



**BIBLICAL ALLEGORY AND
CREOLE CHIASMUS: THE
MARQUESA JÚSTIZ DE SANTA
ANA'S DISPATCHES FROM
OCCUPIED HAVANA (1762)¹**

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Introduction: "Tretas" of the Erudite

Luisa Campuzano's 1990 essay, "Las muchachas de La Habana no tienen temor de dios..." performs a literary rescue of Beatriz de Justiz y Zayas, marquesa de Santa Ana, to whom she grants the title of "la primera escritora cubana" (13).² The apparent author of a letter of protest to Carlos III criticizing governor Juan del Prado's ineffectual defense against the 1762 British invasion (*«Memorial» dirigido a Carlos III por las señoras de La Habana en 25 de agosto de 1762*) and of a lighter, poetic treatment of the same topic (*Dolorosa métrica expresión del Sitio, y entrega de La Havana, dirigida N.C. Monarca el Sr. Dn. Carlos Terc[ro]*), the marquesa owes her long-term anonymity, Campuzano argues, to the "flagrante transgresión" the texts represent ("Las muchachas" 27).³ Since they enter forcefully into questions of statecraft and military strategy and therefore "representan géneros de discurso eminentemente masculinos," Campuzano argues, we should not be surprised that Cuba's historical memory and the process of canonization has tended to remember the texts and forget their author, or that critics who acknowledge the marquesa's authorship have emphasized the influence

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at the IV Simposio Internacional, Las Mujeres en la Independencia de América Latina, Universidad de San Martín de Porres (Lima, Peru) in August 2009, and, subsequently, at a departmental workshop at Columbia University. I am grateful for the assistance of the Barnard Faculty Support Fund, which allowed me to attend the conference in Lima. I also want to thank to Carlos Alonso and Orlando Bentancor for numerous and extremely helpful suggestions.

² Campuzano explains the contemporary importance of the marquesa Jústiz as precursor and exemplar for Cuban feminism, describing her own interest as part of a project to bring about "una recuperación de la memoria de modelos y ejemplares" ("Ser cubanas" 5).

³ See Saínz, 144-54, for a detailed description of the strong, if circumstantial, evidence for the marquesa Jústiz's authorship for both texts.

of her husband ("Las muchachas" 27-28).⁴ Furthermore, the marquesa compounds the singular transgression of being a female author with something to say with the further transgression of extolling the virtues of the island's most marginalized inhabitants, its slaves ("Las muchachas" 17-18), as the division between habaneros and peninsulares transcends the island's interior caste divisions.⁵

Along with her acerbic wit—the marquesa notes the governor's fondness for "muchos consejos de guerra, / faltando Guerra, y consejo" (191)—the texts, and especially the *Dolorosa métrica*, insistently employ Old Testament allusions as allegories for the political situation of the island and the Spanish empire. In the space of twenty-four ten-line stanzas, the *Dolorosa métrica* manages to bring up the well-known family sagas of Abraham and Isaac; David and Absalom; and Esther and Mordacai, as well as a parade of kings and prophets from the period of Judea's resistance to and conquest by Egyptian and Babylonian armies. Literary historian Enrique Sáinz finds the proliferation of such allusions "excessive," but, all the same, sees in them a world-historical elevation of this relatively small battle of the Seven Years' War. They demonstrate, he concludes a desire to "identificar los hechos y las singularidades nuestras con los grandes momentos de las viejas culturas" as well as "un afán moralizante y aleccionador" (154). For her part, Campuzano sees the marquesa's allusionary mania as a kind of poetic credential, one of several stylistic proofs of the erudition and sense of poetic vocation of a writer "no entregada por azar a la poesía de ocasión" ("Las muchachas" 22).

What neither of these conclusions takes into account is the specific content (and therefore the likely connotation) of each allusion. While biblical allusions in general certainly establish the author's erudition, the use of so many varied references also raises several questions—Why these references? Why in this order? and, most importantly, What do the particular allusions she chose to employ say about how the marquesa viewed her position and that of her texts in the Havana of 1762? This essay proposes to examine the marquesa's use of biblical allusions as a device, a

⁴ Asunción Lavrín notes the persistence of this prejudice against female participation in matters of state as one that continues into the Wars of Independence, despite the presence of strong (and sometimes famous) female leaders: "Wars were masculine events, and women who ventured into the political and military terrain during the years of war were invading men's space" (73).

⁵ As Campuzano and Vallejo put it in their preface to *Yo con mi viveza*, "su voz no sólo se alza en representación de su clase de habaneros nobles y ricos, sino que también habla explícitamente por los pardos y morenos que han sido sacrificados o explotados por el gobernador, y particularmente por las habaneras, acosadas tanto por los ingleses a quienes desprecian, como por los soldados españoles que saben que ellas los acusan de cobardes" (10-11).

“treta,” to borrow Josefina Ludmer’s term, which allows her to encapsulate an acid critique of the monarchy of Carlos III within the accepted formulas of praise and loyalty. Ludmer’s use of the term accompanies an analysis of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s difficult position in colonial, patriarchal society. Ludmer proposes a number of tactical maneuvers or “tretas” the female writer must employ to conceal her complete perspective from male authority figures, an approach she sums up as a separation between knowledge and voice: “no decir pero saber, o decir que no sabe y saber, o decir lo contrario de lo que sabe” (51-52). In this essay I will be arguing that biblical allegory serves as a “treta” that allows the marquesa to cloak her most critical gestures in a veneer of submission to authority.

While it would be anachronistic to argue for an independentista reading of a text written decades before any sort of coherent independence movement had broken out, I will argue that comparisons with the Judea of the books of Samuel and Chronicles provides a particularly flexible template for thinking through notions of Cuban nationality not necessarily in conflict with a larger concept of pan-Hispanic nationhood. Poised in a historical moment marked by what 19th-century historian Antonio Bachiller y Morales has called “la desaparición de los gobiernos personales en el mundo civilizado” (185), the marquesa Justiz de Santa Ana fashions an intense and personal appeal to the king buttressed by biblical stories notable for their ambivalent attitude about monarchy in general and their specific examples of individual kings whose poor leadership leads to national disaster. The marquesa’s particular take on Creole identity also corresponds to the larger pattern in Spanish America in which, as O. Carlos Stoetzer puts it, “faith in God and loyalty to the king” would “have as much judicial validity in the Wars of Independence as they had in the days of the Spanish conquest” (1). The use of biblical allegory allows the marquesa to alternate between constructions that fold Havana and all of the Spanish empire into a single term and those that let the island or the city stand alone—an arrangement in which she manages to appeal to local feelings of national pride while always presenting herself as a loyal subject of the empire.⁶

Historical Footnote / Divine Inspiration

The British occupation of Havana began in August, 1762, after a two-month siege, ended less than a year later, in July, 1763, and included only the city and surrounding area (Leuchsenring VII). Given Havana’s strategic importance as a port and naval base, however, and the series of independence movements that would begin to rock the Western hemisphere a decade later, this eleven-month interlude takes on an outsized

⁶ Anthony Pagden has pointed out the anachronistic nature of the Spanish American independence movements that identify themselves as seeking “a restitution of the status quo” and arguing that “It is, therefore, the crown, or its agents, that are the destroyers of order” (*Spanish* 122).

historical importance. Since the occupying army included troops from what would become the United States and the defenders presented a mixture of Spanish regulars and local militia, this small theatre of the Seven Years' War could be called a global one whose repercussions included "a 'sensation' in the North American colonies" ("Conquest" 469) replete with prayers and sermons of Thanksgiving, and a court-martial back in Madrid that convicted Governor Juan del Prado and other principles for their perceived negligence (see Kueth 18-22).⁷

While Allan J. Kueth's historical account cites the circumstances of the battle and the Spanish reforms that followed it as proof that "the Spanish simply lacked the trained soldiery to repulse the British invasion," contemporary responses concluded that it was the British who had triumphed against the odds, and found the cause to be either divine influence or military negligence. A century later, in 1863, the *Atlantic Monthly* would quote Massachusetts Governor Francis Bernard, who saw "the visible hand of God" in the British victory ("Conquest" 470), and Judith Weiss's recent article cites Joseph Treat's 1762 Thanksgiving sermon as a collusion of British and North American notions of imperialism that celebrated the North American colonies' stake in the British imperial project—"se elabora una justificación del imperio británico como expresión de la Gracia divina" (100).⁸

Historians seem to agree on the largely lenient nature of British governance and of the attitude of fierce resistance maintained by the city's population. Guiteras, for example, underscoring his own opposition to Spanish rule, speaks of an occupation "conforme al carácter conciliador, humano y liberal" of the occupying nation (98), but one in which the British rulers "procuraron en vano captarse la estimación de los naturales del país" (97). Campuzano's title, "Las muchachas de La Habana no tienen temor de Dios..." originates in a bit of light verse condemning the habaneras for fraternization with occupying troops, and ending in a rhyme on "Dios": "y se van con los ingleses / en los bocoyes de arroz" ("Las muchachas" 22).

⁷ David Syrett notes that the operation was anything but an unqualified success from the perspective of the North American troops who were involved. Concluding that "the role of the Americans at Havana was short, deadly, and inglorious" (390), Syrett suggests that "probably the forty-three percent casualties suffered by the Connecticut provincials accurately reflects the overall rate of losses of the whole brigade of American provincials during the campaign" (390). For the most part, these were not battlefield casualties: "The vast majority of these deaths were the result of disease" (390).

⁸ Weiss's article provides an excellent overview of 1762's significance for the nascent U.S. national consciousness, and served as my entry into both Treat's sermon and the *Atlantic Monthly's* centennial remembrance, written in the midst of the U.S. Civil War.

And while our current perspective on the occupation cannot help but be colored by its short duration, the marquesa Justiz and her contemporaries had no assurance that their city would soon return to Spanish control. In economic terms, the occupation had a deep if varied impact on the city's inhabitants. On the other hand, Juan Pérez de la Riva's comment that "La toma de La Habana fue un buen negocio para mucha gente" (29) could well apply both to North American traders who saw a new market open and a handful of habaneros ready to take advantage of the situation (see Cluster, Calleja Leal, and Leuchsenring for more on the economic effects of the occupation), but on the other hand Celia María Parceró Torre has pointed out that the immediate economic consequences were dire for most habaneros, and a "la sensación de desamparo" worked to create a feeling of political isolation (154).

From this isolation grows the habaneros' particular patriotic spirit, what Saínz has called "su amor a la tierra donde nacieron, en abierto contraste con el desinterés y la desidia de los jefes" (155). Just as the economic benefits proved more acute for the North American colonies than for Great Britain itself, so the experience of being occupied created an experiential barrier between the habaneros and their mother country, even as it provoked stronger and stronger expressions of loyalty. Under the circumstances, in fact, loyalty to the king becomes an essential component of the nascent sense of Cuban or habanero identity (Guerra 175). Kueth's analysis convincingly calls into question the factual basis for this particular notion of Creole nationhood, arguing that "The Spanish regulars generally fought well, occasionally with incredible heroism" (19), while "The militia, by contrast, contributed very little" (19-20). It was the "isolated exceptions to this pattern of behavior," Kueth argues, that formed the nucleus of the myth of the brave Creole and cowardly Spaniard, and he cites as an example the history of the conquest according to "the mid-nineteenth-century Cuban nationalist Guiteras" (20n54).⁹

However factually valid the notion of a distinction in valor between Creoles and Spaniards may have been, the marquesa's texts serve as one indicator that it was something more than an ex-post-facto creation of the nineteenth-century independence movement. Indeed, one of the difficulties of reading the *Memorial* and the *Dolorosa métrica* two and a half centuries later is the unavoidable refraction produced by the facts of independence. Reading the marquesa as a proto-independentista has thus become an almost unavoidable response to her work. Saínz compares the *Dolorosa*

⁹ One of the points Guiteras insists on is the premature nature of Juan del Prado's decision to surrender the city. He notes that the British soldiers "decían que los españoles eran valientes pero no tenían jefes que supiesen mandarlos" (69), and that the sight of flags of truce was so shocking to the city's defenders that "los regidores pasaron a inquirir el intento de aquella demostración" (86).

métrica with Silvestre de Balboa's 17th-century work *Espejo de paciencia* (which wasn't published until the mid-nineteenth century and therefore could not have influenced the marquesa Justiz directly) as an early example of a Creole sensibility in which Cuban identity trumps race and class (154). Indeed, Balboa critic Raúl Marrera Fente speaks of *Espejo's* functioning in those absent years as "un fantasma en las figuras retóricas principales de la literatura cubana" and names "el sentimiento de ser criollo" and "el ideal comunal" among those figures (11). José Lezama Lima singles out the marquesa as "una excepción que marca la rebeldía frente a la gobernación española, que aconseja la unidad de los pobladores y que procura elevar el nivel cultural" (13). This notion of Cuban unity in the face of attack and isolation forms a key component to the distinction Campuzano sees between "los paisanos" and "los españoles": while members of the first group appear "intrépidos y listos para combatir", those in the second "aparecen soberbios y desdenosos de los vecinos de la ciudad" ("Las muchachas" 19-20).

In each case the act of resistance against British rule and critique of the government sent by Spain becomes the basis for a definition of the "Cuban." Whether or not we agree with Salvador Arias's characterization of colonial Cuban poetry as "el testimonio del surgimiento el desarrollo y la maduración del sentimiento de la nacionalidad isleña" (6), the marquesa's commitment to at least an "isleña" identity remains beyond dispute. The irony, of course, is that she bases this identity on the island's exceptional loyalty to the crown and to a notion of efficient monarchical government from which too frequently it sees the crown depart. This combination of a strict sense of local mission and a larger identity is embodied in the marquesa's choice of analogies for the peculiar position of Cuba and the Spanish empire in the vast, imperial struggle that has visited itself upon the island.

Praise, Critique, and Punishment of Kings

Nothing could be slipperier than the ascription of originality for the use of Old Testament allegory and, in particular, identity with the historical struggles of ancient Israel. The rhetorical move is such a commonplace in Western nationalist discourse as to defy trademark or copyright. And given the variety of struggles and anecdotes recounted in Exodus, Chronicles, 1 and 2 Samuel, and the books of the prophets, *some* sort of Old Testament allusion can come to serve nearly any set of historical circumstances, from Christopher Columbus's feeling of being the embattled leader of a fractious and isolated group (ctd. in *Las Casas* 2:85) to Joseph Treat's exuberant exclamation that "Israel got not the land of Canaan by his own sword; but it was the right hand of God" —proof that in Havana the Royal Navy and

Army enjoyed similar favor (11).¹⁰ Even the lost *Espejo de paciencia* employs the tactic, as a speaker prays for his own salvation by mentioning the Deity's past actions—"a tu querido pueblo de Israel / De egipcios le libraste y Faraones" (Balboa 29). The marquesa de Justiz, arguing from the losing side, chooses a different Old Testament approach, one more specifically applicable to the military details of the battle.

Having noted, in both the *Memoria* and the *Dolorosa métrica* the widespread disgust and despair provoked by the Governor's decision to pull back his troops from la Cabaña, a key elevated position, she takes particular offense at the casualties suffered in repeated attempts to retake the ground that should never have been given up:

Contra toda la Prudencia
del mas arreglado Juicio,
de Cavaña el sacrificio
cifró de Ysác la obediencia:
dos veces a consecuencia
se dirigió expedición
mas con tal desproporcion
que el morir hera preciso,
no haviendo divino aviso
faltando revelacion. (61-70)

The stanza cites a story that would surely be familiar to the poem's readers: the episode in Genesis in which Abraham believes he has been commanded to make a sacrifice and offering of his son Isaac, a ceremony for which a lamb is normally used. As father and son make the normal preparations for an animal sacrifice, Isaac asks innocently "but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" and Abraham replies, cryptically, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (Genesis 22: 7-8). At the moment when Abraham has literally raised the knife to kill his son, an angel appears and tells him to stop—the whole episode had been necessary to prove his willingness to sacrifice even his own child. The angel indicates that a ram is just appearing and will serve as the animal to be sacrificed, thus rendering prophetic Abraham's reply to Isaac.

For the marquesa's purpose the story of Abraham and Isaac provides two moments of dramatic effect. The first invokes the notion of sacrifice in general, as when she makes the Cabaña stand in for Isaac as the son that the

¹⁰ Enrique Krause's treatment of Las Casas's influence on contemporary politics in Chiapas focuses on the work of Samuel Ruiz and points out that "La idea de los sacerdotes y los indios como encarnaciones de Moisés y el pueblo elegido tenía antecedentes en las misiones jesuitas del Paraguay, en el siglo XVII" (n. pag.). In Ruiz's continued support for the Zapatista movement, Krause sees a notion of "el nuevo pueblo de Israel en marcha hacia la Tierra Prometida" (n. pag.).

father (Juan del Prado) has imprudently decided to sacrifice. Of course, in the case of Abraham and Isaac the father's apparent imprudence is really attentiveness to divine orders that defy reason, and the angel's equally irrational appearance averts the deadly consequence of this unreasonable behavior. The marquesa points out that no such friendly angel is frequenting the counsels of power in 1762 Havana. The second moment comes with the revelation that the sacrifice of the position has led to the decision to sacrifice soldiers, who have now slipped into the position occupied by Isaac. With no divine intervention the result is just the sort of reasonable consequence one would expect from sending an outnumbered force "con tal desproporcion" against a fortified position. Even worse, from the marquesa's perspective, is the obvious lack of perception on the part of the city's government. If Abraham, hearing a divine voice, perceives more than those around him, the powers that be in Havana seem to perceive less than the common people charged to their care. In the *Memorial* the marquesa notes the public outcry occasioned by the original decision to abandon the Cabaña—"Toda la ciudad lloró con amargura esta pérdida"—and concludes (with a nod perhaps, to Feijoo, whose work would likely have been familiar to her) that in this example, at least, the voice of God speaks through common sense rather than divine revelation: "fue en esta ocasión voz del Pueblo, voz de Dios" (185).¹¹

While the elevation of the people's voice as more reasonable than that of their leader might be classified as a challenge to the colonial hierarchy, the marquesa is careful to condemn this state of affairs as a perversion of the normal order. In the tradition of letters of protest going back at least as far as Las Casas, she argues that the real interests of the monarchy are in fact being thwarted in the colonies by leaders who act in its name.¹² Thus, in the *Memorial*, she speaks of the "despotiquez" of colonial governors who respond to local whistleblowing with the charge of sedition:

en donde a cualquiera vasallo que toma el legítimo recurso de quejarse a V.M. o noticiarle algún aviso importante lo atropellan, cerrándoles esta puerta con la palabra *sedición*, a cuya farsa vivimos expuestos (sin más arbitrio que padecer) los que lejos de la sombra de V.M. veneramos rendidos sus más pequeños preceptos. (188)

¹¹ Stoetzer points out Feijóo's importance as a writer who counteracted "the stereotyped views which foreigners had of Spain" and his popularity in the New World: "it was in Spanish America in particular that his works attained the greatest fame" (66).

¹² In the introduction to his recent edition of Las Casas's *Brevísima relación*, José Miguel Martínez Torrejón refers to Las Casas's use of "la imagen de los reyes ignorantes, víctimas del engaño de sus subordinados, que son los verdaderos culpables" (40).

The “farce” to which the marquesa refers, is the world turned upside down in which the charge of sedition applies to those who seek to advance the interests of the monarch. Her phrasing also draws attention to the peculiar fate of colonial subjects who find themselves in the clutches of local mismanagement while their true leader remains an ocean away and largely inaccessible, leaving them “(sin más arbitrio que padecer)”.

Unlike the revolutionaries who follow her by a few decades in Spanish America and a bare decade in North America, the marquesa seeks a restoration and seems implicitly to trust the king’s ability to bring that restoration about. Where she does prefigure the tone of those revolutionaries —especially Benjamin Franklin’s “Rules by Which a Great Empire May Be Reduced to a Small One” (1773)— is in her pithy invocation of the absurdity of the colonial subject’s position. In the *Dolorosa métrica*, for example, she speaks of the colonial paradox as a chiasmus in which “mas fue advitrio del Poder / el no poder arbitrar” (69-70), and one from which she and like-minded subjects would prefer to escape: “si es delito la obediencia, / que otras Leyes se nos den” (79-80). But if the poem’s overt fireworks direct themselves towards a deeper loyalty to the king and a contrast between his virtues and the incompetence of his appointed governors, the marquesa’s choice of royal allusions begins to resemble a “treta” in which the vector of the allusion slips from Juan del Prado, to Carlos III, the very king in whom the texts seek deliverance.

Midway through the *Dolorosa métrica*, having chronicled the governor’s military misjudgments and surrender, the marquesa introduces the string of “excessive” allusions, and in its midst embeds a justification for comparing the people of Ancient Israel and the monarchy of 18th-century Spain. She, like Joseph Treat, sees the hand of God in Britain’s victory, but with the terms of the analogy reversed. It is not, she argues, that a British army has, like Israel, conquered the Promised Land with divine intervention, but rather that Spain, like Isreal, has suffered a temporary defeat as punishment for its own imprudence and iniquity. Her argument fits into a single stanza:

Muchas guerras padecia
 Ysrael, Pueblo escogido,
 el que siempre fue vencido
 quando ingrato delinquia:
 De ordinario se valia
 Dios, en sus Jucios constantes
 de Instrumentos semejantes;
 por esso en esta ocacion
 los que te dominan son
 tan pocos, y Protexantes. (141-50)

What the Old Testament proves, she argues, is a divine tendency to use opposing armies “Instrumentos semejants” as vessels of judgment. Thus

the victorious British are not the real protagonists of the narrative but rather a tool for expressing divine displeasure. And the same “against-the-odds” quality cited by Treat proves only that the Spaniards must owe their defeat to divine intervention rather than force of arms. On a subtler level, the stanza makes clear a change in vector already under way. While the whole poem is written as a second-person address to King Carlos III (with the exception of a handful of verses explicitly directed to the people of Havana), the analogical target of the Abraham-Isaac allusion is clearly the local government rather than the monarchy itself. The marquesa’s explanation for her invocation of the Old Testament analogy comes in the midst of a biblical anecdote that cannot help but shift the focus back to Madrid.

One stanza before explaining the allegorical relationship between Spain and ancient Israel, the marquesa brings up the case of Josiah (Joseas) the Judean king famous for instituting a series of religious reforms that failed to save his country from disaster:

Prendas mui recomendables
 tuvo el Rey Joseas Justo;
 y aunque en su renombre augusto,
 fué en sus empresas fatal,
 dando causa a tanto mal
 pecados del Pueblo injusto. (135-40)

On one level we could argue that the passage isolates the people rather than the king as the source of national ills—it identifies Josiah as a righteous king who fails because of the unrighteousness of his subjects. The king, by this reading, may not in fact be capable of saving his kingdom from the folly of those beneath him—whether “those beneath him” means his subjects, full stop, or the Juan del Prados of his colonial administration.

While Josiah’s story is certainly more obscure than that of Abraham and Isaac, listeners familiar with its details would see subtle connections with Carlos III. Josiah’s mantle of reformer comes as a result of the discovery, in the midst of his rule, of sacred texts detailing the proper performance of religious rites. When Josiah makes a great show of repentance for having unwittingly violated the sacred texts and orders the reforms that will bring the kingdom’s practices in line with them, he does so knowing (by a divine message his priests have received) that national punishment is already inevitable. These priests bring, directly from God, the disquieting news that his reforms, however sincere, are too little, too late, as they will only bring about his personal deliverance and not that of his kingdom: “you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place” (2 Kings 22:20). While the marquesa, in 1762, would lack the historical perspective to see Carlos III under the mantle of “Bourbon reformer”, she does remark, in

the *Memorial*, on the misappropriation of funds earmarked for the strengthening of the city's defenses, while giving credit to the king for recognizing early on the need for such reforms ("Las muchachas" 20).¹³ The poem's ground has shifted not so much in terms of finding fault — clearly Carlos III is, like Josiah, "justo" in the marquesa's eyes— but in the necessary reduction of the monarch's authority that has taken place. Rather than the plea of a subject confident the king will help if only he knows of the abuses committed in his name, what she offers is an admonition that sometimes kingdoms are undone despite the best intentions of their kings, a warning that being "el justo" might not be enough to guarantee the survival of the Spanish empire.

A stanza later, after the intervention explaining why Israel's example applies, the marquesa again brings up Josiah as a king whose army was defeated by inferior forces (the biblical account gives little in the way of specific details, listing the Egyptian king, Neco, as Josiah's vanquisher, though acting in concert with Syria, the larger power) (2 Kings 23). Again, however historically accurate the marquesa's presentation, the clear message seems to be that on the battlefield iniquitous kingdoms lose to armies they should have defeated on paper. The next allusion deepens the point:

Y si otro exemplar careas
 cotejo tan a nivel
 hallaras en un Ynfiel
 mi siervo (llamo al señor)
 a Nabucodonosor,
 que fue azote de Israel. (155-60)

Commonly spelled Nabuchadnezzar in English, the "azote" to whom the marquesa refers is the king of Babylon who conquered both Egypt and Judea after Josiah's death, bringing about what has been called "the rapid decline in Judea's political fortunes" (Cogan n. pag.), which is to say the calamity that Josiah's reforms were unable to avert. The phrase "mi siervo" refers to a passage from the book of the prophet Jeremiah in which God speaks, summing up succinctly the policy of employing unbelieving armies as tools of geopolitical punishment — "Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nabuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant" (Jeremiah 27:6). Far from being beyond the theological ken of the Spanish

¹³ Curiously, what María Guevara Sanginés identifies as a destructive tendency of the Bourbon reforms — "la desintegración del las fuerzas políticas locales a favor del poder real y de un control central" (220)— would not fully apply to Carlos III's military reforms, as Kueth points out: "Charles III not only armed Americans through the disciplined militia but, owing to financial and personnel difficulties, tolerated the gradual nativization of the officer corps of the regular army across the empire" (XIV).

empire, the allusion seems to argue, the Protestant conquerors are just the sort of unbelievers likely to “serve” a God intent on punishing a sinful, but chosen people.

Nothing of the marquesa’s argument supports rebellion or even the specific notion of a separate habanero identity apart from greater Spain. If anything the status of being habanero connotes, from her perspective, greater loyalty to the king.¹⁴ But by venturing into the topic of divine punishment the poem again departs from its tactical focus on local bad decisions, and begins to suggest larger forces at work. The tension between these approaches remains unresolved, since the poem never explicitly suggests any corruption or iniquity beyond Havana. Once local misfortune becomes a mere symptom for larger political forces, however, it becomes impossible to build a wall between local incompetence and the global management of the Spanish empire. Even before bringing up Josiah, the marquesa suggests that the governor’s incompetence might well be a symptom, a “servant” rather than a cause:

Juicios son inexcrutables
de la Divina Justicia,
y freno que a la estulticia
presta auxilios admirables. (131-34)

and the grammar leaves del Prado’s lack of perception inexorably intertwined with divine justice. Most alarming, from the king’s perspective, is the combination of responsibility and powerlessness this notion of judgment invokes. Judea’s defeat is Josiah’s defeat, even if the king is powerless to stop it. So Carlos III, finds himself, in the geography of the poem, attempting to steer a glacier: he makes ineffectual gestures aimed at controlling historical fate, always under the suggestion that he will forever be remembered as responsible for his kingdom’s destiny whether or not he is really capable of changing it.

Female Leadership: Exile and Redemption

Having boxed the king into a position of guilt without power, the marquesa has suggested that Havana’s fate might be sealed, too. If God has decided to punish the city with British “servants” then no liberation can be

¹⁴ Indeed, the passage in Jeremiah comes in the context of the prophet’s refusal to condone rebellion against the Babylonian king. Juan Manuel de Agüero y Echave, an argentine opponent of independence, would cite the case of Nabuchadnezzar as an argument against the independence movement, concluding that God’s method of choice for punishing kings is the triumph of opposing kings rather than popular rebellion: “Y así se venga Dios de sus enemigos por medio de otros enemigos” (163).

expected until the same God orders those servants to desist. Where kings fail, however, and where prophets urge restraint, the marquesa finds the possibility of redemption in the invocation of a series of female figures from the Old and New Testaments. The next stanza offers up a familiar, angry quote from the book of the prophet Ezekiel, while noting that even in *that* book a careful examination yields a vision of divinity that remains responsive to female voices, even if it ignores traditional male authorities:

Mas si Dios por *Ezequiel*
 al Pueblo intima, irritado
 no aplacarse, aunque implorado
 sea de *Job*, *Noch*, y *Daniel*:
 No incluye a aquella *Raquel*
 inmaculada *Maria*,
 la *Havana*, ya penitente,
 que convertirá indulgente,
 noche obscura, en claro dia. (161-70)

The first four lines allude to a verse from Ezekiel in which the prophet has God say that once the fate of a nation has been decided nothing can save it from punishment: “even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness” (Ezekiel 14:14).

This is, of course, an even stronger summation of the sensibility expressed in the story of Josiah, a tendency towards harsh group punishment unalterable by individual efforts. The stanza turns, however, when the marquesa begins to consider the Old Testament maternal figure of Rachel and her New Testament counterpart, Mary. Rachel, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin who first appears in the book of Genesis, makes an appearance in the book of the prophet Jeremiah—“Rachel is weeping for her / children” (Jeremiah 31:15)—and tears provoke the divine response that the righteousness of Noah, Job, and Daniel could not:

Thus says the Lord
 “Keep your voice from weeping
 and your eyes from tears:
 for your work shall be rewarded
 says the Lord:
 and they shall come back from the
 land of the enemy
 There is hope for your future,
 says the Lord:
 and your children shall come
 back to their own country.
 (Jeremiah 31:15-17)

Here the analogy between Judea and Havana comes into sharp focus around the theme of exile. While the exile to Babylon was a literal component of the lives of thousands of Judeans, including Ezekiel, in Havana's case the changeover to British rule, combined with the distance between the island and Madrid, suddenly turns the city's population into a collection of exiles torn away from their native kingdom. In the marquesa's formulation it is not royal, military action that serves as a prime mover for the redemption of the conquered people, but rather the people's own penitence and the articulated grief of a maternal figure. These forces, and not the army of Spain, are the allies the marquesa expects will transform "noche obscuro en claro dia."

Lest the focus on grieving mothers of the Old and New Testaments suggest lamentation as the sole source of female agency, the marquesa leaps to perhaps the greatest heroine of the Old Testament, Esther. Here a complicated story finds itself compressed into the space of a ten-line stanza that would be hopelessly incomprehensible to any reader unfamiliar with the original. As the poem leaps from Mary to Esther, its author clearly expects a readership capable of fleshing out the bare details of the story she provides:

Sombra es de *Maria?*, *Esther*,
 y reservó en un conflicto,
 borran el más cruel Edicto,
 que el Mundo llegó a entender:
 Apela a este gran Poder,
 O Havana! Fiel Mardoqueo,
 que aunque en los annales leo
 los progresos de tu afán,
 a el rigor de un nuevo Aman,
 sacrificada te veo. (171-80)

The story to which the marquesa alludes provides another variation on conquest and exile. Esther is a Jewish woman and Mordecai (Mardoqueo), a faithful adviser to the king, is her cousin and adopted father. Living under the rule of Ahasueras, king of Persia and ruler of a large empire—"the Ahasueras who reigned from India to Ethiopia over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces" (Esther 1:1)—she keeps her identity secret, even when Ahasueras chooses her to be queen. When Haman (Aman), jealous of Mordocai's influence, talks the king into a plan to exterminate all of the Jews in the kingdom, Mordecai convinces Esther to intercede, even at great personal risk. She expresses her decision in strident terms—"I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16)—and with it her consciousness of her own national identity: "For how can I endure to see the calamity that is coming to my people?" (Esther 8:6).

Esther's efforts meet with such success that at the end of the story Haman is hanged from the same gallows he had ordered prepared for Mordecai.

Triumphing by dint of her courage and articulateness, Esther serves as the brave voice for the kingdom's Jewish population and cleverly manipulates her proximity to power. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's late-nineteenth-century *Woman's Bible* would single Esther out as a particularly compelling feminist symbol, especially in a Western world in which "Women as queenly, as noble and as self sacrificing as was Esther [...] are hampered in their creative offices by the unjust statutes of men" (92), and while it would be anachronistic to read the marquesa's 1762 through the lens of Stanton's 1898, the terms of her analogy make a Esther's gender an important point of personal identification.

In this three-part analogy, Mordecai's identity as a stand-in for Havana highlights the underlying theme of the city's loyalty, with Juan del Prado and associates as the mostly likely Hamans who have, in effect, conspired to bring about the city's conquest, however unwittingly, by offering such an incompetent defense.¹⁵ No clear identity emerges for Esther or Ahasueras, but the similarity to Esther's position and that of the marquesa is difficult to escape. Just as Mordacai needs Esther to carry his message to the king who has the power to elevate or destroy him and his community, so the marquesa takes up the mantle of speaking to Carlos III on behalf of the people of Havana. Her speech, like Esther's, is transgressive, and she, like Esther, is appealing for the recognition of her community's role within a larger kingdom. What is perhaps most remarkable about the marquesa's invocation of Esther, however explicitly she wishes to take up the heroine's mantle, is the audacious connotation of the episode. Just as the series of allusions to the time of Josiah bring up the fragile nature of kingdoms and the impotence of kings before divine punishment (and the accompanying geopolitical realities), so the story of Esther conjures up a vision of royal authority that is benign but imminently suggestible. While he is not the villain of the story, King Ahasueras is nonetheless willing to commit a massacre on the basis of bad advice, a folly that only Esther's persuasion can convince him to avoid.

¹⁵ The story of Esther would remain a popular political allegory for decades. Former Havana mayor Sebastián Peñalver, who proffered his services to the British and was named lieutenant governor, would himself suffer the critique of a series of popular verses Sáinz identifies as "la expresión de un sentimiento auténticamente popular" (160), and which themselves allude to the book of Esther, identifying Peñalver as "qual otro Amán" who will likely wind up "en la horca de Mardoqueo" (ctd. in Bachiller 266). Decades later a Fransican missionary speaking in favor of Fernando VII would find a contemporary Haman in the figure of Manuel de Godoy (Herrejón Peredo 268). I am grateful to Moisés Guzmán Pérez for suggesting the relevance of Herrejón Peredo's work.

The precarious nature of monarchy in Old Testament scriptures would become something of a hobby horse for the independence leaders whose writings would begin to see print a decade after 1762.¹⁶ North American revolutionary Thomas Paine would cite the stories of Gideon and Samuel as proof that “Monarchy is ranked as one of the sins of the Jews” (73), a sentiment seconded by Mexican independentista (and Catholic priest) Fray Servando Teresa de Mier: “Lo cierto es que Dios le dio a su pueblo predilecto un gobierno republicano; que no le dio reyes sino en su cólera y para su castigo” (210). Juan Germán Roscío, a Venezuelan attorney and convert to the independentista cause, would take the challenge of anti-monarchical hermeneutics seriously enough to author a book-length summation of the biblical arguments against kingship —*El triunfo de la libertad sobre el despotismo* (1817). Roscío would argue that a focus on particular parts of the bible, particularly the Old Testament sagas of Israel’s judges and kings could not help but support republican sensibilities. Those who wished to make the bible support monarchy, he would argue, found themselves in the position of searching out sections “que no eran dedicados a materias políticas” (8).¹⁷

In the case of the *Memorial* and the *Dolorosa métrica*, what emerges from a long list of biblical allusions is the elevation of an articulate female leader and a recognition of the limits to even an absolute monarch’s power. Encompassed within documents courteously addressed to the king to whom they profess undying loyalty, these connotations flourish under the protection of another “treta del débil.” Rather than “saber pero no decir” the marquesa’s artifice might be called a case of “decir” but by allegory and association. The more a reader knows, or chooses to explore the context of her allusions, the less commonplace and more strident their ramifications.

Conclusion: Chiasmus of Creole Consciousness

With deference to Saínz’s complaint, it is worth pointing out that the above explores approximately two thirds of the *Dolorosa métrica*’s biblical allusions. Elsewhere the poem refers to Jehoz (Joacaz) and Uzziah (Asarias) as unsuccessful and successful examples whose fate on the battlefield reflects their fidelity, and it condemns “Un corto Gremio

¹⁶ *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* notes an Old Testament ambivalence regarding monarchy: “a number of Isrealite texts express reservations about the institution of kingship—a sentiment elsewhere unparalleled,” and suggests this may have something to do with the particular historical perspective of the texts of ancient Israel, “the only ancient Near Eastern culture to have preserved written memories of a time before the evolution of kingship” (“Kingship” n. pag.).

¹⁷ See Ruiz for more on Roscío’s historical and literary importance in the Venezuelan context.

convicto [...] que empieza ya a gustar / de las cebollas de Egipto” (191, 192-93), which is to say the handful of collaborators taking advantage of the occupation to enrich themselves (see Parcero Torre). The collaborators, the marquesa argues, are like those Israelites who wished to return to slavery in Egypt rather than endure the hardship of escape: “We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic” (Numbers 11:5).

But the poem closes, turning its focus back towards the beloved king, by reminding him of the people’s devotion and dependence on his rule — “que si has perdido una plaza, / nuestra adbersa suerte escasa / pierde en ti quanto hay perdible” (208-10)— before launching into perhaps the most improbable analogy of all, King David’s relationship to his son Absalom, who revolts and is killed in battle against his father’s army. Representing a firm step in favor of a centralized monarchy —“the complete triumph of the professional army over the irregulars of the countryside” (“Kingship” n. pag.)— in political terms, the conflict between David and Absalom derives its greatest resonance from the tension between political necessity and the power of paternal sentiment. When he learns that the victory has included the death of his son, David launches his famous lament: “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Samuel 18:33). His grief in fact reaches such heights that an aid reprimands him —“I perceive that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased” (2 Samuel 19:6).

Drawing the obvious comparison between paternal love on an individual level and that of a king for his people, the marquesa suggests that in 1762 as in the time of David, these bounds of affection should transcend the results of an individual battle:

Ay Hijo mio *Absalom!*
David doloroso exclama;
si aún Hijo ingrato assi ama,
que hara nro. corazon?
Pesada dominacion
sentimos de extraña Grey;
y con inmutable Ley,
quando Huerfanos lloramos,
que suspiros exalamos
Ay Padre! Ay Señor! Ay Rey! (221-30)

The allusion produces a curious effect. On a structural level, a chiasmus of identity places Havana in the role of King David, but as son, and Absalom in the role of Carlos III, but as father. This means that where the original has a father profess love even for the ungrateful son who has betrayed him, the new version has Havana profess love even for the king who... Foreseeing this problem, the marquesa includes a caveat in the form of a rhetorical question designed to show that the citizens of Havana do not

imagine themselves to have been betrayed by a close family member. The comparison, she insists, serves not to liken Absalom's betrayal to anything Carlos III, might have done, but rather to emphasize the power of filial love as a force capable of transcending the lamentable results of battles: "si aún Hijo ingrato assi ama, / que hara nro. corazon?" Having thus raised the specter of rebellion and betrayal only to dismiss them, the stanza builds momentum to the final lament designed to echo David's "Ay Padre! Ay Señor! Ay Rey!" but to communicate, we are assured, an even purer sentiment given the correctness of Carlos III's conduct—in this case familial love has nothing to overcome.

But of course Havana's lament, like David's must seek to cover some gap, to transcend some obstacle, in order to be something other than an empty exercise in rhetoric, and this obstacle is obvious, too—the fact of British occupation. As long as the population of Havana languishes in the "dominacion" of the "extraña Grey" the lament of filial loyalty to Carlos III will be a statement contrary to fact, a lament for a lost king, just as David's cry is the lament for a lost son. The marquesa is polite or reticent enough not to raise overtly the question of whether Carlos III's estrangement, like Absalom's, might be the result of foolish or selfish actions on his part. The poem has, after all, already parsed the question of responsibility at some length. Significantly, it ends not with the emotion of the people's lament, but with a final stanza pleading for military action "que desembaynes la Espada / contra esta enemiga armada" (232-33), while promising that in the meantime Havana will stay loyal. The surface conflict between a message of eternal loyalty on the one hand, and a plea that the king must retake this territory post-haste, on the other, belies an ambivalence of position rather than message.

This ambivalence is perhaps the most universal aspect of the marquesa's texts as embodiments of the colonial experience in Spanish America and the emergence of Creole consciousness, what Osorio Romero calls "la paradoja de la conciencia criolla": "¿Cómo hacer suya una voz simultaneamente ajena?" (7-8). In the case of the marquesa, the borrowed and agreeable territory of Old Testament anecdotes serves, particularly in her pre-Independence context, as an effective cover for frank displeasure with the monarchy's conduct of government. Furthermore, if the moment of war, as Lavrin and Campuzano point out, delineates a particularly male space for the making of political decisions with often sweeping consequences, the vacuum produced by the occupation provides the marquesa with a rare opening to raise her voice. Since one established female form of communication within the Spanish empire was the protest letter, often directed at the king in the hopes of receiving a husband's lost or mishandled pension, the marquesa's *Dolorosa métrica* and *Memorial*

transgresses by the themes it addresses rather than by its particular format.¹⁸ In an age in which, as Lavrin puts it, “Women could express emotions, but they would have to wait decades to engage in a dialogue on citizenship” (82), the marquesa manages to carve out a position in which she gives voice to both the emotions and critique of the Havana elite she represents, a position all the more tenable when the British victory has either disarmed or co-opted the agents of “despotiquez” who had controlled the local government.

Sáinz describes the marquesa’s particular Creole sensibility as a “conciencia diferenciadora” (156) that limits itself to the question of “los métodos de los gobernantes” rather than “el sistema que éstos encarnan” (155). Clearly Gastón Baquero is referring to this inclusive rather than oppositional sensibility when he claims that “Para el año de 1762 – ya estaba muy bien consolidado el concepto de *criollo*” (149). And while Sáinz and Baquero center their attention on the particular case of Havana, the contradictory sense of difference and belonging has colored a number of approaches to the Creole consciousness, from José Antonio Mazzotti’s invocation of Bhaba’s concept of ambivalence (20), to Pagden and Canny’s mention of a process of identity formation they call “the history not of the creation but of the transformation of values,” a transformation that “often took place under duress” (“Afterward” 269). Certainly the British occupation qualifies as such an instance of “duress,” as much for the crisis of leadership and identity it occasions as for the very real accompanying disorder and violence. This crisis of leadership puts into relief the notion of Creole ambivalence to which Mazzotti alludes, a situation he refers to as that of “un sujeto ontologicamente inestable,” caught between de facto “superioridad frente a los españoles” and de jure “inferioridad en cuanto a su representación política” (20).

This is the repeated chiasmus of the marquesa’s position and that of the Havana her texts construct, this odd colonial world in which “mas fue advitrio del Poder / el no poder arbitrar.” Highlighting a colonial grammar in which competence and perception remain forever separated from power and office, the marquesa’s protests function on two levels. Conventionally, they assume the king’s good will and advocacy for reforms that will make government more closely respond to the needs of its subjects. On another plane —that suggested by the repeated analogies to the sagas of ancient Israel— the poem suggests a world in which kings should want to solve the chiasmic illogic of their own governments, a world in which chaos forever waits at the door of those who fail.

¹⁸ Campuzano and Vallejo speak of the importance of these communications — “Las cartas de viudas and esposas de conquistadores y colonizadores”—as barometers of , in the best cases, “un proceso ni heroico ni triunfante, en el que la participación de ellas resultó decisiva para alcanzar un mejor desenlace” (9).

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