

◆ CHAPTER EIGHT

The Enemy Outside the Gates:  
Isabel the Catholic Queen and the  
Extramural *mujer varonil* in Tirso de  
Molina's *Antona García*

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On December 13, 1474, Isabel of Trastámara assumed the throne as Queen of Castile. Chroniclers described her solemn procession through the streets of Segovia on horseback, wearing a gown richly ornamented with gold and precious stones. To complement the queen's commanding display of wealth, a member of her retinue carried a powerful symbol that would come to epitomize her rule: an unsheathed sword.

Como símbolo del poder de la Reina a quien los Grandes rodeaban a pie llevando el palio y la cola del vestido, iba delante un solo caballero, Gutierre de Cárdenas, que sostenía en la diestra una espada desnuda cogida por la punta, la empuñadura en alto, a la usanza española, para que, vista por todos, hasta los más distantes supieran que se aproximaba la que podría castigar los culpados con autoridad Real. (Palencia 155)

(As a symbol of the power of the Queen, who was surrounded by the Grandees on foot carrying the canopy and the train of her dress, a single knight, Gutierre de Cárdenas, went before her with a naked sword held by the point in his right hand, the hilt on high in the Spanish style, so that, seen by everyone, even those the farthest away would know that she who could punish the guilty with Royal authority was approaching.)<sup>1</sup>

**Confined Women:**  
**The Walls of Female Space in Early Modern Spain**  
*Hispanic Issues On Line 25 (2020)*

Traditionally, the Castilian monarchy had utilized a scepter crowned by a golden orb to symbolize the royal office (Liss, *Isabel* 86–87). Isabel, however, consciously chose the sword to embody and empower her right to rule.<sup>2</sup> According to the chronicler Alfonso Fernández de Palencia, “No faltaron algunos sujetos bien intencionados que murmurasen de lo insólito del hecho, pareciéndoles necio alarde en la mujer aquella ostentación de los atributos del marido” (155) (there were a few well-intentioned subjects who murmured about the unheard-of event; it seemed to them to be foolish ostentation for the woman to boast of having the attributes of her husband). Criticism of this gender doubling that presented Isabel as the mother of her people holding the phallic sword of justice took many forms. Even her most trusted advisors, although supportive of her rule, always maintained that as a woman, she must be properly trained and molded (Weissberger 28–68; Alvar Ezquerro 179–89). Although many of those in attendance grumbled that the kingship belonged to kings, Isabel’s reign and image endured.

Throughout the following centuries, the sword ceremony became a lasting symbol of the queen’s rule and steadfast dedication to her kingdom and her religion. Isabel had left a lasting legacy: as a woman, she presented herself as chaste, virtuous, and pious, but as a queen, she bolstered those qualities with the masculine principles of kingship—bravery, strength, and prudence—and used the hybrid image to support and guarantee her reign. As Peggy Liss explains, Isabel was construed and remembered as a “kingly queen” (“Isabel” 58). In the historiography and literature of the early modern period in Spain, this image endured. Isabel became a popular figure in the *corrales de comedias*, as playwrights scoured national history for popular stories to stage. Critics have argued that while many of these plays celebrated Isabel, they did so by highlighting her exemplarity as a model woman and downplaying the ambiguous gender that surrounded her legacy.<sup>3</sup> María Y. Caba finds that plays that dramatize Isabel “hacen hincapié en esos rasgos de la personalidad de la Reina que podían ser utilizados para presentarla como una mujer dócil y por tanto, femenina y virtuosa” (26) (emphasize those traits of the Queen’s personality that could be utilized to present her as a docile woman, and therefore, feminine and virtuous). Such critical stances follow views on the *comedia*’s depiction of queens in general. Regarding exceptionally powerful monarchs, María Quintero finds that “historical queens such as Elizabeth I and Christina of Sweden—women who in real life displayed disturbing virile behavior—are domesticated in the *comedia*, thus re-writing history in a more ‘gender appropriate’ manner” (221).

In this essay, I will analyze how Tirso de Molina’s history play *Antona García* (c. 1623), set during the Castilian War of Succession, not only follows the general trend by immuring Isabel within a space of exemplary femininity,

but also effectively walls out Antona García, a peasant woman that typifies the *mujer varonil*, or manly woman, a popular character type that found much commercial success in the theater.<sup>4</sup> I will examine how the play associates the hyperbolic Antona with Isabel's historiographic legacy and therefore construes the peasant heroine as a caricatured masculine counterpoint to the queen. Rather than simply domesticating and immuring Isabel's legacy, the play expels her virile behavior from the enclosed feminine space, thus presenting both a prescriptive model of femininity and a criticism of contemporary historiographical practices.

Tirso de Molina's *Antona García* portrays the struggle for power between Isabel and her niece Joanna of Castile (also known as Juana la Beltraneja) in the wake of Henry IV's death. The dynamic heroine of the play, Antona García, helps retake the contested city of Toro for the Catholic Monarchs through her fierce dedication to Isabel's cause. The play begins with Queen Isabel belaboring the current upheaval of her kingdom resulting from Joanna's open rebellion. Isabel ascribes Joanna's support to factional interests that follow worldly passions rather than having any real basis either genealogically or legally, as opposed to her quest: "Dios ampara mi justicia, / ricos hombres, no temamos; / la verdad al cabo vence, / no la pasión. Marche el campo" (1.85–88) (God protects my justice, / noble men, let us not fear, / for truth will triumph in the end, / not passion. Let the army march).

According to historical accounts, Isabel had claimed the Castilian throne as her birthright upon the death of her half-brother Henry IV, ignoring the assertions of her niece Joanna, rumored to be the daughter of one of Henry's advisors, Beltrán de la Cueva, and not of Henry himself.<sup>5</sup> Joanna opposed Isabel's queenship, finding an ally and a husband in Afonso V of Portugal. Joanna claimed the throne for herself with the help of Afonso and members of the Castilian nobility, thus dividing Castilian loyalties and embroiling the population in a civil war that blossomed into an international conflict. After the exchange of vows between Joanna and Afonso, the Portuguese rapidly invaded Castile and claimed the cities lying on their border, including Zamora and Toro. Ferdinand rushed to halt the Portuguese progress and laid siege to Toro, but the Portuguese refused to be drawn out to fight a battle, relying instead on their position within the fortified city on a hill and forcing Ferdinand to withdraw. After success in retaking the city of Zamora the following year, Ferdinand, leading the Castilian forces, met Afonso and his Portuguese army on the field of Peleagonzalo, a few miles to the west of Toro. While the battle left no clear victor, the Castilians gained the upper hand, and Toro quickly fell to Ferdinand and Isabel's forces.<sup>6</sup>

For historian Townsend Miller, the Battle of Peleagonzalo and the subsequent taking of Toro was “perhaps the most important battle in Spanish history” (270). Miller continues, “Isabel and Fernando had managed to pluck safety out of some of the worst nettles which ever faced an infant government. They entered the war insecure, ringed by enemies, widely discredited. They emerged from it strong, obeyed, respected. In a far deeper sense than by their mere marriage, they had unified Spain at last” (270). While the war did not officially end until 1479 with the Treaty of Alcáçovas, the Battle of Peleagonzalo had effectively sealed the Castilian victory. Afonso soon retired to Portugal, and Isabel and Ferdinand used their momentum to eradicate the remaining pockets of resistance from Castilians loyal to Joanna, whom they eventually maneuvered into a Portuguese convent. Tirso, then, chooses to dramatize perhaps the most definitive moment in the history of Spain and the Catholic Monarchs. He conveys the magnetism of the struggle for Toro through a metonymic dramatic equivalent, the struggles of the impressive heroine Antona García.

The historical Antona, along with her husband and several other men, had organized an ill-fated rebellion against the Portuguese soldiers during their occupation of Toro. Her group assaulted the Portuguese in several locations throughout the city in an attempt to breach the walls, but they were thrown back with heavy losses. The Portuguese sympathizer and mayor of Toro, Juan de Ulloa, having thus quelled the rebellion, swiftly executed the conspirators, among them Antona García.<sup>7</sup> By Tirso’s time, Antona’s story, now legend, had taken root in the collective memory. In 1603, Pedro de Salazar de Mendoza thus summarized her political biography:

De esta de Toro fue vecina y natural, Antonia Garcia, mugger de Iuan de Monroy, y tan valerosa, que estando el Rey de Portugal apoderado de la ciudad, trato con muchos vecinos de entregarla a los Reyes Catholicos, sus legitimos y verdaderos señores. Mas sabido por el de Portugal, hizo de ella muy cruel justicia. Los Reyes allí en Toro concedieron privilegio a sus descendientes varones y hembras, y a los que con ellas se casassen, para que fuessen tenidos por hijos dalgo, y gozassen de las libertades de tales. (15–16)<sup>8</sup>

(Antona García, wife of Juan de Monroy, a native resident of Toro, was so brave that when the King of Portugal had seized control of the city, she conspired with several residents to return it to the Catholic Monarchs, their true and legitimate lords. But the Portuguese King found out and carried out a

cruel justice on her. The Monarchs, there in Toro, granted a privilege to her male and female descendants and to those who married the women so that they would be considered noble and would enjoy the freedoms of such.)

Clearly Tirso knew the history of this period well, and his narrative of the Castilian War of Succession in *Antona García* follows the historical accounts fairly accurately, including María Sarmiento's bellicose behavior and the peasant Bartolo's revelation of the secret entrance to Toro.<sup>9</sup> His depiction of Antona García, however, relies more on dramatic convention than chronicle history. Instead of portraying the story of a rebellious yet ultimately failed heroine who was put to death inside the walls of Toro, Tirso turns Antona into an unforgettable character who overpowers her enemies, scales Toro's battlements, and liberates the beleaguered city. Tirso thus hyperbolizes Antona's story, swapping the martyred historical woman for the undefeatable Amazon heroine.

Modifying the historical account to fit within the conventions of the *comedia* was a common procedure in seventeenth-century theater. Dramatic art took precedence over historical truth, and the playwrights oftentimes transformed facts into a fiction designed both to deliver a didactic message and to foment commercial success. In this case, Tirso's version of Antona conforms to the *mujer varonil*, a popular character type in early modern literature that found much commercial success in the theater. Melveena McKendrick defines the term broadly as "the woman who departs in any significant way from the feminine norm of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (ix). During this time period, "Virtue, humility, modesty, tenderness, silence, diligence and prudence were still the most desirable attributes in a daughter and a wife" (12). Any literary departure from these cultural norms, whether it be in the character of a bandit, an educated woman, a warrior, or a woman in man's dress, was considered an incursion into masculine territory and thus formed part of the *mujer varonil* tradition.

As a *mujer varonil*, the protagonist of *Antona García* is both beautiful and unnaturally strong. Her peers emphasize that she "[a]sombra con la hermosura / a cuantos la ven" (1.173–74) (astonishes everyone who sees her with her beauty), and they admire her as the most attractive woman in Toro. The villagers commend Antona for her virility as well: "y en fin, sois de cuerpo / la más gentilhombra" (1.235–36) (and, after all, you are fully the best gentlewoman). Here, comically, Tirso's neologism takes the term *gentilhombre* (gentleman) and converts it into a feminine noun, *gentilhombra* (gentlewoman). As a word praising Antona, this hybridized form of *gentilhombre* summarizes her two aspects, feminine beauty and masculine valor. From these descriptions, Antona becomes both a paragon of feminine beauty and of masculine strength, and as the play progresses, the descriptions devolve into a hyperbolic caricature that

removes Antona from the woman's enclosed space of the home and forces her onto the battlefield.

While she is one of the fairest characters in the play, rivaling the queen in beauty, her actions contradict the sharply defined gender categories of seventeenth-century society. Even in games of strength, Antona's brute force surpasses that of many of her male peers, "Sus fuerzas son increíbles: / tira a la barra y al canto / con el labrador más diestro" (1.185–87) (her strength is incredible: / she throws the javelin and the shot / with the most skilled peasant). Her beauty causes the Count of Peñamacor to fall in love with her, but her strength brings him to his knees. In an attempt to win her over, the count flatters her and takes her hand, but as the stage directions indicate, Antona grabs it tight, and the count howls in pain: "¿Qué infierno fuerzas te dió?" (1.933) (What hell gave you your strength?).

Critics have had a difficult time categorizing Antona. Ivy McClelland finds her two sides, masculine and feminine, to be at odds with one another, arguing that Antona is "disintegrated," and that "not all the dramatist's amendments nor all the spectator's goodwill can put her tidily together" (70). Margaret Wilson encounters in Antona's *desmesurada* figure a self-conscious artistic creation in the capable hands of Tirso, who makes of her a "compelling work of art" (xxi), following Baroque sensibilities of abnormality and violence. McKendrick also views Antona as more than a fragmentary creation. She argues that Tirso follows early modern theatrical convention by exaggerating Antona's tomboy features. McKendrick underscores the fact that Antona is more complex than the simple binary male-female would indicate; the combination of these two features creates something extraordinary that transcends the limits of cultural gender (252–56). To be sure, Antona's astonishing behavior, rather than having a negative effect on her peers, causes admiration: "en la novia dos contrarios / de hermosura y fortaleza, / y en lo uno y otro, milagro" (1.220–22) (in the bride [are] two opposites / of beauty and strength, / and in each, a miracle).

The villagers celebrate Antona's virility, echoing the way in which Isabel's queenship is positively construed in the play. When addressing her supporters at the beginning of the first act, Isabel delivers an impassioned speech to lift their spirits and motivate them, and her uncle praises her bravery, "¡Ah, valor tan generoso!" (1.89) (Ah, such generous valor!), and swears his loyalty to her cause, commending her determination: "el esfuerzo soberano / de esa virtud atractiva, / no los hombres, los peñascos, / llevara, invicta Isabel, tras sí" (1.98–102) (the sovereign effort / of that attractive virtue / would lead mountains, not men, / undefeated Isabel). These comments evoke the carefully packaged image that Isabel and her advisors had created during her reign, an image that was often recalled in historiography and literature. In 1605,

for example, historian Fray José de Sigüenza effusively praised the queen, affirming that: “la gloria y monarquía de España començó con esta valerosa reina y que crió como a sus pechos el valor de las armas, la entrada de las buenas letras, y la firmeza de la religion Christiana” (qtd. in Rodríguez Valencia 1.543) (the glory and monarchy of Spain began with this valorous queen who raised as if at her breasts the bravery of arms, the establishment of good writing, and the strength of the Christian religion). Sigüenza describes the queen as the founder of Spanish prosperity, suckling such illustrious offspring as war, literature, and religion at her motherly breasts. This overstated praise conflates the queen’s maternal side with the masculine trappings of the office of kingship, bestowing upon her a hybrid nature that mythologizes and even to an extent allegorizes her legacy, equating her with the mother of Spain. Juan de Mariana, in his *Historia General de España* (1601), categorizes Isabel as an “[h]embra de grande ánimo, de prudencia y constancia mayor que de mujer” (qtd. in Rodríguez Valencia 1.522) (female of intense spirit, of a prudence and resolve greater than that of women). Mother of her country, and certainly more than a mere woman, Isabel and her myth bore fruit in the work of seventeenth-century writers and playwrights.

At their first meeting in Tirso’s play, Isabel and Antona express their mutual admiration. Antona praises the queen’s magnificence using metaphors that approximate the courtly code of poeticized feminine beauty using rustic comparisons: “En las dos mejillas solas / miro, según son saladas, / rosas con leche mezcladas, / o cebollas y amapolas” (1.279–82) (in her two cheeks alone, / so charming, I see / roses mixed with milk, / or onions and poppies). Before this comical assessment of the queen’s beauty, however, Antona has fixated on another trait. Upon first seeing Isabel, Antona describes her as “tan apuesta y gueredora” (1.250) (so handsome and warlike). These descriptions are far from gratuitous; they establish that the queen and Antona share qualities of beauty and force. Antona makes no secret of the fact that the queen is her role model, pledging her life to defend Isabel’s right to Castile. The queen, for her part, describes the peasant Antona as “notable” (1.410) (impressive), gives her a golden chain, and confesses her happiness at having met her. In addition to highlighting the respect Antona and Isabel have for one another, this first meeting also establishes their kinship in matters of gender; Antona recognizes that Isabel has pushed aside the traditional walls of a patriarchally defined femininity, and she proclaims her adherence to Isabel’s political and gender-bending cause.

The process of emulation, depicted here dramatically as an almost patriotic phenomenon, has its basis in political writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the many *specula principis* of the early modern period, writers often invoked the prince’s exemplarity, arguing that the populace

would seek to emulate him and his actions. Diego de Saavedra Fajardo, expanding on the common solar metaphor that compares the king with the sun, likens his subjects to sunflowers: “Girasoles somos, que damos vuelta mirando y imitando al príncipe. . . . Las acciones del príncipe son mandatos para el pueblo, que con la imitación las obedece” (171) (We are sunflowers that turn, watching and imitating the prince. . . . The prince’s actions are commands for the people, who in imitation obey them). This didactic metaphor emphasizes the need for moderation and exemplary behavior in the figure of the king. Also discussing the virtue of temperance, Pedro de Ribadeneira cautions the prince to rule his own actions so they do not reflect poorly on the kingdom and so his subjects avoid imitating his bad habits: “porque es el espejo en que se miran todos” (318) (because [he] is the mirror in which everyone sees themselves). Lope de Vega reinforces these ideas dramatically in the final scene of *El villano en su rincón*: the king holds up a mirror, pronouncing that “porque es el Rey el espejo / en que el reino se compone / para salir bien compuesto” (3.2899–901) (Because the King is the mirror / in which the kingdom composes itself / in order to emerge well-formed.). Such exemplarity was commonly attributed to Isabel, whom Alonso de Santa Cruz, a historian writing during the early sixteenth century, labeled as the “honra de las Españas y espejo de las mujeres” (qtd. in Rodríguez Valencia 1.143) (honor of Spain’s kingdoms and mirror for women).

In *Antona García*, this conceptual mirror of the sovereign has its dramatic equivalent in the relationship between Antona García and the Catholic Queen. Beyond their common characteristics of beauty and bravery, their affinity for war, and their mutual appreciation, the two women also share a sense of duty as wives. In the literature dedicated to the Catholic Queen that helped construct her image, virtue and obedience were highly regarded. In fact, one of Isabel’s close religious advisors, Fray Martín de Córdoba, provided her with a manual during her youth meant to prepare the young princess for her possible future as Castilian sovereign. In the *Jardín de nobles doncellas* (c. 1468), Córdoba preaches that women must strive to subordinate their passions and instead display humility, piety, order, and even obsequiousness (193–238).<sup>10</sup> He echoes the traditional early modern opinion that women belong in the home: “el marido ha de procurar lo defuera de casa y la muger lo de dentro de casa; ca natural cosa es ala muger estar sienpre en casa. E desto se sigue que la muger ha de ser obsequiosa al marido amándole, honrrándole” (206) (the husband must procure from outside the house and the woman from inside, for it is natural that the woman always be in the house. And from this it follows that the woman must be obsequious toward the husband, loving and honoring him). His advice provisions Isabel for a virtuous life, and he cautions the queen by stressing her naturally flawed condition as a woman, “Las



mugeres natural mente son flacas y temerosas” (245) (women are naturally weak and fearful).

The conceptual model of Martín de Córdoba’s treatise, a garden, plays on the *hortus conclusus* theme while hearkening to the biblical Garden of Eden and implicitly recalling Eve’s role in the fall of man. By presenting Isabel with a *speculum principis* that conceives of feminine space as an enclosed garden, Martín de Córdoba effectively circumscribes Isabel within the boundaries of early modern gender roles. Barbara Weissberger, in her work on the masculinist assumptions and assertions that qualified Isabel’s reign, argues that the queen was guided by advisors who maintained a notion of the inferiority of women using “various discursive strategies to contain the perceived threat of that power to a patriarchal status quo that requires female subordination” (56). The writings of prominent figures like Martín de Córdoba, then, served as a prophylactic that aimed to control and correct women’s inherited vices in the figure of their queen before they had a chance to manifest themselves in her subjects and harm the kingdom.

Such advice commonly included the need for wifely subservience and acquiescence to the husband’s wishes, and Tirso’s play repeats this aspect of Isabel’s image. When asked her opinion on the delicate issue of pardoning those who declared in favor of her niece Joanna, Isabel defers to Ferdinand’s opinion, not once but twice: “El rey mi señor podrá / hacer lo que sea servido” (3.901–02) (The king my lord shall be able to / do whatever he pleases) and “[v]uestra es, señor, esa hazaña, / y mío el obedeceros” (3.944–45) (yours is, sire, this feat, / and mine is to obey you). Her statements clearly delineate the boundaries of power as she defers to her husband on matters of state, thus circumscribing and effectively immuring her political agency within Ferdinand’s rule.

Advice for the queen’s two metaphorical bodies often developed into a contradiction; as a woman, Isabel was to be domesticated, obedient, and feminine, and as a queen, she was encouraged to be active, brave, independent, and masculine.<sup>11</sup> This contradiction also manifested in her mythic legacy. In the case of *Antona García*, Tirso separates these contradictory notions into two characters, underscoring Isabel’s femininity while hyperbolizing Antona’s masculinity. Antona’s reputation is built upon stories that recall her virility and hyperbolic feats of strength, including carrying a donkey and its rider, “cogió al jumento y al hombre / y llevándole en los brazos, / como si de paja fueran” (1.197–99) (she grabbed the donkey and the man, / carrying them in her arms / as if they were made of straw), and corralling six soldiers into a grain silo armed with only a half-burned log, “cogió del fuego un tizón, / obligándolos a palos / a que en el corral se echasen / dentro de un silo” (1.207–10) (she grabbed a charred log from the fire, / and giving them a

beating, / forced them into a pen / inside a silo).

Though she takes pride in these feats of strength, Antona nevertheless attempts to follow Isabel's model of an exemplary wife. Isabel, in fact, parrots prescriptive gender maxims when she advises the bride on her new role, bluntly stating that "Antona, ya estáis casada; / vuestro esposo es la cabeza" (1.359–60) (Antona, you are now married; / your husband is in charge). While such an admonishment contradicts many of the historical realities of Isabel's fiercely independent character, here the queen underscores the role of a virtuous, obedient wife. Isabel admires Antona's bravery and forwardness, but she nevertheless cautions her to tame that behavior and retire to the feminine domain now that she is married:

Olvidad el ser bizarra,  
 viviréis en paz los dos;  
 aliñad la casa vos,  
 mientras él tira la barra.  
 No os preciéis de pelear,  
 que el honor de la mujer  
 consiste en obedecer,  
 como el del hombre en mandar. (1.367–74)

(Forget your old gallant self,  
 you two will live in peace;  
 pick up around the house  
 while he throws the javelin.  
 Do not take pride in fighting;  
 a woman's honor  
 consists in obeying,  
 as man's does in commanding.)

This admonition mimics the views espoused by Fray Luis de León in *La perfecta casada*, in which he underscores that "[l]a naturaleza y estado pone obligacion en la casada . . . de mirar por su casa y de alegrar y descuydar continuamente a su marido" (30) (Nature and custom oblige the married woman . . . to take care of her household and continually please and relax her husband). Isabel echoes these prescriptive comments that confine women to the domestic sphere, showing her adherence to and acceptance of these ideals as she reiterates them to the new bride. Antona complies with Isabel's

suggestions, or at least attempts to do so outwardly, and the ensuing scenes depict a much tamer version of the rowdy peasant woman, complete with the accoutrements of early modern feminine labor, the distaff and spindle.

Stage props and costuming help to accentuate this change: “Sale hilando Antona” (17) (Antona enters spinning thread) and “Sale Antona con delantal blanco, y saca Gila rastrillo y lino; y siéntase Antona y rastrilla” (19) (Antona enters wearing a white apron, and Gila takes out a heckling comb and flax; Antona sits and heckles). Antona’s abrupt transition to a model of feminine behavior surprises the villagers, but she proclaims her dedication to this new phase of life:

Casera pretendo ser,  
si he sido hasta aquí valienta.  
¿El sermonador no puso  
ayer una comparanza,  
que como al rey la lanza,  
honra a la mujer el huso? (1.528–33)

(A housewife I shall be,  
if I have been up to now a brave woman.  
Didn’t the sermonizer make  
a comparison yesterday  
that as the lance honors the king,  
the spindle honors the woman?)

Trading the masculine lance for the feminine spindle, Antona goes about her business of tending to domestic affairs—preparing her husband’s food, mending clothes, and managing the household—in obedience to and imitation of her queen. Although this version of Antona does not last, these scenes delineate the boundaries of the queen’s prescribed feminine behavior for the peasant woman.

While Antona attempts to cultivate a domesticated life and control her wilder nature, she argues that in matters of war, she will not be tamed: “si en vuestro favor tomare / armas, no os dé maravilla, / que ha de ser vuesa Castilla” (1.383–85) (if in your favor I were to take up / arms, don’t be surprised / because Castile must be yours). She has no problem accepting her role as wife, but where the kingdom is concerned, Antona does not hesitate to proclaim her adherence to Isabel’s cause above the dictates of her marriage: “Mande y rija mi marido, / pues Dios su yugo me ha puesto, / pero no me toque en esto, / que no será obedecido” (1.395–98) (Let my husband command and govern, / since God has put his yoke over me, / but don’t let him push me on this, / for he won’t

be obeyed). She expresses her willingness as a bride to comply with common societal and cultural values, but she nonetheless insists that queen and country come before family and marriage. Her choice of metaphor, the yoke, also recalls the Catholic Monarchs' emblem, which was comprised of a yoke and a bundle of arrows. While the yoke on the emblem may have had its origins in military symbolism that referenced Alexander the Great, during the early modern period it had taken on a romantic quality as a symbol of the Catholic Monarchs' marital union (Weissberger 47–50). Antona and her husband are “yoked” together, just like Isabel and Ferdinand. Antona's duty to her queen, however, ultimately trumps her wifely obedience, and when hearing of the Portuguese threat to Toro, she throws off her apron and takes up arms in the queen's favor.

Her refusal to be limited to the role of wife allows her to become the queen's champion, thus mirroring the other side of Isabel's legend, her militancy. The play pits Antona García against María Sarmiento, wife of the mayor of Toro and a Portuguese sympathizer. In the second act, María addresses a group of peasants and delivers a rousing harangue on behalf of Joanna and the Portuguese. Her arguments, however, meet their match with Antona's appeal to truth: “voz del pueblo es voz de Dios” (2.194) (the voice of the people is the voice of God). Beyond bandying words, Antona leads her rag-tag group of peasants, armed with farming tools, against the Portuguese soldiers and supporters, and in the thick of the melee, Antona brandishes Isabel's standard and uses it as a weapon against the Portuguese. María, in contrast, receives a much less heroic portrayal. From the safety of her fortress, she heaves a large rock down upon the unsuspecting Antona who crumples at the blow. María urges her soldiers to finish Antona off, arguing that she is the key to Afonso's victory: “Nunca Alfonso entrará en Toro, / viviendo Antona García” (2.362–63) (Afonso will never take Toro / so long as Antona García lives). Antona's life, however, is spared, and she subsequently escapes from Toro's prison by setting fire to her bedding. At this point, she appears on stage wielding a club improvised from a bedpost, thus showing how items like a bed can change their domestic significance in her hands to be used as weapons of war.

With this shift, Tirso ousts Antona from the confines of the feminine space, providing her as a counterpoint to the queen, who remains inside. In the remainder of the play, Antona's actions move her further from the model sphere of femininity to which Isabel adheres and closer to a caricatured *mujer varonil*. In the play's final scene, Antona once again leaps into battle, promising Toro for Ferdinand and Isabel: “que yo he de ser la primera / que pase el Duero” (3.1173–74) (for I shall be the first / to cross the Duero). Ferdinand gives her his horse, and she accompanies the scouting party into the occupied Toro. The final scene shows Antona on the battlements, victoriously shouting and reveling over her role: “¡A ellos, que aquí está Antona!” (3.1237) (Have at them, Antona is here!). Antona, then,

becomes the embodiment of the military champion that Isabel, as leader of Spain's *Reconquista*, was often symbolically fashioned to reflect.

The queen's active participation in military exploits was a common topic among chroniclers. The anonymous *Crónica incompleta de los reyes católicos* detailed the events in Toro and highlighted the queen's actions: "No solo la reyna tenia cuydado de gouernar y tener en justicia el Reyno, mas avn en cosas de la guerra ningund varon tanta soliçitud y diligençia podiera poner" (Puyol 310) (not only did the queen take care in ruling and maintaining law and order in the Kingdom, but even in war no male could equal her care and diligence). Elizabeth Lefffeldt, in an analysis of the extent to which contemporary chroniclers addressed Isabel's agency during the many wars undertaken during her reign, finds that the story is often recounted of how Isabel physically led her armies to Granada in Ferdinand's absence (110–14). In Isabel's chronicles, then, she often appears as a warrior queen, one who actively strategized and went to war for her kingdom. Literary accounts helped to develop this image further, drawing parallels between Isabel and other religiously motivated warrior women.

An early example of this type of literary construction was the anonymous *La Poncella de Francia* (c. 1475–1476), a prose narrative recounting the story of Joan of Arc that was dedicated to Isabel as a *speculum principis*. The text draws a comparison between Isabel and the French heroine, channeling Joan of Arc's warlike temperament and divine motivation and presenting her as a model for the Catholic Queen.<sup>12</sup> The text recounts the *Poncella's* valor in battle and her victories, describing her as a cunning strategist, ruthless warrior, and exemplar of female virtue:

E luego quiso el Rey provar las fuerças d'ella por saber si la flaqueza de las mugeres era en ésta según en otras suele ser. Mandó a hombres rezios de su casa que luchassen con ella, la qual tan peligrosamente los derribava, que la sangre por la boca y por los oídos rebentava, y a tal fue, que sin fabla y por muertos tendidos estuvieron algunos días. . . . Y así, d'esta manera, muchas cosas que en fuerça de ningún hombre fueron en aquellos tiempos vistas las fazia muy sin trabajo. (Campo and Infantes, 109)

(And the King wished to test her strength to see if she was weak, like all women. He ordered the fierce men of his household to fight with her, and she so dangerously flung them down that blood gushed from their mouths and ears, so much that they were laid up like dead men, without being able to speak, for a few days. . . . And so, in this way, she did many things effortlessly that had never been witnessed, not even as done by men.)

Virtuous and impressively strong, even more so than most men, such is the model presented to Isabel. Joan of Arc's role in France's recuperation was essential; she was the paladin sent by God to redeem France at a time when the kingdom was reeling from civil wars instigated by foreign powers, a situation that bore a strong resemblance to Isabel's accession. The *Poncella*, then, becomes a referent and model in Isabel's self-construction, and these traits form part of the myth that grew around Isabel in the following centuries.

In Tirso's play, Antona fulfills much the same function as the *Poncella* by assuming the exaggerated blend of qualities that described Isabel as a warrior queen. Antona has found another use for domestic objects by wielding a bedpost as a club, and she has become the paladin who represents Isabel's interests in Castile's War of Succession. Isabel's masculine side, her legacy as a kingly queen in chronicles and literature, thus finds a proponent and imitator in the figure of Antona. At the same time, the play nuances Isabel's image by including scenes that exalt the Catholic Queen's courage and resolve. The play applauds Isabel's bravery and decisiveness in matters of war, and although at times she tactfully defers to Ferdinand in her role as obedient wife, Isabel, like Antona, also shows her assertiveness. For example, when Ferdinand is late in arriving to their encampment, Isabel vows that in his absence she will lead her forces: "esta noche Fernando, cierta tiene / su dicha la victoria; / y si se tarda, gozaré la gloria / yo sola de esta hazaña" (2.407–10) (tonight Ferdinand's / good luck will have certain victory, / and if he delays, / I alone will enjoy the glory of this feat). These promises prove unnecessary, since Ferdinand arrives in time to lead the army against Juana's sympathizers. The final scene, in fact, features Ferdinand and Antona, Isabel's proxy, on the battlements of Toro, relishing in the battle and their victory, while Isabel is conspicuously absent.

Witnessing Isabel's courageous yet unnecessary resolve in defeating Juana, an advisor exclaims: "¡Valor de la Semíramis de España!" (2.411) (The courage of Spain's Semiramis!). Semiramis, Babylonian queen, warrior, and skilled military strategist, was frequently invoked as a comparative model for the queen, both in chronicles and literature.<sup>13</sup> Antona, coincidentally, shares the same model in the play: "Parad, Antona, templad, / Semíramis belicosa" (2.857–58) (Stop, Antona, calm down, / bellicose Semiramis). With this comparison, the mythic figure of a warlike Semiramis becomes an axis upon which Antona and Isabel's mirrored relationship rotates. The shared model draws an affinity between the queen and her peasant supporter and joins their reputation as warrior women. However, this example also provides a useful point of comparison to underscore how the play distinguishes between the two women. Antona is compared to a "Semiramis belicosa," an aggressive, warlike version of the legendary queen, while Isabel is praised for sharing

Semiramis's valor and bravery. These attributes privilege different aspects of their characters; in other words, Antona is physical and violent, while the queen is resolute yet tactful. The play thus dramatizes a more feminine image of the exemplary queen, offsetting her hyperbolic myth to focus instead on her courage, resolve, and virtue.

As the "Semiramis belicosa," Antona's bravery and outlandish behavior intensify during the third act to become almost comically absurd. When she stops at an inn to rest during her journey to join Isabel's forces, she happens upon a group of Portuguese soldiers who are gossiping about her. Without disclosing her identity, Antona listens as they condemn her appropriation of masculine gender roles. One scolds the warrior woman, stressing that instead of taking up arms, she should "[h]ile y barra" (3.339) (spin and sweep), while another claims he would take an oak switch to her ribs and teach her how to behave. When a third chimes in and generalizes that "[q]uerer / usurpar lo que le toca / al hombre, es mundo al revés, / y hacer cabeza a los pies" (3.344–47) (she wants / to usurp the man's role, / it's the world inside-out / and upside-down), Antona can suffer no more of the soldiers' humiliating talk, and she picks up a bench and beats them silly with it. The hilarity and absurdity of this scene, a *mujer varonil* chasing after four soldiers and trouncing them all with yet another domestic object, is accentuated by the fact that Antona is pregnant.

She gives birth to twins immediately following her fight with the Portuguese soldiers, and refuses to pause to rest: "¿Vos / cuidáis que es Antona dama? / Antes de empezar la cena / he de parir y estar buena" (3.428–31) (You / are worried that Antona is a lady? / Before dinner is ready / I shall give birth and be fine). Of course, the audience could expect nothing less from this incredibly virile woman who seems to confuse all laws of nature. Her child-birthing behavior does not surprise those that know her, as a fellow peasant explains: "Parirá, si se le antoja, / diez muchachos en un día, / y se irá, sin hacer cama, / al punto a podar las viñas: / es mujer de digo y hago" (3.825–29) (She will give birth, if it please her, / to ten children in a day, / and then she will go, without resting in bed, / to prune the grapevines: / she's a woman who gets things done). After giving birth, Antona packs up her two daughters and hurries off to the Castilian encampment, "Sale Antona, con dos muchachas al cuello, metidas en unas alforjas, una detrás y otra adelante" (96) (Antona enters with two baby girls around her neck in knapsacks, one in front and one behind). Of course, such incredible behavior reinforces this *mujer varonil*'s hyperbolic identity. It also echoes representations of Isabel during childbirth, as the writer Baltasar Gracián described in the seventeenth century:

Aquella Católica Amaçona, desde quien España no tuuo que embidiar las Cenobias, Tomiris, Semíramis y Pantasileas, pudo ser oráculo destas sutilezas. Encerráuase a parir en el retrete mas obscuro y, zelando el conatural decoro, la innata Majestad echaua vn sello a los suspiros de su real pecho, sin que se le oyese vn ay, y vn velo de tinieblas a los desmanes del semblante. Pero quien assí menudeaua en tan escusables achaques del recato, ¡como que escrupulearía en los del crédito! (qtd. in Rodríguez Valencia 2.35)

(That Catholic Amazon, because of whom Spain has not had to envy the Cenobias, Tomyris, Semiramises and Penthesileas, could be an oracle of these subtleties. She used to shut herself in the darkest chamber to give birth, and watching over her innate decorum, the natural Majesty would put a seal on the sighs of her royal breast, so that not even an “ay” was heard, and a veil of darkness over the excesses in her demeanor. But, she who so scrimped on such excusable aches and pains of childbirth, how much more scrupulous would she be with those in her favor!)

Antona’s birth scene echoes and parodies this image of Isabel as emotionless and stoic during labor. It also reinforces the hilarity of the moment and underscores Antona’s procreative power, her unbelievable physical strength, and her determination for success in Isabel’s war. Finally, it points to the exaggerated and dehumanizing proportions that mythicized history could accrue in the collective memory, thus contesting those trends and providing a more domesticated vision of the Catholic Queen that sought to resituate and circumscribe her within the feminine space.

Moreover, the play parodies Antona García’s own legend. For the historic Antona’s martyrdom in service to the crown, the Catholic Kings conferred on her offspring an especially lucrative tax exemption: “que sean francos de la dicha alcabala los hijos é hijas legítimas [de] Antona García, . . . é sus hijos é hijas dellos y dellas, y los maridos dellas, é los hijos legítimos que dellos descendieren” (López Juana Pinilla 61) (that the legitimate sons and daughters of Antona García, . . . be exempt from said tax, as well as the children of the sons and daughters, the women’s husbands, and their legitimate descendants). This exhaustive list of beneficiaries ostensibly reflected Ferdinand and Isabel’s gratitude toward the matriarch of the clan who sacrificed her life for their right to rule. Such a decree was also a keen political maneuver to maintain favorable public opinion in Toro. In any case, those descendants multiplied exponentially; with each successive generation, they became an



increasing economic liability for the tax base in the jurisdictions they occupied. From 1617 to 1623, many of Antona's descendants were embroiled in legal battles attempting to maintain the privileges conceded to their illustrious ancestor.<sup>14</sup>

When read against this backdrop, Antona's closing words ironically reference the current state of affairs in the Castilian courts: "Señores, los que me escuchan, / todo cuanto ahora han vido / es hestoria verdadera / de privilegios y libros" (3.1245–48) (Gentlemen, those that are listening to me, / everything that you have seen / is true history / from books and documented privileges). The story, however, is not true; in fact, Tirso's version of Antona's life directly contradicts the historical account. Her descendants were awarded the tax exemptions precisely because she died as a martyr for Isabel's cause, not because she singlehandedly trounced the Portuguese. The caricatured Antona becomes a wobbly and almost laughable support for her inheritors' lawsuits in the seventeenth century, almost one hundred and fifty years after their ancestor had proven her worthiness to the kingdom of Castile and Queen Isabel. Antona's final pronouncement, then, is a bitingly ironic nod to the *privilegio* enjoyed by her progeny.

In much the same way, the play's portrayal of Antona critiques the accounts that portrayed Isabel as a "[p]rincesa de ánimo varonil" (Mariana qtd. in Rodríguez Valencia 1.522) (princess of manly spirit). Antona García, historic martyred heroine in her own right, under Tirso's direction, becomes an exaggerated *mujer varonil*. The play binds Antona's image with Isabel's, creating a doubling effect by which Antona personifies and caricatures an overstated version of qualities that were commonly attributed to Isabel in the seventeenth century. In so doing, the play also portrays a more feminine version of Isabel, underscoring her exemplarity as woman and as queen. It is important to note that this play does not directly challenge or parody Isabel. In fact, she appears as a strong, virtuous, and above all verisimilar queen. Rather, Tirso's play presents a distorted reflection of her myth in dramatized form. The play hyperbolizes Antona's ferocity while accentuating Isabel's domesticity, thus relegating Isabel to the confines of the prescriptive models of femininity while at the same time casting Antona outside this space. Into this fanciful account brimming with Castilian nationalistic fervor, the playwright has inserted a parodic commentary directed at royal historiography and has realigned Isabel's legacy with the dictates of his contemporary gender normativity.

## NOTES

1. All translations are my own.
2. Recent criticism has questioned the veracity of the chroniclers' accounts. Archival evidence in Segovia points to a much simpler ceremony devoid of elaborate symbols and ornamentation, including that of the unsheathed sword. Whether apocryphal or not, the coronation as recorded in her contemporary chronicles epitomizes Isabel's self-construction and enduring image. Indeed, the fact that the queen's chroniclers recorded her coronation in this manner, even though it may have been a complete fabrication, highlights the importance of Isabel's self-fashioning. As Nancy F. Marino has asserted, "The Queen herself also seems to have created the Isabel that she needed" (187). For a detailed study of the differing accounts of the coronation procession and its possible apocryphal nature, see Carrasco Manchado (23–37).
3. Veronika Ryjik, in her work on early modern theater's contribution to a budding Spanish nationalism, underscores plays' depiction of Isabel's role in fostering a religiously oriented nationalistic community among the early modern audience (129). DeLys Ostlund argues that in the work of Lope de Vega, idealized versions of the lives of the Catholic Monarchs are standard fare, and she finds that the prevailing image of Isabel, across a broad selection of Lope's plays, is one of exemplary piety and wifely obedience (111–13).
4. *Antona García* was originally published in Tirso's *Cuarta Parte* (1635). Following political, cultural, and juridical clues, Ruth Kennedy dated the play's composition to early 1623 (198–208). Margaret Wilson, in her edition of the play, corroborates Kennedy's dates but argues that Tirso may have revised the text as late as 1625 (ix–x).
5. Joanna's nickname, Juana la Beltraneja, alludes to this dubious parentage. In Tirso's play, Antona García also relies on these rumors to win the support of the peasantry: "mas ¿cuál, diga la nobleza, / es mejor que al reino acuda, / una hija de Enrique en duda, / o una hermana con certeza?" (2.205–08) (but, let the nobility speak, / who is better to attend to the kingdom, / a daughter of Henry in doubt, / or a sister with certainty?). It is important to note that Antona speaks with a rustic *sayagués* dialect, a geographically neutral early modern theatrical convention used to designate peasants and produce an endearing, comic effect (Wilson xxv–xxvi).
6. For more on the War of Succession, see Liss (*Isabel* 118–41) and Azcona (155–81).
7. For more on Antona's history, see Wilson (x–xii) and Fernández Duro (91–94).
8. Antona's legacy lives on today as a street name in Toro, the Avenida Antona García, and as a tourist attraction, the Golden Grate, the gilded window where local legend places her garroting. More recently, Bodega Rejadorada has released a wine in Antona's memory, affirming that the wine displays characteristics shared by Antona: "Sutil y elegante con fuerza y personalidad, . . . honor y valentía en una copa de vino (*Ficha de cata Antona García*) (subtle and elegant with strength and personality . . . honor and bravery in a glass of wine). Painter and writer José Carlos Guerra has also

- published a novel of historical fiction with Editorial Círculo Rojo about Antona and her role in the War of Succession, *La reja dorada. No la llaméis Beltraneja* (2017).
9. Tirso shortened the historical Bartolomé to Bartolo. For a detailed contemporary account, see *Crónica incompleta de los reyes católicos* (Puyol 313–17).
  10. For a broader discussion on the *speculum principis* tradition and the *Jardín*, see Guardiola-Griffiths (23–44).
  11. This contradictory image of Isabel responds to a broader discourse present in European monarchies on division between the body natural and the body politic. For a historical and philosophical discussion on the concept of the monarch's two bodies, see Kantorowicz.
  12. For the importance of the work in Isabelline propaganda and legitimization, see Carrasco Manchado (210–13) and Guardiola-Griffiths (69–94). Carrasco Manchado proposes the 1475–1476 date for composition.
  13. When comparing Isabel with Semiramis, writers conveniently ignored those gruesome or sinful attributes (incest and defeat) that did not correspond with Isabel's excellence and virtuous demeanor (Howe 94).
  14. For more on this specific lawsuit and its relation to Tirso's play, see Kennedy.

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