

Gender and Class as Challenges for Feminist Biographies in Early Modern Spain ^[1]

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It has not been very long since a disheartened Domna Stanton, in an important anthology titled *The Female Autograph*, noted that, when searching for exemplars of the genre, "women's autobiographies [were] conspicuous by their absence." ^[2] Until the recent studies by feminist critics, the same could be said of any work written by a woman in early modern Spain. Indeed, save mainly for Manuel Serrano y Sanz, who insisted on challenging the belief, female-authored works of any genre were regarded as non-existent. ^[3] Happily, the recent rush of feminist studies on Golden Age female religious and secular poets, playwrights, and novelists has greatly advanced the recovery of early modern Spanish women's writings. ^[4] This feminist criticism has incisively noted the anxiety of authorship with which early modern women launched their literary careers, an anxiety that nonetheless did not deter them from appropriating those genres previously gendered male. At a time that saw the proliferation of new genres, the writers' commitment to experimentation was by no means unimportant. While Serrano y Sanz organized his exhaustive collection of women writers alphabetically, giving no subdivisions by literary genres, the recent editions of works by separate categories such as religious writings, plays, and poetry suggests that female authors, no less than their critics, were acutely aware of generic selection.

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The genre differentiation so carefully denoted in the anthologies nonetheless remains blurred in practice, since women contributed to most, if not all, of the literary discourses that proliferated in the early modern period, among which are included lyric poetry, plays of intrigue, short stories, novels of chivalry, and the epic. Moreover, although these different categories constitute the recovered canon of early modern women's fiction, many of its authors, whether by design or by demand, also wrote nonfictional works, in particular, educational treatises, sermons, and autobiographies. The only genre that received little attention from women writers is the biography, a category that, for reasons I hope to make clear, continues to prove challenging to feminists. ^[5] This essay addresses two secular women writers' versions of the genre in order to investigate their impact on the several aspects of women's writing: first, what such biographical projects reveal to us about class and gender, since the genre, like other writings by women, opens a window on the perceptions and articulations of a specifically female-centered world. Second, how these biographies functioned within the historical context of the social and political negotiations required for publication by women in the early modern period.

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The genres accessible to readers for the first time through women's own utterance have enriched both the social and literary histories of the period: they have proffered new insights into the social construction of gender as much as they have instructed us on genre formation. They further offer us an opportunity to obtain biographical information about the historical authors who too often remain hidden from critical view in the shadow of their own texts. Despite the very real dangers of misreading the writing for its authors, we may still glean significant aspects of their subjectivity through the self-referential traces left in their literary production. Although the complex play of imitation and intertextuality that so distinguishes early modern literary texts precludes a naive reading as either sincere or confessional, deconstructive and historicist approaches often disclose the unstated or implied in the fissures and gaps of literary texts. In its choice and rejection of specific models, in its use or renunciation of linguistic and stylistic expressions, women's fiction

permits an entry into an other-ordered world that speaks to gender difference, even when such difference remains silent or repressed.

More often than not, however, women's lives, even those of literate or elite women who left a considerable paper trail, have remained unwritten and, when written, unread. We know that the dearth of research on women writers in the past was not due only or even mainly to a lack of information, but just as damagingly, to scholarly neglect. ^[6] Not until the movement to recuperate women's writings began in earnest over two decades ago, led in part by the development of international feminism, were traditional history and literary studies revised to include women and their works. The focus by feminist scholars on social and cultural history has given impetus to sustained, rather than merely sporadic, investigation on the material conditions of women's lives. Following Anglo-American feminism, literary critics of early modern Spain and the New World have begun to mine the revisionary research of María Isabel Barbeito, Jodi Bilinkoff, Asunción Lavrin, Josefina Muriel, and Mary Elizabeth Perry, to name but several feminist historians who record the impact of gender in their social and historical analyses. ^[7]

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Not surprisingly, biographies of early modern women have primarily attracted the attention of modern women scholars. The risks involved in formulating these lives are not limited to a reliance on inconclusive or insufficient data. For scholars committed to such projects, the labor entails significant personal as well as professional investment. Personal, because the selection and interpretation of an other's life and works frequently exacts a psychological price by revealing facets of our own selves. ^[8] Professional, because projects on women writers, despite their intellectual legitimacy, continue to be rated below market value by academic departments that trade in canonical currency. ^[9] Indeed, the attitudes that compelled Annette Kolodny to reproach English departments some twenty years ago under the banner of her feminist manifesto "Dancing Through the Minefield," have yet to disappear from Spanish departments:

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If we are scholars dedicated to rediscovering a lost body of writings by women, then our finds are questioned on aesthetic grounds. And if we are critics, determined to practice revisionist readings, it is claimed that our focus is too narrow, and our results are only distortions or, worse still, polemical misreadings. ^[10]

At this late date, we need not endorse Kolodny's rebuke merely to indict our own field, but to recognize that we must still struggle to convince some of our male colleagues of the importance of women's contributions. ^[11] Certainly, the dismally low numbers of men at conferences dedicated to women writers—and the fact that the latter continue to be advertised as conferences on *women* writers—prove that the vast majority of our male colleagues consider female authors unworthy of their scholarly attention. Only Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Santa Teresa de Ávila have repaid their male biographers with anything like the kind of critical reception given biographers of canonical male writers. We should note, however, that most male *sorjuanistas* and *teresistas*, like Francisco Márquez Villanueva and Octavio Paz, were already well established in their field when they chose to write on these female subjects.

In contrast to the biographies of early modern women, those of male authors, such as Jean Canavaggio's study of Cervantes and Pablo Jauralde Pou's of Quevedo, are usually exhaustively documented and widely publicized. ^[12] Canavaggio's was quickly translated from its French original into Spanish and English, while Jauralde Pou's recent biography, published in two simultaneous editions and amply displayed by specialized and

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nonspecialized bookstores alike, proved a huge best-seller in Spain. This was not the case for Peggy Liss's biography of Isabel la Católica, whose Spanish translation received little publicity, despite its subject's deserved celebrity status. ^[13] The popularized "autobiographies" of historical women such as Almudena de Arteaga's recreation of the life of Ana de Mendoza, the Princess of Éboli, have received more reader attention, perhaps due to the racy nature of their contents. ^[14] In 1988, the American historian Gerda Lerner proclaimed that the "biographical field within women's history remains one of the most promising and challenging for the researcher." ^[15] With the welcome appearance recently of some excellent publications on early modern women writers, this promise is now being met. ^[16] The challenges, however, remain.

Both the professional and the personal risks of women's biography are trenchantly addressed in the anthology *The Challenge of Feminist Biography*, edited by four American historians: Sara Alpern, Joyce Antler, Ingrid Winther Scobie, and Elisabeth Israels Perry. ^[17] The essays in the collection, which proffer biographical sketches of eleven modern American women, are in themselves autobiographical accounts, as they articulate the emotional and intellectual concerns of the women biographers when assuming the projects. ^[18] Given their modernity, the lives examined in the collection were, in general, already well documented, either through the subjects' own works or through historical papers. One author had the additional benefit of interviewing her subject, and all include a photograph of the women studied, so the reader can visualize as well as learn about them. Nevertheless, the challenges faced by the biographers are remarkably similar to those encountered by the biographers of early modern women. As an example, despite the authors' historical proximity to their subjects, not all found biographical information readily available. Writing about her grandmother, the labor activist Belle Moskowitz, Elizabeth Perry remarks on the scarcity of documentation, which then inspired her even more to reconstruct her ancestor's life through a more profound analysis: "[b]ecause of the paucity of ... papers, I had to rely more than I would have liked on context. ... Having so little material ... forced me to probe deeply for meaning in the documents I did have . . . Thus a paucity of sources stretched my abilities as a historian, a process I found exhilarating" (93). ^[19]

But the project, Perry complains, was also taxing for her: "I needed time to absorb the history I was reading. My search for primary sources proved time-consuming and difficult. In addition, I had family and career obligations to meet. My children ... were still small. Moreover, my university teaching career had stalled ... In the end, twelve years passed between the decision to write the book and its publication" (83). And despite her efforts, she found that not all were happy with her choice of subject. When Perry gave a paper on Moskowitz at the Berkshire Conference on Women's History, the commentator chided her for "writing about someone who was not a 'feminist'" and suggested that she would "contribute more to the field by writing a collective biography of *nonelite* women" (91).

Another contributor to the collection, Lois Rudnick, begins her chapter on the life of Mabel Dodge Luhan with the subtitle, "Mable Who?" ^[20] The misspelled name, she tells us, is a reflection on how quickly the author was forgotten, despite her popularity during her lifetime: "The question of who Mabel Dodge Luhan was seems to me particularly provocative, for she was hardly an obscure figure in her own lifetime. ... From 1911 through 1940, her life story and character had figured in at least a dozen published novels, short stories, poems, and plays. Harcourt, Brace had published four volumes of her memoirs during the 1930s. ... Yet by 1974, when I began my research, she was all but forgotten by scholars and public alike" (Rudnick 119-20). Rudnick's reason for choosing her subject uncannily echoes the similarities that link early modern women with our own historical moment: "When I discovered Mabel Dodge Luhan ... I recognized the striking connection

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between her generation and my own intellectual and political autobiography. The men and women in the Luhan circle were among the earliest to respond to the human costs of our emergence as a major urban industrial power and world empire" (123). ^[21] As the editors note in the anthology's introduction, gender is, for these biographers, the distinguishing factor: "they accept as a given that gender will always, in some way, be central to an understanding of a woman's life, even if that woman is not particularly conscious of that centrality or even denies it" (8). The biographers focus on the importance of female friendships for their subjects, and stress that, as *women* biographers, they developed an especially close relationship with the authors ("Introduction" 9-10). Rudnick contends that we must first call into question the "masculinist grounds on which biography has conventionally been defined and accepted" (9).

The insights shared in this collection by modern biographers shed light on the biographical work currently being done on early modern women. Despite significant historical and cultural differences, women's lives often connect transculturally and through time as they position themselves against a misogynist hierarchy, whether in sixteenth-century Spain or in early nineteenth-century North America. Even though American women already formed a strong feminist movement in the nineteenth century, both countries were developing urban societies with women's roles in flux, and both represented world empires powerfully driven by exclusive masculinist interests. This does not mean that women's positions are always identical, whether diachronically or synchronically. What it does signify is that both gender and class need to be addressed as categories of analysis. The early modern women whom I discuss in this essay, still little-known even to Spanish scholars, offer some of the same difficulties that nineteenth-century American women presented to their biographers, and for similar reasons. One similarity hinges on the lack of biographical documentation, which has kept us from knowing exactly who these women are: as with the readers of Mabel Dodge Luhan's biography, most of my readers will be unfamiliar with Ana de Castro y Egas and Isabel de Liaño. Another resemblance resides in the biographical practice: like the American writers, Castro y Egas and Liaño are also women biographers, although not, as we will see, in the conventional sense. For instead of a traditional prose hagiography, Isabel de Liaño composed an epic poem in honor of the Italian saint Catherine of Siena, *Historia de la vida, muerte, y milagros de santa Catalina de Sena*, while Ana de Castro y Egas wrote a short, idealized history of Philip III titled *Eternidad del Rey don Filipe Tercero, Nuestro Señor, el Piadoso*. Following the example of feminist historians, my aim is to recover these women's elusive subjectivity as much as possible by examining what these atypical biographies have to say of their early modern authors. Moreover, as I am myself a woman writing about women writers, they are at once my subjects and my counterparts. Because, like them, I have chosen biography as a genre, I am doubly in collusion with them in attempting to sort out their complexities both as writers and as women.

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Save for what Serrano y Sanz states in his notes, I have found no biographical information for Ana de Castro Egas and Isabel de Liaño. As is the case with most of his entries, theirs merely consist of discrete pieces of information gathered from mainly unrecorded sources. He wonders, for example, whether Isabel de Liaño might not be the daughter of Felipe de Liaño, a painter called "el pequeño Tiziano" and Sánchez Coello's disciple (12). ^[22] We are grateful, therefore, that Liaño's impressive epic on the life of Saint Catherine of Siena, comprised of three books and stretching over five hundred pages, makes sure to contain several self-referential allusions. The poem's paratext includes the usual approvals by censors, a prologue to the reader, the address to a patron, and numerous dedicatory poems. In these introductory sections, we first glean some biographical facts about Isabel de Liaño. The title page notes that she was born in Palacios de Campos and that her poem, dedicated to Philip III's wife Queen Margaret of Austria, was published in Valladolid in 1604. The poem's censor Luis de la Puente, a respected Jesuit ascetic,

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mentions that Isabel is a widow. He adds that he authorizes the book's publication since it declares nothing against the faith, but also, following Horace, because it narrates a pious story in what the censor terms an agreeable ("apacible") style (3r).

In the "Prologue to the Reader," Isabel first demonstrates her cognizance of the dangers inherent in women's authorship. Sherry Velasco has perceived the difficulties in classifying this poem as a biography, and endorses it instead as "the poetic narration of a woman's life," one that "weaves [Isabel] into the life of Catalina de Siena." ^[23] Through its intense identification with the saint, manifested in an assertive, albeit cautious tone, Isabel's prologue clearly assumes a defensive posture. Liaño discloses a deep awareness of the problems she faces because of her gender, but her poem also reveals the anxieties suffered by a woman writer with little or no aristocratic affiliations. She begins by stating that she does not wish to challenge women's inferiority—an opinion held by no less an expert than Saint Paul—since she would be accused of defending her own case. She cunningly calls on God to defend her temerity, anticipating any criticism of female audacity, which she compares to the mythical fall of Icarus: "debaxo de cuya [God's] sombra las alas de mi pluma crecieron tanto que sin temor del incendio fogoso de lenguas mordaces, se atrevieron a bolar tan alto, que a no llevar tal reparo pudiera tener el miserable sucesso del mal considerado Icaro" (4v). Isabel insists that, as a "simple mujer" endowed with a feeble intelligence, she owes her new literary ability to Divine Providence, as a favor for her desire to extol the saint's life: "La divina providencia que admite y premia buenos deseos, agradeciendo el que yo tenia de hazer este servicio a su Santa, proveyo a mi pobre ingenio de algun caudal" (5r).

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After this conventional humility *topos*, however, she is ready to assert that the negative opinion held of women has worked in her favor. Since no one believes the poem could have been written by a woman, to attribute it to her authorship actually calls attention to the poem:

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Despues que por la misericordia de Dios saque mi trabajo a luz ... con la incredulidad de nuestros contraditores diziendo, que hurte esta Poesia y que alguno que la hizo la quiso atribuyr a mi por aventajarse en la venta della, pues por tener nombre de autor tan desacreditado gustarian de verla todos con curiosidad y como cosa a su parecer imposible. (5r-5v)

Liaño explains that the poem's ordinary style and lack of rhetorical flourishes prove that it was written by a woman, but they also establish its veracity:

[L]a llaneza del verso tan sin ornato del que vsan los famosos poetas, da testimonio de la verdad, pues vn language tan casero sin acotar con historias profanas, fabulas de Ouidio, curiosidades de Virgilio, Astros y Planetas, Satyros y Ninfas, bien claro manifiesta ser traça de pecho femeníl. (5v)

Yet, in an apparently paradoxical move, she refuses to deny her knowledge of classical literary sources (in the process, giving us another clue to her life). Rather than ascribe the poem's simplicity to any female essentialism, she clarifies her express choice, not to reject the profane, as moralists enjoined women readers, but to keep it separate from the sacred: "aunque confiesse de mi que por auer leydo algunas dellas, quças supiera engerillas aqui, si de mi inclinacion no fuera tan enemiga de ver las historias diuinas adulteradas con las profanas" (5v).

Liaño's poem, although a hagiographic—and thus theologically acceptable—rendering of Catherine of Siena's life, still requires that she defend her choice of topic. The biography,

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written in Catalan by Catherine's confessor Ramon de Capua, was published in Sicily, Venice, Germany, and in Norway most probably to advance her canonization at the end of the fourteenth century. It was translated into Castilian from a Latin version by the Dominican Antonio de la Peña in 1511, by order of Cardinal Cisneros, whose devotion to female religious accompanied the growth of spiritual communities led by women. [24] After the Council of Trent, however, women mystics lost considerable ground in attracting followers, as the Church clamped down on heterodox practices. Since Catherine was celebrated for her mystical experiences, Isabel finds she must justify both the genre and its subject matter. A rhymed version of the saint's life composed by a "simple" woman, she claims, will more easily delight readers and impress God's grandeur on their memory than its prose chronicle: "considerando el buen zelo con que se hizo, el qual fue manifestar a todos las excelencias que Dios obro en esta gloriosa Santa, que aunque su Coronica las manifiesta, con todo esso andaran mas frequentes con el gusto del verso y compuesto por vna muger simple" (5v). Assimilating her suffering to that of her subject, Isabel tells us that she was herself harassed for writing the poem. Yet the experiences of both the subject and her author redound in God's glory: in the same way that God displays his greatness through Catherine, he reveals his omnipotence through Isabel:

La imposibilidad de nuestra parte entrañas, en parte, o arte ni marañas Dios reparte, hazañas, suya, arguya. (47v)	es siempre, por tener frias Que no porque mi pluma os quente aqui ficiones Y pues con esta santa Parte de sus secretos y Sabernos bastara ser obra Para que lo increíble no se
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A notable aspect of Liaño's poeticized biography is that its intended audience is female, as she again anticipates men's negative reception of her work:

Y tu lector, si tibio te sintieres, mal se perciben, ruego, si quisieres, tales no se escriuen: para mugeres, deuocion mejor reciben, lo merezca, haran estima, mano femenil la rima. (vv. 49-56; 2r)	y mis versos en ti no los leas te Pues para ti los Solo los escrivi Que lo que es Y aunque no Por ser de
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Concerned that her efforts would not attract a male patron, she dedicates the poem to a woman: Margaret of Austria, who married Philip III in 1599. Isabel remarks that although she composed the poem years before, she waited until the queen arrived in Spain to submit it for publication:

[T]emerosa del peligro [que quedara este libro huerfano de favor tan alto] estube mucho tiempo con mi libro acabado esperando la dichosa venida de vuestra Real Magestad a España, dando por muy bien empleado el mucho esperar. (2v-3r)

Not content with merely human, albeit royal, sponsorship, she also dedicates it to the Virgin Mary, asking for her intercession. The poem thus becomes what Velasco calls a

"gynocentric" discourse: from its apostrophe to all women, through its dedication to Queen Margaret and the Virgin Mary, it intends a defense of Catherine's—and by extension, women's—devotion to the Holy Eucharist, of her right to prophesy, and of her miraculous interventions. [\[25\]](#) Moreover, as she narrates the saint's life, Isabel increasingly assumes Catherine's demanding role. By the end of the second book, she fully accepts the weight of her project and identifies completely with her subject: she is as exhausted by her writing, she tells us, as Catherine is by her life. Isabel no longer laments her incompetence, but takes on Catherine's intellectual strength as she declares how carefully she constructs the poem's third book, laying the groundwork for the poetic edifice:

Y pues gozado aveys de sus valores	
En el segundo libro y el	
primero	Y Dios por medio
della da fauores	A mi
simplicidad, passarme quiero	A
tratar de otras cosas no menores,	
Fundando el edificio del tercero,	
Assentando el cimiento y primer canto	
Aunque en los otros me he cansado tanto. (277v)	

Isabel de Liaño creates a woman-centered poem that simultaneously admits to and reacts against feminine weakness, as much intellectual as social. According to Nieves Baranda, the ambiguities in the poem report to the moment during which the poem was published. In a thoughtful article on women writers, Baranda describes the first half of the seventeenth century as a time when female authors felt they had to account for themselves as writers, imitating Saint Teresa in their choice of particular readers: 15

[H]ay algunas autoras que para resguardarse de las críticas de los lectores en su mayoría hombres, imitando consciente o inconscientemente a Santa Teresa, prefieren acercarse al menos de forma expresa a grupos de receptores seleccionados, que coinciden con ellas en encontrarse al margen del poder social en situación de tutela. [\[26\]](#)

While I agree with Baranda's astute evaluation that women's writing reflects the various personal and social negotiations required of them in distinct historical periods, there is more at work in Liaño's poem than her marginalization through the censure of female authorship by male readers. Although, I can only speculate on the little information from Serrano y Sanz, it is most likely that Liaño belonged to burgeoning middle class. The tensions explicitly registered by the poem's female authorship thus also function as a sign of class pressures. The absence of aristocratic patronage is perceptible in the identity of the authors of the dedicatory poems, all of whom are *juristas* or lawyers. Without the sanction of class status, sponsorship by nobles for women's works was difficult, if not impossible. This would explain why Isabel waited until she could approach the young queen, known for her religiosity, for her support, and even perhaps why the poem was not published until the court moved from Madrid to Valladolid, where the queen exerted considerably more power. [\[27\]](#)

Like gender, then, class is a central criterion of analysis for women's writing. By electing to write the life of a Spanish monarch, Ana de Castro y Egas is seemingly more bold in her choice of subject than Isabel de Liaño. Castro y Egas—who published the *Eternidad* in 1629—and Liaño both chose genres—secular history and religious epic—not readily associated with women writers. In doing so, they both idealized their subjects at times when such idealization was considered politically dangerous or, at the very least, 16

raised questions as to the topical import of their subject matter. Yet, while their gender unites them, their class status differentiates them, since, in contrast to Isabel de Liaño, Ana de Castro y Egas was surely a member of the aristocracy. To make this claim, however, I must again speculate from the few pieces of information that we have of her. [28] Although significantly better-connected socially than Liaño, Castro y Egas receives almost as little attention from Serrano y Sanz. What he does tell us is that she was born in Granada, but spent most of her life in Madrid; he cites from Lope de Vegas's *Laurel*: "En la corte de Felipe estaba / .../ ¡Oh ninfa ya de nuestro patria río!" (249). Her Introduction to Philip III's biography, however, offers some clues as to the possibility of noble status.

Castro y Egas dedicates the *Eternidad* to Philip's son, Cardinal-Prince Ferdinand, known to her since childhood. [29] Since Ferdinand was famous for his support of writers, the dedication confirms that the author moved easily in a male literary world of noble patronage. Although the name Castro was common both in Spain and Portugal, her relations at court—as well as the *Eternidad*'s date of publication, as I mention below—suggest that she may have belonged to the Castro side of the Counts of Lemos. [30] Her unusual second name, Egas, originates either in Flanders or, more likely, in Portugal. [31] She was certainly well known socially, judging from the long list of important figures who wrote the dedicatory poems to her royal biography, including the Marquis of Alcañices, the Count of Siruela, and Philip's powerful favorite the Duke of Lerma, the Count of Lemos's uncle and father-in-law. Her extensive contacts also included literary figures such as Lope de Vega and Gabriel Bocángel, Juan Pérez de Montalbán, and Joseph Pellicer de Salas y Tovar. The dedicatory sonnet by Lope de Vega stresses the biographical genre's conventional purpose of resurrecting the deceased through the retelling of his life:

Tu dulce voz, qual suele en Primavera
Suaue despertar Zefiro a Flora,
En las cenizas que animo sonora
Viuir Filipe donde espira, espera. (1-4, 21).

As Serrano y Sanz notes, the distinguished group with whom Castro y Egas associated strongly suggests that she belonged to one of the Madrid literary academies that catered to writers and their noble patrons. Indeed, several of these poems address her as Anarda, a pseudonym typical of the pastoral names assumed by academy members. Although numerous writers and aristocrats appear as authors of these dedicatory poems, the most famous is undoubtedly Lerma, whose broodingly despondent sonnet, with its emphasis on ruins, the stormed-tossed sea, and the torments of death, recalls his break with Philip III and his consequent fall from power in 1618:

<p>Sin paz el mar, entre las ondas rizas Ruynas repite (injuria de la suerte) la muerte, sus cenizas martirizas, importa, q[ue] a deuerte, oluido en lo q[ue] aduierde aplausos que eternizas. viuir de auer viuido, Deuiendo a tu verdad segunda gloria, esperança. mismo agradecido,</p>	<p>Y la tierra tormentas de Del que por ti renace en Al tiempo con tu pluma Pues le para, o no Tanto contra el Llegaran los Filipe Viuir aun mas alla de la Tu cuydado en si Pues tu credito el</p>
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Rey, tu su memoria
eleccion de su alabança. (18)

es paga, tu

Here, a defeated Lerma nevertheless mourns the death of his former patron and hails Castro y Egas's biography for ensuring his remembrance. To be sure, it exalts Philip's relationship with his favorite Lerma, noting that the monarch richly rewarded the Duke and his two sons, the Duque de Uceda and the Duque de Saldaña, for their services (23r). By stating that Philip's fame will again rise, Phoenix-like, from the truth written by Castro y Egas's pen, Lerma bespeaks her credibility as a biographer. Commenting that the biographer attributes Philip's worth not to his virtues, but to his having appointed Lerma his "alter ego," Antonio Feros views the biography primarily as an homage to Lerma. ^[32] Yet the dedicatory poem, I believe, instead substantiates Castro y Egas's social standing, since it allows the disgraced favorite, who at the time was already exiled, a venue at court from which to herald the king's—and, no doubt, his own—vindication by history.

The approval by formidable poet and court preacher Hortencio Félix Paravicino acclaims Castro y Egas's erudition and elevates her to the same category as the muses: "Pongan los noticiosos este papel mas en el numero de las mugeres doctas, que en vnas letras y otras han escrito, y descansan los curiosos en la question antigua: Por q[ue] la Erudicion dio nombres de mugeres y no de hombres a las Musas?" (3v). Paravicino's hyperbolic rhetorical question means to praise her control of the written word; indeed, he has no problem in accepting her as a learned woman. If Paravicino's approval were not enough to endorse Castro y Egas's talents as a biographer despite her sex, the *Eternidad* begins with an introduction by another authoritative male writer—Francisco de Quevedo, who also admires Castro y Egas's style and learning: 19

El volumen es descansado, el estilo pulido, con estudio dichoso, las palabras sin bastardia mendigada de otras lenguas ... tan docto escrupulo ha tenido en lo que dexa, como cuerda eleccion en lo que elige; la sentencia es viua y freque[n]te, los afectos eficaces y deuidos; pues sin digresiones forasteras dexa viuir su vida al Principe. (60)

The *Eternidad*, so well received by so many men, ardently extols the king's virtues. Among these, for Castro y Egas, is the wisdom of his ruling in 1609 to expel the *moriscos*, perhaps the most controversial decision from a king not known for decisive action: "Fue hazaña marauillosa, q[ue] la expulsion de tantas familias, dueños ya de casi la mitad destos Reynos, se co[n]siguiesse sin derramar sangre, ni aun desnudar los Catolicos espada" (15r). The biography also reiterates the king's legendary chastity, as he remained celibate after Margaret's death, apparently restraining his sensual appetite, which Castro y Egas vividly describes as "aquella bestia indomita de la sensualidad, enseñada a correr libre" (20r).

Yet the biography was not published until 1929, eight years after Philip's death in 1621. Lerma, who did not die until 1625, had long since fallen from power, as had his sons. Why, then, was the biography published so late after Philip's death? Ana de Castro merely states that she wrote it to honor Philip III's son, the Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand, whom she had known as a small boy. The numerous dedicatory poems, as well as Quevedo's foreword, would seem to indicate that it was intended to circulate at court as an abbreviated form of a *speculum principae* or manual for princes, as it was composed during the first decade of Philip IV's monarchy. At the time of its composition, Spain was in the midst of a major economic depression. The king's increasingly powerful *privado*, the Count-Duke of Olivares, who had been instrumental in Lerma's fall in 1618, pressed for devaluating the currency. In effect, according to John Elliott, his reforms "constituted a direct challenge to old-established values and practices" (324). 20

Intensely disliked, Olivares and his government were blamed for the ills that had befallen Spain. Writing to his patron the Duque de Sessa, Lope de Vega complained that "there was neither food, nor clothing, nor money" (cited in Elliott, 336), and it is not unlikely that the circulation of Castro y Egas's biography at court intended to remind the young king, who had recently recovered from a grave illness, that he had better assume some measure of control. Certainly, the purpose of the biography was to praise the father's rule and, by implication, serve as model to the son's. Its title, *Eternidad de del Rey don Filipe III*, underscores the king's salvation, but it also encloses the metaphorical meaning of eternity, the extension of one's life through fame. Written very recently after Philip IV's illness, the biography may well have contributed to king's changed behavior since his illness, when he began to attend personally to court business (Elliott 318). Its publication, moreover, at a time when the expulsion of the *moriscos* was coming under fire—and, not coincidentally, when Olivares had invited the Portuguese conversos to serve as royal bankers in Spain—also justified Philip III's actions in attempting to maintain Spanish religious orthodoxy. Commenting on Quevedo's role in prologuing the biography, Pablo Jauralde Pou states that "hay algo de vindicación del viejo régimen y de los Sandoval en esta obrita," which he considers "una auténtica promoción" (576). The complaints of the anti-Olivares faction, which included the Count of Lemos, Elliott tells us, was bound to have an effect on the young king (372). In 1629, the year Castro y Egas's *Eternidad* was published, the Dutch demanded a truce similar to the one Philip IV's father Philip III had signed in 1609. As the months passed, however, and Olivares wore down the king's resolve, Philip IV apparently lost his nerve, along with most of his experienced and independent ministers. In September, the dejected and disillusioned Count of Lemos took the robes of a Benedictine monk (Elliott 383).

Both biographies by Isabel de Liaño and Ana de Castro y Egas serve to differentiate their authors not only from male writers, by gender, but from each other, by class. As a likely member of the nobility, Ana de Castro received an education—evinced in her vocabulary and elegant, concise style—that far surpassed Isabel de Liaño's. Although her class status empowered her to contend with the life of a king, I believe that it was due to the timeliness of its political implications that her biography of Philip III was so readily accepted. In its support for political and religious stability, the *Eternidad* contributed to the critique of the Count-Duke of Olivares. While it did not voice concerns over women's authorship, and therefore is far from Jauralde Pou's notion that it promoted "una curiosa corriente feminista" at court (576), the biography nonetheless motivated several poems by noblewomen, among them Castro y Egas's niece Carolina de Río, and her cousin Clara María. The poem by Doña Juana de Luna y Toledo brings to light the nuances through which Castro y Egas, as biographer, is identified with her subject:

Quite a los siglos todo el cuydado	de eternizar al Principe
esta pluma,	Que oy siglos le
anticipa en mudo acento.	Tan prodigiosa
Eternidad le ha dado,	Que aun quiso
reduzirla a breue suma	Porque traiga
mas señas de portento.	

The simultaneous metaphoric and literal eternity accorded the king by extolling his virtues is compressed into the biography's brief length. Moreover, if Ana de Castro's pen is sufficiently powerful to eternalize Philip's life, then it will also grant the author everlasting fame. Although no explicit parallel is made between Castro y Egas and Philip, all the dedicatory lyrics acknowledge that she is clearly in control. Her voice, in the words of another woman's poem, is "émula de la vida / y vencedora del siglo." Lope de Vega, in his *Laurel de Apolo*, asserts that she will be remembered for her biography: "Y pues das a

Felipe eternidades / reserva para ti siglos de edades" (cited in Serrano y Sanz 249).

Isabel de Liaño's epic rendition of Catherine of Siena's hagiography—like Catherine of Siena's writings—challenges conventional belief that women are incapable of good writing and serious thought. As Velasco so well notes, hers is an adversarial attitude towards those who dismiss female talents: "Que pocas veces suelen dar favores / Al seso femenino los escritores" (Velasco 129). Ana de Castro y Egas's *Eternidad del Rey don Filipo III* was instead applauded from the first by its male censors. In his "Aprobación," Fray Paravicino goes so far as to state that "estamparle sera hazer justicia a la dignidad del assumpto, a la excelencia de la obra y al credito de la nacio[n]." Of the two biographies, then, it is indisputably Liaño's that results in the more daringly feminist project since, with no support for her work by male patrons, she exploits the epic genre to challenge the denigration of women's writing by the masculine hierarchy. 23

Despite their singular endeavors to write biographies, neither Ana de Castro y Egas nor Isabel de Liaño succeeded in achieving any measure of fame beyond what we learn in Serrano y Sanz's *Apuntes*. Still, feminist historians rightly conclude that "feminist biography not only illuminates women's lives, it alters the frameworks within which we interpret historical experience" (Alpern, "Introduction"13). While Isabel de Liaño composed her hagiographic poem to celebrate the life of an exceptional woman saint, she also utilized it as a personal platform to speak out against women's marginalization as writers. Fully ensconced within royal circles, Ana de Castro y Egas produced an idealized biography to honor Philip III's memory that was highly praised by the male hierarchy, but that was nevertheless appropriated for use as political propaganda by a faction at court. My essay, therefore, does not intend to resurrect either woman biographer solely on the literary value of their writings or their individual historical subjectivity. Rather, I wish to locate them as part of the ongoing project by feminist critics of early modern Spain that includes the analytical categories of gender and class when recovering both the silenced and exploited voices of women writers. To do so means to go beyond what we may discover in the occasional history or archive; it entails stretching our limits as literary historians, investing our selves in the project, and risking failure. 24

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NOTES

¹ Shorter versions of this essay were presented as papers at the Conference on Women Writers of Medieval and Early Modern Spain and Colonial Latin America, University of Arizona, Tucson, September 16-18, 1999; and at the Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas, New York, July 14-20, 2001. I thank the audiences of both sessions for their helpful comments.

² Domna Stanton and Jeanine Plottel, *The Female Autograph* (New York: New York Literary Form, 1984), 6.

³ Manuel Serrano y Sanz, *Apuntes para una Bibliografía de Escritoras Españolas*, vol. 2 (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1903).

⁴ See Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlauf, *Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in their Own Works*, trans. Amanda Powell (Albuquerque, NM: U of New Mexico P, 1989); Julián Olivares and Elizabeth S. Boyce, *Tras el espejo la musa escribe: Lírica femenina de los Siglos de Oro* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 1993); and Teresa Scott Soufas, *Women's Acts: Plays by Golden*

Age Women (Lexington: U of Kentucky, 1997). These three anthologies are the leading examples of the extent to which Serrano's pioneering collection continues to be plumbed for women authors.

⁵ Most biographies were written by nuns, often saints' lives, and few if any were published. Very likely, they were copied from conventional hagiographies and served to disseminate religious literature within the convent.

⁶ Examples of critical oversight are the women whose lives may be reconstructed from Inquisitional documents, such as those now documented in the collection *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World*, ed. Mary Giles (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999).

⁷ Pioneering studies by these historians include María Isabel Barbeito Carneiro, *Escritoras madrileñas del siglo XVII (Estudio bibliográfico-crítico)*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Editorial de la Universidad Complutense, 1986); Jodi Bilinkoff, *The Ávila of Santa Teresa: Religious Reform in a Sixteenth-Century City* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989); Asunción Lavrin, ed., *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America* (Lincoln, NE: U Nebraska P, 1989); Josefina Muriel, *Las mujeres de Hispanoamérica: época colonial* (Madrid: Editorial MAPFRE, 1992); and Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1990). European feminist historians include, in particular, Rosa Rossi, *Teresa de Ávila: Biografía de una escritora*, trad. Marieta Gargatagli; notes and bib., Alberto Domingo (Barcelona: Icaria, 1984); and Isabelle Poutrin, *Le voile et la plume: autobiographie et sainteté féminine dans l'Espagne moderne* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1995).

⁸ At a session on María de Zayas at the 2001 Conference of the Renaissance Society of America, Margaret Greer advocated for more critical attention to Zayas's writings. She commented wryly that the new interpretations, like those recently published, will surely result from our particular "hang-ups." While this self-awareness is refreshing, it nevertheless betrays women's deep-seated feelings of vulnerability when exposing our thoughts.

⁹ Only several years ago, a young feminist at a major Midwestern university whose first book, on a religious woman writer, had just been published by a respectable university press, confided disconsolately to me that her department chair had instructed her to "do something on Cervantes" to strengthen her case for tenure.

¹⁰ Annette Kolodny, "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," *Feminist Studies* 6: 1 (Spring 1980): 1-25.

¹¹ The pervasively antifeminist attitude held by some of our colleagues was brought home to me as recently as this year at the Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas (New York, July 16-21 2001), where one of the chairs of the *encuentro de investigadores* on "Nuevas direcciones y ampliación del canon en la poesía del siglo de oro" nevertheless commented that it was not necessary to discuss early modern women poets, since they were neither published nor read in their lifetime.

¹² Versions of Jean Canavaggio's biography in French, Spanish, and English respectively, are: *Cervantès* (Paris: Mazarine, 1986); *Cervantes*, trans. Mauro Armiño (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1987); and *Cervantes* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990). For Quevedo, see Pablo Jauralde Pou, *Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645)*, Nueva Biblioteca de Erudición y Crítica

(Madrid: Castalia, 1999). An edition without the Appendix and Index of poems was published simultaneously by with the same title by Castalia that same year.

¹³ Peggy K. Liss, *Isabel the Queen: Life and Times* (New York; London: Oxford UP, 1992); for the Spanish translation, see *Isabel la Católica*, trans. Javier Sánchez García-Gutierrez, corr. Inés Azar (Madrid: Nerea, 1998).

¹⁴ Almudena de Arteaga, *La Princesa de Éboli* (Madrid: Colección Novela Histórica, Martínez Roca, 1988). The book was re-edited eight times the year it was published.

¹⁵ Gerda Lerner, "Priorities and Challenges in Women's History Research," *Perspectives, Newsletter of the American Historical Association* (April 1988): 17-20.

¹⁶ Although not all are biographical, recent studies of early modern women include Marina Scordilis Brownlee, Margaret Greer, Elizabeth Rhodes, Magdalena Sánchez, and Sherry Velasco.

¹⁷ Sara Alpern et al, *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women*. Urbana, Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1992.

¹⁸ The anthology contains biographical sketches of Florence Kelley, Emma Goldman, Molly Dewson and Polly Porter, Mary Heaton Vorse, Belle Moskowitz, Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Jessie Daniel Ames, Freda Kerchwey, and Helen Gahagan Douglas. Of these, only Emma Goldman and Helen Gahagan Douglas have a highly recognizable profile.

¹⁹ Elisabeth Israels Perry, "Critical Journey: From Belle Moskowitz to Women's History." In *Challenge of Feminist Biography*. 79-96.

²⁰ Lois Rudnick, "The Male-Identified Woman and Other Anxieties: The Life of Mabel Dodge Luhan." In *Challenge of Feminist Biography*. 116-38.

²¹ "Those of us who have been engaged in the challenging process of recovering women's literature and history have often been driven by a desire to understand how the decisions we have made as scholars and teachers, lovers and friends, have been shaped by a past that we are both discovering and reinventing" (123).

²² Liaño is mentioned as a witness at Jerónimo Sánchez Coello's wedding to Antonia de Liaño on 22 October 1584 in Mercedes Agulló Cobo, *Noticias de pintores madrileños dd los siglos XVI y XVII* (Granada: U de Granada, 1978), 186. I thank Marta Bustillo for this information. In private correspondence (14 September 1999), Bustillo proposes another possible connection with Madrid art circles in that Liaño may have been the author of the painter Vicente Carducho's "Vida de Santa Caterina de Siena," inventoried as part of his library.

²³ Sherry Velasco, "Isabel de Liaño: Hagio/Biography as Self-portrait." *Pacific Coast Philology* 27 (September 1992): 124-32. I am grateful to her for a copy of her essay, which I was unable to obtain earlier, and gratified that we agree on several key issues.

²⁴ *La vida de la bien auenturada sancta Caterina de Sena trasladada de latin en castellano por el reuerendo maestro fray Antonio dela Peña dela orden de los predicadores* (Alcalá de Henares, 1511). R/8075 Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. The work was dedicated to Cardinal Cisneros.

²⁵ Velasco arrives at a similar conclusion, stressing the female reader's ideality: "the gynocentric work is not just built around the poet Isabel, the Saint, the Queen and the Virgen Mother but also an ideal female reader" (127-28).

²⁶ Nieves Baranda, "Por ser de mano femenil la rima": De la mujer escritora a sus lectores." *Bulletin Hispanique* 100 (1998): 449-73.

²⁷ For a feminist study of women's power at court, see Magdalena Sánchez, *The Empress, the Queen, and the Nun: Women and Power at the Court of Philip III of Spain*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1998).

²⁸ Although I have searched in the Biblioteca Nacional, I have not found any references to either Liaño or Castro y Egas other than Serrano y Sanz, who, however, mentions a Collado del Hierro as his source for the latter. Neither appears in Carolyn L. Galerstein, *Women Writers of Spain: An Annotated Bio-Bibliographical Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1986); or in *Spanish Woman Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Source Book*, ed. Linda Gould Levine et al (Westport CT: Greenwood P, 1993). While I fully recognize my own failings in this search, for women scholars especially, these endeavors are usually hindered by geographical, time, and funding constraints as well as family and academic responsibilities, obligating many of us to rely on the efforts of our historian colleagues, few of whom, however, study women's history.

²⁹ "La inclinacion que tengo a V[uestra] A[lteza] desde que le conoci niño, facilite, pues no disculpa el atreuimiento de reduzir a breue suma las grandes y excelentes virtudes que exercito el Santo y Piadoso Rey, y señor nuestro padre de V[uestra] A[lteza] que si el desempeño de obligaciones propias se cumple ofreciendo qualquier moderado talento, justamente deseo la satisfacion desde seruicio en la dicha de que V[uestra] A[lteza] le reciba" (2).

³⁰ The most famous, Pedro Fernández de Castro Andrade y Portugal (1560-1637), 7th Count of Lemos and Marquise of Sarria, was Castro y Egas's contemporary. An eminent viceroy of Naples, he was the Duke of Lerma's nephew and married his daughter. He was exiled to his town of Monforte de Lemos on the Duke's fall from power. *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeo-Americana*, vol. 23 (Barcelona: Espasa-Calpe, 1924), 778. See also John H. Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares: The Statesman in an Age of Decline* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1986), 34-35.

³¹ See Sebastián de Covarrubias, *Suplemento al Tesoro de la Lengua Espanola Castellana*, Georgina Dopico and Jacques Lezra, eds. (Madrid: Polifemo, 2001), 206. I am most grateful to the editors for their kind gift.

³² Antonio Feros, *Kingship and Favoritism in the Spain of Philip III, 1598-1621*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 266.

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