The Eve of Spain

Grieve, Patricia E.

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

Grieve, Patricia E.
The Eve of Spain: Myths of Origins in the History of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Conflict.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/60329
Desiring the Nation

The snake has now bitten / it’s biting the part / that deserves the most blame, / the part that has caused / my misfortune and shame.

“Ballad of Rodrigo’s Penance”

The Influence of Pedro de Corral’s Chronicle of King Rodrigo in the Sixteenth Century

When the fifteenth-century chronicler Pérez de Guzmán roundly criticized Corral’s manuscript for its fictional elements that masqueraded as history, he anticipated some of the concerns of sixteenth-century historians and moralists, who believed that the historian’s role was a sacred one. Nevertheless, though some historians rejected aspects of Corral’s work as largely fictional, much of Corral’s plot line already appeared in many histories composed by medieval official court chroniclers. Moreover, some of the features and themes of Corral’s popular historical romance held special meaning for the sixteenth-century reading public, indeed for the public imagination of both the literate and illiterate: prophecy; penance; the character development of the king, La Cava, and Julian; the invention of the love story of Favila and Luz; and the birth and upbringing of their son Pelayo.

Although we know that prophecy played an important role in early medieval versions of the legend, Corral expands the role of prophecy. For the sixteenth-century audience, engaged in the triumphs and struggles of national identity, empire building, and ongoing wars, a reminder of the early Christian nation falling to Islam would resonate in particularly acute fashion.

Another feature, Rodrigo’s confession and grueling penance, was of great significance to sixteenth-century Spain. We know this from two pieces of evidence. First, the ballads inspired by Corral dwell on Rodrigo’s remorse, as he gazes over his devastated army and the field now running with streams of blood, and on his penance. Ballads that derive from longer works traditionally select some high moment of drama and intensify it, such as the ballad lines that serve as epigraph to this chapter. Audiences reveled in the king’s confession to the hermit, the hermit’s imposed penance, and, most popularly, the dramatic moment when Rodrigo cries out, from within the sep-
ulcher he shares with the snake, that the snake is biting him “where most I sinned!”

Second, the 1511 Valladolid edition of *Crónica del Rey don Rodrigo* contains a prologue not found in the earliest printing of Seville 1499, but which reappears in the 1549 Toledo and 1586 and 1587 Alcalá de Henares printings. The new prologue, by an unnamed author, crafts a sermon that encourages the reader to focus on the concepts of sin, penance, penitent, and redemption as they unfold in the tragic tale of the great king. La Cava is referred to as “cruel maiden” (cruel donzella), and the capital letter S in the 1549 printing, which begins the prologue, forms a snake, so that from the very beginning readers are primed to associate Eden with Spain’s fall, complete with serpent, a blameworthy Eve figure, and a man who also falls. Corral showcases redemption through Rodrigo’s personal penance, and sows the seeds of the nation’s recovery and redemption with the actions of Pelayo. We are encouraged as readers to recognize the individual and the universal aspects of the legend. Indeed, the author brings it around specifically to the reader and includes himself: “This was the cause of his terrible and horrifying penance. By means of which example we must all engage in worthy acts of penance since we see that all our sins impede our salvation” (Esto le fue causa dela terrible y espantosa penitencia. Por el qual exemplo deuemos todos hazer dignos fructos de penitencia pues vemos que nuestros peccados del todo impide nuestra saluacion; prologue, edition of Toledo, 1549, n.p.). Unlike the 1499 printing, which ends simply with the inscription on Rodrigo’s tomb in Viseu and a statement that the story stands as a lesson to rulers who follow, the sixteenth-century printings all add an additional final statement about the salutary effects of forgiveness of sin and true penance, that says, in effect, pride topples sinners, humility stabilizes them, God forgives them, and Christ, the son of the virgin without stain, brings them to true repentance.

Both the prologue and the brief new ending to the sixteenth-century editions have relevance in the religious context of the time. Although the Lateran Council of 1215 had mandated that confession was necessary for all the faithful, the eve of the Reformation witnessed a decline in trust of the clergy, resulting in a widely held practice of bypassing the clergy in matters of restoring the relationship of the sinner with God. In a climate that emphasized penance but that did not, in the opinion of the Church, sufficiently recognize the role of auricular confession and the absolution that only the confessor could grant upon the sinner, the story of King Rodrigo, his oral confession to the saintly hermit, and rigorous penance devised by the hermit could be seen in a new and significant light. The prologue draws readers into the story of Rodrigo, moving us to equate his individual penitential practice with the universal need for penance for all the faithful. The ending of the work also moves the narrative from the particular to the universal, making exemplary the
king’s search for the hermit to hear his sins, his willing and humble confession, and his penance.

Stephen Haliczer, in *Sexuality in the Confessional*, a study of confessional and penitential practices in sixteenth-century Spain, illuminates the conflict between the Church’s increasing emphasis on sexual sins and the people’s increasing—and understandable—reluctance to confess such sins, particularly in light of the general practice of making public those sins during an equally public penance. Moreover, the concept of penance was a site of conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants; as one of the ideas of the Church most protested by Martin Luther, the Church reaffirmed the importance of the sacrament of penance and declared it dogma at the Council of Trent (1545–1564). The *Crónica del Rey don Rodrigo* fits, perhaps in a surprising and unexpected way, concerns of religious practice that consumed the Church of the sixteenth century. The redemption of Rodrigo, told through the expanded story of his remorse, serves to rehabilitate him as a more worthy ancestor of the sixteenth-century “Goths” than earlier portrayals would have done.

Corral’s characters express a deep humanity. They go well beyond stereotype, and the four main characters—Rodrigo, La Cava, Julian, and Pelayo—are most articulate and anguished over the events that have occurred and the shape their lives take because of them. Julian at times tries to control his rage but cannot find the means to do so. La Cava yearns to undo what she believes she set in motion by confiding in a friend and in her mother—bringing down a king and a nation. Rodrigo wishes to turn back the clock, but since he cannot, he throws himself into the most grueling penance the hermit devises for him. For his part, Pelayo, groomed from childhood to be an exemplary noble Goth, tries to live under Muslim domination until events dictate that he can no longer reject the mantle of Christian leadership that God’s divine plan thrust upon him. We will see in the section on the ballads that admissions of guilt by the characters lend themselves to embellishment and distortion in terms of the blame that can be accorded them. For example, while Corral’s La Cava moves the reader deeply by her anguished ambivalence about what has happened to Spain and her own role in it, this very ambivalence inspires the ballads that increasingly accord her blame and a conscious role in seducing the king. When she was mute—as she was for all the versions up to Corral’s—La Cava was relatively free from criticism, but once given a voice, she is depicted as a moral agent who chooses her actions. Although she could not have predicted the consequences of her decision to inform her father of the rape, she is nonetheless guilty of setting a chain of events in motion, and for a society inclined to excoriate women’s speech, that was enough.
The Woman’s Body and the Fate of the Nation

In the 1530s, other representations of the fall of Spain experimented with the link between the woman’s body and the nation. Two examples, a poem by Fray Luis de León and a play by Bartolomé Palau, allow us to witness just how culturally ingrained it had become in Spain to focus on sex and the woman’s body as a metaphor for both the downfall of the kingdom and inspiration for its rebuilding. While many Hispanists have not read or even heard of Bartolomé Palau, the name of Fray Luis de León is canonical. His poem “Profecía del Tajo” (Prophecy of the Tagus River), which opens with a consensual adulterous relationship between Rodrigo and La Cava, carries weight in the development of the legend of La Cava as a sexually promiscuous and culpable Eve figure. Palau, on the other hand, is little known while nonetheless credited in nineteenth-century histories of Spanish literature as the first national dramatist in Spanish letters—and national drama, as we know from the examples of both England and Spain, was profoundly important in the seventeenth century. Uniquely among all the versions of the fall of Spain in 711, Palau joins the stirring narrative of a virgin martyr, Rodrigo’s putative Slavonic fiancée, Orosia, with the most titillating part of the founding myth of Spain, the sexual encounter of Rodrigo and La Cava, but he makes sexual violence the story of both women.1

Palau’s historico-national drama, Historia de la gloriosa santa Orosia (History of the glorious Saint Orosia), composed sometime between 1530 and 1550, but probably before 1542, affords a unique opportunity to witness the direction of the sixteenth-century national imagination, particularly the sexualized imagery surrounding Christian-Islamic confrontations. In 1883, Aureliano Fernández-Guerra edited the play in a volume he entitled Caida y ruina del imperio visigótico español (Fall and ruin of the Spanish Visigothic empire). He provides a thorough introduction to the legend of Rodrigo and the fall of Spain and offers what little information is available about the allegedly historical martyred saint Orosia (Orossa or Aurea), reputedly betrothed to a prince of Navarre, but whose caravan was set upon by marauding Saracens. Orosia is still venerated as a saint today in Spain, but whether she ever existed remains questionable. Indisputable is the fact that Palau invents out of whole cloth the engagement of Rodrigo and Orosia. Fernández-Guerra’s title—a hit-parade of significant themes about our legend, including the words “fall,” “ruin,” and the casting of the smallish Visigothic kingdom as a Spanish empire, a notion that develops in the sixteenth-century ballad tradition—reflects the late nineteenth-century enterprise to recover for national attention the lost glory of Spain’s Visigothic heritage. Palau combines myth and contemporary phobias to cre-
ate a drama of the legendary scandal of sexual sin and the fear of the sexual inter-
mingling of Christian women and Muslim men.

Palau creates a new and highly inventive version of the legend of the fall of Spain
by showcasing the dichotomized woman, one fallen, one saintly. The five-act play
opens with a discussion of why it is essential for a ruler to be married and the
benefits of having a good and virtuous wife, an important discussion in early mod-
ern Western Europe. Rodrigo’s adviser first suggests that marriage is necessary to
keep a randy young man free from the sin of fornication. After extolling the virtues
of a good wife, he then repeats the commonplace that the home is analogous to the
kingdom: a ruler who cannot keep a wife and his home in order has little chance of
succeeding on the larger stage of the kingdom. While an ambassador from the Visi-
gothic kingdom travels to Orosia’s land to ask for her consent to marry King Rodrigo,
Rodrigo determines to douse the flames of his ardor for Caba. In deference to the
rules of decorum in the staging of plays, Palau refrains from presenting the rape it-
self. Instead, we hear Rodrigo’s tormented lament that Caba ensnares him, and then
we hear her confession to her father that she has been dishonored. She tells her fa-
ther that she tried to deflect the king’s advances by joking lightly with him, but then
describes the rape as dismemberment: “[M]e asió á fuerzas de brazos, / haciéndome
mil pedazos / como rabioso león” (He pinned me with his arms, and made me into
a thousand pieces, like a rabid lion; ll. 1399–1401).

Palau’s Rodrigo and Julian clearly err, Rodrigo through lust and Julian through
his betrayal of Christian Spain, but Caba’s blameworthiness is representative of the
lot of women in this time. As soon as he hears what happened, Julian swears that the
king’s act will cost him as dearly as “el bocado de Adán” (Adam’s bite [of apple];
l. 1413). By invoking the king as Adam, Julian ironically casts his daughter as the
blameworthy Eve. Next, he lays out his conspiracy plan to Caba, in which he will
bring “hombres crüeles, / fiera gente y muy extraña / porque destruyan á España,
pues á Dios no son fieles” (cruel men, a people fierce and strange, so that they will
destroy Spain, since they are not faithful to God; ll. 1440–43). Unlike other versions
that chastise La Cava for telling her father, but in which she then regrets it, in this
play Caba cheers her father on, claiming that the destruction of Spain will be God’s
gift to them, to satisfy her honor and that of her father. Consequently, she embod-
ies three negative images, the bad Christian woman, the ally of the Muslims, and
the dangerous speech of women.

Implicitly, the invasion is set in motion by the rape at the very time that Orosia
and her party are crossing the Pyrenees and entering Spain. She and her entourage
learn from a shepherd that the land has been overrun by Moors, the king is dead,
and they are likely to be captured by the enemy. Orosia stands firm, declaring that
their faith shall be their defense. As with many tales of young virgin martyrs, Palau’s saint is indescribably beautiful and the object of the lustful desires of the non-Christian leader, be he Roman emperor or Saracen king. In this case, the infidel is Muza, one of the two powerful leaders of the Arab invasion. The enraged Muza orders an erotically charged punishment of Orosia, who courageously and defiantly refuses to become his bride, that his men sever her limbs one by one and then decapitate her. Instead of witnessing Rodrigo’s vision of the slaughtered masses of soldiers, as the ballads and chronicles relate, the destruction of the nation crystallizes in the juxtaposition of the two women—La Cava, the cause, and Orosia, the saintly innocent victim. It is profoundly significant that the first national drama of Spain is constructed—literally—on the broken bodies of two women, the metaphorically dismembered rape victim of the lionlike king, setting in motion the nation’s fall, and the one who is literally dismembered because of the tragedy-inspiring seductiveness of the other woman and the barbarity of the Muslim invader. In terms of the cultural context of sixteenth-century Spain, with its view of women as source of, or at least inspiration for, evil, unless they are saintly exemplars, it is no accident that Palau’s inventiveness best expressed itself in this kind of sexualized, dualistic construct. But he also conflates the Muslim king and the Christian ruler as unhealthily and destructively lustful. Rodrigo’s character traits and personal qualities had been praised in the first act, in a way that makes tragic his giving in to his baser impulses in raping La Cava. The rape shows him to be virtually indistinguishable from Muza: both are sexual predators, and both participate in the destruction of Spain. Moreover, with the rising anti-Morisco sentiment of Spanish society, coupled with the threat of invasion by the Turks, Palau plays into the deepest fears of Spanish Christians, the sexual threat to the Christian nation by Islam both inside and outside Spain. The play contains many anachronisms, but one of the most striking is the reference to Julian’s journey to “Turquía” to conspire with the Muslims about invading the peninsula (ll. 1676–81).

Today, the northern regions of Spain continue to celebrate St. Orosia’s feast day on June 25. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the purported route of her journey into Spain became the site of numerous hermitages. Along the route, near a cave named for Orosia’s brother, St. Cornelius (another totally fictitious figure, who is not mentioned in Palau’s play), markings in the rock are said to be the imprints of Orosia’s knees and of the sword hitting the rock when it decapitated her. According to legend, the Virgin Mary revealed Orosia’s remains to shepherds some three hundred years after her death, in a small town called Yebra de Basa. Devotees venerated Orosia’s head there, while the rest of her remains was translated to the city of Jaca, where they repose in a chapel in her honor. The translation occasioned the
first miracle attributed to Orosia: as the silver urn carrying her remains neared Jaca, all the bells in the city began to peal on their own, signifying the saint’s approval of the clergy’s decision to move her from Yebra de Basa. Orosia became the patron saint of “los endemoniados,” those possessed by devils. Each year, until 1947 when the Bishopric of Jaca prohibited this particular ceremony, the church and town authorities rounded up all those thought to be in the thrall of the devil—mostly women—and subjected them to exorcism, one more example of the pervasive tendency, even up to modern times, to associate women with witchcraft and other dark, supernatural forces.

Fray Luis de León, an intellectual presence in sixteenth-century Spain, is best known for his contemplative poetry and his didactic treatise on marriage, *La perfecta casada* (*The Perfect Wife*). However, “Prophecy of the Tagus River,” one of his earliest odes, treats the legend of La Cava and Rodrigo in a powerful juxtaposition of primitive sexual coupling and nature’s prophetic commentary on it. The Tagus River, for Spain a kind of River Styx in mythic importance, surprises the philandering couple and accuses Rodrigo of kingly misconduct with impending dire consequences. The anthropomorphized river equates the seemingly simple beauty of the Eve-like Cava with unimaginable destruction for the nation, and the concomitant equation of female beauty and sexuality with evil and malevolence is unmistakable: “Aquesta tu alegria / ¿qué llantos acarrea! Aquesa hermosa / que vio el sol en mal día, / al Godo, ¡ay!, cuán llorosa, / al soberano cetro, ¡ay, cuán costosa! / Llamas, dolores, guerras, / muertes, asolamientos, fieros males / entre tus brazos cierras, / trabajos inmortales / a ti y a tus vasallos naturales” (How many tears does that beauty, born on a fateful day, cause the Goth, alas, and how costly is she to his sovereign scepter! Flames, suffering, wars, deaths, desolation, and fierce ills are what you hold in your arms, and endless labors for you and your natural vassals; italics mine).

Prophecy functions in two ways in this poem. The beautiful Cava, “born on that fateful day,” is predestined to be the female destroyer, at the same time that the personification of the river Tagus comes forth to inform the neglectful, reckless, and disbelieving Rodrigo that the sexual act and destruction have fused, bringing imminent devastation. Fray Luis ends the poem with the image of an enslaved Christian faithful: “te condena, ¡oh, cara patria! a bárbara cadena” (he condemns you, oh dear native land, to the barbarians’ chain).

According to Dámaso Alonso, Fray Luis imitates a Horatian ode that condemns Paris for the abduction of Helen of Troy; for Karl Vossler, the poem adumbrates Old Testament wrathful punishment. Leo Spitzer signals an important difference between Horace and Fray Luis. In Horace’s poem, the narrator chastises Paris for the abduction, which will cause a war against the Trojans, while Fray Luis lingers over
the sinfulness of the sexual act between the king and La Cava—“en mal punto te
goces, injusto forzador”—and locates the blame for the deed in the beauty of La
Cava. Perhaps the ghosts of the past inspired the young university student Fray Luis
to recall the peninsula’s earliest history as he strolled the banks of the river, near Baño
de la Cava, the place where she bathed, according to the Refundición toledana de la
Crónica de 1344. Early modern Spanish recountings of the story of Alfonso VIII and
the Jewess of Toledo coincide in the detail that Alfonso abandoned his duties for
seven years while he lived with his lover in the Toledan Palacios de Galiana near the
Tagus River, the castle named for the apocryphal legend of the young Charlemagne’s
first wife, the Muslim princess Galiana. By opening his poem with Rodrigo and La
Cava luxuriating on the banks of the Tagus River in their ongoing affair, which con-
tradicts every known account of their “relationship,” Fray Luis appears to meld the
legends of Rodrigo and Alfonso. In addition, the poem offers an excellent example
of the identification of La Cava with “Moorishness” in that the baths are associated
with Muslim culture. In that sense, like the Jewess of Toledo, she is doubly Other,
woman and non-Christian.

Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo calls “Prophecy of the Tagus River” the first Span-
ish poem to treat a historico-national theme in the classical, or Renaissance Ital-
ianate, style. Oreste Macrì, one of Fray Luis’s modern editors, notices striking coin-
cidences between sixteenth-century ballads and the poem, in which the emotions
and actions of the man and woman become complex, ambivalent, and sinful. Macrì
believes that the similarities illustrate a common view of the legend in the sixteenth
century (Poetas 53, 301–7). This reinforces my argument that there is a marked ten-
dency in sixteenth-century Spain to tilt blame toward La Cava, to cast the fall of
Spain in 711 as a second fall from the Garden of Eden, and La Cava as the Eve of
Spain, a significantly developed feature of the ballads.

The Loss of Spain in the Oral Ballad Tradition

Ballads in Spain, known as romances, were first printed in the beginning of the six-
teenth century, many of them having circulated orally in previous centuries. The
first printed edition of ballads, the 1510 Romancero general (General collection of bal-
lads), included nine of the earliest poems on the subject of Rodrigo and La Cava.
The Rodrigo ballads do not stem from an early medieval oral tradition as so many
songs do but derive instead from Corral’s work, as do some of the newer ballads,
found in the Romancero nuevo (New collection of ballads 1530–1587). Although the
Rodrigo ballads probably originated in the second half of the fifteenth century, fol-
lowing the circulation of Corral’s lengthy historical romance, scholars typically date
this first cycle of ballads from 1440 to 1550. The ballads initially circulated in pliegos sueltos, “loose sheets,” an extremely popular and rapid means of dissemination to an enthusiastic, receptive public. Although sixteenth-century historians differentiated between serious and nonserious history, truth and fiction, the ballads held an ironic place of honor in Spanish society. On the one hand, ballads told fictional stories; on the other hand, they remained the single most effective propaganda tool for teaching history to an unlettered public, and many folks believed them to be minihistories, poetically rendered. No matter how much serious historians challenged or modified details of Corral’s work, between the many printings and widely popular ballad cycle it inspired, it remained the standard version of Visigothic history throughout the sixteenth century.

Spain’s popular ballad tradition extends to many, many themes beyond gender, but a good number of them do reflect the interest in and fear of women’s sexuality, as well as the general trend to cast historical events in gendered language. Lorenzo de Sepúlveda’s highly influential 1563 collection of historical ballads, Recopilación de romances sacados de las Corónicas Españolas, Romanas y Troyanas (Collection of ballads taken from Spanish, Roman and Trojan chronicles), gave new life to familiar medieval figures. Sepúlveda’s goal, to place Spain’s history in the context of great kingdoms and empires, impelled him to collect ballads on topics that ranged from David and Bathsheba and other Biblical figures to Alfonso VIII and the Jewess of Toledo; the noble and sexually available Muslim princess, Almanzor’s sister, in the Seven Princes of Lara cycle; Muslim maidens deceived sexually by Christian men; as well as extensive coverage of La Cava and other “bad Christian women.” Particularly powerful ballads in Sepúlveda’s collection evoke the fall of Granada in 1492 by casting the defeated city as a conquered and violated woman. In the case of the famous ballad “Abenámar,” the female city attempts to dissuade a suitor, the Christian King Juan II of Castile, by pleading her fidelity to her “husband,” the Muslim king. The religiosity of the century comes through in a number of ballads that treat the discovery and recovery of relics of the saints from ancient Spain, such as St. Isidro and the Muslim converts Justa and Rufina. New, too, are ballads that emphasize Pelayo’s feats, a development that undoubtedly derived from the century’s obsession with purity of blood and the desire to cast Pelayo as a Christian Spaniard.

Let us take a close look at the early ballads of Rodrigo and La Cava and how they progress in the negative portrayals of La Cava. The ballads function dialectically in that they both shape and are shaped by evolving public opinion of the culpability of four main characters, Rodrigo, La Cava, Julian, and to a lesser degree Bishop Oppas, who, although still an important presence in sixteenth-century prophetic and historical writings, is almost entirely absent from the ballad tradition. As the century
progresses, the ballads foreground La Cava as more culpable than the king, her Eve to his Adam, in the same way that woman is more guilty than man in sexual sins.

Of the three ballads Menéndez Pidal considers to be the oldest, the first, “Los vientos eran contrarios” (The winds were roused), deals with Rodrigo’s prophetic vision while sleeping next to La Cava in a bejeweled tent; the second, “Las huestes de don Rodrigo” (Rodrigo’s proud army is running away), is a narcissistic ubi sunt, in which Rodrigo, gazing on the mutilated bodies of his vanquished army, lying in a field with streams of blood running through it, laments all that he has lost personally; and the third, “Amores trata Rodrigo” (Rodrigo’s in love), imagines the besotted king’s and the reluctant Cava’s verbal exchange before the rape.

In the first and third ballads, in which the daughter is always called la Cava or Cava, several points matter. First, that “the good King Don Rodrigo slept beside la Cava in a sumptuous tent” suggests mutual consent between the king and La Cava, and casts doubt on the act of rape that has been undeniable to this point in our versions of the tale. The ballad, set within the frame of a prophecy pronounced by the maiden Fortune to the king, opposes the feelings of two men and leaves La Cava without voice or agency. The king’s desire for La Cava is opposed to Count Julian’s portrayal as a man driven by love of his daughter to avenge the dishonor. Significantly, no mention is made of either how the king and La Cava came to be sleeping in the tent together or how Julian came to discover it. What we could consider to be three features in the characterization of the main characters in Corral’s work—the concept of the king as a sinner against Christianity, La Cava as victim yet blame-worthy as representative of dangerous woman, and the count as a traitor to nation—crystallize in this short poem, “Rodrigo’s in love.” In other words, unlike other ballads that focus on a single moment or snapshot of the legend, this one covers the narrative from beginning to end, albeit in brief form. This ballad exists in multiple versions, but all maintain the storyline that the king singles out La Cava, parries verbally with her, and despite her wise responses that should have restrained him, rapes her. Nevertheless, in the version quoted below, a curiously ambiguous line appears to throw some doubt on the rape:

```
cumplió el rey su voluntad
más por fuerza que por grado,
por lo qual se perdió España
por aquel tan gran pecado.
La malvada de la Cava
a su padre lo ha contado:
don Julián que es traidor
the king exercised his will
more by force than by consent
by which means Spain was lost
on account of that grave sin.
The evil Cava
has told her father about it:
Julian has treacherously
```
con los moros se ha concertado
que destruyessen a España
por le aver así injuriado.

What does it mean, logically, that he violated her “more by force than consent?” It does not say “by force, not by consent,” but rather opens up the linguistic possibility of some element of consent.

If the early chronicles spoke fleetingly of a “lost Spain,” the ballads absolutely insist on the identification of Rodrigo’s kingdom as “Spain.” Here, the invasion is not seen merely as a defeat of the Visigothic kingdom, but a “loss” of Spain, the nation, through sin, and indeed the very destruction of it through conquest. Typically, when a title or a line in a work in early modern Spain employs the word “loss,” it is intended to evoke a comparison with the Garden of Eden, original sin, and perdition. “Destruction,” on the other hand, while still associated with sin in the sense of the Decadence Tradition and a wrathful God’s punishment for the iniquity of a king and his people, focuses on the barbarity of the invaders, the assault as taking place on the eve of Spain, and the subsequent growth as the birth of the real Spain, led by Pelayo.

Alain Milhou makes a convincing case for the widespread use of the term “destruction,” and variants of the word in the sixteenth century, arguing that the term infiltrates accounts of New World encounters, of those opposed to strategies of colonization and evangelization, and of those who saw the defeat and elimination of the indigenous population as a necessary cleansing of the vast territory before Spanish occupation could take root and flourish. Milhou cites, in particular, Alfonso the Learned’s Estoria de España (History of Spain) as the work that cast so many of Spain’s battles and wars as one episode of destruction after another. Noting that Corral’s Crónica del Rey don Rodrigo employs the word “destruction” frequently, he postulates that this is the principal influence on the presence of the word in the ballads created in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Not only is Milhou correct about this, but the title changes precisely in 1511 from the 1499 title that merely names the king—Crónica del Rey don Rodrigo, postrimero rey de los godos (Chronicle of King Rodrigo, the last king of the Goths)—to one that adds the phrase “with the Destruction of Spain” (con la destrucción de España). Interestingly, though, Milhou believes that a mid-century change diminished the use of the word “destruction” in newer ballads, substituting instead variants of the verb “to lose,” perder, as the ballads and other works were written as cautionary tales about what was at stake in New World ventures, with its economic and spiritual currency of loss and gain. Even
more important than the word “destruction” was the newfound emphasis on the Visigothic kingdom as Spain, once lost, but a recoverable nation.

The expanded version of the ballad “Rodrigo’s in love” demonstrates how La Cava fares. Composed and circulating vigorously sometime between 1480 and 1550, this version focuses more specifically on La Cava’s physical charms and Rodrigo’s understandable vulnerability to them. She flirts with the king: “She still won’t agree, and runs off with a smile.” This ballad comes directly from Corral. Although she has presumably enjoyed flirting with the king, the sexual act is still rape, not consensual. Afterwards, La Cava loses her beauty day by day, and she finally confides in her friend. The ballad is a poetic summary of Corral’s chapters, ending with Julian’s determination to avenge his daughter’s honor. While the poem does not speak of La Cava in condemnatory language, it nevertheless adds to the popular bank of information that suggests the daughter was aware of her beauty and willing to flirt with the king, although never suspecting an outcome of personal and national tragedy. By implying that she has encouraged the king, the poem contributes to the notion of La Cava as culpable.

In the second class of ballads, composed between 1480 and 1550, prophecy, penance, and Julian’s treachery emerge as prominent themes. The ballad that treats prophecy—a description of Rodrigo’s penetration of the House of Hercules—has not survived into the twentieth century in the ongoing oral tradition. Still well known today are Rodrigo’s severe penance with the snake in the tomb and Julian’s moment of ire and weakness that allowed the Arabs to enter the southernmost gates of the peninsula. Quoted at the beginning of this chapter, “Rodrigo’s Penance,” also known as “Después que el rey don Rodrigo a España perdido había” (After Rodrigo had lost Spain), is a long, narrative ballad whose first line places the agency of the action, the loss of Spain, directly in Rodrigo’s hands. Unlike the earlier ballads in which the passive voice is used, “se perdió España” (Spain was lost), here we have no doubt that Rodrigo has sinned as an individual and must make spiritual reparation as an individual. This is a spectacular ballad, so known to the general public that Cervantes includes the most titillating part of it in Don Quixote—the hungry snake in the tomb—quoted by a lady-in-waiting, someone who, in the populace of the novel, would not be formally educated.

“En Ceupta está Julián” (Julian is in Ceuta) solidifies the notion of Spain as a nation lost at a time when nation building and national identity are among the strongest forces in Europe. It is, moreover, the ballad that most harkens back to the thirteenth-century chronicles of Ximénez de Rada (El Toledano) and Alfonso the Learned. Rodrigo comes out quite well in the poem as a man who knows he may
be beaten, but never defeated, continuing to fight even though he is wounded and his men are down. The poem casts La Cava as a kind of Helen of Troy, and her father and Bishop Oppas as the two traitors to Spain: “Que por sola una donzella / la cual Cava se llamava / causen estos dos traydores / que España sea domeñada” (For the sake of a girl known as La Cava, these two betrayed Spain, which has still not recovered; *Spanish Ballads* 45). Emotions run high in the ballad; when not railing against the treachery of the two men, the poem laments the loss of the motherland as a paradise lost, praising the peninsula as we have seen from as early as Isidore of Seville’s historical writings on the Goths: “¡Madre España, ay de ti!/ En el mundo tan nombrada, / de las partidas la mejor, / la mejor y más ufana, / donde nasce el fino oro / y la plata no faltada, / dotada de hermosura / y en proezas estremada” (Oh Spain, our poor country, renowned through the world, the best and the proudest, a jewel, a pearl, where gold can be found, and silver as well, whose beauty’s renowned, whose virtues excel; *Spanish Ballads* 44). The actual transgression of the king is not mentioned, nor is La Cava blamed, a view that not only is unusual in the sixteenth century, but is overshadowed by the ballads of more vivid description of sexual scandal. According to Menéndez Pidal, the final ballads of the first half of the sixteenth century have a special internal unity, each focusing on a specific scene of the legend, rather than trying to cover many episodes in few lines as the earlier poems do. The earlier poems, for the most part, offer a fairly sweeping overview of the legend from the king’s attempts to seduce La Cava to the consequences when her father and, sometimes, the bishop take action. Two ballads should be mentioned here. The more important, for our purposes, is the widely circulated one that begins, “Gran llanto hace la Cava” (La Cava’s lamentation), which, while deriving in part from Corral by casting her as an Eve figure, intensifies her role as destroyer of the nation, aware of her overt and innate culpability as woman. La Cava laments the tragedy provoked by her beauty and bemoans ever having been born (a view that the public undoubtedly would have shared). As in Corral’s graphic rendering of the effects of defeat, La Cava anguishes over the mutilation of mothers, children, and even nuns by the marauding barbarians. While calling the king a great, but unfortunate, man, she further denounces herself by calling herself “Spain’s perdition”:

*Tú eres perdição de España,*
*fuego que todo lo apura,*
de *tú quedará memoria*
*para siempre en escritura,*
unos te llamarán diablo
otros te llamarán diablura,
*You are Spain’s perdition,*
a fire that destroys everything,
you will forever be remembered
in writings,
some will call you devil
others will call you devilish,
otros te llamarán demonio, others will call you a demon,
otros que eres su hechura. others that you are his witch. (Floresta 2: 44)

One aspect of the dichotomization of women in this era was the escalating view
of women and witchcraft in the sixteenth century, women in league with the devil,
“the source of evil,” which reached astonishing proportions in Counter-Reformation
Spain, as María Helena Sánchez Ortega tells us. Another aspect was the emphasis
on the woman’s open mouth—and garrulity—as proof of a lack of chastity. As Peter
Stallybrass says, in a statement that applies as much to the misogyny of Spain as to
that of England, “Silence, the closed mouth, is made a sign of chastity. And silence
and chastity are, in turn, homologous to woman’s enclosure within the house” (127).
Although it has always been part of the legend of La Cava that she informed her fa-
ther of Rodrigo’s deed, an example of direct speech has been rare. It is ironic, but
not coincidental, that the increased examples of La Cava speaking—pleading,
lamenting, informing, reasoning—all coincide with her emergence as central to the
legend, and culpably so. The voice of agency that she acquires in Corral’s Crónica
del Rey don Rodrigo becomes the very complex, morally suspect, and then completely
unchaste voice of the sixteenth-century ballads. As Diane Wolfthal demonstrates in
“Women’s Communities and Male Spies,” the prevailing medieval viewpoint of
women’s talk as frivolous gossip, and then as potentially harmful gossip, evolved in
the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the firm belief that gossip leads women
to violence (126). She points out many examples of woodcuts and drawings that
showed chatting women grouped in gardens and other ostensibly semiprivate set-
tings, while men peer at them, unseen, spying and eavesdropping, not unlike the
scene of King Rodrigo gazing at La Cava, his wife, and the other women of the
court. While in real life men who spied were breaking the social code, Wolfthal tells
us, male justification for doing so abounded, as women might have been revealing
secrets about their husbands or even plotting nefarious deeds.

“Cuán triste queda Castilla” (How sad Castile is) points to increased national
feeling in the sixteenth century. Specifically, it serves as a popular example of what
Henry Kamen describes as the sixteenth-century tendency to perceive Castile and
Spain as identical, especially among emigrants to various parts of the growing Span-
ish empire: “[T]he history of voyage, discovery, conquest and war was written up by
official historians in a way that gave all the glory to Castile. In a sense this was not
new, for other European nations also were trying to discover their own identity
through an exploration of their past” (Empire 333).6

The ballad bears no relationship to Corral’s work but arises out of purely con-
temporary emotions and concerns. Like “En Ceupta está Julián,” it focuses on the
nation itself, metonymically Castile, which will be the symbol for all of Spain in later Rodrigo ballads as well, as the suffering victim of the treachery of Julian and Oppas. After this brief introduction to the reason for destruction, some ten lines, the ballad demonstrates its affinity with current events—the sixteenth-century wars against the Turks—by describing in painful detail the slaughter of innocent civilians. Worse than the physical slaughter is the horrible affront to Christianity: churches are profaned by the Muslim invaders, bishops are martyred, and violated Christian maidens renounce their faith and embrace Islam. Without mentioning La Cava, the ballad cleverly combines two themes, which in fact have been intertwined ever since the daughter of Julian was introduced into the history of the 711 fall of Spain: sex and the fall of the nation. We have come a long way from the early recountsings of the defeat of the Christian Visigothic kingdom, which carefully refrained from naming the religion of the invaders, preferring instead to focus on their geographical provenance, to avoid the impression that, while God was indeed punishing his Christian people for their sins, He was in any way favoring Islam over Christianity. Sixteenth-century Spain showed no such restraint. Among the many horrors of defeat by enemies of Christendom, the poem suggests the revulsion felt by a Spanish society obsessed with “purity of blood” to know that their Christian maidens were now willingly engaged in sexual intercourse with the Other, the Muslim, and renouncing Christianity to do so. The sexual act between La Cava and Rodrigo may have set in motion the chain of events that led to the fall, but the result is more sex, which continues the downward moral, spiritual, and political decline of the nation. With two new sets of “infidels,” the invading Turks in Europe and the Amerindians in the New World, one enemy to be kept from the shores of paradisical Spain, the other ripe for conversion in the new Garden of Eden across the seas, the legend of La Cava and Rodrigo found renewed meaning, which the ballads both reflect and reinforce.

A new interest in Spanish history resulted from the increase in national sentiment, and the “romances eruditos” (learned ballads), such as those found in Sepúlveda’s 1563 collection, offered unique opportunities to provide names, places, and historical episodes, which helped to teach national history to a generally unlettered public. In one case, a ballad demonstrates a tendency that will become more pronounced in the seventeenth century, the insistence on Rodrigo as the end of a line of rulers, and the emergence of his successor Pelayo as the king to whom all the subsequent monarchs of Spain trace their lineage and right to rule. The poem “De los nobilísimos godos que en Castilla habían reinado” (On the most noble Goths who ruled Castile) accomplishes in a few short lines the linking of Hercules as the first of a line and Rodrigo as the last, while Pelayo holds onto “las Esturias,” both the rem-
nant of the past and the seed of the future Christian kingdom, which will be restored by the efforts of each of the kings who follow. A second poem, “Triste estaba don Rodrigo, desdichado se llamaba” (Sad was don Rodrigo, wretched he was called), reinforces the fact that the Catholic king Ferdinand appeared to matter more in sixteenth-century historiography than Isabel did. The poem not only sweeps the centuries in its movement from the fall in 711 to Ferdinand’s triumph in Granada in 1492, but it emphasizes Rodrigo’s actions as a history and defeat separate from the national history of recovering Christian lands from the Muslims, and it casts La Cava as blameworthy. She is referred to, variously, as the one who inspired the king to “bestial amor,” as “maldita Cava” and “malvada hija” (bestial love, accursed Cava, evil daughter), and she is cursed directly in the poem: “¡Maldita sea la tu hija, / que de tan gran mal fue causa!” (Accursed be your daughter, who caused such great evil!). Rodrigo is emphasized as the last Visigoth: “¡Oh mal venturoso rey, / postrer godo que reinaba, / hoy pierdes tu tierra y reino” (Oh unlucky King, last Goth who ruled, today you lose your land and kingdom). It remains for Pelayo to emerge as the first ruler, a kind of Biblical typology, in which the new man overturns the old, the new law reverses the old law: “diole Dios muy gran victoria” (God granted him a great victory). The final stanza moves from the eighth century to the end of the fifteenth: “Otro reyes sucedieron / que lo perdido ganarán, / hasta el quinto Fernando, que el Católico llamarán, / que con su esfuerzo ganó / el buen reino de Granada” (Other kings followed, who won what had been lost, until Ferdinand V, called the Catholic, who with his mighty effort won the good kingdom of Granada).

Menéndez Pidal calls the next chronological group of ballads “romances artificiosos nuevos,” new “artificial” ballads composed for the specific period, the second half of the sixteenth century, as opposed to ballads that either derive from historical or fictional longer narratives or that existed centuries earlier until being recorded in the sixteenth century. In general, these ballads reflect issues within the culture of sixteenth-century Spain and are a good marker for what interested the public, as well as revealing people’s attitudes toward women and their nation. Except for three ballads that deal most directly with La Cava, they focus on the monarch and national history. Once again, Rodrigo is emphasized as “el postrer godo de España” (the last Goth in Spain) in the opening line of one ballad, and “el último rey godo” (the last Gothic king), in the second line of another. In this current age of empire, the ballads heighten and dramatize the loss by the repetition of España, “Spain,” and by referring to Rodrigo’s kingdom anachronistically as “todo el imperio de España” (the entire Spanish empire) now “y en manos de tus enemigos” (in the hands of the enemy infidel). By reinforcing Rodrigo’s place as the last Goth and the last Gothic king, Pelayo emerges as the first king of a new Spain and the first Spaniard.
Two fascinating ballads highlight the Spaniards’ lively interest in deciphering La Cava’s role in the fall of Spain. “Cartas escribe la Cava” (La Cava writes letters) and “De una torre de palacio” (From a tower in the palace) postulate two opposing views of the daughter of Julian: is she the honorable victim Lucretia or the seductive Eve? In the first forty-six-line poem, La Cava’s letter—her own first-person voice—comprises thirty-six lines of the total number. It is the poem that presents her and women’s words in the most dignified, indeed, almost regal, manner. She addresses her father with appropriate courtesy: “Muy ilustre señor padre, / el mayor que hay en Castilla” (Illustrious father, the greatest one in Castile). While La Cava builds to the high point of the drama, the moment of rape, she never resorts to a harsh or injudicious voice. Moreover, this is the ballad that most exculpates her: not only does she refuse to answer the king at all when he reveals his feelings to her—as the noble Julian’s daughter, she is greatly offended at the king’s disrespect to her lineage and her virginity—but he enters her room when she is sleeping and rapes her. La Cava is not blamed for her failure to dissuade or otherwise fend off the king. The ballad ends with an implied comparison of Rome and Spain, and her exhortation to her father to avenge her honor: “Debéis de vengar, señor, / esta tan gran villanía, / y ser Bruto, el gran romano, / pues el Tarquino se hacía; / si no, yo seré Lucrecia, / la que dio fin a su vida” (You must avenge, sir, this great affront, and show yourself to be Brutus, the great Roman, since he [Rodrigo] acted as Tarquin; if not, I will be Lucretia, who ended her own life).

As we saw earlier, the rape of Lucretia began to represent the impetus for the birth of a nation during the time of humanism. Indeed, one of the most important paintings in Philip II’s collection was Titian’s spectacular Rape of Lucretia, commissioned as a gift for the king. During this time of nation building and, indeed, empire building, it is no surprise that some ballads dramatize the moment of La Cava’s Lucretia-like challenge to her father to act as a brave Brutus, heightening the tension between rape and vengeful action. A curious feature is the fact that La Cava’s suicide is not a given, as Lucretia’s always was. La Cava threatens to kill herself unless her rape is avenged, as if there could be some restoration to honor for a deflowered maiden, whereas for Lucretia, the vengeance she seeks does not in any way deter her from suicide, so certain is she that a raped woman’s dishonor is irreparable.

La Cava was not granted the moral high road for long: circulating at the same time as her “Lucretia” ballad is the one that derives in part from a work we will consider in the next chapter, the Morisco Miguel de Luna’s late sixteenth-century Verdadera historia del rey don Rodrigo (True history of King Rodrigo), “De una torre de palacio.” This ballad, often printed with the title “Fatal desenvoltura de la Cava” (La
Cava’s fatal immodesty), offers an example of how a later title, not found in the poem itself, guides the reader’s interpretation of the poem. La Cava, a fun-loving young woman out in a garden adjacent to the palace, laughs and plays uninhibitedly with other young maidens. She winds a yellow ribbon up her legs, which emphasizes their porcelain whiteness and beauty. Although the girls think they are alone, the king peers through the dense ivy. When the king summons La Cava to his room and propositions her, the ballad moves from the court of the king to the court of public opinion. Using the third-person voice, the ballad ends with contrasting opinions: “Dicen que no respondió, / y que se enojó al principio; / pero al fin de esta plática / lo que mandaba se hizo. / Florinda perdió su flor, / el rey quedó arrepentido / y obligada toda España / por el gusto de Rodrigo. / Si dicen quién de los dos / la mayor culpa ha tenido, / digan los hombres: la Cava, / y las mujeres: Rodrigo” (They say she didn’t answer, and that at first she was angry. But at the end of his proposal, she did what he ordered. Florinda lost her flower, the King became repentant, and Spain yoked, all because of the pleasure of Rodrigo. As to which of those two was more blame-worthy, the men say: “la Cava,” the women say: “Rodrigo”; Menéndez Pidal, Florresta 2: 68). The line about sexual intercourse is a play on words, since as we can see from the Spanish quoted above, flower—flor—is found in her name as well, Florinda, literally, Lovely Flower, Flor[l]manda, who has now been deflowered. The ballad not only suggests consent, vitiating the traditional view of the king as a rapist, but ends with a kind of poll that divides along gender lines: men believe La Cava to be the more guilty, while women blame Rodrigo.

A second version of this ballad is even more overt in its attempts to depict the king as helpless for being hopelessly smitten, while La Cava consents to have sex with him. In this version, she shows more than just her legs. When she disrobes completely to bathe in the fountain in the heat of summer, her body eclipsing the others in loveliness, Rodrigo is inflamed with love. Florinda lost her flower, the ballad recounts and then, in the “public opinion” section of the poem, offers direct contradictions: “She said he forced her to it, / He said she gave full consent.” Then follows the poll again, suggesting the never-ending debate between men and women as to who is more to blame.

Philip II’s Chronicler, Ambrosio de Morales, and the Development of the Heroic Pelayo

Sixteenth-century Spain was not alone in its overwhelming interest in historiography and the unique mission of the historian. The Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives,
who lived in England while the Catholic monarchs’ daughter, Catherine of Aragon, was married to Henry VIII, was but one of many Europeans who wrote eloquently and passionately on the role of the historian to be truthful, edifying, and morally above reproach in his writings. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that this century produced as much writing on the subject of how to write history as it did historiography itself. Eyewitness historical accounts were particularly valued, and the writer who had access to such accounts, or even better, could claim to be an eyewitness to historical events, was special indeed; hence the abundance of court chroniclers appointed by Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and his son King Philip II to witness and record the realm’s significant activities. But the history of early Spain, as well as any history of the distant past, posed obvious challenges. How did early modern historians justify as truth their own writings about ancient deeds they could not have witnessed, and in the face of contradictory accounts of those deeds?

In some cases, they asserted their lack of political agenda as evidence that they would be truthful writers, though one would be hard pressed to find a chronicler without some kind of ideological agenda. In other cases, they spoke of the need for the historian to be an exemplary Christian and to allow himself to function as a kind of empty vessel into which God would pour his sacred truth, which would emerge through the historian’s pen. Pertinent to both arguments was the exhortation to the historian to conduct careful, intelligent, and dedicated research to ensure that he had found all extant evidence about an event, and that he could determine, even if only by counting the number of times an event was recorded in a certain way, what the truth of a matter might be.

The stakes were high for the Spanish historian for two reasons. First of all, Antonio de Nebrija, in his 1492 Gramática castellana (Castilian grammar), had exhorted learned men to write elegant and well-researched histories in Castilian rather than in Latin. Given the widespread belief that Italians wrote better Latin than Spaniards did, when the Latin histories of ancient Spain circulated in Europe, they were often the product of non-Spaniards, especially Italians. Equally widespread among Spaniards was the belief that these histories took delight in diminishing and even mocking Spain’s past. Nebrija believed that Castilian historians needed to take control of their own national enterprise of historical recounting and create a pure, consistent, and high-quality Castilian that would enhance the telling of glorious deeds and would create a body of edifying work for learned readers, too often found wasting their time “leyendo novelas o istorias envueltas en mil mentiras e errores” (reading fiction or histories full of a thousand lies and errors; 6–7). Second, the writing of history not only brought the past to the present, but it strove to guide readers’
future behavior. Naturally, the use of the vernacular, Castilian, would make these histories accessible to a wider public. As Mary Gaylord tells us:

History, whose mission it is to transform deeds that deserve to be remembered into words, necessarily grounds itself on the symbiosis of doing and saying, of acting and reporting. Yet, at the same time that writing serves as record or repository of memorable acts which have already occurred, exemplary history is also charged with using language to incite its readers towards exemplary deeds of their own. In this way, history uses present discourse to link past and future orders. This projection into the future of exemplary and monumentalizing historical narratives can take the form of implicit promises or openly prophetic utterances about the future of persons, dynasties and nations. [Early modern chronicles] had continual recourse to the prophetic mode, which both first- and third-person historians used to confer significance on the deeds of their historical actors and to confer authority on their own written accounts. Promises, based on Spain's providential history and of noble genealogy, serve not only as framing premise, but as part of the compelling subject of these histories. (“Pulling Strings with Master Peter’s Puppets” 137)

But the lot of the sixteenth-century Spanish historian was not an easy one. Given the century’s and the country’s propensity for prophetic writings—their authenticity doubtful and their fictionality often demonstrable—the potential was great for philosophical and ethical dilemmas for the upright moral historian, whose duty included reporting events of prophetic fulfillment and recording prophecies he may well have known to be purely invented. Prophecies and miracles engendered particular challenges for the historian because their very nature as wondrous and supernatural events made their veracity questionable. At the same time, the lines between history and fiction continually blurred (as they had in previous centuries), and theorists and moralists sought out the truthful to excoriate those who wrote not lying fictions, but lying histories. This is the era of the nationalist “falsos cronicones” (false chronicles) and their critics, a polemic that in large measure inspired Cervantes’ masterpiece Don Quixote, with its multiple invented layers of story and history. Indeed, on some level even the sixteenth-century prose romance Historia de los dos enamorados Flores y Blancaflor (History of the two lovers Flores and Blancaflor), a version somewhat different from the thirteenth-century one mentioned in the prologue, could have been criticized as intentionally defrauding the reading public. Instead, Flores y Blancaflor enjoyed great popularity and multiple early modern printings, for this kind of pro-Christian invention was sanctioned by the unspoken code
that if it furthered Christianity in some fashion, its edifying qualities outweighed its potential dangers to a gullible public. Far more dangerous in the opinion of moralists such as Juan Luis Vives and Pedro de Rúa, to name but two, were the works purporting to be “true histories,” written by those who should not have been engaged in such deceit, at least in the view of their opponents. Clever and imaginative authors, such as Antonio de Guevara, the bishop of Maldonado, who was one of the authors most translated in Elizabethan England, and whose fictional history of Marcus Aurelius in the 1520s went so far as to include letters allegedly written by the Roman himself, found themselves condemned by their contemporaries, who believed such betrayal of the truth to be reprehensible.

Not only prophetic material or the sifting out of truth from fiction in the false chronicles proved problematic for scribes of historical deeds. Ironically, in the sixteenth century, Corral’s historical romance, with its largely fictional element, was praised implicitly and explicitly as the principal account of La Cava, Rodrigo, Julian, and Pelayo, with rightful claim to truth-value. Historians of recent decades “have recognized how much fiction there is, not only in stories like those of Rodrigo and Gaiferos, but in the whole notion of ‘Reconquest’” (Gaylord, “Pulling Strings” 131). But even medieval historians noticed the contradictory details in the tellings of historical events of the fall of Spain in 711 and its aftermath, such as El Toledano’s and Alfonso the Learned’s pointing out the uncertainty about whether the king had raped Julian’s daughter or wife, and Díaz de Games’ El Victorial (The victorious one), which refuted the entire story of La Cava and the king. So, when “In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, King Rodrigo and his namesakes turn up everywhere” (Gaylord, “Pulling Strings”: 132), historians turned ever more faithfully to scholarly investigation to deduce the version of the past that most, in their opinion, reflected sacred truth.

A royal chronicler during the reign of Charles V, Florián de Ocampo, produced the first early modern edition of Alfonso the Learned’s Estoria de España (History of Spain) in 1543, designed to promote the telling of history in Castilian, as Nebrija had urged at the end of the fifteenth century, and to comb the sources to compile the most accurate and authentic recounting of early Spain. Ocampo may well have been the one to circulate the story of Cisneros and the putative discovery of a prophecy of imminent defeat for the Muslim enemy in 1509. Ocampo took up the challenge of writing Spain’s early history with zeal, ending with the Roman conquest of the peninsula in 209 C.E., but he confused facts and mixed up names and episodes, which was only to be expected given the “thousand lies and errors” that, according to Nebrija, lay embedded in the medieval chronicles.

One of the most serious and respected historians of the sixteenth century, Am-
brosio de Morales, appointed royal chronicler to Philip II in 1563, a post he held until his death in 1586, grappled with these issues when he undertook the massive project of continuing the history begun by Florián de Ocampo. To verify the material in Alfonso the Learned’s history, Morales returned to early Latin and Castilian sources, most notably Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada’s *De rebus Hispaniae* (*History of the Deeds of Spain*) and the *Crónica de 1344*. However, when it came to telling the founding myth of the fall of Spain, Morales relied on both Alfonso the Learned’s and Corral’s story of La Cava and Rodrigo for his source texts, and on what he believed to be the Arabic chronicle of Rasis, the Moor.\(^{10}\)

In continuing the story of early Spain, whereas Corral invented a fanciful tale of Pelayo’s origins, the mysterious early years of the hero, Ambrosio de Morales expanded—invented—material about the years of Pelayo’s reign in Asturias. Although Pelayo was certainly known and celebrated in the sixteenth century through Corral’s popularity, through some neo-Gothicist poetry and political writings of the fifteenth century, and through the popular ballad, Morales’s lengthy account of Pelayo’s deeds cemented his position as the first king of the new Spanish era. Morales employed the literary convention of the reluctant hero to explain the gap between the fall of Spain to the Muslims and Pelayo’s leadership in the Battle of Covadonga. As we know from folktale and other primitive narrative constructions, when the principal hero fails for any number of reasons, his successor reluctantly accepts the mantle of authority, and usually does much to avoid facing his inevitable responsibility and fate.\(^{11}\)

If the fifteenth century encouraged neo-Gothicism, seeking to confirm Spain’s Christian Gothic heritage, the sixteenth century thoroughly embraced these Gothic roots. Morales, like some of his compatriots in the history-writing enterprise, asserted the veracity of his writings by emphasizing his research skills and his belief in God’s will that these heretofore hidden truths about the early Spanish kings be brought to light. For example, he expresses great pride in how much he expanded the truthful material on Pelayo:

> Pues yo (á Dios sea la gloria de todo) he extendido bien á la larga esta parte de nuestra historia que aquí escribo . . . y acrecentando mucho en ella: pues donde nadie ha escrito cincuenta hojas, yo la prosigo por quasi quatrocientas. El mucho trabajo y las exquisitas diligencias con que se ha comprado esto, y el sacar á luz con buen fundamento de verdad muchas cosas de estos tiempos de que ántes no se tenia ninguna noticia: harto claro se parecerá por toda la Corónica, y cada uno las podrá considerar en ella. (I—though all the glory belongs to God—have greatly expanded this part of our history, adding much to it. Whereas no one had
written fifty pages before, I extend it to almost four hundred. This was paid for by hard labor and exquisite research; this, and the bringing to light on a foundation of truth many things from those times, which have never before been seen, all of this will be apparent in my chronicle, and each reader will be able to ponder these things; vol. 7, prologue: 3–4.)

Wherever possible, Morales cites eyewitness testimony, if not of the deeds themselves, then of the trace evidence of their existence. For example, while weighing whether the king raped Julian's daughter or wife, and recounting the various historical claims of her name, Morales informs us that he saw the pole in Málaga inscribed with La Cava’s name, to mark the spot from which the ship embarked to return her to Africa, proof that she existed and, by extension, proof of other aspects of the story, including her name and kinship to Julian.

Morales links Pelayo to predestruction history, suggesting that this nobleman had been a cousin of Rodrigo and already an heir to the Visigothic throne (vol. 6, bk. 12, chap. 67). This will be of particular importance as the national drive intensifies to establish actual bloodlines back to the Visigoths. Subscribing to the Decadence Tradition, Morales revisits the earlier authorities on the sins of Witiza and the debauched clergy and general populace of Spain. According to Morales, and not found in earlier chronicles, because of Witiza’s cruelty to Pelayo’s father and the potential for wrath to be visited upon him and because he was offended by the disgraceful moral state of the kingdom, Pelayo went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, returning when Rodrigo became king. One of Witiza’s greatest sins against Christianity was to allow the Jews back into the kingdom, and to give them great privileges (vol. 6, bk. 12, chap. 65). How, Morales asks, could divine justice have been temperate in the face of “tan enormes pecados” (such enormous sins)?

Morales suggests that Pelayo had been a royal member of the king’s bodyguard, perhaps the captain of the king’s sword-bearers, and one of the few survivors of the Battle of Guadalete: “En esta batalla creo yo cierto que se halló el Infante Pelayo; pues siendo tan deudo del Rey, y teniendo tan principal oficio en su casa, no le faltaría en tal jornada. Escapó con la vida, porque lo guardaba Dios para el bien universal de toda España.” (In this battle I am certain Prince Pelayo was found; given that he was so loyal to the king and the holder of such a singular office in his household, he would not fail the king on that day. He escaped with his life because God was protecting him for the universal good of all Spain; vol. 6, bk. 12, chap. 69).

In placing Pelayo at the moment of the fall of Spain, he parts company from Corral, according to whom Pelayo, though a relative of Rodrigo and already a prince of northern Spain, the son of the duke of Cantabria, was not present in Rodrigo’s court.
In fact, Morales discredits and discounts Corral, calling his work fictional (vol. 6, bk. 12, chap. 64). Morales sifts through the older chronicles, asserting which facts he believes to be true, combining and resolving various competing traditions. Julian is to blame, indeed, but he was aided by the sons of Witiza, who traveled to North Africa, and by Bishop Oppas, who may have been the brother of Julian's wife. For Morales, the king erred in raping La Cava, but the entire population was decadent and merited God's punishment (vol. 6, bk. 12, chap. 69), culminating in the Battle of Guadalete, which Morales places not in 711, but on September 9, 714. Morales accepts the view that the king simply vanished from the battle, and that subsequently his engraved tomb was discovered in Viseu, Portugal. In short, after having praised Rodrigo for his many personal strengths and that of his court, Morales wastes very little time on Rodrigo and La Cava, and only slightly more on Julian. Well into the story of Pelayo, Morales returns to the ultimate fate of Julian. According to Morales, Munuza believes that Pelayo and his men defeated the Muslims in Asturian battles only because of the treacherous help of Julian and the sons of Witiza. Although Morales does not specify what Julian reportedly did to warrant the label of traitor to the Moors, he recounts the seizing and beheading of the three Christian men by Munuza's men.

Morales ties Pelayo to the most significant symbols of the birth of Spain, the relics of saints contained within the Cathedral of Toledo. By having Pelayo present at the battle in which Spain fell, and by having him accompany Bishop Urbano and the sacred books and relics to the Asturias, Morales makes concrete the continuation of the old, fallen Visigothic kingdom in the Muslim-free area of Asturias, site of a newborn Spain.

In the ninth-century Crónica de Alfonso III (c. 866–910), the earliest recounting of Pelayo and his reign, the Muslim ruler Munuza abducts and marries Pelayo's sister while Pelayo is away, and there is nothing he can do about that. Corral rewrites history so that Pelayo rescues his sister, thereby preventing a mixture of Visigothic and Arab blood. Morales, too, subscribes to the rescue story, though he says no more than that Pelayo took her away from Munuza by a clever stratagem, thereby engendering Munuza's wrath and desire for revenge. Like El Toledano, Morales uses this enmity between the two men to lead into a lengthy preamble to the miraculous battles that launched what Morales calls the “Restauración,” the Restoration of Spain.

As we know, miracles abound in this part of the legend. Pelayo and his men strategize in a cave they have dedicated as a church and shrine to the Virgin Mary, and here the men elect Pelayo as the new king. But Morales makes this part of the legend the occasion for prophecy. A man who committed a homicide tried to hide in the cave, but Pelayo and his men found him and nearly killed him on the spot. A
hermit who dwelled in the cave begged Pelayo not to profane the sacred space, which is a refuge to all, by violence and bloodshed because Pelayo might one day need to seek the sanctuary of that holy place. Pelayo considered the hermit’s remarks to be “a secret prophecy” (secreta profecía) of his future victory, a view Morales shares by declaring that it took place on the very spot where Pelayo later triumphed over the Muslim militia.

Morales often provides dates of events, such as Pelayo’s election as king in 718, and whenever possible emphasizes both the line of continuation from the Visigothic kingdom—the bloodline—and the rupture between the fall of the Visigothic kingdom and the mobilizing military efforts of Pelayo and the other Asturians in 718, seven years characterized mostly by cooperation with the ruling Muslims and a covert resistance. When the abduction of Pelayo’s sister provides the impetus the Christians need to decide that they must not continue in the shadow and service of the Muslims, Morales paints a vivid picture of what they faced to overcome the enemy. Alcamán, one of Tarik’s four principal army captains, led a brigade of many thousands, while Pelayo had only a few hundred men. Bishop Oppas reappears as the archetypal traitor to Christendom, sent as an emissary of Alcamán, clambering up the rocks to call out a warning and an offer to Pelayo. If Pelayo would reconsider the impending battle and recognize that they stood no chance of winning because of the number of men arrayed against them—164,000—and because the rock-mountain terrain left them little opportunity for hiding or for deft footwork in battle, he, Oppas, would serve as intermediary with Alcamán. Pelayo’s contempt for Oppas and trust in God guide his response: “Ni me juntaré jamas en amistad con los Alárabes, ni seré su súbdito . . . yo confio en Dios, que deste pequeño agujeru-el que tú ves, ha de salir la restauracion de España, y de la antigua gloria de los Godos” (I will never befriend the Arabs, nor will I be subject to them . . . I have faith in God that from this little mouth of the cave that you see must come the restoration of Spain and the former glory of the Goths; vol. 7, bk. 13, chap. 3). The enemy attacks the Christians at the site of the holy cave, but miraculously the tens of thousands of arrows heading toward Pelayo’s men turn around in midair and land on the “Pagans” (Paganos), killing fully half of them.

Morales sifts through the authorities to clarify the source of the miracle, determining that the most convincing historical testimony attributes the miracle to the most holy Virgin Mary, “cuya Iglesia aquellos Infieles con tanta violencia profanaban” (whose Church the Infidels profaned with such violence; vol. 7, bk. 13, chap. 3). The changes Morales introduces may be nuanced, but they are significant nonetheless. The ninth-century Asturian chronicle also claimed that the cave was a sacred space in honor of Mary, but that God performed the miracle. Here, the attribution
The Battle between Christians and Moors at El Sotillo, part of an altarpiece, ca. 1637–1639, by Francisco de Zurbarán (Spanish, 1598–1664). Oil on canvas; arched top, 131 ¾ × 75 ¾ in. (335 × 191.1 cm). In 1370 the Spanish forces were saved from a night ambush when a miraculous light revealed the hidden Moorish troop. This picture of the miraculous occurrence was painted for the Carthusian monastery of Nuestra Señora de la Defensión in Jeréz de la Frontera and formed part of a large altarpiece fifty feet wide and thirty feet high, comprising twelve paintings. This is a good example of the centuries-long tradition of attributing aid in battle against the Muslims to the Virgin Mary. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Kretschmar Fund, 1920 (20.104). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
of the miracle directly to Mary resonates with the climate of the century, which identified victories and defeats with women, and particularly in Spain and Latin America, victories were identified with the Virgin Mary. Regarding the instantaneously crumbling mountain in which the rest of the Muslims die, Morales urges doubting readers to recall God’s miracle when the Red Sea parted only for the chosen people, drowning the Egyptians who attempted to follow them. Asturians also tell of the miracle of the Cross that day: a crucifix appeared in the sky, a sign of the victory to come. Pelayo fashioned a cross of oak, and used it as his standard that day, as did the kings who followed him in battle against the Muslims. This image of Pelayo leaning on the cross of victory appears as a woodcut in many works, and as a frequent subject of nineteenth-century paintings.

Morales then recounts how Spain began its restoration, as “Goths” came in increasing number to Asturias. With the death of Pelayo on Friday, September 18, 737, after a reign of nineteen years, and a burial in the church of the virgin martyr Eulalia, his son Favila became the ruler. Shortly after ascending the throne, Favila was killed by a bear while hunting, and his children were too young to rule. The daughter of Pelayo, wed to Alfonso, who according to Morales was an Asturian of royal blood, became the concrete link between the old Visigothic line and its continuation, and her husband became Alfonso I of León. Later histories debate whether Pelayo had ever been king formally and officially, though all histories accord him the role of continuing Iberian Christian blood after the fall of Spain, and of initiating the Reconquest. Morales takes particular care to contradict the history of another of Philip’s chroniclers, Esteban de Garibay y Zamalloa, who had asserted that Pelayo was not a Goth.12 Not only does Morales beg to differ, but he points out that Spain is the envy of Europe for she possesses an unbroken line of kingship more than eight hundred years old at the time of his writing: “No hay Nación ninguna que considerando bien esto, no lo tenga por una incomparable gloria de la real sangre de España” (There is not a single nation that, considering this point well, would not agree that the royal blood of Spain possesses incomparable glory; vol. 7, bk. 13, chap. 6).

Philip II and the Power of Prophecy

An event from the last part of the sixteenth century demonstrates how important its Visigothic history was to the Spanish nation. In addition, the event—the translation of the remains of the fifth-century virgin martyr St. Leocadia to Toledo in 1587—underscores the importance of relics and religion to Spain’s early modern nation building and growing national identity, as well as the intersection of women’s bodies and nation building. One year later, Protestant England handed Catholic
Spain a most devastating and stunning naval defeat. In the background, and spanning the years 1587 and 1590, stands the curious story of Lucrecia de León, the Madrileña whose nighttime dream visions, collected in an enormous set of Inquisition notebooks known as “dream registers,” predicted the downward spiral of the country as well as the downfall of the king personally. According to Inquisition documents, Lucrecia predicted the defeat of the “Invincible Armada” a year before it sailed in 1588. As Kagan tells us in his fascinating book Lucrecia’s Dreams, Lucrecia was unusual in that she was not a nun guided by spiritual stirrings, nor was she known as a political figure or someone close to the court in any way. Although not of the nobility, she was nonetheless a young woman of some means, though she had more in common, apparently, with the street or marketplace prophets, who appeared in times of political unrest and economic crisis to preach millennial scenarios (8). In the 1520s and 1530s, following the prophecy in which Holy Roman Emperor Charles V was heralded as a second Charlemagne, the street prophets “proclaimed Charles V the Last World Emperor, the ruler destined to unite Christendom, conquer Islam, and prepare the world for the Day of Judgment” (8).13 The 1580s were a hotbed of doomsday predictions for the court of Spain and King Philip II personally, spurred on by the “crisis of confidence that beset Philip’s court in the late 1580s” (88). Embedded in this national story of burgeoning unrest is the triumphant moment of the return of the remains of Toledo’s beloved daughter, the patron saint, Leocadia.

Relics of saints were not only required in order to sanctify every church, they were a marketable commodity from the early days of Christianity. Relics authenticated the mission of monasteries and convents, attracted pilgrims (and pilgrim dollars) eager to venerate the remains of their favorite saint, and in a less cynical or commercial vein, appeared to move deeply the public who saw them as a local or national symbol of community. Patrick Geary’s engrossing history of the widespread theft of relics in the Middle Ages documents the transactions, both overt and covert, that testify to the cultural and social contexts that impelled this thriving spiritual and economic commerce.14 Geary’s work entertains not only because thieves—often clerics—went to enormous lengths to obtain authenticated relics as well as to claim authenticity in the face of the most dubious evidence, but because the stories of the saints’ complicity in the theft or restoration of their own remains often rival any Boccaccian novella for humor and tall tales.

In 1567, Pope Pius V granted Philip permission to unearth, buy, or recover by any means necessary the relics of saints to protect and centralize them at the physical, political, and metaphorical heart of the Spanish empire. Philip had moved the court from Toledo to Madrid in 1561, but he nevertheless greatly preferred the austere but imposing monastic refuge of El Escorial, north of Madrid, and his reign was marked
by a relentless drive to bring as many relics as possible there. And although patron saints and holy relics were of undeniable importance to Spaniards in general, Philip was an unrivaled collector of saints’ relics, whose passion bordered on the fanatical, as Carlos Eire tells us: “He continually asked for [the relics] to be placed against his eyes, mouth, head and hands, driving his relicario [relic curator], Fray Martín de Villanueva, to distraction. Philip became obsessed with them and was driven nearly mad” (From Madrid to Purgatory 268). While others dreamed of gold, silver, and other booty from the New World, Philip longed for such treasures as the body of Spain’s patron saint, Santiago de Compostela, and the legendary hairs of Mary Magdalene, two grand quests that remained unfulfilled to him, one because the clergy in Galicia refused to cede the body and the other because, though much sought after, no one knew where any hairs might be found. At the time of Philip’s death in 1598, he had amassed close to eight thousand sacred objects.

For Spain, in the time of its nation building and empire building, the veneration of the remains of a female saint had special resonance. Counter-Reformation Spain’s climate of deep religious sentiment, the focus of sixteenth-century Spain on the cult of the Virgin, the special place of her mother, St. Anne, in the pantheon of saints, the overwhelming popularity of the sensually portrayed penitent Magdalene in print and the plastic arts, and even the implication of the special importance of female martyrs in the nationalist play we examined earlier in this chapter, Palau’s Historia de la gloriosa santa Orosia (History of the glorious Saint Orosia), all point toward and derive from the same cultural practices. Spanish Catholicism even had its version of “the helpful Muslim princess” in the figure of St. Casilda. According to legend, the eleventh-century Casilda, like the father-defying Muslim princess Galiana, associated with stories of Charlemagne, was the daughter of a Muslim ruler of Toledo, a king who, in keeping with the narrative conventions of these tales, hated all Christians and the Christian faith. Instead of a conversion to Christianity inspired by the love of, and in order to be with, a man, as in the stories of Galiana and Alfonso VI’s concubine or wife Zaida, Casilda fell in love with Christianity itself. In her demonstration of love, rather than bestow it on a single person, Casilda chose Christian love, caritas, defying her father by secretly feeding the Christian captives. She escaped her father’s wrath and fled to the countryside, where she lived, after a Christian baptism, as an anchorite near Briviesca in Burgos. The Prado Museum houses the most famous painting of St. Casilda—who is still venerated in Burgos, Zaragoza, and Toledo, and invoked in war—Zurbarán’s rendering of the Saracen maiden with roses in her lap.

In the early 1570s, Philip sent his chronicler, Ambrosio de Morales, on a hunting and collecting spree of books and relics in Spain, which Morales used as the basis for
his 1575 Antigüedades de las ciudades de España (Antiquities of the cities of Spain). As explained earlier in this chapter, Morales explored and wrote about León, Galicia, and Asturias, especially the areas that pertained to Pelayo and the early Asturian kingdom. Morales’s investigation of the legend of Pelayo increased interest in Leocadia, the patron saint of Toledo, especially the part of the legend that attributed the rescue of her relics by Pelayo.

For her refusal to renounce Christianity, St. Leocadia had been imprisoned in a well, where she fashioned a cross from sticks and spent the time in prayer until her death there. Her remains rested in a church in Toledo, until her bones were translated from Toledo to Asturias. There is ample historical evidence of Leocadia as patroness of Toledo and the early Christian church in Visigothic Spain, and thirteenth-century chronicles do mention Pelayo as a translator of some saints’ relics. However, it is im-
important to emphasize that the specific claim of Pelayo as protector of the remains of Leocadia is an early modern creation, which served the needs of the monarchy and historians in the sixteenth century. In the early ninth century, the Asturian king, Alfonso II (791–842), known as el Casto (the Chaste), built a church in honor of St. Leocadia in the royal city of Oviedo, and to house her relics, where they rest today. Alfonso may have translated the relics from Toledo, as some historians believe; it is unlikely that Pelayo rescued them from Toledo during the invasion, as sixteenth-century historians, like Morales, asserted. In a fascinating chapter in Morales’s *Corónica general*, he discusses the relics and sacred objects that he examined in the cathedral in Oviedo, opining on their provenance and authenticity (vol. 7, bk. 13, chap. 40). In addition to bodies of saints, the chasuble miraculously presented to St. Idlefonso by the Virgin Mary, and Pelayo’s gold and jewel-encrusted cross, Morales describes the most precious sacred object of all, the small, blood-stained linen cloth known as the Holy Sudarium of Oviedo that, to this day, many people believe covered the head of Jesus after the Crucifixion.

Morales recounts the story of a miracle associated with the relics of Leocadia when they were still in the Cathedral of Toledo, a miracle first recorded by Cixila, the eighth-century archbishop of Toledo and biographer (c. 775) of St. Ildefonso. The seventh-century bishop of Toledo, Ildefonso, wrote a treatise on the virginity of Mary. One day, while praying before the sepulcher of Leocadia, Ildefonso beheld the levitation of the sepulcher’s stone covering, which “30 men could not have lifted,” and the appearance of the saint herself, who cried out, “O Ildefonso, por ti vive la gloria de mi Señora” (O Ildefonso, through you lives the glory of my Lady! vol. 6, bk. 12, chap. 39: 224). The Visigothic king Recesvindo, also a witness, gave Ildefonso a knife with which to cut a piece of the saint’s mantilla, which Morales claimed to have seen himself in the Toledan cathedral. Morales tells us that Alfonso the Learned brought to the cathedral the remains of kings Wamba and Recesvindo, and, he believes, the remains of “the king, don Pelayo.” In 1575, Philip journeyed to the cathedral to venerate the holy bodies of St. Ildefonso, the Visigothic kings, and Pelayo.

A fifteenth-century witness of the status of Leocadia’s legend, Fernán Pérez de Guzmán, wrote the poetic *Loores de santos* (In praise of saints), which exists in eleven extant poetic songbooks (*cancioneros*), testifying to its popularity; he praises Leocadia as “defensora y patrona / de la ynperial cibdad / que fue de la magestad / gótica trono y corona” (Defender and patroness of the former imperial city of the majestic Gothic throne and crown; Maguire and Severin 165). In the longest of the six saints’ lives recounted in the hymnal, Pérez de Guzmán calls Leocadia a virgin, holy from birth, and, anachronistically, “born in the Castilian kingdom” (naciste virgen muy santa / en el reyno castellano), when there was no such kingdom. The poet makes
much of her rejection of the value and recognition accorded earthly notions of high lineage, both her own and that of the Roman emperor. She rejects the amorous advances of Emperor Dacian, telling him that she prefers the lineage and love of Jesus Christ. Although Dacian expects her to weaken after lengthy incarceration, she resists, winning her martyr’s crown and the enduring adoration of Toledans. In preparing their edition of these fifteenth-century poems, Fiona Maguire and Dorothy Sherman Severin had to rely on a seventeenth-century collection of saints’ stories to relate the lives, which indicates how difficult it is to find versions of the legend of Leocadia that may have circulated in the Middle Ages. At any rate, although Pérez de Guzmán did situate Leocadia in a Castilian realm, and indeed, in a very early example of the later tendency to do so, refers to the Visigothic kingdom as an empire, he makes no reference to Pelayo or the translation of her relics, or any other importance of the saint beyond the city of Toledo.

Leocadia’s remains had long been housed in the monastery of St. Gislenus in Flanders; the Jesuit priest Miguel Hernández had negotiated their release in 1582 (Forcione 317). How they moved from Asturias to Flanders is not clear. The intimate relationship that a believer experienced with a favored saint is demonstrated by the manner in which royal chronicler Esteban de Garibay y Zamalloa describes his own efforts to free the saint, as if she were a damsel in distress. Before Hernández secured the agreement from the pope to allow the saint’s remains to be returned to Spain, Garibay y Zamalloa had pleaded with the archbishop of Toledo and Philip II to “save the saint by removing her from a land where she is ‘surrounded by heretics’ and placing her in the secure kingdom of Spain, where Catholicism is flourishing” (quoted in Forcione 317). The translation of relics sometimes inspired slow processions, allowing for the veneration of the saint along the way by a fervent and adoring public; it took five years for the saint to arrive in Toledo from the Flemish monastery.

In 1587, a long-awaited and grandly conceived and executed spectacle moved and delighted the Toledan crowds that lined the streets for a chance to glimpse the procession and the reliquary carrying the remains of their beloved patron saint, Leocadia. The following passage, which Forcione assembles from the writings of Francisco de Pisa, Hernández, and Garibay, allows us a small window into the magnificence of the event for the population hungry to witness miracle and spectacle:

While the astonished populace expressed its jubilation with “all kinds of music, vocal and instrumental, with dances and games, and a thousand types of merry-making,” the regidores [town councilors] carried the holy burden beneath canopies of “gold and silk” through the streets of the city, sacralizing the spaces of their daily
lives by touching them with wonder-working relics. At various predetermined points on their route the celebrants halted to allow the citizens to offer their tribute to the saint in the form of “triumphal arches, and large images of saints and kings, with their elegant inscriptions written in Latin verse and in prose” . . .

[In] a culminating epiphany, King Philip II, the royal family, and the grandees of Spain emerged from the house of the archbishop to escort the litter on the final stage of its passage . . . They approached the church and the magnificent representations of the glories of “many saints of Toledo, and kings of Spain, and other princes,” which the architects of the city had created for the celebration . . . On the following morning the cardinal conducted a pontifical mass, the coffer was opened, the authenticating documents, “instruments and testimonies” were examined, and, following their approval, King Philip locked the coffer and delivered the key to the treasurer of the church. A solemn procession bore the bones to the sacristy and their permanent abode, “a place which was appropriate for them, as it was the very palace of Our Lady the Virgin.” (318–19)

The festivities occasioned no fewer than three lengthy recounts, one in the memoirs of the diplomat Garibay, and religious histories by Francisco de Pisa and by Miguel Hernández. There existed a vast public demand for this kind of work, as we see in the ship registers of books sent to the Americas, which also contained great numbers of spiritual biographies and devotional texts. But if we consider the staggering quantities of materials that testify to the popularity of such events as the arrival of St. Leocadia in Toledo, as well as the quantities of materials that informed the daily lives of the faithful, we begin to sense the magnitude both of religious practices in the daily experience of the people and of the enormous honor accorded Philip, as well as the nationalistic and imperialistic propaganda, of being portrayed as the monarch who brought the patron saint home, fulfilling the promise of Pelayo almost nine hundred years earlier.

In 1587, the year before the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the power and popularity of the king as unifying symbol of Spanish nationalism was at its peak. Philip, of the Spanish Hapsburg line begun by his father, is equated with Pelayo, the first Asturian king: Philip’s actions fulfill and bring closure to the promise begun hundreds of years earlier by Pelayo; both men protect Leocadia from the barbarians, Pelayo by taking her away from Toledo when she needed rescuing, Philip by arranging for her return. Rather than focus on the idea of the new kingdom overturning the old Visigothic kingdom, as chroniclers had done at least since the twelfth century, Francisco de Pisa bypasses the link of the Spanish monarch to the vanquished Rodrigo, the “last” of his line, in order to connect Philip with Pelayo, and to the
view of history as a pattern of promise and fulfillment. The mental image of Leocadia’s mutilated body serves as a symbol of the desecration Spain suffered during the Muslim invasion, while her remains were transformed into a holy object. The return of her bodily remains to Spain stands as yet another metaphor that employs the woman’s body as the restoration of Spain. St. Leocadia has been invoked even in the twenty-first century in the Church’s 2000 pastoral letter from the archbishop of Toledo, a recent call for Spain to revive the “raíces cristianas” (Christian roots) of its national identity.

The return of Leocadia’s remains offered a symbolic triumph that brought momentary respite from the realities of a nation that feared invasion. Contributing to the country’s vulnerability to attack by the Turks was that, despite its new position as a world power and global colonizer, Spain had never developed a strong navy. The 1571 victory against the Turks in the Mediterranean, the Battle of Lepanto, celebrated equally in Spanish history and fiction as one of the most glorious triumphs of Christendom, should have incited a more concerted effort to build a powerful navy, but it did not. In addition to the constant Turkish threat, Spanish galleons to and from the New World suffered crippling attacks by the English fleet, especially by the legendary Sir Francis Drake. Because of this ongoing and costly piracy, Philip consented to send the Armada toward England, designed to put a stop to the piracy, and retake the Netherlands in the bargain. For Philip and Spain, this constituted another holy war, the opportunity to take on the “Protestant Scourge” and defeat them once and for all. Along with the Spanish ships, private fleet vessels from Naples and Portugal, carrying gunpowder from Germany, in all, set out from La Coruña on July 22, 1588, under the leadership of the duke of Medina-Sidonia. The English roundly defeated the armada at Calais, destroying many ships and killing thousands of soldiers. Many more sailors died off the coast of Ireland, when their ships fled the English onslaught. The duke returned to Santander in the third week of September, having lost about one hundred ships and fifteen thousand men.

To conclude this chapter, let us return to the story of the prophetic Lucrecia de León. She was not formally educated: according to Kagan, she received training only in “rudimentary reading skills,” and her lover, Vitores, “testified [at her trial] that he never saw any books in the León household” (24). Nevertheless, Lucrecia’s dreams registered a fairly detailed knowledge of Spanish history. Kagan offers an intriguing explanation for how she could seem so knowledgeable:

In the sixteenth century oral culture was almost as rich and diversified as that available in print. Oral transmission, for example, may well account for Lucrecia’s knowledge of the Cid, the medieval hero who appeared in her dream of 13 July
1588. Although various versions of the chronicle of the Cid’s life had been available in print since the end of the fifteenth century, he was best known through the romances [ballads], the cycle of old chivalric tales and chansons de gestes that began to be published in the course of the sixteenth century. These ballads may also account for much of Lucrecia’s historical knowledge, notably that concerning King Roderic, Spain’s last Visigothic ruler, who appears in the dream of 20 April 1590. (24)

If we combine Kagan’s opinion with our knowledge that the ballads of Lucrecia’s time were the learned and historical ones filled with names, places, and details, and that one goal of the ballads was to teach history to, or provoke national sentiment in, an unlettered public, the idea that oral tradition supplied Lucrecia’s wellspring of historical data that informed her dreams is even more probable.

Kagan believes that Lucrecia’s dreams—especially her own prominent role in many of them—suggest that she “was engaged in a form of mythmaking in which an otherwise neglected adolescent appears larger than life” (74). She records several dreams in which she is both a victim of the Turks and “a Spanish Joan of Arc, a doncella guerra or warrior woman who helps to rescue Spain from its enemies” (74), and provides additional contexts in which she is portrayed as the savior of Spain. Given that so many of her dreams focus persistently on the loss of Spain in the near future, and that they return to the story of Rodrigo and the fall, she appears to be juxtaposing herself—a new Joan of Arc—as a savior of Spain to the female figure who had lost Spain, La Cava. By the same token, her implication in 1590 that Philip II was an imminent Rodrigo, about to lose his empire, was hardly received with enthusiasm, least of all by Philip, so recently celebrated as a Pelayo, not a Rodrigo. In this climate of anti-Muslim fervor, Lucrecia’s prophetic equation of Philip with Rodrigo terrified the political and ecclesiastical powers, who feared a repeat of the legendary loss of the Christian peninsula to the victorious Muslim armies. As Henry Kamen tells us, at this time Spain and Philip inspired a widespread lack of confidence in the overseas empire: “The king’s own secretary informed Philip II in a confidential document that ‘the people are full of complaints and many say that things are not going well’. ‘I am astonished at what they tell me about Castile’, commented a Spanish resident of faraway Lima in 1590, ‘that it is finished, and I believe it from what people say here. Here we go neither hungry nor thirsty, nor do we lack for clothing.’ Another, writing from the same city to relatives in Jérez de la Frontera, was alarmed by news of ‘the hardship that you suffer in Spain. Since we want for nothing over here, we can hardly believe it’” (309–10).

Whatever the true source of Lucrecia’s prophetic dreams, she had correctly pre-
dicted, a year before it took place, the defeat of the armada in 1588. The Inquisition took note: “The dreams’ prophetic quality, their immediate relevance to the future of Spain, and their source—divine or diabolical—these were the aspects of Lucrecia’s dreams that captured the attention of . . . the Holy Office” (74). Lucrecia was arrested and tortured—during which time she confessed to many of the charges brought against her—and was sentenced ultimately to “one hundred lashes, banishment from Madrid and a two-year seclusion in a religious home” (155). As harsh as it sounds, Lucrecia’s sentence was relatively light compared to the number of women who would not have fared nearly as well faced with the same charges of having dreams instigated by the devil himself.

This is the climate near the end of the century: continuing faith in the powers of prophecy to describe the present and help shape future action, and tremendous reliance on the symbolism of bodies, particularly female bodies, to reflect both the woes and the triumphs of Spain as nation and empire. Linked to this symbolism is a boundless anti-Morisco and anticonverso sentiment among the Christian populace, and uncertainty about the reign of a king who, only months before, during the celebration of the translation of the remains of St. Leocadia, was seen as a savior of the nation and as a king divinely ordained to lead the world to Christianity. Philip faced the humiliation of the defeat of what came to be known, tauntingly by the victors, as the “Invincible Armada,” amid growing national unrest, by retreating even more to the hermetic solitude of El Escorial.20