

THE POLITICS OF FEELING:
LOCUS, PATHOS, AND EMPIRE IN
GUTIERRE DE CETINA'S "SI DE ROMA EL ARDOR"

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“Is it inborn in us or produced by some trick that when we see the places in which we have heard that famous men performed great deeds, we are more moved than by hearing or reading their exploits?” [Naturane nobis hoc, inquit, datum dicam an errore quodam, ut, cum ea loca videamus, in quibus memoria dignos viros acceperimus multum esse versatos, magis moveamur, quam si quando forum ipsorum aut facta audiamus aut scriptum aliquod legamus?] (V.i.2). The question, posed by Marcus Piso to his friends as they stroll through the Athenian landscape of the Academy in book V of Cicero’s *De finibus*, would acquire new relevance fourteen hundred years later during a visit that Petrarch made to Rome. As he walked through the ancient Forum (a wilderness of ruins covered by grazing sheep and overgrown vegetation), Petrarch felt so “overwhelmed by . . . the wonder of so many things and by the greatness of (his) astonishment” [miraculo rerum tantarum et stuporis mole obrutus] (*Familiares* II.14), that he could not find the words to describe what he saw in the old *caput mundi* to his friend Giovanni Colonna. A few years later, during a visit to Mantua, the birth place of his beloved Virgil, Petrarch would experience again the same site-induced transport he felt in Rome.¹ The record of this visit is in a letter addressed to the Roman poet in which Petrarch searches through the Mantuan landscape for traces of the presence of Virgil:

Hinc tibi composui quae perlegio, otia nactus
Ruris amica tui; quonam vagus avia calle
Fusca sequi, quibus in pratis errare soleres

Assidue mecum volvens, quam fluminis oram
 Quae curvi secreta lacus, quas arboribus umbras,
 Quas nemorum latebras collisque sedilia parvi
 Ambieris, cuius fessus seu cespitis herbam
 Presseris accubitu, seu ripam fontis amoeni;
 Atque ea praesentem mihi te specula reddunt.²
 (*Familiares* 24.11)

[It is here (Mantua) I have composed what you are reading, and have enjoyed the friendly repose of your rural fields. I wonder by what path in your wanderings you sought the unfrequented glades, through what meadows you were wont to stroll, what river shore you pursued, what recess in the curving banks of the lake, what shady groves, what forest strongholds. And I wonder too what hilly turf you sought where in your weariness you pressed your elbow upon the grass or upon the bank of a charming spring. Such sights bring you vividly to my eyes]. (341)

There is much here of that “historical solitude” or sense of abandonment that, according to Thomas Greene, was the result of early humanism’s awareness of the unavailability of the classical past, but there is also an attempt to minimize that awareness by tuning into the pathos or emotional energy that emanates from the surroundings.³ Walking around Mantua, Petrarch feels as stirred as he felt in Rome, using the paths, fields, and streams that crisscross the landscape of the northern Italian city to conjure up a vivid mental picture of Virgil. That picture may be simply the result of wishful thinking or self-deception (an *errore*, as Marcus Piso put it to his friends in Cicero’s *De finibus*), but its ability to make the past come to life highlights to what extent the humanist project of cultural renewal hinged upon the interplay between locus and pathos, geography and emotion.

For later generations of humanists, writing in an age of budding nation-states and emerging empires, the emotional appeal that men like Petrarch attached to places served purposes more political than cultural. More than a vehicle to resurrect the ancient past and reconnect with classical civilization, the pathetic value of geography that early humanism had discovered through the work of writers, travelers, archaeologists, and collectors became an effective tool to legitimize the founding myths of modern nations and the imperialist policies

espoused by their ruling elites.⁴ This more obvious politicization of the humanist interest in the relation between pathos and geography became also, on occasion, a vehicle for criticizing the imperial designs of early modern states and their projects of political and geographic expansion. This type of criticism found in the Americas, as I will argue in this essay in relation to a sonnet written by the Sevillian poet Gutierre de Cetina in the mid 1500s, a privileged site for the articulation of its subversive message.

The American landscape, as opposed to Rome or Mantua, was not charged with any meaningful cultural and historical associations for early modern Europeans and therefore remained largely apathetic to them. Chroniclers, in particular those writing in Spain and the Spanish Americas in the sixteenth century, reacted to this apathy in different ways. On the one hand, there were those like Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, who, in his *Historia general y natural de las Indias*, tried, as Ricardo Padrón has argued, "to imaginatively inhabit the American space by associating some of its place names with narratives of memorable people and events" (151) in an attempt to increase the emotional appeal of the conquered territories and to make thereby geographical and political expansion attractive for the metropolitan public. On the other, there were those who turned those narratives into an indictment against their culture by using them to highlight the inability of Europeans to recognize and experience pathos when located in foreign geographies. The writings of Las Casas make abundant use of this strategy. Consider, for instance, the following passage from his *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, which describes the occupation of the city of Cholula by the troops of Cortés:

Todos ayuntados [los indios] y juntos en el patio con otras gentes que a vueltas estaban, pónense a las puertas del patio españoles armados que guardasen, y todos los demás echan mano a sus espadas y meten a espada y a lanzadas todas aquellas ovejas, que uno ni ninguno pudo escaparse que no fuese trucidado . . . Iban llorando ante los españoles pidiendo misericordia, que no los matasen. De los cuales ninguna misericordia ni compasión hubieron, antes si como salían los hacían pedazos . . . Dícese que estando metiendo a espada los cinco mil o seis mil hombres en el patio, estaba cantando el capitán de los españoles: "Mira Nero de

Tarpeya, a Roma cómo se ardía; gritos dan niños y viejos, y él de nada se dolía.” (108)

Reading *Las Casas vis-à-vis Oviedo*, one realizes the extent to which the latter’s plan to infuse pathos into the blank geography of the Americas is subverted by the friar.⁵ Like the narratives that Oviedo attaches here and there in his *Historia* to American toponyms, the story that Las Casas appends to the place name of Cholula turns the Aztec city into an emotionally charged site. Las Casas’s story, however, completely overturns Oviedo’s classical notion of “great deeds” or *res gestarum* and what it thematizes is not the courage and military prowess of the Spaniards, but rather their cruelty and emotional imperviousness, so disturbingly represented in the verses from a famous ballad that the Spanish captain sings as he massacres thousands of Indians in one of the town’s courtyards.⁶ The pathetic deficit that Oviedo locates and tries to fill in the American geography is transferred thus by Las Casas to the European invader and relocated in metropolitan soil.

Feeling, therefore, or the lack of it, and its association with *locus* or place become key elements in the articulation of a critique of empire and the home culture whose textual manifestations can be detected, as I will argue in this essay in reference to Gutierre de Cetina, not only in the *Crónicas de Indias*, but also in the lyric poetry of the period, especially the Petrarchan lyric, a genre deeply implicated, as critics like Roland Greene have argued, in the formation of New World societies and in the imperial plots and experiences of early modern nations. Nowhere is this truer than in “Si de Roma el ardor,” a sonnet published in Mexico in 1577 and included in a miscellaneous volume of amorous and religious poetry titled *Flores de baria poesía*. This sonnet defies all critical assumptions about Cetina, a poet soldier born in Sevilla whose career mimics in part that of Garcilaso and whose verse has been studied almost exclusively in a European context as part of the cultural exchange between Spain and Italy during the early decades of the sixteenth century and the continuation of the *cancionero* tradition that ran parallel to the importation of Italian poetic forms.⁷ Critics of Cetina often forget that the poet travelled twice to the Americas and that he spent his final years there, where, according to his biographer, Francisco Pacheco, he penned “muchas obras, i en particular un libro

de Comedias Morales, en prosa i verso; y otro de comedias profanas, con otras muchas cosas que por su temprana muerte se perdieron" (128). Cetina's American experience plays, as I will discuss here, a central role in "Si de Roma el ardor"; not only because the poem was published in Mexico, but also, and more importantly, because of the complex interaction between love, geography, and pathos it establishes and the critical view of empire that such interaction promotes.

That view may seem, at first sight, far removed from the poem, which makes no mention to the Americas and speaks of empire only in relation to the past through a catalogue of sieges located in the Mediterranean basin:

Si de Roma el ardor, si el de Sagunto,
de Troya, de Numancia y de Cartago;
si de Jerusalén el fiero estrago,
Belgrado, Rodas y Bizancio junto;

Si puede a piedad moveros punto
cuanto ha habido de mal del Indo al Tago,
¿por qué del fuego que llorando apago
ni dolor, ni piedad en vos barrunto?

Pasó la pena de éstos, y en un hora
acabaron la vida y el tormento,
puestos del enemigo a sangre y fuego.

Vos dais pena inmortal al que os adora,
y así vuestra crueldad no llega a cuento
romano, turco, bárbaro ni griego.

According to Roland Greene, the only critic who has paid any serious attention to this sonnet, what puts this poem specifically in the Americas is the phrase "a sangre y fuego" at the end of the first tercet. This, Greene states, "is a technical term in sixteenth century Spain and New Spain for uncompromising war, denoting the savagery of some Indian groups and their resistance to Spanish civilization as well as the conquistadores' answering repression of the Indians by any means" (168). To the short list of sources cited by Greene to support his claim, we could add others, such as, for instance, a 1543 memorial

addressed by Las Casas and Fray Rodrigo de Andrada to the emperor Charles V in which the friars assert the right of the Indians to “hacer sobre guerra a fuego y a sangre” (192) against anybody coming to conquer their land and take their possessions. Yet, we should note that the same expression appears also in contexts that have nothing to do with the Americas—Ginés Pérez de Hita uses it several times, for instance, in his *Guerras civiles de Granada* to describe the style of warfare practiced by the Moriscos in the Alpujarras—and therefore its value as a geographical locator can be questioned.

What cannot be doubted, however, is the fact, unnoticed by Greene, that there are two distinct geographical spaces represented in this sonnet; the first, expanding in itemized form through the first quatrain (Rome, Troy, Jerusalem, Byzantium, Carthage, etc), designates a geography of “ardores” and “fieros estragos” whose most salient feature is its ability to move the beloved; this geography is given very specific boundaries in the second quatrain—“del Indo al Tajo” (6)—, boundaries that coincide with those established by classical and medieval geographers (Plato, Solinus, Pomponius Mella, St. Isidore of Seville) for the known world, namely, Europe and Asia, and that were still being represented in some early sixteenth-century maps (see Fig.1). This geography, explicit and pathetic, has a silent counterpart in the poem in the complaint that the lyric speaker addresses to the lady in the second quatrain, which underlines her inability to be moved by her lover’s suffering:

si puede piedad moveros punto
cuanto ha habido de mal del Indo al Tago,
¿por qué del fuego que llorando apago
ni dolor, ni piedad en vos barrunto?

What these verses do in geographical terms is to place the lyric speaker outside the boundaries set in the initial verses of the quatrain—“del Indo al Tajo”—, in a territory where pathos cannot be experienced. The precise location of this territory is not specified in the sonnet, but if what moves the beloved is “quanto ha auido de mal del Indo al Tajo,” we can assume that what does not move her is located in a place lying outside those two very explicit boundaries. That place

coincides, as any reader familiar with world geography in the mid sixteenth century might have guessed, with the new Atlantic space of the Americas, a locus where the European perception of pathos became problematic, as the description of the massacre at Cholula in Las Casas's *Brevísima relación* clearly indicates. The speaker of Cetina's sonnet straightforwardly identifies with this Atlantic space by underscoring the lack of pathos—"ni dolor ni piedad"—that his suffering inspires in the beloved, a move that sets him off from the pathetic, Mediterranean geography alluded to so profusely in the first quatrain.

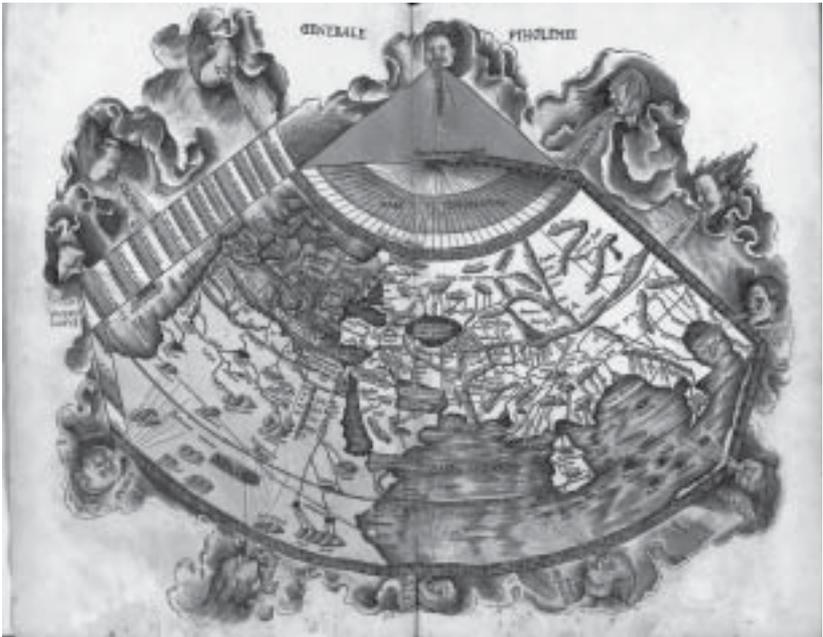


Fig. 1. Mappamundi from a 1513 edition of Ptolomey's *Geographia*.

The Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

This glaring act of self-positioning and separation is visibly inscribed within the system of correlations that shapes the poem. The underlying structure of Cetina's sonnet conforms to what Dámaso Alonso and Carlos Bousoño have called *correlación progresiva* in their study of correlative systems in *Seis calas en la expresión literaria española* (see chart below).⁸ This type of structural *dispositio*, introduced by Petrarch in his *Rime* and imitated afterwards by scores of poets in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, divides the poem horizontally according

to well-defined categories—what Alonso and Bousoño call *pluralidades*: place (A), type of suffering endured (B), and feeling inspired (C) in the case of Cetina’s sonnet—in order to create a system of *correlatos* or semantically interrelated terms that allow the poet to show his skill and inventiveness as *artifex* and also to underscore specific elements and relationships within the text. Anyone who pays close attention to the arrangement of correlations in Cetina’s “Si de Roma el ardor” will notice two things. First, the figure of the lyric speaker (A_4) is presented in topomorphic fashion: it has been included within the plurality assigned to place (A) in the correlative system of the sonnet and has therefore been assimilated to the rest of place names in the poem. Second, and more importantly, in spite of his “topomorphosis,” the lyric speaker clearly stands apart from the rest of the members of his plurality both by the intensity of his suffering—“pena inmortal” (B_4)—and the type of feeling he is unable to inspire: “ni dolor ni piedad” (C_4). The structural design of the sonnet underscores, thus, the geographical divisions at work in the poem, divisions that clearly identify the experience of the lyric speaker-as-lover with that of the Americas under Spanish colonial rule—a locus deprived of pathos.

Place (A)	Roma, Sagunto, Troia, Numancia, Cartago (A_1)	Iherusalén, Belgrado, Rodas, Bizancio (A_2)	Indo al Tajo (A_3)	Lyric Speaker (A_4)
Type of suffering endured (B)	Ardor (B_1)	Fiero estrago (B_2)	Mal (B_3)	Pena inmortal (B_4)
Feeling inspired (C)	Piedad (C_1)	Piedad (C_2)	Piedad (C_3)	Ni dolor ni piedad (C_4)

Such identification does not imply that the roles of conqueror and conquered, Spaniard and Amerindian, fluctuate or are interchangeable in the poem, as Greene suggests. Cetina is not asking his readership,

in my opinion, "to imagine the barbarians or Indians as victors against the Spanish and to [make the latter] occupy the first person position of the loser in such an outcome" (Greene 168). If the speaker of Cetina's sonnet puts himself in the Americas and identifies with that geographical space, it is not because his aim is role reversal (the sonnet makes no explicit attempt, it should be noted, to identify the beloved with the Amerindians), but rather because he wants to make the reader aware of the sharp inequalities that inform the European perception of pathos in relation to geographical location.

The exposure of these inequalities brings Cetina's sonnet close to the type of criticism voiced in Las Casas's *Brevísima relación* and casts, at the same time, serious doubts on the humanist notion of history as practical guide for virtuous action in the present that fueled the imperial enterprise of Spain and other European nations in the early modern period; namely, the belief, as humanist founder Coluccio Salutati once expressed, that "knowledge of what has been done in the past is the best means for stirring up princes, teaching peoples, and instructing individuals about what should be done [in the present]" (qtd. in Cochrane 16).⁹ In Cetina's sonnet, history's ability to inspire virtuous deeds in the present has been seriously diminished as a result of the geographic/pathetic biases that the poem exposes. Knowledge of past events (the sieges of Numancia, Troy or Carthage) may move the beloved to pity, but it does not move her to behave in a virtuous or merciful manner in the present with the lyric speaker. The lessons of the past have thus no ethical bearing on the present if that present is located in an unfamiliar, non-Indo-European setting like the Americas, the silent geographic subtext of Cetina's poem. This is a point Cetina's speaker stresses in the last verses of the sonnet, where he presents the beloved's behavior as being completely detached from and unaffected by historical precedent:

Vos dais pena inmortal al que os adora,
y así vuestra crueldad no llega a cuento
romano, turco, bárbaro ni griego.

By underlining the unprecedented nature of the beloved's cruelty, Cetina's sonnet exposes the limited applicability of the humanist notion of history as *magistra vitae* and denounces again, through the resentful, "Americanized" voice of the lyric speaker, the European indifference to pathos in the Americas. Such indifference is historically parallel to the rise of what Henri Lefebvre has called "representational space" in Western societies, that is, the process by which space was slowly stripped of its affective dimension (mythical, religious, poetic) in order to become rationalized and commodified in maps, land surveys, city plans, etc.¹⁰ This cartographic rationalization of space, as David Woodward has argued, created the idea of a world "over which systematic dominance was possible, and provided a powerful framework for political expansion and control" (87) over those territories that fell under European rule as the result of the imperialist policies of modern and early modern nations. Cetina's sonnet, with its insistence on the relation between locus and pathos, makes a powerful effort to resist this process of rationalization and, in doing so, broadens the critical view of empire it presents to the reader. By the end of the poem, the reader of "Si de Roma el ardor" gains an awareness not only of the geographical biases that governed the European perception of pathos in the early modern period, but also of the debunking effect that those biases had on the didactic and ethical view of history promoted by humanism and of the dwindling role that feeling played in early modern culture's relation to and understanding of place. The politics of feeling that Cetina examines in his sonnet results thus in a comprehensive critique of the forces and ideologies that made early modern imperialism possible and draws attention to the significance of place as a vehicle for political and cultural reflection.

This latter aspect only confirms what critics as diverse as J. Hillis-Miller and Gaston Bachelard have already stressed regarding the rhetorical, psychological, and phenomenological possibilities of place as an instrument of textual and cultural analysis. Yet, the political implications of this term have remained thus far largely ignored due to the fact that place has been traditionally examined in literary studies from a passive perspective, as the handmaid of plot, character, gender, and other major critical and theoretical referents.¹¹ Texts like "Si de Roma el ardor" prove, however, that no account of a literary or cultural

artifact is complete without careful analysis of the function of place within it and serve as a powerful reminder of the need for a political *topoanalysis* of literature that examines place as a critical component of the ideology of what we are reading.¹²

NOTES

¹For the text of the letter to Colonna I am using Rossi's and Bosco's edition of the *Familiares*. For the translation I follow Aldo Bernardo's *Letters on familiar matters*.

²The quote is again from Rossi's and Bosco's edition of the *Familiares*. For the translation I use again Bernardo's *Letters on familiar matters*.

³For Greene's idea of historical solitude, see *The Light in Troy* 4-27.

⁴This becomes apparent for instance in works such as Pedro de Alcocer's *Hystoria e descripción de la imperial cibdad de Toledo* (1554), in which local geography provides the framework for a moving account of "muchas antigüedades y cosas notables de la Hystoria general de España," as the book's cover announces; or in Ambrosio de Morales' *Viage a los reinos de León, y Galicia, y Principado de Asturias* (1574), whose main purpose is to provide King Philip II and the members of his Royal Council with "una gran relación muy en particular de la Cueva [de Covadonga] donde se hizo fuerte el Rey D. Pelayo, y de donde comenzó sus conquistas" (4), a site, according to Morales, "digna de ser por toda España reverenciada, como celestial principio, y milagroso fundamento de su restauración" (61). Although most of the text of the *Viage* is devoted to the description of church libraries, relics, and burial sites of famous saints and martyrs, the description of Covadonga's cave is given top priority by the Royal Council, as Morales makes clear in his preface to the text. Morales's lengthy description of Covadonga's cave can be read in pages 60-66 of the *Viage*.

⁵What I am pointing out here is one more aspect of the opposition between these two authors, which involves both textual and geographical aspects. For an extensive account of their rivalry, see Myers.

⁶For the reader of Las Casas, the emotional imperviousness exhibited by the Spaniards in this episode—and throughout the *Brevísima relación* in general—is especially heinous, given the fact that in other texts the friar refers to the Americas as a place most propitious for fostering the development of a benign human nature (see, for instance, chapters 34 and 36 in book 1 of the *Apologética historia*). The Spaniards were obviously not attuned to this positive effect of the American landscape and this is one more aspect of the conquistadors' behavior that Las Casas is denouncing here. The ballad that the Spanish captain sings in the courtyards of Cholula has a long history in medieval and early modern Hispanic letters. Gutierre de Cetina knew it well and wrote

a version of it which Begoña López Bueno, modern editor of Cetina, places right next to “Si de Roma el ardor” in her edition for Cátedra.

⁷Antonio Prieto emphasizes the influence on Cetina of Luigi Tansillo and other minor poets of the *Rime diversi di molti eccellentissimi auttori*, published in Venice in 1545. José Manuel Blecua has stressed the importance of the *cancionero* tradition in Cetina’s *romances*, *glosas*, and *chistes*. Begoña López Bueno and Victor Montoli Bernadas see for their part Cetina’s poetry as being influenced early on by the poets of the *Rime diversi* and later by Ausías March. All in all, Cetina’s poetry is still in need of a detailed study that goes beyond the view of his verse as “el fruto de un espíritu versátil y disperso” (Lapesa 249), lacking in depth and overflowing with “terneza i afetos” (280), as Herrera wrote in 1580 in his *Anotaciones a Garcilaso*. A recent article by Beatriz Peña, which analyzes Cetina’s departure from the love conventions of Petrarchan poetry in those poems in which the shepherd Vandalio is the protagonist, constitutes a significant step in this direction. This short sequence of poems is also the object of Leah Middlebrook’s recent and stimulating analysis of Cetina’s role as courtier and imperial subject in *Imperial Lyric* 103-37. Middlebrook sees Cetina as a poet who consistently embraces “the identity of the modern imperial courtier” and whose poetry contains no “bitter and ingenious statements of resistance [to empire] on the order of Garcilaso’s sonnet 33 or Francisco de Aldana’s sonnet 45” (108). My analysis of “Si de Roma el ardor” seeks to demonstrate that those statements can indeed be found in Cetina’s poetry.

⁸Alonso and Bousoño explain this particular type of correlation in *Seis calas* 53-54. Cetina’s sonnet also contains what Bousoño and Alonso call “correlación diseminativo-recolectiva” in the last verse of the poem, which gathers in adjectival form all the geographic references that the sonnet scatters through the first quatrain. This, according to Alonso and Bousoño, is the most fertile type of correlation in Spanish literature.

⁹For the humanist idea of the practical application of history and its beneficial moral effects, see Manuel 46-69, Hampton 8-19, and Nadel, Gilmore, and Gilbert.

¹⁰For Lefebvre’s discussion of this process, see *The Production of Space* 229-91. Key to this process, according to Lefebvre, is the rise of linear perspective in Renaissance art. Martin Jay, building upon Lefebvre’s work, has explored how “the scopic regime of modernity” had its origin in the “disincarnated, absolute eye” of linear perspective, which displaced the body as the center of spatial perception in western societies.

¹¹For Hillis Miller, this critical marginalization of place and topography in general becomes most apparent in studies devoted to the novel: “The notion that landscape provides grounding for novels has hardly given rise to a distinct mode of criticism of fiction, as has the criticism of character, or of interpersonal relations, or of narrators and narrative sequence” (9).

¹²I borrow the term *topoanalysis* from Bachelard, who uses it to refer to a general theory of the imagination in relation to spatial and environmental features (houses, corners, cellars, shells) in *The Poetics of Space*.

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