

The Biblical Lyric of Benito Arias Montano in its European and Spanish Contexts

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Benito Arias Montano (ca. 1525–1598) is one of the most important humanist scholars of the Spanish Golden Age. He was most famous for his role as editor of the Antwerp Polyglot Bible or *Biblia Regia*, patronised by Philip II and printed by Christoph Plantin.¹ He also

¹For a recent and meticulously documented biography, see Gaspar Morocho Gayo, “Trayectoria humanística de Benito Arias Montano. Sus cuarenta primeros años (c. 1525/27–1567),” in *El humanismo extremeño II*, ed. Mariano Fernández-Daza, Fernández de Córdoba (Trujillo, 1998), 157–210; idem, “Trayectoria humanística de Benito Arias Montano II. Años de plenitud (1568–1598),” in *El humanismo extremeño*, ed. Mariano Fernández-Daza et al. (Trujillo, 1999), 227–304; additional data supplied by Bartolomé Pozuelo Calero, “La oda de Benito Arias Montano a Pedro Vélez de Guevara o la añoranza de la vida retirada,” *Criticón* 113 (2011), 35–62. For a recent study of Arias Montano’s philological work on the Antwerp Polyglot, see Theodor William Dunkelgrün, *The Multiplicity of Scripture: The Confluence of Textual Traditions in the Making of the Antwerp Polyglot Bible (1568–1573)* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University

published three collections of poetry in lyric metres: *Humanae salutis monumenta* (first published 1571), *Davidis regis ac prophetae aliorumque sacrorum vatum psalmi* (1573), and *Hymni et secula* (1593). However, these collections are understudied; to date there is no modern edition of Arias Montano's Latin lyric poetry, even though Coroleu describes them as "the culmination of Neo-Latin poetry in Spain."² In this study, I aim to situate Arias Montano's poetry in the context of early modern European 'biblical poetry' and Spanish Horatianism. I shall explain that, while Arias Montano is part of the European trend of poetic versions of what were considered the 'poetic' biblical books, in his original poetry he departs from these trends. Rather, his original lyric constitutes an innovation in the field of versified outlines of the Bible. I shall argue that this was possible due, among other factors, to the Renaissance reception of Horace. Finally, I shall also show how his biblical poetry is exceptional in the context of Spain, due to inquisitorial censorship of vernacular poetry on biblical themes and the preference for moral-philosophical themes in Spanish Horatianism.

of Chicago, 2012).

² Alejandro Coroleu, Catarina Fouto, "Iberian Peninsula," in *The Oxford Handbook of Neo-Latin*, ed. Sarah Knight, Stefan Tilg (New York, 2015), 464.

In her seminal study of seventeenth-century religious poetry, Lewalski explains that Renaissance authors, drawing on patristic ideas about the poetic nature of parts of the Bible, developed a biblical poetics which saw Scripture as a repository of and model for poetic genres. As a result, translations and imitations of the ‘poetic’ books of the Bible (that is, *Job*, the *Psalms*, *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes* and the *Song of Songs*) became frequent.³ There was a particular vogue for Latin paraphrases of the psalms in lyric metres, such as those of Jean Macrin, Marcantonio Flaminio, and George Buchanan, often exhibiting a variety of metrical forms.⁴ Psalm paraphrase in the vernacular was also popular, and there is a large body of scholarship on the phenomenon in England and France.⁵ In particular, in her recent and important study, Moul

³ Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, 2014), 31–40.

⁴ Victoria Moul, *A Literary History of Latin & English Poetry: Bilingual Verse Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2022), 68–95.

⁵ Michel Jeanneret, *Poésie et tradition biblique au XVI^e siècle: recherches stylistiques sur les paraphrases des “Psaumes”, de Marot à Malherbe* (Paris, 1969); Terence Cave, *Devotional Poetry in France, c. 1570–1613* (Cambridge, 1969); Carl Calendar, *Metrical Translation of the Psalms in France and England: 1530–1650*

places English vernacular psalm paraphrase in the context of this poetics and the metrical experimentation of Latin psalm paraphrase in the sixteenth century.⁶

By contrast, the biblical poetry of the Spanish Golden Age is often overlooked. In his discussion of the religious poetry of the period, Wardropper divides it into the categories of didactic, occasional, circumstantial, penitential, meditative, devotional, and mystical, making no mention of biblical poetry.⁷ This lack of interest may reflect the idea that biblical poetry could not flourish during the period due to the Inquisition's suspicion of vernacular renderings of the Bible and of the exposition of biblical material by lay people. Indeed, it is true that in the 1560s and 1570s the programmatic use made by Protestants of psalm translation made it a suspicious genre. Consequently, biblical poetry in Spanish all but disappeared after the Valdés Index of 1559 until the poet Fray Luis de León

(unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oregon, 1972);

Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics* (see above, n. 3); Elizabeth Clarke and Simon Jackson, "Lyric Poetry," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion*, ed. Andrew Hiscock, Helen Wilcox (Oxford, 2017), 152–165.

⁶ Moul, *A Literary History* (see above, n. 4), 96–108.

⁷ Bruce Wardropper, "La poesía religiosa del siglo de oro," *Edad de oro* 4 (1985), 195–210.

published three psalm paraphrases in his devotional work *De los nombres de Cristo* (1583), which was protected by royal privilege.⁸ More recently, Núñez Rivera has studied the appearance of biblical poetry in the Spanish Golden Age, and identified what he calls “el concepto de una *poética bíblica*, que se sustenta en esos dos pilares fundamentales, la poetización de los *Salmos* y del *Cantar de los Cantares*.”⁹ He looks in particular at the tendency to see the psalms as lyric poetry and the Song of Songs as pastoral poetry. His studies show that the current of ‘biblical poetry’ which was popular elsewhere in Europe also thrived in Spain, despite the temporary lull caused by the prohibitions of the Valdés Index.

Arias Montano was firmly situated in this tradition. For instance, he interpreted the Song of Songs as a pastoral poem, as can be seen in his *Paráfrasis del maestro Benito Arias Montano sobre el Cantar de Cantares de Salomón en tono pastoril*.¹⁰ He was also part of the

⁸ See Alberto Blecua Perdices, “El entorno poético de fray Luis de León,” in *Fray Luis de León: actas de la I Academia Literaria Renacentista*, ed. Víctor García de la Concha (Salamanca, 1993), 94–97.

⁹ Valentín Núñez Rivera, *Poesía y Biblia en el Siglo de Oro* (Madrid, 2010), 13.

¹⁰ See Arias Montano y el “*Cantar de los cantares*”: estudio y edición de la *Paráfrasis en modo pastoril*, ed. Luis Gómez Canseco, Valentín

trend of psalm paraphrase in lyric metres. His *Davidis regis* (1573) is a collection of metrical paraphrase of the psalms in lyric metres.¹¹ He was aware of the wider tradition: for example, Pozuelo Calero locates echoes of Buchanan's Latin paraphrase of the psalms in his work.¹² As we have seen, this is precisely the period when biblical translation was under suspicion. However, Arias Montano's psalm paraphrases were written in Latin, rather than the vernacular, and therefore escaped censorship.¹³

Scholars of Renaissance religious lyric show how the concept of biblical poetics as demonstrated in translations and imitations in turn influenced the development of original poetry. In particular, religious lyric based on the psalms often followed the introspective example of the sub-group referred to as the Penitential Psalms. The

Núñez Rivera (Kassel, 2001).

¹¹ For an overview of Arias Montano's metres, see Antonio Holgado Redondo, "Hacia un corpus de la poesía latina de Benito Arias Montano," *Revista de estudios extremeños* 43 (1987), 537-550.

¹² Bartolomé Pozuelo Calero, "La paráfrasis latina inédita del salmo 109 (110) del licenciado Francisco Pacheco y sus objetivos en comparación con las de George Buchanan, Benito Arias Montano y Fray Luis de León," *Neulateinisches Jahrbuch* 10 (2008), 5-39, there 26.

¹³ Blecua, "El entorno poético" (see above, n. 8), 97.

typical characteristics of such poetry were the anguished cry to an all-powerful and often vengeful God, the presence of 'enemies', and frequent images of sickness, death and tears.¹⁴ However, most of Arias Montano's original poetry does not fit into this description. Rather, with a few exceptions, Arias Montano's Latin lyric poetry could be described as biblical narrative or versified outlines of the Bible. His first collection of original lyric poems, *Humanae salutis monumenta*, consists of seventy-one odes on biblical passages of the Old and New Testaments which are significant milestones in salvation history.¹⁵ On each double-page spread, the left-hand page consists of a poem, and the right-hand page consists of an *inscriptio*, epigram and engraving in the emblematic tradition, as well as a dedication, in keeping with the overarching conceit of the poems as 'monuments'. In fact, the inclusion of illustrations of biblical episodes relate *Humanae salutis monumenta* to the

¹⁴ See Jeanneret, *Poésie et tradition biblique* (see above, n. 5), 418–425; Cave, *Devotional Poetry* (see above, n. 5), 33–57; Calendar, *Metrical Translation* (see above, n. 5), 122–148.

¹⁵ The edition I am using is *Humanae salutis monumenta B. Ariae Montani studio constructa et decantata* (Antwerp, 1571). All translations are my own.

tradition of the *Speculum humanae salvationis* and *Biblia pauperum*.¹⁶

Arias Montano's final collection of lyric poetry, *Hymni et secula* (1593), is also a chronological overview of sacred history from even before the Creation. It consists of one book of *Hymni* to the Trinity and angels, followed by six books of *Secula*: I–IV cover biblical history from Creation to the prophets, V is an eclectic collection of elegiac poems mostly on Jewish festivals, and VI, entitled *Oriens*, covers the New Testament up to Pentecost.¹⁷ Arias Montano's focus on biblical material can be seen in Pedro de Valencia's introduction to *Hymni et Secula*, where he describes the collection as:

opus [...] quod exiguo volumine magnum thesaurum vera,
simplici et genuina, id est, Christiana disciplina refertissimum
complecteretur. [...] Nihil enim sententiarum est totis his

¹⁶ See Juan Francisco Alcina, "Los *Humanae salutis monumenta*," in *Anatomía del humanismo: Benito Arias Montano, 1598–1998*, ed. Luis Gómez Canseco (Huelva, 1998), 116–121.

¹⁷ The edition I am using is *Hymni et secula* (Antwerp, 1593). When referring to the whole collection, I use the title *Hymni et secula*; when referring to individual poems, I refer separately to the titles *Hymni* and *Secula*, along with the number of the poem in the book. All translations are my own.

carminibus, quod non ex aperta sacrorum oraculorum
interpretatione sit petitum.¹⁸

(a work [...] that would contain in a slim volume a great
treasure full of the true, simple and genuine—that is, the
Christian—doctrine. [...] For there is no thought in all these
poems which is not sought from the patent interpretation of the
sacred oracles.)

Arias Montano's use of lyric metres is curious, because previous
poetry which dealt with large amounts of narrative had been
composed predominantly in epic, not in the lyric metres which
Arias Montano uses. Grant points out that in Renaissance Latin
verse paraphrases of the Bible, the most common metre was the
hexameter and the elegiac couplet.¹⁹ Furthermore, the Renaissance

¹⁸ *Hymni et secula* (Antwerp, 1593), 3.

¹⁹ Leonard Grant, "Neo-Latin Verse Translations of the Bible," *The Harvard Theological Review* 52.2 (1959), 205–211, there 205;
likewise, Gaertner observes that poets tended to render biblical
themes outside of the psalms either in dramatic or in epical form,
see Johannes Gaertner, "Latin Verse Translations of the Psalms:
1500–1620," *The Harvard Theological Review* 49.4 (1956), 271–
305, there 279–280.

had seen some particularly successful epic poems on New Testament themes from the pens of Sannazaro and Vida. Therefore, Arias Montano's original poetry could be understood to be a metrical innovation in biblical narrative poetry.

I contend that this is due to the flexibility with which the Renaissance received Horace. As Comiati has pointed out, Renaissance commentators, translators and poets were aware that Horace's poetry contained multiple modes, including amatory, religious and philosophical ones.²⁰ This was due to a dual inheritance from the Greek lyric tradition which included poets of choral lyric for public celebrations, such as Pindar, and poets of monodic lyric for banquets, such as Anacreon, Alcaeus, and Sappho.²¹ Poets could therefore imitate a wide range of Horatian themes. For example, Horace's odes on amatory themes had been much imitated during the Italian Renaissance, although they were not popular as the objects of imitation during the Spanish Golden

²⁰ Giacomo Comiati, *Horace in the Italian Renaissance (1498–1600)* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2015), 328.

²¹ See *A Commentary on Horace, Odes, Book I*, ed. R. G. M. Nisbet, Margaret Hubbard (Oxford, 1970), xi–xiii; Denis C. Feeney, "Horace and the Greek lyric poets," in *Horace 2000: A Celebration. Essays for the Bimillennium*, ed. Niall Rudd (London, 1993), 41–63; Carol Maddison, *Apollo and the Nine* (London, 1960), 22–38.

Age. Indeed, Maestre Maestre can identify only two Latin amatory odes during the Spanish Renaissance, both written by Spaniards living outside Spain.²²

Even within sixteenth-century Spain, there is a difference between the way Horace is received in vernacular and Latin poetry. In

²² José María Maestre Maestre, “La oda latina en el Renacimiento hispano,” in *La oda: II encuentro internacional sobre poesía del siglo de oro*, ed. Begoña López Bueno (Sevilla, 1993), 75–120, there 115. It is also worth noting that, in Spain, lyric forms had remained popular in various forms throughout the medieval period. For example, some metres, such as the sapphic stanza, were used in medieval hymns. Maestre Maestre draws attention to the impact of the medieval hymn tradition on Spanish Renaissance scholars, particularly Nebrija and Núñez Delgado, who published editions of liturgical hymns, Maestre Maestre, “La oda latina” (see above, n. 22), 105. The influence of this link between classical metre and Christian content can also be seen in Arias Montano, in particular in the book of *Hymni* which precedes the *Secula*. Another important influence is the fourth-century poet Prudentius, who was not only treasured as a fellow Spaniard, but provided a model of Christian poetry written in lyric (including Horatian) metres. See *Prudentius’ Crown of Martyrs: Liber Peristephanon*, ed. Len Krisak, Joseph Pucci (Routledge, 2019), 21–23; *Days Linked by Song: Prudentius’s*

vernacular poetry, such as that of the poet Fray Luis de León, the moral-philosophical aspect of Horace's poetry comes to predominate, as pointed out by López Bueno.²³ This involves imitation of Horace's poems on Epicurean values, such as the benefits of retirement from the world and being content with little.²⁴ By contrast, Arias Montano's Latin lyric is related to Horace's more elevated odes and hymns: this can be seen most clearly in his *Hymni*, and by extension Horace's more serious mode seems to justify the use of lyric metres in Arias Montano's biblical narrative, once the pagan content had been replaced with biblical subject matter.²⁵ One way we might differentiate these two kinds of

Cathemerinon, ed. Gerard O'Daly (Oxford, 2012), 30–31.

²³ Begoña López Bueno, "Hacia la delimitación del género oda en la poesía española del Siglo de Oro," in *La oda: II encuentro internacional sobre poesía del siglo de oro*, ed. Begoña López Bueno (Sevilla, 1993), 175–214, there 188.

²⁴ See John Moles, "Philosophy and Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. Stephen Harrison (Cambridge, 2007), 165–180, there 171–174; *A Commentary on Horace* (see above, n. 21), xiv–xv.

²⁵ This biblicizing of pagan content has been studied with respect to Arias Montano's *Odae variae* (poems inserted into his prose texts) by Guadalupe Marín Mellado, "Los mitos de la Biblia en las odas de

poetry is by referring to the former as Christian Horatianism, and that of Arias Montano's poetry as biblical Horatianism.

To demonstrate the difference between vernacular Christian Horatianism and Arias Montano's biblical Horatianism in sixteenth-century Spain, it is helpful to compare Arias Montano's work to that of the aforementioned Fray Luis de León. Fray Luis was considered a Horatian poet due to his use of the *lira* stanza and the Horatian reminiscences to be found in his poems.²⁶ One example of the different approaches of the two poets can be seen in their different

Benito Arias Montano," in *Humanismo y pervivencia del mundo clásico*, ed. José María Maestre Maestre et al. (Madrid, 2002), vol. 1, 293–302. On *Humanae salutis monumenta*, see Éléonore Villalba, "Vestiges et usages du rituel lyrique horatien dans le recueil des *Humanae salutis monumenta* (1571) de Benito Arias Montano," *Camenulae* 9 (2013). Occasionally, Arias Montano does include poems in the moral-philosophical vein; see Guadalupe Marín Mellado, "Sobre la poesía moral de Arias Montano: una oda de los *Hymni et secula*," in *Benito Arias Montano y los humanistas de su tiempo*, ed. José María Maestre Maestre et al. (Mérida, 2006), vol. 1, 487–494. On Horace's hymns, see Jasper Griffin, "Gods and Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. Stephen Harrison (Cambridge, 2007), 181–194; *A Commentary on Horace* (see above, n. 21), xvii.

treatments of the theme of wealth and trade. For example, in his Ode 5, entitled *De la avaricia*, Fray Luis criticizes trade and the desire for wealth, following Horace in poems such as *Carm.* 3,1 and 3,29:

En vano el mar fatiga
la vela portuguesa; que ni el seno
de Persia ni la amiga
Maluca da árbol bueno,
que pueda hacer un ánimo sereno

²⁶ On the adoption of the Italian *lira* into Spanish vernacular poetry, see Antonio Gargano, "La oda entre Italia y España en la primera mitad del siglo XVI," in *La oda: II encuentro internacional sobre poesía del siglo de oro*, ed. Begoña López Bueno (Sevilla, 1993), 121–145. On Fray Luis's Horatianism, see Soledad Pérez-Abadín Barro, "Horacio y Bernardo Tasso en la poesía de Fray Luis de León," *Castilla: Estudios de literatura* 19 (1994), 103–112, there 103–106; Richard Rabone, "Horatian Roots in Fray Luis's Garden: Imagery and Meaning in the *Vida retirada*," *Hispanic Research Journal* 17 (2016), 201–213; Gregorio Hinojo Andrés, "La *recusatio* horaciana en Luis de León," in *Fray Luis de León: Historia, humanismo y letras*, ed. Víctor García de la Concha (Salamanca, 1996), 331–340.

(In vain does the sea weary the Portuguese sail; neither the bosom of Persia nor the kindly Moluccas produce a tree good enough to make a spirit peaceful).²⁷

However, Arias Montano's attitude to commercial activity is different to that of Fray Luis. This is most noticeable in his poem *De providentia Dei ad Ludovicum Perezium* (*Secula* 1,8), a poem dedicated to Arias Montano's friend Luis Pérez. Pérez was a wealthy spice merchant who frequently supported Plantin financially, advancing him sums of money in exchange for an equivalent sum of the resulting books.²⁸ He was particularly supportive of Arias Montano's publications.²⁹ Perhaps for this

²⁷ The edition I am using is Fray Luis de León, *Poesía*, ed. Antonio Ramajo Caño, (Madrid, 2012), 32. The translation is my own.

²⁸ For more on Pérez, see Alastair Hamilton, *The Family of Love* (Cambridge, 1981), ch. 4, n. 47; for his support of Plantin's press, see Karen Bowen, Dirk Imhof, *Christopher Plantin and Engraved Book Illustrations in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 2008), 119–120.

²⁹ For what is known of Arias Montano's correspondence with Pérez, see Antonio Dávila Pérez, "New Documents on Benito Arias Montano (ca. 1525–98) and Politics in the Netherlands," in *Between*

reason, Arias Montano avoids the usual Horatian criticism of his profession, and instead praises him: “Contentus illis nempe negotiis, | Quae nec piorum iudicium improbet” (Content with that business | Of which the judgment of the pious does not disapprove, *Secula* 1,8,9–10).

Arias Montano’s positive view of trade is rooted in his biblical scholarship. This can be seen in *Phaleg*, his treatise on the repopulation of the post-diluvial earth which was included in the eighth volume of the *Apparatus* to the *Biblia Regia*. There, he develops a theory which makes trade a way to restore the prelapsarian unity of mankind, epitomised by the biblical example of Solomon. Firstly, he explains that the gold known to antiquity was so vast that it cannot come from the sources of the Old World and must have been mostly acquired from Ophir, an unknown location mentioned in the Bible as a source of Solomon’s gold, and which Arias Montano argued was located in the Americas.³⁰ He

Scylla and Charybdis: learned letter writers navigating the reefs of religious and political controversy in early modern Europe, ed.

Jeanine de Landtsheer, Henk Nellen (Leiden, 2011), 252–257.

³⁰ *Phaleg, sive De gentium sedibus primis orbisque terrae situ liber*, separately paginated in the *Apparatus* to *Biblia Sacra Hebraice, Chaldaice, Graece, et Latine: Philippi II. Reg. Cathol. pietate, et studio ad Sacrosanctae Ecclesiae usum*, ed. by Benito Arias

goes on to write that this is in fact what the Creator intended: some regions are particularly rich in a certain good, which obliges them to share it with regions which do not possess it.³¹

These ideas are implied in Arias Montano's poetry on King Solomon, where he emphasises the king's riches. For example, the poet refers to Solomon's unsurpassed wealth in *Humanae salutis monumenta* (Ode 25,3: "divitiisque") and states that no king has ever had, or will ever have, as much gold and silver as Solomon (*Secula* 4,9,33-35: "Cedit argenti tibi, cedit auri | Quanta vis nulli fuit aut priorum, | Aut erit, regum"). Of course, this is a notable departure from the posture of both Fray Luis and Horace.

Montano and others, 5 vols and 3 unnumbered vols of *Apparatus* (Antwerp: Plantin, 1569-73), <doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-77665>), [vii] (1572), fol. A2^r. For more on this, see Zur Shalev, "Sacred Geography, Antiquarianism and Visual Erudition: Benito Arias Montano and the Maps in the Antwerp Polyglot Bible," *Imago Mundi* 55 (2003), 56-80, there 71.

³¹ *Phaleg* (see above, n. 30), fol. A2^v: "Videmus praeterea singulorum commoda locorum non illorum tantum contineri finibus: sed ea ad omnes alias nationes rerum permutatione emanare. Adeo ut haec, quae auri ferax est, regio illud caeteris quae quidem illo carent, impertiat."

In conclusion, Arias Montano's work can be placed in the evolution of the biblical poetry which was popular in Renaissance Europe and involved translation and imitation of the 'poetical' books of the Bible. However, his choice of lyric metres for many of the compositions in *Humanae salutis monumenta* and *Hymni et secula* is not part of this current; rather, it is an innovation in the field of biblical narrative poetry, which was made possible by the Renaissance reception of Horace's more serious religious poetry. Arias Montano's Latin lyric poetry is also different from Spanish vernacular lyric poetry, since vernacular Spanish Horatianism tended towards Horace's moral and philosophical poetry, unlike Arias Montano's biblical odes. Therefore, when we speak of Arias Montano's biblical lyric, we must keep in mind that this is distinct both from the biblical poetry popular in the European Renaissance, and from the tradition of Christian Horatianism which was popular in Spain.

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