The Eve of Spain
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It is the time of Spain's artistic Golden Age, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the epoch of Cervantes, the painter Diego de Velázquez, and the architectural marvel the Escorial, King Philip II's sprawling palace-monastery about an hour away from Madrid.¹ The deeds and rule of King Ferdinand, much more than those of Queen Isabel, inspired laudatory commentaries by early modern historians, convinced that he had been the ruler heralded in earlier prophecies of the coming of a kingly savior, who would restore Christian Spain to its former glory. Well into the nineteenth century, historians praised Ferdinand as the one who had fulfilled the promise that started with Pelayo and the Battle of Covadonga in 718: King Ferdinand had achieved the successful restoration of Spain to the purity and greatness of its pre-Islamic condition. Ferdinand, not Isabel, had prepared the country for empire and world dominion. Ferdinand, the Catholic king, set the visionary standard against which his predecessors measured themselves and were measured by others.²

But in this Golden Age, set against a backdrop of grand achievement in the visual and literary arts, against prophetic events and timely interpretations that predicted Spain's imperial greatness, against New World expansion, colonization, and evangelization, and against the ambitions of Spain's kings to be the most powerful rulers in the world and the principal defenders of universal Christianity, is the harsh reality of a frequently bankrupt Spain, of the ongoing strife and turmoil produced by the Spanish Inquisition, and of revolts by different ethnic and economic groups, including the Moriscos. The Moriscos in Spain were reminders of the looming threat of Muslim Turkish invasion from outside the country. The Protestant Reformation in Europe, and the discovery at various points during the century of pockets of Protestant groups in Valladolid and Seville, fueled the fear of heresy, a topic of acute anxiety in the sixteenth century. This fear fostered the closing off of Spain, the country's spiritual and intellectual retreat from the rest of Europe, and the efforts of Spain's highly active Counter-Reformation to limit the nation's participation in, and access to, European intellectual advances.³ Consequently, while no country lends itself to a static profile in any given period, Spain's internal and external fortunes and tensions throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were particularly volatile, contradictory, dramatic, and dichotomized. The legend of the Fall of Spain in 711,
with King Rodrigo's defeat and the start of the Restoration of Spain with “King” Pelayo’s victory, emerged time and again during the two centuries. The founding myth, the myth of origins, reflected numerous domestic and international crises and shaped the country’s responses to them. Most significantly, the tellings of the founding myth determined how Spain and the Spanish people would define themselves in the modern world. In that sense, though Rodrigo, La Cava, and Julian make for a much more titillating and more frequently told tale, the story of Pelayo mattered more for the future of Spain. The obsession of a blood culture perhaps defined sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain more than anything else did. For that reason, along with the increasing emphasis on the nature of monarchy and the role of the monarch, the figure of Pelayo, which allowed tracing both blood and throne to eighth-century Asturias, gained new prominence.

At the end of the fifteenth century, the start of a new century, Spain had found itself a nation poised on the brink of empire. With the Jews expelled, Granada won, and the Granadine Muslims suppressed and moved out of Andalusia to other provinces, the nation could claim something close to a prelapsarian condition—Spain as it was before the fall, before Rodrigo lost it. And yet, if the end of any century impels societal self-contemplation and reflection, Spain at the start of the new century, in spite of the extraordinary achievements of the Crown, was no different in sounding notes of caution—even apocalyptic predictions—amidst the self-congratulatory tone of its court chronicles and reports from the New World. As we will see in the following two chapters, dominant sociocultural and political issues, such as religion, violence, personal and national honor, prophecy, and the view of women, viewed separately and convergently, intersected with nation and empire in fiction and in real life.

Pedro de Corral’s Crónica del Rey don Rodrigo, postrimero rey de los godos (Chronicle of King Rodrigo, last king of the Goths), the compelling historical romance that audiences accepted as official history, was a perfect tale for the sixteenth century, resonating with important issues of that time. Both the fall and the restoration began with episodes of male personal honor involving the violation of women and were set within a context of religion, violence, and prophecy. These topics gripped the reading public as they entered the new Golden Age, and the issues continued to dominate politics and culture in early modern Spain throughout the sixteenth century. Crónica del Rey don Rodrigo did double duty as a testimony of national triumph and as a cautionary tale, a warning not to let down the nation’s guard in the ongoing threat of invasion from the Turks, to be vigilant regarding women in general, as well as the Muslims and Jewish converts still within Spain. It served also as inspiration to broaden the fight, in the spirit of Reconquest, with the quest to colonize and
Christianize the New World. The fortunes of Spain would fluctuate wildly through the century-long reign of two important kings, Charles (Carlos) I—later Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor—and his son Philip II, grandson and great-grandson of the Catholic monarchs, while Spain's commitment to world domination and to her role as defender of the faith never wavered.

The sixteenth century was an age of unprecedented interest in, and reliance on, prophecy, which flourished as a lens through which one could regard local, national, and world events. While prophecy and the threats of invasions by infidels were hardly new to Spain or Europe in general, waves of prophecy, portents, signs, and apparitions captivated the cultural and political imagination of sixteenth-century Europe. Prophecy became a tool or mechanism by which cultural and political views could be controlled. Prophecy had always attached itself to the legend of the fall of Spain, and that attachment was heightened by the atmosphere of sixteenth-century Spain. Let us look at brief examples of the significance of prophecy as this century opens onto the age of empire and Spain's self-imposed mission of world Christianization.

Richard Kagan, in *Lucrecia's Dreams*, and Ottavia Niccoli, in *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy*, attest to the pervasive atmosphere of dreams, apparitions, monstrous births (a particularly frequent sign), and other kinds of prophetic phenomena in Western Europe. In 1478, Prince John was born to Isabel and Ferdinand, and the hopes of a dynasty rested with him. During the prince's early years, the poet and playwright Juan del Encina reworked into Castilian Virgil's ten Eclogues. The Fourth Eclogue predicts the return to earth of Astraea, virgin goddess of peace and justice. Encina's Sybil prophesies that the monarch who will usher in this new and long-awaited age of peace and harmony is Prince John, while the Virgin Astraea here becomes the Virgin Mary. However, it was not to be, since the prince died in 1497 while the Catholic monarchs were still ruling. Only a few decades later, after the death of the prince, Astraea is linked again to a member of that royal family, Charles I of Spain (1516–1556), on whom fell the hope of world rule. Related to a different prophecy attached to Charles I, Niccoli documents examples of the prophecies surrounding the coming of a second Charlemagne, who would be Holy Roman Emperor and crusading foe against the infidels. An early instance of the prophecy, around 1380, claimed that Charles VI of France was that new Charlemagne. Later reformulated to apply to Charles VIII of France, it then emerged years later attached to Charles I of Spain, who indeed became Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor in 1519, which he held until his abdication in 1556.

The relocation of the former Muslims from Granada throughout the realms of Ferdinand and Isabel did little to assuage the fears of those in power, nor did active campaigns against Islam abate either inside or outside Spain. Isabel had died in 1504,
and Ferdinand was denied the title of king of Castile, but the inquisitor general, Cardinal Cisneros, remained a strong ally and supporter of the king. Cisneros perceived the threat posed by Oran, a city on the coast of North Africa, whose Muslim citizens had welcomed the majority of Spanish Muslims fleeing Spain and forced conversion to Christianity, and who now stood ready to help their religious compatriots fight back. In 1508, four years after the death of Isabel, the archbishop dreamed of a new Crusade, a Mediterranean holy war with Ferdinand, to be joined by his sons-in-law Henry VIII of England and Manuel of Portugal. While that grand plan
failed to materialized, Cisneros did persuade Ferdinand to send a force to Oran, which fell to the Spanish Christian army.

Afterwards, a story circulated about Cisneros, that he had found a letter in a church in Toledo before the siege of Oran, which had predicted Christian victory overseas. This news, that Cisneros had uncovered a prophetic document, would encourage Spain and other European countries to face what seemed like inevitable future sea battles against the Ottoman Turks. According to a French diplomat Charles de Bovelles, writing in 1509 and 1510, Cisneros entered the bowels of a Toledan church and discovered in an ark a parchment that showed pictures of Arabs, along with a statement that foretold their demise once the parchment had been found again. Reversing Rodrigo's discovery in the House of Hercules, this prophecy purportedly relied on the same element—a picture of men in turbans—to send the very different message, eight hundred years later, that this time Christianity would prevail. In praising Cisneros, Bovelles writes longingly for a return to the times sung by Virgil, a time of peace and prosperity, and rule by “a single prince” (Bataillon 57).

According to Richard Kagan, in Lucrecia’s Dreams, the Letter of Toledo was but one of the many doomsday prophecies regularly circulated by medieval astrologers in the Spanish court, this one predicting an era of restoration followed by the destruction of Islam. By providential design, then, the sixteenth-century legend would have us believe that Cardinal Cisneros, almost eight hundred years later, rediscovers a prophetic parchment that reveals that the time had come for the reversal of that fall, and this time, the ones who face imminent destruction are the Muslims. It would not have escaped those who told this fictional tale of Cisneros that, as the current archbishop of Toledo, he would be reversing the treacherous acts of his predecessor Bishop Oppas, the bishop of Toledo during Rodrigo’s reign.

A major goal of chapters 4 and 5 in this volume will be to examine some cultural and political paradigm shifts in early modern Spain, which were also prevalent in Western Europe. First is the pervasive tendency to view women in dichotomized fashion, as angel or whore, good or evil, and, as Mary Elizabeth Perry calls them, Magdalenes and Jezebels, reflecting the widespread view that all women are fallen, but some at least—the Magdalenes—can repent. The chastity of a woman was more than virtue; it was her identity. Second, and related to the first point, is the increasingly eroticized political language: when woman is not Eve, seductress of mankind, she is often chaste nation, vulnerable to rape by invaders who threaten the bodies of the populace as well as the Christian body of the nation.

These two developments of the age, or paradigm shifts, reflecting the views of both high and popular culture, are political and religious depending on their individual context, and I will examine them particularly in relation to how they cause
the legend of Rodrigo and La Cava to function in different ways from previous centuries.

The portrayals and representations of the dichotomized woman and the gendered nation were staples of early modern Europe, which saw an unprecedented interest in depictions of Ave-Eva, of Mary Magdalene, and in the secular arena, of Lucretia, the Roman matron. Mary Magdalene, a particularly fecund and beloved image in this period, embodied both the fallen woman and the reformed one, never completely able to erase her lascivious past, but a symbol of the convert and the newly pious woman. In painting, literature, and sculpture, the Magdalene represents a former vamp, rehabilitated to the chaste life, and her most frequent posture is that of repentant woman, often in sensual and seductive representations. She is a former Eva, turned to emulate Ave. Along with the fear of women came increased means of controlling them, through enclosure of various kinds. Convents housed those who took the veil as well as many who did not; Magdalen Houses proliferated for unmarried women and reformed prostitutes; marital legislation forbade female ownership of property, limited social freedom of movement, and augmented laws on the subject of widows, whose financial and possible sexual autonomy were a threat. Perry explains the centrality of the notion of women’s chastity as a symbol of moral order to political stability in the sixteenth century. There was a “widespread belief in Counter-Reformation Spain that chastity was to be valued above all other virtues for women and that it was the most vulnerable quality. In the peculiar mathematics of Counter-Reformation moralists, the female who lost her chastity acquired in exchange a frightening license to break every other taboo. The unchaste woman, in this view, posed not only a threat to the social order, but a real danger to the salvation of men’s souls” (124). Although there is a longstanding tradition of female unchastity and threatened, if not destroyed, political order, Perry is correct that interest in this tradition explodes in sixteenth-century Spain to an unprecedented degree. And it is made manifest in the sixteenth-century evolution of La Cava from blameless victim to willing lover to siren.

Throughout Europe there is increased cultural appropriation of women to stand as symbols of nations, nation building, and destruction of nations. Although an ancient theme, there is a pervasive use of it in the sixteenth century, one that carries into the seventeenth century as well. Elizabeth I of England—the Gloriana, the Virgin Queen—shows how prevalent in this period characterizations of virginity and chastity were as a political model. It is both disturbing and remarkable to realize how many national stories and founding myths depend on the rape of women. Widespread in this time were the representations of the figure of Lucretia, the chaste
Roman matron who killed herself rather than submit to rape and personal and familial dishonor. The rape of Lucretia became the symbol of the birth of humanism, and then the birth of the republic. Later, early modern monarchs, including Philip II of Spain (1556–1598), appropriated this figure as a metaphor for the emergence of his own nation, as he did with paintings of the Rape of Europa (Abduction of Europa). As Marcia Welles points out, scenes of violence against women, rather than being denounced or even regarded as inappropriate in any way, decorated the palaces of Europe.

When we study the figures of various women as they are employed in the renewal of the Spanish state and the birth of the Spanish empire, whose most illustrious figure is Queen Isabel, we see how highly significant was the Spanish pantheon of woman and nation. The interrelation of female sanctity, piety, chastity, and repentance to nation building, as well as its opposite, the interrelation of the impure, lustful, witchlike daughters of Eve to the dangers of national, imperial, and personal destruction pervade the Spanish national and moral imagination. If Isabel came to be seen, even during the time of her reign, and of course beyond, as the maternal nation builder (“wetnurse of the nation,” a term also used by political writers about Elizabeth I), La Cava came to be known for her harlotry as the female destroyer of the nation, equated with Helen of Troy for her reckless disregard of the welfare of the state, but infinitely worse than Helen for her added and unforgivable sin of causing the loss of the Christian nation to the Muslims, becoming the quintessential “bad Christian woman.”

While fear of heretical practices and crypto-Judaizing threatened the realization of a unified Christian society, the most dangerous and feared enemies, of course, were the Muslims, both inside and outside of Spain, with the English Protestants and French Huguenots a not-too-distant second. Language about these political and religious enemies, especially the Muslims, was eroticized, and comparisons to the female sex were used to disparage the enemy. The Muslims were increasingly characterized as threatening in sexual terms: as effeminate, particularly as sodomites (who would then desire Christian boys), as rapists (leaving unsafe the Christian maiden, wife, and widow), and, since the thirteenth century at least, as morally inferior to Christians and therefore a threat to the entire nation. In the symbolism that saw the country as chaste nation, the Muslims, collectively, threatened to violate the land.

The fear of women converged with the continued revilement of conversos throughout the sixteenth century. Beginning in 1525, the Inquisition pursued with zeal women suspected of sorcery and witchcraft, and of heretical practices such as the movement known as alumbradismo (Illuminism), a religious reform that at-
The Apotheosis of the Spanish Monarchy, sketch for a ceiling painting, by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (Italian, Venetian, 1696–1770). Oil on canvas, oval painted surface, 32¼ × 26¼ in. (81.6 × 66.4 cm). From 1762 until his death, Tiepolo worked in Spain for Charles III and decorated several rooms in the Palacio Real, Madrid. This is one of two oil sketches for the saleta adjacent to the throne room. Each shows a female figure of Spain with lions for the province of León, an old woman beside a castle for Castile, and Hercules, the traditional protector of Spain, with a column representing Gibraltar. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1937 (37.165.3). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
tracted many women leaders and devoted male followers, who were very often conversos. As Mary Giles explains, Illuminism emphasized interiorized Christianity over and against blind adherence to church rituals and belief, with spiritual writers and preachers encouraging individuals to nourish a personal relationship with God through mental prayer and quiet attentiveness to the inner presence of the Divine. Convinced that the Holy Spirit inspired men and women and illumined their way to God, both lay and religious, men and women, learned and uneducated, emerged as spiritual leaders to teach interior prayer and interpret Sacred Scripture. Prominent on the spiritual scene were charismatic women, popularly known as beatas, or holy women, who often were accompanied by male admirers and through their ecstasies, visions, and miraculous healing confirmed the power of God to make of the most ordinary person, even an unschooled peasant woman, the channel of his will. (4)

In Spain, another important tool of nation and empire building came from the value placed on relics of saints. King Philip II’s devotion to his ever-expanding collection of relics was without peer in Western Christendom, and one of his passions indulged a search for relics connected to the Visigothic period. A special premium was placed on the relics of female saints, particularly virgin martyrs, and the 1587 return to Spain of the centuries-old relics of Leocadia, Toledo’s patron saint from the time of the Visigoths, stood as a compelling example of the nation’s efforts to become the most visible center of Christianity, and of Leocadia herself to symbolize the nation restored to wholeness and integrity.

Golden Age histories and literature obsessively took up the legend of the fall of Spain and its restoration. The fall inspired seemingly countless imaginative versions and references to the legend, while the restoration, albeit no less fictionalized, simply allowed for fewer embellishments, and quite deliberately excluded any direct dramatization of sex. No genre contributed more to the dissemination of Spain’s founding myth than the popular oral ballads. The ballads eroticized both history and political language, indeed as more learned writings were doing, but diffused these views and cemented them in the national cultural imagination. Fecund, “feminized” Muslim towns and cities, like the sexually available Muslim princesses of medieval epic and chronicle, found themselves possessed by forceful Christian men, nobles and commoners alike. The imagery allowed for a dichotomous view of Muslim men. In situations in which they were unable to stave off Christian triumph, Muslim men were painted as effeminate. As marauding barbarians, their lustful possession of Christian women and potential polluting of Christian blood through sexual intercourse, Muslim men were equated with women’s dangerous sexuality in
general. Wheatcroft points out in his book *Infidels* that the early medieval recounts of Rodrigo and La Cava made an association between Rodrigo and the Muslims (63). However, early modern tales equated the dangerous sexuality of La Cava with the sexually unbridled Muslim men. In the early legend, Rodrigo’s lust to possess La Cava took precedence over his obligation to protect Christian lands, leaving them vulnerable to the Muslims, who took possession of them and of the Christian women they raped. Corral’s fifteenth-century book began the shift toward the culpable La Cava, and the sixteenth century capitalized on the association of the leg-
end with minorities and women and their sexually predatory nature. The counterpart to the mythical Astraeas, the mytho-poeticized Isabellas and Elizabeths, whose chastity and virginity empowered them to build nations and even empires, and the Leocadias, whose virginity in martyrdom came to represent the nation itself, is the Eve figure of the national legend, La Cava.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but particularly in the seventeenth, both Protestant and Catholic reformers focused on the monarch, who in countries such as England and France was regarded more as a quasi-divinity than was the king in Spain. Counter-Reformation moralists, the Spanish Jesuits in particular, began to “reassert . . . the purificatory ideal of the ascetic self. Spearheaded by the new Catholic preaching orders, the Counter-Reformation spread a message of contempt for the world and the flesh, of redemption through denial and mortification . . . As Louis Chatellier has put it, they sought the ‘realization of the Christian state’ through moral control of the mechanisms of governance” (Monod 51). The Jesuits focused on the nature of kingship:

[They] argued that kings were responsible to the church, to the pope, perhaps even to the people. Father Pedro de Rivadeneira warned the Christian prince “not to puff himself up with the authority or with the power and sovereignty of the king . . . [kings are] no more than a little dust and ashes.” The king should act as the obedient instrument of God and the church: “No king is absolute or independent or proprietary, but is a lieutenant and minister of God . . . [Princes] are guardians of the law of God, but not interpreters; ministers of the Church, but not judges . . . If sometimes, as men, they will fall into some grave crime, they should recognize it and humiliate themselves, and subject themselves to the ecclesiastical canons and the censure and correction of the Church.” (Monod 51–52)

In Spanish Baroque culture, the emphasis was on “an outward, practical morality rather than a spiritual interiority” (Monod 130), and writers such as Cervantes and Lope de Vega reflected this model of the king “as the dynamic center of an organic corpus mysticum” (Monod 130), one that focused on action, and less on introspection and self-examination. The sixteenth-century printings of Corral’s Crónica del Rey don Rodrigo contained a prologue that promoted the importance of confession, and in the story itself Rodrigo submits himself to the mortificatory recommendations of the hermit in order to restore himself spiritually. Here, we can begin to see the seeds of change in the view of kingship, that the ruler must be forgiven by earthly ecclesiastical authorities, as any other sinner would need to do, which also allows society to begin to view the monarch and the nation as separate entities. In
contrast, for example, Lope de Vega’s play *El último godo* (The last Goth) cares very little for the personal story of the salvation of Rodrigo’s soul, turning instead to the actions and monarchical qualities of the nation’s savior, Pelayo.

King Rodrigo’s sin of lust, even if excused or justified in various ways, fit the concerns of the time. All across Europe, calls for the presence in rulers of the “ideals of the ascetic self” allowed Rodrigo to serve in Spain as a negative example of kingship. This renewed focus on the chastity of the king, or at the very least the ability of the king to control his appetites, was not a new phenomenon.

Chastity, while of paramount significance and importance for women, was important for male leaders and rulers, however much a double standard existed in reality. From early times, sexual restraint symbolized the ability to control one’s impulses in general, which would be a good sign of the king’s wider ability to exercise caution and prudent judgment in matters of state. In short, chastity and self-control stood in for the ruler’s virtue. John Gower, in his fourteenth-century poem *Confessio Amantis* (*A Lover’s Confession*), argued that

> the fifth element of statecraft is chastity, which very seldom makes its appearance anywhere these days. Even so, there is no one who can be wholly chaste without an exceptional dispensation of grace. But in view of a king’s elevated position, anointed and consecrated as head of the secular order, for the sake of the dignity of his crown he should be more looked up to than anybody of humble rank who is not of such noble consequence. Therefore a prince ought to stop and think before lapsing into debauchery, and beware especially of such infatuation as would transform the quality of his manhood into effeminacy. (Blamires 248–49)

To some extent, Gower’s view about the essential role played by the king’s own chastity in a successful monarchy resembles the view we have seen from the earliest chronicles of the fall of Spain through the fifteenth century, that decried the decadence of the populace and of the king, when Rodrigo’s lust fatally weakened his position as ruler, opening himself and the kingdom to the revenge of both a wrathful father and a wrathful God. But the sixteenth century signals changes in the tale. Rodrigo is not blameless in most of the accounts and will always, from the viewpoint of the obligations of a king to his country, be guilty of a lack of self-control, with widespread and dire consequences. Much more is made of La Cava’s role in the fall of the nation than before, and accusations of her lack of chastity pervade the early modern retellings. In the sixteenth century, in large measure inspired by the treatment of the noble Rodrigo in Corral’s *Crónica del Rey don Rodrigo*, the fate of the king and his country acquires tragic dimensions. The rape is not seen as debauchery that leads to effeminacy in a ruler, as medieval histories claimed, although adul-
tery is a sin in the Spain of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. It is seen, rather, as the understandable and inevitable result of what happens when a man is faced with the temptation of a beautiful woman, who is unable or unwilling to guard her own chastity.

Pelayo, on the other hand, is made to reflect perfectly the desirable qualities of a ruler at the same time that he serves as a transitional figure, the blood link between Goths and future Spaniards. He springs into action against the Muslims not when they first subjugate the Christians, but when Munuza abducts Pelayo’s sister. Pelayo’s character never seems to develop beyond being a reversal of Rodrigo and is painted in very broad strokes. Thus, for example, in all the stories of Pelayo through the centuries, we never hear about his wife until he is dead, and his wife is buried alongside him. Having a wife is of no importance, though having a daughter—who becomes the wife of the first official Asturian king, Alfonso I—becomes essential to the establishment of the monarchical and biological lineage between the Visigoths and the later throne of Castile and Old Christian citizens of Spain.