

# *Ausiàs and Garcilaso Revisited: Exploring Syncretic Lyricism*

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Garcilaso de la Vega's *Égloga II* has been the object of insightful studies (those of Rafael Lapesa, Elías L. Rivers, Inés Azar readily come to mind), which rightfully present it as an emblem of the Spanish Renaissance<sup>1</sup>. The *Égloga* is, indeed, a summa of sorts, the compendium of traits derived mostly from various classical authors of Greek and Latin antiquity and from the Italian masters of the Renaissance. Garcilaso's genius makes those traits thrive in Spanish soil as determinants of a novel and, by any standard, revolutionary aesthetic in the peninsular domain. The nonpareil bard from Toledo is the harbinger of a new age in the history of Hispanic letters. It is precisely because of its comprehensive nature that the *Égloga*, in its ambitious orchestration and problematic unity, has piqued the interest of many generations of scholars. Rivers puts it best when he states that:

The *Égloga II*, 1885 lines long, was planned as an encyclopedic work of poetry, echoing the Western tradition from Homer to Ariosto. As such it has been extremely difficult for critics to interpret. But in this eclogue we find the entire range of Garcilaso's poetic virtuosity. And there can be no doubt as to the deliberate care with which he designed the work. ("Nymphs, Shepherds, and Heroes" 124)

One is faced, then, with an extremely complex composition, which draws from a wide array of sources. These we may envisage as integrated into a multiplicity of textual layers. Let us imagine the texture of the *Égloga* as a palimpsest. Is it useful, we may ask, to study the palimpsest in order to enhance our understanding of the salient facets of Garcilaso's lyricism? I would argue that the study posed in the question is timely and appealing to those still searching for signs of the vital, genetic link between Garcilaso's tour de force and the autochthonous tradition. In that link resides, I believe, the overall Hispanic quality, which to this day has not been fully acknowledged in Garcilaso's

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<sup>1</sup> For Garcilaso's poems see Elías L. Rivers's edition listed in the bibliography below.

*Égloga II.*

On the basis of these considerations one can formulate the hypothesis of the present essay: a probing into Garcilaso's subtext especially as evidenced in *Égloga II* leads us to define Garcilaso's Hispanism in terms of the affinities, coincidences, and influences that critics often point out in the relationship between him and Ausiàs March, the chief representative of the Catalan-Valencian literary tradition that came to its heyday toward the middle and the latter part of the fifteenth century<sup>2</sup>. Aside from the parallel passages discussed in Lapesa's seminal review of Garcilaso's indebtedness to Ausiàs, the bond between the two authors rests on firm historical ground. It was through his intimate friendship with Juan Boscán -the Boscán who was himself a product of the Catalan-Valencian tradition- that Garcilaso became captivated by a poet who had a striking way of introducing himself:

A temps he cor d'acer, de carn e fust:  
yo só aquest que-m dich Ausias Marc.<sup>3</sup>

Doubtless, Garcilaso found in Ausiàs his kindred soul. In the marriage of these poetic minds we get a glimpse of a sense of deep foundation, a unifying core for the most disparate elements melded together into one composition.

It may prove to be problematic, at first blush, to make these somewhat vague metaphysical notions useful for practical criticism. One thing is to adumbrate a factor of cohesiveness at the heart of a poem; another is to translate that factor into a tangible textual component. In the case of Garcilaso's *Égloga II*, our task is facilitated to a great extent by the approach suggested by Joseph Pons in a short article he penned over half a century ago. Focussing on *Cançión IV*, a kindred composition to the *Égloga* in question, Pons observes that

Il est si naturel de chercher les modèles de Garcilaso en Italie  
qu'on oublie ceux qu'il a pu avoir dans sa patrie. (169)

Soon later he adds that

Il était plus aisé de suivre Pétrarque que d'accorder sa  
[Garcilaso's] pensée à celle de ce Valencien du xv<sup>e</sup> siècle. (169)

These remarks can be readily converted into a practical advice: "Do not neglect the

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of March's life and works see Amédée Pagès's seminal *Auzias March et ses prédécesseurs* and Rafael Ferreres's up-to-date *Introducción*.

<sup>3</sup> The text is from Ferreres's edition (cf. the bibliography below), Poem 114, vv. 87-88.

powerful inspiration that Garcilaso received from his Hispanic predecessors in general and from the Valencian poet in particular". Another, perhaps even more useful advice, stems from Pons's conclusion:

L'influence d'Auzias March est plus certaine dans l'analyse rigoureuse, la sombre passion et l'âpreté de cette pièce; Garcilaso ne pouvait être insensible au style énergique du vieux maître. (171)

Pons uses the individual *pièce* (the *Canción IV*) or the specific passage as a key to the recapturing of a general mood ("la sombre passion") or a prevailing mode ("style énergique")<sup>4</sup>. Implicit here is a warning against pursuing a positivistic search of sources as an end in itself. There is danger in becoming bogged down in details, while losing sight of the complete picture. The trees will prevent us from seeing the forest.

Pons's guidelines may serve as a touchstone to gauge the pitfalls of the criticism on Garcilaso's *Canción IV* and, by extension, *Égloga II*. In his famous *Anotaciones* Fernando de Herrera appreciates the pearly preciousness of scattered parts in Garcilaso's text but fails to apprehend the impact of the wondrous whole. Herrera pays no attention to Hispanic roots. On the basis of the dramatic qualities he perceives in the piece -"Esta égloga es poema Dramático, que tambien se dize ativo, en que no habla el poeta, sino las personas introduzidas..." (qtd. in Azar 16)- he casts aspersions on what he would consider an uneven agglomerate of various levels of discourse:

tiene mucha parte de principios medianos, de comedia, de tragedia, fábula, coro i elegia, tambien ái de todos estilos, frases llanas traidas del vulgo, *gētil cabeça, yo podrè poco, callar que callaràs*; i alto mas que conviene a bucolica, *convocarè el infierno*, i variacion de versos en las tragedias... (qtd. in Azar 16)

Many of Herrera's successors match the gist and/or slant of his remarks. In a valiant attempt to trace the background of Garcilaso's dramatics, Inés Azar, for instance, journeys as far back as the treatises on rhetoric and the *artes poeticae* of Greek and Latin antiquity and undertakes a meticulous critique of the relevant loci. Nevertheless, at least in terms of a definition of dramatic art, Azar's research produces no firm conclusion. Her efforts prove to be as inconclusive as are Audrey Lumsden's statements,

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<sup>4</sup> For a broad study on Ausiàs's influence on Garcilaso's *Canción IV* see Pedro Bohigas, "Más sobre la Canción IV de Garcilaso".

which Azar adopts as her own:

It [*Égloga II*] is... a hybrid in a much deeper sense than that of genre, and any fair attempt at judgment must take this into consideration. (Lumsden 258; cf. Azar 33)

In the face of loose criteria such as these, we may well agree with R. O. Jones's wry observations, proffered before the publication of both Lumsden's and Azar's studies:

Many critics have remarked on its [the *Égloga*'s] dramatic force but none has offered a suggestion as to what the drama is about. (392)

For his own interpretation Jones recurs to the Renaissance love-centered ideologies -especially those that, as ventilated in Baldassarre Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, deal with the relentless struggle between the intellectual and emotive faculties of the psyche. Mindful of Pons's dissatisfaction with those who explicate Garcilaso's aesthetic solely on the basis of the Italianate influence, we see how even such an astute critic as R. O. Jones may miss the mark.

There is one scholar that does not miss the mark in discussing Garcilaso's artistic background. That scholar is Rafael Lapesa. In fact, Lapesa prepares the groundwork for the main points which I intend to integrate here into the exposition of my argument. First, he establishes beyond doubt the connection between Garcilaso and the *cancionero* poets of the fifteenth century. With characteristic acumen he states that:

Las producciones que con mayor fundamento pueden considerarse anteriores a la estancia de Garcilaso en Nápoles abundan en rasgos no petrarquescos propios de la lírica recopilada en los cancioneros. La sobriedad nerviosa va unida a una extraordinaria austeridad imaginativa: las canciones I y II, los sonetos I, IV y XXVI son desnuda exposición de afectos, vigorosa unas veces, tiernamente conmovedora otras, sin una imagen que se cruce en la escueta manifestación del íntimo sentir. Atenta al interior anímico, esta poesía ignora el mundo exterior. (49)

Second, he adduces ample evidence of Garcilaso's affinity with "la reclusión intimista de nuestra lírica" (37), that is, the same *cancionero* lyricism I have just alluded to.

Third, he has a clear grasp of the primary role that Ausiàs March performs among the Castilian poets of his epoch:

Si en este aspecto el lírico valenciano obedece a profundas corrientes del sentir hispánico, ciertos rasgos circunstanciales, pero característicos de la poesía castellana de su época, ofrecen en él intensificación o sentido especial. El análisis interno adopta con más frecuencia aún que en los poetas castellanos, como forma habitual casi, la de contiendas alegóricas: la Voluntad y la Razón, el Cuerpo y el Entendimiento, la Muerte y la Vida, el Amor y el Odio, la Ira y el Amor, el corazón y la lengua, sostienen entre sí pugnas, alianzas y disputas. (40)

Inspired by Lapesa's brilliant pages, one can further stress a point that Ausiàs March is the quintessential Hispanic poet of the fifteenth century: March is the *cancionero* poet par excellence. One can deduce that the influence of Ausiàs on Garcilaso is no less pervasive and decisive than the influence that, as cogently demonstrated by Menéndez y Pelayo, Pagès, and Lapesa, Ausiàs exercises on Boscán himself. It is through Ausiàs March that Garcilaso, whether directly or by the mediacy of Boscán, recaptures the inner world so often depicted in the *cancioneros*.

Lapesa paves the way to a holistic understanding of Garcilaso's affiliation to Ausiàs March. In conformity with Lapesa's global vision, research in March's textuality reveals some fundamental factors that come to bear upon Garcilaso's sense of structure and dramatic conflict. What one perceives at the heart of March's poetry is a paradoxical convergence of centripetal and centrifugal dynamics, an unlikely interplay of concentration and expansion all in one. March operates with a dialectic of two extremes. On the one hand, he keeps close tabs on his persona's withdrawal into the self. Providing us with the most accomplished rendition of the tendency common to Hispanic poetry of the *quattrocento* to explore, "más o menos escolásticamente, las galerías del alma", as Lapesa puts it (21), Ausiàs faithfully records a process, which may be best described with a Hispanic term: *ensimismamiento*. This, by the way, is the same phenomenon that María Rosa Lida de Malkiel explores in the psychological makeup of none other than Calisto, that exemplary lover of fifteenth-century Spanish literature (347-54). On the other hand, at some moment in his psychological probing, Ausiàs becomes captured by the sway of transcendentalism. He, or his persona, instinctively recoils from the contemplation of the time-bound fate of the flesh-and-blood individual and, with a sense of compulsion, looks forward to the timeless destiny of the proverbial Everyman. He turns a blind eye to the Hell of lovers -the "erotic Hell" in the phrase

coined by Chandler Rathfon Post- and, if only for short while, feels the sweet pangs of ecstasy. We may adduce here, as a significant side note, another comment of Lapesa's -the one prompted by March's mighty line "lo meu voler ab infinit s'acosta":

[March] no se resigna a situarse en la órbita de lo humano: con grandioso anhelo de infinitud... ansía querer sólo la unión exclusiva de dos almas, única fuente de amor eterno... (39)

What are the rhetorical correlatives of these driving and, concomitantly, contrary forces in Ausiàs's poetics? The impulse toward *ensimismamiento* finds congenial expression in the short composition, inured to the tremors and instability of a life subjected to powerful emotions. By contrast, the transport toward the transcendental realm commits itself to a literary structure of ambitious design, complex architecture, sustained by the law and order that are the durable planks in the framework of reason. In Ausiàs March, then, the *ensimismamiento* inherent in the purview of the lyric poem is articulated in terms of an élan toward transcendentalism that, in turn, entails a pursuit of a highly syncretic nature. The rhetoric of emotions is in constant tension with its intellectual counterpart; the immanence of the lyric, a shut-in "dark world and wide", must somehow find its *modus operandi* within a system of universal scope: the syncretic system of rationality. Pere Bohigas is well aware of this fragmentary, protean lyricism ("la manera fragmentaria propia de la poesía lírica"), which Ausiàs March makes compatible with an ideological infrastructure -a "gran cohesión interna", as Bohigas calls it- formulated in such *cants* as nos. 87, 93, 106 ("Metafísica y retórica" 10)<sup>5</sup>. These, in turn, Bohigas continues, "se complementan y nos dan un cuerpo de doctrina que constituye el esqueleto de toda la poesía ausiasmarquiana" ("Metafísica y retórica" 10).

This dynamic identified in the light of Bohigas's analysis of March's distinctive artistry I propose to call "syncretic lyricism". It takes no less a genius than Ausiàs March to strike the improbable symbiosis between the syncretism of an overarching cohesive frame and the limited compass of the lyric. Actually, the remarkable operation finds a close antecedent in the *Fiore*, a collection of 232 sonnets, in which, as purported by Gianfranco Contini, none other than Dante recasts the epic structure of the *Roman de la Rose* into the succession of lyrical experiences embodied in said sonnets (Cocozzella, "Trends of Syncretism" 103, n. 17).

How do we gauge the projection of Ausiàs's "syncretic lyricism" onto Garcilaso's *Égloga\_II*? A perusal of such studies as that of Inés Azar helps us identify

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<sup>5</sup> For this tension between the immanence of *ensimismamiento* and the overarching thrust of transcendentalism, see my "Trends of Syncretism" 101-5.

key points of coincidence. Focussing on Albanio's central role in the *Égloga*, Azar elaborates upon the salient aspects of the lover's condition, which seem to have been lifted straight out of March's literary production. It bears reiterating that there are no similarities of specific verses, but there is an affinity of moods, mind sets, perspectives. After a minute analysis of "la primera unidad textual", that is, the first thirty-seven verses which make up Albanio's opening monologue, Azar concludes that "se nos presenta pues como un microcosmos que contiene, en pequeña escala, los motivos fundamentales del poema" (64). She recaps a series of considerations that could easily be applied to March's characterization of the "mártir de amor". Throughout her study Azar expatiates on the several dimensions of Albanio's plight. She dwells upon such key passages as those that illustrate Albanio's reflections on his condition (vv. 161-9, 314-25, 485-99) in order to gain insight into that hapless youth's "pasión indomeñable" (101), "lucha interior, no resuelta" (113), the "dolor y pasión" as "sentimientos absolutos y excluyentes" (133), and the "motivo del *desorden* en el ámbito reducido del 'yo'" (119). Azar's further explication concerning Albanio's existential cul-de-sac, his life as a dead end, his despair of ever finding relief for his obsession, his suicidal inclinations, evoke not only Garcilaso's but also Ausiàs March's favorite stamping ground: the inner theater of a tormented, alienated psyche. Complementary to Azar's study are those essays by such Catalanists as Marie-Claude Zimmermann, Robert Archer, Josep Miquel Sobrer, who concentrate on Ausiàs March's treatment of this inner psychological space. Thanks, particularly, to Archer's and Sobrer's respective analysis of March's song of despair -cant 105, ineptly entitled "Cant Espiritual"- we realize how close March's text is to the very *vivencia* incarnated in Albanio. Azar's general description of *Égloga II* -"tanteos y rectificaciones: perspectivas fragmentarias, pistas falsas que más tarde no se realizan" (43)- may be applied, as well, to the lyric side of the lyric/syncretic dyad, which, as I contend, is common to both Ausiàs and Garcilaso.

Eventually, both Ausiàs's persona and Garcilaso's Albanio experience a recognition of their desolation -an experience which in classical Greek tragedy would be called *anagnorisis*. As their spirits hit bottom at the most depressing vortex of self-awareness, they long for the intervention of some equilibrating agent, such as reason or any of its faculties, to restore order to the universe and wholeness to the perturbed psyche. Ausiàs March is the undisputed master in laying bare the pathology of the self, split by the warring passions, ravaged by *foll' amor*, while struggling to maintain its integrity. In one poem after another Ausiàs depicts a *psychomachia*, which resolves itself in the strife of the forces of disintegration against the powers of integration. As we may expect, more often than not reason in Ausiàs March is in a state of crisis. Lapesa alerts us to the tenuous nature of Ausiàs's rationalistic framework:

A cada hundimiento el poeta vuelve a ensamblar la misma  
armazón doctrinal, tela de araña tantas veces urdida como  
deshecha. (39)

Occasionally, when confronted with reason's inability to heal the wounded soul, the suffering lover, will, understandably, turn his attention wistfully to the transcendental leap via suicide. But the option, of course, is anathema in the context of the Christian ethics and the beliefs the lover espouses. At this point, Ausiàs counters the lover's death wish with the wisdom of the typical "docto varón" alluded to by Fernando de Rojas in the preface to *Celestina*<sup>6</sup>. As a "docto varón", steeped in *senequismo* but also a devout Christian, Ausiàs contemplates from a safe distance the unthinkable transcendentalism of suicide. He fathoms its potential as a primary agon of tragedy -the same tragic momentum that decades later Shakespeare would immortalize in one of Hamlet's haunting soliloquies:

O, that this too too sullied flesh would melt,  
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!  
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd  
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! (*Hamlet* 1.1.129-32)

Garcilaso, on his part, is certainly aware of the tragic dimension of Albanio's twice-attempted suicide. It is precisely this true tragic stature that, as Azar points out, makes Albanio a stranger in the world of Arcadia and sets him apart from the kindred personages -Sincero, Carino, Clonico- created by Sannazaro<sup>7</sup>. Further analysis, I maintain, would reveal that Albanio's distinctive traits, especially "la asociación de *amor, fatalidad y muerte*" and the "*renuncia al albedrío*" (101) -traits that emphasize the contrast between Albanio and Sannazaro's characters- stem from the Hispanic tradition and particularly from Ausiàs March.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. "El autor a un su amigo", a text found on pp. 35-7 of Dorothy S. Severin's edition.

<sup>7</sup> The following comment is indicative of the contrast Azar perceives between Albanio and the counterpart characters created by Sannazaro:

La historia de Albanio no es, pues, ejemplo de confianza y optimismo, sino testimonio de caída y de desdicha.

Carino experimenta cierto ingenuo placer en recordar la infelicidad pasada desde la perspectiva esperanzada del presente. Albanio, en cambio, se resiste a recordar un infortunio que desde el pasado borra toda esperanza de un presente o un futuro dichoso. Por esto mismo la historia de Albanio es algo solicitado con compasión, concedido con dificultad, cuestionado en el momento mismo de su enunciación. (96)

There is still a great deal to learn from a study of the relationship between Ausiàs March and Garcilaso de la Vega. This discussion is an attempt to find a fresh approach to a field of research, which promises a rich harvest. A good beginning would be, in my judgment, the charting of the territory -the profiling, that is, of the distinctive textuality that Ausiàs March elaborates from his lifelong probing into the self-consciousness of the lover. Ausiàs March comes up with a masterly rendition of a paradox. From one perspective, each of his *cants* is a complete entity unto itself: it is a quintessential lyric in that it reflects a "here and now" -the moment-to-moment phenomenology of human suffering. From another perspective, that same lyric poem is the vehicle of a comprehensive creative intention, which comes to fruition not in the portrayal of an individual but in the affirmation of an ideal- the ideal incarnated in a poetic persona, whom, borrowing a term from Susan Sontag, we may call "the exemplary sufferer". In the continuum from the individual to the ideal, we perceive the metaphysics of sublimation and the full force of Ausiàs March's syncretic lyricism.

All this is not lost on Garcilaso de la Vega. In *Égloga II* Albanio is overwhelmed by the heartache brought about by Camila's rebuke. Twice he is rescued, providentially, from the clutches of the Grim Reaper that has been stalking him persistently. After each near-fatal accident, he, again providentially, falls into a deep slumber. This suggestive association of sleep and death, reminiscent of the *hypnos/thanatos* duality of ancient times, signals the tragic depths of Garcilaso's lyricism. At the same time, in a paradoxical shift from time to eternity, from immanence to transcendence -a shift worthy of Ausiàs March- that duality foreshadows the canonization of the lover, the conversion of the sufferer into an exemplary and idealized *mártir de amor*. Here we sense a paradigm similar to the one we find in the *Conversión de Boscán*, in which the Barcelonese poet depicts, in David Darst's words, "the process of his love from the basest elements to the heights of understanding, following precisely the Aristotelian-Thomistic theories of the soul" (43). Darst detects an analogous process within Boscán's Italianate poetry, specifically in the "radical change in tones style, language, and content" witnessed in a sizeable group of poems (namely, Sonnets LXXVII-XC) (Darst 52-3). In all probability, Boscán borrowed the basic outline of the paradigm in question from Ausiàs March, and Garcilaso followed in Boscán's footsteps.

Arguably, the full realization of Garcilaso's own brand of syncretic lyricism occurs not so much in *Égloga II* as in *Égloga I*, which, despite the title, is the later of the two compositions. *Égloga I* charts the transition from Salicio's *ensimismamiento* to Nemoroso's ecstatic vision of his perfected status through the reunion with his *Divina Elisa*. Lest we forget that such a blissful status can only be attained through death, Nemoroso prays that "se apresure el tiempo en que este velo/ rompa del cuerpo y verme libre pueda" (vv. 398-9). The master from Valencia could not have said it better himself.

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