Gendered Representations of the Militant Church: Ana Caro’s and Luisa Roldán’s Rhetoric of War and Religion

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This essay outlines the ways in which the writer Ana Caro and the sculptor Luisa Roldán, two Spanish women from Seville whose lives encompass, respectively, the first and second halves of the seventeenth century, deployed the rhetoric of dominant male discourse to express their own political thought. Both were exceptional women who reached professional status and obtained recognition in male circles in seventeenth-century Spain, a nation destabilized militarily and politically by constant warfare.¹ Both women were able to operate within the framework of patriarchal culture and surmount historical conditions that determined processes of gender inscription. As female authors in a male-dominated environment they used their work to contest male control of the essentially

¹ Though the extent of Spain’s decline during the seventeenth century has been contested in recent works — see to this effect Henry Kamen, *Imagining Spain: Historical Myth and National Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); and Christopher Storrs, *The Resilience of the Spanish Monarchy, 1665–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) — it is undeniable that the seventeenth century was fraught with political instability and punctuated by military conflict. Ana Caro (1590–1650) was witness to the results of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48), a renewal of the hostilities against the Ottoman Turks, the expulsion of the *moriscos*, the Catalonian rebellion (1640–52), and the outbreak of the bubonic plague. During Luisa Roldán’s life (1652–1704), on the other hand, Spain engaged twice in military conflict with France in an attempt to retain its southern territories in the Netherlands, a conflict interrupted in 1684 with the Truce of Ratisbon, which would be broken in 1690 to result in the Nine Years’ War.
patriarchal discourse. As subjects of cultural production, they employed different strategies to negotiate their position within an artistic discourse that often hinged upon bellicose imagery. Caro cleverly adopted the literary genre of the Relaciones [Chronicles], which were designed to celebrate the expansion of church and empire, but which she used to expose the military politics of excess. Roldán adopted the artistic tradition of religious iconography and used images of the militant church symbolically to assign women the role of active subjects.

Both artists flourished under male patronage in an era when religious art was both a form of instruction and one of the main instruments at the service of monarchical power. The position of these women, as professional artists with direct connections to the king, is indeed exceptional if we consider the era’s concern with female inferiority and its perceived connections with the weakening of the state. Early modern conceptions of gender cautioned about the dangers of uncontrolled or unprotected female bodies that needed to be contained in order to ensure the inviolability and proper functioning of a body politic. The perception that a healthy state required the control of women awakened in the public imaginary a perceived need for women’s containment and polarized their representations as either mythical whores or saints. In spite of this, both female artists were awarded public recognition and unexpected liberties. But these privileges came

2 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author’s.
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at a price: in order to move within the dominant public discourse they had to search for ways to integrate an official rhetoric that exploited battle imagery from the almost exclusively male realm as the main metaphor for the spiritual and political invincibility of a threatened state. The two artists, though born half a century apart, were nevertheless shaped not only by similar societal constraints dictated by the well-entrenched principles of the Counter-Reformation but by the specific limitations of their own occupations and circumstances.

While Ana Caro’s unmarried status afforded her legal control over her career as a writer, Luisa Roldán went from the tutelage of her father to that of her husband, a much less skilled artisan, in order to secure professional contracts. Although Caro, as a writer, required no assistants or significant material means in order to write, Roldán’s trade, as a sculptor, imposed physical and economic demands on her in the form of space, materials, and collaborators that constantly compromised her independence as an artist. The nature of their interventions, however, was unavoidably shaped by the tools of their craft: while Roldán aspired to convey personal views, often through a single image, Caro was able to articulate nuanced responses to her social environment by writing Relaciones, a genre designed to memorialize official festivities. In light of these differences it is no wonder that their works represent gender-inflected contributions to the artistic discourse of their era. One of the more interesting aspects of their contribution, as I hope to illustrate, is the means through which these exceptional women chose to deal with the rhetorical partnership of war and religion as artistic convention.

There is little biographical documentation on Ana Caro. Most studies situate her birth in Seville around the early 1590s (she died in 1650), and there are no indications that she ever married. At least five of her works


Mary Elizabeth Perry, The Handless Maiden: Moriscos and the Politics of Religion in Early Modern Spain (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 88–108. Though women were banned from combat, there is now documentation of numerous exceptions of female soldiers who, however, cross-dressed and went undetected in the battlefield.
were published in the early decades of the seventeenth century. Their success allowed her entry into the circles of nobility, where she found mentors, and into the prestigious Literary Academy of Count de la Torre in Seville. As a writer, Caro received several awards and had the unique honor of being listed in Varones insignes en letras naturales de la ilustrísima ciudad de Sevilla [Distinguished Men of Letters from the Illustrious City of Seville], in which she is acclaimed for the excellence and popularity of her work as a chronicler of local events and is celebrated as “Muse of Seville.”

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5 Lola Luna, “Ana Caro, una escritora ‘de oficio’ del Siglo de Oro,” Bulletin of Hispanic Studies 72 (1995): 12–22. In this seminal study, Luna estimates that Caro published her work between 1628 and 1645 and lists and dates the following works: Relación en que se da cuenta de las grandísimas fiestas que en el convento de N.P.S. Francisco de la ciudad de Sevilla se an hecho a los santos mártires del Japón, impreso por Pedro Gómez (Sevilla, 1628); Grandiosa vitoria que alcanzó de los Moros de Tétuán Jorge de Mendoza y Pizaña, general de Ceuta, quitándoles gran suma de ganados cerca de las mismas puertas de Tétuán. Este año de 1633, impreso por Simón Fajardo (Sevilla, 1633); Relación de la grandiosa fiesta, y octava, que (en la Iglesia parroquial de el Glorioso San Miguel de la Ciudad de Sevilla), hizo don García Sarmiento de Sotomayor, (Conde de Salvatierra, Marqués de Sogroso, Gentilombre de la Cámara del Rey nuestro señor, y del Serenísimo Infante, Cavallero de la Orden de Santiago, Asistente y Maese de Campo General de la gente de guerra de Sevilla), y su partido, por su Magestad (impreso en Sevilla por Andrés Grande, 1635); Contexto de las reales fiestas que se hicieron en el Palacio del Buen Retiro. A la coronación del Rey de Romanos, y entrada en Madrid de la señora Princesa de Cariñán. En tres discursos (Madrid: Imprenta del Reyno, 1637); Loa sacramental que se representó en el carro de Antonio de Prado, en las fiestas del Corpus de Sevilla, este año de 1639. Compuesta por Doña Ana Caro Dixose en quatro lenguas, con licencia (impresa en Sevilla por Juan Gomez de Blas).


7 Luna cites Caro’s place in Rodrigo Caro, Varones insignes en letras naturales de la ilustrísima ciudad de Sevilla, studio de Santiago Montoto (Sevilla: Real Academia Sevilla de Buenas Letras. Imprenta Gironés, 1915), 73. In this catalogue, Caro is praised as “insigne poeta, qui ha hecho comedias representadas en Sevilla, Madrid y otras partes con grandísimo aplauso, y ha hecho otras muchas y varias obras de poesía, entrando en muchas justas literarias, en las cuales, casi siempre, se le ha dado el primer premio” [“distinguished poet, who has written poetry and dramas represented in Seville, Madrid and other places to great acclaim, and who has entered in many a literary competition, obtaining the first place almost without fail”] (Luna, “Caro, escritora,” 11).
Despite the public recognition she received for her poetic and dramatic works, it was as a reporter that Caro achieved professional status. The significance of this fact can hardly be overstated: women’s writing at the time was circulated in the privacy of the home or in the restricted circles of the convent or the court. Caro was the first female writer to be commissioned as a journalist to report on public festivals and receive regular payments for her work, a task that would give her a privileged and authoritative access to public spaces in an era obsessed with female containment. In effect, Caro’s behavior stood in direct contravention of the directives of moralists such as Fray Luis de León, who affirmed in La perfecta casada [The Perfect Wife] (1583) that the good and honest woman was the one who followed the divine mandate to remain silent, obedient, and enclosed. Ana Caro would become the eyes and ears of the city and was commissioned by none other than the Cathedral Chapter of Seville to sing of the city’s grandiosity and report on the often disorderly goings on in public, male-dominated spaces.

In order to succeed as a journalist, Caro had to master the Relaciones, a genre most often associated with the reports sent from the New World concerning Spanish exploration and colonization. In order to investigate the author’s processes of rhetorical negotiation between her public and private experience, I focus on the Relación de solemnidades [Chronicles of Solemn Events], a poetic report of festivities and political and religious

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8 Despite the difficulties for women to become professional writers, Caro became a regular contributor to the Cathedral Chapter of Seville, which commissioned several dramatic autos sacramentales for the festivities of Corpus Christi in 1637, 1641, 1642, 1643, and 1645, respectively, for which she received payment. See Luna, “Caro, escritora,” 15–17.

9 Rina Walthaus, “Emerging from the Wings; Women Writing Drama in Seventeenth-Century Spain,” in Heroines of the Golden Stage: Women and Drama in Spain and England, 1500–1700, ed. Rina Walthaus and Marguérite Corporal (Kassel: Reichenberg, 2008), 145–66. Walthaus states what was probably the largest obstacle to female authorship in the seventeenth century: “Silence was a sign of chastity. Thus, the association of the female voice, made public in writing, with public sexuality and sexual accessibility was easily made” (146).

10 Fray Luis de León, La perfecta casada, ed. Javier San José Lera (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1992).
events that required triumphalist depictions of public celebrations and whose ultimate goal was to present the common mission of the Spanish nation as colonizer and evangelizer, roles that were inextricably related in the official discourse.

As a woman who aspired to the status of professional writer in the early stages of her career, Ana Caro was subject not only to the exigencies of the genre but to its readers and her mostly male patrons, among whom were included the local aristocracy and religious authorities. Yet, as a reporter of current events, Caro instituted herself as a public voice and as a decoder of the city’s events. Her writings, therefore, have left some of the most interesting accounts of early modern Seville’s history and topography. Her Relaciones describe the power of the Spanish monarchy, the struggles in the colonies of the Spanish empire, the efforts of the Catholic Church to evangelize the world and spread the Christian faith, and the sacrifice and beatification of martyrs. Her reports, as much as any medium of the time, functioned superficially as propaganda for the institutional powers, such as the monarchy and the church, as well as those who directly paid Ana Caro for her work. Yet, despite the fact that some recent critics comment on the author’s complacency, emphasizing the absence of dissidence in her writing, it is possible to view her particular way of echoing male discourse, specifically in the Relaciones, as a form of negotiation or mimicry. In a manner that fits Homi Bhabha’s analysis of colonial power, Caro’s Relaciones repeat male martial discourse, but with a difference — one that menaces and even

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11 Caro’s reports have often been construed as propaganda for the instituted powers, the monarchy, and the church, as well as for those who directly paid Caro for her work. See Luna, “Caro, escritora,” 12–14; and Francisco López Estrada, “La relación de las fiestas por los mártires del Japón de doña Ana Caro de Mallén (Sevilla) 1628,” Homenaje a Antonio Pérez Gómez (Cieza: Artes Gráficas Soler, 1978), 54. Another critic who proposes that Caro does not truly hold a subversive attitude or pose a challenge to patriarchal discourse is Mercedes Matroto Camino, “Negotiating Woman: Ana Caro’s El conde Partinuples and Pedro Calderón de la Barca’s La vida es sueño,” Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature 26, No. 2 (Fall 2007): 199–216. In contrast, I concur with critics who call into question the author’s purportedly wholehearted support for the causes she was pressured to defend in her writing. See, for instance, Sharon Voros, “Relaciones de fiestas: Ana Caro’s Accounts of Public Spectacles,” in Women in the Discourse of Early Modern Spain, ed. Cammarata, 108–32.
mocks the integrity of the imitated discourse — a discourse which in this case represents the patriarchal order through war imagery.\(^\text{12}\) I would argue that, in Caro’s discourse, the general grandiloquence and glee generally associated with the *Relaciones* gives way at times to more somber tones and darker realities. Occasionally, her particular rendition of the events reads as if ambiguously celebratory. However, beneath the jubilant exterior there lie dark, if ephemeral, moments in which the author uses subtle irony to cast a shadow over the prevalent glow of the festivities. It is to these critical moments that I will refer here.

Since more than one author was regularly commissioned to record and eulogize any given festivity, there are multiple versions of each of the four extant accounts by Caro, two of which describe martyrdom, one a military victory, and the last the festivities in honor of the coronation of the King’s cousin.\(^\text{13}\) All four accounts seem shaped by a dominant discourse common to the period that precludes female experience: battle imagery


\(^\text{13}\) For instance, there are records of two other *Relaciones* written in Seville and Ronda, respectively, about the same Japanese martyrs: the first written by Juan de Acherreta Osorio, *Epítome de la Ostentosa y sin segunda fiesta, que el Insigne y Real Convento de San Francisco de Sevilla hizo [ . . . ] a honra de los gloriosos 23 protomártrres del Japón [ . . . ] Sevilla, Pedro Gómez de la Pastrana, 1628; the second written by Macario Fariñas de Meneses, “Elogio breve a los veintitrés Mártires Religiosos de la Orden del Seráfico P.S. Francisco, y fiestas que en su memoria hizo la Ciudad de Ronda, y el Convento del Bienaventurado Santo. Por don Macario Fariñas de Meneses, Abogado de la Ciudad y Cabildo de Ronda” in Pedro de Torres, *Sermón predicado en el convento de San Francisco de la ciudad de Ronda, en la solemnísima fiesta que bizieron a sus veintitrés Santos Mártires del Japón Domingo después de la circuncisión y día octavo de San Estevan. Por el P. presentado Fr. Pedro de Torres, del Orden de la Santísima Trinidad, Redempción de Captivos, Visitador desta provincia del Andaluzia, y Ministro en el Convento de la dicha ciudad de Ronda* (Sevilla, 1628). Similarly, there is documentation of two other accounts that record the sacrilegious events that took place in Flanders: Juan Alvarez de Alaniz, “Solemnissimo Octavario al Nacimiento [ . . . ] de Nuestra Señora de las Aguas contra el fuego de la injuria, que se le hizo a su Soberana Imagen en Calloo en los Payses de Flandes [ . . . ] (Cádiz, Fernando Rey, 1638); and Fray Juan Herrera, *Querella y pleyto Criminal contra los delictos enormes de Xatillon [ . . . ] y su ejercito cometieron en Tillimont.* 26 de Octubre, 1635. Ms 2366, fol. 440. Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid.
is abundant, and religious iconography combines with military aesthetics and the rhetoric of conquest to contribute to the exaltation of the Catholic Church.\(^ {14} \)

I find particularly interesting the two accounts of martyrdom in which Caro, from her privileged authorial perspective, is able to transgress gendered social boundaries, entering into the male rhetoric of the battlefield with results which are worth examining. The first is her first professionally published relació, Relación en que se da cuenta de las grandísimas fiestas que en el convento de N.P.S. Francisco de la ciudad de Sevilla se an hecho a los santos mártires del Iapón [. . .] Sevilla, 1628) [Chronicle of the Religious Festivities in Honor of the Martyrs in Japan, Celebrated in the Convent of Saint Francis (. . .) Seville, 1628];\(^ {15} \) the other is the Relación de la grandiosa fiesta, y octava, que (en la Iglesia parroquial de el Glorioso San Miguel de la Ciudad de Sevilla), hizo don García Sarmiento de Sotomayor, Conde de Salvatierra [. . .] Sevilla, 1635) [Chronicle of the Religious Festivities celebrated in the Church of Saint Michael by the Count of Salvatierra (. . .) Seville, 1635].\(^ {16} \) The first account describes the festivities for the beatification of martyred Japanese missionaries, the second the celebrations for the religious martyrs fallen in Tillemont as a result of Spain’s war with France. At first sight the connection between martyrdom, military rhetoric, and celebration might not be evident unless seen as part of the larger, socio-political vision of the goals of the Catholic nation to disseminate Christianity. Yet, in these accounts, Caro’s praise and refer-

\(^ {14} \) On the particulars of martial aesthetics in the religious celebrations of early modern Spain, see the informative and perceptive analysis by José Jaime García Bernal, El fasto público en la España de los Austrias (Sevilla: Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla, 2006), 395–423.

\(^ {15} \) Ana Caro, Relación poética de fiestas religiosas por los mártires del Japón, celebrada en el convento de San Francisco de Sevilla en 1628, in Francisco López Estrada, “La Relación de las fiestas por los mártires del Japón de doña Ana Caro de Mallén (Sevilla) 1628,” in Homenaje a Antonio Pérez Gómez, 60–69.

ences to troops and blood shedding are not always given in the context of a triumphalist military discourse.

The Cathedral Chapter of Seville, Caro’s first patron, offered her a commission of religious as well as political significance since the martyrdom of the Christian missionaries was a reaction of the Japanese imperial government to what they believed was a veiled threat of colonialism on the part of the Spanish crown. The *Festivities Celebrated in the Church of Saint Michael* is a similarly political response to the unfortunate episode in the Thirty Years’ War against France when the Spanish frontier village of Tillemont was raided, its population and clergy massacred, and religious imagery used sacrilegiously. Among the war atrocities mentioned by Fray Juan de Herrera in his *Querella y pleyto Criminal* is the feeding of horses with consecrated communion wafers, an offense equally incendiary to Spanish religious and political authorities who strove to publicize it in order to garner public support for the war effort. As public acts of defense of the Church against the attacks of alien religious and political forces, the festivities, together with the *Relaciones*, had a double purpose: as political propaganda, they sought to mobilize the indignant population to serve the nation in its colonial enterprise; and as religious propaganda, they constituted vindications that consolidated mass devotion under the legitimizing auspices of Saint Michael the Archangel, sword-wielding protector of Christendom. The events were structured as spectacles of strength and unity of a militant Church that exhibited St. Michael as the overseer of the triumph of divine justice. Both of Caro’s accounts convey a nuanced response to the events, while strictly following the constraints of the highly formalized genre of the *Relaciones de solemnidades*. In the poem about the festivities in Seville in honor of the martyrs in Japan, the author, according to custom, insists on the city’s adhesion to the crown and describes the sumptuousness of the city’s baroque spectacle. Caro follows

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17 For an account of the different documents generated in this period to describe the event of the martyrdom of the twenty-three missionaries, see López Estrada, “Relación de la fiesta por los mártires,” 53–54.

the conventions of a genre full of hyperbole, ornament, and classical allusions, and with a fairly fixed structure: after the dedications and rhetorical formulas of mediocritas, there follows a description of the motive of the celebration and a eulogy to patrons, participants, and the city. Since the genre is devoted to urban celebrations, Relaciones regularly contain references to landmarks and to the main symbols of the city where the celebrations take place. Yet, the qualities that Caro chooses to praise differ from those of other eulogists. For instance, Macario Fariñas de Meneses, a lawyer in charge of relating the festivities of the same Japanese martyrs in Ronda, calls his town “devoted to the noble and saintly religion” and praises the attitude of its residents as “devout people and worshipers of the living Christ.”

Fernando Torre Farfán, a Sevillian priest in charge of recording the festivities for the beatification of its patron, Saint Ferdinand, similarly calls the Sevillian crowd “faithful,” “inspired,” and “devout.”

Caro instead seems to underline a different order of qualities in both of her accounts when she describes Seville in purely secular terms: “royal Seville / displays the highest nobility / as the first and eighth marvel of the world” where “every night, games and festivities take place / through the wide confines of this excellent Cairo / where the people’s applause, with joyful and happy cheers, held back the winds.”

Caro studiously avoids all allusions to the spiritual or religious demeanor of the crowds. On the contrary, along with the emphasis on the pagan aspects of a celebration, the reader is made aware of the rambunctious, chaotic, and hybrid nature of an event that it would have been less

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19 Fariñas de Meneses, “veintitrés Mártires” in de Torres, Sermón predicado.
20 “devota de la noble y santa religión” (Fariñas, “veintitrés Mártires,” 4).
21 “devoto pueblo [que] a Cristo vivo adora” (ibid., 8).
22 Fernando Torre Farfán, Fiestas de la S. Iglesia Metropolitana, y Patriarcal de Sevilla al nuevo culto del señor rey S. Fernando el tercero de Castilla y Leon: concedido a todas las Iglesias de España, por la Santidad de Nuestro Beatissimo Padre Clemente X . . . / y escrivíolo de orden tan superior, don Fernando de la Torre Farfán, Presbytero, natural de Sevilla, con licencia. En Sevilla, en Casa de la Viuda de Nicolás Rodríguez. En este año de 1671.
23 “Real Sevilla, / Y ostenta en ellas su mayor nobleza, / Que es primera y octava maravilla” (Caro, Mártires Japón, 62).
24 “Donde el común aplauso de la gente, / Con vitores, alegres y contentos, Suspendía los vientos” (Caro, San Miguel, 134).
than decorous for her to attend: “All the city turns up as a troop to witness the grandeur of the feast / they run to and fro, bumping into each other / no one is able to resist the crowds, / so great is the multitude that I dare say that Seville has become a New World.” Particularly interesting here is her use of the term “troop” unhinged from its military context to refer to an unruly crowd that reflects disorder in the body politic, rather than to the usual masculine discipline associated with the term.

García Bernal’s study of public festivities in Spain under the Habsburgs provides a useful insight for the interpretation of the dynamics between Baroque spectacles of discipline and audience behavior:

Military-style parades are in fact one of the rhetorical structures most frequently found in the culture of display of the Baroque. Its epic-military style combines, in similar proportions, elements from martial discipline, from gallantry, and from the ascetic-devotional imaginary. . . . All these processional manifestations share, in any case, the same disciplinary logic and the same militant spirit. The spectacle is paradigmatically constituted as a *spectacle of order and hierarchy* “explained” through a refined structure of internal obedience and subordination that results in a social body which is, at the same time, cohesive and unassailable [my emphasis].

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25 “Acude la Ciudad a toda tropa / A mirar delas fiestas la eminencia / Una con otra aquí y acullá topa, / Sin que puedan hacerles resistencia, / Tanta es la gente, que a dezir me atrevo, / Que se a buelto Sevilla mundo nuevo” (Caro, Mártires Japón, 62–63).

26 “Los cortejos de carácter militar constituyen, en definitiva, uno de los perfiles retóricos más recurrentes en la cultura de las procesiones del Barroco. Su estilística épico-militante conjuga, en proporciones semejantes, elementos de la disciplina militar, de la bizarría, y del imaginario ascético-devoto. […] Todas estas manifestaciones procesionales comparten, en todo caso, una misma lógica disciplinaria y un mismo espíritu militante. El espectáculo es, en ella, de manera paradigmática, *el espectáculo del orden y la jerarquía*, “explicado” en un depurado ejercicio de subordinaciones y obediencias internas que dan como resultado una tropa social cohesionada e inexpugnable” (García Bernal, “el fasto público,” 408).
The institutional exhibitionism inherent in this “spectacle of order and hierarchy” is to a certain degree subverted by the lack of order displayed by the audience Caro describes. The gravity and exemplarity of the participants emphasized in García Bernal’s procession contrast markedly with the haphazard movements of a crowd too large and disorderly to be resisted and that is described by a female voice that refuses to be contained or silenced.

Martial discourse is not, however, the only language by means of which Caro manages to expose and disrupt hegemonic authority through mimicry. Baroque culture, the product of a profoundly hierarchical society, is aesthetically defined by its grandiosity and exhibition of power differences. Not surprisingly, Relaciones customarily include lavish descriptions of the generosity of the patrons who fund the festivities. The display of the riches throughout the city is frequently accompanied by demonstrations of magnanimity on the part of the patrons towards the destitute within the city walls.27 As Sharon Voros notes,28 Caro brings to light the extreme poverty of the era by making special mention in each Relación of the food that is given to the poor during the festivals, thus highlighting the contrast between classes. On further examination of her piece on the Japanese martyrs, however, we see that Caro’s rhetoric implies a criticism that goes well beyond merely gesturing towards social inequality. In fact, although Caro’s language mimics the praise of the wealth and the ornamental splendor of the city and the church typical of all Relaciones, she does so by means of a rhetoric of excess that implicitly denounces colonial exploitation and imperial foreign politics, and that ethically resituates wealth not only in terms of distribution but in terms of provenance. In the first place, Caro’s description of altars that display pearls, diamonds, and gold so indescribable that

27 For a more extensive treatment of poverty and the display of charity in early modern society, see Robert Jutte, Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), and Anne Cruz, Discourses of Poverty: Social Reform and the Picaresque Novel in Early Modern Spain (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

“the understanding loses its decorum / as it surrenders to sight,” signals the demands that such a spectacle makes on the audience’s suspension of judgment in view of the existing economic crisis. The irony in these lines is confirmed in Caro’s final plea: “remember divine Pastor the common misery and misfortunes in which Spain finds itself.”

Nearly a decade later, in her Relación de la grandiosa fiesta, y octava, que (en la Iglesia parroquial de el Glorioso San Miguel de la Ciudad de Sevilla) [. . .], Caro seems to intensify the rhetoric of disapproval in her incisive assessment of the flamboyant display: “The wealth within the Chapel is such / that its jewels could belong to Croesus’s treasure, / and could satisfy Midas’s hungry ambition.” Though extravagant descriptions of wealth were customary for the genre, in other (male) authors’ versions, they were generally veiled under the rhetoric of religious generosity and pious offerings. In Caro’s case, the condemnation of greed, as she intentionally pairs hunger and ambition, is only furthered by her allusion to an emaciated body politic variously weakened by economic distress and by the exploitative bleeding of America, which is pictured in her verses as the victim of a violent, quasi-vampiric economy: “Outside the chapel on either side lay jewels of infinite wealth / outcasts from the new world / which America

29 “Dezir de las riquezas el tesoro, / Que ostenta a aquesta máquina hermosa, / Perlas, diamantes, esmeraldas, oro, Es impossible, y escusada cosa: / Pierde el entendimiento su decoro” (Caro, Mártires Japón, 63).

30 An interpretation confirmed by her parallel comments in the History of the Tillemont commemoration, where, as Voros explains, “[Caro] comments on the criticism that the spectacle was excessive, ‘Unos dizten que excede’ [Some say that what one has seen exceeds], as noted earlier. In the Contexto she also acknowledges the public outcry regarding the tremendous cost of the 1637 festivities in Madrid” (Voros, “Ana Caro’s Accounts,” 121).

31 “Acuérdate divino Pastor santo / De la común miseria, y desventuras / en que España se ve” (Caro, Mártires Japón, 69).

32 Relación de la grandiosa fiesta, y octava, que (en la Iglesia parroquial de el Glorioso San Miguel de la Ciudad de Sevilla [. . .]); Contexto de las reales fiestas que se hicieron en el Palacio del Buen Retiro [. . .].

33 “En la Capilla toda, / Tanta riqueza junta se acomoda, / que pudieran sus joyas conocidas / Ser tesoro de Creso, ser de Midas / Satisfacción a su ambición hambrienta” (Caro, San Miguel, 130).
pours forth from its veins.”  

Caro echoes the split reaction of an audience that includes supportive as well as critical voices: “Some say the spectacle is in excess of anything ever seen, / Others, that it is fabulous.”  

But, though Sharon Voros reads the recording of these opinions as “a way to bring such comments to the notice of her benefactors,” I see in them, in light of the metaphors and personal commentary that I have noted above, as indications of veiled resistance to the politics of the public events she was commissioned to describe.

The contrast of her description with that of Fariñas de Meneses makes Caro’s lines even more poignant. Fariñas describes the grandiose festivities celebrated by Ronda in honor of the Japanese martyrs in this fashion:

> The ancient people beloved by God did not extend so generous an offering / nor did the tent of the leader, Moses, clad in light, contain a present of such Precious jewels / Nor was the Ark, though rich in miracles, carved with such wealth as to surpass the offerings of the people of Ronda that day.

Fariñas clearly justifies lavishness by relating it to generosity and by tracing its biblical precedents. Caro, on the other hand, selects images of greed and exploitation to describe the same splendor. For this reason I am inclined to read censure in Caro’s lines despite taking heed of Voros’s warning about the dangers of “reading Baroque hyperbole as vituperatio.”  

Caro cleverly borrows convention and imitates imperial and religious discourse, yet she inter-

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34 “Fuera de la Capilla están iguales / En dos colaterales, / De riqueza infinita, joyas varias, / Del nuevo mundo parias, / que rinde a manos llenas / América, abundante de sus benas” (Ibid., 131).

35 “Vnos dicen que excede / lo que se ha visto a lo que verse puede / Otros, que es fabuloso” (Ibid., 138).

36 Voros, “Ana Caro’s Accounts,” 121.

37 “No con tan larga mano en rica ofrenda / El pueblo antiguo de su Dios querido, / Preciosas joyas ofrecio en la tienda / Del Caudillo Moyses de luz vestido; / no el Arca de milagros estupenda, / se labró con caudal enriquecido, / que se haga ventaja al que este día / De Ronda el pueblo pródigo ofrecía” (Fariñas, “veintitrés Mártires,” 5).

38 Voros, “Ana Caro’s Accounts,” 120.
jects variations and personal commentary by inserting details about Seville that could be construed as criticism of both internal and external imperial politics. The latter are further exposed and criticized, as the following will show, in her treatment of the martial elements of the festivities.

In the Relaciones under discussion, Caro describes in great detail the last day of the festivals when the images of the relevant saints are carried out in procession with abundant fireworks and military marches to the pleasure of the large audience. The parades are strictly structured in accordance with official regulation, which integrates celestial and terrestrial elements in the battle to promote true religion. García Bernal describes the normative and highly structured constitution of Baroque processions as follows:

The structure of the procession is always the same: the cross or standard of the principal image leading the march, then the banners and candles of the brotherhoods (spearhead of the earthly offensive); after them, the celestial squadrons, that is, the saints in celestial garb, with their attributes and martial accompaniments (the line of transcendent battle), to finish with the protective image that is shown in sovereign attire (the prince of the church or the virgin-queen) placed at the rear, from where it protects and imbues courage in the two armies.39

Caro’s account of the Japanese martyrs keeps close correspondence with the normative procession, describing a procession that opens with the twelve brotherhoods affiliated with the host church, followed by Saint Francis, “its famous and strong captain,”40 the twenty-three martyrs, soldiers only

39 “La estructura del desfile es siempre la misma, la cruz o estandarte de la imagen principal abriendo la marcha, luego las banderas y cirios de los cofrades (punta de lanza de la ofensiva terrenal); tras ellos los escuadrones celestiales, es decir, los santos con atuendos, atributos y acompañamientos castrenses, (la línea de batalla trascendente) para terminar con la imagen protectora que figura con prendas y aparato soberano (el príncipe de la iglesia o la virgen-reina) situada en la retaguardia desde donde ampara e infunde valor a los dos ejércitos” (García Bernal, “el fasto público,” 404).
40 “su capitán fuerte, y famoso” (Caro, Mártires Japón, 64).
“in loyalty and courage,” and the image of the Virgin. But, here again, we see Caro avoid certain terms that are present in male-authored accounts. In contrast to the account of the same celebration by Juan de Acherreta Osorio, Caro makes no mention of the musket volley with which the saint is received in military fashion or of the presence of the Virgin as “rear-guard” to the military train.

When we compare Caro’s account of the Japanese martyrs to Fariñas’s, we see that the latter introduces his version with a genealogy of sacred wars in which the Christian contingent is irrevocably celebrated as the offensive element in a war machine that takes no prisoners and whose strife culminates with the fall of Lucifer and the heretics who “despondently surrender / by Christian gunpowder defeated.” Caro’s report, despite using some of the same imagery, describes the same success in converting Japan to Christianity as a feat of self-sacrifice rather than war. The martyrs, seen as courageous victims rather than military leaders, “turn away the vile fear of death / [and] triumph on the cross pierced by spears.”

As the genre dictates, Caro describes the events commemorated and the church in which the fiesta takes place; she diligently lists the speakers of each day of the fiestas. However, Caro subverts the military discourse in her depiction of the failed conversion of Japan: “by sovereign impulse / these holy men went to Japan / their feeble hearts encouraged / by God’s firm hand.” Not only is the encounter between the missionaries and the Japanese not presented as a battle, it is not initiated by the martyrs’ will but rather by “a sovereign impulse” that conflates the religious with the imperialist quest for conquering foreign territories.

Perhaps Caro’s strongest indictment of colonial policies and the national mission is in a later account, when she praises the Count of

41 “En firmeza y valor fuertes soldados” (ibid., 62).
42 García Bernal, “el fasto público,” 404.
43 “se rinden abatidos / De la Christiana pólvora vencidos” (Fariñas, “veintitrés Mártires,” 3).
44 “Y deponiendo el vil temor de muerte, / Triunfaron en la Cruz alanceados” (Caro, Mártires Japón, 68).
45 “fueron estos santísimos varones / a el Japón por impulso soberano, / alentando los flacos corazones, / en el brazo de Dios y fuerte mano” (ibid., 62).
Salvatierra for his sponsorship of the festivities of Saint Michael in honor of the martyrs of Tillemont: “Blessed be he who conquers / Empires of souls by sight alone / For, to subject others obstinately by blood / Befits not Empires but tyrannies.” 46 This backhanded compliment of Spain’s military strategy could not be further from the triumphalist male-authored accounts. It serves as recapitulation of Caro’s stance as a denouncer of the excesses that, she believes, weaken the body politic.

It becomes clear from this review of her Relaciones that, when Caro echoes the martial rhetoric of the genre, she does so with a difference, in a manner that understates the martial spectacles featured in most accounts; and when she evokes the much less prominent battle imagery, she does it so as to problematize the common association between military aesthetics and the iconographic power structure of the church.

The sculptor Luisa Roldán, in contrast, adopts a different position as she inserts herself within male discourse. As a sculptor, Roldán was subject both to her training as a religious iconographer and to the impact of the Counter-Reformation in the artistic panorama of the time, in which devotional sculpture replaced allegorical, portrait, and other forms of sculpture. Also, the fact that women were unable to join the sculptors’ guild restricted their work to the role of collaborators rather than authors, an obstacle that Luisa Roldán had to overcome to gain artistic independence. 47

Roldán, popularly known as “La Roldana,” was born in Seville in 1652 to Teresa de Ortega and the influential sculptor and painter Pedro Roldán. 48 Raised in her father’s atelier, she soon proved to be the strongest and most talented of the five children — three of them women — he trained in the art of drawing and sculpting. 49 Her excellence as a sculptor

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46 “Dichoso él, que conquista / Imperios de almas solo con la vista, / Que sujetar con sangre y a porfia / Más viene a ser, que imperio, tiranía” (Caro, San Miguel, 139).
48 For the sake of clarity I will distinguish between father and daughter by referring to Luisa Roldán as “Roldán” and to her father as “Pedro Roldán” throughout the article.
49 María Victoria García Olloqui, La Roldana (Sevilla: Diputación de Sevilla, Arte Hispalense, 2003), 18–21.
and her strong will were recognized by her father. Under his supervision, she was allowed to work with male collaborators and execute a number of the works commissioned to his name, all the time exposing her to skills and male camaraderie unknown to most women of her time. The results were not long in coming: according to biographical documents, by 1671 she had fled the parental home to marry Luis Antonio de los Arcos, a gilder, against her father’s will, and by 1683, they were living in Cádiz, where Roldán could establish her own artistic reputation far from her father’s sphere of influence. It was in Cádiz where Luisa Roldán began to stray from the traditional iconographic style that was her father’s signature. From this moment on, through contracts made by her husband, she obtained multiple commissions for sacred images from the church and, after moving to Madrid, even from the crown, an important achievement considering that in early modern Europe, religious images were powerful ideological instruments for both devotion and instruction. Yet neither royal patronage nor her eventual international artistic reputation led to personal success. Her life was tragically marked by strife: she continuously had to demand due


52 The very same day of her death in 1706 she was named Accademica di Merito by the prestigious Italian Accademia di San Luca en Roma (Hall van den Elsen, “aportaciones documentales,” 26). A sign of her relevance in the panorama of Spanish arts is her inclusion in Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez, Diccionario histórico de los más ilustres profesores de las bellas artes en España, vol. 4 (Madrid: La Real Academia de San Fernando, Imprenta de la viuda de Ibarra, 1800), 235–39. Ceán Bermúdez credits Roldán with acquiring her artistic skills intelligently thanks to her tenacity and dedication. He also describes the author’s artistic intelligence in an anecdote in which she single-handedly undertakes the refashioning of a sculpture commissioned to her father but rejected by its patron, the Cathedral Chapter of Seville: “She ordered that the sculpture be brought to the house and had it sawed around the groins to lend movement to the body. After doing the same
payment for her work, and she often had to plead for assistance to sustain her family. On a personal level, she had to deal with a difficult marriage and with the death of two of her children due to malnutrition. She would end her days in indigence as her tragic final “declaration of poverty” reveals; in this document, she entreats the religious officials of her parish to dispose charitably and religiously of her body upon her impending demise, since she has no means or earthly possessions to avail her.53

Roldán’s training as religious iconographer in her father’s atelier had afforded her a mastery of the male nude that was banned for women in the formal education of the time.54 Aranda Bernal describes in detail the exceptional conditions that allowed Roldán to acquire a high degree of professionalization and visibility as a sculptor. She distinguishes Roldán from other female artists of the time who collaborated with their husbands or in family ateliers but were never awarded authorship and from authors who, despite their function as court portraitists, received no contracts or payment other than gifts and no public recognition other than as maids of honor to the queen.55

The production of religious sculptures in Spain was strictly regulated by guilds that mandated academic certification partially based on the ability to accurately represent nude models, training that was barred to women. As a result, Roldán’s work distinguishes itself from that of any other woman of her era by virtue of her style, status, and visibility since she remained the sole female author professionally recognized, the only one to author religious sculptures commissioned by the crown, and the

to the head, the result was so graceful that the church officials received it joyfully, thinking it a different one’ (236).

54 Liana De Girolami Cheney, “Luisa Ignacia Roldán ‘La Roldana’: New Attributions to the First Sculptrress of Spain, 1652–1706,” Mediterranean Studies 14, No 1 (2005): 148–68. This critic comments on Roldana’s unusual skill: “The thieves from the float of the Exaltation of the Cross of 1678–9 in Santa Catalina of Sevilla, for example, demonstrate La Roldana’s mastery of the male nude — and exceptional skill for a female at this time in Spain — acquired in her father’s studio. Since the time of the Renaissance, male artists were instructed in the art of depicting the nude figure in their guilds or atelier. But this mastery was not extended to female artists” (151).
only one to attempt renderings of the male anatomy. In fact, not only did Roldán shape the sacred male body for public gaze but, far from restricting the female body to the realm of the private, she contributed to its exposure thereby transgressing gender boundaries. Her images increasingly became celebrated not only for a striking dynamism that contrasted with the solemn rigidity of her father’s, but for her impressively human portrayals of Christ and for her powerful albeit feminine angels. She would become well known also for her delicate, intimate, and almost prosaic terracotta icons of the sacred. Although some of these characteristics may be superficially interpreted as signs of the transition from the Renaissance to the Baroque, it is also possible to detect uniqueness in her style and a trajectory that gestures towards gendered distinction.

In light of Roldán’s transgressiveness, it is significant that her success as a religious iconographer merited extravagant praise in a celebrated volume entitled Las vidas de los pintores y estatuarios eminentes españoles by Antonio Palomino Velasco, an art censor appointed by the Grand Inquisitor Juan de Camargo. The public approval the sculptor received from one of the key figures in the strictly patriarchal world of religious art is worth exploring in detail, since it signals the terms in which Roldán inserts herself in the existing tradition despite her differences. Although many of the eminent Spanish artists mentioned in Palomino’s work are said to have daughters who inherited their father’s talents, Luisa Roldán is the only Spanish woman deserving of her own entry. The censor describes in detail the

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56 Antonio Palomino Velasco, La vida de los pintores y estatuarios eminentes españoles. Que con sus heroycas obras, han ilustrado la nación: y de aquellos estrangeros ilustres, que han concurrido en estas provincias y las han enriquecido, con sus eminentes obras. Por Don Antonio Palomino Velasco, pintor de cámara de su Magestad Felipe quinto. Londres: impresso por Henrique Woodfall, a costa de Claude du Bosc, & G. Darres, 1742.

57 Antonio Palomino Velasco, Lives of the Eminent Spanish Painters and Sculptors, trans. Nina Ayala Mallory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). The few times Palomino refers to women artists, he mechanically dedicates a line to mention their skills. This is the case of, for example, Doña Magdalena Gilarte, daughter of the painter Mateo Gilarte (344), María and Luisa Valdés, daughters of Juan Valdés Leal (302) and two of the daughters of Don Pedro de Mena (316). There are only three exceptions where the entries are lengthier: Luisa Roldan, Artemisa Gentileschi (40) and Sophonisba
bewilderment that Roldan’s image of Christ bearing the cross causes him: “I was so thunderstruck at its sight that it seemed irreverent not to be on my knees to look at it, for it really appeared to be the original itself” (341–42). Thus, Palomino describes the “superb wonder” and anatomical precision of the image with admiration for its elevated pathos “for not only the head and facial expression mentioned earlier, but the hands and feet were so marvelously executed (and with some drops of blood trickling down) that everything looked like life itself” (342).

The image’s description is distinguished from others in the book by its length and the abundant expressions of an extraordinariness that rendered it “the source of wonder and amazement of the entire Court” (341). The emotional effect of the statue is accounted for as follows: “It is said that when she did an image of Christ or of His Blessed Mother, besides preparing herself by fulfilling her Christian duties, she became so immersed in feelings of compassion that she could not execute it without tears” (342). While rituals of purification and declarations of divine assistance were common among artists dedicated to religious iconography, they are not by any means a component of the biographies in Palomino’s book. In fact, though some of the artists are described formulaically as having virtuous or modest dispositions, many others are described in less than laudatory terms — Vicente de Benavides, for example, is “harsh and inflexible” (340), José Donoso is of “acerbic temper” (288), Claudio Coello is “testy and not very friendly” (313), Francisco de Herrera the younger is “vain” (270), Juan Valdés Leal is “arrogant” (303), and Juan Cano de Arévalo is governed and ultimately killed by a “quarrelsome, ardent and insolent temperament” (192). In sum, pious and humble dispositions are not required of eminent male Spanish artists. Humility is, however, the single most valuable quality of the one Spanish female artist mentioned in the book. Despite Palomino’s apparent acceptance of female authorship, through this

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Anguissola (27). Yet, in the case of the latter Italian artists Palomino included no more than a cursory acknowledgement that they were already endorsed by the Italian patrons; even so, the mention of their works is limited to court portraits produced while the women were ladies-in-waiting to queens. All future quotations from this work will be cited in the text.
praise he sought to confirm the early modern cultural construct that did not accept female creativity unless channeled as divine inspiration, a perception that according to the medical wisdom of the time, transformed the woman artist into an ideal passive medium because of the weakness of the female mind. Art historian Mindy Nancarrow Taggard explores in detail Palomino’s response to Roldán’s statue of Jesus of Nazareth:

Upon further investigation, we find that the preconceptions of women, art, and devotion contributed to Palomino’s response, and that he was engaged in a well-established 17th-century Spanish cultural construct in establishing women’s capacity for creativity: female clairvoyance. He positioned Roldán as a passive medium through whom God operated for his greater glory.  

Ironically, Roldán’s place in the artistic arena was not dependent upon her abilities as a sculptor, but rather, upon her virtue as a modest, pious woman liable to be subject to both male guidance and divine inspiration. It is striking from Palomino’s account that, while male artists achieved the title of court artist due to their “excellent ability” (319), their “erudition” and “inventiveness” (267), their “great talent, . . . diligence and study” (217), or for being “the best in the court” (278), Luisa Roldán had the good fortune of serving His Majesty thanks to the protection of Don Cristóbal Ontañón.

The above circumstances and testimonies suggest Roldán’s keen awareness of the conditions of her survival as an artist in a man’s world. While Roldán was not the only artist whose creativity was endorsed by “divine” inspiration, as the mystical literary tradition shows, hers may well be one of the first cases in which a married woman, not ratified by reli-

59 As is the case of José de Cieza, for instance.
60 As it was with Francisco Rizi.
61 This is how Palomino describes the merits of Sebastián de Herrera.
62 This is the case of Juan Carreño.
gious vows and engaged in physically reproducing sacred imagery, enjoyed such a privileged status. Even more striking is Roldán’s apparent concession to a dominant discourse that demands that the female artist pose as passive medium of divine inspiration. Roldán’s enforced imposture may be interpreted as an act of mimicry that, to borrow Bhabha’s language, would produce the desired, reformed (read virtuous), recognizable “Other” (female artist), “as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.”

That is, a professional sculptor who could imitate the existing tradition of religious iconography, but with divine endorsement, and whose intervention in this tradition effectively “poses an immanent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers.” Indeed, Roldán’s artistic production is testimony to the patriarchy’s failure both to control the images of religious devotion and to discipline women.

Let us take a more detailed look at the additional ways in which Roldán threatened or destabilized a dominant, patriarchal, iconographic discourse in which women did not regularly participate. Besides producing polychrome renditions of sacred male bodies that surpass those of her predecessors in expressivity and sensuality, she often upset conventions related to female representation and toyed with gender ambiguity.

Roldán, in her late production, certainly contributed some extraordinarily subversive images of women to the tradition of religious iconography. Proof of her penchant to circumvent conventions of female representation is a number of her small terracotta renditions featured in Beatrice Gilman Proske’s 1964 catalogue *Luisa Roldán at Madrid.* The figures all imitate...
the usual themes, yet they do so, somehow, unusually. For instance, in the *Education of the Virgin*, the mother simultaneously looks intently at the book and marks with her index finger the lines to be read by the child. Thus, she takes an active role in the process of education instead of gazing in awe at a distant presence, as is the case in other versions of the scene that signal a divine rather than earthly origin of instruction. In Roldán’s last representation of *Virgin and Child*, kept in Santiago de Compostela, the Virgin, rather than gazing tenderly and shyly at the infant, stares intently, almost defiantly, at the spectator as she breast feeds the baby. The result is an astonishing boldness and lack of modesty attached to the figure of the Virgin that seems to emphasize the humanity of the baby’s physical, as well as moral, purity. And several Nativity scenes feature a displaced or absent Saint Joseph, signaling a conspicuously minor role of male parenting in the usual family scene.

Perhaps even more controversial is Roldán’s representation of the leading icon of the militant church, Saint Michael, the archangel most frequently represented after the Counter-Reformation due to his significance in the sacred tradition as the field commander of the army of God. Her last rendition of the saint speaks playfully of Roldán’s subversive statement on gender representation. The larger than life-size wooden image, which is frequently eulogized, was commissioned by Carlos II to be placed in the Escorial and presents a number of striking features that need to be contextualized (Fig. 1). Early depictions of the archangel around the fourth century in the Near East gave it the appearance of an adolescent Roman victory god. The Italian Renaissance had introduced the female angel, an

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67 From the numerous contemporary treatises on breast feeding, the most popular of which was probably Fray Luis de León’s *La perfecta casada*, a common perception was that employing wet nurses and failing to nurture one’s own infant could result in moral as well as ethnic contamination, since both the mother’s virtue and purity of blood were transmitted through the milk. See Emilie Bergmann, “Milking the Poor: Wet-Nursing and the Sexual Economy of Early Modern Spain,” in *Marriage and Sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 139–76.

68 The history of the representations of the archangel may be traced, partially, in M. Victoria García Olloqui, *La Iconografía en la obra de Luisa Roldán* (Sevilla: Junta de Andalucía, 1989).
image immediately opposed by the Counter-Reformation based on the biblical tendency to catalogue angels as *viri* or male and the consideration that lending them female features would denote feebleness, an indecent quality for valiant spiritual beings. This call for angelical virility becomes reinforced in Spain as the role of Saint Michael as protector of the church gradually shifted historically from guardian of just souls — represented by a scale held by the image — to defender of the militant church, depicted by the figure of a warrior defeating a demon under foot.⁶⁹ During the Counter-Reformation, therefore, Saint Michael clearly came to symbolize the triumph of the Catholic Church over heresy and Protestantism. This new function would reaffirm the traditional need for virility in his depictions, which in the seventeenth century included a full coat of arms, sword,

⁶⁹ Ibid., 52–54.
and shield. Hence, there are two elements that indicate a shift in aesthetic and theological perspectives. First, the image’s increasing dynamism, which may be attributable to the theological militarization of the archangel and the transition from Renaissance to Baroque aesthetics, although frequently seen in Italian and Italianate painting, is not reflected in the sculptural renditions of the archangel until the 1700s. Second, the increased masculinization of the images as required by the Counter-Reformation is reflected in the uniforms, postures, and gestures of the archangels painted while battling the fallen angels.

Given this history, the singularity of Roldán’s 1692 rendition of Saint Michael is twofold: first, it begins a movement towards dynamism in sculpture that had so far only been attempted in painting; and, second, the image combines clearly feminized features with an extremely aggressive posture. Roldan’s portrayal of the archangel is revolutionary both aesthetically and thematically: her Saint Michael depicts a woman in a position of agency who is also challenging male power and who represents an act of physical defiance to the passive stance that women, including Roldán herself, were forced to take in public. This work is therefore representative of a feminine act of resistance developed within the gaps of the patriarchal structure.

Spanish male sculptors of Saint Michael had previously represented the angel with the static and peaceful demeanor proper to a figure of justice. Pedro Roldán, the sculptor’s father himself, counts a rendition of Saint Michael among his works of 1663 (Fig. 2). The contract he signed with his patron, the brotherhood of Nuestra Señora del Rosario [Our Lady of the Rosary], merely specifies the type of finish, “gilded and carved,” required of two life-size figures to complete the church’s altarpiece. Pedro Roldán selected two popular favorites, Saint Michael and Saint Gabriel,

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70 Sculptures depicting Saint Michael in the act of attacking the fallen angel would appear only later with strikingly similar compositions, yet none featured countenances or anatomies as feminized as Roldan’s. Luis Salvador Carmona’s of 1746 and Francisco Espinabete’s of 1778 could be considered cases in point. The 1705 rendition of the Italian Lorenzo Vaccaro is also worth mentioning because of the striking number of parallelisms with Roldán in design and composition.
for this purpose. His Saint Michael, however, varies greatly from his daughter’s later version: the angel is a youth in his early twenties, with

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considerably more masculine features than the androgynous Saint Gabriel, whose slightly tilted head and an unnatural and static pose give the archangel a dainty, elegant, and, as Antonio Torrejón Díaz notes, “theatrically casual air.”

No weapons adorn the image, which is nonetheless recognizable by the military helmet and attire that distinguishes it from the messenger angel, Saint Gabriel.

At variance with tradition, and nearly thirty years after her father’s depiction of Saint Michael, Luisa Roldán’s image of 1692 (Fig. 1) portrays a female figure in the startlingly violent moment of executing divine justice, a doubly transgressive gesture that breaks the gender codes for battle and the sacred. The angel’s clearly feminine visage—with thin, perfectly manicured eyebrows, rouged high cheekbones, and delineated fleshy lips—exudes confidence and establishes eye contact with an undersized, oddly bearded demon underfoot as she raises the sword against the squirming, pleading victim. Her voluptuous form contrasts sharply with that of the virile though weakened demon. Some of the puzzling ways the sculpture has been described are worth quoting at length. Gilman Proske, for example, describes the striking sculptural group as follows:

La Roldana’s archangel is a vigorous, spirited young man who dominates with ease the fallen angel under his foot. Brisk action quickened by swirling draperies carries out baroque ideas. . . . Luisa had learned from her father a facile treatment of the human form and earned fame for her expert modeling of hands and feet. The muscular arms and legs are boldly modeled and the torso is well defined under the clinging corselet. She gave the face large features, a strong nose, and a wide mouth, but here she betrayed herself by an over tender handling of detail, something effeminate in the gentle expression around the eyes and mouth.

72 Ibid., 160.
There are here several elements of great significance that signal the figure’s strained relationship with patriarchal tradition and that gesture towards an imitation that resists the appropriation of the artist’s voice by dominant discourse: “vigor,” “brisk action,” “solidity,” and “muscular” limbs are terms rarely associated with feminine features; they openly contradict ideal feminine traits of meekness, frailty, humility, and obedience. The carefully detailed male anatomy of the demon contravenes the rules of modesty that restrained female artists; the physicality with which the feminine archangel overpowers and entirely controls the male body of the demon reverses the patriarchal models of power structure; and, at the same time, the physicality of the figure contradicts the assumed patriarchal analogy normally associated with maternity and Mary as the provider of the Redeemer’s body, namely, that flesh is to spirit as female to male.

Without a doubt, one of the most interesting aspects is the seeming contamination of the image with cross-gendered characteristics. The martial Roman costuming and unusually violent stance of the figure contrasts with the distinctly feminine face. This contamination is doubly transgressive when applied to archangels, who are among the highest ranks of the celestial hierarchy. The deliberate individualization of the wooden icon further disregards the tradition of archetypal characteristics evinced in the religious iconography of the time and offers new traits for the idealization of perfect beauty and virtue embodied by archangels.

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74 Catherine Hall van den Elsen notes Roldán’s changed attitude in her treatment of Saint Michael, for her rendition of 1658 shows no trace of the violence of her later rendition but depicts a calm archangel in the style of her father’s atelier whose serenity indicates the triumph of divine justice: “[En] el San Miguel con el diablo, escultura de unos 50 cm de altura que se sitúa entre el estilo del San Miguel de Pedro Roldán (1658) y la magnífica escultura de San Miguel (El Escorial, 1692), … la actitud serena … señala el triunfo del bien y no hay referencia a la violencia que domina la obra que hará para la corte” (Hall van den Elsen, “aportaciones documentales,” 23).

75 It should be noted that, even though Roldán’s image exhibits novel characteristics in sculpture, the same features were already present in Italian painting. Luca Giordano, for instance, has two paintings of Saint Michael represented while battling demons. His canvas of 1663 presents a robust albeit delicate Saint Michael spearing a demon with a lateral motion maintaining an impossibly gentle balance. In his painting of 1666, Giordano deemphasizes the flowing blond hair by softening the light and donning the
To complicate matters further, not only does Roldán refuse to produce a formulaic portrait of archetypical perfection in conformance with expectations, but some speculate that she may have individualized the image to her own likeness. A few scholars, in agreement with popular tradition, have gone so far as to describe the delicate countenance of the archangel as Roldán’s self-portrait, with her husband as the devil under foot. Liana De Girolami Cheney offers the following explanation of the apparent bond between the image and the author:

The unusual depiction of Saint Michael prompts further investigation. The beautiful face of the archangel reveals the feminine face of La Roldana’s self-portrait, and the devil’s twisted body and its human face resemble her husband’s anatomy and facial expression. La Roldana’s art . . . should be viewed in the context of the Counter-Reformation, as her quest for representing in human terms spiritual transformation and Christian triumphs of good over evil, and human love and divine salvation. Perhaps a psychoanalytical interpretation could provide for a subtext of personal imagery.

While Girolami Cheney suggests a plausible connection between the image’s violence and the author’s mental collapse that might have ensued from personal difficulties such as marital strife or her children’s death, I am inclined to a less personalized interpretation, one that sees in Roldán’s...
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art a model of resistance towards representations of the female as passive, meek, and weak. This option also allows for an exploration of the possible associations between the image and the representations of the body politic: “In the portrayal of Saint Michael and the Devil, La Roldana represents that individual triumph where the laws of society against her gender are invalid, since she could triumph artistically because of her talent.”

Even when the subject of self-representation must remain, as so many historical matters, a matter of speculation, I admit that the idea of a self-portrait offers valid possibilities to the mimetic argument. The image of Saint Michael as a portrait of the artist implies further personal defiance to the patriarchal order. Roldan’s intervention in a long history of representations of the most powerful saint in Catholic iconography constitutes an act of self-affirmation and identity construction that could imply the slippage of mimicry into mockery, as the author appropriates traditional patriarchal images to represent female strength. It is in this context that Roldán’s self-effacing performance of modest piety for the benefit of the censor Palomino stands out in its full relief. The image of Roldán overcome by tears in the process of “inspired” creation contrasts most vividly with the author’s self-image as reflected in the sculpture of Saint Michael. In fact, the patriarchal discourse that produces knowledge of Christianity based on women’s acts of clairvoyance as a form of control of female creativity conflicts with the image of the female author as a maximum executor of justice. To borrow again from Bhabha, the result of this irreverent gesture on Roldán’s part could constitute “a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same, but not quite) does not merely ‘rupture’ the [patriarchal] discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the [male] subject as a ‘partial’ presence.” Hence, in this sharply ironic image, male presence and patriarchal authority are ultimately constructed, defied, judged, and brought to justice by a woman.

Both Luisa Roldán and Ana Caro proved to be exceptionally resourceful, independent, and talented women responsible for their professional

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79 Ibid., 160.
80 Bhabha, “Mimicry,” 86.
success in less than favorable conditions. Both were artists who did not hesitate to move to the court and distance themselves from the safety of their own environment in order to flourish professionally. Yet their contributions were shaped by their experiences as well as by their art: whereas Caro was able to articulate a gender-inflected response to the military politics of empire through her incursion in the Relaciones, Roldán produced a powerful symbolic response to the politics of gender in her milieu through her iconographic representation of the high commander of the militant church. Caro usurped the dominant discourse normally restricted to the male world of military conquest and economic exploitation to denounce the politics of excess of a body politic in need of purging. Roldán, on the other hand, visually appropriated triumphalist martial imagery to wrestle against unfair and inaccurate gender codes that invalidated the female members of the body politic. Both, however, provided creative strategies to circumvent the obstacles that women artists had to confront when faced with the strictures of a male-oriented and defined artistic tradition.