much work, and no sleep at all, my brain lost fluid.

As I read of God's fearful wrath and threats [90], the destruction of the people, the scourge about to come upon them, their downfall, it all seemed to me to fit no people so exactly as it did the Spaniards mixed amongst the Indians, and the Indians themselves. Mexico City, populous with its myriads of Indians, deserves to be overturned, unless it now comes to its senses [95]. It appears as Nineveh did once. His Purpose is settled.

Anxious about the populace, on which I feared there would be scourges, I race twelve parasangs away from the walls of the town. O God, how You were leading me a poor criminal to execution, as I could see nothing in a clear light [100]. Afflicted with sorrow, I depart and leave the Estate which they call Cuernavaca. Mexico City drives me on. At night I arrived at a monastic residence as a late-coming guest. The monks kindly receive me. Would I care to dine? – they keep asking me. At the time it was the season of Advent [105]. I declare that, being tired, I am after a monastic cell rather than dinner: without delay one of the monks amiably escorts me. Lying down with my books all night I am unable to sleep.

In the morning, I rush to the holies of the Mass, spurred on in my ardour. I duly officiate. At that point I was in sound mind as I conducted the holy rites [110]. Mindful of my obligation to give due thanks to my hosts, I approach a few: after I have said goodbye to them, I go on my way alone and bid the servants they have sent out to go on ahead to the city.

For myself I withdraw and seek out the foot of a mountain not very far from that place [115]. I determined to take three of my sacred books with me. Now seeing that Indians' dwellings are nearby I take a rest. Under a sort of bush, which the Indians have called a *maguey*, I lie stretched out on the ground meditating, reclining in the shadow, ever fixing my eyes on the heavens above [120]. Then many Indians come running from every direction. Many of them urgently want to know what is happening and they beg to know what I am doing, why am I alone there, and what might I want for myself? The friendly tribe, unbidden, was bringing food and drink to me. I was fasting: I take nothing at all from them to taste [125]. But, sighing, I say this to them: 'O Indians, you want to do me a favour: may you always fear and love the Lord. Be firm in your faith, I seek nothing further from you.' It is with profuse tears and grief that the Indians respond to my brief words. They then scatter flowers [130] hurriedly around and about. 'Stop', I tell them, but they do not give way. I

give up on the dispute, and fall silent. Intent upon the clouds, for all that my brain was (perhaps) in bad health, like a man who is in good health, I scrutinise things worthy of observation, remaining there right until sunset [135], I was astounded by images of men and various figures, as I wondered at them. I have no wish to tell now of the things I saw then. Should I speak or keep silent? I may speak to those who are cautious. So be it.

I saw men moving to the summons of a terrifying case, the pompous, lofty and proud being assessed [140], all being driven from the face of God for their crimes: a great number of priests, monks, primates and pontiffs were being committed to the Enemy and to the woes of Hell. Though they bore this with undue and excessive rage, they were bound, having to obey the grim lictors [145], and in their confusion were in grievous torment. Certain amorous technicians, physicians and pharmacists heedless of their responsibility, are damned, so too are spongers. I see several heroines who were damned going down to Tartarus and crying out in vain [150], both the over-indulgent and over-severe in equal measure, and there were those too snatched by the Devil, who had taken pains by night and day to corrupt their appearance with numerous colourings.

I am stunned by the Lord's judgement and I weep at the fall and fate of those who were perishing from a vengeful death [155]. I was sad. A little after sunset I see countless knights in glorious array on white horses who were seeking the heavenly realms and service in God's soldiery, invincible and happy with their crowns and garlands of flowers. Gazing upon them, where will a wretch like myself end up? [160]. I give out a groan: 'Am I deserving of hatred? Am I deserving of love? I am a sinner, I confess to You, good Father, but You are my great hope. Pity Your poor little son.'

A report had reached the monks' hospice. By nightfall they came to my aid [165]. They caught sight of me. They bid me to be well. I freely greet them in return. They enquire about the cause of this turn of events. 'No, I am not allowed to speak of it' I reply. The kind brothers are concerned that though I am fasting I should eat. I refuse. They are at pains to take me with them. Again I refuse. 'I want to bed down on the grass here', I say [170]. Since I was unwilling to do their bidding, they took me forcefully while I cried out loudly. Carried off from there on the backs of some stocky Indians, I came to the monks' dwelling.

Greatest King of Kings, what anguish came upon me as a result of that abduction? You, Greatest One, have known what I endured that night [175]. I was plunged into unspeakable straits and oppressed: I really believed that those who were looking after me were enemies, and servants of the Enemy who wanted to destroy me along with themselves. I was thinking that all who were unwilling to pay heed to what I said were not on God's side, but that of a malign demon [180]. Resolved on my fast I abstain from food for three days. The next day, carried by the Indians, I am taken by force to the city, a distance of six miles, to the bishop's palace. I am set down so that he could have a look at me. The bishop shudders.

'Greetings, Father', I say. 'Greetings to you, my friend', he said [185]. 'Greetings again.' 'Pray, what news do you have? What is the cause of your travail?' 'May I speak a word to you in private, your Lordship?' Many of the men are dismissed, and he asks, 'What is it?' I speak out: 'Do you not know that the scourge of the Lord is

coming? Let it not escape your notice. Soon he will destroy the wicked [190]. Unless the sinners repent, woe unto them Father.’ ‘What are you saying?’, he replied, and leaves with tears in his eyes. The doctors he had ordered to be called came. They said that black bile was playing tricks on my senses. They turn their backs and give orders for me to be duly forced into a dark chamber [195] in silence.

I am at once carried off and shoved in there. Why do I speak now I have been put in seclusion? Why do I shout again and again to all the people, in a loud voice: ‘Wretched men, after all this time, come back to your senses’? Confined to bed, I recline, as I am forced to lie down. No tongues could express how I was in torment [200] – as one who seemed insane to everyone else, yet sanest of all to myself. I am far from calm about taking a thousand medicaments from medical men. I kept on shouting that I was not in the grip of any illness. But, as they say, a story sung to deaf people is a story sung in vain.

Fastened by force to the bed, bound by hand and foot [205], afflicted by cruel scourges, there I am tormented. So wretched in my plight I lay in the dark for ten days, saying ‘Lord, my sweet light, I will not be afraid of anything, I will not fear anything, I will not tremble at anything.’ I was sometimes weighed upon by sleep but I remained awake [210], saying, ‘Lord, light up these eyes of mine always, forbid me to fall asleep, lest I be seized by black death.’ Wherefore I carried on shunning any remedies for my violent illness as though they were more noxious to my mind than the plague. At last Your merciful kindness looked down [215], O God, upon a sinner suffering the heaviest torments. You knew me, though I am a mere bubble, a figment of clay.

I am restored to myself, whole, by Your pity. Now I am healthy, this is what I will say and declare frankly: the virtue and piety which flourished in my deranged mind [220] fled and left me barren as long I lived with a healthy body. But what I had feared in my unhappy state would fall upon the head of the people, did fall upon them especially. Although if all these things are heeded, nothing is in vain. Scourges gripped the people too, the light has never witnessed a plague and calamity come forth upon the earth like it [225]. Nothing more dreadful has ever befallen the Indians.

But I have recognised my own sins, I have taken note of the deserved scourges, paying the price for the life I led in a childish way, and, like an unbroken foal or a horse that has cast off its bridle, I behaved as a good for nothing, showing myself as a rebel against You [230]. Prostrate, I worship You, fount of limitless goodness, and I will duly pay back to You immense thanks and praises for eternity, and it will always be a pleasure to remember You: I hope I will be mindful of the gift I have received. It is by that grace of Yours, often prayed for [235], that I may reach Your kingdom in heaven, with, Christ, Your blessing.

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