

## 9 “Tan mal francés como gastas” Syphilis in the Poetry of Quevedo

Adrián J. Sáez

Perhaps one of the best-known passages of *El Buscón*—and of all of Quevedo’s work—is the description of *Dómine* [preceptor of Latin] Cabra. Aside from being cast as “un clérigo cerbatana” with his “ojos avencidados en el cogote” [“eyes next-door to each other in his throat”] and other choice descriptors, Cabra is depicted as having “la nariz, de cuerpo de santo, comido el pico, entre Roma y Francia, porque se le había comido de unas bías de resfriado, que aun no fueron de vicio porque cuestan dinero” [“his nose, like that of the body of a saint, with the end eaten off, between Rome (a term that also means short-nosed) and France, because it had been eaten by some blisters from a cold, for they weren’t quite the kind you get from vices as those cost money to get”].<sup>1</sup> This description accumulates characteristically witty images in order to evoke the idea of a nose without a point: like the incorrupt bodies of saints (or their statues), Cabra’s flat nose is in line with the effects of syphilis (“entre Roma y Francia”), though this physiognomy is actually due to a cold because the cleric is so avaricious that he doesn’t waste his money on prostitutes.<sup>2</sup> By such turns, and thanks to the registered trademark of Quevedo’s wit, this vignette in fact takes advantage of just a small fraction of the figurative and symbolic power of the *morbus gallicus*.

In Quevedo’s context, syphilis represented creative possibilities in the best sort of way because it had everything: circumstantial origins including a touch of mystery (the Neapolitan wars of 1494–98); connections with the sensual (and darker) side of love; implied links to medicine; a relationship with scandal (divine punishment, a sign of sin, etc.); uses as a rhetorical weapon (as in expressions like *mal francés*, *mal español*, *mal napolitano*); and a long and rich intertextual tradition, which could be exploited to both burlesque and serious ends.<sup>3</sup> All of these ingredients combine optimally for the confection of games of wit, and Quevedo gladly picks up the gauntlet, making use of the theme of syphilis in his poems according to diverse aims, functions, and meanings. As Arellano aptly puts it, syphilis is “la reina de las enfermedades en la poesía burlesca de Quevedo” [“the queen of illnesses in the burlesque poetry of Quevedo”].<sup>4</sup> The following discussion is aimed at tracing the contours of Quevedo’s approach to *mal francés*.

## The Game of Taboo: Context, Intertextuality, and Medicine

Something that bears clarifying before proceeding is the complex location of syphilis in Quevedo's work at the triple intersection between the public revealing of the disease within a specific framework, early poetic interest in the disease, and constant historical discourse surrounding the search for a cure, all of which combines to generate a productive, *sui generis* iconography. Perhaps the touchstone of the matter harkens to the relationship between syphilis and clinical categories of disease, beginning with Fracastoro's poem *Syphilidis sive de morbo gallico* (1530), which, together with Fracastoro's treatise *De contagione et contagiosis morbis* (1546), lends its name to the illness.<sup>5</sup> Such works form part of a progressively expanding list of authors and texts interested—with more or less serious or mocking intention—in syphilis. Names like Agnolo Firenzuola (*In lode del legno santo e Intorno alla sua malattia*, 1528 and 1533), Francesco Berni (two poems in *In lode della peste*, 1532), and Gimabattista Lalli (the epic poem *La Franceide overo del mal francese*, 1629) represent an Italian vanguard in syphilitic poetry, a mantle soon taken up by Spanish *ingenios* like Cristóbal de Castillejo, Baltasar del Alcázar, Hurtado de Mendoza, and Sebastián de Horozco, among others.<sup>6</sup>

If in principle the medical theme—the description of symptoms and their connection to the pathologies of chancre, leprosy, etc.<sup>7</sup>—seems to play a predominant role in syphilitic poetry, later on this approach becomes comic material for jokes related to satirical types, such as the prostitute and the old woman. More concretely, poetry dedicated to syphilis tends to fall into one of two categories: on the one hand, texts that are concerned with causes and symptoms of the ailment itself, yielding a sort of scientific poetry, and on the other, comical approaches that exploit the potential of the disease from within the model of the paradoxical encomium.<sup>8</sup> In this context, Ponce Cárdenas warned about the need for a broad examination of the “poetics of disease” elaborated in this Italo-Spanish *corpus*.<sup>9</sup> For now, I'll focus on such an approach in the specific case of Quevedo.

Before turning our attention to Quevedo's poetry, however, there are other texts by the author in which traces of syphilis can be found. Perhaps the epidemic shows its first signs in *Capitulaciones matrimoniales* (1600–05, “Y declara con juramento que es sano y entero de sus miembros, y que no ha tomado sudores ni unciones, ni ha usado de bragueros, hilas ni de otros pertrechos asquerosos” [“And he declares under oath that he is healthy and complete in his members, and that he has not received sweat treatments nor ointments, nor has he used trusses, bandages, nor other disgusting instruments”]);<sup>10</sup> in the *Pregmática que han de guardar las hermanas comunes* (or *Premática contra las cotorreras*, 1609–26, which includes the threat of a sentence “que será aposentada vuestra vejez en el hospital” [“that your old age will be housed in the hospital”]);<sup>11</sup> and

in *Gracias y desgracias del ojo del culo* (c. 1620, “como se ve cada día por falta de los de la cara, que, expuestos a toda ventisca e inclemencia de leer, de fornicar, de una purga, de una sangría, le dejan a un cristiano a buenas noches” [“as is seen every day for the lack of eyes in the face, which, exposed to all sorts of gales and inclemency from reading, from fornicating, from purges, from blood-letting, they leave a Christian in a fine state”]),<sup>12</sup> The theme gains steams in *Visita y anatomía de la cabeza del cardenal Richeleu* (1635), which already opens by playing with dilo-gism in its request for a medical evaluation by sage experts:

Viendo que hasta ahora el peor y más contagioso y asqueroso humor que infestaba el mudo era el que llaman mal francés, y que hoy en Francia se ha derramado y que corre por todos sus miembros peor humor de otro peor francés, y sabiendo que toda la sciencia afirma que estos humores bajan de la destemplanza de la cabeza, y siendo cierto que no es la de nuestro señor el rey de donde procede por ser bien templada y compuesta y asistida de real temperamento, buscando cuál cabeza será esta que es manantial de tanto veneno, he hallado que sea la del eminentísimo cardenal de Richeleu, no por conjeturas sino por testificación ocular y experiencia mayor de toda excepción; y como para la cura sea necesario acudir al origen y reconocerle, he acudido a vosotros, doctísimos médicos, para que veáis de qué suerte se podría explorar con la anatomía de esta cabeza la raíz de tan copiosa y mortal pestilencia

[Seing as how up until now the worst and most contagious and repugnant humor that has infested the world is the one called *mal francés*, and how today in France it has spread and an even worse humor from an even worse Frenchman runs through all of France’s members, and knowing that all of Science affirms that these humors descend from imbalances in the head, and being as it is certain that it is not from the imbalance of Our Lord the King that it proceeds, since his head is well-tempered and composed and assisted by a royal temperament, searching for which head is to blame that is the fountainhead of so much poison, I have found that it is that of the most eminent Cardinal Richelieu, not by means of conjecture but by through eyewitness testimony and experience beyond any sort of exception; and since for the cure it is necessary to go to the source and recognize it, I have come to you, most wise doctors, so that you can see how you might explore the root of such a copious and mortal pestilence with the anatomy of this head.]<sup>13</sup>

A little later on, a very similar game appears in a letter addressed “Al padre Juan Antonio Velázquez, Provincial de Castilla en la Compañía de Jesús” from the prison of San Marcos de León (October 20, 1642):

Lastimosas nuevas vienen aquí de los cristianos viejos circuncidados. Cuéntanse viudas de navaja y cauterio, invención nueva en los matrimonios. En lugar de traer al mal francés debajo de los pies, le traen entre las piernas, y los que habían de invocar a Santiago, invocan a san Cosme y san Damián

[Pituous news arrives here from the circumcised Old Christians. Widows tell of razors and cauterization, new inventions in matrimony. Rather than dragging *mal francés* beneath their feet, they carry it between their legs, and those who should be invoking Santiago, invoke Saint Cosmas and Saint Damian.]<sup>14</sup>

There is a good deal of nastiness to the game here. Aside from the initial opening nod to the imperfections of the penis (a circumcision following Christian rather than Jewish rites), through dilogism the text critiques the dedication of nobles to prostitution—which gets them nothing but “mal francés . . . entre las piernas”—rather than committing to the fight against their French enemy, who they should be working to vanquish (“debajo de los pies”), all the while invoking the patron saints of medicine (“san Cosme y san Damián”) to ask for a cure rather than invoking the name of the Apostle James to aid in the cause of righteous war.<sup>15</sup>

### “El mal comunicado”: Mapping Quevedo’s Body of Syphilis Poetry

There are almost 20 poems by Quevedo dedicated to the theme of syphilis,<sup>16</sup> aside from other scattered possible cases.<sup>17</sup> These references can be distributed into four groups:<sup>18</sup>

1. Above all, these poems offer a gallery of pains and effects of the disease. For example, “Haga en mí lo que las bubas/en otros cabellos hacen” [“May the buboes do unto me as they do unto other hair”];<sup>19</sup> in the context of a hermit’s penitence, “Cofrades de los dolores/son, por mis bubas, mis miembros” [“Because of my buboes, my members are confraternity brothers of my pain”];<sup>20</sup> the warning for a young court pretender that he not end up “sin narices y con parches,/con unciones y sin cejas” [“without a nose and with patches, ointments, and without eyebrows”];<sup>21</sup> “El narigudo oledor” [“The well-nosed sniffer”] who “a sombra de sus narices/se está riendo del romo,/que en figura de garbanzo,/por braco juró de monstruo” [“in the shadow of his nose is laughing at the stub-nosed person who in the figure of a garbanzo as a pug was sworn as a monster”];<sup>22</sup> the grotesque tokens of love of a syphilitic lady in number 729; the action of Time upon young men, which “sin poder andar le hace/pasar caballos a Francia” [“without walking makes him send horses to France”];<sup>23</sup> the scene of a woman “con guardainfante plenario,/de los que llaman las ingles/

- guarda infantes y caballos” [“with a full *guardinfante* (a popular sort of very wide farthingale worn by women in early modern Spain), of the kind that they call the groin that hides infants and horses”].<sup>24</sup>
2. From a different angle, some poems are dedicated to cataloguing a series of remedies and treatments: the “seis libras de zarza” [“six pounds of sarsaparilla root”] that is the dowry of the ugly old woman in “Casamiento ridículo,” which are repeated in the gathering of “zarza y gritos” [“sarsaparilla root and screams”] in case “bubas” [“buboes”] emerge in the dialogued romance between Villodres and Maricomino;<sup>25</sup> the erroneous exchange of two treatments between “la purga/con un recién desposado/y un vejecito con bubas” [“purg-ing with a newlywed and a little old man with buboes”], which are complemented by a prescription for “sudores” [“sweats”] (a clinical treatment whereby sweating is provoked in patients through a variety of means; more on this later).<sup>26</sup>
  3. Aside from these approaches, there is a dialogued game that includes a wink and a nod in the direction of circumstantial and political commentary: “mal francés al buen francés volvieron” [“they gave *mal francés* to the good Frenchman”] in the poem “A la venida del duque de Humena.”<sup>27</sup> This poem is dedicated to the French diplomatic visit aimed at negotiating the capitulations of Spanish-French double royal marriage, and it presents ceremonies of welcome and public celebration that end up with syphilis infecting “las trongas de Madrid peores” [“the worst trollops of Madrid”].<sup>28</sup>
  4. And, finally, syphilis is presented hand in glove with prostitution in the dialogued sonnet “A una roma, pedigüeña por demás”;<sup>29</sup> in two romances on the curing of Marica in the hospital;<sup>30</sup> and in “Respuesta de la Méndez a Escarramán,”<sup>31</sup> as well as in the illness-themed ending of “Dama cortesana lamentándose de su pobreza y diciendo la causa,”<sup>32</sup> in another entitled “Púrgase una moza de los defectos de que otra enfermaba,”<sup>33</sup> more briefly during Antoñuela la Pelada’s summertime stays in Madrid’s Antón Martín in “A la perla de la mancebía de las Soleras,”<sup>34</sup> in the *redondillas* “De la roma,”<sup>35</sup> and in the pitiable state of *la Méndez* who, “de bubosa,/ya no me puedo mandar” [“I can’t move around because I’m so bubo-infested”] and who writes while enclosed and sweating in a hospital,<sup>36</sup> among other poems by Quevedo that do not always privilege the connection to syphilis.<sup>37</sup>

Writing against the grain of contemporary dominant trends in poetry on syphilis, Quevedo’s approach is rather original. To begin with, the poet discards autobiographical touches—whether real or fictional—relating to the afflicted subject, and he also does not follow the popular mode of the paradoxical encomium in dealing with the theme of buboes, which enjoyed Italian precedents<sup>38</sup> and was *de rigueur* in academic circles.<sup>39</sup>

Quevedo prefers, rather, to focus on the witty presentation of the effects of the ailment and evocations of a limited number of remedies (“zarzas” or sarsaparilla root, purges, and “sudores” or clinically induced sweating, but no cures using mercury, concoctions of *palo santo*, bloodletting, etc.). These approaches, however, deviate from the medical satire that Quevedo so exploits on other occasions.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, the poet takes full advantage of dilogism in order to throw political darts through the vehicle of *mal francés* (both in other poems and in his letters and other minor works already alluded to earlier).<sup>41</sup> In short, Quevedo’s approach, which I have only sketched here in broad strokes, represents a novel model for poeticizing syphilis. In what follows, I would like to consider more specifically how syphilis operates in a pair of poems concretely in relation to intertextuality and the category of the visual.

### Syphilitic Visuality and Intertextuality in Quevedo

The exhibitionist pleasure that Quevedo’s work takes in reveling in the ravages of *mal francés* is directly related to the grotesque portraits that are more broadly so dear to the author, and this phenomenon is of a piece with the deformed images of *pidonas*, prostitutes, and related figures that mark his work.<sup>42</sup> The romance “En la simulada figura de unas prendas ridículas, burla de la vana estimación que hacen los amantes de semejantes favores” offers a fine example of such tendencies through the churlish gifts of Benita, a woman devastated by the illness.<sup>43</sup> Her description approximates a clinical profile of the *perfecta sifilítica*:

Sacó luego unos cabellos,  
entre robles y castaños,  
que a intercesión de unas bubas  
se te cayeron antaño.  
Considere aquí el letor  
pío, o curioso o cristiano,  
su gozo al ver que de liendres  
eran sartas los más largos.  
Descubrió un retrato tuyo,  
y halló que tiene, al mirarlo,  
cosas de padre del yermo,  
por lo amarillo y lo flaco:  
la frente mucho más ancha  
que conciencia de escribano;  
las dos cejas, en ballesta,  
en lugar de estar en arco;  
la nariz, casi tan roma  
como la del Padre Santo,  
que parece que se esconde

del mal olor de tus bajos;  
avecindados los ojos  
en las honduras del casco,  
con dos abuelas por niñas,  
de ceja y pestañas calvos;  
una bocaza de infierno,  
con sendos bordes por labios  
donde hace la santa vida  
un solo diente ermitaño;  
halló al cabo un escarpín,  
que, sin estar resfriado,  
tomando estuvo sudores  
seis meses en tus zancajos.

[She removed some hairs, somewhere between oak and chesnut,<sup>44</sup> which you lost yesteryear through the intercession of some buboes. May the pious, curious, or Christian reader consider here his joy upon seeing that the longest ones were but strands because of the lice. She revealed a portrait and found that she has, upon consideration, things proper to a desert father because of being so yellow and so skinny; her forehead much wider than the conscience of a scribe; her two eyebrows in the shape of a crossbow rather than an arch;<sup>45</sup> her nose almost as flat as that of the Holy Father, looking like it's trying to hide from the smell of her lower regions; her eyes, neighbored together in the depths of her skull, with two grandmothers in place of pupils,<sup>46</sup> and bald of eyelashes and eyebrows; a nasty mouth from hell, with a pair of borders for lips where a solitary tooth lives out a holy life as a hermit; at the end, she found a slipper which, without having a cold, spent six months on the end of her foot taking sweat treatments.]<sup>47</sup>

Aside from other tokens that I will leave aside here (a “reverendo zapato” [“revered shoe”], a bad knot, and an even worse ribbon),<sup>48</sup> by means of a lock of hair and a small portrait this poem ridicules the custom of the gallant gifts offered by ladies, mocking such conventions above all because this case relates to a woman sick with syphilis (perhaps a prostitute) whose gift-giving breaks with all possible models. Her amorous token is a repugnant castoff (her hair, infested with lice and fallen out due to buboes). The starkly visual rhetoric of these verses conjures an authentic negative portrait of conventional beauty: yellowish color and extreme skinniness, likened here to a “padre del yermo,” one of the desert fathers; eyebrows affected by a generalized alopecia that leaves her with a depilated face; a nose “como la del Padre Santo” [“like that of the Holy Father”], missing its end while also trying to escape the fetid odor of the girl’s own body; and a toothless and foul-smelling mouth, framed by the sweating (“sudores”) associated with clinical treatments for syphilis.

Together with this explosive parody of the conventional *descriptio puellae* (although following the same descending vertical organization that such descriptions demand), the horrendous image of Benita is presented here as a portrait in miniature, in yet another example of Quevedo's appreciation of the visual medium of painting.<sup>49</sup> The portrait presented here can be read as the flipside of the "Retrato a Lisi que traía en una sortija,"<sup>50</sup> connecting also in a material sense to the genre of the "retrato" (mini-portrait)<sup>51</sup> and to the recourse of the painting within a painting, through which the inserted image is commented upon via ekphrasis within the poem,<sup>52</sup> only to conclude with the abandoning of these turpid objects in the middle of the countryside.<sup>53</sup> The heightened visuality that is basic to this poem invites the text's consumer not only to imagine in vivid detail the sick body of the female subject but perhaps even to draw a measure of sarcastic "gozo" ["pleasure"] from the imaginative activity of conjuring such a grotesque vision.

On a different level, the diptych of Marica's syphilitic cures also stands out ("Cura una moza en Antón Martín la tela que mantuvo" and "Segunda parte de 'Marica en el hospital' y primera en lo ingenioso").<sup>54</sup> In short, this pair of romances presents two descriptions of treatment for Marica's case of *mal francés* and its consequences, with a range of exhibitions of intertextual winks and nods (to *bailes* like "Escarramanes" and "¡Ay! ¡ay! ¡ay!"); traditional and Gongorine romances, like "Cata Francia, Montesinos" and "muchos siglos de hermosura");<sup>55</sup> anti-French attacks within the Carolingian tradition ("Por todas sus coyunturas/anda encantado Roldán");<sup>56</sup> grotesque images of corporeal degradation that invert Petrarchan conventions;<sup>57</sup> and, in the first of these two poems, games of wit of all sorts, while the second maintains the same clever dynamic with the presence of a *galán* who accompanies her in the same suffering.<sup>58</sup>

Although Quevedo had other models at hand—Martial<sup>59</sup> among other Classical authorities, along with a number of Italian authors—I would like to highlight the relevance here of Pietro Aretino's *Ragionamenti* (comprised of a *Ragionamento* and a *Dialogo*, Paris [Venice], Mazzola [Marcolini], 1534 and 1536), which served as a repository of syphilitic and prostibulary themes, recognizing of course the text's survival of censorship in an expurgated version (in the translation of Fernán Xuárez, *Coloquio de las damas*, Sevilla, Juan de León, 1547).<sup>60</sup> Quevedo shows himself to be a connoisseur of some of Aretino's work,<sup>61</sup> which invites us to consider the possible influence of Aretino's representation of syphilis on Quevedo.

The recourse to dialogue, with successive confessions and lessons of a prostitute speaking with another, is valuable as it gives direct voice to the poems' courtesan subjects. Upon her entrance on the scene in the *Ragionamenti*, Antona presents herself by declaring that her only problem is syphilis ("dal mal francioso in fuora, non trovo cane che mi abbair").<sup>62</sup> Shortly afterwards, she repeats the idea that, unlike the petty trifles that



worry Nanna, “la morte è il pigliare il legno due e tre volte ‘anno e non isbollarsi, non isgomarsi e non isdogliarsi mai” (I, 6) because “il mal francioso [è divoratrice] di chi lo ha nelle ossa” (III, 132). Later on, she again underscores the consequences of the illness and the tricks used to ameliorate its effects:<sup>63</sup>

spesso il mal francioso fa le vendette dei mali arrivati: ed è pur bello a vedere una che, non potendo più appiattare sotto al belletto, ad acque forti, a sbiaccamenti, a belle vestie a gran ventagli la sua vecchiezza, fatto denari di collane, di anelli, di robbe di seta, di scuffioni e di tutte le altre sue pompe, comincia a pigliare i quattro ordini, come i fanciulli che vogliono essere preti.

[*mal francés* often comes for the unfortunate ones: and it is quite something to see a girl who, not being able to hide under cosmetics, perfumes, ceruse, beautiful clothes, and big fans, with her old age, selling her necklaces, rings, silk dresses, big bonnets, and all the other vanities, starts to take the four orders like boys who want to be priests.]<sup>64</sup>

Alongside such a portrait, so oft repeated in Quevedo, in the dialogue between Nanna and her daughter Pippa, the martyrdom of syphilis sometimes appears together with invocations of the patron saints of medicine<sup>65</sup>—Cosmas and Damian—who also appear, in most topical terms, in Quevedo’s letter cited earlier. More interesting is the discussion here of the prostibulary origins of syphilis:<sup>66</sup>

Il mal francioso me vien via ora. Io mi consumo quando sento dire ad alcun sorcone: “I tale è stroppiato bontà de la tale”; altro ci è che squarta e crocifigge con le bestemmie la puttancia, con dire: “Ella ha guasto il poverino.” Io ho speranza, poi che s’è trovato che nacque prima la gallina o l’uovo, che si trovará anco se le puttane hanno attaccato il mal francioso agli uomini, o gli uomini a le puttane; ed è forza che ne domandiamo un dì messer san Giobbe, altrimenti ne uscirà quistione. Perché l’uomo fu il primo a stuzzicar la puttana, la quale si stava chiotta, e non la puttana a stuzzicar l’uomo.

[*Mal francés* comes to mind now. It drives me crazy to hear some recluse say: “Such-and-such person is crippled by that so-and-so girl”; there are others who draw and quarter and crucify that same whore with their curses, saying: “She ruined the poor little guy.” I trust, once it is discovered whether the egg or the chicken was born first, that we will also know if it was whores who first gave *mal francés* to men, or if it was men who gave it to whores; and it will be necessary that some day we go ask Saint Job about it to resolve the question because, in the end, he was the first man to stoke up

whores, who until then were quiet, rather than it being whores who provoked men.]<sup>67</sup>

Leaving aside the gendered critique and other implications here, this text presents us—if only in passing—with a theme that appears in Quevedo’s poetic *disputatio* on “podridos” (meaning both “corrupted by the disease” and “irritated from battling”), in a conversation between Marica “la Chupona” [“She Who Sucks”] (v. 1) and the *pícaro* don Crispín Garabía, who is “tan su amante” [“so much her lover”] that he also suffers the effects of the ailment:<sup>68</sup>

Sobre quién las pegó a quién  
ahí de podridos andan:  
él con humores, gabacho,  
y ella Lázaro con llagas.  
(núm. 695, vv. 29–32)

[Regarding who struck whom, there they are walking around corrupted; him, disgusting with humors, and her, a Lazarus with wounds.]

It may be a minor point, but it is worth recalling that Aretino was one of the Spanish Golden Age’s genuinely forbidden loves, and that the work of the Italian author had to be handled with great care. To conclude, we might return to the attitude and tone of Quevedo regarding syphilis in this poetic series, disseminated here and there across his satirical-burlesque production without ever reaching the status of a poetical-syphilitic minicycle, as in other cases.<sup>69</sup> In view of these coordinates of genre and circulation, critics tend to conclude that Quevedo’s treatment of *mal francés* reveals a “tono ambiguo, rasgo definitorio de lo grotesco” [“ambiguous tone, defining feature of the grotesque”] because of its “atención minuciosa a los detalles de la destrucción corporal” [“careful attention to the details of corporeal destruction”],<sup>70</sup> which might be better defined as a “risa feroz” [“ferocious laughter”] that seeks to distance itself from the problem of actual pain, a move that begs the question of whether such discourse reads best as mockery or as satire.<sup>71</sup> Laughter and smiles are tempered especially in poems that wrap up with a final lesson, which might be the case in a moralizing poem even despite the temptation of dialogic play here (“coyuntura” implying both “occasion, opportunity” and “sexual encounters”):

Las que priváis en el mundo  
con el pecado mortal,  
si no perdéis coyuntura,  
las vuestras se perderán.

[You women who deprive the world through mortal sin, if you don’t lose your *coyuntura*, your (*coyunturas*) will be lost].<sup>72</sup>

## Conclusions

In sum, with the preceding brief overview of Quevedo's poetic production relating to syphilis, one can appreciate the expressive *tour de force* of his approach. Quevedo rejects certain traditional *topoi* (such as autobiography and paradoxical encomia) in order to exploit the potential—both symbolic and visual—of the symptoms of the illness by means of witty dilogism, taking advantage at the same time of graphic, pictorial mechanisms (such as ekphrasis), and perhaps instrumentalizing the magisterial work of Aretino, the quintessential “prophet of sexuality.”<sup>73</sup> In the final analysis, Quevedo's production on syphilis connects clearly with his potent abilities for description and with his playful reimagining of tradition, not to mention his penchant for exploiting the theme of prostitution, which lends naturally to the topic. But that is a question for another day.

## Notes

1. Quevedo, *Historia de la vida del Buscón*, I, 3. All English translations in the present article, as well as relevant lexical clarifications, are by Chad Leahy. This chapter has benefited from a Mercator Fellowship at the Universität Heidelberg (SFB 933 «Materiale Textkulturen»), and it forms part of the projects of SILEM: *Sujeto e institución literaria en la Edad Moderna* (FFI2014–54367-C2–1-R del MINECO), coordinated by Pedro Ruiz Pérez (Universidad de Córdoba), and VIES: *Vida y escritura I: Biografía y autobiografía en la Edad Moderna* (FFI2015–63501-P), directed by Luis Gómez Canseco y Valentín Núñez Rivera (Universidad de Huelva). I would also like to express sincere thanks to my dear colleagues Fernando Plata (Colgate University) and Jesús Ponce Cárdenas (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) for our poetical-syphilitic conversations.
2. See Arellano in Quevedo, *Historia*, 73.
3. On such nomenclature, see, among others, García-Verdugo, “*La lozana andaluza*” and Brioso Santos, “El benéfico ‘mal francés,’” as well as Pérez Ibáñez, “Sífilis” and “*Galli vocant*.”
4. Arellano, *Poesía*, 17.
5. See Iommi Echeverría, “Girolamo Fracastoro.”
6. Díez, *La poesía erótica*, 257–86; Ponce Cárdenas, “De burlas”; Gómez Canseco, “Dos sonetos”; and Martínez Navarro, “Cristóbal de Castillejo.” The importance of intertextual play may explain why so many poems on syphilis appear signed in contrast to the anonymity of so many other erotic poems. See Díez, *La poesía*, 286–7.
7. Brioso Santos, “El benéfico ‘mal francés,’” 124, no. 6.
8. On the phenomenon of the *encomion*, see Núñez Rivera (1998 y 2010).
9. Ponce Cárdenas, “De burlas,” 117, n. 3.
10. Quevedo, *Capitulaciones*, 207.
11. Quevedo, *Pregmática*, n. 5, 124.
12. Quevedo, *Gracias y desgracias*, 509. On these sources, see Martínez Bogo, *Retórica y agudeza*, 336–7 and 376–7.
13. Quevedo, *Visita y anatomía*, 322.
14. Quevedo, *Nuevas cartas*, núm. 28 and 104.
15. See Crosby in Quevedo, *Nuevas cartas*, 250.
16. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 518, 565, 580, 689, 694–5, 724, 726, 728–9, 744, 753, 757, 759–60, 791, 850, and 864.

17. According to Cacho Casal, *La poesía*, 266 and 270, the matter of baldness as a consequence of the disease in “Desengaño de las mujeres,” n. 600, should be read as such a case. The trip to Rome of a rufian in a *jácara*, n. 856, vv.129–36, may also refer to syphilis.
18. An almost complete list of such texts can be found in Arellano, *Poesía*, 172, although there is no trace whatsoever of the theme in the romance “Las hijas del Cid Ruy Díaz” (n. 794). Profeti, *Quevedo*, 161–8; “La enfermedad,” 482–5; and “Lo erótico”) deals with some texts (n. 694–5, 730, and 744), even if syphilis may not necessarily be the “la peste” [“plague”] alluded to in the romance “Dama cortesana lamentándose de su pobreza y diciendo la causa” (n. 730, v. 22, addressed in Profeti, “Lo erótico,” 84), though it does likely appear in that poem’s conclusion “en el hospital” [“in the hospital”] (v. 94). One poem on syphilis (“De un ébano sutil, dos bellas piernas”) that Gómez Canseco, “Dos sonetos,” comments upon has at times been attributed to Quevedo.
19. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 689, vv. 45–6.
20. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 724, vv. 69–70.
21. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, “Instrucciones y documentos para el noviciado de la corte,” n. 726, vv. 119–20.
22. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 728, vv. 19 y 23–6.
23. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 757, vv. 95–6.
24. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 760, vv. 26–8.
25. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 518, v. 13, and 99–100.
26. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 759, vv. 10–12.
27. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 565, v. 14.
28. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 565, v. 12. On the wide spectrum of prostibulary names in the period, see Alonso Hernández, *El lenguaje*, 16–73.
29. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 580.
30. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 694–5.
31. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 850, vv. 159–60.
32. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 730. On this romance, see Profeti, “Lo erótico.”
33. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 744.
34. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 791.
35. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 803. This last poem echoes several images found in *El Buscón*.
36. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 850, vv. 159–60).
37. On this last point, see Sáez, “‘Puto es el hombre.’” One case (n. 791) is of doubtful authorship given that it is not included either in *El Parnaso español* (Madrid, Diego Díaz de la Carrera, 1645) or in *Las tres musas últimas castellanas* (Madrid, Imprenta Real, 1670). On this, Alonso Veloso, “La poesía.”
38. Cacho Casal, *La poesía*, 112–13 and 120.
39. Gómez Canseco, “Dos sonetos,” 91–2. Gargano, “Tomé de Burguillos,” 148, presents pertinent Quevedian echoes in Lope’s *Rimas humanas y divinas del licenciado Tomé de Burguillos*.
40. Arellano, *Poesía*, 84–8.
41. Another example of this appears in the following verses of a syphilis-themed romance: “Tan mal francés como gastas / no le ha gastado jamás / Rocheli, ni, en sus herejes, / La Rochela y Montalbán” (Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 744, vv. 5–8). Although with a different spin, this dilogism can be found already in Juan de Salinas (Díez, *La poesía*, 279–80). Cacho Casal, *La poesía burlesca*, 110–28, clarifies that Quevedo plays with this paradoxical scheme in the ode “A la sarna” (Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 780).
42. On this last phenomenon, see Cacho Casal, *La poesía*, 93–103.
43. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 729.

44. [Translator note]: There is a play on words here with “castaño” as a term referring both to the color of brown hair and to the quality of the hair itself, implicitly compared in these verses to the softness of oak and chestnut (“castaño”) trees.
45. [Translator note]: There is a play on words here revolving around “arco” as bow (i.e. bow and arrows) and “arco” as the arched shape that eyebrows should naturally have. The confusion invites a joke comparing the eyebrows’ deformed disposition with that of a crossbow rather than a regular bow.
46. The wordplay here involves a contrast between “abuelas” (grandmothers) and “niñas,” which is a term that can mean both “pupils” and “young girls.” Rather than healthy, normal pupils (“niñas”), the woman described here has “abuelas” (grandmothers).
47. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 729, vv. 33–64.
48. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 729, vv. 21–32.
49. Sáez, *El ingenio*.
50. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 465.
51. Ponce Cárdenas, “Sociabilidad ocrtesana,” 144–57.
52. Medina Barco, “Esto que,” 280–2.
53. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 729, vv. 65–88.
54. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 694–5.
55. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 694, vv. 6–8, 11–12, and 27–8, among others.
56. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 694, vv. 13–14, etc.
57. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 694, vv. 21–64.
58. See Schwartz and Arellano’s notes in Quevedo, *Un heráclito cristiano*, 442–50, and the commentaries of Profeti, *Quevedo*, 161–8; Díez, *La poesía*, 280–3; and Juárez Almendros, “La otra cara,” 301–2.
59. For more on the influential of Martial in similar socioliterary contexts, see J. Ignacio Díez’s chapter in the present volume.
60. Gagliardi, “El *Ragionamento* de Aretino.”
61. Sáez, “Aretino y Quevedo.”
62. Aretino, *Dialogo*, I, 5.
63. Aretino, *Dialogo*, III, 397–8. There is another pair of additional mentions when he criticizes a poor man in the second *Dialogo* who is “very rich in *mal francés*”: “E sendo mendico di ogni altro bene, era ricchissimo di tanto mal francioso che bastava per darne a mille suoi pari, e anche gliene sarebbe rimasto un mondo,” Aretino, *Dialogo*, II, 85), and at the close of the third *Dialogo* he mentions the sale of *mal francés* among the usual wares of *bordelli*: “i bordelli [vendono] mal franciosi” (Aretino, *Dialogo*, III, 159).
64. Aretino, *Dialogo*, III, 117.
65. Aretino, *Dialogo*, I, 237.
66. Such discussion forms part of the burlesque uses of saints that Fernández Mosquera, “Quevedo y los santos,” 12–18 studies, although these latter names aren’t addressed in this last article. The passage in Aretino that includes these saints is more extensive:

E per mia fé che il martorio che ha una puttana nel veder bene addobate l’altre puttane, è più crudele che non è una doglia vecchia di mal francioso anidiata ne la cavicchia d’un piede o ne la chiovola d’un ginocchio o ne la commessura d’un braccio: o per dir più forte, una di quelle doglie di testa le quali non guariría santo Cosmio e Damiano.

[And by my faith, the martyrdom that a whore feels upon seeing other whores all dolled up is more cruel than the old pain of *mal francés* housed in a heel or in the bend of a knee or in the fold of an arm or, to say it more forcefully, one of those headaches that only saints Cosmas and Damian could cure.]

(*Diálogo*, I, 346)]

- There is another mention a little earlier: “il morirsi di fame di qualunque si sia, mentre saziano di se stesse la lebbra, il cancro e il mal francioso che le scanna” (Aretino, *Dialogo*, I, 168).
67. Aretino, *Dialogo*, II, 277.
  68. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 695, vv. 23–4. A similar idea can be found in “Respuesta de la Méndez a Escarramán”: “dentro del pobre hospital, / donde trabajos de entrambos / empiezo agora a sudar” [“in the poor hospital, where I am beginning now to sweat the labors (or suffering) of both of us”] (Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 850, vv. 170–2).
  69. Ponce Cárdenas, “De burlas.”
  70. Schwartz and Arellano in Quevedo, *Un heráclito*, 447.
  71. Díez, *La poesía*, 282 and 288.
  72. Quevedo, *Obra poética*, n. 694, vv. 69–72.
  73. Waddington, *Aretino’s Satyr*, xviii.

## Bibliography

- Alonso Hernández, José Luis. *El lenguaje de los maleantes españoles de los siglos XVI y XVII*. Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1979.
- Alonso Veloso, María José. “La poesía de Quevedo no incluida en las ediciones de 1648 y 1670: una propuesta acerca de la ordenación y el contenido de la ‘Musa décima’.” *La Perinola* 12 (2008): 269–334.
- Arellano, Ignacio. *Poesía satírico-burlesca de Quevedo*. Madrid-Frankfurt: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2003.
- Aretino, Pietro. *Ragionamento e Dialogo*, edited by G. Bàrberi Squarotti. Milan: Rizzoli, 1988.
- . *Las seis jornadas. La cortesana*, edited and translated by A. Giordano y C. Calvo. Madrid: Cátedra, 2000.
- . *Coloquio de las damas*, translated by F. Xuárez and edited by D. Gagliardi. Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2011.
- Brioso Santos, Héctor. “El benéfico ‘mal francés’ de Gaspar Lucas Hidalgo.” In *El sexo en la literatura*, edited by L. Gómez Canseco, P. Zambrano, and L.P. Alonso Gallo, 123–32. Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 1997.
- Cacho Casal, Rodrigo. *La poesía burlesca de Quevedo y sus modelos italianos*. Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 2003.
- Díez, J. Ignacio. *La poesía erótica de los Siglos de Oro*. Madrid: Laberinto, 2003.
- Fernández Mosquera, Santiago. “Quevedo y los santos.” *Criticón* 92 (2004): 7–37.
- García-Verdugo, María Luisa. *La Lozana andaluza y la literatura del siglo xvi: la sífilis como enfermedad y metáfora*. Madrid: Pliegos, 1994.
- Gagliardi, Donatella. “El Ragionamento de Aretino en España: entre censura y moralización.” *Vigilancia y censura de libros e imágenes en los siglos XVI y XVII. Studia Aurea* 9 (2015): 391–432.
- Gargano, Antonio. “Tomé de Burguillos, un ‘discípulo inesperado’ de Quevedo.” *La Perinola* 15 (2011): 131–55.
- Gómez Canseco, Luis. “Dos sonetos bubosos entre Mateo Alemán y Vicente Espinel: edición crítica y estudio.” *Revista de Filología Española* 94, no. 1 (2014): 87–105.
- Iommi Echeverría, Virginia. “Girolamo Fracastoro y la invención de la sífilis.” *História Ciências. Saúde Manguinhos* 17, no. 4 (2010): 877–84.
- Juárez Almendros, Encarnación. “La otra cara de la belleza: fealdad, vejez y deterioro corporal femenino en la poesía de Quevedo.” In *Compostella aurea*:

- Actas del VIII Congreso de la AISO (Santiago de Compostela, 7-11 de julio de 2008)*, edited by A. Azaustre Galiana and S. Fernández Mosquera, vol. 1, 299-306. Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 2011.
- Martínez Bogo, Enrique. *Retórica y agudeza en la prosa satírico-burlesca de Quevedo*. Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 2009.
- Martínez Navarro, María del Rosario. "Cristóbal de Castillejo y el 'milagro americano': el palo santo de Indias y el 'mal de bubas' en clave bufonesca, política y anticortesana." *Temas Americanistas* 40 (2018): 92-118.
- Medina Barco, Inmaculada. "Estos que . . .': écfrosis satírico-burlesca en cinco poemas quevedianos de sociedad." *La Perinola* 8 (2004): 279-304.
- Núñez Rivera, Valentín. "Para la trayectoria del encomio paradójico en la literatura española del Siglo de Oro: el caso de Mosquera de Figueroa." In *Actas del IV Congreso Internacional de la AISO (Alcalá de Henares, 22-27 de Julio de 1996)*, edited by M.<sup>a</sup> C. García de Enterría and A. Cordón Mesa, 1133-43. Alcalá de Henares: Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, 1998.
- . "Para la tradición del género paradójico." In *Paradoja en loor de la nariz muy grande y paradoja en loor de las bubas*, edited by V. Núñez Rivera and C. Mosquera de Figueroa, 15-109. Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 2010.
- Pérez Ibáñez, María Jesús. "Sífilis en el siglo XVI: un problema médico y terminológico." *Voces* 6 (1995): 61-79.
- . "Galli vocant istum morbum morbum eius cuius est: otra designación para el 'mal francés.'" *Asclepio* 60, no. 1 (2008): 267-80.
- Ponce Cárdenas, Jesús. "De burlas y enfermedades barrocas: la sífilis en la obra poética de Pantaleón de Ribera y Miguel Colodrero de Villalobos." *Crítica* 100 (2007): 115-42.
- . "Sociabilidad cortesana y elogio artístico: epigramas al retrato en la poesía de Góngora." In *Sociabilidad y literatura en el Siglo de Oro*, edited by M. Albert, 141-63. Madrid-Frankfurt: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2013.
- Profeti, Maria Grazia. *Quevedo: la scrittura e il corpo*. Roma: Bulzoni, 1984.
- . "La enfermedad como negación del cuerpo en la poesía de Quevedo." In *Actas del VIII Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas (Brown University, Providence Rhode Island, del 22 al 27 de agosto de 1983)*, edited by A.D. Kossoff, J. Amor y Vázquez, R.H. Kossoff, and G.W. Ribbans, vol. 2, 477-85. Madrid: Istmo, 1986.
- . "Lo erótico y lo moral: análisis del romance 730 de Quevedo." *Calíope: Journal of the Society for Renaissance and Baroque Hispanic Poetry* 12, no. 2 (2006): 77-92.
- Quevedo, Francisco de. *Obra poética*, 4 vols, edited by J.M. Bleuca. Madrid: Castalia, 1969-1981.
- . "Un Heráclito cristiano," "Canta sola a Lisi" y otros poemas, edited by Lía Schwartz and Ignacio Arellano. Barcelona: Crítica, 1998.
- . *Nuevas cartas de la última prisión de Quevedo*, edited by J.O. Crosby. London: Tamesis, 2005.
- . "Visita y anatomía de la cabeza del cardenal Armando de Richeleu." edited by J. Riandière de la Roche. In *Obras completas en prosa, III*, directed by A. Rey, 307-45. Madrid: Castalia, 2005.
- . "Capitulaciones matrimoniales." edited by A. Azaustre. In *Obras completas en prosa, II*, directed by A. Rey, vol. 1, 179-208. Madrid: Castalia, 2007.

- . *Gracias y desgracias del ojo del culo*, edited by A. Azaustre. In *Obras completas en prosa, II*, directed by A. Rey, vol. 1, 479–525. Madrid: Castalia, 2007.
- . *Historia de la vida del Buscón*, edited by Ignacio Arellano, 30th ed. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 2007.
- . *Pregmática que han de guardar las hermanas comunes*, edited by A. Azaustre Galiana. In *Obras completas en prosa, II*, directed by A. Rey, vol. 1, 109–30. Madrid: Castalia, 2007.
- Sáez, Adrián J. “Aretino y Quevedo: perfiles de la poesía pictórica.” *Calíope: Journal of the Society for Renaissance and Baroque Hispanic Poetry* 20, no. 2 (2015): 119–49.
- . *El ingenio del arte: la pintura en la poesía de Quevedo*. Madrid: Visor Libros, 2015.
- . “‘Puto es el hombre que de putas fia’: la prostitución en Quevedo.” In “*Cortisanas enamoradas*”: *la prostitución en el Siglo de Oro*, edited by Adrián J. Sáez, 135–48. Madrid: Sial, 2019.
- Waddington, Raymond B. *Aretino’s Satyr: Sexuality, Satire, and Self-Projection in Sixteenth-Century Literature and Art*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.