Privada or outcast: María de Guevara’s Response to Spain’s Economic and Political Decline at Philip IV’s Court, 1663-1664

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ABSTRACT

In the mid-17th Century, María de Guevara Manrique produced two separate works: *Tratado y advertencias hecha por una mujer celosa bien de su rey y corrida de parte de España* (1663) and *Desengaños de la Corte y Mujeres Valerosas* (1664). At a time when Spain was experiencing political and economic decline, Guevara's work illustrated the response of a faction of court nobles, *arbitristas*, to Philip IV's mismanagement of the Spanish government and his complete isolation from his subjects. Guevara was a woman in a male dominated system of power. Her words shed a new light on Habsburg absolutism at the Spanish court, the organization of the Spanish government, especially the role of the *privados*, the king's favorites, and the role these isolationist factions played in the distancing of the monarch from his subjects and the decline of Spain. Guevara's works also illuminate the role of gender in Spanish politics and the limitations imposed by society on women, and on the efforts of outspoken women attempting to play a role in setting Spain's political agenda.
I. INTRODUCTION:

In 1663 María de Guevara Manrique wrote in her Tratado y advertencias hechas por una mujer celosa del bien de su rey y corrida de parte de España, "Your Majesty may say: who is a woman to meddle in this? To which I respond: how sad that we women come to understand what is happening as well as men do, but feel it even more."¹ She asserted that her noble birth, marriage to a soldier in the service of Philip IV’s illegitimate son, and her management of her family’s estates and finances qualified her to offer advice to the king. She argued that as a woman she understood the political, social and economic struggles that faced Spain in the mid-seventeenth century just as well as any of the male authors offering criticism and advice to the king, including his privados or personal favorites.

In 1664 Guevara put her recommendations in writing for a second time, offering to Prince Charles II Desenganos de la corte y mujeres valerosas, a manual in the mirror of princes genre. Charles II was Philip IV’s son and the eventual Habsburg heir to the throne. While historians Victoria Lopez-Cordon Cortezo at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Isabel Barbeito Carneiro and Lisa Vollendorf have written brief essays focused on Guevara’s Desenganos, very little research has been devoted to an in depth analysis of how both Guevara’s works represent Spanish elite society’s response to the absolute monarchy and the diminishing masculinity of the nobility at the court in relation to Spain’s decline. There also has been no analysis of Guevara’s work as a reflection of

¹ "Dirá Vuestra Majestad: ¿quién mete a una mujer en esto? A que respondo que harta lástima es que lo lleguemos a entender las mujeres tan bien como los hombres y a sentirlo mejor." In María de Guevara, Tratado y advertencias hechas por una mujer celosa del bien de su rey y corrida de parte de España (1663), in Warnings to the Kings and Advice on Restoring Spain, ed. Nieves Romero-Díaz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 50-51.
common sentiments among nobles of the era that their birth, lineage and land ownership no longer afforded them a close connection to the king’s inner circles at the court or the clash between court and country nobles. The king was listening and getting advice only from his privados, ignoring the traditional group of advisors among the nobility who had advised his predecessors through treatises, manuals and spoken word.

Guevara altered her written approach after writing her *Tratado y advertencias*. *Desenganós* represents her retreat to a pedagogical approach, offering historical models and reflecting on Philip IV’s reign to educate the prince for a successful reign. She no longer overtly offered her criticism to the prince as she did to the king.

Prior study by historians on María de Guevara’s work demonstrates the progress and growth in women’s history in early modern Spain and illuminates the role of aristocratic, educated women such as Guevara, and their limited ability to affect the course of political history. However, there has been no assessment of whether Guevara had an impact on either leader she was trying to influence. Thus it is necessary to evaluate Guevara’s use of a treatise and mirror of princes manual; what these two forms of written political advice suggest about Guevara’s success or lack thereof and why she chose to alter her approach from the treatise to the manual in her second attempt.

Guevara’s work demonstrates the consequences of gender in politics and the limitations imposed by society on women and their effect on the efforts of outspoken women. What steps did a woman like Guevara take to quell concern that she was speaking and writing as an intellectual and member of the elite, not simply as a woman? What does this say about the presence of women at the court in association with society’s
limitations on female power and voice? How does Guevara’s work reflect the “crisis in masculinity” occurring during the decline?²

To understand mid-seventeenth century conceptions of the Spanish monarchy and the court, this study will examine Guevara’s work, which demonstrates the presence of a female voice at the court and a feminine perspective of the political, social and economic frustrations experienced under Philip IV.

Guevara was a woman in a male dominated system of power. Her words shed a new light on Habsburg absolutism at the Spanish court, the organization of the Spanish government, especially the role of the privado, the king’s favorite, and the aid of these isolationist factors, surrounding the monarch and his removal from his subjects, in the decline of Spain.

Guevara lived between her estates in Valladolid and the court in Madrid. She represented her family’s economic interests at the court. In her attempts to have an audience with the king through her work Guevara felt the isolation of Philip IV from most of the nobility at his court except for his privados, mayordomo mayor or the head of the king’s household, and other close advisors. In addition, this frustration represented a clash between country and court nobles. Country nobles, having received their title from encomiendas or land grants, were resentful of the close contact courtiers, like the privado and his supporters, had with the king.

Guevara’s work makes sense in the historical context of Spanish society and the court in the seventeenth century. But understanding her work requires an examination of manuals and treatises produced in this period by other arbitristas and the popular

influence of the works of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam and Guevara’s great-great uncle Fray Antonio de Guevara on the beliefs, styles and approaches of these arbitristas. In addition, examining the contrast between Guevara’s work and the plays, poems and prose of other contemporary female and male authors will determine why Guevara chose to write in a male dominated genre and why she thought this strategy would prove successful.

II. GUEVARA’S WORK IN A POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

The Spanish court was the political and social epicenter of Spain in the seventeenth century. It had to be Guevara’s main stage if she wanted her criticism read and taken seriously. Examining the structure of the court, both its political and social etiquette will help to understand where Guevara fit in this highly exclusive and powerful space in Spanish society. Guevara’s family lineage and background position her in terms of class, birthright and connection to the court. She came from a family of nobles who controlled regions of the Spanish countryside and who had been well represented at the court. Guevara’s family received their power from the land they were given by kings and queens prior to the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, inevitably, as was the case in Philip IV’s court, a noble’s possession of land did not entitle them to a place in the king’s inner circle as it once had. This fostered an intense competition for power and influence. Members of the court who were the king’s privados or favorites achieved this position because they supported the king’s decisions. Some had served the king since before his reign.

Guevara’s writings express the exclusion occurring at the court. Her Memorial de la casa de Escalante y servicios de ella al Rey nuestro señor por doña María de Guevara
Manrique, condesa de Escalante, y de Tahalú... (1654) is an example of the petitions the king often received from nobility who lacked the constant privanza or private relationship with the king. Traveling back and forth between her estate in Valladolid and Madrid, Guevara represented the traditional noble woman who had inherited land through lineage and who preferred to remain separate from the nobles at the court. She expressed the dichotomy between the country and court nobles in her Desengaños de la corte, y mujeres valerosas (1665), emphasizing the disdain she had for life at the court and her partiality to life as a country noble.

In addition, the countess was also part of a faction known as arbitristas, a faction of the nobility at the court, who saw their critical work as an important check on the highly centralized monarchy and the excessive nobility during Spain’s downturn. Her Tratado y advertencias hechas por una mujer celosa del bien de su rey y corrida de parte de España (1663) is an example of the treatises written by arbitristas to the king, offering their criticisms and suggestions for change. The two copies found of each of her Memorial and Tratado y Advertencias suggest that Guevara shared her work with the court. This supports her ability to communicate with elite members of the court close to the king. Accounts of Guevara’s encounters with Don Luis de Haro and the Duke of Medina, both privados to Philip IV, describe their knowledge of her family and her position as a countess. Her communication with Don Juan José of Austria, Philip IV’s illegitimate son and a military leader, suggests that she had contact with a member of the Habsburg family, closely linked to and in contact with the king. In addition, Francisco Pötting, an ambassador from Austria to the Habsburg court, wrote about Guevara’s work, characterizing the poor reception it received.
For anyone trying to navigate the large bureaucracy that the Habsburg court had become getting through to the monarch was difficult. But for Guevara, who was hampered by her gender, breaking through the bureaucracy was even more complicated. Philip IV took the throne in Madrid in 1621 and settled into the Alcázar, the royal palace and epicenter of the court. The Alcázar was the king’s main residence as it had been for most of the Habsburg reign. Don Gaspar de Guzmán, the Count of Olivares, from the noble family of Zúñiga and Gúzman, quickly became Philip IV’s privado or valido, meaning royal favorite. He set out to restore glory to the monarchy and to Spain and in this effort the Palacio de Buen Retiro was built. It became a second site for the court in the 1630s. Artists, playwrights and poets’ works were displayed or performed within its walls. Olivares’ intention was to build a majestic image of Philip IV through the paintings of Diego de Velázquez, the performances of Pedro Calderón de la Barca and the poetry of Francisco de Quevedo. Glorifying the image of the king was meant to deflect criticism of and concern for the political and economic issues confronting Spain under Philip IV. But, the lavish and excessive lifestyle of the king and his court would come under fierce criticism as Spain fell into further financial and military trouble.

During the reign of Philip IV, both the Alcázar and Palacio de Buen Retiro were the main locations of the court. Madrid was essentially established as the capital in order to house the expanse of the court and all of its courtiers. Despite the vast number of

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3 Madrid became the permanent capital of Spain under Philip II in 1561. But, the capital was moved for a time to Valladolid from 1601 to 1606. With the exception of the move to Valladolid, the Alcázar and Madrid became the center of Spanish government and the location of the court. See Steven N. Orso, “Introduction,” in Philip IV and the Decoration of the Alcázar of Madrid (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) 9.


5 Jonathan Brown and John H. Elliot, A Palace for a King, 43.
people at the court, many subdivisions of the royal household encouraged the exclusivity of the court and the isolation of the king. The court encompassed members of the royal household and government officials. The royal household was divided into two, one for each the king and queen. The head of each house was the *mayordomo mayor*. The *mayordomo mayor* had the closest contact with the king. He was able to access the most private of rooms in the palace. While courtiers had their official business within the palace, the court society permeated its walls, spreading to the city outside. Individuals who were somewhat affiliated with the court were high ranking members of the clergy, preachers, titled nobility residing in Madrid and diplomats, residing in or visiting the capital city. The vast expanse of the court provided little to no intimacy between the king and courtiers. The large number of courtiers and their roles created a loose definition of the court. But, at the same time, this loosely defined court created new hierarchies of access, further isolating the king from his subjects. It was within these layers of power and access that Guevara struggled to find a place for herself.

There was an intense competition among members of noble families to produce *privados* for the king and maintain a *privanza*, a close relationship, with the ruler. There were many advantages to obtaining the king’s favoritism including increased fortune and immense prominence in Spanish society. For example, when Philip III died in 1621 the Sandoval noble family, represented by Philip III’s *privado*, the Count Duke of Lerma, was pushed out by Don Baltasar De Zúñiga and Don Gaspar de Gúzman, the Count Duke

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of Olivares. Olivares was De Zúñiga’s nephew and became Philip IV’s privado.\textsuperscript{10} Lerma had originally appointed Olivares gentleman of the chamber when Philip IV was ten years old and not yet king. From a very young age Olivares had known Philip IV and had been in charge of his education. When Philip IV took the throne, he was only sixteen years of age and Olivares continued to school him, gaining the dependency and trust of the young king. He quickly became the king’s privado and was able to give his relatives positions at the court through appointments to offices and council seats.\textsuperscript{11} Nobles saw the privanza, the intimate relationship between the king and his privado, as a secure way of maintaining influence on the monarchy and at court, bypassing the layers of bureaucracy that prevented most nobility from having access to the king.

Olivares retired in 1643, almost 20 years before Guevara wrote her critical and political works, Tratado y Advertencias and Desengaños. Upon Olivares retirement the king vowed that he would rule on his own, attempting to transform the government from one largely dependent on and influenced by the relationship between the king and his privado to a government run only by the king and his councils. But inevitably Philip IV could not manage without the assistance of a few close advisors. In the final years of Philip IV’s reign, the monarchy felt considerable influence from Olivares’ nephew, Don Luis de Haro and then Olivares’ son-in-law, the Duke of Medina de las Torres, thereby sustaining the king’s dependence on his favorites and their incredible influence on the power of the Spanish monarchy.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} Jonathan Brown and John H. Elliot, A Palace for a King, 14.
The king’s dependency on his *privado*, the trust he placed in the *privado’s* advice and decisions, limited the ability of any other noble, offering advice or seeking the attention of the king, to gain access. Thus, they could only make attempts through petitions, treatises and manuals. María de Guevara wrote her petition to the king in 1654 entitled *Memorial de la casa de Escalante*. She opens the *Memorial* with a summary of her lineage up to her own birth and her marriage to her husband, Don Andrés Velázquez de Velasco. She states,

> Don Pedro de Guevara wed Doña Francisca de Mendoza, and they had a daughter, Doña María de Guevara, countess of Escalante and Tahalú, viscountess of Treceño, lady of the valley of Valdaliga and the marquisate of Rucandio and the village of Villareal at Álava, and lady of the houses of Zeballos and Avendaño, Olaso and Urquizo and Arazuri and Montalbán and Acotayn and Esparza, and of the house of Caviedes, who wed Don Andrés Velázquez de Velasco, who, as stated, is today serving your Majesty.¹³

Using this long title and her family lineage Guevara establishes her nobility in order to justify addressing the king. She mentions her husband, Velázquez de Velasco, who was a gentleman-in-waiting to Don Juan José of Austria, the bastard son of Philip IV. The

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¹³ "Don Pedro de Guevara casó con doña Francisca de Mendoza, tuvieron por hija a doña María de Guevara, Condesa de Escalante y Tahalú, Viscondesa de Treceño, señora del valle de Valdaliga, del Marquesado de Rucandio, y de la villa de Villareal de Álava, y de las casas de Zeballos y Avendaño, Olaso y Urquezo y Arazuri y Montalbán y Acotayn y Esparza, y de la casa de Caviedes, que casó con don Andrés Velázquez Velasco, que como está dicho está sirviendo a Vuestra Majestad." In María de Guevara, "Memorial de la Casa de Escalante y servicios de ella al Rey nuestro señor por doña María de Guevara Manrique, Condesa de Escalante, y de Tahalú, Viscondesa de Treceño, señora del valle de Valdaliga, y del Marquesado de Rucandio, y del a villa de Villareal de Álava, y de las casa de Zeballos y Caviedes y Avendaño, Olaso y Orquizo, Arazuri y Montalbán, y Gamboa, Esparza y Acotayn En Valladolid Año de 1654," in María de Guevara, *Warnings to the Kings and Advice on Restoring Spain*, ed. and trans. by Nieves Romero-Díaz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 112.
Portuguese eventually captured her husband in 1663. Guevara refers to his captivity in her treatise, *Tratado y Advertencias* (1664), when criticizing the king’s mismanagement of the war with Portugal.

In her *Memorial* Guevara pleads with the king on behalf of her family and her estate,

> And in the year 1479, the prince and princess of Navarre, Don Gastón and Doña Leonor, gave the estate of Caparroso to the houses of Navarre, which belong to Don Francés Beamonte, and later they took it away from him, without giving him any other compensation. And to the houses of Avendaño and Gamboa, and Urquizo, the kings gave many rewards and provosts and patronages...Following an evil report, your Majesty took it from us, as well as the provostship of Valbao [sic], a position which is worth one hundred thousand ducats...For all of this, I throw myself at the royal feet of your Majesty as your humble servant, I beg your Sacred Royal Majesty to be so kind as to honor me, rewarding me as befits the services of such honorable houses.

Guevara blames the Spanish monarchy for financial misfortunes her family has experienced. She seeks to reestablish the king’s favor of her family, asking that Philip IV provide monetary compensation to her and her relatives. She stresses the service her family historically provided to the kings of Spain and her own service in the hopes of putting herself in a position to receive the king’s good fortune. Guevara’s petition indicates a financial struggle and a fall from prestige associated with the current lack of

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15 “Y a las casas de Navarra, que es la de don Francés de Belmonte dio el lugar de Catarroso, año de 1479 por don Gastón y doña Leonor Príncipes de Navarra, y después se lo quitaron, sin haberle dado otra recompensa. Y las casas de Avendaño y Gamboa, y Urquizo, dieron los señores Reyes muchas Merindades y Prebostrias y Patronazgos...Con siniestra relación nos lo quitó Vuestra Majestad y nos quitó Vuestra Majestad la Prebostría de Valbao [sic] que era de cien mil ducados...Por todo lo cual me pongo a los Reales pies de Vuestra Majestad como humilde vasalla suya, suplico a Vuestra Sacra Real Majestad se sirva de honrarne, haciéndome la merced, que merecen los servicios de tan honradas casas.” In María de Guevara, “Memorial de la Casa de Escalante,” 115.
wealth and landownership that her family once maintained. Her memorial is a common example of the petitions presented at the court outside of the inner circle of the king. Perhaps in writing this petition to reestablish the king’s favor, she wanted to be able to voice other criticisms as she did in her treatise and manual.

While Guevara’s petition presents her family’s fall from favor, her husband’s position as a gentleman-in-waiting to Don Juan José of Austria puts her closer to the king’s inner circle than most members of the public sphere of the court. In fact, she wrote a letter in 1668 to Don Juan regarding letters unanswered by him and her pariente, which may have been a reference to her husband or a relative.16 Her complaints about a lack of response from Don Juan, and her second publication of her Memorial in 1656, with slight alterations, questions whether she had success in obtaining an audience with Philip IV or other members of the court in very exclusive contact with the king.17 Guevara cites her Memorial in her Tratados y Advertencias, “Your majesty knows quite well that I can write books and memorials, which is why I dare to write this one, concerned as I am about the service they render your Majesty, and tired of hearing that no one dares express what he feels, for fear of being swallowed by dragons who take everything for themselves.”18 This alludes to the possibility that the king read or had heard of her

18 “Vuestra Majestad que sé yo hacer libros y memorials, y así me atreo a hacer este, celosa del servicio de Vuestra Majestad y harta de oír decir que nadie se atreve a decir lo que siente, porque no los traguen los dragones que todo lo aplican para sí.” In María de
Memorial by the time she was writing her treatise. However, she may refer to her
Memorial to quell any concern that could arise from her addressing the king. This
reference explains her prior experience in writing to the king and also draws attention to
her past work in order to gain the audience she desired.

Guevara's work also aligns her with a faction known as arbitristas at the court
and in Spanish society. Arbitristas were not always in the favor of the king because they
offered criticism of the monarchy and the court that questioned the management and
solvency of the government. Typically male, they were often academics, members of the
clergy, government bureaucrats, and members of the military and local nobility. They felt
it was necessary to communicate their concerns to the monarchy for the greater good of
the state and on behalf of any potential benefit they might gain.\textsuperscript{19}

The criticism that arbitristas offered during a time of decline in Spanish history
was in reaction to the economic, social and political issues facing the monarchy and its
subjects. Trade imbalances due to a higher amount of imports, inflation, failing wars,
disease and population decline had been consistently burdening the Spanish empire since
the turn of the seventeenth century but were taking a turn for the worse when Guevara
began to write.\textsuperscript{20} Historians have typically used the work of arbitristas to characterize the
Spain's decline, whether it truly existed or not. Very little scholarship has been done until

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Guevara, Tratado y Advertencias hechas por una mujer celosa del bien de su rey y
corrida de parte de España (1663), in Warnings to the Kings and Advice on Restoring
Spain, ed. and trans. Nieves Romero-Díaz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,
2007), 56-57.
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\textsuperscript{19} J.H. Elliot, Spain and Its World 1500-1700 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989),
243.
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\textsuperscript{20} Elizabeth A. Lehfeldt, "Ideal Men: Masculinity and Decline in Seventeenth-Century
Spain," 465.
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now on how works, like Guevara’s and other arbitrios, show how Spaniards reacted and attempted to restore Spain’s power and prominence as it weakened.\(^{21}\)

In addition, historians have typically overlooked the visible critique of masculinity in arbitrios in response to the decline in Spain. In their complaints and subsequent solutions, arbitristas used classical, medieval and sixteenth century discourse and definitions of masculine behavior to propose changes to the noble and royal classes.\(^{22}\) They condemned the idleness and excessiveness at the king’s court, characterizing it as irresponsible and immoral.\(^{23}\) Arbitristas expected and demanded better behavior from those with the most power: noble men and the king. They found their work as an important method for providing both a political and social analysis of Spain’s state. They argued that both were tied together and it was society’s misgivings that caused unfortunate political and economic times in Spain.

Despite their emphasis on the necessity of restoring Spain, the work of arbitristas was lost in the bureaucracy of Philip IV’s government or more likely, rejected. But, a few found success in the hands of these high-ranking officials and became part of a discussion among government ministers.\(^{24}\) Arbitristas even used printing presses in the hopes of influencing the larger public with their ideas and criticisms.\(^{25}\) Based on the two copies found of Guevara’s Tratado y Advertencias her work may have reached the hands of other members of the court even if it seems unlikely that it reached Philip IV.\(^{26}\)


\(^{22}\) Ibid., 466.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 467.

\(^{24}\) J.H. Elliot, Spain and Its World 1500-1700, 244.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) Isabel Barbeito Carneiro cites one version of Tratado y advertencias in the Biblioteca Nacional de España MSS 12.270 and another copy of the manuscript in Biblioteca
Although typically arbitristas were men, Guevara’s work fits in line with their efforts. Her education, her connection to high ranking officials at the court, her family’s noble status and her great-great uncle Fray Antonio de Guevara’s service to Charles V as his court historiographer, match the social status and characterization of other arbitristas at the Spanish court in the seventeenth century.

As court nobles who lacked a privanza with the king, arbitristas held a common concern for the power afforded to the privado and the increasing seclusion of king. Most nobles were not part of this inner circle and felt ostracized despite their noble birth and possession of encomiendas or land grants given to them by past monarchs. They believed that these fortunes should have allowed them to express their concerns to the government they served. While they agreed that the king possessed the natural power to rule over the people, they argued he could not do it alone or under the influence of a few people. They saw the most success in monarchs that listened to their vassals. A king needed to consider the advice of the sector of people most invested in the prosperity of the Spanish empire: the nobility. Guevara writes, “My lord, it would be a good idea to look at all this very carefully, for I am repeating what people are saying and what reaches my ears as a good vassal who wishes to serve your Majesty, who I beseech to forgive me and

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accept my genuine concern." Guevara implores that the king heed her advice. She defends her criticism as evidence of her interest in the well being of the monarchy and the rest of Spain. She also deflects any concern that may arise over the assertive nature of her criticism by suggesting that she is merely repeating what her contemporaries, other arbitristas, have said.

Many arbitristas would reside in the country and travel to court as Guevara did. Based on their reflections on the lavish and extravagant lifestyle of the court, many arbitristas disapproved of court nobles. In the seventeenth century, the nobility were urged to demonstrate constraint and live life in moderation. Arbitristas did not observe this practice among nobles at the court. They connected Spain’s decline to the materialistic character of the nobility. Lavishness was a trend at the court. Arbitristas highlighted this irresponsibility as a reason for Spain’s financial struggles.

The king financed the lavish lifestyle of the nobility in addition to his own. Most of the wealth spent by the nobility came from juros, or annuity contracts with the king in the seventeenth century. The monarchy borrowed money from the nobility. The nobility benefited from the monarchy’s seven-percent interest upon payback. They relied on these contracts as a source of income. One arbitrista, Pedro de Guzmán, worried this excess wealth given to the noble class would lead to feminization or a decline in

29 "Todo esto, Señor, conviene que se mire muy bien, y yo digo lo que dice el pueblo y lo que se me alcanza como buena vasalla y deseo de servir a Vuestra Majestad, a quien le suplico me perdone y reciba el buen cello." In María de Guevara, Tratado y advertencias, 62-63.
32 Ibid.
masculinity in the court and Spanish hierarchy. Many *arbitristas* resented the behavior of court nobles and this created a divide between the country and the court.

Guevara most likely lived between the court and Valladolid, establishing a close communication and charge over her vassals. She accounts for the feeling of a dichotomy between city and country nobles in her *Desengaños*,

> Viciousness, envy and avarice all reign over these days, and have settled heaviest upon the courts of kings and monarchs, where everyone looks out for himself and not for his king...though there are good souls and confessions are very frequent, it must be noted that not all men nor all women could afford to maintain their houses, so that life there is more miserable than that of the village.

Guevara aligns with other *arbitristas* and characterizes the court as a place crowded with nobles who operate in their own self-interest, looking out for their lives, their prosperity and their own success. While she concedes that there are well-intentioned members of the court, she says it is the debt they incur because of their lavish lifestyles, which causes them to become concerned for their finances and desperate for the attention of the king. Despite being a noble woman with an expected concern for her family’s status at the court and her financial strains, she placed her own lifestyle as a country noble above the lifestyle at the court. She emphasized the contrast between her and the nobles who were lavish and gross over spenders, jealous, greedy and self-centered at the court. She offers only one complaint about her own lifestyle,

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34 María Isabel Barbeito Carneiro, “María de Guevara,” 297.
35 “La malicia, la envidia, y la avaricia todo reina en estos tiempos; y adonde más hace su asiento, es en las Cortes de los Reyes, los Monarcas, en donde todos tiran para sí, y ninguno para su Rey...[A]unque hay buenas almas, y las confesiones se frecuenten mucho, hay que reparar en que no todos, ni todas, pueden estarse en sus casas; porque más triste vida, que la de la aldea.” In María de Guevara, *Desengaños*, 66-67.
Of this sort of men some are great names in the villages, but they are not well known at the court because they do not attend the king or live with flattery, and the monarch only knows only those who surround him closely; some are skilled, but others know only how to engage in idle talk, and when pressed they are without the foggiest notion.\footnote{\textit{Y} de estos tales hombres, hay grandes sujetos en los lugares, y no son conocidos, porque no asisten en la Corte viviendo con la lisonja, y el Monarca no conoce mas de los que le aden alrededor, que algunos tiene buena maña, y otros no saben más que la bachillería, y en apurándolos no tiene cabeza.” In María de Guevara, \textit{Desengaños}, 68-69.}

She argues that the humble country noble who refrains from fawning over the king at the court is often ignored. She complains that the king’s \textit{privados} receive the most attention and argues that they are often times less intelligent than the noble who the king ignores. She claims that because she, or any country noble, chooses not to wait on every need of the king like the \textit{privado}, her voice is not considered. María de Guevara argued that she served the king in a different manner than the \textit{privado}. She offered her advice to the king in what she claimed was his best interest.

Despite Guevara’s complaints about a country noble’s lack of access to the king, there is record of, on at least one occasion, a close interaction between the countess and the king and queen. Guevara authored a report entitled \textit{Relación de la jornada que la Condesa de Escalante hizo a la ciudad de Vitoria a besar la mano a su Majestad}, written in 1660.\footnote{Nieves Romero-Díaz, \textit{“Volume Editor’s Introduction,”} in \textit{Warnings to the Kings and Advice on Restoring Spain}, 43.} It recorded Guevara’s organization of her estate to receive the monarchs on their way to Vitoria for the marriage of their daughter and princess doña Teresa to the duke of Anjou, soon to be King Louis XIV.\footnote{Nieves Romero-Díaz, \textit{“Volume Editor’s Introduction,”} 5.} \textit{Relación de la jornada} characterizes Guevara’s reception of the Queen Mariana of Austria, “[t]he aforementioned countess responded to every question, making the queen laugh for a while—even though the queen
had little need, as she was already happy."

Upon kissing the hand of the queen, Guevara engages in conversation characterized as jovial and pleasing to the queen. At the end of their conversation the countess recalls,

The countess went to bid the queen farewell and told her that in Paris she would kiss her hand again; all the ladies laughed, believing it be a joke, to which she responded that it was not, as she was planning to litigate the house of Ortubia, which is hers and is in the possession of a nephew of the lord of Agramonte, who was in Madrid.

Guevara predicts that she will greet the monarchs when they arrive in Paris because she will be there at the same time. The presence of the countess on more than one occasion in front of the king and queen suggests that she might have been able to obtain an audience with the rulers. However, she was not held in the close confidence of the king. The event described in the Relación de la Jornada was an example of a peripheral relation typical of most nobility. However, if she greeted the rulers on more than one occasion, she may have been afforded some familiarity with the monarchs.

Later segments of the Relación de la jornada record Guevara’s encounters with two great men at the court who were both part of Olivares’ parentela, or clan: Don Luis de Haro and the Duke of Medina. The report states,

And before entering Vitoria, she came across Don Luis de Haro with his sons in a field and told him: ‘Have a pleasant trip, Don Luis.’ He nodded and responded

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39 "[A] todo respondió la dicha Condesa, haciéndola reír un rato, aunque la Reina había menester poco, que va contenta." In Relación de la jornada que la Condesa de Escalante hizo a la ciudad de vitoria a besar la mano a su Majestad, Nieves Romero-Díaz ed., Warnings to the Kings and Advice on Restoring Spain, 118-119.

40 "[Q]ue en Paris le volvería a besar la mano, riéronse todas, pareciéndoles chanza, a que respondió que no lo era proque pensaba a ir a pleitear la casa de Ortubia, que se suya y la posee un sobrino del Agramonte que estuvo en Madrid." In Relación de la jornada, 118-119.
with many courtesies, though he did not recognize her for the mask she was wearing; this confounded him, and he attempted to recognize the voice.\footnote{41}{"[Y] antes de entrar en Vitoria, en un campo topó a Don Luis de Haro con sus hijos, y le dijo: 'Buen viaje, señor Don Luis;' y él respondió e hizo muchas cotesias; no la conoció porque llevaba mascarilla; quedó confuso, queriendo conocer la voz." In \textit{Relación de la jornada}, 120-121.}

Immediately following her encounter with Don Luis de Haro, the report states, "[s]he came across the duke of Medina with all his retinue, and though she was disguised and wearing a mask, he recognized her and said to her: 'At your service my lady, she of the mask;' and she kissed his hand but did not respond so as not to be recognized by those accompanying him."\footnote{42}{"[T]opó al Duque de Medina con todo su acompañamiento, y aunque ella iba disfrazada y con mascarilla, la conoció y la dijo: 'Servidor, señora, la de la mascarilla;' y ella besó la mano y no le respondió por no ser conocida de los que le acompañaban." Ibid.}

Both men were to become the king’s \textit{privados} because their families, the Haros and the Gúzmans, respectively, had achieved recognition from the service of their relative Don Gaspar de Gúzman, the Count-Duke of Olivares, Philip IV’s first and most prominent \textit{privado}. Guevara’s encounters with these officials suggest that she had contact with them and that they recognized her at the court. However, what is curious about both of these accounts is that the author writes that Guevara masked her appearance. While one excuse for the mask was so that the entourage did not recognize her accompanying each man, “but did not respond so as not to be recognized by those accompanying him,” the use of a mask or disguise also questions whether they actually recognized her and thus, knew her at the court.\footnote{43}{"[Y] no le respondió por no ser conocida de los que le acompañaban." Ibid.}

\textit{The Relación de la jornada} served Guevara’s interest and position at the court. This document, recording her relationship with high-ranking court officials, elevates and
supports Guevara’s social status, connecting her to power not accessible by other members of the court.

While there may be room to question the validity of encounters recorded in Relación de la jornada, because of Guevara’s suspiciously masked appearance, acknowledgement of her presence and criticism at the court appears elsewhere. An ambassador from Austria to the court of Philip IV and Charles II, Count Francisco Pötting wrote in his diary in 1671, “The countess visited the Countess of Escalante, a woman who, for her years and bizarre humor, has been in the profession of making licentious remarks of all, from the most superior to the inferior.”44 This statement, written six years after her Desengaños and seven years after her Tratado y Advertencias offers speculation that both manuscripts may have been read by members of the court or talked about with those who had read her writings. However, it also suggests that officials did not appreciate her criticism and considered it inappropriate and immoral.

The copies of Guevara’s documents and the acknowledgement of her vocal and written criticism by court officials, suggest that María de Guevara’s work circulated among members of the court. The court in general was not a small grouping of individuals. Almost two thousand people were part of the king and queen’s households and the government. Living in Valladolid meant that Guevara traveled to the court just as other country nobles did. While there is one record of Guevara greeting the king and queen in Vitoria, there is no indication that she ever had the opportunity of holding a

private audience with the monarchs. Therefore, it is speculation to suggest that the king
read one of Guevara’s works. However, it is likely that the circulation of her treatise and
memorial allowed her criticism to be known at the court. Her acquaintance with privados
and the king’s illegitimate son could have helped her criticism to reach the ear of the king
but there is no evidence of this. At the very best, it suggests that Guevara’s work
potentially reached the ears of the king’s closest advisors. The diary entry of Count
Francisco Pötting in 1671 supports this theory. However, one can only hypothesize
whether officials read her work or whether they simply participated in a discussion with
an official who had read her arbitrios.

III. GUEVARA’S WORK COMPARED TO OTHER ARBITRISTAS’

Arbitristas, like Guevara, produced work in the hope of restoring Spain. One
example is Guevara’s Tratado y advertencias (1663). This treatise was emblematic of
work produced by her male counterparts and intended for the king. Guevara’s second
work of writing was Desenganos de la corte y mujeres valerosas. While Guevara
dedicated Desenganos in 1664 to Philip IV’s son, Prince Charles II, she extended her
audience beyond the prince, to noble society. In this manual, Guevara maintained her
criticism of the monarchy but instead of focusing only on the flaws of Philip IV, she saw
an opportunity to educate the heir to the throne, Charles II. She intended to educate the
future king in order to steer Spain away from further decline. Guevara’s Desenganos
presented a common theme among the work of many arbitristas who produced similar
conduct literature. Arbitristas sought to prevent what historians have labeled as a “crisis
in masculinity” in Spain. Their concern came from the poor examples of male figures of
power, such as the king, who were at fault for the poor management of Spanish economic
and political issues in the seventeenth century. In the style of her fellow arbitristas, Guevara used historical and literary examples to instruct and empower the prince and courtiers to make decisions financially, politically and socially, that supported Spain and returning its glory.

While Guevara approached this popular genre in the same way as other arbitristas had, she offered a new angle: the consideration of valorous women in history as models of power and as an important point of appreciating an incorporation of women into the political realm. Guevara agreed with the popular belief held by arbitristas that a sense of masculine dominance had to be restored to Spanish society and the monarchy. She proposed that this masculinity could be restored with the help of women who were arbitristas, like her, and women following the example of female heroines in Spanish history. These women could return this masculinity to Spain because as Guevara argued they were just as capable. She argued that women had suffered just as much as men during the decline. As noble women, wives and widows, many women were performing the same duties as men, managing their estates and representing their family’s financial and social interests. Guevara’s experiences as a countess, wife and widow, allowed her to understand the country’s needs and propose tangible solutions to Philip IV, including placing women, like herself, in positions of political power. Yet, in making this case, Guevara also argued ironically for a feminization of the government in the sense that women would become part of the leadership within the country.

The mirror for princes genre, “how to” manuals, and similar conduct literature produced to educate princes and nobility was popular in the sixteenth century. Important examples of this conduct literature are the humanist work of Desiderius Erasmus of

Guevara aligned her thoughts in *Desengaños* with those of her great-great uncle, Erasmus and other anti-Machiavellians. *Arbitristas* relied heavily on the courtesy and conduct literature of the sixteenth century. It offered a straightforward model of the masculinity that *arbitristas* believed was the remedy for Spain’s decline.

Guevara’s *Desengaños* reflects and aligns with Erasmus and her great-great uncle Fray Antonio de Guevara’s works. In the seventeenth century, the written work of *arbitristas* reflected a resurrection of bibliographic examples of famed medieval aristocrats, idealized portraits produced in chivalric romances such as *Amadís de Gaula* and the comedy *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, and courtesy and conduct literature from the sixteenth century, such as work by Fray Antonio de Guevara. These genres emphasized the appropriate model for manhood in Spain and were deemed a necessary ingredient in the work of *arbitristas* to criticize the monarchy and attempt to fix its diminished masculinity.

Guevara employed the political theory of Erasmus, Fray Antonio de Guevara and other anti-Machiavellian theorists from the sixteenth century because she considered their theories appropriate for educating a king and a prince on the best way to rule a nation.

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46 Ibid.
Her use of these theorists' works suggests that she felt her work as an arbitrasta could not be credible or successful without incorporating the voice and opinion of these historically respected authors. Erasmus's work *The Education of a Christian Prince*, published in 1516, is one of the most widely known examples of a mirror for princes manual reflected in arbitrios of the seventeenth century. Erasmus believed that the prince could not exist without the state and emphasized the importance of a relationship of respect and appreciation between both the prince and his subjects.47 Both his work and Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, written in 1513 and published in 1523, reflected a Renaissance concern for the imperialistic and dynastic ambitions that began to appear with the Medici in Italy, the Habsburgs in Spain, and the Valois in France.48 Both theories shaped the perception of monarchies across Europe and created two very opposite approaches to educating future monarchs. But the key difference between Erasmus and Machiavelli is that Erasmus stressed building relationships with the populous while Machiavelli stressed a state of fear.49

Guevara was no doubt aware of both political theologians as was her great-great-uncle Fray Antonio de Guevara who wrote two manuals in the likeness of Erasmus. In the classical resurgence during the Renaissance, Antonio de Guevara wrote *Libro de Marco Aurelio* and the *Relox de Príncipes*.50 He wrote *Libro de Marco Aurelio* in 1518 for the

49 Ibid., vii.
new King of Spain, Charles V. In this work, Antonio de Guevara used Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius as a model ruler for Charles V. He continued this approach in Relox de Príncipes in 1526, incorporating almost all of the chapters in Libro de Marco Aurelio and stressing the need for a prince to be a good Christian as Erasmus had done just ten years before. Editions of Guevara’s work circulated in the seventeenth century, attesting to his popularity and crucial contribution to this discourse on the appropriate behavior of a ruler.

María de Guevara incorporated the praise her great-great uncle gave of Marcus Aurelius, using him as a model for Charles II,

Emperor Marcus Aurelius grieves for the fall of Rome and says that when it was populated by ancient Romans it was fertile and that all was as it should be; and now that it has the misfortune of being populated by illegitimate children and foreigners. In the same way we can grieve for Spain, for all the keys—both to peace and to war—are held by foreigners.

Guevara’s criticism of political conditions in Spain looks to Marcus Aurelius’ lamentation for fall of Rome and his anxiety that foreign influences contributed to the decline. She writes of her fear of the impending fall of Spain, suggesting that foreigners are ruining Spain as Marcus Aurelius thought that they had ruined Rome. She argues Spain was overrun with foreigners, such as the Portuguese members of the Councils of War and of Finance, whom she had criticized in her Tratado y advertencias to Philip

51 Michael Mezzatesta, “Marcus Aurelius,” 624.
53 “El Emperador Marco Aurelio, llora la perdiciOn de Roma, y dice, que cuando estaba poblada de Romanos antiguos, estaba fertile, y como debía estar, y que ahora tiene la mala ventura de estar poblada de hijos espurios y extranjeros, y que esa es su perdiciOn. Lo mismo podemos llorar de España, pues todas las llaves, así de la paz, como de la guerra, tienen hoy los extranjeros.” In María de Guevara, Desengaños de la Corte y Mujeres Valerosa (1664), 84-85.
IV. She further illuminates the connection between Marcus Aurelius’ dislike of foreigners and her perspective on Spain’s current condition saying, “[i]n the same way we can grieve for Spain, for all the keys—both to peace and to war—are held by foreigners.”

Guevara laments that Spain has let its fate fall to the hands of other nations, defining the current weakness of the Spanish empire by its loss of Portugal and the rising power of other nations of Europe such as Great Britain. Guevara aligns herself with Antonio de Guevara’s vision of Marcus Aurelius as an exemplary ruler and connects the troubles of the Roman Empire to those of the Spanish Empire in the hopes of producing a strong warning for the decline of Spain to the new king, Charles II.

Guevara, citing Fray Antonio de Guevara, Marcus Aurelius and Erasmus, cautions the young prince that he must decipher who among his subjects is a flatterer and who is a true friend. In Desenganos Guevara suggests,

For in our time we have seen that when people are entrusted with those things, much goes contrary to what should. A king is obliged to know and be familiar with those to whom he gives the important positions and not to govern solely on what he is told; because sometimes a person comes along and tells him that so-and-so is appropriate for such and such a position—saying it because he has been paid to do so, or because of some connection by friendship or kinship.

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54 “Vamos ahora a los portugueses que aquí tenemos; no son más que espías dobles y solo están esperando a decir ‘viva quien venca... Señor, nunca es bueno tener el enemigo dentro de casa.” In María de Guevara, Tratado y advertencias hechas por una mujer celosa del bien de su rey y corrida de parte de España (1663), in Warnings to the Kings and Advice on Restoring Spain, ed. Nieves Romero-Díaz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 58-59.

55 “las naves, así de la paz, como de la guerra, tienen hoy los extranjeros” In Ibid.

56 “Porque hemos visto en nuestro tiempo muchas cosas en contrario, de lo que debían ser cuando se les fiaba esto. Tiene obligación un Rey de saber, y conocer, a quién da los puestos grandes, y no gobernarse solo por lo que le dicen, porque a veces llega uno y le dice, que fulano es propósito para tal puesto, y es porque se lo paga, o tiene otras dependencias de amistad, o parentesco.” In María de Guevara, Desenganos, 84-85.
Guevara proposes the idea that individuals appointed to serve the king can offer important advice but that a large motivating factor is personal gain and the prestige associated with a position of power. Guevara is perhaps also alluding to the strong presence of the *privado*, or favorite, at the court and in the decision making of the king. Erasmus also argued that the advice of the subject is paramount to the success of a king. He says, “[a] state, even if it lacks a prince, will be a state... What makes a prince a great man, except the consent of his subjects?” But, Erasmus cautions the king on those who give him advice,

>This pest has a certain attractive poison, but it acts so quickly that once the princes who rule the world are deranged by it they have allowed themselves to become playthings of the most vile flatterers and to be taken for a ride by them; these repulsively depraved little men, and sometimes even slaves, were masters of the masters of the world.\(^58\)

Erasmus sees flatterers as a large threat to the control of a monarch. The influence of others is especially powerful to a monarch who has a whole nation to rule on his own. While advice can be portrayed as helpful, sometimes it can lead to mistrust and inadvertent power given to the advisor. Among the *privados* of Philip IV was Gaspar de Guzmán, Count-Duke of Olivares, who left the palace in 1643 in scandal, leaving the Spanish people with an economic depression and the aftermath of failed attempts to put down provincial revolts like in Catalonia.\(^59\) The decisions Olivares made and the advice he gave left the monarchy in instability during the final years of Philip IV’s reign, giving Guevara cause to write both *Tratado y advertencias* and *Desengaños* because as she saw things continued to get worse.

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\(^57\) Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, 89.
\(^58\) Ibid., 55.
Guevara grew concerned over the state of the monarchy under Philip IV and wanted to see change in Charles II’s reign. In Desengaños Guevara uses Philip II as a model king for Charles II. The use of a model king in the mirror for princes genre was a popular approach to exemplifying the appropriate qualities of a monarch.

Philip II was a very successful ruler of Spain. Spain enjoyed large prosperity thanks to the annexation of Portugal in 1580, which gave Spain Atlantic coastal power, a large navy for protection, territories in South America, Africa and the Far East, a flow of precious metals and a rich economy. In addition, Philip II believed that he was crowned king in order to serve his subjects, that he must \textit{trabajar para el pueblo} in order to be a successful monarch. Guevara writes of Philip II,

\begin{quote}
This king would gather news, get to know his subjects, go to the Escorial, set out alone through the countryside, and ask the peasants, who did not recognize him, what was being said about the king. In this manner, there was nothing he was unaware of, and he knew to whom he should give the government posts, and with a single word he could have a man killed...As we have seen in the histories, there have been many kings of different sorts of character, but this monarch, Philip II, sets the example for all of them. And his grandson, whom we have today, is of no lesser wisdom and Christianity.
\end{quote}

Guevara appreciated Philip II for his willingness to listen to his subjects. She characterizes Philip II as a king concerned for his people’s needs and willing to hear their advice. She argues that he ruled justly, heeding advice. She claims his grandson, Charles II, will be no less of a great king but, he should look up to his grandfather for guidance on

\begin{footnotes}
\item[61] J.H. Elliot, \textit{Imperial Spain 1469-1716}, 249.
\item[62] “Andaba este Rey adquiriendo noticias, conociendo sujeto, ibase al Escorial, salia solo al campo, preguntaba a los labradores que no le conocian, qué se decía del Rey, con que nada ignoraba, y con esto sabía a quién había de dar los puestos, y con una palabra mataba a un hombre...Muchos Reyes se han visto de diferentes genios, como se ve en las historias, mas este Monarca puede dar ejemplo a todos: y su Nieto, que hoy tenemos, no es menos en entendimiento, y christiandad.” In María de Guevara, \textit{Desengaños}, 88-89.
\end{footnotes}
how to govern Spain successfully. Guevara points to a period in history when Spain was
a country of great masculine power, had a strong and stable economy and society. Living
in a time of instability, disappointment and declining masculinity under Philip IV, she
sees the reign of Philip II as an ideal reference point for returning Spain to its former
glory. Guevara intended her model king, Philip II, in Desenganos as an example for
Charles II and his tutors to emulate.

Concerned with protecting the heir from manipulation by the various court
factions, like the arbitristas, the king would choose a ayo y mayordomo mayor or
governor to oversee the education of the prince by selecting tutors that aligned with the
interests of the king.63 These tutors would use figures from the classical world, like those
cited in arbitrios, to exemplify the appropriate conduct of a king, using both good and
bad examples of behavior.64 The principles of being a good Christian prince such as
benevolence and intelligence were emphasized before the Reformation and in the
Counter-Reformation.65

Guevara was not an appointed tutor for Charles II. Thus, it seems unlikely that her
manual reached the hands of Charles II, let alone his tutor, but it is representative of the
current theories on education of a prince and a faction of criticism regarding the failings
of Philip IV. However, historians argue this effort made by arbitristas, such as Guevara,
to employ late medieval and sixteenth century works to revive manliness in the Spanish

63 Antonio Feros, Kingship and Favoritism in the Spain of Philip III 1598-1621, 16-17.
64 R.A. Stradling, Philip IV and the Government of Spain 1621-1665 (Cambridge:
monarchy, was disconnected from the modern crisis facing Spain. Their proposed models for manliness did not fit the modern king or noble. In the late medieval and sixteenth century being a noble by birth was not enough, one had to prove himself through his own virtues; otherwise his nobility would slip away. The nobility of the seventeenth century had no concept of the need to express their nobility by virtue. They were complacent with their title and satisfied by their wealth. Guevara's work proposes expectations of virtue in the monarch and the nobility similar to those in the sixteenth century, making her solutions disconnected from the tangible financial and political problems facing Spain at the time and character of the royal and noble class.

However, Guevara attempted to produce different models for the modern noble in Desengaños. She used the examples of virtuous historical women. These examples distinguish Guevara's efforts to restore Spain to its domination and power. Guevara's choice to include a section on valorous women in her manual is an indication she had chosen not to downplay her gender in her writing. In fact, she emphasized it more so in this manual than in her treatise Tratado y advertencias. Guevara focuses on providing examples and justifying a place for women in politics and government to Charles II in Desengaños.

Guevara uses the Queen of Zenobia, whose valor she says her great-great uncle Fray Antonio de Guevara studied, as one example. Queen Zenobia was the queen of

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Palmyra in 300 BC and reconquered part of Rome with her husband. Guevara closes her reference to Queen Zenobia stating, "[a] government of women is at times better than that of many men." Guevara uses several powerful women in history as examples of the potential impact her female contemporaries could have by exhibiting a similar sense of self-authority and becoming involved in the politics. Instead of threatening Charles II with a female's capability to wield power in their favor to achieve similar accomplishments as men, she teaches him the importance of these women. She says,

> For by my faith, if women made use of letters, they would surpass men, which is just what men fear; they do not want women to be Amazons but rather to have their hands tied, making it unbecoming for a woman to leave her corner. So how is it, then, that the reputation of women who have been valorous has been spreading throughout history?\(^{70}\)

Guevara explains to Charles II that men have always feared the power of women and labeled any behavior or activities, outside the social norms of being subservient to their husbands, as dangerous. Yet, she argues the polemic political activities of women throughout history, like those in her examples, were widely known, acknowledged and even honored in literature. Guevara’s words also give off a sense that she is trying to rally women to entertain the idea of letter writing, emphasizing the power it can give women and using her own efforts as a prime example. She says, “There is no doubt that if women who were known for their spirit and valor were allowed on councils and in offices, they

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\(^{68}\) Nieves Romero-Diaz ed., “Notes” In *Warnings to the Kings and Advice on Restoring Spain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 129.

\(^{69}\) “[Q]ue el gobierno de las mujeres a veces suele ser mejor, que el de muchos hombres.” In María de Guevara, *Desengaños*, 70-71.

\(^{70}\) “Pues a fe, que si usasen las mujeres de las letras, que les sobrepusieran a los hombres; pero esto temen ellos, y no quieren que sean Amazonas, sino tenerles las manos atadas, con que no parece bien, que las mujeres salgan de su rincón; pues ¿cómo en las historias se extiende la fama de las mujeres, que han sido valerosas?” In María de Guevara, *Desengaños*, 72-73.
would give us as much good advice as the keenest councilors."\textsuperscript{71} She suggests to Charles II that women could manage positions within the king’s government, on his councils and in his offices, as well as or perhaps better than many of the men Guevara witnessed hold office under Philip IV. By asserting that women could do a better job, Guevara blames the decline of Spain on the men in power acting as trusted advisors to Philip IV.\textsuperscript{72} She implies in her writing to Charles II that he should consider appointing women to hold offices and council positions in his government. This argument aligns with the popular criticism of \textit{arbitristas} on the declining power and masculinity of the monarchy and the court. They believed that the court was far too decadent and this threatened the masculinity of the courtiers.\textsuperscript{73} This feminization of royal and noble men was through their idleness, gross financial mismanagement, and excessive leisure activities. However, there are no other \textit{arbitristas}, like Guevara, who appear to offer women in place of men in the government as a solution to the decline of Spain. Guevara puts her own female twist on her reaction to the decline and its connection with a weak sense of masculinity in the government and society. She suggests that women can act as better men. Her push for women to be part of the political circle puts a feminist frame on Guevara’s efforts to instruct the king and the prince on restoring Spain. No male \textit{arbitristas} ever considered women as a fine alternative to the inabilities of men in government positions.

\textsuperscript{71} “Es sin duda, que si algunas mujeres que se conocen de ánimo, y valor les entrenan en los Consejos, y juntas, los dieran tan buenos, como los más acertados Consejeros.” In María de Guevara, \textit{Desengaños}, 74-75.


\textsuperscript{73} Elizabeth A. Lehfeldt, “Ideal Men: Masculinity and Decline in Seventeenth-Century Spain,” 471.
Guevara’s emphasis on the importance of considering and including women in politics is a key difference that makes her work unlike that of Erasmus and Fray Antonio de Guevara. Neither author ever proposed women for government positions or asserted the abilities of women over men. She is not shy about including this emphasis in her manual. Yet, this major difference may have all together gone unnoticed, as she was neither an appointed tutor of Charles II nor a privado, making it unlikely that actual royal tutors used her manual to educate the prince. While her genealogical relationship to Antonio de Guevara and her nobility gave her a background of prestige, she lacked the important proximity Antonio de Guevara had to Charles V as his court historiographer. Her writing reflects current theory on the conduct of a prince, originating from the popular works of Erasmus and Machiavelli, which could have drawn attention. But, the popularity of these theories may have been exhausted by other arbitristas who authored conduct literature or other mirror for princes manuals. She argues in Tratado y advertencias, “My Lord, it would be a good idea to look at all this very carefully, for I am repeating what other people are saying ad what reaches my ears as a good vassal who wishes to serve your Majesty, whom I beseech to forgive me and accept my genuine concern.”74 She suggests that she is merely repeating the concerns of others and pleads with the king that he consider her advice as a humble servant to restoring Spain. Yet, the king, his advisors and other courtiers overlook her female voice, which in itself would seem likely to draw attention. Even her prestige as a noble and the likeness of her theories to Erasmus and Fray Antonio de Guevara do not appear to be enough to

74 “Todo esto, Señor, me alcanza como buena vassalla y deseo de servir a Vuestra Majestad, a quien le suplico me perdone y reciba el buen celo.” In María de Guevara, Tratado y advertencias, 54-55.
transcend the boundaries of her gender. What seems most important in characterizing the success and originality of Guevara’s work in history is the new angle she brings to the mirror for princes genre: including women as models for the prince.

IV. GUEVARA AND THE 17th CENTURY SPANISH POLITICAL VOICE

It is important to examine seventeenth century Spanish women’s history, specifically the female public voice and the extent of women’s political involvement, to understand why María de Guevara was able to express her ardent criticism of Philip IV’s monarchy and why she thought she would succeed in influencing court politics and government policy. Comparing Guevara’s work with the more popular methods of the few female authors during this period will shed light on Guevara’s struggle to gain an audience for her criticism. Spanish women lived in a dual world where matriarchy and patriarchy coexisted and there were times when women had opportunities to play an influential role. During the decline of Spain in the seventeenth century, men and women concerned about the economic and political struggles, burdened by heavy taxation and unsuccessful wars, chose to make their opinions known through several methods of written expression: prose, poetry and plays.

Of the few female writers at the time, a majority were nuns who produced their work in the privacy of the convent and not for public consumption. The convent was a place where women could freely express themselves without a male audience. Since most female authors wrote from within the convent and for the convent, they were not commentators on the political world outside the walls.
A few aristocratic women like Guevara wrote for the public. Most of these writers used allegories in poetry and plays to express their views, but Guevara's work was more overtly political. The voices of these women surfaced as a response to the weakening of absolute male dominance. Using her treatise and manual Guevara questioned the strength of the masculinity in the Spanish government and the ability of its men to lead and maintain a nation of power. Guevara criticized the feminization of courtiers and the king when she wrote about the proper behavior of noble and royal men in her *Desenganos*, saying this had weakened the court and distracted it from its principal duty to lead a strong nation. The work of other authors and playwrights during this time helps to illuminate whether Guevara's work was similar. A similarity between her work and that of many men of the era suggests that Guevara was one of a few women writing on topics usually the province of male authors at the court. Her work incorporates both male and female perspectives and responses to the absolutist monarchy. At the same time her work shows a rare female voice at the court.

The relationship among power, gender, class and marital status in Spanish society helps to further illustrate how Guevara was able to voice her opinion without much difficulty. Even so, Spain was behind other European nations, especially Great Britain and France, where women were gaining political power.

In general in seventeenth century Spain nuns produced a majority of the written work and were not concerned with the inequalities of the outside world because they had found a space for expression and power in the convent. These writings documented the

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76 Lisa Vollendorf, *The Lives of Women: A New History of Inquisitional Spain* (Nashville:
creativity and history of religious women in seventeenth century Spain.\textsuperscript{77} Texts authored by nuns circulated within the convent to confessors and other sisters. Very few made it to the outside world.\textsuperscript{78}

Nuns typically wrote conduct literature, in the form of prose and plays. Nuns like Sor Marcela de San Félix (1605-1688), used drama and prose to communicate the theories and practices of their order. Sor Marcela de San Félix wrote a humorous drama, “Muerto del apetitio,” or “The Death of Desire” depicting the chaste life of a nun, theories on gender in religion and educating novices on the life of nuns.\textsuperscript{79} Living a cloistered life, nuns who were authors did not seek to draw men’s attention to their work, but they did use their writings to counter the idea that women were inferior.\textsuperscript{80}

While the purpose and content of the conduct literature by nuns was not the same as Guevara’s, the nature of these works and their limited audience further point out the uniqueness of Guevara’s work.

Outside of the spiritual world, few women published works in the seventeenth century. Ana Caro Mallén de Soto (c.1600-?) received payment for her work as a poet and playwright and María de Zayas y Sotomayor (c. 1590-?) wrote prose, fiction and dramas for public performance.\textsuperscript{81} Both of these authors and playwrights projected their criticism of the prescribed gender obligations of men and women through their female characters’ exploration of eroticism and violations of sexual norms.\textsuperscript{82} María de Zayas’

\textsuperscript{77} Lisa Vollendorf, \textit{The Lives of Women}, 57.
\textsuperscript{78} Lisa Vollendorf, \textit{The Lives of Women}, 97.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 96 and 100.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 185.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 57-58.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 76.
works are far more sexually provocative and questioning of gender norms than anything Guevara ever wrote. Zayas questioned gender obligations, proposing the idea that women experienced the world differently from men. The works of Zayas and Soto do demonstrate a response to the "crisis of masculinity." But, they formulate this response in terms of their desire to alter gender expectations in the wave of this crisis. While Guevara has a similar intention, her response is to try to alter the political order not merely to change society's understanding of gender and sexuality.

The more dominant form of expression at the court sheds light on Guevara's difficulty in conveying her criticism to an audience that was willing to listen. Guevara's work was more closely aligned with that of male essayists, playwrights and poets. Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645), a satirist and poet, and a contemporary of Guevara, was among many men who wrote critically of Philip IV's government. In his *Política de Dios y Gobierno de Cristo* (1626-1655) he condened the power given to Philip IV's privados and addressed the king directly. Like Guevara, Quevedo tells the king that he must work for his subjects. He calls the king undeserving of his own glory because he allows his privados to represent him to his subjects. Quevedo argues that the privado's office diminishes the king's power.

84 "Muy poderoso y muy alto y muy excelente Señor: los monarcas sois jornaleros: tanto mereceís como trabajador. El ocio es perdido del salario, y quien descansado han os recibió en su viña por obreros, mal os pagará el jornal que él gano así no le ganais." Translated by ARH. In Francisco de Quevedo, *Política de Dios y Gobierno de Cristo*, in *Obras* ed. Aureliano Fernandez-Guerra y Orbé (Madrid: Bibliotecta de autores, 1852), 69.
Similarly, Guevara expressed her disapproval of *privados*, but did so more indirectly than Quevedo. Still, she maintained an assertive and critical tone similar to Quevedo’s. She writes, “Your Majesty knows quite well that I can write books and memorials, which is why I dare to write this one, concerned as I am about the service they render your Majesty, and tired of hearing that no one dares express what he feels, for fear of being swallowed by dragons who take everything for themselves.”

While Guevara does claim that the *privado* blocks the courtiers’ access to the king by considering only advice that he sees relevant to his own agenda, she does not outright suggest that the *privado* is the obstacle. Instead, she suggested that the king consider her advice because many courtiers feared offering their own, concerned that their view would be overlooked.

Men who were lyricists, playwrights and poets also provided their services to the king, showcasing their works at the court. Philip IV and his *privado* commissioned work from a great number of authors in order to present the king in a favorable light and propagate a glorious image of the monarchy. However, sometimes these works also had a critical message for the monarchy.

Men dominated these genres at the court and women merely made an appearance through the female characters of writers like Calderón de la Barca and Quevedo. Calderón de la Barca was well known for his mastery of the three-act play written for the public, encompassing tragedy and comedy, known as a *comedia*. His *auto sacramentals*

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85 “Bien sabe Vuestra Majestad que sé yo hacer libros y memorials, y así me atrevo a hacer este, celosa del servicio de Vuestra Majestad y harta de oír decir que nadie se atreve a decir lo que siente, porque no los traguen los dragones que todo lo aplican para sí.” In María de Guevara, *Tratado y advertencias*, 56-57.

were short allegorical performances meant to instruct the public on the Catholic doctrine. In Barca’s *auto sacramental, La protestación de la fe* (1656), he dramatizes the story of Queen Christina of Sweden, who was of interest to the intensely Catholic society in Spain because she had chosen to convert to Roman Catholicism in her predominantly Protestant country. In *La protestación de la fe*, Barca alludes to the queen through his fictional character, Cristina and in his counterpart *comedia, Afectos de odio y amor*, he calls her Christerna. The presence of a controversial and foreign female figure in a play like Barca’s suggests that the image of women in positions of power, like Queen Christina, may have created and supported a space for women like Guevara, who chose to write critiques of society’s structure without very much concern for their gender. It also suggests that queens were the only respected powerful females at the court.

Like Barca, Guevara also uses female figures of power to support her argument that women’s voices deserved to be heard. She includes biblical and historical figures in her *Desengaños*. She writes, “King Ferdinand goes to war against Granada, and Queen Isabella, loving him so and being valiant, refuses to let him go alone. She rides alongside him, on horseback, encouraging the people. They gain Granada and many other cities and thereby cleanse Spain of Moors.” Guevara uses Queen Isabella I of Castile and León as someone whom Charles II should emulate. She highlights the spirit, valor and ardor

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88 Mary Lorene Thomas, “Conversions of the Woman Monarch,” 143.
89 Ibid.
90 “Sale el Rey don Fernando a las guerras de Granada, y la Reina doña Isabel como le quería bien, y era valerosa, no le quiso dejar solo, va a su lado caballo alentando la gente, ganan a Granada, y otras muchas Ciudades, con que limpiaron a España.” In María de Guevara, *Desengaños*, 76-77.
Isabella has for the Catholic vision of Spain. Guevara writes of Isabella’s support for Ferdinand, but does not distinguish her from playing a submissive female role. Still Isabella’s role in encouraging the people alongside Ferdinand in their conquest of Granada offers an alternative image: her strong and powerful position in Spain’s history.

Like Queen Isabella of Castile, Empress María, Margaret of the Cross and Queen Margaret of Austria, who were all powerful women during Philip III’s reign, also provided inspiration and justification for women of noble status, like Guevara and Padilla, to offer their opinions and position themselves in politics.\(^{91}\)

Many other female authors and playwrights were well educated and were afforded this education because of their upper class background. María de Zayas was from a noble family just as Guevara and Luisa María de Padilla Manrique (1590-1646), the Countess of Aranda. Padilla is the other known female arbitrista and a contemporary of Guevara’s. She wrote two books called *Lágrimas de la nobleza* (1639) and *Ideas de nobles y sus desempeños* (1644).\(^{92}\) In the former, she wrote about her grievances with the noble class, underlining their laziness, immoral practices such as gambling and the common mistreatment of servants in their households.\(^{93}\) In her *Ideas de nobles*, Padilla instructed men on how to be fair in government, what a noble child should learn and the proper education of the noble class.\(^{94}\) Padilla focused on a social critique of the noble class and the flaws plaguing their social conduct. She concerned herself with improving the state of masculinity through conduct literature. This was a common effort made by arbitristas to restore Spain. However, Padilla’s work focused more on the social behavior of nobles

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\(^{91}\) See Magdalena S. Sánchez, *The Empress, the Queen and the Nun*.  
\(^{92}\) Ibid., 181.  
\(^{93}\) Ibid.  
\(^{94}\) Magdalena S. Sánchez, *The Empress, the Queen and the Nun*, 181.
than the contribution that behavior made to the decline of Spain. By contrast, in Guevara’s *Tratado y advertencias*, she concerned herself with making tangible changes such as: replacing certain government officials, altering Spain’s course in the war with Portugal, and making policy changes to help Spain recover from its financial crisis. In this effort, Guevara’s *Tratado y advertencias* was more in touch with the state of contemporary Spanish society because it proposed physical changes to the government’s structure and policy and did not focus on attempting to re-teach the meaning of nobility.

Guevara wrote about her grievances with the noble class and the poor treatment of women by men in *Desenganos*. In this way she presented themes similar to Padilla’s conduct literature but connected them to Spain’s political decline. Although she dedicated this work to educating Charles II, she expands her audience to include the noble class, as they were, according to an overwhelming majority of arbitristas, an integral part of the process of restoring Spain to its former glory. In addition, she catalogs her criticism of the ills of noble society for Charles II in the hopes that he will be able to set a better example for his subjects socially and thus, alter Spain’s course politically.

In chapter 3 of *Desenganos*, “De las desantenciones que tienen los hombres con las mujeres propias,” Guevara criticizes the relationship between men and women in a marriage,

For though a woman gives little advice, he who does not follow it is mad; and how unfortunate he who does the opposite. Married men, respect your wives, because God gave them to you as companions, and do not throw them to the den of lions, as was done with Daniel. For God shows, tolerance, but not forever. And since you men presume to know better and take for yourselves the reins of

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government and its offices, tolerate and handle your wives’ dispositions with prudence; because he who knows the most will suffer the most.96

Guevara urges Charles II to listen to a woman’s advice. She argues that any man who does not heed the advice of a woman will be sorry. While she claims to dedicate this work for Charles II’s education, she begins to direct her advice to a more general “you men.” Here, Guevara’s work takes an angle similar to Padilla’s as she expands her audience to the noble class, men and women. She tells “married men” that they must show their wives respect because God gave women to men as their companions. Her writing becomes less about proposing a solution and more about advocating for women, who did not have a voice before a weakened sense of masculinity caused Spain’s decline.

Her *Desenganos* possesses a pedagogical tone in comparison to her *Tratados y advertencias*, as she educates men to do better by these women and bring back the chivalry that once existed in Spanish society.

Continuing with the conduct literature element of *Desenganos*, chapters 5 and 6, “Que trata de los desenganos de la corte, y vida quieta de la aldea” and “De cómo se han de portar los señores que viven en sus lugares,” present the partiality most *arbitristas* had for the countryside. They possessed a disdain for the excessive and irresponsible behavior of the court nobility. She argues,

> The best-governed republic is Vitoria, where neither carriages nor chairs are allowed, because there are poor noblemen and rich merchants who surpass them. All that which is brought from outside to be sold must first be held three days and

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96 “[P]orque aunque el de la mujer es poco, el que no le tome es loco; y qué desgraciado es, el que halla lo contrario. Señores casados, estimad a vuestras mujeres, pues os las dio Dios por compañeras, y no las arrojéis, como Daniel, en el lago de los Leones, que Dios consiente, y no para siempre: y pues presumir los hombres, que sabéis más, y tomáis para vosotros los gobiernos, y puestos, tolerad, y llevad con prudencia las condiciones de vuestras mujeres, pues quien más sabe, más ha de sufrir.” In María de Guevara, *Desenganos*, 84-85.
used to supply the local residents before the merchandise can be bought by the middleman. Little of this is done at the court since the middlemen go out on the roads to steal and then later resell at twice the price. Everything is allowed and nothing is punished.  

Guevara asserts that she is highly qualified to offer her advice. She points to her governing of estates within the Republic of Vitoria, part of the Basque region of Spain, as far superior to that of any count or countess’ governing in any other region of Spain, including the court in Madrid. She argues that the Republic of Vitoria is run justly and without corruption. In comparison, she cites the theft of merchandise by middlemen at the court and the inflated price they charged for these stolen goods. She argues that this never happens in Vitoria or the countryside. While she disparages the court in Madrid for its immoral behavior, and praises the behavior in her own region, she also uses this moment to assert her capabilities as a countess. The work of this arbitrista from the countryside reflects the tension felt between those nobles at the court and close to the king and those who lived within reach of Madrid but were not in the king’s favor.

In chapter 6, Guevara opens by addressing “señores” or lords. She continues to address a larger audience of noble men and women. She begins, “Dear gentlemen, life is not only a matter of looking for peace of body; we must also seek peace for the soul. In the first place, a lord must set a good example for his vassals.” She emphasizes the need for a lord to act appropriately so that his vassals will follow his good example. She

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97 “La República más bien gobernada, que hay, es la de Vitoria, donde no se consienten conches ni sillas; porque hay Caballeros pobres y Mercaderes ricos, que los sobrepujaran. Todo lo que traen a vender afuera, hasta que pasan tres días y se abastecen los vecinos, no compran los revendones, que poco se hace de esto en la Corte, pues salen a los caminos a quitarlo, para venderlo al doble, todo se permite, y nada se castiga.” In María de Guevara, Desenganos, 98-99.

98 “Señores míos, no todo ha de ser buscar la quietud del cuerpo, que también hemos menester buscar la del alma; en primer lugar debe un señor dar buen ejemplo a sus vasallos.” In María de Guevara, Desenganos, 99-100.
directs lords to follow her advice. While Guevara focuses on addressing lords, she does relate her advice back to the court and to the impending reign of Charles II,

A lord has two servants and the two are in conflict, so that what one does the other undoes; what is the lord to do in this case? Look to see which of the two is worthier and let the other go. Otherwise the house will never be well governed, and the other servants will take sides; and that is neither good policy nor good government, which go together. We all have to give account closely to God for what each of us has received from His hand, for He only made us stewards in his life...An even more careful account will be asked of the pope, a bishop, a monarch, a potentate, a lord, and those to whom God has given so much to account for.99

Guevara advises lords on how to mediate conflicts between their servants. She suggests that one servant must be let go in order to avoid a divide in the house and poor control of the household. She connects her advice to a theological statement: God holds individuals accountable for their actions. Guevara continues by suggesting that while God expects accountability among lords, he expects an even greater accountability among high-ranking religious figures, close advisors to the king and the monarch himself. She underlines her concern for decisions made by the monarchy and brings in a higher power to suggest that king is subject to God’s judgment. This was a prevalent theme in arbitirios. Arbitristas placed the blame and responsibility for restoring Spain on the king and the highest-ranking nobles at the court. They were meant to set an example for everyone else by maintaining a sense of piety and constraint, eliminating the lavishness

99 “Tiene el señor dos criados, y están opuestos, y lo que el uno hace, deshace el otro, ¿qué es lo que debe hacer el señor en este caso?; mirar cuál de los dos es de más provecho, y despedir al otro, porque de otra manera nunca estará la casa bien gobernada, y habrá bandos en ella entre los demás criados; y no es buena política, ni gobierno; que estén juntos. Gran cuenta tenemos que dar a Dios, cada uno de lo que ha recibido de su mano, pues solo nos hizo mayordomos de por vida, y nos ha de tomar las cuentas en la otra...Mayor cuenta tendrá que dar el Pontífice, el Obispo, el Monarca, el Potentado, el señor, y aquellos a quien Dios ha dado mucho de qué darla.” In María de Guevara, Desengaños, 102-103.
and decadence the effeminized the court. Guevara’s warning to the king is threatening but it serves her purpose: to gain more attention for her work.

In their conduct literature, both Guevara and Padilla directed their criticism of social and political ills toward men. While many behavior manuals written by men called women lazy, dishonest and promiscuous, Guevara and Padilla turned these criticisms around and pointed them at their male counterparts, pointing out the growing crisis in masculinity. Both women boldly wrote for a male audience, holding men accountable for corruption among the noble class and Philip IV’s struggling government. Guevara and Padilla, two female arbitristas, offered a female perception on the declining masculinity of Spain. Their work alters the criticism typically provided by arbitristas by invoking female motivations for criticizing male mismanagement of the country. Guevara and Padilla saw this period in Spain as their moment to assert themselves and their political opinions.

While Guevara and Padilla were attempting to influence the monarch in Spain, in other parts of Europe women were gaining greater access to power. Women were emerging in the public sphere, expressing their opinions and raising questions about the male hierarchy that had governed European societies for so long. In other countries there was more female voices from all classes, not just from the fortunate women of noble birth. While the idea that women were not meant to have a political voice, or for that matter a public one, was the most prevalent in England in the 1640s, an increasing number of middle class women began to print their ideas on political, religious, social

100 Elizabeth A. Lehfeldt, “Ideal Men: Masculinity and Decline in Seventeenth-Century Spain,” 471.
and economic matters. In England, the idea of a nation-state and its monarchy became further altered as women moved into even more political power. While many queens were the willful wives of kings, others were widows acting as regents or were given power because the monarchy lacked a male heir. These fortunes left them with incredible roles in the political structure of England as exhibited by the reign of Mary I, Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart. In England circulated pamphlet literature and dramas written in the sixteenth and seventeenth century carried on a debate over women’s abilities in public and private life. Women of aristocratic birth had long exercised their political influence privately. In France, women of aristocratic birth wrote for a public audience using the printing press to create a public space that lay outside the limitations imposed by the government and the church.

Traditionally historians have labeled the Spanish government of this era as an absolute monarchy because of the closed relationship between the king and his privado. But, even so, more recently historians have concluded that there was decentralization of political authority that included men and women. Women’s political participation was

104 Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney, and Debra Barrett-Graves, “Introduction,” High and Mighty Queens, 3.
either formal or informal. Informal or “behind the scenes” means were more common than formal because typically the private sphere was regarded as female and the public sphere was male.

Many historians agree that women like Empress María, Margaret of the Cross and Queen Marianna of Austria, who were all close to Philip III, used informal means to create and develop their political authority through the manipulation of the expectations of their gender as pious and weak. These women used melancholic ills, private conversations at intimate prayer sessions with the king, and pregnancy to influence the decisions of Philip III and maintain a strong connection with the Habsburgs in Austria.

Political historians often break down political authority in early modern society into two. Power is the ability to shape political events and authority is formally recognized power, such as the regency of a queen. Women had power but typically not authority and this power came from the examples of influential marriage arrangements, letters, rumors, giving advice and participating in riots and demonstrations. These examples have provided a wider concept of political history in early modern Europe, expanding it to include the ways women participated in politics. Guevara’s approach to the monarch was different. She used her written words, as well as her authority as the countess of Escalante, to gain influence. She was not as powerful as a regent queen, like Marianna of Austria, who was Charles II’s mother and regent queen for most of his life.

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110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
She was not a woman who manipulated expectations of her gender. Her noble birth put her in a position to express her opinion in the public sphere through *Tratados y advertencias* and *Desenganos*. Just as it was true for women in France and England, Guevara’s aristocratic birth was an important part of her ability to seek out her fellow nobles, the court, the *privados* and the king as her audience, thereby gaining a public space to express her opinions on matters of state and politics.

Modern research proposes that women at the court were expected to use their authority to help friends and to achieve important relationships just as men did.\(^{113}\) Some historians also argue that while men were not always comfortable with these activities of women, often feeling threatened by them, men were also uncomfortable with the power achieved by other men because of divisions between factions.\(^{114}\)

Spanish women lived in a dual world where matriarchy and patriarchy coexisted.\(^{115}\) Matriarchy filled a need that written law or patriarchy could not fill and so women had some agency that was uncontested.\(^{116}\) This need for matriarchy may have fostered noble society’s expectation that women of the court would use their authority to their advantage. This reasoning could have helped them receive attention or demonstrate influence on court decisions. Guevara’s attempts to influence policy through her writing and advice did not receive condemnation because society recognized her as a noble. As a woman, her power increased because of her birthright.

\(^{113}\) Allyson Poska, “How Women’s History Has Transformed,” 9.

\(^{114}\) Ibid.


In her third marriage, after being left a widow twice before, Guevara married Luis Andrés Velázquez de Velasco, a gentleman-in-waiting to Philip IV’s illegitimate who fought in the war with Portugal.\textsuperscript{117} Matriarchy empowered women to control property they either inherited from their family or received as widows, making important financial decisions that required political action.\textsuperscript{118} Her husband’s service to Philip IV in the Spanish army provided a motive for Guevara’s political action. Guevara writes in her *Tratados y advertencias*,

How does your Majesty explain the advice you are offered, given that a nobleman, the owner of very illustrious houses, who for twelve years has served in the current war, today finds himself imprisoned for his King, and not only has gone without reward, but has his pensions taken from him, as are those of his wife, with whom he left his property pledged in order to serve? Nor can she maintain her house with a small pension, despite having the one from her four grandparents who supported her with great ostentation, and who brought many victories to Spain?\textsuperscript{119}

The Portuguese imprisoned Luis Andrés Velázquez de Velasco during the military campaigns of Entremoz and Évora of 1663.\textsuperscript{120} Guevara was left to tend to her family’s estates and she airs her economic problems with the king. She states that Philip IV has left her husband, a man who has served for twelve years in the war with Portugal, and his family in a financial strain. Guevara stresses the difficulty she has in maintaining her


\textsuperscript{118} Helen Nader, “Introduction: The World of the Mendozas,” 3-4.

\textsuperscript{119} “[Q]ué razón halla Vuestra Majestad a lo que le aconsejan, para que un caballero, dueño de unas casas muy ilustres y que a doce años sirve en Guerra viva, y que hoy está prisionero por su Rey, no sólo se le ha hecho ninguna merced, pero que se le está prisionero por su Rey, no sólo se le ha hecho ninguna merced, pero que se le está quitando sus juros y los de su mujer, con que él dejó a su hacienda empeñada para ir a servir y ella no puede sustentat su casa con una medianía, teniendo la de sus cuatro abuelos que la sustentaba con mucha ostentación y dieron muchas victoria[s] a España?” In María de Guevara, *Tratados y advertencias*, 54-55.

\textsuperscript{120} Nieves Romero-Díaz, “Volume Editor’s Introduction,” 5-6.
property with these financial strains. *Tratado y advertencias* is an example of the empowerment Guevara received when her husband left her to take care of their property and her subsequent political action: writing to Philip IV. Guevara’s case demonstrates the impact of property rights bestowed upon a wife and how with her status as countess these property rights mollified her gender.

Guevara would also inherit her husband’s property upon his death. Having been a widow twice before, she had previously experienced the power of property inheritance and had come to collect a large amount of estates.\(^{121}\) Widowhood was a status in which many women obtained the authority that their deceased husbands once had. Noble women especially gained an advantage from their husbands’ death. This was Guevara’s experience. While a husband’s death removed the protection widows had when their husbands were alive, wealthy women were left in control over family property and finances and thus, legal and economic independence.\(^{122}\) This form of property rights bestowed upon a widow would have also given Guevara a status of power and reduced concerns over her gender.

María de Guevara’s writings fall in line with men and women’s writings during the reign of Philip IV and the beginning of Charles II’s, in terms of their concerns over the monarchy, the noble class and the court. Guevara, like several other authors such as Francisco de Quevedo, was responding to the sheltered monarchy and the puppeteer strings of the *privado* during a period of serious decline in Spain. She felt personally affected as a wife and countess solely managing the financial strain of her family’s

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\(^{121}\) Nieves Romero-Díaz, “Volume Editor’s Introduction,” 5.

estates. She responded politically, offering her voice and her ardent advice to Philip IV and the future king Charles II. She used her personal experience to characterize her concern for the decline of Spain having felt some of its effects.

Guevara was part of a small category of women who chose to seek a public sphere for their criticism through the faction of arbitristas and their written arbitrios. They voiced opinions similar to their male counterparts but demonstrated an experience that was different from men. They wanted to be heard because they too as wives, widows and aristocrats were feeling the burden of the weakening monarchy in the 1660s. Women like Guevara were successful in creating a public space for themselves in letters, manuals, poetry and plays that they attempted to share with their intended male audience. It is difficult to tell whether these women successfully influenced court politics and government policy, but it is apparent that women, who had the opportunity to voice their opinions, because they were afforded the right birth, class and marital status, chose to do so.

V. GUEVARA'S EFFORT TO CREATE A PLACE FOR WOMEN IN POLITICS

Guevara expressed her criticism and opinions to the monarchy through the more sharp and honest styles of a treatise, and a mirror for princes manual. She avoided the indirect allegorical method of using a play or a poem to make her point. This put her in the company of arbitristas, who were mostly male. These authors needed power and political connections to be considered credible by the court, so it was particularly difficult for women to use these genres. Treatises and mirror for princes manuals highlighted the flaws of the monarchy, expressed concern and offered resolutions for returning Spain to its former glory. Plays and poetry were representations or measurements of popular
opinion or criticism of the monarchy at the time. These genres disguised their opinions in
the form of comedies, hypothetical characters, and presented situations mocking real
events at the court.

Guevara’s use of decidedly masculine forms of expression: the treatise and the
mirror for princes manual, allowed her to speak more frankly about her opinions on the
state of Spanish politics, economics and society. However, using this framework,
Guevara argued on behalf of power for women, saying they could fulfill the masculine
roles of leadership, decision-making, control and dominance, and could replace the
weakened masculinity of the noble counselors and advisors at the court. She pointed to
other powerful, successful, respected and valorous women in history. She encouraged
competent and opinionated women to author their own works of advice. Here, she was
able to speak to a larger audience; the nobility, including noble women. This, however,
hints that she may have expected little attention from the king and his advisors, and that
she was relying on her fellow nobles to read, support and act upon her opinions. In this
way, Guevara appears to be acknowledging society’s limits on her gender. By using a
masculine means to express her opinions she was trying to transcend those boundaries.

Knowing her gender would be a cause for concern as she adamantly argued
against the king’s policies in *Tratado y advertencias*, she writes, “Your Majesty may say:
who is a woman to meddle in this? To which I respond: how sad that we women come to
understand what is happening as well as men do, but feel it even more.”

Left, as a
widow, with the responsibility of managing the estates of her husband and her family, she

123 “Dirá Vuestra Majestad: ¿quién mete a una mujer en esto? A que respondo que harta
lástima es que lo lleguemos a entender las mujeres tan bien como los hombres y a sentirlo
argued that her position in society enabled her to understand and experience the failings of the Spanish government. She felt the effects of the decline as much as any man performing the same duties as head of his estate, and representing his family at the court. She asserts that perhaps as a woman she could understand the hardships even more than men since she was playing a dual role as a woman and as an estate owner. She claims this experience provides her with the qualification necessary to criticize the monarchy’s poor handling of the political and economic crisis. She questions the male control in the Spanish state by arguing that women have suffered as much as men during this downturn and can offer better solutions.¹²⁴

She was cautious about the tone she used with the king, fearing that as a woman, it would cause alarm and detract from her effort to air criticism of the monarchy, the court and the nobility in order to restore Spain. She writes, “Forgive me, your Majesty, but since I have read so much, I pride myself on being curious, and I dare speak to you in this manner.”¹²⁵ She offers Philip IV an apology for her forwardness and blames it on her curiosity and her education. But, Guevara also asserts pride in her knowledge and interest in the state of the monarchy. In her treatise she concludes by offering,

My Lord, it would be a good idea to look at all this very carefully, for I am repeating what people are saying and what reaches my ears as a good vassal who wishes to serve your Majesty, whom I beseech to forgive me and accept my genuine concern. Would that I were an Amazon at this moment, and that everyone in Spain were an Amazon, to return her honor and the honor of my king. May

¹²⁴ “Your Majesty may say: who is a woman to meddle in this? To which I respond: how sad that we women come to understand what is happening as well as men do, but feel it even more.” In María de Guevara, Tratado y advertencias, 50-51.
¹²⁵ “[P]erdone Vuestra Majestad, que como yo he leído tanto, preciéndome de esta curiosidad, me atrevo a decírlos así.” In María de Guevara, Tratado y advertencias, 50-51.
God watch over you for a thousand centuries and grant you a long succession and protection for these kingdoms.\textsuperscript{126}

Guevara’s interest and investment in restoring Spain to its former glory originates in the opinions of her contemporaries and reflects a genuine concern for the state. She uses the image of the Amazon to shed a positive light on her criticism, depicting it as a fervent effort to return Spain to its golden years. Literature from the sixteenth and seventeenth century had typically depicted the image of the Amazon as a ferocious heroine, a strong and manly woman.\textsuperscript{127} Guevara argues that if all Spaniards were Amazons, Spain would at once return to its former glory. Guevara uses Isabella I and the women of Ávila to capture examples from Spanish history to display the fearlessness and bravery of women.\textsuperscript{128} Isabella’s valiant effort and insistence on going into battle with her husband in Granada is the character Guevara envisions for all of Spain. Citing a “crisis of masculinity” in Spain, Guevara proposes a manly female as a symbolic image of the determination, pride, valor, sense of power and control every Spaniard, not just noble men or the king, should have in order to bring Spain back to an age of glory, political and economic stability.

Guevara crafted her work to resemble as closely as possible the work of her fellow male arbitristas. She was careful to point out that male contemporary authors offered the same opinions and in works similar to hers. However, she could not hide the

\textsuperscript{126} "Todo esto, Señor, conviene que se mire muy bien; y yo digo lo que dice el pueblo y lo que se me alcanza como buena vasalla y deseo de servir a Vuestra Majestad, a quien le suplico me perdone y reciba el buen celo, que en esta ocasi6n quisiera ser una amazona y que todos fuesen en España para volver por la honra de ella y la de mi Rey, a quien guarde Dios mil siglos con mucha sucesión y amparo de estos reinos." In María de Guevara, \textit{Tratado y advertencias}, 62-63.


\textsuperscript{128} Nieves Romero-Díaz, "Volume Editor’s Introduction," 23.
fact that she was a woman. She included valorous women as examples and did not shy away from suggesting women should be put in positions of power in order to restore a sense of dominance and control in society, or masculinity. While offering her criticism in a male style downplayed her gender, it did not eliminate it.

In her *Tratado y advertencias* Guevara offered her opinion on every issue she believed required immediate solution. In *Desengaños*, her second effort to provide criticism to the monarchy and continue to suggest solutions, Guevara attempted a more pedagogic style. While men dominated authorship of the mirror for princes manuals, some of the content of Guevara’s manual was popular and present in work by other women, like Padilla, who offered a similar social criticism of the nobility. The manual differed from the treatise because its pedagogical style used hypothetical anecdotes and provided historical examples for the prince to understand proposed principles of royal and exemplary behavior. The purpose of the mirror for princes genre was not as critical as the treatise. It was reflective and allowed for an analysis of the current monarchy to improve the future one. In this space, criticism could be subtle and purposeful.

In Guevara’s introduction to her manual, she offered both a critique of the current monarchy and an optimistic approach to the future, with encouragement given to the prince. Guevara writes,

> A modern author places at the feet of your Highness this work which is short, yet giant in intentions, and dedicates it to a prince as great as is that of Spain, and implores that once you learn your alphabet, you order your tutor to use this small work to teach your Highness to read, so you may become giant in intentions. Also, because the subject with which I am going to deal is valorous women, I implore you Highness to protect those who may be valorous nowadays, and be
aware of my concern, and may God be with your Highness, for the good of all of us.  

Guevara honors the power of the monarchy by modestly introducing her work and proposing that its grand intentions would make Charles II a great king. Guevara writes as if she expects the prince and his tutors to use her manual, asserting that it will provide the prince with the best chance of making Spain great again. She says that even though her work is short it should not be given a cursory glance. This implies that Guevara anticipated that her work might not reach the prince unless it was concise. She argues that her use of valorous women offers a new perspective on ruling that she hopes will attract the prince and his tutors to her work.

She presents women from all parts of history: religious figures, like the Virgin Mary, queens, such as Isabella I, and noble women. While she dedicates the entire manual to prince Charles II, in this section on valorous women she begins to deviate from who she intended her audience to be: the prince. She begins to address a second audience: the greater nobility both female and male. She does this by making statements, rather than engaging the prince in conversation. She writes,

> For by my faith, if women made use of letters, they would surpass men, which is just what men fear; they do not want women to be Amazons but rather to have their hands tied, making it unbecoming for a woman to leave her corner. So how is it, then, that the reputation of women who have been valorous has been spreading throughout history?  

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129 "Un Autor moderno pone a los pies de V.A. esta corta obra, aunque Gigante en deseos, y la dedica a tan gran Príncipe, como el de España, y le suplica mande a su Maestro, que después de el Cristo enseñe a V.A. a leer en esta pigmea obra, para que sea Gigante en el deseo; y por se el asunto, de que pienso tratar, de mujeres valerosas, suplico a V.A. ampare a las que lo fueron en estos tiempos, y reciba el buen celo, y le guarde Dios a V.A. como hemos menester." In María de Guevara, *Desenganos*, 64-65.

130 "[P]ues a fe, que si usasen las mujeres de la letras, que les sobrepusieran a los hombres; pero esto temen ellos, y no quieren que sean Amazonas, sino tenerles las manos atadas, con que no parece bien, que las mujeres salgan su rincón; pues ¿cómo en las hisorias se
She suggests that if women wrote letters they could be more powerful than men. Alluding to her own use of the pen to affect political action, she argues that women should follow her lead to position themselves in the political sphere. She makes another reference to the Amazon, this time connecting it with the male fear of powerful women and the effort of men throughout history to prevent women from gaining this power. However, she questions the success of this male dominance, citing many women throughout Spanish history who have managed to be Amazons, breaking with the traditional norm of the subservient female.

She goes on to argue, "Marcus Aurelius in his writings speaks at length about women who have been valorous for their learning. He adds that if women were educated they would be sharper than men and that men should permit them a great deal and tolerate them."\(^\text{131}\) Guevara supports her argument for the inclusion of powerful women in Spanish society and in history by using the words of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Guevara’s great-great uncle Fray Antonio de Guevara used Aurelius words in his own work, which was widely known and respected.\(^\text{132}\) In the seventeenth century, many arbitristas referred to Fray Antonio de Guevara’s work, Relox de príncipes, using Marcus Aurelius as a model of virtue and modesty for noble men. He was the image of perfect noble masculinity according to arbitristas who employed his story and Antonio

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\(^{131}\) "Marcus Aurelio dice en sus escritos mucho de las mujeres, que han sido valerosas por las letras; y añade que si se diesen a los estudios, fueran más agudas que los hombres, y que ellos deben sufrirles mucho, y tolerarlas." María de Guevara, Desengaños, 72-73.

de Guevara's work in their own pieces. As María de Guevara writes, Marcus Aurelius, this man of virtue and military skill, idolized by men, commended erudite women and argued that if they were equally as well educated as men they would surpass men. Thus, Guevara presented support for her argument that women should receive a greater amount of respect from their male counterparts. Guevara supports this argument with another exemplary story,

The Moorish king Marfidio comes to ask for the princess of Navarre, Doña Urraca, in marriage. He is refused and as a result lays siege to Pamplona. Her father, King García, sees himself in dire straits and determines to grant him her hand. She fixes her gaze on the road to France and her hope in God, and set about distracting her brother. In the interim, God, who is our real help, allows Doña Blanca de Guevara, daughter of Count Don Pedro de Oñate and widow of Ortuño de Lara, to arrive with the king of France and her two sons. Like a general, she captures Marfidio and liberates Navarre. If a woman wants to do such a thing today, and if she is manly, she will be laughed at. Bad are the times which are upon us.

She writes of the heroine Doña Blanca de Guevara, also a distant relative of Guevara’s, who liberated the princess of Navarre from the Moorish king Marfidio. Using this example she explains that if a woman, like herself, wanted to perform such a courageous act, she would endure torment from her contemporaries. Guevara invokes this story to suggest that history shows women can be just as courageous as men and are able to obtain powerful positions in society. But she also explains that these stories are anomalies in the history of Spanish women’s lives and in seventeenth century Spanish society. This

133 "Viene Marfidio Rey moro a pedir la Infanta de Navarra doña Urraca, no se le dan, cerca Pamplona, verse el Rey don García apretado, y determina de dársela, y ella pone los ojos en el camino de Francia, y la esperanza en Dios, y empieza a entretener al hermano; y en este interin permite Dios, que es el verdadero socorro, que llegue con el de Francia, y con sus dos hijos, doña Blanca de Guevara, hija el Conde de Oñate, y viuda de Ortuño de Lara como General, prende a Marfidio, y liberta Navarra; y si ahora una mujer quisiera hacer esto, y es varonil, se rieran de ella, malos tiempos hemos alcanzado." In María de Guevara, Desengaños, 74-75.
example presents another woman as an Amazon. Guevara suggests that women, like herself, should be considered as leaders and advisors at the court. Women have proven themselves before and their words and actions should be used to help restore Spain to its dominance on the world stage.

By using valorous women as examples for the prince, Guevara puts a feminist twist on the typically male dominated genre. She maintains her purpose of guidance for the prince while addressing a woman’s place in the genre and in politics. She argues, “[t]here is no doubt that if women who were known for their spirit and valor were allowed on councils and in offices, they would give as much good advice as the keenest councilors.”\(^\text{134}\) She explains to the prince that society should be more considerate of knowledgeable and fearless women. She tells the prince that women would serve dutifully in positions as councilors and provide a new perspective to the monarch. She takes her argument one step further, “[a] government of women is at times better than that of many men.”\(^\text{135}\) She invokes the possibility that women could run the Spanish government as successfully as the monarch’s \textit{privados} and closest advisors. Guevara’s words are strong and certainly feminist but they also have more of a suggestive quality to them than a demanding one. She is careful to recognize that she has both a male and female audience, despite her intended audience: the prince and his tutors.

Instead of writing in a genre that was more common among female authors, Guevara used genres where male advisors like \textit{arbitristas} saw the most success; meaning

\(^{134}\) “Es sin duda, que si algunas mujeres que se conocen de ánimo, y valor las entrarán en los Consejos, y juntas, los dieran tan buenos, como los más acertados Consejeros.” In María de Guevara, \textit{Desenganos}, 74-75.

\(^{135}\) “Que el gobierno de las mujeres a veces suele ser mejor, que el de muchos hombres.” In María de Guevara, \textit{Desenganos}, 70-71.
at the very least courtiers knew and recognized arbitristas' work regardless of whether the king read it or took action based on reading it. Her use of both the treatise and the manual to present her opinions to the king suggests that she knew society could not ignore her gender. Whether this was why she chose to write in these genres or not, it speaks to the limitations placed on female writers. Guevara wanted their criticism to reach the king and his advisors and she may have considered the treatise and manual her best chances. However, there is no documentation to suggest that she had any more success using these genres than she would have had with a play or a poem.

Guevara knew that her choice to write a treatise and a manual made her different from other noble women writers who focused their criticism on the social struggles associated with a male dominated society and the limitations it placed on their gender. Guevara’s political response to Spain’s decline was that it was ultimately connected to male dominance in the Spanish government and society and its failings. Thus, she suggested that women could find a place within politics and power for their gender through the use of their pen. Guevara acknowledged that she was stepping beyond the boundaries set up by society but believed that the “crisis of masculinity” allowed her to use these genres to support her progressive assertion that she was qualified to advise the king.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the 1660s, Martínez de Mata, an arbitrista, a member of the Franciscan Order and a self-proclaimed representative of the poor, was known for his radical solutions to
problems facing the Spanish monarchy politically and socially.  

He had been condemned to serve time for forging an official decree but in 1666 he gave a memorial to the council of Castile, proposing the creation of a central credit bank and councilors read it. Male contemporaries of María de Guevara's had success as arbitristas, receiving the attention of councilors. While it was often even difficult for men to have their criticisms heard, more often than not they were able to reach the king’s advisors to offer their concerns.

Using their success as a model and looking to offer her perspective and solutions to the crisis facing Spain, Guevara wrote her own treatise for Philip IV and a manual for Charles II. Guevara’s works and the issues they discuss represent common concerns of the Spanish nobles and subjects about the decline of the Spanish empire. Male critics had the confidence and power to share these opinions with the king. Women were not strongly represented in court politics or as arbitristas. Guevara was an exception because she offered both the social criticism of Padilla, one of the few female arbitristas whose work has been researched, and the political opinions of male authors like Mata.

Guevara used the political theory of her great-great uncle, Fray Antonio de Guevara, and the thinker who influenced him, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, in her work. The content and stylistic approaches of Guevara’s work reflect the dominance of men in Spanish politics and the necessity of incorporating their methods to gain respect and attention from the king and his closest advisors.

137 Henry Kamen, *Spain in the Later Seventeenth Century, 69.*
Guevara, turning to traditional male methods of communication with the monarchy, found a way to express her political voice. She encouraged other women to take up their pens and express their concern for the state of Spain just as she had done. Yet, Guevara’s writings were consonant with her apart from her male contemporaries in terms of political concerns. She expressed opinions that she acknowledged were also held by a majority of her fellow male *arbitristas*.

While trying to write in a masculine genre, Guevara also unavoidably expressed a female perspective as she wrote of her concerns for the state of the monarchy, court politics and the economy. As the wife of a soldier and eventually a widow, as a descendent of a family with historical connection to the court, and as a countess, Guevara saw an opportunity to seek an audience with the king and his advisors at a time when many men were doing the same. Her elite status gave her a connection to the court and a basis for her power that enabled her to represent her family and her anxiety about the future of Spain.

Guevara’s social status as a wife, widow and noblewoman influenced her experiences and resulted in her frustrations, offering the king another perspective. The capture of her husband by the Portuguese compelled Guevara to complain to the king on behalf of her family and their struggling estates. She had been left to care for both her husband’s and her own estates and was therefore in charge of representing her family to the king. Her experiences caused her to make references in *Tratado y advertencias* about her hopes for female power, and the ability of women to serve as the king’s advisors.

In *Desengaños* she devotes a chapter of her manual to valorous women, attempting to educate the prince about his use of power by turning to atypical models of
power and virtue: women throughout history who acted in Spain’s honor. Using these women, she makes a case for the consideration of the political voices and actions of women at the court, giving them a place in Spanish history.

Guevara’s work was written during a period of economic, political and social crisis in Spain. Some historians of art and literature describe the seventeenth century as a golden era but writers such as Guevara suggest a decline was occurring in Spain’s political power, economic stability, and masculinity. While the works of Velázquez, Quevedo and Calderón de la Barca are seen as great representations of the majestic Habsburg monarch Philip IV, these court painters, poets and playwrights constructed grandiose images of the monarchy because they were commissioned to do so. Some of Calderón de la Barca and Quevedo’s works are critical, but the criticism is masked because of the artistic style.

Guevara’s work sheds a different light on life at the court. It is a definite example of the crisis facing Spain. The nobility’s disappointment with the monarchy was growing, as was their written criticism. Guevara exemplifies the fears of the nobility about the growing crisis. Her effort to write to the king also shows a deepening “crisis in masculinity.”

Guevara was compelled to publish her works and speak her mind. This suggests that the male hold on power was being questioned and loosened.

Guevara warned Philip IV of the looming consequences of Spain’s poor performance in the war with Portugal. She singled out many of the king’s advisors and the weak political and economic advice they gave the king. She warned the king that if he did nothing to remedy the situation, Spain would fall further from its former glory. She

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predicted the continued decline which eventually led to the dissolution of the Habsburg Spanish empire. Charles II would marry twice and never produce an heir. A very sickly king, he died in 1700. Philip IV’s daughter Maria Teresa was sent off to marry to Louis XIV of France prior to Philip IV’s death in 1665 and had therefore renounced her right to the throne. Ironically, this established connection with the Bourbon dynasty would help the French to come to power in Spain following Charles II’s death.

The inability of the Spanish Habsburgs to produce an heir would diminish the Spaniards’ control of their country’s power, economy and political order. In addition, Spain’s dominance of the world, including in the Americas, would fall into the hands of the Bourbon dynasty in Spain.

Guevara produced her work at a key point in Spain’s history. While Philip IV had struggled to keep Portugal, maintain a stable economy and manage the Americas appropriately, his was not as much of a failed monarchy as the reign of his son, Charles II. Having written her complaints to Philip IV and to the larger court society, Guevara knew that Philip IV’s monarchy would leave Spain in disarray for his son and she sought to prevent Charles II’s inevitable struggle by advising him through her Desengaños. However, as history would show, Guevara’s work appears to be more an account of the period than a successful preventative measure.
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