



CRIMINALITY AND SUBJECTIVITY IN *INFORTUNIOS DE ALONSO RAMÍREZ*

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ABSTRACT This essay explores the ways that Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora's *Infornios de Alonso Ramírez* adapts the picaresque's classic and Golden Age generic conventions for a Baroque and New World idiom. By examining the nature of criminality in the work, I argue that the traditional Spanish *pícaro*'s ambivalent relationship to the law is, in Sigüenza's text, replaced by an ambivalent relationship to the notion of criminality itself. Building on recent work exploring *criollo* identity in Sigüenza's writing, I show how he complicates our understanding of identity by offering readers a version of transgression that is more existential than juridical, and how he uses Alonso's story to examine the role early modern capitalism and maritime culture played in the development of New World identities.

Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora's *Infornios de Alonso Ramírez* (1690) has long occupied a difficult place in the tradition of Spanish American writing. A text whose generic categorization is suspect,¹ it collapses the distinction between discovery and self-discovery at a time when Spanish Imperial prospects had initiated their slow decline into decadence. Despite these varying critical categorizations, there is no debate as to its historical and cultural importance; as perhaps the most literary text that Sigüenza writes, it plays a quintessentially liminal role within the history of Spanish American letters

1. Kimberle Lopez notes that *Infornios* has been read as a belated iteration of the picaresque, a *relación*, and the first Latin American novel (253). To this list we can add Álvaro Félix Bolaños's and her readings of the work as a *testimonio avant la lettre* (Bolaños 133).

and, more specifically, the development of a distinctly Mexican literary culture. Similarly, it helps to mark a transition from the historiographical tradition in Spanish America towards an intellectual culture that consciously, and self-consciously, tries to articulate an autochthonous literary voice.

By and large, scholars have focused on one of three primary areas of inquiry in writing about *Infortunios*. Research in the early years of colonial Latin American literature as a field showed a heightened interest in generic categorization. As genre studies and structuralist approaches to literary culture waned, newer generations of scholars have shifted their attention to questions of subjectivity, and specifically cultural identity, as a way to understand the importance of *Infortunios* in particular and Sigüenza's *oeuvre* more broadly. More recently, scholars have grown increasingly interested in the complexity of Creole identity and how *Infortunios*'s double authorship might affect the construction of Sigüenza's authorial, and Alonso's more ambiguous, *criollismo*. Each of these traditions hinges on questions of identity, at times textual, other times cultural, and connects its textual conclusions with questions about authorial identity.

Over the following pages, I look at the two traditions with which *Infortunios* has been most closely associated, the picaresque and the *relación*, and argue that Sigüenza's text engages in a broader reflection on the relationship between criminality and modernity, pushing past questions of regional and Iberian versus New World identities. By untangling the core issues in the central debates and connecting them to a close reading of the text, I show how Sigüenza links identity and subjectivity with a growing concern for the way a nascent global² commercial culture is developing by the late seventeenth century, and how an early modern capitalist economy is essential for understanding the way he negotiates the vicissitudes of Alonso's self-perception. For Sigüenza, the crucible in which these contradictions are laid bare is the field of the law as a master discourse that delimits subjects, geographies, and knowledge in the seventeenth century. The law stands as an *aporia* in *Infortunios*, a constantly shifting point of reference that defines the protagonist's narrative trajectory. It is in reading Sigüenza's version of Alonso's story through the screen of the law that I aim to recalibrate the discussion away from a model that reads Alonso's identity as metonymic for various kinds of

2. I use global not in its modern meaning, but rather to recognize how circuits of exchange connected Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas in the seventeenth century.

marginalization. Instead, I argue that Sigüenza considers Alonso's identity within the context of pre-industrial capitalist culture, interrogating the foundations of subjectivity in the early modern period in its commercial and legal dimension.

Alonso's nascent *criollo* consciousness and the role of national identities are essential to understanding Sigüenza's view of Alonso's character development throughout the text. A clear distinction must be made, however, between Alonso's troubling subjectivity and Sigüenza's own discourse. Whereas Sigüenza's class identity and intellectual affiliations place him squarely within the trajectory of early *criollismo*, the construction of Alonso's subjectivity operates in a more ambivalent manner, one that is deeply marked by Sigüenza's rearticulation of Alonso's story. Tracing the way Alonso's subject position changes throughout the text requires that we remain sensitive to how Sigüenza's *criollo* identifications should be distinguished from—and might affect the way he constructs—Alonso's identity. As Rolena Adorno has argued, Sigüenza plays an important role as a transitional figure in the development of a truly *criollo* consciousness (“Reconsidering Colonial Discourse” 143n18). She builds on J. José Klor de Alva's call for a more nuanced understanding of how colonialism in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish America is a discrete phenomenon from its later eighteenth- to twentieth-century versions, and how it is not until the Bourbon reforms of the eighteenth century, and their attempt to recalibrate the economic and political relationship between the metropole and the viceroyalties, that *criollos* become an identity group that could clearly be defined as an “effect of power” (Klor de Alva 19).³ Building on Adorno and Klor de Alva's insights, I argue that Sigüenza's ultimate interest here reflects a keen awareness of the complexity of late-seventeenth-century identities, focusing less on New versus Old World permutations of cultural belonging and more in a larger emergent, and modern, understanding of global capital. *Infortunios* is an acute analysis, and ultimately pointed critique, of the way mercantile capitalism breeds subjects that are at once good citizens and criminal subjects. In

3. Klor de Alva argues that although *criollos* in the Americas were disadvantaged vis-à-vis their peninsular counterparts, the relationship could not properly be described as colonial. He eschews defining colonial ideology as merely “control or dependency,” calling for clearer distinctions between ideological formations about Amerindians, *mestizos*, other *castas*, and Creoles during the viceregal period (Klor de Alva 19).

an ironic twist, Alonso must become piratical in order to be reintegrated into New Spanish culture.

I

In many ways, *Infortunios* is an unusual text from a writer whose prose works were primarily of a historical nature. Julie Greer Johnson and Aníbal González both make persuasive arguments for the importance of incorporating a literary horizon to readings of *Infortunios*, which for most of the twentieth century had been examined exclusively as a historical source. It is characterized by many elements discussed in Claudio Guillén's taxonomy of the picaresque: it is a pseudo-autobiographical narrative, episodic in nature, in which a set of events form the *pícaro* who he is to become by the novel's end, as he moves "horizontally through space and vertically through society" in the process (74–84). Sigüenza slowly shapes Alonso's character as the text unfolds, following a symmetrical plan: introductory chapters (I and V), followed by two chapters of "misfortunes" (II–III and VI–VII, respectively) (Cummins and Soons 15).

For all the narrative and structural resemblance to the classical models that Sigüenza includes, the least picaresque element is the *pícaro* himself. Alonso is hardly an appealing rogue like Lazarillo: he lacks the self-conscious moral ambiguity of his more famous antecedent, replacing the latter's elastic sense of right and wrong with what initially appears to be a rigid and regimented sense of legality and decency.⁴ Building on the moralizing in a picaresque novel like Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599; 1604), Alonso is quick to attach an admonitory interpretive schema to the events he narrates, with Chapter IV and the Prologue providing just such a perspective (Cummins and Soons 15). Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel has noted that *Infortunios* has certain comical elements (156–57), but it is not characterized by a strongly satirical tone throughout.

If *Infortunios* lacks the disarmingly charming main character and the more flexible moral worldview of some of its predecessors, it retains an obsession

4. Bolaños, José Buscaglia-Salgado (*Undoing Empire*; "The Misfortunes of Alonso Ramírez") and Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel have challenged the idea that Alonso is as rigid as he initially appears to be. Bolaños takes this as far as to speculate that Alonso betrays his Spanish and New Spanish Catholic loyalties during his time with the pirates (141–42).

with how institutional authority and legal parameters define and determine the protagonist's life. Roberto González Echevarría has argued that the picaresque was central to sixteenth-century Hispanic letters because it transformed writing into an act of enfranchisement. Lazarillo, the quintessential *pícaro*, directs his tale to the locus of juridical power (the *vuestra merced* of his legal appeal). Exploring the resonances between this kind of address to power and the way the imperial *relaciones* of the conquest engaged in a similar discursive dynamic, González Echevarría writes:

Hay que tener presente que la “relación”, como subgénero, cumple dos cometidos básicos: 1) dar testimonio personal de incidentes presenciados por el que redacta y subscribe; 2) organizar de forma coherente (*res-latio*, enlazar la realidad) esos incidentes o datos, esa “relación de autos”, para que cobren sentido. La forma del texto de Pané es epistolar, pero con ribetes legalistas (como en una deposición), muy similar a lo que encontramos en una obra de ficción escrita pocos años más tarde, el *Lazarillo de Tormes*, donde el narrador escribe a un “vuestra merced”, dando testimonio de sus experiencias, para justificar su conducta y presente estado. Las coincidencias entre el *Lazarillo* y la *Relación* no son fortuitas. (*Relecturas* 25)

González Echevarría's observation about the connection between these two genres reinforces the importance of legal discourse to the genesis of Spanish and Spanish-American writing, and it is in this legal frame that we can see most clearly what is picaresque in Alonso's story, as well as the way his reductive moralizing comes up against an irreducibly murky understanding of subjectivity in an evolving legal system.

If the *pícaro* has a special relationship to the metropolitan power, it is not only as a marginal presence that challenges the integrity of the legal order undergirding an emergent sense of a viable imperial unity. He shuttles in and out of the normative social matrix with a regularity that lays bare a social instability that threatens to undermine any coherent narrative,⁵ and more importantly, highlights the way criminality is constitutive of that emergent order. Rather than focus on the *pícaro*'s “roguishness” then, we might take the question of the law in a different direction. I would argue that for

5. For example, Barbara Fuchs explores the way “border texts” like Miles Philips's picaresque bares traces of “the conflicted, and conflictive, construction of the nation” during the early modern period (56).

Sigüenza it is not that piracy develops alongside legitimate capitalist practice, but rather that it is a fundamental part of it. The legal and the extralegal become categories that define not only the way that particular subjects negotiate a social framework, but are also constitutive of international maritime economic relationships. If *Infortunios* is a troubling text, it is, as Bolaños has also argued, because it troubles the tradition itself as a site of institutional crisis, making its critical intervention in such a way that it breaks out of the binaries to which it has been reduced.

The consensus has been to categorize the text as neither picaresque nor historical document, but rather as a text that must be celebrated for its ambiguity. Most critics consider this generic undecidability one of *Infortunios*'s merits, representative as it is of a Baroque sensibility that incorrigibly defied categorization and institutionalization, even as it became the aesthetic standard in the Indies.⁶ Read as such, the Spanish-American Baroque is more than merely ambiguous; it is a quintessential deconstructive text, a complex monstrosity that embodies both thesis and antithesis, precariously housing dominant ideologies and eccentric—that is, marginal—formulations in a single textual body.⁷

At its core, the focus on generic classification reflects a critical anxiety about textual identity. The generic ambiguity is one of the text's defining characteristics, one that finds a parallel in the growing interest in *Infortunios* as a reflection on the nature of Alonso's—and, via a problematic conflation, with Sigüenza's own—identity. From the outset, Alonso highlights questions of origins and how those roots coincide or not with those of the metropole:

Llamóse mi padre Lucas de Villanueva, y aunque ignoro el lugar de su nacimiento, cónstame, porque varias veces se le oía decir, que era andaluz;

6. Buscaglia-Salgado is the most forceful recent proponent of *Infortunios*'s generic undecidability ("The Misfortunes of Alonso Ramírez").

7. Although José Antonio Maravall highlights the way classical sources and expectations are undermined by *desengaño*, González Echevarría (*Celestina's Brood*) and Mabel Moraña (*Viaje al silencio*) are more recent explorations of how Baroque disillusionment both employs and deconstructs the dominant cultural discourse. Kathleen Ross argues for understanding the Baroque in the way it navigates between a dependency model highlighted in "materially based criticism" ("Carlos de Sigüenza" 29–30) and a "subversive and revolutionary" (27) model resuscitated and taken up by modern neo-Baroque writers. More recently, Gregg Lambert has written about the affinities between Baroque aesthetics and deconstructive critical and cultural practice. As Buscaglia-Salgado writes about the specific case of the *Infortunios*: "the *Misfortunes* is seldom a story in search of equilibrium and stability. . . . [E]verything Ramírez touches comes undone, even the ground upon which he stands" ("The Misfortunes of Alonso Ramírez").

y sé muy bien haber nacido mi madre en la misma ciudad de Puerto Rico, y es su nombre Ana Ramírez, a cuya cristiandad le debí en mi niñez lo que los pobres solo le pueden dar a sus hijos, que son consejos para inclinarlos a la virtud. (8)

Alonso's father represents his only direct connection to the Iberian Peninsula, but even this connection is fractious and tenuous. There is no certainty to Alonso's assertion of his father's place of birth, he does not *know*, he has only *heard* it said that he was Andalusian. His mother, on the other hand, is American-born, Puerto Rican by birth, and it is her legacy that Alonso inherits: she leaves him a natural inclination to (Catholic) virtue, and, more importantly, her name.⁸ He never informs the reader why it is he carries the matronymic, but it is crucial that hers is the legacy he takes up, whether by choice or illegitimate birth. The only thing Alonso's father leaves him is his trade, but carpentry does not serve him in the changing economic landscape of the seventeenth century.

One might also highlight the way Puerto Rico as impoverished and geographically marginal island plays a role in the polarization between Sigüenza's authorial presence and Alonso's construction as a character. If there is a fundamental difference between the way earlier *pícaros* self-identified as subjects and the way Alonso slowly develops a clear sense of himself as "español," it is that the viceregal world is marked by further disjunctions in identities. From the outset, Alonso identifies as Puerto Rican: "Es mi nombre Alonso Ramírez y mi patria⁹ la ciudad de San Juan de Puerto Rico, cabeza de

8. Cummins and Soons write that "Ramírez does not use his father's surname, but this 'indiferencia de apellido' was not uncommon" (76n22). Although multiple surnames were a common phenomenon, Alonso's is not a case of "indiferencia de apellido" for two reasons. First, he uses Ramírez to the exclusion of any other; second, Sigüenza links the parental surnames with a discussion of Alonso's discrete "herencias."

9. Irving Leonard wrote that a nascent Mexicanism is legible in Sigüenza's *oeuvre*, "as in his frequent allusions to 'mi patria,' his reference to the supercilious indifference of Europeans, and his claims of Mexican equality with the Old World in artistic and even intellectual potentialities. All this was no more, probably, than a manifestation of regionalistic loyalty characteristic of Hispanic peoples everywhere, and it is doubtful if Sigüenza's conception of his 'Patria' extended much beyond his own class or far beyond the bounds of the populous vicinity of Mexico City" (225). Although Leonard's analysis may seem like something of an overstatement today, it reminds us that Sigüenza's loyalties are strongly defined by the indeterminacy between regionalism and incipient New Spanish *criollismo*. Ross ("Carlos de Sigüenza"; *The Baroque Narrative*), Antony Higgins ("Sobre la construcción," "La Bibliotheca Mexicana," *Constructing the Criollo Archive*) and José Antonio Mazzotti have all refined our understanding of *criollo* discourse in recent years.

la isla que entre el Seno Mexicano y el mar Atlántico divide terminus” (7). The Caribbean is juxtaposed to the New Spanish main as marginal within an already marginal realm, and Alonso’s self-representation insistently lays bare the way various categories of disenfranchisement are imbricated with each other. If Mexico suffers from the decay of Spanish interests internationally, Puerto Rico lies further yet from some imagined center of prosperity, just as the insistently Puerto Rican Alonso differs from the Mexican Sigüenza. As Mabel Moraña describes it, “La subordinación política, administrativa y comercial de la isla con respecto a la ciudad de México reproduce la estructura de dependencia imperial en el espacio marginal del Nuevo Mundo” (*Viaje al silencio* 221). For Moraña, Alonso’s double marginalization allows him to stand in as an individual screen through which a collective (*criollo*) subjectivity finds a voice for its own “lastimosa peregrinación,” imposed by hegemonic imperial structures.

In these readings, Alonso’s *criollo* consciousness is, to some degree, assumed, and connections are made among elements that are Baroque, *criollo*, New Spanish, and “Other.”¹⁰ However, the interplay between the Mexican Sigüenza and the Puerto Rican Alonso is further complicated by the purely *rhetorical* articulation of identity in *Infatunios*. Kimberle Lopez has explored the ways that the picaresque provides an insufficient model for understanding the rhetoric of a work like the *Infatunios* precisely due to its highly nuanced literary character. Given its dual-authored nature—Alonso’s oral narrative transcribed by Sigüenza’s written one—she proposes reading the text through the lens of contemporary testimonial theory. For Lopez, the emergence of a clearly articulated *criollo* discourse is made possible only through “the interaction between two Spanish Americans of different social strata in this testimonial pact” (253). Lopez’s redefinition of the generic conventions at work in a text like the *Infatunios* is compelling, particularly so because it tries to identify the formal character of this hybrid work in a way that complements the thematic distinctions that set it apart. She articulates the cartographic/national difference as a class difference, but notes that *criollo* discourse emerges from the interstices between the two subjectivities. In a similar vein, Martínez-San Miguel reads Alonso Ramírez as a character who

10. Moraña locates Baroque discourse in, on the one hand, a *criollo* cultural identity that lies somewhere between hegemony and alterity (*Viaje al silencio* 15), and, on the other, as “[a]rte de indios, o al menos, de mestizos” (28), breaking with critical assessments of the Spanish American Baroque as a movement inherited from Europe and only passively adapted to the New World.

“is capable of actively participating in the production of his own narrative of adventures” (146). For her, Alonso’s narrative challenges the way transatlantic paradigms contain or delimit *criollo* discourses, taking a more skeptical view than Lopez of how effective the interplay is between Sigüenza as author and Alonso as character.

These readings interrogate our sense of a liminal textuality insofar as Sigüenza is a gateway figure between early New Spanish culture on the one hand, and later eighteenth-century *criollo* discourses on the other.¹¹ They remind us that distinctions must be made between the articulation of an authorial (Sigüenza’s) *criollo* discourse and the construction of Alonso’s textual, chimerical subjectivity. Ignoring this kind of complexity can lead to a curious reproduction of the anxieties surrounding the work’s generic classification. Alonso’s tale becomes fundamentally historical, rather than literary, whereas the overlay of Sigüenza’s narration represents the intrusion of both fictionalization and figuration. Greater attention to the nuanced interplay between the two voices opens up the discussion of identity and subject formation, taking it beyond the traditional paradigm of an almost transparent *criollismo* that equates Sigüenza’s authorial subjectivity with the construction of Alonso’s, and offers readers the opportunity to further push at the limits of *criollismo* as an interpretive and ideological construct. I have outlined the way the scholarly debates about the *Infortunios* have developed in order to underscore the growing complexity of current theorizations of *criollo* discourses, or as José Antonio Mazzotti (14–15) has articulated it, *agencias criollas*. This richer understanding helps to contextualize what I see as a discursive formation that complements these *criollo* discourses, that of piracy and maritime criminality. Among the *agencias* Sigüenza ascribes to the *criollo* subject born in this text is a criminal one. I turn now to Sigüenza’s text in order to unpack how he frames and constructs a criminal Alonso Ramírez.

II

After leaving Puerto Rico, Alonso seeks out support from his extended family, and travels throughout New Spain in search of work. Motivated by hun-

11. Buscaglia-Salgado refers to Alonso as “the representative embodiment of colonial subjectivity,” even if this subjectivity is “fundamentally unfix and unstable” (*Undoing Empire* 149, 171).

ger and poverty, he labors under various masters until he marries a young woman of means and good family. This interlude, however, is short-lived, as the narrative dispenses with both her and their child in the space of a single sentence. Immediately on the heels of this, Alonso again goes in search of employment, but finally decides to take more drastic measures: “Desesperé entonces de poder ser algo, y hallándome en el tribunal de mi propia conciencia no sólo acusado, sino convencido de inútil, quise darme por pena de este delito [ser inútil], la que se da en México a los que son delincuentes, que es enviarlos desterrados a las Filipinas” (10). What Johnson characterizes as Alonso’s “defensive aloofness” in the face of these events is, perhaps, more aptly described as an affective emptiness. An overly psychological reading of his motivations underemphasizes how much commercial and economic interests, as well as a certain bureaucratic vocabulary, define the rhetoric of his narrative, even in the case of the loss of his wife and crisis of subjectivity. His eventual self-castigation is delineated in coldly institutional language rather than with the despair he claims to feel.

Critics have made too little of Alonso’s perplexing moment of self-recrimination. We can see in the passage above an important element of the Hispanic picaresque: just as Lazarillo’s narrative includes a long litany and exculpation of his petty crimes and misdemeanors, Alonso makes criminality the pivot of his account, but the latter’s story collapses the moment of trial and the moment of judgment in a curious way. Lazarillo’s discourse is in the tradition of Scheherazade, attempting to allay judgment and ultimate punishment through narrative exegesis, but Alonso offers us the simultaneity of *juicio*—both in terms of discernment and trial—and punishment. He exiles himself to the Philippines, as is proper for a criminal in Alonso’s exceedingly regimented world view.¹²

The scene, however, presents a number of difficulties for the classic paradigm of the picaresque. Alonso is perhaps unique among Spanish *pícaros* for his uncompromising judgments; whereas most of his cohorts see themselves as guiltless victims of a larger social matrix and historical circumstances that have forced them into criminality, Alonso finds guilt where no actual crime has been committed and stands accused before a tribunal of his own making.

12. The Spanish East Indies, including the Philippines, were territories of the Viceroyalty of New Spain from 1565 until 1821, when administrative control shifted back to Madrid in the wake of the war for Mexican independence. As the furthest reaches of New Spain, the Philippines play a frontier role in the viceregal imagination.

This imaginary scene in which he judges himself inextricably ties the economic failure of the first chapter with a more profound existential failure. However, as Stefanie Massmann has noted, it would be a mistake to read Alonso's failure as an exclusively economic one, seeing as his crime is a crime of being ("ser") in all the semantic variability of the word. Unlike his predecessors, it is not merely his lack of economic opportunity that marks him as a failure, but rather his lack of any clear subjectivity within the structure of viceregal New Spain. Alonso must carve out a subject position for himself that, following González Echevarría's paradigm, fully enfranchises him, and thereby "become something" in the eye of some imagined viceregal authority. As Martínez San-Miguel has argued (147, 161–64), Alonso grafts his experience of "becoming" something to the route of the Manila Galleons, a highly profitable trade route in the late seventeenth century.¹³

I noted above that Alonso's identity crisis is the focus of much recent scholarship on *Infortunios*, where it is read almost exclusively within the context of Sigüenza's nascent *criollismo*. Alonso's emblematic disenfranchisement, coupled with his character as a rigidly constructed cipher, makes him an ideal screen for such an interpretation. What these readings leave unexplored is the way this crisis is configured as a legal, rather than "psychological" or exclusively "subjective" one. Read as a crisis in subject formation defined in loosely psychoanalytic (that is, twentieth-century) terms, this process of "becoming" is predicated on an oppositional sense of what Alonso is not. Critics have read the construction of an autonomous identity as one that necessarily builds off the "alterity" of other identity categories, be it the English pirates who kidnap Alonso and his crew in the South China seas or the indigenous figures who continue to occupy a stereotyped image of barbarism for seventeenth-century Spaniards.

It seems to me that the construction of Alonso's malleable subjectivity is more complicated than this, particularly when we take into account the way Sigüenza's own discursive practice might not align perfectly with Alonso as a literary character. Referring to Sigüenza's *oeuvre* as a whole, Kathleen Ross has written:

13. Buscaglia-Salgado incorporates the trade route in his analysis of *Infortunios*, which explores the way that Alonso's journey east takes him to "an island world that mirrors the Caribbean and that has been tied to it since the galleon fleets were established" (*Undoing Empire* 153). See also Katharine Bjork (25–28) and Martínez-San Miguel (207n7).

En sus obras [Sigüenza] refleja la búsqueda de un sentido de identidad dentro de una sociedad cambiante; sociedad en la cual la ascendencia creciente de la clase criolla se veía amenazada desde arriba por el desprecio europeo, y desde abajo por la creciente y mezclada clase mestiza. El lenguaje utilizado por Sigüenza habla de esta búsqueda. Se le ve como un cartógrafo que delinea un mapa donde ya no aparece una América excéntrica. (“Carlos de Sigüenza” 238–39)

Although here Ross refers to a generalized sense of *criollismo* in Sigüenza’s works, we might take her characterization as representative of the authorial *criollo* discourse at work even in his depiction of Alonso. His construction of Alonso’s subjectivity struggles with this kind of fluidity as Sigüenza attempts to graft his own sense of evolving, New Spanish identity onto Alonso’s even more unfixed sense of self, and what I have characterized as the imperfect fit between the two opens up a space for a radical textual critique of a nascent *criollo* consciousness.

The fluidity to which Ross refers often appears as indeterminacy in the relational subject formation most often explored in the scholarship. It is clear throughout the text that Alonso’s time among the English pirates serves to further solidify a depraved and corrupted view of Spaniards as well as English subjects. When he reaches the end of narrating Alonso’s time in captivity, Sigüenza writes:

Creo el que no hubieron sido tan malos como para nosotros lo fueron, si no estuviera con ellos un español que se preciaba de sevillano y se llamaba Miguel. No hubo trabajo intolerable en que nos pusiesen, no hubo ocasión alguna en que nos maltratasen, no hubo hambre que nos padeciésemos, ni riesgo de la vida en que peligrásemos que no viniese por su mano y su dirección, haciendo gala de mostrarse impío y abandonando lo católico en que nació por vivir pirata y morir hereje. (24–25)

The figure of Miguel is central to disentangling the contradictions at work in the text. A figure identified as explicitly Spanish, and what’s more, *sevillano*, Miguel become a Baroque disfiguration of the (presumably) properly Hispanic Alonso. We can see in this distanciation from Miguel as Spaniard a germ of the *criollo* consciousness so often highlighted as *Infortunios*’s primary textual articulation. Seville, as the center of ultramarine colonial administration, literally houses the documentary history of Spanish conquest and gov-

ernance. Miguel, as Seville incarnate and pirate *par excellence*, marries the worst of Spanish commercial interests with its seedy and unlawful other, piracy. As Ralph Bauer has characterized him, Miguel “illustrates that the mercantile spirit that is now threatening to undermine the Catholic ‘Universal Empire’ has taken possession not only of Protestant heretics but also of peninsular officials in their greedy raids upon the American colonies” (175). More piratical than his English cohorts and more heretical than his Protestant crewmates, he stands as a figure for the corruption of European Catholicism—which in this case falls into Protestantism—and of the promise of a new capitalist world order that has as its necessary supplement the dislocation of Alonso’s sense of identification. If he cannot identify with the Spanish, Alonso must traverse the complexities of *self*-identification; that is, of constructing a novel or autochthonous rather than inherited identity. María Antonia Garcés has argued that captivity can be viewed as a rite of passage, a “type of transnational passage” across frontiers (191). More recently, Lisa Voigt has further explored the way captives “appropriate the valorization of firsthand knowledge about other lands and cultures in order to authorize suspect, if not subaltern, voices” (29). Alonso’s own captivity differs from the cases Garcés and Voigt discuss, but still plays an important role as a rite of passage in Alonso’s transformation into fully authorized subject by the novella’s conclusion.

It would be a mistake, however, to read Miguel exclusively as a reminder of the difference between Alonso as Puerto Rican and peninsular excess. In a world where Alonso continues to identify as “español” and never explicitly questions the viceregal institutions, it would be salutary to also consider the way that Miguel, to some extent, denationalizes piracy itself, making the traffic in contraband and stolen goods a fundamental part of this new geography that Alonso traverses. The extra-national space he enters when he leaves New Spain is one in which vessels of all nations and goods of all kinds crisscross in a dizzying spectacle:

El concurso que allí se ve de navíos de malayos, macasares, siameses, bugises, chinos, armenios, franceses, ingleses, dinamarcos, portugueses y castellanos no tiene número. Hállanse en este emporio cuantos artefactos hay en la Europa y los que en retorno de ellos la envía la Asia. Fabrícense allí para quien quisiere comprarlas excelentes armas. Pero con decir estar allí compendiado el universo lo digo todo. (12)

Once Alonso leaves New Spain and he “[se despiden de] cuantas ideas [le] embarazaron la imaginación por algunos años” (12), he becomes a part of a global circulation of goods and subjects, abandoning this realm of “imaginación” for one of the harshest kind of reality. The connection between legitimate commerce and piracy, Spain (Miguel) and trade, is an important emblem of the text’s, if not Alonso’s, ambivalence about the nature of the market that has taken shape by the late seventeenth century.¹⁴ With the pirate ship, Sigüenza offers the reader a delimited space where the dark side of early modern capitalism is on display.¹⁵

The pirates eventually free Alonso and leave him a boat filled with goods. After a long and arduous journey, he and his crew are shipwrecked off the coast of the Yucatan, and spend the final leg of their journey trying to recover their vessel and cargo, both of which have been confiscated by the regional authorities. Our protagonist makes it all the way to Mexico City, where he narrates his tale to the viceroy and Sigüenza, who appears as a character in his own text.

Despite the construction of the English pirates as seemingly irreconcilably different from Alonso and his surviving crewmembers, Sigüenza connects the two groups by introducing an element of ambiguity to the perception of Alonso and his multiethnic and international crew upon their return to New Spain. Traveling up the coast they encounter a group of Amerindians, and Alonso explains that: “[n]o satisfechos de nosotros los yucatecos, dudando si seríamos de los piratas ingleses franceses que por allí discurren, sacaron de lo que llevan en sus mochilas para que comiésemos; y dándoles (no tanto por retorno cuanto porque depusiesen el miedo que en ellos veíamos) dos de nuestras escopetas, no las quisieron” (32). Given the prevalence of piracy in the Caribbean and along the Spanish Main during the “golden age” of piracy at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries, this slippage between “hombres perdidos” and “piratas” is logical in

14. Bauer places similar emphasis on the figure of Miguel, but in an argument about “the mercantilist epistemic order of the Baroque Lettered City” (28) that was Sigüenza’s intellectual milieu.

15. Paul Gilroy argues that ships become important chronotopes because “they immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts” (4). In the case of *Infortunios*, the pirate ship condenses and indexes those interlocking categories that are of interest to me here: criminality, capitalism, and identity. Adorno notes the way that Sigüenza’s text “harks back to Cabeza de Vaca’s *Naufragios* in the encounter of pirate and slaving ships” (*The Polemics of Possession* 311).

this context. Indeed, the presence of an illicit multinational community of seaborne criminals captures the imagination of viceregal administrators at the time and that of writers over the subsequent centuries. If what was at stake in Alonso's self-exile is the broader question of subjectivity, it is telling—and certainly no accident—that in the moment of his return, the distinction between Caribbean pirates and Alonso and his crew is illegible to the Yucatecs in chapter VI. This ambiguity, coupled with the way the encounter is configured principally as an exchange of goods (food and firearms), highlights the underlying commercial framework of Alonso's transformation throughout *Infortunios*. His concern over being misread by the Amerindians continues throughout the crew's overland journey to larger urban centers, and Alonso sends Juan González as *adelantado* “así para solicitarnos algún refresco como para noticiar a los indios de los pueblos inmediatos adonde habíamos de ir, sino hombres perdidos que íbamos a su amparo” (34).

This misprision is mirrored, albeit in a distorted manner, by the trickster Alonso encounters once the crew reaches Tixcatal. Pretending to know Alonso from the time prior to his exile in chapter I, the trickster explains that Alonso's reputation is already in question so soon after his return: “sabed que corren voces que sois espía de un corsario, y noticiado de ello el gobernador de esta provincia os hará prender, y sin duda alguna os atormentará” (36). As proper recompense for his help and the costs it will incur, the unnamed man demands Alonso's slave as payment. This scene is most interesting for the manner in which it further complicates the question of nationality and piracy, and the perception of Alonso's reliability as a figure within the boundaries of the law. Of course, at this point Alonso is too focused on matters of economic interest to be fooled, and he rejects the man's offer, but the scene highlights the way that criminality does not cut along strict national lines, and how, in Sigüenza's text, the maritime commercial pursuits of its characters seamlessly slide from the legal to the illegal.

III

What is it, then, that makes a pirate in fact, if not in reputation? As Nina Gerassi-Navarro explains, the definition and categorization of seafaring criminals was constantly evolving and inexact throughout the colonial period. Words like corsair “originally referred to a conflict that was based on

a religious division between Islam and Christianity. As the word continued to be used in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it retained—at least for the Spanish—a certain religious connotation” (16–17). She goes on to stress that the greater frequency with which Spaniards referred to English pirates as corsairs versus French pirates (to whom they more often referred as buccaneers or freebooters) can be traced to this early connection between piracy and religious identity. By the early eighteenth century, however, the notion of piracy as a category was distinct, even if it included all of these sub-categorizations.¹⁶ The *Diccionario de autoridades* defines a *pirata* as “[e]l ladrón que anda robando por el mar. Es voz puramente Latina *Pirata* . . . Por translación se llama el sujeto cruel y desapiadado, que no se compadece de los trabajos y miserias de otro” (Real Academia Española 5: 282). Any heretical connotations were appended through modifiers, as in one of the examples noted under the definition (“piratas hereges”). As outlined in *Autoridades*, the infraction is legal and the offense is to the field of commerce, which is the legitimate exchange of goods between various parties and across social networks. The importance of commerce, politically and economically, as well as semantically, is underscored by the sheer number of entries for it in the same dictionary. It lists five entries for “Comercio,” with an additional six if we include *comerciable*, *comerciar*, and other words deriving from the same root. As the first definition, *Autoridades* provides “Negociación, trato y tráfico de mercancías, géneros, u de dinero con Mercantes o Mercadéres assi naturales, como extrangéros” (Real Academia Española 2: 433).

The unstable relationship between commerce and legality defined not only piracy but also legitimate trade in the Pacific, and the relationship between New Spain and its far-flung *capitanía general* administered out of Manila.¹⁷ During Hapsburg rule, trade with the Philippines was loosely regulated. It was not until 1593, thirty years after the Philippines were absorbed into the Empire, that the Crown issued a *cédula real* limiting commerce between Manila and Acapulco by weight and market (Yuste López 14). This *cédula*

16. The *Diccionario de autoridades* includes definitions for *Pirata* and *Corso* (“el acto de andar pirateando por la mar el Corsario o Pirata” [Real Academia Española 2: 623]), but not a specific entry for “Corsario.”

17. Bjork outlines the way the colonization of the Philippines was determined “by its place in an expanding Asian trade network and by the interests of Mexican officials and merchants” (50). Ricardo Padrón has shown how late sixteenth-century maps had already absorbed “the Pacific into a network of maritime trade routes that tie the Philippines to the Americas, and the Americas to Spain” (16).

was unsuccessful in curbing what was already a thriving commercial relationship; the Crown had to reaffirm it five times over the seventeenth century, three of those within twenty-seven years of its first issue. The lack of attention accorded trans-Pacific regulation, and the proliferation of illicit trade in both the growing influence of piracy as well as illegal Spanish commerce that exceeded the *cédula's* prohibition allowed for the development of precisely the legally ambiguous environment in which Alonso finds himself after his exile. Starting in the early 1670s, trans-Pacific trade began to grow, and the mid 1680s saw a precipitous improvement that lasted into the eighteenth century and the shift from Hapsburg to Bourbon rule in Spain (Yuste López 33, gráfica 1). It was not until the ascension of Philip V of Bourbon in November of 1700, however, that the Crown shifted its policy regarding Philippine trade with the Americas. By 1702, Spain had already introduced comprehensive laws that regulated all aspects of the traffic in goods between its ultramarine territories.¹⁸

I trace both piracy and commerce in the *Diccionario de autoridades* because specific discussion of these categories is essential for understanding the world system at work in Sigüenza's text. As I have already shown, the question of Alonso's journey is read primarily in terms of his presumed *criollo* identity, despite the fact that he never refers to himself as such or mentions *criollismo* in any direct way. While this kind of reading builds towards a greater understanding of the analytical categories important in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (e.g., independence and nationalism), it obfuscates Alonso's clear, explicit interest in the commercial nature of his journey, and the way his careful attention to the economic aspects of his *cautiverio* pick up the economic concerns of the picaresque, bringing it full circle.

Legal ownership is at the core of reflections about piracy, and Sigüenza makes the question of Alonso's proprietary privileges the focus of the final chapter of *Infortunios*. By introducing this issue, he adds another layer to the question of who Alonso has become, reconfiguring his identity in terms of what he has acquired. I believe it is the interest in commerce and piracy that helps us to fully unpack the scene of exile from chapter I discussed above.

18. This increased commercial activity lasted throughout the eighteenth century, as the revenue from taxation and the control of the American and East Asian markets were meant to offset the economic crises and decay of the Empire (Yuste López 34, gráfica 2; 69, gráfica 3; 70, gráfica 4).

The question “who is the legal owner of the goods?” begs the question of their provenance and the trajectory they have taken to get to Mexico and to Alonso in particular. In other words, is Alonso, as he insists, legally entitled to the cargo?

In order to answer this question, we must trace with care the transfer of goods throughout the text. When he sets out for the province of Ilocos and is given command of his own vessel and twenty-five-man crew, Alonso details the supplies provided by the royal garrison. “Sacáronse de los almacenes reales y se me entregaron para que defendiese la embarcación cuatro chozos y dos mosquetes, que necesitaban de estar con prevención de tizonas para darles fuego por tener quebrados los serpentines. Entregáronme también dos puños de balas y cinco libras de pólvora” (13). This vessel and goods, which belong to the Crown (“perteneía al rey” [14]), is the one seized by the English pirates. At the insistence of Nicpat, the merciful *condestable*¹⁹ of the pirate crew, the pirates eventually set Alonso and his remaining crew free: “Llegó a tanto la controversia, que estando ya para tomar las armas para decidirla, se convinieron en que me diesen la fragata que apresaron en el Estrecho de Sincapura y con ella la libertad . . .” (21). In this first description of the boat and the goods with which the pirates provide him, he writes: “Diéronme un astrolabio y agujón, un derrotero holandés, una sola tinaja de agua y dos tercios de arroz, pero al abrazarme el condestable para despedirse me avisó cómo me había dejado, a excusa de sus compañeros, alguna sal y tasajos, cuatro barriles de pólvora, muchas balas de artillería, una caja de medicinas y otras diversas cosas” (21). This is not simple restitution—that is, the return of the cargo stolen from Alonso when his crew is kidnapped on the trip to Ilocos. As we can see, the exchange and supply of goods is occurring in an economy that exists outside legal parameters, and although the narrative allows for Alonso’s transgression—he must survive in order to return from his infelicitous *cautiverio*—it nevertheless incorporates him into this competing commercial system.

There is yet another, final discrepancy when Alonso outlines the goods left in the wreckage of his *fragata* when they are shipwrecked on the coast of the Yucatan:

19. Defined as “El que hace veces de sargento en las brigadas de artillería de marina” in *Seis obras* and as “master gunner” in *The Misadventures*.

Quedóse (ojalá la pudiéramos haber traído con nosotros aunque fuera a cuestras por lo que en adelante diré), quedóse, digo, la fragata que en pago de mucho que yo y los míos servimos a los ingleses nos dieron graciosamente. Era (y no sé si todavía lo es) de treinta y tres codos de quila y con tres aforros, los palos y vergas de excelentísimo pino, la fábrica toda de lindo galibo, y tanto que corría ochenta leguas por singladura con viento fresco; quedáronse en ella y en las playas nueve piezas de artillería de hierro con más de dos mil balas de a cuatro, de a seis y de a diez, y todas de plomo; cien quintales, por lo menos, de este metal, cincuenta barras de estaño, sesenta arrobas de hierro, ochenta barras de cobre del Japón, muchas tinajas de la China, siete colmillos de elefante, tres barriles de pólvora, cuarenta cañones de escopeta, diez llaves, una caja de medicina y muchas herramientas de cirujano. (30)

What was originally a vessel and cargo that unquestionably belongs to the king is transformed over the course of Alonso's circumnavigation of the globe into "la fragata en pago de lo mucho que yo y los míos servimos a los ingleses" (30). In a curious set of transpositions, a kind of unconscious laundering of original vessel and cargo, the Crown's property passes into the hands of pirates, where it is absorbed as part of their fleet, and by the time Alonso and his crew leave, the vessel and cargo have become their justly-earned rewards.

José Juan Arrom is among the few critics to note this second discrepancy, which he ascribes to Sigüenza's own voice breaking through in Alonso's narration. Noting Sigüenza's penchant for sociopolitical critique, Arrom writes:

En esta fantasiosa lista (contando con los cien quintales, "por lo menos", de plomo, las finas tinajas de la China y los codiciados colmillos de elefante), se oye la voz de Sigüenza y hasta se percibe un dejo humorístico. Dejo humorístico que encubre una sutil sátira al comparar la abundancia de los pertrechos de Guerra que a los ingleses les sobran con la escasez de armas que a los españoles les faltan. El contraste es más evidente si recordamos las circunstancias en que el incauto puertorriqueño fue apresado en aguas Filipinas. (37)

Arrom's acute reading underscores the way that Sigüenza satirizes the insufficiencies of the Spanish Empire, whose economic decline and slow decay is

a focus for the author in not only *Infortunios*, but also in many of his later works. Although there is a critical tone throughout Alonso's story, the text lacks the more ludic quality of the picaresque novels; indeed, it seems to me to be sapped of the humor that might make both *Infortunios* more immediately pleasurable and Alonso himself more sympathetic. Rather, Sigüenza seems to make Alonso something of a blank slate, a screen for negotiating ambivalences about trans-Pacific commerce. By this last chapter, Alonso is reduced to his identity as an economic agent and participant in a global market increasingly characterized as criminal. More importantly, he is made a fully viceregal subject when he is interpolated into a world where the goods that make him a fully realized man are acquired illegally.

Once Alonso returns to Mexico, it seems that his quasi-existential concerns fall by the wayside. If he had despaired “de poder ser algo” at the end of chapter I, chapter VII is infinitely more concerned with “poder tener algo” and “poder mantener” goods stolen by the English pirates. He spends the bulk of this final section recurring to legal authorities, mayors, governors, and finally the viceroy himself, for the right to salvage the cargo onboard the pirate vessel on which he and his crew returned to Spanish territories. What Irving Leonard has called the “sordid materialism set forth in the abundant picaresque literature of the time” (29) is here taken to an extreme. Despite appearing to resolve his crisis upon his return to the New World, Alonso's desperate petitioning lays bare what an elusive fantasy economic upward mobility is in Alonso's life. As Raquel Chang-Rodríguez has written:

El protagonista da la vuelta al mundo pero no retorna a su lugar de origen—Puerto Rico—porque su regreso, como el de los indios a España, no le dará conciencia de quién es ni de su lugar en la sociedad. Ni los padres de Sigüenza y Góngora, ni los de Alonso, ni éste, ni el mismo sabio mexicano, encontraron en el Nuevo Mundo la mejora económica y social que deseaban—sus sueños fueron frustrados al encontrar el mismo orden social del cual creían escapar trasladándose a otra geografía. (94)

Infortunios ends not with the full restitution of the cargo and an establishment of its legal pedigree, but rather a promise of restitution: “[D]ecretó . . . mandamiento para que el gobernador de Yucatán haga que los ministros que corrieron con el embargo o seguro de lo que estaba en las playas y hallaron a bordo, a mí o a mi odatario sin replica ni pretexto lo entreguen todo” (38). Even this future is marred by an uncompromising truth: any ascension in

Alonso's station has been thanks to, and not in spite of, his time among the pirates. It is not professional success or legitimate enterprise that will have brought him his fortune. Instead, it is the ill-gotten goods of the pirate Captain Bel and his cohorts that allows for the social transformation and Alonso's integration into viceregal society by the conclusion of the narrative. The text ends not on the triumphant note that some critics read as the culmination of Alonso's upward mobility, but rather with what Chang-Rodríguez characterizes as that dream's elusiveness. Alonso's story spends itself in a circuitous trajectory through a legal system that takes him all the way to the viceroy and into literary history, but it never seems to realize its ultimate fantasy of economic legitimacy.

Alonso's arrival in New Spain at the end of the novella brings his journey full circle. He returns having survived exile, captivity, torture, and the circumnavigation of the globe. For most critics, Alonso has "become someone" over the course of that journey, becoming *criollo* while differentiating himself from the barbaric English pirates, and somehow reintegrating himself as a proper viceregal subject, not quite Spanish, but autochthonously Spanish American. The final chapter of Alonso's long journey dramatizes the connection between a global Imperial culture and the way the circuit of international trade spawns its criminal other in piracy. If Alonso rejects this kind of legal transgression on the surface at the level of plot, Sigüenza shows the way integration into the legalized order of the viceregal state inherently embraces its own morally suspect undercurrent. For if Alonso returns a triumphant success to the Spanish Main, it is *as* a pirate of sorts: piloting a stolen vessel filled with contraband goods. Guillén famously characterized the picaresque as "quite simply, the confessions of a liar" (92). *Infortunios* is the confession of a man who doesn't have the sense to lie, nor the perspective to see what he has become.

Infortunios plots the story of a young Spanish American subject in a time of transition and flux, part and parcel of the Baroque sensibility of the times or the emergent self-awareness of Europeans born in New Spain, whose sense of an identity discrete from that of their peninsular counterparts would crystallize over the subsequent century. But that narrative occludes an equally important project undertaken in this text. If Sigüenza shares something with the young Alonso, it is that both subjects, indeed, *all* subjects, are inextricably mapped onto what is, by the end of the sixteenth century, a truly global exchange of goods and migration of people. Sigüenza may not consider capitalism or economics with the level of sophistication that can be found in

eighteenth-century writers, but he posits early modern capitalism as central to understanding the emergence of the subject that Alonso becomes. More importantly, successful integration into the economic landscape of *Infortunios* de facto shifts Alonso into an ambivalent category, one where the traditional Spanish *pícaro*'s relationship to the law is with an ambivalent relationship to the notion of criminality itself. I have tried to explore some of the ways that Sigüenza adapts the picaresque's classic and Golden Age conventions for an interstitial time, marking the shift in early mercantilism to the rise of a more clearly defined colonial culture. Sigüenza offers his readers a version of transgression that is constitutive of the new modern subject inaugurated in these times, and he creates Alonso's story to explore the connections among empire, early capitalism, and the criminality that makes the very notion of creolization just as suspect as Imperial metropolitan identities.

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