

# *Wits, fittes and fancies: Spanish ingenio in Renaissance England*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper will be introduced by a brief comparative analysis of the terms *wit* and *ingenio*, to be followed by an equally brief reference to those “witty” Spanish works which aroused most interest in Renaissance England thanks to the English translations and adaptations thereof. A more detailed analysis will then be offered of the English version of a particularly interesting Spanish work devoted to “diversas e ingeniosas invenciones... de nuestra nación”, i.e. Anthony Copley’s *Wits, fittes and fancies...* (1595) based on Melchor de Santa Cruz de Dueñas’ *Floresta española de apotegmas y sentencias...* (1574), a little time if possible, being set aside for a discussion of the life and adventures of A. Copley, a picaresque character himself, in all conscience! Finally, some attention will be paid to examples of verbal wit on the part of real-life Spaniards as reported by seventeenth-century English letter-writers, historians, biographers and travellers.

**Key words:** British Renaissance, Spanish Renaissance, Melchor de Santa Cruz, Anthony Copley, wit, *ingenio*.

## *Wits, fittes and fancies: “ingenio” español en la Inglaterra renacentista*

## RESUMEN

Introduce este ensayo un breve análisis comparativo de los vocablos *wit* e ‘ingenio’, al que sigue una sucinta relación de obras españolas ‘ingeniosas’ traducidas o adaptadas que despertaron gran interés en la Inglaterra renacentista. Se analizará a continuación con más detalle la versión inglesa de una obra especialmente interesante dedicada a las “diversas e ingeniosas invenciones... de nuestra nación”, es decir, a la traducción de Anthony Copley, *Witts, fittes and fancies*, (1595), basada en la obra de Melchor de Santa Cruz de Dueña, *Floresta española de apotegmas y sentencias*, (1574). Si queda espacio, se dedicará a relatar sumariamente la vida y aventuras de Anthony Copley, ¡todo un personaje picaresco! Por último se analizarán ejemplos de ingenio verbal por españoles de verdad según los testimonios de viajeros, biógrafos, historiadores y epistológrafos ingleses del siglo XVII.

**Palabras clave:** Renacimiento británico, Renacimiento español, Melchor de Santa Cruz, Anthony Copley, *wit*, *ingenio*.

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An analysis of English writings of the Renaissance period (pamphlets, memoirs, letters, diaries, travellers’ tales, diplomatic papers, plays, etc.) containing references to Spain and the Spaniards, would seem to suggest that the features most generally identified as characteristic of that nation, were, on the negative side (and, of course, there were innumerable political and religious motives for emphasizing such negative aspects), excessive solemnity, ceremoniousness and dilatoriness, pride and arrogance, lasciviousness and cruelty, and on the positive side, sobriety, gravity, loyalty and

austerity. Such opinions are, of course, always subjective, what for a hostile commentator is seen as intolerable pompousness, being for a friendly observer, commendable gravity (Patricia Shaw 2000b). Such stereotyping of the Spaniard as ponderous and ceremonious, and an obvious tendency towards dilatoriness in the settling of political, legal and administrative affairs on the part of Spaniards (which is still observable today) has, I think, been responsible for there being few *overt* English allusions to the existence of what a Spanish scholar has defined as “(our) racial taste for the witty jest, for keen irony, for subtlety of all kinds”, and the possession, therefore, by the Spaniards of the mental agility which makes possible the indulgence of this taste. Now, I say *overt* advisedly since it is evident that this taste is *implicitly* recognised by the facility and the rapidity with which Spanish works which were by definition “witty” or “ingeniosas”, were translated into English, and as we shall see, by the reporting in English texts of Spanish *bons mots*.

It is interesting to observe in this context, however, that more than one 17th century English traveller refers *explicitly* to the wittiness of Spanish *women*: thus the aristocratic William Cecil, Lord Roos, journeying through Spain in 1610, assures his uncle in a letter (P. Shaw 1981: 136). that: “The women of honour (there) are many of them very well favoured, grave in their behaviour, wittily mixed with modest audacitie in their entertainment...”

And the incorrigible James Howell, in 1623, reports that: “If one should cast out an odd ill-sounding word, and ask (a Spanish woman) a favour, she will not take it ill, but put it off and answer you with some witty retort.” (P. Shaw 1976: 418, and P. Shaw 2000a: 172).

Lady Anne Fanshawe, who accompanied her diplomatic husband to Madrid in 1664, assures the readers of her *Memoirs* (P. Shaw 1981: 139) that Spanish women “. . . seldom laugh, and never loud; but (are) the most witty in repartees, and stories, and notions in the world.”

With the exception of the work I shall be commenting on in a moment, however, actual instances of such feminine repartee do not abound in the texts I have examined, although in 1680, the traveller, Thomas Williams (P. Shaw 1981: 20) does report a “skirmish of wit” between an archbishop of Seville and an attractive woman who was spinning at her door, and to whom he shouted as he passed by in his coach: “‘More spinning, and less whoring’: she immediately answering him: ‘More alms and less expense’, with which he was so pleased (adds Williams) that he sent her a present as soon as he came home...” so thereby probably hangs a tale as well!

*Ingenium* in Latin was, of course, highly polysemic: it could mean approximately, “nature”, “type”, “property”; “wit” and “understanding”; “genius” and “humour”, and as C. S. Lewis pointed out in his fascinating essay on *Wit* in *Studies in Words*: “The liaison” between *ingenium* and *wit* is extremely close, the latter being “the almost invariable translation” of the former; (C. S. Lewis 1960).

The same may be said of the Spanish derivative of *ingenium*, ‘ingenio’: hence, Cervantes’ title: *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha*, (1605), was translated by Thomas Shelton in 1612 as *The Valorous* (which he adds) *and wittie Knight errant...* ingeniousness here defining the inventiveness of the Don’s fertile imagination.

The *Diccionario de Autoridades* (1732), defines ingenio as the “Facultad ò potestad en el hombre, con que sutilmente discurre ò inventa trazas, modos, máchinas y artificios, ò razones y argumentos, ò percibe y aprehende fácilmente las ciencias”.

Its semantic field, therefore, like that of “wit”, as C. S. Lewis made abundantly clear, is a rich and complex one. For our purpose here today, however, we may set aside what Lewis defines as the “old sense” of “wit/ingenio”, meaning ‘mind’, ‘rationality’, ‘good sense’ (C. S. Lewis 1960), in favour of the “wit/ingenio” which implies above all ‘subtleness’, ‘inventiveness’, ‘imagination’. . . The operation of which provokes delight and amusement by its very surprisingness, remembering in this context that the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* offers as its second acception of *Wit* the: “(Power of giving sudden intellectual pleasure by) unexpected combining or contrasting of previously unconnected ideas or expressions”.

A definition biased towards verbal wit, towards “that sort of mental agility which uses language as the principal equipment of its gymnasium”, to quote C. S. Lewis, and with this kind of wit I will be principally concerned in this paper. However, as has just been suggested, it is significant to note that among the some 370 Spanish and Portuguese works which were translated into English before 1700, the majority of which were concerned with theological and religious matters, with contemporary European politics, voyages of discovery and “Newfound” lands (A. F. Allison 1974), several novels and stories were included, and among these, *all* the major picaresque novels — the Spanish literary genre *par excellence* — and that which was the exercise the greatest influence throughout Europe. Now, the *pícaro* may be defined as one who lives by his wits, as one who has to *ingeniárselas* (as the Spanish phrase goes) to survive; so it is hardly surprising that such novels should exemplify both the ingeniousness or the inventiveness necessary to turn an adverse situation to one’s own advantage, and, frequently, the verbal wit required to secure the success of such inventiveness, both operations tending to provoke amusement, and, often, unwilling admiration, Quintilian’s affirmation that laughter was concerned *in rebus aut in verbis*, being of the essence here. In this context, it is interesting to note that English translators sometimes include the adjective “witty” in their titles even when this does not appear in the original, which would seem to suggest how closely the English (or at least English writers) identified the Spanish with wittiness in the Renaissance period. Thus, an abridged version of Mateo Alemán’s *Guzman de Alfarache* (A. F. Allison 1974: 18-19) mentions in its title “his witty and unparalel’d rogueries. . .”, whilst Quevedo’s *El Buscón*, translated in 1657 (A. F. Allison 1974: 151) appeared as *The Life and Adventures of Buscon, the Witty Spaniard*.

Setting aside, however, the picaresque novel, I should like to single out for special attention today, a work which centres above all on verbal wit, and, particularly, on witty clinches, quibbles, or punch-lines used to round off an episode or “clinch” an argument or a dialogue, or around which, perhaps, the episode or dialogue has been built up. As F. P. Wilson points out in his ground-breaking study of *Early English Jest Books*, (F. P. Wilson 1938: 122) “quibblings with words and quibblings with sense” “were in their heyday” in the late 16th and 17th centuries, and the jests recorded in these periods, in comparison with those in earlier collections such as *A Hundred merry Tales* (W. Hazlitt 1887), depend “less and less upon situation and more and more upon word play and the turn of the phrase” (F. P. Wilson 1938: 130).

This is perfectly true of a work published in Toledo in 1574 by Melchor de Santa Cruz de Dueñas under the title *Floresta Española de Apotegmas o Sentencias, sabia y graciosamente dichas de algunos españoles...* and translated into English by Anthony Copley in 1595. The *Floresta*, which was immensely popular, and was undoubtedly influenced by the success of Erasmus' collection of *Apophthegms*, was dedicated to Don John of Austria, and little is known about the author, who describes himself as "unlettered and of little wit" (*de poco ingenio*), except that he was living in Toledo, where the best Spanish was spoken, when he composed his collection. The *Floresta* is highly considered by Spanish critics and scholars: Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo dedicates eight pages of his *Orígenes de la Novela* (M. Menéndez Pelayo 1943: III 100-113) to the *Floresta*, which he sees as a "libro curiosísimo", "the richest in content of its type" and whose constant success (22 editions, at least, in the 16th and 17th centuries) makes it particularly noteworthy. A recent editor, R. Benítez Claros (1953) underlines the nationalism of the text and the humoristic techniques employed therein.

Copley must have been familiar with one of the first three editions (Toledo, 1574; Saragossa, 1576; Valencia, 1580), the others all dating from after 1595 (including a French version published in Lyon in 1600). He presumably became acquainted with the text while serving the King of Spain in the Low Countries, and brought it back with him to England in 1592. The *Floresta* was translated into Italian and published in Venice in 1616, and the aforementioned French version was re-edited, together with the Spanish, as a bilingual text in 1614 in Brussels, the same year as Copley's second edition. In Germany, it was included in a collection of apophthegms published in Tübingen in 1630.

That the work was meant to amuse and entertain is implicit in the *graciosamente* of the title, and in the reiteration of words such as *ingenio*, *ingeniosas*, *agudeza*, and *donaire* in the dedicatory epistle to Don John of Austria. Indeed many of the vignettes evoked by Santa Cruz recall scenes from the picaresque novel, and Copley insists on the entertainment value of the book in the Prologue to the second edition of his translation (1614): "In this (which is indeede a mere Rapsody of wit) men may learne how to jest without hurt, how to exercise wit without slander, and to be harmlessly pleasant without ribaldry, or the filth of unwash'd words..."<sup>1</sup>.

The Spanish work is divided into eleven sections, each of which has a varying number of chapters, in which anecdotes concerning similar kinds of people, or situations, are neatly classified: thus the 8th Part has seven chapters concerning respectively: blind men, small men, tall men, fat men, thin men, hunchbacks and cripples. Many of the anecdotes are protagonised, and the clinches uttered, by Spanish personalities, for says Santa Cruz at the beginning of his Dedicatory Epistle, among the many books and the "diversas e ingeniosas invenciones" to be found in Spain, there was lacking "a collection of the notable sentences and sayings of Spaniards" (A. Copley 1614). Amongst such personalities we find the monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella, Phillip II, the Emperor Charles V, and his jester, numerous Spanish grandees, and a fair sprinkling of prelates, generals, writers and physicians.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Copley 1595 ~ 1614. Quotations are always from the 1614 edition.

That in that most anti-Spanish of decades, 1590-1600, in which numerous hostile pamphlets and parodic pieces were rolling off the English printing presses (Patricia Shaw 2000b), Anthony Copley should choose to translate the *Floresta Española*, and that it proved to be so successful, being “received with all the applause and liking due to so witty a speaker” (A. Copley 1614), that a second edition appeared, as was mentioned, in 1614, says much for the intrinsic entertainment value of the book.

In the 1595 Dedicatory Epistle to George, earl of Cumberland, Copley himself says that he had hoped to finish it in time for the earl to take it with him on a sea voyage “to the end it might have pleased you to passe away therewith some unpleasant hours” (L.I. Guiney 1938: 327), and in the general preface addressed to the “Gentlemen readers”, words such as “delight”, “content”, “merriment”, “wit”, and “mirth” abound, his suggestion being that his significantly entitled *Wittes, fittes and fancies* be seen as examples of “Wits wandering variety”.

A few words about Anthony Copley himself will not be out of place here, before examining more closely this entertaining text. Described in one document as “a man of whynynge speech but a shrewd invention and resolucion” (L.I. Guiney 1938: 327), Anthony Copley, born in 1567, was the third son of Sir Thomas Copley, who had been created a baron by Phillip II, and was one of the principal Roman Catholic exiles of the reign of queen Elizabeth, to whom he was, in fact, related. His parents being abroad, Anthony Copley was left in the charge of his kinsman, Robert Southwell, the well known Jesuit, but at the age of fifteen, according to his own account, “stole away” to rejoin his parents near Rome; there he spent two years at the English College, but was dismissed, according to Father Pearsons “because he had neglected his studies to write poetry” (L.I. Guiney 1938: 327-328). Pearsons likewise refers to him as “a little wanton idle-headed boy... so light witted as once. . . he went up with a rose in his mouth to preach or make the tones (as there they call them) before all the Colledge out of a pulpit” (L.I. Guiney 1938: 329). In the interim, his father had died, and his mother and brother had returned to England, where they were soon imprisoned as Recusants, and Copley “served the King of Spaine in his wars in Flanders”. This is when, probably, he acquired the excellent knowledge of Spanish which allowed him to appreciate some quite subtle word-play in Santa Cruz’s *Floresta Española*. He then decided to return to England, obviously without permission, and was imprisoned in the Tower in 1590. He was presumably released soon after (L.I. Guiney 1938; G.R. Corner 1856) and by 1592 was living at one of his father’s manors at Roughey, near Horsham, in Sussex. At this period, although by then possibly a married man, he is described by Richard Topclyffe in a letter to the Queen in the following terms:

Young Anthony Copley the most desperate Youth that liveth, and some others be most familiar with *Southwel*. Copley did shoot at a Gentleman the last Summer, and killed an Oxe with a Musket. And in Horsham Church threw his dagger at the Parish Clerk, and strucke it in a Seat in the Church. There liveth not the like I think, in *England* for sudden Attempts. . . (L.I. Guiney 1938: 328).

In fact, Copley may well have been imprisoned several times during Elizabeth’s reign, although in his writings he expresses devoted loyalty to her, and was a fervent “Elisian”



as he rather wittily puts it (A. Copley 1614: Introduction). In 1595 he published his *Wittes, fittes and fancies* together with *Love's Owl*, another adaptation from the Spanish.

At the end of Elizabeth's reign, Copley participated actively in the controversy between the Jesuits and the seculars, publishing three pamphlets on the secular side. After James' accession, he likewise took part in the Bye Plot to put Lady Arabella Stuart on the throne, being subsequently apprehended, tried and condemned to death. He was, however, afterwards pardoned, in August 1604, having made a full confession, and revealing the names and activities of his fellow conspirators. He then left England for Rome and the Holy Land, and probably died on his way back, some time before 1609. He is, as may be seen even from this cursory biography, an interesting figure, and a controversial *enfant terrible*, who perhaps embodies many of the contradictions of the Renaissance period.

Copley's *Wittes, fittes and fancies*, cover, he says "a large and universell matter" (A. Copley 1614: Introduction), reporting "Iests, and Behaviours of all sortes of Estates, from the Throane to the Cottage" (A. Copley 1614: Introduction) whose author is a "stranger..." indeed, he adds, a Spaniard, who "for his part did not baselie conceipt of this matter" (A. Copley 1614: Introduction), since he dared to dedicate it to "so high a State as Don John of Austria" (A. Copley 1614: Introduction). However, he continues, "Divers (of the stories) are of mine own inserting, and that without any iniury I hope to my Author: the whiche are easily to be discerned from his for that they taste more Englishlie." (A. Copley 1614: Introduction). It is not my intention to analyse here the proportion of Spanish and English material in Copley's text, since I am concerned with Spanish wit; suffice it to say that the greater part is of Spanish provenance, and that "tasting more Englishlie" generally indicates the presence of English protagonists (Cardinal Wolsey, Richard Lionheart, etc.) and the inclusion of episodes which depend less exclusively on the verbal quibble for their humour. Although Copley likewise claims to disassociate himself from Santa Cruz's method, this is not really true: he does, in fact, follow the Spaniard's method of classification quite closely, except that he has grouped his anecdotes into seven parts, whereas Santa Cruz has eleven. The number of subjects dealt with however, are practically the same: 69 in the *Floresta* and 64 in Copley's version, but are, therefore, distributed slightly differently. Like Santa Cruz he dedicates a complete section to the exemplification of different types of word play, and, more surprisingly, included a chapter on *Biscayns and fooles*, modelled on Santa Cruz's *De vizcaínos*, whereas an original English compilation might well have attributed such jests to Welshmen.

Santa Cruz's apophthegms are justly praised for their racy colloquialism: "the range of their expressive nuances", writes Benítez Claros, "is so rich and varied that few (other) books of the period possess such a wealth of idioms" (R. Benítez Claros 1953). According to C. S. Lewis (1960): "... of all the excellences prose can have (wit) is the least translatable": Santa Cruz's text is no less challenging in this respect, but it must be admitted that Copley met this challenge with considerable success: his version reveals not only his perfect mastery of the Spanish language, but also a facility for writing popular idiomatic (colloquial) English in perfect consonance with the nature of his text. The Spaniard tends, on the whole to be briefer and more epigrammatic, but there are many instances where there is nothing to choose between the two texts as far as wit and pithiness are concerned. There are occasions, however, when Copley's

versions seem more laboured because of a tendency towards overexplicitness — a danger for any translator who wants to make sure that his reader is getting the point! In other cases, the English text is more cumbersome because the specifically Spanish context demands some elucidation for a foreigner: the anecdote is then hedged round with explanatory phrases of the type “such being the Spanish maner in that case”, or “Now, the lawe of Spaine is...”, which obviously slow down the narration.

It should be emphasized, perhaps, that in spite of the supposed unpopularity of all things Spanish in the 1590s, Copley made no attempt to disguise the protagonists of the anecdotes he is translating: his pages are full of the names of the Spanish personalities to whom, as was mentioned, Santa Cruz assigned many of what must have been traditional stories, in his desire to “nationalize” them. However, when dealing with personalities less renowned than Queen Isabella or Cardinal Ximenes, Copley does on some occasions try to “acclimatise” his anecdotes for the benefit of the English reader: thus a gentleman’s mistress called “del Campo” in Spanish, becomes “Mist. Field” in the English version; “Profesor Salado” becomes “Professor Salter”, and a “Comendador de Calatrava” becomes “Steven Templar” (Order of Calatrava = Knights Templar). He has too, some other sensible adequations to English circumstances: hence a class of characteristically large Spanish cherries (*guindas garrovaes*) become ‘Kentish cherries’, and the Spanish pairing of *nogal* and *hortaliza* (literally ‘walnut-tree’ and ‘fresh greens’) becomes ‘dock’ and ‘nettle’, which obviously reads much better!

Now the enduring popularity of a text such as Santa Cruz’s, and the fact that, in spite of its many Spanish concomitances, its English version was sufficiently successful to go into a second edition, stems from the fact that the human situations, relations, disabilities, debilities and aspirations from which it springs, and which it reflects, are precisely that: *human*, and, hence, universal and eternal, whether they be embodied in Spanish grandees or country wenches (“from the throne to the cottage”!)

Thus, these anecdotes can satirise vanity, make fun of physical disability, laugh at social realities or class distinctions, ironies about politics or religion, chart the gaining and the losing of money, chastise vice by ridiculing it... and do indeed, it seems to me, illustrate well what Copley calls “wits wandering variety”. It is always, I know, risky to try and anatomise humour, but I should just like to offer a few examples of this *variety*, in order to give you at least a taste of Santa Cruz’s comic imagination and of Copley’s prose style.

## COPLEY’S TEXTS<sup>2</sup>

### WOMEN AS WITS

The wit or Spanish women alluded to, as we saw, by several English travellers, is exemplified precisely in Santa Cruz’s anthology, where, although, as we shall see,

<sup>2</sup> Quotations are always from the 1614 London edition.

women may be presented as the butts of masculine humour, they are also, and fairly frequently, the speakers of the punch-line.

Queen Isabella herself is said to have affirmed, on hearing a city praised above her beloved Toledo: "If it be as great as Toledo, then is it not so strong, and if it be as strong, then is it not so great". (111)

Indeed, Copley translates literally several anecdotes concerning Queen Isabella: "He who carried himself well, carried a letter of reference".

She, likewise, we learn abhorred garlic, and being served a dish of fish covered in parsley "which had laine among garlice: as soon as the Queen smelt it, she said: Away with that Villain, see where he is come disguised in greene."

Isabella: four things she liked best to see: "An armed man in the field, a Bishop in Pontificalibus, a Ladie in estate, and a Theife upon the gallows". (estate = en estado = pregnant ~ Probable Hispanism!)

Emperor's Empress: "It seemeth that Nazareth (i.e. Nájera.) comes rather to be seene of us, than to see us". (i. e. richly adorned and accompanied).

## SEXUAL EXPLICITNESS ON PART OF WOMEN

Female references to the sexual shortcomings of their partners, or overt allusions to sexual pleasure, are not lacking in this collection. Thus, in an anecdote, which was to become very popular, "A Lascivious Dame conversing among her Gossips", alluded thus cunningly to her husband's ingenerativeness saying: "In sooth my husband (thanks be to God) hath many good parts in him. He is a good musitian, he writes well, and he can cast an accompt no man better, save onlye that he cannot multiplie". (9).

The text is more agile in Spanish, and the adjective "Lascivious", expressing moral judgement on the part of Copley, is an addition of his own: she is simply "una señora" in Spanish.

Even more daring is the following episode:

A Gentleman taking his leave of his mistresse, said: "I kisse your hands and your feete": She answered, "forget not (I pray) the station between". (95).

*Estación* says the *Diccionario de Autoridades*, could mean "a place designated for some special purpose", and Copley has translated it literally.

## WOMEN AS WITS: SEX

In another *picaresque* story:

To co-rivals to a Maid's dishonestie, drew and fought under window: and she looking out, said: "Sirres, you mistake, your quarrel is not to be ended with steele, but with golde and silver". (95).

A faithful wife shows how to be both witty and moral, when, after being enticed to "unlawful lust by a man", she answers him:



All the while I was a maide I obeyed my parents, and now that I am a wife, I obey my husband: wherefore if your request be honest and reasonable, goe move it to my husband. (94).

Copley makes rather cumbersomely moralising a neat little anecdote about an older woman who:

Seeing the Bride her daughter unarray herself fearfullie to bedward as who would say: "Lord is this the last hour of my maiden head". She said unto her: "Faith (Daughter) and if it pleas'd God, would I were to abide all thy paines too night". (96).

The picaresque world of *La Celestina*, albeit clothed in erudition, is reflected in another anecdote:

One asking what was the reason that such a gentle woman being but a pure widow had so many faire maides in her service? Th'other answered: Because she affordes them free scope, as Hannibal did to his Souldiours at Capua. (96).

Mother-in-Law jokes are also "hardy annual", but, in this collection, less typically, perhaps, joke-wise (since men generally tell the jokes) it is the daughter-in-law/ mother-in-law relationship that is reflected on: Thus even a box of sugared preserves, tastes "sowre" because they come from a girl's mother-in-law, and another young woman has to contend on a more fundamental front with a mother-in-law who fears for the health of her "leave Sonne", if he "haply converse overmuch a nights with his faire bride, and thereby incurre a consumption", seizes all the opportunity she can to send him away on her business. Her angry daughter-in-law therefore scares away a band of birds saying (with old woman's hearing): "Faith (Sparrowes) you had best be gone, least my mother-in-law come and send you away with a witness". (169). Santa Cruz's version is more apposite, since he has *his* sparrows "friskeing".

Isabella Good (in ironical vein) after the discovery of Indies, "it was discoursed before Isabella... that hardly any of her subjects would be found that would adventure so far and dangerous a voyage by Sea". The Queen answered: "Yes Fooles and Misers will". (6).

## OF PHYSICKE-PHYSICIANS

*Old Age and Infirmary*, although essentially tragic, can be approached from an ironical perspective, such a perspective on these subjects being very characteristically Spanish, and jokes about doctors and physicians are, of course, perennial, a term which recalls the story in our text, of the:

Sicke old woman asking her physitian how he thought she should die, he answered: Even as a leaf that can no longer hide upon the tree: she replay'd: What like an orange leaf (I pray)? (192).

A good example of Spanish black humour with medieval undertones is to be found in the story of:

A gentleman lying very sicke in bed, heard a passing bell ring out, and said unto his Physician: Tell me (maister doctor) is yonder musicke for my dancing? (195).

The cunning of the sick forms the basis of the tale of the fevered man asking his daughters for wine, and being granted his wish on the condition he drink water afterwards: however,

He (then) refused it saying; “Now I am not athirst”. Whilst a thirsty feverish child, asks his physician father to give him “some holy water”. (188).

Doctors and physicians, like women, are traditional butts of popular humour: thus a sick man refuses to call for a doctor, preferring “to die at leisure” (192) (id est, in his own time, not the doctor’s!), whilst a bad painter, who never managed to sell a picture, sets up as a doctor in another locality, “to th’end the *earth* may bury all my ignorance and errors hereafter” (75).

In so far as *OLD AGE* is concerned, the wryly ironical perspective is manifest in the saying of an old gentleman, who affirmed:

that three things were increased unto him by olde age: viz. to see more, to doe more, and command more: To see more, by reason he was faine to use spectacles to make his letters seeme the greater: To doe more, in that alighting off his horse he was readie to drawe the saddle after him: To command more, for that he was faine to speake twenty times, before ere he could get his men to stirre (189).

In fact, Copley departs from the original to no very good purpose here, since Santa Cruz has his old man “seeing double, because of the weakness of his sight.”

## OLD AGE

Another old man contemplating his wrinkles and his toothless mouth in a mirror attributes these defects to the inferior quality of the glass: “Mirrors are not what they used to be when I was young. When I was (a) young man I tooke pleasure to view myselfe in a glass, so well mettled were they in those days.” (190) Santa Cruz’s original is perhaps neater being literally: “they don’t make mirrors these days like they used to.”

A further lamentable effect of old age is pointed out, even more explicitly in Copley’s version than in the original: for an old man leaving his bed “to visit” his wife, bangs his nose against the bedstand. She awakes crying “Who is there?” Her husband answering “Somewhat it was (Lady) that was coming towards you, but now it is downe again.” (190) Not really funny in English — neater in Spanish “Who is there? Nobody now, by God!”

## ANTI-WOMEN

Women, and above all wives and mothers-in-law, must have been the butts of masculine witticisms since the dawn of civilisation and many of the “dichos” collected by Santa Cruz would not have sounded out of place on the old English music-hall, where jokes about women’s loquacity, inquisitiveness, lasciviousness and bossiness used to be the order of the day. Thus “One advised his friend to chose his wife rather with his ears than with his eyes.” (88)

Similarly, “One being asked why he married so little a wife, he answered: Of evils, the least is best” (del mal, el menos).

Whilst Pedro Mexía was, apparently, wont to say “that a woman is the heaven of a man’s eye, the Hell of his soul, and the Purgatorie of his purse...” (96).

Interestingly, here Copley omits a final comment, included by Santa Cruz “y limbo del pensamiento”, probably for stylistic reasons, because he has added “a man’s” which Santa Cruz does not write (“paraíso de los ojos, y infierno de las almas, y purgatorio de las bolsas, y limbo del pensamiento”).

In another misogynistic instance, Copley seems to have misinterpreted the Spanish text, or perhaps knew too much idiomatic Spanish for “One (asking) an aged man, how it chanced that he being of those yeares, he continued so fat withall: he answered: Never was I yet a husband nor a servant”. In fact, the original *amo and moço* should, I think, be translated as *master and servant*: it makes better sense. However, *amo* could refer colloquially (bantering) to the husband of a wet-nurse, so perhaps this contributed to Copley’s confusion.

In another misogynistic anecdote the master of a storm-tost ship voyaging to Peru asks his passengers to throw their heaviest belongings overboard. One man offers to throw his wife out, for “She is the heaviest thing I have, and I can best spare her”!

## SOLDIERING AND FIGHTING

These give rise to a number of anecdotes as is to be expected in a period of constant warfare, and incidentally, it is perhaps worth mentioning here, that Spanish soldiers had an excellent reputation for valour and endurance (P. Shaw 1987-1988).

The effects of war are neatly summed up in the following two stories: “A Captain dispatching a lame Souldier out of (his) band, the Souldier mal-content said unto him: the warres need no men that can run away, but such as can bide by it”. (186).

Whilst a Galician soldier protagonises a popular anecdote: this Gallego going to the wars, and being shot in the head by an arrow: “The surgeon recording the wound said, that he could not possibly live, for that the arrow has pierced his braine. The Gallego answered: That cannot be, for I have no braine at all; had I had braines, I trow I had never come to the wars”. (40).

The “Gran Capitán”, the Spanish General Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, is supposedly the author of a number of *bon mots*, which Copley translates literally: such are, for example, “souldiours in peace are like chimneys in Summer” (34); “... if their enemy flye, make him a golden bridge” (34) (orig. text = puente de *plata*, alliterative)! Still said: “One discommending Bull-baying in Spain with dartes when the bull is suffered to run loose and his reason was: Because it teacheth men to run away...”

## FOOD

There is a story of a servant who bought his master small cheap cherries, instead of “great Kentish” ones.

Vignette: “Wherefore I eate them thus with spectacles to make them seem great ones, and that is as good”. Lovely apothegm!

One wanted to say that “povre men want meat to their stomackes and rich men stomacks to their meat”.

Spanish: *el rico cuando tiene ganas, el pobre cuando tiene qué*.

## SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL CLIMBING

These aspects of human life are as old as human civilization, and was certainly common in Renaissance Spain: hence, Santa Cruz tells the anecdote of the “Grave Preacher, ambitious of a Bishopricke”, who, after preaching, and “a gentleman of worship” offering to help him down from the pulpit, replies: “Pardon me, sir... may it please you rather to keep me up with your friendly hand, for downe (alas) I can come along all too easily” (63), a version of St. Thomas More’s “I pray you good master... help me up, for to come down I will make shift for myself.” (he said at the scaffold).

Another anecdote concerns a rich farmer marrying his daughter to a poor and infirm *hidalgo* who has passed on to her his disease, and the reply of the girl when her father asks after his health “Doe as he may, for me (father), You (for your part) to endow me with his blood (i.e. blue, noble) have undone my flesh” (192-3).

## CLASS DISTINCTION

This aspect is likewise reflected in anecdotes such as that of the veterinary farrier surgeon who refused to charge a doctor for his services, affirming that “We fellow craftsmen use not to take money of one another”.

Doctor Parra (and Copley leaves the Spanish proper names untouched) having visited the Duke of Nájera’s son, and his muleteer, prescribes for “Don García half a chicken, and (for) the muleteer a pound and a half of beefe” (127). Today, we should probably prefer to be in the muleteer’s place! But it is interesting to observe that the original Spanish has *mutton* (carnero), not beef: a case of “acclimatisation” perhaps!

## TRAVEL BY LAND AND SEA

The subject will obviously lend itself to picaresque-type vignettes. Thus we read about the two travellers who meet up in an inn, and decide to share a capon for their supper. One, however, asks his companion how his father died and the latter, nothing loth, launches into a long discourse concerning his father’s last illness, whilst his companion serenely eats his way through the capon. When he realizes this, he in his turn asks his fellow how *his* father died, only to be told “suddenly, very suddenly”. Real fabliau matter! (Spanish *súpito*).

Rather neat too is the tale of the traveller passing through a country village on a frosty morning who “... was set upon by a Mastiffe: He stooping for a stone to throw at him, and finding it hard frozen to the earth said: A poxe on the country where the stones are ty’d and dogs let loose”!

## EQUIVOCATES OF SPEECH - WORDPLAY

### *Reported Grafitti*

A man getting a good contract, proud of his work, writes: “Sancho Rodríguez made this bridge”; another man adds: “this bridge made Sancho Rodríguez”.

D. Álvaro de Luna has a half moon in his heraldic crest of his escutcheon engraven on a wall: Page writes with a coale underneath: “Nunca llena” (Copley *verbatim*): “Bee it never at full”, Duke angry, Page: “Mary (sir), because the moone being once at full, of force it must decrease”. The sense reversed by identities of speech provides the *double-entendre*.

## OF FELLOWS AND THEEVES

Ronquillo, a Spanish justice, used to say that “it is good to hang a theefe of what age so ever he bee: a young thiefe to th’end shall steal no more, an old thiefe for former thefts.”

A group of Thieves were removing furniture, tapestries, etc. A neighbour intervenes and is told that the mother has died. But the neighbour says: “I’ve seen no one weeping at the door”. Copley explains the Spanish custom. The neighbour gets this answer: “I warrant yee you shall see weeping eyes enough there in the morning.” And so indeed (when the family comes back to their house).

## GAME AND GAMESTERS

Picaresque scene: a woman with a gambling son: on a storm-tost ship: “Sonne, if I drowne today, I pray thee play not away my clothes till I be buried.”

## BULLFIGHTING

A Moore viewing the bull bayted with dartes in an enclosed compasse of ground, where both the bull and the man fought loosely and in danger: A Spaniard asked him how he liked that sport: he answered: too little for earnest and too much for Jest.

Such as at San Fermín, talking of earnest: what would Hemingway have made of that?

## KINGS AND GRANDEES

These anecdotes are generally more sententious, less amusing. There is an interesting paradoxical maxim: “it is much safer to take advice of the dead, than of the living” (i.e. books). In Santa Cruz this is attributed to King D. Alonso de Aragón, while Copley acclimatises this as King Alfred the Great. There is a touch of Sheridan’s Mr. Hardcastle about King Alonso of Aragón: “who used to say, that five olde things pleased him passing well; viz. olde wood for fuell; an olde horse for easie riding, wine of a year olde; olde friends, and olde books.”



## PHYSICAL DEFORMITY

The Renaissance was less sensitive to physical defects, and picaresque novels are full of jokes against such figures: However, let us have this anecdote: A blind man gets married, tries to embrace his bride before all the company: "She in modestie requested him to forbear till night: he answered: Nay (Mouse) all is night with mee". Santa Cruz's version reads slightly differently: "esté vuesa merced quedo, habrá otro día –para mí no hay día!"

## BISCAYNS AND FOOLES

As F.P. Wilson points out "It is the habit of every country to poke fun at foreigners and their stupidity at misunderstanding the manners and speech of the country they are visiting" (F.P. Wilson 1938: 121-158), and we may add, at their simpleness and stupidity in general. "The favourite butt of the (English) sixteenth century jest-book was the Welshman" (*ibid.*). Today, it is, undoubtedly, the Irishman, in America the Poles perhaps (?). "In sixteenth century Spanish jest-books this sort of jest is told about "Biscains", who, writes Thomas Wright, "are not so subtle as the Castilians" (Th. Wright 1604). Indeed Santa Cruz has a chapter devoted to *Vizcainos*, which Copley exegetically translates as OF BISCAYNS and Fooles: as was mentioned, he does not, therefore, "acclimatise" these jests: one or two examples will suffice:

In a tumult in a town of Biscay, the Mayor red the Kings Proclamation thus: "King of Castile, Leon, Arragon, Navarre", etc. Whereunto they all answered: "King and Queene God blesse them, but as for etc. the Devill take him, we'll none of him." (147)

A Basque priest being reproved by Cardinal Pero González de Mendoza for carrying a cutlass under his cloak, it being improper for a priest to carry arms, defends himself by saying that: "it is for dogs, not men". The Cardinal suggests as a remedy against aggressive dogs the reciting of the Gospel of St. John, but the Basque retorts: "True (my Lord) but these cures understand no Latin. . ." Some of the amusement derives from their dialect (like in Shakespeare's *Henry V*). Copley can't "translate" this.

A preacher sends a boy called David to the cook for some pies on tick: the boy returns while the preacher is at his sermon on the prophets: "What saith David?" — "Marie, no more pies (he saith) till you have pay'd him the skore."

Tortured to confess a crime of no avail, finally the justice says: "Tell us now even as you are a gentleman, did you not it?" Then the Byscayn answered: "I marie (sirres) as I am a gentleman: that's another matter, why said ye not so at the first? Go to, I did it!"

Today, these kinds of jokes are assigned above all to the inhabitants of the township of Lepe (mentioned by Chaucer's Pardoner) in the south of Spain: there are even anthologies of "Chistes Leperos".

## SIMPLETON JOKES

Simpleton jokes can be exemplified by the “passenger at sea (who feeling his stomacke rise, said unto the maister of the ship): I pray hold still the ship a while, till I vomit” (48), or the boy, who, when thieves enter the house, says: “Sirs, get you gone, and come again anon, for I am not yet asleepe.”

## OBSEQUIOUSNESS

The awe inspired by royalty is ironically dealt with in an anecdote concerning *Queene Isabella* (just “a queen” in Copley): “A Queene asking a country gentleman where his wife was to be brought to bed? He answered: Whensoever it shall please your Highnesse to command.” (6).

## CHILDREN’S SIMPLICITY - Ingeniousness

A traveller at an inn asks after the excellent meal they gave him when he was there before: the child of the Innkeeper answered: “If my father should loose a horse every week, it would be deare veale to him!”

A father forgets to give his child meat. He calls for “Salt (said the father) and wherefore salt (my boy?).” “Marie, father... for the meat you are to give me.”

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Copley is not, however, the only source of transmission of Spanish wit in the 17th century, for we do find witty anecdotes and examples of Spanish *bons mots* reported in other texts. It is significant, however, that one of the most characteristic purveyors of examples of Spanish wit, the hispanophile James Howell,<sup>3</sup> who lived on and off in Madrid between 1622-24, reproduces in his letters several of the clinches included in Santa Cruz’s (or Copley’s?) work, without acknowledging his debt to either: among these may be mentioned the cases of the “brainless Galician”, the “unmultiplying husband” and the country girls whose flesh has been tainted by her contact with noble blood! Spanish aristocrats, however, loom large in Howell’s *Letters* as sources of amusing anecdotes or sayings: thus, says Howell, writing to his brother in Amsterdam, the Duke of Alba referred to the Dutch as being:

The nearest neighbours to hell (the great abyss) of any people upon earth, because they dwell the lowest...

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<sup>3</sup> Howell’s correspondence is quoted from A. Replier’s 1907 edition.

More amusing, in fact, is what Howell call the “Dutchmen’s litany” and which he likewise quotes: “From the sea, the Spaniard, and the Devil, the Lord deliver us...”<sup>4</sup>

The Albas themselves were, in fact, the subject of another Spanish *bon mot* recorded by the traveller Thomas Williams, in 1680, and connected with their notorious longevity:

“... their sons”, he writes, “being always old before they come to the estate or title... makes the Spaniards call them *Padres Eternos*”.

The Duke of Osuna is another Spanish grandee quoted by Howell in a letter dated 1620: the Duke having asked a series of galley slaves about the crimes that had brought them to this pass, they all violently protest their innocence and the injustice of their sentence, except for one “sturdy little black man”, who replied:

“Sir, ... I cannot deny but I am justly put in here, for I wanted money, and so took a purse hard by Tarragona to keep me from starving”; the Duke with a little staff he had in his hand gave him two or three blows upon the shoulders, saying, “You rogue, what do you do among so many honest innocent men? Get you gone out of their company”. So he was free’d...

The Duke of Osuna as dispenser of justice has recourse to what Copley defines as “Sence reversed by Identitie of Speech” in another amusing anecdote recounted by Howell (A. Replier 1907) when he was Viceroy of Sicily, a local Duke left his fortune and the upbringing of his son to the Jesuits, saying that when the boy was of age: “darete al mio figliuolo quell que voi volete”. The Jesuits therefore proposed giving him one third of his father’s fortune and keeping the other two thirds for themselves. However, the Duke of Osuna ordering the will to be re-read, and finding the above-mentioned words: “darete al mio figliuolo quel que voi volete”, told the Jesuits: “you must by virtue and tenor of these words, give what you will to the son, which by your own confession is two parts of three...”

Howell reports *verbatim* another courtly *bon mot*, this time uttered by the Marquis of Montesclaros, who, spying Don Rodrigo Calderón giving a letter to Philip III’s favourite, the Duke of Lerma, on his knees, observed: *Voto a tal, aquel hombre sube más a las rodillas, que yo no hago a los pies* (sic), meaning: “By God, that man will rise higher on his knees than I shall do standing up”. This jest may be classified with similar “clinchés” which depend for their humour on the identification of physical elevation with social advancement, like Copley’s “Great Preacher” wanting to be helped up, rather than down! Sir Richard Fanshawe who was Ambassador in Madrid 1664-66, likewise reports *verbatim* to Henry Bennet<sup>5</sup> what he describes as an example of “witty reason” on the part of the Madrid populace: a *graffito* on the Palace walls saying “Si el Rey no muere, el reino muere” (“If the King does not die, the kingdom will”)! In a similar vein, Howell assures his correspondent (P. Shaw

<sup>4</sup> James Howell *Letter 5 september 1633*; Cf. A. Replier 1907.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. P. Shaw 1981: 150, and Letter to Mr. H. Bennet, written from Madrid, 21 October 1664. See *Original Letters of his Excellency Sir Richard Fanshawe, during his Embassies in Spain and Portugal*. London 1702.

2000b (1979): 114) that: “As witty an anagram as I have ever heard or read”, was that made by a gentleman called Tomás, enamoured of a novice called María: “To María mas. I would take more”!

I, too, would willingly take more of your time retailing such wits, fits and fancies, but I fear I may be overloading my subject with so many illustrations that it is in danger of sounding more like a music-hall tune than an academic talk; however, this is, as Copley might say, “a gentle merry-wittie” audience, and I trust you will forgive me.

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