

Figuring Vittoria Colonna's Desirous Widow in Francisco de Aldana's 'Pues cabe tanto en vos del bien del cielo'

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ABSTRACT

The sonnet 'Pues cabe tanto en vos del bien del cielo' by Spanish-Neapolitan poet Francisco de Aldana (1537-78) challenges interpretation through its genre-defying mix of consolatory, philosophic, and amatory elements; in particular, its inclusion of an enigmatic statement by a ventriloquized female figure alien to contemporary Hispanic courtly poetry. In this study, I offer an interpretation through a comparative study with the *Rime amorose* (1538) of Vittoria Colonna (1490-1547), in which she popularized the Petrarchan voice of the desiring widow in Italian poetry. After establishing a link between the Aldana and Colonna families by virtue of the fragment 'Aunque a la alta región del alegría', which addresses the death of Colonna's niece, I explain how the yearning contained within Colonna's lyric, noted to possess an erotic potential, may have led Aldana to incorporate this voice in his own poetic exploration of a combinatory spiritual and physical philosophy of love. Additionally, given the absence of the Colonnaesque tradition in Spain, I consider how expressions of desire by female voices in the *arte menor* and pastoral traditions potentially could have led to a similar interpretation for Hispanic readers.

KEYWORDS

Vittoria Colonna; Francisco de Aldana; Neoplatonism; *consolatio*; desire; grief; love

It would appear, all puns aside, that the Spanish-Neapolitan warrior-poet Francisco de Aldana (1537–78) is enjoying something of a (second) Renaissance. My recent monograph (Lennon 2019), a special edition of the e-journal *Studia Aurea* (2018), García's study (2010), and a variety of articles published since around the turn of the millennium have contributed to the growing scholarly base that underpins how we understand the poetry of this multifaceted figure. In particular, critics have paid careful attention to Aldana's writings on the subject of love and their philosophic sources, primarily the *trattati d'amore*, in an effort to understand better his approach to the interrelationship of love and sensuality, spirit and body. On this topic, I propose a reading of 'Pues cabe tanto en vos del bien del cielo', whose content was labelled 'enrevesadísimo' by Ruiz Silva (1981, 89), which sheds light on hitherto unrecognized influences in addition to the contemporary treatises. The poem is one that has garnered little critical attention compared to perennial favourites, such as 'Cuál es la causa, mi Damón, que estando'; however, there have been recent efforts (Lennon 2019, 59–61; García 2010, 259–63) whose results will be

discussed below. By virtue of an exploration and comparative consideration of the Petrarchan female lyric voice first introduced into Italian Peninsular literary culture by the poet Vittoria Colonna (1490–1547), and later employed by Gaspara Stampa (1523–54), among others, I offer a means by which not only to read and interpret Aldana’s sonnet with greater clarity and coherence, but also contribute to our knowledge of the female lyric voice as well as of a variety of sources that influenced his captivating characterization of love, and our understanding thereof, within the field of Hispanic letters.

Commencing with the inspiration that led to this comparison, Aldana’s poetic fragment ‘Aunque a la alta región del alegría’, also titled ‘A Don García de Toledo, virrey de Sicilia, etc’, offers evidence that links the Spanish-Neapolitan poet and the Colonna family:

Aunque a la alta región del alegría
subió quien os la daba acá en el suelo,
ved cuánto puede un puro y santo celo en
amorosa y santa compañía:

que aun a pesar de muerte helada y fría,
podadora crüel del frágil velo, siempre os
sigue vitoria desde el cielo y a vuestro
nombre da perpetuo día [. . .]
(Aldana, 2000, 485)

The sonnet fragment, which appears solely in what is considered to be a later edition of the poet’s posthumously published poetry, offers its own conundrum.¹ Acting upon the information given, we know that don García de Toledo (1514–78) was Viceroy of Sicily between 1564–66, and it is believed the poem concerns the loss of his wife Vittoria d’Ascanio Colonna, niece of the poet with whom she shared a name, whose exact date of death remains unknown. Lara Garrido (Aldana 2000, 485) believes lines 7–8 allude to don García’s role in the Great Siege of Malta in 1565 and suggests that his wife’s death could therefore not be any later than that year; however, Langdon (2007, 175) suggests Vittoria died shortly after the birth of her final child in 1553, and I note that Lara Garrido fails to consider don García’s decisive role in the retaking of Peñón de Vélez de Gomera off the Moroccan coast in 1564 (Posac Mon 1998, 102–3), the same year he became Viceroy of Sicily.² Therefore, one could posit a date of death for Vittoria between 1553–66 that encompasses the period between the birth of her last child and don García vacating the post in 1566, while the reference to don García’s being Viceroy of Sicily in the title would suggest a tentative date of composition spanning 1564–66,³ placing Aldana in his mid to late twenties and raising the question of what occasioned the penning of the piece for the widower so long after his wife’s demise.

Indeed, Aldana’s quatrains are clearly redolent of a *consolatio* to help comfort don García de Toledo. The poetic voice acknowledges the passing of Vittoria and the absence of the ‘alegría’ (l. 1) she once brought don García on the physical plane, an aspect which is highlighted to the reader by the use of the direct object pronoun ‘la’ in line 2. The result is such that the reader must refer back to the use of ‘alegría’ in the descriptive phrase ‘alta region del alegría’ as a periphrastic reference to heaven and the associations that come with it. Arguably already hyperbolic in its description, the lyric voice attempts to soothe the widower by inviting him to consider just how much more joy his late wife might provide him with now as a devout soul in heavenly company. A similar idea continues into the second stanza where a play on her name Vittoria/victoria intimates that she, like the acclaim for his

military success(es), follows him and gives his name honour and renown. The word play and its link to a positively cast luminescence are perhaps in homage to similar rhetorical devices involving the elder Vittoria, such as in her poem 'Qui fece il mio bel lume a noi ritorno': 'dele vittorie sue tante e si chiare' (l. 11) (Colonna 1982, 33).

We know there was a certain proximity between the two families that could have led Aldana to pen the *consolatio*. Rivers (1955, 19), in his notes on the fragment, observes that 'García de Toledo era hijo de don Pedro, virrey de Nápoles y hermano de doña Leonor [de Toledo], duquesa de Florencia'. Recent research (Nievas Rojas 2019, 126) shows that Aldana's father, Antonio de Aldana, formed part of the retinue that accompanied doña Leonor, don García's sister, to Florence in 1539 for her marriage to Cosimo I de' Medici before going on to occupy a variety of other influential roles.⁴ Additionally, María Salomé de Coccalá, wife to Antonio and mother of Francisco, formed part of doña Leonor's bridal party (Nievas Rojas 2019, 149). While the question of Francisco's own degree of familiarity as an individual remains open to debate, it is an interesting link that could have influenced Aldana's decision to imitate Vittoria Colonna's word play in the above-mentioned fragment, as well as emulate the female lyric voice she cultivated in his sonnet 'Pues cabe tanto en vos del bien del cielo'.

Of course, it is also true that Colonna was already a colossus of Italian peninsular poetry by the time of Aldana's birth and subsequent education first in Naples and then at the University of Florence. After the death of her husband, Ferrante Francesco d'Avalos, Marchese de Pescara, in 1525, Colonna's star began to rise with her poetry circulating around Naples and beyond in manuscript form. 1538 marked the publication of Pirogallo's edition of her *Rime*, which focussed on her late husband, a work that would see a further twelve editions before her death in 1547.⁵ Recognized as a paragon of wifely devotion, she was also a favourite of Bembo, Michelangelo, and Ariosto, who chose her to represent the pinnacle of female authorship and chaste virtue in the third edition of his *Orlando Furioso* (Canto XXXVII) (Brundin 2008, 22). Unquestionably, the popularity of Colonna and her lyric after the demise of her husband cannot be underestimated. Acclaim, both popular and critical, had converted her into one of the most published poets of the time (Cox 2005, 14–15), while her lyric also circulated in numerous anthologies and was subject to a commentary on her collected works, an honour she shared with only two other (male) sixteenth-century Italian Petrarchists: Luca Contile (1505–74) and Bernadino Rota (c.1509–75) (Brundin 2008, 156).

In particular, it is Colonna's earlier secular lyric that interests us rather than her turn to subject matter more religious in tone.⁶ On the subject of her poetry dedicated to the departed d'Avalos, it bears restating that these are the works of a widow and concern the expression of what we might more appropriately term an amorous grief via her lyric voice. Even though Colonna does not produce what we would recognize as a structurally definitive *canzoniere* with its own metanarrative (Sapegno 2016, 147), she does adopt and adapt the authoritative code of Petrarchism and her poems are linked by their 'conveying a powerfully erotic poetics for an absent body' (McHugh 2013, 346).⁷ Indeed, McHugh 2013, 346) notes how this endeavour necessitated a reversal of the typical male and female roles, which in turn required a translation of "the traditionally female Petrarchan love object to a male form" that would have implications for the presentation of the hitherto unobjectified (absent) male form. D'Avalos, who, like Petrarch's Laura, would go unnamed, is frequently presented in an "abstracted spiritual state" as a source of light, for example 'sole', 'lume', 'luce', or a spirit beyond the physical realm, which, in conjunction with his having been Colonna's husband, helped to attenuate moral critique (Smarr 2001, 3). Brundin (2008, 24) adds that while d'Avalos remained 'undeniably human, the poet stresses the qualities of the loved one that

most easily ally him with a morally exalted image, constantly rehearsing key words (“virtù”, “gloria”, “valor”, “chiaro”, “nobile”).

Colonna would also have to negotiate a space for the female lyric voice within a system that had only ever permitted ‘the presence of a voiceless woman, placed in the position of Other, of mirror, of muse’ (Sapegno 2016, 146). Ultimately, Colonna’s poetics of amorous grief would give rise to the ‘the construction of her authorial identity and of a feminine subjectivity’ hitherto inexistent within the tradition (Sapegno 2016, 155). And while the philosophic underpinning of her lyric would remain (largely) Neoplatonic (McAuliffe 1986, 101), this ‘does not mean that her interests never veer into the carnal’ (McHugh 2013, 352). Smarr (2001, 8) highlights in particular how Colonna’s lyric voice makes use of the human sensorial gamut to express love, not only the privileged ‘upper senses’ of sight, hearing, and the mind. It is this figure of Italian peninsular poetry, the widowed lyric I, proprietress of a once exclusively male voice and desirous body, that I will explore as a means to understanding more clearly Aldana’s ‘Pues cabe tanto en vos del bien del cielo’ and his approach to love more broadly.

It has not been possible to date the sonnet in question but the birth and death dates of Aldana and Colonna, respectively, make it clear that the poem posthumously revisits the widow’s poetic expression of amorous grief. The sonnet may have been a show of respect towards the d’Avalos family, which supported the Hapsburgs and was prominent in the Neapolitan court (Sapegno 2016, 141), or the Colonna family, in addition to the fragment dedicated to Vittoria d’Ascanio Colonna for the reasons outlined above. We know that Aldana had previously penned sonnets in Italian upon the deaths of Lucrezia de Medici in 1561 and her mother Leonor a year later, but both their timbre and content differ greatly from the poem treated here.⁸ There is also the possibility that Aldana was inspired by an existing *consolatio* for Colonna because the opening resembles lines of a sonnet by Ariosto, which could suggest that Aldana’s lyric voice may not only be drawing upon her legacy but also tacitly addresses the poetic embodiment of widowhood itself.⁹ Additionally, the poem may demonstrate Aldana’s appreciation of Colonna’s handling of amorous grief, which would bring to the fore parallels that have emerged regarding their shared acknowledgement of the role of the body and sensual love within an otherwise markedly Neoplatonic context.

The sonnet itself is classically Petrarchan in structure (ABBA, ABBA, CDE, CDE) and has the poetic voice relate an exchange with a woman after the death of her beloved using a mix of the simple past tense and direct speech:

«Pues cabe tanto en vos del bien del cielo
que en vuestros ojos hay de su alegría, cese el
tierno dolor, señora mía, que os da la
privación de un mortal velo.

Aquel que amastes tanto acá en el suelo
goza la luz do nunca muere el día, cuya clara
visión no convernía
mostrar que escureció vuestro consuelo.»

Este yo dije, y respondiome luego ella:
«Revuelve Amor con llama presta los
extremos y el medio en un instante; yo
gozo al resplandor del santo fuego
y peno al vivo ardor.» ¡Ved qué respuesta dina
que de los ángeles se cante!
(de Aldana 2000, 219–20)

Aldana's use of dialogue has been linked to a number of different traditions, including the *sonetto dialogato* and the Socratic dialogue, and has been subject to study as a contemplative and edifying form in his pastoral lyric (Lennon 2019, 93–96), although it also appears in the more jocular 'Diálogo entre cabeza y pie' (de Aldana 2000, 385–88). Allegretti (1999, 78–79) notes it was a common feature of the dialogic love sonnet to consist of some form of 'consiglio o insengamento che impersona la sofferenza amorosa' with the female interlocutor asking the questions. The same pairing of female (pupil) and male (teacher) would also have been familiar from the popular Socratic dialogue tradition channelled by contemporary *trattati d'amore*, including Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore* (1535) and the debate that takes place therein between Philo and Sofia. Note that there would come a reversal of the male/female teaching/pupil relationship in 1547 with the publication of Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo dell'Infinita d'Amore*. The poem's focus on amorous suffering (or grief) harkens back to Colonna's lyric widow, while Aldana's sonnet offers the usual case of a lyric voice, most likely male, ultimately sharing what he has learned in spite of his initial intention to console her. The choice to communicate grief through dialogue reminds us of Walters' belief that it was a favoured mechanism of Aldana's for expressing his protagonists' feelings (Walters 1988, 34). The presence of the female voice, even if ventriloquized, stands out on this occasion due to the more familiar focus of male lyric voices lamenting the loss of a friend, brother, or female beloved in elegy (Wardropper 1972, 135).¹⁰

Of course, the presence of a female lyric voice, while novel in the Spanish Petrarchan sonnet form, would have been familiar to some Spaniards from *arte menor* poetry (Frenk 1994, 91). Among these, the Galician tradition of the *cantiga de amigo*, which featured women as subjects, contained confessions of love for gentlemen that would have been 'understood as expressions of desire'. (Gaylord Randel 1982, 119). In the same confessional and desiring vein, we have the *kharjas*, part of the *muwashshahas*, although Gaylord Randel (1982, 120) is careful to acknowledge the fabricated nature of the female poetic personae by male poets. The presence of female characters in active roles was also no stranger to the pastoral either. In lyric, there was the enduring example of the exchange between husband and wife offered in the biblical *Song of Songs*, as well as San Juan de la Cruz's *Cántico espiritual* and Garcilaso de la Vega's *églogas* (Núñez Rivera 2002, 195–96). Pastoral novels, which, although authored by men, were primarily consumed by women (Rhodes 1987, 131), offered 'indecorous' examples of 'women as desiring as well as desired characters' (Rhodes 1987, 144). Gomes Ferreira (2019, 122) observes how the trend of depicting the desiring female extended to Portuguese pastoral poetry, focussing primarily on examples by Luís de Camões (1524–80) and Diogo Bernardes (1530–1605?). The result is such that while the female voice vanished from Spanish Petrarchan courtly love poetry, it was not absent from other peninsular genres and lyric forms. The development of the desiring female voice, when present in courtly lyric, would not only have shocked by virtue of the subject's sex, but also on account of the discourses they espoused when compared to the typical 'casto galán' that was its hallmark (Frenk 1994, 93).

The opening statement spans the octet and addresses the woman in an effort to console her upon the death of her beloved. The Neoplatonic underpinning, common to both Colonna and Aldana, is observed by García (2010, 260) in the 'bien del cielo' (l. 1) that exists within her and whose source is the 'mundo celeste platónico'. The use of 'su alegría' (l. 2) echoes its deployment and connotation in 'Aunque a la alta región del alegría' as a divine joy, while the possessive adjective 'su' guides the reader back to 'bien del cielo' and leaves one with the possibility that the abstraction may in fact refer to the departed male beloved. The idea of an

abstract male beloved is redolent of Smarr's take on Colonna's handling of the deceased d'Avalos and would also link with García's point on Neoplatonism, for it suggests that there exists a part of one in the other akin to the exchange of souls ('bien') when love is reciprocal.¹¹ The joy contrasts with the pain believed to result from the sense of physical loss endured by the woman: 'dolor [. . .]/que os da la privación de un mortal velo' (ll. 3–4). The construction of the quatrain is such that the reader experiences the contrast of worldly/pain with heavenly/joy, although Ruiz Silva (1981, 89) notes the motif of duality pervades the sonnet as a whole. There is a sense, at least on the part of the lyric voice, for we have no additional information beyond the sonnet itself, that the woman is believed to be focussing upon his mortal loss to the exclusion of the spiritual gains of eternal life with God. Colonna's 'Cara union, con che mirabil modo' offers a potential clue in its outlining of what the female lyric voice enjoyed on earth with her beloved: 'Cara unión, con che mirabil modo/per nostra pace t'ha ordinata il Cielo,/che lo spirito divino e 'l mortal velo/leggi un soave ed amoroso nodo!' (ll. 1–4) (Colonna 1982, 17). The 'soave ed amoroso nodo', which Sapegno (2016, 173) notes follows Petrarch, much like the use of 'mortal velo', intimates her belief in their union being a creation of the divine: 't'ha ordinata il Cielo'. Her chaste bond re-emerging in 'Di così nobile fiamma Amor mi cinse' (Colonna 1982, 6): 'né temo novo caldo, ché 'l vigore/del primo foco mio tutt'altri estinse. // Ricco legame al bel giogo m'avinse' (ll. 3–5).

The second quatrain goes on to clarify that the beloved for whom she cared so much on earth now resides in heaven: 'goza la luz do nunca muere el día' (l. 6). The focus on light recalls Colonna's own penchant for the semantic field in reference to the departed d'Avalos (Smarr 2001, 3). In this example, it is his vision that emits light in lieu of the more common Colonnaesque associations of the departed beloved as light or the sun. In reference to the mention of 'clara visión' (l. 7), García (2010, 260) suggests two possible interpretations of lines 7–8:

La «clara visión» del alma bella que ha ascendido al mundo celeste, que se encuentra rodeada de luz diurna y perenne, no debe «oscurecer» el gran consuelo que ofrece. O a la inversa: la falta total y absoluta de consuelo no debe oscurecer esta clara visión [. . .] no puede traducirse bajo ningún concepto en oscuridad.

In line with the idea that the lyric voice's intention is to console the bereaved woman, the first of García's possible readings becomes the more viable of the two. The suggestion is that the loss suffered should not outweigh his newfound state of being in the afterlife, which Lara Garrido (2000, 219) supports, hence the continued motif of luminescence ('clara'), and the comfort she should take from knowing the joy he experiences where he now resides: 'goza la luz do nunca muere el día'.

If I am correct in my assumption that Aldana's use of the dialogic pastoral permits exploration of 'questions surrounding the subject of sensuality' (Lennon 2019, 96), then we may be witnessing a similarly edifying sonnet in 'Pues cabe tanto en vos del bien del cielo'. The lyric voice, as the octet concludes, brings what would be recognized as a traditionally Neoplatonic consolation (Wardropper 1972, 134) to an end, and so sets up the reader for the coming *volta*. Described as 'the dramatic and climactic center of the poem' offering a 'solution' to the 'problem' of the octet (Fussell 1979, 115–16), it is at this point in the sonnet that we have the introduction of the female poetic voice, a reversal of the more typical male response to a point or question from a female protagonist in the Socratic model that makes it all the more resonant from a Hispanic perspective: 'Este yo dije y respondiome luego/ella' (ll. 9–10).

The female lyric voice describes her present state in response to the consolatory tone and it becomes clear that she is overcome: 'Revuelve Amor con llama presta/los extremos y el medio en un instante' (ll. 10–11). The experience of Amor rekindling the flame reminiscent of the one Colonna's lyric voice undergoes: 'Di così nobile fiamma Amor mi cinse/ch'essendo morta in me vive l'ardore' (ll. 1–2) (Colonna 1982, 6). The deity, as signalled by the capitalization of 'Amor', has stirred within her a burning, depicted here via the flame, that, I hold, simultaneously affects 'the physical body [extremos] and soul [medio]' (Lennon 2019, 60).¹² The speed with which it took place is highlighted by the adjectival 'presta' and phrase 'en un instante'. The fact that the female voice describes how she is affected both spiritually and physically recalls the sweet union embodied by humanity's 'nodo' in Colonna's above-mentioned 'Cara unión, con che mirabil modo'. Indeed, there is almost nothing in the sonnet to suggest a need for the female lyric voice to eradicate the bodily desire she feels, which readers familiar with Colonna might consider redolent of her petition in 'Se in oro, in cigno, in tauro il sommo Giove' (Colonna 1982, 15) that Amor raise her up to be with d'Avalos in her human form: 'Maggior miracolo fia, più altera impresa/di trasportarmi al Ciel con mortal velo' (ll. 9–10).

While McHugh (2013, 352–53) acknowledges the frequent Neoplatonic interpretation of such myths in the Renaissance, in this case Jupiter's sexual exploits on earth, she argues for Colonna's poem containing a more lustful intimation that acknowledges how 'she wants her body to play a role' which is conveyed via her adoption of a male guise.¹³ In line with McHugh, I devote the fourth chapter of my monograph to Aldana's use of myth as a (thinly) veiled means to explore the place of sensuality in his approach to love (Lennon 2019, 125–66), in particular the incomplete 'Marte, dios, del furor, de quien la fama'; the parallels lending support to McHugh's point regarding contemporary multifaceted readings of mythological poems. With this in mind, the querying of Green (1958, 132) by García (2010, 261) that the poem 'no es de amor, sino de consuelo' seems wholly justified.

The subsequent reinvocation of fire imagery via 'santo fuego' (l. 12) and 'vivo ardor' (l. 13) recalls Colonna's repeated use of *ardere* in its various forms in both her earthly and religious verse (Cox 2013, 138), although the motif of burning was a staple of the period. With Colonna in mind, however, my previous discussion of 'conscious confusion' (Lennon 2019, 60) now seems less likely as a means for the interpretation of the female poetic voice's sentiment. As noted by García (2010, 262), the interpretation offered by Navarro Durán (de Aldana 1994, 21) appears more fitting: 'La dama sufre la antítesis del gozo por saber la presencia del amado en el cielo y el dolor por el amor que le produce'. The lyric voice appears capable of rationalizing her desire from two distinct, if interrelated, viewpoints: she rejoices in the 'resplendor' of a holy fire that represents her spiritual yearning for the beloved, thus echoing the relationship between heaven and light, and agonizes over the desirous earthly burning resulting from his physical absence.¹⁴ The result is the presentation of the female lyric voice, like Colonna's lyric widow, as one enduring a state of amorous grief that the male lyric voice lauds: '¡Ved qué respuesta/dina que de los ángeles se cante!' (ll. 13–14) The exaltation of her expression of amorous grief, which is described as worthy of an angelic chorus, I would argue, invites the reader to consider how it compares to the initial and more spiritually focused consolatory opening to the poem. The sonnet's structure further reinforces this via the introduction of the female voice's response in the *volta*, thus lending it greater importance and framing it as a 'resolution'. The intimation of the dual recognition, if not also the dual importance, of the spiritual and physical desire experienced by the Colonnaesque voice, who was recognized as a paragon of wifely devotion and chaste virtue, surreptitiously suggesting

to the reader the absence of any incompatibility in the expression of such sentiments for one's departed beloved. The use of the *consolatio* offers a fitting frame narrative for Aldana to introduce the recognizable – at least within the Italian Peninsula – and respected figure of the desirous widow to support his stance that love embraces the gamut of human sensorial experience.¹⁵

Ultimately, the reasoning behind Aldana's decision to compose 'Pues cabe tanto en vos del bien del cielo' may have included, in part, the idea that the warrior-poet saw in Vittoria Colonna a kindred spirit of sorts. The similarities drawn between his, at least *prima facie*, *consolatio* and that offered by Ariosto, as well as his imitation of Colonna's wordplay in the fragment addressing her niece's death, would suggest his sonnet draws upon a familiarity with the Marchesa di Pescara's prodigiously popular poetry. Indeed, the stark differences in style and content between this piece and the *consolationes* for Lucrezia and Leonor de Medici serve to throw the similarities with Colonna into greater relief.

Of course, there are notable differences in that the female lyric voice does not narrate the experience herself, although this would appear to be a conscious decision based on Aldana's use of the dialogic form as a means to invite contemplation of one's approach to love, as signalled by both her introduction in the *volta* and the praise that follows thereafter, as well as the decision to cede to her the role of Socratic responder, akin to d'Aragona's example, that invites contemplation of approaches to Christian Neoplatonism. In this way, the poem echoes Aldana's use of the pastoral and mythological genres elsewhere in his corpus (Lennon 2019, 122–23, 138–39). The importance of the female voice is again strengthened by the decision to afford space to her experience at the expense of laudatory details concerning the departed male beloved. In spite of Colonna's death, the praising of the male's virtues and qualities of character in a variant form of the Petrarchan female blasón, had been kept alive in the Italian Peninsular tradition by Gaspara Stampa, among others (Smarr 2001, 5).

The present study also raises interesting points in regard to the question of readership(s). With respect to the poetry of Colonna, Aldana's emulation of her widowed lyric I offers an insight into how he and others may have read her *rime amorose*, thus lending emphasis to McHugh's remarks on the latent erotic potential therein, and a nuancing of how we understand contemporary perceptions of her carefully manicured public persona. Arguably, it is not a question of whether such erotogenic sentiments are interpreted in spite of their being 'filtered through a Neoplatonic screen' (McAuliffe, 986: 101), but rather as a result of the growing recognition of the importance of the physical alongside the spiritual in *trattati d'amore*, including, but not limited to, Bembo's *Gli Asolani* (1505), Nifo's *De pulchro et amore* (1531), and Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore* (1535). Indeed, the comparative element of this study illuminates the longstanding protean nature of love in the poetic tradition, even within the relatively settled system of Neoplatonism, and what might have been a mutual intelligibility of approach between the poets, had they ever had the opportunity to meet or correspond. The fostering of such a perspective by Aldana, likely the result of his having been educated within the culture of the Italian Peninsula, already noted to have played a highly influential role in his own poetry.

The issue of readership continues into Aldana's sonnet to the extent that it raises questions over the status of the female lyric voice. Colonna's star had shone brightly within the Italian Peninsula since around the time of Aldana's birth, and familiarity with her poetry addressing her departed husband, the first and only flame she would ever entertain, was part of her virtuous self-fashioned persona and considered common knowledge. To those readers also familiar with Colonna's poetic legacy, Aldana's sonnet adopts and adapts the

Renaissance poster child of wifely virtue to downplay the potential for moral sanction that his poem could invite from a (likely) more local readership, such as Varchi's literary circle (Rivers, 955: 34–35). The implicit civil status serving to shift the possible critique of her desirous state to the contemplation of the physical and spiritual dimensions of her amorous grief, which is a feat similar to that accomplished by Aldana in his interpretation of the marital coitus enjoyed between the Medoro and Angelica characters of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (Canto XIX).¹⁶

There arise, then, questions related to whether such a perspective might be applicable to our framing of his pastoral sonnets and the perilous Neoplatonic journey undertaken by the couple in 'Pues tan piadosa luz de estrella amiga', as well as the extent to which this might affect our readings? Furthermore, how did a Spanish readership, potentially less *au fait* than he with the dialogic and Colonnaesque traditions, understand this and other poems by the Spanish- Neapolitan? Aldana's decision to employ a call and response structure, while recognizably dialogic in the scope of his corpus and the Italian Peninsular sonnetting tradition, generates the potential for confusion with other sources of inspiration from the Hispanic literary world. Indeed, his explicit incorporation of the female voice, as well as the absence of "legitimate" desire, could have invited interpretations rooted in Spain's *arte menor* and pastoral traditions. In their elision of the Petrarchan with popular tradition, the Hispanic reader may have had to confront not only the presence of a desiring woman within a courtly space, but more importantly the union of the widow's spiritual yearning for the beloved, traceable to San Juan's *amada* figure with that of a human widow. Fortuitously, the fashion in which a Spanish reader might effect such a synthesis of sources still had the potential to offer a viable, if approximate, result paradigmatic of Aldana's philosophy on love.

Notes

1. Lara Garrido (2000, 485) refers to the poem's location as '[D], fol. 78 r-v', which he links to R-5530 held by the Biblioteca Nacional de España (2000, 116). For the purposes of clarity, the details of the specific edition are as follows: Aldana, F. de. n.d. *Segunda parte de las obras que se han podido hasta agora hallar del Capitan Francisco de Aldana*. n.p.: n.p. Peeters-Fontainas and Frédéric (1965, 725) suggest the edition may date from c.1594 and was likely published in either Brussels or Antwerp. For more on the posthumous organization of Aldana's corpus, see: García Aguilar, I. 'Cosme edita a Francisco de Aldana: problemas en la edición póstuma.' *Cánones críticos en la poesía de los Siglos de Oro*, edited by P. Ruiz Pérez, 193–208. Vigo: Academia del Hispanismo.
2. Murphy (2008, 350) supports Langdon's dating of Vittoria d'Ascanio Colonna's last child to 1553 but does not suggest when she died. The child in question, Leonora García de Toledo, would go on to be raised by her aunt doña Leonor and Cosimo I de' Medici for life as a *menina* within the court.
3. My dating takes into consideration the limited span of don García's occupation of the role (1564–66), thereby making it unlikely to have been an addition by Cosme de Aldana in his role as editor after Francisco's death (1578) or that the publisher of the c.1594 edition in which it appears.
4. Nieves Rojas (2019, 126) explains Antonio de Aldana would go on to serve as: 'capitán de caballos en el Reino de Nápoles, capitán de justicia de la ciudad de Barletta en 1540, capitán, hacia finales de 1541 o principios de 1542, de arcabuceros a caballo al servicio de Cosme I de Médici, castellano de Livorno entre 1546 y 1553, y de la fortaleza de San Minitato, en Florencia, desde 1554 hasta su muerte, en 1570'. Furthermore, Nieves Rojas (2017, 62) notes in his analysis of the letters between Cosimo de' Medici and both Antonio and Francisco de Aldana 'la posición de favor de que gozaban los Aldana bajo el amparo de los Médici'.
5. Details of the rich manuscript and print traditions of Colonna's lyric, including her more religious works, can be found in both Brundin (2016, 39–68) and Crivelli (2016, 69–139).

6. In line with McAuliffe (1986, 101), I agree that the ‘terms secular and spiritual must be used with caution since they are likely to give [. . .] a false impression of what Vittoria Colonna’s poetry is about. It is an intensely spiritual poetry from the earliest sonnets and the “secular” elements of the earlier *canzoniere* are finely filtered through a Neoplatonic screen.’
7. Russell (1992, 24) puts forth a reading whereby developments in the poetic voice’s pursuit of ascent are said to lend Colonna’s poetry a ‘coherence’.
8. The poem for Lucrezia, titled ‘Sonetto del medesimo’ reads: ‘Tremò la terra intorno e pianser le acque, / sospirò l’aria, il foco se stesso arse, / quasi un Febo novel Cintia comparse, / colmo d’alto stupor Mercurio tacque; // rise la bella dea che nel Marchnacque, / lampeggiò il Sol, giocondo Marte apparse, / nè fur il Giove ancor le gioie scarse, / nè il pigro men Saturno si compiacque; // fermòssi il firmamento ochiuto e bello, / le stelle si inchinar, la bella veste / del Cielo Cristallin tutta si aprìo; // di sé lo Impireo fè trono e scabello, / e a veder corse ogni anima celeste / quando Lucrezia ascese in grembo a Dio’ (de Aldana 1966, 16). Leonor’s sonnet, ‘Del Signor Francesco di Aldana, in risposta a Messer Benedetto Varchi,’ reads: ‘Ben gran’ avria cagion l’alto dolore, / che delle spoglie altrui sen’ va sì altiero, / per dolce triegua al duro mio pensiero / farmi, e gl’anni menar con più liet’ ore, // poi che pur dianzi, egli di sè maggiore / essendo, all’apparir del toscano Omero, / come de’ rai solar’ nostro emisfero, / si vestì il cor’ d’un chiaro e nuovo albore; // ma poco giova, ahimè! ch’ad or’ ad ora / convien che gli occhi della mente giri / dove è la dea, cui già fu ancilla Flora; // il mio di voi sì degno acquisto fora, / presente lei, qual degl’ eterni giri / è quel che, per mio mal, si godon’ ora’ (de Aldana 1966, 16–18).
9. ‘Illustrissima donna, di valore / ferma colonna, se ‘l volubil cielo, / come vedete, or ne dà caldo or gielo, / or vita or morte, or gioia ed or dolore; // s’egli ha furato ‘l vostro primo amore, / ch’è anche l’estremo, ed il fral suo velo / sciolt’ha dal spirto anzi il cangiar del pelo, / dando a voi noia, ed a sé eterno onore; // temprate il duol, ch’i vostri e suoi bei rami, / crescendo all’ombra santa ed immortale / de la vostra virtù ch’ogni altra avanza, // più che lor tronchi o voi la morte chiami, / inalzeran le cime con speranza / di far sua gloria e vostra al ciel uguale’ (Ariosto 1954, 152–53) [emphasis follows Lara Garrido (2000, 219)].
10. On the topic of ventriloquizing the female voice, see Harvey (1992).
11. For a fuller contemporary explanation of this phenomenon, see Ficino (1985, 55–57).
12. Lara Garrido (2000, 219–20) differs in his reading and proposes that the ‘«extremos» y el «medio» en correlato a la dicotomía «gozo-peno» equivalen a la unión-separación de las almas: desde su anterior fusión terrena se corresponden en la comunidad frutiva de la luz divina, aunque la amada sufre hasta la resurrección en la unidad última, cuando también se levante su velo corporal.’ While I disagree with his interpretation of the image, I support his acknowledgement of the lyric widow’s suffering stemming from her separation from her male beloved. For example, Colonna makes repeated references to her body as a prison (McAuliffe 1986, 104) that build upon Petrarch’s introduction of the metaphor in ‘i’vo pensando e nel pensier m’assale’ after Laura’s death (Sapegno 2016, 172).
13. McHugh goes on to discuss how Colonna’s lyric voice aligns herself with another desiring male from mythology: ‘Once again, we find Colonna extraordinarily applying a masculine, and explicitly sexual, mythical identity to her desire, this time the moral Actaeon’ (McHugh 2013, 354).
14. *Penar* in this context being interpreted according to de Covarrubias Horozco (2006, 1353): ‘ordinatamente se toma por agonizar’. I suggest a reading of the line as an admission of culpability or sin is possible but unlikely.
15. In particular, I am reminded of *De pulchro et amore* (1531) by Nifo (1990, 190): ‘si la imagen de lo bello se traslada hasta la facultad imaginativa a través de todos los sentidos, el amor no se puede ser sino deseo de disfrutar la belleza a través de todos aquellos sentidos que transmiten al alma la imagen de lo bello.’ For more on Aldana’s approach to Neoplatonism, see: Lennon (2019, 7–48); Sol Mora (2017, 368) ‘No hace falta insistir en la importancia de la educación de Aldana y en su conocimiento de los *trattati d’amore*, que leyó como pocos poetas de su tiempo.’; and Mateos Paramio (1993, 657) [Aldana received] ‘una formación probablemente

más amplia que el neoplatonismo tipificado que se aprendía en la España de Felipe II.' Also, Russell (1992, 18) suggests that Colonna was familiar with contemporary *trattati d'amore*.

16. For more on this poem, see Lennon (2019, 128–47).

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